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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Headquarters 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile)
APO San Francisco 96383

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AVDG-CA-E

4 August 1969

SUBJECT: Sapper Attack - FB Berchtesgaden

Commanding General
101st Airborne Division (Airmobile)
ATTN: G-3
Camp Eagle, RVN
APO San Francisco 96383

1. In accordance with your unclassified msg 060433A, Hq 101st Abn Div AVDG-GC-H, dated 25 June 1969, subj: Sapper Attacks; the following After Action Report concerning the attack on FB Berchtesgaden, 14 June 1969 is hereby submitted.
2. The 3d Bde TAC CP displaced forward from Camp Evans to FB Berchtesgaden (YD423012) on 26 April 1969. On the night of 13 June 69, the units occupying and defending FB Berchtesgaden were: CP 2-327 Inf, Rcn 2-327 Inf, Co E(-) 2-327 w/one platoon B-2-327 Inf attached, B-1-506(-), 3d Bde Security platoon, 3d Bde TAC CP, B-2-319 Arty (105), C-2-11 Arty (155).
3. Intelligence:
 - a. 2 Fire Support Bases in the area, FB Bradley and FB Airborne had been hit by sappers.
 - b. On 3 occasions recon parties of 2-3 NVA were observed outside the perimeter within 1 week of the attack.
4. Basic Defense Plan:
 - a. The static defense of FB Berchtesgaden consisted of the following:
 - (1) A defensive perimeter of twenty-nine bunkers, each bunker constructed of PSP, heavy 8"x12" supporting timbers and at least three layers of overhead sandbag protection. All bunkers had both internal wire and radio nets to the CP.
 - (2) Replaced outside and in the perimeter wire were twenty-seven drums of fougasse (55 gallon drum). In addition, each bunker has the means to detonate between ten (10) and fifteen (15) M-18A Claymore mines as final protective fire in addition to organic weapons.

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(3) Weapons employed in the bunker defense were 50 Cal MG's, M-60 7.62mm MG and 90mm RR, M-79 grenade launcher, and M-16's. Stretched the length of the perimeter defense were at least two (2) bands of triple concertina wire, and at the most likely avenue of approach, up to five (5) bands of wire.

(4) It is impossible to determine the exact number of trip flares employed during the morning hours of 14 June, let it suffice to say the entire perimeter was ringed by at least two interlocking belts of trip flares, plus hundreds more scattered throughout the wire.

(5) Daily activities conducted specifically to counter sapper attacks.

(6) Internal wire barriers were emplaced nightly to confuse and channelize the enemy into prearranged killing zones.

5. Daily activities conducted specifically to counter sapper attack:

a. Up to seven times daily, squad size patrols rified from the perimeter out to ranges of 1500 meters. At first light each day, a check was made of all exterior wire and likely avenues of approach. Other patrols secured the immediate area to detect any new or unusual enemy activity. These patrols also discouraged close, accurate observation of the Firebase. Finally, just before dark a final check of the perimeter wire was conducted.

b. Verification of close-in defensive fires was conducted nightly at differing times so as not to establish a pattern. These defensive concentrations were fixed by both 105mm howitzer from neighboring Firebases and 81mm mortars from FB Berchtesgaden itself. In addition, the 81's conducted a nightly H&I program of some 100 rds of HE.

c. "Mad Minute" or employment of all organic weapons on the perimeter for a short period of time was conducted at least twice nightly at varying times. All weapons were directed into the wire and a distance of some twenty meters beyond.

6. Narrative Description: Sketch - See Incl 1.

On 14 June at 0330H, enemy sappers of C2 and C3 Company of the K-3 battalion, 6th Regiment initiated the attack on FB Berchtesgaden using RPG, SA fire, 82mm mortars and satchel charges. The sappers had apparently conducted an extensive reconnaissance for several days prior to the attack as once the wire had been penetrated they moved to seemingly predesignated targets. The timing and weather conditions were utilized to full advantage as the enemy spent from early evening till after 0300, moving through the exterior wire, locating trip flares and either tying them down so as not to ignite, or replacing the safety

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pins. Periodically during the evening trip flares set off by the NVA and the very high gusty wind which lasted from dusk until dawn. Significantly no actual enemy movement was detected until the enemy attacked bunker 12 even though following the ignition of each trip flare, extensive reconning of the area using M-26 grenades and M-79 was conducted. "Mad Minutes" were conducted at 2200H and 0300H. At 0345H, the CP of B-1-506 was notified by the Bde Scty Platoon Leader that there had been several loud explosions in the vicinity of bunker 12, and bunker 13. He also stated because commo wire was now out, he was going to investigate. Shortly after this, the field 1SG for B-1-506 went outside to relieve himself. While outside, he noticed a figure approximately three(3) feet away who seemed to appear from beyond the wire which was stretched atop a steep slope. The 1SG challenged the man, who was wearing a helmet without a liner and appeared to be holding a bag. When asked his name, the man replied "Quan, Quan" then attempted to either detonate the satchel charge he was carrying, or throw a grenade, but was instead pushed back over the slope on the top of three other sappers, crawling up the hill. This separate party was then grenaded causing one of their charges to detonate among them. Between 0400H and 0415H, five (5) man sapper teams attacked FB Berchtesgaden, using three (3) different avenues of approach, one from the NE, one E where bunker 12 had been eliminated, and finally from the south across the VIP pad to the Bde TOC. Each five man team consisted of three (3) AK 47's with 100 rds of ammunition each, two (2) RPG's with four (4) rds and satchel charges. Any type bunker or conex container was hit as a likely target. At approximately 0415H, the Bde TOC was hit by two (2) satchel charges, causing some damage, and disrupting wire and radio communications. To cover the sapper attack and possibly to prevent the Bde portion of the hill from being reinforced, an intensive barrage of 82mm mortar was directed at the 2-327 CP and bunker line. This shelling lasted until 0530H.

At 0400H, upon determination that an actual attack was under progress, illumination was provided by 81mm (organic) and 105mm fm FB Airborne. All LP's were pulled behind the wire, and "Spooky" was requested, arriving at 0500H. ARA and AF FAC's were also employed. It is to be noted that due to the precision of the enemy attack, all fighting was done at very close range, in many instances hand-to-hand. As daylight approached, contact was broken as the enemy pulled back through the wire, leaving behind thirty-three (33) dead and three (3) PW's. From these prisoners it was determined that approximately ninety-six (96) NVA had taken part in the attack and that their route of withdrawal was to be to the SW. US casualties were eleven (11) killed and forty seven (47) wounded.

At 0530H, medevac ships arrived on station and an orderly evacuation of US wounded was begun. Concurrently, recon patrols began to check the perimeter to determine along which route the enemy had withdrawn,

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while a pursuit force organized to pursue and destroy the fleeing enemy force. This action resulted in one additional NVA KIA (BC).

At 0545H, FB Berchtesgaden began to systematically reconsolidate its defenses, effect a resupply of ammo, and repair damage sustained in the attack. By 0630H, activity had returned to normal level, and the 3d Bde TAC CP continued to control the day's offensive actions against the enemy.

7. Lessons Learned

a. Enemy Recon: From interrogation of POW's and captured document readouts, it has been determined that prior to any sapper attack, extensive reconnaissance is performed in detail. Any Firebase which discovers evidence of greatly increased enemy recon activity should be alerted to the very real risk of sapper attack.

b. Concertina Wire: Perimeter barrier wire should not only be emplaced, but at short intervals staked into the ground. Staking in this manner makes it more difficult for the sapper to negotiate the wire as it is stretched taught. The wire itself should be liberally laced with empty cans and other noise makers for early warning. Once established and emplaced, perimeter wire should be viewed and analyzed from all points, especially the outside to determine gaps and deadspaces not covered by fire and concealed routes of approach.

c. Fougasse: Selected fougasse, especially those along well defined avenues of approach should be detonated early, at the first sign of sapper attack. This action is especially effective against sappers in the perimeter wire.

d. Internal wire and Barriers: Internal wire and extra barriers should be placed throughout the interior of the Firebase after dark and taken up prior to first light. The layout of this wire should be different each night so as not to establish a set pattern. The benefit of internal wire is that it confuses the enemy as well as channelizes him into selected killing zones. Sappers conduct such an extensive recon and rehearsal for the attack, that anything which to them is abnormal greatly confuses and weakens their attack.

e. "Mad Minutes": The total employment of all perimeter weapons at random intervals during the hours of darkness is especially effective against sappers who are just beginning to attempt the negotiation of a Firebase's perimeter wire. However, all defenders should recognize that, although the sapper is unexpectedly and suddenly engaged by fire, this does not mean that he will always return fire. At FB Berchtesgaden it was determined after the attack that many of the 33 NVA KIA wore fresh bandages on wounds they had apparently sustained during the

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"mad minute" just prior to the attack. At that time, the enemy had to have been negotiating the outer wire, yet during and after the mad minute, there was no evidence of enemy activity, neither by cries from the wounded, nor movement as they attempted to find protection from the fire.

f. TOC Protection: Each sapper attack has a primary target against which a maximum effort is exerted. In the case of FB Berchtesgaden it was the 3d Bde TAC CP. One of the main reasons the TAC CP was not destroyed was the wise employment of RPG screen around the TOC and two guard posts, one at either end of the TOC itself. 360 degree RPG screening serves a dual purpose; it protects the TOC against RPG rounds by causing early detonation while also warding off satchel charges. The guard posts have the normal mission of preventing congestion in the TOC area by limiting access, and as a final defense while under attack.

g. Trip Flares: Trip flares are an invaluable means of early warning. All firebases should have several interlocking belts completely around and in the outer perimeter wire. In addition, trip flares should be concentrated in a random sprinkling in such natural avenues of approach as ravines, woodlines, etc. The flares should be employed in a variety of manners. Some should be armed with pressure pull wire, and others with a pressure pull and pressure release wire. Any method of establishing ignition which will function should be employed, so as to confuse the enemy.

h. Grenades: At varying times during the hours of darkness, regular H&I action should be taken with the M-26 frag grenades. This is the best means of H&I since it does not pinpoint the exact location of the defender. Additionally, the use of frag grenades should be augmented with concussion grenades, especially in areas of considerable deadfall. The protection from frag offered by deadfall is nullified to a great extent by the blast effect of concussion grenades, thus rendering them more effective in some instances.

i. Claymore mines: Claymores used in a static defense role should be utilized in the following manner:

- (1) Interlocking belts of claymores should be placed both in front and behind the outer wire;
- (2) Claymores should be concentrated in natural defiles to give 100% coverage of what would be normally a protective depression.
- (3) Obvious static claymores should be affixed to prominent objects such as stumps, so that the enemy maneuvers to avoid these obvious dangers by either bypassing or choosing another route. The alternate and less obvious approaches should then be covered by concealed claymores, repositioned after dark.

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(4) In the perimeter wire itself, claymores should be placed so that their range fans run parallel to the wire sweeping the entire perimeter front providing zero dead space and making the wire a complete interlocking killing zone.

(5) Claymores should be employed either in trees or on poles 360 degrees around the firebase. These claymores, directed downward provide added shock effect and are extremely demoralizing to an attacker in retreat.

j. Bunkers: The familiar "wagon wheel" effect of one circular line of mutually supporting bunkers is effective against sapper attack only on perfectly flat terrain. Because of the varying degrees of slope, all infantry leaders, must analyze the terrain so that bunkers afford mutual support. In the event one bunker is knocked out, supporting fires from the rear or flanks can cover the area. Employed supplementary positions and rifle pits with connecting trenches should be fabricated between bunkers.

k. Bunker Observation and Security: It is not sufficient for bunker guards to observe only to their direct front. The threat of sapper attack extends in all directions. As a result, observation must be accomplished in all directions, special alertness must be maintained between the hours of 0000H - 0600H. At this time normally 50% alert is sufficient, but when intelligence dictates a sapper attack is probable it is best to maintain 100% alert and maintain 30% alert for the hours between 0600H - 1200H, so the men can get some sleep.

l. Rehearsals: Both day and night rehearsals are required of all personnel in the Firebase so as to coordinate actions to be taken during a sapper attack. Each man must have an assigned battle position and know how to reach it under any and all conditions. Nighttime rehearsals are particularly important to familiarize personnel with inherent problems of movement to and the location of battle positions. These rehearsals should be thorough and incorporated into a "mad minute" so as to simulate realism.

m. Living Bunkers: Personnel with duty in the same section should be dispersed throughout several bunkers so as not to cause mass casualties of key personnel. The bunkers themselves should have either blast proof doorways or have a ninety degree turn in bunker entrances to minimize satchel charge damage. Someone must be awake in each bunker to insure prompt alerting of those sleeping and rapid movement to fighting positions.

n. CARE Package: "Counter-attack Reinforcing Essentials": When a fire base is under sapper attack, the ground commander must provide a fast, correct assessment of the tactical situation on his fire base and request additional support as required. At the first confirmation of a sapper attack on a firebase, ARA, TAC Air,

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Spooky and Flare Ships should come on station and all tube and mortar illumination within range must fire battlefield illumination. The following essential support must be readied to react as soon as the situation allows: medevacs, a combat tracker team to exploit fresh trails, an IFW team to interrogate POW's and a fresh ready reaction force to be airlifted to the scene to exploit intelligence gathered and pursue the enemy until he is destroyed. Above the RRF should be a "pink team" scouting in advance. Blocking forces must be maneuvered in advance of the fleeing enemy to close escape routes. When this is done in a professional and timely, coordinated manner, there is no escape for the sapper. As the pursuit is being carried out, resupply ships must bring in ammo, barrier material, and class I to restore the firebase defenses and defenders to full combat effectiveness. All this is in the finest sense of the word, a "CARE" package.

o. Sentry Dogs: Sentry dogs should be used to actively patrol the bunker perimeter during the hours of darkness. The dogs are able to detect enemy presence by both airborne scent and their accurate hearing, thus providing a measure of early warning not otherwise available.

p. ARA & Flare Ship: ARA & Flare Ships may be used for devastating H&I's up to 50 meters of the perimeter when accurately controlled. The combination of illumination plus the ARA HE rockets provides both psychological and physical damage to the sapper and his timetable for attack.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

Michael B. Stoyfield
for JAMES W. McELROY
CPT, INF
Adjutant

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SUBJECT: Operational Report - Lessons Learned
Hq 3d Bde, 101st Abn Div - Period
1 May 69 - 31 Jul 69

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