

Operation Merino

18-25 July 1968

Operation Merino was a battalion-sized reconnaissance in force carried out in the western part of the enemy zone known as the Hat Dich.

The enemy considered himself relatively safe here and carried out training and operational planning in numerous camps.

On July 18 4RAR/NZ(Anzac)Bn deployed to FSPB Chestnut, which was established beside Route 15 near the village of Thai Thien. Movement was by Chinook helicopter and everything went smoothly except that at one stage B Company tried to join 3RAR.

W Company was fire support base company and the three other companies moved into their AOs on foot. V Company moved about 4000 metres along the Firestone Trail to an area north of the trail. B Company's AO was to be in the north-east and D Company was to operate south of B Company.

W Company was responsible for an AO which included the fire support base and covered as far south as the stream running through Thai Thien.

First contacts of the operation occurred about 4 pm when B Company had three small contacts and leading elements of D Company contacted a small group of enemy in a base camp. Several more small contacts held up D Company, with the result that it never entered its own AO, but operated in W Company's for the duration of the operation.

On July 20 Chestnut was vacated and FSPB Dyke established on the Firestone Trail about 4000 metres from Route 15.

V Company had two small contacts before one of its platoons was ambushed by the VC. Fortunately, no casualties were sustained.

Patrolling by V Company on July 22 located what appeared to be a sizable number of enemy in a bunkered camp. Two platoons were committed, but returned to the company base in fading light. The next day V Company returned to the camp and came under heavy small arms and RPG fire. The company pulled back for an airstrike on the camp, but darkness descended, preventing its return to the scene of the action.

That night the first battalion attack since the Korean War was planned in the 4RAR/NZ(Anzac)Bn command post.

The task force reaction company at the time, C Company, 1RAR, happened to be operating on Route 15 and, together with the APC squadron, arrived to lend a hand.

D Company took over the defence of Dyke and a platoon from V Company moved to a cut-off position on the left flank. The assault echelon was made up of W Company left assault company, B Company right assault company, with C Company, 1RAR, in reserve.

The attack was preceded by a further airstrike and heavy bombardment by two batteries of 105 mm and a battery of 155 mm guns.

The commanding officer positioned himself, with a tactical headquarters, near the assaulting companies. The attack went in, but the camp had been vacated. There was very little equipment left and all that was recovered was a 60lb bag of rice.

Though contact was not made, the lessons learned and the procedures tested were valuable, especially for the command post staff who planned the attack.

The VC were found to use tracks continually, even after suffering casualties on the same tracks. It was found they were prepared to use a type of claymore mine to slow up troops and inflict casualties.

The operation ended on July 25 and the battalion returned to Nui Dat after 33 days' continuous operations.

Remember....?

The greeting with which Maj Reynolds was met: "Welcome back to 3RAR".

M60 gunner — One round, two Charlie.

Brigadier's rude message to OC B Company on his navigation.

Member of staff on task force net: "I will not accept wait out." Reply from 4RAR/NZ(Anzac)Bn: "Wait out."

V Company's move by penlight torch and night Dustoff.

The whole day it took B Company to search one small tunnel.

First fright from the air.

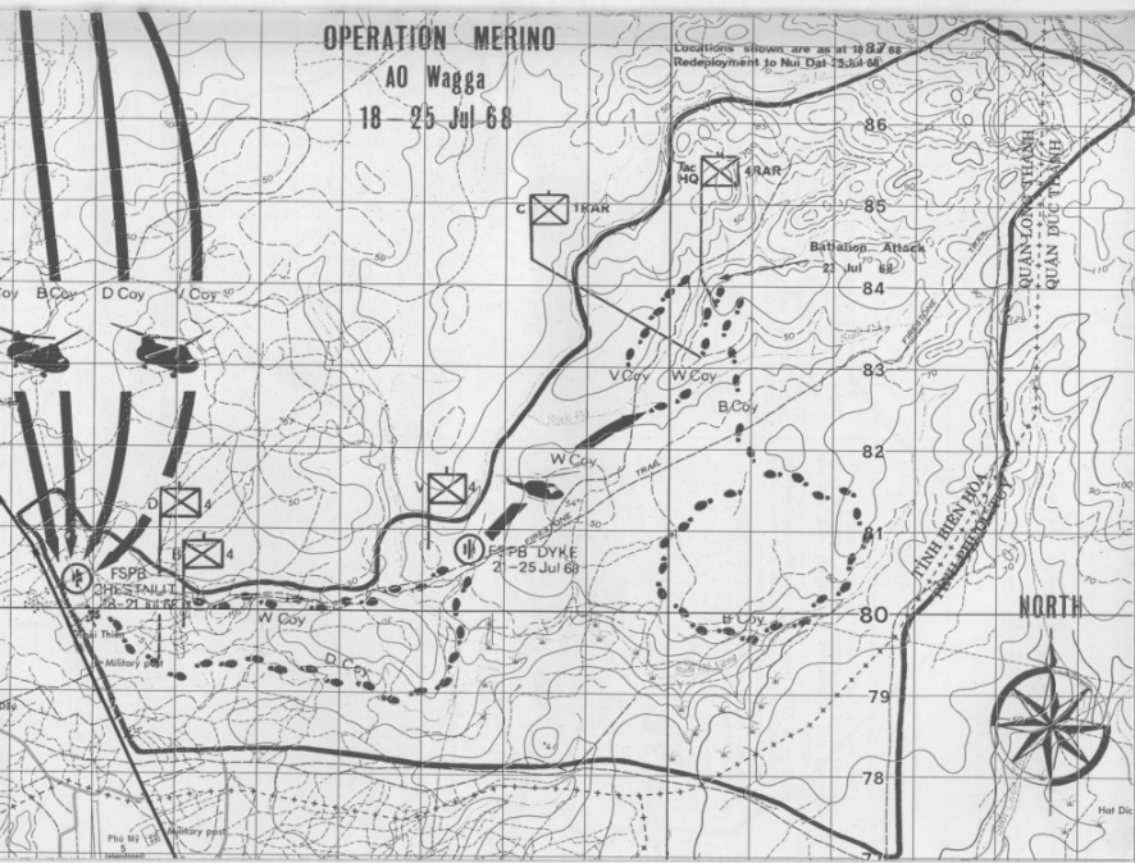
RESULTS — Own troops: Four wounded.
Enemy: Eleven killed, three killed by artillery, six wounded, one captured.

OPERATION MERINO

AO Wagga

18-25 Jul 68

Locations shown are as at 18 Jul 68
Redeployment to Nui Dat 23 Jul 68



QUAN LON THANH
QUAN DUC THANH

TINH BIEN HOA
PHU THUAN

NORTH



Hal Di