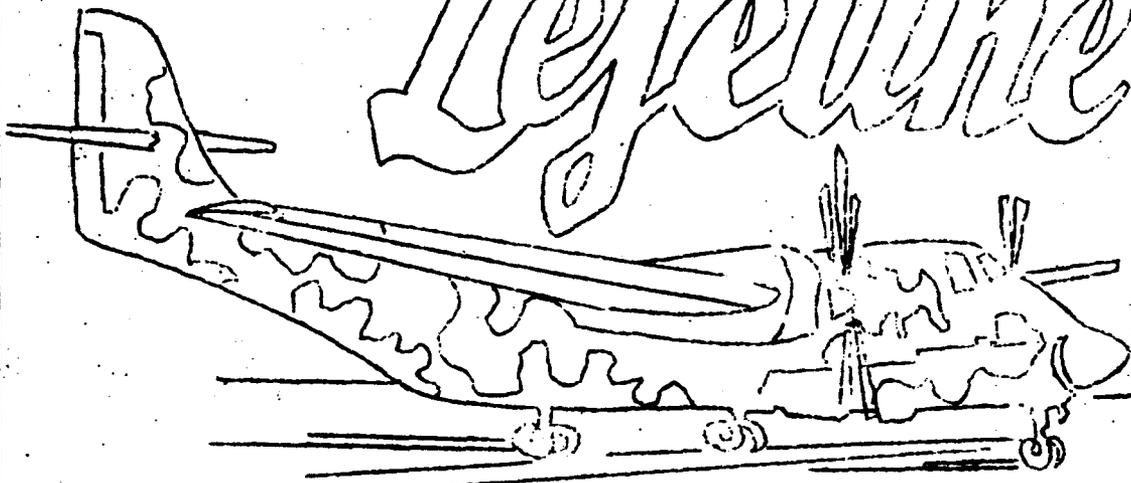


Operation Lejeune

1ST AIR CAVALRY DIVISION
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
Office of Information and History



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Unit Historical Report No. 10



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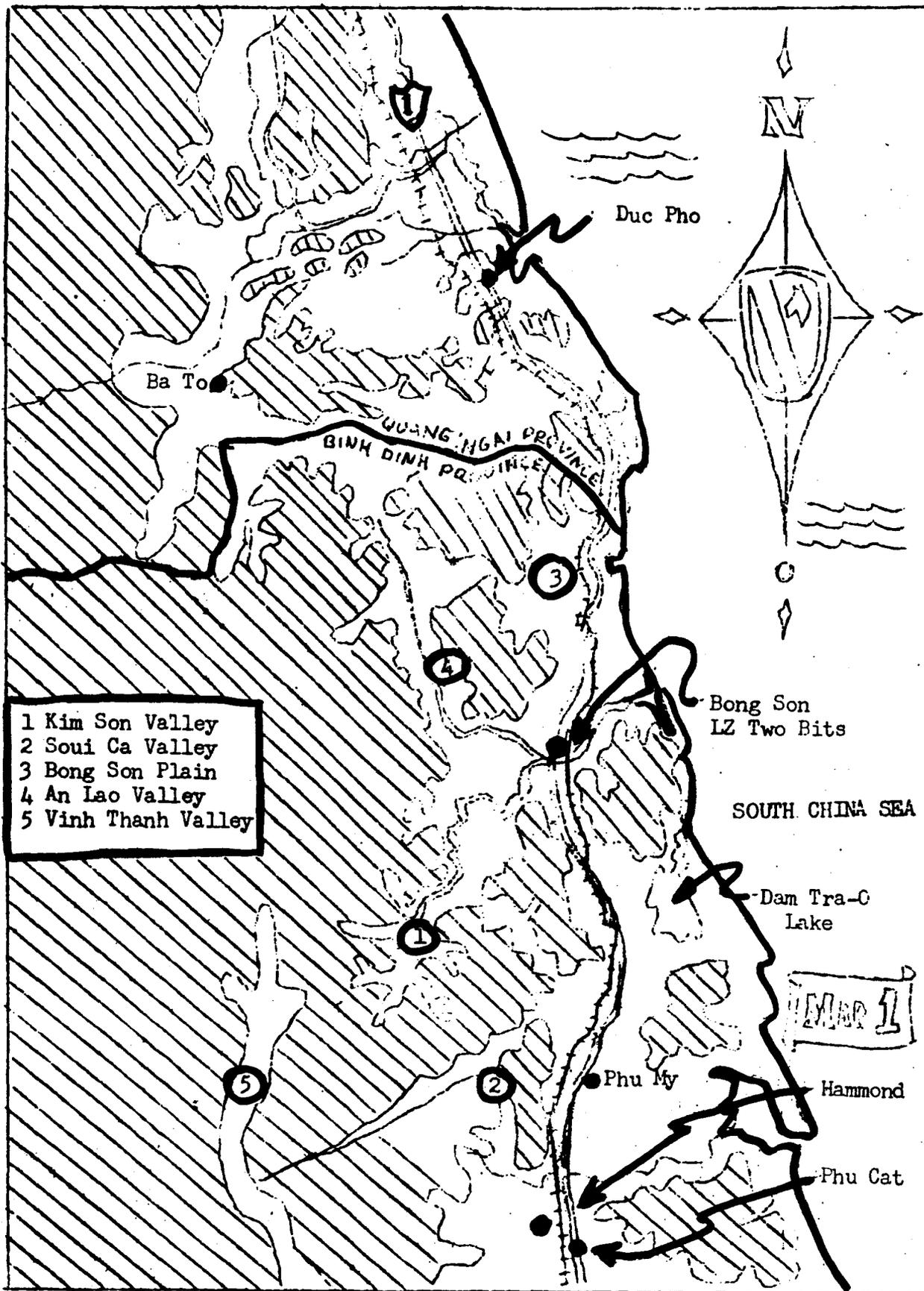
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OPERATION LEJEUNE

The defeat of the 3d North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Division and its three main force regiments has been the primary military objective of the 1st Air Cavalry Division since the Binh Dinh Pacification Campaign commonly known as the battle of Binh Dinh was initiated in mid-September 1966. That Campaign, which presently continues in Pershing, the fourth component operation, progressed in stages through Operations Thayer I, Irving, and Thayer II. A capsule analysis of the Division's scheme of maneuver during these four operations from September 1966 through March 1967 will demonstrate the overwhelming success of this Campaign. These victories forced the main enemy forces out of Binh Dinh Province, which in conjunction with other military objectives, led to the Air Cavalry's commitment for Operation Lejeune.

In Thayer I two brigades of the Division uprooted two of the 3d NVA Division's three regiments from their rear base and logistical supply areas in the Kim Son Valley. (Map 1) This was accomplished by a series of thorough search and destroy missions. The enemy chose not to stand and fight, but instead retreated eastward into the coastal plains along the South China Sea. It was in this coastal area that Operation Irving commenced in early October with the deployment of three Free World Forces around the suspected enemy locations. Republic of Korea (ROK) units, as well as a division from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), joined the Air Cavalry to tighten the noose. The Free World Military Assistance Force (FWMAF) saturation of the coastal area resulted in the withdrawal of enemy main force remnants, which were able to escape the Irving trap, back to mountain sanctuaries in the west. Once again in hot pursuit, the Division uncovered this time the massive base and supply area in the Soui Ca Valley just southeast of the Kim Son.

Operation Irving terminated on October 24, 1966 and Thayer II commenced thereafter. The objective in Thayer II was to continue exerting heavy pressure on the enemy units throughout central-coastal Binh Dinh Province. Battalion sized operations were conducted from Position Hammond, a division forward command post and logistical resupply area, to the Bong Son River, and from the sea coast westward to the Vinh Thanh Valley. Simultaneously, a battalion of the First Cavalry and an ARVN battalion operated north of Bong Son on the coastal plains area in a search for the enemy. Again forced to move on, the enemy withdrew in the only possible direction - north and into the Bong Son Plain and the An Lao Valley. Operation Pershing began on 11 February 1967 in response to intelligence reports that main force NVA units were massing on the Bong Son Plain to attack US/ARVN installations in the area. Thorough search and destroy operations concentrated in the coastal area and enemy main force units were encountered and badly defeated. The division then shifted part of its forces westward into the An Lao Valley, a rugged, foreboding area, which for years had been the location of the 22d NVA Regimental Headquarters, as well as other enemy staging and base areas. These areas had never before been challenged in force. Reinforced by the three battalions of



the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, the three brigades of the 1st Air Cavalry Division minus the Camp Radcliff security force and the battalion task force at Phan Thiet on Operation Byrd have in Operation Pershing maintained the pressure throughout Binh Dinh Province. Elements continued to operate in the Thayer I/Irving areas to prevent an enemy regrouping there while search and destroy activity continued in the north through the Bong Son Plain/An Lao Valley regions. The effect of the pacification campaign has been that two regiments, the 18th NVA and the 22d NVA, of the 3d NVA Division have suffered severe logistical and personnel losses. Relentlessly pursued in every portion of the Province, these units were forced to find an area in which they could regain strength and reorganize ranks, an area that would be "safe", free from the pursuit and devastating tactics of the Air Cavalry. Consequently, the 2d VC Regiment, as early as mid-October 1966, retreated into Quang Ngai Province and thereby avoided severe losses in Binh Dinh Province. The 22d NVA Regiment made two withdrawals into Quang Ngai when the pressure became too severe during the month of March. These enemy retreats to the north contributed to the reasons for commencing Operation Lejeune on April 7th.

The boundary between the Provinces of Quang Ngai in the north and Binh Dinh in the south establishes the demarcation line between the I Corps and II Corps Tactical Zones. (Map 1) In all there are four Corps Tactical Zones which divide South Vietnam for Vietnamese military jurisdictional purposes. (Map 2) This same boundary line divided the US military effort, for to the north in I Corps area was the III Marine Amphibious Force (M&F), and to the south was I Field Force Vietnam, an Army control headquarters commanded by a Lieutenant General and to which the 1st Air Cavalry Division is directly responsible.

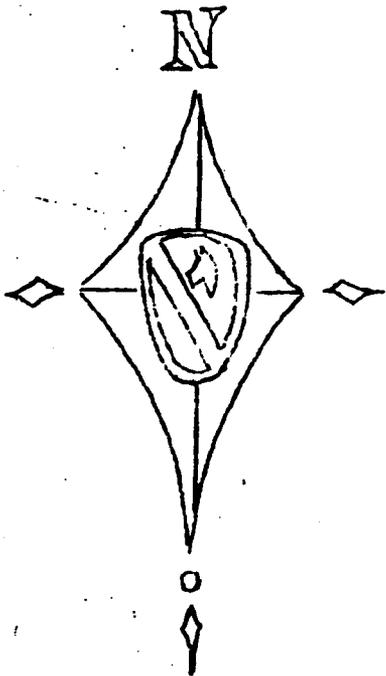
Since its arrival in South Vietnam in September 1965, a period of nineteen months, the 1st Air Cavalry had never before operated outside the II Corps Area. As a matter of fact, no Army unit had ever operated in the III M&F/I Corps territory. Therefore, it must have been with some sense of security that the enemy units crossed the boundary line, presuming, and reasonably so, that the endless pursuit by the "Cav" would not follow. This proved a mistaken assumption, however, for on the 7th of April an air cavalry battalion task force assaulted into Duc Pho, the southern most district of Quang Ngai and one of the two districts which were the target area of Operation Lejeune.

The fact that these enemy units had withdrawn into Quang Ngai was not the only reason for the Division's commitment into the area. The general enemy intelligence picture in that province, and more particularly in the Duc Pho District, was less than encouraging. Duc Pho had been effectively controlled by the Viet Cong and its political arm, the National Liberation Front (NLF), for more than ten years. Since late 1964 this pressure upon and control over the civilians had tightened considerably. With increased power, achieved ostensibly by political indoctrination, but more convincingly by torture and acts of terrorism, the VC sphere of influence grew until a well-developed infrastructure had matured from the sea coast as far inland as Ba To. The VC

17th Parallel
DMZ

MAP LEGEND

----- National
----- Province
----- Boundaries



I

II

III

IV

CENTRAL
VIETNAM
HIGHLANDS

KONTUM

Kontum

Pleiku

PLEIKU

Quang
Ngai

Ba Duc
Pho

Lejeune
AO

BINH DINH

Bong Son

An Khe

Qui Nhon

Thy
Hoa

Cam Ranh Bay

Saigon

SOUTH CHINA SEA

MAP 2

held a tight grip and it would take nothing less than a major effort to break it. The legitimate Government of Vietnam (GVN) controlled only 10% of the land area in the District, which was, at best, a small island around the city of Duc Pho. The pro-Government population was also estimated at 10%. The remaining 90% of the District was unquestionably the enemy's--he could, and did, roam at will. The other 90% of the 100,000 residents of the district were either hard core VC, or had a father, brother or son who was VC, or were completely intimidated by the Viet Cong. In essence, the GVN was substantially powerless in the area.

To maintain control, the VC insured that the preponderance of the District hamlets had strictly disciplined local guerrillas, organized into well-armed squads. The coastal villages of Pho Lai and Pho Xuan were sea infiltration routes through which large shipments of weapons and materiel often passed. The VC stranglehold on rice production enhanced their control over the local populace. Land was taken from the farmers and used to plant VC crops, and those who retained their land to produce their own crops were forced to make strict accountability for each rice harvest. The VC would predetermine the amount of rice each paddy should produce and estimate how much the owning farmer and his family would need to survive until the next harvest; the VC would then demand and receive the remainder. Without exception, rice is the critical and basic staple of all enemy units in Vietnam whether main force or local guerrillas, and all these units throughout South Vietnam depend primarily on resupply by coerced civilians. Also, with increased US pressure in Binh Dinh Province, the rice tax burdens had correspondingly increased on the peasant in Quang Ngai. Without access to the rich rice areas in Binh Dinh, the VC were compelled to supplement their rations from elsewhere.

It was not the Free World Force policy that this state of affairs should continue. On January 28th a Task Force of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines moved from its northern base in Chu Lai into the Duc Pho area for Operation De Soto, a search and clear mission to alleviate some of the enemy control in that District. Because the Marine battalion was restricted to ground mobility with very little helicopter support, its operations were limited and hamlets were not cleared as quickly or as effectively as necessary. The Marines concentrated their operations around the city of Duc Pho itself. To assist in the southern portions of the District, additional Marine battalions were committed. At the end of February the Special Landing Force (SLF) of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, previously the general reserve of the III MAF at Okinawa, landed one company ashore south of Sa Huynh and air assaulted two others into two landing zones (LZ) on the high ground to the northwest. Simultaneously, the 2/5 Marines were committed from Chu Lai to begin Operation Deckhouse VI with the 1/4 Marines, a search and clear mission to the southeast, south, and southwest of Duc Pho city, in an effort to expand the Marine influence and, concurrently, the GVN control in the District. Deckhouse VI was completed in early March when the 2/5 Marines returned to the Chu Lai Tactical Area of Responsibility (TACR) and the 1/4 Marines sailed back to Okinawa to reassume the III MAF general reserve.

The 3/7 Marines remained in the vicinity of Duc Pho city with its organic four companies, reinforced by a company from the 2/5 Marines, which stayed behind as a roving and securing force in the area of operations (AO).

In the early months of 1967--January, February, and March--the III MAF units had noticed an increasing pressure from North Vietnam along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the demarcation line established by the 1954 Geneva Accords dividing North and South Vietnam until peaceful elections could be held unifying the country. The marked increase of enemy infiltration through the DMZ and across the 17th Parallel demanded that the Marines commit in its defense as many forces as could be collected. The Marines were thin on the DMZ and the only way to get reinforcements was to pull units on TF X-Ray from Chu Lai. Furthermore, the Marines needed to pull the 2/5 Marines out of the Duc Pho District. The decision was made to extract the battalion and reposition it in the northern portion of the I Corps area. The battalion could not be moved, however, without a replacement force, for to do so would completely strip that area of friendly troops and leave a vacuum in which the VC could regain its lost control. Consequently, Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV) looked for the most responsive unit to replace the Marines, and at that time, the 6th of April, it was the 1st Air Cavalry Division.

Although the 1st Cavalry Division was given less than twelve hours to put a battalion task force into the Duc Pho area and less than thirty-six hours to increase that force to a brigade task force the planning in higher headquarters to augment the Marines in southern Quang Ngai had been contemplated for several months. Unfortunately, the planning had not progressed far enough nor fast enough which resulted in a "crash" program for the Division's commitment. Several months earlier it was thought that the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division would replace the Marines in Duc Pho; but when the order came and there was an immediate need for a force, only the 1st Air Cavalry with its airmobility could react in time.

Approximately 10:00 PM on April 6th Division Headquarters received vocal orders from its higher headquarters, I Field Force Vietnam, that a battalion task force had to be deployed into Duc Pho by sunset the next day. Hurried preparations began immediately for what would be a fifteen day operation.

The 6th of April was merely five days after Major General John Norton, Division Commander since 6 May 1966, had relinquished his command to Major General John J. Tolson. General Norton was well-known and respected for his aggressiveness, his relentless pursuit of the enemy, as shown particularly by operations in Binh Dinh Province. Before his departure General Norton had known that the enemy had retreated across the I/II CTZ boundary to avoid the "Cav" pursuit and was outspoken in his desire to go "north". It was therefore not surprising to hear the prediction in his farewell remarks, "We're going north soon." General Norton's intuition proved correct.

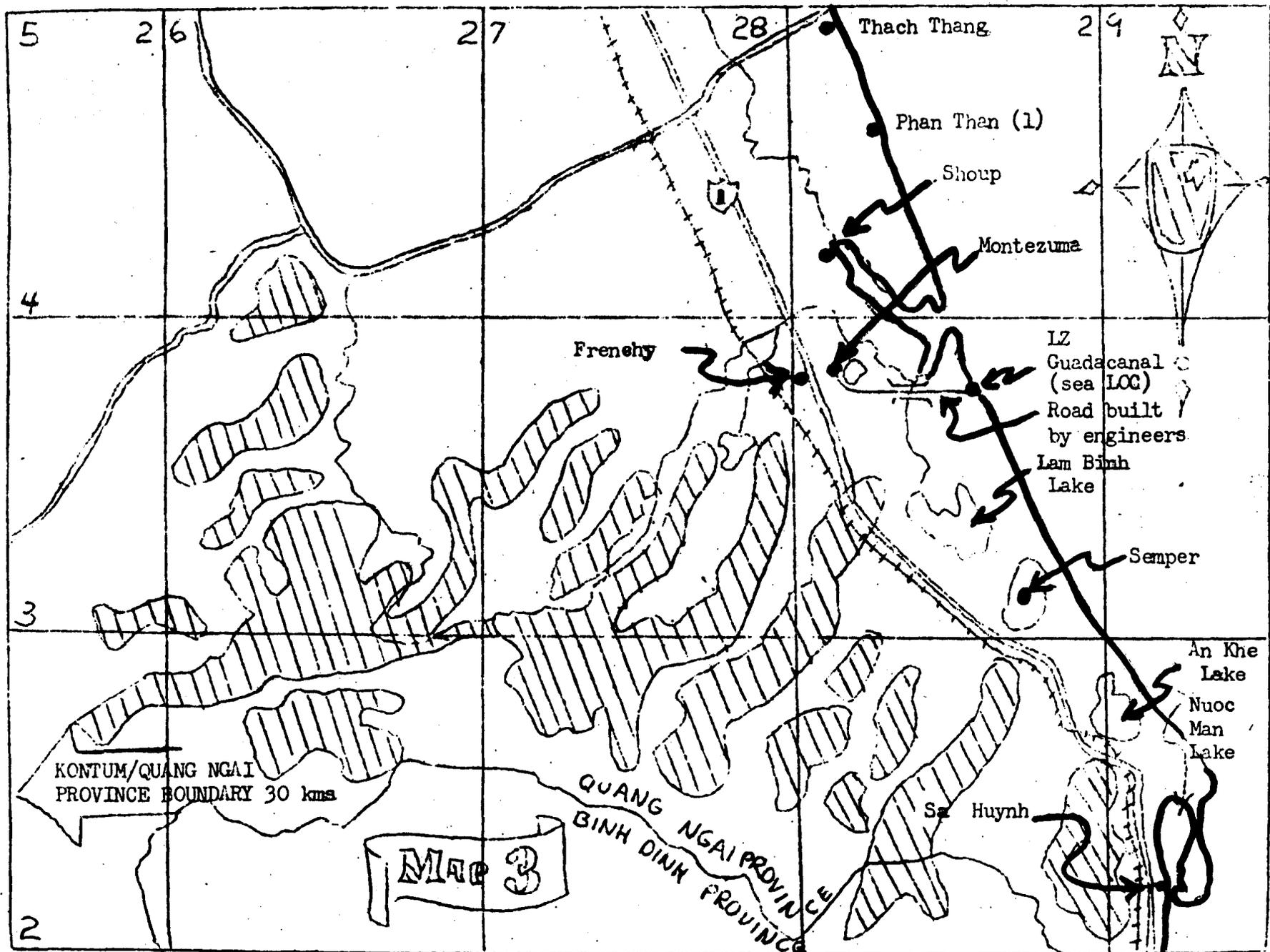
General Tolson was in command only five days before he implemented orders from higher headquarters--an assault north. Lejeune was General Tolson's first

initiated operation as Division Commander. It was also the first time in Vietnam that the Air Cavalry operated outside of the II CTZ; moreover, these fifteen days were going to establish a precedent in Air Cavalry history, in US Army military history, and, in particular, US Army engineering history.

The names and places associated with Operation Lejeune reflect a distinct Marine Corps flavor. In its first assault into Quang Ngai Province, the 1st Air Cavalry wished to pay all due respects to the III MAF which had so long been responsible for the entirety of I Corps. The operation was named after Major General John Archer Lejeune, a Marine leader who served during both the Spanish-American War and World War I. The names of the landing zones and forward base areas (naming areas is usual in Vietnam for the purpose of easy reference) read like a history of the US Marine Corps—Montezuma, Guadalcanal, Shoup, Semper, Tripoli, and others.

The month of April is a transition month—the period between the northeast monsoon season and the southwest monsoon season. Consequently, the general wind flow pattern was weak and variable. The temperatures and humidity increased; there were occasional rain showers. No operations or any air assault were in any way inhibited by marginal weather. On the ground the Lejeune AO extended from the sea coast generally to the western Quang Ngai/Kontum Province boundary (including the two Districts—Duc Pho and Ba To) and from the Quang Ngai/Binh Dinh boundary (E-W grid line 20) north into central Quang Ngai (E-W grid line 50). (Map 3) The 2d Brigade activity concentrated in Duc Pho District. This area is characterized by varying terrain: coastal plains, river valleys and rugged mountains. The coastal plains area runs north and south in the Duc Pho District and consists of numerous open rice fields with scattered thickets of grass brush and forest. The great majority of activity and contacts in Operation Lejeune concentrated in the flatland area.

As already mentioned, the enemy units in the area of operations (AO) were not confined to local guerrillas. Intelligence sources had confirmed the presence of the Headquarters of the 3d NVA Division and of the 22d NVA Regiment and the presence of the entire 2d VC Regiment (three battalions), which was expected to have regained its full strength of 2,400 men. Also identified were the 407th Sapper Battalion, the 38th and 48th Local Force Battalions, and the C-217 and C-19 Local Force Companies. It was probable that three other infantry battalions were in the area, two main force and one local force. These units were not completely idle and content merely to rest and refit. In mid-March 1967 elements of the 2d VC Regiment conducted a mortar attack against the US Marines position at Duc Pho; moreover, the enemy had the capability to attack any US or ARVN position in the area with two or more full strength battalions, reinforced by regimental heavy weapons. Sources showed that all three battalions of the 2d VC Regiment were in close proximity to Duc Pho and it was believed that sea infiltrated supplies were coming into the District between Thach Than (3) (BS 8149) and Phan Than (1) (BS 8344) in the northern AO. (Map 3)



Meanwhile, the 1st Cavalry continued its hurried preparations to comply with the April 6th order for deployment into the Lejeune AO. The fragmentary order 34-67 from I Field Force Vietnam which confirmed the verbal orders received the night before was dated 070545Z (5:45 a.m. on April 7th Greenwich Mean Time) and arrived in Division Headquarters at 1:45 p.m. (Vietnam time) on the 7th. The order was clear and succinct as it had been the previous night. It reiterated that there was a large enemy build-up along the DMZ and in the Quang Tri-Thua Thien and Quang Ngai areas for the anticipated summer offensive which had required III MAF to reinforce its forces in the north. The Division mission was specific: relieve elements of the Marines in Duc Pho, construct and secure selected roads throughout the area and conduct, concurrently, search and destroy operations in Duc Pho District. Time was limited, for a battalion task force had to close Duc Pho by the evening of the 7th. A brigade headquarters, an additional battalion, plus the necessary brigade support units had to close by the evening of the 8th. Simultaneously the Marines were to be relieved and air lifted to the north. Deployment transportation would be by organic division aircraft, but if necessary, higher headquarters would support with additional C-7A Caribou aircraft. Initially all resupply would be by an engineer forward support activity (FSA) and organic aircraft until a more effective means of sustained resupply was established.

The immediate problem after the orders were received on the night of the 6th was to decide which one of the nine Air Cavalry battalions should be alerted for deployment on such short notice. The obvious choice was the 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry of Lieutenant Colonel Robert D. Stevenson which was in a preparatory posture at Camp Radcliff, the Division's base camp at An Khe, ready to commence an operation in that immediate vicinity. While this mission could be changed to divert the battalion into the new AO, there were still numerous arrangements which would have to be made. A great deal of planning was required to air assault the 2/5 task force over ninety-five kilometers for what would be sustained operations in Lejeune. The 2d Brigade Headquarters and the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry were also selected. Lieutenant Colonel Fred E. Karhohs' 2d Brigade had just finished a sweeping operation in the Crescent Area. With these decisions made, Division Headquarters published its frag order 7097-4 and subordinate units started immediate preparations.

At 1:15 a.m. on the 7th, approximately three hours after the Division had received the oral orders, the Division's 11th Aviation Group, located at LZ Two Bits (a forward command post at Bong Son) was alerted to be prepared to airlift part of the 2/5 Cav and other supporting elements from An Khe to Duc Pho. (Map 4) The lift would begin at first light and continue until completion that evening. Fragmentary order 7097-4 was received by other units: the 2/5 Cav, 2d Brigade Headquarters, 1/5 Cav, the 1st Squadron 9th Cavalry, the 8th Engineer Battalion, the 1st Battalion 77th Artillery (105 to name a few. At 5:00 a.m. the 1/9 Cav released its fragmentary order stating in part, that its "B" Troop would come under the operational control (OPCON) of the 2d Brigade and move to Duc Pho on order. An hour later, the men of the 2/5 Cav began moving from An Khe to English by Air Force C-7A Caribous and

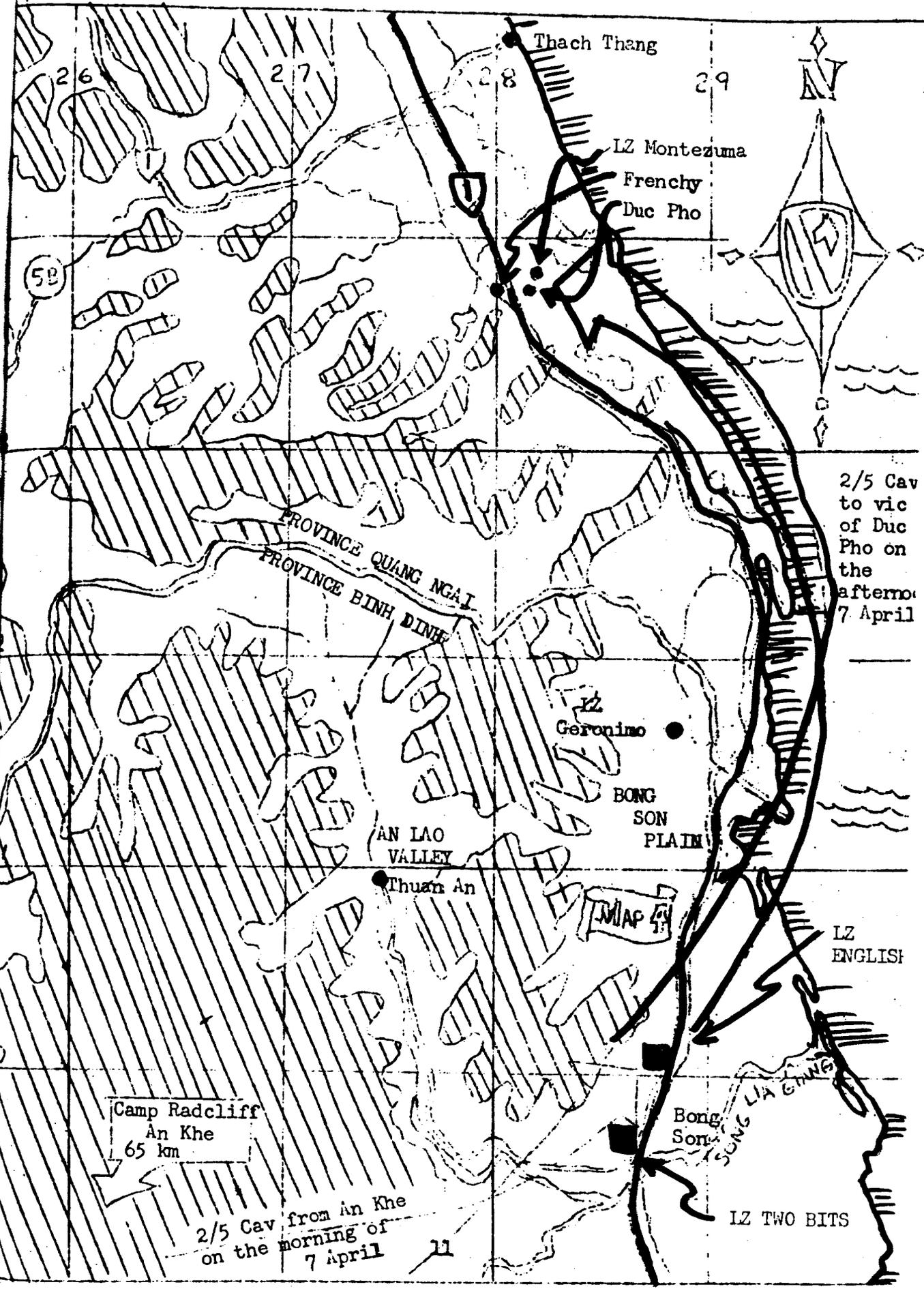
the Aviation Group's CH-47 Chinooks, closing English around 11:30 AM. Elements which deployed by road convoy from Camp Radcliff to English did not arrive until later that day.

Meanwhile, during the morning hours on the 7th, liaison and quartering parties with representatives from the Division Staff, Aviation Group, 1/9 Cav, the Forward Support Element (FSE), HHC 2d Brigade, and from the artillery units flew to LZ Montezuma to coordinate with the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines for the forthcoming arrivals. They would also try to determine unit locations, gather initial intelligence, and plan for the control of air traffic which would shortly saturate the air around Duc Pho.

Before the 2/5 received the change of mission for commitment in Quang Ngai, the battalion was under the operational control of Division Headquarters for its mission near Camp Radcliff. Therefore, for simplicity, the battalion remained under Division control in Duc Pho until the 2d Brigade Headquarters arrived on the 8th. Once it arrived in the AO, the 2/5 would be primarily interested in establishing its companies so that they could rapidly relieve the Marine companies in place and begin security as well as search and destroy operations.

Although the operation officially began at 9:30 AM on the 7th, actual deployment into the AO did not begin until 1:00 PM when the 2/5 Cav (minus the trains) began the thirty-five kilometer assault from English to Duc Pho. The Aviation Group supported the airlift with twelve UH-1D Hueys and two CH-47 Chinooks. Each aircraft made numerous return trips before the battalion had fully closed the AO by 5:00 PM. Meanwhile, the Marine units at LZ Montezuma were packing to leave the LZ, but tents remained up leaving very little space in which to fit another battalion. Consequently, Lieutenant Colonel Stevenson, Commanding Officer of the 2/5 Cav, decided to leave his Bravo Company at Montezuma to assist security while the Battalion Headquarters and C and D Companies settled at LZ Frenchy to the west. "A" Company (minus) immediately began local patrolling and setting up ambushes a kilometer to the northeast of Duc Pho. Simultaneously with the move of the cavalry battalion, the first artillery movement was underway. Battery A, 1st Battalion, 77th Artillery (105) commenced deployment from Position English at 3:00 PM by thirteen CH-47 Chinooks. By 5:15 PM the entire battery had closed LZ Frenchy, and within another hour and fifteen minutes, Battery A, 1st Battalion, 30th Artillery (155) attached to the 1/77th Artillery, after a two hour move from LZ Geronimo, (Map 4) was on the ground at Montezuma. The Division wasted no time in establishing contact, for on the first day of actual operations before the majority of the other Brigade Task Force units had closed, the first enemy was killed by cavalry troopers.

These were not the only units to move into Duc Pho on that first day. Headquarters and Headquarters Company (minus) and B Company (minus), which would be in direct support of the 2d Brigade, of the organic 8th Engineer Battalion of Lieutenant Colonel Charles G. Olentine had been alerted that day



2/5 Cav
to vic
of Duc
Pho on
the
afternoon
7 April

Camp Radcliff
An Khe
65 km

2/5 Cav from An Khe
on the morning of
7 April

11

LZ TWO BITS

LZ ENGLISH

Geronimo

BONG
SON
PLAIN

AN LAO
VALLEY

Thuan An

PROVINCE QUANG NGAI
PROVINCE BINH DINH

MAP 47

Bong
Son

SONG LIA GIANG

LZ Montezuma
Frenchy
Duc Pho

Thach Thang

26

27

28

29

59

0

to prepare for what would soon prove to be the largest heliborne lift of heavy engineer equipment in the Division's history. In light of the unique airmobile lift of the Air Cavalry, it would be the largest such lift in US Army history.

Even before the Division knew it was going into southern Quang Ngai, planning personnel undertook to locate a heavy duty airstrip in that area which could accommodate large Air Force aircraft to facilitate any move northward if such an order might come and to provide a means of logistical resupply. The only airstrip of any kind was a sod-covered, long-abandoned strip built by the French--west of Duc Pho city, the LZ chosen by the CO 2/5 to settle his battalion headquarters and appropriately named Frenchy. This strip was inadequate for two reasons: first, its sod covering and a long period of disuse ruled out any immediate use by C-7A Caribou aircraft. To be usable the strip would require considerable engineer effort. Secondly, even though it could be repaired for C-7A use, the planning objective of having a much more durable and longer C-123, and finally a C-130 airstrip could not be met, as the strip was so located that it could not be expanded. The decision was then made to put the engineers into LZ Montezuma where they would build, from scratch, the C-7A strip, which could be expanded to accommodate C-123 aircraft. There would also be space to build a parallel C-7A strip while elements of the 39th Engineer Battalion, which would shortly close into the AQ, could improve and surface the first airstrip to handle the much larger and heavier Air Force C-130 aircraft. It should be noted here that the 39th Engineer Battalion is part of the 45th Engineer Group under control of I Field Force Vietnam.

Bravo Company (minus) of the 8th Engineer Battalion arrived at LZ Montezuma during the morning of the 7th and two platoons, the 2d and 3d, became OPCON to the 2/5 Cav once that battalion had closed in the afternoon. The operations section of the 8th Engineer Battalion and the reconnaissance team of the intelligence section under First Lieutenant Kenneth C. Service made a thorough reconnaissance of the airfield site. The monumental task of building the two airstrips on such short notice and with such a strict deadline became the combined task of portions of the 1st, 2d, and 3d equipment platoons of the Headquarters and Headquarters Company. During the next two days thirty-one pieces of heavy engineer equipment weighing over 200 tons would be airlifted to Duc Pho. To do so required twenty-nine CH-54 "flying crane" sorties and fifteen CH-47 Chinook sorties. Much of the equipment had to be partially disassembled or sectionalized to reduce the pieces to a transportable weight before they could be helilifted. By 6:00 PM on the 7th enough equipment was on the ground to begin work. The earthwork commenced and continued throughout the night under floodlights. Two D-6B bulldozers and four CAT 112 graders began stripping the sandy silt off the surface. By midnight, six hours after the construction began, the C-7A strip was 25% completed.

Per orders, the 8th of April found the remainder of the 2d Brigade Task Force deploying into the Lejeune AO beginning at 7:30 AM. Earlier that morning, at 6:00 AM, the 2d Brigade Headquarters was relieved of the operational

control of the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry, the OPCON of which was passed to the 1st Brigade so that battalion could remain in the Pershing AO. The 2d Brigade Headquarters Company began its airlift into Montezuma from English at 7:30 AM, followed two hours later by the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, which was relieved of its security mission at Position English and around the Bong Son Bridge. The 2d Brigade Headquarters closed at 12:30 PM and immediately assumed OPCON of the 2/5 Cav from Division Headquarters. The speed and efficiency with which the 2d Brigade deployed into the Lejeune AO is a great credit to Lieutenant Colonel Karhoks and his operations officer, Major Leonard P. Wishart.

The 1/5 Cav prepared for search and destroy operations to begin on April 9th. Bravo Troop, 1/9 Cav received orders and was placed OPCON to the 2d Brigade at 6:00 AM for aerial support and surveillance. Using entirely its organic aircraft, B Troop under Major Wilson C. Wooley closed from Two Bits to Montezuma by 6:30 that afternoon. Additional fire support deployed into the area, as B Battery 1/77 Artillery was moved by eleven Chinooks from English to Montezuma, closing at thirty minutes after noon.

While these units arrived in the AO, the companies of the 2/5 Cav and the artillery unit continued to relieve in place the companies of the 3d Battalion (reinforced), 7th Marines; I Battery, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines; and a platoon, K Battery, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines. The 2/5 Battalion CP remained at Frenchy, with Bravo Company at Montezuma. Alpha Company relieved the Marine company at LZ East in the high ground southeast of Lam Binh Lake and Delta Company relieved the USMC Company at LZ West on the sea coast south of the Tra Cau River.

The remainder of the Marine task force was placed OPCON to the 2d Brigade at 12:30 PM on the 7th and continued to prepare for complete extraction from the AO. Operation De Soto officially terminated on the 9th and it was originally planned that the entire task force would be cleared by the 10th. This schedule was not met for various reasons. Although the Marine task force command post departed by late in the afternoon on the 9th, there still remained behind roughly twenty-five percent of the battalion and support elements. An air corridor was established to facilitate the Marine move, which was generally south of the Brigade's northern boundary and east of the Song Tra Cau River, entering Montezuma from the northeast. This corridor provided a safer passage for Marine personnel and equipment. Because of low aircraft availability, the extraction time was revised upward. With the Marine build-up in the northern part of I Corps, there was a scarcity of CH-54 helicopters for heavy lift. The Marine deployment progressed slowly with final clearance around the 21st.

The amount of rotary wing traffic at Montezuma and the fact that the LZ was sandy to begin with presented a serious problem of dust control. At times the LZ itself became obscured by a thick blanket of sand and dust stirred up

by rotor turbulence. Peneprine, an oil-based dust palliative, was spread on the helipads and refueling areas as fast as it became available which helped immeasurably to settle the dust. With the dust under control a very serious maintenance problem was avoided. Great quantities of dust and sand tend to erode rotors and rotor heads and make maintenance virtually impossible. Peneprine probably reduced the problem by 95%.

With the vast amount of Air Cavalry combat and combat support units being lifted into Montezuma throughout the day and Marine aircraft commencing the outward deployment, the air traffic at the LZ was at best confusing. To assist the Marine air traffic control personnel, the pathfinder platoon of the 11th GS Aviation Company tasked a three-man team, headed by First Lieutenant Barron Blizzard, to control the arrivals, landings, and departures of all Division rotary wing aircraft. As the 8th Engineers had not yet finished the C-7A airstrip, the added problem of controlling fixed wing aircraft with the hundred or so helicopters was not yet presented. The air traffic control problem did not become serious until the 8th and 9th when the main deployment began into LZ Montezuma. The 2/5 Cav had substantially avoided the problem when the decision was made to land two of its companies and the battalion command post at Frenchy instead of Montezuma.

The effort of two radio control agencies, one Marine and one US Army, on April 8th improved the air traffic control problem, but did not solve it. Marine pilots, unaccustomed to strict traffic control measures which are inherently necessary with the hundreds of aircraft in the airmobile division, often failed to contact the control agencies when either arriving or departing, making flying hazardous. Another complication which aggravated the air control problem was the inexactitude at which the various brigade task force units were given assigned areas at LZ Montezuma. Because of the "hurry-hurry" attitude which was required to completely deploy a full brigade task force solely by air in a day and a half, it was self-evident that some corners would have to be cut. One of these corners was that not enough time could be given by the advance and liaison parties to fully plan unit disposition on Montezuma. As a result, when the units arrived, some settled in indicated areas which turned out to be unsatisfactory and in some cases they had to pick up and move as much as 800 meters. Also, each Army unit had established its own aircraft control to guide its ships into its area with the result that many units directed their aircraft into or through another unit's area. As is experienced at every landing zone, even when there is no confusion, the air turbulence from hovering helicopters was terrific. Tents were blown down; equipment scattered. One irate individual anonymously called over the radio, "If you blow my tent down one more time, I'm going to shoot you out of the air." Although perhaps not expressed so vehemently, this is a common feeling when landing zones are initially established.

Brigadier General George S. Blanchard, Assistant Division Commander - A and overall supervisor of Operation L'Épave, remained in the Lejeune AO almost exclusively. On several occasions he expressed deep personal concern over the

aircraft density, but was amazed at the effectiveness of the three-man pathfinder team which controlled daily, with nothing more than a FRC-25 radio, the more than 1,000 arrivals and departures of OH-13, UH-1B, UH-1D, CH-47, CH-54 helicopters, OV-1 Forward Air Controller (FAC) aircraft, C-7A, and Marine aircraft. He often smiled inwardly when he compared this responsibility, assumed by a lieutenant, a non-commissioned officer, and an enlisted man, and carried out with the minimal equipment in less than desirable conditions (the team initially stood on the hood of a 1/4 or 3/4 ton truck in raging dust storms churned up by rotor turbulence) with the air-conditioned, specially-equipped offices of highly-paid technicians of any large US airport.

Additional radio communications were set up as the Tactical Air Support Party (TACP) departed English at 1:00 PM on the 8th in CH-47 Chinooks arriving at Montezuma within a half hour. The TACP radios were operational in the Brigade Tactical Operations Center (TOC) within another hour. The prior coordination with the US Marine Direct Air Support Center (DASC) at LZ Montezuma permitted a smooth transition when the TACP assumed responsibility for the tactical air support at 8:00 AM on the 9th. As will be seen, the Air Force air support of ground contacts in Lejeune was substantial.

Heavy engineer equipment continued to arrive at Montezuma from English on the 8th with the lifting in of two MRS 100 tractors with scrapers. Additional engineer personnel arrived from Headquarters Company as well as from the third platoon from "B" Company, 8th Engineer Battalion. By 4:30 that afternoon, just twenty-two hours after work began, the 1500 foot C-7A strip was completed, but round-the-clock work continued to expand it to 2,300 feet for C-123 use. This project would be completed in another fifty hours when the equivalent of 25,300 cubic yards of soil had been moved.

Along with the infantry, aviation, and engineer units, logistical support and maintenance personnel were deployed. This 1st Forward Support Element (1st FSE) of approximately 150 officers and men was responsible for providing all the logistical needs of the Brigade Task Force--supplies, equipment, food, ammunition, clothing, fuel and water. It was also responsible for the maintenance of vehicles and equipment to include artillery, small arms, and communication facilities. Company, 15th Medical Battalion, a part of the 1st FSE, moved its field hospital from An Khe to English by C-130 and on to Montezuma by CH-47. Its field hospital provided daily sick calls and dental care. Medevac helicopters evacuated the injured from the battlefield and provided, if necessary, further evacuation to surgical hospital.

The respective elements of the FSE closed into Montezuma by airlift. The operations sections and the supply platoon of the 15th Supply and Service Battalion convoyed from Position Hammond, where the 1st FSE had been engaged in support mission, to English, and from English to Montezuma by CH-47 aircraft. The FSE was operational the afternoon of the 8th although all units had not fully closed until the 9th of April.

Now that a Brigade Task Force was in Duc Pho, logistical resupply became imperative, and there was only one feasible solution—a sea line of communication (sea LOC). Ideally a ground line of communication from LZ English to Montezuma would have been preferred, but National Route 1, which paralleled the sea coast (Map 1), was completely unusable. Many parts of the road had been fully washed out and there were large gaping holes which prevented any vehicular traffic. The road could have been repaired with a major engineer effort, but once repaired the problem of road security would have been very difficult. Without complete security vehicles and personnel would be lost to enemy mines and booby traps. Moreover, the fact that the highway passed through mountain ranges just north of the I Corps-II Corps boundary complicated both engineer repair and convoy security. Therefore, a ground LOC was out of the question, and all efforts turned toward establishing a sea LOC. Large scale operations in the Duc Pho area had been under consideration for months before Lejeune commenced, and an integral part of this planning was deciding what part of the coast was best suited as a terminal point for the sea LOC. A sea LOC had to be established to provide the required 250 short tons of supplies a day to support a brigade task force. There were no heavy duty airstrips in the area, although the C-7A strip at Montezuma provided for limited air LOC. Nor were there any road networks over which supplies could be hauled. These considerations meant that massive resupply could only be provided by the sea route. Prior to the Division's commitment into Quang Ngai the III MAF had entertained the question of which area would be the best for the beachhead. But little headway had actually been made on the decision for with only a battalion in the area there was no pressing need for a massive logistical resupply. Now that a brigade was involved and the Division was responsible for the success or failure of all operations in the Duc Pho District, there was an immediate requirement for quick action. Planning and liaison personnel coordinated with their counterparts in the III MAF to benefit from Marine experience in trying to decide where to locate the terminal point of the sea LOC. The III MAF planners had tentatively selected a position southeast of the Dang Mountains, but Division planners decided a better choice would be farther north and almost directly east of LZ Montezuma. If this were the case, the proximity would enhance the security requirements of each and the distance would be reduced for a connecting road which would have to be built. The Division's recommendation, which was submitted to General Westmoreland, was accepted.

The force which operated the sea LOC was known as Task Force Gallagher and was composed of units from three important coastal ports; the Terminal Service Company (minus) and the truck platoon were part of the Cam Ranh Support Command (SUPCOM), the Headquarters of the Task Force and Forward Support Activity (FSA) were from Tuy Hoa, and the LARC LX platoon came from Qui Nhon. Total personnel in Task Force Gallagher amounted to nine officers and 345 enlisted men.

Each of these units received a warning order on either the 7th or 8th of April to prepare for imminent commitment to support the 2d Brigade in Duc Pho. This order stressed that the sea LOC become operational as quickly as possible. Task Force Gallagher units had received in early March a warning that the TF would be formed and that they should begin planning. On the 9th, the advance party of the task force, along with twelve LCM's (landing craft, mechanized)

arrived off-shore at the debarcation point, called by the division, LZ Guadalcanal and by the task force, Razorback Beach. Guadalcanal and the beachhead had been secured by the 3d platoon, A 2/5 Cav and by the 1st platoon, A 1/5 Cav. The remaining elements of the Task Force closed into Guadalcanal during the next eight days; each was fully operational within twenty-four hours after arrival. During the eight day period between 9 - 17 April, 8,200 short tons of equipment and supplies were moved in the LOTS (Logistical Over The Shore) operation from the following vessels: eight LST's (landing ship, tank), fifty-eight LCM's (landing craft, mechanized), and four LARC LX (lighter amphibious resupply cargo). The 5th Transportation Command, Qui Nhon Support Command, committed its entire resources (LCM, LARC LX, and personnel) to support Operation Lejeune. (Map 5)

The first three days of the LOTS operation were not without difficulty. The Guadalcanal site was the best available for beach unloading operations as the beach gradient dropped suddenly enough to enable the vessels to approach close to shore. A little over a half mile offshore, however, there were a number of sandbars which could not be passed except in high tide, and even then, they still presented problems. Fully-loaded LST's could not sail over the sandbars even at high tide. The first day the LST's spent a full, but futile day trying to do so. Thereafter the cargo was transloaded from LST's to LCM's, a smaller craft which rides higher in the water. The LCM's reached the shore, but due to heavy surf (8-12 feet breakers) three were swamped, capsized and badly damaged. In spite of the difficulties, the supplies and equipment were off-loaded and the LOTS was successful.

Although the sea LOC was responsible for establishing the supply line to Guadalcanal, the 1st FSE had the job, during the first several days of the LOTS operation, to receive the supplies and equipment at the beach site. Men of the 2/5 did the off-loading work. Of the forty sorties a day flown from the beach to Montezuma, personnel of the 1st FSE rigged all the equipment in slings and nets for displacement by Chinook helicopters, derigged it on arrival at Montezuma, and issued it to the respective units.

Although the birth of the sea LOC was sudden, it matured quickly, and by the end of Operation Lejeune, it appeared that Razorback Beach had become, on the basis of tonnage handled, one of the top ten port operations in the Republic of Vietnam.

Meanwhile, the lack of enemy contact on the 7th did not carry over to the 8th, for around 8:15 PM that evening, after an earlier air assault into LZ East on the coast, the men of A 2/5 Cavalry spotted fifteen to twenty-five individuals in black pajamas running toward bunkers roughly a half-mile to the east. A Company 2/5 engaged them with M-79 grenade launchers and small arms. Supporting artillery from A 1/77 Artillery at Frenchy and A 1/30 Artillery at Montezuma were called in. There was a negative enemy assessment that night, but a sweep through the area the next morning revealed three enemy killed by the artillery fire.

17th Parallel
DMZ

REPUBLIC
OF SOUTH
VIETNAM

I

LZ Guadalcanal

Lejeune
AO

Qui Nhon

Thy Hoa

Cam Rahn
Bay

CENTRAL
VIETNAM
HIGHLANDS

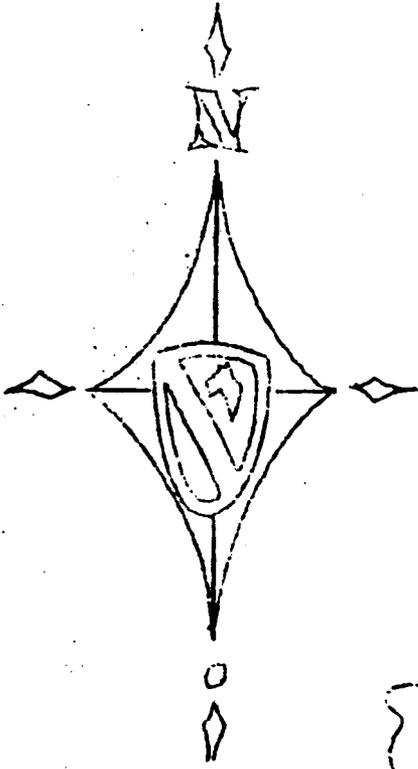
II

III

IV

Saigon

SOUTH CHINA SEA



MAP 5

The general scheme of the combat operations during Lejeune was uncomplicated. The 2d Brigade was responsible for the AO until it was relieved in place by the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division at noon on April 19th. The 3/25, under the operational control of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, remained in the Lejeune AO until April 22d when the Division relinquished control of the 3/25 and Lejeune terminated. Thereafter the 3/25 remained in the southern Quang Ngai Province, but joined another operation, Oregon. Included in this operation in addition to the 3/25 were the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, and an armored cavalry squadron from the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. Troop B of the 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry stayed on in the Duc Pho area after Operation Lejeune as part of Task Force Oregon. All of these units were united under a provisional divisional headquarters from MACV.

While the 2d Brigade had control of operations, the 2/5 Cav was used primarily as a security force for the so-called inner area which extended east of National Route 1 to the sea coast between E-W grid lines 30 and 40. The sea LOC, LZ's Montezuma and Frenchy and local PF (Popular Forces) and RF (Regional Forces) posts were the most important posts in this inner area. The 1/5 Cav was responsible for the outer area in which it concentrated its search and destroy operations. That battalion was also prepared with a reaction force to exploit any contacts of B 1/9 Cav. B Troop dispatched daily its aerial surveillance helicopters to conduct first and last light reconnaissance as well as aggressive search missions during daylight hours primarily to the north and northeast of Duc Pho. B Troop's blue platoon, the organic infantry platoon, was inserted daily in two different locations throughout the operation to develop the situation when sightings were made by the helicopters.

Except for a heavy contact made on April 16th, there were no other major enemy actions in the Lejeune AO. The enemy were sighted but only in two and three man groups, usually with packs and weapons, which were taken under fire by either the covering aircraft or the inserted blue platoon of 1/9. Out of twenty insertions, the blue team made sporadic to heavy contact on thirteen occasions. In all the blue platoon was credited with seventy enemy killed. On several occasions it was necessary to commit the brigade reserve-reaction force by air assault to assist the blues and to further exploit an enemy contact. On April 9th, after the blues were inserted in Tap An Hamlet, the covering aircraft observed a number of VC trying to maneuver, flank and engage the platoon. These gunships, at less than fifty feet above ground, engaged the target with rockets and machine guns. B Troop's forward observer called for artillery, and A 1/77 Artillery responded with 105mm fuse quick and delay rounds within 100 meters of the blues. The reaction force, 2d platoon, B 1/5 Cav was inserted 200 meters west of the blues as a maneuver element. The artillery was lifted and the two US forces linked up to sweep the area. But the enemy had withdrawn taking his dead, leaving behind only three enemy killed and one wounded. Both elements were extracted by 3:00 that afternoon. A sporadic exchange of fire occurred at approximately 8:30 AM on April 10th

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when the blues assaulted into Binh My (1) hamlet six kilometers northwest of Duc Pho. One VC was killed. A subsequent search of the hamlet and the surrounding area revealed a VC classroom complete with benches and blackboard. Later that day, when the 2d Brigade command and control helicopter reported that it was receiving ground fire from a bamboo thicket in An Ninh (2), two kilometers east of the blue's position, the platoon moved to a PZ (pick-up zone). The blues were extracted and reinserted with the reaction force, this time 1st platoon D 1/5 Cav. Artillery fire was adjusted in, but lifted as the ground elements swept west, killing an additional Viet Cong soldier. The body count revealed only two more killed by supporting aircraft, but it was believed many other dead or wounded had been dragged from the battlefield.

Also during the morning of the 10th on the rising ground southeast of Lam Binh Lake, the 1st platoon of A Company 2/5 Cav spotted three armed enemy, engaged and pursued them into a fortified position, subsequently determined to be bunkers four feet deep with railroad track overhead cover. When the platoon was still in contact three hours later, it was estimated that an enemy platoon was cornered and A Company's three platoons assaulted from Montezuma to assist. Within another half-hour D 1/5 Cav was placed OPCON to the 2/5 Cav and inserted at LZ Brass, a half kilometer north, to reinforce. ARA (Aerial Rocket Artillery) was directed in, killing two enemy moving down a trail and a third two hours later as the enemy sought to recover the dead bodies. Even after D 1/5 arrived, light contact of small arms and automatic weapons continued. When several men in khaki uniforms were seen near a cave, ARA was again called in and destroyed the cave entrance. Moreover, six air-strikes were brought to bear dropping 17,000 lbs of bombs, 7,500 lbs of napalm, expending 12,720 rounds of 20mm cannon, and 2,400 rounds of .50 caliber machine gun. All enemy firing ceased at 7:00 PM after this overwhelming demonstration of fire power. Final assessments were four enemy killed by body count; others were believed to be dead in the blown fortifications or carried off the battlefield. US losses were one killed and four wounded. This area of contact was searched on the morning of the 11th and A 2/5 Cav located a cave complex large enough to conceal an enemy company. Later that day another sizable cave was found in the same vicinity. During the next two days there was sporadic contact throughout the AO, with numerous ground to air firings.

It was apparent right from the beginning that the local enemy in the area had never before been challenged by airmobile tactics. They learned the hard way. It took several days for them to appreciate the versatility and flexibility of the American helicopter. They realized that mine fields and booby traps around an Air Cavalry command post or logistical area in no way restricted air assault tactics as would be the case with a unit limited primarily to ground movement. That is not to say, however, that the enemy gave up using mines and booby traps, for just the opposite proved true. There were more sniping incidents and booby traps encountered in the district than in any other district in Binh Dinh Province during the preceding few months. The tactical combat engineer support units, after the operation, described their support as routine during Lejeune, with the exception of the large number of mines and booby traps uncovered; moreover, the manner in which they

were placed, as well as the different types that were used, displayed a great deal of skill and technical knowledge. They were rapidly emplaced using a large amount of captured or found US ordnance up to and including 250 pound bombs. Items found by the engineers during a single minesweeping operation included; 1 VC anti-personnel mine, one 250 lb bomb, three 81mm mortar rounds, four 155mm howitzer rounds, three 105mm howitzer rounds, one 106mm Bee Hive round, two claymore mines, and several hand grenades.

Unfortunately not all of the enemy booby traps were discovered and unarmed. On the 12th of April, the first platoon C 2/5 lost two men killed and two wounded from a mine made of a 155mm artillery white phosphorus round. That same day two men and a scout dog of D 2/5 were killed two and a half kilometers southeast of Duc Pho when a booby trapped 105mm or 155mm howitzer round was accidentally tripped. On the 14th the 2/5 Cav found and destroyed eleven booby traps. None of these traps or mines seemed in any way visibly marked, and a check with the US District Advisor revealed that probably no markings were ever used because the area was generally VC controlled before the brigade's arrival. There was no need to mark the traps as a warning to the civilians. The VC reasoned that as long as they were in control the sympathy of the peasants was immaterial.

On April 13th at 8:25 AM the scout platoon leader's OH-13 helicopter from B Troop received heavy automatic weapons fire from Vinh Hien hamlet, seven and a half kilometers north of Duc Pho. Within fifty minutes the blues of B Troop were again on the ground to develop the situation. As soon as they landed, the helicopters above observed a large number of persons moving north from the hamlet and along National Route 1. The 3d platoon of A 1/5, the ready reaction force, was committed to establish a northern blocking position. After stopping and questioning the Vietnamese, the 3d platoon detained seventeen, one of whom turned out to be a VC tax collector carrying 28,000 piasters. Meanwhile, the blues had picked up twenty-nine detainees. After these were extracted, the platoon continued west until confronted by a heavily fortified area. The platoon halted until the A 1/5 reaction platoon could be extracted from the highway to join them. The two platoons then swept the area with very little resistance. Aerial reconnaissance indicated the area was 200 meters square, which, when searched by the ground troops, revealed numerous fighting bunkers, trench works and a good deal of barbed wire. There were two VC killed by helicopter gunners. The units were extracted in the early afternoon.

The heaviest combat action of the operation occurred on April 16th, a day which was also marked by twenty-three light and sporadic contacts. The 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division which had deployed into the Lejeune AO the day before was to play a significant part in this action. On the 15th the 2/35 Infantry, a battalion of the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, deployed from the Pershing AO to replace the 1/5 Cav which was to return to Binh Dinh Province. In effect at 10:30 AM that day the 2d Brigade and the 3/25 Infantry merely exchanged the operational control of their respective battalions. The first C-7A sortie of the 2/35 personnel arrived at

Montezuma at 7:20 AM and the main body of the battalion with C Battery, 2d Battalion, 9th Artillery had closed by 2:40 in the afternoon. The 1/5 Cav used the backhaul CH-47 and C-7A for its deployment into Fershing, clearing Montezuma with B Battery 1/77 Artillery by 4:20 PM. Alpha Company 2/35 Infantry remained at LZ Montezuma as the brigade reaction force, while B and C Companies 2/35 moved by foot to Frenchy to establish a forward operating base (FOB).

On April 16th, the 2d Brigade continued its search and destroy mission with the one air cavalry battalion, one infantry battalion and B Troop 1/9 Cav. The hamlet of Hoi An (2), in the very northeastern part of the AO near the Duc Pho-Quan Mo District boundary was suspected of being the location of a VC company. The blues were on the ground there at 7:40 AM and a detainee reported that there had been fifty NVA and ten VC in the hamlet the night before. A platoon from the 2/35 was inserted as reinforcements and the two platoons swept south to make contact. Meanwhile there were numerous enemy sightings to the north where approximately 100 individuals were observed, indicating that the sweep was in the wrong direction. The ground elements turned around and started north. After moving 200 meters north of the hamlet with artillery fires moving progressively 100 meters ahead of them, the men of both platoons encountered intense enemy ground fire. A heavy fire fight developed in which there were twenty-one separate ground-to-aircraft firings in the two kilometer area. One weapons helicopter gunship of B 1/9 was shot down and all four crew members killed. As the fight continued to escalate, two more companies from the 2/35 were inserted as a blocking force a kilometer to the north and along the northern District border, the limit of the AO. Too many aircraft were in the air to have artillery "prep" the proposed landing zones, so a CH-47 "Go-Go" helicopter armed with a 40mm cannon, aerial rockets and machine guns provided the necessary support prior to the two-company assault. Once on the ground C 2/35 blocked to the north and A 2/35 to the northeast. At this point, the commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry with the majority of the troops on the ground assumed control of the infantry elements. When the enemy positions were pinpointed through the aggressive deployment of the ground elements, two Air Force tactical air strikes were called in on the main enemy positions killing approximately twenty-five VC. Meanwhile, at 2:15 PM, the downed helicopter and its four dead crew members were secured by C Company 2/35, and within another hour B Troop's rigging and recovery team were on the site to begin the extraction. When the extraction began, the recovery team came under intense fire from what appeared to be an enemy force of company size or larger moving to the northwest. B Troop's gunships flew at treetop level and engaged them with machine gun fire and 40mm grenades, killing four enemy by body count and wounding an estimated ten more. By nightfall on the 16th, a total of forty-three VC had been killed. Of this total B Troop claimed seventeen, and the 2d Brigade commander's command and control ship six. In addition, several detainees were taken as well as two prisoners from the 219 VC Local Force Company.

A sweep of this contact area on the 17th by A and C Companies 2/35 resulted in a sporadic contact and two additional enemy were killed. Also on the 17th B

Company, 8th Engineer Battalion found and destroyed seven booby traps on the short access road to the water point at LZ Montezuma, all of which had been placed there during the night. In response to a report by the 1/77 Artillery liaison team that the ARVN Popular Force (PF) Camp with two 155mm howitzers, a kilometer southeast of Duc Pho city, was expecting an enemy attack, A 2/5 was air assaulted into that position. Meanwhile, both the PF camp and LZ Montezuma were alerted and artillery concentrations fired around each position.

One particular technique that was singularly successful during Operation Lejeune was the brigade's Night Hunter operation conducted practically each night. In what used to be territory under his control, the Viet Cong became the hunted rather than the hunter. A night hunter operation required four helicopters and combined aerial fire support capabilities. Flying in a one-two-one formation, three armed and unlighted helicopters would follow the lead ship which would be lighted. As the lead ship dropped flares, the door gunners in the following two helicopters, which flew at a higher altitude and at a distance not to be revealed by the flares, would observe the ground with starlight scopes. Once the enemy was spotted, the gunners would open up with tracers to make the target visible for the following, and the last ship to engage with 2.75 inch rockets within a matter of seconds. The Night Hunter concept was very effective at finding and killing the enemy.

Operation Lejeune combined the efforts of the four military services; the US Army, the US Marine Corps, the US Air Force, and the US Navy. USMC assistance was limited as the battalion had a more pressing commitment to deploy out of the AO. The tactical Air Force support was substantial. The Air Force C-7A Caribous made 159 sorties into Montezuma, carrying 1,081 passengers and 128.7 short tons of cargo. In support of ground troops there were numerous air strikes both preplanned and immediate. Most of the preplanned strikes were scheduled against reported enemy positions outside the range of organic artillery. There were a total of seven immediate strikes flown for close support to troops in contact. These were filled by alert aircraft or by other flights in the AO which were diverted in air for this additional fire support. During the first eight days of the operation 230,700 lbs of bombs were expended, 140,000 lbs of napalm dropped, 366 2.75" rockets and approximately 60,000 rounds of 20mm and .50 caliber rounds poured on enemy positions. The US Navy provided gun support with a total of 2,348 rounds from one of its two ships off the shore--the US Picking or the US Shelton.

Engineer support throughout Operation Lejeune was outstanding to say the least. The first C-7A airstrip was completed during the afternoon of April 8th, but it was not cleared for fixed wing aircraft until the US Air Force Inspection Team could approve its use. At noon on the 9th of April, the first C-7A Caribou landed to initiate an afternoon of shuttle traffic. The incoming Caribou that day had as their first loads thirty tons of culvert which were unloaded by the side of the runway since no parking ramp area was yet prepared. As an indication of air traffic density, there were thirty C-7A landings and 36 rotary wing landings on the 9th. The airstrip work continued without

let-up to lengthen it for C-123 aircraft. Another night passed with glaring search lights. This was one part of the move into Montezuma that the Marines could not understand. Long accustomed to very strict light and noise control at night, the Marines shuddered to think of the roar caused by the bulldozers and scrapers, of the intense illumination from the flood lights. But this apprehension was fortunately unfounded, and the engineer work continued without enemy interruption. There are at least two reasons why this was so; one, enemy forces could not react quickly enough to attack such a large installation and secondly they were probably awed by the fire superiority of the helicopters. Moreover, as seen, the night which had previously belonged to the enemy was all but neutralized by the 2d Brigade's night hunter operations.

The engineer work was making headway. One hundred fifty feet of thirty-six inch culvert was assembled to improve the airstrip drainage, and the ground trench was dug for its emplacement. On April 11th, the 2,300 foot C-123 strip was completed with 100 foot overruns at each end. The USAF Inspection team approved it the next day for C-123 traffic with a runway of 2,000 feet because the base perimeter fence at the north end restricted the glide path, eliminating a few hundred feet of runway. The airstrip was named Dusseau Airfield in honor of Specialist Four Jerry Dusseau, a demolition's specialist from Charlie Company who was killed by hostile action near Phan Thiet during the preceding January. Two days later on April 13th the 8th Engineers began the construction of the second C-7A strip parallel and west of the completed C-123 strip. One thousand meters of barrier were removed to make room. This second strip was necessary so that the engineers of the 39th Engineer Battalion, a nonorganic unit, could improve and surface the C123 airstrip to meet C-130 aircraft criterion without reducing the C-7A traffic into the LZ. This second C-7A strip was finished in twenty-five hours after 4,150 cubic yards of earth had been graded and moved. The Air Force inspection team declared this new strip operational on the 16th and the first Caribou landed at 4:00 PM that afternoon.

On the coast another major construction effort had begun. The road which would eventually connect Guadalcanal and Montezuma and over which the supplies brought in by the sea LOC could be transported inland was under construction by other elements of the 39th Engineer Battalion (combat). The advance party of the 39th Engineers arrived at Montezuma on April 10th to coordinate with the 2d Brigade Headquarters for the accomplishment of its two missions. The battalion was in general support of the Division and was tasked to construct the road from the coast inland capable of sustaining Class 30 traffic and to improve the airstrip at Montezuma for all-weather C-130 use. On the 13th of April, D Company of the 39th Engineer Battalion landed from LST's at Guadalcanal and prepared to begin work on the pioneer road west from the sea early the next morning. Secured by an element from C Company 2/5 Cav, the road work party had moved three kilometers west by the evening of the 14th. On the 15th D Company moved its command post from Guadalcanal to this river crossing point and established a water point there. That same day A Company and Headquarters Company of the 39th Engineer Battalion personnel disembarked at Guadalcanal.

On April 16th as the men of A Company were minesweeping the road for a kilometer west of Guadalcanal, an enemy mine was detonated at 8:43 AM killing two US soldiers and wounding four others. The resulting crater was five feet deep. Other elements of Alpha Company hauled fill dirt to stabilize the lateral roads to the beach area, and improved the defensive positions on the north end of the beach perimeter. Delta Company completed a forty-five foot dry span M4T6 over the San Mong River. Work continued during the subsequent days to improve the beach unloading area and to construct the road to Montezuma. The heavy rains on April 18th considerably hampered the road construction effort, but the road work continued until the road was completely finished and ready for convoy traffic on April 25th.

Civic Action Programs were very much a part of Operation Lejeune as in every division operation. The coming of the 2d Brigade was sudden and dramatic and the people of Duc Pho lined the streets to watch in awed silence as load after load of troops and equipment moved into the area. The construction of the C-7A airstrip at Montezuma meant an additional resupply means for the District, and plans were made immediately to bring backlogged USAID materials, refugee relief supplies and district resupply in on the new airstrip. As plans were developed for operations and construction in the area, the mission of the district advisory team became clear; to provide close, continuous liaison and assistance to the District administration, and to coordinate the development of the Duc Pho area.

One of the major civic action projects was the complete relocation of people living in Truong Sanh Hamlet, just north of LZ Montezuma, necessitated by the LZ base development and the needed construction for the longer airstrip. The 2d Brigade S-5 maintained close coordination with Vietnamese District Officials as well as the MACV advisory team at Duc Pho to insure the civilians would be given all assistance necessary. The District Chief held a meeting in the hamlet on April 12th to explain the necessity of the move and the amount of assistance to be rendered by the GVN/USFVF. Two GVN Claim/Settlement officials were on hand to explain the procedures for making claims and what settlement would be made by the Province. The families were given the choice of resettling in one of three other hamlets, each within two kilometers of Truong Sanh. It was not required that the hamlet be resettled in mass. The relocation was divided into three phases, each phase requiring the movement of a particular section of the hamlet. Phase III was to be finished by the 25th of April. Minute attention to detail was made, since even the movement of the ancestral graves was included in the planning.

Several kilometers to the north of Duc Pho, beginning on the 13th of April, B Troop 1/9 Cav provided aerial surveillance so that the local civilians could harvest the rice crops without fear of enemy intervention. Ironically the rice crops which were being harvested were planted by the VC, and for the first time, with Free World assistance, the Vietnamese peasant were deriving a benefit from their enemy. Over a four day period more than

1,000 harvesters brought in rice in excess of 66 tons. Additional ground security was provided for this operation, called Gold Fleece by the Vietnamese Popular Force troops.

The usual civic projects continued; tending to the refugees, daily sick calls, passing out food and vegetable seeds, assisting in the construction of classrooms and housing, and looking for public projects to employ the civilians. During Lejeune, 2,000 sheets of roofing tin, 120 bags of cement, 100 pounds of medical supplies, 1,000 pounds of ammunition, and 4,000 pounds of barrier material were delivered to the district.

In addition to the maintenance problems caused by the overwhelming amount of dust and dirt at Montezuma, there were additional maintenance requirements, especially with the air support provided on the sea coast. The helicopters which supported the 1st FSE at Guadalcanal were often required to pick up from and deliver cargo to sea going vessels and on the sandy beaches near the water's edge. As a result, there was a great deal of powdery sand and salt spray stirred up which required a daily washing of the helicopters to prevent corrosive damage.

During Lejeune, the large twin-rotored workhorse, the Chinooks from the 228th Assault Support Helicopter Battalion supported primarily from Position English, with some of the aircraft laagering (positioning aircraft on the ground in an area which has a perimeter defense) at An Khe and Hammond. The 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion provided six to eight UH-1D's and two UH-1E's daily to the 2d Brigade for tactical assaults. Additionally four UH-1E's provided logistical resupply and four more were tasked for command and control ships. The aircraft were flown into the Lejeune AO each day and laagered at Duc Pho during daylight when not involved in combat assaults. The 1st Aviation Detachment (Provisional) supported Operation Lejeune on a mission basis and flew twenty sorties on two different missions for a total of nine aircraft flying hours. The Aviation Detachment aircraft expended 148 2.75 inch rockets, 2,920 rounds of 20mm cannon fire, 2,125 rounds of 40mm grenades, and 5,500 rounds of .50 caliber machine gun fire in support of ground troops.

The artillery fire support during Lejeune was similarly extensive. The 1st Battalion, 77th Artillery (minus its C Battery which was attached to the 2/19 Artillery in the Pershing AO was in direct support of the 2d Brigade. Attached to the battalion minus were A 1/30 Artillery (155), a platoon from C 4/60 Artillery (M-42) and a squad from C 4/60 Artillery (M-55). The units from the 4/60 Artillery were in the AO between 8 - 14 April and OPCON to the 2/5 Cav. Also the rocket artillery fire from a platoon from C Battery 2/20 Artillery (ARA) reinforced the howitzer fire from the 1/77 Artillery. On April 15th, when the 2/35 Infantry replaced the 2/5 Cav in Lejeune, C Battery, 2d Battalion, 9th Artillery also arrived at Guadalcanal to replace A 1/77. B 1/77 was then attached to 2/9 Artillery until Bravo Battery also departed. Primarily the artillery fire support was rendered from LZ'S Montezuma and Frenchy both. On the 11th the Montezuma defensive fire plan was upgraded to include sixteen counter mortars, seventeen defensive concentrations, and six

mortar targets. On the 12th a coordinated fire plan was developed with searchlights and a Battery Commander's Scope (BC Scope) on top of Dang Mountain just to the east of LZ Montezuma. Day observation was improved and at night any given concentration around the position could be illuminated and a round fired thereon. The artillery ammunition expenditure until 6:00 AM on April 18th, as reflected in totals by caliber, were 7,326 rounds of 105mm, 2,727 rounds of 155mm, 2,348 naval gunfire, and 350 rounds from the USMC Artillery.

On April 18th the 2d Brigade Task Force units were preparing to leave the Lejeune AO. It was a typical day in the operation. The aircraft of Bravo Troop 1/9 Cav had nine incidents of either enemy sightings or light engagements. The blues were inserted five kilometers west of the northern portion of the An Khe Lake to sweep a built-up area. After sporadic fire, three enemy were killed, two captured, and eleven detainees evacuated. The blues were extracted a few minutes before noon. A Company 2/35 was in contact with an estimated enemy platoon in the northern portion of the AO. A Company 2/5 was committed as a reaction force to deny escape to the north. The contact resulted in three US wounded and eight VC killed. Elsewhere there were the usual aircraft firings and discovery of mines and booby traps.

On April 19th the Division's 2d Brigade was relieved of all responsibility in this AO at 12:00 noon when the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division assumed control. The 2d Brigade released the OPCON of the 2/35 Infantry and B 1/9 Cav to the 3/25 and moved to LZ Uplift with the 2/5 Cav to rejoin Operation Pershing. The 3/25 TF with the 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry and B 1/9 Cav continued this aerial surveillance, LZ security, rice harvest security, and thorough search and destroy operations throughout the AO. There was very little contact for the remainder of the operation. Early on the 20th A 2/35 received small arms fire from just south of the Lam Binh Lake and called in artillery. A search of the area revealed twelve VC killed in addition to four huts and ten bunkers destroyed. On April 21st there were eight light contacts and nine incidents of ground-to-air firings. A brigade long-range patrol encountered a VC booby trap which was possibly a 60mm mortar three kilometers west of Duc Pho which killed four US soldiers. Three of the nine ground-to-air firings involved 12.7mm anti-aircraft fire. Three airstrikes were called in on the suspected locations and both the fighter pilots and the FAC's observed numerous enemy. The four anti-aircraft positions were destroyed, but there was no assessment on enemy killed.

At noon on April 22, Operation Lejeune terminated and the 1st Air Cavalry Division released OPCON of the 3/25 which joined Task Force Oregon.

Operation Lejeune was certainly one of historical importance. The 2d Brigade's commitment was the first time any US Army unit had operated in Vietnam's I Corps Tactical Zone. The engineer effort which helilifted thirty tons of equipment to build two tactical fixed-wing airstrips in a matter of a few days is unparalleled in Army engineering history. The reaction capability to deploy fully a brigade task force in a day and a half to begin operations in an entirely new area of operations once again proves the overwhelming

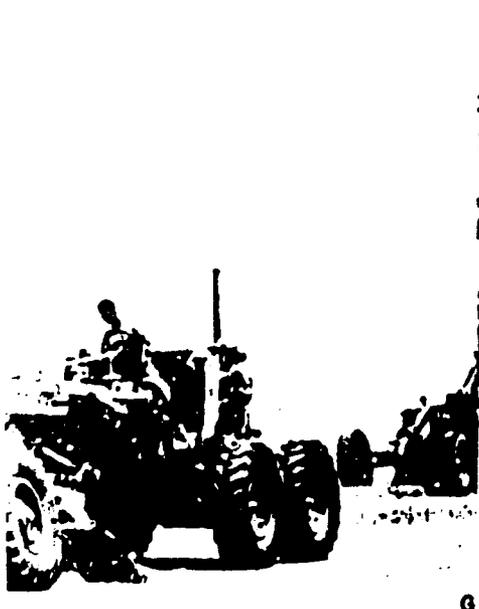
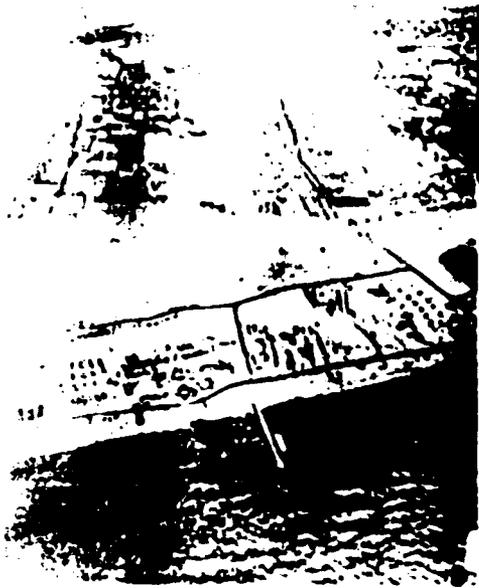
flexibility of an airmobile division. Although contacts were primarily light throughout the operation, the 176 VC killed and 127 VC captured by the Air Cavalry units in twelve days testify to the effectiveness of the brigade task force to find the enemy and destroy him. The 3/25 killed 29 enemy to bring the total enemy dead to 205. There were very few contacts with main force enemy units so the enemy losses, totaling 332, were predominantly from local groups and the vital infrastructure. The casualty ratio, an indication of the success of any operation, was high—nine enemy dead to one of ours. The statistics for enemy dead are those verified by body count. As it is a proven fact that the enemy places great importance on removing his dead from the battlefield, it is a reasonable presumption the enemy death toll was substantially higher.

The Division entered Quang Ngai Province as a stop-gap measure so that the pressure could be maintained while the Marines moved out and before the 3/25 could deploy into the AO. Again this was the first time any Army unit had operated in the Marine zone. The Division left behind two airstrips, a massive sea LOC, a crucial supply road, a badly damaged VC infrastructure and better provided for Vietnamese population. In light of the limited mission, the operation can be best described as a complete success.

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OPERATION LEJEUNE

- A. Brigadier General George A. Blanchard, Assistant Division Commander - A, supervised Operation Lejeune from 6 - 22 April 1967.
- B. Lieutenant Colonel Fred E. Karhohs, Commanding Officer of the 1st Air Cavalry's Second Brigade.
- C. Lieutenant Colonel Charles G. Olentine, Commanding Officer of the 8th Engineer Battalion, supervised the engineering efforts in the Lejeune Area of Operations (AO) from 8 - 11 April 1967.
- D. Razorback Beach or Landing Zone Guadalcanal as seen from the air.
- E. Lieutenant Colonel Robert D. Stevenson, whose 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry swiftly deployed into the Lejeune AO.
- F. The airstrip at LZ Montezuma as seen from the air.
- G. Engineer graders work on airstrip at LZ Montezuma.
- H. A mine-sweeping team clears area between LZ Montezuma and LZ Guadalcanal.
- I. Bulldozer at work on airstrip at LZ Montezuma.