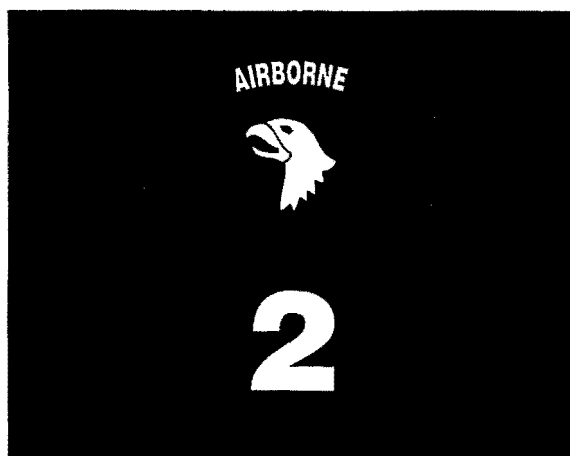


A Personal Memoir
An Account of the 2d Brigade and 2d Brigade Task Force,
101st Airborne Division
September 1967 through June 1968



by

John H. Cushman
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army, Retired

This is my story of the 2d Brigade and the 2d Brigade Task Force,
101st Airborne Division, during my period in command
from September 1, 1967, until June 28, 1968

"Ready to Go!"

DRAFT of July 8, 1996

July 8, 1996

This account makes use of memory, of personal letters written at the time, of material from my files, of the contributions of others who participated in these events, and of unit journals and other records on file at the National Archives facility at Suitland, Maryland.

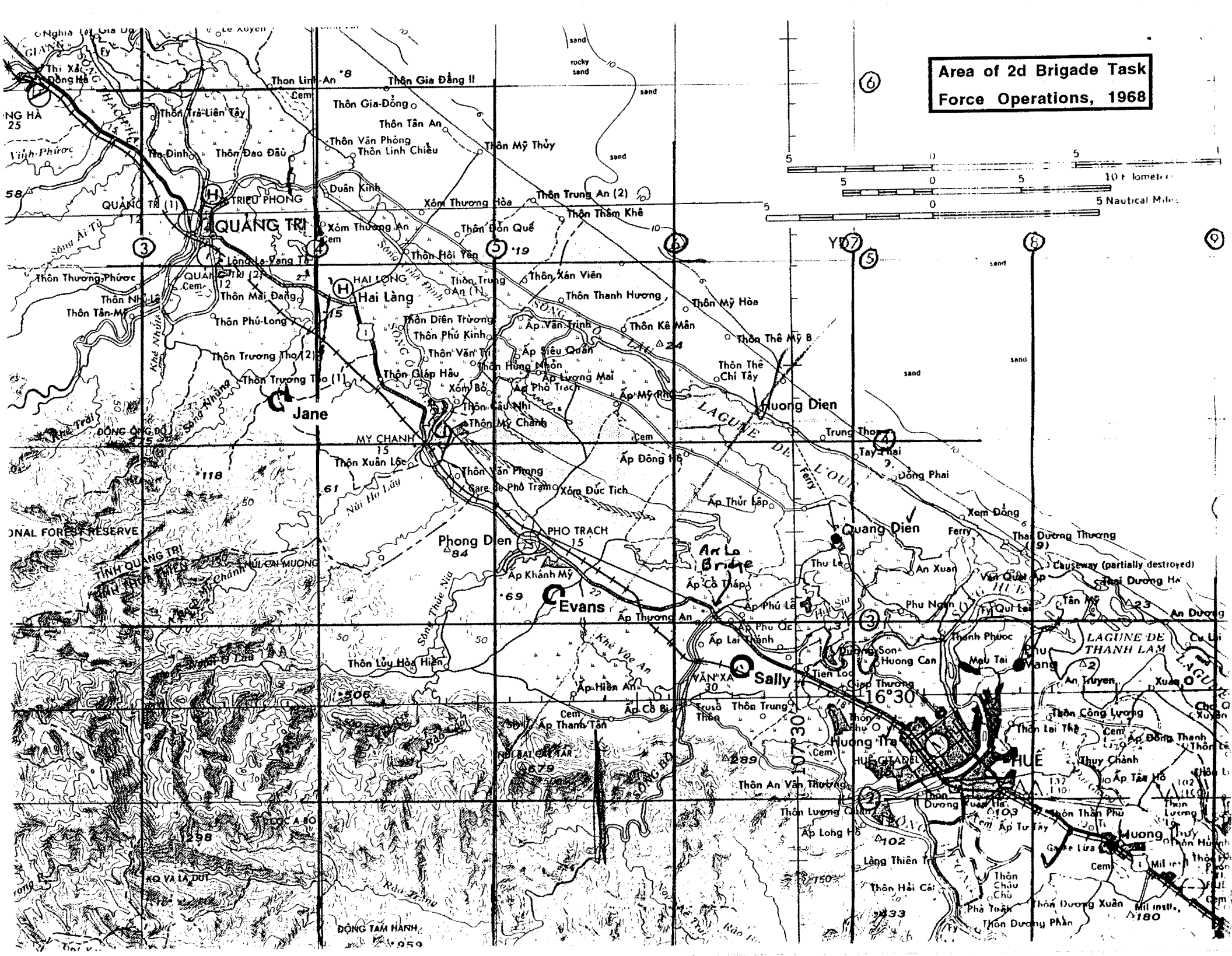
This draft reproduces, with minor changes, the draft that I wrote to share with those members of the 2d Brigade Task Force, 101st Airborne Division, of the period September 1967-June 1968 who gathered at Columbus, Georgia, on 2-3 August 1995, during the 50th Annual Reunion of the 101st Airborne Division Association. I reproduce it now to offer to those members of our brigade task force who will assemble at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for the 101st's Week of the Eagles, 8-13 July 1996.

This draft remains incomplete. The final product, which will be edited for a more general readership and which I expect to complete in due time, will be written primarily for my own benefit and the benefit of my family. This draft therefore includes personal material not necessarily appropriate for an official history (for example, my working into the narrative certain of my award citations).

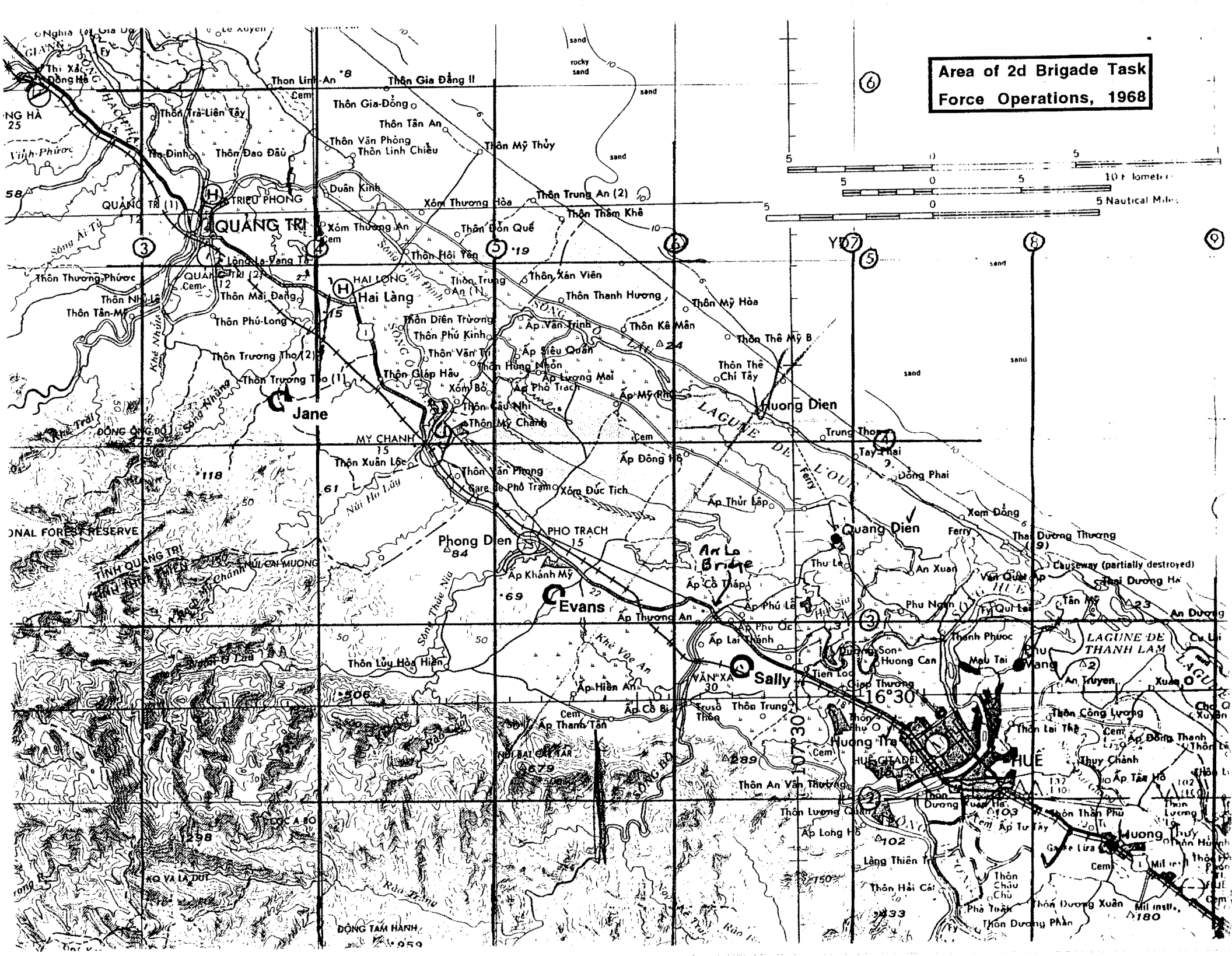
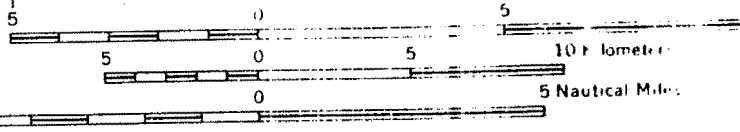
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John H. Cushman

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]



Area of 2d Brigade Task
Force Operations, 1968



A Biographical Note

(When asked for a short biography, I usually provide a text that leads off like this... JHC)

General Cushman was born in China in 1921, enlisted in the Army in 1940, and graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1944, commissioned in the Corps of Engineers. He served with engineer units in the Pacific and Japan and in 1946 joined the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project at Sandia Base, NM. In 1949-50 he earned a Masters degree in Civil Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, thereafter attending the U.S. Army Engineer and Infantry Schools and joining the 22d Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, in Germany where from 1951-54 he was battalion and regimental operations officer and battalion commander. He then attended the Army Command and General Staff College and was for three years on the College faculty.

1958-60, General Cushman was in the Office, Army Chief of Staff; 1961-62 in the Office of the General Counsel, OSD; and 1962-63 a military assistant to the Secretary of the Army. 1963-64 he was Senior Advisor, 21st Infantry Division, Vietnamese Army, in Vietnam's Delta region. 1964-65 he attended the National War College, reporting then to the 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, KY; he was successively Director of Supply, Chief of Staff, and commander of the 2d Brigade. In December 1967, General Cushman led the 2d Brigade to Vietnam where it fought in the Tet 1968 battles around Hue and earned the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm, the RVN equivalent of a Presidential Unit Citation.

This personal memoir is the story behind that last sentence.

I will add that when I returned in April 1964 from Vietnam duty I gave many briefings that described what the ARVN 21st Infantry Division, the province chiefs in its division area, and US advisors to division and province had been doing in "pacification" -- which was what we called the program we developed locally for taking back the countryside from the Viet Cong. I said that the concept put into practice there should be extended and supported country-wide, but argued that the United States should not place ground forces in the populated countryside, where, unable to tell friend from foe, they could do grave harm; fighting in the countryside was properly a task of Vietnamese troops.

While a National War College student, I recommended that the United States commit air/land forces to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, extending the boundary that divided North Vietnam from the South. I said that this decisive blow should be coupled with an effective US-supported, Vietnamese-conducted, internal pacification effort like that of the 21st Division, that the South Vietnamese Army could be made capable of defeating North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces in-country, and that this two-pronged strategy would bring success in a reasonable time.

However, In mid-1965 the U.S. introduced its ground forces into the countryside, began a half-hearted air campaign aimed at leading Ho Chi Minh to end his external support, and adopted a self-defeating strategy of attrition of the enemy. Two years later I took command of the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. My task then became to train that brigade and lead it to Vietnam where along with other U.S. ground troops it would fight in the countryside.

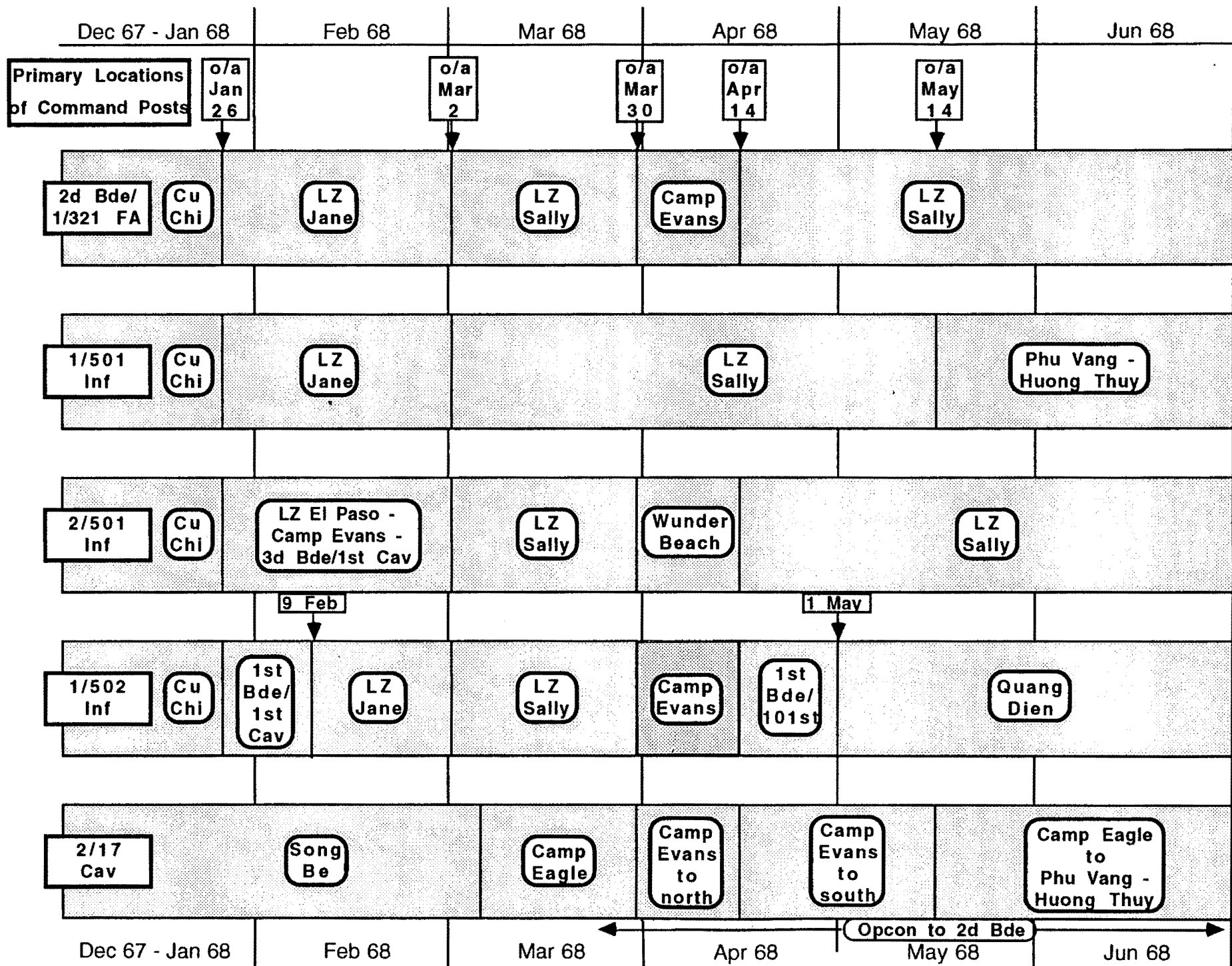


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Glossary of Selected Terms

abn	airborne
ACD	air cavalry division
ACR	armored cavalry regiment
AH-1	attack helicopter (Cobra), fires rockets, M-79 grenades.
AK-47	widely used, Soviet-developed rifle
AK-54	more modern version of AK-47
AO	area of operations
ARA	aerial rocket artillery (see footnote, page 28, Chapter 3)
ARP	aero rifle platoon, of the 2/17th Cavalry Squadron
arty	artillery
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
ASAP	as soon as possible
attached	pretty much the same as opcon, maybe a little tighter relationship
avn	aviation
AW	automatic weapons
BC	body count (see footnote page 14. Chapter 2)
bde, Bde	brigade (there are two or more battalions in a brigade)
bn, Bn	battalion (there are two or more companies in a battalion)
CA	combat assault, by airmobile troops in helicopters into a landing zone that may be contested
C&C	command and control (usually refers to C&C helicopter)
C-130	USAF transport aircraft
C-ration	a meal for troops in the field that comes in a box, with cans/packets of food inside that can be eaten as is, or heated; not bad, but can get tiresome
CG	commanding general
CH-47	twin-rotor cargo helicopter; can carry internal or sling loads
Chinook	nickname for CH-47
chopped	placed opcon to (e.g., "A Co was chopped to the 1st Battalion")

claymore	antipersonnel mine, consisting of pellets, backed by explosives, that are sprayed into a devastating swath when a soldier detonates the mine
closed	completed its (unit) movement to a certain location
cmd	command
CO	commanding officer
co, Co	company (a company has two or more platoons)
Cobra	AH-1 gunship
Conex	a large steel shipping container that can be loaded on a truck or ship, with a door that can be locked in transit
console	radios and intercom gear mounted on a frame inside a command and control helicopter (see footnote, page 35, Chapter 3)
div, Div	division; a self-contained organization that has, usually, three brigades, a "division artillery" with several artillery battalions, a division support (i.e., logistics) command, an aviation battalion or group, and other separate units, such as combat engineers, signal, cavalry (reconnaissance)
DTOC	division tactical operations center (or command post)
EM	enlisted man
enr	engineer
FASC	forward area signal center (a detachment of the division signal battalion that goes along with a brigade task force)
FO	artillery forward observer (accompanies a rifle company commander and calls in his artillery support)
FOB	forward operating base
frag order	fragmentary order (as distinguished from a complete "operation order")
FSB	fire support base
FSE	forward support element (a detachment of the division support command that goes along with a brigade task force)
G2	intelligence officer on a general (e.g., division commander's) staff
G3	operations officer, likewise
G5	civil affairs officer, likewise
GVN	Government of (the Republic of) Vietnam

H-13/23	two models of light observation helicopter
HHC	headquarters and headquarters company
hook	colloquialism for CH-47, or Chinook
Huey	likewise for UH-1, or Iroquois
indiv wpn	individual weapon
inf	infantry
journal	a daily log of messages sent and received in a headquarters
KHA	killed in hostile action (sometimes used instead of KIA)
KIA	killed in action
LFT	light fire team; a pair of Cobra gunships working together
LMG	light machine gun
LnO	liaison officer
loach	colloquialism for LOH-6 light observation helicopter
log bird	a UH-1 that responds to the logistic needs of troops in the field
LOH-6	light observation helicopter, more modern than H-23
LZ	landing zone for helicopters, usually several of them at a time
M-79	40mm grenade antipersonnel munition, launched by shoulder-fired grenade launcher that is carried usually by a member of rifle squad
maint	maintenance
med	medical, or medium depending on context
medevac	a helicopter that comes to the scene of a wounded soldier and takes him to medical treatment. Called "Dustoff" from their ubiquitous radio call sign.
MG	machine gun
mortar	indirect fire, relatively short range, weapon carried by battalions, sometimes companies, in battle
MP	military police
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NDP	night defensive position
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
O	officer

off	officer
Ontos	A tracked vehicle on which were mounted six 106mm recoilless rifles, a fearsome item of U.S. Marine equipment.
opcon	operational control (see discussion in footnote, page 20, Chapter 3)
opord	operation order
organic	items authorized by TOE and carried by a unit (a rifle company's "organic" weapons would be distinguished from its "supporting" artillery or gunships)
PF	Popular Forces; lightly equipped paramilitary units, platoon-size, at the village level
PK	"poste kilometer" (see footnote, page 54, Chapter 5)
plat	platoon (usually three or four squads)
POW	prisoner of war (also PW)
psyops	psychological (warfare) operations
QL	Vietnamese abbreviation for "highway"
range fan	the coverage of an artillery battery, extending to the limit of its range (a rifle company does not like to get outside of its supporting artillery range fan)
recon	reconnaissance
RF	Regional Forces; more heavily equipped paramilitary units, company size, at the province level
RPG	rocket propelled grenade, fired from rocket launcher, designed for use against armor and personnel
RTO	radio-telephone operator
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
S1	personnel staff officer at battalion and brigade level
S2	intelligence staff officer, same..
S3	operations staff officer, same..
S4	logistics staff officer, same..
sapper	enemy specially trained to penetrate barriers of defensive positions
satchel charge	demolitions carried by a sapper
SA	small arms (usually connotes rifles)

SeaBee	member of a U.S. Navy construction battalion (CB)
SGM	sergeant major
sgt	sergeant
sig	signal
SKS	rifle of Warsaw Pact origin
slice	that part of a division, such as its direct support artillery battalion and engineer company, that goes with a brigade when it becomes a brigade task force
slicks	troop transport UH-1s, so called because their sides are "slick" (unarmed)
sortie	one flight by one aircraft
spt	support
tac CP	tactical CP; a small command post that is in the field with the troops
TF	task force
TOC	tactical operations center; the main command post, usually rearward
TOE	table of organization and equipment; the document that prescribes the authorized personnel and materiel items of a unit, in great detail
trains	the logistics echelon of a battalion or brigade
troop	the cavalry unit equivalent of a company
UH-1	utility helicopter (also Iroquois)
VC	Viet Cong; indigenous Vietnamese communist
WHA	wounded in hostile action; sometimes used instead of WIA
WIA	wounded in action

Chapter 1. Fort Campbell

In a change of command ceremony on the Fort Campbell, Kentucky, troop line on September 1, 1967, I took command of the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, accepting the brigade colors from Colonel Douglas Mitchell who had been its commander for two years. I had been at Fort Campbell since July 1965, serving for two months as deputy chief of staff for garrison matters, then for nine months as Director of Supply, an installation billet, and for a little more than a year as Chief of Staff of the 101st Airborne Division and Fort Campbell. Since July 1, 1967, the division and post had been commanded by Major General Olinto M. Barsanti, who had replaced Major General Ben Sternberg.

General Barsanti, a mission-oriented hard driver with very high standards,¹ arrived with the mission to prepare the 101st Airborne Division, minus its 1st Brigade Task Force which had been there for two years, for movement within a few months to Vietnam. Soon after his arrival General Barsanti began to separate the then-combined division and post staffs. In mid-August I turned over my separated duties to Colonel William P. Tallon, the new division Chief of Staff, and to Colonel Burch, new post Chief of Staff. I then moved my family to Lexington, Massachusetts, returning to take command of the brigade. By this time the 101st had been alerted for late January air movement to Vietnam, soon to be changed to a mid-December departure.

My command consisted of the brigade headquarters and headquarters company and three airborne infantry battalions -- the 1st and 2d Battalions, 501st Infantry, and the 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry, each consisting of three (soon to be four) rifle companies, a combat support company, and a headquarters and headquarters company. In due time I would be responsible for the 2d Brigade Task Force, which included the 1st Battalion, 321st Artillery, B Company of the 326 Engineer Battalion and other elements of the brigade "slice."

Everything would depend on my battalion commanders, and here I was fortunate in having Lieutenant Colonels Joseph L. (Pete) Piotrkowski, (1/501), Richard J. (Dick) Tallman (2/501), and Bertram J. (Jack) Bishop (1/502), of whom Tallman and Bishop were new. Lt. Col. Earl L. Keesling was brigade executive officer, and Command Sergeant Major A. B. Cannon brigade sergeant major.

¹General Barsanti's demanding standards, ubiquitous presence, piercing comment, and short temper made an immediate impression and engendered among many a certain awe, even trepidation. Captain Jack Justice, of the 2d Brigade S-3 Section, was drop zone safety officer for General Barsanti's first jump at Fort Campbell, out of a helicopter. Justice's primary personal objective was to "make the jump uneventful for the new commander." From the ground and at the determined point in the helicopter's path, he gave the command "Execute" only to see General Barsanti, who was the second jumper to leave the helicopter, begin to drift toward a parking lot surrounded by telephone poles, just off the drop zone. At this point, writes Justice, "the young captain dropped to one knee as he watched his career drift out the window." General Barsanti missed the telephone poles, landed safely in the parking lot, and deemed the event a grand experience, whereupon Captain Justice resumed his military career -- to the benefit of the 2d Brigade.

Our first task was to organize, shipping out non-deployables and gaining fillers and creating in each battalion a fourth rifle company. From the 1/502 unit history:

"The 1/502 Infantry was alerted in early September 1967 for movement to Vietnam. The identification of non-deployable personnel and their shipment to the 82d Airborne Division and to Third Army units at Fort Campbell [was] the first major step. Personnel were considered non-deployable if they were RVN returnees, sole surviving sons, under 18 years of age, pending shipment to OCS, flight training, or USMA, or other more selective criteria.

"[Then] came the task of filling G Series TOE [note: later T Series TOE] vacancies with deployable personnel. The majority of fillers [came] from the 82d Airborne Division [note: also XVIII Corps units] and the 8th Infantry Division.

"Preparation for overseas movement began, including checking ID cards, ID tags, health and dental records, pay records, 201 files, wills, powers of attorney, etc. Soldier qualifications were methodically checked using [the brigade's] "Minit-Wash" system;² at various stations individual records were checked, compared with information furnished by the soldier himself, and then matched with the qualification needed according to his slot on the TOE. Records were then prepared for shipment.

"The first step in the materiel field was to requisition the increased equipment and vehicles authorized under the change from the F Series TOE [note: three rifle companies] to the G Series TOE [four rifle companies]. In October there was another change from G to T Series TOE. This involved turning in equipment and vehicles which this TOE deleted from the G Series TOE. In mid-October the T Series TOE was modified, requiring the requisitioning of added vehicles and equipment. Later in October the T Series TOE had another modification that deleted some of the vehicles and equipment required by the first modification."

I had decided that "Ready to Go" would be the motto for our brigade and was determined that we would live up to that motto in every respect. I was fortunate in having been assigned to Fort Campbell for two years, in duties that gave me a better than usual understanding of personnel and supply and maintenance administration down through the unit level. I had arrived at a conviction that unit excellence in these fields was essential to achieving excellence in training and operations.

From my first day in command I insisted on such excellence, directed its achievement, and inspected for it. I was also fortunate, in addition to Lt. Col. Earl Keesling and Command Sergeant Major Cannon, in having very competent brigade staff officers for these administrative functions to assist me: Major Jerry P. Allen, S1, and Captain James

²"Minit-Wash" was a one-time process of straightening out individual and unit personnel records that I had instituted for the division while Chief of Staff.

M. White, S4. Moreover, I soon gained a trained and very competent officer of the Military Intelligence branch as my S2, Major Raymond B. Riggan, Jr.

General Barsanti and I were of one mind in believing in troop discipline and a strong chain of command, and in the supreme value of these and of quality training in saving men's lives in combat. His own slogan was "Bring them back alive."

I said that we would make the chain of command strong by exercising it day and night. For example, no matter how thin the ranks when a company fell into formation and when it moved, I ordered that it would never deviate from its organization by squad and platoon. If one squad had only three men present, and another had eight, we would never "break it off" and even the ranks -- whether out for a run or marching to training. This was an article of faith, aimed at driving home the principle of squad and platoon integrity and the chain of command. A first sergeant would not gather the troops around him to give instructions; he would tell platoon sergeants, who would go through their squad leaders. Squad leaders would inspect, and be accountable for, their squads. And so on.

We devoted September to individual training, including physical training with a run every morning, weapons qualification for every soldier, and an inspection every Saturday. About mid-September we learned that we would deploy by air from Fort Campbell in mid-December. We would not complete our personnel fill until early October, when we would have only ten weeks to go. The last four weeks would be required for two weeks leave for each man, half the brigade at a time. So we would have only six weeks for unit training. This, despite the fact that more than half of my company commanders, several of whom were special forces and armor officers, were brand new to command.

I told my battalion commanders and Major Russell C. Miller, my highly competent brigade S3, that we would use three of those weeks for squad training, two for platoon training, and one for a three or four day field exercise in which we would concurrently conduct company, battalion, and brigade training. I said that each battalion commander would prepare one week of squad training lesson plans, complete with range, ammunition and other requirements, and that battalions would rotate their execution. One week would be exercises in "Squad in Attack," another would be "Squad in Defense," and the third would be "Squad on Patrol." Each battalion could thus have three weeks of superior squad training.

For platoon training, each battalion commander would prepare three days of training for either platoon in attack, or in defense, or on patrol and similarly rotate these; Friday of the second platoon week would be devoted to recovery and preparation for the final week of exercises. We had live fire exercises at both squad and platoon. Battalion reconnaissance platoons were trained separately, and training of the battalion 4.2-inch mortar platoons and company 81-mm mortar sections was centralized in each battalion.

Russ Miller acquired the necessary ranges and training areas, saw to the timely preparation and exchanges of lesson plans, and orchestrated the day-by-day execution of this six weeks of intensive unit training. In their final two weeks before departure each soldier rezeroed his rifle (new M-16s having been issued all around) and had another crack at field target firing. That was all we could get before arrival in country, where an additional month of unit training and acclimatization was visualized before combat.

General Barsanti had ideas of his own on training, one of which was the requirement for a rifleman's (or infantry squad's) "quick reaction course." Developed by the Division G2, Lieutenant Colonel Charlie Beckwith, this required course set up lanes, like jungle trails, for infantrymen to traverse and quickly engage by fire pop-out targets that appeared by surprise.

We distributed a "Vietnam Primer" written by S.L.A. Marshall and an infantry major named David Hackworth, a Korean War veteran who had served in the 101st at Fort Campbell and in its 1st Brigade in Vietnam. I was also able to acquire copies of a highly readable series of studies prepared by the Army's Human Resources Research Office (HUMMRO) branch at Fort Benning on the platoon leader in combat. It dealt with the full range of demands on platoon leaders in Vietnam; I especially remember one on how to cope with sleeplessness. We made this series required reading for each platoon leader and a mandatory text for the battalions' officer schools.

In September I had the opportunity to accompany General Barsanti and his party on a week-long orientation trip to Vietnam, where our host was the 1st Infantry Division. That division had perfected a technique in which at about 1600 daily each battalion in the field would halt operations to prepare a fortified defense position. CH-47 "hooks" would haul in barbed wire, sandbags, and so on so that by nightfall every soldier on the perimeter could complete a foxhole with overhead cover. Although the Big Red One had often defended such positions with considerable enemy body count, the tactic left the night to the enemy who used it to consolidate his hold on the people. General Barsanti and the rest of us vowed that we would not adopt this tactic.

We received first rate troops, officers and men. I saw each officer and many of the senior NCOs. One day Jerry Allen, S1, introduced a tall fine looking officer as 2d Lieutenant Pershing. When asked, young Pershing verified that he was the grandson of General John J. Pershing who had commanded the AEF. I was moved by our connection with his grandfather, whom I had long admired. I assigned Lieutenant Pershing to the 1/502.

In the final few weeks the troop line was a beehive of activity as companies and battalions organized separate loads for air and sea shipment and began packing the vehicles that we would take with us by air. The sea train, due to arrive many weeks after air movement, included Conex containers with less essential items; we would fight on

arrival by air with what we carried by air. (In our sea train I packed a priceless set of briefing charts that I had brought back from my 1963-64 Vietnam tour, where I had been senior advisor to the ARVN 21st Infantry Division; I never saw it again.) Jim White, S4, would be last to leave, remaining for a few days to complete shipment of the sea train and to turn over our barracks and station property to the 6th Infantry Division.³

We called the 1/501 "Geronimo Red" and the 2/501 "Geronimo White;" the 1/502 was "First Strike." At the end of our six weeks of unit training, I assembled the entire brigade in Mann Theater, told them where we now believed we were heading (to Cu Chi base camp near Saigon, home of the 25th Infantry Division), confirmed that we would wear the full-color division patch into combat as the Screaming Eagles always had,⁴ gave the troops a pep talk, ending with "Geronimo Red! Are you Ready to Go?" with "Yeaaaa" the responding shout -- and doing the same for the 2/501 and 1/502 in turn.

Meanwhile Russ Miller and Jim White oversaw the development of loading plans that would fit our personnel, weapons, and most vehicles into C-141 Starlifters for air movement. The brigade would be part of Operation Eagle Thrust, the unprecedented deployment by air of 10,000 troops and 5,000 tons of equipment of the 101st Airborne Division to Vietnam. (20,000 tons would move by sea.) Having departed November 20th, the division advance party, including a contingent from the 2d Brigade, was already in Vietnam. The division air movement would begin December 11th with the departure of the division commander and his party; they would arrive on the 13th, local time, with the Commander in Chief, Military Airlift Command, General Estes, piloting the lead C-141. An arrival ceremony involving General Estes and General Barsanti was scheduled.

Before leaving I acquired from the Gate Three Printers outside Fort Campbell a large quantity of Christmas cards for men of the brigade to send home from Vietnam upon arrival. They showed the brigade colors with the words "Merry Christmas from the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division -- Ready to Go -- On the Scene and On the Job."

Thanksgiving weekend I went home to be with my family, and the next weekend travelled to Charleston, SC, to visit my parents. From letters of our last two weeks to my wife:

"It's cold here. The troops shiver because they have turned in all their really warm clothes and have mostly their sweaters to keep them warm. We are gradually regaining our men as they come back from leave and morning PT runs look bigger by com-

³The delay suited Jim White, S-4, because on November 13, as he reminded me recently, he had become father of twins. Jim also reminded me that the next day I visited his wife, Maureen, in the Fort Campbell hospital and presented her with a "Grand Job Pennant," an award I used to recognize superior performance (I got the name for this award from an admired more senior colleague of an earlier time, George I. Forsythe). Accompanied by a certificate that the recipient could retain, the Grand Job Pennant, to be kept for a week, was a 10 inch high wood flagstaff on a round case, with a pennant at its top showing the brigade colors.

⁴Soon after the first combat troops arrived in Vietnam, and largely because the 1st Cavalry Division had a large yellow shoulder patch with a horse's head on it, the word went out to dye patches so that colors were subdued. The 101st's 1st Brigade did not dye its Screaming Eagle patch.

pany. The pressure is really on as we pack up and make up our aircraft loads. "We are about "Ready to Go" and remaining items will go ahead on schedule. The troops are ready -- more than ready actually. The problem this remaining week will be to keep their high spirits and natural tension under control. The young men like beer and shouting "Geronimo!" and roughhousing. I can't blame them, but we have to keep the lid on to keep them from fighting with 'legs'⁵ and such.

"Each battalion is having its review, and yesterday was 1/502's day. They retired Sergeant Strike Eagle, battalion mascot, to his new home at the Rod and Gun Club, ceremonially. Today the 2/501 has its review and church services. I give each battalion a talk with slides of our new home, which they appreciate. The 6th Infantry Division, which will replace the 101st at Fort Campbell, has its commanders here but they have no men.

"The post has been strangely different. It will be quite a different place without the airborne units. The big Christmas decoration on post headquarters shows the Third Army patch on one side and the Sixth Division six sided red star on the other. No sign of a 101st patch until night before last someone from the division sneaked up on the roof and hung a big division patch over the six pointed star!

"We leave this afternoon. I won't have time today to see anyone to say goodbye -- I've done that already. Time to go to work."

Late on the afternoon of December 13th, aircraft carrying the 2d Brigade began flying out of Campbell Army Airfield.

Twenty years later it was satisfying to read in Sergeant Charles Gadd's book, Line Doggie... "It was snowing lightly... when our C-141 Starlifter ascended from the runway at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. We were a well-trained group--A Company, 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry--an element of Uncle Sam's proud 101st Airborne Division... Most of us were replacements... from every aspect of training that the Army had to offer--military police, armor, artillery, mechanics, clerks, cooks... but three months of intense infantry training had honed us to the sharpness of expensive cutlery."⁶

While making due allowance for pride-based hyperbole on the part of Sergeant Gadd, he had it right. Our limited time to get ready reflected General Westmoreland's urgent need for reinforcements and so we were not fully-trained. But we were good and we felt good about ourselves. Above all, we were disciplined. With one exception, our mortar training (to be discussed in the next chapter), we had used well every hour of the time that had been given us.

⁵Paratroopers refer to non-jumper soldiers as "legs."

⁶Charles Gadd, Line Doggie: Foot Soldier in Vietnam, Presidio Press, Novato CA, 1987. p. 1

Chapter 2. Cu Chi

The Daily S3 Journal at the 2d Brigade command post at Cu Chi logged me in at 1615 December 15th 1967. The brigade colors and I had been met upon landing at Bien Hoa by Earl Keesling, who had very capably commanded our advance party and had things about as ready as could have been wished.

A later entry, at 1745, said that "1-502 [our lead battalion] closed Cu Chi base camp."

From a letter to my wife, 17 December:

"Two days at Cu Chi and it seems like two weeks. Lots to do and lots to be done. We have a fairly good area to settle into, but all battalions have plenty of work. We are concentrating on the basics -- water, lights, mess halls, showers. Very few days of this, then we must begin training again, shaking down our men to their new environment. We have begun to run early each morning before it gets too hot.

"We are about 15 miles NW of Saigon, in a big base of the 25th Infantry Division -- one of dozens of units and thousands of men in this camp. All battalions are about in, and two more days should see the end of the move -- artillery and all. The dry season has been on for a month now, and the place is dusty. And very busy -- helicopters all about."

Cu Chi was the home of the 25th Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Fillmore K. Mearns, and was in the area of responsibility of the Army of Vietnam (ARVN) III Corps, the commander of which also commanded the Vietnamese government's Military Region III and the province chiefs' military forces known as Regional Forces and Popular Forces. The 2d Brigade was not under General Mearns' opcon; except for perimeter defense, we got our orders from the 101st Airborne Division.

The U.S. command in the same area was known as II Field Forces, commanded by Lieutenant General Frederick M. Weyand. The Cu Chi camp had been built smack in the middle of one of the worst areas of VC control in the III Corps area. Indeed it was said that the camp had been built on top of some of the notorious VC tunnels. Our three battalions immediately took over sectors of the Cu Chi perimeter.

Each sector had in place several bands of barbed wire and concertina seeded with Claymore antipersonnel mines that when detonated could sweep the area with devastating small fragments. Spaced about ten meters apart along the perimeter were numbered two-man bunkers with overhead cover. Manned by two riflemen or by a machine gunner and assistant, these positions covered the obstacles with fire. Each bunker had a telephone to the battalion TOC (tactical operations center, or command post). The batta-

lion's mortars were in position to fire on close-in targets when ordered, and artillery batteries plotted deeper concentrations. In many bunkers the troops had a Starlight scope night vision device; this first generation equipment often gave an impression of movement in and beyond the wire where actually there was none.

Nights on the bunker line were rarely quiet. Occasionally the VC would probe the wire, or fire into the perimeter with small arms. Sometimes a bunker team would see shadows with its Starlight scope. The VC would often lob mortars, and occasionally fire 122 mm rockets, into the base camp.

Journal entries, from 2/501¹...

- 20 Dec, 1505: From Bde: Increase alertness for the period 201800-210700 Dec 67. Requires 4 men per bunker, 2 awake at all times. Sector reaction force on 15 min standby.
- 21 Dec, 1937: Bunker 46 fired M79 rounds at a person stripped to the waist. Individual turned to left.
- 25 Dec, 0230 From Bde: There continues to be considerable activity around the perimeter, some of it the result of personnel from the Cu Chi base camp engaging in unauthorized discharge of weapons and flares. Recent activities at bunker 12 may be an enemy penetration. Battalion commanders should be advised of the foregoing and should insure control in their sectors, with particular attention to fire discipline and rules of engagement.
- 25 Dec, 2159: Col Cushman enroute to bunker line.

Complying with orders we carried out shakedown inspections for unauthorized pyrotechnics and flares, with negative results. For both Christmas and New Year's Day, both sides declared a kind of "truce" or "cease fire." This proved meaningless; our people made no change in readiness, and the enemy continued to probe.

I made a practice of emphasizing sanitation, the mess halls, and other preventive medicine, and I reviewed the sick call data daily. From a letter of December 23d:

"Our troops are doing fine, impressing visitors no end with their ready smiles and high spirits. Less than one man in a hundred is going on sick call, and then mostly for colds brought on by a shift in climate. Major Allen is in the hospital with bronchitis -- a chronic cold in Fort Campbell, plus a long and fatiguing plane ride. He slept twenty hours

¹I copy journal entries exactly as written throughout without regard to their style or grammar, but correcting obvious misspellings and inserting ellipses (...) for words not copied.

straight and is feeling much better. Should be out in a day or two. The Bob Hope show comes the 28th, bringing all activities to a halt. It's nice of them to set this up, but I would rather be training. Troops with time on their hands in this environment get into trouble."

From a later letter:

"The troops enjoyed Bob Hope and his troupe.² He has quite funny lines, but it is disillusioning to see him have to read them from four-foot high prompter cards out there in front of him in the audience, shuffled by one of his assistants on the TV camera stand."

"We have TV here -- taped shows of several weeks back sometimes, and football games a week or so old. The comforts of home are well provided. Cold showers are one of the main unpleasant features of life for the soldier. You would think that in the tropics a warm shower would not be wanted, but it is very welcome."

We soon began our in-country training program. Special schools and training began for mines and booby traps, and so on. The 25th Infantry Division was running an excellent jungle warfare training school; we sent officers and NCOs there. The Cu Chi district advisor briefed our battalion and company commanders on the situation in his district. Company commanders and platoon leaders began helicopter recons of the area.

On December 21st our platoon leaders and platoon sergeants began accompanying units of the 25th Infantry Division on local operations. The 2d Brigade's first casualty was an officer who had been with a platoon from the 25th Infantry Division.

Our small civil affairs staff began to link up with local authorities. From the brigade journal of December 29th: "Brigade Civil Affairs personnel purchased and delivered 60 kilos whitewash, 10 kilos green enamel, and 6 kilos yellow dye to the village office in Tan Phu Trung. This paint and whitewash is to be used to refinish medical dispensary in Ap Moi II hamlet. Work to begin Monday, labor provided by villagers. Civil Affairs personnel obtained medical supplies for maternity hospital at Son Loc hamlet."

The legendary John Vann was the director of CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development) for the Vietnamese Military Region 3 in which we operated, reporting to General Weyand, the II Field Force commander. Years later he told me that in a commanders meeting at about this time he told General Weyand that something unprecedented had happened in his region: Colonel Cushman, commanding the 101st's 2d Brigade, had actually visited Vann's local province senior advisor and asked what his brigade could do to assist him and the province chief. Remembering my experience as

²The 1/502, out on an operation that day that I describe later, missed the show.

division senior advisor in the Delta in 1963-64, I had thought this the natural thing to do. It was a measure of how skewed was our approach to the Vietnam problem that this was unusual for a brigade commander.

By December 23d, rifle squads were conducting squad technique of fire training with live ammunition in training areas beyond the perimeter. The night of 23-24 December, 2/501 sent out its first ambush patrol; negative results. On December 27th 2/501 conducted platoon live firing exercises in local training areas.

That same day the 1/502 went outside the perimeter for its first operation, and our in-country training suddenly became very realistic. 1/502 suffered, and division wondered about the 2d Brigade. From my 30 December report to General Barsanti:

"This action of the 1-502 Infantry was the battalion's first training operation outside the perimeter of Cu Chi base camp. The action took place in an area of operations around Xon Moi, Bao Cap, and Bao Tron. Inasmuch as this area some 3 kilometers east of the camp had been patrolled by elements of the 25th Infantry Division's 2d Brigade and 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry, for several weeks without significant enemy contact, it was considered to be appropriate for a limited battalion size sweep and night security mission.

"The battalion (minus one company held at base camp as a rapid reaction force), exited Cu Chi camp, moved southeast along a road for about a mile, then moved northeast across country to its planned night position another mile distant. The battalion formation was C Company on the left, A Company on the right, and B Company following, all companies with platoons in column. Necessary support had been arranged including air support on call, a light fire team standing by, artillery fire plans supporting the advance, artillery registered, and Chinook resupply.

"Halfway across country to the planned night position, the battalion command group, following C Company, encountered a booby trap and minefield. Two mines detonated, with no casualties. As the advance continued, A Company's lead platoon, moving in open formation with scouts well forward, came through low thick vegetation to an open field. Two scouts moved forward along the left (north) edge of this field. At 1450, when they were within ten meters of the hedgerow, the two scouts received heavy enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire at close range. One scout was killed instantly and the other wounded.

"An intense fire fight at close range ensued, with A Company bringing two platoons on line and delivering a heavy volume of fire against concealed and well dug in enemy positions. Artillery and air were not brought onto the enemy position because the friendly and enemy lines were too close together. Withdrawal would have left wounded men behind. Instead, the light fire team was called in and at 1545 began strafing the

enemy position. At 1551 one gunship of the light fire team was shot down by a large caliber projectile into its rotor blades. [Note: The two-man crew was killed. JHC]

"The fire fight subsided at approximately 1750, the killed and wounded were recovered, the helicopter was stripped, and all elements closed into the night defensive position by 1900 and dug in for the night. 630 rounds of 105mm artillery were fired during the night, around the defensive perimeter and into areas where the enemy had been encountered during the day.

"The two KIA and 6 of the 8 WIA in this action were from A Company. Four of these were from small arms fire and the remainder from booby traps and grenades. One C Company casualty was from a punji stake and the other by a grenade fragment.

"The following day, 28 December, D Company was lifted into the battalion position. Tunnel clearing teams were employed and an extensive tunnel complex, with bunkers, storage rooms, and a kitchen, was cleared and destroyed. Blood pools were found within these tunnels. Small arms fire was received and returned inside the tunnels by the tunnel clearing teams. Booby traps and mines were destroyed in place, including one antitank mine. Documents were taken. During this day, two additional men were wounded, one by a punji stake, and one by a booby trap.

"Beginning at 1400 the 28th, the battalion was extracted, closing into camp by 1715."³

We took this action very seriously. What had gone wrong?, I wondered. How could we have done better? Clearly the area around Cu Chi was dangerous VC-infested territory, with tunnels a VC specialty. Indeed, on December 23d the 25th Infantry Division had reported that its military police contingent was fired on as it was departing one of the Cu Chi camp's gates, with "one man WIA."

Jack Bishop had been a squad leader in World War II and a platoon leader and company commander in Korea. I trusted him to run a good battalion. I felt the same way about Dick Tallman -- who as a machine-gunner in the 42d Infantry Division in Europe had in

³In the mid-1980s I received this letter:

"Airborne. Hello sir, I am Harry Adams, life #145 [101st Airborne Division Association]. I see that you have a small life member number also...

"What I am writing about is this. I want to thank you for showing us, the common foot soldiers, something of the officer corps that we could be proud of as Americans.

"I was in Co. B, 1/502d Abn Inf. I deployed with the division on Operation Eagle Thrust Dec 12th, 1967.

"While operating around Cu Chi in late Dec. 1967 we had several men killed from Co. A including the commanding officer, first sergeant, and a platoon leader. The bodies were badly burned & blown apart. The usually helpful Dustoff [medevac helicopters] refused to transport them back to Cu Chi.

"The battle continued and then your chopper landed. You stepped out and ordered your personal crew to "take these boys home." You stayed there with us with pistol drawn.

"Sir, that was the finest act I saw by an officer in Vietnam. You gained the respect of the finest men in the world, the common foot soldier. No officer could have done better. H.R. Adams, Sr. All the way!" I remember that event. I did not think what I did was remarkable.

February 1945 earned a battlefield commission and had then resigned to enter West Point with the class of 1949 -- and about Pete Piotrkowski, the youngest of the three battalion commanders, but also a veteran of Europe in World War II and of Korea. And I was entirely confident in their people. So we took the pain of the 1/502's fruitless, casualty-producing contact, and vowed to do better.

Two days later disaster struck again. From the 2/501 operation order of 28 December:

"2/501 Inf moves by foot at 290730 to area one, establishes defensive perimeter and conducts Phase II training... Companies conduct search and destroy operations on order in assigned AOs..."

From a letter of December 31:

"We had an unfortunate accident in 2/501 day before yesterday. A mortar round was incorrectly aimed, through human error, and landed on our own men, killing four and wounding ten. This has been tough to take for the battalion and for all of us. Some fine men were hit."

This was A Company, 2/501. The 4.2 mortar platoon had made a 200 mil error in deflection. Immediate corrective action ensued. Journal entries, from 2/501...

31 Dec, 0927: From Bde: Delayed entry: All mortar plat ldrs must be at the Bde S3 at 1500 for a briefing on training to be conducted.

31 Dec, 1620: From Bde: All mortar platoon leaders and platoon sgts with no exceptions will met at Bde Conf room at 1900 tonight.

1 Jan, 0940 All personnel assigned to mortar plts (81 and 4.2) will be released for tng during the period 2 Jan 68 thru 8 Jan 68, 0700 to 1800... they must be exempt from other details during those hours.

5 Jan, 1440: From Bde: By 1500, have the number of personnel who are assigned to your mortar platoons who attended training at Fort Benning. Number assigned, and number who attended training.

Although mortar accidents were common in Vietnam, in retrospect to me it was clear that our mortar training at Fort Campbell had left something to be desired. Mortars are different. They call for zero-defects calculations at the fire direction center and for precise settings on the mortar sights. They call for checks. Their rounds, especially the 4.2, are devastating on impact.

Our time at Fort Campbell was short. I should have pulled together all of the brigade's mortar squads and platoons for at least three weeks training, and would have held at

least a week of refresher training for all mortarmen in the final four weeks before departure. The only special arrangements for our mortar training had been at Fort Benning.

Mortar problems, often caused by bad ammunition, had plagued us from the beginning. On December 23 we had received word on a suspended lot of 81mm mortar ammunition, and we continued to do so. On 10 January, for example, there was another.

January 3-5, the 2/501 conducted its first airmobile operation. Complete with air, gunship, and artillery support, this was a search and destroy operation and tunnel demolition operation into the Filhol woods, a VC-infested area not far from the Cu Chi camp, in which the 2/501 discovered a brand new enemy base camp.

We were now beginning to operate at greater distances from the Cu Chi base camp and to stay out on operations for two or three days at a time. These were what were known as "search and destroy" operations -- with rare enemy contact unless the enemy sought it. The advantage was with the enemy. We used ambushes. But results were few and casualties, while few also, were not outnumbered all that much by "body count"

We began to have changes in company command. On January 5th Captain John C. Speedy III moved from battalion S-2 of the 1/502 to take command of C Company, replacing Captain A.J. Jankovsky, who had been seriously wounded on January 4th. Speedy's successor in the S-2 slot was Captain Frank R. Dimmitt, formerly commanding E Company. 1st Lieutenant James P. Doogan replaced Dimmitt in command.

From a letter home of January 10th:

"I spend hours each day in a helicopter, visiting various places and looking at places we may operate. We have been given many planning missions, and a different one each week it seems. In another week or so our 'training' status will end and we will be on operations.... The US fights its own war over here. So far I have spoken only a few words of 'hello' in Vietnamese."

About this time we had a visit from General Westmoreland; I wrote my wife that "he seemed preoccupied." What happened was that he asked me what our casualties had been so far, and how many enemy we had to our credit -- then frowned when he heard the numbers.

From a letter of January 16th:

"We have a 'mission' now -- still around Cu Chi, but something that is ours... The battalions are doing fine."

This would be Operation Normandy, run by brigade from our Cu Chi command post. The 2d Brigade was no longer in the "in-country orientation and training" phase. On January 16th, a typical entry in the brigade journal reported...

"1-502... engaged five sampans in the Saigon River at 0100 vic [coordinates] -- all were sunk... Enemy losses were 4 VC KIA (BC)⁴ and 6 VC KIA (possible). At 1135, Co B, vicinity [coordinates] engaged ten VC in a tunnel complex with bunkers and overhead cover. Air strikes and artillery were called in. The area was searched resulting in three VC POW. At 1916, Co C engaged twenty VC with automatic weapons vicinity [coordinates]. Air, artillery, and 4.2" mortar fires were directed into the area resulting in six VC KIA (BC). At 2145 the unit, vicinity [coordinates] was subjected to an unknown number of rounds from automatic weapons. Fire was returned with artillery with unknown results. Contact was broken at 2212."

On January 18th, the brigade journal reported the 1/501 conducting search and destroy/clearing operations in its area of operations, with various sightings of VC, some VC fire received, but no known results. That day the 2/501, coordinating with the district chief and in company with two platoons of regional forces and two of popular forces, and the intelligence platoon from Phu Hoa province, conducted a cordon and operation at Tan Hoa village not far from Cu Chi. Intended to be a night (early morning) surprise, the operation produced "23 suspects detained and reported to province." The 1/502 was destroying tunnel complexes with demolitions, tear gas, tactical air, and artillery.

Early on January 18th division informed us of a proposed operation in "AO Attala," in and around Minh Thanh in the Michelin rubber plantation, near Minh Thanh to the north, to work with the 5th ARVN Division on riverine operations. The brigade journal of the 18th closed with this entry: "All TF elements were informed that Operation Normandy terminates on 19 Jan. Units will return to base camp and prepare for future operations." All brigade elements having closed Cu Chi, on the evening of the 19th the enemy attacked that base camp with 75mm recoilless rifle fire, killing three men of the 1/502 with a direct hit on a bunker and wounding five. Including those casualties, the short Operation Normandy had resulted in 3 KHA and 8 WHA and had netted 19 VC KIA (BC) and 14 (possible), plus 2 confirmed POW, 2 AK-47s, and 1 US carbine captured.

Using the 20th for preparation, on January 21st the 2d Brigade Task Force departed Cu Chi, moving by ground convoy and helicopter lift into the Attala area of operations "to conduct search and destroy operations, operating with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regi-

⁴The initials (BC) stand for "body count." Earlier in the Vietnam War, when unit claims of casualties suffered by the enemy were often viewed as exaggerated, the U.S. chain of command insisted that before casualties could be reported the enemy bodies must be seen and counted and, this having been done, that "(BC)" be added to the report. Before long "body count" became a measure of a unit's success, especially when compared with the casualties suffered by the American unit. In time, "body count" became a measure of the success of the entire Vietnam effort. Although adopted by authorities as high as the Secretary of Defense, it was an unsatisfactory measure.

ment in the area of operations of the US 1st Infantry Division, to locate and destroy the 165th Viet Cong regiment. Brigade Admin Order 1-68, prepared by Major White, S4, spelled out the movement details. The 12th Aviation Group provided 75 C-H 47 sorties, and the ground movement took place in four serials. At 0818 that morning I left Cu Chi by helicopter with a command group for a meeting at the command post of the 2/2d Infantry (Mech) battalion where with General Clay and some of the division staff we coordinated operations for Operation Casey that would begin the next day.

Operation Casey called for the 11th ACR and the 2d Brigade, cross-reinforced, to operate together in and near the VC-infested Michelin rubber plantation under the control of the 101st Airborne Division in a combined mechanized/airmobile infantry operation. The 11th ACR placed its 2d squadron under the 2d Brigade, and the 2d Brigade placed the 1/501st under the 11th ACR.

We were now operating, and for the rest of this history would continue to operate, as the 2d Brigade Task Force, which at this period in time was officially composed of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Brigade, and, usually, the following units:

1-501 Abn Inf Bn	2d FASC Plat, 501st Sig Bn
2-501 Abn Inf Bn	2d Plat, 101st MP Co
1-502 Abn Inf Bn	Team, 101st MI Co
1-321 Abn Arty Bn	2d Platoon, 265 Radio Research Co
A Btry, 1-11 Arty Bn	34th Photo Interpretation Team
C Co, 326 Engr Bn	Support Units, 101st Div Spt Cmd,
B Co, 326 Med Bn	incl 2d Plat, A Co, 801st Maint Co

The 2d Brigade Task Force closed into assigned locations near Minh Thanh by 1707 the 21st, occupied and defended its assembly areas, and prepared for operations. The brigade command post was at the village of Chon Thanh. The 1/501 had only its A Company in the area, already chopped to the 11th ACR; the remainder of the battalion would helilift into the area directly from Cu Chi the next day, January 22d.

A letter home of January 25th summarized what then happened:

"We have had four hectic days beating the bushes up-country, vicinity of An Loc, with no significant result but with lots of good experience. We came back yesterday and today are preparing to go much farther north. By the time you receive this we will be in the vicinity of Hue... working under the 1st Cavalry Division. It appears that they need us up there. It should be interesting."

That story began at 0915 on the morning of January 22d, while the 1/501 (-) was about midway in its helilift. Division at that hour ordered us to cancel the 1/501 move and to assemble the entire battalion back at Cu Chi, so that it could move by C-130 aircraft the

next day from the Cu Chi airstrip to "the vicinity of Da Nang" far to the north in the I Corps Tactical Zone of the RVN.

This was not a total surprise; we had known for a few days that General Westmoreland was concerned about an enemy buildup in the far north of the RVN, that he had been considering reinforcing his forces up there, and that our brigade might be involved.⁵ A Battery of the 1/321 and the 1/501 battalion trains moved by motor to Cu Chi, closing that evening. At 1700 on that very day, the 22d, a 40-man advance party of the 1/501 with three quarter-ton trucks and trailers departed by air.

Operation Casey continued nonetheless on the 23d. In the 2d Brigade sector, TF 1-502 attacked on the left with a troop of 2-11 ACR, TF 2-11 with two of our companies was in the center, and TF 2-501 was on the right, also with a cavalry troop. All units crossed the line of departure at 1100. Supported by 1/321 Artillery, units made sporadic contact, swept through previously occupied VC base camps in their assigned zones, and took no casualties. The night of 22-23 all units established ambushes.

The 2d Brigade journal, 23 January, datelined Chon Thanh, laconically reported that...

"Major activity this date centered around a change in mission of the Brigade TF. The Div CG arrived at 1000 hours to confer with CO 11 ACR, CO 2d Bde, and CO 1-321 Arty concerning Operation Casey and redeploying the 2d Brigade to Phu Bai, RVN, where it will come under the operational control of the 1st Air Cavalry Division...

"Essentially the Brigade deploys 1-501 by air on 23 Jan [this date] from Cu Chi; 1-321 moves to Lai Khe by air and road on 24 Jan and stages to Phu Bai from that location on 25 Jan; 2-501 moves to Cu Chi by road and air the afternoon of 24 Jan, re-equips and moves by air to Phu Bai on 25 Jan; HHC (-) conducts motor march from Chon Thanh to Cu Chi at 241000 Jan and prepares for movement to Phu Bai on 26 Jan. 1-502 continues current operations in assigned sector and redeploys to Cu Chi on 25 Jan for further redeployment to Phu Bai on 26 Jan. 2-11 ACR reverts to opcon 11th ACR, which assumes responsibility of the northern sector of AO Attala."

That journal for 23 Jan relates that "1-501 Inf and A 1-321 departed Cu Chi, with all essential fighting equipment, by C-130 aircraft for Phu Bai, RVN [no coordinates given but its airfield was located just south of Hue, in the next-to-northernmost province of South Vietnam] as the initial element of the Brigade which will deploy to the area during

⁵At our level we had not heard that on January 15th General Creighton W. Abrams, Westmoreland's deputy commander, had ordered Major General John J. Tolson III, commanding the 1st Air Cavalry Division, to move his division base and the entire division (minus one brigade task force) from An Khe in Vietnam's central highlands, where it had been since arriving in-country in mid-1965, 200 miles north to the I Corp Tactical Zone, north of Hue. MACV had never made a division-size move of this magnitude. The Cav's 2d Brigade task force would remain in the south for a while, and our brigade task force would be the Cav's third brigade.

the period 22-26 Jan 68. A total of 21 C-130 sorties lifted 806 personnel, 51 vehicles, and 7 equipment pallets. The first chalk⁶ departed 0835 hours, last chalk departed 1916 hours, rear detachment from 1-321 Arty and communications for Bde HHC will depart Cu Chi on 24 Jan for Phu Bai."

The summary also reported that "units deployed in AO Attala reported only sporadic contact this date. Task organization and sectors remained unchanged -- TF 1-502 deployed left, TF 2-11 Cav center, and TF 1-501 right.2400. -- Journal closed. Jerome F. Sullivan, SGM."

Sergeant Major Sullivan was our unflappable and indispensable operations sergeant. Russ Miller, Jerry Allen, and Jim White were our equally unflappable and valued S3, S1, and S4. An unsung hero was Earl Keesling, brigade executive officer, who kept things coordinated and moving on track back in brigade rear at Cu Chi. I simply do not know how we could have carried this operation off, orchestrating the departure on short notice of an entire brigade task force from four airfields, without the teamwork and sheer competence displayed by people like these throughout the brigade task force and all its units, from lieutenant colonel down to the last trooper.

The journal for the next day, 24 January, still datelined Chon Than, reported that all plans of the 23d were duly executed without significant incident. C Company, 326 Engineers, travelled to Cu Chi with the Brigade HHC. On the 24th, B/2-501, which had been providing security for the division command post at Bien Hoa, was relieved by C/1-502, which would not go to Phu Bai, yet. The final journal entry for 24 January: "2400. TF 1-501 remains at Phu Bai."

At 0800 on the 25th our CP closed at Chon Thanh and brigade rear assumed control of the brigade task force. An hour later I departed Chon Thanh by helicopter for Lai Khe to visit with the 1/321 Arty, thence to Cu Chi.

At 0733 on the morning of the 26th, with the brigade tactical command post, I left on the first aircraft from Cu Chi. Earl Keesling remained behind to push out the remainder of the brigade task force. The 1st Cavalry Division had decided that the 1/502, our last battalion to depart Cu Chi, would fly directly to Quang Tri where it would be opcon to the Cav's 1st Brigade. The rest of the brigade task force would continue arriving at the Phu Bai airfield, scheduled to complete its move by the 28th. By the evening of the 26th, the bulk of the 2d Brigade brigade task force that was scheduled for Phu Bai had arrived. That night our units would be going into their assigned positions at the airfield or at LZ El Paso, the Cav's base camp. The 1/502d task force would arrive at Quang Tri on the 27th.

⁶The term "chalk" derives from the practice of putting numbers in white chalk on the sides of the aircraft which an airborne unit was to use for an airborne assault, and then identifying members of the unit by "chalk number."

From the 2d Brigade Situation Report of 1500, January 26th, to the Commanding General, 101st Airborne Division:

"2d Bde CO and TAC CP group... arrived Hue-Phu Bai approximately 261000 Jan. CO and party moved to the 1st Air Cav Div CP. CO reported to CG, 1 ACD, at 261130 Jan. 2d Bde forward CP opened at 261200 Jan... [N]o difficulties encountered in the move from Cu Chi to Hue-Phu Bai... J H Cushman, Col, Inf, Commanding."

My letter home of January 25th had ended, "Well, tomorrow the 2d Brigade enters a new phase... Should be real interesting." True enough!

Glad to be out of Cu Chi, we were about to embark on our great adventure in northern I Corps.⁷

⁷How we happened to be selected for the move north I do not know. However it came about, I for one -- and I believe most of the brigade agreed -- was pleased to be leaving Cu Chi.

Chapter 3. LZ Jane; The First Ten Days

The 1st Air Cavalry Division (or 1st ACD, or 1st Air Cav) had been in Vietnam since mid-1965. It had started life at Fort Benning in 1964 as the 11th Air Assault Division, which had been organized from scratch to test the recommendations of the Howse Board. This board had been formed by the Army in 1962, with Secretary of Defense McNamara's encouragement, to determine if major increases in air mobility might produce a qualitative improvement in Army forces operations. The Howse Board, at Fort Bragg, had supervised a test program that used troops of the 82d Airborne Division and other units.

By the spring of 1965, the 11th Air Assault Division tests were essentially complete and the Army was about to disband the 11th Air Assault Division. However, in early 1965 the Johnson administration began seriously considering sending U.S. ground forces to Vietnam to shore up the rapidly deteriorating situation in the Vietnamese countryside. In June 1965, the Army exchanged the colors of the 1st Cavalry Division, which was then stationed in Korea, with the colors of the 2d Infantry Division, which was at Fort Benning. The 2d Infantry Division and the 11th Air Assault Division were then combined to form the new 1st Air Cavalry Division at Fort Benning, and the newly-named 2d Infantry Division took up its life in Korea where it is to this day.

Major General H.W.O. Kinnard, who had commanded the 11th Air Assault Division for more than a year, commanded the 1st Air Cavalry Division in its new configuration. The staff and commanders of the former 11th Air Assault Division were the nucleus of the commanders and staffs of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, which immediately began filling its ranks and preparing to deploy to Vietnam. In mid-July President Johnson announced that he was sending to Vietnam both the 1st ACD and the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division from Fort Campbell. Both contingents arrived in Vietnam in late summer, by sea.

Commanded for another year in Vietnam by General Kinnard, the 1st ACD had by 1968 established an excellent reputation. Uniquely equipped with far more UH-1 Hueys, AH-1 Cobra gunships, and CH-47 "hooks" than any other division (and even with twin-engine Caribou fixed wing aircraft), it had developed air assault operations to perfection and was also highly regarded for its infantry operations (as had been the case in World War II, its "cavalry" battalions were really dismounted cavalry, or infantry). Its "aerial rocket artillery" and "air cavalry squadron" gunships were a unique and powerful feature. It had plentiful two-man LOH-6s, or "loaches." The Cav called its fire bases "landing zones," or "LZs."

The 1st Air Cav, which had left its 2d Brigade down south, was the first Army division to deploy into the area of operations of the III Marine Amphibious Force, the two divisions of which (1st MarDiv and 3d MarDiv) were under the command of Lieutenant General Robert Cushman, USMC. General Abrams had decided that the Cav would take over the large Marine base north of Hue, known as Camp Evans. In the interim, the Cav's division

command post, along with some division support units, was temporarily located in LZ El Paso, which was partly in a graveyard just north of the Phu Bai airfield.

Although the 101st's 1st Brigade had established its own excellent reputation since 1965, we were ourselves new, without a reputation as yet. Late the morning of January 26, Major General John J. Tolson III, division commander, welcomed me in his office. I had lunch at his mess, then a G3 briefing, then got very busy.

The 1st Cav was with our arrival now a three-brigade division. Its 1st Brigade was based out of Quang Tri and its 3d Brigade out of Camp Evans between Hue and Quang Tri. General Tolson had already decided that the 1/502 (actually TF 1/502, with a battery of the 1/321 and other units), which would be our last battalion to arrive from the south, would fly directly into Quang Tri the next day, the 27th, to be opcon¹ to his 1st Brigade, and that the rest of our brigade would assemble at LZ El Paso.

From the 1st Cav's Operations Journal of 26 January:

"2nd Bde, 101st Abn: Bde became opcon 1st Air Cav Division upon closure of Bde CP at LZ El Paso at 1200, and assumed control of 1-501 Abn. 1-501 assisted in security of LZ El Paso with three companies while its D Company air assaulted to [an area outside the perimeter] and conducted operations in that vicinity. 2-501 Abn closed LZ El Paso at 1810, opcon to 2d Bde, 101st Abn."

The 1/501 took over its sector of the perimeter that evening, and the 2/501 went into its positions the afternoon of the 27th.

¹"Opcon" is short for "operational control" and differs from "full command." Opcon connotes that the opcon unit is responsive to the tactical direction of the headquarters to which it is opcon, but does not look to that headquarters for personnel matters (e.g., replacements, promotions, awards) and certain logistic support (e.g., repair parts, replacement weapons or vehicles); those are the responsibility of the commander with "full command" or "full command less opcon." However, "consumable" supplies (rations, ammunition, fuel, fortification materials) are the responsibility of the "opcon" commander. In this situation, Jack Bishop looked to Colonel Donald Rattan, commanding the 1st Brigade, 1st Air Cav Div, for his tactical direction and his consumable supplies. For units not under another headquarters' opcon, the CG, 101st Airborne Division had true "full command," which means "responsible for everything." For me, opcon to the 1st Cav, he had "full command, less opcon," which still meant a lot.

I, as brigade commander, had no logistic resources of my own; the weapons, radios, vehicles ("end items") and replacements for my three scattered battalions came through the 101st Division Support Command (even when we were as far away as LZ Jane), and the consumables came through the supply points of the 1st Cav Div's support command, or through the depots that provided the Cav logistic support. Because the efficiency report of a commander was usually written not by the commander to whom he was opcon but by the commander who exercised full command (or "full command less opcon") a commander who was opcon only could on occasion demonstrate a certain lack of concern for what his "opcon only" commander thought of him. That could be dangerous, inasmuch as the "opcon only" commander was free to give his opinion to the "full command less opcon" commander (but on the other hand the latter often took the side of his own man temporarily removed from his own opcon). The commander with opcon is responsible for the mission accomplishment of the force, through the opcon channel; this gives him great moral authority over all his units, opcon or not. Complicated business, but these matters lie at the heart of military force operations.

The 1st Cav, with its units strung out along highway QL 1 from Hue to Quang Tri, was responsible for the security of that vital route. The Cav had on January 21st initiated Operation Jeb Stuart, which entailed search and destroy operations against VC and NVA forces in the coastal lowlands as well as into the mountains to the west known as enemy Base Area 101. On the 27th A and B Companies of 1/501, using Cav helicopters, each conducted company-size heliborne assaults and extractions in areas near LZ El Paso -- seeking enemy contact in operations of six or seven hours duration.

Meanwhile the C-130s carrying the 2d Brigade Task Force continued to arrive from various bases in the south, being pushed out by Jim White and Captain Birdwell of the S3 Section who were still down there -- and being tracked on arrival at the Phu Bai airfield by Earl Keesling, who organized them for onward movement.

We were entirely dependent on the 1st Cav for helicopter support. I told the 101st that we must at least have the three H-23s that belonged to brigade headquarters company, and that I especially wanted my own C&C ship from the division aviation battalion -- a UH-1 with radio console set that I had used daily while at Cu Chi.

From the 2d Brigade journal of 27 Jan:

- "1545: From Division Avn O: H-23s are enroute and will remain overnight about half-way to your location... Bde Avn O departed for Hue at 0800 today...
- "1620: To 1st Cav: Plans for tomorrow. 2d Bde units will concentrate on establishing defensive positions and readjustment of defense perimeter..
- "1840 From Captain Birdwell. There will be no more acft today -- 25 have been requested for tomorrow -- HHC Bde will be in the last few acft tomorrow.
- "2240: From Bde Rear: Today shipped 4 sorties from 1-502, 21 sorties 1-502 will be sent out on 28 Jan, plus HHC, FSE, Arty trains, 1-501 trains & pallets of 2-501 for a total of 41 sorties from Cu Chi. Also approximately 25 sorties at Tan Son Nhut including HHC rolling stock and other wheel loads. Have shipped to date 21 sorties on 23 Jan and 3 sorties on 24 Jan from Cu Chi, 32 sorties from Lai Khe, plus 43 sorties from Tan Son Nhut, and 34 more from Cu Chi.
- "2325 From G5, 1st ACD: No gravesites are to be disturbed while in LZ El Paso. No VN personnel are allowed in this area by order of the Province Chief.

The brigade task force continued to roll in. Entries from the Jan 28 brigade journal:

- "0945 At 0740 hours, 2 1/4 [ton trucks], 1 3/4 [ton] and 12 pax [passengers] from MPs and Sig arrived. At 0750, 2 3/4 and 6 pax from 501st Sig arrived. At 0900, 1 1/4T and 5 pax from 501st Sig arrived and 1 1/4T and 2 pax from TACP. At

0905, 4 1/4T and pax from HHC arrived. Convoy departed Hue-Phu Bai airfield for El Paso at 0950.

"1145 C/326 Engr: Present strength at this location -- 5 Off/97 EM plus 9 EM attached."

Meanwhile the 1/502, opcon to the 1st Brigade, 1st Air Cav, which already had four dismounted cav squadrons under it, was assigned the mission of "base security" at that brigade's LZs Sharon and Betty near Quang Tri.

While I was busy with my brigade on the 27th and 28th, including visits (in a UH-1 provided by the 1st Cav's 11th Aviation Group) to Phu Bai airfield and to the 1/502, the 1st Cav was deciding how it would reconfigure. The decision: The division CP and its division-base units would move from LZ El Paso to Camp Evans; the Cav's 3d Brigade CP would move ten kilometers south of Evans to LZ Sally, which was itself ten kilometers north of Hue; and our 2d Brigade CP, with one battalion, the 1/501, would relieve the 1st Bde's 1/5 Cav squadron at LZ Jane, near Hai Lang (10 km south of Quang Tri and 15 km north of Evans). The 1/5 Cav would go to the 3d Brigade, 1st ACD, leaving the Cav's 1st Bde at Quang Tri with four battalions, including the 1/502. The 2/501, intended to join us at LZ Jane later, would in the interim be assigned to perimeter security at Camp Evans.

From the 2d Brigade Journal of 29 January:

"1136 To Bde Rear: Need from Captain Birdwell total number of sorties programmed today and tomorrow by unit. Request Major White come forward today. Have Captain Birdwell close out Rear and get up here ASAP.

"1740 The Tet cease fire will be from 291800 - 310600 hrs... Battalions will conduct short range plat-size patrols and establish night ambush patrols. No H & I's will be fired during this period. Firing will be restricted to illumination and defensive fires if fired upon."

And from the journal's summary of that date, the 29th, this kicker:

"At 2053 the Bde received notification that the 1/501 and bde tac CP would move to LZ Jane on 30 January, one day earlier than previously planned." Without this decision, Tet 1968 would have caught us at Camp Evans.

I have found Copy 11, of 64 copies, of the 2d Brigade Frag Order 2, to OpOrd 5-68 (Operation Jeb Stuart), issued at 2300 on that night, January 29th. It is signed by Russ Miller, and is accompanied by Annex E (Route Overlay), with routes, times, and check points for two serials, to fit the 1:250,000 scale map. That frag order is a beauty. Its paragraph 2:

"Mission: TF 2d Bde (-) moves by motor... commencing 300830 Jan to LZ Jane vicinity YD378430), establishes FOB (forward operating base) and prepares to conduct operations in AO to be assigned."

Its paragraph 5b: "Command Group will be airborne during motor march."

I would be flying that day, January 30th, for the first time up north, in my own 101st Airborne Division C&C, console-equipped, UH-1, Eagle 122, with its big Screaming Eagle patch on the front. It had just arrived.

Vietnam conforms to the ancient Chinese calendar, for which in 1968 the first day of the New Year was January 31st. The New Year's celebration is called Tet by the Vietnamese. Tet celebrations began nationwide on New Years Eve, January 30.

Sergeant First Class (Retired) Timothy O'Connor, who was the platoon sergeant of the 2d Platoon, A Company, 1/501st Infantry, writes about the trip north from LZ El Paso on that January 30th:

"We travelled about eight miles north on Highway One when we could see the Imperial City of Hue... The people were starting to celebrate the new year called Tet... Holiday flags were flying and people were jamming the streets... We made it out of Hue and continued our trip north... We could see the mountains and jungle to the west and the South China Sea to the east. Our destination was the village of Hai Lang, about thirty miles north of Hue... We crossed a major bridge over the Song Bo river and continued our trip north. There were numerous villages along the way... Tet banners and the people looked like they were having a good time.

"When we reached Hai Lang we turned left at the crossroads and headed west... for about five miles and came to a large sized hill. The battalion commander passed the word that this area was going to be our LZ and fire support base. The place was called LZ Jane. Each company was assigned a sector of the perimeter. Alfa company was assigned the southern part of the LZ. I called the platoon together and told them that 'Charlie is watching us so let's dig our bunkers deep.'"²

From the brigade journal for 30 January, datelined "Vic Quang Tri":

"1824 To 1st ACD DTOC: Forward CP open at 1824, located at YD377430 [this was LZ Jane].

"1922 To 1st ACD DTOC: All elements serial 1 and serial 2 closed this location by 1922 hrs, no incidents.

²From pages 92-93 of Blood Brothers: Till Death do Us Part, by Timothy O'Connor (Carleton Press, New York, 1988).

"2245 2d Bde LnO (at 1st Cav command post) reports that 2d Bde will receive 5 + 2 helicopters for 31 Jan. To serve as reaction force. The C&C ships will come out of the 5 + 2 helicopters." (Note: "5 + 2" signifies five UH-1 "slicks" and two CH-47 troop lift "hooks." This was a trademark 1st Cav lift package.)

"The 1-501 has the mission of security for LZ Jane [having relieved 1/5 Cav, which had departed]. 2-501 remains at LZ El Paso, with responsibility for security of [1st ACD] units remaining at that location. TF 1-502 remains under the opcon of 1st Bde, 1st ACD [vic QuangTri]. The majority of TF support units are at Hue-Phu Bai airbase under the command of Bde XO -- additional units are still arriving from Cu Chi.

"The Bde TF is deployed along a NW-SE line from vicinity Quang-Tri to Hue-Phu Bai -- a distance of approximately 70 km. Journal closed. Signed: Jerome F. Sullivan."

My trip northwest from Hue by helicopter gave me an opportunity to observe the countryside along Highway 1 (called QL 1 by the Vietnamese), which paralleled the coast of the South China Sea some six to ten miles inland. The lowland was well populated farmland, much of it in rice paddies. The ground rose toward the mountains in the west. An unused rail line followed the general track of the highway. Off to my right as I flew over QL 1 was the famed "Street Without Joy," a secondary road that ran along the coast just this side of the sand dunes and beaches.³

Touching down at LZ Jane at nightfall, I told my helicopter pilot that LZ Jane was too dangerous for Eagle 122 to spend the night there, so he should "go south to a spot where it will be safe overnight -- and come back in the morning."

On the night of 30-31 January the North Vietnamese Army in South Vietnam, together with the Viet Cong in the South which they controlled, opened their 1968 Tet Offensive. It would change the course of the war.

I did not see Eagle 122 for three weeks. When I did it was on the US helipad in Hue City, with RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) and other holes in it, destroyed.

* * * * *

On the night of 30-31 January the combined Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces in South Vietnam with some 100,000 troops launched a coordinated attack

³In the chapter "Street Without Joy," in his 1958 book of the same name, war correspondent Bernard Fall tells of a 1953 battle in which the French used a 30-battalion force of infantry, airborne, armor, and marines, the latter landed over the beach, in an attempt to destroy the Viet-Minh 95th Regiment, whose harrassing actions from bases in the villages along that road had severely hampered operations of the French Army. Most of the 95th Regiment succeeded in slipping out of the planned encirclement. That action took place along the coast due west of Quang Tri. In 1967 Fall was killed in an ambush while accompanying U.S. Marines in an operation along the Street Without Joy.

nationwide. The VC/NVA attacked Saigon, 36 of the Republic of Vietnam's 43 province capitals, 64 of the RVN's 242 district capitals, and an uncounted number of field positions of U.S., South Korean, and RVN forces throughout the countryside. Enemy forces penetrated into the cities of Saigon, Da Nang, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, Kontum, Ban Me Thuot, Dalat, Phan Thiet, Can Tho, and Ben Tre. In the 1st Air Cav's area of operations, the enemy established lodgments in both Quang Tri and Hue -- committing eight battalions of its regular forces to Hue alone, which would take almost four weeks to recapture. For me the Tet offensive began when mortar and RPG fire awakened me a few minutes before 4:00 on the morning of the 31st. I rolled out of my cot and moved swiftly from my tent to the sandbag-protected brigade command post nearby. From the brigade journal:

"0405 1-501: A Co receiving 3 incoming mortar rounds, C Co receiving small arms fire.

"0410: 1-501: E Co reports incoming mortar rounds.

"0412 1-501: D Co reports 4 incoming mortar rounds, 4 WIA, one machine gun position took a hit.

"0415 1-501: Co Co reports 1 enemy KIA.

"0440 1-501: C Co reports 11 enemy KIA, all carrying demolition kits.

"0455 1-501: D Co reports 2 enemy KIA, C Co reports 12 enemy KIA total.

"0540 1-501: D Co estimates having received 20 rounds of RPG-2 fire; A Co estimates 4 rounds of RPG fire; C Co spotted enemy in wire, set off claymores and observed 3 secondary explosions presumably from satchel charges. As a result of these explosions and small arms fire, C Co reports 12 VC KIA and 2 VC WIA POW and D Co reports 2 VC KIA.

"0555 1-501 requests total of 2 medevacs for 5 litters and 2 ambulatory."

Let Charles Gadd, of A Company, tell the story as he remembers it:

"War came calling during our second night at LZ Jane.⁴ I was asleep on the rocky ground just beyond our foxhole (when) explosions and machine-gun bursts erased the silence of the night. The attack had come on the opposite side of the perimeter from us, but we were receiving stray mortar shells... An artificial dawn erupted as artillery and mortar teams rushed to their guns and fired round after round of illumination

⁴Charles Gadd on page 17 of Line Doggie. Gadd, who built his book years later from memories triggered by photos he had taken almost daily, kept no diary. His memory here was off; this was his first night in LZ Jane. He also overstates the casualty figures from this action as "thirty-five dead NVA and thirteen dead GIs."

shells. The pale yellow light from the illumination gave the landscape an eerie glow that would enable us to detect enemy movement among the scattered brush..."

By dawn the fight was over and I went out to look at the perimeter with Pete Piotrkowski. His troops, from the positions that they had built the evening before, had done well. They were now policing up the battlefield, engaging that enemy trying to slip away, patrolling out to 300 meters, finding blood stains, more dead and quantities of ammunition and explosives, and completing the medevac of, now, a total of three litter and three ambulatory; our battalion medics were patching up the remaining wounded, who would soon be back with their units.

This laconic report was the last entry in the 2d Brigade summary for January 31st:

"LZ Jane began receiving mortar & RPG fire at approx 0405H from Vic YD87284211. At 0427, units reported enemy ground activity to their front, enemy tried to penetrate 1-501 perimeter. By 0455, elements reported all quiet. 1-501 elements had 6 friendly WIAs and 14 NVA KIA, 3 NVA POW (med-evaced), 11 indiv wpns captured, a crew served wpn (RPG-2 launcher) and one flare pistol. Negative further activity reported."

From what we heard that morning from our troops still at Cu Chi -- from the 101st at Bien Hoa, from the Cav at Camp Evans, from Earl Keesling and his people at Phu Bai, from reports from the 1/502 and 2/501, and from listening to Armed Forces Radio, Vietnam -- it was clear that the enemy had struck very hard.

The next day, I wrote my first letter home since leaving Cu Chi:

"I'm sitting in my tent, pitched on a hillside about six miles south of Quang Tri, in the most northern coastal region of South Vietnam. We moved up to near Hue on the 26th, then up here day before yesterday... We are pretty much out of touch with what's going on in Vietnam, other than right around here. I gather that the North Vietnamese have mounted a very large and coordinated offensive which has apparently met with much success, although information is sketchy...

"We are doing all right. It's a mixed-up war, hard to comprehend from the inside, and I expect from the outside also... I have fine troops, who are doing well. We lost four last night to a direct mortar hit on their tent [the 2/501, at LZ El Paso]; it's always a tragic loss when something like that happens... But we also gave a good account of ourselves in an action last night, when the VC attacked one of our battalions to his regret...

"One remarkable feature of the war is the tenacity and endurance of the enemy, and his evident professional tactical and logistical capacities. He is overcoming great obstacles and waging a very carefully laid out campaign with considerable skill.

"Sacks of mail are at Phu Bai, south of Hue. I am trying to get a chopper to haul the mail to the troops." [Note: I was successful; we got a large load of mail the next day. But it was my last letter home for ten days.]

Adding to our difficulties, the weather got bad -- uncomfortably cold, especially at night, rainy, and fog-ridden. To put the next several days into perspective, I'll quote from a situation report that I sent to General Barsanti on February 7th:

"The NVA Tet offensive, coupled with very bad flying weather (low ceilings primarily) since 1 February, has seriously affected operational and logistic capabilities of the 1st ACD. On the night of 30 January the enemy cut the road from Quang Tri to Camp Evans by blowing culverts in numerous places. Strong forces have been in and around Hue since 30 January. They are well equipped with antiaircraft weapons. Aircraft flying under the low ceiling near Hue are without exception fired on and frequently hit. Both UH-1s and CH-47s have been shot down. As a result the highway through Hue has been blocked and air movement is severely limited. In addition the Phu Bai airfield has been attacked by mortars almost every day. I have flown at low level to Phu Bai and back, circling Hue to the east, without drawing fire. However, 1st ACD has told us that admin/log ships are not to be flown to Phu Bai until the weather improves.

"The NVA attack on Hue and the blocking of Highway 1 the night of 30-31 January caught the 2d Bde TF with half its planned move from LZ El Paso to LZ Jane completed. [Most of TF 1-501] was at LZ Jane, the 1-502 TF was complete at LZ Sharon/Betty, and the rest of the brigade TF was at LZ El Paso and the Hue-Phu Bai airfield. LZ El Paso was closed 2 February. Since that date the vehicles and trains of Bde TF elements have been at Phu Bai and the 1st ACD has been trying to move the combat elements of the 2-501 Inf by CH-47 from Phu Bai to Camp Evans. Because of poor flying weather, intensive anti-aircraft fire, and low CH-47 availability, the 2-501 has not yet completed its move. Four CH-47 sorties remain at the Hue Phu Bai CH-47 pad.

"The logistical situation at LZ Jane is fairly good now with the road from Quang Tri open. However, the FSA [forward support area] at Quang Tri has been short radio batteries and various types of ammunition and has literally no clothing stocks. Camp Evans ran out of fuel, was very low on ammunition, was feeding entirely C-rations, and was relying on C-130 air drops for emergency resupply until 6 February when the road from Quang Tri was repaired and a supply convoy moved to Camp Evans....The 1st ACD has taken substantial helicopter losses, most recently by mortars the night of 6-7 February at Camp Evans.

"At this time, only 1-501 Inf remains under my operational control..."

A lot of fighting had taken place in the days from February 1 to the time of this report. In due time the world would see that with his stunning Tet Offensive the enemy had struck a

psychological blow that would be the turning point of the war. But now his main force units, in sizeable numbers, were out in the countryside and open to attack. Fighting would be heavy. We would take casualties. But the enemy would suffer grievously.

For the 1st Cav Division the most serious problem in our area was at Quang Tri where province forces, the 1st Regiment of the 1st ARVN Division, and the Cav's 1st Brigade had reacted well to the attacks of early 31 January. By that afternoon the 1st Brigade had air assaulted two battalions directly onto the enemy force in Quang Tri city, supporting them with the Cav's aerial firepower, and assisting the 1st Regiment of the 1st ARVN Division "in their [as the Cav reported the next day] victory over the 812 Regiment of the 324B NVA Division." The Cav report continued, "A great psychological victory was also achieved... as the occupants of the besieged city witnessed the presence of U.S. infantrymen and the specialty aircraft of the First Cavalry Division."

Under the 1st Cav's 1st Brigade, commanded by Colonel Donald Rattan, the 1/502 (minus its C Company, which was still at Bien Hoa) had on the 31st without significant contact been securing LZs Sharon and Betty (one company had gone out on an operation). On February 1st the Cav's 1st Brigade journal had this item:

"1200 A 1-502 loc at YD355477 in contact with approximately a plt size ele. Have a white team (2 Cobra gunships) working with them. Have killed approx 10 NVA."

Jack Bishop had put together, under Captain Holland commanding A Company, a three platoon force -- one platoon from A Company, one from D Company, and the battalion reconnaissance platoon -- to sweep the area between the two LZs. Captain Holland's force had encountered a large NVA force in a village. Calling in Cobras from the 1st Cav, he ordered a platoon to assault heliborne into the area. It made immediate contact.

In the four hour fight that followed, the 1/502 lost four men killed, including Captain Holland and A Company's first sergeant, and five wounded.⁵ But, supported by the Cav's "aerial rocket artillery"⁶ AH-1s, this A Company team killed 35 and captured 2 NVA, and captured an 82mm mortar complete, two .50 cal. machine guns, one light machine gun, many AK-47s and Chicom carbines, some rocket launchers, and assorted ammunition, including 175 rounds of 82mm and 50 rounds of 60mm mortar.

Through the night of February 2d-3d, the 1/502 continued its perimeter security mission, conducting daylight sweeps and nightly ambushes without significant contact. On the 3d,

⁵We sent Captain Terry Spiegelberg, our brigade headquarters company commander who had wanted a rifle company, down to replace Captain Holland.

⁶Aerial rocket artillery, or "ARA," was a 1st Cav specialty. Organic to the Cav's division artillery, these Cobra gunships, equipped with two pods each carrying 19 2.75 rockets, came in pairs or larger teams. Responding to artillery forward observers or platoon/company commanders, they could fire a salvo of several dozen rounds that blanketed a target.

the 1/12th Cav Squadron relieved the 1/502, and the First Strike battalion (still minus its C Company) air-assaulted into search operations in the village and rice-paddy-land east of Quang Tri city, finding numerous bodies and weapons in the area of the 1/12th's contact of the day before.

Having blunted the NVA offensive in Quang Tri, General Tolson wanted to quickly open Highway QL 1 from Quang Tri, where a logistic base was located, to Camp Evans, where he badly needed resupply. Although US Marines were fighting to relieve Hue from the south and the 3d Regiment of the ARVN 1st Division and other forces were engaging the enemy inside the city, there was little hope for opening soon QL 1 through Hue. Only the compound that housed the command post of the ARVN 1st Infantry Division and one that housed its US advisors⁷ were in friendly hands.

On January 31st, in our hilltop command post with the 1/501st at LZ Jane, we had little knowledge of the broader situation that had been created by the VC/NVA offensive that morning. We were hearing that the enemy was still on the attack elsewhere, but our main concern was to understand the situation immediately around us.

By radio from the US advisor to the ARVN district chief in Hai Lang we heard that his compound was surrounded by NVA occupying Hai Lang, but we knew little else. I had lost Eagle 122 and we got no helicopters that day from the Cav, so I was grounded. At 1045 on the 31st the 1/501st began clearing the road to the main highway. When they declared it open three hours later, in my own jeep and accompanied by two machine gun equipped jeeps of our military police platoon, I ventured to the outskirts of Hai Lang, but decided not to go into that town to the district chief's compound.

On the evening of the 31st, we planned that on the 1st the 1/501st's B Company would assault into a landing zone three miles west of LZ Jane; this was cancelled because no helicopters were available. That night I told the 1/501st to send a patrol to Hai Lang the next morning and find out the situation there. (Early the morning of the 1st we heard from Earl Keesling at Phu Bai that the airfield there was coping with a heavy mortar and ground attack. The airfield was not damaged and our troops had no casualties.)

We had a twin-40mm tracked antiaircraft vehicle (nicknamed the "duster") on LZ Jane (how this happened I do not know), so Pete Piotrkowski gave it to Charles Gadd's platoon from A Company for the mission. Gadd writes that on February 1st...

⁷The 1st ARVN Division was commanded by Major General Ngo Quang Truong, one of the ablest officers in the Vietnamese Army. On 29 January, General Truong, sensing that there might be an NVA attack that night, had ordered full alert status for his headquarters. No attack came, but he ordered the same for the night of the 30th, telling his US advisory team however that it was not necessary for them to participate. The attack that night found most advisors in their compound, with only a night duty team in the division command post. The crew of Eagle 122 spent that night, and three weeks more, with those US advisors.

"Our squad... climbed on the duster and headed.. down the road toward the small village... We moved into the ARVN camp [Gadd is referring to the district chief's compound] and talked with their... advisors, who told us that the NVA had attacked their camp the same night LZ Jane was attacked. A battalion of NVA soldiers had moved into Hai Lang and was there to stay. They advised us not to enter the village with such a small force... [The brigade journal reports that the NVA attacked A Company's platoon with small arms and mortars, and the battalion responded with artillery while the district chief called in an airstrike, which did not materialize.] We rode the duster back to LZ Jane before dusk."

We had learned that the enemy in and around Hai Lang were from the 5th NVA battalion. Pete Piotrkowski prepared his Frag Order 1-68, with the mission: "1-501 (Abn) Inf conducts coordinated attack in zone 020800 Feb 68 to destroy 5th NVA Bn."

Before dark, Pete also sent back to Hai Lang the duster with a platoon from A Company, to assist in night defense of the compound. From the 1/501 journal early on Feb 2:

"Compound receiving mortar and small arms fire... 5 man sapper squad routed by small arms and duster... est plat size force attacked from village... 4-6 VC KIA."

Our helicopters for the day having been cancelled, A, B, and C companies moved out on foot at 0800 from LZ Jane. The force arrived near Hai Lang in position for an attack, and Pete had set up his Tac CP a kilometer or so west of the village and was getting ready to fire an artillery preparation, but an 1121 entry in the battalion journal, without further explanation in the brigade journal, reads: "From Bde S3. Do not continue with mission."

The troops returned to LZ Jane, leaving the A Company contingent and the duster with the Hai Lang compound.

The 2d Brigade journal for February 2d reports:

"1400 Bde CO landing at Camp Evans to visit CG, 1st ACD.

"1435 Bde CO advised S3 that Tac CP should be prepared to move to Camp Evans by 1700; 1-501 will be opcon to 1st Bde.

"1510 To 1st ACD DTOC: 1st Bde assumed opcon of 1-501 and 2d Bde AO effective 1500 hours.

"1555 Bde CO: Effective 1600 hrs 1-501 returns opcon to 2d Bde, 101st. AO remains the same, move will probably be effected 3 Feb."

At his evening briefing on February 2d, General Tolson confirmed his intention to place LZ Jane and the operations around Hai Lang under the Cav's 1st Brigade, giving that brigade opcon of the 1/501 and, on the 3d, moving our brigade command post to Camp Evans where we would have opcon of the 2/501 and one battalion of the Cav.

The first three days of February were for me a low point. I was uncertain of the situation. My brigade was strung out from Quang Tri to Phu Bai. We had no helicopters. I was about to lose my mission. We were unfamiliar with the Cav's ways, we had very few of their renowned assets, and we seemed not to be seen as members of their team.⁸

Well, as so often happens in such a situation, my troops through a brave and professional effort at Hai Lang and in the days that followed, saved me -- and, what is more important, saved the 2d Brigade for a future of great accomplishment.

At 1030 in the morning of February 3d I was preparing to visit Dick Tallman at Camp Evans to verify his situation and to give him instructions (the 2/501st was midway in its move from Phu Bai to Evans). At that moment a supply convoy from Quang Tri to Camp Evans was stopped by the enemy just north of Hai Lang. These words are from the brigade journal: "2d Bde was tasked to reopen QL 1 because it was in our AO..."

I stayed at LZ Jane. B/1/501 left LZ Jane by truck at 1100. The journal continued: "At 1159 hrs B Co arrived at QL 1 and closed with the enemy. D Co arrived at 1240 hours and also closed with the enemy."

From the brigade journal:

"1340 1 ACD: Enemy well dug in in 2 and 3 man positions near village of Hai Lang... Bunkers appear to be well reinforced & camouflaged; heavy artillery should destroy them. There are dug in positions along banks overlooking rice paddies.

"1352 CO 1-501: Arty prep has started; attack should kickoff in 15 min.

"1400 Bde CO: Notify CO 1-501 to proceed with caution. Walk arty in front of troops. CO 1-501 reply was, walking arty in front of troops was unfeasible due to every house must be searched."

Sergeant O'Connor has described what happened with A Company that morning...

⁸In retrospect I can appreciate that General Tolson had his reasons for using the 2d Bde/101st as he did. We had come north with a bare minimum of support assets, and no helicopters; his 2d Brigade was far south with, I suspect, a greater portion of his own support assets, including helicopters. As a brigade, we were unfamiliar with the Cav's ways of operating, but under his own brigade commanders our battalions (which were in better shape than his strength-wise and, as in the case of the 1/502, quickly proved their mettle) could learn fast. The frustrations of a newly opcon brigade commander quite naturally mattered less to him than getting his urgent task done, making full use of the means on hand.

"My platoon was given the mission to clear the road from the LZ back to Hai Lang... We had some engineers attached to us with mine detectors. We had cleared about three miles of road when trucks started coming our way.

"Captain Shive (A Company commander) said, 'Get aboard. The NVA has taken most of Hai Lang and the ARVN compound is about to be taken.'

"About a mile out of Hai Lang we got off the trucks and got into tactical formation... Bravo and Charlie Companies led the attack on Hai Lang. Delta Company was behind them. Alfa Company was in the rear. During the assault all three companies got thrown back. There was an estimated battalion of NVA holding most of Hai Lang and they were well dug in...

"Battalion called in artillery from LZ Jane... (then) gunships from the 1st Air Cav... We got the word that it was Alfa Company's turn to attack... Captain Shive gave orders for the Third Platoon to attack and the First and Second Platoons to give them cover fire. As soon as the Third Platoon started into the village all hell broke loose. The sky above was loaded with flying lead... We could see that the Third Platoon was running into a meat grinder and Captain Shives told Lieutenant Rodriguez to pull back. Quite a few of the Third Platoon members were hit and Lieutenant Rodriguez's radio operator was killed... the first man in our company to get killed by the enemy."⁹

From the 1/501 journal...

"Bn commander advised Bde CO that situation was bad. Bde CO told CO, 1-501, to pull back Co B and D and call in artillery... The requested airstrikes to support 1-501 were cancelled at 1535 hrs due to rainy misty weather."

Pete Piotrkowski disengaged, sending A and C Companies back to LZ Jane. From the 1/501 operations summary for 3 February:

"Cos B & D were in contact most of the day, w/contact being broken at dusk. Losses: Friendly - 1 US KIA, 16 WIA, Enemy - 27 NVA KIA."¹⁰

The 2d Brigade journal for 3 February reported that..

"...the brigade HHC Company sent a tac CP party to Camp Evans at 0845 (on the 3d), but this group returned to LZ Jane later in the afternoon because of the attack by 1/501 on the Hai Lang village and the poor flying weather (fog and dense drizzle) which prevented the move of the 2-501 to Camp Evans.

⁹Blood Brothers, pages 95-97.

¹⁰Charles Gadd and Timothy O'Connor, both of whom were in A Company's fierce fight, can be forgiven for reporting the casualties in this action as higher than they actually were.

"During the afternoon the Bde Commander ordered that the perimeter defense of LZ Jane would be maintained by the personnel present at LZ Jane (and) informed CO, 1/501, that C/1-501 would be able to join the attack of B and D 1-501... He said that the attack on Hai Lang village was not to begin until 0800 hours in order to permit precise and thorough coordination of artillery fire support."

On the 4th Russ Miller was arranging with the Cav's G3 people for a CH-47 to move the 2d Bde Tac CP to Evans that afternoon. We asked that representatives of the Cav's 1st Brigade visit LZ Jane to coordinate the arrangements for taking over the 1/501st and our sector. At 1438 we got word that the CO and S3 of the 1st Brigade were inbound. By now the 1/501 was heavily engaged with three companies south of Hai Lang.

Entry 91 for the brigade journal for 4 February, at 1510:

"From CG, 1 ACD: Move to Camp Evans cancelled."

On February 4th, the 1/501st continued its attack. From my personal report to General Barsanti on February 6th (locations are described by coordinates in the actual report):¹¹

*(The night of 3-4 February), the 1-501 Tac CP and B and D Companies were in a night defensive position just outside Hai Lang to the west, and A and C Companies were securing LZ Jane. The mission of 1-501 on 4 February was to open Highway 1 from Hai Lang to the south. B Company moved out to the east at 0830 hours, clearing the road through Hai Lang and the village on both sides of the road. Progress was slow in the village, since this area had been fortified by NVA forces and had been the scene of heavy contact the previous day. In addition, GVN civilians had entered the area to search for their belongings, further complicating the situation. Artillery was systematically used in advance of the lead elements. D Company was in a supporting position, and C Company moved from LZ Jane to a position off the highway to the south of B Company. Upon reaching the road junction just south of Hai Lang at 1225 hrs, with only scattered resistance, B Company turned south and soon made heavy contact with NVA in fortifications in the village.

"B Company pulled back and the enemy position was pounded with artillery (600 rounds adjusted by C Co's FO alone). C Company then attacked north through the

¹¹Except for the mail, our only way to communicate with the 101st's division headquarters in Bien Hoa was by a trailer-mounted single sideband HF radio-teletype (I don't remember the model number) provided by our detachment from the 501st Signal Company. Its operator would type the message (taken to him through the pouring rain) onto a tape, then feed the tape into the machine for transmittal. It was necessary to cut the transmitter's antenna wire, which was strung between poles, to a precise length that varied with the frequency (wavelength) being used. The transmitter had a tendency to drift off frequency, thereby garbling the text. Garbled letters could usually be corrected on receipt, but numbers (such as coordinates) could not. Not only was this link to division our only way to keep them informed each day about our operational situation, but it was vital to us, and frustratingly inadequate, for administrative and logistic matters.

village, with B Company holding a blocking position. By 1445 hrs, C Company had advanced about 1,000 meters, killing approximately 15 VC and capturing assorted weapons, including an 81mm mortar. At this point, C Company held up in order to reorganize and continue the attack, and D Company moved to a position alongside B Company to the west. C Company resumed the attack with artillery support at 1700 hrs, and at 1718 hrs became heavily engaged with concealed and dug-in NVA at close range. The company commander and two platoon leaders were immediate casualties, and the advance was halted. D Company moved to the west of and alongside C Company, then attacked across the front of C Company. As the NVA fled their positions they were cut down by D Company's lead elements. D Company then discontinued the attack and from 1745 hrs to after dark assisted in the recovery of the dead and evacuation of the wounded."

The 1/501 had four men killed in this action, and 40 wounded, of which 20 were returned to duty. The confirmed enemy killed were 42.¹²

By nightfall, A Company from LZ Jane had relieved B Company, which along with D Company returned to Jane. The 1/501 made known its plans for a coordinated attack by all four companies against a reported VC battalion position northeast of Hai Lang the next day. The 1st Bde would provide two rifle companies for the security of LZ Jane.

February 3d and 4th had been busy days for the 1/501. It had done well.

But we still had a tough job to do. An emphatic message from the 1st ACD that morning read: "Priority for today is clearing of Hwy 1. Must be accomplished for resupply." That night we were told that ("prior to resuming our attack to the northeast of Hai Lang") our immediate task would be to clear QL 1. On the 5th we were to escort a US Navy SeaBee party that would arrive at Hai Lang from Quang Tri to a place three miles south where they would repair a blown culvert, and our planned attack was off.

I was not happy with the helicopter support we were getting from the 1st Air Cav. My UH-1 C&C ship had been shot up, and they were sending me, for a replacement, a UH-1

¹²For his heroism on this day, Captain Gordon H. Mansfield, commanding Company C, received the Distinguished Service Cross. The citation reads, "...When his company came under devastating enemy fire, he immediately maneuvered his elements into positions for an attack. Receiving word that one platoon had been pinned down by enemy automatic weapons fire, he led a second platoon into position for a frontal assault on the enemy. When the attack stalled in the face of ravaging fire, he led five men to the enemy's flank. With complete disregard for his personal safety, he led a savage charge upon the enemy position that completely destroyed it. Captain Mansfield repeatedly exposed himself to enemy weapons fire to evacuate his wounded men. While moving the casualties to safety, he was seriously wounded. Refusing aid, he continued to direct the evacuation of the wounded and coordinated with an adjoining company for aid. Only when he was certain that his men were safe did he agree to his own evacuation."

that had not only had no console¹³ but also had no seats. Our three two-place H-23s had flown into Phu Bai all the way from Cu Chi, but there was no maintenance there for H-23s (the Cav owned only the H-13). One H-23 had been shot down on the 31st, killing the pilot and a forward observer from the 1/321 Arty. I could live with makeshift C&C support; my RTO could pack a set of radios and we could sit on the deck. But, with far more helicopters than any division in Vietnam, the Cav allocated us hardly any day to day.

After objecting to this treatment without success, on February 4th I delivered to General Tolson a letter, with a copy by teletype, as I remember, to General Barsanti down south:

"The disposition of 2d Bde TF elements for a distance of 70 kilometers along a closed highway from Quang Tri to Phu Bai creates a serious situation from the viewpoint of administrative and logistic support. For example:

"Maintenance personnel are at Phu Bai, while vehicles and radios needing maintenance are at LZ Jane and elsewhere.

"Mail, administration, and critical supplies (e.g., batteries) are stacked up at Phu Bai, waiting helicopter movement to units....

"This situation can be resolved only with adequate helicopter support. UH-1 support for this brigade (minus 1-502 TF) since 1 February has been as follows:

"1 February: One C&C (w/o console) all day. Four log ships were requested. Two log ships arrived in afternoon after my telephone call to the Chief of Staff, but were diverted to the 1st Bde in mid-afternoon by 1st ACD.

"2 February: Two C&C ships (w/o console) all day. Four log ships requested, no log ships allocated.

"3 February: Two C&C requested. One reported (w/o console). Three log ships were allocated but never arrived.

"4 February: Two C&C requested. One reported (w/o console). Four log ships requested. Two log ships allocated. As of 1200 no log ships had reported.

"This... is inadequate. If there is no improvement, the present serious administrative and logistic difficulties will become intolerable and will reduce the combat effectiveness of my brigade. I am currently using C&C ships for logistic purposes and have inadequate C&C capability compared to like units of the 1st ACD."

¹³The "console" of a C&C (command and control) helicopter arranges the commander's radio and intercom gear on a frame facing his seat that makes it easy for the commander, while airborne, wearing a headset with earphones and a microphone, to talk by voice radio to his commanders on the ground, switching frequencies and channels as necessary, and to talk privately via intercom with the staff officers, the crew chief, and others who are in the cabin with him and to the pilots up front.

I soon had an office chat with the 1st ACD Chief of Staff at Camp Evans. The situation improved, but it took a while for the hard pressed 1st Cav to fully appreciate the 2d Brigade. General Barsanti never told me what he thought of my message.

Complicating the situation was the weather. We were in the cold northwest monsoon season. Its drizzling rain, low, misting cloud ceilings, and dense ground fogs lasted some twenty-seven days straight with only occasional breaks. Under these conditions a heliborne assault could only navigate at low level, flying slowly and risking ground fire. Artillery was called in by coordinates and often adjusted by sound alone. Air support was limited; airborne FACs could get overhead a few hours a day at best. Bad flying weather frequently cancelled gunship support and severely limited medevac and troop lift operations. (However, the Dustoff medevac choppers almost always found a way to get to the casualties and bring them out.)

The chopper situation improved right after my letter to General Tolson, and we quickly responded to his emphasis on getting Highway 1 repaired and open to daylight traffic. The 1st Cav was getting desperate; Camp Evans was now receiving supplies by airdrop and low-level extraction from C-130s. The next day, the 5th, the 1/501 protected the SeaBees at three more work sites. But at the same time the 1/501st was seeking to find and kill the enemy, both in daylight operations and night ambushes.

Now, let's get back to the 2/501st Infantry, which on the night of January 30th was at LZ El Paso preparing to move the next day by truck and CH-47 to LZ Jane where it would join the brigade command post and the 1/501st. When the VC/NVA Tet offensive opened on the morning of the 31st, mortars hit the 2/501, killing four troopers and wounding nine. The 1st Cav ordered one company of the 2/501 to be a quick reaction force and told the battalion to "hold convoys until further notice. Hwy 1 appears to be cut at this time."

On February 2d the 2/501st task force moved by truck to the Hue Phu Bai airfield. That night the battalion was told to prepare to move by CH-47 on the 3d to Camp Evans where it was planned (but soon cancelled) that the battalion would come under our 2d Brigade, whose command post would be moved to that location.

Only five Ch-47's lifted off Phu Bai on the 3d; one was shot down en route (no injuries; one man wounded by small arms fire; all safely moved to Camp Evans). It turned out that because of marginal weather and a shortage of CH-47s the move of the 2/501st task force would not be completed until February 7th. On the 5th, two of its rifle companies (A and C) went to the 3d Bde's 5/7 Cav at PK-17, on Highway 1 near the headquarters of the 3d Regiment of the 1st ARVN Division. Throughout this time the 2/501 was opcon to the 3d Brigade, 1st ACD.

Meanwhile the 1/502 had been busy. From the Cav's 1st Bde journal of February 4th:

"A Co, 1-502, conducted search and destroy operations from YD407520 to the northwest. The company was extracted and air assaulted to YD 378558. The company made contact with an estimated enemy battalion in the vic YD378564. The company pulled back to the southwest and artillery was fired into the area. B Co conducted search and destroy operations from YD 407520 to the northwest. The company was extracted and air assaulted to YD 391554 and conducted search and destroy operations to the northwest. D Co conducted search and destroy operations from YD 407520 to the northwest. One US was WIA (not serious) by a booby trap."

The next day was more productive. From the 1st Bde journal for the 5th:

"East of Quang Tri city, A Co and B Co came under mortar and ground attack at 0658, vicinity YD388547. The companies returned fire with organic weapons and artillery, ARA, and mortars and engaged the enemy positions. The two companies conducted search and destroy operations in that area and were in sporadic contact throughout the day. 25 NVA were KIA, and 2 MGs, 1 81mm mortar and 1 60mm mortar were captured during the operations. One US was KIA and thirty WIA. A Co was extracted and air assaulted to YD 362538 and secured the LZ for B Co which was airlifted to the LZ. The two companies conducted search and destroy operations in that area. D Co conducted search and destroy operations from YD 384527 to the east. The company was extracted and air assaulted to YD 356525 and conducted search and destroy operations in that area."

That night the 1/502d reported to the 2d Brigade command post that the day had started at 0326 with B Co's ambush of an NVA mortar platoon, and that the total VC losses that day had been "100 as reported by air observers, 25 killed directly by the 1/502d... This brings to a total of 250 NVA approximately killed in past 3 days."

On the 6th and 7th, the 1/502 continued with search and destroy operations east of Quang Tri city. On the afternoon of the 7th, D Company and the recon platoon made a contact that resulted in seven NVA KIA.

February 8th was a day of search and destroy operations for the 1/502, without significant contact. But on the morning of February 9th, the NVA struck back. An 0345 entry from the journal of the Cav's 1st Bde:

"A, B, and D Co 1-502 at YD409521 received approx 40 60 & 82mm mortar rounds from the north and 6 rockets from the west. Results: 9 US KIA, 25 US WIA (8 serious). Key personnel CO A Co WIA, 1st Sgt A Co KIA, FO A Co KIA. B Co had 3 NVA KIA after the enemy had infiltrated the perimeter and began throwing TNT around. Also captured 1 AK-47. At 0400 hours B Co heard movement to the front and engaged w/small arms. 0403 arty was called in on north and west. 0415 contact ceased and it was discovered that rockets had been received from the west. 0420 it became appa-

rent that A Co had taken most casualties. 1st medevac was called at 0545; all complete at 0610."

That evening the 1/502 was replaced east of Quang Tri by the 1/12 Cav and was heli-lifted to LZ Sharon, reporting its foxhole strength as A 91, B 104, D 136, and E 107. The plans summary for the Cav's 1st Brigade on the 9th had this entry for the next day:

"The 1-502 Abn Inf (-) will be released by the 1st Brigade and will move to LZ Jane by CH-47¹⁴ and motor convoy, opcon to the 2d Bde 101st Abn Div."

On the morning of the 10th, the journal of the 2d Brigade reported:

"To 1/502: C/1/502 will arrive at Quang Tri. Have an element meet them and inform this Hq when contact is made." We would now have all our rifle companies.¹⁵

By nightfall on February 10th the 1/502d -- except for B Company, which would join us the next day -- would move to LZ Jane by motor and CH-47 and would assume its sector of our perimeter (D Company occupied a night defense position about three kilometers to the east of Jane). Our 2/501st remained opcon to the Cav's 3d Brigade to the south, but we now had two of our three battalions with us.

Meanwhile, the Cav's 1st Brigade had sent us C Co, 1/5 Cav, to help secure LZ Jane and operate nearby, thus permitting the 1/501 to operate continuously along QL 1 with a four company battalion. We were beginning to work satisfactorily with the 1/9th Cav, who now had a liaison officer at our CP. The Cav was sending me a C&C ship daily and usually one for Pete Piotrkowski; I chafed when mine was late, as it often was, but it helped me get around.

By late afternoon on the 6th the SeaBees had repaired Highway 1 from Hai Lang to our boundary with the Cav's 3d Brigade. The road had been cut in many places, and repairs were complicated when a SeaBee crane was destroyed by a land mine.¹⁶ The first convoy went through late on the 6th. Although the road would remain in poor condition

¹⁴Jack Bishop attempted to "sling load" from a CH-47 a Conex container that he had filled with weapons that his companies had taken in battle (these were useful for swapping for supplies with rear echelon units). En route to LZ Jane, the door of the Conex came open, scattering enemy weapons across the countryside.

¹⁵C Company would have a story to tell. Early on January 31st a platoon of C Company, under the assistant division G2 and Captain Jack Speedy, company commander, had air assaulted to the roof of the US Embassy in Saigon with orders to take back the embassy if necessary. Upon landing in their "hot LZ" the Screaming Eagles contingent reinforced the military police and Marine guards who had been battling the enemy seeking to take it over.

¹⁶Sergeant O'Connor's platoon was providing security for this SeaBee party. He writes: "The enemy had planted a command detonated mine under the road and the CBs had parked a large crane where the mine was planted. Charlie detonated the mine and blew the crane off the road. Metal from the crane started flying all over the area. Alfa Company and the Navy CBs were lucky -- nobody was hurt -- but we had a mess on our hands. I sent out patrols to see if we could find the sapper who detonated the mine. We did find the detonator wire and a battery. Charlie had left the area without a trace." Blood Brothers, page 102.

because of heavy traffic and the incessant rain, the Cav's 8th Engineer Battalion kept it trafficable. From February 7th the 1st Air Cavalry Division could receive regular logistic support from Quang Tri during daylight hours.

Keeping that highway clear in our sector was still the task of the 1/501. But now the battalion went on the offensive against the NVA/VC nearby.

That cost us a battalion commander. Flying over enemy-held territory at 300 feet on February 8th, Pete Piotrkowski and his S3, Captain Charles Harrell, were both hit by .50 caliber machine gun fire. Their helicopter landed safely, but Pete, with gunshot wounds in both legs and a compound fracture in his left leg, was evacuated, eventually all the way back to Fort Campbell. Harrell returned to duty in a few days. Major Jim Higgins, battalion executive officer, took command of the 1/501.

On the 8th our journal reported that Brigadier General Clay... "ADC, 101st Abn Div, will arrive tomorrow." It had been a busy ten days; the 1/501st alone had had 10 killed in action and 80 wounded. It had also killed 104 VC/NVA, captured five, and taken enemy weapons to match those numbers. And the 1/502 reported its record under the 1st Brigade, 1st Air Cav, as twenty troopers killed and 101 wounded and claimed 305 enemy confirmed killed with another 100 estimated, and six wounded prisoners taken.¹⁷

February 8th was our Day 10 at LZ Jane. We were finally about to become a two-battalion brigade.

¹⁷Our own losses were counted with precision. Enemy losses can be taken as reasonably accurate, given that the Cav's aerial firepower accounted for much of the "body count."

Chapter 4. LZ Jane; The Next Three Weeks

Lieutenant Colonel Frank Garrison, G3 of the 101st Airborne Division, accompanied General Clay (who also brought in a new battalion commander for the 1/501, Lt Col Dan Foldberg, a noted Army football player of some years back and formerly the 3d Brigade executive officer). Frank remembers that because the weather was terrible the Clay party was forced to land on Feb 9th at Dong Ha, north of Quang Tri, and that it was raining hard as we brought our visitors back to muddy LZ Jane, arriving at 1225. This kind of weather was by now familiar to us, but it made an impression on those coming from the south.

General Clay would learn that late on February 8th, we had informed the 1st Cav that on the 9th "Cos A and D will conduct an attack on suspected enemy positions in YD4648/4649/4748 [a mile or two west of QL 1 and three miles south of Hai Lang]. The brigade journal for the next day, February 9th, reflects that that morning (9 Feb, which was the day that General Clay was to arrive and the day after Pete Piotrkowski had been shot down), General Tolson's reaction was "to hold any attack until the Deputy CG arrives at this [our] position... Have elements of 1-9 Cav conduct recon of objective area. If the enemy is that big, more forces are needed."

The journal reflects that the Cav's assistant division commander for that visit (who I am assuming, but not recollecting for sure, was Brigadier General Oscar Davis, an associate from my early days at Fort Campbell in 1965-66) arrived at 1009 on the 9th and departed at 1100, en route back to 1st Cav. At 1225 the commander of C Troop, 1/9th Cav, reported that he had seen no troops in the area but had observed well constructed bunkers in defensive positions covering avenues of approach, into which enemy in the village could move.

The brigade journal closed with this remark:

"A, D, and recon plat initially planned to make a sweep to the northeast and attack enemy believed to be vic YD4649. Due to lack of sufficient resources if a large enemy force was encountered, this mission did not go. Instead the units conducted local sweeps in the area that they had set up their NDPs.

"1st Air Cav emphasized the necessity of keeping QL 1 open to traffic as a main supply route. As a result 1-501 conducted a survey of critical points along QL 1 and moved elements of C Co and D Co to secure bridge sites along with the ARVN and PF forces that presently secure them.

"There was no major contact throughout the period. Recon platoon ambush site was sprung at 2020 hours which required them to move thereafter. No friendly losses throughout the period."

An earlier journal entry reads: "At 2150 hours, B Co ambush vic YD364439 ambushed 4 NVA walking south. Results: 4 NVA KIA."

I don't know how General Tolson saw the 2d Brigade at that time. My guess is that he viewed us as having good troops, as not lacking in initiative and a fighting spirit, but also as having something to learn in our new locale, especially about Cav-style operations.

From our experience of the first ten days I was forming my own view of the best way to operate. While search and destroy operations and air assaults were called for, I thought that we could also use the night to better effect. One way to do that was in ambushes. Another way was to hide from the enemy by moving after dark, rather than staying where we were and digging ourselves in, only to become a target for mortars and RPGs or even a ground attack. I believed that we could move at night, and was willing to try that out.

I also believed that we must tie in closely with the ARVN (regular Vietnamese Army) and province forces in the area. Province forces came in two types. Regional Forces (RF) were company size and moved about; they had heavier weapons than did the Popular Forces (PF) which stayed generally in the same village area and were platoon size.

Aside from the areas in which our troops operated and a scattered few locations where a district chief might have an RF company or one or two PF platoons, the countryside was rich with the NVA and VC forces that had taken part in the Tet Offensive and were now licking their wounds getting ready to make more trouble. Most villages, and those people who remained in them (for there were many refugees), were dominated by the enemy. We had not yet begun to work with the 1st Division's troops in the area. One urgent requirement was to cooperate with the local loyal Vietnamese and get intelligence.

The brigade operations summary of 10 February told of the kind of action I liked to see:

"Before dark a platoon of C/1-501 moved into a defensive position at the bridge (YD436433) to reinforce the PF unit securing the bridge. At 0230 hours, an NVA force of approximately platoon size attacked the bridge from the east. The attacking force was apparently unaware of the presence of the C/1-501 as the RPG, small arms, and automatic weapons fire was primarily directed against the PF outpost. C/1-501 withheld its fire until the enemy force had reached a point approximately 20 feet from a machine gun position, at which the machine gun opened fire and the enemy was engaged with small arms, automatic weapons, M-79s, hand grenades, and claymores. A sweep of the immediate area at first light revealed 4 NVA bodies, 4 AK-47s, 2 LMGs, and numerous other small items of equipment. Friendly losses: none."

On February 10th I issued brigade Operation Order 4 for Jeb Stuart:

"TF 2d Bde (-) continues offensive operations to locate/destroy enemy forces and to conduct minesweeping/clearing operations of QL 1... with infantry battalions in assigned AOs."

1-501, assigned to the QL 1 task, would "reinforce ARVN security of critical bridge sites with... a minimum of one reinforced rifle squad with an artillery FO party." It would "assist ARVN by providing barrier material, training, and other assistance as necessary to improve ARVN defenses of these critical points."

1-502 would sweep the access road to LZ Jane daily and provide strong point security during daylight. It would also post a rifle squad for security at our nearby water point. Both battalions were ordered to "Establish liaison with Major Wells, Hai Lang District Advisor."

And my final instruction was that "Particular command emphasis will be placed on care of the individual soldier, his weapons and equipment during this period of adverse weather."

The troops had sweaters and of course ponchos, but often spent all night in water. Sergeant O'Connor writes:

"The rain did not let up, but once in a while I had my squad leaders rotate their people so they could spend some time in a 'hootch' without getting rained on. No words can describe the misery of a combat infantryman fighting and living in the mud... Lying in the mud with a cold rain beating down on you waiting for the VC to hit your position or lying in an ambush site shaking from the cold rain was a bitch."¹

We tried to circulate the rifle companies through LZ Jane to dry out and change clothes, but LZ Jane was muddy, the drizzling rain was incessant, and of course we could have fires there only in daylight.

A letter home at about this time described LZ Jane as:

"...a small series of ridges on which our perimeter is about half a mile in diameter, following an irregular trace, and including my command post, my two battalion headquarters, plus my artillery battalion, their "trains" or supply elements, and lots of troops.

"It has been chilly and wet for two weeks now, and our hillsides are muddy. It's not at all like most of us expected Vietnam to be -- the rain has been light but continuous, and the temperature has gone as low at 55° at night, rarely over 70° in the day."

Our basic maneuver unit was the company, although platoons and squads might be given independent missions -- ambushes, patrols, security, and the like -- and the battalion reconnaissance platoons almost always operated independently. Battalion commanders

¹Blood Brothers, page 104.

would rotate their companies so that they had an opportunity, desirably every three or four days (but sometimes it was a week or longer), to get to LZ Jane and dry out; otherwise the troops' feet would begin to crack between the toes and in some cases bleed. At night companies would occupy night defensive positions, or NDPs, from which they would set out ambushes or listening posts and on the perimeter of which two-man teams would always have one man awake.

As dawn broke the troops would get up, check their weapons, have a head count, open their C-ration boxes for breakfast, heat their C-ration dehydrated coffee in a canteen cup (with the heating tablet, or by breaking open a claymore mine for a piece of explosive to heat it with), take their malaria pills, and get ready for whatever the day had in store. By then the company commander had his instructions by radio from battalion and had called in his platoon leaders and his artillery forward observer to give them theirs. Later in the day a logistics helicopter "log bird" would come to the company from LZ Jane; it had been loaded by the battalion S4 section and the company supply sergeant with ammunition, water, rations, and sometimes mail. First sergeants were usually in the field with the company commander.

By mid-February the 1/501st had lost about 75 men killed or evacuated because of wounds, and the 1/502d had lost about 100, and we began to receive a few replacements. The battalion and company commanders sought to introduce the new men into their units while they were drying out and otherwise recovering on LZ Jane.

At full strength a rifle company had 164 officers and men, and a rifle platoon had three rifle squads of ten men each, a light machine gun squad of nine, and a command section with a platoon leader (lieutenant), a platoon sergeant, a radio-telephone operator, and a medic, for 43 men total. Squad members carried either the rifle or the M-79 grenade launcher with plenty of ammunition, plus hand grenades and often claymore mines -- not to mention two canteens of water, a box of C-rations, and an extra pair of socks.

When its losses caused a platoon to shrink, the platoon leader would often move its two machine guns into rifle squads, and then with further losses he would shrink the squads. A squad needed two three-man fire teams to permit it to "fire and maneuver;" the squad leader could lead one of the teams, so the absolute minimum for a squad was six men including the leader. With 21 men a platoon could have three six man squads, a platoon leader or platoon sergeant, an RTO, and a medic -- and so a rifle company could function (but hardly so) with as few as 75 men.

Our companies never got to that size. I sought to keep their field strengths at no less than 100, and if at all possible at 120-125. But this was not always possible.

By this time, end-February, we had lost quite a few of our second lieutenant platoon leaders, of which we had had a practically full contingent when we left Fort Campbell;

young, brave, in vulnerable leadership positions, many were casualties before they had time to become battle-wise. So our platoons were often led by the senior noncommissioned officer platoon sergeant (E-7), and even on occasion by a staff sergeant (E-6); these experienced soldiers were capable of doing the job, but were without the backup assistant that the full TOE platoon provided the officer platoon leader. Squad leaders, who by TOE should have been staff sergeants, were for the most part sergeants (E-5s).

Our troopers were marvelous -- brave, competent, by now battle-wise, and responsive. When we arrived in the 1st Cav's area of operation most of them had been together for months. They had bonded, and it seemed to me that those bonds had grown stronger in battle. Their discipline, willingness, and cheerfulness was an inspiration from which I drew much of my own strength. Although fully ready to commit them to battle, I was determined not to lose a single man to death or wounds through any failure on my part, to include a failure by me to insist on the highest standards in our care of the troops and in their own care of their weapons and of themselves.

In this miserable weather it was crucial to take care of our weapons. Sergeant O'Connor:

"I passed the word to the platoon to keep their weapons dry. The platoon knew what I meant. They could get sick, but their rifles could not. They were only as good as the operational capabilities of their weapons. They all remembered what I told them back in the States, "Clean your rifles first, then if you have time you can clean yourself."²

For the troops own good, I was a demanding leader. Troops do not like to be told to shave every day while they are in combat for days at a time, or when it is raining and they are miserable, but I told my leaders to see that they shaved regularly. I recognized that exceptions were tolerable when really called for, but I wanted each soldier to be in the habit of thinking well of himself every day and do his job well, and I expected leaders to set the example.

Our emphasis at Fort Campbell and Cu Chi on rigorous training at squad and platoon and on a strong chain of command had been paying off in battle and in personal health. Troops in northern I Corps were required to take two kinds of malaria pills, one kind weekly and the other daily. This called for discipline. I charged the chain of command to see to it that squad leaders had each soldier take his pill, of both kinds.³

²Blood Brothers, pages 101-102. Unlike the more rugged M-1 of World War II and Korea, the smaller caliber M-16 rifle would not function if it had mud or sand in its works. A soldier could carry a lot more ammunition for it, but it had to be kept clean all the time. Some months later, in May or so, the Department of the Army, reacting to reports of frequent malfunctioning, sent an inspection team to Vietnam. When the team checked out of the 2d Brigade, it told me that it had encountered very few such problems in our battalions. We kept our weapons clean.

³Throughout my period in command I made a practice of examining sick call records every day. I never learned of a single case of malaria in my command.

By now we were getting from the Cav each day a "log bird" for each of our two battalions. That, plus a rotation every few days back to LZ Jane, made it possible to maintain the troops' well-being sufficiently so that they could fight, even in our still bad weather.

C&C ship support for me and the battalion commanders was another matter. I had understood that General Barsanti, who was a commander known to have a certain volatility, had expressed himself with some vigor back on 31 January when he had heard that my C&C ship, Eagle 122, had been destroyed. I gathered that my immediate request that it be replaced had caused additional upset, and that it was not advisable to bring up with him the subject of our helicopter assets. But we continued to be handicapped by lack of helicopter support, so on February 12th I sent the division commander this personal message, worded as best I could not to give offense:

"I recognize that replacement of my C&C ship, Eagle 122, which was destroyed at Hue 31 January, may not be possible considering aircraft assets now available to 101st Abn Div. Request, however, that efforts be made to augment division assets by a number sufficient to allow 2d Bde to operate in a manner similar to organic brigades of 1st Air Cav Div. This brigade is at a serious disadvantage compared to the other two, each of which is authorized five UH-1s and eight LOH (light observation helicopters). As the 1st Air Cav receives OH-6s, I am working on arrangements to get their excess OH-13s to replace my OH-23s which cannot be maintained here. I would appreciate whatever can be done to increase my UH-1 assets, preferably with console equipped UH-1s."

I have found no record that anything came of this message.

On February 13th I sent this message to the 1st ACD:

"Plan to relocate some elements to decrease support of LZ Jane & reposition arty support within the AO. Propose to establish a FSB at YD436438 and to relocate C/11 Arty (a 155 battery) and A/321 Arty with one rifle company for protection. By doing this can resupply artillery btrys from Quang Tri on QL 1. 155 btry can cover Street Without Joy & 105 btry can cover to that area and also SE area of AO. Have coord with District Chief. Will have a village adjacent to FSB but no problem exists as PF will help security at night with ambush positions and OPs. Will provide positions to secure QL1 & to secure bridges along QL 1. Eventually would like to see LZ Jane defended only by personnel at that location. Have started things in motion."

Operation Order 5 issued on the 14th extended our AO to the northeast, and transferred the task of clearing and securing QL 1 to the 1/502d.

In this mid-February period with our two battalions based on LZ Jane we were, despite the continued poor weather, settling into a reasonably productive pattern of operations. Brigade, and each battalion, was seeking and sharing intelligence. Battalions were working

with the local Vietnamese, keeping QL 1 open, expanding into areas ever more distant from that road, conducting search and destroy operations, carrying out an air assault every two days or so, and placing ambushes in place every night.

An entry in the brigade journal for 14 February summarized a typical day for a battalion:

"1-501: C Co and D Co continued a sweep SE along highway 55. B Co made an airmobile assault to the SE to provide a blocking force. C and D made contact in the afternoon. Friendly losses were 1 KIA and 9 WIA (8 evac). Enemy losses were 7 NVA JIA (BC). Tac CP vicinity Hai Lang. B Co extracted late afternoon. Co A perimeter defense. Recon platoon night ambush."

That night the 1-502 reported:

"At 0325 hrs A Co sprung squad size ambush YD349427 on estimated 30 NVA with mortar tubes on boats, took under fire with small arms. Ambush force pulled back and encountered a 2d group of 30 NVA, took under fire with small arms inflicting heavy casualties, negative friendly casualties. Request White Team check river vicinity A Co location YD351424 at first light. 15 or 16 boats were traveling NE."

Reinforcing A Company, the 1/502 worked that area over with success the next day. But a few days later, we were saddened to have to report the death of Lieutenant Pershing, a platoon leader in B/1/502. The New York Times for February 20th carried the story:

"The 24-year-old grandson of General of the Armies John J. Pershing was killed in action in Vietnam, his parents reported here yesterday. The news of the death of Second Lieut. Richard W. Pershing was carried to his home at 771 Park Avenue by a special representative of the Secretary of the Army. The lieutenant, who went to Vietnam last Dec. 13 with the 101st Airborne Division, died on February 17 from what the official telegram of notification described as 'wounds received on a combat operation when he came under hostile small-arms and rocket attack while searching for remains of a missing member of his unit.'"

From a letter home on February 21st:

"We are doing OK. This is a rough little war, and the North Vietnamese Army has put a lot of its forces into this country, far more I think than anyone would have expected. They operate at many disadvantages, but with many advantages also, especially in the way they can move about the countryside at night. One of our objectives is to deny them this freedom of movement, and I think we are having some modest success along these lines...

"The amazing thing to me is how our troops do so well. The rain and chill don't seem to bother them. They are keeping their weapons clean and using good common sense in

their tactics. They retain their sense of humor. It's really quite remarkable. They are taking casualties -- the rifle companies always do in war -- but they keep coming up every day ready for another day...

"One of my battalions, 2/501 (Tallman), is attacking the NVA forces north of Hue. It does seem remarkable that that town, or key parts of it, has been in the hands of the 'guer-rilla' for three weeks now. I haven't been down there since Dick Tallman is not under my operational control now, temporarily working for the 3d Bde, 1st Cav Div."

The 2/501st had since early February been at Camp Evans on perimeter security and conducting local operations under the 1st Cav division's control. On February 18th, the battalion moved its tac CP and B and E Companies to a location near the An Lo bridge on QL 1 over the Song Bo river and became opcon to the Cav's 3d Brigade, leaving A and C companies at Camp Evans opcon to the 1/7 Cav. Its D Company, which had been providing local security at PK 17 two miles south from the An Lo bridge, with one platoon securing the bridge itself, remained in place.

Three days earlier, on the 15th, D Company had been tasked to conduct a search and destroy operation to the south of PK 17. About two miles from PK 17, the company commander, Captain C. W. McMenamy,⁴ came upon a situation where he suspected that the enemy was trying to draw his force into a kill zone. As scouts of D Company's 3d Platoon neared a woodline an enemy force in that woodline opened heavy fire.

D Company responded with its own firepower plus artillery, ARA, and gunship support, and then beat back the enemy's attempts to flank D Company to both left and right. The 3d Brigade ordered 5/7 Cav to reinforce D Company with two companies. Contact was broken at 1530 and D Company returned to PK 17. D Company lost 6 KIA, including the 3d Platoon leader, 17 wounded and evacuated, including Captain McMenamy, and 5 wounded, not evacuated. The 1st Air Cav Division reported a total NVA body count of 56, with this breakdown: D/2/501 - 8; ARA - 24; Arty - 22; 5/7 Cav - 2.⁵

On February 19th the 2/501 command post and all its companies moved to LZ Sally, just west of PK 17. On the 20th the Cav's 3d Brigade made its plans for an attack to the south-east with the 2/501st and three Cav squadrons (1/7, 5/7, and 2/12) into the vicinity of Thon La Chu (YD 6924) three miles west of Hue and to the east of the locale of D Company's action of the 15th.

⁴Wayne McMenamy was a superb company commander who activated D Company at Fort Campbell, named it the "Delta Raiders," trained it, motivated it, and led it into its first action. With a mailing list of more than 200, and holding reunions every two years, the Delta Raiders have the largest alumni group of any company-size unit of the Vietnam War.

⁵A breakdown like this is always questionable, and estimates like these were never a useful way to calculate overall progress in a war. But they gave some satisfaction to the soldiers, fight by fight, and to the units who tabulated them over a period of time.

From the journal of the 3d Brigade, 1st ACD, 21 Feb:

"1-7 Cav attacked SE with 4 Cos meeting sporadic heavy resistance... 14 US WIA; 5/7 Cav attacked SE with 4 Cos... met sporadic resistance from well prepared enemy positions... 2 US KIA, 14 WIA; 2-12 Cav C & D Cos attacked N while A & B Cos remained in position and conducted local patrols... 17 WIA; 2-501 attacked SE with 3 companies while B Company acted as reaction force and secured LZ Sally. Contact with the enemy continued until the close of the reporting period (2400). US losses: 2 KIA, 31 WIA."

The next day the 2/501 reported that it had suffered six killed and 31 wounded in a day of some of the heaviest fighting of the Vietnam War, and much of that again by D Company.

On the 20th Dick Tallman had named 1st Lt. Cleo C. Hogan, Jr, to take McMenamy's place as D Company's commander.⁶ Hogan, who had been a member of D Company since Fort Campbell but who had recently been made battalion S1, kept a diary.

⁶Dick had intended that Hogan, a first lieutenant, be "acting" company commander, inasmuch as there were qualified captains in the brigade who wanted to command companies. Cleo Hogan has written (in a letter of 1990 to Wayne McMenamy that Hogan has shared with me for use in this history): "LTC Tallman told me that I would be temporary until a captain came in. I had the company about three weeks through the heaviest fighting and LTC Tallman brought a captain out to the area and turned D over to him. He apologized a hundred times for having to replace me. He said that since I was a 1Lt he would have to give the company to a captain. As I arrived back at LZ Sally, Col Cushman happened to be in the D Company area and he asked what I was doing back there. I told him that I had been replaced by a captain and that I had been assigned back to HHC. Col Cushman became raving mad. He ordered me to get on his helicopter and go back out to D company. LTC Tallman was there talking to the new C.O. Talk about being in the middle of a mess. To make a long story short, Col Cushman arrived on the scene and told LTC Tallman that he could not replace me and that I would remain D Company commander. He and LTC Tallman had words and finally they left taking the new captain with them. I just knew that LTC Tallman would make it rough for me, or at least think that I had gone to Col Cushman. In a couple of days LTC Tallman came out and said that he had not thought that Col Cushman would keep me rather than a captain. Anyway LTC Tallman and I got along great and I got to keep the company only because you had this company standing tall."

Reflecting on Cleo Hogan's description of my behavior and his expression "raving mad" gives me a place to acknowledge that I was far from a model leader when it came to correcting my people. Mission oriented, caring about my troops, and demanding high standards, I was with my officers sometimes arbitrary, often scathing, occasionally wrong, and too often allowing no discussion or explanation. I rarely ignored a deficiency, was quick to correct, and was frequently harsh -- even with my battalion commanders from time to time. I usually did not allow my wrath to linger, and usually quickly forgot. This was not a desirable character trait and I am aware that it got in my own way. I admired Dick Tallman as a person and commander, held him and his fine family in the highest esteem, and sought his advice often. When he made the brigadier general list, I sent him the one-star shoulder boards that I had worn on my dress blues before I made major general. I was stunned at Dick's death, which came on his next tour in Vietnam. He was alighting from his helicopter on a visit to a troop unit when an enemy mortar round hit him, right there on the pad.

Until reminded by Cleo Hogan, I had completely forgotten the incident and only vaguely recall it now (that is not unusual; most of the details in this history I do not remember). I was reminded that the captain in question was our own Mike Birdwell of the brigade S3 section, so Dick Tallman had plenty of company thinking that D Company should have a competent captain in command, not a lieutenant, and that it was his responsibility to make that decision in any event. Birdwell got his company later.

For February 21st Hogan's diary reads:

"Up at 0600 and began to move. Company D and Company C on line, Company A in reserve... (By noon) we knew we were close to the NVA... At 1330... (approaching a stream and woodline) the 1st Platoon on the left, 3d Platoon on the right, C Company on our left... 3d Platoon opened up while 1st Platoon crossed the stream... When we reached the wood line I thought we would lose the whole 1st Platoon. It looked like every tree was firing at us... I had to commit the 2d Platoon. Joe Hooper and Sgt Urban killed about 5 or 10 NVA and the other NVA began to withdraw. In the meantime Company C had advanced through the woods and were killing the NVA as they came out. The NVA decided to fight it out with D Company and the fighting was hand to hand for close to 2 hours... Lt Bush (recon platoon leader) came up from the right flank and began killing the NVA in the trenches. This opened the way for D Company to advance through the woods and join Company C.

"In just a little over three and a half hours we had overrun a major NVA headquarters. The dead NVA were everywhere. 21 men from D Company had been wounded; SSG Simms had been killed. Recon platoon had 3 wounded and C Company had 2 wounded. I am really proud of these Raiders. Captain Mac had them ready and they really performed well today."

Staff Sergeant Clifford S. Simms and Sergeant Joe R. Hooper of the Delta Raiders received the Medal of Honor for their actions on this day, Sergeant Simms posthumously.

Some extracts from the Recommendation for Award for Sergeant Hooper:⁷

"Weather: Overcast with poor visibility and low clouds. Terrain: Majority of terrain consisted of dense woods and high bamboo with a scattering of sugar cane. Bamboo interlaced by thorned vines, and overall the terrain was extremely difficult to maneuver in.

"The enemy was well supplied, had good uniforms and equipment as well as the latest models in weapons. Their personal hygiene had been good, and their morale was apparently high as their determination and resistance were above average. Their observation from an intricate trench and bunker system located in the woods was good. An example of their high morale and contempt for the foe was the flaunting of a North Vietnamese flag in their lines. (The flag was captured early.)

"Unit morale was at an all-time high despite one week of constant rain. Mission was to drive enemy from strongly held position in woods. D Company was making a coordinated assault on enemy bunkers in order to relieve pressure on the 3d Platoon which, upon crossing the river and entering the woods, had come under intense fire.

⁷I include this material to shed light on operating conditions for the troopers of the 2d Brigade during this period. Documentation in great detail supports this recommendation.

"Sergeant Hooper recaptured one machine gun and took two prisoners. Sergeant Hooper personally cleared eleven enemy bunkers, destroyed three enemy houses, knocked out two machine guns, and killed either by grenades, rifle fire, LAW [shoulder-fired light antitank weapon], or hand to hand fighting at least 22 enemy."

The next day, the 22d, B Company lifted in from LZ Sally to join the 2/501st in its sweep eastward with the Cav's 3d Brigade to reach the walls of Hue, to enter that city, and to join the South Vietnamese forces and U.S. Marines in ejecting, killing, or capturing the NVA forces that had taken Hue a month earlier. From the journal of the Cav's 3d Brigade:

"22 Feb: 2-501 Abn attacked E toward Hue w/5 Cos and secured positions near YD705227 meeting heavy resistance from determined enemy defenders. US casualties at the end of the reporting period were listed as 6 KIA and 30 WIA. Enemy assessment was incomplete.

"23 Feb: 2-501 Abn attacked to the S against light to moderate enemy resistance then turned E and attacked Hue on the S flank of the 2-12 Cav. 13 US WIA (11 evac).

The 3d Bde journal was not informative for the next three days,⁸ but Lieutenant Hogan's diary relates:

24 Feb:

"D Company given the mission to search a wooded area and to occupy a temple on top of a large hill... the NVA began to place mortar rounds on us, however the temple had large concrete walls and we had excellent cover."

25 Feb:

"Called in artillery all night long on the area below our position... In all, more than 500 rounds of 105, 155, and 8 inch were fired, as well as few rounds from the battleship New Jersey... The Delta Raiders stormed into Hue at 1630 hours and occupied the west wall around Hue."

26 Feb:

"During the night D Company occupied several bombed out buildings. Received sniper fire but for the most part things were quiet. Most of the Raiders got a good night sleep for the first time in five days. At 0730 hours 1st Sgt Scott flew us in eggs, spam, biscuits, and coffee. Our first hot meal in 7 days. For the first time in days, I will be sleeping in a bed."

To catch up with events back at LZ Jane, in mid-February we had gotten wind of Operation Beachball, in which the US Navy would land Army engineers on the coast northeast

⁸My experience in researching information for this account makes me quite proud in retrospect of the performance of the 2d Brigade S2 and S3 sections in maintaining thorough, well written, and meaningful journals, along with relevant papers such as operation orders, overlays, and reports from other headquarters.

of Hai Lang and the SeaBees would improve the existing road from Hai Lang to join them, with the idea of providing an alternative logistic route to Quang Tri and Camp Evans. By this time the 1/501 was operating between QL 1 and the coast with its command post at Hai Lang, and the 1/502 was operating around LZ Jane, with its command post at LZ Jane.

On the morning of February 18th the 501st's recon platoon made contact two miles north-east of Hai Lang. A Company air assaulted into a hot LZ near the recon platoon, and the 1/501st called for artillery, ARA, and air support. Dan Foldberg was in the air over the action when he was hit in the leg by ground fire and evacuated never to return -- a repeat of Pete Piotrkowski's wound in the air ten days earlier.⁹ Including Foldberg, the 1/501 lost 14 wounded during the day and reported a body count of 34 NVA.

My brigade operation order issued on February 19th said that we would protect the road upgrade by the 3d Naval Construction Battalion from Hai Lang to the coast, and that beginning the 21st we would provide a secure beachhead for the landing of the 14th Engineer Battalion and protect it as it began road upgrading toward Hai Lang. With Major Higgins once again in command, that became the task of the 1/501st.

That morning Russ Miller and I paid a visit by helicopter to the USS Comstock, a "landing ship dock" that was to bring the engineers to the scene and get them ashore. We had a very nice lunch with the skipper, and got to see how the Navy at sea was fighting this war with clean sheets every night.¹⁰ The 1/501 then established FSB Mogan near the Street Without Joy. A Battery, 1/321, was lifted into that position, which also provided an overnight location for the the SeaBee working party.¹¹

On February 20th the brigade journal reported my comment that "the Navy will not come ashore soon" (Renamed Utah Beach, the operation materialized as we left LZ Jane ten days later) so the 1/501 should operate along the Street Without Joy and not the beach-head. That it did, just as the 1/502 was looking for the enemy in its area of operations west of QL 1.

The 2d Brigade was now springing on average one ambush each night; we had helicopters for combat assault almost every day and were daily receiving three C&C ships and

⁹Understandably, I got a growl from the Cav chief of staff about my battalion commanders taking unnecessary risks, not only with themselves but with the Cav's helicopters.

¹⁰The skipper loaded five cases of beer on my helicopter. When shared at LZ Jane it did not go far, but it was much appreciated. The brigade had had no beer since Cu Chi.

¹¹FSB Mogan, named after the commander of A/1/321, was to the east of Hai Lang where it could give better coverage to the Street Without Joy. A day or so after we put it in, and not satisfied with its location and security in the sand dunes but undecided what to do about it, I took General Abrams, Deputy Commander, MACV, to it on a visit. He looked at it with more than a hint of disapproval but said little; my tactical judgment had not made a very favorable impression. A few days later, General Barsanti let me know that General Abrams had spoken to him of it. We had already relocated FSB Mogan.

two log birds; the Cav's ARA and its 1/9 Cav squadron were working well with us; 8 inch howitzers with bunker busting precision could support us from Camp Evans; the troops were now getting A and B rations in the field to supplement their C's; QL 1 remained clear and (with constant engineer effort in the incessant rain) passable, as did our access road to LZ Jane (except that on the 23d it broke down completely and we had to tow ammunition supply vehicles with a bulldozer).¹²

We continued to support RF/PF units guarding critical points on QL 1 with barrier materials, technical assistance, and a reinforced squad with FO party; Earl Keesling was running periodic practice alerts for the defense of LZ Jane; and our company field strengths were averaging 110-120 (only rarely in the 90s). But the weather was still bad; and the enemy still abounded in his hiding places out of our sight, harassing us often. Although we engaged him each day, usually taking our own casualties, he controlled by far the greater part of the countryside. Operations continued.¹³

¹²Upon reading earlier drafts of this and the previous chapter, Jim White telephoned me with a few observations about life on LZ Jane. He reminded me that I had sent him up to Jane very early on January 30th where, the first officer of the brigade to arrive, he enlarged the perimeter so that it could hold the sizeable increase that would be there by nightfall (Jane later grew even larger). He found LZ Jane on one terrain knob; he spread it to include another knob with a swale in between. Jim remembers that that day was sunny (he says he got sunburned) but that that was the last sunny day we had on LZ Jane. He recalls the unending fog, rain, and drizzle -- and the mud, which became more than ankle deep between the two knobs; Jim stationed a 2 1/2 ton truck in the swale to shuttle people from one knob to the other. He recalls our difficulties with supplies in the early days, reminding me that whenever I could get a UH-1 I would tell Jim to send out a lieutenant to nearby units to scrounge batteries, clothing, rations, and other necessities; the Marines to our north were a good source. He tells me (I still do not recall it) that I told him to collect dry socks from those men on Jane who had them, to take the socks in bundles to the troops in the field, and to bring wet socks back to be dried out. He recalls the almost nightly attacks by 122mm rockets. (Both Jerry Allen and Russ Miller have reminded me of the 122mm rocket that landed in the tent housing Jim, his food service officer, and a newly assigned assistant S4. That rocket penetrated the tent and landed right on the new officer's footlocker, wounding no one but sending its contents in all directions. Russ tells of a call from Jack Bishop asking how all the underwear got on his perimeter wire.)

¹³To give a flavor of our operations, I will relate that on February 15th General Barsanti visited us. As was the CG's practice, his aide brought a box filled with medals for "spot" awards. He pinned an Air Medal with "V" on me and told me to figure out a citation for it (which was also his frequent practice). I do not fault General Barsanti for this general practice; it was his way, and the way of other division commanders, to recognize what they believed to be a deserving action, especially within the rifle companies and platoons, soon after the action had occurred. The practice can perhaps lead to abuses, but I know of none in the 101st Airborne Division. In any event, I told Major Allen, brigade S1, that I would help him with the citation. Three days later, on the 22d, I experienced a reasonable occasion, and gave Major Allen the gist of the citation, which, telescoped, reads: "1/501 and 1/502 in contact throughout the day... weather poor, 500-700 foot ceilings... enemy ground fire against low-flying helicopters characterized the day's operations... Colonel Cushman airborne seven and one-half hours during the day... on several occasions landed in forward battle areas to visit companies in contact... in the afternoon C/1/502 made heavy contact with NVA forces dug in along a woodline... ordered by battalion commander to withdraw so as to permit heavy artillery and rocket fire on the enemy positions... unable to do so because of difficulty of moving a platoon sergeant who had been seriously wounded in the action... medevac helicopter not immediately available... battalion commander's helicopter was en route to refuel... monitoring the battalion net, Colonel Cushman informed the battalion commander that he would use his own helicopter to evacuate the wounded trooper... Colonel Cushman directed his helicopter into the area, debarked to assist in loading the wounded trooper aboard, and evacuated the wounded man..." All in a day's work, but it sufficed.

But higher headquarters were making plans for the redistribution of forces after the enemy was cleared from Hue. The rest of the 101st would soon be north, to fight alongside the 1st Air Cav, which would regain its own 2d Brigade. In late February General Clay established the 101st Airborne Division (Forward) at Phu Bai. On the 28th I sent General Bar-santi this message, copy to General Clay.

"Redisposition of units of 1st ACD began today, 28 Feb. 1-502 TF moved to PK 17 (YD650284), temporarily opcon to 3d Bde, 1 ACD, and was replaced in LZ Jane by 2-5 Cav temporarily opcon to 2d Bde 101st. 2d Bde, 1st ACD, will open its CP at LZ Jane day after tomorrow, 1 Mar, and at same time I will open my tac CP at PK 17, with an area of operations northwest of Hue, and 2-501, 1-502, and 5-7 Cav under my opcon. 1-501, now vicinity LZ Jane, and 5-7 Cav will exchange places later. We will establish a brigade base at the airfield vicinity YD639274 [this would be LZ Sally], with my move from LZ Jane estimated to be complete o/a 4 Mar. I propose to base logistically on the Hue Phu Bai area as soon as the road is open. This will shorten my supply line, facilitate communication between 2d Bde elements and 101st Advance, and make it possible to use 101st Advance support to the extent it is available."

The night of the 27th, before the 1/502d moved to LZ Jane the next day, it left a memento with the NVA in its area. In setting up its night position, B Company sent out patrols to check the immediate area. One patrol came under fire and a rifle platoon was sent to assist; it also came under fire. The platoon and patrol returned to the perimeter, whereupon B Company itself came under fire and detected enemy movement around its perimeter. B Company called in artillery and ARA and the enemy broke contact at 2000 hours. The company suffered 10 wounded. They were evacuated and the next morning B Company counted 25 dead NVA in the immediate area.

On February 29th, 1/501 and the 2/5 Cav continued operations under the 2d Brigade's opcon from LZ Jane. The 1/501st secured its new Fire Base Hog at a spot off QL 1 two miles north of My Chanh. The artillery battery that moved into Hog had formerly been at Fire Base Mogan near the Street Without Joy.

That, February 29th, would be the 2d Brigade's last full day in LZ Jane. Item 14 in the brigade journal for March 1st, datelined "Vic Hue, RVN, YD649284" read:

"0745 CO and party departed Jane for new CP location."

Four days later, that "new CP location" would be LZ Sally, located near that journal date-line's YD649284. LZ Sally had been named weeks before, I later learned, for the wife of a 1st Air Cav company commander. It would be the 2d Brigade's home for a long time to come.

Chapter 5. LZ Sally; March 1968

Not long after I had left LZ Jane the morning of March 1st, and while my area of operations in the north was still my responsibility, the brigade journal reported:

"0830 C/2-5 landed at a hot LZ and are under fire... FSB also under A/W fire."

Later:

"1101 2-5: Request immediate air strike vic YD486435... Nearest friendlies 1500 meters, enemy in heavily fortified positions, contact CO A/2-5 on Arizona push.¹

"1120 2-5: At 0825 hours vicinity YD451421, 3 Vietnamese children were KIA by rockets. Inform the S-5. Will contact district advisor and extend apologies. Incident was accident.

Innocents would continue to suffer as this war in the countryside went on. I returned to LZ Jane later that day to take the commander of the 2d Brigade, 1st Air Cav, Colonel Joseph C. McDonough, on a tour of his new AO. Meanwhile, troop convoys and CH-47s were taking our troops south into their new area. From the brigade journal of March 1st...

"1500 1-501: 1st lift D Co landed LZ Sally at 1457 hours."

D Company joined B and C Companies, already there by truck, and -- now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Wayne Prokup -- the 1/501st began organizing the defenses of LZ Sally.

At 1540 the 2d Brigade CP at LZ Jane closed down, our old area became the responsibility of the 2d Bde, 1st Cav, and the 2d Bde's brigade tac CP opened at PK 17.²

At 1040 the next day, March 2d, we assumed responsibility for the area of operations of the 3d Brigade, 1st Cav, and command of all three battalions of the 2d Brigade/101st. The 2d Brigade task force was together again for the first time since late January. 1/502 was operating near the An Lo Bridge, from FSB Nola nearby; 2/501 was down near Hue, operating out of FSB Pinky; and most of the 1/501 was at LZ Sally, with its A Btry, 1/321, having just arrived (bad weather had forced the CH-47s to leave A/1/501 at its old fire base one more night).

¹"Arizona push" means a radio frequency spelled out in the SOI (signal operating instructions), which leaders and others who need it carried so that they could find each other's radio call signs and frequencies for coordination purposes. Radio frequencies were selected by turning dials on the radio face. In earlier times, a preset frequency was selected by "pushing" a certain button.

²"PK 17" means "poste kilometre 17." The term was a residue of French colonial Vietnam, where main routes bore roadside markers that told the distance from a point of origin. The compound housing the headquarters of the 3d Regiment, 1st ARVN Infantry Division, was on QL 1 at PK 17.

From the brigade journal of March 2d:

"1645 Arty LnO: A Btry laid and ready to receive fire mission at 1600 hours."

I wanted to be certain of the security of our brigade base and command post location at LZ Sally. I assigned Wayne Prokup, commanding 1/501, the immediate task but soon made LZ Sally's defenses the responsibility of Earl Keesling, who had admirably taken charge of that mission since he had joined us at LZ Jane in mid-February from Phu Bai.

LZ Sally was ideal for a brigade base. It was on rising ground with good drainage and firm soil. Around a short laterite airstrip there was ample room with open fields of fire and we had an access road to QL 1. An abandoned railroad running through the perimeter gave us rails for overhead cover.³ We immediately began digging an underground TOC.

One great advantage of LZ Sally was that the headquarters of the 3d Regt, 1st ARVN Division, at PK 17 was only half a mile away. On arriving at PK 17 on March 1st, I introduced myself to the regimental commander, who was Lieutenant Colonel Phan Ban Hoa and to his senior U.S. advisor, Major Morales. In 1963-64 I had been senior advisor to the 21st ARVN Infantry Division deep in Vietnam's Delta. I knew what faced Vietnamese troops and their advisors. I was determined to help them. Much more than that, being responsible for employing the American Army's assets in this area of operations, I was determined to do all that I could to see that we operated as part of a common plan that would coordinate our operations, the operations of the 1st ARVN Division, and those of province and district forces into a single effort from this point forward.

I invited Colonel Hoa to join me at my morning briefing the next day, the 2d (this was convenient, since we were in his compound), and at every morning and evening briefing from then on. He did so, or sent someone, as a matter of routine. And, aside from visiting him often myself, I had a member of my S-3 section attend his briefings and planning sessions, and relied on his advisory team to keep us informed at all times.

At 1300 on the 2d of March the 2d Brigade issued its operation order for the new area of responsibility and mission. One of its coordinating instructions read... "Units will effect close coordination with Hqs 3d Regt, 1st ARVN Div (vic YD649280), Quang Dien District Hqs (vic YD674336), and Huong Tra District Hqs (vic YD754252) as necessary."

On March 2 the brigade, minus only A/1/501, the balance of E Company, and the 1/501 rear echelon which came in the next day, completed its move. We swept and secured QL 1 for a 70 truck convoy from Phu Bai to Camp Evans. All battalions were now operating in their new areas -- 1/501 at and around Sally, 2/501 to the south, and 1/502 to the north. There was an abundant enemy to operate against. The next four pages reproduce the intelligence annex of our brigade order of March 2, and contemporary terrain estimates.

³For which we were justly criticized after the area became secure and a working railroad was wanted.

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 Hqs, 2d Bde, 101st Abn Div
 Vic HUE, RVN(YD649280)
 011300H Mar 68
 IRA

Annex A (Intelligence) to Frag Order 8 to OPORD 5-68 (Operation JEB Stuart) (U)

Reference: Same as Basic Order

1. (C) Enemy Situation

a. NVA Units

(1) K-2 Bn - 802 Bn, 6th NVA Regt - last known strength was 345 but could be considerably higher since the liberation of 2,500 personnel from the Hue jail during the T&T offensive. This battalion was last contacted on 1 March 1968 vicinity of YD6930 and is reported to still be in this area in a defensive posture. The K-2 battalion is fully combat effective, has new individual weapons and clothing, and crew served weapons to include heavy machineguns and 81-82mm mortars, and possibly 75mm recoilless rifles. It has been reported that this battalion is defending a large hospital complex from well fortified positions surrounding the village at the above location. It has also been reported that the NVA are attempting to evacuate their wounded to an unknown location by way of the rivers and canals leading from the village. This battalion is supported by the local VC and use the civilians in the area as porters for their wounded and supplies.

(2) Other NVA units - of particular interest are the NVA units that retreated from Hue beginning on 22 Feb 68. Elements of the 29th, 90th, 6th, and 4th NVA Regts were indentified in the Hue offensive. These units withdrew from Hue and were last reported in the area bounded by the following grids: YD5719, YD5713, YD7019, and YD7013. The mission of these units is unknown, however, it is still possible for them to mount a multi-battalion attack at the time and place of their choice. These units suffered heavy casualties in the Hue offensive but, are still thought to be combat effective since they have had time to be resupplied from Bas: Area 114, and from caches located in the mountains to the south and west of the AO.

b. Local Force Units

(1) 810 Bn LF - was last reported at a strength of 400. This battalion has not been contacted since the early days of the Hue offensive and is believed to have been pulled back and held in reserve after the arrival of the NVA units from the north. The last report on the location of this battalion placed it to the east of Hue but was not confirmed. This unit is rated fully combat effective.

(2) C-114 Co Quang Dien District - was last contacted on 1 Feb 68 vicinity YD6331. The strength of this unit is unknown but it should be noted that this unit is well-armed and well-supplied. C-114 Co usually operates to the north and east of the An Lo bridge, YD623303, and is rated fully combat effective. A known supply base and cache area (CO BANG AREA) is within the C-114 company's area of operation. The CO BANG is bounded by the following grids: YD6331, YD6334, YD6031, and YD6034.

(3) C-115 Co Huong Tra District - has not been contacted since on or about 26 Feb 68. The normal area of operations of this company is to the west and northwest of Hue on a radius of about 10 kilometers from YD7324. The strength of this unit is unknown but is rated fully combat effective, and is well-armed and well-supplied.

(4) Hue Sapper Bn and 12th Sapper Bn - In the beginning of the Hue offensive. The Hue Sapper Bn was augmented by the 12th Sapper Bn and since that time have been reported working together in platoon and company size groups. The estimated total strength of the two battalions is 300. The last contact with any element of the Sappers was on 29 Feb 68 vicinity of YD621273 when a 1st ACD scout helicopter killed three (including a platoon leader). It was believed that these three sappers were on a recon of the PK-17-LZ Sally area. These two battalions were instrumental in leading the NVA units into Hue at the beginning of the offensive. The present missions of the sappers is to destroy the An Lo bridge, YD623303, and to infiltrate and sabotage when possible. The present weather situation aids the sappers immensely since they attack with stealth and surprise.

c. Irregular Forces

(1) Guerrilla and VC forces are located in the majority of the villages throughout the AO. These forces are presently well-armed and supplied and many have been reported wearing NVA uniforms. They have access to the caches left by the NVA forces from the Hue offensive. Many are supplied with new AK-47's and other individual weapons and have many crew-served weapons including heavy machineguns, recoilless rifles, and 60mm and 81-82mm mortars. Local irregular forces have been acting as guides for the main force and NVA units operating in the area. The morale of these irregular forces is high, since being encouraged by the NVA units, and can be expected to stay and fight from fortified positions. They have intensified the mortar attacks since being well-supplied by the NVA units.

d. The Song Bo river is a confirmed major supply route and is well fortified in many places. The road running northwest along the foothills from YD700196 to YD603255 and then along Hwy 554 is another known and confirmed infiltration routes run north and south across QL1 vicinity of YD668270, YD673278 and YD694254. Along these routes, the enemy has been known to move in large groups, during the day, and along trails, rivers and roads. Nearly all villages in the AO are well-fortified with trenchlines and bunkers with good overhead cover. The enemy moves from village to village at will and occupies these previously prepared positions. Previously used rocket and mortar positions are vicinity of YD635225, YD648228, YD655242, and YD662230. PK17, LZ Sally and FSB Pinky can expect rocket attacks from anywhere in the foothills extending east and west parallel to QL1. Ground to air firing can be expected from the majority of the villages within the AO. The enemy throughout the AO can be expected to defend because his morale is considered to be good and he has good weapons acquired from the NVA units. The enemy will frequently snipe and retreat when in small numbers or when caught out of defended positions.

2. (C) Essential Elements of Information

- a. Will the enemy attack LZ Sally and FSB Pinky? If so, when, where, and in what strength?
- b. Will the enemy employ indirect fire weapons on LZ Sally and FSB Pinky? If so, when, from where, and what volume?

3. (C) Intelligence Acquisition Tasks

- a. Orders to attached and subordinate units. All attached and subordinate units report all enemy activity in assigned AO, as outlined in the Brigade SOP.
- b. Requests to higher, adjacent, and cooperating units. G2, 1st ACD and G2, 101st Abn Div are requested to provide information on enemy activity in and surrounding the 2d Bde, 101st Abn Div AO.

CUSHMAN
Col

Distribution: Same as OPORD 5-68

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DECLASSIFIED PER EXECUTIVE ORDER 12356, SECTION 3.3, NND PROJ
NUMBER MMR 873541, BY RB/VSW, DATE 6/28/98

8. (C) Intelligence:

a. Weather. During mid-March the NE monsoon became weak as the transition from the previously dominant NE monsoon to the SW monsoon began. As the NE monsoon began to weaken, cloudiness, along the eastern coast, ground fog and morning haze decreased. On occasions, a surge of the NE monsoon reduced ceilings below 1000 feet and visibilities to less than $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles thus hampering the use of helicopter and TAC Air support. Of significance was the increase in thunderstorm activity, gusty winds, and variations of temperature. Generally winds ranged from 5-10 knots with gusts in excess of 15 knots while the temperatures ranged from the mid 90's to the low 60's.

b. Terrain. The area of operation was characterized by varying terrain and vegetation consisting of sandy beaches, low rolling hills and mountains. The terrain from QL 1 to the coast was primarily coastal lowland plains with elevations generally between 0-5 meters, very little vegetation, and poor drainage. West of the coastal lowlands, elevation increased slowly through rolling hills with brushwoods or discontinuous, single canopy forests to the highlands with double and triple canopies and dense undergrowth in places. Numerous rice paddies were found in the coastal lowlands and observation and fields of fire were generally good; however, treestands, hedgerows, ditches, and embankments somewhat reduced observation. Villages were intermitted throughout the lowland area and were enclosed by treestands and hedgerows composed mostly of dense bamboos, bushes, banana and palm trees. These islands of vegetation facilitated enemy defense in the area. These hedgerow areas contained well concealed spider holes and fortified bunkers with thick overhead cover, and connecting trenches and tunnels. The villages afforded the enemy excellent defense in all directions. Drainage in the highlands was good while observation and fields of fire were generally very poor. The highlands generally afforded the enemy freedom of movement since observation from the air and ground was negligible.

(2) Terrain:

The terrain from QL-1 to the coast is primarily coastal lowland plains with the majority of the vegetation centered around the villages. Observation and fields of fire are generally good however, treestands, ditches, hedgerows and embankments may reduce the observation. The majority of the villages, hedgerows, trails, and waterways within the AO are characterized by intricate trench-tunnel complexes, bunkers and spider holes. The area along the waterway running generally East and West from grid YD830197 contains many various types of booby traps. The numerous waterways and trails within the AO provides the enemy excellent routes of withdrawal and are frequently used for movement of supplies and personnel.

On March 3d the 1/501 and 2/501 reported little action, while the 1/502d engaged the enemy with three of its rifle companies (A Company being opcon to 1/501, working on the defenses of LZ Sally) and the recon platoon. 1/502's operations were supported by artillery, ARA gunships, and six sorties of tactical air. From the brigade journal:

"B and C Companies... [to the east of FSB Nola and the An Lo bridge] made heavy contact with an unknown size enemy force resulting in 12 KIA and 4 US KIA and 11 US WIA. [West of Nola] D Company made contact resulting in 6 VC KIA and 3 detainees. The Bn CO in the C&C made an assessment of air and artillery in support of Co's B and C contact... (reporting) an additional 48 NVA KIA."¹

B and C Companies, 1/502, were extracted by helicopter and returned to LZ Nola. Jack Bishop and his radio operator received minor leg wounds while in a C&C ship over D Company late in the afternoon; the battalion S-2 was killed.²

In its Plans Summary for March 3d the brigade journal reported that on the next day...

"2d Brigade will provide artillery support for LZ prep, coordinate air support, and assist in supervision of a combat assault vic YD685355 of 3d Bn, 3d Regiment, 1st ARVN Div. Battalion will attack south vic YD690355 to YD699328 to destroy suspected NVA units. A platoon size PF blocking force will combat assault vic YD705330 in support of ARVN operations. One PF platoon will conduct operations on each side of Song Bo river in conjunction with Co C 1-502."³

Because our two command posts were both temporarily at PK 17, it had been simple to work out this cooperation with the 3d Regiment. By this time I had met Major General Ngo Quang Truong, Commanding General of the 1st ARVN Infantry Division, who had given his enthusiastic approval to this kind of combined operations of his troops and the province's forces with the 2d Brigade. Many more such were to come, at every level.

¹From this point forward, I will no longer use the expression "(BC)" following assessments of enemy losses. This parenthetical remark, which means "body count," (see footnote 2, page 14, and footnote 5, page 48) had become meaningless. I am satisfied that our troops accurately reported, or objectively estimated, the results that they accomplished; that at this stage of the war "body count" had become ample in any event for the battalions of the 2d Brigade; and that we did not need its inflation to satisfy the desires of higher headquarters. The addition of the parenthetical expression "(BC)" had by now become a bad Vietnam habit that could be broken only by official action at the highest command level, and that was not likely to happen

²A battalion commander would normally be accompanied in his C&C ship by his battalion S3, his artillery liaison officer, his battalion S2, and his RTO. Captain Jack Justice, who was S3 of the 1/502 during this period recalls the frequent need to return to the battalion fire base or to LZ Sally to exchange ships because of small arms damage. He writes... "The ticking sound of a round piercing the skin of the UH-1 became well known to all of us."

³Our reporting may have used RF (regional forces) and PF (popular forces) interchangeably.

On the 4th we moved our brigade command post to LZ Sally. The brigade operations summary for that day reported that the combined ARVN/PF/US operation just mentioned had taken place (but it gave no assessment of results inasmuch as these were reported via ARVN channels). The journal for the 4th also reported that on that day...

"...a total of 34 enemy contacts were made by elements of the Bde Infantry Bns. Negative friendly casualties; enemy assessments - 6 NVA KIA , 5 VC KIA ... Bde units were supported throughout the Bde AO by 4 ARA sorties, one USAF air strike, and artillery."

On March 5th, the brigade journal reported...

"Enemy contacts were made by units from the 2-501 Inf and 1-502 Inf resulting in 1 US KIA and 7 US WIA; enemy assessment: 7 NVA KIA and one AK-47 and one LMG captured... units were supported throughout the 2d Bde AO by 4 ARA sorties, two USAF air strikes, and artillery. The 2d Bde TF reacted to reliable intelligence indicating enemy units attempting to infiltrate into the city of Hue. Two rifle companies were combat assaulted into likely avenues of approach... On arrival in assigned areas units were placed in blocking positions to supplement the overall brigade denial plan of movement by NVA and VC units. Bde continues to exchange tactical intelligence and conduct joint operations with ARVN, RF and PF within AO."

By now, 1/502 had a fulltime liaison officer with the Quang Dien district chief, exchanging operational and intelligence information. At 2253 that night, March 5th, the 1/502 reported that on the 6th...

"Quang Dien District is going to furnish 60 men -- 2 RF platoons, 30 men each -- to work with A Co on... sweep through LZ then village then back to highway. The A Co combat assault and movement will be a combined operation."

The 2/501 around Hue and the 1/501 around Sally made relatively little contact during the next few days. But the area of Quang Dien district in which the 1/502 was operating was infested with NVA, who had fortified many of the villages. Working with the district chief and the 3d Regiment, Jack Bishop went after the abundant enemy. On the 6th the brigade journal reported that A Company, 1/502...

"...made a combat assault, then joined two PF platoons on a sweep, negative contact. B Company with two PF platoons made contact with an estimated 50 VC, resulting in the PFs killing 5 VC, and taking 10 detainees, 1 60mm mortar, 1 AK-47, 1 B40, 1 ChiCom 7.62 LMG, 1 M-1 rifle, 1 M-79, and some AK 47 ammo...

"D Co made contact with a Bn size element. Arty and air strikes were used against the village where contact was made. The unit pulled back and was extracted. Friendly losses were 5 KIA and 25 WIA. Enemy losses were 8 NVA KIA... 4 AK-47s, 1 SKS,

1927 rounds AK-47 ammunition, and 9 RPG-2 rounds... An assessment of the damage in the village was not made due to heavy ground fire received by aircraft attempting to make assessment... and dense foliage... A joint US-PF combat assault operation is planned for 7 Mar. C/1/502 will lead the assault followed by one PF co."

From the brigade operations summary for March 7th...

"1-502 conducted combat assaults and S&D operations in area where Company D-502 met heavy resistance 6 Mar. Significant enemy contacts were made by A, B, & C 1-502 Inf and by bn recon platoon 2-501 resulting in 1 US KIA and 1 US WIA. Enemy assessment: 14 NVA KIA, 1 AK-47, 1 M-1 rifle, 1 SKS.

"During the period TF units were supported throughout the AO by 14 ARA sorties, 16 USAF airstrikes, and DS and GS arty, 1-9 Cav and 11th Avn Gp."

From a letter home on March 6th:

"My surroundings have been somewhat temporary since we moved from LZ Jane. We spent three nights in a Vietnamese compound, then one night roughing it here on LZ Sally, and another more civilized night last night. Tonight it is looking even more civilized. I have had a shower, my first since leaving Cu Chi about six weeks ago.

"Our new LZ Sally is more attractive than Jane. Sally is the name of the wife of the first Cav company commander who defended this position, and I decided not to change it to "Bastogne" or Eagle," at least not yet.

"We have had marvelous weather the last couple of days. The soil is fairly flat and sandy, easy to dig. The brigade is slowly assembling and we are putting up our facilities and getting well set.

"The area is very interesting, lots of enemy around but lots of good Vietnamese to work with. Hue is a shambles and it's tragic to see it.

"I got laundry today that I had sent in Phu Bai before the Tet offensive and couldn't get because Hue was in enemy hands. Very reliable Vietnamese laundry."

The brigade journal reflects that on March 7th I instructed Jim White, Brigade S-4, to arrange for Penta-Prime for our airstrip at LZ Sally. Penta-Prime was a kind of thin asphalt that when sprayed on the ground kept the dust down; it was especially helpful for helicopter pads. The weather had turned sunny, the ground had turned dry, and while relief from the dismal weather of February into early March was welcome, the choppers in and out of LZ Sally's pads, and especially the Chinooks, were raising lots of dust.

LZ Sally was taking shape as the brigade's operations and logistic base. No point in our AO was more than 10 miles distant, thus no point was more than a few minutes away by helicopter. Battalion commanders could go to the field with their units and a tactical command post, and battalion rear at Sally could provide them and their troops the necessary logistic support. Each battalion had a log pad from which its daily log bird took chow, ammunition, water, mail, and so on to the companies in the field.⁴ Within the perimeter we were establishing "battalion areas" for each battalion, where company administrative and supply personnel could function and into which each rifle company could move for rest and recovery when its time came.

Jim White had his own brigade log pad on the airstrip, on the hard laterite surface of which a team from the division support command could operate a brigade supply point. B Company of the division medical battalion was now operating a brigade clearing station into which "dustoff" helicopters could take the wounded men of the brigade for treatment and further evacuation if necessary (men with life-threatening wounds were taken directly to the surgical hospital at Phu Bai).

The 1/321 Arty with one battery was stationed on LZ Sally, along with C Btry of the 2/11 Arty, a towed 155 howitzer unit. In due time we would get a self-propelled 8 inch battery. Other batteries of the 1/321 were at fire bases elsewhere, providing full coverage of our area of operations.

I was determined to make the enemy afraid to attack LZ Sally, even with their skilled sappers. (On the first night we were in Sally, a sapper trying to cut our wire hit a trip flare and fled, leaving prints of his bare feet.) We not only had fortified positions with overhead cover and with their interlocking fields of fire, but bands of concertina wire, and claymore mines, and trip flares, plus artillery and mortar concentrations (also direct fire 105s, firing canisters of deadly small arrows called flechettes); we also set up something called a fougasse, which was a barrel of fuel oil that could be ignited by an explosive charge that would send out a fan of flaming oil to cover any would-be sappers. Earl Keesling ran frequent practice alerts, and from time to time at night we would demonstrate to the watching enemy a fougasse. The enemy did not attack LZ Sally in my time.

For protection against the frequent 122mm rocket attacks, we installed overhead cover on all key installations. My cot, with some shelves and a wash basin, was in a Conex container, just off my office, which was only a door away from the brigade TOC. All of this was in a large hole that had posts supporting a roof of railroad rails covered by corru-

⁴Our log birds were still provided by the Cav, and would be until we came under the 101st's full command again. Their daily dispatch had become routine, as had the daily dispatch of a C&C ship for me and for each battalion commander (occasionally a battalion commander used his C&C ship to haul other passengers, such as troops that he wanted to reposition, to which the Cav's 11th Aviation Group would take understandable exception).

gated steel sheets on top of which we stacked three or feet of sandbags. A set of steps led to the outside.

From March 6th through March 10th the 1/502d, with its battalion CP near the An Lo bridge but with the battalion commander (Jack Bishop) continuously in the air and working with the 3d ARVN Regiment and with Quang Dien district, went through very heavy fighting centered on hamlets Ap Dong Lam, Ap Son Trung, and Ap Pho Lai two kilometers southwest of Quang Dien. As compiled, the brigade journal's summaries for this action reported (MIA later recovered as KIA are counted as KIA):

6 Mar	4 US KIA	25 US WIA	Enemy assessment:	None
7 Mar	1 US KIA	1 US WIA	Enemy assessment:	14 NVA/VC KIA
8 Mar	3 US KIA	24 US WIA	Enemy assessment:	47 NVA/VC KIA
9 Mar	4 US KIA	17 US WIA	Enemy assessment:	35 NVA/VC KIA
10 Mar	_____	<u>2 US WIA</u>	Enemy assessment:	<u>38 NVA/VC KIA</u>
Totals:	12 US KIA	69 US WIA	Enemy assessment:	146 NVA/VC KIA ⁵

⁵The journals of the 1/502 for 1967 and 1968 are missing from the National Archives records. In the 1/502 organizational history there is a document that is evidently compiled from daily journals and that records each day's action and results. Following are extracts (the numbers differ from those reported by brigade):

6 Mar 1968: Heavy contact made by Delta Company at 1343 vic YD698304 (W-shaped vill). Delta broke contact at 1612 and were extracted from hot PZ after using all available fire support on the village. Estimated 2 reinforced companies in the village.

Results: Friendly	5 KIA	Enemy	58 KIA (BC)
	25 WIA		confirmed by aerial observation
	2 MIA		

7 Mar 1968: Battalion continued operations and made 3 company sized C/As resulting in moderate contact. Bravo recovered the bodies of the 2 MIA from Delta.

Results: Friendly	1 KIA	Enemy	30 KIA (BC)
	1 WIA		
	2 MIA to 2 KIA		

8 Mar 1968: Battalion continued operations and Alfa made heavy contact near Ap Dong Lam (YD680318). After 3 hours of heavy fighting Alfa was ordered to pull back leaving 3 KIA behind because of intensive enemy fire.

Results: Friendly	4 KIA	Enemy	35 KIA (BC)
	17 WIA		4 WIA/POW
	3 MIA (KIA)		50 KIA (estimated)

9 Mar 1968: Battalion conducted joint [meaning with ARVN] 3 company assault on village complex center of mass YD6731. Alfa, Bravo, and Charlie remained in heavy contact from 0900-1445. Air strikes, artillery, naval gunfire, and organic weapons used against suspected 3 Bns of NVA in villages.

Results: Friendly	3 KIA	Enemy	30 KIA (BC)
	17 WIA		20 KIA (est)
	2 MIA		

10 Mar 1968: Companies engaged in heavy contact vic YD6731. Charlie and Alfa recovered 5 MIA (KIA). Alfa reported finding 38 more bodies from yesterday's action and killed 10 more.

Results: Friendly	5 KIA (MIA)	Enemy	48 KIA (BC)
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11 Mar 1968: Battalion conducted joint operations and swept Ap Duc Trong with ARVNs. Contact was light and ARVNs found 46 NVA KIA by artillery and captured 3 more.

Results:		Enemy	46 KIA (BC)
			3 WIA (POW)

On March 6th I had written home that...

"General Barsanti will be up here tomorrow and in a few more days will be taking over our control. It's been an education working with the cavalry. They do their job well and have some real fine people."

That was true. Although I had gotten off to an uncertain start with the Cav as Tet hit all of us, by now we had learned, and were accommodating to, their ways and I believe that our battalions had earned their respect.

March 8th and 9th would be our last full days under the Cav. At noon on the 10th we would return to the full command of the 101st Airborne Division, reporting to the 101st's command post at Camp Eagle, occupying old LZ El Paso.

From a 9 March letter home:

"Doing fine, weather is beautiful, brigade is in outstanding shape and doing well."

And on March 10th I wrote...

"We have more heavy fighting with the 1/502 Infantry (Jack Bishop). They are doing well but the enemy is tenacious and well dug in."

That was also quite true. On the 8th, 9th, and 10th, the 1/502 had done almost all the fighting in the 2d Brigade, taking casualties of 8 KIA and 22 WIA in three days and accounting for some 97 enemy KIA. On the 9th, a typical day, the 1/502 was supported (as it was for the 7th) by 14 ARA sorties, 16 USAF airstrike sorties, in addition to direct and general support artillery.

My letter of 10 March continued...

"The weather was delightful yesterday. Countryside looked beautiful from the air, but it is vicious on the ground.

"Today is Sunday, and we will have some relaxing and church services. Our new area is shaping up well, with an APO, a PX, and other amenities coming in."

That day, March 10th, the brigade operations summary reported:

"To 1200 hrs in this reporting period 2d Bde TF, 101st Abn Div, conducted tactical operations in support of Operation Jeb Stuart, opcon to 1st ACD.

"At 1200 hrs the Bde TF returned to opcon 101st Abn Div and conducted operations in support of Operation Carentan, without change in AO."

A short and significant period in the life of the Second Brigade had ended. A new period was opening.

* * * * *

General Barsanti was a hard-driving, mission-oriented commander who had performed with distinction in combat in two wars; his sound tactical and operational insight certainly had my respect. However he had an explosive temper that often led him to mistreat badly his staff. But he recognized quality work, and he could see that the people immediately around him were giving him that. So although he berated them often and publicly, and virtually daily threatened one or another of them with relief, in reality he showed more patience than his often shameful manner conveyed. General Barsanti was personally courageous and cared deeply for his men. Although working for him could not be called a pleasure, neither is war a pleasure. He aimed for results, and from his division he got results.

There was never any doubt about what General Barsanti wanted from us in the 2d Brigade. He wanted enemy contact; he wanted those contacts to generate reports of "NVA/VC KIA" and "NVA/VC PW;" and in getting those results he did not want any casualties among his troops that were not absolutely necessary. And in driving for that kind of results, General Barsanti supervised the hell out of me.⁶

Well, what he wanted was what I wanted myself, and with some exceptions as to the last point -- unnecessary casualties, with which I too was never satisfied -- that is what the 2d Brigade was now producing.

In daylight our operating style included (1) the company-size ground reconnaissance in force (RIF -- sometimes called "search and destroy" or S&D), (2) the company-size, occasionally multiple-company-size, combat assault into a location from which the assault force could conduct a RIF, and (3) the use of battalion reconnaissance platoons, and occasionally rifle platoons, on independent patrols. I wanted, and my battalion commanders knew very well that I wanted, each action to be based on the best intelligence that

⁶One evening, I think it was in April or so, the briefer at division headquarters reported that one of our companies had made contact on the edge of a village but that we had not followed up with an attack. General Barsanti interpreted the briefer's phrasing to mean that we had "broken contact," which to him was always unacceptable. We had indeed not continued the attack, but had done what we could with ambushes to cut off an enemy withdrawal from the village. My staff was informed of General Barsanti's ire, and shortly afterward I received a telephone call from a highly exercised CG; we were not to break contact! I said to him, "Goddammit, General, I don't want to send a company into a defended village at dusk and get myself all..." He shouted into the telephone in the high squeaky voice he used on such occasions, "Goddam you, don't you goddam me! Are you tired? Don't you want to fight? Want me to find a new brigade commander? I'm coming down there right now! Meet me at your pad!" His helicopter came in, he alighted, I saluted, and he put his arm about me and we walked to the CP without any mention of what had brought him there.

we could gather, and each action to be planned and executed so that it would engage the enemy on terms that favored us.

Achieving terms favorable to us was difficult when our troops were required to move into combat while the enemy -- in cleverly concealed and bunkered positions along tree lines and on the edges of villages, and with observation of our approach -- could simply occupy his positions when we came near. While "reconnaissance by fire" -- in which direct or indirect fire was placed on a suspected enemy position -- was an available tactic, it rarely drew an enemy response and hardly ever damaged the defenders significantly. So our troops did not often use that technique; they simply, and very carefully, approached likely defended positions, took the enemy's opening fire and the casualties that went with it, and then used maneuver and fire to defeat that enemy.

"Fire" meant more than the company's and battalion's organic weapons, including mortars. It meant 105mm, 155mm, and 8 inch artillery, and gunships, and tactical air, and naval gunfire. Expertise in calling in and adjusting these means of fire support was essential to the success of a rifle company and platoon. Also essential was expertise within our direct support artillery, the 1/321st, in responding -- to include their orchestrating general support 155s, 8 inchers, and naval gunfire. However, such massive fire support left the villages, from which the population had fled, in ruins.

An example, from the brigade journal of March 9th (cited on page 64):

"1-502: Co A conducted S&D operations in villages vic YD688317, moved west to YD6822317. Received AW and SA fire... At 0925 company received 2 RPG rockets and 1 mortar round. The company incurred 2 WIA in this action. At 1125 hrs unit was engaged by enemy AW, MG, RPG, SA, and sniper fire. Enemy occupied well concealed and protected positions. Every attempt to advance met heavy fire from 6 MG, 30 SA, one cal. 50 MG and 1 mortar. Targets were extremely difficult to identify for ARA ships because of the heavy volume of fire and excellent concealment. At 1445 hrs company pulled back to blocking psn and brought airstrikes on the target. During withdrawal an intense volume of fire was received from vic YD686234 and countered with artillery. Contact was broken at 1615 hours. Friendly losses: 1 KIA (medic), 7 WIA (medevac), 4 WIA (not medevac), and 1 MIA. Enemy losses: 23 VC KIA, 4 AK-47s, and 1 RPG." (The missing man's body was recovered the next day.)

I wanted company commanders to be aggressive, but I insisted that they use common sense tactics. I summarily relieved only one company commander while brigade commander; I had come upon him, his company platoons lined up abreast and about to advance across an open rice paddy toward a hedgerow on the edge of a village, using no smarts whatever. I stopped the attack and told him and his battalion commander that he was through as company commander, and why.

Working with district chiefs' intelligence officers was invaluable to our battalion commanders and their S-2s for the intelligence it gave us in planning an operation. And working with the district's RFs and PFs in execution was for the most part valuable for their instincts about the enemy.⁷ The better PFs knew the area intimately and appreciated our firepower and determination, and we made good use of their battle-wisdom.

Our operating style for nighttime operations was a different matter. Here our goal was to deny the enemy the freedom of movement that the night gave him, and here our specialty was the ambush. Springing a successful ambush, which by now had become almost a nightly occurrence, gave the troops great satisfaction. We learned that the night was our friend, that it was safe to move at night, and that a night position into which a unit moved after dark, before dark having led the enemy to believe that they were in another location, was remarkably safe. Even when we were at LZ Jane, we had begun to use PF soldiers to accompany our ambush squads and platoons.

In March, Sergeant First Class Jerome F. Sullivan, the brigade operations sergeant,⁸ made for me a 1/50,000 scale map. Covered in acetate glued to its surface, it could be folded so as to fit in my left trouser leg pocket. I was never without that map. To look at that very map today is to see, along QL 1 and eastward toward the South China Sea, clusters of small black dots among green forms -- village after village, densely vegetated. Almost every one of these villages was owned by the NVA/VC. Many of them were largely empty of civilians, or became largely empty when it was evident that fighting was about to take place. Our task, working with our Vietnamese partners, was to kill the enemy in those villages or capture him.⁹

As we entered Carentan I on March 10th, battalion command posts were at: 1/501 (Prokup), LZ Sally; 2/501 (Tallman), FSB Pinky,¹⁰ to the southeast of Sally; and 1/502 (Bishop), FSB Nola, near the An Lo Bridge. Battalion commanders were airborne most

⁷PF platoon performance varied, and some troopers of the 2d Brigade even today express dissatisfaction with the fighting qualities of the PFs they encountered.

⁸Later Sergeant Major, Jerome Sullivan was division operations sergeant when I commanded the 101st Airborne Division in 1972-73. A finer non-commissioned officer and more competent operations sergeant I never knew. He died a few years ago, God rest his Irish soul.

⁹In writing this personal memoir I have asked myself, and have asked Russ Miller, my S3, and Ray Riggan, my S2, if we had a brigade "campaign plan" -- that is, an orderly scheme to put our forces to best use against the enemy, not just a day or so at a time, but over a period of days or weeks at a time -- with an intelligence estimate and an operating sequence that would derive from that estimate. I regret to say that we did not, although I am not sure that to do so would have been other than futile, given our frequent guidance and AO revisions from division and a seemingly ever-changing enemy picture. In any event, I simply gave each battalion commander his area of operations and told each of them to "go get 'em" -- exchanging ideas, sometimes giving specific instructions, but in general relying on them to decide where to go. (Ray Riggan gently faults me for not paying enough attention to his brigade intel picture early on but says that that I got better at it as time went by.)

¹⁰Pinky was named after my red-headed friend, Colonel Richard M. Winfield, Jr., whose family had lived in the other half of the duplex, reserved for large families, that our families shared at Fort Leavenworth in 1956-58. We had been majors then; he was now commanding the 1st Air Cav Division's division artillery.

of the day, exercising command from their C&C ships. LZ Sally continued to grow; the 101st's 188th Assault Helicopter Company was now on station.¹¹ Some typical days...

11 March: Company B, 2-501 Inf made contact with a strong, well dug-in enemy reinforced company. Company C, 2-501 Inf maneuvered to the enemy's location, vicinity of YD698296, and also received intense SA and AW fire. Elements of 1-502 operating in the vicinity close into encircling positions to the north of the 2-501. Operations resulted in 1 US KIA, 12 US WIA. Enemy assessment was 72 NVA KIA, 16 VC KIA, one detainee, 4-AK-47s, 1 7.62mm PPS-43 SMG, 1 M2 carbine, and 1 AK-44 rifle.¹²

12 March: Company A, 1-501 Inf vic YD610220, found an ammunition cache containing 48 cases of AK-47 ammo, 102 rounds of RPG-7, 228 B-40 rockets, 321 rounds of 60mm mortar, 170 rounds of 82mm mortar, 40 122mm rocket motors, 19 122mm rocket warheads, 25 cases of TNT, 3 cases of dynamite, detonating cord and electric and non-electric blasting caps. Operations resulted in 4 US KIA, 8 US WIA. Enemy assessment, 5 NVA KIA.¹³

14 March:

Company D, 1-501 Inf attacked north into the village at YD675306 toward which the enemy had been observed moving during the night. After an artillery preparation, Company D entered the edge of the village, where resistance was encountered. Company B, 1-501 Inf entered the same village from the north and assumed a blocking position. Companies C, 1-501 and D 2-501 were maneuvered into positions east and west of the objective area to block the exits and maintain pressure on the enemy during the night. Operations resulted in 1 US KIA and 20 US WIA. Enemy assessment 15 NVA KIA, 1 VC WIA, 1 NVA PW, 1 AK-47, 1 MG, 1 gas mask, 1 pair binoculars, 3 grenades, and 9700 pounds of rice.

15 March

Company B, 1-501 Inf, with 50 PF forces attached, attacked south into the village at YD675309 and found 2 NVA (KBA), 1 AK-47, and 2 M16 rifles. Company A, 1-501 Inf engaged 2 VC in vicinity YD663309 with SA and artillery resulting in 1 VC KIA, 1 VC PW. Company B, 1-502 investigating a report of an enemy cache, was engaged by AK-47 and LMG fire vicinity YD639310. Artillery and air strikes were placed on the

¹¹ The 188th "Black Widows" with its 23UH-1H (slick) assault helicopters and eight UH-1C "Spider" gunships would play a big part in our upcoming operations. It arrived with eleven months combat experience, having been organized at Fort Campbell in 1966-67, and then supporting units in the III Corps area from Dau Tieng.

¹²This and the similar reports that follow are taken verbatim from the document "After Action Report (Offensive Operations 10 Mar 68 - 17 May 1968)," Headquarters 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, APO San Francisco 06383, dated 29 May 1968, on file in the National Archives.

¹³Charles Gadd and Timothy O'Connor each has a tale to tell about the active patrolling up the Song Bo River into the mountains where at a bend in the river A/1/501 after a fire fight uncovered this well-concealed storage site complete with delivery sampans. After visits by many, including the division commander, A Company blew up the ammo and left the scene, headed for the action described under March 15th.

position. The enemy, estimated to be a reinforced NVA company, returned fire on the attacking aircraft. Company A, 1-501 was moved into overwatching and ambush positions in order to attack the enemy's position on 16 March. Operations resulted in 1 US KIA, 6 US WIA. Enemy assessment was 12 NVA KIA, 2 VC KIA, 2 VC PW, 3 detainees, 2 AK-47s, 2 M16 rifles, 3 ChiCom grenades, 1 60mm mortar round, 6500 pounds of rice.

16 March

Companies B and C, 1-501 Inf had night ambushes sprung resulting in 1 NVA and 1 VC KIA. Company A, 1-501 with an attached PF platoon attacked village at YD540320. Company B, 1-501 Inf turned toward the NW and was engaged with SA and AW fire vicinity YD635325. While deploying maneuver elements, the company suffered 1 US KIA and 4 US WIA from an explosion of an unknown type booby trap. The attack continued and by late afternoon enemy action had ceased. Other enemy contacts were from sniper fire. Operations resulted in 1 US KIA and 17 US WIA. Enemy was 14 NVA KIA, 3 VC KIA, 1 VC suspect, 1 RPG-2 launcher, 2 rounds RPG-2, 1 60mm mortar round, 350 rounds AK-47, 3600 pounds of rice, 6 bunkers destroyed, 5 ChiCom claymore mines, 2 rounds 82mm mortar, and 1 BAR.

Condensed daily summaries such as these cannot capture the intensity and detail of what goes on in this kind of fighting. Nor, understandably, were these the sort of details that I chose to include in my letters home, which were my only contemporary records. So I include here two accounts, one official and one personal, of the events of those days in mid-March 1968. On March 22d I wrote my wife:

"Day before yesterday General Barsanti came by and presented me with the Silver Star for action last month in Hai Lang. He is generous with his authority for this award. Other commanders were likewise decorated, Bishop & Tallman."¹⁴

Although he must have been satisfied that each of us had done something to deserve this award, General Barsanti had no specific action in mind for me. Once again, my headquarters was required to prepare a citation. Recalling my participation in the 16 March action described above, I told Jerry Allen to have someone compile the facts and to use that as a basis for the award to me, if it seemed all right. He did so, and my citation, in General Orders Nr. 913, Headquarters 101st Airborne Division, 1 June 1968, reads in part as follows:

"For gallantry in action in the Republic of Vietnam on 16 March 1968. Colonel Cushman distinguished himself on 16 March 1968 while serving as Brigade Commander, Second Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, on a combat operation with Company A 1st

¹⁴The day after Pete Piotrkowski was wounded (see Chapter 3, page 39), General Barsanti had ordered that he be written up for a Silver Star. In the National Archives' files on the 1/501st at Suitland, MD, there is a newspaper clipping of the presentation of that award to Pete in the hospital at Fort Campbell.

Battalion (Airborne) 501st Infantry... On 16 March the 1st platoon, attacking north, had been stopped by intense rocket and automatic weapons fire from concealed bunker positions 200 meters inside the village. The 2d platoon was engaged with the enemy in a flanking position 300 meters to the northwest. Movement of the company was halted. Colonel Cushman, Brigade Commander, was airborne over the battle area in an unarmed light observation helicopter, OH-23. Realizing that effective and early resumption of the attack required his personal intervention, Colonel Cushman landed in his OH-23 100 meters from the 2d platoon and with his radio operator moved forward into the fire-swept area to the platoon leader and platoon sergeant where he determined the situation. Returning to his landing area, he called in his helicopter and moved to the location of the company commander. With his radio operator he accompanied the company commander and artillery forward observer to where the 1st platoon was in contact. Here he determined that the point elements of the 1st platoon had been cut down by machine gun fire from a concealed enemy bunker, and that platoon lead elements continued under intense enemy fire. Colonel Cushman then moved forward to join the lead riflemen of the platoon. Exposing himself to hostile fire at close range, he determined that the primary fire support needed by Company A was aerial rocket artillery fire to disengage the 1st platoon, recover its wounded, and destroy the enemy positions. Colonel Cushman so informed the battalion commander, and remained with the artillery forward observer near the enemy positions until the rocket attack was successfully completed. Returning to the company command post, and determining that lack of ammunition was holding up a flanking attack by the 2d platoon, Colonel Cushman again called in his OH-23, boarded it, loaded it with ammunition, and once more entered the fire-swept 2d platoon area where he delivered the ammunition and evacuated a wounded soldier. Company A then executed a flanking attack by the 2d platoon, enveloping the enemy positions..."¹⁵

¹⁵In May 1994, I received a letter from Sergeant Timothy O'Connor, to whom I had written about a Memorial Day ceremony planned for that year. His letter said in part:

"I was glad to hear that you commanded the 101st Abn Div and retired as a Lt. Gen. I know that every member of my platoon in Vietnam would be proud.

"The 2nd Platoon of 'A' Company was saved by your brave deeds on 16 Mar. 1968. I don't know if you remember but that day we were in combat in the village of Ap Co Thap. I took my platoon on a flanking mission to try and cut off the NVA. We got to the rear of the forward group of NVA but didn't know that we were in the middle of a large amount of NVA soldiers. We got hit with everything -- mortars, machine guns and small arms fire. Five of my troops were wounded and the NVA had us surrounded. Lt. Gary Scott, my platoon leader suffered a concussion and I took over. I called in a med evac in the middle of my perimeter and got the wounded troops aboard. The chopper started to lift off but was shot down. We got the troops off the chopper and also the crew members. We evacuated the wounded to cover and formed a tight perimeter around them. During that fire fight I tossed over a dozen hand grenades and fired about 200 rounds from my M-16. The only targets we had were the NVA's muzzle flashes. I called 'A' Company's CO on my PRC-25 and yelled for help. He said that the rest of the company was pinned down also. We were almost out of ammo and I gave the command to fix bayonets.

"The next thing I remembered was getting a call on my radio saying that you were on your way with a resupply of grenades and ammo. I saw your chopper come in on the other side of the small river--you were getting a lot of fire from the NVA and I thought that they were going to shoot you down. I tried to wave you off but you kept coming. I got some of my troops and we crossed the river and retrieved the ammo. You gave us a hand salute. I saluted you back and we held our own.

"If it wasn't for your bravery probably all of us would have died that day. General, I can't thank you enough."

An entry from the 29 May After Action Report...

21 March: During the early morning hours (0315-0330) LZ Sally received approximately 40 60mm mortar rounds. Company C and recon platoon, 1-501, located and destroyed VC force in vicinity YD714315. During the same time period that LZ Sally received the mortar attack, FSB Pinky was subjected to a coordinated rocket, mortar, and AW attack with the artillery positions receiving the majority of the fire. During the attack approximately 10 sappers reached the perimeter wire, cut it, and entered the perimeter. This attack resulted in 7 US KIA, 21 US WIA. Enemy assessment was 26 NVA KIA, 21 VC KIA, 3 NVA PWs, 2 VC PWs, 1 K-44, 8 AK-47s, 1 M1 rifle, 1 LMG, 1 7.62 Russian pistol, 1 7.62 LMG, 1 SKS, 1,000 rounds AK-47, 20 60mm mortar rounds, 13 stick grenades, 17 blocks TNT, 2 US grenades, 1 ChiCom grenade, 20 rounds SKS.

That coordinated sapper and mortar attack on LZ Pinky demonstrated how dangerous was the enemy and how vital it was that we not be vulnerable to his skill and determination -- and to his intelligence on our fire base layout, gained because he could observe a fire base from outside its perimeter and could be told the inside layout by a local Vietnamese who we hired for sanitation. His sappers were particularly dangerous; we redoubled our efforts to make sure that he never believed LZ Sally to be vulnerable to his attack.

The Pinky attack took place the night before the 2/501 was to transfer Pinky to the 2/17 Cavalry Squadron, Lieutenant Colonel Julius Becton commanding, which on the 21st was to move from Camp Eagle south of Hue to join the 2d Brigade. The 2/17 would take over the AO of the 2/501, and the 2/501 would head southward into the foothills rising to mountains to the south and west of Hue.

Our brigade AO was the shape of a triangle. One apex, the area of the 2/501, pointed southward alongside of and southwest of Hue. Northwest of that was the area of the 1/502, which included LZ Sally and the ground north to the Song Bo River, but also went southward into the foothills. East of that AO, and northeast of the 2/501, was the area of the 2/17th; it included QL 1 southeastward toward Hue and the territory beyond QL 1. North of both the 1/502 and 2/17, the 1/501 had a swath of territory that was the base of the inverted triangle; it included the An Lo bridge and the district town of Quang Dien.

The 29 May After Action Report related that on March 22d "Both the 2-501 and 1-502 Inf attacked south into Base Area 114..."

D/2/501 had already begun that attack. From Cleo Hogan's diary:

20 March

Today we received orders to go up into the mountains outside Hue called Nui Hon Vuon, or 309. At 1500 hrs NVA on top of Hill 309 opened up with automatic weapon

fire and RPG. 3d Platoon attacked while 1st Platoon supported. Too much resistance. I ordered 3d Platoon to withdraw. The Air Force bombed it for nearly an hour and 3d Platoon tried it again. I had to bring them back down. The Air Force sent in 4 more sets of fighters and they blasted it again. We tried for the 3d time but could not take the hill. Artillery blasted the hill all night long.

21 March

Still engaged with NVA on Hill 309. At 0700 the Air Force sent in two more sets of bombers. This time Dave Loftin attacked with 3d Platoon supporting, and for the 4th time we were forced to withdraw. The NVA have stood bravely in defense of this hill. After we withdrew, the NVA came out of their bunkers and were walking around on top of their hill waving at us. We were only about 800 yards apart....

22 March

At 1145 hrs Loftin, 2d Platoon, went around behind the hill while we kept their heads down with automatic weapons fire. At 1225 Loftin was on top and had the hill secured. The hill isn't very large, only about 100 yards across, but it looks down on everything. From here you can see Hue, Hwy 1, the ocean... At 1500 hrs MG Barsanti and LTG Stillwell (Note: It was actually LTG Rosson, corps commander) landed on top of the hill. They had a newsman with them... At 1600 MG Barsanti came back and presented 3 Silver Star awards. I am very proud of these men. We killed 23 NVA and lost 1 KIA and 8 WIA.

The afternoon of March 26th I was in the air, in touch with Jack Bishop and monitoring the 1/502 battalion command net. B Company 1/502 was operating in the hills six miles south of LZ Sally. From the brigade journal...

"1720 Bde CO: Believe that 1/502 had mortar accident, plat leader 1st Plat now CO, total 7 KIA, 12 WIA reported so far, they are attempting to cut LZ for medevac now."

From the 29 May After Action Report:

26 March: Company B, 1-502 Inf, made contact with estimated platoon. Several rounds of 4.2 mortars fell on the company command group, resulting in 11 US KIA and 19 US WIA. [Note: Company B had been operating along a jungle trail in a valley, leading its advance by firing 4.2 mortar rounds out ahead of the column when this disaster struck, killing the company commander and many of his command group. I took my UH-1 C&C ship into a tiny cleared area by vertical descent and ascent and along with dustoff helicopters was able to get the dead and wounded out of there. This serious loss of troopers from their fellow troopers' misdirected fire caused grief to all concerned. We redoubled our efforts to avoid any recurrence.]

On the day that mortar disaster occurred, March 26th, we were planning to displace temporarily the operations of the 2d Brigade into a tier of battalion AOs to the north and to move the CP of the 2d Brigade from LZ Sally to Camp Evans. The purpose of this shift northward was to take over for a couple of weeks the AOs of brigades of the 1st Cav Division, while that division took its three brigades on a major operation along Highway 9, which led westward from Quang Tri to the besieged Marine fire base at Khe Sanh.

We would turn our present area of operations over to the newly arrived 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, which was now under 101st opcon. Leaving the 1/501 with the 3d Bde/ 82d, but taking the 1/502, 2/501, and 2/17 Cav with us, the 2d Brigade would assume responsibility for LZ Jane, the Hai Lang area, and Utah Beach. The 2d Brigade would be joined in its new AO by 2/327, the "No Slack" battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Charles Beckwith, who had formerly been Division G-2.

With the loss of several fine troopers to sappers at LZ Pinky, and even more to a mortar accident in the 1/502, and with relatively little to show for our contacts with the enemy in our RIF and combat assault operations, the last few days had been disappointing. But on March 27 the 1/501 began an action that would prove to be the beginning of a new phase of operations for the 2d Brigade.

From the Plans Summary, for the next day, of the 2d Brigade journal of March 26th...

"1-501 Inf... Co A conduct CA [combat assault] from vic An Lo Bridge to LZ vic YD725325. Move to secure objective vic YD723328... Co D conduct CA from vic An Lo Bridge to LZ vic YD705335. Move to secure objective vic YD715330."

During the night of March 26-27, the S-2, 1/501st, was informed by the Quang Dien district PF people that elements of the VC 810th local force battalion had just the previous day moved to a location three kilometers to the east of these planned objectives. U.S. Navy patrol boats on the Perfume River, with whom 1/501 was in daily contact, also informed the battalion that ninety VC were occupying a village 1,500 meters further to the east. Lieutenant Colonel Wayne J. Prokup, battalion commander, told me well after midnight that he was changing the objectives for the A and D company combat assault.

From the brigade journal for March 27th...

"0320 From Bde CO: The C/As of 1-501 will begin at 0800 hrs, weather permitting. This has been passed on to 188th Avn Co. Have C&C ship report to Quang Dien for 1-501 use by 0700 hours.

"0817 1-501: 1st lift of D Co abn at 0810 hours."

By late morning A and D Companies of the 1/501 were on the ground and moving. From the brigade journal, March 27th...

- "1253 1-501: A & D Co together and S3 briefing and discussing how to get across river.
- "1340 1-501: Request 5+2 to lift D Co across river, believe have NVA company boxed in with 6 gunboats and PF. PZ YD748308, LZ YD764303.
- "1500 1-501: D Co YD754316 prep for CA to YD764303. A Co YD754316 crossing river at this time by sampans.
- "1521 1-501 (late entry): D Co in heavy contact on LZ, receiving mortars and small arms, need airstrike.
- "1534 Bde CO: D 1-501 landed on LZ764303. LZ was green. Lead element received mortar and SA fire as they neared village line (YD768307). FO and RTO WIA. Have gunships and Navy gunboats supporting. One gunboat drew fire from village. Request air strike.
- "1602 1-501: Medevac complete for D Co. 9 WIA, no KIA reported.
- "1605 1-501: D Co has 2 KIA.
- "1708 1-501: A Co has completed river crossing vic YD768310, moving to link up with D Co.
- "1730 CO returned CP."

I had been with Wayne Prokup and his S3, Captain Charles Harrell, all afternoon.¹⁵ By this time we had gotten the 1/501 some helicopters to lift its recon platoon to reinforce A and B Companies.

Although, along with artillery and Cobra gunships, three airstrikes had supported the 1/501, Wayne Prokup and I were seeing night coming on and with it a typical, and probably typically successful, effort by the VC in the village to slip out of our grasp. We decided that we would ask for an Air Force C-47 flare ship to fly overhead, that the 1/501 along with PFs would surround the village on its land side, that the Navy's patrol craft would cover the water side, and that we would trap the VC in the village.

The sketch map, next page, is from a report by the 2d Brigade S3 of 22 June (see page 79, Chapter 6). It shows the actions during the day of the 27th of A and D Companies -- which had first gone into LZs just west of the village at (1) -- and of the recon platoon.

¹⁵Harrell, soon to be a major, was a son of (later) four-star Army general Ben Harrell. He was a superb S3. Like many others who helped make the reputation of the 2d Brigade, he is now dead -- from cancer three years ago.

Returning to Sally, I arranged the flare ship, which reported in just at dark and made radio contact with the 1/501st. Directing the flares was a new experience to us and, using voice radio, maps, and landmarks, was difficult.

From the brigade journal for March 27th...

"2343 1-501: D Co reports enemy was forced back into village, some may have slipped out because flares were not properly spaced. D Co believes they got a couple of the enemy.

The 22 June S3 report relates...

"At 2130 hrs (27 March), Co A captured one wounded NVA. Sporadic enemy small arms fires were directed into the cordon all night as the enemy unsuccessfully tried to escape. At first light another NVA surrendered to Co A and Co D engaged three in front of their position and killed them. Up to this time, approximately twenty enemy had been killed. At 0800 hrs, psyops loudspeakers were used to broadcast surrender appeals to the encircled NVA/VC. These appeals achieved no results. Tactical air and artillery were again directed into the enemy positions and lifted at 0945 hrs, when Co D began to sweep the objective from the south. After meeting no resistance, Co D returned to the south and assessed over thirty NVA/VC by air and artillery.

"Results: Friendly - 2 US WHA, 19 US WHA. Enemy - 31 NVA KIA, 3 NVA PW, 22 VC KIA. 10 individual weapons captured."

In this operation, among other things, we had learned some useful lessons about the employment of flare ships and psyops teams.

Meanwhile in the mountains 20 kilometers to the southwest, the 2/501 had been in contact. From the brigade journal of March 27th:

"After heavy arty preparation D Co moved from its NDP at 0920 hrs towards an objective at YD637195. At 1215 heavy contact was made with an estimated plat size force in bunkers..."

On that day Cleo Hogan wrote in his diary...

"Today was a bad day. We finally found the 9th Battalion, 90th Regiment NVA Headquarters and they put up a delaying action while most of the Battalion escaped. We had several Tac Air strikes, artillery, and 4.2 mortar strikes. I lost another killed today. Clifford Williams was killed and 1SG Scott and Sgt Bowman went in to get his body and encountered an NVA who let them get the body out. My best friend 2Lt Loftin was

shot today and 1st Plt Sgt Parker was also wounded. Also hit were Saxiones, Sgt Martin, Washington, Buzzini, and Pfc Brockman... We used a total of 14 sets of bombers. Bad weather kept them from going into North Vietnam and so they supported us."

The brigade journal entry continued...

"Enemy assessment - 7 NVA KIA. Friendly losses - 1 KIA, 8 WIA (medevac) and 2 WIA (not medevac)"

Three days later, on 30 March and after some additional contact across the AO, Operation Carentan I ended. Our journal for that day summarized the results of its twenty days for the 2d Brigade and all its units, including the 2/17 Cav...

"Friendly losses: 68 US KIA, 271 US WIA (248 medevac)

"Enemy assessment (personnel): 233 NVA KIA, 105 VC KIA, 12 NVA PW, 7 VC PW."

This ratio of losses did not suit me at all, and I especially regretted those that could have been prevented, such as those taken in Pinky's sapper attack and in the 1/502 mortar accident. Fortunately, beginning with the half-successful encirclement operation of the 1/501 on 27-28 March, we were in the embryonic stages of finding a way to dramatically improve the ratio. The 2d Brigade had conducted the first in what would be a series of cordon operations that broke the back of the NVA/VC in its area of operations north, and later south, of the ancient imperial city of Hue.

The next chapter -- Chapter 6 -- tells of those cordon operations. After that, in Chapters 7, 8, and 9, I will give a more complete account both of cordon operations and of other events from March 30th through June 28th 1968, to include how we transferred to a new AO, effective at noon on March 30th.

Chapter 6. Cordon Operations; March-June 1968

In early June 1968, knowing that I would turn over command of the brigade later that month, I asked Major James J. Waldeck, who had become brigade S-3 in mid-April, to prepare a file for the records of the brigade on the cordon operations that we had conducted, March through June. He did so, and I took home with me a copy of his report of 22 June.

A year and a half later I used that file and other material to write an article for Army magazine called "How We Did It in Thua Thien."

Published in the May 1970 issue (which appeared as I was back in Vietnam serving as deputy senior advisor to the RVN's Commanding General, IV Corps and Military Region IV, at Can Tho in the Vietnam Delta), that article's introduction read:

"The 2d Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division succeeded in Thua Thien Province in 1968 by applying the three basic principles it had formulated for destroying the enemy: work closely with the Vietnamese, exert constant and unrelenting pressure on the enemy day and night, and at every opportunity quickly encircle him so tightly that he cannot wriggle out of the trap."¹

The article began...

"In early March 1968, the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, moved its command post to Landing Zone Sally, eight miles northwest of Hue, in Thua Thien Province, Republic of Vietnam.

"The brigade had been under the operational control of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) in the fierce fighting following the NVA Tet offensive, beginning in late January. Battalions of the brigade had decisively defeated NVA formations from Quang Tri to the Street Without Joy to Hue. The 2d Brigade now rejoined the 101st Airborne Division.

"During the next 100 days, from mid-March to the end of June 1968, the brigade was to forge a remarkable record of achievement.

¹This combination of principles can justifiably be called an original formulation of the 2d Brigade. Certainly we were motivated and supported by General Barsanti himself in the second of these principles, "exert constant and unrelenting pressure on the enemy day and night." But the whole of the conception and its daily application in practice was in April-June a trademark of the 2d Brigade. The practice continued with success and without interruption upon transfer of brigade command to Colonel John A. Hoefling.

"The full record of that achievement and of all those magnificent soldiers who took part in it can never be completely portrayed. But this is the basic sweep of that story.

"This is how the troopers of the 2d Brigade did it in Thua Thien..."

The text continued...

"I am told that the countryside of Thua Thien, around the ancient and imperial city of Hue, is quiet and secure now, two years later. Farmers tend their fields, children go to school, and the daily life of the villagers moves in a rather peaceful fashion.

"In March 1968, however, the lowland plains north and west of Hue were infested with North Vietnamese Army formations. These NVA units had infiltrated into South Vietnam from the north. In January they had occupied the villages. In the Tet offensive they had entered the city of Hue. After having been driven out of Hue, they were now moving about the countryside. The roads were insecure, the district towns were beleaguered, and many villages and hamlets were under VC and NVA control.

"Just a little more than three months later, by the end of June 1968, the NVA was gone and the process of digging out the last of the remaining VC units was under way.

"The stage was set for the continuing transformation of this area into the peaceful, secure region that it is today.

"How did this remarkable change take place? What did the 2d Brigade do, and in what ways -- perhaps different -- did it do it, to bring about in 100 days a completely new complexion in the countryside?"

The next six pages copy the remainder of the article.²

²Brigade records shown the correct spelling of the name of the battalion commander of the 1/501 to be Prokup, not Procup as in this article.

Brig. Gen. Cushman
**HOW WE DID IT
IN THUA THIEN**

'Our battalion commanders took it as their task to provide coordination for all actions in the area, from Navy patrol boats to Revolutionary Development teams.'

mation of this area into the peaceful, secure region that it is today.

How did this remarkable change take place? What did the 2d Brigade do, and in what ways—perhaps different—did it do it, to bring about in 100 days a completely new complexion in this countryside?

Three basic rules of operation were applied by the units of the 2d Brigade during this period. The first of these was: *work closely with the Vietnamese.*

These lowland plains were populated by the Vietnamese villagers, and the enemy was among them. Vietnamese could tell friend from foe far better than we could. They were far more familiar with the area than we could be. Vietnamese authorities had access to intelligence through the villages and hamlets where we had little. And the Vietnamese forces—Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Forces (PF)—had numbers to augment our own.

So we immediately began to work with the district and province officials and with the units of the ARVN 1st Infantry Division. We did this in several ways:

Whenever possible, our battalion command posts were set up alongside the Vietnamese district chiefs' headquarters. Where we could not co-locate, we set up permanent liaison officers with the district chiefs.

We took it as our task to help the local forces—the Regional and Popular Forces—to train them, to help them occasionally when supplies were short, to encourage them.

Platoons of the brigade would have with them one or two or three Vietnamese from the RF or PF of the district in which they were operating.

We set up joint U.S.-Vietnamese night ambushes. Our battalion reconnaissance platoons teamed up with their Vietnamese district counterparts.

Using our "log-bird" helicopters (normally used in logistical roles for sling-load resupply), we moved the RF squads and platoons around in "mini-assaults" when intelligence told us a likely VC target was in a hamlet.

Our battalion commanders also took it as their task to provide coordination for all actions in the area. Everything from Navy patrol boats to Revolutionary Development teams was tied in to the battalion CP.

BRIG. GEN. JOHN H. CUSHMAN commanded the 2d Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division from September 1967 through June 1968, after which he became CG of Fort Devens, Mass. He returned to Vietnam in April 1970 for his third tour. He presently is deputy commanding general of the Delta Military Assistance Command.

We worked closely with the province chief in Hue and with his advisors, and we established excellent working relationships with the commander of the ARVN 1st Infantry Division and his staff and advisors in Hue.

The command post of the ARVN 1st Division's 3d Regiment was only half a mile from a brigade CP. The regimental commander, Lt. Col. Phan Ban Hoa, and I attended each other's daily briefings and our staffs coordinated operations.

My battalion commanders and I never let a day go by without checking in with district chiefs in our area of operations (AO).

This cooperation paid off tremendously in intelligence. Our intelligence networks were closely tied together. We began to find that the Vietnamese knew a great deal that we didn't know, and when it was put together with what we knew, we were able to operate far more effectively.

One thing that caused the Vietnamese to share their intelligence with us was that as soon as we got good information about the enemy we immediately did something about it. They learned that to give information to us was to their own advantage.

That leads to our second principle of operations.

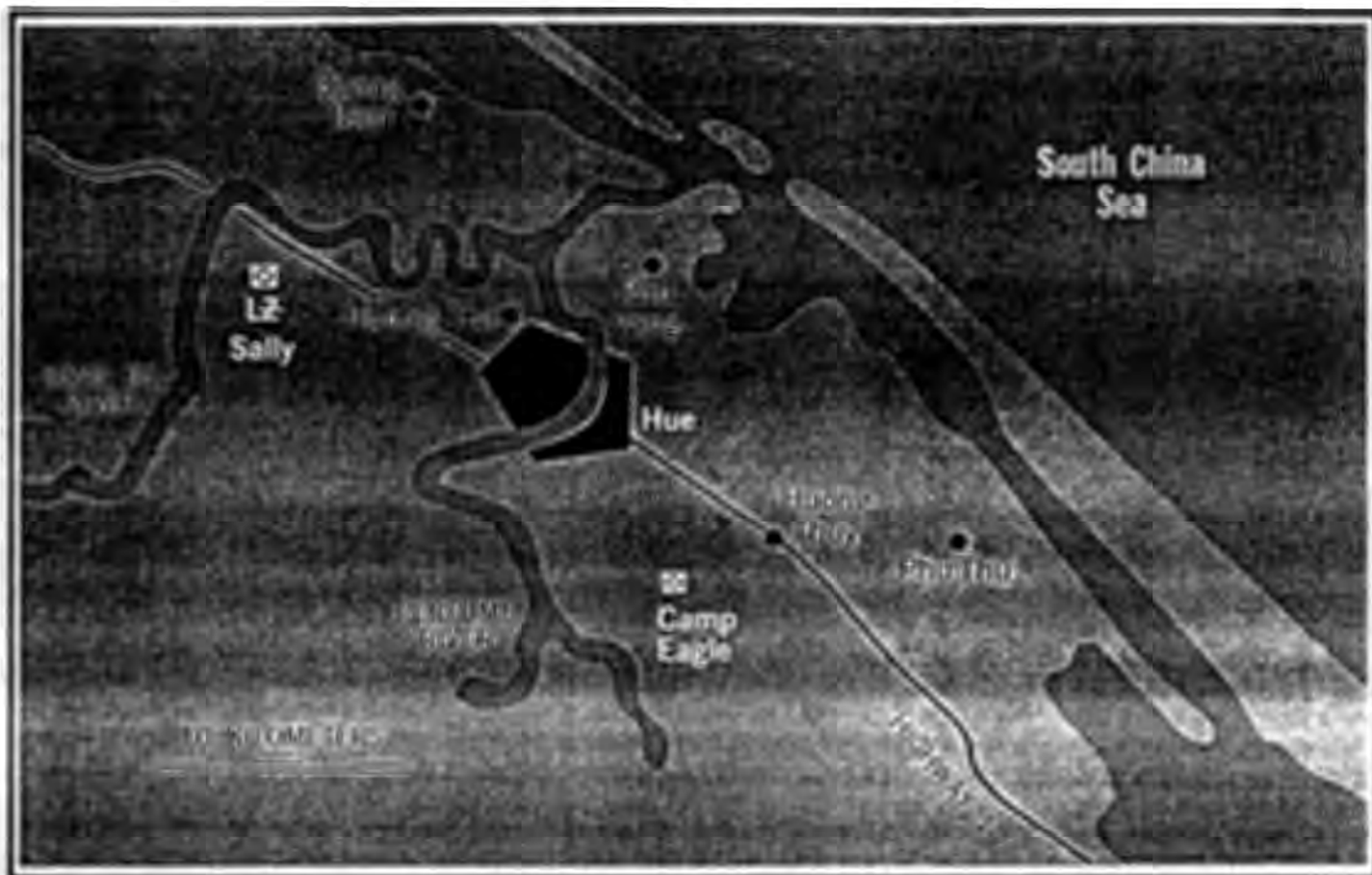
This fundamental principle of the entire 101st Airborne Division, emphasized over and over by Maj. Gen. O. M. Barsanti, division commander, was: *maintain constant and unrelenting pressure on the enemy.*

On the move day and night, we gave the enemy no rest. At night we were in ambush locations throughout the area of operations. In the daytime we were constantly searching for contact in company-size and smaller formations.

Constant movement and night ambushes are dangerous. We wanted to be careful so as not to get caught short or surprised. But at the same time, we strove for an attitude of "go get 'em, go find 'em."

When we did make contact, we acted swiftly to bring all forces to bear—supporting weapons such as artillery and air strikes besides additional platoons and companies from whatever source. Any forces not in contact were considered available for reinforcement. Gen. Barsanti kept no forces in reserve; his only reserves were lift helicopters which could swiftly move units not in contact to the area of operations.

Night moves by units of the brigade were common. On one occasion we received intelligence after dark that some NVA in Quang Dien District were going to move overland to sampans which would be waiting along the shore. I talked by telephone to the battalion commander of the 1/502d Infantry, Lt. Col. Bertram J. Bishop. Did he have someone he could put out to ambush the route? The battalion reconnaissance platoon was sent out to lie in wait and was in position by midnight. Early in the morning the enemy came by. The result: a highly successful ambush.



The results of ambushes during this period were indeed remarkable. We hurt the enemy badly.

The final operational technique that figured in the successes of the 2d Brigade was the "cordon," or encirclement. This cordon operation followed logically from the application of the first two techniques: working closely with the Vietnamese, with the resulting excellent intelligence and increased capabilities that this gave us; and constant and unrelenting pressure on the enemy day and night.

The essentials of the cordon operation were:

- Once an enemy force is located, surround it before nightfall.
- Once the enemy is surrounded, seal off all avenues of escape.
- When you have him penned in, turn night into day with constant illumination.

Our cordon operations started with improvisation. They were perfected in successive actions until we had a style that was unique and highly effective. More than a dozen successful cordon operations of the 2d Brigade from the end of March to the end of June in 1968 broke the back of NVA forces in Thua Thien Province.

We were led to the cordon principle almost by chance, as we observed and learned from a battle episode in late March.

On the 27th, the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry, commanded by Lt. Col. Wayne J. Procup, had its command post with the district chief at Quang

Dien. Companies A and D were pursuing a company of the Viet Cong 810th Battalion over by the Perfume River. During the day, U.S. Navy river patrol forces reported to the 1/501st that 90 Viet Cong were occupying the village of Thuan Hoa on the river bank.

Lt. Col. Procup moved Company A overland to establish a blocking position west of the village. He sent the battalion reconnaissance platoon by helicopter to occupy a blocking position to the north. Company D was then lifted into a landing zone south of the village prepared to fight its way into the village, with the other two elements blocking.

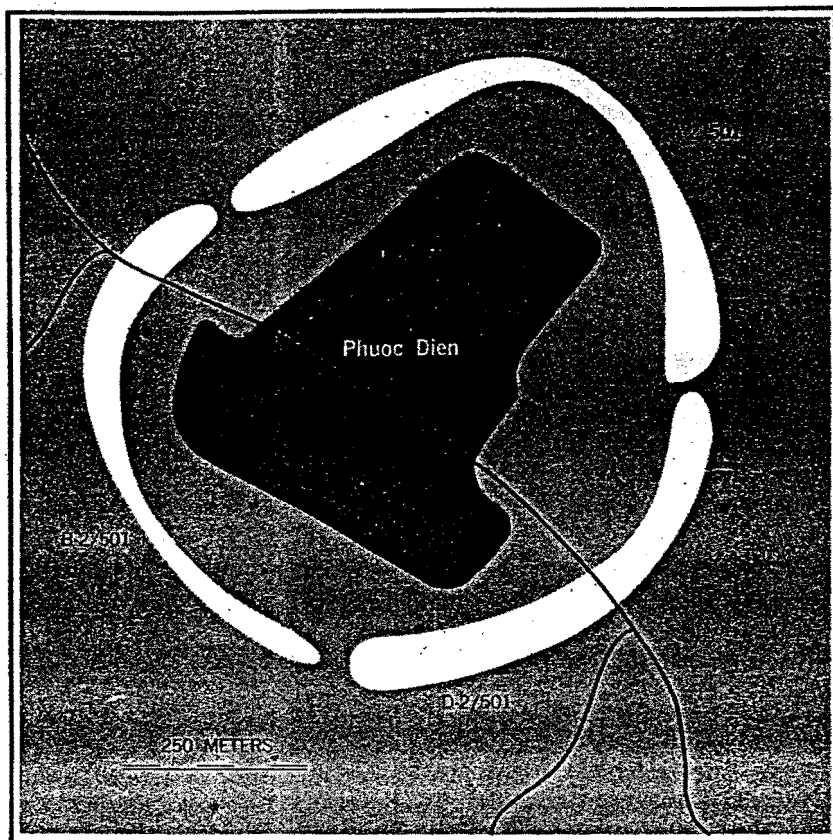
Upon arrival in the landing zone (LZ), Company D began its move and immediately came under intense small arms fire from the village. It was clear that the place was heavily defended. The civilians were gone and the VC were in there.

Darkness was coming on, and we had too little time to assault the village that afternoon. The enemy was surrounded. We thought he had at least a company in the village. Our experience with this type of situation told us that he would try to get out during the night.

It was at this point that Lt. Col. Procup made a suggestion which was to become a key element of the successful cordon. He requested night-long illumination so that he could keep his forces in position and keep the enemy from sneaking out.

We ordered the flare ships and they came over shortly after dark. Companies A and D, and the recon platoon, spread out around the village. The

Area of operations of 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, mid-March to end of June 1968.



The Phuoc Dien encirclement 10-11 April 1968.

Navy patrolled the river line.

During the night, sporadic enemy small arms fire came from the village and there was scattered activity all along the cordon. At 2130, an NVA soldier was wounded and captured attempting to escape. When day broke, two more were captured. When the positions in front of the cordon were surveyed at first-light, some 20 enemy dead were found—men who had been killed trying to break out. At 0800, we brought in loudspeakers to broadcast surrender appeals, and Company D entered the village with no enemy resistance. The only signs of the enemy were the bodies of more than 30 uniformed NVA and VC.

We learned a lot from this experience. For one thing, we found that despite our attempts to surround the enemy, a substantial number succeeded in slipping away. The fact that no resistance was made to our attack the next day attested to this.

We also learned how to get and control flare ships. We found that we should call for them early and must be sure that a replacement ship was requested well ahead of time. We found it necessary to have a standby helicopter flare ship on strip alert and to prepare artillery to fill gaps in illumination.

Our next opportunity for a cordon came when we were in the 1st Cavalry Division's normal area of operations, and had taken over the AO of its 3d Brigade which had moved into Khe Sanh. The 2/501st Infantry, commanded by Lt. Col. Richard J. Tallman, was operating out of Wunder Beach on the South China Sea. We had had intelligence from an agent that two enemy companies were entrenched in the village of Phuoc

Dien. So we went after them.

By late afternoon of 10 April, Companies A and D of 2/501st were in heavy contact but unable to penetrate the strongly defended village. It became evident that we could not take the objective that afternoon without excessive casualties. The village was too big to surround with only two companies.

Gen. Barsanti said, "stay with the enemy," and asked us what we needed. We answered, "helicopters." We got them.

Lt. Col. Tallman moved Company B by helicopter immediately. It arrived at 1840 and by 2000 the three companies had established their cordon.

This time, explicit instructions were issued: spread the cordon into the rice paddies; establish positive links between companies, have no more than ten meters between foxholes and be 100 percent alert during the night. Constant illumination was provided by flare ships and artillery.

Continuous fire from rifles, grenade launchers and machine guns from the cordon helped keep the troops awake. Between 2000 that night and 0730 the next morning, the NVA troops made at least 12 attempts to break out of this cordon. Enemy were detected moving on their bellies and much of the action was within hand-grenade range. The next morning, 36 enemy were found dead in front of the cordon positions and two prisoners were captured.

At daylight a coordinated attack on the village was made by Companies B and D, against moderate resistance.

A total of 70 North Vietnamese soldiers were killed and 13 NVA were taken prisoner in this action at Phuoc Dien. It was apparent from the prisoners and from captured documents that the 2/501st had trapped and destroyed a company-size element of the NVA 6th Battalion, 812th Regiment.

By this time we had learned that these are the basic ingredients of the cordon:

- As soon as we suspected that there was a sizable force, we must immediately move to surround it on all sides by nightfall. Enough forces have to be moved to completely ring the village, with foxholes ten meters apart and every escape path covered.

- We had to have "lights on" all night long so that the enemy—capable of slithering through a furrow or along the bank of a rice paddy—could be seen, stopped and dealt with. One of our biggest problems was to insure uninterrupted lighting. If the lights were off for as long as ten minutes or if they drifted away the enemy would take advantage of this and try to get through the cordon. This called for the closest coordination between the brigade's tactical operations center and the Air Force's flare ships.

- We had to be totally alert all night long. Everybody had to stay awake: commanders, troops, everyone. This was hard on troops who had been fighting all day and we had to allow

them to rest the next day. But what this did was to turn night into day. It made the battle a 24-hour operation and it gave the enemy no rest.

In mid-April, the 2d Brigade's command post moved back to LZ Sally and our three infantry battalions and the 2d Squadron, 17th Cavalry, took over our old operations area, still infested with NVA.

No sooner had we arrived back in our old area of operations than we had two opportunities for cordon operations in quick succession. Each of these was somewhat less than satisfactory because in both instances we were unable to close the loop completely, and there were escape routes left open for the enemy. But, even so, the enemy suffered casualties.

Then came the classic cordon operation of Phuoc Yen.

In late April, we were continuing to receive reports of large NVA units in various villages in Quang Dien and Huong Tra provinces.

Companies of the 1/501st Infantry and local Vietnamese forces, along with the Black Panther Company of the ARVN 1st Division, were scouring the area looking for the enemy. This was slow work because each village entered was a potential defended position. Although most of the people had long been gone from this area, the NVA had dug in and were moving at night from one place to another, rarely staying in the same spot more than two nights.

At midday on 28 April, the Black Panther Company began a reconnaissance in force into the village of Phuoc Yen. While approaching the tree line they met intense fire from small arms, automatic weapons and rockets. The commander of the Black Panther Company estimated that the force in the village was of battalion size.

We immediately moved to establish a cordon around the entire enemy force. Company A of the 1/501st moved overland to establish a blocking position across the river to the west. Company B of the 2/501st was picked up by helicopter from its operating area well to the east and occupied the southern part of the blocking position along the river bank. Maj. Nguyen Huu De, Huong Tra district chief, moved three of his PF platoons to the river line to the east of the enemy force. A few civilians came out through the PF lines and the village was clear except for the enemy.

By 1800, all but some 20 percent of the perimeter was complete. We then moved Company A of the 1/502d from LZ Sally into a landing zone at the northeast edge of the perimeter. The question at this point was where to draw the perimeter. Should it include the village of Le Van Thuong or could we take that village that evening and shorten the line?

A twilight attack by Company A into Le Van Thuong met heavy fire. The village could not be taken; it must be contained within the perimeter. But by now it was getting dark. We had to drive a blocking force down to the river line, and the



river bank across from Le Van Thuong was also undefended.

Maj. De then directed the 40-man militia of the small hamlet across the river to form the cordon along that position, and Company A, 1/502d, moving in the early hours of the night, drove a platoon along a hedgerow all the way to the river line, sealing the last escape route.

This final action of Company A, 1/502d, was crucial, because the cordon's success completely depends on closing every last escape route. There can be no way left for the enemy to wriggle out of the trap. If there is, he will find it and an entire battalion can slip away.

By 2000 that night, a ring was drawn around the entire enemy battalion—the largest net we had ever drawn in a cordon. Included in it were one company of the 1/501st; one company of the 2/501st; one company of the 1/502d; the Black Panther Company of the ARVN 1st Division; three Popular Forces platoons from Huong Tra District; and 40 hamlet militiamen. All were under the operational control of Lt. Col. Jim I. Hunt, CO of the 1/501st, a brand-new battalion commander who had taken over only two days earlier and was doing a superlative job in his first Vietnam action.

We had close liaison with each of the Vietnamese units through an officer or NCO equipped with a radio. Each surrounding unit had its instructions: foxholes ten meters apart, 100 percent alert, don't let anyone get out.

When we turned the lights on that night the enemy knew he was trapped. He had seen this tactic used against others in the area and now it was being used against him.

The first night encirclement of Phuoc Yen on 28-29 April 1968.



Troopers of Company D, 2/501, move cautiously along a hedgerow in encirclement operation.

During the night, scattered firing was heard from the enemy inside the cordon. We had a hunch that he would try to use the escape route by the river line which had been sealed off by Company A, 1/502d. At about 0500 his breakout attempt began. Three separate attempts were made to rupture Company A's left flank. All were repulsed by a strong and courageous defense and the next morning the enemy was still trapped.

Company A then resumed its attack, attempting to gain a foothold in the northeastern section of Le Van Thuong. This was met with heavy fire from entrenched and camouflaged positions; the company pulled back and adjusted artillery on the position. That day, the Black Panther Company also advanced into Phuoc Yen where they made heavy contact. Later that evening, we brought another company of the 2/501st into the cordon.

The cordon was again sealed throughout the night of 29-30 April under constant illumination. Small arms and automatic weapons fire was exchanged in the darkness as the enemy tried to find a gap in the position. There was no gap to be found.

On the third day, 30 April, we continued to probe the enemy position and to pound him with artillery and tactical air strikes. That evening, the Black Panther Company was airlifted from the cordon back to another operational commitment in the vicinity of Hue.

Throughout the night of 30 April, the cordon was maintained under constant illumination. In the early morning of 1 May, there was a break in illumination when a flare ship ran out of lights before its replacement had arrived. In the interim, while artillery provided illumination, it was darker in front of the left flank of Company A, 1/502d.

Between 0500 and 0600, the enemy attacked the left flank of Company A in a final desperate attempt to penetrate and escape the perimeter. This attack cost the lives of three men of Company A but failed in its purpose.

Dawn came and the enemy defenses opposite Company A, 1/502d, began to crumble. A psychological warfare team was on hand and began broadcasting appeals to surrender. Among the first group of prisoners was an NVA sergeant. He was handed the microphone and began to broadcast, telling his own men that they were surrounded. In a few minutes, increasing numbers of prisoners began to surrender.

By noon, it was possible to move through Le Van Thuong. Company A, 1/502d, did so and that afternoon was extricated and returned to LZ Sally. It was replaced in the shortened cordon by Company B, 2/501st.

For three more days the cordon was maintained with the enemy making futile attempts to break out. Finally, during the early morning of 3 May, he made his last attempt, was repulsed again and the cordon ended.

The results were decisive. The enemy suffered more than 400 men killed. Even more significantly, 107 prisoners were taken—the largest number of NVA captured in any single action that far in the war. An entire NVA battalion—the 8th of the 90th Regiment—was eliminated and great quantities of equipment were seized. The total losses among friendly forces were eight American and two Vietnamese soldiers killed and 56 wounded.

We learned a number of lessons in this operation. One was that when streams flow through a cordon, the men on the banks must be positioned out into the stream—actually with "one foot in the water." They must have visual contact with troopers on the opposite bank. Hand grenades and grenade launchers must be fired into the water to discourage swimmers.

This decisive and remarkable victory terrified NVA and VC troops in our area of operations and we kept the pressure up.

Intelligence taken during the Phuoc Yen cordon indicated that the trapped enemy battalion had called for reinforcements to move into the area of Op Pho Nam hamlet, so the 2d Brigade went looking there. The 2/501st and the 1/502d conducted two successful cordons in this area during the next two days and destroyed the trapped North Vietnamese.

On 5 May, the 2/501st was operating with one company of the 1/501st in the vicinity of La Chu. The night before, ARVN positions near Hue had been attacked, and Vietnamese sources reported that one of the company-size units involved was in La Chu. A probe of the village confirmed the information. We decided to surround and destroy it with a cordon. By nightfall, the cordon was firmly established with two battalions participating. Elements of the 2/501st, now commanded by Lt. Col. James A. Heiter, held the northern part of the objective; the 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry, was on the south. Once again the enemy was trapped.

The next day, both battalions attacked. Prog-

'There can be no way left to the enemy to wriggle out of the cordon's trap. If there is, he will find it and an entire battalion can slip away.'

ress was slow because of the network of bunkers and trenches in the village. Just as the day was ending, the enemy's main positions were finally located by the 2d Squadron, 17th Cavalry. The cavalry troopers, under Lt. Col. Julius W. Becton, squadron commander, then continued the attack under the light of flares. At 0100, the final series of bunkers was overrun. This attack by the 2/17th Cavalry and under illumination—using infantry, armored personnel carriers and tanks until the last enemy resistance was eliminated—was a "first," to my knowledge.

In mid-May 1968, the 2d Brigade's area of operations was extended to the east of Hue into the districts of Phu Vang, Huong Thuy and Phu Thu.

According to now well-established brigade standing operating procedure, we moved the 1/501st Infantry's command post right alongside that of the district chief of Phu Vang, and immediately put into effect our concept of working with the Vietnamese, maintaining pressure day and night and conducting cordon operations. A few days later, the 2/17th Cavalry joined us east of Hue.

Working with the ARVN 1st Division's units in the area, and with the local and Regional Forces of Thua Thien in a series of operations, within a few weeks these two units of the 2d Brigade destroyed the NVA in the area and drove them out.

Several cordon operations were conducted in rapid succession by the 1/501st and the 2/17th. One of these, during the night of 30-31 May, can be described as typical.

During the morning of 30 May, the 2/17th Cavalry made contact with enemy elements at the western end of the village of Le Xa Dong. By noon, it became evident that a strong enemy force was occupying the village. Sensing an opportunity to encircle and destroy this force, we moved a rifle company of the 2/17th and a platoon of the 1/501st into position north of the village and arranged with the ARVN 1st Division to order the nearby 3d Battalion of its 3d Regiment to a cordon position west and northwest of the village. By nightfall, the U.S.-ARVN cordon was established. Throughout the night the trapped enemy attempted in vain to break out and the next morning his defeat was complete.

The enemy's losses were 156 killed and 41 prisoners. We had also destroyed the command groups of a battalion and of a regiment.

In early June, Lt. Col. Becton's 2/17th Cavalry set up a command post at Phu Thu District, together with a tactical command post element from the ARVN 1st Division, including 'repre-



President Thieu presents the Cross of Gallantry with Palm to the 2d Brigade and its commander on RVN Armed Forces Day, 19 June 1968.

sentatives from Thua Thien Province. The 2d Brigade also provided a small command and communications element at this district town. Among its other missions, this U.S.-Vietnamese command center was coordinating the rice harvest plan for Phu Thu District and neighboring areas. The Allied mission was to destroy any NVA and VC forces that still remained in the area.

For the next two weeks, this U.S.-Vietnamese force roamed through Phu Thu District completing the defeat of NVA and VC forces in the area. Cordon operations along the coast were supported by U.S. Navy river patrol boats. By the middle of June, Phu Thu, Phu Vang and Huong Thuy districts were essentially clear and the NVA had been eliminated from the eastern approaches to Hue, as he had previously been driven from the western approaches.

That was how we did it in Thua Thien: work with the Vietnamese, give the enemy no rest, and encircle him at every opportunity.

We had many operations besides encirclements, of course. There were hundreds of actions, major and minor, during this period. But the encircling cordon typified the style and technique of the 2d Brigade.

The cordons were not without their cost. Twenty-eight men of the brigade and six Vietnamese soldiers were killed in action during the encirclement operations. But the cost was far greater to the enemy with whom we came in contact. More than 1,200—eighty percent of them North Vietnamese—were killed during the cordons, and 252 prisoners—also 80 percent NVA—were taken.

The NVA enemy was driven from the area. He has not returned. The stage was set for the next phase: eliminating the Viet Cong and restoring peace, security and serenity to the countryside.

Cordon Operations, 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division -- March-June, 1968

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8 July 1996

<u>Nr</u>	<u>Control Hqs</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Village</u>	<u>Grid</u>	<u>Enemy Unit</u>	<u>US Losses</u>		<u>Enemy Losses</u>	<u>Materiel Taken</u>
						<u>KHA</u>	<u>WHA</u>		
1	1-501	26-28 March	Thon Thua Hoa	YD769309	Elements 810 LF Bn	2	24	31 NVA KIA 18 VC KIA 3 NVA PW	10 indiv wpns 5400 lb rice
2	2-501	10-11 April	Thon Phuoc Dien	YD475485	Elements 6th Bn, 812 NVA Regt	7	35	70 NVA KIA 13 NVA PW	24 indiv wpns 7 crew-svd wpns 100 lb rice
3	1-501	17-18 April	Ap Ny Xa Ap Dong Xuyen	YD723314	Elements 803 NVA Regt	1	13	48 NVA KIA	10 indiv wpns 4000 lb rice
4	2-501	21-24 April	Kim Doi Thon Than Trung -1	YD748305 YD755313	Elements 803 NVA Regt		12	70 NVA KIA 13 NVA PW	11 indiv wpns 1 crew-svd wpn
5	1-501	28 April-4 May	Thon Phuoc Yen	YD687283 YD690277	8th Bn, 90th NVA Regt	8 2*	44 12*	314 NVA KIA 115 NVA KIA* 107 NVA PW	88 indiv wpns 15 crew-svd wpns 7 indiv wpns* 7 crew-svd wpns* Bn radios and SOI
							*ARVN		
6	1-502	3-5 May	Ap Nam Phu Ap Pho Nam	YD690300	Elements 1st Bn, 803d Regiment	3	14	31 NVA KIA 2 VC KIA 2 NVA PW	4 indiv wpns 1 crew-svd wpn

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8 July 1996

Nr	Control Hqs	Date	Village	Grid	Enemy Unit	US Losses		Enemy Losses	Materiel Taken
						KHA	WHA		
7	2-501 2-17 Cav	5-7 May	Thon La Chu	YD693241	Elements C115 LF Co Co, 9th Bn, 90th NVA Regt	2	14	53 NVA/VC KIA 1 NVA PW 2 VC PW	23 indiv wpns 3 crew-svd wpns 400 lb rice
8	1-501	19-21 May	Thon Lang Xa Bau	YD839210	Elements 810 LF Bn		12	65 NVA/VC KIA 1 NVA PW 1 VC PW	12 wpns total
9	1-501	27-28 May	Thon Xuan Hoa	YD805227	Elements C117 LF Co		1	2 NVA KIA 2 VC KIA 2 NVA PW 1 VC PW	12 indiv wpns 750 lb rice
10	2-17 Cav	30-31 May	Thon Le Xa Dong	YD884228	Elements 810 LF Bn		6	91 NVA/VC KIA 7 NVA PW 12 VC PW 65 NVA/VC KIA* 22 VC PW*	30 indiv wpns 6 crew-svd wpns 30 indiv wpns* 9 crew-svd wpns*
						2*	2*		
						*ARVN			
11	2-17 Cav	1-4 June	Trung Phuong Thon Moc Tru Thon Trung Ha	YD884228 YD967173 YD975163	Elements K4 MF Bn K10 LF Bn C118 LF Co	5	38	38 NVA/VC KIA 90 VC KIA 18 NVA PW 40 VC PW 107 NVA/VC KIA* 19 VC PW*	54 indiv wpns 24 crew-svd wpns 31 indiv wpns* 5 crew-svd wpns* 15,000 lb rice
						2*	5*		
						*ARVN			

Chapter 7. Camp Evans; March 30 - April 14, 1968

Entry 41 in the brigade journal for March 30th, with a Camp Evans dateline, was..."1200; 2d Bde CP open 1200 hours."

The troops were on the move. Thus began Carentan II.

The 101st Airborne Division was extending its area of operations to the north in order to free the 1st Cavalry Division for a division-scale "airmobile raid" that would relieve the pressure on the beleaguered Marine outpost at Khe Sanh, which was just north of Highway 9 in the far northwest corner of the Republic of Vietnam. The Marine regiment's situation there had long been desperate; with two NVA divisions facing them, they were cut off by road, pounded by heavy and light artillery and mortars, under frequent ground attack, and barely hanging on. The crisis of the Tet Offensive was past, but Khe Sanh was becoming a major crisis for Lyndon B. Johnson, President of the United States.

Earlier in March General Abrams, deputy commander of MACV, had told General Tolson to begin detailed planning for a lightning aerial offensive that would support an ARVN/ Marine relief column. Under the supervision of Brigadier General Oscar Davis, ADC, the Cav built a major base at LZ Stud, with runway, ammunition storage, and refueling. D-day for launching Operation Pegasus was 31 March. As the brigades and supporting artillery of the 1st Air Cav moved out in air assault, opening seven new landing zones in five days, the 2d Brigade, 101st, moved in to take their places.

At LZ Sally, we had known only that the Cav had gone north and that, displacing the 2d Brigade CP to Camp Evans, we would take over their AO from Evans as far north as LZ Jane and Hai Lang. We would leave the 1/501 in its AO in the north of our old 2d Brigade AO, and would leapfrog over the 1/501 with the 1/502, 2/17, and 2/501, who would in turn be replaced by battalions of the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division. An ARVN task force would take the place of the Cav's forces that would soon be absent from the Quang Tri area. And the 3d/82d Brigade would take over our CP at Sally, and the 1/501.

On March 30th the 1/502 and 2/17th moved by motor and air, with the 1/502 going into Camp Evans to assume responsibility for its security (A/1/502 had earlier been assigned a special mission, opcon to the 3d Marine Division at Dong Ha), and the 2/17th likewise into Camp Evans but assuming responsibility for AO Mann nearby.

On April 1st the 2/501 completed its move to Utah Beach (later, Wunder Beach), secured the fire support base Hardcore there, and took charge of its new AO along the Street Without Joy. On April 2d, the 2/327 Inf, from the 1st Brigade, moved into LZ Jane and took over the AO nearby, including Hai Lang.

From the brigade journal of 1 April...

"1705 2-501: D Co closed Utah Beach at 1650 hours"

D Company had come in by CH-47; the remainder of the battalion arrived the same day by motor march. A/2/501st and C/1/321 Arty occupied FSB Hardcore not far from Hai Lang, with a range fan that included Utah Beach and the road from there to Hai Lang.

From Cleo Hogan's diary...

April 4

Unbelievable. I'm setting here watching the ocean break on the sands at a place called Utah Beach. We arrived here the 31st and are providing security for a Navy Depot. They are unloading ships day and night. The company gets to go swimming about every afternoon, then pulls guard duty at night. A few rocket or mortar rounds each night but nothing serious.

5 April

Nothing much going on. Hasn't been any enemy sighted in over a week. Company found some booby traps... Company is up to 120 men, the most I have ever had. We're getting two hot meals each day now.

Our units were adapting to their new missions, establishing contact with the locals and with adjacent units, reporting their new locations, clearing assigned roads, guarding assigned bridges, carrying out local RIFs, and placing ambushes out each night. The brigade journal for the 31st... "Friendly losses: None. Enemy assessment: Unknown."

We would for some time now have the 2/17 Cav under brigade opcon. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Julius W. Becton, Jr.,¹ the 2/17 had two ground troops, each with a rifle platoon, and each troop with platoons of jeep mounted machine guns and 106mm recoilless rifles. B/2/17 also owned six M113 armored personnel carriers, each of which mounted one .50 cal. and two light machine guns. Squadron headquarters company had 81mm mortars and an aero rifle platoon (ARP). The 2/17 soon gained a platoon of M-48 tanks from C/3/5th Cav, and a Marine Ontos unit which was equipped with 1/4 ton trucks, each of which carried six 106mm recoilless rifles.

Based then at Camp Evans, the 2/17 traveled to its new AO by conducting a two day coordinated squadron RIF operation in the dune country along the Street Without Joy, arriving in the vicinity of Hai Lang on April 2d. The squadron order, copied on the next three pages, gives an idea of how the 2/17th with its two ground troops operated.

¹Julius Becton retired in 1983 after a career that took him to lieutenant general and command of VII Corps in Germany. He was until 1994 president of Prairie View A&M University, Texas.

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NUMBER NND 873541, BY S.M. J. R. R., DATE 7-11-95

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Copy 14 of 15 Copies
2d Squadron (Abn), 17th Cavalry
Camp Evans (YD522312), RVN
311600 March 1968
YZ 51

OPORD 11-68

References: Map, 1:50,000, Sheet G42 II.

Task Organization:

A/2/17 (CPT Hartjens, Cndg)

2d Plt, A/5/5: Overlook at bridge at YD5738

Radar Team (DS)

Engr Mine Sweep Team (DS) at YD5738

TF CONTROL:

1 CAC UH-1H

1 H-23

1 UH-1H (Log Ship)

Aero Rifle Platoon

B/2/17 (CPT Bastello, Cndg)

Radar Team (DS)

Engr Mine Sweep Team at bridge via YD5738

1. SITUATION: Situation highly volatile via YD5738

a. Enemy Forces: See Current BTSM.

b. Friendly Forces: 2/101 Bde continues to secure Camp Evans off Hwy 1 in
AG, CO, 1/502 Inf, assumes responsibility for anti mine and vic
YD593306 to YD606312, for security to bridge at YD519349, and for
security of designated mine sweep teams on Hwy 1 effective 311330
Hrs, March 1968.

c. Attachments & Detachments: Task Organization.

2. MISSION: TF 2/17 Cavalry will conduct a reconnaissance in force into the
village complex along road from YD582117 to YD611393 to locate and de-
stroy VC/NVA forces and supplies found therein.

3. HIGHLIGHTS:

a. Concept of Operation: Annex B (Overlay) TF 2/17 Cavalry will attack
with two troops abreast, A/2/17 on Axis ABLE and B/2/17 on Axis BAKER
to seize objectives A and B. On order, A/2/17 will seize objective
C. B/2/17 will be prepared to reinforce the attack. TF 2/17 Cavalry
will be prepared to RCM via YD5738.

b. Fires: Annex C (Fire Support) Priority of fires to B 2/17.

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OPORD 11-68

a. Trp "AB";

b. (1) ~~Attack on Axis ABIE, seize Objective A.~~

ACHIEVEMENT:

(2) CNO seize Objective C.

(3) CNO secure Western half of TP NDP via YD57385.

INTERCOM:

A. Initial Trp "AB" (Classified)

B. Initial

C. Initial (1) Attack on Axis BAKER, seize Objective B.

D. Initial Order (Classified)

(2) CNO reinforce attack on Objective C.

DETAILED PLAN:

(3) CNO secure Eastern half of TP NDP via YD57385.

DETAILS:

a. Aero Rifle Platoon:

(1) Reinforce PF at bridge via YD476376.

(2) Establish nighty ambush via YD4836.

(3) Be prepared to reinforce A/2/17 or B/2/17 by helicopter assault.

(4) Secure mine sweep teams in sector.

f. Coordinating Instructions:

(1) Route to Attack Positions: Route Red. Order of March: A/2/17, B/2/17, CNO Group.

(2) FO available in CNO Ship, airborne at 0630 hours.

4. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS:

a. Medical evacuation on call through MEDEVAC BRAVO, freq 46.90 or 45.70.

b. Logistical resupply will be by UH-1H.

5. COMMAND AND SIGNAL:

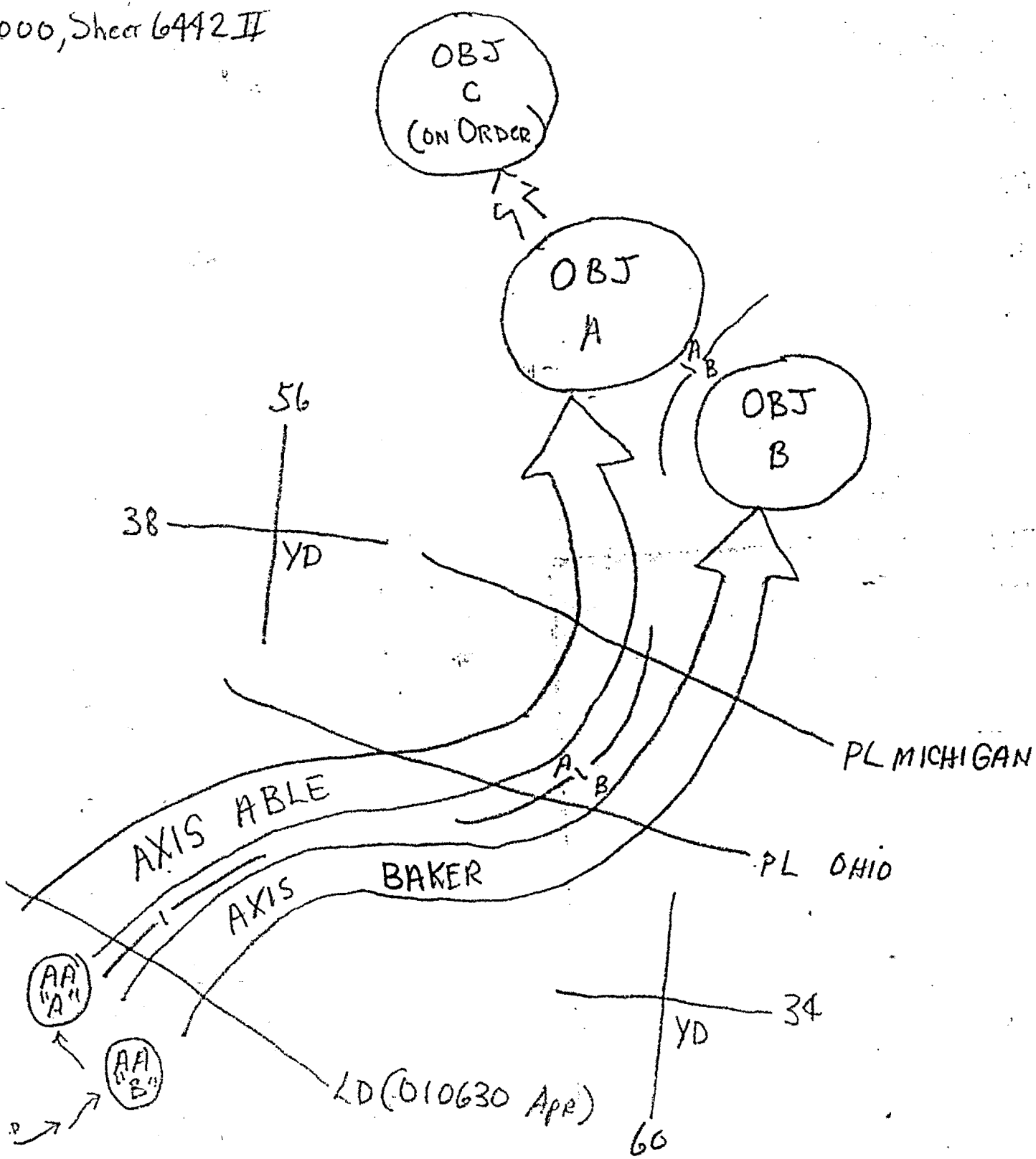
a. Current SSI & SOI in effect.

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The journal for 1 April reported little activity other than routine. A road mine damaged the S-3 jeep of the 2/17, with two wounded. There was no other contact.

The 1-501 sent brigade this report of its activities ^{tht} day in the AO of the 3d/82d. It reflects that a lot goes on in a rifle company daily, that often gets summarized in a couple of lines or a short paragraph.

FROM: CO, 1st BN (ADM), 201ST INF, 1st SALLY, RVN

TO: CO, 3d Bde, 82 Abn Div

SITREP FOR PERIOD 311730H - 011730H Apr 68

1. (C) OPERATIONAL SUMMARY

a. A - 1-501: At 311745H Mar 68 A/1-501 found one body at YD716310. Believe to be Chinese doctor as he was wearing a medical jacket under his NVA fatigues. A/1-501 established CP at YD716311, 311845H and positioned squad size ambushes at YD714315, YD723311 and YD712313 at 312006H, A/1-501 discovered freshly dug mortar position, ten feet in dia, with trench connecting to bunker at YD716311, 312035H. Ambush patrols closed CP 010740H Apr 68 with neg contact. A/1-501 commenced search and destroy mission at 010805H with suspected NVA hospital YD723313 as objective. At 011035H A/1-501 found hospital location at YD723313. Hospital appeared to have been destroyed 2-3 days ago by demolition. Hospital was underground with bamboo and tin sewing as reinforcement for walls. A trench from hospital to canal was found. At 011130H, 2,800lbs of bagged rice and 2,000lbs of loose rice were found vic YD723303. At 011215H, 200lbs of bagged rice were found in sanpan at YD722313.

b. B - 1-501: At 311800H B/1-501 establish CP vic YD705315 and squad size ambushes were emplaced YD706315, YD702314, YD703312 at YD703312 received grenades and small arms fire from est enemy platoon resulting in 2 WHA. Ambushes pulled back to CP neg enemy casualties. At 312055H B/1-501 received small arms and RPG fire from YD707315 from est enemy platoon. Neg friendly casualties. Ambushes closed CP 010755H Apr 68. Platoon size sweeps 500 meters W and S commenced 010700H Apr 68. Platoon sweeping W found blood trails vic YD705315. Both sweeps completed 010805H Apr 68 with no additional finds. At 010950H B/1-501 received 2 bursts automatic weapon fire from YD707310. Called Arty. Results unk. At 011224H B/1-501 received 1 RPG round from vic YD711316. Negative friendly casualties. Located at YD702327 at 011600H moving East negative contact at this time. At 011614H Apr 68 B/1-501 received sniper fire (ineffective) from YD698334. Gimpy also fire from this location at 011616H. FAC spotted 10-15 VC in grave yard YD708335H at 011619H. At 011631H B/1-501 apprehended one detainee at YD703327. Evac to Quang Dien District Hqs for interrogation. Neg further enemy contact through 011730H.

c. C - 1-501: Unit continues improvement of defensive positions vic An Lo Bridge. At 010930H Apr 68 platoon size sweeps commenced NE to YD608283 and SW to YD637307. Element sweeping SW received two rounds of small arms fire from YD616307, at 011156 Apr 68. Fire returned. Negative enemy casualties. Neg friendly cas. Both platoons on the sweep mission closed CP 011600H Apr 68.

d. D - 1-501: At 311800H Mar 68, D/1-501 established CP at YD736317. Squad size ambushes were emplaced at YD739319 and YD724315 at 311950H. Neg enemy contact. Ambushes closed CP 010711H Apr 68. At 011048H one platoon moved NE to YD727314. Co (-) remained CP awaiting log extraction. At 011105H D/1-501 sighted 12 VC walking into village YD735327. Arty called. Results unk. D/1-501 moved and closed YD729315 at 011640H.

On 2 April the 2/327 travelled by convoly from Gia Le in the 1st Brigade AO to LZ Jane, closing its artillery and most of the battalion by dark. The 2d Brigade task force had one friendly KIA all day, incurred when an enlisted man from C Company, 326 Engineer Battalion, stepped from his jeep onto a land mine in the road. The 1/501 continued operations in its 3d/82d AO, negative assessment.

On 3 April the enemy harassed the 2/327 on LZ Jane's perimeter. From the brigade journal...

"0408 To 101st ALO (USAF air liaison officer): Request flare ship illum LZ Jane.

"0415 Bde CO: Informed duty officer to call 101st ALO and cancel flare ship."

On April 3d, A Co 1/502 returned from its special (unexplained) mission at Dong Ha. That night the 1/502 sprung an ambush, one trooper wounded and 1 VC KIA, one PW.

Division advised us that effective April 3d Utah Beach would be known as Wunder Beach, evidently for someone by that name. On the 4th, the 1/501 reported little action, but that they had found 9 NVA bodies.

From the brigade journal for April 5th, at 1810...

G3 101: CG directed LTC Garrison to call the 2d Bde S3 and tell him the Bde is shooting too much arty without any kills, used 1400 rds today."

There were no doubt enemy in our area, but we were not making contact with them yet. Back in our old AO, however, there was action. In brigade journal entry 16, April 5th, the 1/501 reported on a 4 April action by the 2d Bn, 3d ARVN Regiment...

			1945 hrs 1-501 received a wrap up report for		
			2-3 ARVN vic YD682285 - ARVN made contact with		
			a NVA force believed to be part of 312 Div -		
			4 or 1st Regt - 12th Bn - (Info captured		
			led to this effect) - results - 71 NVA KIA		
			(BC) 18 SA weapons, 2 LMGs, 1 hand MG and one		
			unidentified heavy cal weapon - all NVA		
			were carrying protective masks - observed many		
			secondary explosions - vic YD682285 - believe		
			poss POL point - friendly losses 40 ARVN		
			wounded - 10 killed.		

Of interest is this Quang Tri Sector operation plan, worked out with the 2/501. It called for helilifting into VC hamlets along Wunder Beach an armed propaganda team from province, a band for entertainment, a medcap (medical treatment team), and two PF platoons from Hai Lang, plus squads of national police and some Kit Carson scouts. U.S. Navy swift boats would screen the operation from seaward. The purpose was to make friends (not an easy task among villagers who had lived for generations along the Viet Minh dominated Street Without Joy). The operation was carried out on April 8th.

OPPLAN 1

Copy No. 408
Quang Tri Sector
YD 338533
041700 April 68
QT Northside

Reference: Map, Vietnam 1:50,000, Hai Lang sheet 6442 II and N00 SA DONG sheet overlay: Annex A

TASK Organization:

<u>TF RF</u>	<u>TF PFF</u>	<u>2/501</u>	<u>Tn New Hope</u>
101 RF Co	PFFCo	Co A	APT Tm
125 RF Co	PFF Plt	Co B	Med Cap Tm
Kit Carson	C G Tm	Inf Plt	Entertainment
	DOICO Tm		Food Team
	PSB		RD Tm

1. Situation

a. Enemy Forces: Current INTSUM

b. Friendly Forces:

- (1) Sector initiates plan H-hour, D-day to Cordon/Search Hai An Khe villages vic YD (5155) (5453) (5452) (5153).
- (2) 2/501 Abn Bn (-) Cordons Thon Trung An and Thon Tham Khe hamlets YD (5253) (5352) NLT 080600 April.
- (3) Naval Element at Wunder Beach screens eastern flank of Hai An, Hai Khe villages YD 5155 to 5553 from 080600 April to termination of operation.

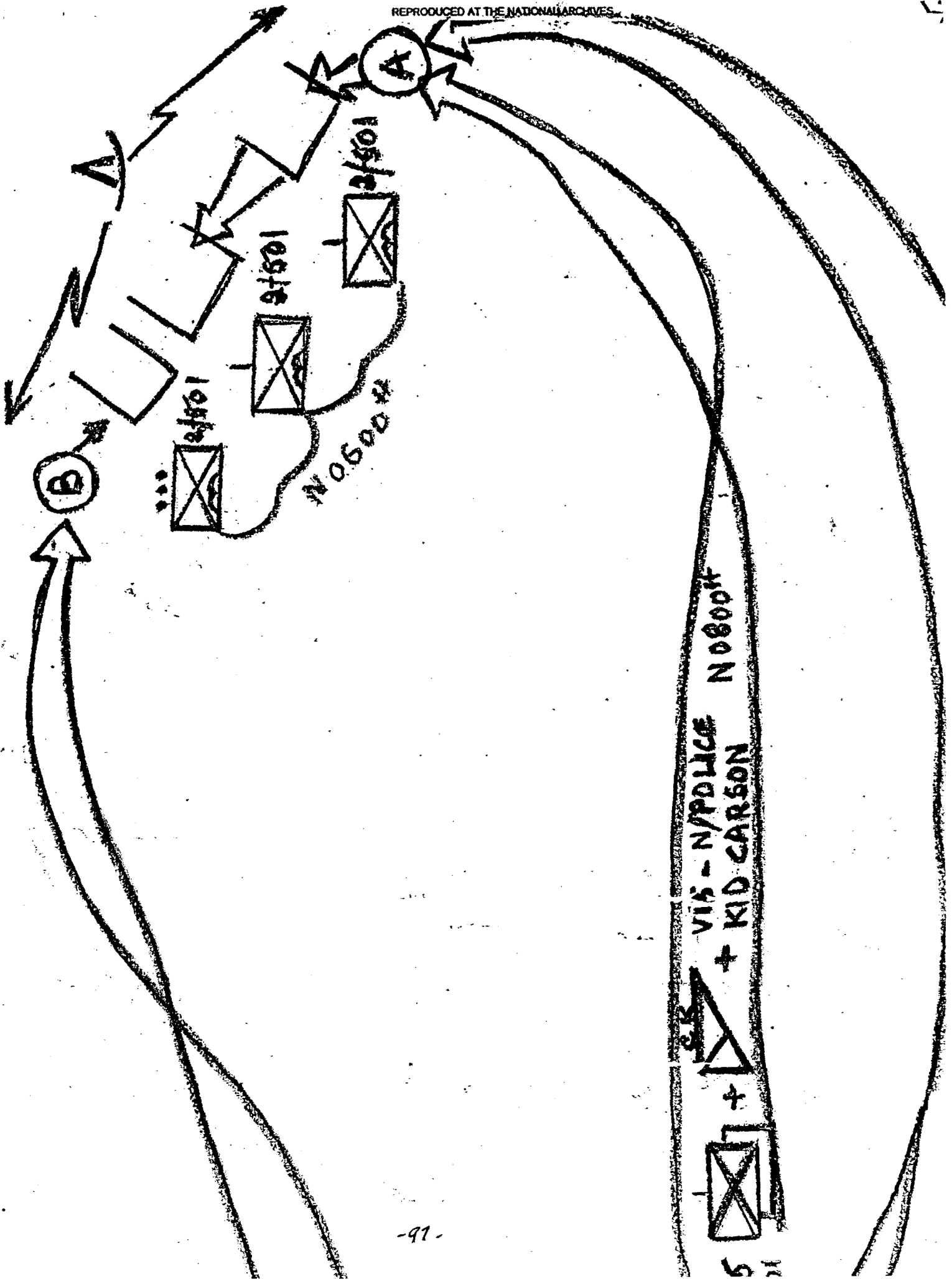
(4) Mevevac supports operation (Freq 49.30)

c. Attachments and Detachments: TASK ORG.

d. Assumptions:

- (1) Thon Tan An, My Thuy hamlets YD 5154 Non Hostile.
- (2) Thon Trung An and Thon Tham Khe hamlets contain booby traps.
- (3) Villagers of Trung An and Tham Khe initially will be hostile and fearful, but will become cooperative upon understanding intent of operation.

2. Mission: Section in conjunction with 2/501 Abn Bn (-) and naval support conduct Cordon/Search, County Fair Operation 080000 April in Hai Lang Sub sector for purpose of population control.
3. Execution:
 - a. Concept of Operation: Annex A Operation Overlay. 2/501 Abn Bn (-) moves into position by foot to Cordon Trung An and Tham Khe villages; RF Companies/Kit Carson move by helicopter from Hai Lang District HQ to objective "A" and conduct clearing operation; PFF elements move by helicopter from La Vang to objective "A" and conduct Search/Classification operation; "New Hope Tm moves by helicopter from La Vang to objective "B" and conduct Country Fair Activities Commencing at 081300 hours April.
 - b. 2/501 Companies; Move into position at H-hour, D-day.
 - c. TF RF : Commence clearing operation H-hour, D-day.
 - d. TF PFF; Commence Search/Classification operation H-hour, D-day.
 - e. Tm "New Hope": Commence County Fair activity H-hour, D-day.
 - f. Coordination Instructions:
 - (1) Report the enemy use of boby traps.
 - (2) Report the presence of VC in Village.
 - (3) Medevac available on call.
 - (4) 2/501 Abn Bn (-) and Hai Lang Sub Sector arty available on call.
 - (5) All coordination and reporting will be effected with Hai Lang Sub Sector Commander.
 - (6) Duration of operation is one day. Hai Lang Sub Sector command will advise on termination.
 - (7) Effective for planning on receipt; for execution on order.
4. Administration/Logistics and supply:
 - a. Supply:
 - Class 1: Cords
 - Class 2/4: Psyop kit - RD Team.
 - Tents - Cords
 - Helicopters - 2/501 Abn
 - Leaflets - Cords
5. Command and Signal



The April 4th brigade summary contained these items on the 2/501st...

(3) Co C. Conducted amphibious assault utilizing 1 BRC from WUNDER BEACH to vic YD546526. Conducted cordon and search in village vic YD540525. Conducted RIF operations from village to WUNDER BEACH. Negative casualties. Negative enemy assessment.

(4) Co D. PF squad attached. Conducted RIF operation in AO. Moved by truck to YD462523. Conducted RIF operations to YD445535, YD462530. Continued operations to WUNDER BEACH. Negative casualties. Negative enemy assessment.

(5) Recon Plt. Provided security for minesweep team from WUNDER BEACH to FSB HADCORE. Prepared for future operations. Negative casualties. Negative enemy assessment.

That day, April 4th, all companies of 1/502 and all but one of the 2/327 reported no contact, and "negative casualties; negative enemy assessment." The 2d Brigade had four wounded all day, all from mines.

However, in 5 April's journal, the 1/501 reported a serious engagement on the 4th.

26	0503	From 1-501: Wrap up on yesterday's activities. A Co YD648297 found graves - 6 NVA		
		bodies - 2 days old - killed by NAP & Arty.		
		1254 Co A YD697297 - engaged 1 NVA in bunker		
		results - 3 NVA POW's - 2 AK-47's, 2 M16's,		
		2 RFG's. 1358 A Co YD700296 - 2 NVA		
		ran in bunker - 3 came out gave up - 1 more		
		is in bunker - killed. 1505 - losses - 15		
		WIA, 3 KIA, 3 MIA - Arty all night at		
		YD686307.		

Although April 5th was another day of light activity, our S-2, Major Ray Riggan, was not letting us forget the enemy. From a page of his intelligence estimate of April 5th...

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Appendix 1 (Agent Reports, 191st MID) to 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division
INTSUM 96468

1. By order of the Tri-Thien Military Region Commander, the VC have organized five to seven armed "assault propaganda teams" in each district. Each team consists of three or four members. The teams are controlled by their district, which provides the propaganda materials, posters etc. In some cases local guerrilla forces and villages may have one or two teams, also controlled by Tri-Thien Military Region. Mission of the propaganda teams is to turn the people against the GVN and the Americans, destroy all evidences of the GVN in areas they control, and teach the people songs of the revolution.

Activities of the teams include stopping civilian busses to propagandize the people, infiltrate the GVN controlled areas at night, make speeches by loudspeakers, pass out propaganda, and post propaganda signs, flag, pictures and placecards. Sources believe that there are at present three teams at Quang Tri and one team at Phong Dien, one at Quang Dien and one at Phu Vang (C-3)

2. On 3 April 1968, all hamlet guerrillas living along the Song O Lau (River) from Iho Trach #1 (YD439435) north to Ap Van Trinh (YD515469) came to the Dong My-Iho Trach area (YD509437) to join with the Than Phong District Force Company and an NVA company, not further identified, to form a new battalion, unit designation unknown. Strength of the battalion will be 320 men, including 117 from Than Phong Co, 150 from the NVA Co, and 53 Hamlet guerrillas. Villagers from Iho Binh Village have been ordered to cook food for the unit. Weapons of the new battalion include 2X82mm mortars, 4 X 60mm mortars. The unit also has 4 X IHC-10 radios. Commander for the new battalion will be the present CO of the Than Phong Co, who is an NVA. (C-3).

3. At 1400 hours 4 April 1968, two VC companies unit designation unknown arrived vicinity Iho Ninh (YD608291), Xom Ga (YD604283) and Dong Gia (YD607283). Source believes that these two companies moved from the mountains on 3 April 1968, moving at night, and that they may cross Hwy 1 vicinity YD603510 on the night of 5 April 1968 to reinforce units at Quang Dien. (C-3).

4. At 1300 hours 2 April 1968, approximately 50 VC commanded by Them, moved into the Cao Xa-Hien Luong area (YD637322-YD639318). All carried weapons. Also at this location were 20 armed PsyWar team cadre. The cadre have been divided into two 10 man teams. Leader of the first team is Hoang Dat, Iho Nhim Village Clerk. Leader of the 2nd team is Thu, Phong Dien District Clerk. Source believes the 50 VC are from the C-3 Company and that their mission is to support the PsyWar teams. The VC and PsyWar teams were known to have been in the Cao Xa-Bien Luong area on 2-3 April 1968. (C-3).

5. At 1430 hours 4 April 1968, 20 armed VC arrived vicinity (YD611320) with four (4) anti-tank mines. Source believes mines will be used to mine Hwy 1 from (YD615310 to YD600309) on the night of 5 April 1968. (C-3).

Meanwhile the 1/501 was busy in its AO, reporting in the April 6th journal its "activities of 5 Apr 68... A Co at 0900 found 4...

			graves - 4 NVA bodies - brown uniforms -		
			4-8 days old - killed by arty or NAP; 1208		
			booby trap - 82mm - YD693299 - destroyed;		
			1530 YD613302 - 1 NVA POW wounded in ankle;		
			B 1006 - grave YD686397 - 5 bloody uniforms -		
			1 NVA body; 1105 YD683311 - received SA fire		
			called arty - sweet village - found 6 NVA		
			bodies - 3 AK-47's - destroyed by arty; C		
			0800 - engaged unk size NVA force - YD672293		
			3 NVA KIA - 1 NVA POW - 1 SKS; 0940 YD672293		
			contact - 1 NVA KIA, 2 SKS - 2 AK-47's - 10		
			CICOM grenades; Co C - no time - YD677297 -		
			1 NVA KIA - 1 CHICOM claymore - 1 RPG -		
			Losses US 11 WIA - all evacuated.		

On April 6th A Company, 2/501st, had the brigades first serious contact in our new AO. The brigade journal reported that A Company had provided minesweep security from FSB Hardcore to QL 1, then began conducting platoon-size operations. "At 0925 hours, the 1st Platoon was...

moving as planned on operation and conducting search through NW section of village. At 1243 hours vic YD460492 the lead element was engaged by undetermined size enemy force. The plat leader was with the lead element. The plat Sgt was with 2 squad at YD459491. When the lead element became engaged, the squads deployed and established a base of fire. The initial burst of enemy fire wounded the plat leader and killed the RTO. 12 RPG's were in the first volley. Co A (-) began moving to assist plat at 1255 hours. Company moved down north side of stream (YD450506) and crossed vic YD455500 then moved on the south side of stream in an attempt to approach the enemies rear and

flank. Company called for LFT which arrived on station at 1335 hours. Company moved security across river on left flank and began moving forward utilizing the gunships fire power against enemy SA and AW fire received from the flank. Because of the intense enemy fire unit suffered 3 US KIA. 3d Plat crossed bridge at YD457492 and moved to assist 1st Plat. Company was supported by 4 AS, gunships and GS and DS arty. Company returned to FSB HADCOME at 1835 hours. Friendly losses - 3 US KIA, 8 US MIA, 13 US WIA (8 medevac) and 1 interpreter WIA (medevac). Enemy assessment - 7 NVN KIA (BC), 12 NVN KIA (poss), 1 60mm mortar round (destroyed).

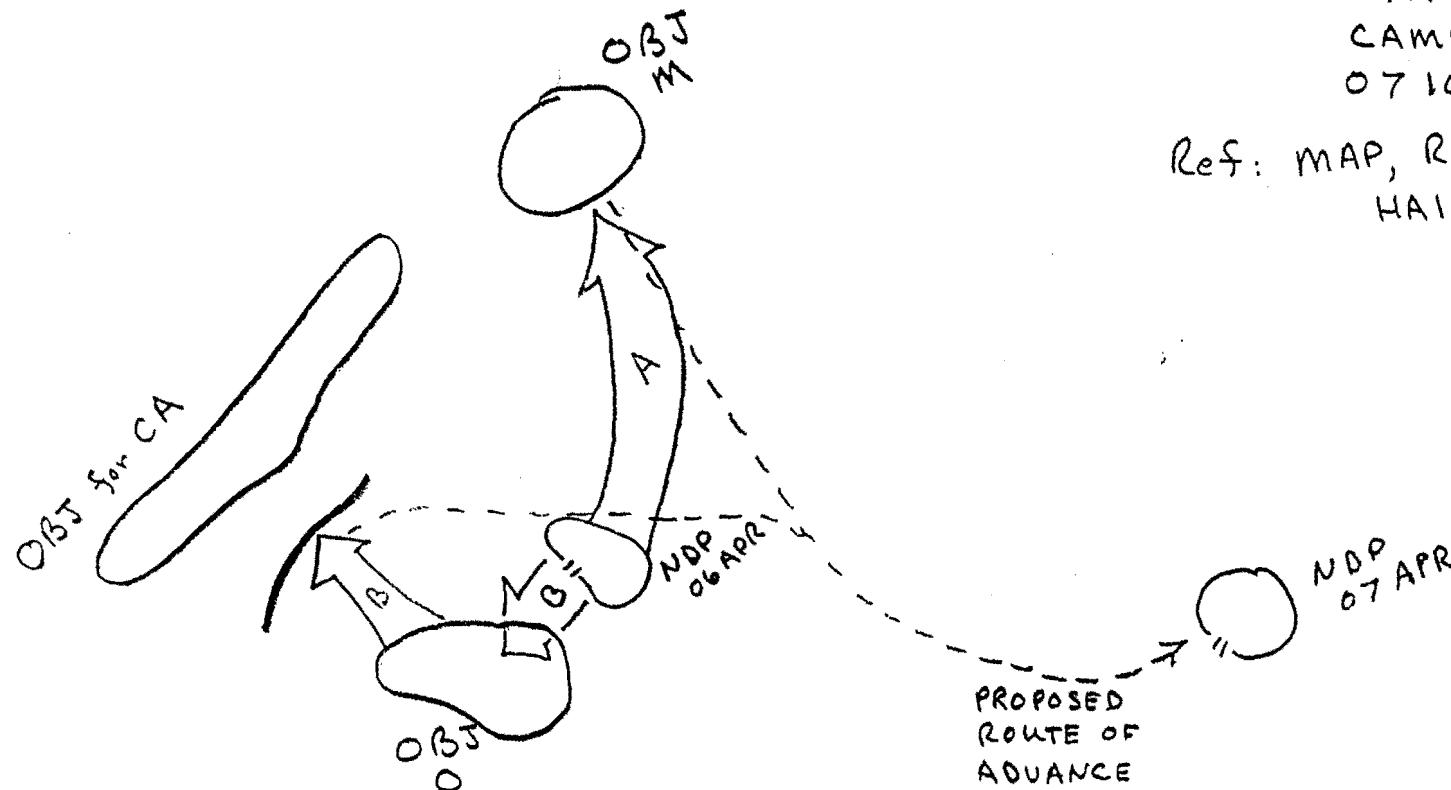
As reported in the brigade journal on the morning of April 7th, the 2/17th planned an operation that day that would begin from the night defensive position of A and B Troops on the 6th...

52	0940	Late Entry	From 2-17: Some of maneuver - B Trp dis-mounted with <i>(Recon rifle platoon)</i> ARPAOPCON into obj 0, YD510435 -		
			search out 1 km area - A element sending		
			mounted or dismounted obj "H" YD516430 -		
			when complete will go W with block at		
			YD491443. APR CA YD437447 supported by		
			fire from B element maneuver NW to YD502462		
			then back across river to SE - assemble		
			forces to NDF YD555435 - check out area of		
			recent SKYFOT.		
53	0952		From 2-17: Flight leader for CA is going		
			out to discuss CA with 3 in field.		
54	0953		From 2-327: 3.1 in sector is cleared at		
			this time.		

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Copy No. 1
2/17 Cav, 101st Abn Div
CAMP EVANS, RUN
071000 Apr 68

Ref: MAP, RUN, 1:50,000
HAILANG sheet



+LZ for CA: TBA
for move to NDP 07 Apr: TBA

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The 101st Airborne Division report for April 7th summarized the events in the 2d Brigade AO as follows...

b. 2d Bde 101st Abn Div: Co A 2/501, while conducting a sweep of the area of contact on 6 April, vic YD 455495, found 8 US KIA, now confirmed KIA. Also found were 10 NVA KIA (previously carried as 12 poss KIA). At 0845H, vic YD 510440, ARP 2/17 Cav rec sniper fire. Results 1 US WIA (evac). At 1100H, vic YD 477408, Co D 1/502 engaged 2 VC with organic wpns. Res: 2 VC KIA. At 1228, vic YD 475415, Co D 1/502 engaged 2 VC with SW fire. Res: 2 VC KIA. At 1510, vic YD 458492, Co A 2/501 found 1 AK-47 (evac). At 1510, vic YD 487423, Co D 1/502 engaged 1 VC with SA. Res: 1 VC KIA. At 1515, vic YD 490418, Co D 1/502 engaged 2 VC with AW. Res: 2 VC KIA. At 1530, vic YD 458492, Co A 2/501 sustained 1 US WIA (evac) as a result of a BBT. At 1705, vic YD 488444, ARP 2/17 Cav sustained 1 US KIA, 2 US WIA (evac) as a result of an engagement with an est VC squad.

On April 8th, the 2/327 had a mortar accident in a training situation. From the brigade journal of that date..

112	1838	late entry	To G3 101 Cpt GILLEM: Msg sent forward at 1630 hours, reference C 2-327 mortar accident Co C was conducting a training operation and had moved by fire and maneuver to crest of a hill against a simulated enemy squad. Co commander revised to simulated Company and		
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112	cont		ordered withdrawal to vic YD373428 to call		
			supporting indirect fires. Arty FO called		
			in 81mm mortar fire with critical request		
			grid YD367433 and direction 4400 OTL. Mor-		
			tar position YD38004373. 1st round landed		
			approx on area request (WP round). Subse-		
			quent command was left 300 did not change		
			direction. The 2nd round was left 300 how-		
			ever fell slightly into fold in the ground.		
			The next FO adjustment was L300, D100 based		
			on primarily on sound sensing. The 3rd rd		
			landed forward of FO into friendly troops		
			wounding 7 (1 litter, 5 ambulatory), criti-		
			cally evac by log bird to B 326 Med subse-		
			quently to 22d Surg FHU BAI - LTC BACKWITH		
			went to the 81mm mortar position and ordered		
			the troops to withdrew 300 meters. He then		
			had the arty FO recall the same fire mission.		
			The 1st, 2nd, 3rd rounds landed in the same		
			location as the previous 1st, 2nd and 3rd		
			rounds had impacted. Col Cushman tentativ-		
			ely believes based upon this that the ad-		
			justment had been either to bold or not		
112	cont		properly sensed. 2-327 policy allows only		
			Arty FO to adjust arty and mortar fire.		
			LTC Keesling has been appointed investiga-		
			ting officer.		

The brigade journal for April 9th reported the total losses of the 2d Brigade during the ten days of Carentan II to this point. They were: 18 KIA and 70 WIA, of which 58 had been medevaced. The enemy assessment was: 41 NVA KIA, and 32 VC KIA -- plus some 10 or so individual weapons.

For some reason we were not doing much damage, and the enemy was hurting us too much.

On April 10-11, that picture changed. The 2/501 conducted its first, and the 2d Brigade's second, cordon operation.

The morning of April 10th, A Company, 2/501st (A/2/501, which was providing security for B/1/321 Artillery at FSB Hardcore [YD 450508], was operating in the immediate area) made heavy contact five kilometers southeast of Hardcore at Phuoc Dien (YD475485), where district intelligence believed that elements of an NVA battalion were located. (See sketch map, next page)

With A Company in an attack position (1), the 2/501 lifted D Company (which had been providing security for Wunder Beach, also the location of the 2/501 command post) to an LZ at (3). After an air and artillery preparation, climaxed at 1305 by the use of CS tear gredades dropped from helicopters, A and D Companies made a coordinated attack at (4) and (5).

From the brigade journal for April 10th...

"1258 From 2/501: Bde CO at Bn CP.

"1338 Bde CO: A and D 2-501 have both made contact in woodline, both have taken casualties, number unknown at this time, units are maneuvering, employing heavy firepower.

"1338 S-3 2-501: A & D receiving heavy fire from objective, AW and RPG. D Co has passed through 1st hedgerow, A Co pressing on slowly, both are working in conjunction with each other.

"1410 2-501: Medevac for 3 WIA D Co complete at this time, A Co has 1 KIA, D Co has 1 KIA not evac, ARA back on station.

"1554 2-501: Request medevac for D Co 3 WIA, YD475483. Estimated Bn size force.

It was clear that a sizeable NVA force was entrenched in Phuoc Dien, more than A and D companies could handle alone. But night was coming on. From the brigade journal:

- "1615 CO: A & D pulled away from village, putting in air strike, keep air coming with plenty of napalm and 500 lb bombs.
- "1630 Bde CO: Informed G3 that air strike and arty fired on 2-501 objective all morning until CA, 2-501 put in CS (tear gas) before the attack, A & D Co attacked employing fire and maneuver with D Co on the right and A Co on the left. D Co ran into a bunker line, received 4 casualties (1 KIA), A Co situation was similar, lead plat of A Co was very well supported by gunships, destroyed bunkers with LAW & 90mm, sustained 1 KIA, recently reported 2d KIA, presently pulling out of village to put in more air strikes and arty, estimated co size force.
- "1655 CG: CG informed CO not to withdraw A & D 2-501 from area, leave them there and clear up that area if it takes a week."

General Barsanti asked what I needed.¹ I said that I needed helicopters right away to move B Company so that we could encircle the enemy. They were on the way immediately. I replaced B Company, which was securing FSB Hardcore, with A Troop, 2/17, Dick Tallman, battalion commander, moved D Company to an encircling position south of the village (8) where it could link with A Company which had formed a cordon line in the rice paddies to the north and east (7), and at 1840 B Company was making a combat assault into an LZ (3) from which the company could link up with A and D Companies on its flanks (6). The cordon was in place by 2000 hours. We had ordered flareships to be on station all night, with artillery flares on standby.

I told LTC Tallman that two-man foxholes were to be placed no more than 10 meters apart, and that his troops were to be 100% awake and alert during the night. The cordon line was in open fields with excellent observation of any enemy attempt to exfiltrate. During the night, the NVA made at least 12 attempts to break out; each of them failed, at a cost to the enemy of 36 killed and 2 captured. The next day, after further artillery preparation, the 2/501st troops swept through the village against moderate resistance, overrunning bunkers and trench systems.

Cleo Hogan, D Company, wrote in his diary...

10 April

We attacked today using gas masks and that is a real joke. Most of us just pulled off the gas masks and cried our way through it. Kept the area encircled all night and the

¹This was the kind of leadership that a division commander should give, and was characteristic of General Barsanti. His orders to me, and his offer of help which I converted into helicopters for an encirclement, led to a turning point in the fortunes of the 2d Brigade. In the remaining months of my command, the brigade received considerable credit for the series of cordon operations that followed this one. But the basic pattern was set here, and in my remarks at General Barsanti's farewell dinner for me in late June 1968, I said that a great deal of the credit for our accomplishments belonged to the division commander, for his direction and assistance to me on April 10th.

Air Force dropped flares to keep the area lit up. At 0330 the NVA attempted to break out and several of the 3d Platoon were wounded... We brought out a loudspeaker and our interpreter told them to surrender or be killed. About 20 of them surrendered and we only had to kill about 6 more.

In an account, written "during the fall [of 1968] when I was at 2d Bde Hq [as assistant S-3]," Hogan writes a version slightly different from that of the brigade journal, indicating that the action began in a more ad hoc fashion...

On 10 April 1968 2-501 CP was located at Naval supply Depot Utah Beach. (The chronology calls it Wunder Beach, however we knew it as Utah Beach) Company D was providing security for the Depot and Bn Hq, and conducting close in daylight recon patrols. Company A was providing security for FB Hardcore and conducting close in daylight patrols. During the morning of 10 April 68 Company D was located approximately 1 kilometer north of Utah Beach relaxing and swimming in the ocean after having provided security the night before. One platoon of Company A led by Lt Grugel departed FB Hardcore to conduct a recon mission in the area of Phuoc Dien. The platoon approached the village and was engulfed in a hail of fire by a large NVA force in the village. The platoon sustained massive WIA's and a few KIA's. At approximately 1145hrs Company D was alerted to be ready for pickup by UH1D to conduct a Combat Assault on Thon Phuoc Dien to assist Company A. At the same time the remaining platoons of Company A would CA from FB Hardcore into the same area. Company A was inserted on the left and Company D on the right. Our mission would be to pin down the enemy while Company A evacuated their WIA and KIA. Company A was inserted without resistance, however one platoon of Company D (2d Plt) was inserted too close to the wood line and came under heavy fire as they exited the aircraft. The initial battle resulted in one KIA. (Spl G.P. Eller). It was obvious that the enemy force was much larger than Bn had estimated and Company D was ordered to pull back 500 meters and direct the TAC air strikes. At approximately 1530hrs. Company D attacked the village while Company A maintained a blocking position on the north and east. The village had been prepped with artillery and APA and was then bombarded with 4.2 inch mortar tear gas canisters. (To my knowledge this was one of the only battles in which tear gas and gas masks were used in Viet Nam and the official record doesn't even mention it). Even after massive artillery and air strikes the enemy force continued to hold their positions. The attack had only gotten underway when both Company A and Company D were ordered to immediately break contact and force march immediately to FB Hardcore. Company D had captured an NVA POW who stated that a large NVA force were going to attack FB Hardcore on the night of 10 April. Company A and Company D had moved approximately half way to FB Hardcore when both were ordered to turn around and go back to the village Phuoc Dien. Company B was CA'd to join Co A and Co D in establishing a cordon around the village. (note: 2/17 Cav moved to secure FB Hardcore, no attack came).

During the night the NVA made several attempts to break out of the cordon in small groups and at approximately 0415hrs a platoon size NVA force attempted to storm the Company D area. Lt Bishoff and a few other members of 3D were wounded, however the NVA were beaten back. During the morning hours of 11 April the cordon continued with additional air strikes and artillery being used. 3d Plt Company D observed several NVA firing from bunkers and attempted to silence them using M82LAW, to no avail. Bn Headquarters were pushing Company D to begin an assault on the village, however it was obvious that the bunkers would have to be neutralized before any attack could begin. Cpt Hogan requested that a 106RR rifle be airlifted to the area. The 106RR arrived at approximately 1130hrs and fired 5 rounds. Brigade Headquarters sent out a loud speaker unit and an interpreter, and after firing the 5 106RR rounds, the loud speaker unit demanded that the NVA surrender or face additional 106RR, artillery, and air strikes. After a proximately 5 minutes an NVA soldier came out of the wood line with a white flag tied to his rifle barrel, and asked to talk to the officer in charge. Cpt Hogan moved to the area of 3d Plt and the NVA stated that there were only about 25 NVA still alive in the village and that they would surrender if the US forces would quit firing. Approximately 20 minutes later approximately 20 NVA marched single file out of the village to a point approximately 200 yds from Co D

perimeter. The NVA stopped, formed a platoon formation, stacked arms just like a parade and then marched to the 3D area with their hands on their heads. The NVA were airlifted to Utah Beach classified as PCN's.

At 1330hrs Company B on the left and Company D on the right began a sweep of the village. Company B met no resistance and swept through their sector, however Company D came under heavy fire approximately half way through the village. 1st Plt was sent to help 2d Plt neutralize a complex of bunkers and while the fire fight was raging, BG Clay the assistant Division Commander radioed that he was overhead and wanted to land and observe the mop-up operations. Cpt Hogan requested that B. Clay delay coming in the area until the fighting had died down however within 5 minutes BG Clay was on the front lines. 5 additional NVA were killed, 2 more captured and then Company D swept through the village without additional incidents. Sph Eller's body was recovered and evacuated. Company D and Company A moved to FB Hardcore and at 1730hrs Company D was moved by truck to Utah Beach. During the 2 day battle Company D lost 1 KIA (Sph Eller) and approximately 15 MIA. Company D had captured 22 NVA and killed at least 65 in our sector.

Casualties to the 2/501st were 7 killed and 35 wounded. Enemy losses were 70 NVA killed and 13 captured. 24 individual weapons and 7 crew-served weapons were taken. It was evident from the PWs and captured documents that the 2/501 had trapped and destroyed a company-size element of the 6th Battalion, 812th NVA Regiment.

The after action report highlighted "the need for continuous illumination in cordon operations... During the hours of darkness the trapped NVA made numerous attempts to exfiltrate the cordon area. Illumination enabled movement to be detected, and small unit commanders were able to make rapid adjustments in disposition to thwart each attempt."

Another lesson for me was that it was nice to have the 106mm recoilless rifles that we got from the 2/17 Cav to bust bunkers at short range.

In retrospect, I wonder why -- given our success with the 1/501 cordon in late March -- we did not go directly into developing cordon situations as soon as we arrived in this AO to the north. It wasn't until Phuoc Dien that I got the picture of how we should operate. One thing for sure, we went into that operating mode when we returned to LZ Sally.

Which we soon did. On April 12th, the 2/12th Cav Squadron of the 1st ACD returned from Operation Pegasus to Camp Evans. The next day it relieved 1/502 of its base security mission and the 1/502 headed for LZ Sally. (We would quickly lose the 1/502, which would go south of Hue to FSB Henry, under the 1st Brigade/101st).

On the 14th the 2/327 was relieved on LZ Jane by the 1/5 Cav and moved by CH-47 and truck convoy to rejoin the 1st Brigade, 101st, south of Hue.

On the 14th the 2d Brigade CP, having been relieved by the 2d Brigade/1st Cav, departed Camp Evans. At 1500 that day it opened at LZ Sally and resumed opcon of the 1/501st and responsibility for its former AO, including the 1/505 Abn of the 3d/82d.

On April 17th the 2/501 turned over the responsibility for Wunder Beach to the 3d Battalion, 26th Marine Regiment, 3d Marine Division. The 2/501st moved its artillery battery and B Company to Quang Dien, its command post to LZ Sally, closing at 1525 hours, and would complete the battalion's move south the next day.

On the 17th and 18th the 2/17 Cav, which would keep its base at Camp Evans, motor marched south into the 2d Brigade AO, taking up security missions at several bridge sites along QL 1.

Pleased to be back at LZ Sally and in our old area of operations, we got to work.

Chapter 8. LZ Sally; April 15 - May 13, 1968

The night of April 14th we had, under our opcon from our LZ Sally command post, the 1/501 which was in the AO it had never left, the 1/502 which had just closed into LZ Sally from the north, and the 1/505 Abn of the 3d/82d. Division had told us that the 1/502 would move on the 15th to FSB Henry south of Hue in the AO of the 1st Brigade/101st, to assist in a strike by the 101st Airborne and 1st Cav divisions into the A Shau Valley.

From the brigade journal for April 15th...

- "1018 G3: LTC Garrison called and said not to let 1-502 move to Henry until he gave the word, area is presently being contested by the enemy.
- "1025 G3: It's OK for 1-502 to move to Henry.
- "1045 1-502: D Co abn from Sally at 1044 hrs.
- "1047 1-502: A Company departed Sally at this time by convoy.

The 1/502d would not be back until May 1st.

On April 17th B Troop, 2/17 Cav, motor-marched south from Camp Evans into the 2d Brigade AO and secured bridge sites along QL 1. The remainder of 2/17 Cav would move south from Camp Evans the next day, the 18th.

On the 17th the 1/505th Abn moved to fire base Bastogne south of Hue, back under the control of the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division.

On April 17 and 18 the 2/501st moved in from the north, locating its artillery battery and B Company at Quang Dien and its command post and other units at LZ Sally.

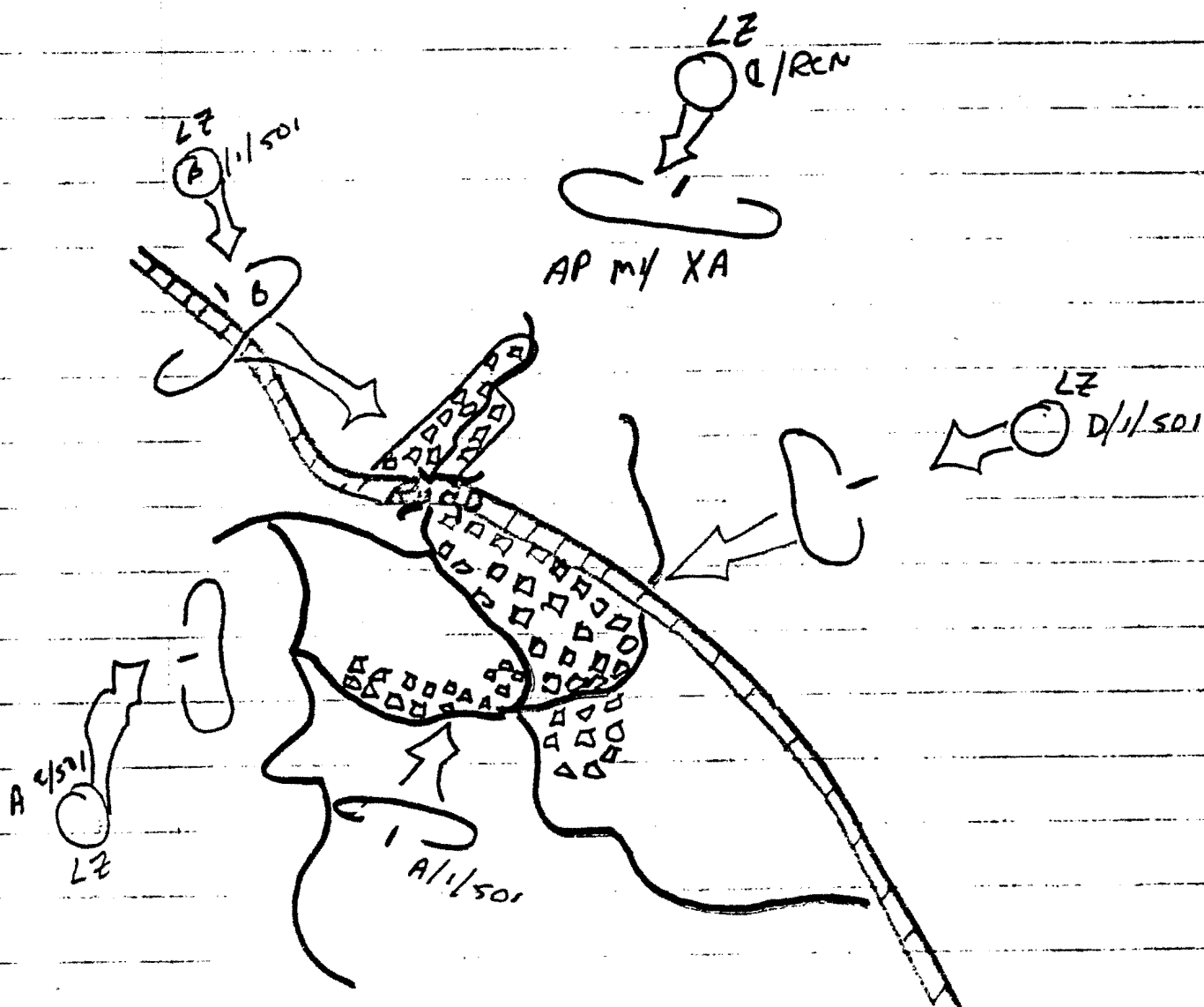
On the 20th I had a new S-3, Major James J. Waldeck, who had come to us from the 2/327. Jim had been a G-3 advisor in my advisory detachment with the 21st ARVN Division in 1963-64. Russ Miller, whose steady hand, good humor, willingness, professional competence, and sound judgment had been invaluable to me since my first day in command, moved to the division G-3 Section; Frank Garrison was getting a good man.

We also lost Dick Tallman, commanding the 2/501, who would soon make colonel and had gone to a higher headquarters down south that wanted him very much. His replacement lasted only a few days; General Barsanti soon sent down newly promoted Lieutenant Colonel James A. Heiter of the division G-3 Section. Tony was an old hand in the division; I was confident that he would be a fine battalion commander.

Just as we were settling into our new AO, we executed another encirclement operation, at Ap My Xa and Ap Dong Xuyen, five kilometers southeast of Quang Dien. From the brigade summary of April 17th...

"1-501 Inf. At 1330 hrs vic YD728307 an informer told Co D [the brigade log says that the informant told Co A] that 2 NVA companies were located vic YD723314 and YD726305. During the afternoon the Bn deployed to blocking positions around the objective area. 4 air strikes were flown into the objective area between 1555 and 1642 hours. Continuous illumination will be provided throughout the night."

This sketch and text is from the S3 report of June 22d (see page 79, Chapter 6)...



"[On April 17th] Co A 1-501 moved overland by foot and established a blocking position to the south of the objective area. [This seems incorrect; the brigade journal has A Company making a combat assault from a position at YD689284 and engaging the

enemy at 1015 hrs.] Company D conducted a combat assault at 1123 hrs and established a blocking position to the east. Co C and the Recon Platoon, at 1722 hrs, conducted a combat assault to the north of the objective and established a blocking position. Co B conducted a combat assault at 1837 hrs to the west of the objective and established a blocking position." (These other unit actions are consistent with the brigade journal of the 17th).

From the brigade journal for the 17th...

"1450 Bde CO departed CP for Quang Dien."

I don't remember this action at all. I'm certain that I must have been frustrated that B and C Companies, 1/501, were so slow moving into position around the enemy on the 17th (we pulled B Company off the An Lo Bridge, where it had been opcon to the 2/17th, who assumed bridge security). In any event, when night fell we had not encircled the village. Indeed, its southern sector was open.

I had no reserves. 1/502d was with 1st Bde/101. 2/501 was not relieved of its Wunder Beach security mission until 1800 on the 17th; its tac CP arrived at LZ Sally only by dark. The brigade journal for the 17th reported that one platoon of B Company moved with B/321 Arty to secure the fire base at Quang Dien, opcon to 1/501. A and C Companies were still up north.

But the 17 April journal reported that, after securing bridges up north during the night, "Co D... moved by UH-D from bridges to LZ Sally and established NDP and local ambushes..." Why I did not yank them as soon as they arrived at Sally on the 17th and make them available to 1/501 I do not know; there must have been a reason.

Evidently the first rifle company that I could get my hands on was A/2/501, which moved the next day, the 18th, by truck from its security mission at FSB Hardcore near Wunder Beach, closing at LZ Sally at 1442. At 1610 on the 18th, opcon to the 1/501, A/2/501 lifted off in a combat assault and closed into its LZ on the southwest portion of the "encirclement" at 1642.

It was really not an encirclement. The units had not locked arms around the enemy with no gaps whatever, and had not lined themselves up in two man foxholes placed no more than 10 meters apart. Along with constant illumination, this had been our recipe for success in the cordon done by 2/501 near Wunder Beach (page 105). Allowing no escape, this technique would characterize each future great success. In addition, we probably needed one more rifle company.

We used a lot of firepower, even tear gas. We had one man killed and 13 wounded. The enemy lost 48 NVA killed and we gathered 10 individual weapons, but we took no pri-

soners. Brigade S2 believed from an agent report that the two hamlets contained an estimated 200 NVA, in two companies of the 7th Battalion, 90th Regiment. Considering the opportunity presented, our results were disappointing.

It is clear to me as I write this years later that after this experience I decided that, most of all, my brigade's exploitation of an opportunity for encirclement called for intense yet controlled energy on my part, not necessarily in the encirclement's detailed tactical direction (although I would occasionally have to be quite specific with my encirclement battalion commander) but in the gathering and the direction of resources -- helicopters, firepower, reinforcing units, including ARVN and RF/PF forces from wherever they could be found -- and in my driving motivation of all concerned to insure that the loop was tightly closed around the enemy before dark.

On April 20th both 1/501 and 2/501 had sharp engagements, for a total of 7 US KIA and 42 WIA, with an enemy assessment of 53 NVA KIA and 6 NVA POWs. We heard that the 1/502, with the 1st Brigade, had moved from FSB Henry to FSB Bastogne.

On the 21st we built our fourth cordon. The villages were Thon Thanh Trung and Thon Kim Doi, on the road seven kilometers southeast of Quang Dien, to which the 2/501 had moved its command post the day before. I will copy the S3 report of 22 June in its entirety.

"Task Organization:

2-501 Inf

Co A
Co B
Co C
Co D

ARVN

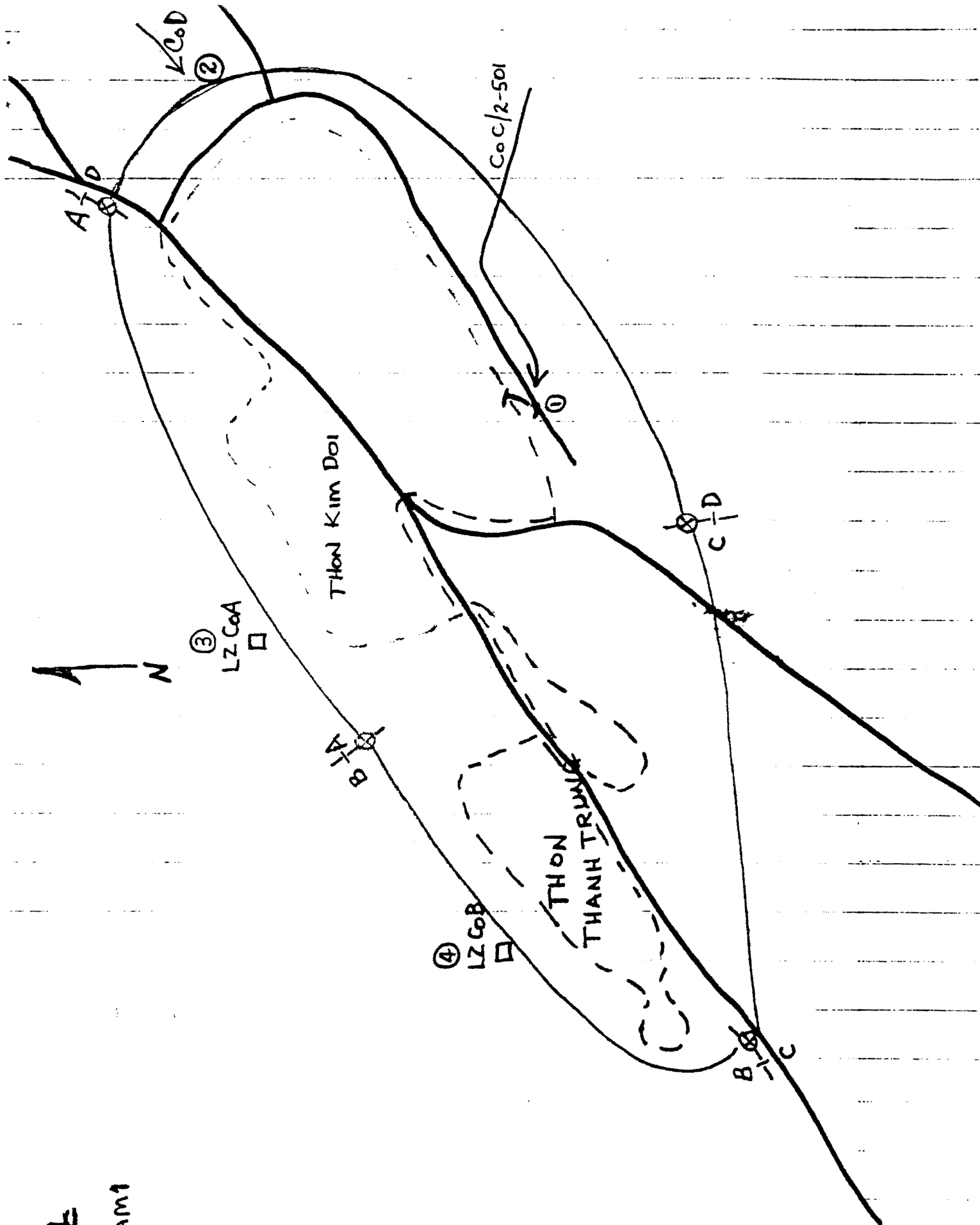
Black Panther Co, 1st ARVN Div
5 PF plats
222d RF Co

"Initial tactical situation, scheme of maneuver (Diagram 1, next page)

"On 21 April, in reaction to intelligence reports, Co C was conducting a RIF operation in the vicinity of the objective area. Contact was made initially at 1430 hours with an estimated squad-size enemy force (1). Co D, operating to the NE, was ordered to the area of contact as it became apparent that Co C was in new contact with an estimated company of NVA. As Co C developed the situation and utilized artillery to support, Co D maneuvered into a blocking position to the NE (2). At approximately 1900 hours, Co A was combat assaulted to an LZ (3) on the NW of the village area. Co B was combat assaulted to an LZ (4) on the SW side of the village. The four companies firmly established the cordon and occupied blocking positions as indicated on the diagram by 2030 hrs. The area was illuminated continuously with a combination of artillery, helicopter, and USAF flare aircraft. Throughout the night, cordon elements received sporadic SA, AW, and RPG fire, as several unsuccessful attempts were made by the enemy to escape.

DIAGRAM 1

DRAFT



"Execution (Diagram 2, next page):

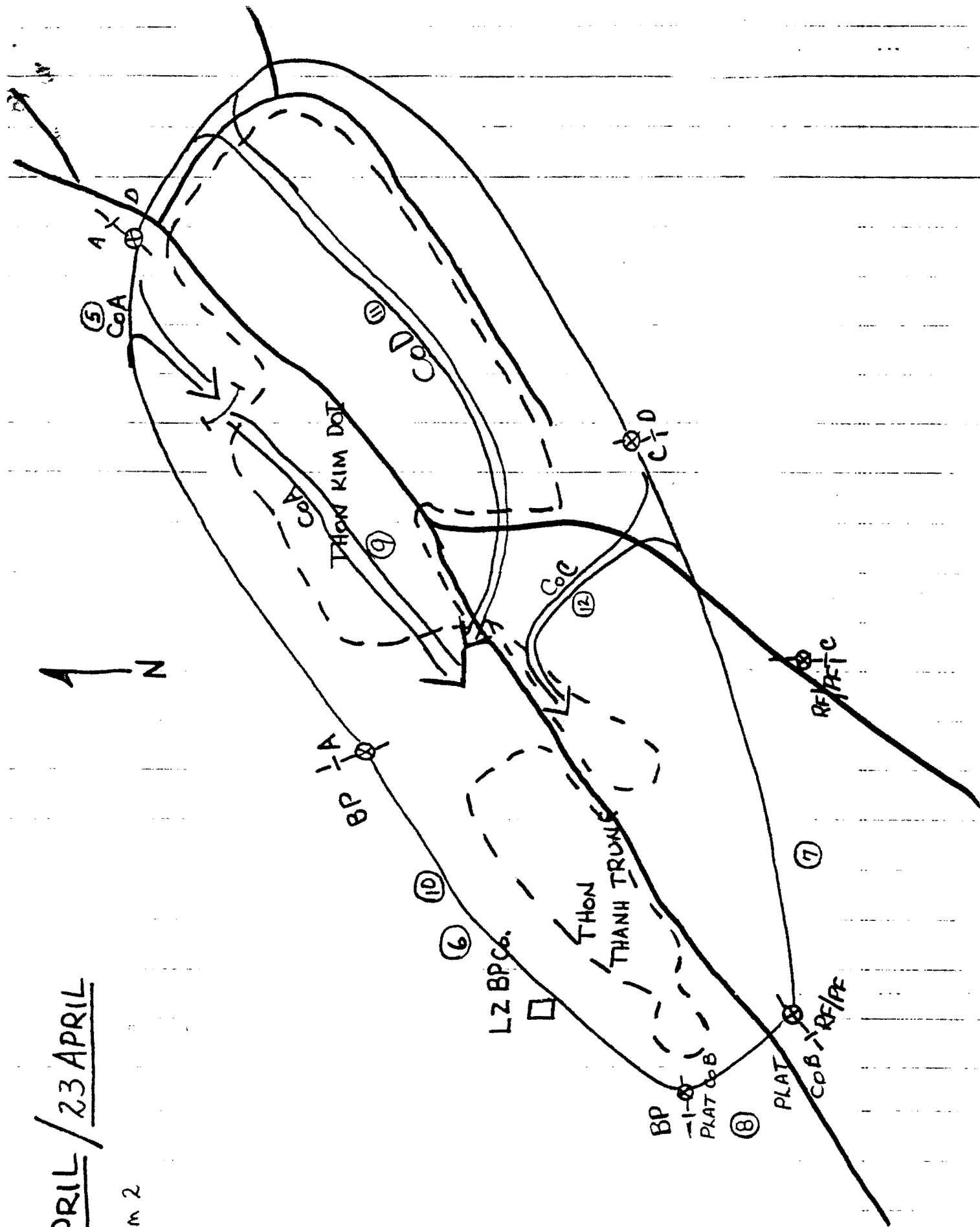
"On 22 April a psyops team broadcasted to the encircled enemy. 106mm RR were flown in to reinforce the direct firepower capability of the infantry units. An air and arty preparation preceeded an attack by Co A to the SW (5) that was initiated at approximately 1500 hours. An intense volume of fire prevented Co A from advancing through the village. During this period other companies continued to maintain blocking positions and received periodic intense volumes of SA fire. At approximately 1600 it was decided to divert Co B to another area. The Black Panther Company, 1st ARVN Div, was combat assaulted to assume the blocking position manned by Co. B. An RF company and 5 PF platoons were also moved to fill the gap (7) as Co C adjusted its position. At 1900 hrs, Co B was moved out of the cordon area. At 2100 hrs a plat of Co B was assaulted to the cordon to fill a gap (8) between Co B and the RF/PF elements.¹ Throughout the second night the various elements received sporadic SA fire as the vigil continued with the assistance of continuous illumination from USAF flare aircraft.

"On 23 April, Co A swept thru the village to the SW (9). This sweep was preceded by an air and artillery preparation and only light sporadic resistance was met. The company then relieved the Black Panther Company of their blocking position (10) so that the Black Panther could be extracted at 1500 hrs. At this time, Co D swept the north-eastern portion of the objective area (11) and then crossed the stream and prepared to attack SW. Co C swept the village in the southeastern portion of the objective (12) and departed for another operation. The platoon of Co B was also extracted to rejoin Co B. Throughout the day, only sporadic light contact was made with the remnants of the enemy force. By nightfall, the RF Co, Co A, and Co D had reduced the cordon as indicated (diagram 3). A series of strong points and ambushes were established along possible escape routes. On 24 April, Co A and Co D swept thru the remaining portion of the objective by 1100 hrs (13) with the RF company blocking on the SE side of the stream (14). Only sporadic sniper fire was received by lead elements of Co A as they entered the village.

¹The frequent use of passive voice throughout these chapters often obscures the fact that events did not happen by themselves; usually someone ordered an action, then someone else made it happen (or failed to do so). In this case it was no doubt I who decided to move B Company, arranged the use of the Black Panther Company and the 5 RF platoons, and saw to their insertion. I remember clearly how "a plat of B Company was assaulted to the cordon" because on return to my CP that night I was told that someone in the TOC listening to the radio traffic was writing me up for the Distinguished Flying Cross; it was awarded 1 June 1968. The citation reads... "...on 22 April 1968... during a cordon operation around the village of Thon Thanh Trung... One battalion had established a cordon around the village... Late in the afternoon, an Army of the Republic of Vietnam company relieved one of the U.S. rifle companies in place. Colonel Cushman noted that a large gap in the cordon had resulted and immediately alerted a rifle platoon from the recently deployed U.S. company to be airlifted back into the cordon area. Using his own command and control helicopter and two other helicopters, Colonel Cushman began lifting the rifle platoon to the cordon. Both the pickup zone and the landing zone were subjected to fire every time a helicopter approached. Although darkness had closed in on the operation and the other two helicopters were forced to return for fuel, Colonel Cushman continued the airlift... (until the cordon was complete, etc, with typical citation language...)"

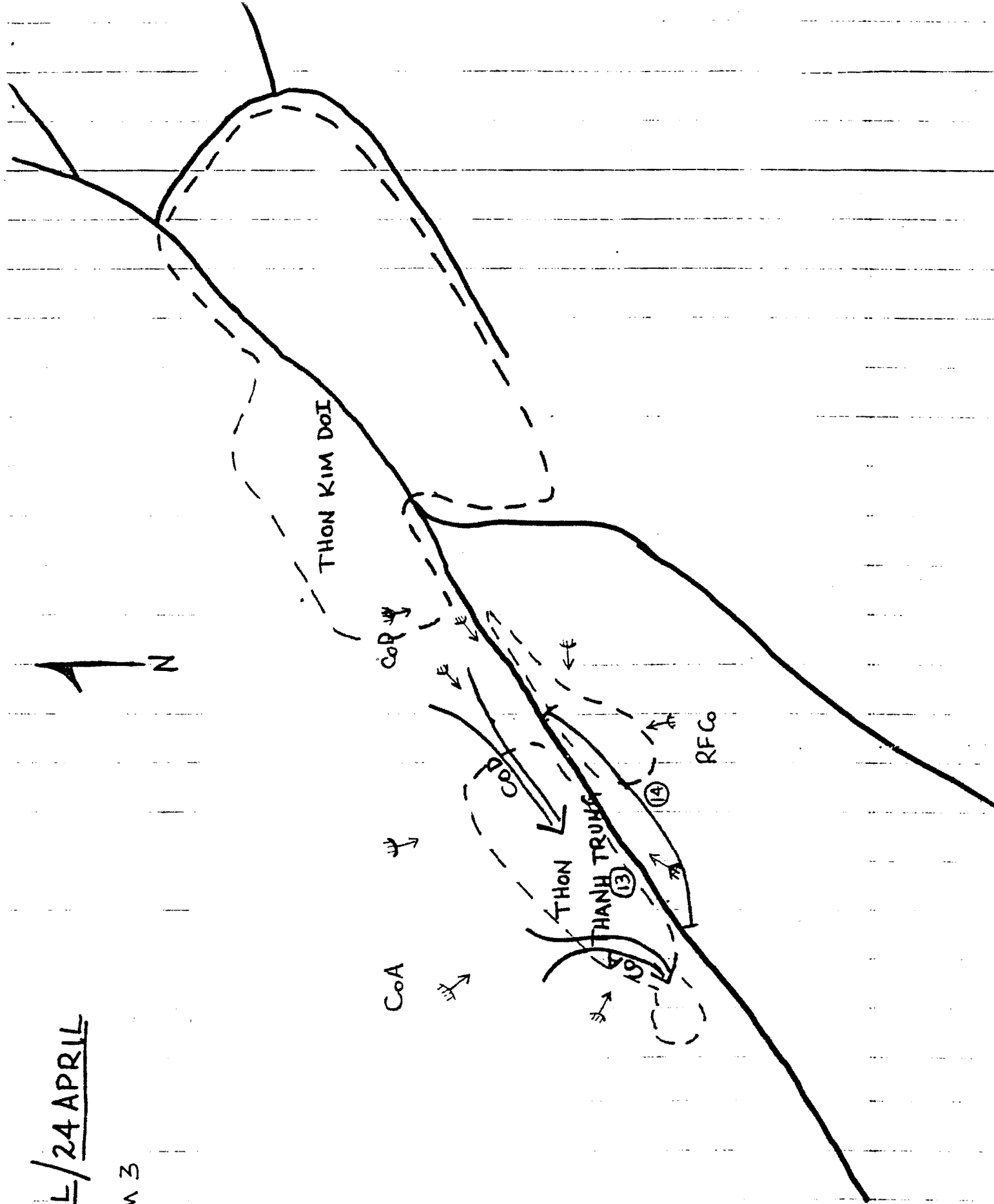
22 APRIL / 23 APRIL

DIAGRAM 2



23 APRIL / 24 APRIL

DIAGRAM 3



"Results: 21-24 April:

Friendly casualties: 12 WHA

Enemy losses: 74 NVA KIA and 1 NVA POW

7 indiv weapons captured and 1 CS weapon captured

"Special techniques and lessons learned:

"This operation exemplified the necessity of extremely close coordination and fire control by ground commanders. Because of the narrow, elongated nature of the objective area, it was essential that commanders be constantly aware of adjacent unit locations to prevent exchanges of fire between friendly units.

"Individual artillery pieces were registered during daylight because of the proximity of friendly elements. Little if any shifting of these fires could be accomplished because of the close friendly troop proximity.

"In this situation, it was found that the 106mm RR, to a degree, compensated for the inability to mass artillery fires and was a valuable asset in augmenting the direct fire capability of the rifle company."

While this encirclement took place, operations continued elsewhere, and the enemy was dangerous. Items from the brigade journal of April 23d...

"1335 2-501: Vehicle ambushed vic An Lo bridge, 3 WIA, request medevac and light fire team, UH 1 in area, doorgunners placing suppressing fire.

"1412 Bde CO: 4 evacuated from vehicle ambush, vehicle is still there, received fire from across the river, indications that personnel were approx 1500 meters SW of river washing vehicle.

"1528 2-501: At 1515 hours vehicle was retrieved, no damage to vehicle.

"2010 S3 1-501: Vic YD683276 bridge, A Co ambush was moving into position, spotted 15-20 NVA. All had weapons, dressed in khaki uniforms, engaged and saw 3 fall, enemy did not return fire, ran to north, will assess after arty is fired. (Later report: 7 NVA KIA and 4 AK-57 and 1 SKS captured)

"2140 From 2-17: C Co 1-501 ambush. Time 2133, grid YS619300, engaged 2 VC, 2 VC KIA, captured 1 weapon, contact broken 2140, firing arty.

On April 24th, the 2/17 Cav, reinforced by B Company, 4/31 Infantry, from Camp Evans, launched an operation northwestward into a village complex southeast of My Chanh.

This operation, outside the normal 2d Brigade AO, was evidently designed to keep pressure on the enemy in the 1st Cav Division area, in the absence of its units that were fighting alongside the 101st Airborne Division in the A Shau valley. The 2/17 Cav task force lost 1 KIA and 10 WIA and assessed 12 NVA KIA in this three day operation. The squadron operation order is copied below and on the next two pages.

Copy 10 of 12 Copies
2d Squadron (Abn), 17th Cav
Camp Evans (YD526312), RVN
231800H April 1968
YZ 51

OPORD 15-68 (DELAWARE)

Reference: Map, 1:50,000, Sheet 6442 II

Task Organization:

B 2/17 Cav (CPT Rozzelle, Cmdg)	TF Control
Mine Sweep Tm	1 C&C UH-1H
RF/PF	1 H-23
	1 Log UH-1B
B 4/31 Inf (CPT Wolf, Cmdg)	Aero Rifle Plat
	GSR (-) GS
A 2/17 Cav (CPT Ingram, Cmdg)	
Mine Sweep Tm	
GSR Tm A	

1. SITUATION:

- a. Enemy Forces: (Annex A - Intell) Omitted.
- b. Friendly Forces: 2/101 continues its mission of the security of LZ SALLY and conduct of ops in AO.
- c. Attachments & Detachments: Task Organization.

2. MISSION: 2/17 Cav conduct a reconnaissance in force into the village complex along river from YD480400 to YD498462 and locate and destroy VC/NVA forces and supplies found within area.

3. EXECUTION:

- a. Concept of Operation: Annex B (Overlay). TF 2/17 Cav will attack with two trps abreast, B Trp on the left seize obj Y, W, V and T. B 4/31 Inf conduct combat assault vic YD483397 seize obj Z, X and V.
- b. Fires: Annex C (Fire Support).
- c. Trp "A": Continue to conduct RIF ops within Co Bang area vic YD615329. ONO reinforce Squadron in zone.
- d. Trp "B": Conduct overland displacement to attack psn. Cross LD 240900. Attack northeast to seize obj Y, W, V and T.

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(CLASSIFICATION)

OPORD 15-68 (DELAWARE)

- e. B 4/31 Inf: Conduct combat assault into LZ via YD483397 beginning at 240800H. Move to atk psn. Cross LD 240900, attack northeast to seize obj Z, X and V.
- f. 2d Plt, A/3/5 Cav: OPCON to C 1/501 Inf.
- g. ARP: CMO conduct combat assault to reinforce B 2/17 Cav or B 4/31 Inf.
- h. C 1/501 Inf: Continue to secure An Lo Bridge and conduct RIF opns within AO.
- i. Surveillance Section: GS 2/17 Cav.
- j. Coordinating Instructions:
 - (1) ACL - 6 pax per aircraft.
 - (2) No recon by fire into obj Y or Z unless fired upon.
 - (3) SP at YD549327 at 240630H.
 - (4) PZ time for B 4/31 Inf is 240800 Apr; assemble at YD533319.
 - (5) Downgraded to "FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY" upon execution.
- 4. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS: Annex D (Admin Order) Omitted.
- 5. COMMAND AND SIGNAL:
 - a. Current SSI and SOI in effect.
 - b. Command Group will follow B Trp.

Acknowledge:

Annexes:

A-Intell (Omitted)
B-Overlay
C-Fires
D-Admin Order (Omitted)

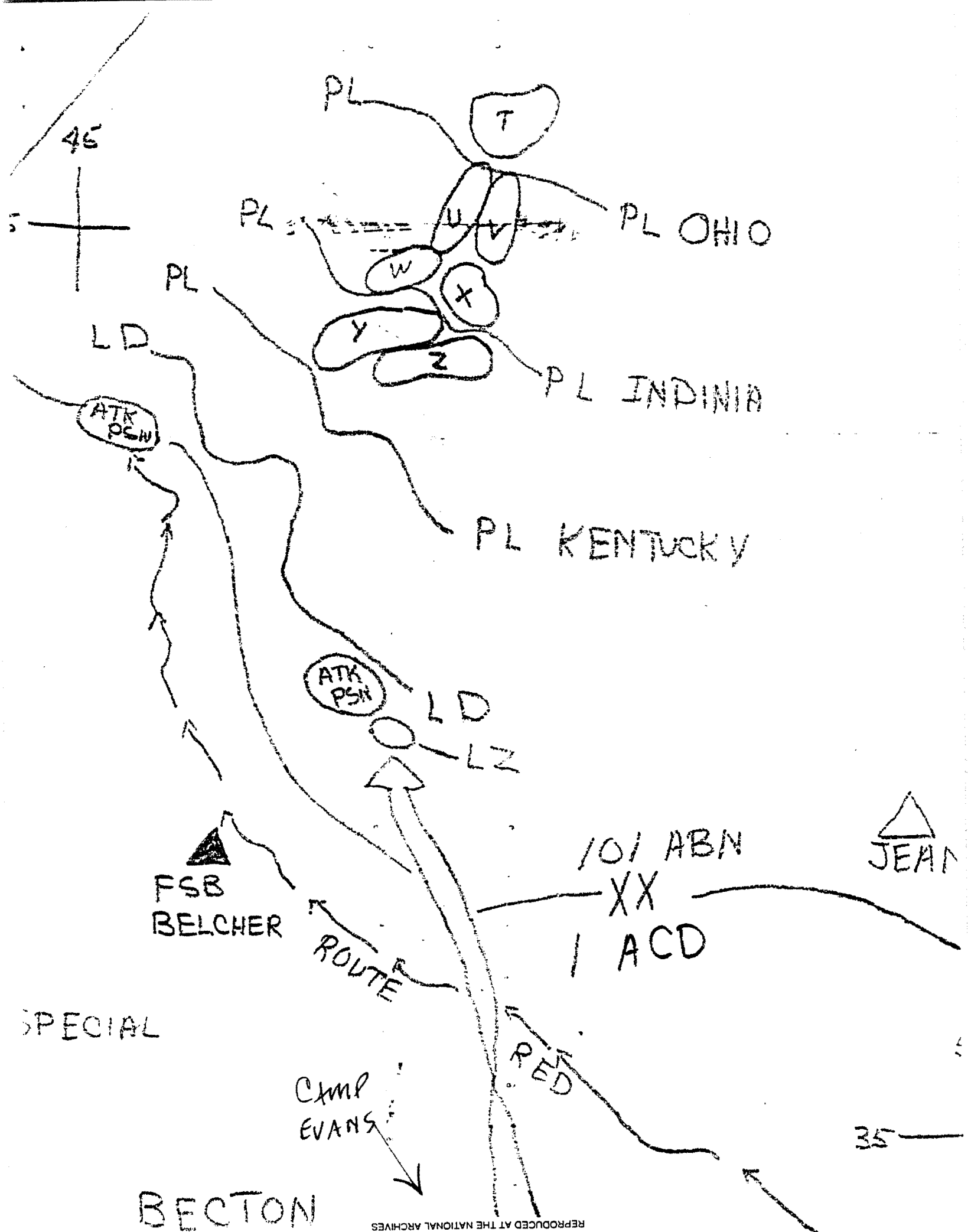
BECTON
LTC

DISTRIBUTION: Special

OFFICIAL:

CRUMP
S-3

CONFIDENTIAL
(CLASSIFICATION)



The 101st Div operations summary for April 26th described actions of the 2/501 that day...

"B/2/501 Abn Inf engaged an est NVA reinforced company in the village of Nam Phu. The enemy, entrenched in fortified bunkers, employed SA, AW, and RPG fire. Co B immediately employed organic weapons fire, artillery, LFTs, and tac air, resulting in 16 NVA killed. In the same general vicinity, C/2/501 Abn Inf established a hasty ambush position to capitalize on a target of opportunity, and engaged an NVA squad moving toward a suspected enemy strong point killing 4 enemy. While pursuing the remainder of the enemy force, Co C made heavy contact with an est NVA company, and received SA, AW, and RPG fire. Maximum supporting fires (including artillery and tac air) were placed on the enemy's fortified positions, resulting in 20 enemy killed."

The brigade journal for April 26th noted the cost of this action: 7 US KIA and 23 WIA.

On April 27th the 2/17 Cav task force operating to the north of Camp Evans went into action on the Street Without Joy seven kilometers north of Phong Dien. The 2d Brigade operations summary for the 27th reported that, after a day of relatively light contact...

"...at 1650 hours vic YD585415 (Troop B made contact) with an estimated NVA Co as heavy SA and AW fire was received. NVA were in fighting trenches and bunkers (one bunker was estimated to have contained 14 to 18 NVA). The 2d plat of B Troop moved to reinforce. A heavy volume of fire was placed on the enemy positions as the units were supported by the .50 cal machine gun and M-60 machine guns mounted on the 2d plat of Trp B. The elements withdrew to medevac the wounded and fire arty on the enemy positions... (then) moved to a night position. Results: 1 US KIA, 6 US WIA (medevac); enemy assessment - 44 NVA KIA, 2 7.62mm HMG, 1 AK-47, 1 SKS."

April 28th was the day -- according to the May 20 issue of Eagle Line, the 2d Brigade's weekly newspaper, reporting the remarks of the Quang Dien district chief at a "thank you, airborne" ceremony -- that "... an NVA POW named Quang The Hau, captured by the Quang Dien Popular Forces, said that the VC commander gave the order that when his unit gets in heavy contact with airborne troops they must make every effort to stop the advance of the airborne during day-time and retreat out of the objective during the night time because the paratroopers fight through the night and will defeat them."²

I think that it was at about this time that, upon returning to the LZ Sally pad and heading from my helicopter to the brigade TOC, I passed by the interrogation of an NVA, or

²I had remembered this story differently, namely that a message found on an NVA soldier who was killed in an ambush at about this time had said, in effect.. "if you make contact with the airborne, get out fast; they will surround you and kill you." In any event, Bill Robertson, who was the communications officer of the 2/17 Cav in those days and who has written his personal account of the squadron's first year in Vietnam, recently told me of his recollection that, over the operations map in our 2d Brigade TOC at LZ Sally, the words of that message (or of that VC commander's guidance, whichever it was) were inscribed for all to see.

possibly VC, prisoner. I saw him pointing at the Screaming Eagle patch on a nearby trooper and I asked what he was saying. The interpreter's reply was, "He is saying that that little bird is real mean." So we built a little archway over the steps leading down into our TOC and placed our new brigade slogan, "That Little Bird Is Real Mean," across the top of the arch.

April 28th was the first day of the 2d Brigade's classic cordon at Phouc Yen. The next few days would show just how accurate was that VC commander's warning, and just how mean was that "little bird."

I will copy the 22 June S3 report of that operation in its entirety, adding footnotes of my own.

"Control Hqs: 1-501 Inf³

"Task Organization:

1-501 Inf

Co A

Co B

Co A 1-502

Co B 2-501

Co D 2-501

ARVN

1st ARVN Black Panther Co

Three PF Platoons

25 Catholic Militia⁴

"Intelligence: On 25 April 1968, an agent report indicated 50 NVA were located in the village of Phuoc Yen (YD679283). On 27 April 1968, another agent report indicated 2 NVA/VC companies were located in the vicinity of the village.

"Tactical situation, scheme of maneuver (Diagram, next page)

"Based on the information mentioned above, and guidance from the CO 1-501 Inf, the 1st ARVN Div Black Panther (BP) Co initiated a reconnaissance in force into the village from the north. At 281359 April, the BP Co received intense SA, AW, and RPG fire from an estimated rifle company (1). The BP Co called for and received a light fire team (LFT) to suppress the enemy fires. Because of the intense enemy fire coming from the village, it was estimated by the commander on the ground that he was opposing a battalion size enemy force. The CO, 2d Brigade, directed the CO, 1-501 Inf, to establish a cordon around the enemy force. A/1-502 was immediately inserted into an LZ to the east of the BP Co and established a blocking position (2). Co A/1-501 moved overland and established a blocking position to the west (3). Co B/2-501 conducted a combat assault at 1810 hrs and occupied a blocking position to the southeast of the

³Lieutenant Colonel Jim I. Hunt had assumed command of the 1/501st at mid-morning, April 27th.

⁴Hamlet militia (who unlike RF and PF received no pay but were farmers by day and fighters by night) were the last armed element down the scale of paramilitary forces. Responsible to the hamlet chief, they established local security and saw to it that the VC guerrillas did not disturb the hamlet's peace at night.

THON PHUOC YEN

BLACK PANTHER COMPANY

SONG B RIVER

LZ D/2-501

D/2-501

LZ A/502

Lt B/1-501

A/1-501

CATHOLIC
MALITIA

1/D/2-501

(5) 3 PF PLATOONS

B/A-501

A/2-501

B/2-501

LZ

SAFETY ROAD
AFT

village (4). At 1823 hrs Co A/1-502 attacked south in an attempt to develop the situation, however their advance was met by intense enemy SA, AW, and RPG fire from the village. They then disengaged and returned to their original blocking positions on the left flank of the BP Co (2). Three PF platoons plus 25 Catholic Militia established blocking positions to the east (5 and 6) and shortly after dark all the units had joined their flanks and the cordon was established.⁵

"Execution

"During the night of 28 April, constant illumination was provided by CH-47 and UH-1 flareships. All units remained alert as 105mm, 155mm, and 8" howitzer rounds im-

⁵By now I had established an operating style for a cordon. The controlling battalion commander would be on the ground (or from time to time in a C&C helicopter as he saw fit) directing the units in contact and calling for specific air, artillery, and gunship support. In close touch with him, I would be in the air, and occasionally on the ground with him or his troops. I arranged the delivery of his reinforcements, insured his support, kept abreast by monitoring his command channel, and counseled him from time to time.

Entries from the brigade journal for the 28th...

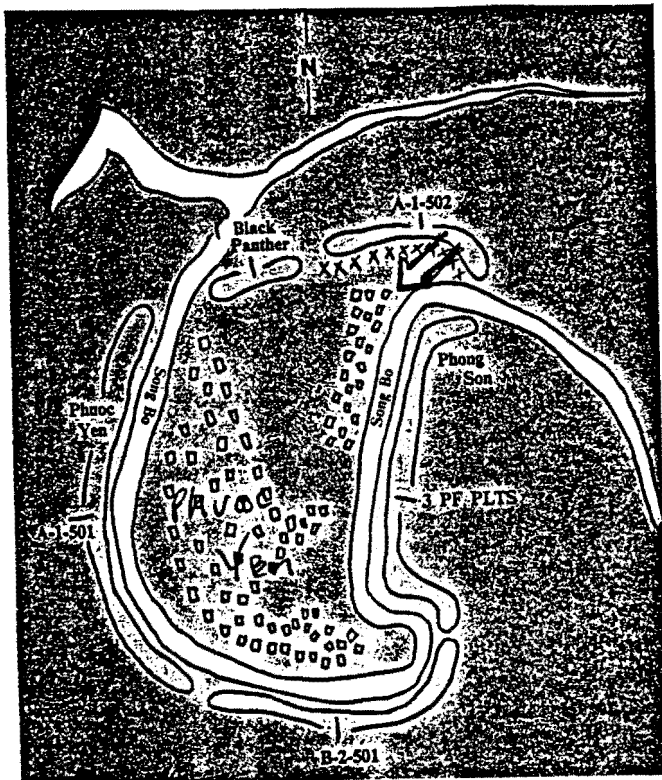
- "0904 From 101st: Lift for Black Panther Co has been approved.
- "0940 To DTOC: Cancel CA of ARVN Co. Will ford river [actually used footbridge] and move to objective.
- "1227 1-501: All elements of ARVN Co across river (a USMC captain, company advisor, was reporting)
- "1327 1-502: ARVN Co receiving sporadic fire. Estimate platoon to their front. Arty called.
- "1400 1-501: ARVN Co received 2 RPG and small arms fire. Request gunships, neg casualties.
- "1415 To DTOC: B/2-501 is immediate action force to cordon village of ARVN contact. A/1-502 opcon 2/17 Cav, assumes mission C/1-501 on An Lo bridge.
- "1445 To DTOC: Mission of A/1/502 changed. They will remain at Sally as IAF.
- "1456 1-501: Gunships left station at 1454 rs. ARVN Co have 1 KIA, 3 WIA. Now estimate Bn size force. Received 57 RR fire. ARVN FAC on station."

A Co 1/502, commanded by Captain Terry Spiegelberg, former commander of the 2d Brigade headquarters company, was alone at Sally (the rest of the 1/502 was still with the 1st Brigade). It began its lift at 1716. Meanwhile, with A/1/501 moving to the position to which Jim Hunt had ordered it, I had been arranging the lift of B/2/501. I had also taken Major De, Huong Tra district chief, to the village just across the Song Bo River from where A/1-502 was to go in, so that he could order three PF platoons to get down on the river bank and secure that sector of the cordon. (The Song Bo was the district boundary with Quang Dien.) Among other actions, I had Jim White, S-4, bring in concertina wire for the Black Panther Company to use in front of its position. From the brigade journal:

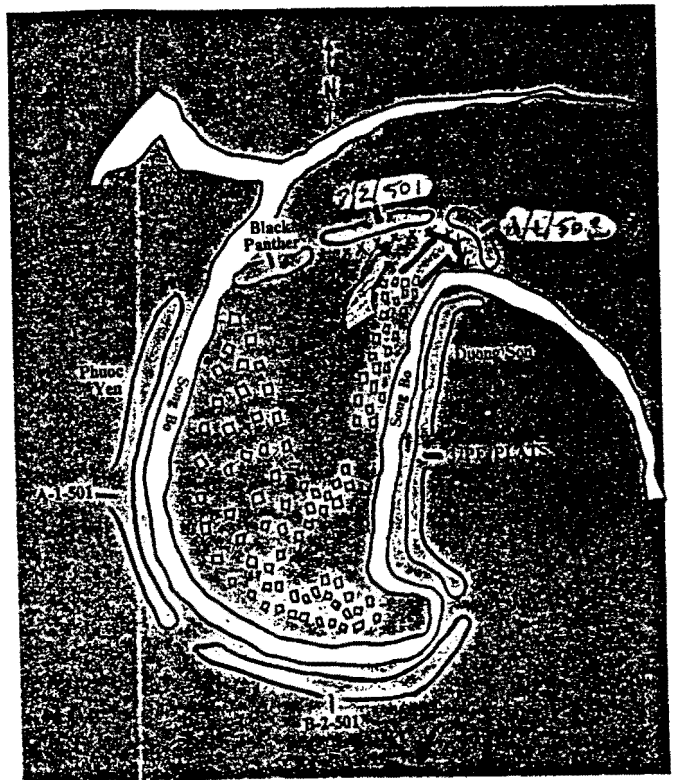
- "1803 1-501: Lift of A/1-502 complete.
- "1810 1-501: 1st lift of B/2-501 abn at this time.
- "1825 1-501: A/1-502 has 1 KHA & 1 WHA.
- "1848 1-501: Last lift B/2-501 on LZ at 1847 hrs."

At the A/1/502 LZ I briefed Terry Spiegelberg; Jim Hunt, by radio, then ordered him to attack along the river (see arrow on the left sketch, next page) to shrink the cordon. When resistance was too strong, Jim Hunt told Spiegelberg to break off the attack, recover his troops, and slice through to the river along a hedgerow. Meanwhile I took Major De to the village where he had obtained his PF platoons so that he could find hamlet militia to take care of the river bank for the more extended cordon. By nightfall he had the bank secured on his side of the river with three PF platoons and 25 or so hamlet militia, and Jim Hunt had that force on the radio though a US district advisor.

It was getting dark for Terry Spiegelberg. I reached him on (as I remember) his company command frequency. I told him to look for my C&C helicopter overhead; that, to guide him in the growing darkness, I would fly at low level straight down a hedgerow to the river. I told him that this was the final element of the cordon and that when he reached the river he was to plant his men on the river bank and to put his men in two-man foxholes along the hedgerow no more than 10 meters apart, and that we would turn on the lights. He did all that, and we had a cordon, arms locked.



April 28th



April 29th
First Breakout Attempt

pacted within the cordon. During the early morning hours of 29 April three separate attempts were made by the enemy to rupture the left flank of Co A/1-502 blocking position (7), at the hedgerow that came to the river bank (sketch at the right above). These attempts were repulsed with a heavy volume of fire and courageous determination by the men of Co A.⁶ Shortly after 0800 hrs Co A attempted to gain a foothold in the northeastern section of the village, however this maneuver was met with a heavy volume of fire from a well entrenched and well camouflaged NVA platoon. Co A resumed its blocking position and adjusted artillery fire on the enemy positions. At 1215 hrs, the BP Co advanced approximately 100 meters into the village where they made heavy contact with the enemy... At 1850, Co D/2-501 (minus a platoon) made a combat assault into an LZ northwest of the cordon and moved into a blocking position between Co A 1-502 and the BPCo (8). One rifle platoon from D/2-501 landed on the east side of the cordon to reinforce the PF platoons and militia (9).

⁶I have recently come to know William F. Lux. Bill Lux, then a Specialist Four in A/1/502, was defending the critical hedgerow that morning. He was awarded a Bronze Star for his actions April 28th. His citation reads: "A Company was conducting an assault on Phuoc Yen, Republic of Vietnam, a village north of Hue. Moving through fields and hedgerows... the company encountered enemy mortar, rocket propelled grenades, and machine gun fire. Suddenly the point element came under intense fire from automatic weapons and rocket propelled grenade rounds. The point man, Specialist Lux, immediately began to return the enemy fire. Despite his exposed position in front of his platoon and the large amount of enemy fire, Specialist Lux remained in his forward vantage point with complete disregard for his personal safety and indicated to the platoon leader the location of the enemy positions. When the remainder of the platoon had reached his location, Specialist Lux joined with them in assaulting the enemy positions. Specialist Lux's personal bravery and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army."

Troopers like Jim Hunt, Terry Spiegelberg, and Bill Lux made this cordon happen.

"The cordon was sealed throughout the night of 29 April under continuous illumination. Small arms and automatic weapons fire was exchanged during the night as the enemy attempted to find a gap in the friendly positions. At first light on 30 April, the BP Co again penetrated the village from the north. This action was met by strong enemy resistance which hampered the company's advance. Artillery and tac air were placed on the enemy positions and by mid-afternoon the BP advanced toward the south against light enemy resistance. At 1718 hrs, because of other operational commitments, the BP Co was airlifted from the cordon to the city of Hue. Co B/1-501 conducted a combat assault to an LZ in the northern sector of the cordon and replaced the BP Co (10).

"In the early hours of 1 May, during a short break in the illumination⁷ caused by the time lapse between the expended flareship going off station and artillery illumination being placed over the cordon, the enemy made an all-out effort to penetrate the area occupied by Co A/1-502 (7). This attack was repulsed by intense fire from SA and AW and by 0610 hrs, Co A reported that the enemy had withdrawn into the village. This effort by the enemy cost him 35 NVA KIA while A Co suffered 3 KHA, and 12 WHA.

"At 0800 hrs a psychological warfare team began broadcasting appeals to surrender which resulted in 16 NVA surrendering. Afterwards tac air and artillery fires were resumed and at 1330 hrs a CS [tear gas] grenade drop was climaxed by a TOT [for "time on target," or the simultaneous delivery of the massed fires of many batteries of artillery). At 1345 hrs, Co A/1-502 began to move south against light resistance. During the afternoon friendly elements shifted their positions in order to tighten the cordon and at 1600 hrs, Co B/2-501 relieved Co A/1-502 in place, and Co A/1-502 was extracted by helicopter to LZ Sally.

"The cordon, now consisting of A/1-501, B/1-501, A/2-501, D/2-501, 25 Catholic militia, and 3 PF platoons remained in place throughout the night of 1 May. Sporadic SA fire was again exchanged as the enemy desperately attempted to find a way out. At first light of 2 May, Co A/2-501 and Co B/1-501 began moving south and were met by a heavy volume of SA and AW fire. The two companies held in place and called in artillery and tac air in an attempt to destroy the the enemy's well fortified positions. At the end of the day, the cordon was maintained in the north by B/1-501 on the right (west) and A/2-501 on the left (east). Co A/1-501 composed the west flank of the cordon while Co D/2-501 covered the south and the militia and 3 PF platoons the east.

"During the early morning hours of 3 May, the enemy made another futile attempt to break out of the cordon but was repulsed again by superior friendly fires. A 55 gallon drum CS drop was made over the village from a CH-47 after which further appeals were made by loudspeaker for the enemy to surrender. Companies B/1-501 and A/2-501 made the final sweep of the village overcoming small pockets of resistance and completed the cordon operation.

⁷My cot was just off the TOC where during the night I could hear the radio traffic. I had no trouble sleeping, but when the radio voice pitch rose because of urgency I would awake. Here the 1/501 voices raised pitch when the flareship departed and the enemy attacked. In minutes we restored illumination, with artillery.

"Results:

Friendly casualties: 8 US KHA and 44 US WHA
2 ARVN KHA and 12 ARVN WHA

Enemy losses: 429 NVA KHA, 107 NVA prisoners, 117 weapons captured."

Also captured were the radios and signal operating instructions of the 8th Battalion, 90th NVA Regiment, which was totally eliminated in this action.

The Second Brigade had executed a classic.

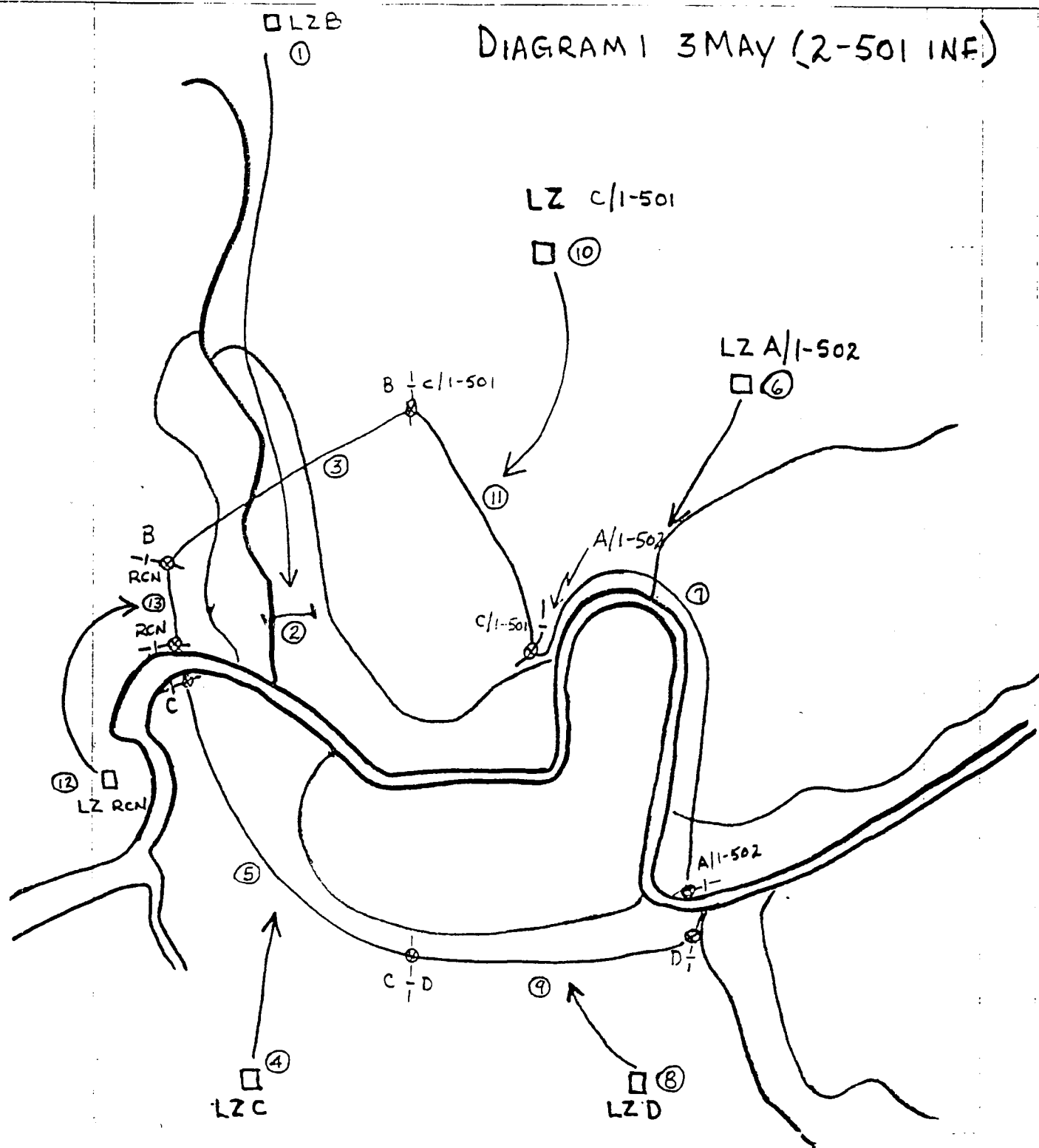
During the six days of this cordon operation, the rest of the brigade AO was also active. The night of 28-29 April the 1/501 recon platoon sprung an ambush, 2 PF WIA, 5 NVA KIA. That night ground surveillance radar on the LZ Sally perimeter several times detected "enemy tanks" to the disbelief, or alarm, of many; the 1/501 recon platoon reported finding "tracks" the next day but that was the end of it. The brigade journal reported General Barsanti slightly wounded in the leg, returned to duty. In the Cao Bang area, north of the An Lo bridge, the 2/17th Cav, reinforced, on May 1st had a sharp and well-supported contact that cost them 2 KIA and 26 WIA, with an enemy assessment of 82 NVA KIA. On 2 May D/1/501 sprung an ambush. The same day B/2/501 made contact with an estimated company, with 2 US WIA and 8 NVA killed by air.

Then came another cordon. Documents captured at Phuoc Yen revealed that the trapped 8th Battalion, 90th Regiment, had called for reinforcements to move into Ap Pho Nam, a hamlet two kilometers north of Phuoc Yen. The 2/501st, its command post at Quang Dien, began a cordon of that hamlet on May 3d. On May 4th the 1/502 returned from duty with the 1st Brigade, its CP replaced that of the 2/501 in Quang Dien, and the 1/502 took over the second day of the cordon. The sequence of the first day (sketch, next page)...

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| (1) is a combat assault by B/2/501 at 1215 | (7) is A Co's sector of the cordon |
| (2) is heavy contact inside the hamlet | (8) is D Co's combat assault, 1700 |
| (3) is where B Co withdrew, after contact | (9) is D Co's cordon sector |
| (4) is a C/2/501 combat assault | (10) is C/1/501's LZ |
| (5) is C Co's sector of developing cordon | (11) is C/1/501's cordon sector |
| (6) is an A/1/502 combat assault, 1645 | (12) is 2/501's recon platoon LZ |

At (13), at 1910, the recon platoon completed the cordon. We were getting good at this.

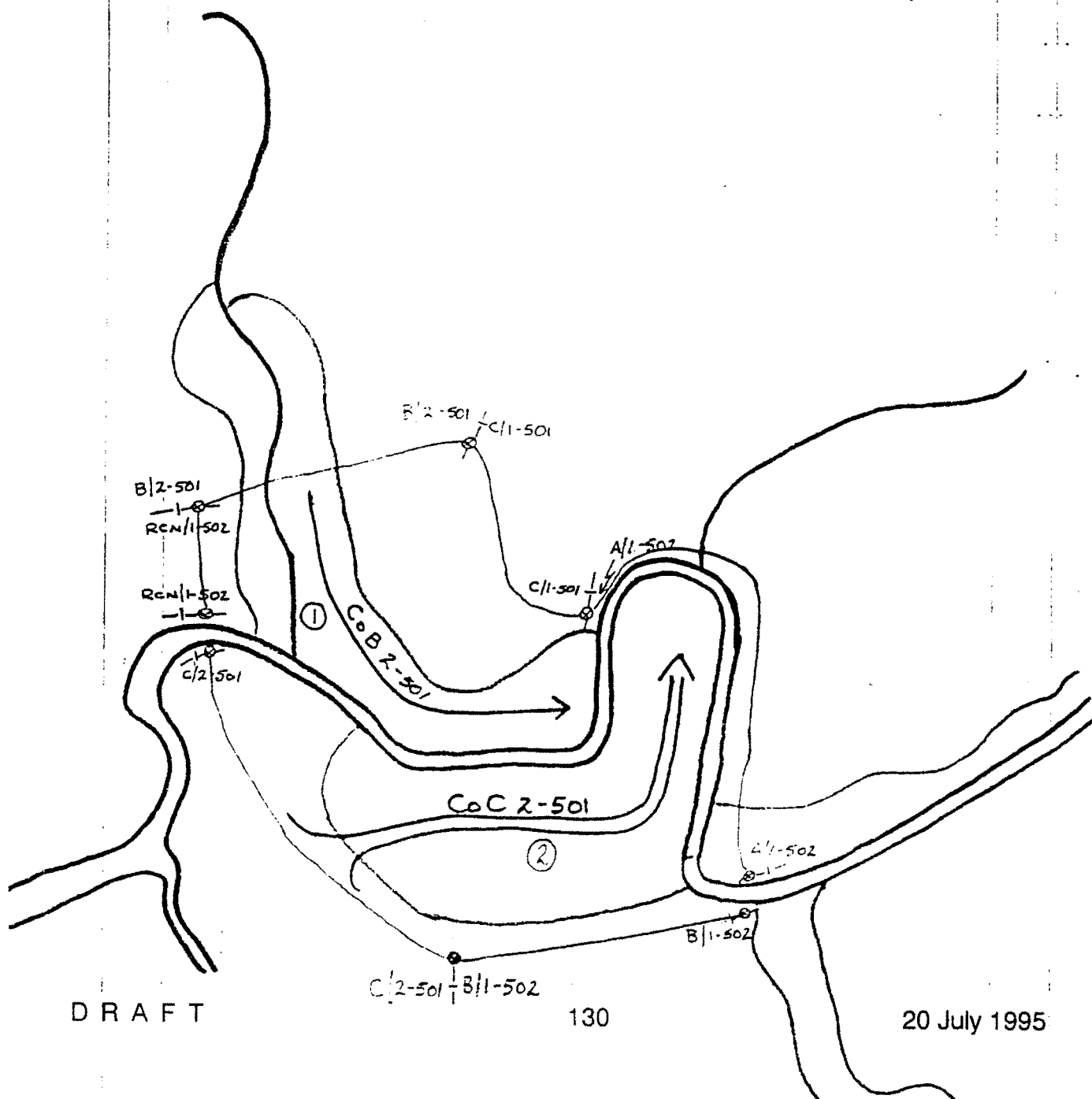
That night the enemy attempted to break out of the cordon, without success. On May 4th B/1/502 relieved D/2/501 and the 1/502d's recon platoon replaced that of 2/501. Artillery and 20 sorties of tac air pounded the enemy during the day, and illumination was overhead the following night. The trapped enemy fired small arms and 60 mortars and tried



to escape. He could not; the cordon was tight (sketch, next page) And we had learned that to block escape through water routes, those securing the river banks must "have one foot in the water" and must explode grenades and M79 rounds in the water as well. The results:

Friendly casualties:	2-501 Inf:	2 KIA; 13 WIA
	1-502 Inf:	1 KIA; 1 WIA
Enemy losses:	33 NVA/VC KIA; 2 NVA POW	

DIAGRAM 2 4-5 MAY (1-502 INF)



DRAFT

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20 July 1995

The night of 4-5 May, the enemy tried to mount a region-wide attack. Quang Dien, Hue, Camp Eagle, Da Nang, the An Lo and other bridges, all were mortared; many were probed. From the May 5th brigade journal, May 5th...

"0030 From 1-502: Quang Dien.. placed all elements on an increased alert.

"0205 From 1-502: Quang Dien reports Hue is receiving mortar and rocket fire.

"0225 From 101st: Put all units on 100% alert.

DRAFT

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27 July 1995

- *0239 S2: Received from Div G2; Hue is under mortar attack.. Da Nang is under rocket and ground and mortar attack.
- *0035 From 1-502: From Phong Dien; NE corner of Hue under heavy ground attack
- *0349 From 2-501: D Co [on the Hue bridge] reports that NW corner of Hue is under ground attack, tracers going into and out of city.
- *0405 From 2-17: An Lo bridge under RPG and mortar attack.
- *0409 From 2-17: CO has moved 2d plat reinf to A Trp location to reinforce bridge."

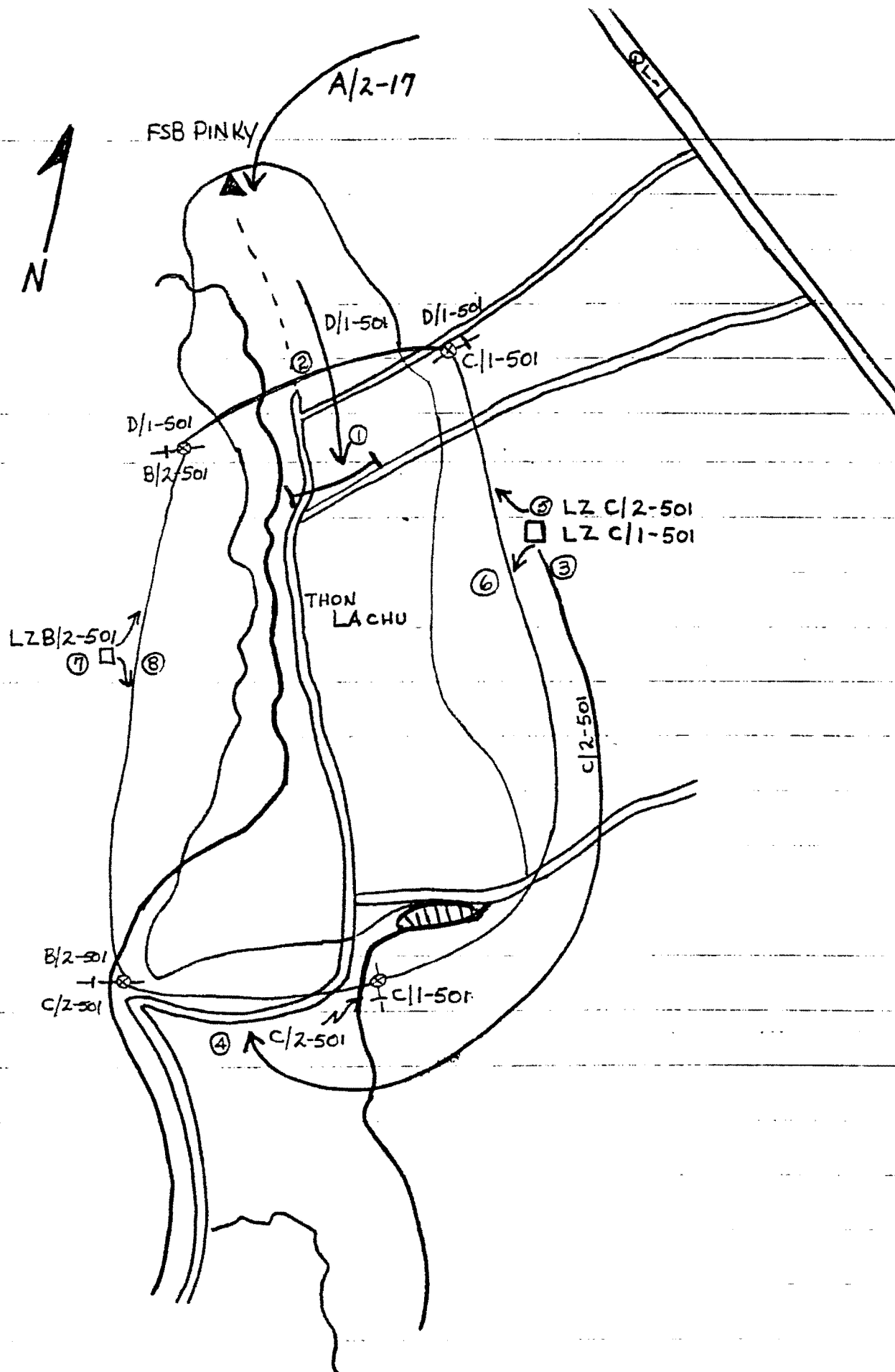
That night we were somewhat scattered. The 1/502, just back from the south, was completing its cordon at Ap Pho Nam, near Quang Dien. The 1/501, CP at Sally, had repositioned after Phuoc Yen; its D Co was southeast of Sally. The 2/501st's CP and one company was at FSB Geronimo, out of position on the edge of the mountains west of Hue. The 2/17, CP at Evans, had not fully returned from its operations on the Street Without Joy. I sent the Brigade S2, Major Upchurch, out to find out what was going on so that we could react -- and then made my decision. From the brigade journal, May 5th...

- *0850 Bde CO: Bde S2 at Huong Tra district headquarters indicates NVA Bn attempted to destroy bridge at Hue, they failed, withdrew 1 Co south, Bn (-) in village discussed earlier vic 6924. [Note: this village was La Chu, just off QL 1, 6 kilometers SE of Sally] D 1-501 [which had moved to secure Pinky, between Sally and La Chu] opcon to 2-501 effective 0900. [To 2-501...] Establish FSB at Pinky. Move D 1-501 toward village, try and establish contact to locate NVA Bn (-)... Plan to receive C 1-501, B 2-501, and C 2-501.

We would put into place a four-company cordon (this would make three cordons for the 2d Brigade, back to back). By noon Tony Heiter, his CP, B/1/321 Arty, and A/2/17 Cav were established at FSB Pinky between LZ Sally and La Chu. The sketch, next page, shows that, at 1215, D/1/501 made contact (1), then withdrew to its cordon sector (2), after which C/2/501 went into its LZ (3), then took up its cordon sector (4). C/1/501 followed into its LZ (5) and sector (6), followed by B/2/501 into its LZ (7) and sector (8). By nightfall the cordon around La Chu was complete, and we turned on the lights.

Again we pounded the enemy inside the cordon with artillery, and again the S3 report reads... "Numerous unsuccessful attempts were made to exfiltrate the cordoned area as units received sporadic but intense SA and RPG fires."

This was the La Chu cordon's Phase One. Phase Two (sketch, second page down) would be an attack the next day into the defended village by the full 2/17 Cav and its opcon D/1/501.



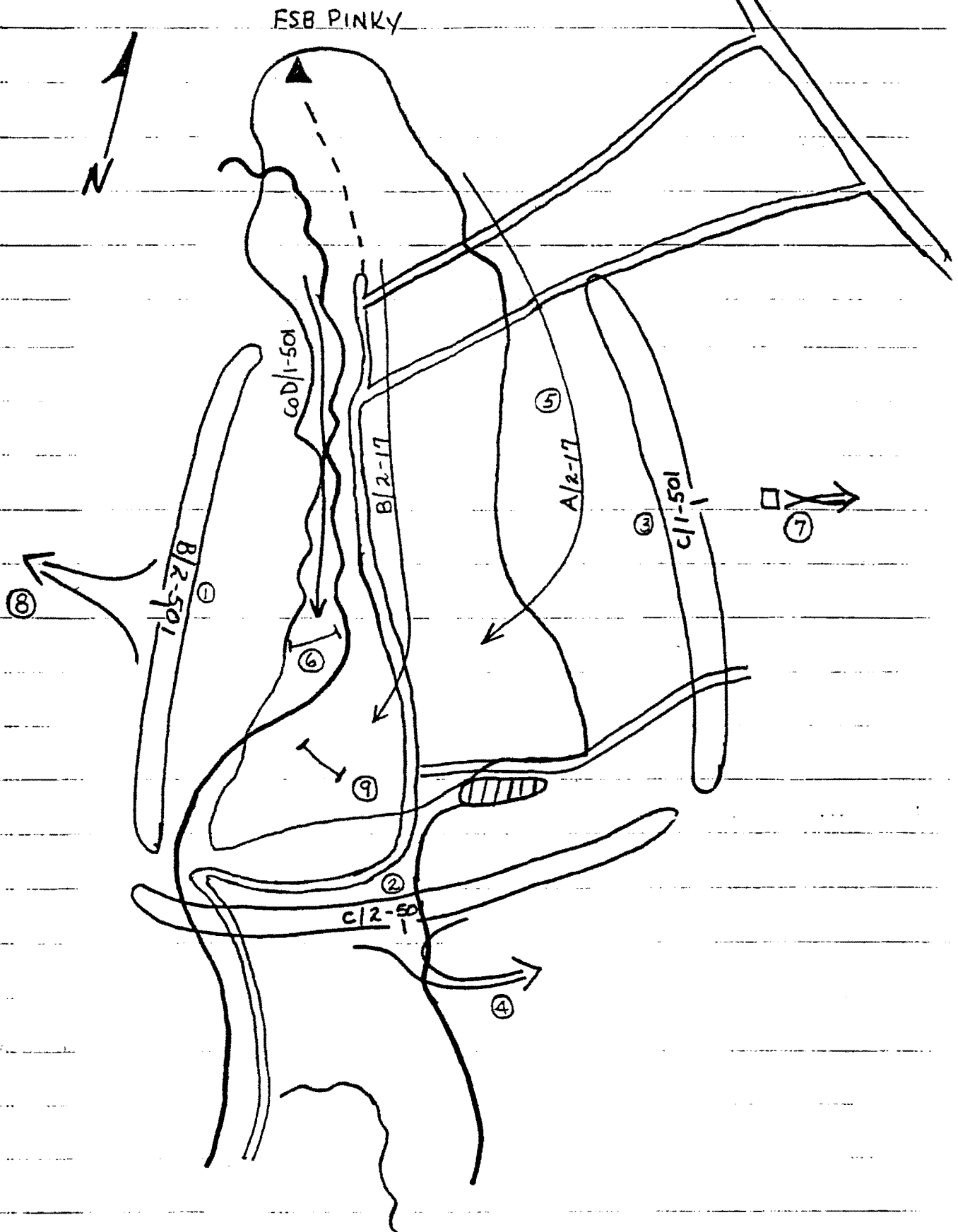


DIAGRAM 2 (6-7 MAY)

As 2/17 called in an artillery preparation and four tac air strikes, B/2/501, C/2/501, and C/1/501 backed away from the objective area, remaining in overwatch. The armor-infantry attack jumped off at 1150, May 6th. D/1/501 attacked down the west side of the stream that ran through the village; B Troop, with its organic machine-gun-equipped M-113's and its attached tank platoon, attacked directly into the village east of the stream, and A Troop went around the village's eastern side to enter the village further south. Artillery and gunships supported the attack.

From the S3 Report:

"Progress was slow as the troops made a thorough search of a vast network of bunkers and trenches... As the attack bypassed the blocking positions of C/1/501 and B/2/501... [...these units departed the area for other missions and C/2/501 returned to FSB Pinky in mid-afternoon to provide overnight security...]... Troop A came abreast of Troop B on the east and continued the attack. [D/1/501 engaged a bunker complex at (6)...] At 1920 hours, Troop B met heavy resistance (9) and it was apparent that the primary enemy positions had been located and engaged. Intense fighting continued under continuous illumination and the units advanced slowly and attacked the well entrenched enemy."

Entries from the brigade journal, May 6th...

- "1526 From 2-17: D 1-501 in contact N of river, B 2-17 sending APC on S side where fire is coming from. No estimate of size of force. SA and AW fire.
- "1650 From 2-17: B Trp 3 WIA, 2 serious, all medevac, still do not know size of enemy. A Trp to make contact with B Trp, sweep across their front.
- "1900 From 2-1: B Trp below stream pushing along, fairly heavy contact.. D 1-501 opcon to 2-17 effective 1858 hours [Note: This is a surprise; D Co should have been opcon since early that morning]. D 1-501 has some elements across stream, also element to north of stream.
- "1918 From 2-17: B 2-17 pushing along, receiving stiff resistance, also receiving RPGs, 1 tank stuck in bomb crater... enemy pinned in 150 by 150 meter area in SW corner of village.
- "2235 From 2-17: B Troop, C 1-501, and ARP, 2d plat A Trp are clearing Ton La Chu. Have all cleared except approx 50 meters."

Continuing with the 22 June report...

"By 2400 only a small pocket of the village remained to be cleared. However, the remnants of the die-hard enemy fought stubbornly and it was not until approximately 0100 hrs that the final series of bunkers had been overrun. The intensity of contact

dwindled to sporadic SA fire and all firing ceased at approximately 0200. A sweep of the area at first light revealed that a company size force composed of elements of the C115 Local Force Co and the 9th Bn, 90th NVA Regt had been destroyed.

"Results Friendly casualties: 2 KIA; 14 WIA
 Enemy losses: 53 NVA KIA; 2 NVA/VC POW
 23 individual and 3 crew-served weapons captured"

The citation for the award of the Medal of Honor to Sergeant Robert M. Patterson of B Troop, 2/17th Cav, ^{below} on the next page gives an idea of the intensity of combat at La Chu.

GENERAL ORDERS

No. 65

HEADQUARTERS
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
WASHINGTON, DC, 25 October 1969

AWARD OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR



By direction of the President, under the Joint Resolution of Congress approved 12 July 1862 (amended by act of 3 March 1863, act of 9 July 1918 and act of 25 July 1963), the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty is awarded by the Department of the Army in the name of Congress to:

Sergeant *Robert M. Patterson*, 244-78-4310 (then Specialist Four), United States Army, who distinguished himself on 6 May 1968 while serving as a fire team leader of the 3d Platoon, B Troop, 2d Squadron, 17th Cavalry during an assault against a North Vietnamese Army Battalion which was entrenched in a heavily fortified position near La Chu, Republic of Vietnam. When the leading squad of the 3d Platoon was pinned down by heavy interlocking automatic weapon and rocket propelled grenade fire from two enemy bunkers, Sergeant *Patterson* and the two other members of his assault team moved forward under a hail of enemy fire to destroy the bunkers with grenade and machinegun fire. Observing that his comrades were being fired on from a third enemy bunker covered by enemy gunners in one-man spider holes, Sergeant *Patterson*, with complete disregard for his own safety and ignoring the warning of his comrades that he was moving into a bunker complex, assaulted and destroyed the position. Although exposed to intensive small arm and grenade fire from the bunkers and their mutually supporting emplacements, Sergeant *Patterson* continued his assault upon the bunkers which were impeding the advance of his unit. Sergeant *Patterson* singlehandedly destroyed by rifle and grenade fire five enemy bunkers. Killed eight enemy soldiers and captured seven weapons. His dauntless courage and heroism inspired his platoon to resume the attack and to penetrate the enemy defensive position. Sergeant *Patterson* by his conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his own life has reflected great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army.



We had evidently been upsetting the enemy. That afternoon, May 6th, he attacked LZ Sally with 122mm rockets. From the brigade journal..

- "1700 Bde: Incoming rounds (rockets).
- "1703 From 1-502 (rear): Have 2 incoming rounds, unknown cal.
- "1705 From 326 Med: Have 7 WIA in clearing station.
- "1710 From 1-502: Estimate 122mm, landing between TOC and mess hall, 1 KIA, 4 WIA.
- "1915 Final report on rocket damage. 1-501 1 WIA (cut getting in hole), 1-502 1 KIA, 12 WIA. Damage back of orderly room, 2 field desks and chairs, 2 122mm rockets received in area. 1-321 2 WIA (minor), 2 10KW generator damaged, received 1 122mm rocket. HHC 2d Bde, 2 GP medium tents damaged. TACP 1 WIA (broken leg getting into a bunker).

On May 6th we assumed opcon of the 2/1st Infantry, a battalion of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, which had moved by UH-1 to the vicinity of the An Lo bridge where it established its command post and prepared for operations in that vicinity. The 2/501 continued closing out FSB Geronimo, secured the Hue bridges, and operated in its zone. The 1/502 had several sharp contacts near Quang Dien, taking casualties of 4 KIA and 8 WIA.

For the week May 7th-May 13th the 2d Brigade would have five battalions. The 2/1st Infantry, with its CP and one company from time to time at the An Lo bridge, would have a zone about five kilometers east-west and 10 kilometers north-south, with LZ Sally in the midpoint of its eastern edge. The 1/501 would operate northeast of Sally, and the 1/502 was northeast of that, around Quang Dien and beyond. The 2/501, operating out of Pinky, would be in familiar territory northwest of Hue to the mountains, except that ARVN units would be immediately around that city. The 2/17th Cav, its CP at Camp Evans, was assigned an area north of the 2/1st, but would, with brigade's permission and the necessary coordination, on occasion operate in another battalion's AO.

On May 7th, the 1/502 continued its action around Quang Dien; all companies were engaged and 17 tac air strikes were called in. By the end of the day four troopers of the 1/502 had been killed, four were missing (their bodies later recovered), and 20 wounded.

The 101st's division summary for May 7th noted that "Continuing the 101st Abn Div's program of extensive and aggressive night opns, 4 ambush psns, in the vic of the Perfume River, 5 km north of Hue, were activated killing 17 enemy. This continuous pres-

sure applied by airborne troopers has denied the enemy the protection of darkness as a means for unrestricted movement."

Entry in brigade journal, 8 May...

"0735 From 1-502: Co B found a total of 14 enemy bodies, 1 AK-47, 5 SKS from ambush last night, Co C found total of 5 NVA bodies, 1 AK-47."

For May 8th the 101st Airborne Division summary read in part... "A (2d Brigade) ambush psn established 6 km north of Hue, along a known enemy LOC, observed 20 NVA moving toward the canal. The plat from B/1-502 allowed the enemy to move well within the killing zone, then violently executed the ambush employing claymore, SA, AW, and M-79s. A first light sweep of the area revealed a total of 17 NVA killed and 6 wpns captured during the night action... Acting on intelligence information A/1-502 conducted RIF operations in the vic of Phu Luong A village. As the paratroopers approached the village contact was gained with an estimated NVA Co. Swiftly massing firepower in the area of contact, C/1-502 Abn Inf and B/1-502 Abn Inf were air assaulted into psns surrounding the village, establishing a tight cordon⁸ by nightfall. 7 airstrikes and supporting arty were employed on the enemy psn as opns continue throughout the night."

Action continued throughout the brigade AO during May 9th through 11th, with all battalions reporting contact. The May 10th division summary reported that...

"Co C, 1/502 Abn Inf, made contact with an NVA reinforced platoon 9 km N of Hue. Co C immediately employed heavy volumes of organic weapons fire as the enemy struggled to disengage. Co C maneuvered, pursuing the withdrawing enemy until by mid-afternoon the NVA platoon was trapped against the Pha Tam Ciang bay. Heavy volumes of artillery and tac air were employed on the trapped enemy force which, together with the fires from airborne troops, resulted in 21 enemy killed."

On May 12th and 13th, the 1/501 Inf and 17th Cav both took part in an action around Ap Co Thap two kilometers northeast of the An Lo bridge that is worthy of description.⁹

The night of May 11-12 the full 2/17 Cav was in a squadron base at YD609379, in the sand dunes just south of the Street Without Joy and seven kilometers north of the An Lo bridge. The 2/17th's plans summary that night called for A troop to conduct a reconnaissance in force generally eastward and for B Troop to do the same generally westward from that location. The tank platoon of C/2/34 Armor that had been overnight, 11-12 May, at the An Lo bridge was to join the squadron the next day.

⁸The 2d Brigade records do not reflect this "cordon" operation, probably, I suspect, because no mention is made in the journals about night-long illumination, which a true brigade cordon always called for.

⁹I have pieced together this account from the brigade and division journals. Limited discussion at our 2d Brigade assembly, August 1995, Columbus, GA, and since have led to no better an understanding.

The division summary for May 12th reported...

"As intelligence information began to indicate increased enemy activities and the presence of a Regt Hqs in or around Ap Co Thap hamlet, paratroopers of the 2d Bde were dispatched to conduct RIF operations to determine the exact location of the enemy force..."

I ordered 2/17 Cav into this operation. From the 2d Brigade journal for May 12th...

"0755 2-17: Will move SW to QL 1, when cleared will move to SE.

"0945 2-17: Lead presently 2.5 km from Evans main gate. Estimate lead element will not be in position until between 1030 or 1100 hours.

"1010 2-17: Move tac CP to Evans.

"1125 2-17 Cav: A Trp NDP YD620315 [Note. 2 km N of An Lo bridge], B Trp NDP YD600314 [2 km west of A Trp].

"1155 CO: At 1230 hrs 2-17 Cav will receive opcon of C and D/1-501."

The division summary for May 12th continued...

"C/1/501, while moving from the SE toward Ap Co Thap hamlet [Note: C Co had been at the An Lo bridge, under the direction of 1/501], began to receive sporadic SA fire from within the hamlet."

From the 2d Brigade summary for May 12th:

"Co C, 1-501. Conducted RIF operation to vic YD640314. At 1115 received intense SA and AW fire from vic YD641317 [Note: Ap Co Thap] resulting in 1 US KIA. Co withdrew to be supported by tac air. At 1152 hrs contact had broken. At 1230 opcon to 2-17 Cav.

"Co D, 1-501. (From vic YD659305, two kilometers SE of Ap Co Thap...) Opcon 2-17 Cav effective 1230 hours.

"Co A, 1-501 Inf. Conducted RIF opn to An Lo bridge. At 1431 hrs 1 plat opcon 2-17 Cav. At 1740 Co (-) began moving to vic 637308, opcon 2-17 Cav.

"Co B, 1-501. At 1629 hrs conducted a combat assault to LZ vic YD651315. Closed LZ 1547 hrs. Opcon 2-17 Cav effective 1633.

"Co C, 2-501. Opcon to 2-17 Cav at 1700 hours. Moved by vehicle to An Lo bridge."

I do not remember this action well, but it is evident to me from the record that I decided to attack the Ap Co Thap position with the 2/17th Cav and that I gave its commander, Julius

Becton, five rifle companies --all four companies of the 1/501 and C Company of the 2/501 -- with instructions to encircle the hamlet before nightfall so that we could destroy the enemy within it during the night and the next day.

Using the journals of the 2d Brigade and the map of the brigade AO that I retain from those days, I have reconstructed this action as best I can on a sketch map (next page).

The brigade summary for May 12th reported on one more company...

"Co D, 1-502. Moved to a PZ vic YD728297 (5 kilometers SE of Quang Dien) and conducted a combat assault at 1727 hrs to vic YD629314, closed 1824 hrs. Opcon 1-501 effective 1800 hrs."¹⁰

Continuing the division summary of May 12th...

"A/2/17 Cav together with B/2/17 Cav attacked eastward and engaged elements of an NVA company. Massed firepower, consisting of SA, AW, 90mm tank guns, and 106mm RR together with artillery and tac air were employed, as the enemy returned SA, AW, RPG, and mortar fire. As the contact developed, indicating the presence of a sizeable enemy force, four additional maneuver companies were rapidly air assaulted into the area to encircle the enemy position. As the cordon was being established, paratroopers of A and B Trp, 2/17 Airborne Cavalry, continued the savage close in fighting as the enemy, now estimated to be elements of a battalion, made a determined effort to escape before the cordon could be closed. The enemy employed a heavy volume of intensive mortar, RPG, and AW fire."

The brigade summary of May 12th continues, building a picture of a "cordon" that, as my sketch that reconstructs the action reveals (next page), was open at its top...

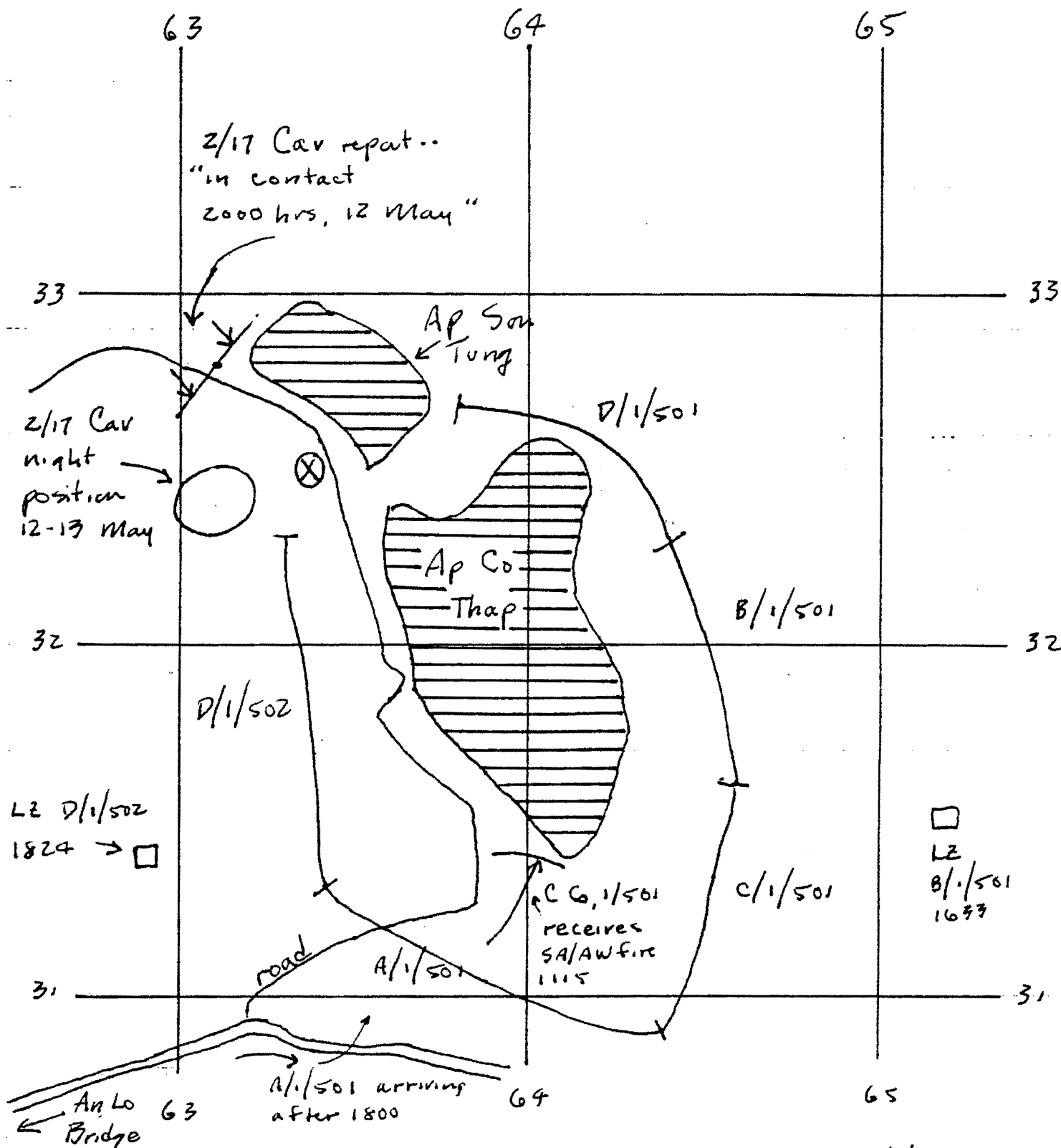
"Co A, 1-501. Returned to opcon of 1-501 Inf 1800 hrs and occupied a blocking psn vic YD644309 to YD634313.

"Co B, 1-501. Returned to opcon of 1-501 Inf 1800 hrs. Occupied a blocking psn vic YD644323 to YD646316.

"Co C, 1-501. Returned to opcon of 1-501 Inf 1800 hrs and occupied a blocking psn vic YD646316 to YD644309.

"Co B, 1-501. Returned to opcon of 1-501 Inf 1800 hrs. Occupied a blocking psn vic YD638327 to YD644327.

¹⁰The brigade journal is confusing, probably inaccurate, in that it reports an 1840 request by 2/17 Cav "to receive opcon of A/2-501 to place them on W side of cordon" and an 1845 reply by the brigade S3: "A/2-501 opcon 2-17 effective this time." However, A/2/501 was operating around FSB Geronimo far to the southwest that afternoon. The unit that made this move was clearly D/1/502, which on its arrival was opcon 1/501. This confusion of units tells me that during the afternoon and evening of this battle those involved were under considerable stress.



C/2/501 at
bridge; not
employed

Reconstruction of action, according to 2^d Bde journals of 12 & 13 May

D/1/501

at 1230
(1 km)

"Co D, 1-502 Inf. Opcon to 1-501 Inf effective 1800 hrs. Occupied a blocking psn vic YD634313 to YD633323.

"2-17 Cav.

"Trp A. At the close of the reporting period Trp A was in contact vic YD631328.

"Trp B. At the close of the reporting period Trp B was in contact vic YD631328.

The "reporting period" ended at 2000 hours daily. Continuing with the division summary for May 12th...

"After the encirclement was completed, Trp A and B were redeployed outside the cordon in order to establish an attack position in preparation for an assault on the enemy position 13 May. At the close of the reporting period continuous illumination, together with heavy volumes of artillery fire, were being employed as the action continues. Thus far, during the vicious action 27 enemy have been killed and 7 weapons captured."

From the brigade summary of the next day, May 13th...

"2-17 Cav. At the beginning of the reporting period [Note: 2000 hrs 12 May] and until 0206 hours [13 May] continued to engage elements of an NVA Bn vic YD633328. Troop A, Troop B, and A/2/501 [Note: this was probably A/1/502; see footnote 10] received intense MG, RPG, and 82mm mortar from the enemy positions. The enemy defended from trenches and bunkers with overhead cover. The intensity of enemy fire prevented the link-up with Co D 1-501 to complete the cordon of villages vic YD638313 and YD640320. The squadron elements withdrew to a night position vic YD631324. Arty was fired into the open portion of the cordon throughout the night."¹¹

Something had gone wrong, and the bulk of the enemy had slipped away. A sweep of the area the next morning, May 13th, revealed 36 NVA KIA and 1 AK-47. The 2/17th and C/2/501, with the 2/17th in the attack, had lost a total of 6 killed and 52 wounded.

I am reported to have been furious at the lost opportunity.¹²

¹¹The use of the term "cordon" here is inaccurate. In the 2d Brigade, there was no concept of a "cordon" with an "open portion."

¹²Jim White, brigade S4, told me in a 1995 telephone call of his recollection that, back in our brigade mess, I was, in his words, "furious" at Julius Becton for his part in our failure to exploit an opportunity for a major encirclement. I probably was at that moment, but I got over it.

Bill Robertson, who was the communications officer of the 2/17th Cav, has written a book, with the help of other members of that unit, on the 2/17th Cavalry Squadron's first year in Vietnam. Describing the action discussed here he writes that on the night of May 12-13th the action was intense and that I was in the air overhead, monitoring the Cav's command channel. Julius Becton was seeking to seal a specific part of the cordon by inserting a rifle company (Robertson does not name the unit or its commander) between A and B Troops. Becton ordered one troop to slip sideways (a difficult maneuver when under fire) so that the rifle

Reflecting on these events 28 years later with the benefit of the reconstruction, page 139, I would say that I should have seen during the late afternoon of May 12th that we had a bigger cordon target than I had thought, and that I should not have let 2/17 Cav get so deeply engaged in attacking into Ap Son Tung. The brigade journal for the afternoon of May 12th has these entries...

- "1745 2-17: B Trp location YD634325 [Note: marked with (X) on the sketch map], center of mass on right flank of A Co. 1 WIA; 2 tanks hit.
- "1750 WIA was from RPG frag that hit tank. One tank burning. Do not know condition of other tank at present.
- "1755 1 tank inoperable, burning inside and outside. One tank operative, stuck in dirt."

The fact that the enemy in Ap Son Tung was strong enough to stop our tanks should have led me to disengage Julius Becton's 2/17th at that point in the battle, to decide to put even more troops into the cordon, to enlarge the encirclement to include Ap Son Tung, and to direct that the 1/501 and 2/17th would together and under my direction in a brigade-controlled encirclement would form an airtight barrier to the enemy's escape. As at Phuoc Yen we would then begin to attack and reduce the trapped enemy the next day.

But I think that I did not dwell on the matter, and put the events of 12-13 May behind me not to be thought about until I began writing this part of this history. The 2d Brigade, with the 2/17th Cav along, was headed for a new challenge.

company commander could move forward to fill the gap. Roberston relates that the rifle company commander would not move his unit forward (this may have been a matter of who had the opcon of the company), and that Becton was then required to order the troop commander to move his force laterally back. The troop commander, using an expletive, said into his radio, "I see, just like the f----- Charge of the Light Brigade." The story goes that, monitoring that channel, I then told Becton to "meet me on my push" (meaning "on my brigade command frequency"). When Becton came up (and of course the 2/17th commanders and Robertson had also switched frequencies), I was heard to say, "I want that troop commander relieved." Whereupon Colonel Becton was heard to say, in effect, "Sir, you can relieve me, but I do the relieving of my troop commanders." Given the intensity of the fight and the passions of the moment, I do not doubt this story, but do not remember it either. He was in the right of course; I had no fit reason to relieve a troop commander, and Joe Rozelle, commanding B Troop, was in any event a superior combat leader. But such is the stress of war. My outburst, in anger at what I may have thought was the troop commander's imputation regarding my brigade, must have stemmed in some part from my frustration at being unable to execute an encirclement.

This story illustrates the significance of "opcon," which I had over the 2/17th, versus "full command," which I approached having over my three infantry battalions (see footnote, page 20, Chapter 3). With the latter commanders, I could summarily relieve a company commander for cause, without explanation to the division commander (see the last paragraph, page 67, Chapter 5). Only if the misbehavior were exceptionally grave and flagrant, did this freedom of action exist for me with the 2/17th Cav. And of course, a troop commander in the 2/17th was aware that his squadron commander had a degree of independence not possessed by the three infantry battalion commanders of my brigade, as Julius Becton demonstrated on this occasion (although the personalities of more than one of my battalion commanders would surely have caused them to challenge so unjustified an outburst on my part in an instance like this -- but probably not on the command net).

Chapter 9. LZ Sally; May 14 - June 28, 1968

After the hectic days of May 12th and 13th, May 14th was for the 2d Brigade Task Force a day of modest enemy assessment and of "no friendly casualties," our first since arriving at LZ Jane. We had lately heard talk of an expansion of the task force AO into Phu Vang district east of Hue, and into Huong Thuy district south of Hue. This area of operations was the responsibility of a U.S. Marine Corps command called Task Force X-Ray, at Phu Bai. On May 14th, talk had become reality; from the brigade journal...

"1408 From 1-501: 1st lift Co C landed LZ YD845321 at 1505."

C Company's LZ was on Col Co Beach (sometimes called "Cocoa Beach") on the South China Sea 10 kilometers northeast of Hue. Here a tank farm stored fuel that it unloaded from tankers, and from here a pipeline took that fuel to depots near Hue, with pumping stations along the way. Later that afternoon, the brigade journal reported...

"1524 Bde CO departed for Thua Thien Sector."

The purpose of my visit was to work out with the Thua Thien province chief a scheme by which the two of us, and his district chiefs in Phu Vang and Huong Thuy, could cooperate to accomplish the mission to be assigned to the 1/501st and its A Battery, 1/321 (plus one MP squad). Five days later the brigade opord spelled out that 1/501 mission:

"Secure the following installations/areas:

Tan My refuel area, dredge area, landing support area, and fuel farm

Col Co Beach SeaBee vehicle park

POL pipeline from Tan My to Hue in assigned AO

QL 1 and QL 551 [Note: which ran from Hue to Col Co Beach] in assigned AO

SeaBee work parties in assigned AO as required

"Provide security for daily minesweep on QL 1 and QL 551 in assigned AO.

"As required, provide fire support and/or reaction forces for Combined Action Platoons [these USMC units assisted village chiefs in local security and pacification].

"Establish close liaison with Combined Action Platoons and district headquarters to insure full utilization of all available military and paramilitary forces.

"Establish liaison with Task Force Clearwater (a U.S. Navy patrol boat unit, whose call sign was "Pistol Pete") and provide fire support and/or security for patrol boats along the Perfume River to Hue."

Inasmuch as the same operation order assigned the 2/17 Cav the mission: "On order, initiate combat operations in 1-501 Inf AO," Jim Hunt, 1/501 battalion commander, also on occasion had opcon over units of the 2/17th in his area of operations.¹

When I visited the command post of the Marine battalion near Phu Vang, I was surprised to hear from the battalion commander that he was accomplishing his security mission (top subpara above) by placing three of his rifle companies on static security -- detachments on the beach, at his fire base, along the road and pipeline, and so on -- and was using only one rifle company mobile in his area of operations. (With 13 man rifle squads and a much larger TOE strength, USMC rifle companies had a field strength of about 160-175, while ours were at about 125 at best.)

The consequence of this was immediately evident to me; the enemy roamed the countryside at night without interference from the Marines.

I told Jim Hunt that we would use one company in static positions (he decided that a platoon, along with the fire base's occupants, would secure his artillery fire base and take care of the daily QL 551 minesweep, and that the rest of the company would take care of Col Co Beach) and that he would use the other three companies on the offensive night and day out in the battalion AO. Jim was familiar with that concept; he had been operating that way since he took command of the 1/501.

From our experience working with district chiefs and their PF platoons, I was confident that, if we gave them fire support and a rapid reaction force, we could rely on them for road and pipeline patrols, for protection of the pumping stations, and for ambushes that would imperil any enemy sneaking around localities that it was our duty to protect.

On May 15th, B/1/501 moved by air to secure FSB Mongoose, near Phu Vang, so that A/1/321 Arty could come in that afternoon by CH-47 and occupy a position there. On the same day D Company helilifted into the new AO, A Company moved there by truck, and Jim Hunt set up his Tac CP at Mongoose. That night, the 1/501 set out four ambushes, one per company. The next day, May 16th, companies of the 1/501 began patrolling. Snipers shot at an A Company patrol; the company commander reported "negative casualties - engaging with arty - contact broken immediately."

From the 1/501 on May 17th, the brigade journal at 0820 reported: "A Co had 4 personnel from 2-17 link up at 0815 hrs." That day, the 17th, the 1/501 engaged the enemy in four minor contacts during the day and sprung one night ambush.

On the 17th, 2/17 Cav moved by convoy from Camp Evans to establish its new base of operations at Camp Eagle. The brigade journal for that day, the 17th, had this 0800

¹In due time, visitors to Jim Hunt's command post would be impressed with the function that the 1/501 commander performed in bringing together and coordinating the many military and paramilitary activities taking place in his AO, under a common concept of operations.

entry: "To all units: There will be a planning meeting at Bde Hqs at 1600 hours today." At this 17 May planning meeting we laid out the new areas of operation:

The 1/501st AO would be east of the Perfume River to the coast and southeast of Hue to the district town of Huong Thuy, four miles from Hue, where the battalion recon platoon would secure a vital bridge on QL 1 and where its platoon leader would provide liaison with the district chief and especially with his intelligence officer.

Based at Camp Eagle,² the 2/17th would operate in the 1/501st AO -- either coordinating with the 1/501 under brigade control or, when necessary, placing its units opcon to the 1/501. (Early the next morning, May 18th, 2/17 Cav moved to a departure area just across the Perfume River from Hue and -- with its two troops and its aerial rifle platoon, plus a platoon of M48 tanks from C/2/34 Armor and a USMC Ontos platoon -- swept eastward across the rice paddies for six kilometers with minor contact and established a position for the night, prepared to conduct RIF operations in four directions from that position the next day, the 19th.)

The 1/502d, Jack Bishop commanding,³ would continue to operate eastward and westward from the An Lo bridge, but primarily in Quang Dien district to its east. Jack would keep his command post alongside the district chief in Quang Dien.

The 2/501st, Tony Heiter commanding, with its command post at LZ Pinky, would operate south and east of LZ Sally, primarily in Huong Tra district, as far as Hue. Tony would secure the Hue bridges and keep a liaison officer at the district headquarters.

I laid out the brigade task force mission and concept of operations. They appeared in the operation order two days later:

"Mission: 2d Bde... continues RIF operations in the coastal plains rice producing areas within AO, provides security and support for rice collection within capabilities; finds and destroys NVA/VC base areas and logistical installations; interdicts enemy movement into and within the AO; protects Hue from attack; assists in building the capabilities of paramilitary forces; conducts daily minesweeps of QL 1 and QL 551; provides security for designated installations; assists paramilitary forces in securing An Lo bridge, Hue bridge, and (two bridges on QL 1 south of Hue).

"Concept of operations: 2d Bde employs maneuver units in assigned AOs to find, fix, encircle, and destroy NVA/VC forces. During the hours of darkness, units employ saturation ambushes astride NVA/VC routes to deny him freedom of movement, hamper his operation, and dominate the night by offensive action. When the enemy is fixed, 2d Bde employs heavy air and artillery fires and other means to destroy the enemy. Priority of fires to unit in contact."

²The 2/17 based itself either at Camp Eagle or Camp Evans, where there was maintenance backup for its many vehicles, and never at LZ Sally, where there was not.

³Jack would soon become division G-3, turning his battalion over to Lt. Col. Leslie D. Carter, Jr.

Three paragraphs from the opord's "coordinating instructions"...

"Establish liaison with district headquarters in assigned AOs, and coordinate operations with local RF/PF and ARVN forces to insure maximum utilization of all available forces and unity of effort.

"Place emphasis on aggressively gaining accurate and timely intelligence from all sources, especially district and ARVN sources; maximum effort to acquire prisoners and documents. Report intelligence promptly.

"Assist GVN in securing rice harvest and denying rice to the VC/NVA."

The 101st's Operation Nevada Eagle began at noon May 18th. Division emphasized that a primary objective was to protect the rice harvest and deny it to the enemy. But division agreed with us that the best security for a farmer was to reduce the enemy presence in his part of the countryside to the point that village PFs could protect his rice harvest.

On May 20th, one day after brigade published its operation order, the 1/501st executed its first encirclement operation in its new AO. Based on an agent report that an enemy force was in the objective area, on May 19th A, B, and D Companies had been operating with little significant contact toward Ap Dong Gi Tay, YD 835217 (sketch, next page).

From the 22 June 1968 report of the brigade S3 (see page 79, Chapter 6)...

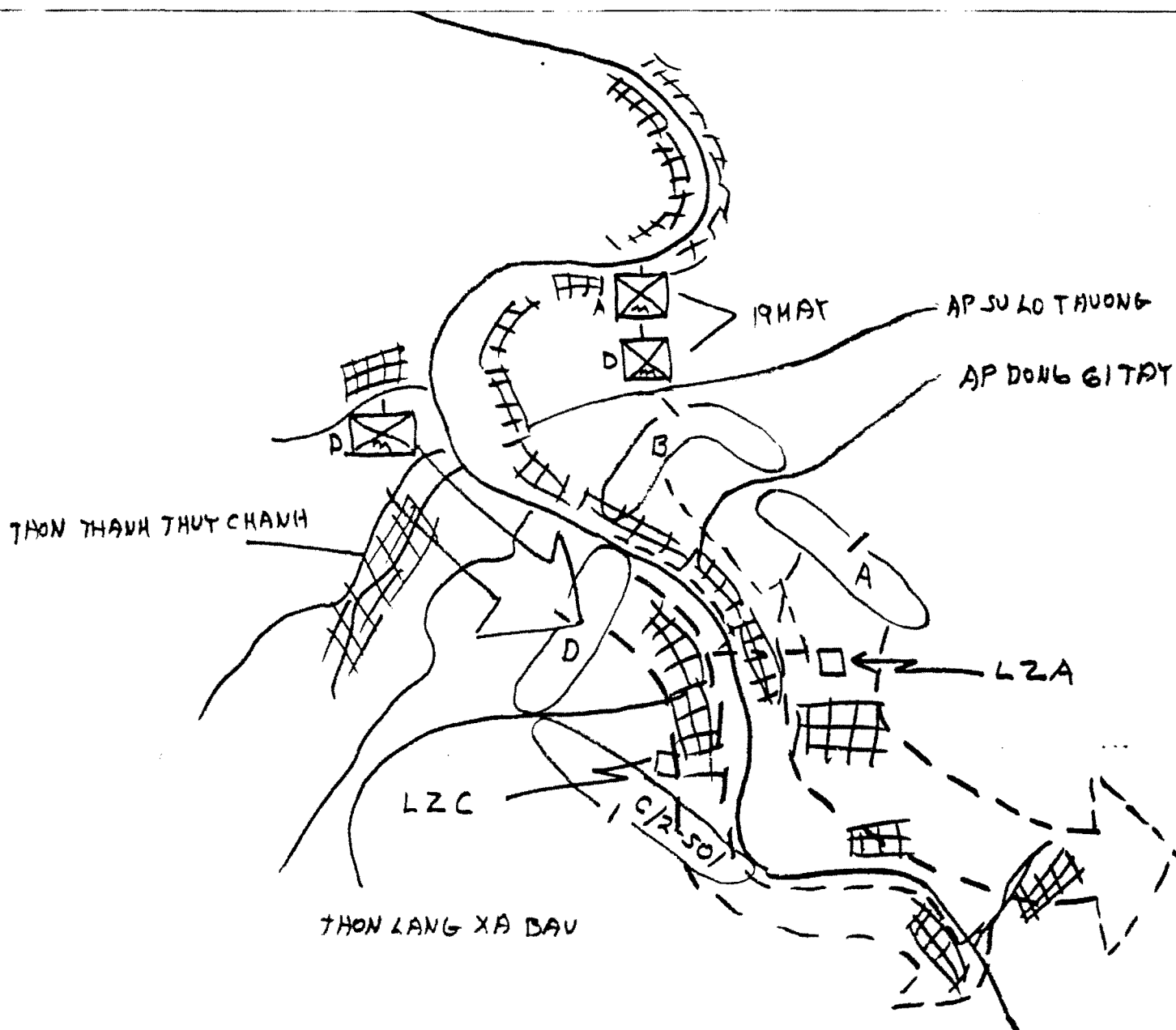
"At 0522 the following morning (May 20th), Co B received SA and RPG fire from the east, vic Ap Dong Gi Tay. Shortly afterwards, at 0600, Co B engaged an enemy squad in bunkers vic the same location. Contact was broken at 0730 hrs as Co B withdrew to the west and directed tac air strikes on the enemy positions. Co D, moving generally to the SE towards Co B's contact, also received sporadic SA and sniper fire from the same area. Based on these contacts and the agent report received 19 May, CO 1-501 decided to cordon the enemy force, now estimated to be a reinforced company. While continuous artillery, tac air, and LFT fires fixed the enemy, CO 1-501 deployed Co A, B, and D into blocking positions as indicated on the diagram (next page). Co A, upon landing at LZ A at 1610 hrs received intermittent SA and 60mm mortar fires until 1930, at which time a partial cordon was established with Co B to the N, Co D to the W, Co A to the E, and Co C 2-501 to the SW. Co C 2-501 was placed opcon 1-501 and was inserted into LZ C at 1829 hours. By last light 20 May, a cordon⁴ consisting of four rifle companies (plus one PF plat opcon Co D), and SA interlocking fires between the right flank of Co C 2-501 and the left flank of Co A, was established.

⁴The "cordon" was not airtight, so the term here is again inaccurate, according to proper 2d Brigade usage. And the final sentence of the report, next page, is incorrect in that small arms and artillery cannot effectively seal a gap.

"During the night of 20-21 May, constant illumination was provided over the cordon by USAF flareships, UH-1 flareships, and artillery illumination, as the encircled enemy force, now identified as elements of the 810th LF Bn, vainly tried to escape. At first light, after an intensive tac air and artillery preparation, Co A, B, and D swept through the enemy positions from the NW to SE and by mid-afternoon had completed their search of the objective area.

"U.S. casualties totaled 12 WHA. The enemy lost 65 KIA, two PWs, and 12 weapons captured.

"Although CO 1-501 did not have enough forces to completely encircle the enemy force, he effectively sealed the gap with SA and artillery."



The night of 18-19 May, the 2/17th Cav, complete, was in a night location two kilometers northeast of where the 1/501 would execute the operation just described on the 20th. It was dangerous territory. The brigade journal reported that at 0015 the 19th the 2/17th...

"...received SA, RPG, and approx 30 82mm mortar rounds. Incoming fire ceased at 0035 ours. Arty was fired on suspected enemy position. Results: 19 US WIA (11 medevac), negative enemy assessment."

Meanwhile the 2/501st and 1/502d had been establishing themselves in their assigned AOs. The 1/502 AO was relatively quiet. From the brigade journal for May 17th...

- "0206 1-502: At 0200 PFs conducted raid on 2 VC squads reported at YD708330, presently in contact.
- "0300 1-502: C/1/502 captured 2 VC at 0253 hrs (YD718342) walking past C Co night position, the two were part of a 6 man patrol Co C ambushed earlier last night (16 May), killing 2, they are local VC from village vic YD714323 that Co C and PF RIF through earlier yesterday.
- "0620 1-502: At 0400 hrs, 1 PF plat conducted raid on target YD709330, killed 1, captured 3, all were political cadre group.
- "0625 1-502: At 0600 hrs Co C ambush was returning to NDP and as they neared the Co psn an OP [meaning a member of an outpost that had been set out for local security] stood up to return to Co NDP also, one man from the ambush opened fire on the OP as he stood wounding one man in the head, medevac complete at 0623 hours, condition was serious."⁵

On May 22d the 2/501st had a sharp action. From the brigade journal for that day...

- "1721 From 2-501: D Co at 1716 hours made contact with 30 VC/NVA at YD604268, killed 10 (BC), captured a AK-47 and 2 RPG rounds, VC/NVA fled east - are presently being engaged with gunships.
- "1914 From 101st: Gunships in support of Co D 2-501 report 6 NVA/VC KIA."

Cleo Hogan's diary tells more about this action, and gives an account of a later entry in the brigade journal...

⁵I remember this report. In my small office in the LZ Sally TOC, doing paperwork and monitoring the brigade channels, I heard the 1/502 call for a medevac. I immediately called Jack Bishop on the land line (we had long had one in to Quang Dien) and asked about the medevac. I understood him to say that the outpost member had fired on the returning ambush (which with good practice can be avoided), not the reverse as reported here. I growled at him; I said that his people should not make that avoidable mistake. He replied, "Sir, those things happen in combat." I instinctively said sharply, "Not in this brigade, they don't!" -- wanting to leave him in no doubt of our standards. Only when I encountered this journal item did I realize that the accident resulted from an understandable quick reaction by a surprised ambush patrol member, which made it an entirely forgivable act. Jack Bishop is years dead, so I can't tell him that I was too harsh.

22 May

The company CA'd into the area north of the Song Bo. Intelligence indicated that the enemy was building up in this area. Lt Trabert and 5 of his men attacked several NVA and killed them. At 1800 hrs when the choppers brought us in our night chow and supplies, the NVA let go with a mortar attack. We moved about 1000 meters and at 2200 hours they attacked. We killed 18 and had no losses. General Barsanti came out and Colonel Cushman. They were really pleased...

An item from Cleo's diary entry the previous day caught my notice...

21 May

Yesterday we conducted live firing training exercises just outside La Chu. So many of the men in the company are new that they decided to have a live fire exercise for those men who have not yet been in a real battle.

From the brigade journal of May 23d, a report from 1/502 (typical of reports on PF actions from 1/502)...

"0830 1-502: Report from Quang Dien. At 0600 hours 2 plat of PF conducted raid at YD720347 - killed 2 VC/NVA (smudges on journal) 2 of the women were NVA nurses, captured 5 weapons, 2 AK-47s, 2 AK-44s, 3 AK-55s, have 22 POWs, 4 women, 18 men - one of which is an NVA from 2d Co, 16th Bn, 2d Regt."

Later in the day, this report...

"2200 1-502: At 2145 hours PF sprung ambush YD862325, 3 VC KIA, 3 weapons captured, negative casualties."

Companies of the 1/501 had begun operating with PRUs (provincial reconnaissance units, which were specially trained to go after VC infrastructure, i.e., political cadres). Both 1/501 and 1/502 sprung ambushes the night of the 23d. And on the 23d we learned that 2/17th would get its own artillery battery. C Btry, 6/33d Arty, was on the way to the 2/17th location, which was a triangular promontory that jutted out into a lagoon about nine kilometers east of Phu Vang and had been the night location of TF Sabre. The position, now with artillery, would be known as FSB Forward. It would often be the location of the 2/17 tac CP.

On the 26th activity erupted in the 1/501 AO. According to the brigade journal, a Troop B, 2/17th Cav, listening post near FSB Forward "...observed movement, engaged with 106RR. First light check 11 NVA KIA, 3 NVA POW, 3 AK-47, 2 RPG-7, 1 RPG-2, 23 B-40 rds, 22 RPG-7 rds, 30 lbs explosives..."

A/1/501 went opcon to the 17th Cav and at 1245 made a combat assault into an LZ six kilometers south of FSB Forward. Late that afternoon and into the evening B Troop with Ontos and tank reinforcements was working with A/1/501 in a contact with an estimated enemy company, sustaining 2 KIA and 8 WIA.

That activity would continue the following day. The 2/17's plan, according to the brigade journal for the 26th..

"Trp B, Co A 1-501 (plus one PF platoon), 3 companies from 3d Bn 3d ARVN Regt and C Trp 3d Sqdn 7th ARVN Regt. Maintain blocking positions around the villages vic YD876235 to vic YD887226 [this was the village of Thon Le Xa Dong]. At approx 0730 Trp B [Note: reinforced with a Marine Ontos platoon, a Marine amphibious tractor platoon, a Marine tank platoon, and the 2d platoon, C Co, 2/34 Tank Battalion] will attack obj at YD880230 from the NW to the SE toward a blocking position occupied by ARVN elements." (The remainder of an elaborate blocking and attacking plan involving Cav, Marine units, tanks, ARVN troops, and a night combat assault by A/1/501 is not repeated here.)

Called a "cordon" operation and supported during the night with illumination, it was not really that. On 27 May this force met only scattered resistance and sustained 2 KIA and 8 WIA, including 4 Marines, 1 ARVN, and 1 PF.

The following day the same force had considerable success sweeping for eight kilometers southeastward down a chain of villages along the shore from FSB Forward, with A/1/501 making a combat assault into a blocking position at the far end of the sweep (see operation overlay, next page). At a cost of one man killed and seven wounded (the KIA was from a booby-trapped 155mm round, and two WIAs were from a booby-trapped AP mine), 2/17, with attachments and fire support, assessed 32 VC KIA, 8 NVA KIA, and 1 VC POW.

Meanwhile an agent report on the 27th that "an unknown number of VC/NVA" were located in Thon Xuan Hoa village, YD789242, had led Jim Hunt to carry out a cordon operation that night. The encircling force was two companies of the 1/501, the battalion recon platoon reinforced with a PF platoon, and D/1/502 which combat assaulted at 2103 that evening and completed the encirclement. Illumination was continuous, but when a sweep was made the next day, the count was disappointing: 2 NVA KIA, 8 VC KIA, 2 NVA POW, 1 VC POW and 12 weapons. 1/501 had one man wounded. D/1/502 was helilifted back to the 1/502 AO.

May 28th completed ten days of Operation Nevada Eagle for the 2d Brigade Task Force. Friendly losses for our two battalions (the 1/502 was with the 1st Brigade) and cav squadron had been 4 KIA and 117 WIA, of which 86 had been medevaced. The enemy assessment was 120 NVA KIA, 63 VC KIA, 7 NVA POW, and 7 VC POW, and 82 individual and crew-served weapons.

101

FSB
FORWARD

LD

PZ

PL CAT

FCL

PL DOG

CROSS LD AT 280730
RIF SE to VIC
35, ONO EST BLOCKING
YD898235 to SE
OBJ#2 AND #6

CONDUCT COMBAT ASSAULT: PZ
FORWARD 281000 HRS MAY 68.
YD 928200, EST BLOCK PSN

DO NOT WRITE IN THESE SPACES

19

91

GA 13
LZ

922 212

903 232

883247

89/0257D

2

8213

CAT

9

8

4

251

L2

125

GA

May 29th was a relatively quiet day in the 2d Brigade Task Force AO. But on the 30th the 2/17th had an opportunity to go back to Thon Le Xa Dong, above. This time we would do it with a proper cordon.

Troop A,⁶ 2/17th, was on a RIF operation southeast from FSB Forward. From the 22 June after action report (see sketch, next page)...

"At 0750 hrs, as Trp A approached the NW end of the village complex, one platoon made contact with an unknown size force (1). The platoon attacked and by 8045 hours had eliminated enemy resistance. As one platoon continued the attack SE other elements of Trp A (with attached Marine units)⁷ maneuvered south and then east to attack the enemy from the rear or eastern [actually western] side of the village (2). Suspecting the presence of a sizeable enemy force in the area CO 2d Brigade requested assistance from the CO, 3-3 ARVN. Coordination was effected to have one company of the regiment establish a blocking position (3) on the SE end of the village. At 1050 hours, the advancing forces were subjected to a mortar attack (4) from the center of the village area. At 1305 hrs, Trp A, having advanced still further SE into the village, made contact (5) with an unknown size force. Tac Air, artillery, and a LFT were used to support Trp A. As the contact grew in intensity, the Bde CO, reacting rapidly, directed Co B/1-501 Inf be placed opcon to 2-17 Cav and to conduct a combat assault to a LZ (6) north of the objective. Co B established a blocking position (7) and linked up with the blocking position (3) of the 3-3 ARVN Regt company on the SE. Troop A continued to attack SE until approximately 1830 hrs, and then positioned elements in blocking positions (8) to complete the cordon. At 1932 hours, one platoon of Co C/1-501 was placed opcon 1-17 Cav and landed at a LZ NW of the cordon. The rifle platoon was used to assist in completing the encirclement.

"Continuous illumination was provided by artillery fire, naval gunfire, helicopter flare-ships, and USAF flare aircraft. During the hours of darkness numerous attempts to escape were driven back by alert and vigilant troopers. At first light, 15 enemy attempted to escape thru the ARVN position. When the attempt failed, the group turned and in desperation attempted to break thru Trp A's position on the north [Note: where the platoon from C/1501 had been deployed]. This attempt also failed and a LFT arrived on station to engage the fleeing enemy. Following an artillery preparation, the Aero Rifle Platoon and the platoon of Co C/1-501 began a sweep into the objective area (10) from

⁶Julius Becton's 2/17th Cav had only two troops; from time to time one of them would rotate out of the area of operations to Camp Eagle (or in earlier weeks to Camp Evans) for "maintenance and preparing for future operations." Troop A had just replaced Troop B in the AO. The two troops were identical except that B Troop had a platoon of six M-113 armored personnel carriers, each equipped with a .50 caliber machine gun and two M-60 machine guns.

⁷These consisted of an Ontos platoon from A Company, 1st Marine Antitank Battalion, and a tank platoon from the 1st Marine Tank Battalion.



NW to SE, as Trp A, Co B11-501 Inf and the 3-3 ARVN Regt company maintained blocking positions. The sweep met no significant resistance. Cordon units advanced toward the center of the objective and captured defeated and demoralized VC and NVA and numerous weapons. A psyops broadcast was credited with the surrender of 12 enemy. By 1150 the entire area had been swept and captured personnel and equipment evacuated.

***Results:**

Friendly casualties: US: 6 WHA. ARVN: 2 PF KHA and 2 PF WHA

Enemy losses:

By US forces: 91 NVA KIA, 7 NVA POW, 12 VC POW, 30 individual and 6 crew-served weapons captured

By ARVN forces: 65 VC KIA, 22 VC POW, 30 individual and 9 crew-served weapons captured"

We had dealt a devastating blow to the 10th Local Force Battalion.⁸

⁸When General Barsanti once again pinned a Silver Star medal on me later, I told my people, for its citation, to write up my actions in this cordon. With some typical hyperbole, and with slight inconsistencies/inaccuracies as to the troop deployment, the citation conveys the intensity of direction that was called for, in order to make our kind of encirclement happen. It reads...

"Colonel Cushman... on 30 May 1968 (was) directing combat operations in the village of Thon Le Xa Dong, Thua Thien Province, Republic of Vietnam. The Second Squadron, 17th Cavalry, which was under the operational control of the Second Brigade, made contact with an enemy force in the western end of the village. By noon it was evident that a strong enemy force was occupying the village. Colonel Cushman was over the battle area in a light observation helicopter, and sensing an opportunity to encircle and destroy the enemy force, he ordered a rifle company from a nearby battalion to be combat assaulted into a position north of the village. He then persuaded Army of the Republic of Vietnam authorities to order an infantry battalion to a cordon and blocking position west and northwest of the village. Despite hostile fire throughout the battle area, he remained aloft personally directing devastating air strikes and artillery fire, and on many occasions joined United States and Army of the Republic of Vietnam commanders on the ground to determine the situation, give them counsel, and arrange for their support. Disregarding the hazards of night flight in the light observation helicopter, Colonel Cushman stayed aloft for several hours after darkness, counseling his commanders, adjusting the cordon positions, and insuring flare ship and artillery support. During the night the trapped enemy attempted in vain to break out of the ring of troops. The following morning the systematic destruction of the enemy force was completed. Included among the enemy losses were the command groups of a battalion and a regiment. These losses coupled with the large number of enemy casualties and prisoners rendered the enemy battalion and its regimental headquarters ineffective as remnants of the force fled to the mountains... This action, which was the tenth in a series of successful cordon operations conducted by the brigade under Colonel Cushman, brought the total enemy losses in these ten operations to eight hundred and twenty (820) killed and two hundred (200) captured, with remarkably light friendly casualties...."

Julius Becton was the commander on the ground in this action, directing the units in contact and calling for specific air, artillery, and gunship support; I was arranging his reinforcements and insuring his support, keeping abreast by occasionally monitoring his command channel, and counseling him from time to time. This was a good division of effort.

Before the action of 30-31 May, and working with the 1st ARVN Division, the 2d Brigade had been planning for an extension of combined US/ARVN operations southeastward from Phu Vang into Phu Tu district. While the 30-31 May action was in progress, 2d Brigade published its operation order, dated 1500 hours, 30 May. D-day was 1 June.

Extracts from the operation order...

The task organization:

TF 1-501 Inf

1-501 Inf (- B&C Cos)

A/2-17 Cav

ARP/2-17 Cav

2/C/2-34 Armor

2-501 Inf

1-502 Inf

TF 2-17 Cav

2-17 Cav (- A Trp)

B/1-501 Inf

C/1-501 Inf

Scty Plat, Bde HHC (for scty, FSB Forward)

Ontos Plat/1 Tk/1 Mar

Plat/A/1 Tk/1 Mar

Plat USMC Amtrac

We would be working with the ARVN TF 7, commanded by the Sector Commander, Thua Thien Sector (who was also the Province Chief, Thua Thien). TF 7 consisted of...

3d Squadron, 7th Cav Regt (ARVN)

12th Coastal Group, RVN Navy (Supporting)

3d Battalion, 3d Inf Regt (ARVN)

13th Coastal Group, RVN Navy (Supporting)

Black Panther Co, 1st ARVN Division

Copied below is an extract of the intelligence annex to our brigade order...

1. (C) ENEMY SITUATION:

a. General: The exact enemy units and locations within the area are unknown. A major operation has not been conducted in the SE part of PHU TU District in over a month and in VINH LOC District since February. In view of this fact, it is possible that a Regimental(+) size enemy force could be located in the area of interest. Also effective saturation operations in PHU VANG District in the NW part of PHU TU District has possibly driven the major units to the SE and into the area of interest.

b. Disposition: In PHU TU District, the C117 LF Company is one of the most active units and is believed to be combat effective. The 117 Company was last contacted on 27 May 1968 vicinity YD925208. It is believed that 2 to 4 local VC platoons operate within PHU TU District. An agent stated that on 19 May 68 an unidentified VC/NVA Battalion was located vicinity YD9615. On 29 May, agent reports stated the 802d Bn located vic YD963156, 804th Bn vic YD970170, the C117 LF Co vic YD948167 and 2 VC companies located vic YD960145 to YD973152. In VINH LOC District it is believed that from 3 to 6 local VC platoons have been conducting harassing operations and gathering food which is to be taken to the mountains to supply NVA units. An agent report on 25 May 1968 stated that the K4 Battalion was located vicinity ZD0712 to ZD0812. Another agent report on 28 May 68 stated that an enemy battalion had moved into the area vicinity ZD0415 and that the personnel spoke with a northern accent and had numerous mosquito bites on their arms. On 29 May, an agent reported the C118 LF Co located vic YD9718.

At the National Archives I have had copied the operation overlay of this 30 May order. It shows the command posts of the 2/17 Cav and the ARVN TF 7 colocated at Phu Tu where their commanders could coordinate with and gain intelligence from the district chief. TF 2/17 and TF 7 are shown attacking abreast to the southwest, with the Cav on the left along the coast and TF 7 about 3 kilometers inland. The Black Panther Company, in the zone of TF 7, and D/1-501 in the zone of the 2/17 Cav are shown executing combat assaults under 2d Bde control into LZs fifteen kilometers southeast of the Cav and ARVN TFs line of departure; the Black Panthers to occupy a blocking position in the TF 7 zone, and C/1-501 to do the same in the Cav zone. Each would revert to parent TF control upon closure in their respective LZs. The RVN Navy's two coastal groups would be screening the coast alongside the 2/17th Cav. TF 1-501 is in reserve.

At first light 1 June, Jim Waldeck and I were over the area in my C&C ship. From the brigade journal for 1 June...

- *0545 DTOC [the 101st Div CP]: Naval gunfire reports 3 secondary explosions, 1 large white smoke at YD967141, other 2 at YF983137 (firing LZ prep)
- *0653 Bde S3: 1st lift of C/1-501 LZ (YD989138) at 0651 hrs.
- *0710 Bde CO: Lift for C/1-501 started at 0645 hrs - 2d lift complete at 0710 hrs.
- *0712 Bde CO: 1st lift C/1-501 moved into woods NE of LZ - received light fire, LFT engaged, no further fire received.
- *0750 2/17: C Co presently receiving sporadic sniper fire from the W end of the LZ, have 1 US WIA, medevac has been requested.
- *0808 Bde CO: 1st lift Black Panther Co abn at this time.
- *0820 2-17: B Trp at YD918212 receiving heavy volume of SA fire and 6 RPG rounds, neg cas, calling arty and returning fire with organic weapons.
- *0845 Bde CO: 2d lift Black Panther Co landed at 0841 hrs - 3d lift abn at 0845 hrs.
- *0847 Bde CO: Check with Div on availability of acft for move of B/2-501 later this AM.
- *0851 2-17: B Trp still receiving SA & AW fire and occasional RPG round - fire is coming from village to E, neg cas.
- *0900 2-17: Lift for Black Panther Company complete at 0858 hrs.

"0945 Bde S3: TF 7 reports heavy contact, enemy located at YD945160 - received heavy fire from obj 1 area YD947167.

"1000 2-17: FAC overhead waiting for fighters. Amtracks at YD810252 moving to B/1-501 location. C/1-501 receiving neg fire - searching area."

From the 22 June S3 after action report (see sketch, next page)...

"(Trp B's contact with force estimated to be company size...) continued throughout the morning as Trp B advanced slowly. At 1145 hrs Co B 1-501 Inf moved SE utilizing Marine amtracks to assist Trp B. At 1508 hrs Co B made contact (2) and was able to penetrate several hundred meters into the village. At 1513 Trp A was returned to the control of 2-17 Cav and began moving to the area of contact from FSB Forward. At 1840 Hrs Co B 2-501 was placed opcon to 2-17 and conducted a combat assault to an LZ (3) SW of the village area. All units then established blocking positions to cordon the area of contact as indicated."

Inasmuch as B/1/501 had penetrated inside the village, the "cordon" at its northeast end was not airtight (although it developed that during the night few if any enemy attempted to escape through those infantry lines). B/2/501 and A and B Troops of the 2/17 were however in open rice paddies; continuous illumination enabled them to establish an effective cordon to the southwest and southeast. RVN patrol boats screened the coast along the inland bay.

Meanwhile, as the brigade journal for June 1st reported...

"TF 7 (ARVN) conducted operations to the SW of 2-17 Cav elements. The Black Panther Co made a combat assault and occupied a blocking position. 3-3 ARVN and 3-7 ARVN attacked SE and made contact with an estimated 100 VC. Enemy assessment was 10 VC KIA, 2 VC POW, 6 individual weapons captured, and 1 crew served weapon."

Without attempting to describe the unit actions and contacts of TF 2/17 on the next day, June 2d, in detail, suffice it to say that by nightfall it was possible for Julius Becton to establish an effective cordon of three rifle companies and two cavalry troops, as shown by the lines connecting limiting points on the sketch, two pages down, of larger scale.

The 22 June S3 report relates that...

"Illumination was provided during the night. At 0305 hrs on 3 June, movement was detected to the front and rear of Trp A's position. Both areas were engaged with 106mm recoilless rifle fire. At 0515 hrs Co B 1-501 Inf observed personnel moving toward the

CORDON #11

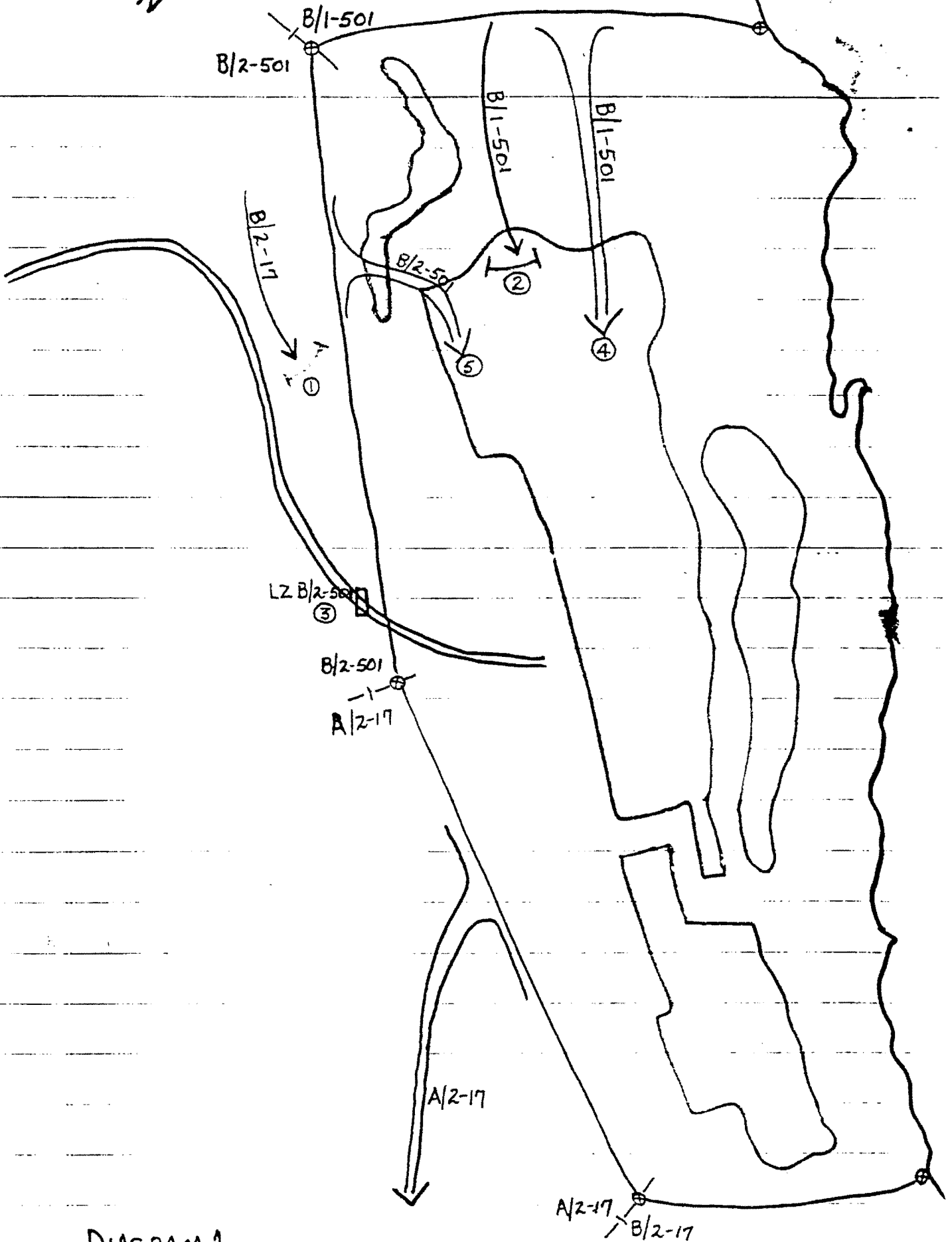
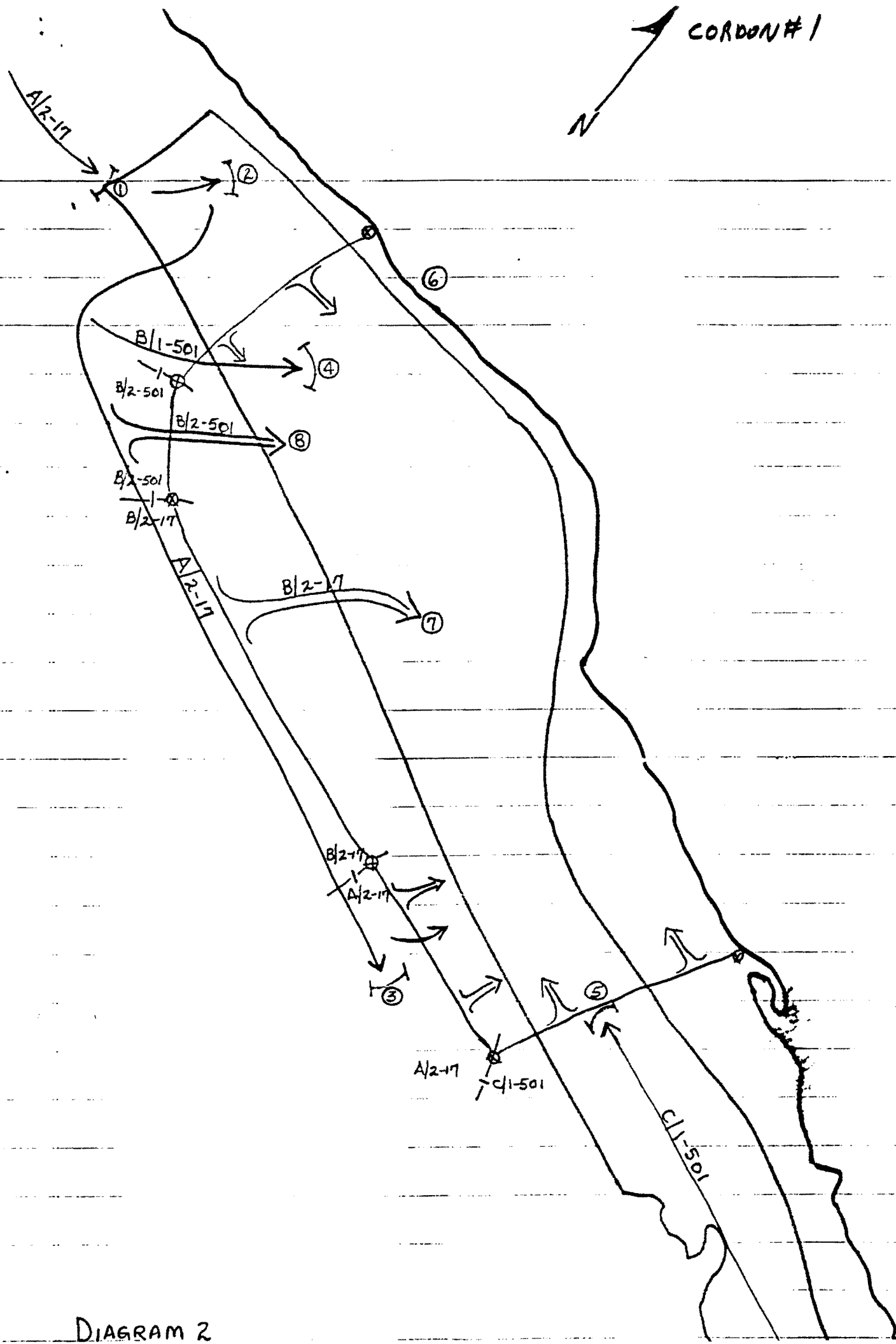


DIAGRAM 1



inland bay to the east. At 0535 hrs USN (sic) patrol boats on station in the area captured 5 VC/NVA with weapons. At this same time Co B 1-501 engaged personnel moving into the water. At 0735 hrs units began advancing to tighten the cordon and assess targets engaged during the night. At 0920 hrs Trp B and Co B 2-501 began sweeping into the village. As the sweep progressed many personnel were captured or surrendered. Recognizing the signs of a beaten and demoralized enemy, a psyops broadcast was delivered over the area. At 1105 hrs Co C began moving NW into the objective area to assist in the search. Units continued to clear the area throughout the day capturing numerous weapons and prisoners.

"During the hours of darkness units ambushed throughout the area. On the morning of 4 June the final searches of the objective were completed and units directed to new areas of operation.

"Results: US:	5 KIA	38 WIA	Enemy assessment:	<u>US</u>	<u>ARVN</u>	<u>Total</u>
ARVN:	2 KIA	5 WIA	NVA/VC KIA	128	107	235
			NVA/VC PW	58	19	77"

That action was the end of heavy fighting in my time as brigade commander. A soldier killed or wounded is never simply a statistic to his commander, but in ten days from the end of this operation to the 14th only six men of the 2d Brigade were killed (several times that were wounded). On the 14th five men of the 2/17th were killed by a mine, and on the 15th five more, in the 1/502d, lost their lives to booby-trapped 105 rounds. But on the 16th we had only five casualties. And on June 17th, 1968, for only the second time since arriving at LZ Jane, the 2d Brigade task force had no soldier killed and none wounded.

During this period of heavy fighting east and south of Hue, the northern part of our AO had been relatively quiet. The next three pages reproduce an account of daily actions of the 1/502d from May through June 13th that I discovered in that battalion's organizational history in the National Archives.

I. May 1968

Battalion moved back into Quang Dien District by helicopter and began RIF operations and security of An Lo Bridge and clearing of Q.L. #1. "C" sprang ambush at 706348 on 5 NVA, killing 2 (BC). Later 2 VC were captured as they walked into the NDP. After interrogation it was learned they were going to vic 715330 to act as guides for NVA. At 0630 the NDP received SA fire and suffered 1 WIA. At 0635 they moved to the village 715330 and swept it finding a grave approximately 24 hours old with 4 KIA SA.

Results: 1 WIA Enemy: 6 KIA (BC) NVA
2 WIA/POW

Alfa returned from OPCON to 1-501 Infantry after 3 day operation (Battle of Phuoc Yen). They recieved credit for 80 NVA KIA (BC)

4. May 1968

Cordon by A, B, & Recon with other 2nd Dde elements at vic 692303. Contact was heavy during the night by elements seeking to escape the Cordon. Artillery was called for and adjusted as well as use of small arms. At first light a sweep of the area revealed.

Enemy: 26 NVA KIA (BC)
2 VC KIA (BC)
3 VC POW

5. May 1968

Battalion continued RIF and security missions. A & B cordoned vill vic 700304 and had 1 WIA from grenade while enemy losses were 1 NVA KIA (BC), 2 NVA WIA/POW.

6. May 1968

Battalion continued it's pacification operations. A company NDP was under sporadic contact from 0335 till 0545 and had 2 WIA from SA fire from est, reinforced squad. First light check revealed 1 NVA KIA (BC). B company established 3 ambushes. At 2140 one ambush fired on 4 NVA across the river from them. No assessment could be made. At 0745 another ambush fired on 5 NVA in a sampan. Results 5 NVA KIA (BC) and sampan sunk. Bravo combat assault vill vic 750291 and encountered heavy fire. Formed a cordon of the vill with Delta and called in airstrikes and artillery. C company ambush killed 2 NVA KIA (BC). Delta combat assault to 748294 and were pinned down by heavy fire. Went into cordon with Bravo suffering 2 KIA, 7 WIA.

Results: 2 KIA Enemy: 8 NVA KIA (BC)
9 WIA 4 NVA WIA (Est)

7. May 1968

Bravo swept vill at first light vic 750290 and made contact. Results 3 WIA: 5 NVA KIA (BC). Charlie made contact at 0800 and remained in contact throughout the day vic 748307. The fire was heavy MG, lightMG, AW & SA. Called in artillery and airstrikes.

Results: 2 KIA Enemy: 5 NVA KIA (BC).
11 WIA
4 MIA later confirmed and recovered as KIA

8. May 1968

Battalion continued RIF and security missions of An Lo and QL #1. A made contact at 715294 cordoned the village and called in airstrikes. B company sprung an ambush on 30 NVA with organic weapons. First light check revealed 16 NVA KIA (BC). C 2 KIA and 2 WIA from sniper fire.

Results: 2 KIA 16 NVA KIA (BC)
 2 WIA
 2 MIA (KIA) found by C 1/501 also 2 NVA KIA from airstrike

9. May 1968

Bravo found 15 NVA KIA (BC) from airstrike at 724294. Charlie CA to 715302 made heavy contact and had 2 KIA and 3 WIA. Established ambushes around the area of contact and captured 1 NVA who crawled up to one of the positions while trying to escape. Delta made moderate scattered contact during the day and killed 8 NVA (BC). Recon found 3 NVA KIA (BC) in a grave at 723311.

Results: 2 KIA 26 NVA KIA (BC)
 2 WIA 1 POW

10. May 1968

Battalion continued RIF and security missions in AO and made moderate to heavy contact. Charlie had a running fight with 2 NVA snipers that led into a village at 729333 where they received heavy fire that killed their point man and prevented his recovery. Airstrikes were called in and caused 10 NVA to leave their bunkers and run into Charlie's positions. Results: 1 KIA, 1 WIA, and 1 MIA (KIA), 11 NVA KIA (BC). Delta made contact at 715328 and called for an airstrike after the strike a sweep of the area revealed 13 NVA KIA (BC). Recon found 8 NVA KIA (BC) at 720296 killed by airstrike the day before.

Results for day: 1 KIA 32 NVA KIA (BC)
 1 WIA
 1 MIA Later recovered as KIA

11. May 1968

Light contact was made during the day and Charlie recovered their MIA (KIA) and found 1 NVA KIA (BC).

12, 13, and 14 May 1968

Light contact made during this time as the battalion continued the RIF and security missions in the AO. On the 14th Recon and Bravo operating with PF's from Quang Dien killed 1 NVA (BC), 2 VC (BC).

15, 16, and 17 May 1968

Light contact made as the battalion was credited with 6 VC KIA (BC) and 2 VC POW.

18, 19 May 1968

Light contact and the Battalion received 2 WIA from snipers.

20, 21 May 1968

The Battalion continued RIF operations and security mission of An Lo and QL #1. During these 2 days only light contact was made.

Results: 1 WIA 4 VC KIA EC
 1 VC WIA (Escaped)

Delta while conducting the road sweep from An Lo to Evans spotted a mine but before they could remove it a civilian bus ran over it. Results no one injured and the bus was heavily damaged.

22. May 1968

Bravo company while on a RIF vic of 694305 received fire from the vill. After returning fire and artillery they swept the area and found 2 NVA KIA (EC) and 1 NVA/VC POW's in their bunkers. Delta fired artillery on suspected enemy positions then swept thru the area and found 3 VC KIA and 1 NVA KIA.

Results: 3 NVA KIA (EC)
 5 POW

23, 24. May 1968

Battalion made light contact throughout the period while conducting RIF and security missions throughout the AO.

Results from these operations were:
1 WIA BBT 8 VC KIA (EC).

26. May 1968

As the Battalion continued operations in the AO Charlie suffered 6 WIA from a BBT and Delta made heavy contact vic 691312. They returned fire and called in artillery and estimated the enemy element as an NVA company (-). 14 WIA.

Results: 20 WIA.

27. May 1968

The Battalion made light contact during the day's operations.

Results: 1 WIA BBT 1 VC KIA (EC)
 1 KIA BBT 1 VC POW

28, 29, 30, and 31 May 1968

The Battalion continued RIF operations in the AO and security mission of An Lo and QL #1. During this period contact was very light and resulted in 7 VC captured with weapons.

Results from 19 December 1967 to 1 June 1968
Friendly: 59 KIA Enemy: 852 KIA (EC)
 393 WIA 250 KIA (Est)
 129 WIA/TOW

1. June 1968

Light contact Bravo company caught 2 VC coming out of bunkers 2 VC KIA (BC). Delta company ambushed 6 VC, 1 VC KIA later found 2 more trying to run away 2 VC KIA.

2. June 1968

Battalion RIF with PF, Bravo joint RIF with PF vic YD7140 and found that almost all of the gates entering the vill were BBT with grenades. These grenades were blown in place. As they swept thru the village they received light contact and returned fire wounding 1 VC who fled. They also blow several BBT's in place but 1 PF was killed when he stopped on a 105 BBT.

3. June 1968

Battalion continued operations. Alfa secured An Lo and conducted RIF with 1 Fla.. Recon of PF's. At vic YD6231 PF's attach and killed 3 VC and had 3 WIA. Bravo combined operations. Sweep resulted in 1 WIA from fire at vic YD7132 and 3 NVA KIA in bunkers at vic YD7131 by H/G. Recon 1 KIA 105 BBT.

4. June 1968

Battalion continued operation and road sweep. Co B conducted a C/A to vic 699288 and conducted S&C operations with negative contact.

5. June 1968

Contact was light with 2 Hot Charlus coming into Co A MDP. They had 1 AK47 and 1 SKS.

6. June 1968

Battalion continued operations with Delta working with some plow. Contact was light capturing 1 VC, and 10,000 pounds of rice, 1 SKS and 2 VC KIA, and wounding 1 more who escaped.

(7 and 8 June missing)

9. June 1968

Co "C" and Co "A" combined for a cordon search of an area vic YD7030. The cordon resulted in 2 VC KIA and a large cache containing weapons, ammo, clothing and food. There were 23 bunkers in the area, 15 had been used recently, (all destroyed). In vic YD7132 numerous punji pits were encountered. Co C found 5 tons of rice. Co D and PF continued operating with some plow. Their progress report showed, 200 meters hedgerow, 45 bunkers destroyed. During the day 8 VC KIA, 6 VC captured, 1 of these was a messenger who had document from his commander stating his men could not fight due to lack of food, weapons, and ammo. There were 5 friendly WIA from BBT.

10. June 1968

Co "C" and Co "A" continued sweep of cordon established 9 June while D Co continued some plow operations. They requested and received an airstrike vic YD6931. Co "C" and "A" had light contact capturing 7 VC, 5 tons of rice while they had 1 friendly KIA and 4 WIA. The some plow destroyed another 36 bunkers. The PSYOPS plane flew over the AO making leaflet drops and loud speaker broadcasts.

11. June 1968

The cordon operation was completed with 6 more VC KIA 1 Hoi Chanh, 9½ tons of rice were discovered. Also a directive came out on this day from Brigade that said all elements operating independently would have compass, map, radio, and strobe light. Co "A" had one friendly WIA (US).

12. June 1968

Very light contact 2 VC KIA. Co "C" found 19 tons of rice 1 PF was WIA by a BBT.

13. June 1968

The PF joined Co A and B in a joint operation resulting in 5 VC KIA, 5 VC captured, 1 VC Hoi Chanh, 2 AK47, 1 M-16, and 1 B40, were captured 1 PF and 1 US were WIA. Co D continued to support some plow which destroyed 5 acres of village. 75 bunkers and 300 meters of hedgerow.

Meanwhile, as the article beginning next page, from the Fall issue of the 101st Airborne Division magazine, Rendezvous With Destiny, relates, the "liberation of Quang Dien" was proceeding. While this article focuses on the 1/502d, which went into Quang Dien district as soon as the 2d Brigade came to LZ Sally in early March and which was there continuously from May 1st, all three battalions of the brigade had operated in Quang Dien, and each under the same concept of operations. I reproduce this article because what it says about Quang Dien describes what went on in March through June 1968 throughout the area of operations of the 2d Brigade, including its expansion east and south of Hue.

The 1/502d's operations around Ap Dong Lam, second page of the article, are treated on page 64 of Chapter 5, LZ Sally; March 1968.

LIBERATION OF QUANG DIEN

2nd Brigade paratroopers fought bravely for four months so 50,000 South Vietnamese people would not have to choose between death and slavery as a way of life.

By Spec. 4 Robert P. Johnston

The story of Quang Dien District is a story of South Vietnamese people who learned that life without freedom is no life at all. It also concerns a brigade of American airborne soldiers who gave their strength and some of their lives so that the district's 50,000 people would not have to choose between death and slavery.

Early in February, during the stormy weeks surrounding the Communist Tet offensive, this patchwork of flat, coastal ricelands only an afternoon's walk from Hue's Citadel was the undisputed home of two North Vietnamese Army regiments and a strong infrastructure of local Viet Cong.

Feeding like giant leeches from the lifeblood of the cone-hatted farmers, fishermen and small merchants, the enemy soldiers and Viet Cong ruled absolutely. The people did not have to build bunkers and give up their rice; but the alternative was always a bullet in the head.

The only American presence then was a five-man MACV advisory team, holed up like prisoners at the district headquarters with only a small contingent of district Popular Force (PF) soldiers for protection.

"They could have overrun us any time they wanted," said the team's commander, Capt. Robert A. Selzer, Merritt Island, Fla. "We asked a captured prisoner why the NVA didn't come and massacre us, and he said it was because nobody told them to."

On March 1, the 2nd Brigade moved south from Quang Tri and pushed the NVA off an abandoned French airstrip along Route 1 a few kilometers west of Quang Dien. Springing up there almost overnight, the brigade's base camp was dubbed Landing Zone Sally, the new home of the "Ready To Go" paratroopers.

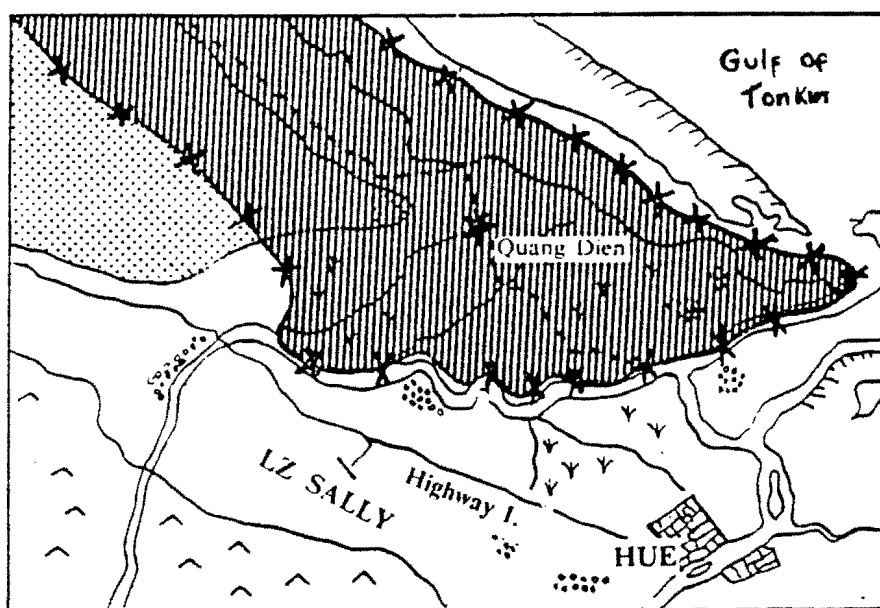
For the liberation of the district, brigade commander Col. John H. Cushman, Lexington, Mass., chose the 1st Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf., commanded by Lt. Col. Bertram J. Bishop, Springfield, Va.

The first thing Col. Bishop noticed

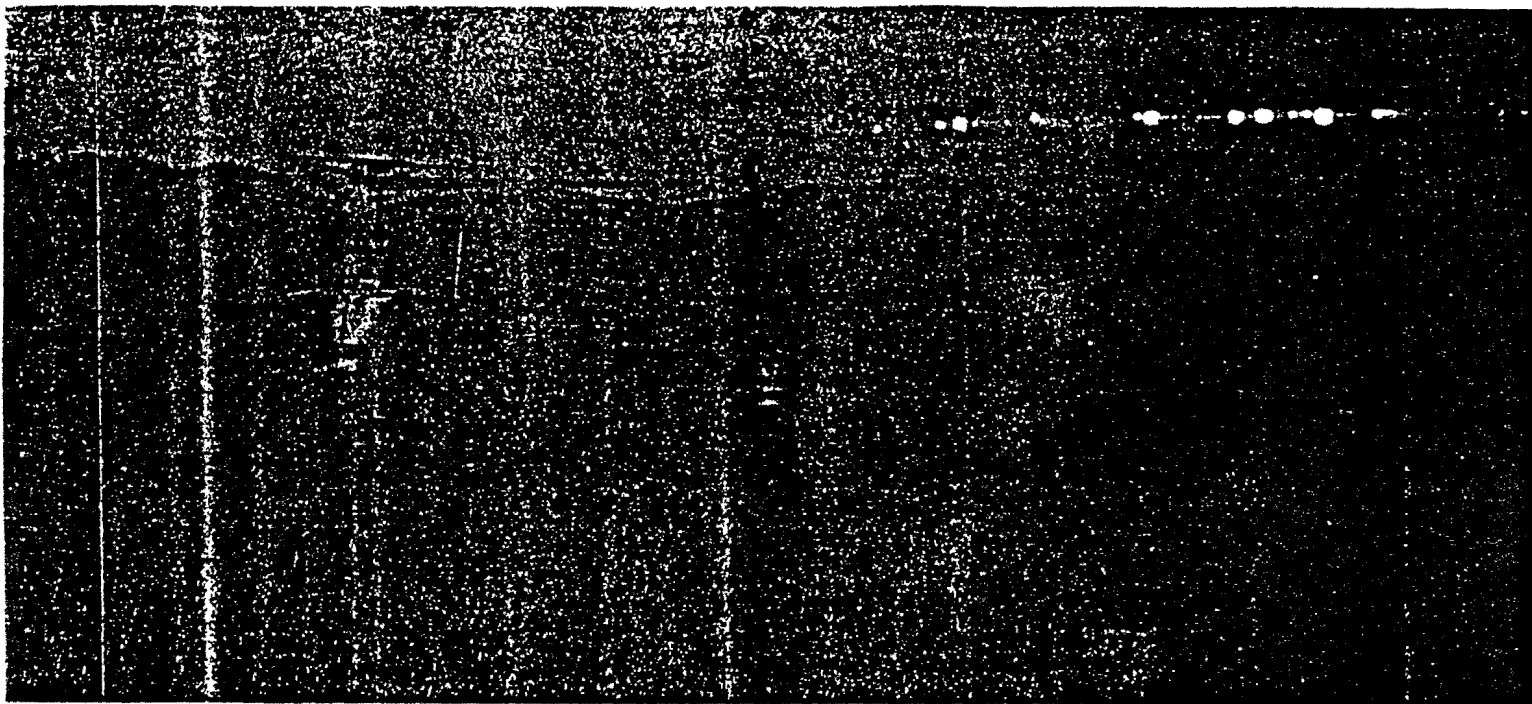
was the steady, silent streams of villagers leaving his new turf. Sensing a fight, many of the people hastily migrated to the homes of friends and relatives farther south.

Then began some of the most bitter and bloody fighting of the Vietnam Conflict as the "First Strike" Battalion mounted a war of attrition against the wily and well-dug-in NVA and VC. Every village and hamlet meant another prolonged battle; every hedgerow meant another fight. A single error or misjudgment could have cost an entire company of paratroopers.

With the Airborne providing the



Quang Dien District north of Hue.



2nd Brigade paratroopers invade rich rice basin of Quang Dien district in search of harassing NVA soldiers.

Hisp

muscle and mobility, and the PF's furnishing the intelligence reports, detainee interrogation, and scouting knowhow, the allies hounded the NVA in every known sanctuary in the district.

"Col. Bishop used the PF's just as they should be used," Capt. Selzer said, "and he treated them with the same consideration and respect as his men."

It was the PF intelligence officer, the young and talented Nguyen Van Hue, whose accurate and timely information led to the two landmark battles of the Quang Dien campaign.

The first was Ap Dong Lam, where the "First Strike" battalion, plus D Co., 2nd Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf., and the PF's hemmed in an estimated reinforced battalion of the 803rd NVA Regiment. The four-day struggle cost 222 dead enemy soldiers and put the NVA on the run throughout the district.

It also helped accomplish something totally unexpected by the Americans. One afternoon in late March, some 2,000 district citizens gathered in the Sia market place to pay tribute to the Airborne combat successes, and to condemn the terrorist tactics of the local Viet Cong. Vowing to fight the VC to the death, the people themselves recorded a stirring moment in their country's history with shouts of "Vietnamese Government Number One! Down with

the VC!"

Such bravado in a secure marketplace would be meaningless unless reflected in the countryside where people were still dying. But it was in the countryside—in the paddies and along the distant canal banks—that a subtle evolution was beginning.

As word of each fresh enemy defeat flashed through the district, the iron grip of fear which had held the people for so long loosened a little more. It became apparent that the enemy's days were numbered, as were those of anyone who voluntarily aided their cause.

Even small children and old women would point out enemy weapons caches and booby-traps. The once-familiar blank stare and shrug of helpless ignorance was gradually replaced by the Vietnamese equivalent of "He went that-a-way."

In late March, April and early May, the 1st and 2nd Airborne Battalions of the 501st Infantry each took a crack at the reeling NVA. In the first week of May, the grim process of extermination culminated in the now-famous cordon of Phuoc Yen.

For four days, companies from all three battalions, plus PF's and the "Black Panther" Co. of the 1st ARVN Division lay siege to the stocking-shaped village complex that intelligence sources

said was harboring an NVA battalion.

The paratroopers were joined by the batteries of the 321st Artillery, helicopter gunships and Air Force fighter-bombers. By morning of the fifth day, the NVA body count reached 419, and another 104 became the largest NVA force to surrender en masse to an American unit thus far in the history of the war.

Except for a few scattered pockets of die-hards, Phuoc Yen marked the end of the NVA in Quang Dien District. Of approximately 1,500 that Lt. Hue estimated to be occupying the district before Tet, more than 800 were killed and the rest fled west to the mountains to lick their wounds and contemplate the "mean little bird" worn on the left shoulders of the Airborne enemy.

Phuoc Yen was also a beginning. "Our PF's had neither the numbers nor the weapons to fight the NVA," said Capt. Selzer. "But now the enemy are Viet Cong, and no one can fight the VC better than the PF's can."

In the last week of May, the Quang Dien PF's pulled a coup that shocked the local Viet Cong. Just before dawn, with the night mist still hanging over a VC stronghold, a small PF band burst through the hedgerows, yelling and shooting. Twenty of the Viet Cong who tried to fight or run were killed.

Six other VC, plus a small arsenal of weapons were easily captured.

To avoid further bloodshed on both sides, a co-ordinated psychological operations (Psy-ops) program was initiated by the 2nd Brigade psy-ops officer, Lt. David Hendry, East Hartford, Conn. The team dropped leaflets and broadcast appeals from former VC, imploring the hardcore Communists to give up a hopeless cause.

"This district is now ripe for psy-ops," said Capt. Donald E. Smalley, Peebles, Ohio, a MACV co-worker of Capt. Selzer. "The Airborne and the PF's have made the remaining VC want to give up safely."

During the first five days in June, 15 former VC decided there was no future for their line of work in Quang Dien District. Marching timidly forward with Chieu Hoi safe-conduct leaflets held protectively aloft, the VC surrendered in two's and three's to the paratroopers of the 1st Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf. and the government troops.

With most of the enemy dead or on the run, the allies turned their attention to the endless fields of rice, ripe and ready for the spring harvest. Before the Airborne came to Quang Dien, everybody knew that the great bulk of the harvest would be confiscated by the NVA and VC to feed their troops stationed in the villages and mountain base camps.

But now there were no more NVA, and the remaining VC were in no mood to challenge the Airborne companies who threw protective perimeters around the areas being harvested. At the end of May, Capt. Selzer estimated that 90 per cent of the crop was safe in the hands of its rightful owners. By direction of the fiery district chief, Capt. Tran Hhu Hung, the rice was shifted to three secure collection points where each farmer was given a receipt for his crop. Throughout the coming year, the farmers will come to the collection points and receive enough of their rice for their families but not enough to tempt the remaining Viet Cong.

Though he is first a soldier, Capt. Hung is a man of his people. Whenever an important decision loomed, he hop-

ped in his unpredictable jeep with balding tires and drove over miles of unsecured roads to consult with citizens whose lives depended upon his judgment.

Lt. Col. Leslie D. Carter, new battalion commander, gave his medical officer, Capt. David H. Leeper, Padukah, Ky., a free rein in giving the district the best medical service available. The young "Bacsi" discarded the usual one-shot MEDCAP approach and set up a regular schedule for himself and his staff at the district's three hospitals.

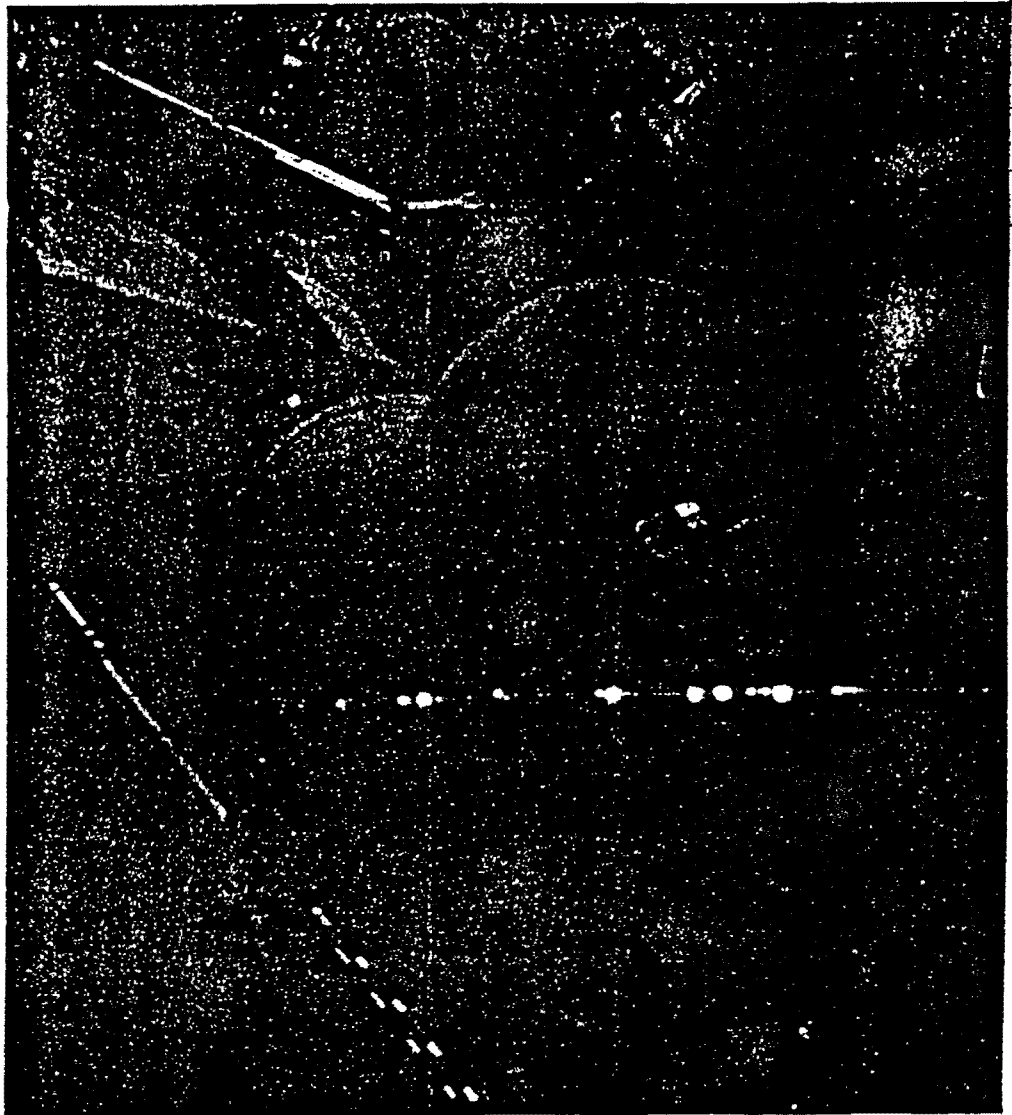
Now Quang Dien District bears no resemblance to the field of terror it became under the heel of the NVA.

The people's smiles, the masks of fear and distrust, became the expressions of good feeling and good times. The "big-footed" Screaming Eagles and the wiry native country folk came face to face, and found not monsters and minatures, but merely international variation of themselves.

Today when the people of Quang Dien District speak of the American soldiers who helped transform their homeland from a hell to a haven, they do not say, "the Americans," "the U.S. Army, or "the GI's." They say, "the Airborne," and they say it with a mixture of gratitude and respect.



Morrow



2nd Brigade paratroopers seek protection of a concrete wall near Quang Dien during heavy firefight with NVA regulars.

The area of the 2/501 had become fairly quiet as well. From a record of the daily actions of D/2/501...⁷

June 2, 1968

Co. D moved to FB Pinky and assumed security for the firebase. At 0810H 1/D moved by CH-47 to OP T-Bone and assumed security mission, and 1 platoon with 1 PF PLT provided security for MEDCAP at YD724264.

June 3, 1968

1 platoon from Co. D provided security for MEDCAP at YD693243.

June 4, 1968

Co. D(- 1/D) provided security for FB Pinky and secured minesweep from FB Pinky South to Hue, and 1/D provided security for OP T-Bone.

0306H (FB Pinky): Co. D reported a trip flare went off around bunker #19, but nothing was sighted. 1/D near FB T-Bone found and destroyed 2 Chicom grenades, 1 NVA canteen, 3 carbine magazines, and 1 charge of C-4 wrapped in bamboo.

June 5, 1968

Co. D(-1/D) continued security mission for FB Pinky and 1/D continued security mission for OP T-Bone, with both elements conducting RIFs in the adjacent area.

June 6, 1968

1032H (YD637191): 1/D found 6 bunkers with concrete sides (2 large enough to hold 6-8 personnel), 3 well camouflaged huts (2 of which were partially built), 1 rucksack, and 1 pair of PJs. Results: 1 rucksack and 1 pair of PJs captured and evacuated, bunkers and huts destroyed

1850H (YD681711): 1/D at OP T-Bone observed 3 mortar flashes outside their AO. This information was passed on to the 1st BDE.

June 10, 1968

1040H (YD646216): A Co. D patrol found a 250 lb bomb.

June 11, 1968

1145H (YD693275): The Pathfinders with Co. D received small arms fire from the East as they swept down from the Northwest. Small arms fire was returned silencing the enemy fire. A sweep of the area met with negative results.

1330H (YD678288): The Pathfinders engaged an estimated VC squad with small arms and automatic weapons fire. The enemy force returned 1 M-79 round and automatic weapons fire before fleeing West.

⁷Ron Soubers, a member of D/2/501 in 1969 and now Senior Archivist at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, has compiled a daily record of the Delta Raiders from their arrival in Vietnam in 1967 to their departure in 1972. These extracts are copied from that record.

1408H (YD680282): Co. D while sweeping the area of the 1330H Pathfinder engagement received 8-10 rounds of M-79 fire. The company returned small arms and automatic weapons fire silencing the enemy fire. Results: negative US casualties, enemy casualties unknown

2125H (YD653203): 1/D received 2 unknown type mortar rounds (both duds) impacting 200m outside their NDP. Fire was not returned since the source could not be determined.

June 12, 1968

0001H The battalion reports they are unable to contact Co. D by radio, finally establishing contact at 0030H through artillery channels. They were informed that the Co. D RTO had fallen asleep.

1130H (YD682282): Co. D found 2400 lbs of rice.

1320 1/D moved by air from OP T-Bone to Co. D CP location, YD646247.

1700H Co. D returned to FB Pinky.

June 13, 1968

0200H Acting on a tip from an NVA informer and under orders from LTC Heiter. Co. D, along with an ARVN PLT (Pathfinders), followed an NVA informer into the hills where he said 5 other NVA were located. At 0712H (YD628196), the Pathfinders with Co. D engaged and killed 2 VC running from a bunker while sweeping Southwest from their NDP. 1 AK-47 and 1 SKS were also captured. At 0945H at the same location Co. D received small arms and automatic weapons fire from an estimated enemy squad to the Southwest (vic. YD625191). Organic weapons fire was returned silencing the enemy fire at 1015H. A sweep of the area was conducted with negative results. Results: 1 Pathfinder WIA, 2 VC KIA, 1 AK-47 and 1 SKS captured

From the 101st Division summary of 8 June...

"In the late afternoon information from a Hoi Chanh (returnee to GVN) indicated the presence of a substantial VC force base camp and tunnel complex 12 km west of Hue. Reacting to this information... paratroopers of C/2/501 Abn Inf⁸ augmented with 50 RF from Huong Tra district, air assaulted into the area. Upon insertion of the first lift, 20 VC were engaged with organic weapons..."

The brigade journal reported 4 VC KIA in this action, which continued through the night. A journal entry for the next day read..

"0838 2-501: Co C at YD623199 found what they believe to be a base camp, with many weapons and 1000 lb of rice (polished). NV/VCA had been drinking

⁸In its reporting, division called its troops "paratroopers." The truth was that we had many a non-jumper imbued with the airborne spirit wearing the Screaming Eagle patch.

San Miquel beer." (The journal reported that "RFs working with Co C found an additional 24 individual weapons and (number obscured) crew-served weapons.)

Cleo Hogan's diary sheds light on the tempo in the 2/501 AO in June...

4 June

Providing security for FSB Pinkie with 1st Platoon on T-bone¹¹...

7 June

Still at Pinkie. Nothing happening. None of the companies are having any contact. In fact no contact in the Brigade AO...

14 June

Still looking for the NVA that are supposed to be in this area. Nothing here. Today we got cold cokes. It's amazing how the simple things mean so much.

17 June

Last night the Raiders conducted another succesful ambush. We killed 6 VC and captured rifles and hand grenades. Back at LZ Sally. Bn Hq wanted us to go back into the mountains and they brought us in for showers, clean clothes. Let the men go to the PX and rest a day. Had an awards ceremony today.

18 June

We're back in the mountains again...

19 June

Well we found out why we are back in the mountains. We are strung out across the mountain tops providing security for the visit of the South Vietnamese President to the city of Hue. The 2d Brigade is to receive an award...

The Second Brigade was indeed to receive an award. Here is how it came about.

Since March our brigade task force had been working closely with the 1st ARVN Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Ngo Quang Truong (who also commanded the 11th Division Tactical Area, which included the provinces of Thua Thien and Quang Tri). We worked closely also with the Thua Thien province chief, who was responsible to General Truong for military operations, and with the district chiefs of Thua Thien province. I visited General Truong regularly, our staffs cooperated, and our battalion commanders worked well with his regimental commanders and with the RF and PF units in the districts.

One morning in mid-June I was with General Truong in his Hue headquarters. As I began to leave, he invited me to the ceremonies that would take place in Hue in a few days, on

¹¹T-bone, west of LZ Sally and with a spectacular view, was the mountain top for the possession of which Cleo Hogan and his company had fought so hard in March (page 73, Chapter 5).

June 19th, which was the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Day. When I accepted, he added, "Bring your brigade colors."

Puzzled, I stopped by to see General Truong's deputy division commander to learn more about this request to bring my brigade colors. He told me that General Truong had recommended to the President of the Republic of Vietnam that the 2d Brigade Task Force be awarded his country's Cross of Gallantry with Palm, which was the Republic of Vietnam's equivalent of the U.S. Presidential Unit Citation, and that President Nguyen Van Thieu had approved General Truong's recommendation.¹²

Extraordinarily pleased and proud as I was at this news, I realized that I must inform General Barsanti, division commander; I did so by telephone immediately. His reaction was understandable; he asked me why the award was not to be presented to the entire division. I could not answer that question.

On June 19th in Hue, in the presence of General Abrams, Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, and a host of other dignitaries, President Thieu placed the streamer of the Cross of Gallantry with Palm on my brigade colors and presented me personally with the same award.

On the next page, from the files of the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), is what I take to be both the recommendation that General Truong submitted through channels to the President of the Republic of Vietnam and that was approved by President Thieu, and the citation that was read in Vietnamese and English at the ceremony.

In the subsequent processing of General Truong's recommendation through channels to the Department of the Army, the period for which the award was to be made was extended to August 15th. This might have been because Operation Nevada Eagle, cited by General Truong, went to that date.¹³

Dates matter. A member of a unit that is given an award like this, who served in the unit during the period covered in the award, is entitled to wear the decoration over his uniform's right breast pocket for the rest of his military service, and on civilian clothes for the rest of his life. I would have preferred that the period covered by the award include all our time in General Truong's division tactical area, from Tet onward. But I was gratified that the 2d Brigaders of my time had contributed to the right of those who came into the brigade for some time after that to wear the decoration indefinitely.

¹²This was not surprising. Although only a division commander, General Truong was -- by virtue of his leadership, example, tactical skill, dedication to duty, and absolute incorruptibility -- extraordinarily well regarded by Americans and Vietnamese alike.

¹³When Colonel John A. Hoefling took command of the 2d Brigade he retained its characteristic operational style and led it to further victories around Hue, including a brilliantly successful US/ARVN/province forces surprise assault on and elimination of a long held enemy base area at Vinh Loc on the South China Sea.

TRANSLATION OF VIETNAMESE CITATION FOR 2D BDE, 101ST AIRBORNE

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N

Republic of Vietnam
RVN Armed Forces
1st Inf Division
Staff - AG

Citation Armed Forces Level
For The Unit Flag And The
Commandant Of The 2nd Brigade, Task Force
101st US Airborne Division
- COL John H. Cushman

The Second Brigade Task Force, 101st Airborne Division, is an allied well-fighting unit led by Colonel John H. Cushman, an outstanding field officer who is highly experienced in Viet Cong tactics and has gained many successful victories in the Eleventh Division Tactical Area.

During Operation Lam Son 216 (CARENTAN II), organized and conducted from 19 April 1968 to 17 May 1968 in the Delta of the Quang Dien District, the Second Brigade Task Force, 101st US Airborne Division, bravely attacked and destroyed the enemy command post and interdicted the hostile attempt against the ancient imperial city of Hue.

During Operation Lam Son 224 (NEVADA EAGLE), organized and conducted from 16 May 1968 to present, this unit was successful in defending the people's crop, causing many casualties to hostile units of the fifth Viet Cong work site, and destroying the 803rd Regiment of the 324B North Vietnamese Army Division.

As a result of these operations:

- 2382 Viet Cong were Killed in Action
- 257 Viet Cong were Captured, and
- 724 Weapons of which 119 were crew-served weapons were captured.

In these glorious victories, the Second Brigade Task Force, 101st US Airborne Division, Colonel John H. Cushman are deserving of the citation at Armed Forces level, on the occasion of the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces Day, on 19 June 1968 at Hue.

APO 48.96 Dated 10 June 1968
Major General Ngo Quang Truong
Commander First Infantry Division
Eleventh Division Tactical Area

228-08,7

What follows is an extract from General Orders No. 21, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., 8 April 1969...

II. 5. The Cross of Gallantry with Palm has been awarded by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam for outstanding service during the period 19 April 1968 to 15 August 1968 to:

THE 2D BRIGADE, 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION (AIRMOBILE) and its assigned and attached units:

- 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile),
- Headquarters and Headquarters Company
- 1st Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry
- 2d Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry
- 1st Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry
- 1st Battalion (Airborne), 321st Artillery
- 2d Squadron, 17th Cavalry
- Company C, 326th Engineer Battalion
- Company B, 326th Medical Battalion
- Company B, 501st Signal Battalion
- 2d Platoon, Company A, 801st Maintenance Battalion
- Forward Support Element, 501st Supply Company
- 265th Radio Research Company
- 34th Public Information Detachment

The 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), United States Army, under the command of Colonel John H. Cushman, is an excellent, veteran unit which always displays an enthusiastic spirit of dedication to destroying the Communists. While participating in battles in the 11th Division Tactical Area, the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), along with various organic and attached units, fought courageously and achieved splendid victories through two outstanding operations. The first operation, Lam Son 216-Carentan II, was conducted from 19 April 1968 to 17 May 1968... Operation Lam Son 224-Nevada Eagle was conducted from 16 May 1968 to 15 August 1968... Through these splendid achievements, the soldiers of the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), contributed significantly to the fight against Communism to preserve freedom in Vietnam and, at the same time, displayed the indomitable will and the heroic tradition of the United States Armed Forces.

The ceremony done, we went ahead with our work. From the operations summaries of the 2d Brigade for the next several days..

"19 June: Contact was light with a total of 4 contacts...¹⁴

¹⁴The division summary however read: "...in the early morning hours of 19 June 68, ambush patrols from D/2/501 and D/1/502 Abn Inf, located in the coastal plains northwest and north of Hue respectively, observed enemy movement and violently executed their ambushes, killing 5 enemy."

"20 June Contact was light with a total of 4 contacts...

"21 June Contact was light with a total of 3 contacts...

On June 21st, the 2d Brigade issued a new operation order. It included these instructions:

"2/17 Cav: Close out FSB Forward and occupy FSB Pinky NLT 221800 June 1968."

The 2/17th was no longer needed south of Hue. The enemy had gone away.¹⁵

One evening during this period, General Barsanti invited me and my senior commanders to his mess at Camp Eagle for my farewell dinner. In my remarks I responded to a mention of the 2d Brigade's record of cordon operations by reminding the commanding general that our success really began with Cordon Nr. 2 (see footnote, page 107), which would not have taken place had he not ordered us to stay in contact and asked us what we needed -- whereupon I had said "helicopters" so that we could make an encirclement. I then presented General Barsanti, who would soon be departing himself, a gift from the 2d Brigade; it was an AK-47 rifle inscribed "Captured by the 2d Brigade in a night ambush."¹⁶

Continuing with the brigade summaries...

"22 June Contact was light with a total of 4 contacts...

"23 June Contact was light with a total of 7 contacts...

"24 June Contact was light with a total of 10 contacts...

"25 June Contact was light with a total of 4 contacts...

"26 June Contact was light with a total of 6 contacts..."

¹⁵In 1971, General Truong, by then a lieutenant general, took command of the ARVN IV Corps and Military Region 4, responsible for the territory south of Saigon; I was his senior advisor. In April 1975, when the Republic of Vietnam fell, General Truong and his family came to live with my family at Fort Leavenworth, KS, where I was Commandant of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. During these periods, General Truong reminded me of how the 2d Brigade Task Force had by its operations in May and June 1968 forestalled an enemy attack from the south on the city of Hue.

¹⁶Although General Barsanti's leadership style left a great deal to be desired, I had a high regard for him as a soldier and commander -- as did many of the subordinates who suffered under his frequent chastisements. A fighter to the end, he died of cancer in 1971. When I commanded the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell in 1972-73, I memorialized General Barsanti by naming as "Barsanti House" the quarters that we maintained for senior official guests. At the dedication ceremony, at which his wife and daughter and some of his former subordinates were present, I noted his demanding standards, his integrity, and the magnificent record of the division that he took to war (at that time he was only the second of its commanders to take the 101st Airborne Division to war).

And on June 27th, my last full day in command...

"Contact was light with a total of 2 contacts..."

As General Barsanti and our visitors assembled the next morning for the brigade change of command ceremony, Major General John J. Tolson III, commanding the 1st Air Cavalry Division, landed in his helicopter at the LZ Sally pad. When I greeted him, he told me that, while he was not able to stay for the ceremony, he wanted to thank me for all that the 2d Brigade had done for his division. I told him that we had liked working with him.

On June 28th, the 2d Brigade journal contained this entry, Nr. 56, verbatim...

"1046 Col Hoefling assumed Command of 2d Bde from Col Cushman at 0947 hrs. Col Cushman departed Bde AO at 1050 hrs."