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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

Headquarters, 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion  
APO San Francisco 96383

AVDG-AVA-E

25 August 1968

SUBJECT: Combat Operation After Action Report, Operation Somerset Plain

THRU: Commanding Officer  
160th Combat Aviation Group  
101st Air Cavalry Division  
APO San Francisco 96383TO: Commanding General  
101st Air Cavalry Division  
ATTN: AC of S, G3  
APO San Francisco 96383

1. Name of Operation: SOMERSET PLAIN
2. Dates of Operation: 040900H August 1968 thru 202400H August 1968 \*
3. Location: ~~Quang Tri~~ and Vicinity, including portions of Thua Thien PROVINCE shown on Vietnam 1:50,000 Maphsheets: 6441 IV, 6441 I, 6442 III, 6441 II, 6541 III, 6432 II, and 6542 III.
4. Command Headquarters: 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion, 160th Combat Aviation Group, 101st Air Cavalry Division.
5. Reporting Officer: LTC Paul B Snyder
6. Task Organization:
  - a. Headquarters, Headquarters CompanyCommand Element  
1 UH1H Console (Bn HQ, Bn G3)  
1 UH1H Console
  - Coordination and Control Element  
1 UH1H Console (Bn HQ, Flt Ops Off)
  - Forward Stagefield Element  
Stagefield Commander (Bn S4)  
Bn Forward CP (Bn Operations Sergeant, Commo Chief, MPC CO)

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Battalion Aid Station

Rear Operations Element

Battalion Operation Center

Reserve Aircraft (Consoles, Troopships, Gunships and Smokeships)

b. Company A

10 UH1H Troopships

1 UH1H Maintenance Recovery Ship

c. Company B

15 UH1H Troopships

1 UH1H Maintenance Recovery Ship

d. Company C

15 UH1H Troopships

1 UH1H Maintenance Recovery Ship

e. Company D

16 UH1C Gunships (2 attached from 229th Aslt Hel Bn, 1st Air Cav Div)

f. Composite Company (attached from 229th Aslt Hel Bn, 1st Air Cav Div)

10 UH1H Troopships

1 UH1H Maintenance Recovery Ship

## 7. Supporting Forces

a. B Troop, 1/9 Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division provided essential support during both the planning and execution phases of this operation. Liaison with B/1/9 Cav before the operation yielded much useful information relating to enemy anti-aircraft weapons positions and current patterns of enemy troop activity in the I Shau Valley. Because B/1/9 Cav was under operational control of the 101st Cavalry Division for a period before, and throughout Operation Somerset Plain, the unit was an excellent source of intelligence on enemy activity. B/1/9 Cav provided important support to the 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion by screening the flanks and reconnoitering ahead of air assault formations within the I Shau Valley. The unit also assisted, on request, by adding the considerable weight of its firepower to that of organic 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion Gunships.

b. 101st Air Cavalry Division support Command established and operated the stripfield at Fire Support Base Birmingham (MD918106). Primary support

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provided at Birmingham was construction of aircraft landing surfaces, stabilization of soil for rotary wing aircraft operation, installation and operation of aircraft refueling facilities, as well as provision for revetments for armed helicopter ammunition.

c. Pathfinders assigned to the 160th Combat Aviation Group established and operated air traffic control and advisory facilities at the stagefield and at key fire support bases throughout Operation Somerset Plain. In addition, 160th Combat Aviation Group Pathfinders provided effective control of landing zones and pickup zones for helicopter company and battalion size assault and extractions.

d. Evacuation of downed and disabled aircraft was performed by the 159th Assault Support Helicopter Battalion, 160th Combat Aviation Group.

e. Medical evacuation aircraft were provided by the 50th Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance) throughout the operation.

f. Fire support for air assault operations was provided by Division Artillery and the United States Air Force.

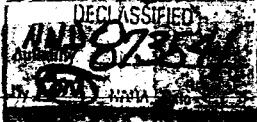
g. A black maintenance recovery capability was provided by A/5TC Battalion, 101st Air Cavalry Division.

8. Intelligence: The A Shau Valley complex is one of the largest and most concentrated enemy logistical bases known to exist in South Viet Nam. The areas of greatest enemy activity are vicinity of A Shau, Ta Bat, Lai Loui and La Dut. The enemy is believed to have major armor, artillery, infantry and supporting units in and around the valley. Of particular interest is the presence of the 260th Air Defense Regiment in the valley. The presence of an effective anti-aircraft capability was confirmed before the operation by the loss of three high performance aircraft, one each on 13 and 21 July and 2 August 1968, as well as two B/1/9 Cav helicopters shot down during low level reconnaissance south of the Ta Bat airstrip on 2 August 1968. Anti-aircraft weapons believed to be in use in the valley range from light automatic weapons through 23-mm, 37-mm and up to 57-mm guns.

9. Mission: The mission of the 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion was to execute the air assault of two US Infantry Battalions into two landing zones in the A Shau Valley on D Day and to assault with two NAV Battalions on D+1. The 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion was further alerted to be prepared to execute the air assault of a reinforcing battalion into the valley, reposition company size units within the valley, and accomplish daily logistical support of units in the valley. Implied, but not specified by the 160th Aviation Group Operation Order, was the mission to extract both US and NAV troops from the A Shau Valley.

10. Concept of the Operation: The operation may be visualized in five phases

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PHASE I Movement to the Staging Area. At H-1 Hour, the Battalion Forward CP opened at Birmingham. Commencing at H-22 minutes, assault helicopter companies began arriving at the Birmingham FWD Stagefield at two minute intervals. By H-1 all assault helicopters are closed on the stage field and loaded or loading. Concurrently, helicopter gunships arrive at a rendezvous point along the route of flight just short of the first landing zone. Spare aircraft marshall near the Battalion Operations Center. The smoke ship arrives on station, with the command and control ship in position to observe the assault.

PHASE II: Assault on D Day. Commencing at H-16 minutes, assault companies begin lifting off Birmingham stagefield with an infantry battalion in flights of five aircraft at one minute intervals. Flying westward along a route generally following Route #547 and 547A to LZ#1 at the Ta Det Airstrip, the air column of 50 troopships picks up gunship escort at H-1 minute, when artillery preparatory fires shift from the landing zone to supporting fires in the immediate vicinity. As artillery fires shift, escort helicopter gunships place suppressive fires over and around the landing zone as they lead the troopships in. At H Hour on D Day, the lead assault aircraft lands on the first landing zone, followed at one minute intervals by the remaining troopships while gunships provide security around the zone. At the completion of the first lift, a second lift is made into the same zone, completing the battalion movement. After the second lift, all aircraft are refueled, repositioned and shut down for maintenance and combat damage inspection. Commencing at H+2 hours 14 minutes, the lead assault troopships again lift off Birmingham Stagefield, with a second infantry battalion and arrive at LZ#2 (1237008), vicinity of A Loui Airstrip, at H+2 hours 30 minutes. Following the same plan as for LZ#1, the second infantry battalion is assaulted into LZ#2 in two lifts. Aircraft return to refuel after the fourth lift and stand by until released.

PHASE III: Assault on D+1: Staging as on D Day, assault into a designated zone with two ARVN battalions at T Time on D+1, completing in two lifts of 50 troopships in flights of five aircraft each at one minute intervals.

PHASE IV: Resupply, Reinforcement, and Repositioning: Immediately following the ARVN assault on D+1, commence logistical resupply of units in the Shu Valley by air lifting supplies from forward fire support bases to unit locations. Be prepared to lift one battalion reinforcement into the Shu Valley on a few hours notice. Be prepared to reposition company size units in the valley on or

PHASE V: Attacks on LZ#3: Staging at H-Hour on D-Day extract two ARVN Battalions from designated pickup zone in the Shu Valley to landing zone vicinity Voghol. This operation is to be accomplished in four lifts using thirty five troopships, including extraction of the 2d infantry battalion from designated LZ in the valley to vicinity Voghol LZB. Such battalion to be extracted in three lifts using thirty five troopships. On H+2, extract one 3d infantry battalion from designated LZ in Shu Valley to LZ vicinity Voghol.

#### 11. Execution:

a. Methods of Operation: All movement related to this operation was

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accomplished via organic aircraft except for the forward stagefield party and battalion command post, which displaced from home station at Camp Eagle (YD808163) to FSB Birmingham by motor vehicle and aircraft. Support of the stagefield party, which operated at varying strengths throughout the period covered by Somerset Plain, was accomplished by organic aircraft supplemented by motor vehicles. The planned use of escort gunship helicopters, artillery and tactical air support was conventional and featured no innovations to current doctrine. While moving along flight routes between the LS and TA, an undershoot altitude, varying between 500 and 1000 feet, was used. This was deemed the best course of action, since artillery hazards prohibited flight above 1500 feet, and the rugged terrain made use of the earth flying impracticable. Throughout the operation on D Day, there was only one incidence of ground fire along the flight route near FSB Son (YD472012), but there was no aircraft damage. On D+1, it was possible to raise flight route altitude above 1500 feet absolute, and this was properly coordinated and accomplished. There were no incidences of ground fire along the flight route on D+1. On this operation, each of the four assault helicopter companies provided its own maintenance recovery escort aircraft. Although these aircraft are not generally specified as a necessary complement to assault helicopter company operations, it is essential to the professional, expeditious recovery of downed aircraft. The presence of the company's own maintenance recovery aircraft is important to the aircrew morale, particularly on hazardous missions of the type discussed here. Provision for several maintenance recovery aircraft also gives the capability for concurrent multiple aircraft recovery and emergency medical evacuation without depriving the battalion of a continued maintenance recovery capability.

#### b. Operations Narrative

(1) Planning and Preparation On 18 July 1968, initial coordination was effected between the 101 Aslt Hn Bn S3 and the 1st Brigade S3. During this meeting, the general assault tactical plan was discussed, possible landing zone areas were considered, and logistical support requirements were outlined. On 19 July, an Operation Schedule was received from 1st Brigade which outlined assault helicopter lift requirements to effect the marshalling of troops to execute the operation. This included the establishment of four Fire Support Bases on the eastern side of the Shau Valley. On 20 July, representatives of the 160th Aviation Group, 159th ASB, 101st AHB, Division Support Command, Division Engineers and 1st Brigade met at FSB Birmingham and jointly agreed upon the general layout and utilization of the stagefield facilities to be constructed at Birmingham to support Operation Somerset Plain. On 22 July, construction of the Stagefield was begun. On 23 July a conference was held by the CO, S3 and S2 of the 101st AHB, 1st Brigade Commander, S3 and S2, and the 160th Aviation Group S3. Specific landing zone locations were selected, and an armed reconnaissance to confirm those landing zones selected was planned for 24 July. On 24 July the reconnaissance was made, but the First Brigade S3 or CO did not accompany the reconnaissance party. During the recon, intense heavy and small arms antiaircraft fire was encountered south of Ta Bat Airstrip. Based upon this experience, plans to assault two RVN Battalions into Landing Zones south of Ta Bat and ALot 1 airstrips were re-considered. On 25 July, the First Brigade conducted an independent reconnaissance of landing zones in the Shau Valley. On 30 July a liaison officer was dispatched from the 101 AHB to the First Brigade.

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On 31 July, an armed helicopter rearming point was established at FSB Birmingham by the 101st AHE. By 2 August the Brigade Operations Order was published and final selection of Landing Zones made. Final coordination with 160th Aviation Group Pathfinders was effected, and a final check of FSB Birmingham Stagefield facilities was made. On 3 August, final coordination was effected with the 2/327 Inf and 2/502 Inf. The 101st AHE Operations Order was finalized, written, and published at a briefing conducted at 1930 hours. Present at this briefing were representatives of all supported units and fire support organizations, as well as 160th Aviation Group Headquarters and 101st AHE subordinate units and staff.

(2) Initial Assault

(a) At 0530 on 4 August, initial USAF reconnaissance of the A Shau Valley revealed dense ground fog. By 0630 it was apparent that the fog was not going to lift rapidly enough to allow the USAF TAC preparatory fires, and a one-half hour weather delay was invoked, moving LZ time up to 0930. By 0730, it appeared that the fog was breaking in the vicinity of LZ#2 (YD375008) near the Loui Airstrip, while LZ#1 (Y0425450) at the Ta Bat Airstrip continued to be obscured. At this point, the decision was made to assault LZ#2 first, and TAC preparatory strikes scheduled for LZ#1 were delivered around LZ#2. Orders effecting the change were received by the 101st AHE, 2/327 Inf and 2/502 Inf, and the necessary adjustments were made to assault the 2/502 Inf into LZ#2 first.

(b) At 0907, the first aircraft of a total of fifty troop carrier UH1H helicopters arrived at Birmingham Stagefield to load troops. The air column order was A Co, B Co, Attached Company (229th AHB), and C Company. The first flight of five aircraft lifted off Birmingham at 0913, followed by additional flights of five at one minute intervals. Led by gunships delivering suppressive fires, the lead flight of troopers touched down on LZ#2 at 0930. Three lifts of troops were delivered to the landing zone without incident to the troop carriers. Armed helicopters, however, began to receive fire from an area west of the LZ. Near the end of the first lift, UH1C gunship #089 received caliber .50 or equivalent hits and was forced down on the LZ with a ruptured fuel cell. The aircraft was subsequently evacuated without incident. Later, UH1C gunship #471 sustained three Cal 30 hits, disabling part of the aircraft armament system. This aircraft was not forced down, and there were no casualties.

(3) Upon completing the lift of the 2/502 Inf into LZ#2, all aircraft returned to refuel. The decision was made to accelerate the refueling by cutting out the aircraft shutdown and maintenance check. This permitted a new LZ time to be established at 1130 hours which had effect of canceling out the one half hour weather delay. Accordingly, aircraft were marshalled at the stagfield for assault on LZ#1 at the Ta Bat airstrip.

(4) The first flight of five aircraft lifted off the stagfield at 1114 hours enroute to the LZ. Led by gunships delivering suppressive fire, the lead flight of five arrived at the LZ at 1130 hours. Three lifts were accomplished into this landing zone without incident, although moderate to heavy anti-aircraft fire was encountered. Again, as on LZ#2, gunships took the brunt of enemy resistance. Shortly after the assault began, heavy automatic weapons fire was received from areas west, east and north of the LZ. UH1C gunship #087 was shot down, crash landing approximately two hundred meters north of

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at airstrip. The crew was recovered, with one man lightly wounded. Gunship #680 was struck by enemy fire just north of Ta Bat airstrip, burst into flames, and crashed approximately 400 meters north of the airstrip. Three seriously wounded crewmen were recovered, while the crew of 4 perished in the crash. Gunship #739 sustained twelve hits which inflicted extensive metal damage, causing the aircraft to be returned under its own power to the stage field. One round struck the chest protector of the aircraft commander and shattered, lightly wounding him. The assault of the 2/327 Inf on LZ #2 was completed by 1300 without further incident.

(5) On 5 August, fifty troo ships were again used to assault two battalions of the First RVN Bn. The assault, planned for 0800, was delayed by weather. At 0745, a decision was made to expedite the assault notwithstanding the weather delay. Aircraft were marshalled and the lead aircraft lifted off the stagefield at Birmingham at 0820 hours. While departing Camp Eagle, Company troo ship #062 experienced a power loss and crashed on takeoff destroying itself and UH-1 #982 in the process. One crewmember was lightly injured in the crash. Because the Ta Bat Airstrip was secured by a company of the 2/327 Inf, there were no preparatory or suppressive fires except along the flight route. Insertion of the 3/1 and 2/1 RVN Battalions was completed without further incident in two lifts by 0945 hours, and a company of the 2/327 Inf was lifted in on the third lift. Upon the completion of this troo lift, the composite company of troo ships from the 1st Ar Cav Division was released.

(6) On 6 August, the last insertion of combat troops into the A Shau Valley was carried out by Company A, using 10 troo ships and two gunships. Two lifts were made from Birmingham stagefield to Ta Bat Airstrip with the first LZ time at 0830 hours, with the RVN Black Panther Company.

(7) During the entire period of the A Shau Operation, one light fire team, ten troo ships and one console were committed to the support of 1st Brigade and RVN units in the valley. These aircraft performed logistical support administrative trooplift, command and control and suppressive fire support missions on a daily basis. During these operations, one gunship was lost with all four crewmen during a resupply escort mission, and one troo ship was lost due to a blade strike on a resupply mission. In addition, four more troo ships were hit by enemy fire during resupply missions, one sustained hits while picking up troops, and another troo ship was struck by groundfire while performing a visual reconnaissance mission. This brought the total casualty count for aircraft and personnel to:

GUNSHIPS

	Hostile	Nonhostile	Total
Damaged	3	0	3
Destroyed	2	1	3
	6	0	6

TROO SHIPS

Damaged	7	1	8
Destroyed	9	3	12
	7	4	11

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	<u>Hostile</u>	<u>Nonhostile</u>	<u>CONFIDENTIAL</u>	<u>Total</u>
Injured	5	1		6
Killed	5	0		5
	10	1		11

(8) On 17 August, the extraction of troops from the A Shau Valley began with the withdrawal of the ARVN Black Panther Company in one lift of 30 aircraft from a pickup zone at YC448924 to the Hue Citadel Airstrip at Hue City. This operation was executed at 0730 hours without incident, except that the com and control aircraft experienced complete hydraulic failure at 0720. A precautionary landing was accomplished at Birmingham stagefield at 0735 without incident.

(9) On 18 August, the 3/1 and 2/1 ARVN Infantry Battalions were extracted from PZ's YC448924 and YC443923 in four lifts using 33 troopships to LZ Ann at YD562025, vicinity FSB Veghel. This extraction was accomplished without incident although 60mm mortar fire had been received in the PZ area within the past 24 hours, and some enemy fire was encountered by elements of B/1/9 Cav screening south of the PZ's.

(10) Following is a tabular summary of 101st AB Operation during Operation Somerset Plain:

## (a) Major Combat Assaults

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>PZ</u>	<u>LZ</u>	<u>Supported Unit</u>	<u>Fax</u>
4 Aug	0930-1030	YC718106	YD375008	2/502 Inf	540
4 Aug	1130-1400	YC718106	YC425950	2/327 Inf	540
5 Aug	0835-0945	YC718106	YC425950	1st ARVN Div	960
5 Aug	0945-1015	YC718106	YC425950	1/327 Inf	130
7 Aug	0900-1130	YC425950	YD377010	1/327 Inf	140
8 Aug	0900-1100	YC423950	YD377010	1/327 Inf	125
10 Aug	0900-1100	YC718106	YC425950	1st ARVN Div	240
				Total:	2675

## (b) Major Troop Extractions

17 Aug	0730-0800	YC448924	YD225747	1st ARVN Div	240
18 Aug	0730-0800	YC448924	YD562025	1st ARVN Div	440
18 Aug	0800-0850	YC443923	YD562025	1st ARVN Div	520
19 Aug	0730-0850	YC345937	YD562025	2/327 Inf	520
		YC360934			
19 Aug	0930-1030	YC413946	YD562025	1/327 Inf	315
		YC425950			
19 Aug	1100-1210	YC388990	YD562025	2/502 Inf	430
		YC386981			
		YC385984		Total:	2465

(11) On 19 August, the 2/327, 1/327, and 2/502 Infantry Battalions were extracted from multiple PZ's in the A Shau Valley commencing at 0730 and terminating at 1210 hours when the last flight of troopships landed at LZ Ann. These were accomplished with from 30 to 22 troopships without incident. Troopships were fueled twice, and a total of 8 lifts were required to complete the extraction. The withdrawal of the 2/502 Infantry Battalion on 19 August represented a change to the original schedule, which had called for that battalion's extraction on 20 August.

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## (c) Troop Placements, Administrative, and Logistical Operations

Passengers: 5750

Cargo: 200 Tons

## (d) Armed Helicopter Support Operations

## Ammunition Expended:

2.75" Rockets: 1294 rockets

7.62 Ammo: 214,000 rounds

40mm Ammo: 4969 rounds

## (e) Flying Hours in support of Operation Somerset Plain:

UH1H	1285
UH1C	<u>367</u>
	1652

## (f) Results

a. The 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion accomplished its assigned mission in support of Operation Somerset Plain in a superlative manner. No mission was aborted; every task was successfully accomplished. All air movement time schedules were met punctually.

b. Enemy Losses: No enemy losses were credited to the 101st AHB during this operation.

## (g) Friendly Losses

(1) Personnel: 1 WMA, 13 WHA, 5 KHA

## (a) Wounded, Non Hostile

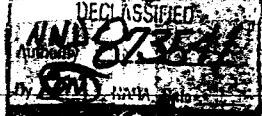
DATE	NAME	GRADE	ASN	ORG.	DUTY
5 Aug	Kennedy, Donald P	SP5	RA17736985	Co A	Crew Chief

## (b) Wounded, Hostile Action

4 Aug	Murphy, Robert D	WO1	W3160661	Co C	Pilot *
4 Aug	Clark, Jerry L	WO1	W3157773	Co C	Pilot *
4 Aug	Burton, Robert Y	SGT	RA16841314	Co C	Gunner *
4 Aug	Gaskill, Curtis B	WO1	W3138812	Co C	Pilot *
4 Aug	Parry, James C	SP5	RA53451731	Co C	Crew Chief *
4 Aug	Perry, Ronald C	MAJ	082221	Co D	Pilot *
4 Aug	Searls, Michael D	SP 4	RA11564936	Co C	Crew Chief *
4 Aug	Wheeler, Paul W	CW2	W3155741	Co C	Pilot *

## (c) Killed, Hostile Action

4 Aug	Kim, Harry	Sp4	RA18847961	Co C	Crew Chief
4 Aug	Higgin, Greg L	CPT	05420467	Co D	Pilot *
5 Aug	Ovaitt, Richard A	WO1	W3160363	Co D	Pilot *
5 Aug	Bartlett, Charles D	SP5	RA11363873	Co D	Crew Chief *
8 Aug	Leach, Dickie L	SP4	RA19300774	Co D	Gunner

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## (d) Summary, Personnel Casualties

	Wounded	Killed	Total
Hostile	8	5	13
Non-Hostile	1	0	1
Total	9		14

## (2) Aircraft

## (a) Damaged

Date	SN	Type	Location	Mission	Cause	Casualties
4 Aug	59471	UH-1C	YC338013	Aslt Escort	Ground Fire	None
4 Aug	66739	UH-1C	YC428958	Aslt Escort	Ground Fire	1 WHA
4 Aug	15089	UH-1C	YC372998	Aslt Escort	Ground Fire	None
5 Aug	66996	UH-1H	YD809164	Combat Aslt	Collision	None
7 Aug	17464	UH-1H	YC473926	Resupply	Ground Fire	None
7 Aug	17124	UH-1H	YC368975	Resupply	Ground Fire	None
8 Aug	66115	UH-1H	YC375997	Resupply	Ground Fire	None
9 Aug	17347	UH-1H	YC395947	Extraction	Ground Fire	None
12 Aug	16124	UH-1H	YC355982	Resupply	Ground Fire	None
14 Aug	17124	UH-1H	YC501931	Visual Recon	Ground Fire	None

## (b) Destroyed

Date	SN	Type	Location	Mission	Cause	Casualties
4 Aug	15087	UH-1C	YC428958	Assault Escort	Ground Fire	4 WHA
4 Aug	66680	UH-1C	YC428958	Assault Escort	Ground Fire	3 WHA/1 KIA
5 Aug	17062	UH-1H	YD809164	Combat Assault	Collision	None
5 Aug	16982	UH-1H	YD809164	Combat Assault	Collision	1 WNH
8 Aug	61054	UH-1H	YC394946	Resupply	Blade Strike	None
8 Aug	15227	UH-1C	YC370977	Resupply Escort	Ground Fire	4 KIA

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(c) Summary of Aircraft Damaged and Destroyed

**CONFIDENTIAL**GUNSHIPS

	DAMAGED	DESTROYED	TOTAL
Hostile	3	3	6
Non Hostile	0	0	0
Total	3	3	6

TROOPSHIPS

Hostile	7	0	7
Non-Hostile	1	2	4
Total	8	3	11

AGGREGATE

Hostile	10	3	13
Non-Hostile	1	2	4
Total	11	6	17

13. Administration: No Comment.

14. Logistics: A forward staging area was established at Fire Support Base Birmingham for this operation. Provisions for Class IIIA and Class V were adequate, although it was found effective to utilize both Camp Eagle and Birmingham during peak refueling periods. Total fuel and ammunition requirements for the 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion for Operation Somerset Plain are:

a. Fuel: 16,520 gallons JP-4

b. Ammunition

2.75 Rockets: 1294 rockets

7.62 cal Ammo: 214,000 rounds

40mm Ammo: 4969 rounds

15. Chemical: Although a chemical munitions plan was implemented and protective masks were carried throughout this operation, detectable quantities of CS agent were encountered only briefly by A/101 AHB on 6 August, along Highway 547 west of Veghel FSB. The concentration of CS agent encountered on this date was insufficient to merit the use of protective masks, and was believed to have been generated from persistent residues in the area by extremely turbulent air on that date.

16. Civil Affairs: No Comment

17. Psychological Operations: No Comment.

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18. Communications: Communication was maintained by radio. No wire was used. The battalion command net was maintained air-to air by UHF. Ground-to-ground and air-to-ground communications were by FM. An unsuccessful effort was made to link the stagefield to battalion headquarters at Camp Eagle by HF radio. HF Communications are hampered by a lack of parts, test equipment, trained operators and qualified repair personnel.

19. Engineer: No Comment

20. Artillery: No Comment

21. Special Equipment and Techniques: Smoke dispensing helicopters were made available throughout Operation Somerset Plain. Under the proper conditions, the smokeship can be an important and effective screening device. Although smokeships were immediately available on station during all major airmobile operations during Somerset Plain, smoke was actually employed on only two occasions. On 17 and 18 August, smoke screens were laid around PZ's for the ARVN units extracted on those dates. On 17 August, ground fog effectively obscured the upwind side of the PZ. The presence of fog indicated favorable atmospheric conditions for smoke, and an extremely effective smoke screen was laid on the downwind side of the PZ. The combination of smoke and fog formed an excellent screen which obscured direct observation of the PZ on three sides. On 18 August, ground fog had dissipated by the time of extraction, but stable air conditions and adcv with approach to the PZ's again permitted effective use of smoke on two sides of the PZ's. Smoke was not employed at any other time during Somerset Plain because either atmospheric conditions were unfavorable, wind direction or drift was unfavorable, or the disposition of the LZ/PZ with respect to surrounding terrain rendered the use of smoke ineffective.

22. Commander's Analysis

a. Lessons Learned

(1) Item: The use of smokeships must be continuously evaluated and judiciously controlled.

(2) Discussion: The two occasions on which smokeships were used during Operation Somerset Plain demonstrated that smokescreens can be a most effective tactical asset. The conditions under which smokeships may be employed, however, must be carefully evaluate. If smoke is placed on the wrong side of the PZ/LZ it may obscure the landing area or approaches so that the whole operation is jeopardized. The two best techniques for employing smoke seem to be either placing it close to the PZ/LZ as a general screen, or placing it as a mask over specific areas, such as streamlines, which are felt to offer a special hazard to this operation. Close supervision must be exercised over the laying of smoke screens.

(3) Solution: When the operations order is published, direct control of the smokeship must be clearly vested with the command and control aircraft. The air mission commander must actually observe the flight path of the smokeship before giving permission to dispense smoke. Especially capable pilots should be identified and habitually assigned to operate smokeships; in this way they will develop the requisite expertise and tactical skill in laying smoke.

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Item: Co-location of pathfinder control and battalion CP at  
Stagefields**CONFIDENTIAL**

(2) Discussion: Continuous liaison must be performed at the stagefield among the pathfinder control, assault battalion forward command post, and supported ground unit CP in order to assure a smooth operation. Problems arose with troop staging on 5 August which could have been averted had the pathfinder control radio station been co-located with the assault battalion CP.

(3) Solution: In future stagefield operations, the 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion will coordinate the co-location of its forward CP and pathfinder control.

(1) Item: Operation of 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion Facilities at the stagefields.

(2) Discussion: Establishment and operation of the 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion forward CP must be improved. The physical layout and provision of facilities was never satisfactory. The headquarters company commander must be present to supervise battalion forward CP operation. No CP tent was provided and set up to give the battalion CO a suitable conference room and a base of operations. In short, the Bn CP was adequate but not first class. As a minimum, a CP tent or equivalent must be provided which is set up as a communications/operations center, and restricted to access by all who do not have official business. This affords the Bn CO with a secure and private place for conferences with his staff, unit commanders and the Aviation Group or other commanders.

(3) Solution: A more elaborate and closely supervised stagefield plan will be implemented.

(1) Item: Role of the Battalion Staff during major battalion assault operations.

(2) Discussion: It is essential that the battalion staff attend the final briefing for a major battalion air assault operation. This includes the S-1, S-2, S-3, S-4, Maintenance, Signal and Surgeon. All of these staff agencies have a direct contribution to make to the success of the operation. The Intelligence, Supply and Signal Officers will normally cover paragraphs 1a, 4 and 5a of the Operation Order briefing, respectively. The S3 usually covers paragraphs 1b and c, 3 and 5b. In cases where logistical requirements do not necessitate exceptions to SOP, the S4 may not be required to brief, but all staff officers should habitually attend Operations Briefings. This is particularly critical in cases where a forward staging area will be established. Since the S4 is normally responsible for all battalion activities at a stagefield, he must attend the briefings along with the Signal Officer, Surgeon and Headquarters CO, all of whom have definite responsibilities at the stagefield. The S4 and Communications Chief were absent from the initial operation order briefing for Somerset Plain. This caused unnecessary confusion in the operation of the stagefield.

(3) Solution: All battalion staff officers will attend overall staff briefings.

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(1) Item: Control and discipline in the general use of smoke grenades and marking of targets must be improved.

(2) Discussion: There were isolated cases of the misuse of smoke colors during the operation. All sources of enemy ground fire must be immediately marked with identifying white smoke and the known or suspected source of fire references from the smoke position.

(3) Solution: The basic load of smoke to be carried on each helicopter and the use of each color have been re-emphasized. In addition, the use of the clock system, where 12 o'clock is the direction of landing, is encouraged to facilitate transmission of enemy fire locations.

(1) Item: Maintenance Recovery of aircraft was not expeditiously done in all cases.

(2) Discussion: When an aircraft was downed, some confusion ensued as to which maintenance recovery aircraft would assist. This problem is most pronounced in the case of downed gunships, which have no assigned maintenance recovery aircraft.

(3) Solution: An SOP was established that specifies that the assault company maintenance helicopter arrives at the LZ/LZ with the lead element of its company and departs with the trail element. All maintenance recovery aircraft will go to the assistance of a downed gunship, with the first aircraft arriving assuming the recovery mission. Maintenance recovery aircraft have the further responsibility to report the status of downed aircraft and crews to the command and control aircraft as soon as it can be determined.

b. Commander's Notes (1) Maintenance Management of Aviation Resources

(a) An operation time table was developed and disseminated approximately two weeks before the assault was initiated. This schedule called for the phasing out of some fire bases, the establishment of other fire bases, and the redistribution of forces to make troops available for Somerset Plain. One criterion of this operation schedule was that major requirements for division assault helicopters would terminate several days before the assault to permit performance of maintenance to insure maximum aircraft availability on D Day. Despite several weather delays, major troop movements involving the use of assault helicopter troopers were completed by 31 July. The expected aircraft stand down did not occur during the period 1-3 August, due to continuing heavy commitments for administrative, logistical and combat assault requirements throughout the division area of operations. Despite this lack of stand down flying, the 1st ABH did succeed in putting up over 40 trooperships for the assault on D Day and D+1.

(b) Due to substantial enemy contact in the A Shau Valley on D-1, initiation of the assault to D-1 was contemplated. Had this plan been implemented, aircraft availability for the operation would have been significantly less than that originally scheduled for D Day. In order to program maximum aircraft availability, maintenance scheduling has to be carefully managed during the period of time preceding the maximum availability target date. When it is not possible to adjust to last minute changes in the time scheduling unless aircraft utilization is greatly reduced during the period immediately preceding a maximum effort.

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In fact, when aircraft utilization is not reduced immediately following a maximum effort, the average availability rate will also decline below the average daily rate, as it did in fact do after 5 August 1968.

(2) **Logistical Support Planning:** Provision for the logistical support requirements of the 101st AHB was initiated early in the planning sequence by the 1st Brigade S4. The establishment of logistical support requirements, however, must be coordinated through the supporting aviation unit to insure adequacy and optimum efficiency of operations. The AMTF S4 should receive from the Air Mission Command S4 the total logistical requirement to support the Army Aviation portion of the operation. In the operation under consideration Army aviation support requirements for the 1st Brigade should have been obtained from the Brigade S3 by the 160th Avn Gp S3, who then disseminates requirements to subordinate S3's, who then transmit specific operational requirements to their respective S4's or supply officers. The Group S4 then receives from subordinate units their specific logistical support requirements. The group S4 submits one consolidated support requirement to the Brigade S4, who uses these figures as a basis for developing the logistical support plan. This procedure is effective, efficient, and expeditious. It keeps the planners aware of their resources and the logisticians responsive to operational requirements. It provides for an effective feed back among the people who manage resources and the people who use them. Such team work is imperative in aviation operations. During this operation, aviation planners and logisticians did not enjoy the type of partnership with the supported ground combat force envisioned by this concept.

(3) **Available Aviation Resources.** In airmobile operations, the number of assault and supporting aircraft available is a basic planning factor. Substantial changes in aircraft availability for an operation usually have a major impact upon the assault staging, aviation task organization, and logistical support plans. Flexibility in aviation operations proceeds from detailed advanced planning; when critical planning factors such as the number of aircraft to be used are not confirmed well in advance, the air mission commander is deprived of the opportunity for the precise planning which will allow for last minute changes without chaos. It is axiomatic that the probability of success in combat operations varies inversely as the number of variables in the plan; that is the principle of simplicity. In this operation, it was not known by the assault helicopter battalion until approximately 48 hours before the assault how many helicopters would be attached or whether attachment would even be critical in terms of being integrated with the assault's assault companies. These are critical planning factors for the assault battalion.

#### (4) Observation of the Inverse Planning Sequence

(a) The ground tactical plan was well developed during the early stages of planning. Based upon the ground plan and a thorough intelligence briefing by the 1st Brigade staff, landing zones and flight routes were tentatively scheduled, and plans were made for a reconnaissance of the proposed landing zones. Unfortunately this conference occurred much too late in the planning sequence after, for example, the flight routes had already been selected. It is imperative that, as soon as the ground tactical plan has begun to gel, the AMTF Commander get together with the Air Mission Commander and conduct a thorough briefing on the enemy situation and ground plan.

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and come to a tentative agreement on landing zones and routes of flight. This is also a good time to confer with the USAF FIC and Arty LNO about preparatory and supporting fires, shell grooves, and integration of the assault battalion suppressive fire plan with planned and on call supporting fires.

(b) In this operation, development of the Landing Zone Plan was unsatisfactory. LZ locations were being changed until the last minute. Numbers of aircraft and spacing into the LZ's were changed about. Routes of flight were developed before the LZ locations were approved. Fire support plans were developed before the final LZ location and approach routes were selected. The Landing Zone location and air landing plan must follow one upon the other and both must precede the fire support plan and air movement plan. The firm decision on the LZ landing plans are made jointly through coordination between the AMTF and Air Mission Commanders.

(c) The flight route ultimately used in this operation was satisfactory. It was, however, changed twice because it had been selected out of sequence, before the air landing and fire support plans had been coordinated. The airmobile inverse planning sequence must be observed.

(5) Landing Zone Reconnaissance and Selection As a minimum, the following personnel should go on the visual reconnaissance to select the landing zone for air assault operations, as applicable: Supported Unit S3's

Assault Avn Unit S3's  
Lead Assault Unit CO  
Aerial Wpns Unit CO  
ARA Unit CO\*  
Air Cav Unit CO\*  
Arty LNO\*  
USAF FAC\*  
Naval Gunfire L.O.\*  
(\*When applicable)

AMTF and Air Mission Commander may desire to go along, but the personnel named must see the LZ and jointly agree upon the most minute details of the Landing Zone, Fire Support and Suppressive Fire Plans. The optimum arrangement for this reconnaissance, which envisions a large scale air assault, is one C&C aircraft escorted by a light fire team or equiv light. On the operation being discussed, a joint reconnaissance of the LZ's was not conducted by the ground and aviation unit S3's.

(6) Fire Support Plan:

(a) Development of the fire support plan cannot be finalized until the Landing and Air Zone Landing Plans are completed. The route of flying may affect supporting fires, but the flight route can usually be adjusted to accommodate the artillery. It should be noted here that preparatory fires should have been planned along the flight route, particularly since the enroute altitude varied from treetop level to 1000 feet. The key to successful air assault against defended LZ's is massive, close, continuous, and immediately responsive fire support. Artillery preparatory and supporting fires for the assault of this operation were unsatisfactory. They were not massive, close or continuous. They were not responsive to requirements for neutralization of enemy positions.

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of ground fire during the assault. Air Force support was more responsive, but still could not be obtained rapidly enough. To be effective, supporting fires must be delivered close enough to neutralize possible sources of ground fire which may jeopardize the aircraft. Concentrations fired within a 1000 meters of the LZ must be closely coordinated with the air mission commander so that allowance is made for troopship and gunship flight patterns.

(b) A good concept is to use massive artillery concentrations to deny control of critical terrain in the vicinity of the LZ, while the more flexible and responsive TAC aircraft are directed against close in targets of opportunity with wing tip to rotor tip precision. Such fire support is devastating to the enemy defenses and quite possible when the air mission commander is allowed direct coordination with TAC air support. Under the present arrangement, the air mission commander must work through the AMTF Commander. This is unsatisfactory because it prevents effective use of fire support during the critical air assault phase. The air mission commander is usually the first to know the quality and location of ground fire. Action to neutralize ground fire must be immediate and accurate. If the FAC is responsive directly to the Air Mission Commander during the air assault phase, it is relatively easy to coordinate effective supporting fires effective supporting fires which increase the chance for safe and rapid delivery of combat troops into battle.

(7) The Assault Battalion Operations Order

(a) Attendance at the 101st AB briefing by representatives of all supporting and supported units and agencies was a key action which undoubtedly resulted in a much smoother operation than would have been possible without this final coordinating measure. It demonstrated the pre-eminent importance of the Air Mission Commander in air assault operations. Air assault does not go until the Assault Battalion Commander issues his order; that ties it all together.

(b) The operations order should have been published at least 36 hours before the operation began. It was not possible, however to publish it until only 12 hours before the operation and even then, last minute changes invalidated the refueling and air column interval plans.

(c) Finalized plans for air assault must be made well in advance of the operation. Last minute changes and lack of adequate planning data drives assault battalions and companies, where the most detailed planning can occur, of the minimum acceptable reaction time. In the case of the extraction plan for A Shau, for example, the 101st AHB Operations Order was necessarily written and published before the 160th Aviation Group Order was received. If the battalion order had been delayed pending receipt of the Aviation Group order, it could not have been written and disseminated to subordinate units in time for the operation.

## (8) Stagefield Operations

(a) The 101st AHB was required to operate the rearward point on Birmingham stagefield during Somerset Plain. The battalion does not have the organic capability to perform this mission. The mission properly belongs to Division Support Command.

(b) Refueling operations at the stagefield could have been considerably improved from the safety aspect by proper revetment of the fuel bladders, provision for aircraft grounding cables, and provision for 55 gallon drums at each refuel point to discharge fuel into in order to clear the hose nozzle.



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(9) Time Schedules and Weather Delays

(a) As originally conceived and coordinated, adequate time was allowed during all assault and extraction operations to provide for an aircraft shutdown and inspection for maintenance serviceability and combat damage at each refueling. In the execution of the operation however, no time was permitted for this important procedure, and aircraft were run continuously on air assault operation for up to six hours without a maintenance check.

(b) Weather decisions should be made at least one hour before LZ/PZ time in operations of this magnitude, where intermediate staging and long flight routes are used. When a weather delay is taken, it should be rigorously adhered to.

(c) Time tables for airmobile operations are carefully worked out in advance to provide for the optimum mission performance. These time schedules are widely disseminated and serve as important coordinating measures for the whole operation. Except in a tactical emergency, efforts to accelerate time schedules to compensate for weather delays can ultimately serve only to degrade the efficiency of the operation, and the capability of the airmobile task force to cope with unexpected circumstances.

(d) A decision should never be made to commit air assault into marginal weather conditions when there is a chance that weather will improve, and adequate time remains to complete the missions after the delay.

(10) Communications: The 101st ABF was unable to communicate with B/1 /9 Cav on any frequency on 4, 5 and 18-19 August. Similarly, the airborne standby medical evacuation helicopter could not be contacted on 4 August. The situations were potentially disastrous to the combat effectiveness and efficiency of the 101st ABF.

(11) Command and Control: When multiple battalion assault lifts are carried out, the assault Battalion Commander cannot effectively control his organization when he is tied to one of the supported ground battalion commanders by joint occupancy of the same aircraft. The ground unit commander should have his own Command & Control aircraft, by which he will be the battalion commander's direct link over the whole area of operations and effectively supervise the operation.

23. RECOMMENDATIONS:

a. A compensatory decrease in aircraft daily commitment should accompany a maximum availability effort in order to permit maintenance scheduling to sustain an average availability rate.

b. The airmobile operation operation inverse planning sequence should be rigorously observed.

c. Critical planning factors such as the numbers of aircraft to be used, troops to be moved, PZ/LZ locations, landing plan, fire support plan, routes of

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of flight and staging plan should be determined well in advance of the operation.

d. A joint reconnaissance of the LZ/PZ should always be conducted by the CMF and Air Mission Commander.

e. Delivery of TAC fire support during air assault should be coordinated directly between the Air Mission Commander and the FIC.

f. The Aviation Group should issue a mission type order authorizing direct liaison early enough to allow adequate planning time for the assault battalion.

g. Division Support Command should operate all stagefield refuel and rearm points.

h. Stagefield Pathfinder Control should co-locate with the Assault Helicopter Battalion Forward CP.

i. Time schedules and weather delays should be adhered to except when preceeded by a tactical emergency.

j. Weather decisions should routinely be made one hour before PZ/LZ time to allow for dissemination of the decision to all echelons before the air assault force is committed.

k. The weather decision should be made jointly by the assault battalion commander and the supported unit commander.

l. Helicopters should not be operated more than three hours in a combat assault environment without shutdown and inspection for maintenance serviceability and combat/incident damage.

m. All air units engaged in the same operation should be in communication with each other.

n. In multiple ground battalion lifts, each battalion commander should have a command and control helicopter separate from the assault helicopter separate from the assault helicopter battalion commander's aircraft.

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