

PREK KLOK I AND II, VIETNAM, 1967

v.1.0 October 9, 2002

Ravi Rikhye

Readers are most welcome to expand on this orbat. Source: <http://www.army.mil/cmhp/books/Vietnam/90-7/ch11.htm>

The two battles of Prek Klok were so obscure that we may doubt many even in the US Army know about them. Prek Klok was a stream in the Iron Triangle, a communist stronghold, and the battles came about as a consequence of Operations Cedar Falls/Junction City.

Prek Klok I, fought on February 24, 1967, was essentially a company-size operation, with B/1/16th Infantry losing 25 killed and 28 wounded in a few hours fighting. In turn the US claimed 167 enemy KIA, and so the US Army reckoned Prek Klok I a victory.

Forty percent losses might presumably put a dent in a unit's efficiency, yet thanks to the efficiency of the US Army's replacement system, the company was back in action five days later. We are entitled to wonder how the US Army expected a unit with 40% new personnel to operate cohesively on the battlefield with five days. Particularly when the replacements would have come not from a regimental training center where at least the men would have trained together, but from the anonymity of a replacement depot that would have processed men from all over the United States like interchangeable parts. Yet, the US Army had - and still has - its own ways of doing things. The system was set up for the meat grinder of massive industrial age wars: an endless stream of casualties was replaced by an endless stream of individual replacements. The system worked well in both World Wars, but whether it was suited for a war like Vietnam may be debated.

The precursor to the battle was a mortar barrage directed against 1/16th Infantry, which was in reserve for 3rd Brigade, 15th Division at Suoi Doi and also responsible for part of the perimeter. At 0800 the next morning, Company B left the base to conduct a search and destroy operation and was advancing, meters at a time through very thick jungle, to within 2500 meters of the stream when it became mixed up in a meeting engagement with enemy troops. The battle ended at 1500 when the enemy broke contact. Though the official story does not explicitly say so, the heavy loss was probably caused by communist snipers who were expertly hidden in the jungle. The company brought back all its dead and wounded and one of its members won a posthumous Medal of Honor.

3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division [Col. Marks], CP at Sui Doi

1/16th Infantry [LTC Rufus C. Lazzell] reserve for the brigade, also at Sui Doi; aside from B Company, two other companies reinforced during the battle.

2/2nd Infantry [Mechanized] (-) participated in the battle

2/33rd Artillery [LTC Charles D. Daniel] had a battery of 105mm howitzers at Artillery Base II near the stream, and together with

???? Artillery, 155mm howitzers, provided the fire support for the battle.

Unknown US fighter squadrons provided 51 CAS sorties.

The enemy troops came from

2nd Battalion, 101st NVA Regiment of the 9th VC Division.

Prek Klok II was fought on March 10-11, 1967. The enemy attacked the US artillery firebase. This time the US had 3 killed and 38 wounded; the communists lost 197 killed and 5 POW. The engagement took place about 30 kilometer northeast of Tay Ninh City.

Units involved included:

2/2nd Infantry [Mechanized], minus Company B, protecting the perimeter of Fire Support Patrol Base II at Prek Klok

B/2/33rd Artillery

C/2/33rd Artillery

168th Engineer Battalion [elements], building an SF/CIDG camp and airstrip nearby.

The much heavier enemy casualties may be explained both by the communists having to assault fixed defenses including M-113 APCs with heavy machine guns, and the availability of 100 CAS sorties and an AC-47 Spooky gunship. Several helicopters were also available. Five UH-1s protected by a Light Fire Team flew 64 sorties, bringing in 16 tons of supplies and evacuating casualties, mainly at night.

This time the enemy consisted of two battalions of the 272nd Regiment, 9th VC Division.