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OPERATION FORREST CONTINUES IN VIETNAM

Australian Task Force troops have launched Operation Forrest in a bid to deny to Viet Cong rice about to be harvested in Phuoc Tuy Province.

Elements of the 2nd and 7th Battalions, The Royal Australian Regiment; armour of "A" Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment; artillery of the 4th Field Regiment and supporting RAAF and US helicopters make up the force.

Operation Forrest started a week ago but for security reasons details have not been disclosed earlier.

The operation is aimed at protecting Vietnamese farmers during harvest and to deny rice and other food to the VC.

So far, units have killed 10 VC.

Major contact has been between elements of 7 RAR and VC dug in at a fortified enemy base camp north-west of Nui Dat.

There was a two-hour battle for the base.

A search of the VC camp, which consisted of nine huts 15 ft. x 10 ft., with trenches and mortar pits, resulted in one of the largest caches of enemy weapons, ordnance and equipment yet found by the Task Force.

Forty-three VC weapons were taken, including mortars, machine guns, rocket launchers, pistols and rifles of Soviet and Chinese origin.

Grenades, mines and ammunition were found in the caches.

The VC also lost radios, a typewriter, a sewing machine and 300 lb. of documents.

Food prepared for 25 enemy was found ready to be served in the VC camp.

Task Force Commander, Brigadier Ron Hughes of Stafford Heights, Queensland, said that a recent increase of guerilla harassment and

terrorism in Phuoc Tuy Province is believed to stem from the enemy's grave food shortages and his difficulty in recruiting civilian labourers to work as supply porters.

"Rice harvesting is about to start in Phuoc Tuy and it is known that the VC will make an all-out bid to get as much of the current crop to meet their needs for the dry season," Brigadier Hughes said.

"Captured enemy documents reveal a critical supply situation, with the enemy getting only 15-25 percent of needed supplies."

One VC report stated that continued attacks, pacification and operational pressure by Vietnamese and Australian-American forces had seriously affected VC supply systems.

"Enough rice to feed the entire 274th VC Regiment for two weeks has been lost to allied units on recent operations," claimed one document taken from a VC base.

Evidence shows that they must replace part of their monthly rice ration with sweet potatoes and other edible roots to "conserve present rice stocks".

Operation Forrest is continuing in Phuoc Tuy Province about 40 miles south-east of Saigon.

Lists: A

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1 December, 1967.

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