



AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES

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Quote In Reply

ADDRESS

103 Sig Sqn
AFPO 3
GPO SYDNEY
NSW

28 Jun 66

Lt col K.J. TAYLOR
1 Sig Regt
Milpo INGLEBURN
NSW*Dear Colonel Taylor,*

In the month since I last wrote, we have moved forward from our staging area at VUNG TAU and are now deployed in the task force base camp area around a small hill called NUI DAT. The choice of the base camp site was based on a wide variety of factors. One of these was the requirement for a position which would allow communications coverage of the area of operations. NUI DAT is a pimple in a large flat area, so we were forced towards it. Unfortunately it is a steep and rough piece of ground and as such was not attractive as a headquarters site. We have therefore finished up with the situation where the VHF radio elements of the squadron are operating on the top of NUI DAT, remotely controlled from the task force HQ, over about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of cable.

This has its disadvantages of course but I believe that in the longrun, for a base camp, the advantages of having a good comfortable site in a rubber plantation will outweigh the disadvantages of having to operate some radio detachments a little remote from the rest of the squadron. I will enclose a map showing the location and layout of the task force base.

Radio

With the task force having taken over operational control in the area, the command and telegraph nets are operating basically as envisaged by the establishment. Sub stations on the command net are 5 RAR, 6 RAR, 3 SAS Sqn, 1 APC Sqn, 1 Fd Sqn, 161 Recce Flt, 1 ATP Logistic Coy, Comd's Rover, CO 1 Fd Regt, Civil affairs LO. Stations manned by squadron operators are 5 RAR, 6 RAR, 161 Recce Flt, Comd's Rover. Sub stations on the telegraph net are 5 RAR, 6 RAR, 1 Fd Regt, 1 Fd Sqn and 161 Recce Flt.

At present all units except 161 Recce Flt are based at NUI DAT and present no communications problems at all. 161 Recce Flt is based at the airfield at VUNG TAU. This presents no problems either at present as there are excellent VHF communications to VUNG TAU from the site on top of NUI DAT.

In addition to these standard communications, we provide a couple of "funnies". The first one is for communications with the US Army advisers at the local sector HQ at BA RIA, just to our SOUTH. The arrangement is that, since neither of us has the ability to join the other's net permanently, we will come up on their net if we wish to contact them and they will come up on ours if they wish to contact us. For this purpose, we have an AN/PRC-25 on top of NUI DAT, with remote control from the tactical operations centre (TOC).

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The other requirement is for communications to alert the casualty evacuation helicopters which are in support of us (DUSTOFF). By day one of these helicopters is based on the task force helipad and is readily contacted as a local extension off our switchboard. By night, however, because of the scarcity and value of these machines and their crews, they are withdrawn to the air base at VUNG TAU. It is then possible to contact them through the trunk telephone system or the alternate means, which involves contacting the tower at VUNG TAU airfield by radio (VHF) and asking them to get the DUSTOFF aloft. Once aloft, the helicopter contacts the air safety control operated at task force HQ and is directed from there. Again, for this requirement, we maintain a PRC-25 on top of NUI DAT, with a remote control in the Signals Duty Officers' tent. This set is available to the SDO for any other miscellaneous communications requirements which come up during the day.

Radio relay

The primary means for trunk communications to our rear at present is a radio relay (TRC-24) system provided by the US. The circuits operate back to AFV in SAIGON, to 1 ALSG in VUNG TAU and to II Field Force, VIETNAM (our superior HQ) in LONG BINH, NORTH of SAIGON. The circuits provided, the people providing them and the routing of radio relay shots are all in a state of flux at the moment, so I think it best if I leave details of this until my next letter.

In addition, the 145 Sig Sqn radio relay detachments are currently deploying, so this adds to the changes now in progress.

Line

I think possibly the linemen have been the hardest worked members of the squadron since we have arrived here. As we have moved into a relatively static location there has been a requirement to get line in to all units as quickly as possible. This has meant very long hours for the linemen, particularly as it is not possible to build up the lines everywhere and there have been many line breakages caused by engineer plant, APCs and all the other natural hazards of lines.

The switchboard is now committed for 56 lines and is expected to go over the 60 before very long. For this reason, and for the reason that we have a requirement to be able to maintain base camp communications when the task force moves out on operations, I have submitted an RVE for an AN/MTC-3 as a theatre increment to the squadron equipment table.

SDS

Vehicle SDS has been a regular commitment since we arrived in the area. We have four runs a day at present, each one taking about an hour for the round trip. Because the area is not yet completely secure, each vehicle is required to have a "shotgun" with the driver so there is a commitment for two people each time the DR goes out.

In addition to the vehicle SDS within the task force, there is currently being established an aerial SDS, using Sioux helicopter, to link 1 ALSG, RAAF elements at VUNG TAU, 1 ATF, 2 F Force V and AFV. Initial proposals were that this would be a liaison officer's run, doing the joint task of liaison and carrying despatches between the various locations. However, the liaison Officer has not been forthcoming and after some initial fumbling, the system has reverted to the more satisfactory one for us, a purely SDS run.

Neither 145 Sig Sqn nor 103 Sig Sqn has provision in it's establishment for a run of this nature, so we have agreed to share it, initially on a week - and - week - about basis.

You will see that to do these tasks and to run an SDS office, our two DRs are stretched rather thinly and some ad-hoc arrangements are necessary. (The bicycles do not fully cope with the requirement).

Sigcen and telegraph terminal

From the time that radio relay circuits became available, two secure teletype circuits have been operating from the telegraph terminal (to AFV and 1 ALSG). Initially, an attempt was made to operate these circuits from the MGC-17. This proved to be impractical for a number of reasons. We have been having quite a high fault rate with telegraph machines and KW-7s particularly. With the confined space in the shelter, it is just not a practical proposition to have a technician working on one circuit while trying to operate the other. The shelter does not allow for the preparation of tapes simultaneously with the operation of the circuits. There is no provision for patching across to a spare third operating position while repairing one of the others.

For these reasons we have dismantled the telegraph equipments and KW-7s from the shelter and are operating them in a tent at the back of the sigcen. This requirement has been reinforced by the addition of a RAAF circuit. Currently this is an exclusive one-to-one circuit between RAAF elements here and at VUNG TAU, operated with RAAF personnel and equipment, but it is operated in our telegraph terminal for reasons of convenience.

With this arrival we have reached the stage where we have to produce for ourselves a layout with four operating positions (three working and one spare) and one or two tape preparation positions, and the F of S is working on this now.

Because the sigcen is staffed largely with quite inexperienced people, we have had some initial difficulties in getting organised and settling down. However, with the concentration of the task force in this location, the load on radio operators has reduced and I have put some of the OKRs into the sigcen to reduce the load on individuals and allow them to do their job under less pressure and thereby, I hope, gradually improve in efficiency and effectiveness.

Tech Maint

We have taken over, since we arrived here, a tels repair vehicle from the Logistic Support Company which was at BIEN HOA with 1 RAR. It is fairly old and is not equipped with all the test equipment we would like for our range of equipment, but it provides a basis and tech maint is functioning. We have indented for the additional test equipment we need to meet all our requirements.

Signals Operating Instructions (SOIs)

A procedure we are employing here (to conform with US procedures) which will be different from what you are used to is the issue of a monthly Signal Operating Instruction (SOI). This is a document giving the information needed to operate the various signals facilities provided in the task force. I will include a copy of the current one with this letter. It is classified until the end of the month and then is normally destroyed.

The reason for the format of the SOI, using small pages is that there is available here a 4"x5" book with clear plastic pockets,

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produced as a photograph album, but which is widely used for carrying information which is regularly referred to and is therefore liable to be ruined by the rain. Each holder of the SOI therefore cuts up the parts he refers to continually and carries them in this way.

You will, of course, note that call signs, address groups, codes and other aspects change every seven days. This is a subject which is still under discussion. Last month we changed every second day. Now, on request from units and after my arguments to the contrary, the Commander has directed that we will change only every seven days. This is based on the argument that VC reaction time is of the order of a month to produce anything of the order of battalion size reaction. I am sure this subject is one which will receive further discussion. It is the old one of balancing speed and simplicity against security.

Operations

Operations currently being conducted are designed to secure the base area, extend the controlled area and destroy VC installations within the TAOR. The first battalion size operation is currently under way and is being carried out by 6 RAR. It is being carried out in the village of LONG PHUOC about 4,000 yards to the SE of the base area. The village has long been VC dominated and many reports say that it contained the VC Province capital. It was re-settled on the orders of the Province chief with the combined efforts of US and ARVN forces just before we moved in here. However the village contains a very extensive bunker, trench and tunnel system and the aim of the operation is to destroy the buildings and fortifications completely so that the VC cannot move back in. The aim in this particular operation is not to kill VC but to destroy installations, and it is expected to last from two to three weeks.

Operations planned for the present and immediate future present no communications problems as they are at short range and involve only one major unit at a time.

General

I seem to have covered a variety of topics with out much continuity in this letter, but I hope you will find something of interest in it.

Best wishes,

Peter Mudd

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