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After Action Report: An Khe, 2/66

HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR ON MICROFILM

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Davis

REPORT ON THE RAID ON 1ST US AIR CAVALRY DIVISION
BASE IN AN KHE ON THE NIGHT OF 19 FEBRUARY 1966

I. DETERMINATION OF MISSION:

1. Purpose of the raid:

This raid was intended

- To counter the "Dry Season" plan of the Americans and to push the political struggle movement a step further.

- To destroy one key element of the enemy, and an important part of the US facilities and weapons, as well as to create trouble in the rear base area of the enemy.

- To increase the combat experience of cadre and to raise the combat tactics and technique of the unit to a higher degree.

2. Combat tactics used:

Secretly used assault force and combined fire power to raid An Khê base.

Requirement: Ensure the success in the first battle.

3. Attacking forces:

The attacking forces consisted of the following:

- 407th Battalion minus one company
- One 82mm Mortar Platoon with four 82mm mortars
- One company of Province Local unit
- Militia, Guerrilla and concentrated units of areas 11 and 8

4. Preparations:

All preparations had been made within the period: from 20 December 1965 to 10 February 1966 therefore on the night of 19 February 1966 the attacking forces were ready to carry out the order from the higher headquarters.

5. Favorable conditions and difficulties (in general)

a. Favorable conditions:

The entire unit—from cadre to soldiers— was highly excited by the determination to destroy the Americans in vengeance for the people in the North and the South who have been killed by them. Cadre

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and soldiers swore to overcome all possible difficulties and danger in the forthcoming fight.

A high tradition of heroic struggle had been created due to successive victories over the US troops and puppet Army during the past few years.

b. Difficulties: The unit had recently moved to the new place with a variety of objectives, so cadre and soldiers were not familiar as yet with the way of preparing for these objectives. Moreover, they were still unfamiliar with the roads and lines of communication in this area so their movement was very difficult.

6. Resolutions made upon the assumption of missions

The Party Committee and the politico-military commanders had studied the assigned mission, analyzed and evaluated the enemy situation and friendly situation to find out factors that were favorable, or disadvantageous to us so as to decide necessary measures to overcome difficulties and achieve the assigned missions successfully.

II. PLANS

a. Preparations for the battlefield:

1. Some elements were organized to prepare for the battlefield. These elements consisted of cadre from battalion level cadre down to soldiers (fire power element /combat support/ and assault force).

- Three Terrain Reconnaissance elements, each consisting of 5 or 6 persons were organized, to survey and penetrate into the enemy terrain from 3 different directions.

- Element #1: Surveyed and penetrated into the enemy area from the mainway which leads to the base. It means starting from Dá Trông /White Stone/ Hill, this element moved north westward toward the base and further to Hòn Công.

- Element #2: Moved along the axis of Road 19 south of Hòn Công airfield to penetrate into the parking area and the hospital area of the US troops in the northern portion of Dôn market /Cho Dôn/.

- Element #3: Moved eastward along the axis of Road 7, across Ba river, into Ba Tas area. But as it was difficult to cross Ba river this element had to seek the way to penetrate into Cây Me airfield area in An Khe city.

Reconnoitering the terrain and preparing for the penetration necessitates choosing definite objectives: landing area of the helicopters, battle positions, artillery, trucks, information center, Division Headquarters, Brigade CP, and vital concentrated areas on which we can concentrate our heavy firepower and which can be the proper target of attack for our firepower /combat support/ element and our assault force. These preparation must be ready within 2 months.

- Result:

- Element 1, on the whole, did its job well
- + Element 2, though being able to locate only a small number of objectives, could organize combat fairly well

+Element 3 could neither locate the objectives nor cross the river because the river was at high tide.

b. Preparations by the attacking forces. While preparing the battlefield the unit can organize training for soldiers and cadre on higher combat technique so that they can meet the combat requirements in the forthcoming battle. All preparations, combat plans and combat training must be based on and in accordance with the terrain features of the enemy base and the enemy defense system. The unit must, in addition to training, constantly encourage cadre and soldiers to do their best in the performance of their combat missions, and to clear their mind of such thoughts as fear of enemy artillery and aircraft, fear of being defeated and fear of moving deep into the enemy land. Meanwhile all material preparations must be made before the combat in order to ensure success.

C. Combat plan.

Situation.

1. Terrain features:

The US 1st Cavalry Division was based within An Khê District, in a large valley surrounded by high mountain and over bases, which were located from 3 to 15 kms away. There were also hills in or near this area: Hòn Công Núi Dát, Hòn Nhon. In addition there were many small hills inside or in the surroundings of the base area against which the enemy was building a breastwork system. On the whole, the area close to the enemy base was flat, thinly wooded. This base, therefore, was closely concealed behind a hedge. In the dry season, the trees in this area can be burnt to make landing areas for helicopters.

- On the east is Ba river which always flows very swiftly, so the attacking force from outside can hardly cross it.

- On the south is road 19 which runs through An Khê city and southern Hòn Công.

On the whole, the terrain is favorable to the enemy because the enemy occupies all the surrounding hills to extend his control over the surrounding areas. In addition, there are many open fields which can be used as landing areas for helicopters that lift enemy troops to this base when reinforcements are called for to stop our close quarters attacks. These fields can be used as landing areas for enemy reconnaissance planes whose missions are to detect our troops and fix our locations.

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In such conditions we are obliged to stop our plans of close quarters attack and our movement during day time. We can only overcome these difficulties by moving our troops at night and by secretly opening underground ways to avoid the eyes of the enemy.

2. Enemy situation:

Enemy defensive system: The enemy defense system is established around the enemy base area with a circumference of 20 kms, including within it such hills as Hòn Công, Núi Dát and Da Trang. This base is protected by 12 layers of barbed wire of all patterns and all types, of which the barbed wire entanglements

are more numerous and trickly woven. These barbed wire fences make attempts impossible to penetrate into the enemy base by creeping or climbing through the barbed wire. Between these layers of barbed wire fences are many fields of anti-personnel mines etc...

Hon Cong alone is protected by two layers of barbed wire carentine and straight stone walls. There are no trails or roads leading into this area and each enemy post in the area must use a definite road.

South Hon Cong is located on the axis of road 19 and is surrounded by a system of strategic Hamlets with a very strict control system which gives no access to our troops from outside. In the eastern and southern part of an Khe city near road 19 are well secured systems of strategic hamlets in which there are none of our agents operating.

Inside the enemy base area:

Inside close to the barbed wire fences is a system of sandbagged blockhouses, each protected by 4 or 6 enemy and all set from 40 to 60 meters apart. In between these blockhouses are combat positions, each guarded by 2 or 3 enemy soldiers. This system as a whole is a continued covert underground defense line. Behind this line are houses made by corrugated iron sheets or tents. These houses are protected by breastworks and sandbags and are parcelled into many compartments. These houses occupy many separate sections of the areas. They provide lodging for many enemy brigades. In the inner perimeter are the landing fields for helicopters. Between various sections occupied by the enemy troops are parking fields for enemy trucks and armor and landing fields for helicopters.

At night, the whole base area is lit by a powerful system of electric lights. There are also patrol trucks equipped with strong searchlights running their rounds. Besides, there are many fixed searchlights along the surrounding barbed wire fences and on the hills to light areas 3 or 5 kms away.

In this base area searchlights are more frequently used than flares.

-All Vietnamese (including puppet soldiers and personnel of the puppet government) are not allowed to approach this base.

Enemy operating procedures:

The enemy fire is woven into a thickly woven net of fire with all types of weapons ranging from individual weapons to 155mm RR's. Day and night the enemy uses its artillery to shell areas and roads suspected of our presence / VC/ on penetration. Everyday they use 190mm and 81mm RR's to shell around the base from the barbed wire fenced outward to prevent our possible close quarters attacks.

Besides they still use helicopters to lift platoons or companies of US Special forces to blocking points (usually from 8 to 10kms away) to check the direction of our movement or to search the hills and our forested areas around the base for traces of our activities. These forces often stay outside the base from 2 to 3 days awaiting a new force to replace them. They used to get back to the base at night.

Comments

Enemy strong points:

- Adequate strength, weapons and equipment
- The enemy knew how to take advantage of the terrain and landmarks to deploy his troops.

Enemy weak points:

- The enemy morale was shaken by our sapper activities.
- The enemy was overconfident in his weapons and the obstacles around his bivouac sites. As a result, he showed several vulnerabilities of which we could take advantage.

During night time: Sentries were posted at pillboxes and soldiers' quarters. Patrol tours were made in the soldiers' rest and combat areas. On the top of Hòn Công, three searchlights were used to help the view of the sentries posted in the soldiers' quarters and on the road.

Enemy force:

- An entire air cavalry division with 18,000 US soldiers was stationed in the base. One Regional Forces Company and one Popular Forces Company were stationed in An Khê city.
- There were nearly 500 helicopters of various types, 150 heavy guns (from 81mm to 155mm) and 1,600 vehicles of various types (including armored personnel carriers).

Strongly and weakly protected directions:

The enemy put emphasis on the protection of the west and northwest sides of his location. East and southeast were his vulnerable directions (from Ba River upwards).

Enemy reinforcements and supports in case of being attacked:

- The enemy often used artillery fire to support attacked units. He shelled into our possible locations and movement routes.
- He used helicopters to conduct fire to cut off our movement routes and to intensively strafe areas, especially high areas, where his troops had been thoroughly destroyed.
- He used armored personnel carriers to block our movement routes.

People's situation:

Generally speaking, in early 1965 almost all people, including Montagnards, were liberated except those living near An Khê city.

In August 1965, the above air cavalry division occupied and terrorized this area causing the people to move into our remote base areas. The wicked RVN authorities returned and controlled the people and oppressed the Revolution.

The people were anxious and confused. They could not go from place to place because most of them were in illegal status. Famine appeared due to poor production outputs.

Based on the investigations and preparations for enemy and friendly forces; to meet higher echelon's requirements; and in accordance with the assessment of the enemy, the Party Committee and commander made the following resolution:

- Use a fortified assault unit to destroy Hòn Công high point (C3)
- Use a fortified assault unit to make deep thrusts into enemy areas and helicopter landing sites around Tân Tạo high point (C1)
- Use a fortified assault unit to make a deep thrust into the southern part of Hòn Công (along Highway #19, Chợ Đồn) in order to harass and wear down enemy forces (C3)
- A fortified assault unit will launch attack on Cây Me Airstrip or An Khê city ten days after the D-day of the main unit (C1)
- Use four 82mm mortars and four 60mm mortars and 350 mortar shells (including 185-82mm shells and 170-60mm shells) to shell fiercely into the helicopter landing site, housing areas and enemy brigade headquarters.
- The Province local company and district concentrated troops will block enemy withdrawal routes and provide security for rear areas.

Main direction of attacks:

Central points of all signal and liaison activities were located on the top of Hòn Công and in the airstrip area to be attacked by the mortar element. However, the top of Hòn Công was the most important point.

- Hour of deployment: 2250 hours
- H - hours: Main H - hour: 2300 hours secondary H - hour (in case of unexpected occurrence): 2330 hours.
Latest H - hour (free for all elements to open fire and carry out their missions no matter what happens): 0100 hours on 20 Feb 66.

Organization, equipment, and missions of each element:

Element #1: (Destroyed enemy troops stationed on the top of Hòn Công. This mission was assumed by C3)

- This element consisted of 23 comrades divided into 5 cells (including 2 reserve cell armed with 2 B40 rocket launchers, 2 company cadre, liaison cadre, medics). Mission of this element was to destroy enemy troops stationed on the top of Hòn Công and to hang a NLF/SVN flag there. During combat, the following slogans were used: "Be accurate, be prompt, thoroughly destroy the enemy, quickly clear the battlefields, immediately withdraw to maintain security". After the battle, a 3-man cell, including a platoon cadre, was left behind so that this cell could use explosive charges and sub-machine guns to intercept US reinforcements. After this, it bivouacked on the top of Hòn Công to control the battlefields and launch attacks on the enemy brigade headquarters area and enemy troops assembling at the airstrip in the north of Tân Tạo.

- This element was armed with sub-machine guns, AK assault rifles, explosive charges and grenades. (The 3-man cell was armed with 2 sub-machine guns and one explosive charge).

Element #2: (Consisting of 10 comrades, including 2 platoon leaders, belonging to C1).

This element was divided into 3 cells, armed with 9 AK, 1 B40 rocket launcher and 3 rockets. Each man was armed with 5 or 7 hand grenades (500 grams each), grenades, 1 "fence destruction tube" and 2 pair of scissors to cut barbed wire.

Mission of this element was to destroy the enemy assembly area, attack the enemy brigade headquarters and

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then attack the helicopter landing site located north east of Tan Tao,

Element #3: (Executed deep thrust into vehicle parking area, storehouses and concentration of personnel in area south of Hòn Công). C3 was in charge of this mission.

This element included 18 comrades reinforced with one 57mm RR and 12 shells. They were organized into 5 cells including one warning cell placed at the flank. Two comrades were given the mission of deceiving the enemy in order to mislead his fire. Two C cadre were in charge of this mission. Equipment consisted of 1 B40 RL, AK assault rifles and grenades.

Their mission consisted of executing a deep thrust into the vehicle parking area, storehouses, and enemy concentration point in area south; intercepting and attacking trucks passing by the airfield area, along the portion of the road leading from Don Market to Hòn Công, then firing 57mm shells into the storehouse area.

Element #4: (Launched attack deep onto Cay Me airfield area and An Khe for a period of 10 subsequent days) C1 was given this mission.

This element consisted of 12 comrades including 2 C cadre. They were organized into 3 cells. Equipment consisted of 1 B40 RL, AK assault rifles and grenades enough to launch two battles successively.

Their mission was to study and prepare to attack objectives around An Khe armed at Cay Me airfield, enemy artillery positions, depots and the American concentration points. They had to launch one to two battles, using one small element. Time prescribed was at the end of February 1966.

Element #5: (Attacked the horse-back [Ridge of earth] west of Hòn Công if the enemy concentrated here). C3, including 12 comrades, was assigned this mission.

They were organized into 4 cells. Equipment consisted of 2 AR's, submachine guns, explosive charges and grenades.

Mission: If the enemy occupies the ridge of earth west of Hòn Công summit to block our advance to Hòn Công, this element has to approach the enemy, deploy secretly, and as soon as the element in Hòn Công opens fire, immediately raid the enemy position, destroy him in order to protect element #1 withdrawing along the roadside. If there is no enemy, develop formation, deploy forces, and provide security for element #1 to withdraw safely.

Fire power [Combat support] element:

Equipment: 4 60mm mortars + 170 shells
4 82mm mortars + 185 shells, total 355 shells

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C.4 Combat support was assigned the mission of:

- Directing strong fire into the helicopter airfield area, the brigade command post and its complex, assigning forces to protect the flank of the battle ground in northeast area, organizing medical evacuation after completion of the mission.

- Deploying one squad of C3 in the observation post area to attack the landing force and provide security for the withdrawal of the main element attacking the main objective.

- Assigning 2 squads of C1 to provide security for the surgical station and the withdrawal path at the rear.

- Deploying the province local company in open fields to attack landing troops, protect the rear and the withdrawal of the entire unit. The withdrawal would take place 3 days after the battle was launched.

Coordination:

- Hon Cong element #1 and the fire power [combat support] element were the main elements to launch the attack, but Hon Cong would have priority to open fire.

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The other elements should observe the prescribed time, maintain security, ensure good preparation, launch assault upon opening of fire, develop combat formation, accomplish the prescribed mission, clear up the battlefield and withdraw according to the plan.

After using all the ammunition issued, the fire power element would withdraw, leaving behind one element to evacuate wounded.

Upon completion of mission, Hon Cong element #1 should leave behind one cell (well concealed) to operate day and night, then withdraw. The element at the horse-back [ridge of earth] would withdraw after element #1 and protect the rear of the formation.

Assumptions:

During the movement to contact we may possibly encounter the enemy. We should avoid him by all ways and means. In case we cannot avoid him, only one or two comrades will open fire and stay close to the enemy while the others elements continue to proceed.

- In case the main elements (Hon Cong element and fire power element) encounter the enemy, they should try to find concealment and wait until he moves past, then continue to proceed toward the objective and launch the attack on the 2d or 3d night. This still ensures a surprise attack although the other elements have opened fire on the 1st night.

In case the Hon Cong element encounters the enemy at the horse-back and cannot advance to the old road, two cells must be assigned and resolutely move to the summit of Hon Cong to destroy the enemy in this place regardless of any difficulty.

Implementation of the combat plan:

Movement to contact: Due to the broken terrain, the compartmented characteristics of the enemy positions, the combat requirement and the long distance between our elements and the objective, a specific plan had been made for organization of combat, coordination, and settlement of every situational condition. Elements which had to move separately thoroughly understood and scrupulously followed the plan.

- Element #3 was split from the formation 42 hours before the opening of fire and did not have any means to maintain liaison until the withdrawal to the position prescribed for the entire unit.

- Element #4 was split from the formation and could not maintain liaison until four days prior to the opening of fire.

- Element #2 was split from the formation and could not maintain liaison until completion of mission and withdrawal to prescribed position (17 consecutive hours).

- Liaison between the fire power element and Hòn Công [element] could not be maintained from the moment they were separated from the formation (1800 hours) to the opening of fire.

Securing combat positions:

At 0200 hours on 19 February 1966, all elements secured their combat positions, destroyed the fence secretly. At 2230 hours [should be 0230 hrs] they developed their formation and ready to open fire upon orders.

Evolution of the battle: On 19 February 1966, at 1130 hours while we were moving to contact the enemy, 1 C of Americans landed from helicopters at the rear of our formation, along the roadside.

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We assigned one squad led by 1 C commander to move back and stay close to the enemy. The mission of this squad was to find out if the enemy searched, discovered or ambushed us and if they did, to stay close to him, wait until fire was heard from the base [sic] to launch attack in order to protect the route through which the unit would withdraw the next morning.

- Hòn Công element #1 approached Hòn Công base, did not find the enemy at the horse-back but discovered a large road with traces of armored trucks going from area south of Tân Tạo and Suối Dầu. They then assigned one cell of element #5 to launch attack on the horse-back, concentrated explosive charges and fire power in order to block the eventuality of the enemy coming from the main area to attack us when we opened fire to attack the summit of Hòn Công. This cell was also assigned the mission of providing security for element #1 to withdraw safely.

Generally speaking all elements followed the plan properly throughout the movement to contact.

At 2300 hours sharp, the Hòn Công element opened fire, occupied the bridge head, seized the enemy machine gun and two minutes later destroyed the entire enemy security guard element in the signal center area, then

destroyed his radar, technical personnel, and command post. The enemy directed fire at us, killing 1 comrade and wounding 3 others. We then enveloped the flank, advanced, and 8 minutes later, occupied the entire area, hoisted the Liberation Army flag on the top of Hòn Công, then began to control the battle field. We withdrew 30 minutes later, leaving behind 1 cell to stay close to the area North of Hòn Công.

15 minutes after our seizure of Hòn Công, the enemy realized that they had lost this point. They then used 90mm DKZ and fired from the Tân Tạo Center area. At the same time 2 HU-1A helicopters flew over. From Cây Me airfield 3 more airplanes took off. Strong fire (including mortars and machine guns) from the area west of Hòn Công was directed onto the top of Hòn Công and the horse-back to intercept our withdrawal. We dominated the situation for 30 minutes then withdrew. Due to the enemy's strong reaction, 3 comrades were missing.

Fire power: Upon opening of fire we directed strong and accurate fire to the enemy position paralyzing the enemy activities in this area. Columns of fire were seen in the camp site and helicopter parking area. After 8 minutes of firing, we withdrew safely. Fifteen minutes later the enemy used 3 HU1A, 106mm mortars to fire along our withdrawal path but it was too late.

Element #2: Upon opening of fire, element #2 launched attack on the objective so rapidly that the enemy had no time to take action. 1 US C occupying the blockhouses in the area was completely destroyed within 5 minutes. Another cell attempted to attack the airfield and command post but the distance was too long and when they withdrew they were intercepted by enemy fire directed from both sides of the road and could not move out until

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1800 hours the next day. As they moved out, they were discovered by an American squad. Our comrades opened fire and destroyed the entire enemy squad. One of our comrades was wounded, 1 was killed. Two remaining comrades were wounded in the arms and could not rejoin their units until 5 days later.

Element #3: Arrived at the prescribed area that night, but all vehicles had moved out. The Americans had not yet come. At 2300 hours, vehicles stopped moving on the road from the post to the area where they haul away the soil (because it was on 7th night [possibly Saturday night]). Therefore, there was no objective to be attacked. We only used 57mm RR to fire at the storage area and at the hospital. A POL depot was burned. Two compartments in the hospital collapsed killing a number of wounded soldiers under treatment here.

The deceiving cell did not accomplish its mission for fear of strong reaction.

At 1600 hours on 20 February 1966, as an alternate to their defensive plan, the Americans used explosive charged to destroy the blockhouses on the top of Hòn Công. Two comrades of the element left behind were caught under the falling blocs of the collapsed blockhouses and could not move out. There was no way to rescue them. They then told a third comrade, outside, to report to the unit commander on their situation, then began to shout as loud as they could. Upon their shouts, the Americans rushed toward the place. The two comrades used grenades, killed a number of Americans, then sacrificed their lives.

Element #4: This element did not launch any battle even though we were at the end of February 1966. This is due to the [poor] ideology of the cadre in charge.

Withdrawal: Generally speaking, all elements succeeded in withdrawing safely without difficulty.

Enemy reaction: The enemy was violently attacked by surprise. Many installations, including the signal communications and radar center, were destroyed at the very start, therefore they could not use the command net and became confused. Their reaction was slow and weak, their fire was not accurate. They only succeeded in directing strong fire to the top of Hon Cong at the beginning of the battle but later their fire became sporadic and did not affect our formation. We withdrew safely.

Results of the battle:

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Enemy losses: - 497 Americans KIA
 - 97 aircraft of all types
About- 50 vehicles of all types, signal and radar station, and other equipment } destroyed
 - 2 artillery pieces (105mm) }
 - 2 sections of the hospital } destroyed
 - Depots, ammunition }
 - 10 tents }
 - 5 blockhouses }

 1 50 caliber machine gun }
 1 new rifle and ammunition } seized

Friendly losses: 11 comrades KIA
 7 - WIA

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Comments on the battle:

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All cadre and soldiers appeared determined in their missions. This could be seen through their preparations for the battle.

As a result, they succeeded in wearing down enemy strength, destroying a part of the facilities and equipment of a US base in An Khe and hoisting a NFLSVN flag on the top of Hon Cong, consolidating our reputation and causing anxiety among the RVN soldiers who began to lose their confidence in the US troops;

- They succeeded in conducting a raid and destroying an important high location which was a midpoint of communication and liaison activities of a large US base.

- Though they had no signal and liaison facilities, they succeeded in maintaining contact between various elements.

- Though this method of attack was used for the first time, they succeeded in carrying it out from the early moment of the battle. They also succeeded in solving a number of ideological problems of their units, making the troops no longer afraid of dangerous attacks, of isolation, of air and artillery fire.

Strong points: Investigation of the enemy and preparation for friendly forces were made successfully and in time.

- The soldiers had high fighting spirit and showed determination in their missions.

- They succeeded in consolidating our reputation by hoisting our flag on the top of Hon Công.

- Combat preparations were carefully and thoroughly made.

Weak points: Leadership of unit commanders or leaders (from company commanders to cell leaders) was not perfectly performed during combat and withdrawal.

- Attacks from the East and the South were not successfully launched.

- Preparation for the battlefield was not thoroughly made. The troops were still afraid of being discovered by the enemy.

- Disciplinary measures were not strictly complied with (this must be checked to ensure that all combat procedures will be complied with by all cadre and soldiers).

- Booty was not thoroughly collected. A number of killed soldiers were left on the battlefield. This showed that the units failed to comply with a great policy of the Party.

15 August 1966

END OF TRANSLATION
