

HEADQUARTERS
1st Battalion, 9th Marines
3d Marine Division (Rein), FMF
FPO San Francisco 96602

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003480
9 Apr 67

00109-67

2 of 15

SER NO 0012-67

From: Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines
To: Commanding General, 3rd Marine Division
Via: Commanding Officer, 3rd Marine Regiment

Subj: Prairie III, After Action Report

Ref: (a) Maps: Vietnam 1:50,000 AMS, Series L7014, Sheets 6342I
and 6442IV

Encl: ✓(1) Operations Overlay I
✓(2) Operations Overlay II

1. Code Name. Prairie III
2. Dates of Operation. 190001H March 1967 to 031735H April 1967
3. Location. Quan Cam Lo, Quan Gio Linh, Quan Trieu Phong
4. Task Organization.

1st Battalion, 9th Marines

Maj FULHAM

H&S Co (-)(Rein)	(19 Mar-28 Mar)	Lt THOMSEN
Infm, Btry "D", 2nd Bn, 12th Mar	(28 Mar- 3 Apr)	Capt HUTCHINSON
Det, 4th Plt, Co "B", 3rd Engr Bn		

Company "A" (-)(Rein)

(19 Mar-24 Mar)	Capt FESTA
(25 Mar- 3 Apr)	Capt SLATER

Co "A"
 FoTm, Btry "D", 2nd Bn, 12th, Mar
 Det, 4th Plt, Co "B", 3rd Engr Bn
 Det, H&S Co
 FAC Tm
 FO Tm, 81mm Mortar Plt
 Det, Med Plt
 Det, Comm Plt

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1/9
a/a, PRAIRIE III

19 MAR-3 APR 67

Tab 5

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9 Apr 67Company "C" (-)(Rein)(1 Mar-25 Mar) Capt CURD
(26 Mar-31 Mar) Capt REED

Co "C"

Det, 4th Plt, Co "B", 3rd Engr Bn

FO Tm Btry "D", 2nd Bn, 12th Mar

Det, H&S Co

FO Tm, 81mm Mortar Plt

Det, Med Plt

Det, Comm Plt

Company "D" (-)(Rein)(1 Mar-8 Mar) Capt KEYS
(9 Mar-31 Mar) Capt SHAW

Co "D"

Det, 4th Plt, Co "B", 3rd Engr Bn

Det, H&S Co

FO Tm, 81mm Mortar Plt

Det, Med Plt

Det, Comm Plt

5. Supporting Forces.

a. Artillery. Artillery was used during this period on targets of opportunity, counter mortar fires, prep fires, reconnaissance by fire, grid square saturations and H&I fires. -

Artillery was used in prep fires quit extensively. It was determined that the forward observers could obtain better results on a prep fire if they would first fire the prearranged fires then work over specific areas with adjusted fire missions.

Reconnaissance by fire was used during this period with satisfactory results while moving through close terrain where observation was very poor.

Counter mortar fires were good once the enemy mortar positions were located. Once the mortar fire was suppressed, battery fire for effects were fired on avenues of approach and other likely mortar positions throughout the night to inhibit further mortar attacks.

Artillery fires from "K" Btry, 4th Bn, 12th Marines were brought within 100 meters of friendly units who were in close contact with the enemy in order to suppress mortar and machine gun fire.

A total of 109 combat missions were fired during this reporting period. Artillery fired a total of 5694 rounds of 155mm and 105mm ammunition. This count does not include ammo expenditure on H&I fires and grid square saturations.

b. Armor. Armor consisting of four M-48 tanks, four M-42 twin 40 vehicles and two M-50 Ontos were utilized on 22 March while the battalion was required to move rapidly along a road north of the Cam Lo Bridge. On 23 March the armor was returned when the battalion arrived at its designated position. On 24 March four M-48's and one tank (Flame) were requested and

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utilized in an infantry tank attack on Phu An. In attacks the previous day on Phu An the enemy had been well dug in with machine gun emplacements. When the armor was used in the assault no enemy forces were encountered. Whether this was due to extensive artillery and air preps, tactics of the NVA or the effectiveness of armor is unknown. One tank hit an anti-tank mine and lost one tread during the attack. This was repaired. The armor was to go in direct support of the 3rd Bn, 3rd Marines on 25 March, but enroute another tank hit a mine although the route had been swept by engineer teams. Because of the difficulty the sweep team had in locating the mines (believed to be non-metallic), the large number (total of 5 encountered in 800 yds) and the channelization caused by the terrain, the tanks were sent to the rear. If the enemy had elected to defend Phu An as done previously it is felt that the shock action and firepower provided by the tanks would have been effective. The tanks were used to recon by fire during the assault.

c. Air. During Prairie III helicopters were used for resupply and to transport a number of replacements. Seven medevacs were made which carried a total of 93 marine casualties. On the night of 19 March 1967 there were 38 marine casualties these casualties were not evacuated until 20 March due to the inability of pilots to get into the landing zone. Inclement weather played only a part in the aborted attempt to extract the casualties from the combat zone. These casualties were evacuated just prior to noon on 20 March. This was done despite the regimental 14 recommendation, to not launch the helicopters because of adverse weather (The helicopter pilots who came in despite the weather did an outstanding job of evacuating the casualties).

Medevacs ran on a semi-continual basis from 1400 to 2230 on 24 March. These medevacs were efficiently executed.

Fixed wing aircraft were used in direct air support of the battalion on 24 and 25 March. They were controlled by the AO and coordinated by the battalion FAC. A total of 2 F-8, 6 A-4, and 4 F-4B aircraft expended 4650 rounds of 20mm cannon ammunition, 8 Zuni Rockets, 114 2.75 rockets, 35 500 pound cannisters of napalm, and 24 250 pound bombs.

6. Intelligence. On Operation Prairie III the battalion expected to encounter elements of the 324 B Division, probably battalion sized, from the 812th Regiment. On 17 March this information was rated A-2 by 3rd Marine Division G-2. Harassing mortar fire with occasional small arms engagements were expected to comprise most of any enemy contact. Contact was expected to come from the northwest and increase as the battalion moved in that direction.

Contact, when the operation began, was less than anticipated. Only one mortar attack disturbed the conduct of activities in the planned area of operations.

The battalion was moved east on the 23rd to a position from where a northerly search was to be made. The only intelligence available was past experience of the battalion in the area. Ambushes of varying size were

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expected. They were encountered. Two reinforced NVA companies executed two highly successful minuet ambushes. They occurred in the vicinity of the village of Phu An. The NVA appeared to have been well rehearsed and were extremely well dug in. Only their withdraw was somewhat sloppy in execution.

Terrain in the area of operations was of two types. The first consisted of rolling foot hills which extended into steep mountainous terrain. Almost without exception dense undergrowth impeded movement and limited helizones. Tracked vehicles would have been difficult to employ at best and nearly impossible to use for the most part. In the village area around Phu An dense quadrangular tree lines were an obstacle to both movement and sight. They provided excellent cover and concealment to a defending enemy. LZ's were difficult to find and all tracked vehicles were canalized onto trails. Commanding terrain features in the village area were non-existent due to the lack of visability in the areas.

The weather for the entire operation was excellent. It should have presented no problem to air support and did not present any problems to ground units.

Of notable intelligence value was the discovery of a NVA rocket launch site near YD 073617. There were 5 to 7 positions, having 10 to 15 rocket pads each, stretching over approximately 100 meters length. Each firing position was a shallow hole approximately 2 X 2 X 4 feet. Two stakes in front were used to support the shoulder of the rocket round and three in back were used as a back stop (The stakes were used to support the round itself). Numerous BA-30's were found in the area believed to be used to electrically launch the rocket. Four rocket rounds were also at the site.

No psychological operations were conducted on this operation.

7. Mission. From battalion position in the vicinity of objective #3 (enclosure #1) the battalion was to conduct a detailed search of the hill complex formed by objectives 4, 5, and 6 and "Helicopter Valley" vicinity of GS YD 0364. An additional mission to search "Mutter Valley" and the area between YD 075605 and 051605 was assigned. Upon completion of the aforementioned missions the battalion established a new position and concomitant mission to attack to the north and to seize objectives "A" and "B" (Enclosure 2 operation overlay II). The battalion was to be prepared to continue the attack to the north or east. Search and destroy operations were to be carried out in the ZOA and patrol activities to the southwest. The final mission for the battalion was to move to Camp Carroll and assume duty as base defense battalion.

8. Concept of Operation. From a CP established YD 046636 at objective #3 the battalion (-) was to conduct aggressive patrolling to objectives 4, 5, 6, (enclosure #1) and in "Helicopter Valley" (vicinity of GS YD 0564). In "Mutter Valley" one company was to conduct a detailed search of GS YD 0462 and one half of GS YD 0461 and one company was to conduct detailed search of the area south of the stream in GS YD 0561 and YD 0661. The battalion was then to be transported by motor convoy to the vicinity of the Cam Lo Bridge YD 148604. The battalion was to advance in a column

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of companies to objective #1 (enclosure #2) and on order to continue the attack to objective #2. The lead company was to continue the attack to objective "A" and the second company to attack objective "B". Both companies were to be prepared to continue the attack north or east and the third company was to be prepared to take the mission of either company. Maximum use of supporting arms was planned for all phases of the operation both to cover movement of the battalions elements and to interdict enemy lines of communication.

9. Execution. On 18 March the battalion (-) was in position at YD 046636 engaged in Operation Prairie II. Word was received that Prairie II would end 182400H March 1967 and Prairie III would begin at 190001 H March 1967. The battalion (-) began Prairie III from its position in vicinity of YD 046636. Company "D" made a search and destroy sweep to the northwest of objective #5 (enclosure #1) Company "C" conducted a reconnaissance patrol to and around objective #5 and provided cover by fire for Company "D". At 1325 Company "C" found a well developed bunker system at YD 043644. There was no contact until 1935 when the battalion (-) position received 90 rounds of 82mm mortar fire. The barrage lasted approximately 25 minutes and resulted in 35 marine WIA and 6 KIA. The battalion remained in position, conducted aggressive ambush and patrol activities but no further contact was made. Artillery was called on the suspected NVA positions and H&I fires were directed in the area during the night. The casualties were medevaced on the late morning of 20 March. On 20 March Company "A" made a reconnaissance of objective #6. No contact was made. In the afternoon of 20 March the battalion (-) moved by tactical march to the vicinity of YD 053620. A diversionary action was initiated when establishing the bivouac site by moving the battalion (-) past the bivouac site just prior to dark and then returning to the position under cover of darkness. This maneuver was thought necessary since another Marine Battalion used the position on the previous night and the position was exposed to possible enemy observation from high ground on three sides of the position. Normal night activities, ambushes and patrols were carried out without incident. On 21 March the battalion (-) moved from its position to the assembly area at YD 086589. An extensive search and clear mission was carried out when the battalion moved to the new position. The battalion (-) set in position, conducted night defense, patrols, and ambush activities without incident. The day of 22 March was spent preparing for forthcoming operations. Local patrols and night activities were conducted without incident. On 23 March local security activities were conducted and no contacts were made. In the late afternoon the battalion conducted a motor march to a assembly point at YD 150606. From this point a tactical foot march, with armor escort, was made to an over night bivouac site in the vicinity of YD 135622. Local security was established with patrols and ambushes. At first light on 24 March Company "A" conducted sweep north with Company "C" and the battalion CP in trace and Company "D" in the rear. Company "A" moved to attack objective #2. Company "A", at YD 134671, while in the attack, received 5,000 rounds of automatic small arms fire, 250 grenades and approximate 140 rounds of 60mm mortar fire from an estimated 120 NVA. The NVA were well deployed and were wearing khaki and gray uniforms with pith helmets. Their positions ran generally east and west along coordinates YD 136671 to

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to YD 131671 and north and south along coordinates YD 131671 to YD 133676. The NVA were well organized with mutually supporting positions from which they would not move. Company "A" returned fire with approximately 9,000 rounds 7.62, 350 rounds M-79, 70 hand grenades, 30 Laws, 26 12 guage, 28 rounds 60mm and an artillery and 81mm mission were called. Supporting fires were placed as close to friendly troops as safety would permit. An enveloping maneuver was attempted but heavy cross fire precluded its success. The attacking company was withdrawn after 2 hours of heavy fighting to permit artillery saturation and close air support. The target area was well covered with rockets, bombs, napalm and strafing runs. Company "A" sustained 5 U.S. KIA and 27 WIA while killing 14 NVA by body count and estimating 40 possible NVA KIA. Company "C" continued the attack on objective #2 after artillery saturation and air strikes were secured. At 1700 they were taken under fire at the north end of the village (Phu An) by approximately 15 NVA. The enemy was well dug in and armed with at least five machine guns in cross fire positions. The NVA allowed the point to pass and then fired into backs of the point and took the main body under fire. Company "C" returned fire and called artillery in on enemy positions. One marine KIA and 17 WIA were sustained by Company "C" 2 NVA bodies were counted, 1 NVA was captured and 43 possible kills were estimated from the condition of the battle field. Company "C" returned to YD 133659 to spend the night. The battalion (-) normal night activities were carried out without further contact. On 25 March, after early morning air strikes on Phu An, Company "C" and "D" conducted a sweep through objective #2 without incident. Company "A" provided security for the battalion CP. Tanks were in support of sweep activities and one tank at YD 133673 hit a mine which blew off the track and two road wheels. Thirty-one bodies were found and one NVA WIA was taken prisoner. A large amount of hastily abandoned NVA equipment was found. The enemy losses appeared to be the result of the previous days encounter. The battalion set up in the vicinity of YD 136668. Night defense, ambushes and patrols were conducted all without contact. On the morning of 26 March Company "D" moved towards objective "A" with Company "C" in trace. Both companies moved through the objective without incident. Four bodies were found at YD 134674. All of the bodies were clothed in NVA uniforms and had apparent gunshot wounds. The battalion CP and Company "A" remained at YD 136668 while Company "C" and "D" stayed at objective "A" throughout the night. Extensive night activities were conducted at both sites but no contacts were made. On 27 March contact was made when a tank hit a mine at YD 134674. No casualties resulted, however, a track was blown off. Patrol activities to the north were conducted by Company "C". The battalion moved to the vicinity of YD 132655. While moving to the new position three NVA bodies, all in uniform, were found at YD 131676. Normal night activities were carried out with no incidents. On 28 March the battalion conducted a tactical motor march to Camp Carroll. There the battalion was used to defend the perimeter of the combat base. Patrol and ambush activities, both day and night, were conducted in connection with base defense in the period from 28 March to 3 April. The battalion also provided a company for rough rider and platoons for bridge security. During the period at Camp Carroll, 3rd Bn, 9th Marines controlled the operation of the perimeter, filed all reports and kept journals covering the 1st Bn, 9th Marines activities while at Camp Carroll. On 3 April the battalion entrucked for transportation to Dong Ha and chopped opcon to 3rd Marine

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Division Forward at 131200H April 1967. The battalion was further transported to the Chinook area and chopped upon to the 4th Marines at 031735H April 1967 which terminated 1/9 activities in Prairie III.

10. Results.

- a. USMC KIA 13
USMC WIA 103

There were no equipment or material losses by USMC units.

- b. NVA KIA confirmed - 36
NVA KIA possible - 43

All areas of air strikes were searched.

c. Equipment Losses NVA.

- 1 Chi-Com Machine gun
- 1 Anti-tank weapon
- 20 60mm Mortar rounds
- 49 Chi-Com Grenades
- 1 Russian Rifle
- 12 Sub-machine guns (6, AK-47's)
- 60mm Mortar fuses (6 boxes)
- 6 60mm Mortar primers
- 1 Russian Anti-tank rocket
- 1 Chi-Com Carbine
- 2 Magazines for Sub-machine gun
- 4 82mm Mortar rounds
- 400 rounds Machine gun ammo
- 500 7.62 rounds
- 4 rounds 82mm RR ammo

11. Administrative Matters.

a. At the onset of Prairie III the battalion was deployed in Operation Prairie II with a prescribed load of one day of Class I, a BA of Class V and combat essential Class II. Resupply was by helicopter and motor transport from the LSA. Weather did not hinder resupply by air.

b. Maintenance. Nothing significant

c. Casualties were treated by the battalion medical officer or corpsman in the field and medevaced as rapidly as possible by helicopter.

d. Motor transportation for the battalion motor marches and for resupply was conducted without serious incident.

e. Communications. Nothing significant

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f. Medical evaluation. The battalion medical officer was not present in the field during the entire period reported on. However, his presence was extremely valuable when large numbers of casualties were encountered in a brief time period. The doctor was able to aid many of the wounded who could not be immediately evacuated. Non battle casualties due to heat continued to be a problem. It is felt that a more heedful use of salt tablets will lessen this problem.

12. Special Equipment and Techniques. Nothing significant

13. Commanders Analysis. In this period of encounter with the NVA forces the action at the village of Phu An typified the tenacity and demonstrated the ~~defensive~~ capabilities of the enemy. The village was not known to be fortified or defended and had been evacuated by the civilian populace. Artillery prep fires were conducted but adverse weather precluded any air prep. A marine company in the attack recieved a large volume of well directed small arms fire and grenades from well placed mutually supporting positions. The enemy withheld all fire until the marines were within 25 meters of NVA machine gun placements. As the battle progressed it became evident that because of the close proximity of friendly troops and the loss of direct observation due to hedgerows, the unit would have to withdraw to permit maximum utilization of supporting arms. When the unit attempted to withdraw the NVA fired pre-registered mortar barrages on all routes of egress and inflicted numerous casualties on the marines. It would appear that this action elucidates the defensive posture and planning of NVA forces in this type of situation. During actions involving disengagement by withdrawal all counter mortar fire precautions should be taken including avoidance of obvious routes of egress

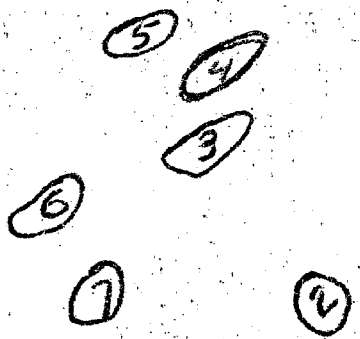
Other contacts in this action were of less significance than the battle at Phu An. However, the enemy appeared to be uniformly proficient although less effective in these contacts.


F. D. MITCHELL
By Direction

1/9, Mar 67

SECRET

Operations Overlay



08
+ 64

60
+
04

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By Command of D. J. FULHAM

F. D. MITCHELL JR
Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps
Assistant S-3

Enclosure (1)

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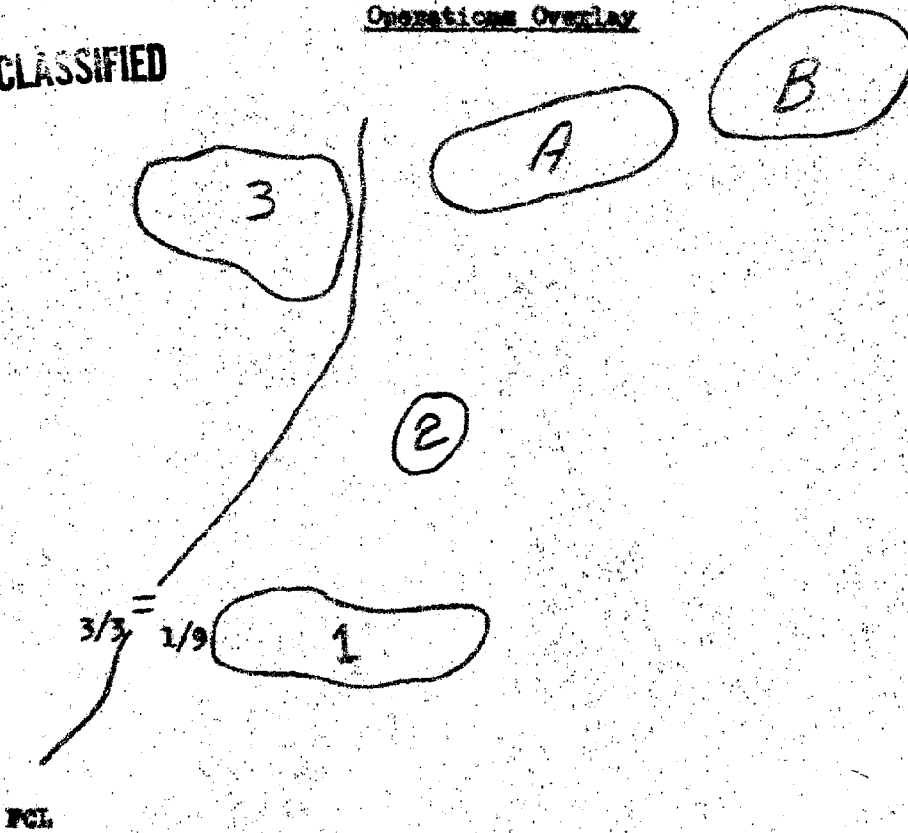
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Operations Overlay



By Command of D. J. FULHAM

F. D. Mitchell Jr.

F. D. MITCHELL JR.
Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps
Assistant S-3

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Enclosure (2)

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