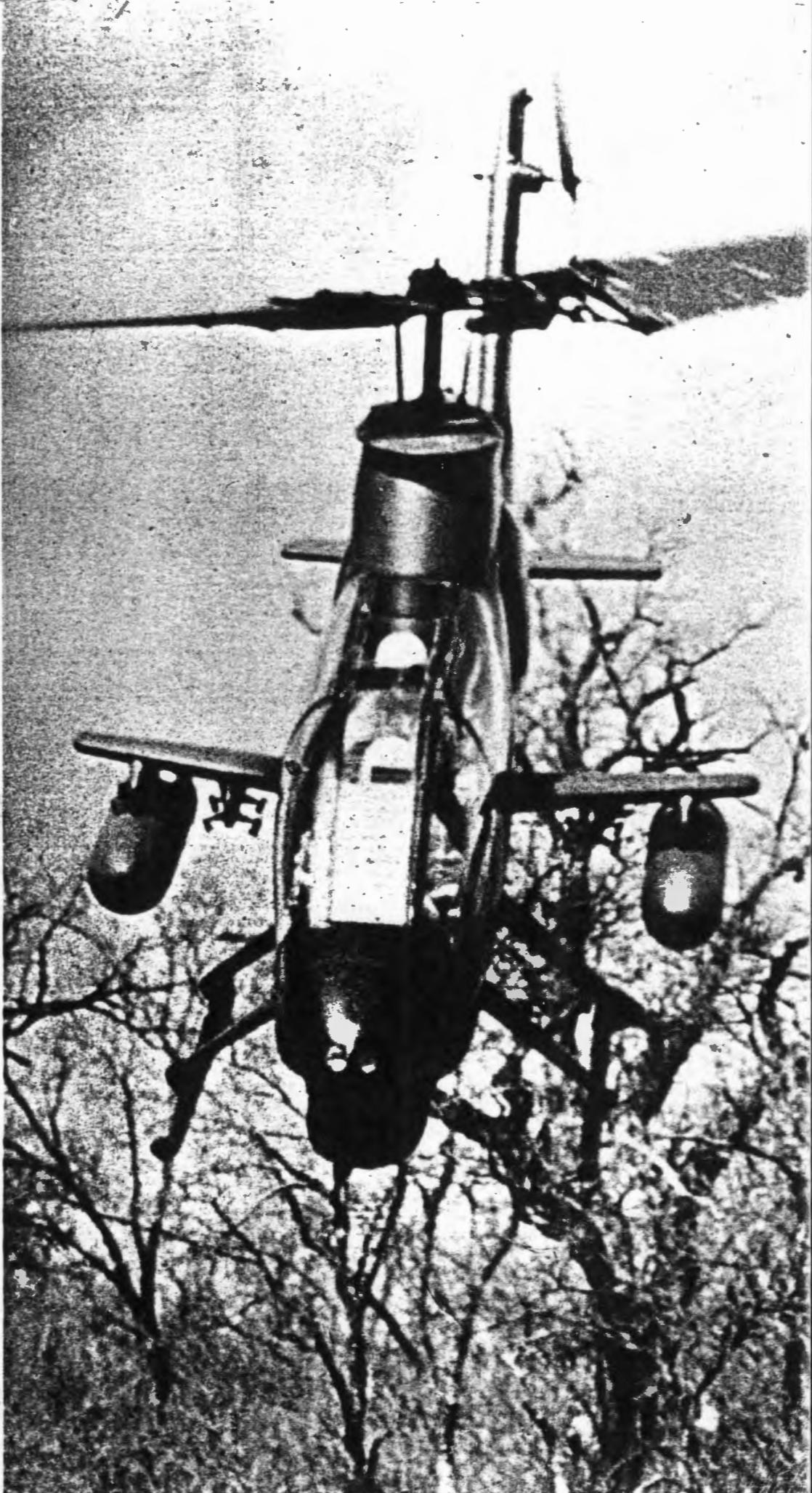


VIETNAM

Summer, 1968

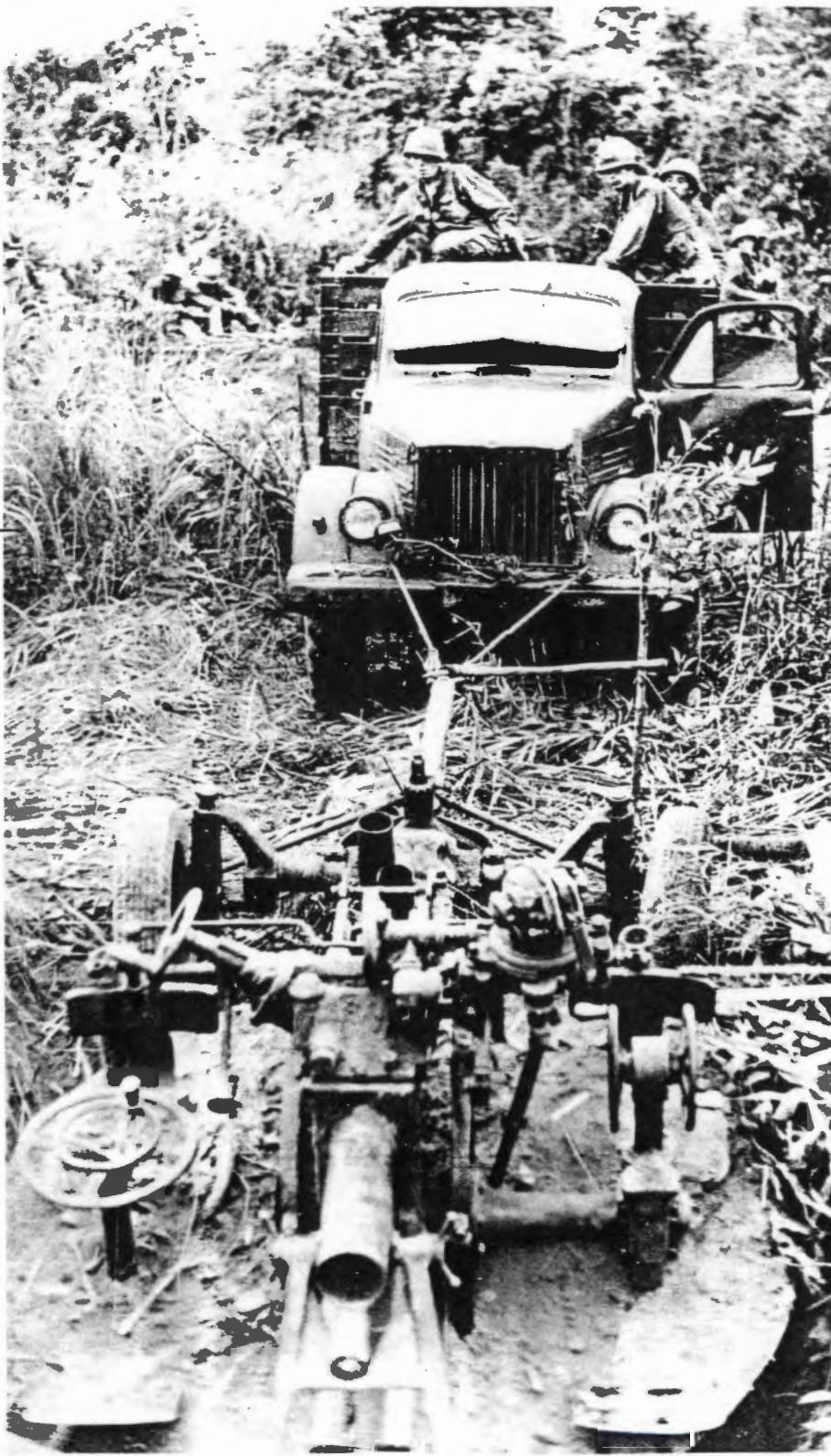
United States Army, Vietnam



SOURCE:

CW2

Dusty Rhodes,



A captured North Vietnamese Army truck is used to tow a 37mm anti-aircraft gun base from its camouflaged position in the A Shau Valley, by men of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). During the attack into the enemy stronghold, Chinook helicopters helped resupply, often hovering atop cliffs overlooking the Ho Chi Minh trail (above right).



"What a weird piece of terrain."

That was the muttered reaction of one Sky Trooper upon first seeing the A Shau Valley during Operation Delaware/Lam Son 216. "It looks like a ditch cut out of a bunch of mountains," the soldier said.

Delaware/Lam Son 216 was designed to compliment other operations assisting the Marines at Khe Sanh, and spoil enemy plans for again attacking Hue. To be successful, it was necessary to strike the enemy logistical base in the valley and thus deny him material, arms and ammunition needed to support an attack.

The Delaware objective was to disrupt the Communist main supply depot in the area—the A Shau Valley.

The success of the operation can be demonstrated by the large amounts of enemy equipment, ammunition and weapons captured. The attack was launched so quickly after the successful relief of Khe Sanh and surprise was so effective that the enemy abandoned many of his supply sub-bases in great haste. Food left cooking and laundry out drying were common sights.

The joint operation began April 19 and ended May 16, with Major

In The A Shau Valley
Soldiers Charged, Yelling . . .

Go Home Ho Chi Minh!



Compiled by UpTight staff from official battle reports and information provided by information offices of Provisional Corps, Vietnam, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), and 101st Airborne Division.

General J. J. Tolson's 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) piling into and sweeping out the A Shau Valley while units of the 101st Airborne Division conducted a series of assaults along Highway 547/547A—the enemy line of communication out of the valley. ARVN Ranger and Airborne battalions also contributed to the successful operation.

Lieutenant General William B. Rosson, commanding general of Provisional Corps, Vietnam, directed the battle fought in the western portion of Thua Thien Province near the Laotian border.

"As for the timing of the attack, the weather intervened to exert strong . . . influence, for only during April and May do conditions in the A Shau Valley permit sustained air operations," General Rosson said, relative to the decision to commence the air assault on April 19.

The operation began with the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry and 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry assaulting from helicopters on to enemy positions in the remote valley stronghold.

"This was probably our most important mission," said Captain John W. Taylor, commander of Company A, 5th Bn. "The feeling the majority of the men had upon first coming

into the valley was sort of fear, distinctly different from that felt during Hue or Khe Sanh. We had heard so many stories about A Shau—its significance, its potential to the enemy—we had a fear of the unknown.

"We didn't like moving down the hills . . . because we felt we would run into a huge force of NVA. This feeling was overcome when we reached the valley's floor, and found few enemy troops," he said.

Strong resistance encountered the first day by the Cavalry units melted before the Sky Trooper's determined attack but not before some 20 helicopters were damaged by enemy fire. Tell-tale indicators of a successful mission soon appeared, however. The 1st Cav. Div. made its first significant confiscation of enemy material two days after the assault began, seizing two Soviet-made bulldozers and a flat-bed truck.

A new landing zone was established two days later by the 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry on a ridgeline overlooking the A Luoi airstrip near the center of the valley.

At this time, the 1st Battalion, 327th Airborne Infantry, 101st Airborne Division and elements of the 3rd ARVN Airborne Task Force were

attacking enemy positions east of the valley. Moving from the Hue area south along Highway 547/547A, the Screaming Eagles and their allies found, fixed, and destroyed enemy units along the route. These actions served to spoil Communist plans for attacking Hue. Charlie was being up-staged and battered indelicately.

Establishment of a close fire support base was accomplished when the 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry of the Screaming Eagles pushed southward from Hue. The base kept up nearly continuous supporting fires after two 105 mm field artillery batteries were air-lifted into its perimeter.

The cavalry and paratrooper units continued their air assaults as enemy resistance crumbled to scattered ambushes and sniper fire.

During operations in the A Shau Valley, a 1st Cav. Div. patrol captured several trucks, two of which were sophisticated communications-equipped vans of the type used by a division headquarters. One unusual find consisted of a commercial type radio broadcasting station. Its studio was in a bunker.

On the same day, April 25, other patrols found more cargo trucks and stocks of Russian-made helmets. Curious Cavalrymen tried on the



A 101st Airborne Division unit moves along a roadway in support of the assault on the A Shau Valley during Operation Delaware/Lom Son 216.

helmets for size, painted their home states on the trucks, and then gave the vehicles a test-drive around the area. "Ho Chi Minh, go home!" was one of the more polite shouts heard to echo in the valley.

Among the booty captured or destroyed were 2,290 bolt action rifles; 12 37 mm anti-aircraft guns, together with 18,000 rounds of ammunition; one PT 76 Soviet-built amphibious tank; 31 flame-throwers; 73 wheeled vehicles; 36 mine detectors, and six military radios. Tons of assorted enemy munitions were seized.

More than 36 tons of foodstuffs, 1,300 pounds of medical supplies (including sulfa and penicillin), and thousands of miscellaneous spare-

parts were also captured.

Extraction of allied forces from the valley began May 10, and involved air movement of heavy equipment, artillery, supplies and men. The lift out was completed within the week.

In all, U.S. losses totaled 139 killed in action, and 662 wounded who required evacuation. The enemy lost 726 killed. The NVA had been routed from his valley base and his operations there seriously disrupted.

Operating at times 35 miles from the nearest friendly unit posed problems. Specialist 4 Joe McClure of the 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry remarked afterward on the improvisations adapted:

"At first when we got into the valley, we had to get water from a

bomb crater, but later we used captured Russian trucks to haul supplies for us."

Captain Douglas L. Verdier, a company commander with the same battalion said, "The mission was intended to be a reconnaissance-in-force. We were supposed to destroy everything we could find. We destroyed a hell of a lot out there. That was the mission we were sent up to do, and we did it."

Major General Olinto M. Barsanti, commander of the 101st Abn. Div., said of the terrain the paratroopers had fought through, "(it's) about the roughest I have seen." The paratroopers, too, located and destroyed numerous caches of weapons, ammunition and supplies.