7 RAR SUCCESSFUL OPERATION

Troops of 7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment had their first clash with Vietcong while on operations in Phuoc Tuy Province this week.

On their first major search and destroy mission, called Operation Lismore, Australians killed five Vietcong, wounded three and followed many other blood trails, and detained six suspects.

The Battalion successfully used its tracker dogs, black labradors Justin and Cassius, for the first time to hunt a wounded soldier and follow blood trails. There were two minor Australian casualties. Their names have already been announced.

Supported by New Zealand and American artillery, Australian armoured personnel carriers of 3rd Cavalry Regiment and American gunship helicopters, Operation Lismore was a massive helicopter borne assault followed by a seven day search and destroy mission.

Troops were lifted from Nui Dat in waves of armed American Iriquois helicopters to a four square mile padi field landing zone under protective air cover.

The troops searched south east of the Australian Task Force base through a known Vietcong supply route area which included stretches of the Song Rai, a river used by the enemy to ferry supplies and equipment from the South China Sea into Phuoc Tuy Province.

On the second day of the operation, contact was made with a group of Vietcong who were holding six Vietnamese prisoners. The communist troops shot four of the prisoners before fleeing into the jungle with the remaining two.

The four wounded Vietnamese were found with their hands bound with wire and their feet tied to a long iron bar. Despite urgent attention by Australian medics one Vietnamese died.

The others were given field treatment and evacuated by helicopter to the Task Force Aid Post at Nui Dat.

Australian Army Doctor, Captain Jack Blomley, of Newcastle, gave emergency treatment to two of the badly wounded Vietnamese.

After treatment at Task Force they were flown to Long Binh hospital for extensive surgery.

Further contact the same day resulted in one Vietcong dead and a number wounded. Tracker dog teams flown in from base followed blood trails that led to further contacts and one Vietcong killed.

Documents identified the Vietcong as troops of the Reconnaissance and Sabotage Company of D445 Battalion. This was one of the enemy battalions badly mauled by troops of 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment in the battle of Long Tan last August and again during Operation Bribie in February.
At least 15 other contacts with Vietcong were made during the operation but the number of enemy casualties could not be established although numerous blood trails were found.

During Operation Lismore, 7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment destroyed about 30 enemy bunkers, 10 large weapon pits, a sampan, a number of Vietcong base installations, and captured three tons of rice and some enemy weapons.

A quantity of enemy documents was taken plus the packs of a Vietcong group who dropped them while fleeing. Vietcong armourers tools, booby trap manufacturing equipment, and a number of booby traps, were also captured when the Australians destroyed an enemy mine and booby trap school.

They also took an enemy base camp measuring 200 by 100 metres, and destroyed five Vietcong fish camps.

Task Force Commander, Brigadier Stuart Graham, said the most significant feature of Operation Lismore was that it helped destroy plans believed made by the Vietcong to mount attacks on both civilian and military targets in the area.

The attacks had been planned for Sunday May 7 to coincide with the anniversary of the fall of Dien Bien Phu during the Indo China war between the French and the Viet Minh. Reports of planned targets for Vietcong attack had included the Australian base at Nui Dat.

"From the number of small groups of Vietcong contacted by 7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment during the operation it was obvious that attack plans had been made," Brigadier Graham said.

"We believe the operation helped destroy Vietcong planning in the area. The operation also continued the process of separating main Vietcong forces from local guerillas in Phuoc Tuy Province by physically denying them the transit routes and staging camps set up between the two Vietcong forces," he added.

Lists: A and B

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