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LESSONS LEARNED

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HEADQUARTERS

UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
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MACJ 323

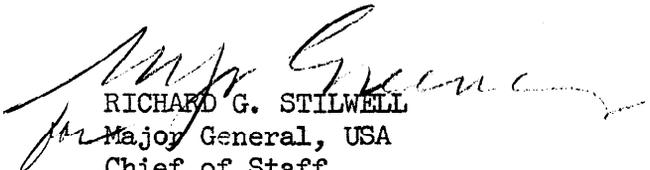
SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 47, River Assault Group Operations

TO: See Distribution

1. (U) Attached as Inclosure 1 is the latest "Lessons Learned" from counterinsurgency operations in the Republic of Vietnam.
2. (U) The information contained in "Lessons Learned" is primarily intended for use by US Advisors in Vietnam. Lessons may be of value for direct application, or they may simply reinforce existing tactics, techniques, or doctrine.
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FOR THE COMMANDER:

1 Incl


RICHARD G. STILWELL
Major General, USA
Chief of Staff

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SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 475 River Assault Group Operations

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1. (U) General: River Assault Groups (RAG), since their formation by the French in 1946, have played an important role in combat operations on Vietnam's extensive network of inland waterways. The RAGs provide, as direct support for corps commanders, Naval Forces to perform combat lift, logistic and gunfire support, patrol, escort and minesweeping. Each of the VNN's six RAG units can embark and support a battalion of troops for independent operations in enemy-controlled areas for a period of 10-14 days. This issue of "Lessons Learned" discusses two operations involving RAG support of ground operations and illustrates the value of naval support to military operations in the Delta area.

2. (CMHA) Joint Operation in Vinh Long Province, 6-9 February 65.

a. Participating Units: The main tactical element was composed of the 13th Regt, Vinh Long RF and PF forces and the 23d RAG.

b. Supporting Forces: One L-19 and two platoons armed helicopters from the 114th and 62d Avn Bns.

c. Concept of Operations: Intelligence reports placed the 801st Viet Cong Co in position on the Rach Muong Khai Canal in Duc Thanh District, Vinh Long Province. The 23d RAG was to transport two RF and two PF companies north on the Rach Muong Khai Canal and make contact with the VC. The 1/13 Inf Bn was assigned blocking positions in the vicinity. The 9th Division Recon Co remained in reserve in Sadec for deployment as an Eagle Flight reaction force.

d. Narrative of Action: (See sketch map, Inclosure 1)

(1) Units of the 23d RAG, including one monitor, one commandment, three LCMs, four FOMS (STACANS) and four RF LCVPs were underway from Vinh Long at 062200. The convoy proceeded to the Bassac River, arriving at the southern mouth of the Rach Muong Khai Canal at 070745 and then traveled north into the area of operations.

(2) At approximately 0915, the troops debarked under the cover of naval gunfire. Contact with the VC was immediately established. The initial encounter resulted in nine VC killed and three weapons captured. Following this action the Eagle Flight was requested and it arrived

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in the area at 0930. Fighting continued throughout the day with the RAG units following the advance of the troops in order to be readily available to provide gunfire support or troop lift. By 071945 the area had been swept. The 1/13 Inf Bn returned to Sadec and the RF/PF troops were re-embarked on the RAG units. The results of the day's action were 47 VC killed and 33 weapons captured as opposed to friendly casualties of 2 KIA and 3 WIA.

(3) The RAG units, with troops embarked, spent 8 February probing tributary canals in Duc Ton District in an effort to make contact with the VC. It was intended that the RAG units, acting ostensibly as an independent unit, would land troops if attacked while providing covering fire from 40mm and 20mm cannons, 50 cal and 30 cal MG and 81mm mortars to keep the VC pinned down. However, the VC did not present themselves that day.

(4) The following day the RAG, with troops aboard, travelled south on another main canal in the area. At 090830 two VC propaganda booths were detected and destroyed. At 1030, contact was made with an estimated VC squad. Troops were landed, but the VC immediately withdrew. The operation terminated at 091415. Final results for the three days were: enemy, 49 VC killed (nine by the VNN), 37 weapons captured and nine prisoners taken. Friendly: 2 KIA and 13 WIA.

e. Analysis of this operation indicates that the VC initially presumed the RAG units to be a small force over which they had a tactical or numerical advantage. Thus on the first day of operations the VC chose to fight. The VC evidently withdrew from the area once the full scope of the forces arrayed against them was known.

f. LESSONS LEARNED:

(1) Ground commanders should always consider the use of RAG units in planning operations in the Delta area. Coordinated joint operations employing naval elements can be extremely successful as shown in the above operation. The capability of the RAG to provide rapid support to ground operations based on current intelligence and to support an operation with a large volume of heavy gunfire in either direct support or as a blocking force significantly enhances the chances of success of military operations conducted over terrain such as the Mekong Delta.

(2) RAG units operating in VC controlled areas can usually make contact with the VC. Probing actions by RAGs with troops embarked or a small mobile RAG force used as "bait" to provoke attack with either type action backed by preplanned air support or an Eagle Flight will ordinarily result in a successful action against the VC.

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3. (CMHA) OPERATION AN DAN 70: (Conducted 21-22 Jan 65)

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a. Participating Units: The main tactical element included the 52d Rangers; 1st Battalion, 50th Regiment; 2d and 3d Battalions, 49th Regiment and 2d Troop (APC), 1st Cavalry Squadron. The operation was supported by the 22d River Assault Group; 2 platoons 105mm, 251st Artillery; 2 platoons 155mm, 38th Artillery; 2 platoons armed helicopters, 145th Aviation Battalion; 28 HU-1Bs, 145th Aviation Battalion; 4 VNAF H-34 helicopters and VNAF fighter aircraft. The operation was controlled by the 25th Division.

b. Intelligence: Intelligence reports placed an estimated four companies of VC in the operations area, with a strength of about 900 men. The terrain of the area is semi-jungle, laced with numerous canals and rivers, pineapple fields and rice paddies. The population in the immediate vicinity of the operation are VC supporters.

c. Mission: To search out and destroy the VC force in the operation area.

d. Narrative of Action: (Refer to sketch map, Inclosure 2)

(1) The 22d RAG ferried the 52d Ranger Bn across the Vam Co Dong River under the cover of darkness at 210615. The Rangers made initial contact upon reaching objective B at 0810. Ten VC were killed and several weapons captured.

(2) As planned, the 1/50 Inf Bn departed the LD for objective A at 210657. At 211100 the 2/49 Bn was airlifted to Objective C. Light to heavy resistance was encountered by all units moving toward their objectives. 3/49 Inf Bn was committed at 211500 and airlifted to the vicinity of objective Cl. At the same time the 22d RAG lifted the 1/50 Inf Bn from objective A to objective C. 2/1 CAV provided security for objective A and provided logistic support from Duc Hoa.

(3) As the day progressed, the 52d Rangers became engaged in a heavy fire fight. By 1650 the Rangers were running low on ammunition. At the same time the RAG returned the 1/50 Inf Bn to Objective A and continued down river. The RAG reached objective B at a most dramatic moment. The 52d Rangers, backed against the river, were completely out of ammunition, the battalion commander had been killed and the VC were beginning a final assault to overrun their position. The RAG immediately began extracting the Rangers from their position under heavy covering fire. During the embarkation process, repeated assaults by the VC were repelled by the RAG with heavy casualties inflicted on the VC. The Rangers were evacuated from their precarious position to objective A.

(4) On 22 January the RAG lifted the 2/49 and 3/49 Inf Bns to the area where the previous day the 52d Rangers had met heavy resistance. The battalions failed to ~~reach objective B~~

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(5) As the operation drew to a close, the RAG was utilized to lift the 1/50 Bn from objective A to Luong Hoa and the 2/49 Inf Bn and 3/49 Inf Bn from the area of objective B to objective A.

(6) As a result of operation An Dan 70, 73 VC were confirmed killed with an additional 130 VC estimated killed or wounded by air strikes and artillery. Five individual weapons were captured. Friendly losses included 33 KIA, 52 WIA, one crew served weapon, 11 individual weapons and one PRC-10 radio.

e. LESSONS LEARNED:

(1) The importance of employing River Assault Groups in support of ground operations is emphasized by the outcome of Operation An Dan 70.

(2) RAG units can provide mobility for large units in areas not trafficable for wheeled and tracked vehicles.

(3) Designation of several RAG units as ammunition resupply boats could be instrumental in alleviating situations as confronted the 52d Rangers. Such a boat would be immediately responsive to requests for resupply from units engaged along river and canal banks and can provide its own gunfire support in effecting such resupply.

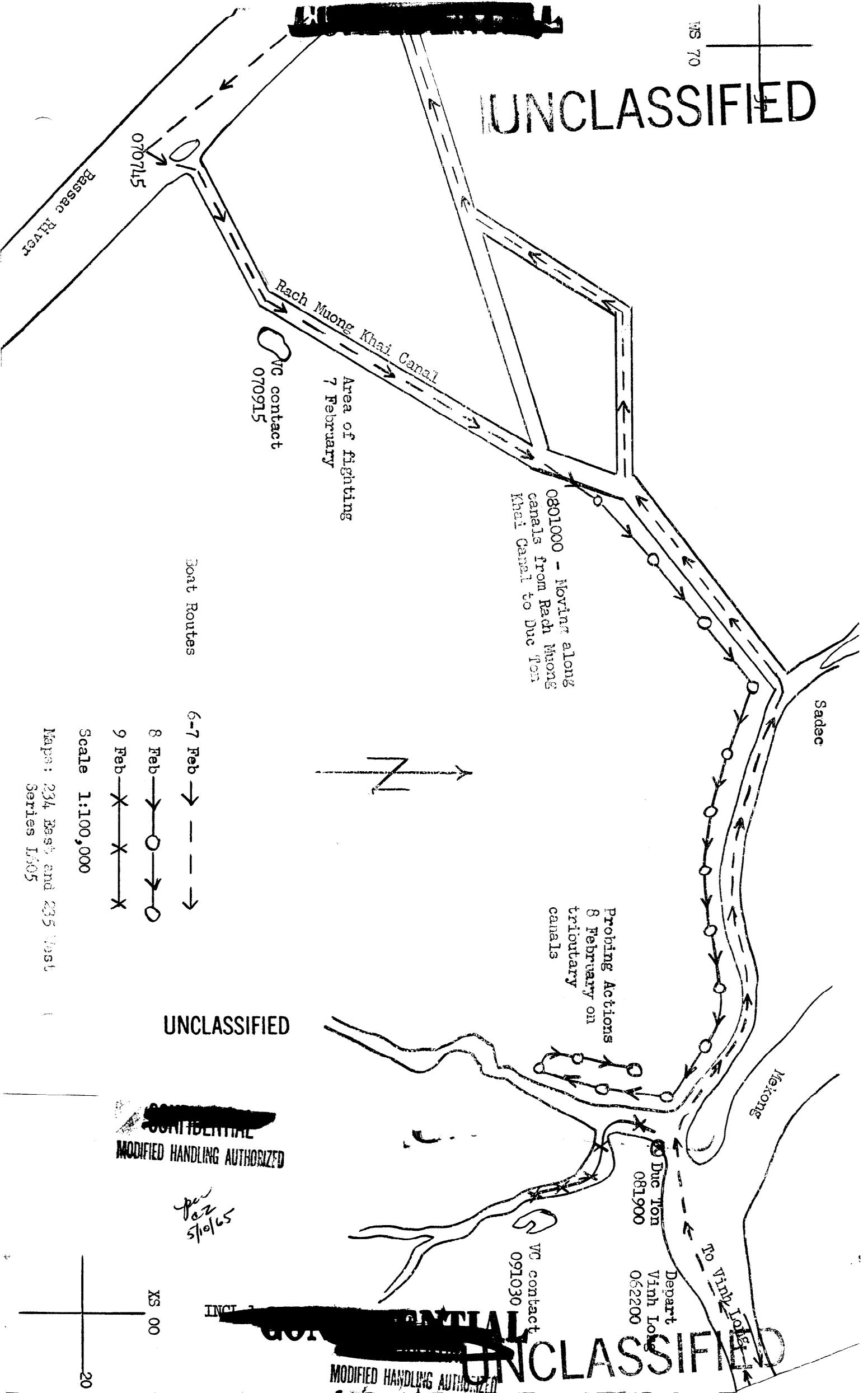
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Area of fighting
7 February

VC contact
070915

0801000 - Moving along
canals from Rach Muong
Khai Canal to Duc Ton

Sadac



Probing Actions
8 February on
tributary
canals

Mekong

Duc Ton
081900

Depart
Vinh Loi
062200

To Vinh Loi

VC contact
091030

Boat Routes

6-7 Feb → - - - - →

8 Feb → ○ → ○ →

9 Feb → X → X → X

Scale 1:100,000

Maps: 234 East and 235 West
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