

OPERATION AUBURN AFTER ACTION REPORT

by W.K. ROCKEY

HEADQUARTERS

3rd Battalion, 5th Marines
1st Marine Division (Rein) FMF
FPO San Francisco, California 96602
3/GWB/dab
3121

5 January 1968

From: Commanding Officer
To: Commanding Officer, 5th Marines
Subj: Combat After Action Report
Ref: (a) Division Order 3480.1
(b) 5th Marines Frag Order 74-67

1. Code Name. Operation AUBURN
2. Date of Operation. 280835H December 1967 031530H January 1968
3. Location of Operation. Go Noi Island, Quang Tin Province, Republic of Vietnam
4. Command Headquarters See Task Organization
5. Task Organization

3rd Battalion, (-) (Rein), 5th Marines Lt Col Rockey

H&S Co. (-) Capt Marnell

Det; Btry. F, 2nd Bn, 11th Marines

Det; 1st SP Bn (HST)

Det; 1st Eng Bn

Det; Med Plt

Co I

Co I (Rein) Capt Kolakowski

Det; H&S Co

Det; Med Plt

Det; Comm Plt (FAC tm)

Det; Intel Sec (Scout)

Det; Btry F, 2nd Bn, 11th Marines

Det; 1st Engineer Battalion

Det; 1st SP Battalion (HST)

Co E 2/3 Capt Cahill

Co E (Rein)

Det; H&S Co 2/3

Det; Med Plt

Det; Comm Plt

Det; 1st Engineer Bn

Det; Btry D, 2nd Bn 11th Marines

Det; 1st SP Battalion (HST)

Det; Scout Dogs

Co E 2/5 Capt McKee

Co E (Rein)

Det; H&S Co 2/5

Det; Med Plt

Det; Comm Plt

Det; Btry E 2nd Bn, 11th Marines

Det; Scout Dog Team

Co G 2/5 Capt Meadows

Co G (Rein)

Det; H&S Co 2/5

Det; Med Plt

Det; Comm Plt

Det; Btry E 2nd Bn, 11th Marines

1st Plt, Co H 2/5

Det; 1st Engineer Bn

Co M

Co M (Rein)

Capt Mitchell

Det, H&S Co

Det; Med Plt

Det; Comm Plt

Det; Scout Dog Team

Det; Btry F, 2nd Bn, 11th Marines

Det; 1st Engineer Bn

6. Supporting Forces

a. Artillery

(1) From Commencement of Operation AUBURN at 280835H December 1967 until completion at 031530H January 1968, the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines received direct artillery support from Battery F, 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines. At no time during the Operation was the Battalion without artillery support. Battery F, 2/11 fired a total of 1,509 rounds in support of the operation. These were observed fire missions and harassing and interdiction fires.

(2) On D-day a coordination problem occurred which resulted in sporadic artillery support. Artillery was placed in check fire status from the time an aircraft left the runway, until it returned.

(3) There were three batteries in general support; 1st Plt, 3rd 8" Howitzers, Battery E, 3/11, and Battery W, 3/11. They fired 501 rounds in support of the Operation.

(4) Several friendly WIA's (minor) resulted from calling artillery on enemy units that were heavily and closely engaged with the Battalions. This was a calculated risk dictated by the situation.

b. Air

(1) During Operation AUBURN, weather was not a significant deterrent to the utilization of close air support.

(2) Fixed wing support was used extensively and effectively on D-day and D+1. A total of 50 fixed wing missions were run in support of 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines during the Operation.

(3) Most fixed wing missions were controlled by aerial observers and monitored by the forward air controllers. Target coverage was excellent.

(4) Helicopters were utilized extensively throughout the Operation for assault landings, medevacs and resupply.

(5) Flare ships were used in support of the defensive positions on five occasions.

7. Intelligence

a. The enemy forces, anticipated on Operation AUBURN were not expected to exceed one NVA Battalion, three local force guerrilla companies, and selected hamlet/village defense squads. This intelligence was passed to the Battalion Commander, staff and unit commanders in estimate, briefing and overlay form.

b. The following enemy units were identified as being disposed in the general area of Go Noi Island or within distance to possibly influence the action:

3rd Bn, 3rd NVA Regt

V-25 Bn

R-20 Bn

R-24 Co

Q-13 Co

Q-15 Co

c. A past operation intelligence estimate of enemy forces encountered by 3rd Bn, 5th Marines was one VCMF Battalion, and 20 to 30 local guerrilla snipers.

d. Collection and Dissemination

(1) During Operation AUBURN, the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines ITT Team interrogated over 100 Vietnamese nationals. No unit designations were developed but confirmation of numerous enemy activities in the area was achieved.

(2) Captured documents included a squad leader's notebook, recent tax collection records, diploma and personal letters with unit designations affixed thereon (I.E. V-75, M5, Q-89 and Q-92). Drawings of bridges in the area with the unit V-75 (AKA for Q-92) were obtained.

(3) Captured rice totaling 11,000 pounds was destroyed in place because of the inability to transport it.

(4) Captured weapons were 5 rifles with 2000 rounds of new ammunition, 5 assorted hand grenades and two Smith & Wesson revolvers.

(5) Other captured gear included five 2.75 inch rockets, assorted detonating devices, four bottles of penicillin, one stethoscope, 250 assorted ampules of medicine, six uniforms, two homemade shape charges, two homemade bangalore torpedoes, and two aluminum tubes.

(6) Total enemy losses were 37 VC KIA (confirmed).

8. Mission

During the conduct of Operation AUBURN, the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines was initially assigned the mission of providing blocking forces for attacking ARVN units. On D+1, this mission was modified to that of a detailed search and destroy operation to the West on Go Noi Island.

9. Concept of Operations

a. At L-hour on D-day the Battalion Command Group and two rifle Companies execute an assault helicopter landing, secure landing zone Hawk, seize Objectives A and B, and establish a block on the West side of the railroad track from 997616 (error, may be 997546) to 003520. Two additional rifle Companies execute an assault helicopter landing, secure landing zone Eagle, seize Objective C, and establish a block along Phase Line Blue. ARVN forces sweep from East to West compressing enemy forces against the blocking positions of this Battalion.

b. On D+3 days the Battalion repositions its companies and executes a deliberate search and destroy operation to the Western limit of the

10. Execution

a. 26 Dec 1967

At 261700H the Commanding Officer 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, received the 5th Marines Operation Order for Operation AUBURN.

b. 27 Dec 1967

At 271500H Company E 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines was assigned to the Operation Control of 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines.

c. 28 Dec 1967

(1) At 80835H Company I and Company E, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines and the Alpha Command Group, commenced deploying by helicopter from the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Combat Base to assigned LZ Hawk. See Operation Overlay.

(2) At 281000H Company E and Company G, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines commenced deploying by helicopter from the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines Combat Base to a signed LZ Eagle. See Operation Overlay.

(3) At 281040H Company I secured Objective A.

(4) At 280940H Company E 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines encountered heavy small arms fire while moving from LZ Hawk to Objective B. Company E returned fire and called air strikes. Company E advanced through initial enemy positions at 993533 and by 281115H began receiving heavy automatic and semi-automatic weapons fire from enemy positions in the vicinity of 991532. Company E requested and received fixed wing support. This action continued until 281650H at which time Companies E and M broke contact and moved into night defensive positions centered at 996538.

(5) At 281220H, Company I moved from Objective A to support Company E. The 2nd platoon, Company I, at 997536, came under automatic, semi-automatic and M79 fire from 997533. Small arms fire was returned and a fixed wing and helicopter gunship air strike was delivered. Sporadic automatic and semi-automatic weapons fire was received from the same area until 281620H.

(6) At 281400H Company G, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines seized Objective C.

(7) At 281530H Company M (Bald Eagle) departed, by helicopter, from the 3rd Bn, 5th Marines TACR.

(8) At 282530H Company M began arriving in LZ Hawk and received small arms fire from enemy located at 998533 and 991632. Company I and Company E fired suppressive small arms fire in support of Company M's landing.

(9) At 281640H Company M received 40 rounds semi-automatic from treeline at 998529 while reoccupying Objective A. It returned 100 rounds M60 MG, 60 rounds 5.56 and searched the area with negative results.

(10) At 281645H Company I at 997536 received approximately 400 rounds mixed automatic and semi-automatic fire from 998533. It returned 400 rounds M60 MG rounds, 200 rounds 5.56 and 10 M79 rounds.

(11) At 281710H an AO on station reported observing thirty-two enemy bodies, most of which were in green utilities, in front of Company E 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine positions.

(12) At 281899H, Companies E 2/3, M 3/5, and the Bn Command Group moved into night defensive positions centered at 996538. Company I organized a separate perimeter center at 997536.

(13) At 282000H Company E 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, reported that at 018514 an undetermined number of VC were observed by a squad ambush, which fired 200 rounds mixed small arms fire. The area was searched with negative results.

d. 29 Dec 1967

(1) At 290820H Companies E and G, 2/5 moved by helicopter from LZ Quail to LZ Hawk in accordance with a Frag Order issued at 281140H by 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines.

(2) At 290855H 5th Marines Alpha Command Group and 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines Alpha Command Group displaced from respective Combat Bases to LZ Hawk. Company E and Company G 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines chopped to parent unit at this time. Operation AUBURN was then controlled by the 5th Marines, employing two maneuver battalions.

(3) At 290940H 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines secured Objective One.

(4) At 292240H Company I received approximately 500 rounds mixed small arms fire from undetermined number of enemy located at 993530. Company I returned 400 rounds M-60 MG, 300 rounds 5.56 and 5 M-79 rounds, and searched the area with negative results.

(5) At 291345H 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines secured Objective Two.

(6) At 291420H UH-1E gunships conducted an air strike on enemy located at 990533 with good target coverage.

(7) At 292015H a Company I patrol moving to ambush sight saw 8 VC moving down a trail approximately 25 meters distant. The unit set up a hasty ambush and fired 150 rounds of 5.56 and 50 rounds of M-60 MG. One VC fell. Enemy returned 300 rounds of automatic and semi-automatic fire. The patrol then searched area with negative results.

e. 30 Dec 1967

(1) By 300030H Company E 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines received 20 M-26 grenades at 997533 during the preceding four hours. It returned 15 M-79 rounds and searched the area at first light with negative results.

(2) At 300805H a Company I unit observed one heavily camouflaged VC moving East to West at 990537. A sniper killed the VC with 5 rounds rifle fire. The body was kept under observation. Result: One VC KIA (confirmed).

(3) At 300835H a squad OP from Company I located at 992536 was keeping the VC body under observation when it received 100 rounds automatic and 100 rounds semi-automatic weapons fire from an estimated squad of VC. The squad returned 1 LAAW (?), 700 ROUNDS 5.56mm, and 4 60mm rounds, one VC fell. This fire was not effective in suppressing enemy fire. The squad pulled back to the Company perimeter and called an artillery mission. They searched the area after the artillery mission and found several blood traces but could not locate any bodies.

(4) At 300840H a helicopter landing in LZ Hawk received 5-10 semi-automatic rounds from an undetermined location. One Marine reporting from Combat Base to Company E 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines was wounded while moving away from the LZ.

(5) At 301045H a Company I sniper observed one VC in an open field at 990539 carrying a weapon. He fired 10 rounds of rifle fire, 3 M-79 rounds, and 2 LAAW's (?). The VC fell as though hit. Search of the area disclosed three blood trails and two M-26 grenades which were booby trapped. They were blown in place.

(6) At 301120H Company E 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines was chopped from parent unit to 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines.

(7) At 301120H Operation AUBURN returned to Operational Control of 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines.

(8) At 301230H Company M found four heavily reinforced bunkers, numerous documents, small arms brass, 1 US pack and one 8" artillery round and returned other items to the Battalion S-2.

(9) At 301245H Company M, alerted by a scout dog, dropped to the ground immediately. They received 150 rounds of semi-automatic weapons fire from approximately 50 meters away (friendly coordinates 997530). They returned 175 rounds of 5.56 and 7 M-79 rounds, and called an artillery mission. They searched the area with negative results.

(10) At 301400H Company I moved to the Combat Base.

(11) At 301405H one Marine received minor shrapnel wounds from a friendly round. He was given first aid by a Corpsman and sent to the Battalion CP for further treatment. Later, he was medevaced.

(12) At 301515H Company G 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines chopped to 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines.

(13) At 301540H resupply was effected.

(14) At 301830H a male detainee was returned to the Battalion CP from the Regimental CP. He revealed the location of an underground vat, approximately ten (10) feet in diameter containing approximately 11,000 lbs of processed rice. The detainee stated that this was VC rice, and it was destroyed.

f. 31 Dec 1967

(1) At 310430H One Marine was wounded by an incoming hand grenade. He was treated by the Battalion surgeon and returned to duty.

(2) At 311307H Company G received approximately 50 rounds of semi-automatic weapons fire from an estimated 2-3 VC. Company G returned 100 rounds machine gun fire, and 50 5.56 rounds. The area was searched with negative results.

(3) At 311430H one Marine received a small piece of shrapnel in his right arm while destroying a bunker with an M-26 grenade.

(4) At 311500H one Marine fell while searching a bunker. His rifle discharged and the round went through his right hand, resulting in a medevac.

(5) At 311535H a unit from H&S Co. was destroying captured ordnance in a bunker. One male VC fled from the bunker, and he was shot and killed by H&S personnel. One ChiCom grenade and one M-26 grenade were taken from the body.

(6) At 311700H 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines units had seized and searched Objectives B, C, and E in accordance with the Frag Order issued on 30 January 1967.

(7) At 312055H Company E 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines observed 4 VC with weapons 20 meters West of their position. Two M-26 grenades were thrown at the VC, 1 VC fell, and the other three dragged the body away. 100 rounds 5.56 were fired at the fleeing VC. The area was searched with negative results.

(8) At 312115H Company E 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, received 2 rifle grenades. The grenades fell 25 meters short of the listening post position.

g. 01 January 1968

- (1) At 010900H while effecting resupply, the helicopter received 4 to 5 rounds of semi-automatic weapons fire from coordinates 981532.
- (2) At 011100H local security patrolling and hole hunting within the defensive perimeter were conducted in compliance with the terms of the truce.
- (3) At 011100H while checking a bunker, Company E, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines found a quantity of monofilament line attached to small bamboo stakes, apparently used as tripping devices for booby traps, two bandages, iodine and three miscellaneous items.
- (4) At 011150H a Company M squad patrol received a 7-9 round burst from an automatic weapon located in the treeline approximately 300 meters away. The patrol returned 3 M-79 rounds and searched the area with negative results. (Enemy position 996536).
- (5) At 011155H a Company G patrol found two trails with fresh bare footprints. The hole hunting operation discovered numerous fortified shelters trenches and individual fighting holes. The following items were found in a tunnel: 1 poncho liner (US), 1 CS grenade and 5 cans of C-rations. All holes and trenches were either blown or filled in. The captured equipment was turned in to the Battalion S-2.
- (6) At 011445H, Engineers attached to Company M blew up bunkers and tunnels 30 feet long. The tunnels extended from inside the perimeter to outside the perimeter, exiting in a cane field.
- (7) At 011530H a Company M patrol found 1 flak jacket, 1 cartridge belt, 1 pack w/entrenching tool, 1 M-26 grenade, 2 antennas and 1 gas mask (all US).
- (8) At 011830H Company M received approximately 20 rounds automatic weapons fire from 991535 and 993527. They returned 100 rounds M-60 MG, 200 5.56 rounds, and 4 M-79. A night activity in front of the lines searched the area and reported negative results.
- (9) At 011930H Company E 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines reported that an undetermined number of enemy threw several grenades at their defensive position. When one grenade landed within a machine gun position, a Marine dived on top of the M26 grenade and told his fellow Marines to clear the area. The grenade did not detonate, and it was thrown toward the enemy.
- (10) At 012020H Company G received three incoming grenades at 986532. 3 M-26 grenades were returned. A search was made at first light with negative results.

h. 2 January 1968

- (1) At 020740H Company E 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines received approximately 20 rounds of automatic weapons fire and 15 rounds semi-automatic weapons fire from a treeline approximately four hundred meters to their front. 50 rounds 5.56, 8 rounds M-79 were returned. The area was immediately swept with negative results.
- (2) At 020830H Company E, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines was advancing toward an assigned Objective when the attached scout dog picked up a strong scent. The unit then conducted a reconnaissance by fire, causing a VC ambush to fire prematurely. An estimated 12 VC fired 100 rounds automatic and 20 to 30 rounds semi-automatic fire. 300 M-60 MG rounds 200 5.56 were returned. 1 VC fell. The area was searched and blood, and a small number of AK47, M-14 and M1 cartridges were found.
- (3) At 020940H, the point man of Company G tripped a grenade booby trap, resulting in 1 USMC WIA medevac.
- (4) At 021100H, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines continued to sweep and search the Objective areas on the Western part of Go Noi Island.
- (5) At 021300H, at 964540, Company E, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines received sniper fire from 964542. Fire was placed on the enemy positions. the area was swept with negative results.
- (6) At 021330H Engineers attached to Company M blew four reinforced bunkers.
- (7) At 021600H, a Marine from Company E, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines tripped a booby trap, (concussion type grenade) at 967539. No injuries were sustained.
- (8) At 021715H one man from Company G tripped a booby trap, believed to be a homemade variety, which was placed on the trail at 965541, resulting in 2 USMC WIA, 1 priority medevac and one non medevac.
- (9) At 021715H, Company E, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines found one explosive device consisting of a C-ration can variety grenade, with a 15 foot long trip wire attached. The device was destroyed.
- (10) At 021954H, a Company G squad ambush received an incoming grenade which resulted in 1 USN KIA and 3 USMC WIA, medevaced.
- (11) At 022105H, a Company G squad ambush observed 7 VC approximately 30 meters away from their position. They threw 2 grenades at the enemy and fired 50 5.56 rounds. 4 VC were seen to fall as they were illuminated by the blast. Immediately after throwing the grenade, the ambush received one incoming grenade from another location, resulting in one USMC WIA, non medevac.

i. 3 January 1968

- (1) At 030825H, a Company G platoon sent to search the area of the previous night's ambush received 10-15 sniper rounds from the cemetery located at 966543, resulting in 1 USMC WIA. (Emergency medevac). 200 rounds M-60 MG, 11 60mm mortar rounds and 100 5.56 rounds were returned.

- (2) From 030930H until 031215H, all units crossing the stream south of the AO received harassing sniper fire from an undetermined number of enemy in the vicinity of 955542. Artillery missions were called on these positions.
- (3) At 031040H Company G received several sniper rounds at 956537 from an unknown location. One Marine received a superficial bullet wound in the arm. (non-medevac)
- (4) At 031330H, Company G, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines chopped to parent unit.
- (5) At 031400H Company E, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines chopped to parent unit.
- (6) At 031430H Company E, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines chopped to parent unit, and returned by truck.
- (7) At 031439H, a Marine in the left flank security element of Company M tripped a concussion grenade booby trap located in tall grass. 2 casualties (non-medevac) were sustained.
- (8) At 031530H Operation AUBURN terminated.
- (9) At 031530H Company M and the Alpha Command Group displaced to the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines Combat Base, by truck.

11. Results

a. Enemy

- (1) Personnel: 37 KIA (confirmed)
- (2) Material:
 - (a) Rifles.....5
 - (b) Pistols.....2
 - (c) Ammo-2,000 rds. 7.62 long
 - (d) Rice - 11,000 lbs (processed)
 - (e) Grenades.....5
 - (f) US 2.75 Rockets.....5
 - (g) Large amounts of assorted detonating devices and shaped charges.
 - (h) Assorted medicines
 - (i) Uniforms.....6

b. Friendly

- (1) KIA.....23
- (2) WIA.....62 (52 WIAE and 10 WIANE)

12. Administration

a. Resupply

- (1) All resupply was effected by helilift.
- (2) The HST net was used as a logistical and helicopter control net.
- (3) In general, helicopter support for resupply was excellent.

b. Maintenance.....No maintenance problems were encountered.

c. Treatment of Casualties, Evacuation and Hospitalization

- (1) Treatment of casualties was performed in an excellent manner by the 3/5 medical detachment in the field.
- (2) Evacuation of casualties was accomplished within a minimum amount of time.
- (3) Difficulties were encountered in the area of casualty tabulating and reporting on D-day. The casualty reporter became a casualty on D-day and this contributed directly to the difficulties. Medevac helicopters came under fire while in the zone and on occasion lifted off with body bearers aboard. Tactical radio traffic was at a maximum on D-day and limited the administrative messages which could be transmitted.

d. Transportation, No problems were encountered with transportation. Replacement and special supplies were transported to the LSA by truck or hand carried. All resupplies and replacements were delivered to the field by helicopter from the LSA.

e. Communications

- (1) AN/PRC 25 radios performed extremely well. The Battalion was able to communicate effectively with its rear echelon and with Regiment.
- (2) The AN/PRC 41 was used extensively for controlling fixed wing air support by ground FAC Teams and to communicate with aerial observers and helicopter pilots when other means of communications were not feasible.
- (3) Because of the multitude of units in this area of operations, traffic on some frequencies interfered with others. Units operating in the same general area or adjacent areas need to effect liaison so as to minimize difficulties of this nature.

f. Medical Evacuation

- (1) Total number of medical evacuations.....75
- (2) Killed Action.....23
- (3) Wounded in Action.....61
- (4) Wounded in Action, Non Evac.....10
- (5) Non Combat Deaths.....0
- (6) Non Combat Injuries, Evac.....1

13. Commander's Analysis

a. As the initial landing was made in landing zone Hawk on D-day, the zone progressively moved westward, with each helicopter wave landing a little farther west than the last wave. This increased the coordination difficulties faced by the CO, Company E, 2nd Bn, 3rd Marines. As that unit became more deeply and closely involved in heavy contact with the sizable enemy force southwest of LZ Hawk, it became apparent that our mission of establishing a blocking force along the railroad track was impractical. Consequently, Company I, 3rd Bn, 5th Marines was called from Objective A to support Company E, and the Bald Eagle, Company M, 3rd Bn, 5th Marines, was committed into LZ Hawk at L+5 1/2 hours. By 281630H, the situation was well in hand, and the enemy had broken contact.

b. Upon receipt of 5th Marines Frag Order 76-67, we proceeded westward on Go Noi Island, in compliance with our new mission, until D+6, when we extracted from Phu lac (6) in the 2nd Bn, 5th Marines, TAOR. Contact with significant enemy forces was not made, due to the abundance of luxuriant natural cover and concealment, and the large area covered. I feel that a larger force than a battalion is required for adequate coverage of the AO. Large enemy forces could have evaded our search and destroy efforts, concealed in the vast expanses of elephant grass, in some cases reaching twelve feet in height.

c. The unnecessary check fares imposed on direct support artillery on D-day was and is a matter of great concern (see paragraph 6a). Vitally required fire support was needlessly withheld from the Battalion because of this imposition. The tactical unit controlling the operation must be allowed to effect the necessary coordination of all supporting arms.

14. Recommendations

a. That future Operations in this AO should be conducted by a minimum of two maneuver Battalions.

b. That an extensive defoliation program should be immediately initiated in the AUBURN AO.

c. That checking the fire of direct support artillery should be the sole responsibility of the support unit commander.

W.K. ROCKEY