

HEADQUARTERS
39TH ENGINEER BATTALION (COMBAT) (ABN)
APO 96316

~~ECDBA-15~~

~~11-120F~~
7 February 1969

SUBJECT: After Action Report of Operation Geronimo I - Adams (first phase)

11-120F

TO: Commanding Officer
45th Engr Gp (Const)
ATTN: S-3
APO 96238

1. GENERAL:

- a. Name of Operation: Geronimo I (1st Bde, 101st Abn Div) and first phase of Operation Adams (1st Bde, 11th Inf Div)
- b. Date of Operations: 31 October - 27 December 1968
- c. Location: TUY HOA, RVN
- d. Control Headquarters: 39th Engr Bn (C)(A)
- e. Reporting Officer: LT COL T. R. FULTON

2. ORGANIZATION:

- a. 39th Engr Bn (C)(A) (Hq Co, A Co, B Co, C Co)
- b. 553 Engr Company (FB)
- c. 572 Engr Company (LB)

3. SUPPORTING FORCES: None

4. MISSION: Battalion provides combat support for FWMF in area; clears route 7B from TUY HOA to CUNG SON and keeps road open; upgrades QL #1 to Class 50 one-way traffic from TUY HOA to TUY AN; upgrades airfield at CUNG SON to take C-123 traffic; clears route 6B from QL #1 to TL 2D. Battalion also constructs POL line extension from HAO SON to TUY HOA South Airfield and POL pumping station (FORT LANE); and executes other construction missions as directed.

5. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS: 1st Bde, 101st Abn Div conducts search and destroy operations vic CUNG SON. Company "B", 39th Engr Bn provides Engineer support for 1/101, continues construction of CUNG SON Airfield and clears

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western portion of route 7B daily. 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div conducts search and destroy operations vic TUY AN and DONG TRE. Company "A", 39th Engr Bn provides engineer support for 1/4, clears eastern portion of route 7B and route QL #1 (TUY HOA to TUY AN) daily. Company "C" continues construction of PORT LANE facilities at VUNG RO, clears QL #1 (TUY HOA to VUNG RO) and provides ROK Army 9th Inf Div at NINH HOA with engineer support.

6. EXECUTION:

a. 31-2 November: Company "A" swept route 7B in sector (CQ 162463 to BQ 953415) and worked on QL #1 from (CQ 162463 to CQ 112677). Company "B" worked on CUNG SON Airfield and approach road and swept route 7B in sector (BQ 810423 to BQ 953415). Company "C" swept route QL #1 in sector (CQ 285233 to CQ 175448), swept access road to battalion area (CQ 195366 to CQ 251347), and continued work on PORT LANE. (See inclosure 1 for coordinate reference)

b. 3-10 November: Company "A" continued to sweep route 7B and QL #1 in sector and conducted nightly platoon ambushes vic of (CQ 055393) with negative results. Two (2) Viet Cong suspects were captured on 5 November and turned over to the 1/101 MPs. Company "B" continued construction of CUNG SON Airfield and swept route 7B in sector. Company "C" swept route QL #1 in sector, swept access road to battalion and continued work on PORT LANE. Company "C" moved to battalion area and began work on POL line extension from HAO SON (CQ 243273) to TUY HOA (CQ 202416). 553 Engr Co (FB) & 572 Engr Co (LA), which had been detached on 20 October, were attached again on 10 November 1966.

c. 11-14 November: Company "A" continued nightly ambushes (with negative results) and sweeping of route 7B. Company "B" covered the rock base course of runway at CUNG SON with 2" of sand, began hauling laterite for runway surface course and continued sweeping route 7B. Company "C" continued work on POL line extension and began construction of a pumping station at VUNG RO BAY (CQ 269227); continued work on PORT LANE.

d. 15-18 November: Company "A" continued sweeping route 7B in sector but discontinued ambush operations. On 15 November two (2) Anti Tank mines were detonated at (CQ 080408) by convoy vehicles injuring 7 EM. During the next two (2) days, three (3) Anti Tank mines were found in the area of the ambush site. Company "B" continued work on the CUNG SON airstrip and swept route 7B. Company "C" completed pumping station at PORT LANE and conducted POL line flushing operation.

e. 19-27 November: Company "A" employed two (2) platoons to sweep route 7B and one (1) platoon to sweep route QL #1; supported 1/101st with security force at TUY HOA North Airfield. One (1) platoon replaced existing M416 bridge at TUY AN (CQ 139574) with timber bridges. (See inclosure 3 page 3) Company "B" continued work on CUNG SON airfield and swept route 7B. Company "C" repaired

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breaks in POL line, repaired submarine POL line at PORT LANE; began working on a Signal Relay Site at top of HILL 430, (CQ 253219) and started construction of a one-way dry weather access road from QL #1 to HILL 430. 553 Engr Co (FB) reinforced Bailey bridge (CQ 271217) from SS to DS.

f. 28 November - 1 December: Company "A" replaced M416 bridge with timber bridge (CQ 130503), (see inclosure 3 page 2) and maintained and swept routes QL #1 and 7B in sector. Company "B" swept route 7B and worked on drainage at CUNG SON Airfield. Heavy rains hampered work. Company "C" continued clearing top of HILL 430 (247m² cleared) and pioneering of access road to HILL 430. 553 Engr Co (FB) began construction of 60' SS Bailey bridge at Dialahn Crossing. (see inclosure 3 page 3) Assumed maintenance and security responsibility of float bridge (CQ 201350). 572 Engr Co (LE) began construction of access road to new battalion CP area at TUY HOA North Airfield and began driving piles at Dialahn bridge (support of 553 Engr Co (FB) bridge job).

g. 2-4 December: Companies "A", "B", "C" continued with assigned missions. 553 Engr Co (FB) added 90' of floats to bridge #1 (CQ 201350); tested POL line "Tee" (CQ 230367) to spur line to Class III yard and laid 4,000 feet of 6" pipe.

h. 5-9 December: Company "A" began construction of timber bridge to replace existing M416 (CQ 116644), continued with mine sweep and maintenance of route QL #1 in sector. Company "B" continued sweeping route 7B in sector and assumed maintenance responsibility of M416 float bridge at (BQ 952415). One span of an Eiffel bridge on route 7B (BQ 876444) collapsed during passage of a 5 ton wrecker towing a 5 ton dump truck. Truss failed at mid span due to prior damage and span is not repairable. Company "C" continued clearing on top of HILL 430 and pioneering access road. 553 Engr Co (FB) completed POL line to Class III yard and continued Bailey bridge construction at Dialahn. 572 Engr Co (LE) continued supporting Company "C" project on HILL 430 and worked on access road to new battalion CP area at TUY HOA North Airfield. 1st Bde, 101st Abn Div relocated to vic of KONTRUM, and Operation Geronimo I ended. 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div moved CP to TUY HOA North Airfield into the old 1/101st area.

i. 10-13 December: Company "A" completed timber bridge on route QL #1 (CQ 116644), began work on 3 span timber bridge at (CQ 113651) and began support of 1/4th at TUY HOA North Airfield. Company "B" continued with assigned missions but weather hampered work at CUNG SON Airfield. Company "C" (minus 1 platoon) moved to NINH HOA (BP 992832) to commence support of 9th ROKA Inf Div (-). The 2d platoon remained at HILL 430 to support the 572d Engr Co (LE) which assumed responsibility for pioneer road to HILL 430 and signal facilities on top of the Hill. 553 Engr Co (FB) continued missions. 39th Engr Bn Headquarters moved to TUY HOA North Airfield (CQ 152478) to be collocated with 1/4th. CP closed at 1730 hours, 10 December 1966.

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j. 14-17 December: Company "A" continued with assigned missions; one (1) squad was ambushed on route QL #1 (CQ 115647) with three (3) EM WEA; two (2) squads were ambushed later that day in the same location with no casualties; one (1) platoon conducted a route recon on route QL #1 North to vic of (CQ 102802) with security provided by 47th ARVN Regt. Company "B" continued with assigned mission on route 7B but work on CUNG SON Airfield ceased because of heavy rain. Company "C" conducted recon of route QL #1 from BP 969816 to CQ 233194 and continued maintenance of route QL #1 from NINH HOA to VUNG RO. 553 Engr Co (FB) continued with assigned missions. 572 Engr Co (LE) completed clearing top of Hill 430, continued construction of pioneer access road and completed access road to battalion CP area. (See inclosure 3 pages 1 and 2)

k. 18-20 December: Company "A" completed timber bridge (CQ 113651) on QL #1, one (1) platoon moved to TUY AN (C. 113665) to work on forward airstrip as well as maintenance and mine sweeping of route 6B to TL 2D. Company "B" was pulled off CUNG SON Airfield job due to unfavorable weather and began relocating CP at M4T6 float bridge site on route 7B (BQ 953414) as first step in withdrawal of company to TUY HOA. Enemy ambushed the mine sweeping team early 20 December (CQ 009387) and one (1) officer (Artillery FO) from 1/4th was KIA. The withdrawal "B" Company from CUNG SON was supported by attachment of one (1) platoon of Infantry and one (1) gun section of 105 How from 1/4th. Company "C" assumed responsibility for base development construction support of ROK cantonment area (BP 999857 to CQ 005856), 9th ROKA Inf Div, and began construction of a 4,000 meter all-weather road from route QL #1 to TAC CP of 2d Bn, 29th Inf Regt, 9th ROKA Inf Div. 572 Engr Co (LE) and 553 Engr Co (FB) continued assigned missions.

l. 21-23 December: Company "A" continued assigned mission. Company "B" removed tactical bridging on route 7B (BQ 953414 and BQ 953415) and relocated company CP just west of QL #1 (CQ 132523). Company "C", 572 Engr Co (LE), and 553 Engr Co (FB) continued on assigned missions.

m. 24-27 December: Company "B" closed at new CP location (CQ 132523) on 24 December and started maintenance of equipment. All other companies continued assigned construction during Christmas truce period. (See inclosure 2 for CP locations)

7. SUMMARY of OPERATIONS:

a. Company "A" supported 1st Bde, 101st Abn Div with security force of one (1) platoon at TUY HOA North Airfield, replaced four (4) M4T6 fixed spans on QL #1 with timber bridges, improved drainage of TUY AN Airstrip for 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div, and swept routes QL #1 and 7B daily within sector.

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b. Company "B" swept route 7B daily within sector and improved roads vic CUNG SON, lengthened CUNG SON runway to 2200' and completed upgrading of Airfield to take C-123 traffic, except for emplacement of T-17 memorane.

c. Company "C" swept route QL #1 daily within sector, supported 2d Bn, 29th Inf Regt, 9th ROKA Inf Div with engineer advice and by construction of a 4,000 meter all-weather tactical road, completed assigned PORT LANE construction (phase I) and a 6" PCL line extension 14,000 meters from HAO SON (CQ 243273) to TUY HOA (CQ 202416); completed clearing for a signal Relay site on Hill 430 at VUNG RO and initiated construction of a pioneer access road to site.

d. 553 Engr Co (FB) built 60' DS Bailey bridge at Dialahn Crossing (CQ 233194), supported the 39th Engr Bn with trucks for hauling materials from CAM RANH BAY DEPOT, reinforced M416 float bridge on route QL #1 (CQ 201350), and built 4,000 meter 6" PCL line from (CQ 230367) to the Class III yard, TUY HOA Sub-Area Command.

e. 572 Engr Co (LE) supported the 39th Engr Bn with equipment, built an access road from QL #1 to TUY HOA North Airfield, supported the 553d Engr Co (FB) bridge project at Dialahn Crossing with pile driving equipment and assumed responsibility for construction of pioneer access road and signal facilities (Hill 430).

f. Upon departure of the 1st Bde, 101st Abn Div (10 December 1966) from the TUY HOA area, their TAOR was taken over by 1st Bde, 4th Inf and Operation Adams was expanded to cover the increased TAOR. Operation Adams was still continuing at the end of this reporting period. It will be covered more completely in a separate After Action Report.

8. COMMUNICATIONS:

a. Communication with higher, lower and attached units by the battalion NCS was accomplished with a AN/VRC 47 radio and two RC 292 antennas, one 60' in height and the other 40'. The organic line companies' NCS used an AN/VRC 47 radio with an RC 292 antenna. Communications between the company NCS and subordinate elements was accomplished by utilization of AN/VRC 46's mounted on 1/4 ton vehicles and the squad radios (PRC 25's) which were easily transportable either by back pack or vehicle.

b. The 553 Engr Co (FB) was also equipped with the AN/VRC 12 series radios, i.e., the AN/VRC 46's and PRC 25's. However, the 572 Engr Co (LE) was still equipped with the old "D" series TOE radios, (AN/VRC 18 and AN/VRC 10) which battalion loaned the company when the new series radio was issued to battalion. The 45th Engineer Group (located at QUI NHON) maintains communications with battalion by use of an AN/VRC 46 with an 81' high RC 292 antenna.

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c. Communications operations were generally satisfactory between battalion, lower, higher, adjacent and supported units during the entire operation, notwithstanding the extensive area of operation and the widely dispersed units. At one time the companies were dispersed in a 40 mile radius around the Battalion CP and it was necessary to establish a relay station at the top of CHAP CHAI mountain, located just North of the battalion CP. However, the radio equipment authorized the battalion under the "D" series TOE is not adequate for operations in this environment or for sustained dispersed operations.

9. SUPPORTING ADMINISTRATION:

a. During the reporting period, support was received from the following organizations:

(1) TUY HOA SUB-AREA COMMAND (THSAC) -- All Class I, III, and V supplies and limited Class IV construction and barrier materials.

(2) CAM RANH DEPOT (CRD) -- All Class II supplies and Class IV constructions materials not available at THSAC.

b. At the beginning of the reporting period, the line companies of the battalion were supported as follows:

(1) Company "A" -- Located on route 7B vic Catholic Church (BQ 953415), approximately 45 kilometers distant, was supported in the following manner:

(a) Class I -- supply point pick up

(b) Class II, III, IV and V -- unit delivery by Battalion.

(2) Company "B" -- located at CUNG SON (BQ 800422), approximately 05 kilometers distant, was supported in all classes of supply with unit delivery by Battalion.

(3) Company "C" -- located at PORN LANE, VUNG RO (CQ 287233), approximately 25 kilometers distant, was supported in the following manner:

(a) Class I and III -- unit delivery by THSAC

(b) Class II, IV and V -- unit delivery by Battalion.

c. On 10 November, the 553 Engr Co (EB) and the 572 Engr Co (LE), were reattached to the Battalion for all purposes. Both units were located vic of the Battalion CP (CQ 247370) and were supported by unit distribution of Classes II, IV and V. Classes I and III were obtained from THSAC supply point.

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d. On 11 November, Company "C" moved to vic. Battalion CP (CQ 247376) and began to pick up Class I rations at the supply point. Classes II, IV and V continued to be supplied by Battalion. Class III was supplied by the THSAC Class III supply point.

e. During the latter part of November, Company "A", moved its CP to TUY HOA North Airfield (CQ 118491). This location was approximately 20 kilometers distance from the Battalion. Logistic support continued without any changes. On 9 December, the unit displaced to TUY AN (CQ 112677). This move did not significantly increase the distance from the Battalion CP because on 11 December the Battalion CP moved to TUY HOA North Airfield. After Company "A's" move to TUY AN, all resupply was delivered to the unit by Battalion.

f. On 23 December, Company "B", moved to vic (CQ 135523), approximately 5 kilometers North of the Battalion's new location at TUY HOA North Airfield. Logistic support continued to be supplied by Battalion without any changes. At the same time Company "C" deployed to NINH HOA (CQ 990832), approximately 60 kilometers South of TUY HOA. This required the unit to be attached to the 63d Maintenance Battalion for logistic support, with the exception of Classes II and IV. Battalion continued to provide this support. Both unit and supply point distribution were used for resupply.

g. The Battalion obtained its supplies during this period by supply point pick up with exception of Class III. MORGAS and diesel were supplied to a retail point in the Battalion area by THSAC, but oils, lubricants, and bulk MORGAS and diesel for the line companies was picked up by the Battalion at the Class III supply point. This system was used by the Battalion at both locations.

h. Availability of all classes of supply improved considerably during this reporting period. This occurred because of the following reasons:

(1) Opening of PORT LANE at VUNG RO in September made possible shipment of increased tonnage to the TUY HOA area during the monsoon season. High seas had already made over the beach resupply at TUY HOA impossible.

(2) Opening of route QL #1 from NHA TRANG to TUY HOA enabled the battalion to convoy to CAM RANH DEPOT to obtain supplies and construction materials. During this reporting period the battalion ran two (2) convoys to CAM RANH DEPOT with a total of fifteen (15) vehicles. Tonnage transported by type were:

(a) Class II -- 7 tons

(b) Class IV -- 55 tons

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i. Of special note during this reporting period was the support of Company "B" at CUNG SON. From 31 October to 21 December, the following supplies were delivered by battalion with transportation support from THSAC:

(1) Class I - Rations were delivered practically everyday by truck to enable the unit to serve two (2) A rations and one (1) MIC ration a day. On 20 November an emergency resupply was delivered by CH-47 due to the road being opened for two (2) days. Approximately 5,000 pounds of rations were delivered.

(2) Class II - Unit was issued one (1) 1/4 ton truck and one (1) 5 ton dump truck.

(3) Class III - 43,700 gal of diesel, 20,400 gal of MOGAS and assorted POL products were delivered.

(4) Class IV - Construction materials delivered were 5,000 bags of cement, 43 boxes of T-17 membrane, 600 feet of CMP, 156 rolls of concertina, and miscellaneous.

(5) Class V - 6,000 pounds of ammunition and demolitions were delivered during this period.

10. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED:

a. The Airfield construction at CUNG SON consisted of improving an existing earth strip to all weather C-123 capability. The existing strip was 2,000 feet long and had poor surface drainage. The desired final product was a 2,500 foot forward airfield surfaced with T-17 membrane, turn arounds at each end and an aircraft parking apron. With the exception of T-17 and cement, only locally available material (sand, cracked rock and laterite) could be obtained for construction. Base course construction consisted of a six (6) inch lift of cracked basalt rock (4 inch). This was stabilized by blending in sand and cement with graders. The surface of the base course was too irregular and was not considered of adequate strength to serve as a surface course beneath the T-17, so a 6" lift of laterite/clay was emplaced on top. The entire field was at grade when daily rains of the monsoon season began in early December which would not allow adequate compaction prior to placing T-17. Specific problems encountered:

(1) Lack of adequate water pumping capability for large quantities of water required in cement stabilization.

(2) Only one (1) steel wheel roller was available for finish rolling and was not adequate to keep pace with final grader work.

(3) Monsoon rains preclude earthwork that requires reasonable specification for compaction and grade.

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b. Security of route 7B was inadequate, especially in the villages, and resulted in excessive number of ambushes and mining incidents. Most of the mines were discovered outside the village of TIVONG TIEV HOT on route 7B, indicating probable presence of V.C. in the village. Since both ARVN and US units were responsible for route security, coordination was difficult and gaps occurred.

c. Reconnaissance operations as well as command control more severely hampered because of lack of organic air support. Supported tactical units furnish helicopter support when available; but because of operational requirements, air transportation requests were often pre-empted by higher priority operational requirements. Control and coordination of isolated projects was extremely difficult. Radio communication is not completely effective for describing technical problems and does not substitute for on the job inspections.

d. Mine detectors are not proving capable of easily locating V.C. bamboo and burlap land mines, buried in a road surfaced with rock containing a high ore content. (See inclosure 4)

e. Construction of POB lines at night is extremely difficult if adequate lighting cannot be provided. Use of indigenous labor compounds the problem and the work often must be redone during daylight hours. An excessive amount of dirt and rock was found in the pipe and many couplings were improperly placed, indicating extreme carelessness or sabotage.

f. Supply problems continued to hamper the operations of the Battalion. The two (2) main areas were replacement of major end items and availability of construction materials in the THSAC Class IV yard.

g. An excessive number of AN/PRC-25 handsets were damaged during mine clearing operations. The radio operators were walking too close to the mine clearing element or were riding in a sweep vehicle when it hit a mine. A battalion SOP was published on mine clearing operations which included the requirement that the radio operator should not ride in the sweep vehicle but should be well behind the sweep party in case mines were inadvertently detonated.

11. LESSONS LEARNED:

a. Roads sections passing through villages must be checked for land mines more thoroughly and with greater emphasis than the rest of the road.

b. Roads that are deliberately cleared of V.C. land mines at the start of an operation must be secured at night by tactical units and by harassing and interdiction Artillery fire. Otherwise the road cannot be opened each morning by a hasty sweep but must be cleared by a deliberate sweep which is a slow and time consuming process. (See inclosure 4)

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c. When POL lines are constructed by use of indigenous labor the work must be carefully supervised and inspected during construction to avoid sabotage by labor personnel. POL lines should be tested only between completed stations.

d. It is imperative to forecast needed materials and supplies in order that the supply system can respond with the required items. Many times the items are not available at the base camp location and the items must be obtained from the DEPO, many miles away. Insecure land lines of communication and dependence on air and sea lift for resupply compounds the problem.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

Edward B. Wengers

EDWARD B. WENERS
CAPTAIN CE
Adjutant

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2- CP Locations
3- Bridge Construction
4- Viet Cong Land Mines