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AUTHORITY

AGO D/A ltr dtd 29 Apr 1980

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

IN REPLY REFER TO

AGAM-P (M) (20 Nov 68) FOR OT UT 683119 25 November 1968

SUBJECT: Operational Report - Lessons Learned, Headquarters, 577th Engineer Battalion (Const), Period Ending 31 July 1968

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Kenneth G. Wickham

KENNETH G. WICKHAM
Major General, USA
The Adjutant General

1 Incl
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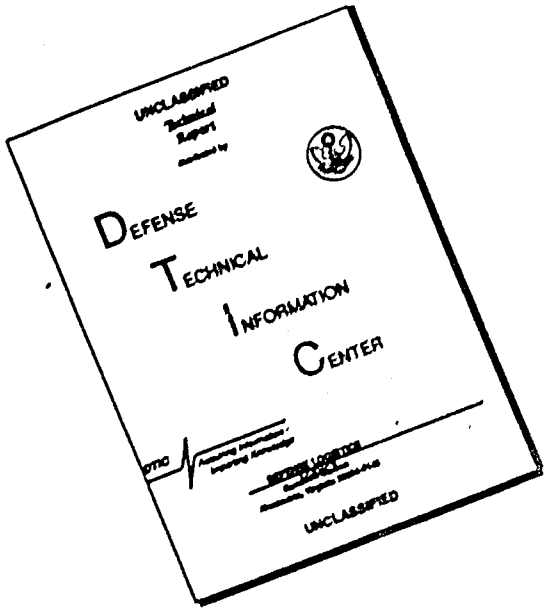

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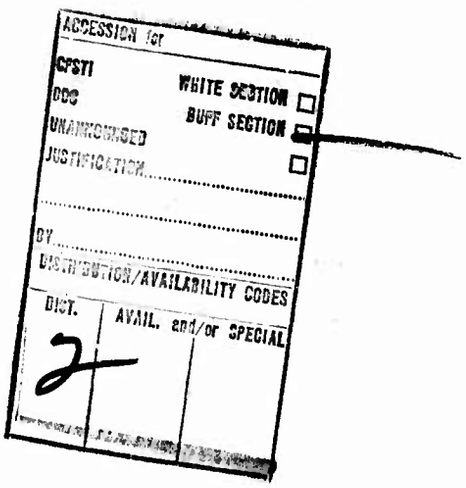

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, 577TH ENGINEER BATTALION (CONSTRUCTION)
APO US FORCES 96316

EGACBD-3 31 July 1968

SUBJECT: Operational Report of 577th Engineer Battalion (Construction), for Period Ending 31 July 1968, RCS CSFOR-65 (R1)

THRU: Commanding Officer
35th Engineer Group
APO 96238

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

Commanding General
United States Army, Vietnam
ATTN: AVHGC (DST)
APO 96375

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

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

1. Section 1, Operations: Significant Activities.

a. Attached as inclosure 1 is a chart of the organization of the 577th Engineer Battalion (Construction) with its attached units.

b. This unit engaged in ninety-two days of operations during the period covered. Mandatory and special training were conducted after normal working hours or integrated into the daily work.

c. Activities: This period was typified by a significant lull in enemy activity in the Phu Hiep - Tuy Hoa area and consequently an increase in construction occured in the areas of both base construction as well as restoration and upgrading of the Vietnamese National Highway QL-1. The battalion has remained dispersed, with elements operating at Vung Ro Bay and at Tuy Hoa North Field. On 6 May A Company relocated 3 helipads for the 173rd Airborne Brigade, continuing to provide support under Operation Bolling. In support of this same operation the 572nd Engineer Company (LE) restored Highway LTL 7B from Tuy Hoa to Cheo Reo. The road was upgraded to a limited, all weather class 18 road, for a distance of 89 miles. Seven bridges were redecked and 40 bypasses (primarily rock fords) were constructed where bridges had been destroyed by enemy action. At the same time the 572nd Engr Co constructed two fire support bases in the Cung Son Area, one each for the 4/503 Infantry and for the 6/32 Artillery. This project required 44 days and was completed on 13 June 1968. On 6 June the VC attacked a US installation at Vung Ro Bay, 15 miles south of Phu Hiep, using mortars, rockets, and small arms. Elements from this battalion which were located at Vung Ro received no casualties but played a major role in assisting in the defense of the installation and in the care and evacuation of other unit's wounded. A total of nine US personnel were KIA during the attack. On 10 June, at Phu Heip Army Air Field, D Company completed construction of a 50' aircraft control tower. This facility includes a fully air-conditioned, glass enclosed observation deck. At this same time, C Company was tasked to construct five CH-47 landing pads; two for the 173rd Airborne Brigade, and three others, including revetments, for the 180th Assault Helicopter Company. Completion date for the latter project is expected to be 10 August. On 17 June work was initiated on a chapel for the 268th Aviation Battalion. The chapel, to be constructed on a self-help basis, is to be a duplicate of the 18th Engineer Brigade Chapel at Dong Ba Thin. A twenty-three dog capacity sentry dog kennel was completed by D Company on 20 June. This facility included a potable water system and an air-conditioned dispensary. On 20 June the 2nd construction platoon of D Company returned to Phu Hiep from Ninh Hoa, where it had just completed construction of a cantonment facility and provided operational support to the 48th Assault Helicopter Company. To assist in the production of concrete, a C.S. Johnson Batching Plant was brought from Cam Ranh Bay on 16 June. The plant, operated by the 39th Engineer Detachment (Concrete Mixing and Paving) was attached to Company C. During the period 18-22 June the battalion underwent the Annual General Inspection and received an overall rating of satisfactory. B Company, after spending approximately four and one half months at a ROKA Cantonment near Phu Khe, returned to the garrison location on 22 June. Just prior to their relocation the company completed construction of bridge QL-1-236, a 120 ft, two span steel stringer bridge. In a dedication ceremony on 14 June 1968, attended by COL Ba, Province Chief, the bridge was dedicated to PFC Edward Rankin, who was killed in action in defense of the float bridge on the Ban Thach River on 30 August 1967. Immediately upon return to the Phu Hiep area, B Company began the construction of a 4,500 foot emergency pipeline from the POL storage facilities at Tuy Hoa to the FWF cantonment beach. This six inch pipeline will provide emergency service

to Tuy Hoa Air Force Base, whenever the main pipeline from Vung Ro Bay becomes non-operational as a result of enemy action, or other circumstances. This pipeline was completed on 27 June 1968. On that same day one half of the earthmoving platoon of B Company moved to Vung Ro Bay. This move was made to facilitate unit operations in the restoration of highway QL-1 through the mountain pass north of Vung Ro Bay. On 29 June, Company C formally turned over a heliport to the Phu Hiep Army Air Field. This project included 62 parking ramps for UH-1 helicopters, hover lanes, landing and take off lanes, and 5 miles of access roads. In addition, two ammunition storage bunkers and a miniport refueling facility were constructed at the heliport on a self-help basis by the using unit. Work continued on the 22 unit ammunition storage facility for THSAC. A design change has been approved to eliminate the 1½" lift of asphaltic concrete and replace it with a single surface treatment. In a change of command ceremony on 6 July 1968, MAJ Richard S. Kem took command of the 577th Engineer Battalion (Construction) from LTC John R. McDonald. On 11 July the battalion was assigned the operational support mission of clearing a 100 meter wide strip around Vung Ro Bay. This project came about as a result of the attack on 6 June, which pointed out the need for improved defenses at Vung Ro Bay. The project also included the construction of seven observation towers and two first aid bunkers. This task was assigned to B Company, which immediately moved its two construction platoons to Vung Ro, where they joined the earthmoving platoon. The 553rd Engineer Company (FB) continued work on the Free World Forces tank farm, completing two 500 BBL POL tanks and three of four 3,000 BBL storage tanks. The 553rd also installed three dry span bridges to replace bridges blown by the enemy, and one dry span to provide a bypass to permit traffic to move while a culvert was being installed on QL-1. The majority of the battalion's construction effort (approximately 60%) continues on the restoration and upgrading of Highway QL-1. Company B, in addition to the upgrading of Vung Ro Pass, was engaged in preparing the section of QL-1 between bridges QL-1-237 and QL-1-238 for paving. D Company, charged with upgrading approximately 13 KM of QL-1, hauled and placed 129,000 cubic yards of select fill and base course on QL-1. In addition they completed 16 drainage structures. C Company continued progress on bridge QL-1-238, an 840 foot, 14 span bridge across the Song Ban Thach River. Three piers were completed and 21 additional piles driven into the ground. 15 steel stringers were placed between the completed piers and the north abutment. In mid-July work was initiated on the construction of a pre-cast yard to facilitate the production of pre-cast concrete decking to be placed on the bridge. In support of construction operations the battalion is operating five crushers. One of these, a 75 TPH Primary crusher, is operated by A Company at Vung Ro Bay; the others, two 75 TPH Primary units and two 75 TPH Secondary crushers are located at North Feild, Tuy Hoa in the vicinity of the quarry at Chap Chai Mountain, and are operated by the 572nd Engr Co (LE).

d. Summary: Upgrading of the Vietnamese National Highway QL-1 was the focal point of construction effort during the reporting period. Elements of the 577th Engineer Battalion hauled and placed 171,973 cubic yards of select fill and 44,218 cubic yards of 3"(-) base course. All of the rock was produced at crusher sites operated by this battalion, and fed from battalion quarries. 84,533 cubic yards of blast rock were produced at the two quarry sites. This was used to produce 3"(-) base course, 3/4"(-) for production of asphaltic concrete, 1½" MED for concrete production, and for maintenance and repair of roads. A total of 7.9 KM of QL-1 were paved and completed to MACV Standards. In addition 3.1 KM of base and 4.0 KM of subgrade were prepared. Twenty-one drainage structures were constructed and one bridge, QL-1-236 was completed.

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

a. Personnel.

(1) Personnel Shortages Due to Rotation:

(a) OBSERVATION: The capability of the construction battalion to perform its mission effectively was reduced by a severe shortage of personnel during the period of optimum construction.

(b) EVALUATION: As of 31 July this battalion had assigned 83% of its authorized strength. During the reporting period this battalion lost 321 men due to rotation, and received only 151 replacements. The effect of this loss is more significant considering that it occured in the dry season, during which construction should be pressed to the fullest to permit project completion prior to the on coming northeast monsoon.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: That measures be taken to maintain sufficient personnel strength in engineer construction battalion, with additional emphasis to insure shortages are minimized during optimum construction seasons.

b. Operations.

(1) Moving of Paving Machines:

(a) OBSERVATION: The loading and off-loading of paving machines has been delayed on numerous occasions due to lack of 20 ton cranes. Organic loading ramps for 25 ton lowboys have too great a slope and are not safe for unloading the paver.

(b) EVALUATION: Portable loading ramps can be fabricated from damaged M4-T6 aluminum bulk, thus eliminating the need for a crane at paving sites.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: The use of portable aluminum loading ramps to load and off load paving machines can facilitate movement, as well as to free critical items of equipment for other projects.

(2) Installation of Grill on Culvert Openings:

(a) OBSERVATION: Culverts in remote areas provide a simple chamber facilitating placement of command detonated mines and explosives.

(b) EVALUATION: Recently a 3 barrel, 36" CMP culvert was destroyed by a command detonated mine when a truck passed over the culvert. The mine was placed inside the culvert. Originally both ends of the culvert were open. It was found that at the time of installation of the headwall, pieces of rebar could be arranged in a grid pattern so as to prevent a man from entering the culvert to place explosives. This was done by cutting a few holes in the culvert and placing the concrete headwalls to hold the grid in place.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: Placement of a rebar grid on culvert openings deters the enemy's capability to place sufficient explosives inside the culvert to destroy it.

(3) Clearing Operations at Vung Ro Bay:

(a) OBSERVATION: In clearing the dense jungles surrounding Vung Ro Bay great difficulty was encountered in gaining access to the trees so that demolitions or chain saws could be used to fell them.

(b) EVALUATION: The dense entanglement of vines and underbrush in jungle areas prevents the expedient and effective use of chain saws and demolitions to clear major obstacles. By using several sections of bangalore torpedoes pushed under the vegetation, a ten to fifteen foot wide path could be cleared quickly and easily. This method expedited clearance of thick underbrush, reduced the snake hazard, and provided easy access to large trees for subsequent demolition.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: Bangalore torpedoes provide an effective and expeditious means of removing jungle underbrush and foliage.

(4) Movement of C.S. Johnson Central Mix Batching Plant:

(a) OBSERVATION: Pulling a Central Mix Batching Plant with a 5 ton tractor over a rough road resulted in the batch plant overturning.

(b) EVALUATION: Although the entire plant is wheel mounted and designed to be pulled by a 5 ton tractor, such movement is impractical on super-elevated curves. Due to the height of the unit and the resulting top heaviness, a slight change in grade will cause the plant to tip over.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: When moving a Central Mix Batching Plant all components should be chained to a twenty-five ton trailer, and pulled with a 10 ton tractor.

(5) Problems Incurred When Placing a Thin Lift of Decomposed Granite:

(a) OBSERVATION: Ruts and break throughs resulted when a 2"-3" lift of decomposed granite was placed over a sand subbase.

(b) EVALUATION: Specifications for various projects frequently called for a 2"-3" lift of decomposed granite over a sub-base of sand. It is highly difficult to obtain an even surface when grading sand due to depressions made by tires; therefore, a thin lift of decomposed granite resulted in soft spots and breakthroughs. The watering and/or asphalting equipment that followed left ruts and tracks in the otherwise smooth surface.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: When placing decomposed granite on a sand subbase it is desirable to have a minimum lift of 5" to prevent the occurance of soft spots and ruts.

(6) Obtaining a Strong Soil Cement when Mixing in Place with a Rotary Tiller:

(a) OBSERVATION: A poor grade sand cement was obtained when a fine textured sand was used to mix in place soil cement.

(b) EVALUATION: When mixing sand cement in place with a rotary tiller two types of sand were tested. A fine grain sand was unsatisfactory as it would not compact but tended to "spread-out" when a roller was used. Beach sand was too coarse and allowed the water to percolate and remove some of the cement. In addition a strong bond could not be obtained. Finally it was determined that a 2" lift of fine sand, then a 2" lift of beach sand, followed by another lift of each type for a total lift of 8" provided a satisfactory mixture.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: When mixing sand cement in place with a rotary tiller a mixture of fine sand and beach sand should be used. The resultant mixture will be considerably stronger than either of the two used separately.

(7) Transportating Concrete Using 5 Ton Dump Trucks:

(a) OBSERVATION: Considerable water loss and segregation occured when hauling concrete with 5 ton dump trucks.

(b) EVALUATION: At times 5 ton dump trucks may be the only means available to haul concrete from a batch plant. Concrete with a slump of 4" and batched using 1½" minus aggregate, when hauled for two miles, arrived at the construction site totally unsuitable for placement. The aggregate settled to the bottom, and the water and cement floated to the top and evaporated or ran off. When a stiff mix (2" slump) and 3/4" minus aggregate were used, satisfactory results were obtained.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: When movement of concrete by 5 ton dump trucks is necessary, using 3/4" minus aggregate and a 1"-3" slump mix will reduce segregation and loss of water between the batch plant and the job.

(8) Crane Attachement Trailer Used as a Water Trailer:

(a) OBSERVATION: Two 1,000 gallon capacity Navy cubes mounted on a 10 ton crane attachment trailer make an effective water trailer for use on both horizontal and vertical construction projects.

(b) EVALUATION: Standard plumbing fixtures should be used in constructing an interconnecting two-inch outlet line to the rear of the trailer. By utilizing flexible line with standard POL snap connectors the trailer can be used with a detachable spray bar for road compaction operations or as a service unit for concrete mixers.

(c) RECOMMENDATIONS: The adaptation of a 10 ton crane attachment trailer for use as a water trailer proved to be an effective method of providing additional water haul capability.

(9) Fabrication of Concrete Bucket:

(a) OBSERVATION: A crane attached concrete bucket can be constructed from a fifty-five gallon or any similar open-topped water tight container.

(b) EVALUATION: A standard fifty-five gallon barrel was reinforced with plate steel and 2" steel pipe and was adapted for use with a crane (incl 2). The barrel is enclosed within a reinforced pipe framework, and a primary line yoke swivels from a reinforced a reinforced swivel point above the center.

(c) RECOMMENDATIONS: A .3 cubic yard crane-operated bucket can be constructed for a 16-S mixer, to be used in those locations where a chute or wheelbarrow is not practicable.

(10) Construction of Hand-Operated Tamper for Culvert Bedding:

(a) OBSERVATION: When preparing bases for CMP culvert installation, considerable problems are sometimes encountered in bedding the culvert.

(b) EVALUATION: Hand-operated tampers were constructed using sections of CMP. Culvert was cut to one-tenth the diameter, handles were attached and the sections were filled with concrete.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: Hand-tampers can be effectively used to form a culvert bed when used in conjunction with a vibratory compactor in wet sand.

(11) Use of a Delay Blasting Mechanism for Quarry Operations:

(a) OBSERVATION: A detonation delay in explosives is necessary in quarry operations in order to push the rock outward and downward. This saves many hours of dozer operation by eliminating the need to loosen rock that has not been completely freed from the quarry face.

(b) EVALUATION: Delay blasting caps have not been available from the local ammunition supply point. As a substitute, a striker box was developed (incl 3) consisting of a coffee can encompassing a 6 volt battery. Leg wires from four different blasting caps were connected to the striker box; when the handle is given a quick twist the striker provides a one half second delay between cap one and cap four.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: An expedient striker box can be constructed to be used effectively in lieu of delay blasting caps.

(12) Expedient of Water Wells:

(a) OBSERVATION: Water wells can be driven in sand in the coastal regions of Vietnam with a minimum amount equipment.

(b) EVALUATION: In a recent move of the 572nd Engineer Company (LE) to North Field, it became immediately apparent that no source of water was available. By using 8" pipe and a 3,000 lb drop hammer a 50' well was driven. It was accomplished by welding a heavy steel point to the first section of pipe, and then cutting holes in the point and first four feet of pipe. Pile leads were used in conjunction with the drop hammer and a 20 ton crane to drive the pipe to a depth of 50 feet. The well maintains a constant 12 feet of water.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: Water wells can easily be driven in sand using equipment that is organic to a construction engineer unit.

d. Intelligence: None

e. Logistics: None

(1) Shortage of Critical Items of TOE Construction Equipment:

(a) OBSERVATION: The battalion was hindered continuously in its accomplishedment of the construction mission by shortages in critical items of TOE construction equipment.

(b) EVALUATION: Among the shortages of major TOE items of equipment in this battalion and attached units are the following:

ITEM	AUTHORIZED	ON HAND 31 JULY
Scoopleader	15	11
20-Ton Crane	13	13
10-Ton Truck Tractor	31	13
25-Ton Semi-Trailer	40	24
Bituminous Distributor	4	2
Water Distributor	8	2
Roller, 10 Ton	4	2
Roller, Pneu Tire, 13 WH	6	4
Drill, Track	4	0
Compressor, 600 CFM	4	1
Compressor, 250 CFM	10	7

The impact of these critical shortages is a significant reduction in the mission capability for the battalion. The following actions have been taken in attempts to alleviate this problem:

(1) Valid requisitions and follow-up actions are in effect at the Cam Ranh Bay Depot.

(2) Available equipment is operated two shifts per day when feasible.

(3) Equipment is borrowed on hand receipt from other units when available.

(4) Normal density and PLR reports are submitted to 35th Engineer Group.

(5) Frequent command inquiries have been made.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: That these critical items be made available.

f. Organization: None

g. Other: None

3 Incl
1. Organizational chart, 577th EDC
2. Concrete Bucket Diagram
3. Striker Box Diagram

RICHARD S. KEM
Major, CE
Commanding

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EGA-3 (31 July 1968) 1st Ind MAJ Pierce/3303
SUBJECT: Operational Report of 577th Engineer Battalion (Construction), for Period Ending 31 July 1968, RCS CSFOR-65 (R1)

DA, Headquarters, 35th Engineer Group (Const), APO 96238, 23 August 1968

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

1. I have reviewed the Operational Report of the 577th Engineer Battalion (Construction) and consider it an accurate account of the Battalion's activities during the quarterly period ending 31 July 1968.

2. Concur with the comments and recommendations of the Battalion Commander with the following comment added: Reference Section 2, paragraph e (1). A request has been submitted through command channels for the establisment of an account with the 504th Field Depot at Cam Ranh to authorize the unit to draw items directly from depot without going through a direct support unit (DSU). The 577th Engineer Battalion has had considerable difficulty obtaining status of requisitions submitted to the DSU in the Tuy Hoa Sub Area of CRBSC. Approval of this request will greatly enhance the Battalion's capability for procuring TOE items. Additionally, this headquarters redistributes critical items of construction equipment based on job requirements and priorities. Consideration has been given to the lateral transfer of additional equipment to this Battalion.

DELBERT M. FOWLER
Colonel, CE
Commanding

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AVBC-C (31 Jul 68) 2nd Ind
SUBJECT: Operational Report of the 577th Engineer Battalion (Construction) for the Period Ending 31 July 1968, RCS CSFOR - 65 (R1)

DA, Headquarters, 18th Engineer Brigade, APO 96377 4 SEP 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 577th Engineer Battalion (Construction) as indorsed by the 35th Group. The report is considered to be an excellent account of the Battalion's activities for the reporting period.

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

a. Reference: Section II, paragraph b 2. Placing rebar grids over culvert openings will restrict enemy efforts to place explosives in the culvert. This practice will also restrict water flow somewhat and increase chances of the culvert becoming plugged. Care must be taken to avoid reducing the culvert capacity below that required. The grill will also require periodic cleaning.

b. Reference: 1st Indorsement to 577th Engineer Battalion ORLL, paragraph 2. The request has been forwarded by this headquarters to Cam Ranh Bay Support Command for action.

Douglas K Blue

DOUGLAS K. BLUE
Colonel, CE
Acting Commander

AVHGC-DST (31 Jul 68) 3d Ind MAJ Klingman/ds/LBN 4433
SUBJECT: Operational Report of the 577th Engineer Battalion (Construction) for the Period Ending 31 July 1968, RCS CSFOR - 65 (R1)

HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES ARMY, VIETNAM, APO San Francisco 96375

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

4 OCT 1968

1. This headquarters has reviewed the Operational Report-Lessons Learned for the quarterly period ending 31 July 1968 from Headquarters, 577th Engineer Battalion (Construction).

2. Comments follow:

a. Reference item concerning personnel shortages due to rotation, page 4, paragraph 2a(1). There has been a shortage in USARV of personnel with engineer MOS. DA has been contacted and additional 12 Series MOS have been programmed.

b. Reference item concerning shortages of critical items of TOE construction equipment, page 8, paragraph 2e(1): Concur with the initiated actions and recommendations. This headquarters has taken action to eliminate the present shortages.

c. Reference paragraph 2, 1st Indorsement; and paragraph 2b, 2d Indorsement: Nonconcur. The supply system does not make provision for units to draw items directly from the depots.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

A.R. GUENTHER
CPT. AGC
ASST. ADJUTANT GENERAL

Cy furn:
HQ 18th Engr Bde
HQ 577th Engr Bn

GPOP-DT (31 Jul 68) 4th Ind
SUBJECT: Operational Report of HQ, 577th Engr Bn (Const) for Period Ending 31 July 1968, RCS CSFOR-65 (R1)

HQ, US Army, Pacific, APO San Francisco 96558 15 NOV 1968

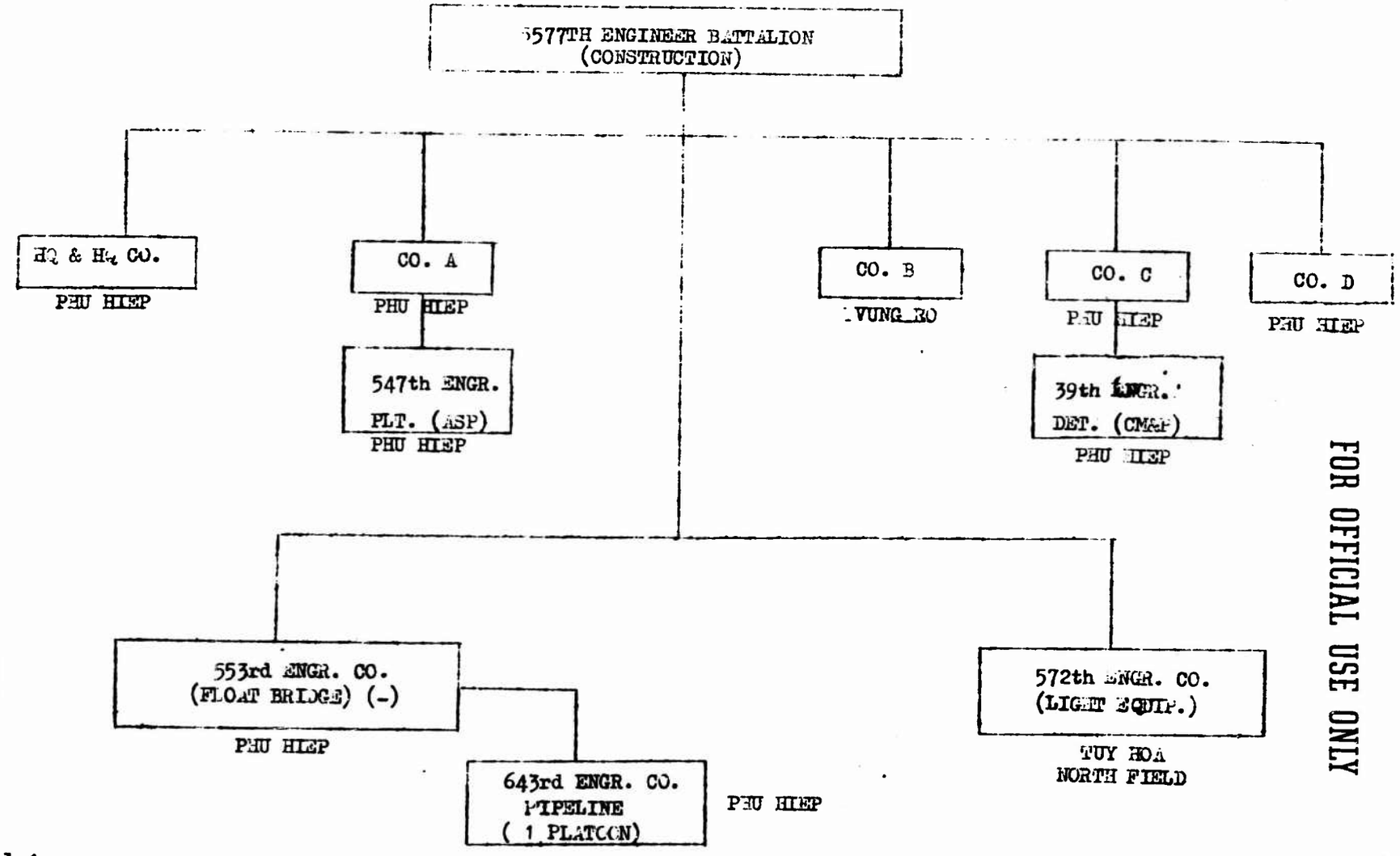
TO: Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, Department of the Army, Washington, D. C. 20310

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

FOR THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF:

C. L. SHORTT
CPT, AGC
Asst AG

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART
577TH ENGINEER BATTALION (CONST) AND ATTACHED UNITS



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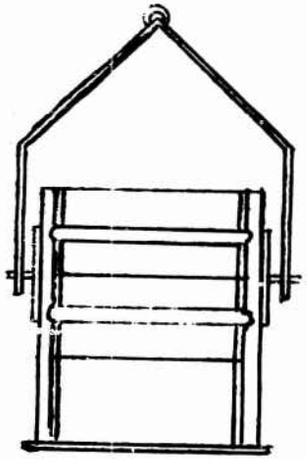

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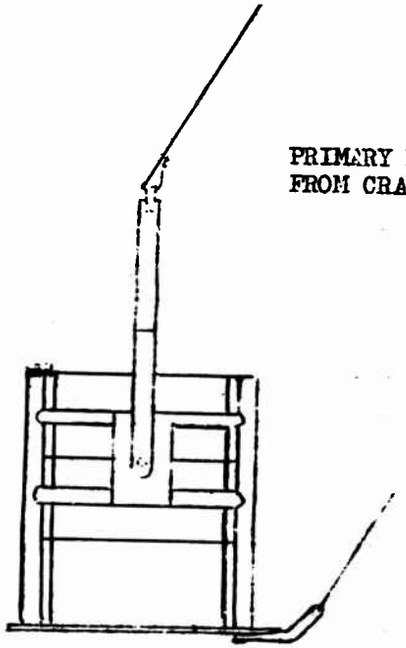

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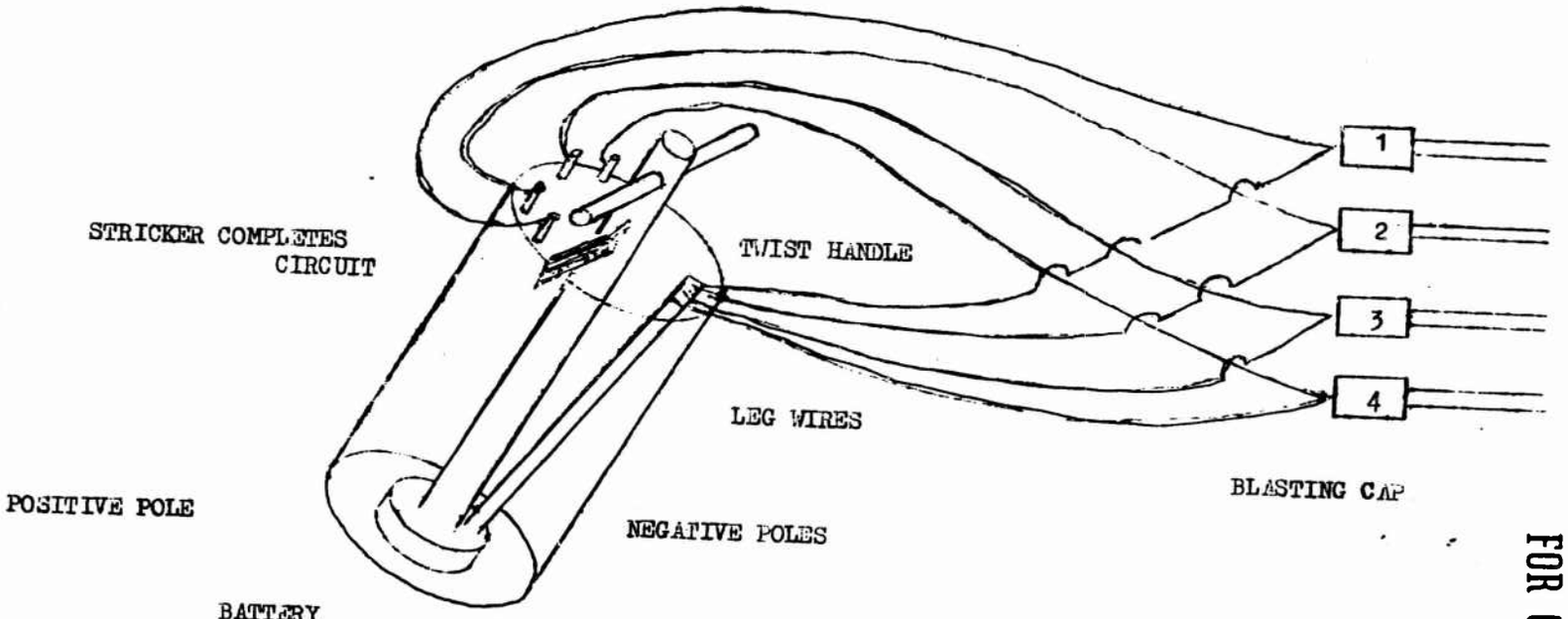

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4. DESCRIPTIVE NOTES (Type of report and inclusive dates)

Experiences of unit engaged in counterinsurgency operations, 1 May - 31 July 1968

5. AUTHOR(S) (First name, middle initial, last name)

CO, 577th Engineer Battalion (Const)

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13. ABSTRACT

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