

Chapter 5. LZ Sally; March 1968

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

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

Later:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From the brigade journal of March 2d:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reference: Same as Basic Order

1. (C) Enemy Situation

a. NVA Units

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

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

b. Local Force Units

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

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

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

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

c. Irregular Forces

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

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

2. (C) Essential Elements of Information

a. Will the enemy attack LZ Sally and FSB Pinky? If so, when, where, and in what strength?

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

3. (C) Intelligence Acquisition Tasks

a. Orders to attached and subordinate units. All attached and subordinate units report all enemy activity in assigned AO, as outlined in the Brigade SOP.

b. Requests to higher, adjacent, and cooperating units. G2, 1st ACD and G2, 101st Abn Div are requested to provide information on enemy activity in and surrounding the 2d Bde, 101st Abn Div AO.

CUSHMAN
Col

Distribution: Same as OPORD 5-68

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

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8. (C) Intelligence:

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

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

(2) Terrain:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From a letter home on March 6th:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From a 9 March letter home:

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

And on March 10th I wrote...

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

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

My letter of 10 March continued...

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

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

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

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

- Cushman memoirs - Jack here's your notes for narrative

Jack Johnson
notes 4/13/98

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

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

* * * * *

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

HOW TRUE - I MONITORED HIS CMD CHANNEL IN THE C&C. HE REALLY WAS OUTRAGED IN HIS CRITICISM OF HIS PEOPLE OVER THE RADIO

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

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

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

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

DRAFT
(OVER.)

GEN BARSANTI HAD HIS OWN LITTLE HOCH WITH A ONE HOLE CRAPPER RIGHT OUTSIDE HIS FRONT DOOR - HONEST TO GOD THE DOOR TO THE CRAPPER HAD A TWO STAR PLATE. ONE MORNING BARSANTI GOT UP AND WENT OUT TO DO HIS DAILY DUMP AND SOME ONE HAD USED HIS CRAPPER DURING THE NIGHT. HE WENT 'NUT'S - HAD THE MP'S AND CID IN TO TRY TO FIND THE CULPRET. HE WANTED ANALYSIS DONE ON THE CRAP TO SEE IF THE PERSON COULD BE IDENTIFIED. REALLY KIND OF CRAZY.

THEN WHEN HE WAS CHANGING COMMAND HE CAME BY EACH UNIT AND SHOOK HANDS WITH EACH OF US AND ALMOST CRIED WHEN HE THANKED US AND SAID GOOD BY. I WAS XO AT THE 159TH WHEN HE LEFT THE DIV, AS I RECALL, AND HE WAS REAL EMOTIONAL WHEN HE CAME BY OUR TENT AREA TO SAY GOODBY.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of the day, exercising command from their C&C ships. LZ Sally continued to grow; we now had the 101st's 188th Aviation Company with its ~~31~~ UH-1 assault helicopters based right on Sally. Some typical days' operations...

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

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

14 March:

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

15 March

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

¹¹This and the similar reports that follow are taken verbatim from the document "After Action Report (Offensive Operations 10 Mar 68 - 17 May 1968)," Headquarters 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, APO San Francisco 06383, dated 29 May 1968, on file in the National Archives.

¹²Charles Gadd and Timothy O'Connor each has a tale to tell about the active patrolling up the Song Bo River into the mountains where at a bend in the river A/1/501 after a fire fight uncovered this well-concealed storage site complete with delivery sampans. After visits by many, including the division commander, A Company blew up the ammo and left the scene, headed for the action described under March 15th.

positions in order to attack the enemy's position on 16 March. Operations resulted in 1 US KIA, 6 US WIA. Enemy assessment was 12 NVA KIA, 2 VC KIA, 2 VC PW, 3 detainees, 2 AK-47s, 2 M16 rifles, 3 ChiCom grenades, 1 60mm mortar round, 6500 pounds of rice.

16 March

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

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

"Day before yesterday General Barsanti came by and presented me with the Silver Star for action last month in Hai Lang. He is generous with his authority for this award. Other commanders were likewise decorated, Bishop & Tallman."¹³

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

"For gallantry in action in the Republic of Vietnam on 16 March 1968. Colonel Cushman distinguished himself on 16 March 1968 while serving as Brigade Commander, Second Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, on a combat operation with Company A 1st Battalion (Airborne) 501st Infantry... On 16 March the 1st platoon, attacking north, had been stopped by intense rocket and automatic weapons fire from concealed bunker

¹³The day after Pete Piotrkowski was wounded (see Chapter 3, page 39), General Barsanti had ordered that he be written up for a Silver Star. In the National Archives' files on the 1/501st at Suitland, MD, there is a newspaper clipping of the presentation of that award to Pete in the hospital at Fort Campbell.

positions 200 meters inside the village. The 2d platoon was engaged with the enemy in a flanking position 300 meters to the northwest. Movement of the company was halted. Colonel Cushman, Brigade Commander, was airborne over the battle area in an unarmed light observation helicopter, OH-23. Realizing that effective and early resumption of the attack required his personal intervention, Colonel Cushman landed in his OH-23 100 meters from the 2d platoon and with his radio operator moved forward into the fire-swept area to the platoon leader and platoon sergeant where he determined the situation. Returning to his landing area, he called in his helicopter and moved to the location of the company commander. With his radio operator he accompanied the company commander and artillery forward observer to where the 1st platoon was in contact. Here he determined that the point elements of the 1st platoon had been cut down by machine gun fire from a concealed enemy bunker, and that platoon lead elements continued under intense enemy fire. Colonel Cushman then moved forward to join the lead riflemen of the platoon. Exposing himself to hostile fire at close range, he determined that the primary fire support needed by Company A was aerial rocket artillery fire to disengage the 1st platoon, recover its wounded, and destroy the enemy positions. Colonel Cushman so informed the battalion commander, and remained with the artillery forward observer near the enemy positions until the rocket attack was successfully completed. Returning to the company command post, and determining that lack of ammunition was holding up a flanking attack by the 2d platoon, Colonel Cushman again called in his OH-23, boarded it, loaded it with ammunition, and once more entered the fire-swept 2d platoon area where he delivered the ammunition and evacuated a wounded soldier. Company A then executed a flanking attack by the 2d platoon, enveloping the enemy positions..."¹⁴

¹⁴In May 1994, I received a letter from Sergeant Timothy O'Connor, to whom I had written about a Memorial Day ceremony planned for that year. His letter said in part:

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

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

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

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

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

I REMEMBER RIGHT AFTER WE GOT TO SALLY ~~WE~~ GOT A LOT OF 60MM'S -

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

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

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

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

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

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

20 March

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

I COULD
HEAR THEM
DROPPING THE
ROUNDS DOWN
THE TUBE.
MOST OF THEM
WENT INTO
THE BOE
TROOP AREA.
WE HAD
MAYBE ONE
ACFT THAT
GOT SOME
SMALL FRAGMENT
DAMAGE.

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

21 March

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

22 March

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

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

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

From the 29 May After Action Report:

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE BN CMDR WAYNE PROKUP PUT ME IN FOR A SILVER STAR FOR OUR SUPPORT OF THIS OPERATION. IT WAS AWARDED BEFORE I DECEASED IN SEP 68.

*

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

From the brigade journal for March 27th...

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

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

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

"1253 1-501: A & D Co together and S3 briefing and discussing how to get across river.

"1340 1-501: Request 5+2 to lift D Co across river, believe have NVA company boxed in with 6 gunboats and PF. PZ YD748308, LZ YD764303.

"1500 1-501: D Co YD754316 prep for CA to YD764303. A Co YD754316 crossing river at this time by sampans.

"1521 1-501 (late entry): D Co in heavy contact on LZ, receiving mortars and small arms, need airstrike.

"1534 Bde CO: D 1-501 landed on LZ764303. LZ was green. Lead element received mortar and SA fire as they neared village line (YD768307). FO and RTO WIA. Have gunships and Navy gunboats supporting. One gunboat drew fire from village. Request air strike. NAVY A-4's LOW LEVEL - SOME REALLY GOOD BOMBING BECAUSE OF POOR WEATHER. OUR GUNS

"1602 1-501: Medevac complete for D Co. 9 WIA, no KIA reported.

"1605 1-501: D Co has 2 KIA.

"1708 1-501: A Co has completed river crossing vic YD768310, moving to link up with D Co.

"1730 CO returned CP."

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

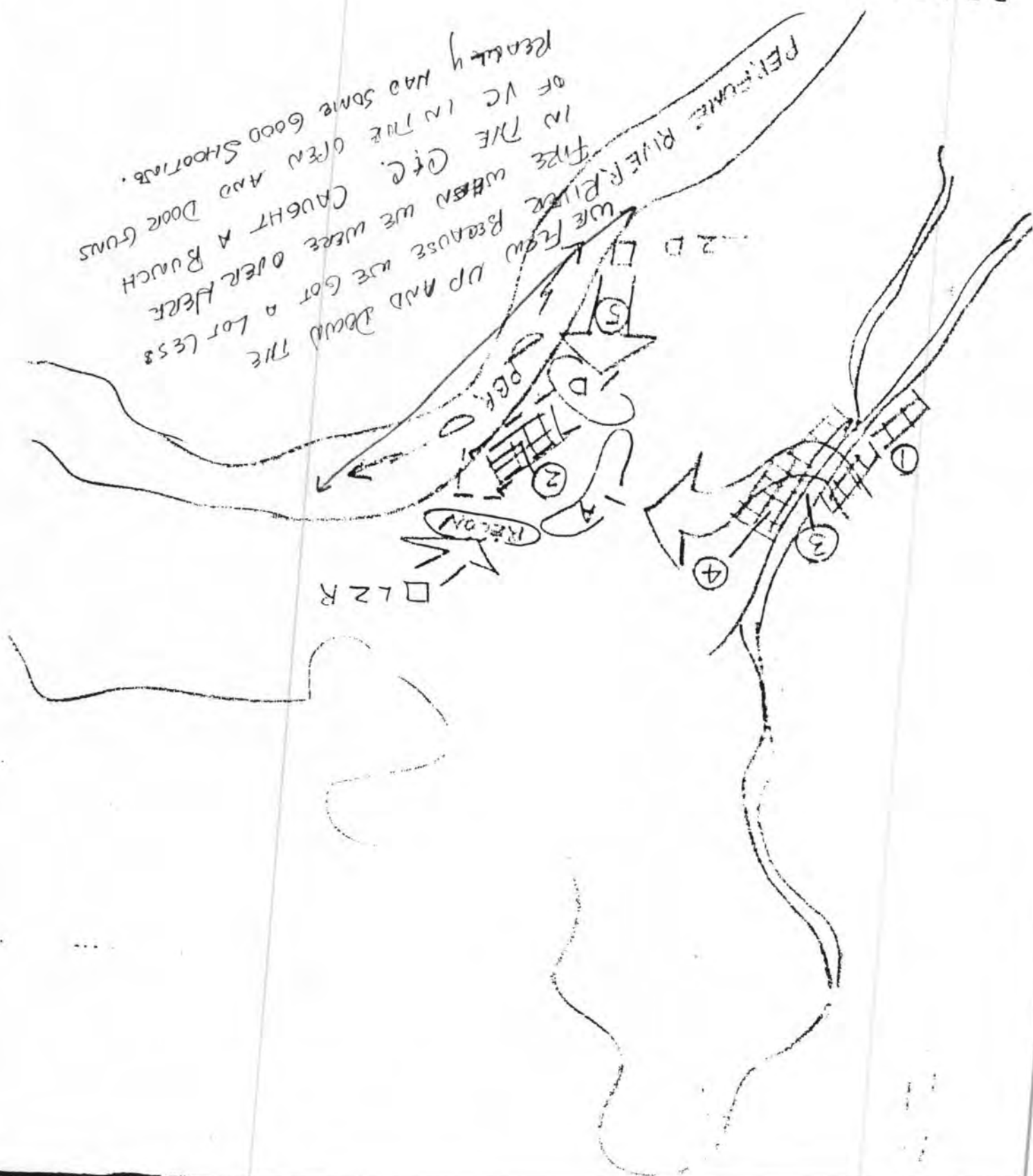
Although, along with artillery and ^{Spiders} ~~Cobra~~ gunships, three airstrikes had supported the 1/501, Wayne Prokup and I were seeing night coming on and with it a typical, and probably typically successful, effort by the VC in the village to slip out of our grasp. We decided that we would ask for an Air Force C-47 flare ship to fly overhead, that the 1/501 along with PFs would surround the village on its land side, that the Navy's patrol craft would cover the water side, and that we would trap the VC in the village. ^{NO - I DON'T THINK THEY WERE AVAILABLE IN OUR AREA.} YES, I CONTROLLED THEM FROM THE C&C.

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

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

THIS WAS REALLY A FUN TIME. LOW VISIBILITY CLOUD COVER 500-600 FOOT ALTITUDE IS ALL YOU COULD GET.

REARLY HAD SOME GOOD SHOOTING.
 OF VC IN THE OPEN AND DOOR GUNS
 IN THE CTR. FIRE
 WE FROU BECAUSE WE WERE CAUGHT A BUNCH
 UP AND WE GOT A LOT LESS
 FIRE IN THE CTR. BECAUSE WE WERE CAUGHT A BUNCH



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

From the brigade journal for March 27th...

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

The 22 June S3 report relates...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The brigade journal entry continued...

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 6. Cordon Operations; March-June 1968

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

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

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

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

The article began...

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

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

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

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

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

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

The text continued...

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

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

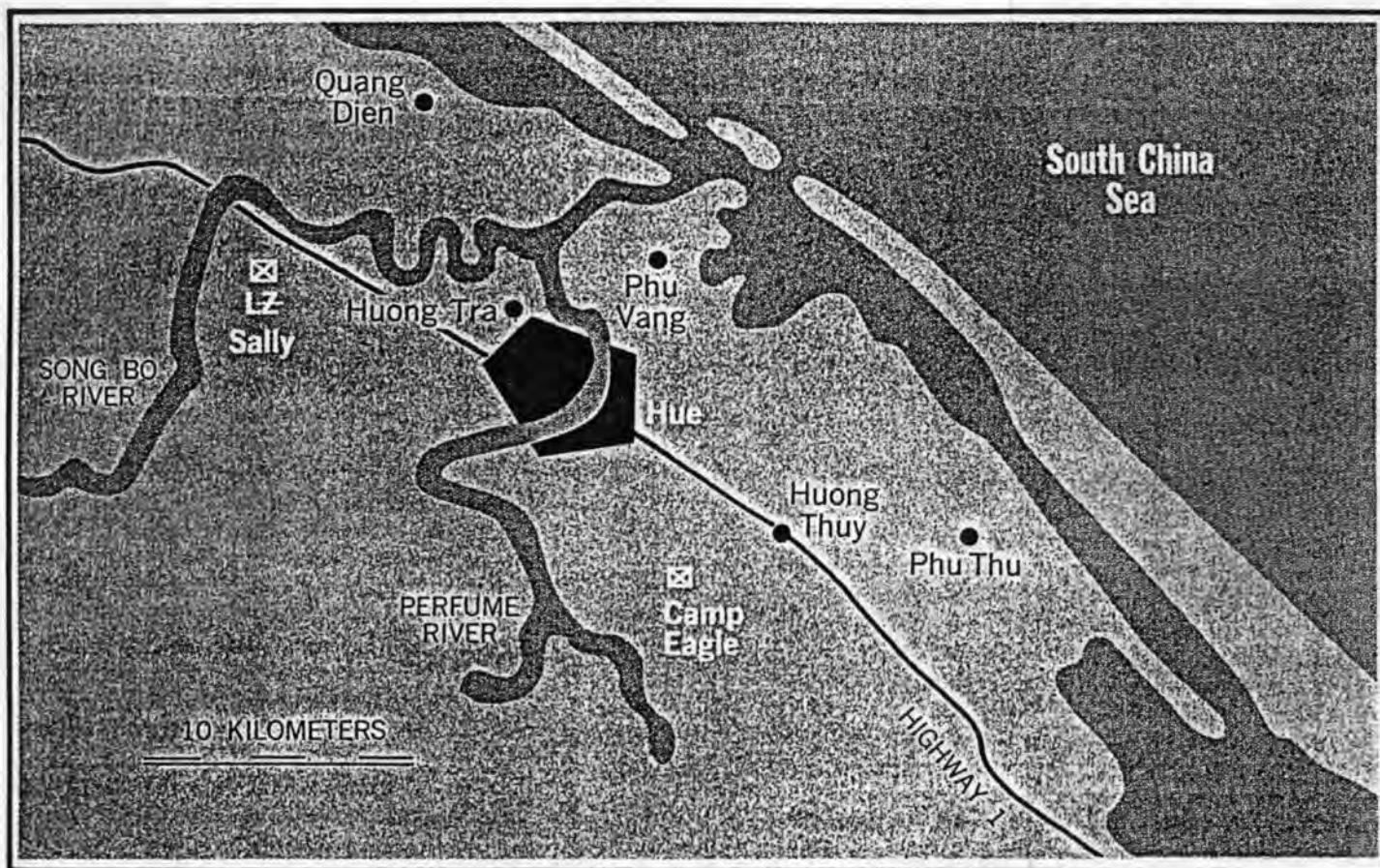
"Just a little more than three months later, by the end of June 1968, the NVA was gone and the process of digging out the last of the remaining VC units was under way.

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

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

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

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



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

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

The essentials of the cordon operation were:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

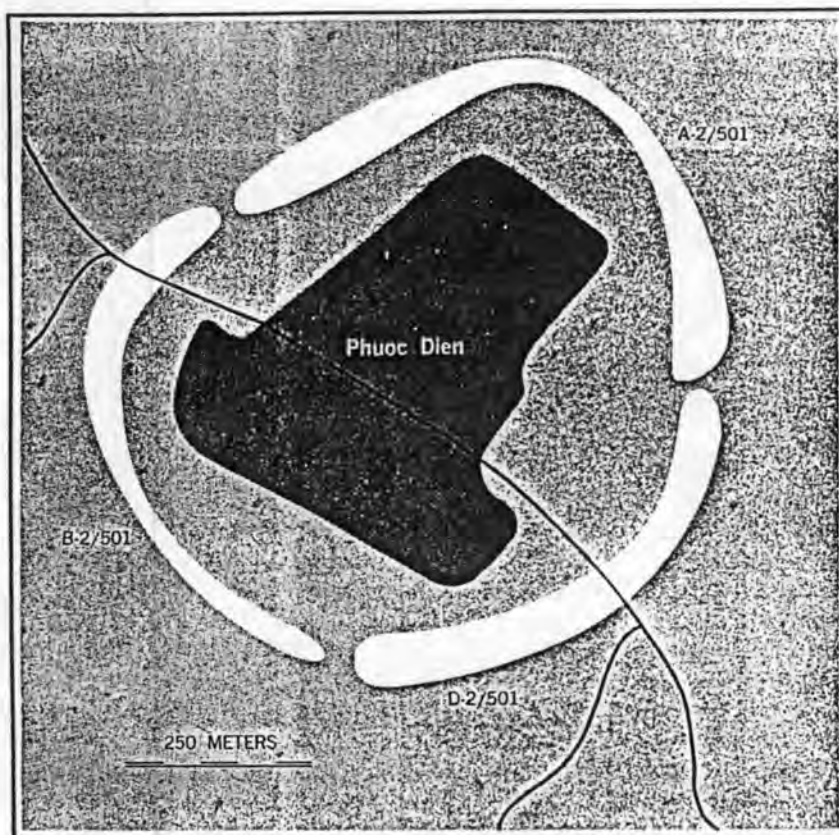
Darkness was coming on, and we had too little time to assault the village that afternoon. The enemy was surrounded. We thought he had at least a company in the village. Our experience with this type of situation told us that he would try to get out during the night.

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

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

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

WE PUT THIS LIFT IN AND GOT A LOT OF FIRE OUT OF THE VILLAGE THE LIFT TO THE SOUTH WAS NOT HOT AT ALL. WHEN THEY MOVED UP TO THE EDGE OF THE VILLAGE ALL HELL BROKE LOSE.



The Phuoc Dien encirclement 10-11 April 1968.

Navy patrolled the river line.

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

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

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

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

Dien. So we went after them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THIS WAS A
MAJOR REQUIREMENT
FOR US.

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

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

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

Then came the classic cordon operation of Phuoc Yen.

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

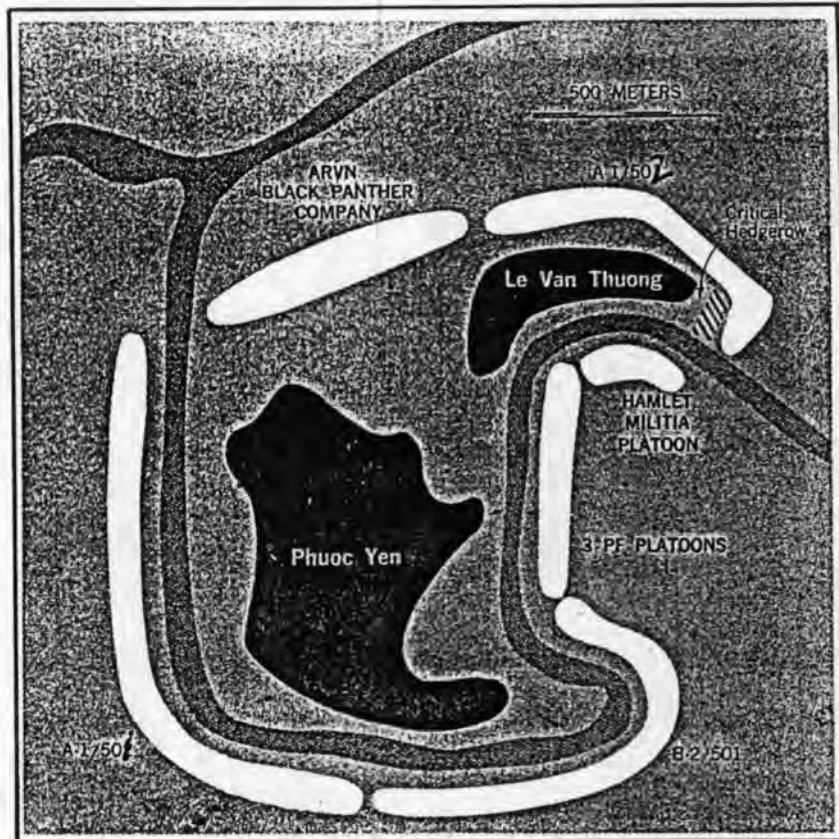
Companies of the 1/501st Infantry and local Vietnamese forces, along with the Black Panther Company of the ARVN 1st Division, were scouring the area looking for the enemy. This was slow work because each village entered was a potential defended position. Although most of the people had long been gone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

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

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

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

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



river bank across from Le Van Thuong was also undefended.

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

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

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

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

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

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

WE DID THE AIRLIFT AND STAGED THE WHOLE THING WHEN THE C&C. SA SOME FORCE WHEN WE FLEW BY ON THE NORTH.

HE WAS IN THE C&C AND REALLY DIDN'T HAVE A LOT OF EXPERIENCE HAD TO COACH HIM A LOT ABOUT DOWN COMBAT ASSAULTS.



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

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

AS I RECALL WE GOT A CALL - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT TO GET A FLARE SHIP UP. WE GOT OUR STAND BY OUT AND THEN SPENT THE REST OF THE NIGHT UNPACKING AND LOADING FLARES INTO OUR AIRCRAFT.

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

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

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

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

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

Between 0500 and 0600, the enemy attacked the left flank of Company A in a final desperate attempt to penetrate and escape the perimeter. This attack cost the lives of three men of Company A but failed in its purpose. 84

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The next day, both battalions attacked. Prog-

I DON'T THINK WE GOT A THING FROM 101 IN THE FORM OF AWARDS OR DECORATIONS FOR THIS OPERATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That leads to our second principle of operations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DRAFT

86

8 July 1996

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

DRAFT

87

8 July 1996

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From the brigade journal of 1 April...

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

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

From Cleo Hogan's diary...

April 4

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

5 April

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

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

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

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

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

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NUMBER NND 873541, BY D.M.G. / R.R., DATE 7-11-95

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Copy 14 of 15 Copies
2d Squadron (Abn), 17th Cavalry
Camp Evans (YD52312), RVN
311600 March 1968
YZ 51

OPORD 11-68

References: Map, 1:50,000, Sheet 642 II.

Task Organization:

A/2/17 (CPT Hartjens, Cndg)

2d Plat, A/3/5: Cav

Radar Team (DS)

Engr Mine Sweep Team

TF CONTROL:

1 CAC UB-1H

1 H-23

1 UH-1H (Log Ship)

Aero Rifle Platoon

B/2/17 (CPT Rossiello, Cndg)

Radar Team (DS)

Engr Mine Sweep Team

1. SITUATION: Situation is highly volatile with YD 52312.

a. Enemy Forces: See Current INTSUM. as of 2/2/17 by mail and airtel.

b. Friendly Forces: 2/101 Bde continues to secure Camp Evans off Hwy 1 in AG. CO, 1/502 Inf, assumes responsibility for anti mine amb via YD593306 to YD606112, for security of bridge at YD519349, and for security of designated mine sweep teams on Hwy 1 effective 311330 Hrs, March 1968.

c. Attachments & Detachments: Task Organization.

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

3. EXECUTION:

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

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

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OPORD 11-68

a. Trp "A":

b. Trp "B" to follow B/2/17

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

Reinforcements:

(2) C&O seize Objective C.

(3) C&O secure Western half of TP WDP via YD575385.

Annexes:

1. Initial Trp "B" (Omitted)

2. Order

3. Order

4. Order (Omitted)

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

(2) C&O reinforce attack on Objective C.

Reinforcements:

(3) C&O secure Eastern half of TP WDP via YD575385.

OPORD 11-68

a. Aero Rifle Platoon:

1. Order

(1) Reinforce PF at bridge via YD476376.

(2) Establish night ambush via YD4836.

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

(4) Secure mine sweep teams in sector.

f. Coordinating Instructions:

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

(2) FO available in C&O Ship, airborne at 0630 hours.

4. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS:

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

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

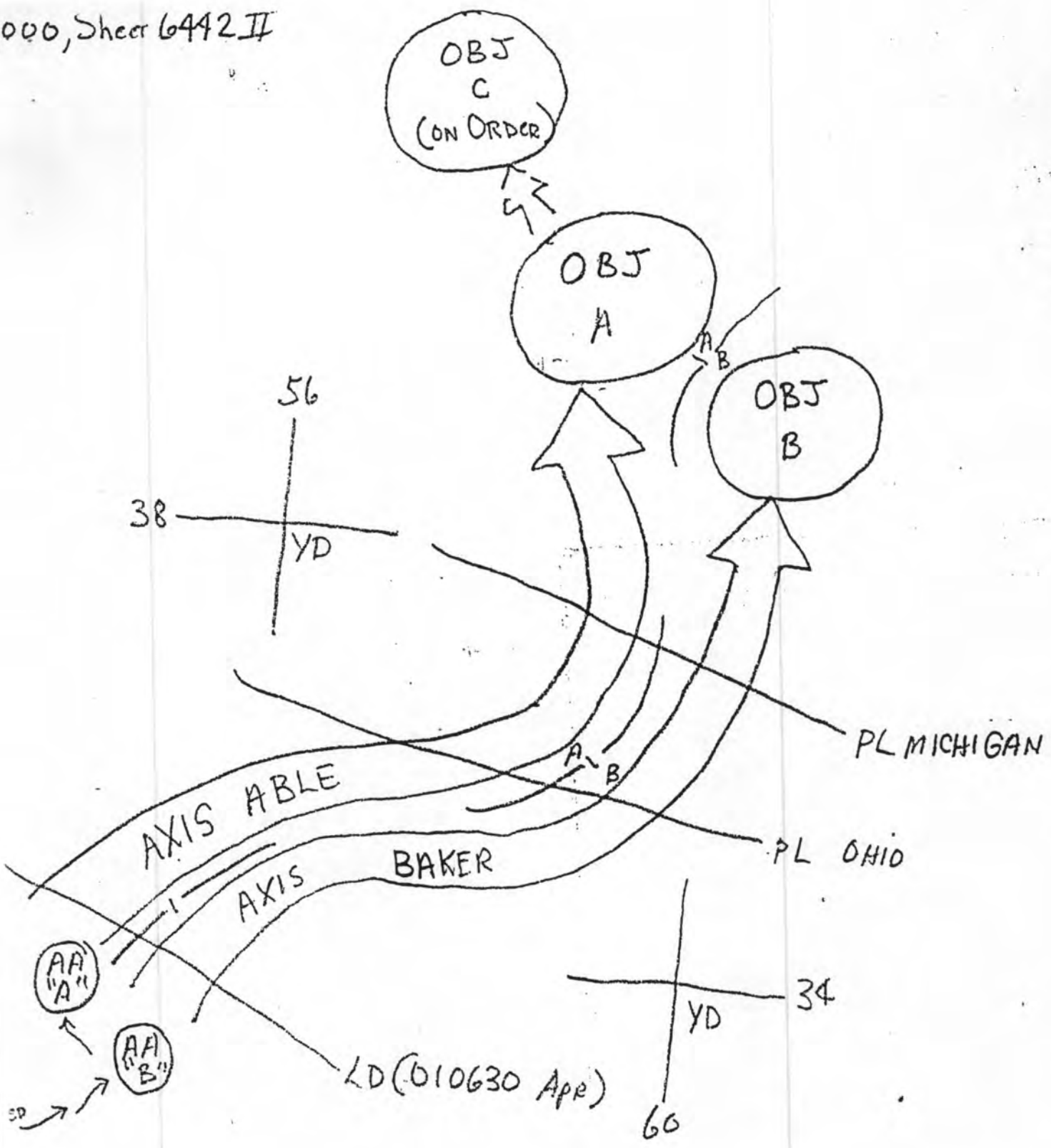
5. COMMAND AND SIGNAL:

a. Current SSI & SOI in effect.

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

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

FROM: CO, 1st BN (ADM), 501st INF, LZ Sally, RVN

TO: CO, 3d Bde, 82 Abn Div

SITREP FOR PERIOD 311730H - 011730H Apr 68

1. (C) OPERATIONAL SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OPPLAN 1

Copy No. 4 of 8
Quang Tri Sector
YD 338533
041700 April 68
QT Northside

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

TASK Organization:

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

1. Situation

a. Enemy Forces: Current INTSUM

b. Friendly Forces:

- (1) Sector initiates plan H-hour, D-day to Cordon/Search Hai An Khe villages vic YD (5155) (5153) (5152) (5153).
- (2) 2/501 Abn Bn (-) Cordons Thon Trung An and Thon Tham Khe hamlets YD (5253) (5352) NLT 080600 April.
- (3) Naval Element at Wunder Beach screens eastern flank of Hai An, Hai Khe villages YD 5155 to 5553 from 080600 April to termination of operation.

(4) Mevevac supports operation (Freq 49.30)

c. Attachments and Detachments: TASK ORG.

d. Assumptions:

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

2. Mission: Section in conjunction with 2/501 Abn Bn (-) and naval support conduct Cordon/Search, County Fair Operation 0800 April in Hai Lang Sub sector for purpose of population control.
3. Execution:
 - a. Concept of Operation: Annex A Operation Overlay. 2/501 Abn Bn (-) moves into position by foot to Cordon Trung An and Tham Khe villages; RF Companies/Kit Carson move by helicopter from Hai Lang District HQ to objective "A" and conduct clearing operation; PFF elements move by helicopter from La Vang to objective "A" and conduct Search/Classification operation; "New Hope Tm moves by helicopter from La Vang to objective "B" and conduct Country Fair Activities Commencing at 081300 hours April.
 - b. 2/501 Companies; Move into position at H-hour, D-day.
 - c. TF RF : Commence clearing operation H-hour, D-day.
 - d. TF PFF; Commence Search/Classification operation H-hour, D-day.
 - e. Tm "New Hope": Commence ^{County}~~County~~ Fair activity H-hour, D-day.
 - f. Coordination Instructions:
 - (1) Report the enemy use of boby traps.
 - (2) Report the presence of VC in Village.
 - (3) Medevac available on call.
 - (4) 2/501 Abn Bn (-) and Hai Lang Sub Sector arty available on call.
 - (5) All coordination and reporting will be effected with Hai Lang Sub Sector Commander.
 - (6) Duration of operation is one day. Hai Lang Sub Sector command will advise on termination.
 - (7) Effective for planning on receipt; for execution on order.
4. Administration/Logistics and supply:
 - a. Supply:
 - Class 1: Cords
 - Class 2/4: Payop kit - RD Team.
 - Tents - Cords
 - Helicopters - 2/501 Abn
 - Leaflets - Cords
5. Command and Signal

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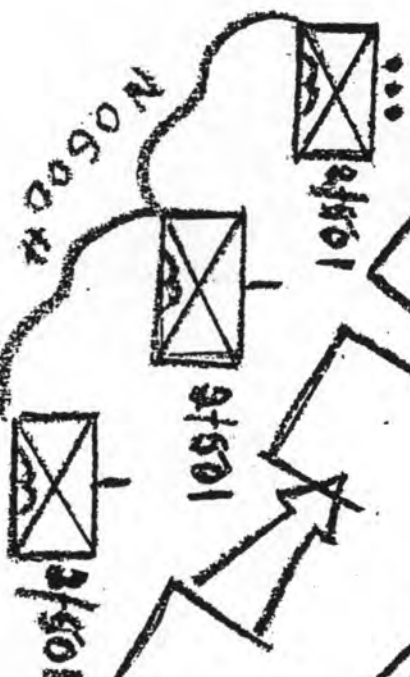


+



VIA - N/POLICE
+ KID CARSON

N0800H



B

A

A

The April 4th brigade summary contained these items on the 2/501st...

(3) Co C. Conducted amphibious assault utilizing 1 BARC from WUNDER BEACH to vic YD546526. Conducted cordon and search in village vic YD540525. Conducted RIF operations from village to WUNDER BEACH. Negative casualties. Negative enemy assessment.

(4) Co D. PF squad attached. Conducted RIF operation in AO. Moved by truck to YD462523. Conducted RIF operations to YD445535, YD462530. Continued operations to WUNDER BEACH. Negative casualties. Negative enemy assessment.

(5) Recon Plat. Provided security for minesweep team from WUNDER BEACH to FSB HARCORE. Prepared for future operations. Negative casualties. Negative enemy assessment.

That day, April 4th, all companies of 1/502 and all but one of the 2/327 reported no contact, and "negative casualties; negative enemy assessment." The 2d Brigade had four wounded all day, all from mines.

However, in 5 April's journal, the 1/501 reported a serious engagement on the 4th.

26	0503		From 1-501: Wrap up on yesterday's activities. A Co YD648297 found graves - 6 NVA		
			bodies - 2 days old - killed by NAP & Arty.		
			1254 Co A YD697297 - engaged 1 NVA in bunker		
			results - 3 NVA POW's - 2 AK-47's, 2 M16's,		
			2 RFG'12's. 1358 A Co YD700296 - 2 NVA		
			ran in bunker - 3 came out gave up - 1 more		
			is in bunker - killed. 1505 - losses - 15		
			WIA, 3 KIA, 3 MIA - Arty all night at		
			YD686307.		

Although April 5th was another day of light activity, our S-2, Major Ray Riggan, was not letting us forget the enemy. From a page of his intelligence estimate of April 5th...

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Appendix 1 (Agent Reports, 191st MID) to 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division
INTSUM 96468

1. By order of the Tri-Thien Military Region Commander, the VC have organized five to seven armed "assault propaganda teams" in each district. Each team consists of three or four members. The teams are controlled by their district, which provides the propaganda materials, posters etc. In some cases local guerrilla forces and villages may have one or two teams, also controlled by Tri-Thien Military Region. Mission of the propaganda teams is to turn the people against the GVN and the Americans, destroy all evidences of the GVN in areas they control, and teach the people songs of the revolution. Activities of the teams include stopping civilian busses to propagandize the people, infiltrate the GVN controlled areas at night, make speeches by loudspeakers, pass out propaganda, and post propaganda signs, flag, pictures and placards. Sources believe that there are at present three teams at Quang Tri and one team at Phong Dien, one at Quang Dien and one at Phu Vang (C-3)

2. On 3 April 1968, all hamlet guerrillas living along the Song O Lau (River) from Pho Trach #1 (YD439435) north to Ap Van Trinh (YD515469) came to the Dong My-Pho Trach area (YD509437) to join with the Than Phong District Force Company and an NVA company, not further identified, to form a new battalion, unit designation unknown. Strength of the battalion will be 320 men, including 117 from Than Phong Co, 150 from the NVA Co, and 53 Hamlet guerrillas. Villagers from Phong Binh Village have been ordered to cook food for the unit. Weapons of the new battalion include 2X82mm mortars, 4 X 60mm mortars. The unit also has 4 X HKC-10 radios. Commander for the new battalion will be the present CO of the Than Phong Co, who is an NVA. (C-3).

3. At 1400 hours 4 April 1968, two VC companies unit designation unknown arrived vicinity Pho Ninh (YD608291), Xom Ga (YD604283) and Dong Gia (YD607283). Source believes that these two companies moved from the mountains on 3 April 1968, moving at night, and that they may cross Hwy 1 vicinity YD603510 on the night of 5 April 1968 to reinforce units at Quang Dien. (C-3).

4. At 1300 hours 2 April 1968, approximately 50 VC commanded by Tham, moved into the Cao Xa-Hien Luong area (YD637322-YD639316). All carried weapons. Also at this location were 20 armed PsyWar team cadre. The cadre have been divided into two 10 man teams. Leader of the first team is Hoang Dat, Phong Nhieu Village Clerk. Leader of the 2nd team is Thu, Phong Dien District Clerk. Source believes the 50 VC are from the C-3 Company and that their mission is to support the PsyWar teams. The VC and PsyWar teams were known to have been in the Cao Xa-Bien Luong area on 2-3 April 1968. (C-3).

5. At 1430 hours 4 April 1968, 20 armed VC arrived vicinity (YD611320) with four (4) anti-tank mines. Source believes mines will be used to mine Hwy 1 from (YD615310 to YD600309) on the night of 5 April 1968. (C-3).

Meanwhile the 1/501 was busy in its AO, reporting in the April 6th journal its "activities of 5 Apr 68... A Co at 0900 found 4...

			graves - 4 NVA bodies - brown uniforms -		
			4-8 days old - killed by arty or NAP; 1208		
			booby trap - 82mm - YD693299 - destroyed;		
			1530 YD643302 - 1 NVA POW wounded in ankle;		
			B 1006 - grave YD686397 - 5 bloody uniforms -		
			1 NVA body; 1105 YD683311 - received SA fire		
			called arty - swet village - found 6 NVA		
			bodies - 3 AK-47's - destroyed by arty; C		
			0800 - engaged unk size NVA force - YD672293;		
			3 NVA KIA - 1 NVA POW - 1 SKS; 0940 YD672293		
			contact - 1 NVA KIA, 2 SKS - 2 AK-47's - 10		
			CICOM grenades; Co C - no time - YD677297 -		
			1 NVA KIA - 1 CHICOM claymore - 1 RPG -		
			Losses US 11 WIA - all evacuated.		

On April 6th A Company, 2/501st, had the brigade's first serious contact in our new AO. The brigade journal reported that A Company had provided minesweep security from FSB Hardcore to QL 1, then began conducting platoon-size operations. "At 0925 hours, the 1st Platoon was...

moving as planned on operation and conducting search through NW section of village. At 1243 hours vic YD460492 the lead element was engaged by undetermined size enemy force. The plat leader was with the lead element. The plat Sgt was with 2 squad at YD459491. When the lead element became engaged, the squads deployed and established a base of fire. The initial burst of enemy fire wounded the plat leader and killed the RT0. 12 RPG's were in the first volley. Co A (-) began moving to assist plat at 1255 hours. Company moved down north side of stream (YD450506) and crossed vic YD455500 then moved on the south side of stream in an attempt to approach the enemies rear and

flank. Company called for LFT which arrived on station at 1335 hours. Company moved security across river on left flank and began moving forward utilizing the gunships fire power against enemy S. and NW fire received from the flank. Because of the intense enemy fire unit suffered 3 US KIA. 3d Plat crossed bridge at YD457492 and moved to assist 1st Plat. Company was supported by 4 AS, gunships and GS and DS arty. Company returned to FSB HADCOMB at 1835 hours. Friendly losses - 3 US KIA, 8 US MIA, 13 US WIA (8 medevac) and 1 interpreter WIA (medevac). Enemy assessment - 7 NVN KIA (BC), 12 NVN KIA (poss), 1 60mm mortar round (destroyed).

As reported in the brigade journal on the morning of April 7th, the 2/17th planned an operation that day that would begin from the night defensive position of A and B Troops on the 6th...

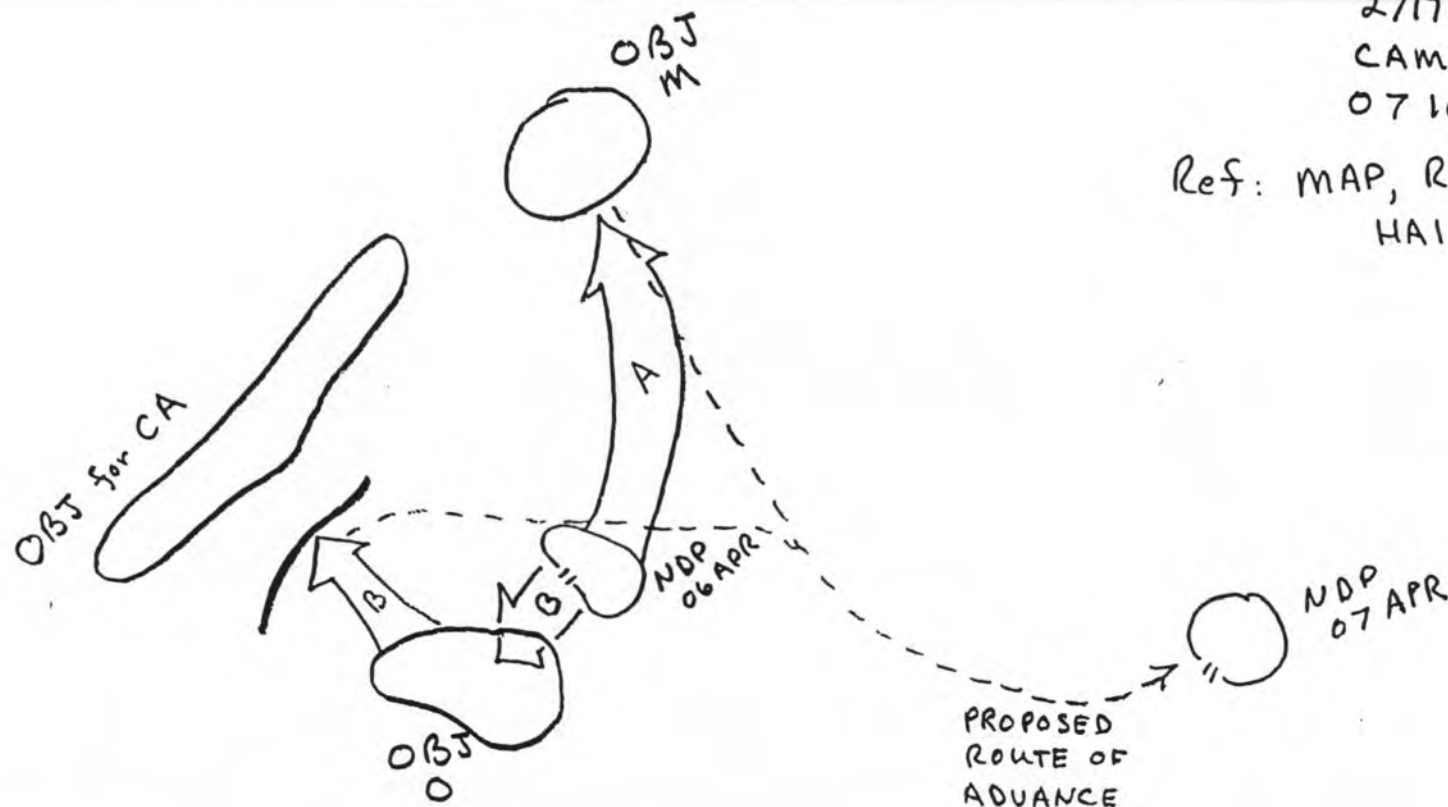
52	0940	Late Entry	From 2-17: Some of maneuver - B Trp dis-mounted with <i>(some rifle platoon)</i> ARP, OPCON into obj 0, YD510435 -		
			search out 1 km area - A element sending		
			mounted or dismounted obj "M" YD516430 -		
			when complete will go W with block at		
			YD491443. APR CA YD487447 supported by		
			fire from B element maneuver N. to YD502462		
			then back across river to SE - assemble		
			forces to MDF YD555435 - check out area of		
			recent SEYSPOT.		
53	0952		From 2-17: Flight Leader for CA is going		
			out to discuss CA with 3 in field.		
54	0953		From 2-327: 1.1 in sector is cleared at		
			this time.		

CONFIDENTIAL

Copy No. 1

2/17 Cav, 101st Abn Div
CAMP EVANS, RVN
071000 Apr 68

Ref: MAP, RVN, 1:50,000
HAILANG sheet



ARP's

+LZ for CA: TBA
for move to NDP 07 Apr: TBA

DECLASSIFIED PER EXECUTIVE ORDER 12356, SECTION 3.3, NND PROJECT
NUMBER NND 873541, BY R.M.J./R.B., DATE 7-11-95

57
+ 40

The 101st Airborne Division report for April 7th summarized the events in the 2d Brigade AO as follows...

b. 2d Bde 101st Abn Div: Co A 2/501, while conducting a sweep of the area of contact on 6 April, vic YD 455495, found 8 US MIA, now confirmed KIA. Also found were 10 NVA KIA (previously carried as 12 poss KIA). At 0845H, vic YD 510440, ARF 2/17 Cav rec sniper fire. Results 1 US WIA (evac). At 1100H, vic YD 477408, Co D 1/502 engaged 2 VC with organic wpns. Res: 2 VC KIA. At 1228, vic YD 475415, Co D 1/502 engaged 2 VC with SW fire. Res: 2 VC KIA. At 1510, vic YD 458492, Co A 2/501 found 1 AK-47 (evac). At 1510, vic YD 487423, Co D 1/502 engaged 1 VC with SA. Res: 1 VC KIA. At 1515, vic YD 490418, Co D 1/502 engaged 2 VC with AW. Res: 2 VC KIA. At 1530, vic YD 458492, Co A 2/501 sustained 1 US WIA (evac) as a result of a BBT. At 1705, vic YD 488444, ARF 2/17 Cav sustained 1 US KIA, 2 US WIA (evac) as a result of an engagement with an est VC squad.

On April 8th, the 2/327 had a mortar accident in a training situation. From the brigade journal of that date..

112	1838	late entry	To G3 101 Cpt GILLEM: Msg sent forward at 1630 hours, reference C 2-327 mortar accident Co C was conducting a training operation and had moved by fire and maneuver to crest of a hill against a simulated enemy squad. Co commander revised to simulated Company and		
-----	------	------------	---	--	--

112	cont		ordered withdrawal to vic YD373428 to call		
			supporting indirect fires. Arty FO called		
			in 81mm mortar fire with critical request		
			grid YD367433 and direction 4400 OTL. Mor-		
			tar position YD38004373. 1st round landed		
			approx on area request (WP round). Subse-		
			quent command was left 300 did not change		
			direction. The 2nd round was left 300 how-		
			ever fell slightly into fold in the ground.		
			The next FO adjustment was L300, D100 based		
			on primarily on sound sensing. The 3rd rd		
			landed forward of FO into friendly troops		
			wounding 7 (1 litter, 5 ambulatory), criti-		
			cally evac by log bird to B 326 Med subse-		
			quently to 22d Surg PHU IAI - LTC BACKWITH		
			went to the 81mm mortar position and ordered		
			the troops to withdrew 300 meters. He then		
			had the arty FO recall the same fire mission.		
			The 1st, 2nd, 3rd rounds landed in the same		
			location as the previous 1st, 2nd and 3rd		
			rounds had impacted. Col Cushman tentativ-		
			ely believes based upon this that the ad-		
			justment had been either to bold or not		
112	cont		properly sensed. 2-327 policy allows only		
			Arty FO to adjust arty and mortar fire.		
			LTC Keesling has been appointed investiga-		
			ting officer.		

The brigade journal for April 9th reported the total losses of the 2d Brigade during the ten days of Carentan II to this point. They were: 18 KIA and 70 WIA, of which 58 had been medevaced. The enemy assessment was: 41 NVA KIA, and 32 VC KIA -- plus some 10 or so individual weapons.

For some reason we were not doing much damage, and the enemy was hurting us too much.

On April 10-11, that picture changed. The 2/501 conducted its first, and the 2d Brigade's second, cordon operation.

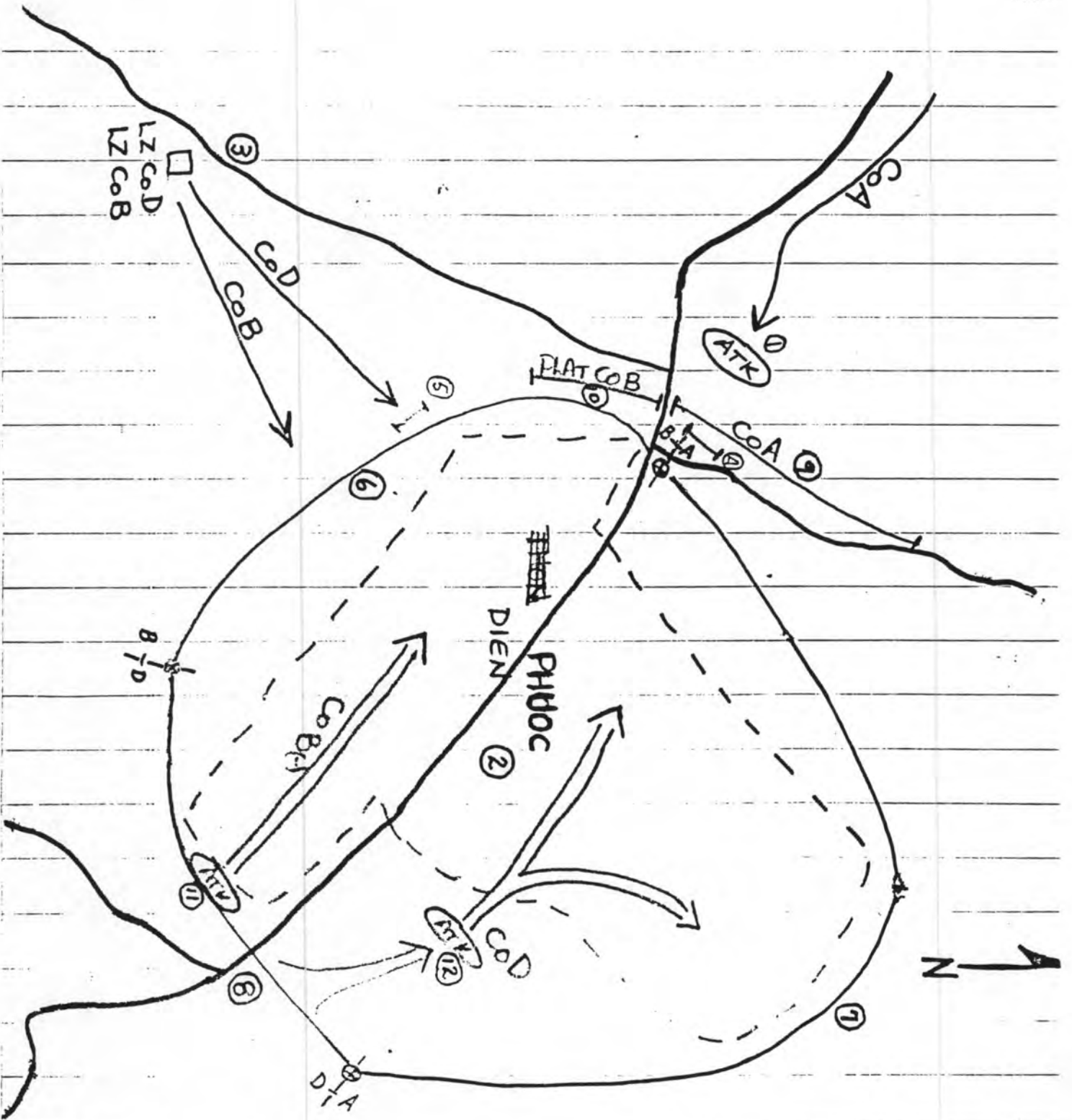
The morning of April 10th, A Company, 2/501st (A/2/501, which was providing security for B/1/321 Artillery at FSB Hardcore [YD 450508], was operating in the immediate area) made heavy contact five kilometers southeast of Hardcore at Phuoc Dien (YD475485), where district intelligence believed that elements of an NVA battalion were located. (See sketch map, next page)

With A Company in an attack position (1), the 2/501 lifted D Company (which had been providing security for Wunder Beach, also the location of the 2/501 command post) to an LZ at (3). After an air and artillery preparation, climaxed at 1305 by the use of CS tear gredades dropped from helicopters, A and D Companies made a coordinated attack at (4) and (5).

From the brigade journal for April 10th...

- "1258 From 2/501: Bde CO at Bn CP.
- "1338 Bde CO: A and D 2-501 have both made contact in woodline, both have taken casualties, number unknown at this time, units are maneuvering, employing heavy firepower.
- "1338 S-3 2-501: A & D receiving heavy fire from objective, AW and RPG. D Co has passed through 1st hedgerow, A Co pressing on slowly, both are working in conjunction with each other.
- "1410 2-501: Medevac for 3 WIA D Co complete at this time, A Co has 1 KIA, D Co has 1 KIA not evac, ARA back on station.
- "1554 2-501: Request medevac for D Co 3 WIA, YD475483. Estimated Bn size force.

It was clear that a sizeable NVA force was entrenched in Phuoc Dien, more than A and D companies could handle alone. But night was coming on. From the brigade journal:



- "1615 CO: A & D pulled away from village, putting in air strike, keep air coming with plenty of napalm and 500 lb bombs.
- "1630 Bde CO: Informed G3 that air strike and arty fired on 2-501 objective all morning until CA, 2-501 put in CS (tear gas) before the attack, A & D Co attacked employing fire and maneuver with D Co on the right and A Co on the left. D Co ran into a bunker line, received 4 casualties (1 KIA), A Co situation was similar, lead plat of A Co was very well supported by gunships, destroyed bunkers with LAW & 90mm, sustained 1 KIA, recently reported 2d KIA, presently pulling out of village to put in more air strikes and arty, estimated co size force.
- "1655 CG: CG informed CO not to withdraw A & D 2-501 from area, leave them there and clear up that area if it takes a week."

General Barsanti asked what I needed.¹ I said that I needed helicopters right away to move B Company so that we could encircle the enemy. They were on the way immediately. I replaced B Company, which was securing FSB Hardcore, with A Troop, 2/17, Dick Tallman, battalion commander, moved D Company to an encircling position south of the village (8) where it could link with A Company which had formed a cordon line in the rice paddies to the north and east (7), and at 1840 B Company was making a combat assault into an LZ (3) from which the company could link up with A and D Companies on its flanks (6). The cordon was in place by 2000 hours. We had ordered flareships to be on station all night, with artillery flares on standby.

I told LTC Tallman that two man foxholes were to be placed no more than 10 meters apart, and that his troops were to be 100% awake and alert during the night. The cordon line was in open fields with excellent observation of any enemy attempt to exfiltrate. During the night, the NVA made at least 12 attempts to break out; each of them failed, at a cost to the enemy of 36 killed and 2 captured. The next day, after further artillery preparation, the 2/501st troops swept through the village against moderate resistance, overrunning bunkers and trench systems.

Cleo Hogan, D Company, wrote in his diary...

10 April

We attacked today using gas masks and that is a real joke. Most of us just pulled off the gas masks and cried our way through it. Kept the area encircled all night and the

¹This was the kind of leadership that a division commander should give, and was characteristic of General Barsanti. His orders to me, and his offer of help which I converted into helicopters for an encirclement, led to a turning point in the fortunes of the 2d Brigade. In the remaining months of my command, the brigade received considerable credit for the series of cordon operations that followed this one. But the basic pattern was set here, and in my remarks at General Barsanti's farewell dinner for me in late June 1968, I said that a great deal of the credit for our accomplishments belonged to the division commander, for his direction and assistance to me on April 10th.

Air Force dropped flares to keep the area lit up. At 0330 the NVA attempted to break out and several of the 3d Platoon were wounded... We brought out a loudspeaker and our interpreter told them to surrender or be killed. About 20 of them surrendered and we only had to kill about 6 more.

In an account, written "during the fall [of 1968] when I was at 2d Bde Hq [as assistant S-3]," Hogan writes further...

During the night the NVA made several attempts to break out of the cordon in small groups and at approximately 0415hrs a platoon size NVA force attempted to storm the Company D area. Lt Bishoff and a few other members of 3D were wounded, however the NVA were beaten back. During the morning hours of 11 April the cordon continued with additional air strikes and artillery being used. 3d Plt Company D observed several NVA firing from bunkers and attempted to silence them using M82LAW, to no avail. Bn Headquarters were pushing Company D to begin an assault on the village, however it was obvious that the bunkers would have to be neutralized before any attack could begin. Cpt Hogan requested that a 106RR rifle be airlifted to the area. The 106RR arrived at approximately 1130hrs and fired 5 rounds. Brigade Headquarters sent out a loud speaker unit and an interpreter, and after firing the 5 106RR rounds, the loud speaker unit demanded that the NVA surrender or face additional 106RR, artillery, and air strikes. After a proximately 5 minutes an NVA soldier came out of the wood line with a white flag tied to his rifle barrel, and asked to talk to the officer in charge. Cpt Hogan moved to the area of 3d Plt and the NVA stated that there were only about 25 NVA still alive in the village and that they would surrender if the US forces would quit firing. Approximately 20 minutes later approximately 20 NVA marched single file out of the village to a point approximately 200 yds from Co D perimeter. The NVA stopped, formed a platoon formation, stacked arms just like a parade and then marched to the 3D area with their hands on their heads. The NVA were airlifted to Utah Beach cla ssed as PCN's.

Casualties to the 2/501st were 7 killed and 35 wounded. Enemy losses were 70 NVA killed and 13 captured. 24 individual weapons and 7 crew-served weapons were taken. It was evident from the PWs and captured documents that the 2/501 had trapped and destroyed a company-size element of the 6th Battalion, 812th NVA Regiment.

The after action report highlighted "the need for continuous illumination in cordon operations... During the hours of darkness the trapped NVA made numerous attempts to exfiltrate the cordon area. Illumination enabled movement to be detected, and small unit commanders were able to make rapid adjustments in disposition to thwart each attempt."

Another lesson for me was that it was nice to have the 106mm recoilless rifles that we got from the 2/17 Cav to bust bunkers at short range.

In retrospect, I wonder why -- given our success with the 1/501 cordon in late March -- we did not go directly into developing cordon situations as soon as we arrived in this AO to the north. It wasn't until Phuoc Dien that I got the picture of how we should operate. One thing for sure, we went into that operating mode when we returned to LZ Sally.

Which we soon did. On April 12th, the 2/12th Cav Squadron of the 1st ACD returned from Operation Pegasus to Camp Evans. The next day it relieved 1/502 of its base

security mission and the 1/502 headed for LZ Sally. (We would quickly lose the 1/502, which would go south of Hue to FSB Henry, under the 1st Brigade/101st).

On the 14th the 2/327 was relieved on LZ Jane by the 1/5 Cav and moved by CH-47 and truck convoy to rejoin the 1st Brigade, 101st, south of Hue.

On the 14th the 2d Brigade CP, having been relieved by the 2d Brigade/1st Cav, departed Camp Evans. At 1500 that day it opened at LZ Sally and resumed opcon of the 1/501st and responsibility for its former AO, including the 1/505 Abn of the 3d/82d.

On April 17th the 2/501 turned over the responsibility for Wunder Beach to the 3d Battalion, 26th Marine Regiment, 3d Marine Division. The 2/501st moved its artillery battery and B Company to Quang Dien, its command post to LZ Sally, closing at 1525 hours, and would complete the battalion's move south the next day.

On the 17th and 18th the 2/17 Cav, which would keep its base at Camp Evans, motor marched south into the 2d Brigade AO, taking up security missions at several bridge sites along QL 1.

Pleased to be back at LZ Sally and in our old area of operations, we got to work.

Chapter 8. LZ Sally; April 15 - May 13, 1968

The night of April 14th we had, under our opcon from our LZ Sally command post, the 1/501 which was in the AO it had never left, the 1/502 which had just closed into LZ Sally from the north, and the 1/505 Abn of the 3d/82d. Division had told us that the 1/502 would move on the 15th to FSB Henry south of Hue in the AO of the 1st Brigade/101st, to assist in a strike by the 101st Airborne and 1st Cav divisions into the A Shau Valley.

From the brigade journal for April 15th... WE LIFTED UNITS IN TO SECURE A FIRE BASE HALF WAY INTO THE A SHAU FROM HUE. 5 ACFT AT A TIME - WE WERE END LIFT -

"1018 G3: LTC Garrison called and said not to let 1-502 move to Henry until he gave the word, area is presently being contested by the enemy. ACFT 11-15 INTO LZ. REALLY HOT -

"1025 G3: It's OK for 1-502 to move to Henry. ACFT SHOT DOWN RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME. I WAS FLYING LEAD ON THE LIFT FOR THE 188TH.

"1045 1-502: D Co abn from Sally at 1044 hrs. AIRCRAFT LATER LOST SOMEWHERE BETWEEN A SHAU & HUE - NEVER FOUND THEM. NOT PART OF THE 188TH THANK GOD!!

"1047 1-502: A Company departed Sally at this time by convoy. MUST HAVE BEEN WITH 117TH

The 1/502d would not be back until May 1st.

On April 17th B Troop, 2/17 Cav, motor-marched south from Camp Evans into the 2d Brigade AO and secured bridge sites along QL 1. The remainder of 2/17 Cav would move south from Camp Evans the next day, the 18th.

On the 17th the 1/505th Abn moved to fire base Bastogne south of Hue, back under the control of the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division.

On April 17 and 18 the 2/501st moved in from the north, locating its artillery battery and B Company at Quang Dien and its command post and other units at LZ Sally.

On the 20th I had a new S-3, Major James J. Waldeck, who had come to us from the 2/327. Jim had been a G-3 advisor in my advisory detachment with the 21st ARVN Division in 1963-64. Russ Miller, whose steady hand, good humor, willingness, professional competence, and sound judgment had been invaluable to me since my first day in command, moved to the division G-3 Section; Frank Garrison was getting a good man.

We also lost Dick Tallman, commanding the 2/501, who would soon make colonel and had gone to a higher headquarters down south that wanted him very much. His replacement lasted only a few days; General Barsanti soon sent down newly promoted Lieutenant Colonel James A. Heiter of the division G-3 Section. Tony was an old hand in the division; I was confident that he would be a fine battalion commander.

soners. Brigade S2 believed from an agent report that the two hamlets contained an estimated 200 NVA, in two companies of the 7th Battalion, 90th Regiment. Considering the opportunity presented, our results were disappointing.

It is clear to me as I write this years later that after this experience I decided that, most of all, my brigade's exploitation of an opportunity for encirclement called for intense yet controlled energy on my part, not necessarily in the encirclement's detailed tactical direction (although I would occasionally have to be quite specific with my encirclement battalion commander) but in the gathering and the direction of resources -- helicopters, firepower, reinforcing units, including ARVN and RF/PF forces from wherever they could be found -- and in my driving motivation of all concerned to insure that the loop was tightly closed around the enemy before dark. AND HE DID DRIVE US AT TIMES.

On April 20th both 1/501 and 2/501 had sharp engagements, for a total of 7 US KIA and 42 WIA, with an enemy assessment of 53 NVA KIA and 6 NVA POWs. We heard that the 1/502, with the 1st Brigade, had moved from FSB Henry to FSB Bastogne.

On the 21st we built our fourth cordon. The villages were Thon Thanh Trung and Thon Kim Doi, on the road seven kilometers southeast of Quang Dien, to which the 2/501 had moved its command post the day before. I will copy the S3 report of 22 June in its entirety.

"Task Organization:

2-501 Inf

Co A
Co B
Co C
Co D

ARVN

Black Panther Co, 1st ARVN Div
5 PF plats
222d RF Co

"Initial tactical situation, scheme of maneuver (Diagram 1, next page)

"On 21 April, in reaction to intelligence reports, Co C was conducting a RIF operation in the vicinity of the objective area. Contact was made initially at 1430 hours with an estimated squad-size enemy force (1). Co D, operating to the NE, was ordered to the area of contact as it became apparent that Co C was in new contact with an estimated company of NVA. As Co C developed the situation and utilized artillery to support, Co D maneuvered into a blocking position to the NE (2). At approximately 1900 hours, Co A was combat assaulted to an LZ (3) on the NW of the village area. Co B was combat assaulted to an LZ (4) on the SW side of the village. The four companies firmly established the cordon and occupied blocking positions as indicated on the diagram by 2030 hrs. The area was illuminated continuously with a combination of artillery, helicopter, and USAF flare aircraft. Throughout the night, cordon elements received sporadic SA, AW, and RPG fire, as several unsuccessful attempts were made by the enemy to escape.

possibly VC, prisoner. I saw him pointing at the Screaming Eagle patch on a nearby trooper and I asked what he was saying. The interpreter's reply was, "He is saying that that little bird is real mean." So we built a little archway over the steps leading down into our TOC and placed our new brigade slogan, "That Little Bird Is Real Mean," across the top of the arch.

April 28th was the first day of the 2d Brigade's classic cordon at Phouc Yen. The next few days would show just how accurate was that VC commander's warning, and just how mean was that "little bird."

I will copy the 22 June S3 report of that operation in its entirety, adding footnotes of my own.

"Control Hqs: 1-501 Inf³

"Task Organization:

1-501 Inf

Co A
Co B
Co A 1-502
Co B 2-501
Co D 2-501

ARVN

1st ARVN Black Panther Co
Three PF Platoons
25 Catholic Militia⁴

"Intelligence: On 25 April 1968, an agent report indicated 50 NVA were located in the village of Phuoc Yen (YD679283). On 27 April 1968, another agent report indicated 2 NVA/VC companies were located in the vicinity of the village.

"Tactical situation, scheme of maneuver (Diagram, next page)

"Based on the information mentioned above, and guidance from the CO 1-501 Inf, the 1st ARVN Div Black Panther (BP) Co initiated a reconnaissance in force into the village from the north. At 281359 April, the BP Co received intense SA, AW, and RPG fire from an estimated rifle company (1). The BP Co called for and received a light fire team (LFT) to suppress the enemy fires. Because of the intense enemy fire coming from the village, it was estimated by the commander on the ground that he was opposing a battalion size enemy force. The CO, 2d Brigade, directed the CO, 1-501 Inf, to establish a cordon around the enemy force. A/1-502 was immediately inserted into an LZ to the east of the BP Co and established a blocking position (2). Co A/1-501 moved overland and established a blocking position to the west (3). Co B/2-501 conducted a combat assault at 1810 hrs and occupied a blocking position to the southeast of the

³Lieutenant Colonel Jim I. Hunt had assumed command of the 1/501st at mid-morning, April 27th.

⁴Hamlet militia (who unlike RF and PF received no pay but were farmers by day and fighters by night) were the last armed element down the scale of paramilitary forces. Responsible to the hamlet chief, they established local security and saw to it that the VC guerrillas did not disturb the hamlet's peace at night.

I HAVE ADDED
NOTES ON THIS
OPERATION
TO THE
ARTICLE
WRITTEN BY
JEN CUSHMAN
LOCATED IN
CHAPTER 5
SPIDERS

OUR GUNS

village (4). At 1823 hrs Co A/1-502 attacked south in an attempt to develop the situation, however their advance was met by intense enemy SA, AW, and RPG fire from the village. They then disengaged and returned to their original blocking positions on the left flank of the BP Co (2). Three PF platoons plus 25 Catholic Militia established blocking positions to the east (5 and 6) and shortly after dark all the units had joined their flanks and the cordon was established.⁵

"Execution

"During the night of 28 April, constant illumination was provided by CH-47 and UH-1 ^{our ships} flareships. All units remained alert as 105mm, 155mm, and 8" howitzer rounds im-

⁵By now I had established an operating style for a cordon. The controlling battalion commander would be on the ground (or from time to time in a C&C helicopter as he saw fit) directing the units in contact and calling for specific air, artillery, and gunship support. In close touch with him, I would be in the air, and occasionally on the ground with him or his troops. I arranged the delivery of his reinforcements, insured his support, kept abreast by monitoring his command channel, and counseled him from time to time.

Entries from the brigade journal for the 28th...

- "0904 From 101st: Lift for Black Panther Co has been approved.
- "0940 To DTOC: Cancel CA of ARVN Co. Will ford river [actually used footbridge] and move to objective.
- "1227 1-501: All elements of ARVN Co across river (a USMC captain, company advisor, was reporting)
- "1327 1-502: ARVN Co receiving sporadic fire. Estimate platoon to their front. Arty called.
- "1400 1-501: ARVN Co received 2 RPG and small arms fire. Request gunships, neg casualties.
- "1415 To DTOC: B/2-501 is immediate action force to cordon village of ARVN contact. A/1-502 opcon 2/17 Cav, assumes mission C/1-501 on An Lo bridge.
- "1445 To DTOC: Mission of A/1-502 changed. They will remain at Sally as IAF.
- "1456 1-501: Gunships left station at 1454 rs. ARVN Co have 1 KIA, 3 WIA. Now estimate Bn size force. Received 57 RR fire. ARVN FAC on station."

A Co 1/502, commanded by Captain Terry Spiegelberg, former commander of the 2d Brigade headquarters company, was alone at Sally (the rest of the 1/502 was still with the 1st Brigade). It began its lift at 1716. Meanwhile, with A/1-501 moving to the position to which Jim Hunt had ordered it, I had been arranging the lift of B/2-501. I had also taken Major De, Huong Tra district chief, to the village just across the Song Bo River from where A/1-502 was to go in, so that he could order three PF platoons to get down on the river bank and secure that sector of the cordon. (The Song Bo was the district boundary with Quang Dien.) Among other actions, I had Jim White, S-4, bring in concertina wire for the Black Panther Company to use in front of its position. From the brigade journal:

- "1803 1-501: Lift of A/1-502 complete.
- "1810 1-501: 1st lift of B/2-501 abn at this time.
- "1825 1-501: A/1-502 has 1 KHA & 1 WHA.
- "1848 1-501: Last lift B/2-501 on LZ at 1847 hrs."

At the A/1-502 LZ I briefed Terry Spiegelberg; Jim Hunt, by radio, then ordered him to attack along the river (see arrow on the left sketch, next page) to shrink the cordon. When resistance was too strong, Jim Hunt told Spiegelberg to break off the attack, recover his troops, and slice through to the river along a hedgerow. Meanwhile I took Major De to the village where he had obtained his PF platoons so that he could find hamlet militia to take care of the river bank for the more extended cordon. By nightfall he had the bank secured on his side of the river with three PF platoons and 25 or so hamlet militia, and Jim Hunt had that force on the radio though a US district advisor.

It was getting dark for Terry Spiegelberg. I reached him on (as I remember) his company command frequency. I told him to look for my C&C helicopter overhead; that, to guide him in the growing darkness, I would fly at low level straight down a hedgerow to the river. I told him that this was the final element of the cordon and that when he reached the river he was to plant his men on the river bank and to put his men in two-man foxholes along the hedgerow no more than 10 meters apart, and that we would turn on the lights. He did all that, and we had a cordon, arms locked.

"The cordon was sealed throughout the night of 29 April under continuous illumination. Small arms and automatic weapons fire was exchanged during the night as the enemy attempted to find a gap in the friendly positions. At first light on 30 April, the BP Co again penetrated the village from the north. This action was met by strong enemy resistance which hampered the company's advance. Artillery and tac air were placed on the enemy positions and by mid-afternoon the BP advanced toward the south against light enemy resistance. At 1718 hrs, because of other operational commitments, the BP Co was airlifted from the cordon to the city of Hue. Co B/1-501 conducted a combat assault to an LZ in the northern sector of the cordon and replaced the BP Co (10).

"In the early hours of 1 May, during a short break in the illumination⁷ caused by the time lapse between the expended flareship going off station and artillery illumination being placed over the cordon, the enemy made an all-out effort to penetrate the area occupied by Co A/1-502 (7). This attack was repulsed by intense fire from SA and AW and by 0610 hrs, Co A reported that the enemy had withdrawn into the village. This effort by the enemy cost him 35 NVA KIA while A Co suffered 3 KHA, and 12 WHA.

"At 0800 hrs a psychological warfare team began broadcasting appeals to surrender which resulted in 16 NVA surrendering. Afterwards tac air and artillery fires were resumed and at 1330 hrs a CS [tear gas] grenade drop was climaxed by a TOT [for "time on target," or the simultaneous delivery of the massed fires of many batteries of artillery). At 1345 hrs, Co A/1-502 began to move south against light resistance. During the afternoon friendly elements shifted their positions in order to tighten the cordon and at 1600 hrs, Co B/2-501 relieved Co A/1-502 in place, and Co A/1-502 was extracted by helicopter to LZ Sally.

"The cordon, now consisting of A/1-501, B/1-501, A/2-501, D/2-501, 25 Catholic militia, and 3 PF platoons remained in place throughout the night of 1 May. Sporadic SA fire was again exchanged as the enemy desperately attempted to find a way out. At first light of 2 May, Co A/2-501 and Co B/1-501 began moving south and were met by a heavy volume of SA and AW fire. The two companies held in place and called in artillery and tac air in an attempt to destroy the the enemy's well fortified positions. At the end of the day, the cordon was maintained in the north by B/1-501 on the right (west) and A/2-501 on the left (east). Co A/1-501 composed the west flank of the cordon while Co D/2-501 covered the south and the militia and 3 PF platoons the east.

"During the early morning hours of 3 May, the enemy made another futile attempt to break out of the cordon but was repulsed again by superior friendly fires. A 55 gallon drum CS drop was made over the village from a CH-47 after which further appeals were made by loudspeaker for the enemy to surrender. Companies B/1-501 and A/2-501 made the final sweep of the village overcoming small pockets of resistance and completed the cordon operation.

⁷My cot was just off the TOC where during the night I could hear the radio traffic. I had no trouble sleeping, but when the radio voice pitch rose because of urgency I would awake. Here the 1/501 voices raised pitch when the flareship departed and the enemy attacked. In minutes we restored illumination, with artillery.

WE FLAT
RAN OUT
OF FLARES
AS I RECALL.
WE OPENED
FLARE BOXES
ALL NIGHT
AND USED
THEM ALL UP.
WE WERE NOT
REAL GOOD AT
DOING THIS AND
IT WAS DANGEROUS.
ONE AFT FROM
ANOTHER UNIT
HAD A FLARE GO
OFF INSIDE A
SHIP AND ALL
THE CREW WAS
LOST. THEY
COULDN'T SEE
TO LAND AND
THE AFT BURNED
BEFORE IT HIT
THE GROUND.

*Results:

Friendly casualties: 8 US KHA and 44 US WHA
2 ARVN KHA and 12 ARVN WHA

Enemy losses: 429 NVA KHA, 107 NVA prisoners, 117 weapons captured."

Also captured were the radios and signal operating instructions of the 8th Battalion, 90th NVA Regiment, which was totally eliminated in this action.

The Second Brigade had executed a classic.

During the six days of this cordon operation, the rest of the brigade AO was also active. The night of 28-29 April the 1/501 recon platoon sprung an ambush, 2 PF WIA, 5 NVA KIA. That night ground surveillance radar on the LZ Sally perimeter several times detected "enemy tanks" to the disbelief, or alarm, of many; the 1/501 recon platoon reported finding "tracks" the next day but that was the end of it. The brigade journal reported General Barsanti slightly wounded in the leg, returned to duty. In the Cao Bang area, north of the An Lo bridge, the 2/17th Cav, reinforced, on May 1st had a sharp and well-supported contact that cost them 2 KIA and 26 WIA, with an enemy assessment of 82 NVA KIA. On 2 May D/1/501 sprung an ambush. The same day B/2/501 made contact with an estimated company, with 2 US WIA and 8 NVA killed by air.

Then came another cordon. Documents captured at Phuoc Yen revealed that the trapped 8th Battalion, 90th Regiment, had called for reinforcements to move into Ap Pho Nam, a hamlet two kilometers north of Phuoc Yen. The 2/501st, its command post at Quang Dien, began a cordon of that hamlet on May 3d. On May 4th the 1/502 returned from duty with the 1st Brigade, its CP replaced that of the 2/501 in Quang Dien, and the 1/502 took over the second day of the cordon. The sequence of the first day (sketch, next page)...

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| (1) is a combat assault by B/2/501 at 1215 | (7) is A Co's sector of the cordon |
| (2) is heavy contact inside the hamlet | (8) is D Co's combat assault, 1700 |
| (3) is where B Co withdrew, after contact | (9) is D Co's cordon sector |
| (4) is a C/2/501 combat assault | (10) is C/1/501's LZ |
| (5) is C Co's sector of developing cordon | (11) is C/1/501's cordon sector |
| (6) is an A/1/502 combat assault, 1645 | (12) is 2/501's recon platoon LZ |

At (13), at 1910, the recon platoon completed the cordon. We were getting good at this.

That night the enemy attempted to break out of the cordon, without success. On May 4th B/1/502 relieved D/2/501 and the 1/502d's recon platoon replaced that of 2/501. Artillery and 20 sorties of tac air pounded the enemy during the day, and illumination was overhead the following night. The trapped enemy fired small arms and 60 mortars and tried

I WROTE TO
YOU ABOUT
THIS IN THE
PAST. I
WENT OUT
WITH THE
GUNS WHEN
WE WERE
CALLED.
LOW VISAILITY
ER. RADAR
REPORTED TANKS
W/ INFANTRY
COMING AT THE
FIREBASE AT
25 MPH. I
COMMENTED THAT
THEY WERE REALLY
FAST INFANTRY
LOW AT 25 MPH.
BIG SILENCE - THEN
CAME BACK - FALSE
ALARM.

NO TRACKS
NO TANKS