

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 1ST ENGINEER BATTALION
APO San Francisco 96345

AVDB-CE-3

6 September 1966

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report

THRU: Commanding General
1st Infantry Division
ATTN: AVDB-T
APO 96345

TO: Commander
US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
ATTN: J321
APO 96307

1. Name of Operation: Operation Cheyenne.
2. Dates of Operation: 010700 August 1966 to 051700 August 1966.

3. General: The command headquarters for the engineer portion of Operation Cheyenne was Headquarters, 1st Engineer Battalion acting in accordance with 1st Engineer Battalion Frag Order 10-66 dated 28 July 1966, and 11-66 dated 31 July 1966. The battalion provided combat support to 2d and 3d Brigade during the clearing and securing of Route 13 from Lai Khe to An Loc and accomplished road repairs necessary to keep the road passable for wheel and track convoys up to Class 55. One Engineer Task Force worked from An Loc south to Chon Thanh and another from Lai Khe north to Chon Thanh. One platoon supported 3/9 Infantry (ARVN) with mine clearing teams.

a. Reporting Officer: LTC J. M. KIERNAN JR.
Commanding Officer
1st Engineer Battalion

b. Task Organization:

HQ's, 1st Engr Bn - LTC KIERNAN

(1) Task Force I

TF HQ's - Maj Donahue
3d plt, Co D, 1st Engr Bn - Lt Truesdell
Company, 5th Engr Bn (ARVN)

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(2) Task Force II

TF HQ's - Cpt Jackson (on 2 Aug)
 - Maj Treadwell (3-5 August)
 Co D (-), 1st Engr Bn - Cpt Jackson
 1st Plt, Co B, 1st Engr Bn - LT Sternberg

(3) 3/9 Infantry (ARVN) support platoon

3d plt, Co A, 1st Engr Bn - LT Beville

4. Intelligence:a. Intelligence Prior to Operation

(1) Location, date, type activity (obstacles)

<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>TYPE ACTIVITY</u>
XT 767862	23 July 1966	60' concrete Bridge Span collapsed - water 6-8' depth to sides partially filled on old concrete
XT 767753	23 July 1966	15' culvert span road bed collapsed
XT 767752	23 July 1966	Same as above only 20' wide
XT 765729	23 July 1966	40' culvert concrete bridge collapsed - partially filled
XT 765722 - 765715	23 July 1966	5 Roadblocks - felled trees
XT 765685 - 765682	23 July 1966	3 Roadblocks - felled trees brush piles
XT 784559	23 July 1966	60' Concrete Bridge collapsed partially filled
XT 792535 - 791532	23 July 1966	3 Road - blocks felled trees
XT 790529	23 July 1966	Crater 10' diameter 3' deep
XT 786510	23 July 1966	Crater 30' diameter 4' deep
XT 785505	23 July 1966	same as above
XT 784495	23 July 1966	5 craters on each side RR crossing, each crater 10' Dia
XT 785491 - 785486	23 July 1966	Roadblocks - felled trees and brush

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(2) No laterite pits were located prior to operation.

(3) Heavy rains were expected during the operation.

b. Enemy Situation During Operation:

(1) No laterite sources were located during the operation.

(2) Heavy rains occurred during the operation, washing out one culvert and causing much additional engineer effort.

(3) One Claymore mine was encountered at XT 765761, resulting in one KHA (1/4 Cav) and three WHA (1st Engr).

5. Mission: Provide combat support to elements of 1st Infantry Division engaged in securing Highway 13 and repair Highway 13 to pass division traffic.

6. Concept of Operation: One Engineer Task Force with supporting units from 5th ARVN Division Engineers supports 2d Brigade and one Engineer Task Force supports 3d Brigade. Both Task Forces clear mines and repair Highway 13 as required to conduct convoy operations. Six mine detector teams support 3d Battalion 9th Infantry Regiment ARVN.

7. Execution:

a. D Day - 2: Battalion forward CP moved to vicinity Division forward CP at Lai Khe.

b. D Day - 1:

(1) Task Force I cleared Route 13 from An Loc south to XT 765728.

The VC detonated a Claymore mine at XT 765761, killing one 1/4 Cavalry prober and wounding three 1st Engineer personnel. The clearing party disarmed a booby trapped grenade at XT 769758 and destroyed several dud mortar rounds, grenades, and CBU bomblets along the road near this location. Two road blocks, one of stones and bricks, the other of timbers, were removed near XT 765730. Two AT mines were detected and destroyed at a bridge site at XT 765728. A culvert was installed at XT 768762, with work continuing for 24 hours straight through the hours of darkness. After completion of this culvert, heavy rains caused a three foot rise in the water level and washed out the culvert. At the end of the day, all dumps returned to Quan Loi to pick up fill rock. No suitable sources of fill were located along the road.

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(2) Task Force II cleared Route 13 from Lai Khe to XT 783559. The culvert at XT 784397 was not passable and required extensive work before TF II could pass. The 3d platoon of Company A was transported to Chon Thanh and attached to 3/9 Infantry (ARVN). A grader hit a pressure type mine near Bau Bong, resulting in one WHA and loss of a wheel. The wheel was flown in by helicopter and the grader was operational for the following day. The clearing operation was delayed for two hours when one dozer w/rocter ran out of fuel and the other was stuck in mud. The S3 took command of TF II at the end of the day.

c. D Day:

(1) Task Force I cleared the road from XT 765728 to XT 767670. Company E lifted one 38 foot dry span and one bridge section from Di An to XT 765728 by CH-47 aircraft (3 lifts) and constructed the dry span at that point. The AVLB from 65th Engineer Battalion was emplaced at XT 768762, where the culvert had washed out. At XT 766750 the ARVN Engineers constructed one fill of timbers and rock from Quan Loi and also constructed a ford by-pass. Several cuts were filled in the vicinity of XT 765710. Four Calymore mines and two AT mines were destroyed.

(2) Task Force II worked on three roadcraters, a destroyed bridge and several softspots. A crater under the road/railroad crossing at XT 784494 was largely below the water table and had turned rails over the roadway. The rails were cut with demolitions and the crater filled with ballast off the railroad. Due to the saturated soil under the crater, the surface became unstable under traffic and PSP was used as a surface. A crater at XT 784504 was given a similar treatment, but even PSP surfacing would not suffice here, so plans were made to install a 38 foot dry span across the crater. A crater at XT 785507 was relatively dry, and a passable surface was attained by dozing part of the rock base course into the hole and surfacing with PSP. The softspots were covered with PSP for a passable surface. The demolished bridge at XT 784559 was passed by filling from the roadbed; however, constant handwork maintenance was required to pass traffic. The 3d Plt, Co A, with 3/9 ARVN Infantry, cleared the road from Chon Thanh south to XT 783559 and north to XT 765697. One command mine and two pressure mines were destroyed.

d. D Day + 1

(1) Task Force I refilled and shaped the road to pass the south bound convoy. The dry span at XT 765728 was left in place, equipment to be used at Quan Loi airfield was attached from Task Force II, and all but the AVLB closed back into Quan Loi at 1700 hours. The AVLB was removed at 2000 hours and closed into Quan Loi at 2200 hours.

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(2) Task Force II recleared their portion of Route 13 and maintained the road during the passage of the southbound convoy. Company E moved a Section and a 38 foot dry span from Di An by Ch-47 aircraft and installed the span at XT 784504, over the unstable fill in the crater. A dozer on loan from the 168th Engineer Bn hit a mine at XT 784494, resulting in a destroyed track and transmission. The Division Commander decided to leave in place all PSP and the two 38 foot dry spans. Company E personnel were airlifted back to Di An. Four pressure mines were destroyed.

e. D Day + 2: Task Force II closed into Lai Khe at 1130 hours. The Battalion Forward CP moved by C-130 back to Bien Hoa, then to Di An by vehicle, closing at 1530.

8. Supporting Forces: 2d Brigade secured Task Force I and 3d Brigade secured Task Force II. 5th ARVN Division assisted in security from XT 783559 to XT 765697. Task Force I was supported by one AVLB from 65 Engineer Bn and one company of the 5th ARVN Division Engineers, with three $2\frac{1}{2}$ T dump trucks, one D-7 dozer with transporting lowboy, and one $2\frac{1}{2}$ cy loader. Task Force I was supported by two 5 ton dump trucks and one HD-16 from Co B, 168th Engineer Battalion.

9. Results:

a. Personnel: 1st Engineer Battalion sustained six WHA during Operation Cheyenne.

b. Construction:

(1) Roads and Bridges:

- (a) Improved 30 miles of road.
- (b) Installed two 38 foot dry spans.
- (c) Installed 45 feet of culvert.
- (d) Prepared one ford.

(2) Field Fortifications: Individual protective emplacements only.

(3) River Crossings: None

(4) Airfields: None

(5) Reduction of enemy obstacles:

- (a) cleared five mines

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- (b) cleared several booby traps
- (c) cleared two road blocks
- (d) filled three large road craters
- (e) filled numerous small cuts
- (6) Denial Activities: None
- (7) General Construction: None
- (8) Engineer Reconnaissance:
 - (a) three ground recons
 - (b) thirteen aerial recons
 - (c) reconned 30 miles of road
 - (d) reconned 8 bridges
 - (e) no water points required
 - (f) no airfields required
- (9) Water Supply: Accomplished by helicopter from established base camps.

10. Administration:a. Personnel:

- (1) Strength in field prior to operation - 219
- (2) Strength in field after operation - 241

b. Supply: Normal supply channels were utilized. Sandbags were supplied thru S4, 3d Brigade, at Lai Khe. No major supply problems were encountered, although reaction times could be reduced and smoother operations could be effected if the S4 section operated as a separate entity in the field, relieving the Operations Section of all supply problems.

c. Maintenance: One dozer ran out of fuel on the first day in operations due to lack of pre-operation maintenance by the operator. One 5-ton truck-tractor developed a leaking power steering reservoir, requiring third echelon repair for which the part was not available. The tractor could still be steered with great difficulty and this fault did not affect operations.

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d. Transportation: The battalion forward CP was transported completely by air, as were the platoons of Companies A, B and E. The bridging emplaced by Company E was also transported by air. PSF used in road repair was moved by both air and trucks.

e. Communications: The absence of communications personnel in the forward CP threw the communications responsibility on to the Operations Section.

f. Medical: First aid treatment and evacuation of WHA's was completely satisfactory; however casualty reporting was unsatisfactory. Problems were created by failure of units to report casualties among attached personnel.

11. Special Equipment and Techniques:

a. One 38 foot dry span was used to bridge across an unstable area where fill had been placed in a road crater whose water table was about 3' below the surface.

b. Tractor-drawn rooters were used to cut command mine wires on both sides of Route 13.

c. Railroad ballast was used as fill for crater.

d. Rock base course was used as fill for craters.

e. AVLB employed at XT 768762.

12. Commander's Analysis:

a. Operation Cheyenne demonstrated once again that the 1st Engineer Battalion can provide the combat support and road work required to move a convoy during the monsoon season. Quick thinking and fast reaction resulted in passage of the convoy with no appreciable delay. The decision to use dry spans over unstable filled craters was made when it became evident that normal methods of stabilization will not suffice in monsoon conditions. The Division Commander's decision to leave the dry spans in place was made because the time, effort and possible casualties required to secure, clear and extract the bridges did not warrant removal. Further it is the Divisions mission to open and maintain Route 13 to civilian traffic.

b. The Division's Situation Report for 4 August 1966 contained the following statement: "The 1st Infantry Division engineers performed the herculean feat of filling the numerous cuts, repairing the damaged bridges, and building new bridges where necessary along Hwy 13. The demonstrated fact that US and ARVN forces can repair and secure Hwy 13 when necessary should have a tremendous psychological impact on the Vietnamese people in the area.

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13. Conclusions and Lessons Learned:

a. Conclusion: If timely reconnaissance is made and road repair is planned for by the commander, combat engineers are completely capable of accomplishing the roadwork required to move a convoy in Vietnam during the monsoon season, even on poor, cut, and cratered earth roads.

b. Lessons Learned:

(1) On-the-ground or low-level aerial reconnaissance by the Engineer Task Force Commander is a must. Recon team reports are excellent for early planning but cannot substitute for recon by the man who must do the work.

(2) Adequate preparations, particularly including materials and procedures for operations under adverse conditions of weather and the enemy, are a must.

(3) When moving out on a road repair job, the Engineer convoy should be arranged so that hasty repairs can be accomplished by the first few items in the convoy, to allow passage of the rest of the convoy.

(4) All Engineer Troops should be moved into the area of operations as early as possible to allow quick reaction to sudden requirements.

(5) Craters can not generally be filled and subjected to traffic during the monsoon season. They must be bridged. PSP can be used as a temporary surfacing over filled craters; however, the time and effort required to install and maintain this surfacing indicate that dry span bridging is quicker and much better able to take traffic.

(6) The Battalion Forward CP must contain portions of all staff sections, no matter how few troops are involved, to eliminate burdening the Operations Section.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

RODGER M BIVENS
Cpt, CE
Adjutant

DISTRIBUTION:
Special