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The Battle of Phuoc YEN

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Screaming Eagles terminated Operation Carentan II on May 17. The paratrooper forces killed 2,100 NVA, captured 157 prisoners and 581 enemy weapons during the 47 day operation around Hue. "Relieve the pressure from the area around Hue," was their standing order and the Airborne infantrymen did just that as their highly mobile fighting units continually maintained pressure on the enemy and discouraged any future attack of the old Imperial City.

As a prelude to Phuoc Yen, the classic cordon operation of the Vietnam war, paratroopers from the 2nd Bn., 501st Abn. Inf. followed two Viet Cong into the village of Thon Kim Doi. An NVA company was waiting for the onrushing Screaming Eagles.

Immediately the village was sealed off allowing artillery and air strikes to pound the enemy force. The first day yielded 21 enemy bodies. Illumination continued through the night as the trapped enemy unit tried to exfiltrate the village. The following day found airborne riflemen firing into the village while air strikes and artillery continued to batter the remaining NVA. The day's results were 47 NVA killed. The final day saw the 2nd Brigade troopers sweeping the village and raising the total body count to 95.

The tactic of cordoning a village continued to develop through the 2nd Brigade and the coastal plains operations. The concept consists of keeping the companies in constant sweeping motions and still within striking distance of each other. Then when a lucrative target is found artillery and air strikes contain the enemy until additional airborne units are airlifted to the area sealing off any possible escape routes. The classic cordon of the Vietnam war occurred on April 28, around the village of Phuoc Yen.

The Phuoc Yen battle began with units from the 2nd Brigade trapping the 8th Bn, 90th NVA Reg in the stocking area of the Song Bo River, 2 miles northwest of Hue. For four days, companies from three 2nd Brigade battalions, plus local Popular Forces (PFs), and the "Black Panther" Company of the 1st ARVN Division, lay seige to the stocking shaped village complex that intelligence sources said was harbouring an NVA battalion.

The paratroopers were joined by the batteries of the 21st Artillery, helicopter gunships, and Air Force fighter-bombers. By morning of the fifth day, the NVA body count reached 419, and another 107 became the largest NVA force to surrender en masse to an American unit in the history of the war.

The Battle of Phuoc Yen

By Lt. Jon McAtee

So successful was the 2nd Brigade's cordon of Phuoc Yen village early in May, that U.S. Marine forces in Vietnam's I Corps tactical zone have now started to employ this type of tactics near the DMZ.

The stench of death hung in the air as the paratroopers of B Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf. continued their search at the scene of a five-day cordon operation which marked the largest single victory since the arrival of the Screaming Eagles in Vietnam. The 8th Bn., 90th North Vietnamese Regiment fought for survival for nearly four days trying to break through an impregnable airborne encirclement. Determined paratroopers from the 2nd Brigade repulsed every enemy escape attempt, inflicting heavy casualties on the NVA soldiers.

The battle of Phuoc Yen began with intelligence reports of the presence of the 8th Bn., 90th Reg., operating in the "stocking" area of the Song Bo River, 3 miles northwest of Hue. Two allied rifle companies, A Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf. from the 2nd Brigade and the Black Panther Co. from the 1st ARVN Division were deployed on the afternoon of April 28 to investigate.

The first contact of the ensuing battle was made under the hot afternoon sun amidst the humid green rice paddies just north of Duong Son village, situated at the opening of the "stocking." The allied fighting force pushed the enemy southward through the rice and into the natural barrier formed by the Song Bo.

Col. John H. Cushman, Lexington, Mass., 2nd Brigade commander, immediately dispatched his forces to seal

any potential escape routes for the trapped enemy force. Spreading through the rice in the late afternoon, the Black Panthers and A Co. paratroopers formed a curving arc of men to seal off the mouth of the "stocking." Delta Co., 2nd Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf. was helilifted into a reinforcing position east of Alpha Co.

While Vietnamese Skyraiders dropped 250-pound bombs on enemy positions, sending jagged steel fragments whirling through the trees, A Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf. and B Co., 2nd Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf. maneuvered around the bend of the river on the west and south. By nightfall, the paratroopers, with three Popular Forces (PF) platoons on the east side of the "stocking," completed the cordon. They sealed the enemy in what was described by one observer as "a field commander's tactical dream." All forces were in position by 7 p.m. with reinforcing units moving to close on the enemy, should an attempted break take place.

Throughout the night, the paratroopers surveyed their fields of fire by the ghostly light of flares dropped from C-47's. The thump and crack of artillery pounding the trapped enemy battalion provided background sounds to the shifting flare shadows as the allied troops held the trap shut. At 1 a.m., Alpha Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf. tensed as they observed three NVA

trying to swim out of the cordon. Their figures immediately came into view against the dark water under the flares. They made good targets as the troopers fired on them, forestalling a potential escape.

The first significant attempt to break the tight encirclement was made on the morning of April 29, when A Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf. engaged an enemy platoon. Ducking shrapnel from bursting 60 mm mortar rounds, the paratroopers held their positions against heavy volumes of small arms and automatic weapons fire. Alpha Co. paratroopers returned the fire as gunships and heavy artillery tore the enemy force apart. Unable to breach the shrinking airborne snare, the NVA force retreated back to their doomed stronghold in Duong Son village.

Sporadic fire continued throughout the day with artillery and air strikes battering the enemy fortifications. Late that afternoon, a second desperate enemy attempt to break the airborne stranglehold began as an unknown size enemy force attacked the northern blocking position with hand grenades and small arms fire. The airborne troopers of A Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf., nestled behind a natural hedgerow, sprayed the NVA with deadly grazing fire. By twilight, the decimated enemy force was driven back into their sanc-

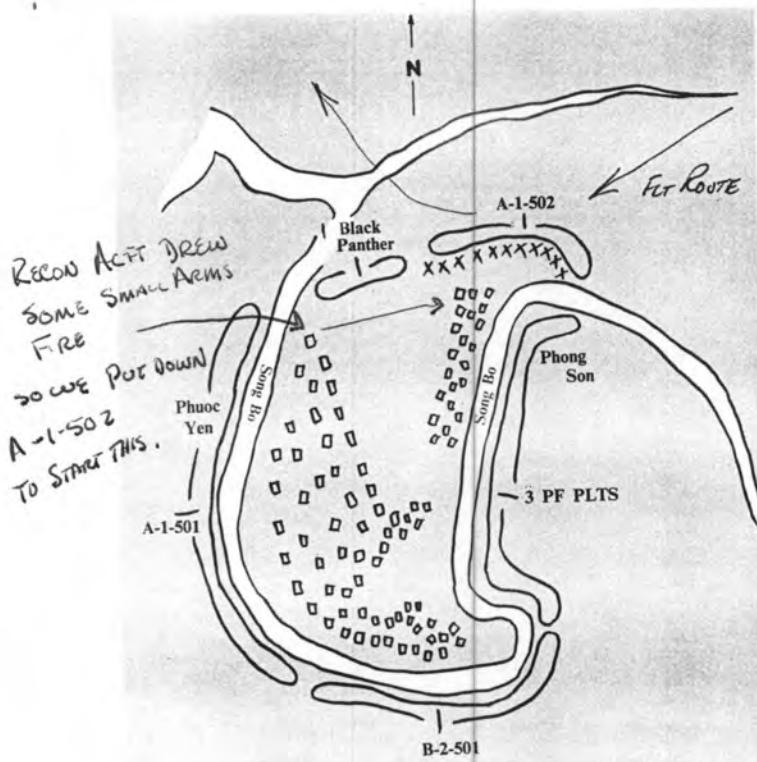
By COMBAT ASSAULT

188th Put them in. I was Air Mission Cdr., our gun ships got 55 body count

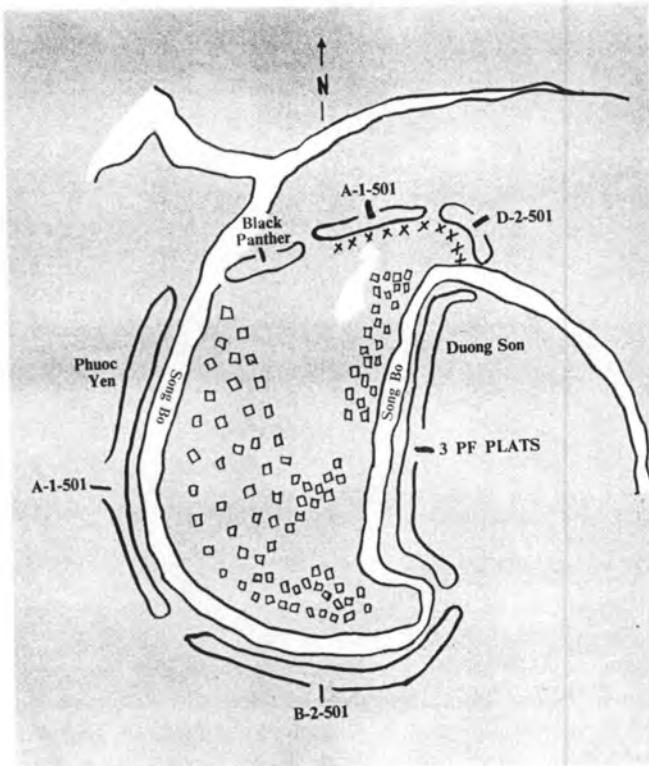
* WE HAD TO DROP FLARES ON SEVERAL NIGHTS WHEN THE AIRFORCE OR FIELD ARMY RAN OUT.

Jack - add your comments into this article and we will print the entire article with map

THE STOCKING

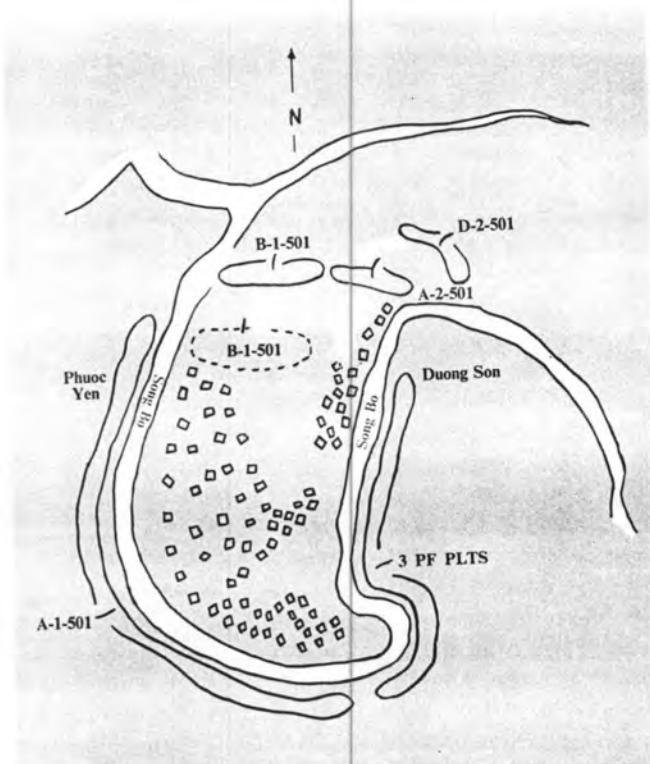


April 28th



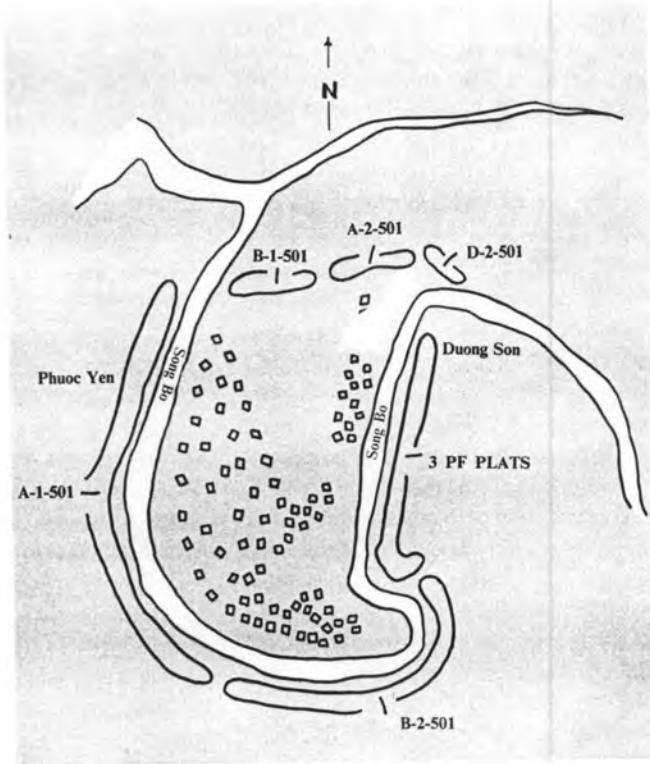
April 29th

First Breakout Attempt



May 1st

Assault and Shrinking Perimeter



May 1st

Second Breakout Attempt



Onn

2nd Brigade paratroopers storm Vietnamese village following numerous artillery missions and tactical air strikes.

tuary, leaving seven bodies sprawled before Alpha Co's hedgerow.

The sights and sounds of the first night were repeated as artillery and illumination again made the night miserable for the trapped NVA. On the morning of the 30th, the ARVN Black Panther Co. began an assault into the northern section of Phuoc Yen, but withdrew because of intense enemy fire. Members of A Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf. also launched an attack on Duong Son village but withdrew after meeting stiff enemy resistance. Fourteen air strikes pounded the enemy forces and artillery fires bridged the gaps between the sorties. "When the air strikes were called in, our artillery shells would stop just as the jets swooped down," said Capt. Jimmie J. Smith, South Lyon, Mich., an artillery fire direction officer. "By coordinating with all factions involved, the intense pressure on the enemy never faltered." During the course of the five-day battle, "Redlegs" of the 1st Bn. (Abn), 321st Arty. lobbed more than 13,500 rounds of 105 mm, 155 mm, and 8-inch howitzer shells on the enemy. Like the airborne infantrymen holding the line at the cordon, the artillerymen toiled day and night, endlessly uncrating, fusing, and firing the high explosives and illumination rounds which steadily

blew the enemy forces apart.

Late in the afternoon of the 30th, the Black Panthers returned to their parent unit and were replaced by B Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf., who air assaulted into position at the northwestern edge of the cordon.

All units on the cordon received intermittent rifle, machine-gun, RPG, and mortar fire during the night as remnants of the frustrated enemy battalion again probed the confining perimeter for weakness. At 4:40 a.m. on May 1, A Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf. was struck by a ground attack toward the northwestern corner of the cordon. Supported by concentrated 60mm mortar fire lobbed from a mortar position outside the cordoned area, the NVA charged across the dewy rice toward the hedgerow positions held by the paratroopers. Holding their positions, the airborne infantrymen matched the NVA round for round for two hours before the enemy broke contact. During a lapse in the illumination, an enemy platoon broke through the cordon. At daybreak, 23 enemy bodies were strewn across the battlefield, cut down by the combined paratrooper force. Another 10 were killed attempting

NVA platoon sergeant tells his men to give themselves up.

to swim north in the Song Bo.

Artillery continued to pound the enemy-held villages as a Division Psychological Operations team began broadcasting an appeal for the hopelessly trapped enemy to surrender and avoid further punishment. At 11 a.m., a one hour lull in the shelling was an-

Higgs





Rifleman from the 502nd Infantry fires M-16 at enemy bunker position.

A Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf. began a southward sweep of Duong Son. Little enemy resistance prevailed as the paratroopers searched the rubble for the battered survivors.

During the sweep, B Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf. and D Co., 2nd Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf. tightened the cordon around the remaining buildings in Phuoc Yen. Along the southern bend of the river, B Co., 2nd Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf. boarded helicopters to move to another area of operation, while A Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf. and the local popular forces platoons extended their lines to plug the hole in the cordon. At the end of May 1st, the most decisive day of the operation, the combined airborne fighting force killed 121 NVA, and captured 95 prisoners with 59 enemy weapons.

During the night, the few surviving NVA soldiers continued to probe for a weak spot in the dense shrinking perimeter. Short, sharp firefights followed, resulting only in swelling the body count of NVA for the paratroopers holding the perimeter. On May 2nd, a final sweep of the cordon was made with little enemy resistance.

Between May 3rd and the 6th, Bravo Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf. combed the rubble, picking up weapons and equipment, while uncovering additional bodies to bring the final enemy body-count to 429 NVA killed and 107 captured against American losses of five killed and 31 wounded. Interrogation of prisoners revealed their battalion commander, executive officer, and three company commanders died in the vicious five-day battle. So successful was the paratrooper's combat cordon in pinning down an elusive enemy that Lt. Gen. Henry W. Buse Jr., commander of the Pacific Marine Force, said recently that I Corps Marine forces have adopted the tactic and have started to employ it near the DMZ.

Maj. Gen. O. M. Barsanti, Division commander, presents Silver Star to 2nd Brigade company commander after the battle.

Higgs

nounced to allow the enemy to safely give up. The team, lead by Capt. Larry Cochran, Thomaston, Ga., appealed to the enemy through a loudspeaker carried to different positions on the cordon. "We wanted to save as many lives as we could," Capt. Cochran said. "An interpreter spoke to the NVA telling them their situation was hopeless.

An NVA staff sergeant was first to surrender and after receiving medical treatment and food, he volunteered to urge his comrades to follow the same course of action. Going back to the enemy hamlet, the sergeant went into one of the fortified bunkers and per-

suaded six NVA soldiers to surrender. Soon a slow trickle of NVA filtered to the perimeter with their hands in the air and then a deluge of beaten enemy soldiers began surrendering. Some had to be pulled out of the bunkers, the wounded carried, and many were uncovered by a systematic search of the river bank and pulled out of the water. Medevac helicopters quickly came in to extract the seriously wounded.

Elsewhere in the cordoned area, four air strikes struck the area around Phuoc Yen, where several NVA soldiers were observed trying to sneak past the ring of airborne companies. At 1:45 p.m.,



Bishop

SOURCE: ARMY MAGAZINE ? *Jack if you have the original article we need to put that info here*

② THE BATTLE OF PHUOC YEN

a The cordon operation around Phuoc Yen village (vic ID 6827) began on 28 April when four rifle companies from 2d Bde 101st Abn Div (A-1-502, A-1-501 and B and D-2-501) responded to intelligence information and encircled the hamlet where an NVA battalion later identified as the 8th Bn, 90th NVA Regt, was reportedly intrenched. During the night and early morning hours of the 29th, the enemy made three concerted efforts to break the encirclement which were successfully beaten back. On 29 April, heavy artillery, TAC Air, gunships and recoilless rifle fire together with intensive machine gun and rifle fire from the paratroopers continued to batter the enemy. Gunships from the 308th Avn Bn and 101st Avn Bn killed 51 enemy. An additional 13 NVA were killed by the paratroopers and 4 weapons were captured. On 30 April, the enemy continued to deliver heavy volumes of SA/AW/RPG fire from the village. Friendly artillery and 15 TAC airstrikes continued throughout the day to soften up the objective area, as another paratroop company (B-1-501) was heli-lifted into augment the seal.

SOURCE: Operational Report - Lessons Learned, Headquarters, 101st Air Cavalry Division, Period Ending 30 April 1968 (U)

— Jack Johnson INPUT here on the Bw's part