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HEADQUARTERS
1ST SQUADRON, 9TH CAVALRY
1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (Airmobile)
APO US Forces, 96490

AJVRS

20 November 1965

SUBJECT: Lessons Learned #2

TO: Commanding General
1st Cavalry Division
APO US Forces 96490

1. This ~~second~~ "Lessons Learned" report covers the period from 16 October thru 15 November 1965. It incorporates in a generalized form the contents of three previous reports forwarded during this time frame: Recon in Force After Action Report, 23 Oct 65; Tae River Battle, 2 Nov 65; Drang River Ambush, 6 Nov 65. Significant data are shown as Inclosure 1.

2. During this reporting period the Squadron.

a. Maintained daily air reconnaissance, augmented by occasional ground I & R patrols, of the AN KHE Base TAOR, between the Brigade Picket Line and the Division TAOR perimeter.

b. Conducted a four day reconnaissance in force of the SUOI DONG TRE Valley, south of Highway 19 where it passes through the DEO MANG pass, 20-23 October.

c. Participated in the PLEIKU I campaign from 25 October thru 5 November with the Squadron less D Troop.

d. Participated in the PLEIKU II campaign with C and D Troops, both attached to 3d Brigade, beginning 10 November.

3. Controllable factors adversely affecting our mission performance during this period were:

a. A steadily deteriorating available-for-combat personnel situation, both officer and enlisted. We arrived in country in September understrength and our posture has declined progressively ever since due to combination of combat losses, disease and injuries, and termination of service of enlisted men. As of this date I am short 32 officers/warrant officers and 75 enlisted men. Of 147 riflemen authorized, I have only 104 on hand.

b. Lack of parts to keep our helicopters mission-ready

c. Lack of tropical uniforms and boots for all personnel.

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SUBJECT: Lessons Learned # 2

4. Lessons Learned:

a. Medical Evacuation:

(1) Discussion: Virtually all Squadron casualties occur either where there is a fire-fight going on which makes extraction by Med Evac helicopter very dangerous or under heavy jungle/rain forest tree canopy where no LZ is reasonably available. Casualty evacuation has become virtually the biggest problem for the cavalry commander on the ground. On two occasions we have had to request a Chinook to extricate casualties because the only way to get them out was by winch. All 34 Squadron casualties during the Tai and Drang River battles were evacuated from the place of occurrence by organic helicopters because of the volume of ground fire present.

(2) Recommendations:

(a) Fit two UH-1D Helicopters in each air cavalry troop with a winch as a matter of priority.

(b) Send a stretcher forward with each Class V resupply pallet. Cut the handles of these stretchers off six inches from the canvas to permit loading aboard a tactical UH-1D.

(c) Modify Med Evac procedures so that tactical helicopters from the Squadron carrying casualties can rendezvous with Med Evac helicopters at the closest reasonable secure area and transload patients. An MD should accompany the Med Evac helicopter(s) if at all possible.

b. CH-47 Support:

(1) Discussion: For an average recon-in-force or search-and-destroy operation at the normal distance from the FSE at which we have been fighting, from ten to twenty CH-47 sorties are required daily, depending on such variables as attached infantry elements, helicopters shot down and hours flown by Squadron aircraft in mission performance.

(2) Recommendation: When the tactical situation requires that the Squadron operate from a base at a greater distance than 20 kilometers from its supporting FSE, or when an infantry company is attached, place a section of 2 CH-47s in DS of the Squadron for the duration of the mission.

c. Marking of Front Lines:

(1) Discussion: Time and again during this reporting period effective, close-in fire support was impossible or overly risky because pilots and FOs could not positively identify the positions of forward elements under the dense tree canopy. Smoke grenades, panels, pencil flares, and radio vectoring simply did not work. At the end of PLEIKU I we laid hands on some Very Pistol flares and fired them from the M 79 grenade launcher. They worked effectively.

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(2) Recommendations;

(a) Include 96 Very Pistol flares in the basic load of each troop of the Squadron.

(b) Establish or reconfirm by strong command action the color flare to be used to signify:

1. Own position.

2. Direction of enemy (two flares in his direction).

3. Require med evac.

4. LZ

d. Reaction Time of Reinforcing Units:

(1) Discussion: Our experience on both the Tae and Drang Rivers establishes beyond argument that on a recon-in-force mission where it is desired to establish and maintain contact with the enemy, a reinforcing infantry company is essential to mission accomplishment. This reinforcing company should be from the battalion which is intended to exploit any suitable target which the Squadron may discover. Whether the infantry company is attached or "op con" or whatever is academic. What is required is that the company be married to its lift and ready to move to the target area, ready for combat, on 15-minute notice. It must move forward and fight on order of the Squadron CO. If more than this company is required, then the battalion commander should accompany the second company, and he should assume operational command of the situation when the second company has closed in the objective area. At this time the Squadron's ground elements should be extracted since their mission of finding the enemy and maintaining contact until reinforcements arrive has been completed.

(2) Recommendation: Incorporate the above combat-tested procedure in our tactical planning.

5. Combat Notes:

a. Two handsets are required per PR-25 radio so that the radio does not become inoperative in heavy rain.

b. PAVN units we came up against are alert, prompt, and vigorous as respects counter-attacks, day or night.

c. Look for snipers high in the trees. They produce most of our casualties during the Tae River battle.

d. If you must bring helicopters into an LZ, the perimeter of which is under fire, shoot everything you have during the operation--mortars, M-79s, 2.75 rockets, rifles, machine guns, the works. It can be done.

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We flew like 20 sorties into the Drang River patrol base at night under heavy PAVN fire. Every helicopter was hit, but none were destroyed and all flew out of the LZ under their own power.

6. PAVN snipers use weapons with little or no muzzle flash. It is also significant to note that sniper fire predominately when a counter-attack is in progress or when other distracting influences are present.

↑ Incl a/s

/s/John B. Stockton
/t/JOHN B. STOCKTON
Lt Col Cavalry
Commanding

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HEADQUARTERS
1ST SQUADRON, 6TH CAVALRY
1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMOBILE)

AVCRS

20 November 1965

Incl 1 Operational Data, 16 Oct - 15 Nov 65

	DAY	NIGHT	TOTAL	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
1. Operational flying hours				
a. Combat assaults	1667	182	1849	2239
b. Direct combat support	1340	85	1425	2140
c. Other combat support	198	122	210	288
TOTAL	3105	279	3484	4667
2. Tactical operations				CUMULATIVE TOTALS
a. Recon and screen sorties		1837		3583
b. LZs secured		38		80
c. Raids & recon in force operation		10		13
d. Cav Plat cdt opns		75		108
3. VC:				CUMULATED TOTAL
a. Confirmed kill (body count)		166		190
b. Estimated kill		128		165
c. Estimated wounded		150		203
d. Captured		30		64
4. Own losses	Off/WO	WIA	TOTAL	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
a. KIA	0	7	7	9
b. WIA	2	24	26	33
c. MIA	0	0	0	0
d. Died, direct result of VC fire	0	1	1	1
e. Died, not direct result VC fire	0	1	1	2
f. Injured, not direct result VC fire	0	2	2	14
g. Malaria, evacuated	1	13	14	14

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AVURS

20 November 1965

Incl 1 Operational Data 16 Oct - 15 Nov 65 (Cont'd)

5. Helicopters hit:	UH-1B/ UH-1H /OH-13S	TOTAL	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
a. Above 1,000' abs alt	2	0	5
b. Between 50'-1,000' abs alt	8	2	22
c. Below 50' abs alt	14	7	24
d. Destroyed as a direct result of VC action	1	0	2
	TOTAL	34	55