

HEADQUARTERS  
3rd Battalion, 1st Marines  
3rd Marine Division (Rein) FMF  
FPO, San Francisco, 96602

3/WDF/rhc  
3100  
11 March 1966

From: Commanding Officer  
To: Commanding General, Task Force Delta

Subj: Combat Operations After Action Report

Ref: (a) 3rd Marine Division Order 3100.1B

1. Code Name. Operation UTAH (Search and Destroy Operation).

2. Date of Operation. 041500H - 071830H March 1966.

3. Location. Quang Ngai Province, Republic of Vietnam.

4. Command Headquarters

3rd Battalion, 1st Marines

LtCol J. A. YOUNG

Company I, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines

Capt T. B. LECKY

Company K, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines

Capt L. H. GONZALES

Company L, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines

1stLt S. H. GREGORY

Company M, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines

Capt C. W. LATTING

5. Task Organization. (Upon Commencement of Operations)

3rd Bn, 1st Mar (-)

LtCol YOUNG

Co I (Rein)

Capt LECKY

Co I

Det, H&S Co

1st Sec, 81mm Mortar Plt

Det, Med Plt

FO Tm, Btry C, 1st Bn, 11th Mar

Co K (Rein)

Capt GONZALES

Co K

Det, H&S Co

2nd Sec, 81mm Mortar Plt

Det, Med Plt

FO Tm, Btry C, 1st Bn, 11th Mar

Co L (Rein)

1stLt GREGORY

Co L

Det, H&S Co

3rd Sec, 81mm Mortar Plt

Det, Med Plt

1st Sqd, 3rd Plt, Co A, 1st Engr Bn

FO Tm, Btry C, 1st Bn, 11th Mar

Co M (Rein)

Capt LATTING

Co M

Det, H&S Co

FAC Tm

4th Sec, 81mm Mortar Plt

Det, Med Plt

2nd Sqd, 3rd Plt, Co A, 1st Engr Bn

FO Tm, Btry C, 1st Bn, 11th Mar

6. Supporting Forces. Forces utilized in support of 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines during Operation UTAH included the following:

a. MAG-36 provided twenty-eight helicopters for lift of Command Group Alpha and two reinforced rifle companies and one company (minus) from loading zone vicinity coordinates BS56052 to landing zone vicinity coordinates BS554875. The commitment which was initiated by Task Force Delta, was an immediate request and was not preplanned. At 041310H, after receipt of verbal frag order from Task Force Delta, liaison was effected with MAG-36, and L-Hour, which Task Force Delta had directed to be as soon as possible, was established as 041500H due to the fact that sufficient helicopters would not be available prior to that time. The helilift was executed successfully and without incident, and the number of helicopters available did provide for a rapid build-up in the landing zone.

b. The only other major helicopter support provided was for retraction from the area of operations to Chu Lai which was conducted in two echelons. The first commencing at 071300H when Company I and Company K were retracted, and the second commencing at 071800H when Command Group Alpha and Company M were retracted. Again, the number of helicopters was sufficient; they arrived on schedule; and the lift was successfully executed.

c. In addition to the helicopters required for the major lifts, extensive use was made of helicopters for medical evacuation and resupply during Operation UTAH. Almost without exception, the support provided was more than satisfactory. The sole problem developing from isolated instances where in resupply helicopters, either as a result of being misinformed as to requesting unit or misinformed as to correct coordinates of requesting unit, insisted on orbiting the Battalion Command Post at night which, as a natural consequence, tended to compromise the Battalion Command Post. Specific noteworthy items concerning helicopter support included:

- (1) Rapid evacuation of medical emergencies both day and night.
- (2) Less dependence on landing lights at night.
- (3) Use of loadmasters to assist battalion HST personnel in organizing loading zone.

d. In addition to helicopter support, close air and artillery were utilized to prepare the Battalion objective vicinity coordinates BS555837 on the morning of 6 February. This included an intense two and one-half hour combined air and artillery preparation. Marking rounds were fired by the artillery to mark the target area for the air strike. As the air strike lifted, artillery fire was directed into the target area, with more than eighty rounds being fired on the objective with good accuracy. Close air ran a total of six sorties and delivered fifteen 250-pound bombs, seventy-six 2.75-inch rockets, and fifteen napalm bombs. The air strike which was preplanned was requested over the tactical air request net; the reaction time was satisfactory; however, the attack was characterized by a 40% failure in napalm to ignite, and the attack could only be rated as 50% effective. In regards to this massive preparation of the objective, it should be noted that fortification and entrenchments in the objective area were not destroyed and, in fact, were not appreciably affected.

## 7. Intelligence

a. Enemy Forces Anticipated in Objective Area. Initial intelligence received via land-line communications from 1st Marines indicated that a helicopter and a fixed wing airplane were down vicinity coordinates BS538818 and that the area was under intense hostile fire. This intelligence was received at 1010 on 4 March. At 1020, a second communication from 1st Marines indicated that an estimated VC battalion was believed to be located in grid square 5482. This was the intelligence picture when the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines commenced lifting out from Chu Lai to the objective area.

### b. Enemy Forces Actually Encountered

(1) General. Command Group Alpha, Company L, Company M, and Company I (-) landed in landing zone vicinity coordinates BS554873. Companies L and M immediately moved into assigned blocking positions and held those positions throughout the night. No enemy contact was reported during this period. Commencing at first light on 5 March, Companies L and M started a southward advance making contact with enemy units vicinity coordinates BS555838 and 552838. This contact was maintained throughout the day and into the night when the VC forces broke contact.

(2) Strength. Based on examination of uniforms, captured documents, weapons, and interrogation of unit commanders, NCOs, wounded Marines, and civilians living in the area, it is estimated that the enemy forces consisted of one battalion, comprising both PAVN and Main Force VC troops. Weapons included heavy and light machineguns, 82mm

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and 60mm mortars, 57mm recoilless rifles, submachineguns, rifles, pistols and grenades.

(3) Disposition. Enemy forces were deployed in depth around two hills located at BS552836 and 556838.

(4) Personnel and Equipment Losses

(a) Personnel

VC KIA (Confirmed)	101
VC KIA (Possible)	109
VCC	0
VCS	2
VCC WIA	2
VC WIA (Possible)	12

(b) Weapons and Major Items of Equipment

CHICOM Light Machinegun	3
CHICOM Heavy Machinegun	1
57mm Recoilless Rifle	1
82mm Mortar (tube)	1
60mm Mortar (baseplate)	1
CHICOM Submachinegun (assault carbine)	12
CHICOM Rifle	1
CHICOM Pistol	2
CHICOM Grenades	53
Power Unit (Possible detonating device)	1
Typewriter	1

c. Terrain

(1) Cover and Concealment. Outstanding from enemy point of view and fair from friendly troops point of view. An extensive cave, bunker and trench network plus bamboo fences, sugar cane, trees and rolling terrain afforded best possible cover and concealment.

(3) Critical Terrain Features. The large hill located at BS552838 and the small hill at BS559838 dominated the battlefield.

(5) Avenues of Approach. Because of the disposition of friendly units, the avenues of approach into the objective on 5 March were limited to the trails and open area to the North. By moving on foot and carrying minimum equipment, the terrain presented no obstacles and movement was rapid and relatively easy.

d. Other. Villagers interrogated on 6 and 7 March indicated that approximately 100 VC entered the area one month ago and started entrenching the area. This detachment left after about ten days but the VC returned on 27 February in force and resumed defensive preparations. A detailed search of the battlefield on 6 and 7 March revealed five individual graves. It is believed that mass burial of VC bodies was accomplished in two deep tunnels which had been filled-in. Bodies littering battlefield on 5 March were missing on 6 March.

a. The initial mission assigned to 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines was established in a frag order received from Task Force Delta by land-line communications. Specifically, it assigned the following mission:

(2) After landing in zone, vicinity coordinates BC 554875, establish blocking positions north of east-west grid line 85.

b. Subsequent to receipt of the aforementioned frag order, Commanding General, Task Force Delta arrived 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines Command Post briefed the Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines on the disposition of friendly forces and authorized the commitment of an additional rifle company.



c. Changes to the initial mission were established by means of daily frag orders issued by Task Force Delta.

9. Concept of Operation. The initial concept of operations provided for landing Company M (Rein) to secure the landing zone followed in trace by Company L (Rein) and Company I (-) (Battalion Reserve). After landing, Company L advance by best possible route and occupy blocking positions vicinity coordinates BS 545856. Company I (-), after landing, assume responsibility for landing zone security. Company M, after being relieved of landing zone security, advance by best possible route and occupy blocking positions vicinity BS 567861. The concept further provided for extensive ambushing and patrolling along likely routes of egress from south of east-west grid line 85 to the north and northeast.

10. Execution

a. 04 February *MARCH*

(1) At 041015H, Commanding Officer, 1st Marines directed 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines to place two rifle companies (rein) and a command group on immediate alert for helilift to area of operations to be designated. Simultaneously, Command Group Alpha, Company L, Company M, two sections of 81mm Mortars and two attached engineer squads were alerted as required.

(2) At 141030H, Commanding Officer, 1st Marines directed 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines to establish helicopter landing zone for alerted forces. Landing zone was established vicinity coordinates BT 556052.

(3) At 041100H, Commanding Officer, 1st Marines directed the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines to alert remaining two companies, one of which was to move by truck at 041200H and operate as security for a convoy and security for Task Force Delta Command Post. Company K and Company I were alerted, and Company K was directed to provide convoy security and Task Force Delta Command Post security. The requirement for convoy security was later increased to include a platoon (rein) from Company I.

(4) At 041245H, Company K (Rein) with platoon from Company I departed Chu Lai by truck as convoy security and was CHOPPED OPCON to Task Force Delta.

(5) At 041310H, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines received Task Force Delta Frag Order (see paragraph 9 above) and immediately initiated required liaison with MAG-36.

(6) At 041350H, Commanding General, Task Force Delta arrived 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines Command Post and authorized Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines to increase heli-

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lifted forces to include remaining company (-). Company I (-) was directed to commence movement to helicopter loading zone.

(7) At 041500H, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines (-) commenced helilift into designated landing zone vicinity BC 554875 with Company M being the initial element lifted into landing zone followed in turn by Command Group Alpha, Company L (Rein), and Company I (-). Negative enemy contact during helicopter landing.

(8) After landing in zone, and at 041645H, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines (-), established Command Post vicinity coordinates BS 555873; Company L commenced movement to establish blocking positions vicinity coordinates BS 536855, BS 546856, and BS 550858; Company M commenced movement to establish blocking positions vicinity coordinates BS 568861, BS 563853, and BS 577861; Company I (-) deployed in perimeter vicinity Battalion Command Post at coordinates BS 555873.

(9) At 041815H, completed helilift into landing zone except for platoon (-) from Company I which was delivered into landing zone at first light on 05 February.

(10) At 041830H, vicinity coordinates BS 569863, Company M challenged two VC on trail, engaged with five rounds small arms. One VC was observed to fall after engaged, but was not captured. Result of engagement, one VC WIA.

(11) At 041850H, Company M established designated blocking positions.

(12) At 041900H, vicinity coordinates BS 545857, Company L located one mine made from 3.5-inch rocket round. Mine destroyed. No friendly casualties.

(13) At 041912H, Company L established designated blocking positions.

(14) At 042100H, Company M observed weapon suspected of being .50 caliber machinegun firing from vicinity coordinates BS 569845 at helicopter. Fired 81mm mortar mission on suspected machinegun location; rounds were on target; machinegun fire ceased.

(15) At 042330H, received Task Force Delta Frag Order 170-66 which directed 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines to conduct search and destroy operations to south and southeast. Issued 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines Frag Order 16-66.

(16) During night and early morning of 04 - 05 February, negative enemy contact.

b. 05 February MARCH

(2) At 050650H, vicinity coordinates BS 568862, Company M exploded one anti-personnel mine; unknown type. One friendly WIA sustained.

(4) Task Force Delta issued verbal frag order to reorient direction of search and destroy operations in order to relieve pressure on 1st ARVN Airborne Battalion. 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines immediately issued required verbal frag order and commenced movement to south and to area where 1st ARVN Airborne Battalion was engaged. The Battalion was deployed with Company L on right and Company M on left. Company I (Battalion Reserve) in trace.

(6) At 051100H, both Company M and Company L were heavily engaged in respective areas.

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KIA and twenty WIA. Company L, after clearing objective, consolidated positions, linked-up with and turned over objective to 1st ARVN Battalion. Following this, Company L displaced to vicinity 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines Command Post.

Company M, after deploying to reinforce reserve platoon and after initial contact, was heavily engaged for approximately three hours on objective centered coordinates BS 855857. Initial estimate of enemy strength was considered to be a VC company - this estimate was later revised upward and it is now estimated that VC on objective was closer to battalion (-) size and contained a battalion or regimental headquarters. VC were entrenched in depth in well-prepared positions with excellent fields of fire and employed 60mm mortars, .50 caliber machineguns, 57mm recoilless rifles, a large number of automatic weapons, and grenades. Company M, after engaging VC, aggressively assaulted and penetrated VC positions, and at 1330H, Company I was passed through Company M in effort to increase pressure on VC. Results of Company M contact were fifty-nine VC KIA, fifty VC KIA (possible), and a large number of captured weapons and other major items of equipment (see paragraph 7 - Intelligence). Friendly casualties sustained were fifteen KIA and forty-six WIA.

(7) At 051330H, Company I, after passing through Company M, continued the assault on objective centered vicinity coordinates BS 855857 and remained in heavy contact for approximately three hours. Results of Company I contact were nine VC KIA, four VC KIA (possible), four WIA (possible). Friendly casualties sustained were seventeen KIA, thirty-four WIA.

(8) At approximately 051630H, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines (-) was directed by Task Force Delta to maintain Company I in present positions while 5th ARVN Airborne Battalion made contact with and passed through or immediately to south of Company I, at which time, Company I would retract to the north for new mission. At about this time, contact decreased to sporadic small arms fire and Company I maintained position as directed.

(9) At approximately 051900H, the 5th ARVN Airborne Battalion advisor informed the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines that physical contact with Company I would not be established. In response to this, the Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines requested permission to retain Company I in present positions rather than retracting to the north in effort to maintain contact with VC; and further requested that all friendly units be withdrawn to safe distance while massive air and artillery preparation of objective was conducted which, in turn, would be followed by continued assault of objective by Company I and Company L followed in trace by Company M. While awaiting approval, Company I maintained occupied positions. There was no enemy contact during period.

c. 06 February MARCH

(2) At 060800H, Task Force Delta approved Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines request and at 061030H, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines commenced massive air and artillery preparation fires (see paragraph 6 - Supporting Forces). At 1245H, preparation fires were ceased and assault of objective was commenced. There was no enemy contact during assault. Results of operations included capturing a number of weapons, documents, and other items of equipment (see paragraph 7 - Intelligence); recovery of a number of friendly KIAs who could not be recovered on previous day; and at vicinity coordinates BS 555838 discovery of a vast, interconnecting, well-developed cave complex that required 5000 pounds of C-4 to destroy; 300 meters of entrenchments and wire fortifications vicinity coordinates BS 555839 to BS 554834; two overhead bunkers suitable as command post bunkers for large headquarters.

06 March. (3) The search of the cave complex continued through

(4) At 061430H, Commanding General, Task Force Delta arrived vicinity cave complex and after inspecting the complex, directed Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines to remain in objective area as long as required to conduct thorough search of complex following which the complex would be destroyed.

(5) At 061130H, Company K, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, CHOPPED OFCON from 1st Battalion, 7th Marines to 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines and joined 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines vicinity Command Post.

(6) During the night of 06 February and the following day, enemy contact was negative.

d. 07 February MARCH

d. 07 February MARCH

(1) At 070830H, Company M commenced destruction of cave complex utilizing 5000 pounds of C-4 in accomplishing the task.

(2) At 071000H, Company L, as directed by Commanding General, Task Force Delta, was CHOPPED OPCON to 1st Battalion, 7th Marines.

(3) At 071130H, Commanding General, Task Force Delta directed retraction of 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines (-) from area of operation to Chu Lai after destruction of cave complex.

(4) At 071300H, Company I and Company K were retracted from area of operations by helicopter.

(5) At 071800H, after completion of destruction of cave complex, Command Group Alpha and Company M were retracted from area of operations by helicopter.

(6) At 071830H, Command Group Alpha and Company M arrived at Chu Lai and assumed previous mission.

11. Results. Total friendly losses number forty-one KIA and 102 WIA. VC casualties and equipment captured are delineated in detail in paragraph 7 (Intelligence). All areas where air strikes were conducted were searched by ground forces; however, enemy losses killed by air could not be determined due to removal of bodies by the enemy.

12. Administrative Matters

a. Supply Requirements and Resupply. Supply requirements were submitted directly to the Shore Party Battalion detachment supporting the operation. These requests were filled at the Force Logistics Support Unit at Chu Lai and flown directly to the Battalion by helicopter. This method included all types of supplies. At the operation site, Battalion personnel received the requested supplies and distributed these to the companies concerned. The supply support given this Battalion was, in most cases, satisfactory except in one instance when an emergency ammunition resupply was delayed for an inordinately extended period. Special items such as the C-4 required to destroy the cave complex were expeditiously delivered.

b. Equipment and Ammunition

(1) In the operation, selected items of equipment organic to an infantry battalion were not used because of the mission given this Battalion. Included in these items were 106mm recoilless rifles, motor transport equipment, and flame throwers. Equipment

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used included: 81mm mortars, 40mm M-79 grenade launchers, 7.62mm M-60 machineguns, 3.5-inch rocket launchers and individual arms and equipment.

(2) Ammunition initially carried consisted of the Basic Allowance per individual. Resupply of expended ammunition was provided as requested except as noted above. Equipment carried was considered as adequate; however, for future operations of this type, flame throwers will be carried and employed or placed in an "on-call" pre-positioned status.

## c. Maintenance and Salvage

(1) First echelon maintenance on all equipment was performed in the field by the individuals within the Battalion. Equipment requiring higher echelon maintenance was evacuated back to the Battalion Rear where it was either repaired or evacuated to Force Logistics Support Unit, Chu Lai.

(2) Battalion personnel at medical and equipment evacuation points conducted salvage operations. In this manner, individual equipment and weapons were recovered by the Battalion for redistribution purposes. This method proved satisfactory.

d. Treatment of Casualties and Evacuation and Hospitalization

(1) Medical and surgical first aid was administered to forty-two KIAs, 102 WIAs from hostile action, two POWs, and fifteen civilians.

(2) Disposition of casualties were as follows:

(a) Eighty-four WIAs were treated and evacuated.

(b) Eighteen WIAs were treated and returned to duty immediately.

(c) Two of the eighty-four treated and evacuated were returned to duty during the operation.

(d) Two POWs were treated and evacuated.

(e) Three civilians were treated and evacuated.

(3) All evacuees were sent to Company B, 3rd Medical Battalion at Chu Lai via helicopter.

(4) Hospitalization was provided at Company B, 3rd Medical Battalion and 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines BAS, with some personnel being evacuated to a further medical facility as designated by Company B, 3rd Medical Battalion.



e. Medical Evaluation, General

(2) Helicopter evacuation was delayed at times more than two hours due to concentrated hostile fire; this undoubtedly increased the mortality and morbidity of the WIAs.

(4) On 7 March, after the battle zone was secured, a search of the area was made for the purpose of seeking out wounded civilians. Four civilians were discovered that had been wounded, three of which were evacuated by the Medical Officer due to broken lower extremities. Several children were treated by company copsmen for burns due to napalm bombs.

f. Communications

(a) One Communications Chief

(b) One Radio Chief

(c) One Message Center Chief

(d) Eight radio operators

(e) Two wiremen.

(f) Two message center men

(2) Radio

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(b) It is also recommended that when helicopters are dispatched to units, instead of entering the unit's tactical net, helicopters utilize the TACP local for contact with the supported unit and guidance to the landing zone.

(3) Supply. Resupply of communications-electronics items was satisfactory. The 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines sent a liaison communications-electronics representative to Force Logistics Support Unit who assisted with replacement of items requested by the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines from the field.

#### 14. Commander's Analysis

b. The Battalion, based upon the experiences of Operation Double Eagle, after making contact on Operation UTAH, immediately and aggressively closed with and assaulted the VC positions in a concerted effort to maintain contact. This limited full exploitation of supporting arms, and hypothetically resulted in higher friendly casualties. Accordingly, the most obvious lesson learned from Operation UTAH, as well as other recent operations conducted, was the requirement to be prepared for either type of VC contact by

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fully exploiting all information collection assets - i.e. scouts, higher, adjacent, and subordinate units, recent aerial reconnaissance to include photography, infra-red, camouflage detection, etc. - in order to insure proper and timely interpretation of VC contacts. This problem, while not without solution, does require extensive and careful, weighted consideration and study with the most immediate solution being more effective use of the aforementioned information collection agencies and the indoctrination and education of troop leaders, at all levels, so that obvious indications of enemy intentions are properly interpreted at the lower levels, as well as higher level, with immediate and appropriate action being initiated on the lowest level possible and coordinated and controlled at the higher levels.

15. Recommendations. Specific recommendations drawn for experience gained from Operation UTAH are delineated in those paragraphs dealing with the problems area (i.e. Communications, etc).

JR Young  
J. R. YOUNG

Copy to: CO, 1st Marines