

OPERATION GREEN LIGHTNING

1. This operation which took place from 8-17 Feb 1969 is worthy of note for the following reasons:

a. It involved the use of one of the largest artillery preps ever in the 4th Div.

b. Maximum utilization was made of all available fire power, to include air. This necessitated extremely close coordination between air and artillery channels in order that a steady rate of fire could be maintained upon the target areas without unnecessary checkfires being imposed upon the artillery, thereby keeping a constant volume of fire in the target area, for 5½ hours.

c. The operation was marked by an high degree of coordination and cooperation between infantry, artillery, and air channels. Thus it stands as an example of the true combined arms operation; harnessing all of the resources at hand towards one single purpose.

d. The artillery fires delivered were designed to place a constant volume of fire on known and suspected enemy locations. They were programmed on the basis of selective targeting, as opposed to the zone fire method often used in artillery preps. The liaison officer responsible for the fire support plan utilized the so called "School Solution" to achieve outstanding results. In addition, the appropriate shell and fuze combination for all targets were passed to the firing elements. Each of these areas mentioned will be discussed in detail after the background of the operation has been presented.

2. EVENTS LEADING UP TO OPERATION GREEN LIGHTNING

In early January, ARVN Forces of the 42nd ARVN Regiment began operations in the area of Chu Pa Mt. (vic YA951679). Intelligence reports indicated that the Chu Pa area was being used as a storage area for NVA Forces.

During the first week of their operation several large arms and food caches were found in the area and contact with enemy forces was minimal. By mid January, however, the situation had changed in that the ARVN were in constant contact with large enemy forces employing small arms, 82mm and 60mm mortars, 57mm recoilless, 75mm RR rifles and 12.7mm anti-aircraft weapons. At different times in the operation the ARVN also utilized three ARVN Ranger Bns in addition to their forces already in the area. During this period, artillery batteries were moved into supporting range of Chu Pa Mt. to provide maximum fire support for the operation going on. In the same time frame, troops of the 1/35 Inf were CA'd onto the southeast portion of the Chu Pa. Contact with the enemy was made and after a week of fighting the 1/35 Inf was replaced by the 1/14 Inf, who assumed blocking positions around the Chu Pa area, with elements of the 1/12 Inf while the ARVN Forces assumed blocking positions to the west of the Chu Pa, in the vicinity of the Ya Krong Bolah River. This cleared the Chu Pa area for B-52 strikes which were put in on the top and sides of the mountain. The elements in the blocking position were to cut off any enemy attempt to escape the area. Upon completion of the B-52 strikes,

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the area was to be swept by U.S. and ARVN Forces to conduct a bomb damage assessment. When the sweep was launched there was little contact with enemy forces on the eastern slope of the Chu Pa, however, ARVN and U.S. Forces to the south and west of the Chu Pa again came under indirect fire attacks from the enemy. Additionally many small unit contacts with the enemy were reported. Despite massive night firing programs by the artillery and the numerous airstrikes conducted, enemy forces were still in the area. At the beginning of February the ARVN forces laid plans to leave the Chu Pa vicinity on 7 Feb. It was at this juncture that plans for operations Green Lightning began.

3. OPERATION GREEN LIGHTNING - THE PLANNING STAGE: By mid January, it became apparent that the enemy had the K4 and K6 Bns of the 24th NVA Regiment in Chu Pa area. Additional enemy forces included at least one company of the 31st Bn, 40th Arty (NVA). When the ARVN announced their intention to withdraw from the Chu Pa, it was decided that U.S. Forces would take over the ARVN AO and would seek out and destroy the enemy forces remaining in the Chu Pa. Operation Green Lightning arose from this plan.

a. THE FIRE SUPPORT PLAN - THE ARTILLERY PORTION: The Bn CO, LTC Wiles, 2/9 Arty was, in his capacity as the Fire Support Coordinator, responsible for the coordination of all fires. The first step in the fire plan was to analyze the available fires at his disposal with regard to and the target area to be covered. The following artillery batteries were able to cover all or portions of the target area:

- (1) A/2/9 Arty - 6-105mm Howitzers at LZ Tommie (DS 1/14 Inf)
- (2) C/2/9 Arty - 6-105mm Howitzers at LZ Tango (Reinf A/2/9 on order; DS 1/35)
- (3) A/6/14 Arty - 4-175mm Guns at New Plei Djereng (GS)
- (4) C/7/15 Arty - 4-8 inch Howitzers at Old Plei Djereng (GS)
- (5) B/4/42 Arty - 6-105mm Howitzers at LZ Emery. (DS 1/12 Inf)
- (6) C/1/92 Arty - 6-155mm Howitzers at LZ Susan. (GSR 2/9 Arty)

b. Before moving 3rd Bde troops back into the mountain, it was decided by the 3rd Bde CO, Col Gruenther, that the mountain should be the target of a massive artillery and air prep in order to further reduce the enemy's capabilities in the area. The task of coordinating all fires both artillery and air fell upon the Bn CO 2/9 Arty. From this point on there were two stages in the planning, the Fire Support Plan and the Infantry Concept for sweeping the area.

(1) The target area encompassed over 15 grid squares of terrain. It had been directed by the 3rd Bde CO that the prep and airstrikes should completely saturate the Chu Pa area. Due to the large amount of terrain to be covered, it was decided to engage point targets in the area rather than to try and cover the entire area with artillery fires. By targeting the artillery fires against known and suspected enemy locations, it was felt that a better coverage could be obtained than would be the case if zone fires had been used. By engaging point targets, maximum

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results could be obtained while at the same time allowing sustained firing in the target area for what amounted to a five and a half hour period.

(2) A list of 191 point targets was compiled. Each target was either a known or suspect enemy position. The target list included cave and bunker complexes, areas where contact had been made, suspected mortar and anti-aircraft emplacements, and suspect and actual enemy troop locations. Also targeted were the main avenues of approach to, and egress from the Chu Pa area. These latter targets were programmed in order to cut off any possible avenues of escape from the enemy. For each target programmed, the best possible shell and fuze combination was selected, with CP being used for caves and bunkers, VT and firecracker for open areas, and fuze superquick on the remainder of the targets. Fuze delay was not programmed because experience has shown that, in a triple canopy cover, a delay fuze results in an inordinately high percentage of dud rounds. (Arty Fire Support Plan - Annex C) *

(3) The fire support coordinator realized that the prep itself would require such a large number of rounds that many of the firing elements would expend a large percentage of their basic load ammunition on it. Therefore, the proper logistical steps were taken to supply the firing batteries with enough ammunition before the prep began, to ensure that the firing elements would have the capability to respond to any fire requests placed upon them both during and after the prep. The 191 targets programmed were all assigned target numbers and a time to be shot. The latter was done to provide an added measure of control to the prep. Finally, all targets were analyzed with respect to gun-target problems for the batteries involved and with respect to the type of target to be engaged, with an eye towards passing targets such as bunker and cave complexes to the heavy batteries firing. Once this had been done, the appropriate targets were passed to the batteries firing them, together with a shell and fuze combination for each target and a designated time during the prep for each to be fired, *

c. THE FIRE SUPPORT PLAN: THE AIR PORTION: The FAC at 3rd Bde Hqs coordinated with the Air Force to obtain air support for the prep. A total of six airstrikes were made available. Each strike consisted of two jet fighters carrying a load of ordnance which was tailored specifically for the terrain in the Chu Pa area. The ordnance selected consisted of Blu-27-B's, M-82 high drags, and M-117's with a .010 delay fuze. The fire support coordinator directed that the 2/9 Arty's AO would be on station physically with the FAC during the prep. The AO would provide a final coordination between artillery and air channels while the prep was in progress. All artillery fires in the prep area were to be under his control so that timely checkfires could be given and lifted as each air strike began and ended. Thus, the periods of checkfire would not be unduly prolonged and a steady volume of fire could be maintained upon the target area. |

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d. THE CHEMICAL PLAN: Both the 3rd Bde CO and the fire support coordinator agreed that the use of non-persistent CS would be beneficial during the prep, as it might force the enemy out of his caves and into the killing zone of artillery and air fires. In addition to the artillery CS being utilized, it was decided to conduct a CS air drop over one area where the enemy was known to be entrenched in bunkers and caves. This drop was coordinated with the 3rd Bde Chemical Officer who was to personally conduct the drop. Again, the 2/9 Arty's AO was to be responsible for imposing and lifting the checkfires necessary for the CS drop to take place.

e. THE INFANTRY PLAN: The infantry plan, as determined by the 3rd Bde CO involved the utilization of all available elements of both infantry battalions in the area.

Elements of the 1/14 Inf were to occupy blocking positions to north, northwest, and west of the Chu Pa area while elements of the 1/12 Inf occupied blocking position to the southwest and south of the mountain in order to contain the enemy in the area during the prep. B CO 1/35 Inf, who was OPCON to the 1/14 Inf, the 1/12 Inf, and a CSF company OPCON to the 1/14 Inf were poised to sweep the mountain's western slopes once the prep had ended, to seek out and destroy any enemy elements remaining in the area either themselves or by forcing them into the fires of the blocking units. Realizing that the enemy was well entrenched in a network of caves and bunkers, the 3rd Bde CO specified in his operations order that the infantry units in the area would be prepared to utilize flamethrowers when necessary. This weapon, which has seen relatively limited use in the Vietnam war, was one well tailored for the operation at hand.

4. OPERATION GREEN LIGHTNING: THE EXECUTION STAGE

a. PREPARATORY FIRE: The prep of the Chu Pa Mt area began at 0500 hours on 8 Feb and ended at 1018 hours. At 0745 hours the AO of 2/9 Artillery was on station with a 3rd Bde FAC to control the artillery fires and provide thorough coordination with the FAC. A total of six airstrikes consisting of 48 napalm bombs, 16-750lb bombs, 12-500lb bombs, two 2000lb bombs, and 20mm cannon were put into selected targets in the area. In all 29 tons of ordnance were expended by the Air Force. The AO controlled the artillery fires in such a way that continuous fire was maintained upon the area. At no time during the prep was any artillery checkfired except when an airstrike was being put in. As soon as one ended, firing resumed again. Two aerial CS drops were put in on known enemy bunker locations followed by airstrikes. A total of 1148 rounds of artillery were fired.

b. THE INFANTRY ASSAULT: The infantry made an air combat assault onto the top of Chu Pa Mt immediately after the prep ended and began to sweep down the sides of the Mt. Heavy resistance was encountered during the second day as the enemy was well entrenched in caves and bunkers and chose to fight rather than abandon the area. B/1/14 Inf had the heaviest