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301 INFANTRY IN VIETNAM (PART I)

"THE AMERICAN DIVISION" • 29 minutes, color (1969)
Beginning with a brief history of the Division's activities in World War II under General Douglas MacArthur, this section focuses on the reactivation of the proud Americal Division in the early days of Vietnam. Based at Chu Lai, the Army's only named division on active service, fought beside the U. S. Marines in the rugged terrain of I Corps Tactical Zone.

"FIRST INFANTRY DIVISION IN VIETNAM" • 28 minutes, color (1971)

The "First" is more than just a numerical designation as the proud, bloody pages of the First Division's history testify. The First's 2nd Brigade, for example, was the first element of an Army infantry division to arrive in Vietnam. Headquartered at Bien Hoa, Di An and Lai Khe, the First participated in Operations Attleboro and Junction City. Combat action is the main focus of this gripping segment, but it also covers "The Big Red One" as it trained and coordinated with ARVN troops.

302 INFANTRY IN VIETNAM (PART II)

"THE FOURTH INFANTRY DIVISION IN VIETNAM" • 29 minutes, color (1969)

This is the story of the "Ivymen" from their arrival in South Vietnam in 1966 through the brutal battle for Dak To in the winter of 1968. Elements of the division went into combat in Operation Attleboro almost immediately upon arrival in "Nam". They saw plenty of action along the Cambodian border, participated in Operation Junction City and conducted sweeps through the Western Highlands.

"READY TO STRIKE" • 29 minutes, color (1968)

Although few knew it at the time, this was going to be a different kind of war. And the men of the 25th Infantry Division, dubbed "Tropic Lightning", learned their lessons early in 1963. Headquartered in Cu Chi, the 25th fought courageously in the "Iron Triangle" and Operation Junction City and in the sweep of enemy forces from the Hau Nghia province.

304 VIETNAM AIRBORNE

"THE SKY SOLDIERS—173RD AIRBORNE BRIGADE" • 29 minutes, color (1968)

A group of elite soldiers who earned a Presidential Unit Citation for their valor at Dak To, the 173rd experienced a long string of fire fights and major battles in Vietnam. And that includes Operation New Life, a bold action to save the rice harvest from destruction by the VC. This color footage shows the Sky Soldiers in combat action at Vung Tau and Bien Hoa as well.

"SCREAMING EAGLES IN VIETNAM" • 29 minutes, color (1967)

This is the dramatic story of the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne as they fought a skilled and tenacious enemy from Spring, 1965, through January, 1967. Covering most of the Screaming Eagles fourteen combat operations in "Nam," it includes Operations Harrison, Van Buren, Hawthorne, Pickett and John Paul Jones. A concise and inspiring history of Americans in combat.

305 RIVERINE WARFARE

"THE SMALL BOAT NAVY" • 28 minutes, color (1968)

An unusual film that captures the excitement of an unusual aspect of an unusual war. "The Small Boat Navy" follows an extraordinary armada of swiftboats, PBRS, MSBs and LCPLs and armored troop carriers as they bring the action to the Viet Cong in a savage series of amphibious fire fights and invasions. Including some terrific footage of Seawolf Helicopters under fierce enemy fire.

"RIVER PATROL" • 28 minutes, color (1967)

Operations against the VC in the sprawling waterways of the Mekong Delta demanded a brand new chapter in U.S. Naval Strategy. Only the men who fought and met this unique challenge understand this fascinating blend of 19th Century river combat and 20th Century firepower. But this fine footage makes its incisive point.

306 NAVAL AND COAST GUARD OPERATIONS

"THE AMERICAN NAVY IN VIETNAM" • 28 minutes, color (1967)

Excellent, exciting combat film of the U.S. Navy conducting river assault landings and bombing/missile strikes in Vietnam. Plus many scenes of civil action in South Vietnam.

"NGUNG LAI" • 26 minutes, color

Operation Market Time was a special assignment handed to the U.S. Coast Guard. Its objective: to cut the Viet Cong off from their suppliers in North Vietnam. This interesting segment describes the special training for the USCG crews, vessel preparation and then takes you along on patrol operations on the swift 26-foot cutters.

307 MARINES IN ACTION

"A DAY IN VIETNAM" • 28 minutes, color (1967)

No rumors, no cover up. This forthright film has one objective: to describe what life was like for the brave, resolute men of the United States Navy and Marine Corps during combat action in the height of the Vietnam conflict. Tough, uncompromising action.

"THE BATTLE OF KHE SANH" • 28 minutes, color (1969)

An exciting account of one of the most ferocious battles in the long, difficult Vietnam struggle. VC forces mounted a major attack to re-take the strategic Khe Sanh sector and this visual chapter vividly captures the cooperative efforts of the U.S. Marines and ARVN forces, supported by Air Force and Army elements, to fight them off. It depicts taut scenes of aerial resupply under fire and the raw courage required to call in artillery fire virtually on top of your own position.

308 THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

"THE USAF IN VIETNAM" • 27 minutes, color (1967)

This is an authoritative outline of Air Force activities and operations during the early stages of the U.S. buildup in Vietnam, 1964 to 1967. Its dominant focus: the tactical and psychological aspects of the air war over this troubled land.

"AIR RESCUE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA" • 16 minutes, color (1973)

Vietnam's scattered and sporadic action—and the versatility of modern helicopters—permitted U.S. Forces to rescue many downed pilots and isolated platoons. This exciting, dramatic segment shows the rescue of Captain Gerald Lawrence by one of the components of the Combat Rescue Force, a bold tactical group that saved many American lives in Vietnam.

"ANOTHER DAY OF WAR" • 14 minutes, color (1967)

From bitter combat to the ho-hum of daily routine, this unusual segment takes apart a day in the life of American Air Force personnel in Vietnam operations. "Another Day" depicts air and ground warfare, air rescue, flight line maintenance, food service and the U.S. forces' unique civic action programs.

309 ENGINEER/LOGISTICAL OPERATIONS IN VIETNAM

"THEY CLEAR THE WAY" • 28 minutes, color (1968)

Here's a detailed visual overview of the Army Engineers at work. Vietnam style, building roads and airfields, clearing mines and providing general support for combat activities. An uncommon look at some uncommonly brave men in action.

"LOGISTICS IN VIETNAM—PIPELINE TO VICTORY" • 28 minutes, color (1968)

For a country used to quick, decisive action, the decade-long Vietnam conflict posed serious problems. Not the least of these was supplying weapons and materials to troops scattered all over the Vietnamese battlescape. This tells the unique logistics story of Vietnam—from driving through the densely packed streets of Saigon to protecting convoys headed for the shifting fronts of the "Nam" operations.

310 DAVID AND GOLIATH

"MEN WITH GREEN FACES" • 29 minutes, color (1969)

Training and commando action as the USN elite frogmen, the Seals, prepare to do their stuff—to the enemy!

"THE AMERICAN DREADNOUGHT" • 29 minutes, color (1969)

Details how the famous battleship USS New Jersey was demothballed and recommissioned for combat action off the coast of South Vietnam. Terrific footage, especially for those who served aboard this great lady!

311 MARINES IN ACTION (PART II)

"THE BATTLE" • 14 minutes, color (1965)

One of the earliest and still one of the best records of Leatherneck war in Vietnam. Centered primarily around Operation Pranhia, this is filled with exciting footage of across-the-beach landings, close air and naval gunfire support—plus artillery, treatment of wounded marines and capture of VC prisoners.

"CONTACT—AMBUSH" • 13 minutes, color (1966)

The definitive film on Marine Corps land and river patrols in Vietnam: the importance of patrol action is emphasized. Features actual combat footage of the capture of an entire VC village.

"FULL BLADE" • 14 minutes, color (1965)

Often unknown and frequently neglected by protesting statesiders during the war were the successful civic action programs conducted by the Corps in Vietnam. Illustrates food distribution and medical assistance as well as the harvesting of rice under Leatherneck protection in I Corps.

"OPERATION DEWEY CANYON" • 26 minutes, color (1969)

An epic battle of the 9th Marine Regiment! Isolated in VC country, the Marines scored one of the most impressive victories of the Vietnam War. Highly recommended.

312 NEW MISSIONS/NEW TECHNOLOGY

"THE ELEVENTH ARMORED CALVRY REGIMENT" • 28 minutes, color (1969)

Conventional wisdom held that "tracks" could not operate in the jungle and marsh of southeast Asia; this is the exciting story of how the "Black Horse" regiment prove that armored vehicles could succeed in Vietnam.

"THE ARMY AIRMOBILITY TEAM" • 28 minutes, color (1969)

Combat operations in the difficult terrain of Vietnam demanded new solutions to old problems. The answer came in the form of the airmobility concept, illustrated here with exciting footage of men and supplies responding instantly to battlefield conditions.

313 NAVAL ADVISORS/SEABEES IN VIETNAM

"EYE OF THE DRAGON" • 29 minutes, color (1967)

A dramatic and early account of the dangerous lives led by our USN advisors serving with the South Vietnamese jung forces. Eye focuses on its subject thru the use of rare footage not found in other wartime films.

"WE BUILD, WE FIGHT" • 22 minutes, color (1969)

Admiral Ben Morrell, founder of the Fighting Seabees in WW II, narrates this story of the role played by the naval construction battalions in SE Asia and the Pacific from WW II to the Vietnam counterinsurgency days of the 1960's. Exceptional camera work draws attention to the often unpublicized (but never easy) work performed by these men in Vietnam.

314 THE FIRST TEAM IN VIETNAM

Airmobility was just a dream until the men of the First Air Calvary proved that they could get to the enemy and defeat him. This is the exciting story of the "Cav" from the initial tests at Fort Benning to deployment overseas to the first two years of combat in Vietnam. It has some of the best shots of heliborne operations we have seen. Also includes a discussion of tactics by General Kinnard. 62 minutes, color (1968)

315 ARMY HELICOPTER OPERATIONS

"HELICOPTER OPERATIONS" • 24 minutes, color (1967)

The techniques and tactics of helicopters in search and destroy missions. Centers on operations conducted by the First Air Calvary. Excellent combat material.

"HELICOPTER DOOR GUNNERS" • 25 minutes, color (1967)

Door gunners are the forgotten men of Army Aviation. This is their story from initial training at the famed school run by the 25th Division in Hawaii to typical combat missions in Vietnam. Shows how they protected both helicopters and their loads from enemy action.

"DIRECT AERIAL FIRE SUPPORT BY ATTACK HELICOPTERS" • 22 minutes, color (1969)

The attack helicopter, both Huey and Cobra, at its very best. Shows how our aircraft joined search and destroy missions as well as direct fire support to units locked in combat.

316 MARINES IN ACTION (Part III)

"ON TARGET" • 15 minutes, color

Aerial recon is a little understood mission but a vital part of modern warfare. In Vietnam it provided the intelligence so necessary to find and defeat the enemy. This is the story of one USMC squadron.

"UMCJ" • 14 minutes, color

Aerial recon is a little understood mission but a vital part of modern warfare. In Vietnam it provided the intelligence so necessary to find and defeat the enemy. This is the story of one USMC squadron.

"THE UGLY ANGELS" • 15 minutes, color

Marine helicopter pilots performed a variety of combat missions in support of troops in the I Corps Area. This is their story.

"ENGINEERS UP" • 10 minutes, color

We often forget the many combat roles of engineer troops. Here we see road clearance missions, mine removal as well as construction activities of USMC engineers.

318 ARTILLERY IN ACTION

"FIRE SUPPORT" • 22 minutes, color (1966)

Few combat infantrymen will forget the welcome support of artillery in a fierce fire fight. This film portrays various artillery units in Vietnam and the types of missions they handled in combat.

"FIRE SUPPORT COORDINATION" • 25 minutes, color (1969)

In an unconventional war, it is important to avoid civilian losses while still defeating the enemy. The fire support coordination center was responsible for controlling the firepower available to our troops. This film is somewhat technical but is clearly shows the system of artillery used in Vietnam to support our combat forces.

CHARLIE COMPANY TO THE RESCUE

The Embassy was under siege, the only way in was by air, and the airborne troopers of Strike Charlie Six were on the way.

By Colonel Jack Speedy

It started off as a boondoggle. In country just over a month, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry, got orders to stay put in the Bien Hoa area just north of Saigon and provide security for the headquarter's complexes there, while the rest of the battalion went north to conduct operations between Hue and Quang Tri City with members of the 101st Airborne Division.

But this cushy assignment was interrupted by rumors of a big enemy attack on the way. An increasingly heavy stream of intelligence reports began to paint a picture of impending VC/NVA action in the Bien Hoa area. But all of this was hard for the infantrymen to accept.

Surely these were exaggerated reports given greater significance by the REMFs (Rear-Echelon personnel) seeking to justify in their own minds the "combat pay" they received. Besides, the mounting tensions created a sense of drama and provided the grist for adventure stories in the letters of the clerks and other staff puking groveling in the base camps. The paratroopers expected enemy offensive activity, but the scope, duration and intensity of the action appeared to be manageable.

These skeptical infantrymen entered the night of January 30-31, 1968, in a high state of alert. They grumbled about the hassle. At about 0300 hours, all personnel complied with a warning to get under overhead cover. The fantasy war of the REMFs was becoming annoying.

There was no active railroad near the company, so the troops knew the freight train-like sounds they heard were from Communist incoming. The angled exhaust nozzles

on the 122mm rockets sent their deadly ordnance spinning on trajectories into American facilities. Small-arms fire erupted and flares began to burst. Early hits on the Air Force fuel stocks sent flames far into the air and illuminated a large part of the adjacent air base. Throughout Vietnam this sequence repeated itself as events unfolded to fill in the gaps in the Allied intelligence. What was surprising was the size, coordination and intensity of the VC/NVA effort in an operation so clearly leading to their tactical slaughter. More was expected from Communist generalship.

Attacking Communist infantry promptly exploited their preparatory fires against Bien Hoa Air Base. The purpose of their main attack was to breach the Air Force perimeter about 600 meters away from the prepared positions of C Company. Momentum of the attack quickly carried the VC/NVA into the wire. Some of the men met death on the wire while others fell short of the defenses. Determined attackers blew paths through the wire and some of them got into the defenses.

Army Cobra gunships responded to the onslaught with accurate fire, which stabilized the situation for the Americans. The stalled attack was a disaster for the bold attacking Communist commander, as his regiment relied heavily on quick penetration of the American defenses so he could get in as close as possible. He could then inflict maximum destruction while limiting the ability of the Americans to use their firepower to optimum effect. Neutralizing the Cobras was crucial for the VC/NVA, and they concentrated their fire on the aircraft.

The door gunner of a UH-1 "Huey" helicopter keeps his eyes peeled for trouble during a typical airmobile mission in Vietnam. On January 31, 1968, C Company, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry of the 101st Airborne Division rode their Hueys into a most unusual combat zone—the U.S. Embassy in Saigon.





TOP: ARVN soldiers display a captured 122mm rocket launcher at Long Binh, one of the rockets' main targets during the Tet Offensive. ABOVE: Charlie Company's ride to Saigon was a pleasant one, with lush green scenery and a cool breeze blowing through the open doors. When they reached the South Vietnamese capital, things turned much hotter.

Charlie Company had been following the battle through the base defense net but had not engaged the attack because of difficulties in determining the positions of friendly forces in the rapidly developing battle. Now the situation was clarified. Streams of green tracers aimed at the Cobras gave the infantrymen targets. The company commander requested and received permission to enter the battle.

Terrain from C Company to the enemy penetration fell away slowly in an open area—perfect for the company's machine guns. The guns went to work on the enemy air-defense effort and ground troops from an enfilading position on the VC/NVA right flank. Now the attackers faced direct frontal fire from the Air Force security force, plunging fire from the Cobras, and flanking fire from a previously unknown company-sized unit. Effects of the friendly fire rapidly became evident as Communist fire slackened. A night of glorious dreams for the foe had degenerated into the horror of his own butchery. Dawn would only bring more severe problems for the shattered Communist units facing re-enforcing American formations.

Paratroopers in C Company looked forward to following up on the defeat of the beaten attackers. Having targets in the open beat chasing the VC/NVA into jungle bunker complexes, and the troopers would enjoy the chance to hunt the enemy without having to move through booby-trapped areas to get to them.

While this fight was going on, the U.S. Embassy in Saigon was also under attack. Charlie Company was ordered to its relief. An airmobile relief force would land on the embassy roof and assist in securing the facility. Complicating the operation was the fact that the fog of war had closed in tight. The objective of the Communist attack, the extent to which it had succeeded, and the situation of local U.S. and Vietnamese forces were all unknown.

But there was some light. American personnel inside the embassy were in contact with external sources; thus, it was known that at least portions of the building remained in friendly hands. With less than two hours to prepare for the mission before the arrival of the helicopters that would carry them into action, Captain Speedy [the author], the Charlie Company commander, selected the third platoon for the mission, and the warning order went out promptly.

Preparation had to be simple if it was to be effective. The 101st Airborne Division G2 came up with maps of Saigon from somewhere, and the company commander elected to follow his SOPs (Standing Operating Procedures) for combat loads and airmobile operations.

Ambiguities in the situation at the embassy precluded development of a detailed plan. Instead, a concept of operations was developed that would facilitate flexible response to the prevailing situation. The command group would lead so that prompt coordination with personnel on the objective could identify specific missions for the incoming paratroopers. Rules of engagement were critical in metropolitan Saigon, especially with the French Embassy nearby, so verbal rules of engagement were to be developed on the spot. Locations of friendly forces and enemy activities needed clarification. Command and control arrangements needed to be verbally agreed upon once the command section made contact with someone in the embassy. Company Headquarters was prepared to take charge if warranted by the situation. Slicks (i.e., troop-carrying helicopters) following the command group had to land one by one to bring in the third platoon. Time, of course, was critical and there would be no forgiving or forgetting of any poor judgments made under pressure.

While C Company scrambled to prepare for the mission, supporting aviation personnel went about their planning tasks with superb professionalism. As dawn broke, the lift ships arrived exactly as planned. Last minute intelligence updates con-



While Charlie Company, 1/502, was assigned to defend Bien Hoa, near Saigon, the rest of the 101st Airborne Division was sent north to the Quang Tri-Hue area to conduct search-and-destroy missions. Charlie felt decidedly shortchanged.

firmed that friendly forces still held at least parts of the embassy building. Actions of other Allied forces in the area remained unknown, but they were in the area.

As soon as the helicopters arrived, the troops were quickly airborne en route to Saigon. This was the dry season in Military Region III, and the morning was spectacularly beautiful as the sun rose higher in the sky. Mist rose from the Saigon River. Smoke from cooking fires was in evidence in many of the dwellings below. Green, shimmering vegetation emerged from the golden reflections of the rising sun that had previously covered the trees and vegetation. Cool, comfortable air swept over the troops riding in the open-doored helicopters. Ears were ringing from the sounds of turbine engines, rotor blades and rushing air. At the end of this natural beauty and exhilaration of flight lay combat, so the troopers were tense. The command group finalized details for the landing. They hoped friendly forces in the area would take the initiative to provide suppressive fires for the approach and landing.

But once over the city, the picture changed. Something was radically wrong. Streets that should have been teeming with people were deserted. Grunts quickly concluded that things must be really "screwed" up—the reserve mission boondoggle had ceased to be a chance to "get over." It was time to go to work.

The flight came in parallel to the front of the embassy and the troopers strained to see all they could that would help them once they were on the ground. The choppers turned in a wide circle to the left after passing the embassy so that

they could make the final landing approach over the embassy compound and into the rear of the helipad atop the main building. No useful information came from the pass, and the enemy became aware of an airmobile force in the vicinity.

Tension mounted as they went into the final approach and the helipad grew larger and larger. Sounds of the rushing air and the laboring helicopter filled their ears with a rhythm they all knew too well. Familiar vibrations from the aircraft flowed through them. They tried to think about what they would do when they dismounted on the helipad. The tension was like a burning fuse that disappeared in the flash of an explosion that shattered the senses. Automatic-weapons fire punched through the right side of the C&C (Command and Control) ships with a terrifying popping sound. Blood from the wounded right-door gunner splattered on the passenger compartment ceiling, and the occupants of the aircraft were pinned to their seats as the pilot instinctively turned from the fire and accelerated. M16s and the remaining door gun pointed toward the sound of the incoming fire, but exact target identification was impossible, and there were friendly forces in the area. Not a round of return fire went out. The following aircraft broke off their approach and maintained formation at a prudent distance from the mauling of the lead ship.

Within seconds the action was over and stock was taken of the situation. Enemy fire appeared to dominate the air approaches to the helipad and there were no suppressive fires to be called upon. Formulation of another course of action in the air was not feasible, as the C&C bird had been damaged and could not long remain airborne. Moreover, the door gun-

Troops at right prepare to board UH-1s for an air assault mission. While many American troops became frequent fliers in the Hueys, C-1/502 never expected to conduct an air assault in downtown Saigon, let alone brave small-arms fire from the U.S. Embassy.



ner was bleeding heavily and needed medical attention. How to complete the mission became the dominant concern as it was realized the ship would likely make Long Binh and the evacuation hospital there. The aircraft commander requested a new C&C ship, and alternatives were reviewed for the airborne relief requirement. Again, the superb aviation support came through as the pilots recalled that there was an active CS riot-control gas-dispensing ship at Long Binh. A liberal dose of CS on the embassy compound could change the situation to the Americans favor, so the request went forward for the CS support. They emphasized that the gas had to be provided quickly, as time pressure to land was growing, not diminishing. Unknown and unseen, staff officers flew into frenzies trying to coordinate the action.

Meanwhile, the Long Binh ammunition dump blew up, sending a concussion wave across the area. A huge mushroom-shaped cloud rose into the sky. Personnel within Long Binh were all in a high state of agitation. This Tet thing was clearly having a widespread effect on U.S. forces and the Vietnamese forces, too. Charlie Company's command team scrambled aboard the new C&C ship as soon as it arrived and headed back to the embassy. They hoped, as this was taking place, that a CS Huey was in the air, or about to be, from elsewhere in the huge Long Binh complex. Coordination en route would finalize their concept of operations. Their confidence was high—they had seen the area and had a solution to the problem. All they had to do was execute, and they suffered no lack of self-confidence as paratroopers.



Three courses of action were available: They could turn back, divert to an alternate landing location, or try to go back onto the roof of the embassy, hoping that local forces had hurt the Communists badly enough to make landings practical. The previous excursion to the helipad was their only "intelligence update."

Mission success most likely would be realized by landing directly on the embassy, and that is what they chose to do. Again, the C&C ship led because of the ambiguities on exactly what the force would do. Lacking information on the enemy, the commander tried to develop an attack scenario that would accomplish the mission while still allowing the attack force some slender hope of survival. Since there was still enemy contact, it was surmised that the enemy had like-

ly attacked with at least a platoon, with the likelihood of another platoon-sized element acting to secure the area to keep an escape route open. The possibility of the VC/NVA force trying to secure and hold the embassy was eliminated as unlikely. The biggest concern was that the attackers had gained entry into the embassy and turned it into a bomb. With that eventuality, automatic-weapons fire en route to the helipad could easily have been the least of the problems. Thus, the clearing and securing of the building became the first objective. Subsequent actions against the attackers would likely develop in coordination with friendly forces already engaged in the area.

The relief force aircraft lined up for final and went in waiting for shattering bursts of enemy fire. This fire never came, which meant one of two things: Either friendly forces had destroyed the VC/NVA force or the enemy was inside the embassy and unable to engage the helicopters.

The embassy roof helipad was too small to stay on, as following aircraft would soon be on the LZ. There was no choice but to plunge into the building by way of the stairs leading down from the pad. A member of the embassy staff met the helicopter with a look that said the troopers were the greatest people on the face of the earth. He did not know if the Communists had gotten into the building and, if they had, what force might be waiting. From his work place in a vaulted area high in the building, he had been able to keep communications open with the outside, but he had little sense of what was going on.

The first mission of Charlie Company was to ensure that the embassy building was clear of attackers and that no demolitions were set. As this mission was being executed, information would be sought for subsequent action. Follow-on ships quickly disgorged their paratroopers, and the small teams of the relief force were ready for coordinated action. Speed was still essential.

Clearing a sensitive building in a critical international situation with almost no intelligence was a requirement far removed from the rifle company's training experience. But the relief force was thoroughly competent in the application of the fundamentals of small-unit tactics. The issue was how quickly the force could adapt to change, for at this point the unit was no longer a tactical force of bush grunts. Instead, "Strike Charlie Six" had just entered center stage of the world media in a strategic dimension.

The plan was to dominate access to each floor by controlling the steps and the elevator. Concurrently, the paratroopers dominated the central corridor so that anyone coming out of a room would be engaged by cross fire from at least two weapons. The assault teams could do a room by room clearing operation. All was in readiness in a remarkably short time.

Most doors were locked and there were no signs of forced entry. Attackers had not penetrated the top floor. Members of the relief force quickly moved to the next floor—same situation. They wasted no time working their way to the first floor.

No VC/NVA had entered the embassy building—the building was not a bomb! The building was clearly secure, for the moment at least, and the relief force was ready for another mission. At about this time, gunfire killed the last known attacker on the compound in a nearby building.

Members of the company located the fallen Communists and searched the bodies for documents and weapons. Other members of the force maintained local security and searched for snipers. Leaders made plans to integrate the relief force into the defensive plan for the embassy. This was a joint and combined endeavor, as elements of Charlie Company, Marine Guards, Army MPs and Vietnamese National Police had to be coordinated. How the enemy would organize for follow-on action and what his objectives would be were



TOP: One of the side entrances of the U.S. Embassy shows damage caused by the initial attack by the Viet Cong sappers. ABOVE: While Viet Cong Sapper Detachment C-10 made headlines with its raid on the U.S. Embassy, other Viet Cong units struck throughout the city. Most were killed or driven off within six days of the offensive.

key questions being worked on by intelligence sources in higher headquarters.

Bodies of the Communist dead were not even cold when a horde of reporters burst into the embassy compound. Suddenly, each paratrooper was an "expert" on the attack and the most pressing—though not most important—problem became newsmen. There was no attempt to censor or suppress information; rather, the challenge was to ensure the troopers gave only correct data to the press. An immediate problem arose when a soldier stated the VC/NVA had gained access to the embassy building. This was dead wrong, but the soldier claimed he had heard this from another soldier. Expeditious action by the chain of command put the story straight and put the troops on notice to be precisely accurate in their statements.

A hasty defense evolved based on strong points controlling the avenues of approach into the embassy compound. Each strong point was on a high position with wide ranging fields of observation and fire. The company had taken good care of its squad radios, and these little devices served to supplement visual communications between the points. Placement of the M60 machine guns was the backbone of the scheme. Ongoing planning between the company commander and embassy security personnel developed the essential coordination. Mobile response forces from the Saigon area were available to augment local defensive measures.

Reports of a "second wave" of attackers came in to stimulate activities. Time proved these wrong but, at the moment, the data was believable in light of the impact the initial Communist attack had attained. Certainly bigger would be better, so Charlie Company prepared for a major fight.

Focus was on the rules of engagement. Identification of the enemy and placement of appropriate fires were the most difficult problems. Hosing down the Saigon area with U.S. firepower was not an alternative. Much discussion went into how the bad guys could be separated from the good guys. It was agreed that the Vietnamese National Police would be the key to this requirement.

Highly selective firepower was essential, so the designated snipers in the relief force underwent extensive refresher training. Fortunately, a state rifle marksmanship champion was available, through the courtesy of the CIA, and he helped bring the paratroopers to full proficiency. Placement of the snipers in the defensive plan received careful consideration.

Nightfall brought no peace. Flares, gunships, gunfire and the booming of HE rounds continued throughout the Saigon area and throughout the rest of South Vietnam. For the U.S. Embassy, though, the Tet Offensive was over. None of the reported threats materialized and the following days were peaceful.

Charlie Company's mission blurred the distinction between tactical and strategic operations. Implications from the actions of the relief force, to include the actions of the individual paratroopers, had national and international consequences. Helicopters and worldwide media communications propelled a rifle company from routine tactical operations to the attention of the world in a way unpredictable to all concerned.

Yet, as rapidly as the company had entered center stage for the world media, it departed stage right. Charlie Company relief force withdrew as it had arrived—by helicopter extraction from the helipad on the roof. From here the company assembled and rejoined its battalion for the Tet Counteroffensive far north in Military Region I. Lying ahead were the Street Without Joy, Annamite Mountains, Quang Tri City, Hue and other spots whose names cannot be recalled. □

Formerly on the faculty of the Army War College, Colonel Speedy is now serving on the staff of SHAPE in Belgium. Suggestions for further reading: Tet! by Don Oberdorfer.