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AUTHORITY

AGO ltr 29 Apr 1980

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20310

IN REPLY REFER TO
AGAM-P (M) (10 Jul 68) FOR OT RD 682031 19 July 1968

SUBJECT: Operational Report - Lessons Learned, Headquarters, 14th Engineer Battalion (Cbt)(Army), Period Ending 30 April 1968 (U)

SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. Subject report is forwarded for review and evaluation in accordance with paragraph 5b, AR 525-15. Evaluations and corrective actions should be reported to ACSFOR OT RD, Operational Reports Branch, within 90 days of receipt of covering letter.

2. Information contained in this report is provided to insure appropriate benefits in the future from lessons learned during current operations and may be adapted for use in developing training material.

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY:

Kenneth G. Wickham

KENNETH G. WICKHAM
Major General, USA
The Adjutant General

1 Incl
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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTER, 14TH ENGINEER BATTALION (COMBAT) (ARMY)
APO 96495

EGD-BB-C 30 April 1968

SUBJECT: Operational Report-Lessons Learned (RCS CSFOR-65) for Quarterly Period Ending 30 April 1968

THRU: Commanding Officer
45th Engineer Group (Const)
APO 96337

Commanding General
18th Engineer Brigade
ATTN: AVBC-C
APO 96377

Commanding General
United States Army, Vietnam
ATTN: AVGGH-DH
APO 96307

Commander in Chief
United States Army, Pacific
ATTN: GPOP-OT
APO 96558

TO: Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development
Department of the Army (ACSFOR DA)
Washington, D.C. 20310

FOR OT RD
682031

EOD-BB-C 30 April 1968
SUBJECT: Operational Report-Lessons Learned (RCS CSFOR-65) for Quarterly Period Ending 30 April 1968

Section 1, Significant Organization or Unit Activities.

This ORLL is the sixth report submitted by the 14th Engineer Battalion (Combat) since its arrival in the Republic of Vietnam in October 1966. This report covers the major activities of the battalion during the three month period ending with 30 April 1968, including the relocation of the battalion from Dong Ba Thin, RVN, to the Northern ICTZ.

A. COMMAND:

During the quarter the battalion was commanded by LTC Bennett L. Lewis.

B. PERSONNEL, ADMINISTRATION, MORALE, AND DISCIPLINE:

An effort was made to bring the battalion as near TO&E strength as possible prior to moving to ICTZ. As a result enlisted gains for the month ending 25 April were 121, with losses for the same period totalling 51. A "rotational hump" was avoided in these gains by taking the majority from in-country sources. Promotions during the quarter totalled 82 to grade of E4, 51 to E5, and 1 to E6. The morale of the battalion continues to be very high, with no abnormal disciplinary problems.

C. INTELLIGENCE:

A hasty reconnaissance of the bridges on National Highway QL-1 from Phan Rang to Dong Ba Thin was conducted by the S-2 section early in the quarter.

When verbal notification of a probable move to ICTZ was received, the S-2 began collecting all available intelligence material pertaining to that area. The S-2 made several trips to Saigon and Nha Trang for maps. On one trip to Saigon, the S-2 section also procured five "Starlight Scopes" for use on the perimeter at the new location. Authority to obtain the scopes was received from 18th Engineer Brigade.

The S-2 was a member of the advance party which laid out the battalion area and began site preparation at Utah Beach. On arrival at the new location, the S-2 established initial contact with local intelligence officers and coordinated with the 1/5 Cav for the communication of intelligence data.

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D. PLANS, OPERATIONS, AND TRAINING:

At the beginning of February, the battalion was engaged in 9 active projects, 4 minor tasks and 3 operational support missions, with elements stationed in 7 locations in the southern half of the II Corps Tactical Zone. On 14 March, the entire battalion moved to the northern I Corps Tactical Zone to provide the necessary non-divisional engineer effort required to develop the Utah Beach logistical support complex, and to provide direct combat support to the 1st Air Cavalry Div, 101st Abn Div, and 3rd Marine Division. This move was conducted in two general phases: a planning and consolidation phase, during which all movement plans were made and the battalion, less C Company, was assembled in the Cam Ranh Bay area: and the execution phase during which the Battalion (-) from Cam Ranh, and C Company from Phan Thiet, moved to the ICTZ. On completion of the move, the battalion (-) was located at Utah Beach (YD 488551), and D Company at LZ Evans (YD 54323) in support of the 1st Air Cav. Div. Headquarters complex. An after action report on the movement is attached as Inclosure I.

During the quarter, A Company conducted 63 days of operations, 19 days of training, maintenance, and preparation for movement, and 8 days in transit. On 1 February, the company (-) was in Phan Rang with one platoon at Song Pha on National Highway QL-11. Work on QL-11 included the construction of three bypasses at blown bridges and one 40' steel stringer bridge. On Communal Highway 408, two concrete culvert headwalls were poured and three miles of the road were ditched and graded.

One platoon of A Company was moved to Dalat on 17 February as a job site security force for C Company, 87th Engineer Battalion (Const), but returned to Phan Rang after one day when the company was alerted for movement.

At Cam Ranh Bay, A Company participated in a training program in sand-cement road construction, building 1600 feet of road. Other jobs at Cam Ranh included setting posts for a fence around a sentry dog kennel and the construction of a 20'x 100' building in Dong Ba Thin.

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On 14 March, A Company sailed for Utah Beach with the battalion. Upon arrival, A Company was assigned responsibility for upgrading and maintenance of the road from Utah Beach to Hai Lang. The existing narrow French road had been reopened by the Seabees about the end of February, after which upgrading of the surface was begun. When complete the road will be two full lanes wide with a laterite surface as a minimum. Included in the project is the construction of two (2) each Class 35/60 bridges. These bridges will be timber pile construction and 120 and 140 feet long. It is anticipated that the road will be capable of passing at least 2000 tons of supplies a day upon completion. At the start the only available source of laterite for the road was located in Quang Tri. Shortly after starting the project, A Company located and developed a new pit near LZ Jane (YD 383435) which allowed about a 25% increase in the amount of laterite hauled each day. By the end of the quarter, 25,161 cubic yards of sand and laterite had been placed, and the road was 33% complete. Other tasks accomplished by A Company at Utah Beach included construction of access ramps to the sand-cement roads, erection of a fence around the 1 km exclusion zone in front of the battalion's perimeter; repair of approaches to the float bridges on Hai Lang Road, and the construction of defensive positions, showers, and latrines in the company area.

B Company conducted 61 days of operations, 19 days of training, maintenance and movement preparation, and 10 days in transit during the quarter. The company headquarters, 1st and 2nd platoons were located at Duc Trong during February, and work there consisted of reconnaissance and planning for an upgrading of Routes QL-20 and QL-21a, and civic action projects at Duc Trong and Tai Hinh Hamlet. At Tai Hinh a bulldozer was used to clear land for a new settlement, and the company medic assisted the people with first aid and medical supplies, while at Duc Trong equipment support was provided in constructing defensive berms and roadways for the RF/PF Training Center. The company also continued work on the cantonment at Duc Trong building bunkers, sandbagging, and building a shower.

The 3rd Platoon, B Company was located in Bao Loc when the company was alerted for movement. Enemy activity during Tet had left Route QL-20 insecure and blocked at numerous locations. With convoy security provided by a company of the 3rd Bn. 506th Abn Inf. 101st Abn Div. the platoon moved from Bao Loc to Duc Trong, opening QL-20 by clearing enemy roadblocks and filling ditches. One squad of B Company had moved to Lang Bian Mountain in January to begin the Lang Bian Mountain Access Road project. Work on the road stopped about 1 February due to enemy activity, and the squad assisted in manning defensive positions at the signal site until they were extracted for the move. The whole of B Company

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assembled at Duc Trong for the convoy to Cam Ranh Bay, and the 3/506 Inf secured the company as far as Phan Rang. On QL-21a and QL-11 from Duc Trong to Phan Rang, the company constructed two bypasses, removed numerous VC roadblocks, and improved the approaches to one bridge.

On 14 March, B Company sailed for Utah Beach with the battalion, arriving on 22 March. Defensive positions, barriers, and roads were constructed on arrival, and on 25 March, the company began construction of a sand-cement road system at the beach. The sand-cement roads are 24 feet in width, and at the end of the quarter over 18,000 linear feet of road had been opened.

C Company conducted 60 days of operations, 11 days in training, maintenance, holidays, and movement preparation, and 7 days in transit. Twelve project days were lost due to enemy activity in and around Phan Thiet during Tet. During the first part of the quarter, C Company supported the 2nd Bn, 7th Air Cav, 1st Air Cav Div. in Operation Byrd and the 3rd Bn, 506th Abn Inf, 101st Abn Div. in Operation McLain. Work included preparing administrative areas for the tactical units; hauling fill to improve roads at LZ Betty, constructing 12'x 12' bunker frames; performing expedient repairs to Highway 8B, and continuous dust and sand palliation. After action reports for Operation Byrd ~~and McClain are~~ attached as Inclosures 2 [redacted].

At Utah Beach, C Company was assigned the daily task of sweeping the road from Hai Lang to Utah Beach for mines. Enemy mining of this road has been intensive, and numerous mines and booby traps have been detected in the road and removed for evaluation or destroyed. The most commonly found anti-vehicular mine has been similar to the Soviet TMB-2 mine, with MV-5 pressure detonating device. This mine is extremely difficult to detect due to the small amount of metal in the pressure device, and in most instances the mines were buried at depths of 6 to 12 inches, increasing the difficulty of detection. Finding the mines is dependent on perfect operation of the detection equipment and well trained operators. The mine detection problem has been compounded by the employment of phony mines in the road, apparently by local VC. In one instance a C-ration can was placed in the road by a carefully cut tunnel in from the shoulder. Bits of metal are often buried a few inches deep, sometimes by the hundreds.

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In the construction of the Utah Beach logistics facility, C Company constructed sand-cement pads for the Class I storage area, installed anchors and bases for the POL fill stands, and poured sand-cement access ramps to the roads. Combat support missions have included extensive enemy bunker destruction " and local demolition jobs.

During the quarter, D Company conducted 60 days of operations, 23 days of training, preparing for movement, and maintenance, and 7 days moving. On 1 February the company was located at Dong Ba Thin where it was working on a 2000 KW Generator Plant, an aircraft control tower, and a land clearing project. On 2 February, two platoons of D Company were airlifted to Duc Trong after intelligence estimates indicated a large enemy force surrounding the B Company cantonment there. The elements from D Company reinforced the B Company perimeter for 6 days, returning when the threat had diminished.

When D Company was alerted for possible movement to ICTZ, the projects at Dong Ba Thin were turned over to the 864th Engr Bn (Const). The company moved with the battalion (-) to Camp Evans, remaining there while the other companies moved on to Utah Beach. At Camp Evans, D Company is in support of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, and has constructed two large bunkers, perimeter bunkers, concertina fences, an access road, and an airfield wind sock. D Company also conducts a daily mine sweep of a portion of National Highway QL-1.

At Utah Beach, the battalion was augmented by the Earthmoving Platoon, C Company, 589th Engineer Battalion. The 290M scrapers, bulldozers, grader, and water distributors of the platoon have greatly increased the battalion's capabilities in performing horizontal construction tasks at the new location. The Earthmoving Platoon equipment is being utilized at Utah Beach, LZ Jane, and Camp Evans.

E. LOGISTICS:

During the quarter the battalion S-4 processed approximately 600 requisitions for supplies, exclusive of PLL items. In preparation for the move the S-4 procured 15 days rations for the battalion, accomplished the lateral transfer of equipment augmentation to the battalion, and stocked basic loads of ammunition and demolition materials. Requisitions were processed for barrier materials, and supply forecasts for POL, construction materials, and other requirements were developed. During loading for the move, the S-4 made arrangements for transportation of general cargo to the ship from Dong Ba Thin and Cam Ranh Bay Depot,

and processed the shipping documents for the move. Close coordination between the battalion S-4 and the S-4 sections of 35th Engr Gp, 45th Engr Gp, and Transportation Movement Authority resulted in expeditious loading for movement and filling of requisitions for supplies and equipment.

In the maintenance program, a concerted effort was made to prepare the battalion's equipment for the move. Three principal techniques were employed, with the objective of reducing the deadline rate, preparing for sustained operation in the field with minimum support available, and increasing reliability of all equipment. With the battalion (-) at Cam Ranh Bay, the first step in the maintenance program was a complete technical inspection of all equipment, under the supervision of the Battalion Maintenance Section; second, all organizational deficiencies were repaired, and vehicles requiring further work were turned in for classification. The third step was to perform as many scheduled services as possible covering the period of the move, so that there would be a minimum backlog of required services on arrival at the new location.

An additional item of major importance to the maintenance program at Utah Beach was the stockage of PLL consistent with the mission requirement of extended field operation. Authorization to stock excess PLL was received from 18th Engr Bde.

The value of extensive maintenance preparation was proved after the move. Due to the requirement for defensive construction by all personnel, including the maintenance section, and to the work required to build a motor pool and maintenance area, it was three weeks after arrival before the maintenance section had returned to normal operation. During that period work was limited to repairs, with only a minimum of scheduled service work done. Despite this the deadline rate was extremely low and maintenance problems did not interfere with mission requirements.

F. CIVIC AFFAIRS:

Civic Action during this quarter was restricted by the Tet offensive and relocation of the battalion from the II Corps Tactical Zone to the I Corps Tactical Zone. In the Dong Ba Thin area, the Chaplain visited the orphanage at Tan Binh giving them several boxes of clothing sent from the states. In addition, a check for $25 was given to the orphanage from individuals in the United States. Headquarters Company provided two cranes to the city government to off-load rice at the Ba Ngoi pier. A total of 1805 tons of rice were off-loaded. D Company cleared an area 100 x 300 meters for the city government south of Ba Ngoi to provide a firing range for training local defense forces.

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At Phan Thiet, C Company provided equipment support to clear rubble from the city of Phan Thiet. At Phong Dinh Village, Quang Tri, D Company is rebuilding a destroyed school building. 400 Vietnamese children are benefiting from this project.

2. Section 2, Lessons Learned: Commander's Observations, Evaluations, and Recommendations.

a. Personnel. Temporary Promotions.

(1) OBSERVATION. The low promotion quota to E-6 may limit the incentive of E-5's to do a better job. In this battalion there are 16 E-5's currently serving in E-6 position, 10 of these are squad leaders.

(2) EVALUATION. It may be feasible to establish a system which would permit a "brevet" or temporary promotion for an individual serving in a vacancy in a combat situation. This promotion would be in effect as long as the man is serving well in the position in a combat zone.

(3) RECOMMENDATION. That a temporary promotion system be developed and studied for feasibility. If found feasible it should be implemented. This entire action should be handled as quickly as possible.

b. Operation. Mine Sweep Techniques.

(1) OBSERVATION. On a critical section of road, in spite of a heavy daily commitment of mine sweeping effort in both personnel and equipment, the battalion is unable to remove or detonate all the mines early enough to meet the desires of tactical and logistical units.

(2) EVALUATION. A part of the battalion's daily mine sweep responsibilities is 12 kilometers of laterite surfaced road passing through an area completely controlled by the enemy during the hours of darkness. In order to interdict the flow of supplies over this road the enemy has undertaken an extensive program of mining and booby-trapping. Enemy devices include mortar rounds, grenades, locally constructed TNT mines, and standard Soviet mines - (TMB-2), a model which is extremely difficult to detect as the only ferrous metal is in a very small detonator. In an effort to open the road at the earliest possible hour consistent with a thorough sweep seven techniques have been employed:

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(a) Increasing the size of the basic sweep team to include four primary detectors which sweep the width of the road. If a positive reading is obtained the location is marked and probers start searching the area with the assistance of two back-up mine detectors. By using these additional mine detectors the primary detectors can remain together insuring complete and continuous coverage of the road.

(b) In the initial phases of the sweep operation a maximum effort was made to remove all trash buried in the road which caused a positive detector reading. This has saved a significant number of hours over always using demolitions on each reading as this would be repeated each day. Also, a vigorous advertising campaign was conducted to inform the users of the road to stop throwing C ration cans and other trash onto the road.

(c) The road was swept with four teams, one starting at each end and two starting at the mid-point sweeping to either end. Also, on occasion, helicopters were used to insert sweep teams at critical locations in an effort to open the road earlier.

(d) A team is always assigned the same section of road as it has been found that its efficiency increases as the team members become more familiar with the condition of the surface and areas of repeated incidents on the part of the road. The chief problem however, is the ability of the enemy to interdict the road at will during the hours of darkness.

(3) RECOMMENDATION. That a maximum effort be made by tactical units to control these vulnerable sections of road day and night. Only then can significant reductions be made in the time required to sweep the road.

c. Training. None.

d. Intelligence. None.

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SUBJECT: Operational Report-Lessons Learned (RCS CSFOR-65) for Quarterly Period Ending 30 April 1968

e. Logistics. Requirements for relocation to isolated areas.

(1) OBSERVATION. The ability to shift the "pipeline" of repair parts and supplies from supporting to supported units frequently does not match the ability of the supported forces to move. This may lead to serious resupply problems.

(2) EVALUATION. When the 14th Engineer Battalion moved from the southern portion of the II Corps Tactical Zone to the northern part of I Corps it was given authorization to take an undefined quantity of extra repair parts and a certain number of days of rations. The extra quantity of repair parts obtained was not sufficient to supply the battalion until normal resupply was established; the rations were sufficient.

(3) RECOMMENDATION. When a unit is scheduled to move, estimates of the time required to shift the "pipeline" should be made for each class of supply. Based on these estimates, units should be authorized as standard practice to requisition and draw needed additional supplies. For example, if it will take 30 days to establish a full repair parts pipeline the unit should be authorized to requisition and draw quantities represented by an additional 30 days of PLL stocks. In theory, once the pipeline is established the unit's stocks will be at the proper 15 day PLL level.

f. Organization. None

g. Other. None

3 Incl

1. After Action Report, Relocation of 14th Engineer Battalion (Cbt)

2. After Action Report, Operation Byrd

~~3. After Action Report, Operation Malain~~

BENNETT L. LEWIS
LTC, CE
Commanding

EGD-BB-C

30 April 1968

SUBJECT: Operational Report-Lessons Learned (RCS CSFOR-65) for Quarterly Period Ending 30 April 1968

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APO 96558

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5 - CO, 45TH ENGR GP

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EGD-3 (30 April 1968) 1st Ind
SUBJECT: Operational Report - Lessons Learned, Headquarters, 14th Engineer Battalion (Combat), for Quarter Ending 30 April 1968, RCS CSFOR-65 (RI)

DA, HEADQUARTERS 45TH ENGINEER GROUP (CONSTRUCTION), APO 96337 1 2 MAY 1968

TO: Commanding General, 18th Engineer Brigade, APO 96377

1. This Headquarters has reviewed the Operational Report - Lessons Learned for the 14th Engineer Battalion and considers it an accurate description of activities and accomplishments during the reporting period ending 30 April 1968.

2. Concur with the Battalion Commander's observations and recommendations.

George B Fink
GEORGE B. FINK
COL, CE
Commanding

1c

AVBC-C (30 Apr 68) 2nd Ind
SUBJECT: Operational Report of the 14th Engineer Battalion (Combat) for the Period Ending 30 April 1968, RCS CSFOR (R1)

DA, Headquarters, 18th Engineer Brigade, APO 96377 12 JUN 1968

TO: Commanding General, U.S. Army, Vietnam, ATTN: AVHGC-DST, APO 96375

1. This headquarters has reviewed the Operational Report-Lessons Learned for the 14th Engineer Battalion (Combat) as indorsed by the 45th Engineer Group. It is considered an adequate account of the Battalion's activities for the period ending 30 April 1968.

2. This headquarters concurs with the observations and recommendations of the Battalion and Group Commanders with the following comments added. Reference paragraph 2 a.

a. The reduction in the number of quotas for promotion to E-6 has been in effect for several months now. Headquarters, USARV began controlling allocations for promotion to E-6 in February 1968. The limited number of allocations received during the past months would indicate fewer such allocations are being authorized by DA. Whether or not this will be just a Fiscal Year (30 Jun 68) limitation is not known.

b. A "brevet" system as proposed would suffice for the moment, but it would cause dissatisfaction when the EM lost the pay and rank upon leaving the combat zone. Additionally, if the funds or spaces are not available to promote EM to higher grades it would follow that such funds would not be available to support a "brevet" system.

c. Accelerated promotions are authorized by USARV Reg 600-200 for deserving individuals, however a promotion allocation must be received before such promotion can be effected.

d. The problem stems from the relatively few allocations, both of E-6's and for promotion to E-6, being received. This headquarters recommends a re-evaluation of the allocation system rather than initiation of a "brevet" system.

Douglas K Blue

DOUGLAS K. BLUE
Colonel, CE
Deputy Commander

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AVHGC-DST (30 Apr 68) 3d 1nd CPT Arnold/ms/LBN 4485
SUBJECT: Operational Report-Lessons Learned (RCS CSFOR-65) for Quarterly Period Ending 30 April 1968

HEADQUARTERS, US ARMY VIETNAM, APO San Francisco 96375 14 JUN 1968

TO: Commander in Chief, United States Army, Pacific, ATTN: GPOP-DT, APO 96558

1. This headquarters has reviewed the Operational Report-Lessons Learned for the quarterly period ending 30 April 1968 from Headquarters, 14th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Army) as indorsed.

2. Comments follow:

a. Reference item concerning temporary promotions, page 8, paragraph 2a; 2d indorsement, paragraph 2. Concur with comments of Deputy CO, 18th Engineer Brigade. Promotion allocations for grades E6 through E9 are controlled by DA. There has been a reduction in the number of allocations received from DA in CY 68 as compared to CY 67. USARV has formally requested that DA provide a special promotion allocation to compensate for this shortfall. The message requested a specific number for each grade E6 through E9.

b. Reference item concerning requirements for relocation to isolated areas, page 10, paragraph 2e: Nonconcur. The 1st Logistical Command has an established procedure (LC Reg 700-44) to provide continued supply support to customers. Using units when alerted for movement will immediately notify the supporting activity. During the interim period prior to movement, only urgent or emergency requisitions will be submitted to the losing supporting unit. Units should submit a letter to the gaining supply activity notifying them of the ETA; Copy of PLL and density listing of equipment. Unit commander may coordinate with the gaining supply activity for submission of requests prior to units arrival at new location. Supplies received by the losing supplying unit after the units departure will be shipped to the unit's new support activity, marked for the unit.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

JOHN V. GETCHELL
Captain, AGC
Assistant Adjutant General

Copies furnished:
HQ, 14th Engr Bn (Cbt)
HQ, 18th Engr Bde

GPOP-DT (30 Apr 68) 4th Ind
SUBJECT: Operational Report of HQ, 14th Engr Bn (Cbt)(Army) for Period Ending 30 April 1968, RCS CSFOR-65 (R1)

HQ, US Army, Pacific, APO San Francisco 96558 26 JUN 1968

TO: Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, Department of the Army, Washington, D. C. 20310

This headquarters has evaluated subject report and forwarding indorsements and concurs in the report as indorsed.

FOR THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF:

K. F. OSBOURN
MAJ. AGC
Asst AG

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, 14TH ENGINEER BATTALION (COMBAT) (ARMY)
APO 96495

EGD-BB-C 7 May 1968

SUBJECT: After Action Report: Relocation of 14th Engineer Battalion to I Corps Tactical Zone

Commanding Officer
45th Engineer Group (Const)
ATTN: S-3
APO 96337

1. NAME OF OPERATION: Relocation of the 14th Engineer Battalion to ICTZ

2. DATES: 12 March 1968 - 24 March 1968

3. LOCATION: Dong Ba Thin, RVN to Utah Beach, vic Thon My Thuy, RVN

4. COMMAND HEADQUARTERS: 35th Engineer Group until 21 March after 21 March 45th Engineer Group

5. TASK ORGANIZATION:

a. Organic Unit: 14th Engineer Battalion (Combat)

b. Attachments: 171st Well Drilling Detachment

c. Detachments: None

d. Supporting Forces: Transportation Movement Authority (Cam Ranh Bay)
35th Engineer Battalion (Combat)
10th Transportation Battalion (Cam Ranh Bay)
3/506th Infantry Battalion, 101st Airborne Div.
1st Cavalry Division
159th Transportation Battalion (Utah Beach)
Naval Support Activity (Danang), 1 st battalion
5th Air Cav, 1st Cavalry Division
MSTS (Cam Ranh Bay and Danang)
Hudson Waterways Corporation
87th Engineer Battalion
7th Marine Engineer Battalion

Incl 1

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EGD-BB-C 7 May 1968
SUBJECT: After Action Report: Relocation of 14th Engineer Battalion to I Corps Tactical Zone

6. INTELLIGENCE:

a. The enemy Tet Offensive continued through both the planning and execution phases of the operation. The enemy had interdicted LOC's within the battalion AO delaying for two weeks the movement of B Company to the staging area at Cam Ranh Bay. The 3rd platoon, B Company, moved from Bao Loc to Duc Trong with a company size security force from the 3rd Bn 506th Inf, 101st Abn Div. This platoon, as it moved, swept the road, removed roadblocks and repaired enemy damage to the road and drainage structures. With the arrival of this platoon at the company CP, B Company moved to Cam Ranh Bay with the same infantry unit providing security along route QL-21a. B Company repaired enemy damage to the roads and bridges as it moved. Moving B Company to Cam Ranh required two days. Prolonged fighting in Phan Thiet, and damage to US facilities there, caused an initial delay in the movement of C Company. However, C Company moving separately from the main body, arrived at the destination with the battalion.

b. Enemy activity did not affect movement of the battalion by sea from Dong Ba Thin to Danang.

c. From Danang to Utah Beach, the main body of the battalion moved by road march. The convoy was without incident, although the enemy is active in the area and mining and sniper fire are common along the route.

d. The battalion arrived at Utah Beach after the 1st Bn, 5th Air Cav, 1st Air Cav Div had cleared the immediate beach area. However, the enemy in the Utah Beach area is considered to have the capability of rocket mortar, and ground attack. Therefore, extensive defensive construction and perimeter fortifications were begun on arrival.

7. MISSION:

Move the 14th Engineer Battalion (Combat) with attachments from Dong Ba Thin, RVN, to Utah Beach, vicinity of Thon My Thuy, RVN.

EGD-BB-C 7 May 1968

SUBJECT: After Action Report: Relocation of the 14th Engineer Battalion to I Corps Tactical Zone

8. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS:

a. On 6 February 1968 the warning order was given the battalion to prepare for immediate movement to I Corps Tactical Zone (ICTZ). The battalion staff studied two alternatives: a move by land and a move by sea. First estimates indicated that moving the battalion by road over the entire distance would be extremely difficult. A requirement would exist for many additional vehicles to transport the engineer equipment and supplies. Much of the equipment which would not be carried on trailers was only nominally roadable, and wear and tear on all vehicles would likely lead to a reduced capability on arrival. Nevertheless, studies were made to determine support requirements, develop command control techniques, and serialization. It was further noted that the enemy's "Tet Offensive" had left sections of the proposed route closed to overland traffic. Movement by sea appeared more feasible.

b. On 15 February the Battalion Commander and S-3 reconnoitered the beach area at Thon My Thuy while a Navy group was surveying the beach to determine the feasibility of beaching LST's. The initial Navy report indicated that LST's could beach as soon as the monsoon season ended, and possibly immediately. Based on this report, G3 III MAF, on 15 February, directed that the 14th move immediately by LST to Thon My Thuy arriving 18 February if possible. CG III MAF sent messages to appropriate headquarters to obtain necessary LSTs for the movement. On 16 February CG III MAF received the final Navy survey of the beach site which indicated that LSTs could not beach but would require a 900 foot amphibious causeway to discharge cargo. CG III MAF directed that an amphibious causeway be sent immediately from Japan. On return to DBT on 16 February, the Battalion Commander alerted the battalion and sent an advance party to Danang to coordinate the move with III MAF, with 1st Cav Div, who was tasked with providing security on the beach, and with Army direct support units in the Danang area. Also at this time the staff started to prepare detailed plans for loading the battalion on LSTs. On 17 February the Battalion Advance Party departed for Danang, arriving the next day. On 20 February CG III MAF advised CG, 18th Brigade that there would be a delay of at least a week in obtaining the causeway. The Advance Party returned to Dong Ba Thin on 22 February when it was clear that the delay would be much longer than a week.

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c. Planning for a sea move continued. Ship data was obtained through direct coordination with MSTS and TMA, Cam Ranh Bay, and LST loading plans were made for both tactical and administrative loading. Variables considered included the tactical situation at the destination, the feasibility of off-loading directly on the beach or over the side into lighters, and the possibility of landing various elements at different times versus a concurrent landing of whole battalion. A study device which proved extremely valuable in this planning was the use of ¼" = 1' scale cutout templates representing all vehicles, equipment and general cargo to be moved. These cutouts were fitted on a scale deck plan of the LST and various arrangements were recorded as proposed loading plans. Another set of loading plans was made for movement of the battalion by LSD, and the cutout template technique allowed a thorough examination of this alternative. Landing from LSD's was studied using LCM and B/RC lighters in an over-the-side operation.

d. On 25 February 1968, III MAF requested of CG USARV that if feasible, one company with minimum essential supporting equipment be airlifted to I Corps. This company was to be in direct support of the 1st Air Cav Division. A Company was selected for the airmove. The battalion staff prepared loading plans for transport by C-130 aircraft. These plans considered moving with and without engineer equipment.

e. In the meantime the road to the landing site was under construction by the 10th MCB, and the surf and weather conditions were improving. On 1 March 1968 the Battalion Commander and Operations Officer went to Danang again for conferences with the G3, III MAF and the 45th Engineer Group.

f. On 2 March 1968, CG USARV recommanded moving the battalion by sea to Danang then overland to Utah Beach. Aircraft assets for any movement by C-130 were not available, and the sea/road idea appeared feasible. The tactical situation north of Danang had improved and the road was being opened by the 35th Engineer Battalion, but heavy support requirements and possible damage to equipment in a road march remained as drawbacks to the plan. An acceptable compromise was a movement of all roadable vehicles by sea to Danang and thence overland, and movement of all heavy equipment and cargo directly to Utah Beach by sea. This would put a minimum drain on the available lighterage at the beach while avoiding the problems with the road march.

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g. At the same time that the sea/road plan was being formulated, a ship became available which was capable of transporting the Battalion Headquarters and three line companies as a unit. The ship was the SS Seatrain Carolina, a modified tanker constructed especially for transporting vehicles and military cargo and equipment. With deck plans provided by the "Carolina's" First Officer, another series of loading plans was developed using the cutout device. Plans were drawn to permit off-loading each company, with equipment, as an integral convoy serial, and for off-loading without heavy equipment. The latter plan was selected when it was agreed that the heavy equipment could be off-loaded into lighters at the beach.

h. In the meantime, C Company remained at Phan Thiet, and arrangements were made for an LST to move this company from Phan Thiet to Utah Beach. The LST would also stop at Cam Ranh Bay to load any shortfall equipment or cargo left by the battalion. A second LST was also required to transport additional cargo to Utah Beach and was scheduled.

9. EXECUTION:

With detailed plans prepared, loading of the "Carolina" began on 10 March 1968, and was completed the morning of 14 March 1968. The ship sailed for Danang at 0800 14 March 1968, arriving at Danang Harbor 18 hours later. Due to congestion at the docks the ship was compelled to drop anchor in the harbor, and the troops were off-loaded by LCM. Approximately 70 men remained aboard the "Carolina" to secure the vehicles, equipment, and supplies. On the evening of 18 March the "Carolina" was able to dock, and the vehicles were off-loaded. The ship sailed for Utah Beach at 2400 hours 19 March, arriving the following morning.

An advance party consisting of the Battalion S-2 and S-3 Officers and the Executive Officers of A and B Companies had gone ahead to the beach by helicopter from Danang on 15 March. Coordination was established with the 159th Transportation Battalion and the 1/5 Cavalry, and a battalion area was staked out. Using borrowed equipment, the advance party cut the main access road into the area, and stockpiled sandbags and concertina wire in the company areas. Initial contacts were made in Dong Ha and Quang Tri in an effort to locate the Battalion's mail, and coordination was effected with the 10th MCB at Utah Beach and Quang Tri to allow smooth transfer of projects at the Beach. At Camp Evans the advance party coordinated with the 8th Engineer Battalion in setting up a work program for D Company, which would remain there.

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The battalion left Danang in convoy at 0830 hrs 20 March 1968. The convoy was divided in company size serials, and the first element (A Company) arrived at the beach at 1730 20 March 1968. The last convoy element closed at Utah Beach on 21 March 1968. D Company stopped at Camp Evans to support the 1st Cav Div. The entire convoy provided its own security.

The IST carrying C Company arrived at the beach on 20 March, started off-loading immediately and finished by 21 March. Off-loading of the "Seatrain Carolina" was completed on 29 March 1968, after a storm had delayed the work for two days.

10. RESULTS:

The convoy elements had all closed at Utah Beach by 21 March and construction of the battalion perimeter and bivouac began immediately. The battalion became fully operational and began mission assigned tasks on 25 March 1968. Total time for the move, from cessation of all work at the old location until work began on assigned tasks at Utah Beach was therefore 17 days. The move covered approximately 390 miles, and included all battalion assets, barrier materials, rations, and other supplies.

11. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS:

a. Rations and Quarters:

(1) The SS "Seatrain Carolina" is a cargo ship without provision for transporting personnel. It was recognized, however, that there were numerous disadvantages to moving the Battalion's personnel separately from the equipment. Conferences with the ships officers and representatives of TMA led to the conclusion that the personnel could be accomodated on the "Carolina" for the overnight voyage from CRB to Danang. Latrines were constructed for use on deck, life vests were procured for all personnel and issued on boarding, and C-rations were issued. During the trip, emphasis was placed on safety, fire prevention, and police, and the personnel were transported to the satisfaction of the battalion and the ships' officers.

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(2) On arrival at Danang, the battalion was supported by 45th Engineer Group, the 35th Engineer Battalion and the 7th Marine Engineer Battalion who provided billets, bivouac areas, showers, and latrines.

(3) Headquarters Company arrived at Camp Evans at 1430 and remained at that location over night. B and D Companies stopped on Gia Le north of Phu Bai for the night of the 20th. On the morning of the 20th B and D Companies moved north. D Company joined Headquarters Company at Camp Evans and both moved to Utah Beach. D Company stopped at Camp Evans and moved into its new area.

12. ANALYSIS AND LESSONS LEARNED:

The relocation of the battalion was a successful operation. This is attributed to the following planning steps:

a. Detailed loading plans. The use of the cutout template technique referred to above, combined with thorough research, yielded a plan which was detailed but flexible. A particular advantage of this technique was that the individuals who would supervise the loading became familiar with the sizes and spaces involved. This allowed on-the-spot changes as necessary with minimum time lost.

b. Adequate safety precautions. During the operation no time was lost due to accidents within the battalion. This record is ascribed to thorough safety briefings and maximum supervision.

c. Close coordination with transportation representatives. The cooperation and constructiveness of both military and civilian personnel involved in the arrangements for the move were essential to the smooth execution of the loading and off-loading phases. The ships officers of the "Seatrain Carolina" were entirely agreeable and cooperative despite the unique utilization of the ship to carry troops as well as cargo.

d. Support of higher Headquarters.

(1) The assignment of priorities consistent with the requirement for expeditious movement characterized the reaction of 35th Engineer Group to all requests for equipment and supplies. TO&E shortages were made up rapidly, and the Battalion moved with materials and equipment augmentation which allowed work to begin effectively as soon as the unit had settled in the new location.

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(2) The 45th Engineer Group, which the battalion joined on moving, provided outstanding support during the operation. All requests for assistance in transportation, accomodations and information were acted on with a promptness that allowed the move to proceed efficiently and with minimum delay.

e. Efficient loading and off-loading. A considerable saving in time resulted from the use of a special loading ramp provided by MSTS, Cam Ranh Bay. The ramp allowed the roll-on loading of the main deck of the ship. It is estimated that approximately 24 hours were saved in loading and off-loading time by using the ramp.

f. Effective phasing of required tasks. As the "Carolina" left Danang for Utah Beach, four operations were proceeding concurrently:

(1) Movement of heavy equipment by sea

(2) Convoy of vehicles to thebeach

(3) Preparation of Battalion area at the destination

(4) Movement of C Company by LST

The concurrent accomplishment of these tasks allowed organization of the new area to begin as rapidly as possible.

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