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COMPANY B  
1st Tank Battalion, FVF  
3d Marine Division (Fud), FVF  
c/o FPO San Francisco, California 96601

AWL/jar  
38Sep65

**From:** Commanding Officer  
**To:** Commanding Officer, 3d Tank Battalion, FVF  
**Subj:** After Operation Report, Operation Starlite  
**Ref:** (a) Map, VIETNAM, 1:50,000 AMS L701 Sheets 6757 II, 6757 III, and 6756 I

- Units.** CoB(-), 1stTkn, FVF  
3dPlat, CoA, 3dTkn, FVF  
Sec. 2dPlat, CoC, 3dTkn, FVF  
a. CoB(-) consisted of one (1) Gun Tank, three (3) Flame Tanks, and a VTR, M51.
- Total Strength.** 3 Officers USMC  
43 Enlisted USMC  
1 Enlisted USN
- Date.** 18 August 1965.
- Time.** Approximately 0900-2400.
- Place.** Vicinity of Hamlet Complex An Quang (1) and (2).
- Casualties.** USMC 1 KIA 13 WIA.
- Organization.** The Tank elements of BIF-7 were organized into three separate increments. The Section of 2d Platoon, Company C was attached to BIF 2/4. The 3d Platoon of Company A was attached to BIF 3/3. Company B (-) was with Headquarters, BIF-7 in a General Support Role.
- Scheme of Maneuver.** Companies of BIF 2/4 and BIF 3/3 advanced abreast on the left of the regimental zone (see overlay). The boundary between Companies was the streamline. Due to trafficability the tanks of both units advanced generally along the same axis.
- Terrain.** The area was primarily rolling, wooded or brush covered interspersed with dry crop fields, wet rice paddies, and paddy dikes. The dry crop fields were set apart by hedgerows of small trees and brush ranging from six (6) to ten (10) feet high.

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10. Trafficability. With the exception of the wet rice paddies and the streamline areas, movement was fair to good. The dry crop fields were generally at different levels and movement through the hedgerows was slow until it was determined how much lower the next field was.
11. Observation. Direct line of sight rarely exceeded two (2) to three (3) hundred meters. Most often, either a tree line, a wooded knoll, or hedgerow restricted visibility to fifty (50) or one hundred (100) meters.
12. General. At approximate coordinates 700925 the advancing companies, with supporting tanks, came under enemy small arms, mortar, and anti-tank fire. Enemy positions were well concealed. The action continued between the first point of contact through the streamline and paddy area to approximate coordinates 702930. Near this point A34 was put out of action by Anti-Tank fire at close range. The Section of Company C Tanks assisted in evacuating the crew and returned to the defensive perimeter of Headquarters Company 2/4 at approximate coordinates 703926. Two Tanks of 3d Platoon, Company A, having lost contact with supported infantry, also returned to the area of the perimeter. A35 had previously had track problems and returned to the beach in company with A33.

During this time BIF-7 Headquarters was moving into a OP at approximate coordinates 709927. Situation reports from the companies in contact had not been received and neither their position nor situation was known.

At approximately 1100, India Company 3/3 requested a Flame Section at their position. India Company was in contact with the enemy, but reported the route between them and BIF-7 OP was clear. The Flame Section moved out in company with five (5) LVT's with resupply for India Company. The Flame Tanks had not been assigned as escorts for the resupply column, but since going to the same destination, moved out together.

The column passed the area in which Company H 2/4, with supporting tanks, were engaged by a matter of meters. The column proceeded to approximate coordinates 700931 and was hit by small arms, mortars, and Anti-Tank weapons. B55 was put out of action and the wounded crew evacuated. The LVT's, attempting to get cover, drove into the rice paddies and bogged down. B55 having expended the .30 Cal. ammunition, with the .50 Cal. out of action, and the driver wounded by blown out fragments of the driver's periscope, broke contact and returned to BIF-7 OP.

A company of BIF 3/3 was mounted on LVT's and with B51 moved out to the point of contact.

At approximate coordinates 703928 the gun tank stopped to fire .30 Cal. at enemy running across the front. While firing, B51 was hit by Anti-Tank fire from the direct front. The Anti-Tank fire continued, from a well concealed position, at and over the tank into the LVT column that had closed up behind. When the column dispersed the gun tank again came under fire from the right flank before pulling back into a covered position. 90mm fire returned was limited to cannister since friendly positions were not known. When the Anti-Tank positions could not be determined by a feet reconnaissance contact was broken.

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A further attempt was made to relieve the column. At approximately 1600, Company L 3/7 with B51, A33, and the VTR moved north and then west to approximate coordinates 702932. Contact was made with the enemy. By the time the Company could advance it was too dark to determine the exact position of the column.

Radio contact was made between A33 and A32. It was reported that they had not had enemy contact for several hours. With the two elements separated by a rice paddy running five (5) to six (6) hundred meters long, contact was again broken at approximately 2340.

Early on the morning of 19 August 1965 the wounded were evacuated by helicopter. Two Companies of 3/7 with B51, A33, and the VTR moved into the area shortly thereafter. Evacuation of the dead and burial of enemy dead was accomplished. Recovery of vehicles was started. One LVT was recovered from the paddy and all tanks returned to KIA-7 CP. On 20 August 1965, recovery of the remaining vehicles was accomplished except for one LVT and A34. Both the LVT and tank had received multiple Anti-Tank and mortar hits. Both had burned in excess of thirty-six (36) hours.

Upon personal inspection by the Company B Commander it was determined that A34 was not of sufficient salvage value to risk attempting to evacuate or cannibalize it. Both fuel tanks, when ruptured, had burned. The engine compartment was completely gutted. The right track was burned off. The right air cleaners, stowage boxes, and fenders were fused together from the heat. The left side had been hit, and though not burned, was of little value. In the turret the radio was melted in a mass. The deciding factor was the condition of the 90mm ammo. The bases of the shell cases had swollen out over the deck held down by the ready racks. It was assumed that any ammo stowed under the turret deck, nearer to the heat source, would be in even more dangerous condition.

As requested, engineers blew the ammo in place.

13. Remarks. The account as relates to the initial activities of both Company A and Company C was compiled from reports of participants. The account as relates to Company B results primarily from the participation of the Company B Commander.

## LESSONS LEARNED

1. As a result of a very brief planning period and the attachment into three (3) tank elements there was a total lack of coordination except spontaneous assistance as the situation developed.

RECOMMENDATION: That in future operations of this nature Tank units be placed in direct support under central control and coordination of the Regimental Tank Officer.

2. That in the absence of knowledge of friendly troops' disposition the main gun of a tank cannot be fired without danger to friendly troops.

RECOMMENDATION: That subordinate unit situation reports be accurate and

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frequent enough to determine their disposition in so far as the situation permits.

3. That in the type of terrain in which this action took place it is not only possible, but probable, that the enemy can position a strong force in between two advancing elements.

RECOMMENDATION: That units requesting support from the rear provide necessary guides and/or security into their position as the situation and terrain dictates.

4. That when an infantry unit with attached tanks continues to advance through terrain impassable to tanks the tank unit loses contact and becomes an easy target for Anti-Tank weapons.

RECOMMENDATION: That if a tank unit cannot continue the advance the supported unit must give specific instructions as to a rally point, another unit location or leave them adequate security to provide close in Anti-Tank defense.

5. That in an area where concealment favors the defender tanks are particularly vulnerable to close in Anti-Tank fire.

RECOMMENDATION: That in terrain encountered in this operation infantry precede tank elements until the absence of Anti-Tank positions is assured.