

SEABEE TEAM 1104
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San Francisco, 96601

SEABEE TEAM 1104/fap
4911/R
Ser 3
19 June 1965

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From: Officer in Charge, SEABEE Team 1104
To: Commander Naval Construction Battalions, Pacific
Via: Officer in Charge, CBPAC Detachment, Republic of Vietnam

Subj: Dong Xoai Incident; report on

- Encl: (1) Map of Dong Xoai Area Sheet 6345, AMS Series L701 1:50,000
(2) Plan of Compound where Dong Xoai Incident took place
(3) Plan of proposed Special Forces camp extension
(4) Statement of: Captain William M. STOKES III, Armor, Detachment
Commander, Special Forces Detachment A342
(5) Statement of: 2nd LT Charles Q. WILLIAMS, Infantry, USA,
Executive Officer, Special Forces Detachment A342 Regarding SHIELDS
(6) Statement of: 2nd LT Charles Q. WILLIAMS Regarding EYMAN,
BRAKKEN, WILSON, KEENAN and MATTICK
(7) Statement of LTJG Frank A. PETERLIN, CEC, USNR, 662376/5105
(8) Statement of McCULLY, Johnny R., 351 41 34, EOC, USNR
(9) Statement of BRAKKEN, Dale B., 369 77 33, BU1, USN
(10) Statement of WILSON, James D., 971 95 08, CM1, USN
(11) Statement of EYMAN, Lawrence W., 471 05 76, UTP2, USN
(12) Statement of KEENAN, James M., 533 89 80, HM2, USN
(13) Statement of MATTICK, Douglas M., 583 70 30, BUH2, USN
(14) Lessons Learned and Recommendations

1. On 7 May 1965, Captain STOKES, US Army Special Forces, CO Detachment A342; Sgts. JOHNSON and DEDMAN, USASF; and LTJG PETERLIN arrived at Dong Xoai, RVN (grid coordinates YT 078759), for the purpose of making a reconnaissance of the proposed Special Forces "A" Team camp site. SEABEE Team 1104 was to commence building the camp upon completion of Camp Ben Soi, RVN. The reconnaissance group stayed at Dong Xoai until 9 May, 1965, at which time they returned to Phuoc Vinh, RVN. During the stay at Dong Xoai a rough of enclosure (3) was drawn up by Captain STOKES and LTJG PETERLIN showing the proposed camp extension to be located to the West of the abandoned Ranger Camp which would form the nucleus of the new Special Forces Camp, and to the North of the existing District Headquarters. During the early morning of 9 May 1965, a few 60mm mortar rounds landed in an area within 100 feet of the District Headquarters north berm and in the abandoned Ranger Camp (locations H&G, enclosure 2). The Americans were guests of the District Chief and were sleeping in the District Headquarters Building at the time of the incident.

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2. LTJG PETERLIN returned to Dong Xoai again on 25 May 1965 with two Cambodian CIDG companies who were to defend the camp. Both companies were considered excellent fighting companies. One was at SEABEE Team 1104's old camp site, Ben Soi, and was highly respected by the member of SEABEE Team 1104. The other company had just finished training at Trang Sup, RVN, and was regarded as the best company of four that went through the training. One of the companies was deployed in the abandoned Ranger Camp which was to form the nucleus of the new Special Forces camp and the other company was situated two kilometers East of the camp on the east end of the town of Dong Xoai. During LTJG PETERLIN's two hour stay at Dong Xoai on 25 May, 1965, Captain STOKES advised that the previous night the VC had dropped a 60mm mortar round on the school building (building 9, encl. 2) about 100 yards South of the District Headquarters building. LTJG PETERLIN was also informed that Special Forces had five men at Dong Xoai and were expecting the other seven on 26 May 1965. It was the opinion of Captain STOKES and LTJG PETERLIN that the probing with mortars would now stop since patrols could be put out with the addition of the two CIDG Companies which would augment the existing Regional Forces company located at the District Headquarters camp. Also with a Vietnamese CIDG "Cowboy" company coming on 30 May 1965 and two others on 20 June 1965 security was considered adequate. It is noted that the District Headquarters had two 105 howitzers and an armored car platoon of six armored cars with 50 caliber machine guns mounted on them. LTJG PETERLIN gathered information in regards to the availability of construction materials and departed to Ben Soi, RVN.

3. On 4 June 1965, LTJG PETERLIN, BRAKKEK, EYMAN, HOOVER, MATTICK, KEENAN and SHIELDS arrived at Dong Xoai with all of the allowance gear less the heavy equipment and about 6,000 pounds of gear which they did not have enough time to take. It took eight C-123's starting at 1030 from Tay Ninh with the last plane arriving at Dong Xoai at 1930, 4 June 1965. ALEXANDER and SUPCZAK left for Saigon to take R&R in Bangkok at 1630, 4 June 1965. Chief McCULLY remained at Ben Soi until 5 June 1965, at which time he went to Saigon for R&R. WILSON had been in Saigon on R&R since 1 June 1965. ALLEN and KLEPFER were to remain in Tay Ninh with the equipment until a convoy was set up to take the equipment to Saigon where they would dismantle the equipment, load it on C-123's and accompany it to Dong Xoai. Since there was a delay in getting the equipment to the new site, the time was being utilized in giving some of the team members R&R.

4. When we arrived at Dong Xoai on 4 June we were given berthing areas; LTJG PETERLIN and EYMAN sleeping in the center section of building (2) enclosure (2), SHIELDS and HOOVER sleeping in the Headquarters building building (1), enclosure 2) and BRAKKEK, MATTICK and KEENAN sleeping in building (8). The Team was given alert instructions by Captain STOKES. In the event of an attack, all members were to go to the Headquarters building of the compound in which they were staying (building (1) or (7)) and then to the weak wall or the wall to which the attack was coming upon the discretion of Captain STOKES or the senior man present. Also noted on 4 June was that the Vietnamese CIDG "Cowboy" company had arrived and was in buildings (5) and (6) and that the Cambodian CIDG company was in buildings (3) and (4).

5. On 5 June 1965, we commenced building a latrine and a shower, and purifying water. That evening there was an alert as small arms fire was heard near the airfield when an outpost claimed to have sighted some V.C. There were no casualties.

6. On 6 June 1965, the SEABEE Team commenced buying lumber; hauling gravel from the airstrip; securing the school building (building 9) for a work shop for prefabricating trusses; and continued building the latrine.

7. On 7 June 1965, we commenced converting the school building into a work shop area, finished the latrine and continued hauling gravel from the airstrip. About 2300 there was an alert at which time a 60mm mortar round hit about 20 feet to the West of the main gate to the District Headquarters (location 1, enclosure 2). There were no casualties.

8. During the days of 8 and 9 June 1965, we continued hauling gravel; purchasing lumber; converting the school building into a work shop area; and began to lay out the supply building which was to be the only new building in the existing camp area. On 8 June, Chief McCULLY and WILSON arrived, were assigned berths in buildings (2) and (8) respectively, and were given their alert instructions. In the afternoon ALLEN and KLEPFER arrived with the remaining 6000 pounds of allowance gear from Tay Ninh. They then returned to Tay Ninh to supervise the movement of the construction equipment.

9. From 1 through 9 June 1965, Special Forces personnel worked in the Camp Extension Area clearing fields of fire, removing barbed wire, and detonating mines to enable us to strip and grade the area when the equipment arrived. They had completed detonating nearly all of the mines, leaving hardly any obstacles in that area.

10. The first VC mortar or 57 recoilless rifle round hit the camp at approximately 2345, 9 June 1965, at which time Chief McCULLY was on duty in the Special Forces camp and 1st Lt PORTELLIO, USASF, was on duty at the District Headquarters. (There was an American on duty both at the District Headquarters and the Special Forces Camp during the hours of 2100 to 0700. The watches were of a two-hour duration which required hourly radio checks, insuring that the camp was secure, and that the personnel on duty were awake and alert). The initial rounds hit the Headquarters Building (building 1) wounding both SHIELDS and HOOVER as indicated in enclosures (4), (7) & (8); and the LLDB (Vietnamese Special Forces) and USASF barracks (building (2)), where RUSSELL and JENKINS, USASF, were sleeping and believed to have been killed in bed. Both of the above locations had communication facilities which were destroyed.

11. All of the USASF personnel and SEABEES except JENKINS and RUSSELL got out of their bunks and went to the following positions indicated on enclosure (2):

- Position A. Chief McCULLY and HOOVER
 - " B. LTJG PETERLIN, EYMAN and SHIELDS
 - " C. Captain STOKES, TAYLOR, DEDMAN: HAND and CRCW (all of USASF).
 - " F. BRAKKEN, WILSON, MATTICK, KEENAN and McLAUGHLIN (USASF).
- These men reported to position F after first reporting to the District Headquarters building as indicated in enclosure (9).

Building (7). 1st LT PORTELLO, 2nd LT. WILLIAMS, JOHNSON. (All of USASF).

12. A summary of the major events and the approximate times they occurred is listed below. For detailed accounts of individual actions see enclosures (4) through (13):

2345, 9 June 1965. - Mortar and 57 recoilless barrage commenced. RUSSELL killed by this barrage & possibly JENKINS.

0030, 10 June 1965 - Mortar barrage lifted only to start again with less intensity in a few minutes. SHIELDS went to get some ammunition from the burning tilt-deck trailer and returned with two boxes.

0040, 10 June 1965. - Chief McCULLY went to see Captain STOKES at position (C) and then returned to position (B). LTJG PETERLIN went to position (A) with HOOVER.

0100, 10 June 1965. - Flare aircraft arrived and started dropping flares periodically. KEENAN went from position (F) to the District Headquarters building (building 7) to treat the wounded.

0145, 10 June 1965. - Armed helicopters arrived and bombed & strafed the areas north and west of camp.

0200, 10 June 1965. - TAYLOR and HAND moved to position (C) and DEDMAN moved to position (A).

0230, 10 June, 1965. - BRAKKEN, WILSON, MATTICK and McLAUGHLIN returned to the District Headquarters building (building 7) from position (F).

0245, 10 June 1965. - Intense mortar and 57 recoilless barrage started on the Special Forces camp. Waves of VC came over the west wall of the Special Forces camp. LTJG PETERLIN, HOOVER and DEDMAN were cut off from the rest of the Americans and took evasive action along the route illustrated on enclosure (2) and described in detail in enclosure (7). LTJG PETERLIN last saw HOOVER and DEDMAN somewhere in the vicinity of position (D). LTJG PETERLIN stayed in a fighting hole at position (E) until 0730, 11 June 1965. Chief McCULLY was also cut off from all other Americans and evaded along the route illustrated on enclosure (2) and described in detail in enclosure (8). He continued moving as indicated in enclosure (8) until about 0830, 11 June when he was air evacuated. Captain STOKES, TAYLOR, EYMAN, SHIELDS and HAND withdrew from positions (B) and (C) on the route illustrated on enclosure (2), and as described in enclosures (4) and (11). CROW had withdrawn to the District Headquarters building sometime between the initial mortar barrage and the attack at 0245 to maintain communications with aircraft. HAND was carried to the District Headquarters by two Cambodians of the CIDG. SHIELDS and TAYLOR carried Captain STOKES to the District Headquarters while EYMAN carried their weapons.

0300, 10 June 1965. - Intense mortar and 57 recoilless barrage, small arms and hand grenade attack commenced on the District Headquarters building. All Americans were wounded by this time but they held the VC off.

0530 (approximate), 10 June 1965. - Vietnamese Skyraiders and US jets started bombing and straffing the compounds and surrounding areas, upon request of the Americans in the District Headquarters building.

0700, 10 June 1965. - 2nd LT WILLIAMS and SHIELDS went to position (J) with a 3.5 rocket launcher and destroyed a machine gun emplacement located in the school building. LT WILLIAMS was hit by a round in the lower arm when returning to the District Headquarters, but he was not critically injured. SHIELDS, however, received a critical injury when he was hit in the leg while returning to the District Headquarters building. He was carried back to the District Headquarters building by JOHNSON (see enclosures 5 and 9 for details.)

0700-1300, 10 June 1965. - The six SEABEES, (BRAKKEK, WILSON, EYMAN, MATTICK, KEENAN and SHIELDS) and the eight Special Forces members (Capt STOKES, 1st LT PORTELLO, 2nd LT WILLIAMS, JOHNSON, TAYLOR, CROW, McLAUGHLIN and HAND) continued to hold the District Headquarters building. The Viet Cong continually tried to get over the North and West berm but were knocked back by bombs and straffing fire from the air, or were piled up by small arms fire from the District Headquarters building. The Viet Cong were also firing mortars & 57 recoilless rifles intermitently at the District Headquarters building.

1300, 10 June 1965. - The fourteen men went to a 105 howitzer pit (position K). SHIELDS and Capt STOKES were carried there by some of the other members.

1355, 10 June 1965. - Helicopters landed near the 105 howitzer pit to air-evacuate the 14 men while Skyraiders and jets held the VC down with intense bombing and straffing.

1430 (approximate), 10 June 1965. - SHIELDS died.

1430, 10 June - 0730 June 1965. - Continual bombing and straffing by Skyraiders and jets. Viet Cong continued to hold the compounds, the town and the surrounding areas and continued returning fire on the Skyraiders and jets.

0730, 11 June 1965. - VC withdrew from the compounds and town. Helicopters started landing in helipad area between the District Headquarters and the school building.

0830, 11 June 1965. - Chief McCULLY and LTJG PETERLIN were air evacuated from the helipad area.

13. JENKINS and RUSSELL's bodies were found in the afternoon of 11 June 1965, and HOOVER and DEDMAN's bodies were found on 12 June 1965. Enclosures 1 through 13 are forwarded to augment this report in order to complete this detailed description of the Dong Xoai Incident. The times indicated above sometimes disagree with those of the enclosures, but as a result of study of all the compiled information are believed to be most nearly accurate. Enclosure (14) was compiled by the surviving SEABEE Team 1104 members, and is hoped may be of some value to future SEABEE Teams.

/s/F. A. Peterlin
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LTJG CEC USNR