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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Headquarters, 1st Battalion 506th Airborne Infantry
APO San Francisco 96383

AVDG-CB

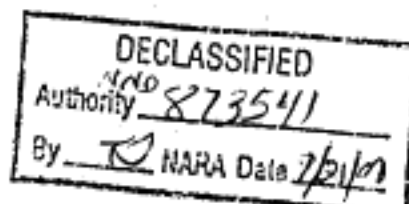
30 April 1969

SUBJECT: Sapper Attack

Commanding Officer
3d Bde, 101st Abn Div
ATTN: S-3
APO SF 96383

1. In accordance with letter, headquarters 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (AM), subject as above, dated 20 April 1969, the following After Action Report concerning the sapper attack on FSB SWORD, 23 February 1969 is hereby submitted.
2. FSB SWORD was opened at coordinates YD423312 on 14 Feb 69. The FSB was originally intended to provide security for four 81mm mortars and a reconnaissance platoon; however, a 105mm Howitzer battery was subsequently introduced into the FSB and the perimeter expanded accordingly. The perimeter consisted of 15 bunkers, (sketch, incl 1) each of which was constructed using a minimum of one layer of M8A1 matting and two layers of sandbags for overhead cover. Each bunker was equipped with multiple claymore mines and one E-8 gas dispenser. A triple concertina wire was emplaced around the perimeter and heavy use was made of trip flares. When originally occupied, the perimeter did not include bunker number 2A since the company commander occupying the fire base felt that this was the most unlikely avenue of approach and did not need to be covered by fire or observation. Two days prior to the attack, the battalion commander inspected the defenses and directed the construction of bunker 2A. It is considered highly probable that NVA forces reconnoitered this avenue of approach prior to construction of bunker 2A and decided to use this avenue of approach since it offered no observation or fire.
3. Narrative description: Sketch - see incl 1.
On 23 Feb 1969 at 0415 hours the enemy initiated the attack on FSB SWORD using RPG fire and 82mm mortars. Bunkers 1, 2, and 2A were hit by RPG and/or mortar fire and all occupants of these bunkers were wounded. Subsequent inspection of the bunkers revealed that the combination of M8A1 matting and 2 layers of sandbags, while not providing absolute protection against direct hits by 82mm mortars or RPG's, did prevent serious injury to the occupants. Five of the six occupants, while wounded, were able to remain in their position and continue the defense. The only indication of an enemy ground attack was the ignition of several trip flares in front of bunker 2A. Personnel manning bunker 3 observed these flares and activated the claymore mines which guarded the approach to bunker 2A. Subsequent investigation revealed that this act, plus a heavy volume of M-16 fire from bunkers 1 and 2, stopped the attack. It was not until a subsequent search of the area in front of bunkers 1, 2 and 2A that personnel confirmed that a ground attack had occurred.
4. After commencement of the attack by fire, 81mm mortars were employed for illumination and artillery fire was delivered around the perimeter. Previously emplaced strobe lights were lighted and gunship helicopters delivered close-in fires. The attack ceased after 20 minutes without US personnel having been aware that a ground attack had actually occurred. The ground commander then directed patrol action be initiated around the

Incl 1



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perimeter and thus discovered that a ground attack had in fact, taken place. Four bodies and parts of bodies were discovered in the immediate vicinity of the perimeter. The commander then requested tracker dogs which were delivered at first light. Rapid pursuit by the dogs uncovered three additional bodies.

5. It should be pointed out that the defense of FSB SWORD included considerable land clearing effort with machete, bangalore torpedoes and burning. This action limited easy approach by the enemy into the FSB.

6. Lessons Learned:

a. Upon occupying a FSB, immediate attention must be given to construction of bunkers, emplacement of wire obstacles, and extensive use of early warning devices such as trip flares.

b. The Brigade policy which requires priority effort be given to bunker construction and the emplacement of wire obstacles and trip flares is a sound practice. In the instant case, this policy permitted the defeat of enemy forces even though personnel were not aware of an enemy ground attack.

c. Battalion commanders and their staff officers must inspect defenses at every opportunity and insist on maximum security. Reliance on the tactical knowledge of the rifle company commander is not enough; often these commanders are tired, over-extended or sympathetic towards the over-worked condition of their troops. Senior commanders must insure that the best possible defense is provided and that no weak-spots are included in the perimeter.

d. While fortified bunkers are good defensive positions, they are also the most likely targets of RPG attacks; accordingly, supplementary positions should be prepared using foxholes and trenches which permit movement and observation without revealing friendly positions.

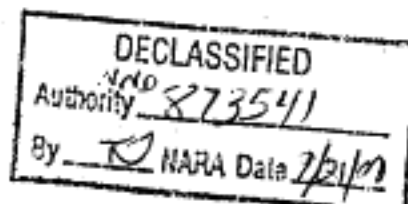
e. Vigorous pursuit of the enemy after an attack must be accomplished. In the instant case, at least three enemy personnel were killed because artillery, mortars and gunship fire was employed after the attack had terminated.

f. Each fighting position should employ multiple claymore mines - this includes supplementary positions. Personnel must not be hesitant in firing these devices nor in delivering small arms and other direct fire when an attack occurs. Multiple claymore emplacements will eliminate the soldier's reluctance to fire his "one and only".

g. While no E-8 gas dispensers were employed, these devices were available and their use would have greatly hindered the enemy. As should be the case with claymore mines, defending soldiers should not hesitate to employ E-8 dispensers. Of course, protective masks must be carried by personnel or readily available on position.

h. While armor vests were available, personnel did not wear them during the attack. Subsequent investigation revealed that had personnel donned these vests upon initiation of the attack, the number of wounded personnel would have been reduced to two and these wounds would have been less serious.

7. A significant point to be noted is the emphasis which had been placed on defense against Sapper attacks prior to this incident. HQ, 3rd Brigade had published an information sheet concerning Sapper attacks to include previous lessons learned and tips on defense. The Brigade Commander had given personal attention to this matter which resulted in considerable command emphasis on proper defensive measures. These measures resulted in this successful defense against a Sapper attack.

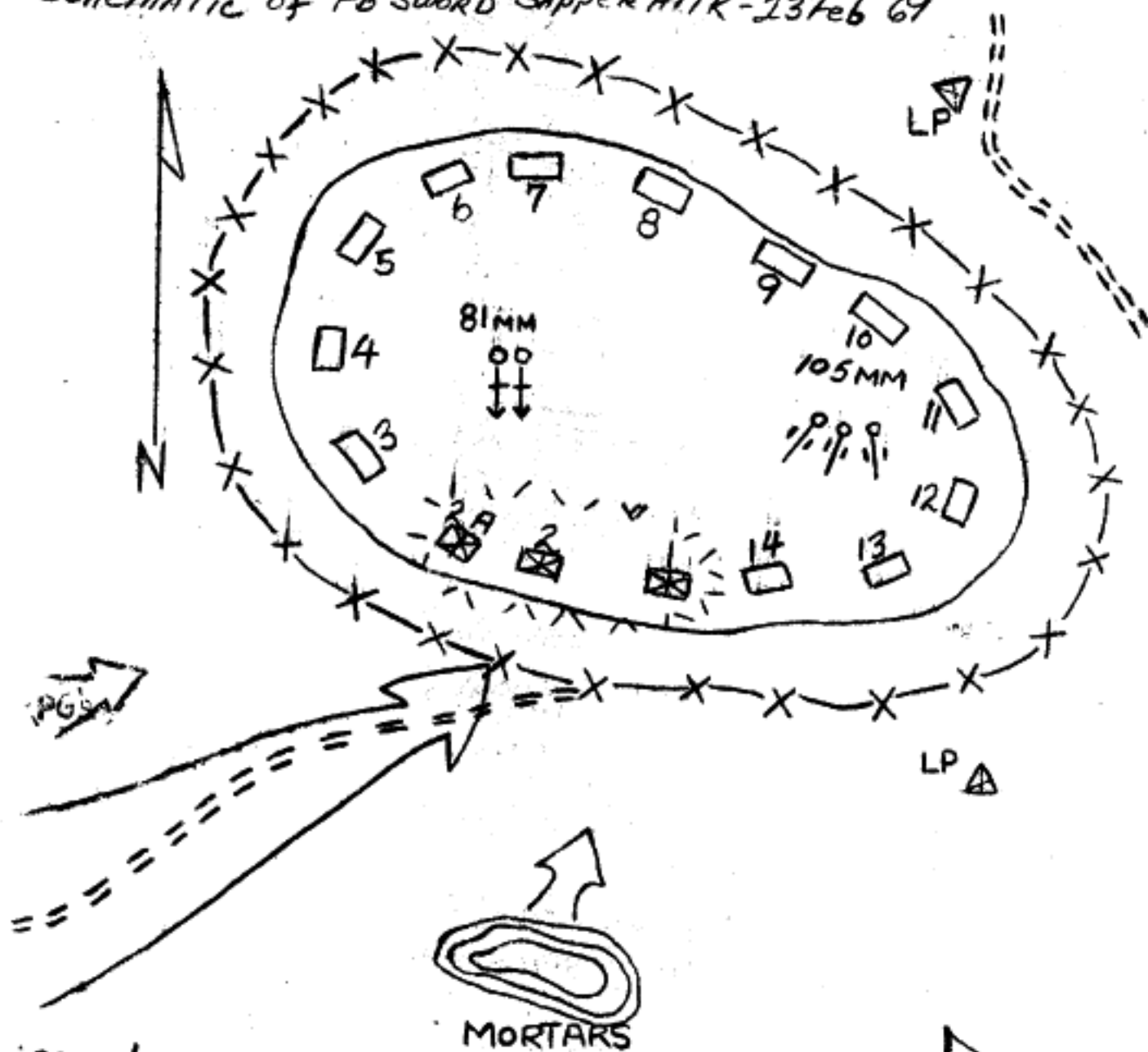


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Annex A to Incl 1 of ORLL for Pd 1 Feb-30 Apr 69.

Schematic of FB SWORD Sapper ATK-23 Feb 69



Legend:

- ☒ - BUNKERS DESTROYED
- ☼ - IMPACT AREA (RPG's)
- ==== TRAILS

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Authority 873541
By [Signature] NARA Date 7/21/99