

MARSHALL JACKSON

B-1-35

65-66

24 Nov 04

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STEMMING THE TIDE, EARLY COMBAT
OPERATIONS 65-66 by John M. Garland
Thought you might like to have
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Marshall Jackson

FOR SOME REASON THE LINK
TO THE DID ROSTERS ON THE CACTI
WEBSITE STILL DOES NOT WORK

I WONDER IF THE CACTI KNOWS CAMP ENARI
IS NOT THE SAME PLACE WE BUILT IN 65-66?

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by John M. Carland
Combat Operations
Stemming the Tide - May 1965 - Oct 1966



Men of the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, load artillery on a Chinook during GARFIELD.

On 15 March Stoutner's brigade had its first taste of major combat. The previous evening Colonel Callanan's 1st of the 35th Infantry had settled in at a landing zone about thirteen kilometers northwest of Ban Brieng. During the night an enemy force fired forty to fifty mortar rounds at the perimeter, but the rounds fell short. The following morning Callanan ordered Company A to search in the direction from which the barrage had come. The 3d Platoon left on that mission at 0630, following the Ea Wy, a stream. Coming upon the mortaring site, the troops found a number of unfired rounds, a booklet with firing tables, and a history of the enemy unit's operations over the previous year. They spent the next three hours moving northwest along the stream. Around noon the platoon leader decided to return to base, but shortly afterward his point man discovered a wire and started to follow it to its source. When

he did, North Vietnamese troops who had been watching all along brought the platoon under fire.⁷

Although outnumbered, the Americans held their own against possibly two reinforced companies from a unit later identified as the 32d *Regiment*. Within fifteen minutes a forward air controller brought in the first of what would become sixteen tactical air sorties over the afternoon. At 1315 the commander of Company A air-assaulted in with another platoon. The enemy chose that moment to launch an attack and inflicted casualties on the arriving troops. In the end, however, the North Vietnamese got the worst of it, as shells from the nearby 2d Battalion, 9th Artillery, continued to rain down upon them in between helicopter flights. A half hour after the arrival of the company commander, a third platoon landed. The company counterattacked, overrunning the strongpoint and pursuing the North Vietnamese as they fled to the west and south. Meanwhile, artillery and close-air support pounded likely avenues of escape along the Ea Wy, and Callanan sent his Company B about a thousand meters west to serve as a blocking force. The Americans then conducted a three-hour search, which resulted in 21 North Vietnamese killed. During the evening the two companies linked up near where the action had started and folded in behind a common perimeter to spend the night. In all, Callanan's men had suffered 11 killed and 27 wounded. Enemy casualties came to 36 known killed and possibly another 100 killed. The Americans captured twelve rifles and an American M79 grenade launcher.⁸

A second clash occurred a few days later. On 18 March Colonel Proctor's 1st of the 14th Infantry deployed some thirty kilometers northwest of Ban Brieng. After searching all day long, the battalion simulated a departure by helicopter, but only the command group and the artillery actually withdrew. During the night the three rifle companies that stayed behind moved out along different preselected routes, hoping that the North Vietnamese would think they had the area to themselves and would let down their guard. When nothing occurred the first night, the troops took cover during daylight and returned to the field when darkness fell. Once again nothing happened, but at 0745 on the twentieth Company C fought a North Vietnamese force for about forty-five minutes, killing 19 at a cost of 1 wounded.⁹

Over the next five days Stoutner's battalions continued their efforts. In a series of small firefights they accounted for 15 more enemy killed, losing 1 of their own. Stoutner finally terminated GARFIELD on 25 March. During the month-long operation the 3d Brigade, supported by air strikes and artillery, had tallied 122 enemy dead at a cost of 21 Americans killed.

⁷ Memo, Brig Gen Glenn D. Walker, CG, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, for Headquarters (HQ), DA, 28 Sep 66, sub: Valorous Unit Award, box 1, 82/643, RG 338, NARA.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ AAR, Opn GARFIELD, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, pp. 8-9.

Plei Meiku Battles—PAUL REVERE I

The centerpiece campaign in the highlands during the spring and summer took place not in Kontum but in Pleiku Province. And Operation PAUL REVERE, which started as a small offensive to blunt a sortie of the 1st PAVN Division from its Cambodian strongholds, soon escalated into a major contest for the western plateau. The trip wire initially was the 3d Brigade, 25th Division, under General Walker. He stepped off the operation on 10 May in response to sightings west of Duc Co and Plei Me, sliding two of his battalions toward the border. For more than a week they operated southwest of the brigade forward at OASIS and found almost nothing. But when they shifted their attention to the west around the Chu Pong Massif, the action picked up almost immediately.⁴⁵

On the morning of 24 May, operating about ten kilometers southwest of its camp at Plei Djereng, a CIDG patrol ran into an enemy force estimated at two battalions. Two CIDG companies reinforced the patrol, and together they fought throughout the day. Toward evening they broke contact and moved to higher ground for the night. The Communists followed, digging in about three hundred meters to the west. Before dawn the next morning they attacked. The CIDG companies and their American advisers pulled back to Plei Djereng, with the North Vietnamese right behind. Two Special Forces troopers and 18 Montagnards died in the running firefight. Enemy mortars pounded Plei Djereng throughout the morning, killing 30 and wounding 54.⁴⁶

General Walker immediately dispatched Lt. Col. Phillip R. Feir's 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry, to relieve pressure on the camp. His men searched south of Plei Djereng for two days. On the twenty-seventh Colonel Feir moved his command post, with its attached artillery, almost twenty kilometers south of the camp to Landing Zone ELEVEN ALFA. The next day Company B flew to Landing Zone TEN ALFA, about ten kilometers west of the command post. Enemy bullets greeted the helicopters as they dropped into the clearing, forcing them out after only sixty-three soldiers had dismounted. Over the next several hours the stranded Americans beat off attacks, opening the way for the rest of Company B as well as Company A, 1st of the 35th Infantry, to land. By early evening three hundred Americans were on the ground at TEN ALFA.

The Communists were determined to break the American foothold. Just past midnight, on 29 May, the 66th PAVN Regiment launched a multibattalion assault on TEN ALFA. After fierce fighting throughout the night, the 66th was repulsed. An attack on Feir's command post at ELEVEN ALFA by part of the 33d PAVN Regiment was also turned away. At 0615

⁴⁵ ORLL, 1 May-31 Jul 66, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, 15 Aug 66, p. 1, box 1, 82/584, RG 338, NARA.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 12; Op Sum, Opn PAUL REVERE, MACV, Jul 66, p. 3, Historians files, CMH.

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the Americans ventured outside TEN ALFA. They found about 80 enemy dead.⁴⁷

The interlude was brief. As the troops pressed outward, they encountered more fire and were pushed back to the landing zone. Mortar rounds rained down, and the North Vietnamese again assaulted TEN ALFA. Once more the Americans fought them off. The North Vietnamese returned at midmorning, closing at times to within twenty meters of the defenders before they were forced back. By late morning the battle was over. Walker quickly reinforced TEN ALFA with the remainder of the 1st of the 35th Infantry under Lt. Col. Robert C. Kingston. The enemy had paid dearly, losing approximately 250 in the fighting (Map 23).⁴⁸

Encouraged by his victory, Walker ordered his brigade to search west and south of TEN ALFA. Colonel Berenzweig's 2d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, joined the operation on 1 June, sending two battalions northwest of Duc Co to the banks of the Se San. Although the Americans spent eight days hunting, they found no North Vietnamese. Once again the enemy had apparently reached the safety of Cambodia. On the tenth the brigade reverted to the 1st Cavalry Division for an operation elsewhere.⁴⁹

General Walker's task force continued its mission around TEN and ELEVEN ALFA, but the enemy had left the area. On 17 June Walker turned his attention back to the Chu Pong Massif, but only twice did the brigade meet North Vietnamese. On the twentieth elements of Colonel Feir's 2d of the 35th Infantry were searching near the border about ten kilometers north of the Chu Pong. In the jungle ahead they spotted small groups of enemy soldiers and called in mortar and artillery fire. At 1500 the battalion reconnaissance platoon chased four North Vietnamese across an open area, only to be pinned down by heavy fire. Other troops from Feir's battalion and from Troop C, 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry, rescued the platoon, but 3 of Feir's men lost their lives and 14 were wounded.⁵⁰

Four days later, on 24 June, Colonel Kingston's 1st of the 35th Infantry, which had replaced Feir's weary battalion on the twenty-second, approached the Cambodian border. At 1030 the battalion reconnaissance platoon took fire from what appeared to be a reinforced battalion. Going to ground, the troops called in air strikes and gunships, which drove off the North Vietnamese. The Americans pursued, only to run into more

⁴⁷ Memos, Brig Gen Glenn D. Walker, CG, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, for HQ DA, 17 and 31 Aug 66, subs: Distinguished Unit Citation [Co B, 2d Bn, 35th Inf, and Co A, 1st Bn, 35th Inf], box 1, 82/643, RG 338, NARA.

⁴⁸ Msg, MACV to National Mil Cmd Center, 25 Jun 66, Historians files, CMH; Memos, Walker for HQ DA, 17 and 31 Aug 66, subs: Distinguished Unit Citation [Co B, 2d Bn, 35th Inf, and Co A, 1st Bn, 35th Inf]; ORLL, 1 May-31 Jul 66, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, p. 13.

⁴⁹ AAR, Opns PAUL REVERE and HOOKER I, 2d Bde, 1st Cav Div, 9 Jul 66, p. 13, Historians files, CMH.

⁵⁰ Op Sum, Opn PAUL REVERE, MACV, Jul 66, p. 6.

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fire when they reached the border. Using what General Walker later described as a "suck-in tactic," the Communists had retreated to well-fortified positions from where they could fight the Americans.⁵¹

Colonel Kingston reinforced his platoon with the equivalent of two infantry companies and an armored cavalry troop, but the men made little headway. The North Vietnamese were fighting with their backs to the border, preventing encirclement. Kingston sent in air strikes and artillery, but the enemy stayed put until nightfall and then slipped away into Cambodia.⁵²

Walker's men continued patrolling into the next month, with negligible results except for one action on 3 July. Colonel Kingston's battalion was operating along the border when one of Company B's platoons split in two to cover more territory. Each patrol had gone only a short distance when the North Vietnamese attacked and surrounded the southerly one. The platoon leader radioed the other for help, only to learn that it too was under attack and encircled.

Another Company B platoon and the brigade's armored cavalry troop went to the rescue. As they approached the beleaguered Americans, fire from small arms, machine guns, mortars, and rocket-propelled grenades opened up from three directions. The cavalry troop's armored personnel carriers moved ahead and, with the support of well-aimed artillery fire, punched through and linked up with the surrounded patrols. All units withdrew to the north, while artillery and air strikes pounded the area throughout the night. A sweep through the killing zone the next morning, 4 July, found that the enemy force, later identified as the 66th Regiment's 7th Battalion, was gone. The North Vietnamese had lost at least 23 killed. American casualties came to 17 killed and 32 wounded.⁵³

Five days later, on 9 July, the South Korean Capital Division's 3d Battalion, 1st Cavalry Regiment, joined PAUL REVERE, but it had less luck than the Americans in finding someone to fight. Walker's brigade remained on the border until the thirty-first.⁵⁴

The situation was about to change. As July ended, intelligence reports indicated that the North Vietnamese were using the monsoon season's cloud cover and rains to shuffle old units and infiltrate new ones into South Vietnam. A North Vietnamese soldier, captured on the twenty-ninth, reported that his own regiment, the 66th, was ensconced

⁵¹ ORLL, 1 May-31 Jul 66, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, p. 16; MFR, MACV MACJ00, 17 Aug 66, sub: MACV Commanders' Conference, 24 July 1966, p. 26 (quoted words), Westmoreland History files, CMH.

⁵² MFR, MACV MACJ00, 17 Aug 66, sub: MACV Commanders' Conference, 24 July 1966, p. 25; ORLL, 1 May-31 Jul 66, I FFI, 25 Aug 66, p. 9, Historians files, CMH; ORLL, 1 May-31 Jul 66, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, pp. 16-17; Op Sum, Opn PAUL REVERE, MACV, Jul 66, p. 6.

⁵³ *Western Highlands*, p. 49, copy in CMH; Op Sum, Opn PAUL REVERE, MACV, Jul 66, p. 7; ORLL, 1 May-31 Jul 66, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, p. 18.

⁵⁴ MACV History, 1966, p. 376, CMH.

about four kilometers east of the border on the northern slopes of the Chu Pong Massif and that a sister regiment, the 32d, was about ten kilometers southwest of OASIS. General Larsen wasted no time. Concentrating infantry, armor, and the Koreans north and northeast of the massif, he enlarged General Walker's task force to six battalions by giving him control over the I Field Force reserve—Lt. Col. William M. Vaughn's 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry—on the thirtieth. The next day Colonel Vaughn's Companies A and B air-assaulted to Landing Zone ORANGE, some seven kilometers southwest of OASIS, and began to search.⁵⁵

The North Vietnamese found Vaughn first. Just after daybreak on 1 August mortars and grenades rained down on his command post at ORANGE, followed by three battalion-size ground attacks. The American perimeter held, aided by air strikes and an Air Force gunship. Confronted by the Spooky's wall of fire, the North Vietnamese withdrew to the northwest. They had killed 5 Americans and wounded 40 others, including Vaughn, who had to be replaced by the 1st Cavalry Division inspector general, Lt. Col. Robert D. Stevenson. After the battle, an American patrol found the bodies of 28 North Vietnamese dead and twelve weapons. Documents on the bodies indicated that the soldiers were from the 32d Regiment.⁵⁶

PAUL REVERE II

It now appeared that the enemy had begun a major offensive west of Pleiku City. The 1st Battalion, 69th Armor, under the command of Lt. Col. Ronald J. Fairfield, reported unusually heavy civilian traffic crossing Highway 19 from south to north, a good indicator of hostile activity. The Special Forces camp at Duc Co also reported a number of sightings of and encounters with enemy units. In response, General Larsen instructed General Norton to deploy his 3d Brigade to the battle area. That brigade, under Colonel Daniel, became part of the newly formed Task Force WALKER. Three battalions came under Daniel's control: Colonel Markham's 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry; Colonel Stevenson's 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry; and Colonel Root's 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry. At that point, Walker's two-brigade force contained eight battalions—seven infantry (six American, one South Korean) and one armor.⁵⁷

Task Force WALKER deployed from OASIS on 2 August, moving westward the Cambodian border. Walker's battalions worked to the south-

⁵⁵ Westmoreland Jnl, 10 Aug 66, Westmoreland History files, CMH; ORLL, 1 May–31 Jul 66, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, p. 19. See also CHECO Rpt, PACAF, 27 Jul 67, sub: Operation PAUL REVERE/SAM HOUSTON, p. 12; AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, 10 Sep 66, p. 4; and Annual Hist Sum, 1966, 2d Bn, 7th Cav. All in Historians files, CMH.

⁵⁶ AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, p. 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 4, 10.

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west and west, while Daniel's battalions hunted around the base camp. Fighting broke out almost immediately. Patrolling some fourteen kilometers west of Plei Me, Company A, 2d of the 35th Infantry, and elements from the battalion reconnaissance platoon encountered three North Vietnamese soldiers, killing 1 and pursuing the others to the north-east. Advancing thirteen hundred meters, they killed the second soldier and pressed on after the third. Around noon the odds changed. Suddenly the Americans found themselves up against a well-entrenched main force battalion, which was firing at them from all sides. Both the company commander and his first sergeant were killed, but the troops quickly returned fire and called in artillery, air strikes, and gunships. As the enemy took cover under the aerial onslaught, the Americans withdrew to the west. By midafternoon the North Vietnamese had all but disappeared.

But the battle was not over. After moving about nine hundred meters, the Americans established a perimeter in a clearing, and Company C, 2d of the 35th, joined them at dusk. They were just settling in when the North Vietnamese, now regrouped, began mortaring the laager. Forty minutes later the Americans heard them screaming and shouting, perhaps to nerve themselves for an attack. If that was their plan, they never got the chance because the noise gave away their positions, and artillery and air strikes soon found them. By morning the enemy regulars were gone.⁵⁸

A second encounter on 2 August brought far different results. Early in the afternoon, following extensive air and artillery preparation, the 3d Platoon, Company A, from Colonel Stevenson's 2d of the 7th Cavalry, air-assaulted to Landing Zone PINK about four kilometers west of ORANGE. The move seemed routine and unopposed at first, but a reinforced company was concealed just beyond the ring of American fire. Maintaining impressive fire discipline, the North Vietnamese waited until the entire twenty-seven-man platoon was on the ground before attacking. Radio contact ended abruptly, and the company commander feared the worst. Helicopters lifted another Company A platoon to PINK an hour later in an attempt to reinforce, but heavy rain made it impossible to land. In the meantime, Colonel Daniel directed the commander of the 1st of the 12th Cavalry, Colonel Root, to move his Company B overland to the fight. Trekking in the heavy rain and slowed by thick mud, dense brush, and the possibility of an ambush, the company took more than three hours to march five kilometers. By then the rain had abated, permitting the remainder of Stevenson's Company A to land by helicopter just to the north.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 11; ORLL, 1 May-31 Jul 66, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, p. 11; ORLL, 1 Aug-31 Oct 66, 1 FFV, 30 Nov 66, pp. 1, 18, box 3, 73A/3330, RG 338, NARA. See also Rpt, 14th Mil Hist Det, 1st Cav Div (Ambl), 7 Mar 67, sub: Seven Month History and Briefing Data (April-October 1966), p. 26; AAR, Opn PAUL REVERI II, 3d Bde, 1st Cav Div (Ambl), 5 Nov 66, p. 10. Both in Historians files, CMH.

Arriving around 1800, Colonel Root assumed command of U.S. forces on the scene, but he was too late. All was quiet; the Communists had gone. Later in the evening Colonel Stevenson's men found only a few survivors from the 3d Platoon. Too far apart to form a single perimeter, Companies A and B bedded down in separate positions north and south of the landing zone, but they kept in radio contact, relying on fire support for protection whenever the enemy probed them.

The next morning the two companies met with no resistance during a search of the area, an indication that the nighttime probes had probably been an effort by stay-behind forces to cover the withdrawal of a larger unit. The search revealed that the North Vietnamese had killed 18 Americans and wounded 6 at a cost of 12 of their own. Twenty of the 3d Platoon's weapons were missing, as were two radios. Two troopers and a South Vietnamese interpreter had come through unscathed.⁶⁰

Although American commanders still had no clear picture of the Communists' intentions in western Pleiku Province, they had begun to identify North Vietnamese units in the area and to speculate on why they seemed so willing to stand and fight, if only temporarily. They knew, in addition to the 32d *Regiment*, elements of which American units had encountered on 1 August, that the 33d and 66th *Regiments* were nearby and that the 88th *Regiment* seemed to be standing in reserve in Cambodia. All of this led them to conclude that the North Vietnamese were planning attacks on the Special Forces camps at Duc Co and Plei Me, and perhaps even Pleiku City. But intelligence analysts differed as to the significance of the effort. Some contended that North Vietnamese commanders were desperate for a monsoon season victory; others argued that by mounting a new offensive in the highlands they hoped to draw U.S. forces away from Tuy Hoa and eastern Binh Dinh Province so that the Viet Cong could secure the critically important coastal rice harvest. A third hypothesis was that they planned to score a "major victory" in order to disrupt the South Vietnamese national elections in September.⁶¹

Whatever the Communists' motives, the buildup of the main forces in the highlands prompted General Larsen to make an important decision. Postponing the airmobile division's next operation on the coast, he reconfigured PAUL REVERE II as a 1st Cavalry Division operation. Effective at 1830 on 2 August, Task Force WALKER was dissolved, and General Norton assumed control of both Colonel Daniel's 3d Brigade and General Walker's 3d Brigade, 25th Division.⁶²

⁶⁰ AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 3d Bde, 1st Cav Div, pp. 3, 10. For additional detail see ORLL, 1 Aug-31 Oct 66, I FFV, p. 18; Annual Hist Sum, 1966, 2d Bn, 7th Cav; ORLL, 1 May-31 Jul 66, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, p. 11; and AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Cav Div (Ambl), 25 Jan 67, p. 12, Historians files, CMH.

⁶¹ AARs, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, p. 4, and 1st Cav Div, pp. 5-6, 31 (quoted words); Rpt, 14th Mil Hist Det, 1st Cav Div, 7 Mar 67, sub: Seven Month History and Briefing Data (April-October 1966), p. 105.

⁶² AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Cav Div, p. 11.

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At first General Norton intended "to drive the two brigades down through the Ia Drang Valley," but bad weather hampered logistics and forced him to rethink the idea. In the end, "we simply followed our instincts to pursue contacts wherever we had them." Each of the two brigades was to search in carefully defined sectors in an area that extended north from the northern foothills of the Chu Pong Massif to Duc Co, west to the Cambodian border, and east to a line running south from OASIS. Walker would hunt to the west and south, while Daniel would operate in the northeast.⁶³

Then new intelligence forced another modification. It now seemed more likely that the North Vietnamese would avoid combat and retreat toward Cambodia through the Ia Drang Valley and the Chu Pong Massif. Accordingly, General Norton decided that the time had come to bring a third brigade—Colonel Berenzweig's 2d of the 1st Cavalry Division—into the operation and to spread it around the massif in case enemy units were indeed withdrawing deeper into the mountains.⁶⁴

The soundness of Norton's decision became apparent on 8 August, when the expanded search netted a main force unit. Early in the morning Berenzweig's two battalions—Colonel Markham's 1st of the 7th Cavalry and Colonel Lynn's 2d of the 12th Cavalry—deployed north and south of the massif. From Landing Zone JULIET Capt. Robert A. Wands' Company A, 1st of the 7th, began a probe just south of the Ia Drang. Following a trail near a supposedly abandoned enemy bunker complex, the lead platoon surprised a group of North Vietnamese soldiers, killing 3. The Americans pursued the survivors, but then ran into machine gun fire. Cut off from the rest of the company, the patrol fought its way back to safety, but the North Vietnamese—later identified as belonging to the *4th Battalion, 32d Regiment*—were close behind. They struck Wands' position with a human wave attack, threatening to overrun it. Wands was wounded in the fighting and had to be replaced by his executive officer, although before he went down he managed to call in fire support and reinforcements. Artillery fire poured in from JULIET, followed by fighter-bombers and gunships. They saved the day. By midafternoon, faced with a rain of steel, the enemy had withdrawn.⁶⁵

Scouring the battlefield, the Americans found 15 enemy bodies. By the time the brigade, division, and field force headquarters had added their own estimates, the count had risen to 98. Whatever the actual figure, Wands' company paid a steep price—25 dead and 36 wounded.

⁶³ Ibid.; MFR, MACV MACJ00, 3 Oct 66, sub: MACV Commanders' Conference, 28 August 1966, p. 41 (quotations), Westmoreland History files, CMH.

⁶⁴ AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 2d Bde, 1st Cav Div (Ambl), 5 Sep 66, p. 4, Historians files, CMH.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 11; Annual Hist Sum, 1966, 1st Bn, 7th Cav, n.d., p. 23, and Op Sum, Opn PAUL REVERE II, MACV, Aug 66, pp. 1-2, Historians files, CMH; AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Cav Div, p. 14.

⁶⁶ AARS, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Cav Div, p. 14, and 2d Bde, 1st Cav Div, p. 4; AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Bn, 7th Cav, 8 Sep 66, p. [3], Historians files, CMH; OR II, 1

Raising the Stakes on the Border

Although reinforcements arrived too late to help, they were not too late to pursue the withdrawing Communists. Two companies of Colonel Lynn's 2d of the 12th Cavalry were at the time in flight to a landing zone south of the massif. Diverted northward to relieve Wands, they landed near his perimeter on the afternoon of the eighth, where they came under Colonel Markham's control. About an hour later they were joined by two companies of Markham's 1st of the 7th Cavalry, and the chase was on. Artillery fired along likely escape routes, the rest of the 2d of the 12th blocked to the north, and 1st of the 9th Cavalry helicopters reconnoitered to the northeast, east, and southeast. But none of this had much effect. As darkness approached, Markham called off the pursuit and pulled his force into Wands' original position. The next day Markham's men continued the sweep, but the enemy was gone.⁶⁷

On 9 August the North Vietnamese decided to fight again, this time in a different area against the South Korean 3d Battalion, 1st Cavalry Regiment. Having joined PAUL REVERE I a month earlier, the Koreans had established defensive positions just north of the massif. Under the operational control of the 3d Brigade, 25th Division, they had mounted almost daily patrols, but with no significant results. The battalion now occupied a position immediately to the east of the hamlet of Plei Girao Kla, about eight kilometers south of Duc Co. Its 9th Company was located about three kilometers farther to the southwest at Landing Zone 77V, only six kilometers from the Cambodian border, where it had been since 27 July. Each week the company had controlled a different tank platoon from the U.S. 1st of the 69th Armor. During the week



South Korean soldiers on patrol

Aug-31 Oct 66, I FEFV, p. 18; Rpt, 14th Mil Hist Det, 1st Cav Div, 7 Mar 67, sub: Seven Month History and Briefing Data (April-October 1966), p. 107; Annual Hist Sum, 1966, 1st Bn, 7th Cav, p. 24.

⁶⁷ Annual Hist Sum, 1966, 1st Bn, 7th Cav, p. 24; ORLL, 1 Aug-31 Oct 66, I FEFV, p. 12; AARs, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Bn, 7th Cav, p. [3], and 2d Bde, 1st Cav Div, pp. 11-12 and an. A.

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beginning 5 August the 1st Platoon, Company A, was the one at hand.⁶⁸

Roughly oblong in shape and surrounded by a trench two feet deep, Landing Zone 27V extended two hundred meters east-west and one hundred seventy meters north-south. The South Koreans had laid concertina wire some twenty meters outside of the trench line. Beyond that were trip flares and claymore mines. Interspersed among covered machine gun emplacements and trenches for the riflemen were the tank platoon's five M48A3 Pattons.⁶⁹

The South Korean company had just returned from a two-day mission near the border. Before sunset on the ninth the company commander set up three listening posts about two hundred meters beyond the perimeter and, following standard Korean practice, placed 50 percent of the men inside the main laager on alert. Unlike the other nights, this one would not be quiet.

About an hour before midnight the southwest listening post reported sounds of digging. Five minutes later someone tripped a flare on the western side of the perimeter. Certain that an attack was in the offing, the company commander ordered all three listening posts inside the laager. The digging continued. One of the Pattons turned its searchlight on the noise and cut loose with one of its machine guns. Enemy soldiers in a tree line to the south fired back immediately, followed by mortars from the northwest. Three Americans outside their vehicles, including the platoon commander, were slightly wounded, but all reached their tanks safely. By now the defenders were on full alert.

As enemy fire increased, three Pattons sent antipersonnel rounds into the tree line to the south and the other two fired to the southwest. Two tanks were outfitted with searchlights, but during the night both searchlights were knocked out. For the rest of the night, artillery flares and Air Force flare ships provided illumination. Still, the attack intensified, prompting the South Korean company commander to call in fire support from his parent battalion nearby and from American batteries at Duc Co. One battery laid down fire within fifty meters of the allied position, another fired along the northern flank, a third aimed at the southern flank, and a fourth created a ring of fire about one kilometer beyond the perimeter. The 9th Company's own mortars concentrated their fire to the north.⁷⁰

By 0130, 10 August, enemy fire had slowed, but the North Vietnamese were not finished. After a half-hour lull they attacked from the west, charg-

⁶⁸ AAR, Battle of 27V, 9-10 Aug 66, 1st Bn, 69th Armor, 8 Sep 66, p. 1, box 2, 81/376, RG 338, NARA.

⁶⁹ Memo, Brig Gen Glenn D. Walker, CG, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, for HQ DA, 3 Sep 66, sub: Distinguished Unit Citation [for South Korean 3d Bn, 1st Cav Regt], 3d Brigade Task Force, 25th Infantry Division, p. 1, box 1, 82/643, RG 338, NARA.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 2; AAR, Battle of 27V, 9-10 Aug 66, 1st Bn, 69th Armor, p. 2; ORNL, 1 May-31 Jul 66, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, p. 13.

ing to within fifty meters of the laager before being driven back by withering fire from the American tanks and South Korean machine guns. Over the next two hours they mounted two more assaults, this time from the north and south. A few of them came to within five meters of the allied position, and one actually penetrated the defensive wire before being bayoneted, but most were cut down or fell back. By 0600 the firing trailed off and then ceased altogether. When a combined American and South Korean tank-infantry team swept beyond the perimeter soon afterward, it encountered several wounded soldiers who fought to the end.⁷¹

The battle was a clear victory for firepower. Artillery from American and South Korean bases fired nearly nineteen hundred high-explosive rounds. Inside the laager the South Koreans expended fifteen hundred mortar rounds; the American tanks, twenty-four high-explosive and thirty-three 90-mm. canister rounds and nearly seventeen thousand machine gun rounds. All this resulted in at least 197 North Vietnamese killed, most from the *88th Regiment's 5th Battalion*. The South Koreans lost 7 men, the Americans none. Intelligence analysts later speculated that the assault might have been a diversionary move to distract attention from units escaping through the Ia Drang Valley-Chu Pong area.⁷²

While the fighting at Landing Zone 27V was running its course, the rest of General Norton's force continued to search western Pleiku Province. Walker's 3d Brigade operated in the Duc Co area, Daniel's 3d Brigade patrolled in the Ia Drang Valley, and Berenzweig's 2d Brigade campaigned in the mountains and valleys south of the Chu Pong Massif. Although these units failed to find the enemy, interrogations of North Vietnamese prisoners and current intelligence seemed to suggest that Berenzweig's sector, south of the massif, held the most promise. Enemy units seeking to escape into Cambodia would have to pass through the area to reach the border.⁷³

On 10 August Colonel Siegrist's 1st of the 5th Cavalry deployed from JULIET and the TURKEY FARM to Landing Zone RAY, east of the massif, as a blocking force. The next day Colonel Lombard's 2d of the 5th Cavalry moved southeast of the massif to Landing Zone CAT, where Colonel Berenzweig located his command post. The two battalions searched the area over the next three days. When they began to encounter small groups of enemy soldiers moving toward Cambodia, U.S. commanders concluded that the North Vietnamese were indeed using the region as a thoroughfare. In one clash on the eleventh the Americans killed 9 soldiers from the

⁷¹ [Unit History], 8 Mar 66-10 Apr 70, 1st Bn, 69th Armor, n.d., p. 13, box 2, 81/376, RG 338, NARA; Memo, Walker for HQ DA, 3 Sep 66, sub: Distinguished Unit Citation [for South Korean 3d Bn, 1st Cav Regt], 3d Brigade Task Force, 25th Infantry Division, p. 3; Op Sum, Opn PAUL REVERE II, MACV, Aug 66, p. 2.

⁷² AAR, Battle of 27V, 9-10 Aug 66, 1st Bn, 69th Armor, incl. 2, p. 1; ORLL, 1 May-31 Jul 66, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, p. 14; AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, pp. 3, 14.

⁷³ AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Cav Div, p. 14.

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66th Regiment and captured 2 others. Over the next two days they encountered several smaller groups; some fled, while others fought. Most of the soldiers who were captured belonged to the *32d Regiment*. One said that he and his comrades had not eaten in three days and that the *32d* was heading southwest toward a resupply base, a course that would carry the regiment directly through the 2d Brigade's sector.⁷⁴

On 14 August Colonel Berenzweig's two battalions searched near Hill 534, on the southern slopes of the Chu Pong Massif about four kilometers from Cambodia. The hill became the reference point for much of the action over the next two days. Siegrist's 1st of the 5th Cavalry patrolled to its north; most of Lombard's 2d of the 5th Cavalry hunted to the southeast. Meanwhile, from a position named *GEORGE* about twenty-five hundred meters west of Hill 534, Capt. George D. Shea's Company A, 1st of the 5th, conducted a slow and cautious search eastward along a footpath through a valley north of the hill. Shea's men found a communications wire and followed it. They surprised a group of fifteen North Vietnamese soldiers, killing 2 and capturing 1 while the rest fled.⁷⁵

The company continued along the footpath. At 1305 that afternoon, just before the path made a sharp turn to the north, the Americans ran headlong into what seemed to be a North Vietnamese company that opened fire from dug-in positions. Captain Shea called in artillery and air strikes and then pulled back. Shortly before 1500 he again met an enemy unit and called in more artillery and air support.⁷⁶

A larger fight was brewing. Colonel Berenzweig had ordered Capt. William E. Taylor's Company B, 2d of the 5th Cavalry, searching two kilometers southeast of Shea, to move overland to reinforce the beleaguered company. After marching fifteen hundred meters to within a kilometer south of Shea, the unit stalled when it met an enemy force in a complex of well-camouflaged bunkers. Taylor called in air strikes and then moved his men into a perimeter. With evening approaching and the chance of linking up with Taylor before nightfall pretty slim, Shea also coiled in place. Throughout the night, air strikes and artillery protected the friendly laagers.⁷⁷

The cavalry division had walked into a tempest. Although the size of the enemy force was not known at the time, it seemed large enough by the end of the day to justify a major American effort. Colonel Berenzweig decided to reposition his forces. Siegrist's battalion reserve, Capt. Donald

⁷⁴ AAR, Opn *PAUL REVERE II*, 2d Bde, 1st Cav Div, pp. 4-5; Annual Hist Sum, 1966, 1st Bn, 5th Cav, n.d., box 1, 82/899, RG 338, NARA.

⁷⁵ AARs, Opn *PAUL REVERE II*, 1st Cav Div, p. 17, and 2d Bde, 1st Cav Div, p. 14; AAR, Opn *PAUL REVERE II*, 1st Bn, 5th Cav, 26 Aug 66, p. [6], Historians files, CMH.

⁷⁶ AARs, Opn *PAUL REVERE II*, 1st Cav Div, p. 16, 1st Bn, 5th Cav, an. A, and 2d Bde, 1st Cav Div, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Edward Hymoff, *The First Air Cavalry Division, Vietnam* (New York: M. W. Lads Publishing Co., 1967), p. 97; AARs, Opn *PAUL REVERE II*, 1st Cav Div, p. 17, and 1st Bn, 5th Cav, p. [6].

R. Sims' Company C, 1st of the 5th Cavalry, moved fifteen hundred meters northeast of Hill 534; Colonel Lynn's 2d of the 12th Cavalry placed its Company C seven kilometers northwest of the hill. As these units completed their moves, Company A of Colonel Lombard's 2d of the 5th Cavalry, reinforced by the battalion reconnaissance platoon, formed a blocking force thirty-five hundred and fifty-five hundred meters southwest of 534, sealing off escape routes into Cambodia. Hopefully, firepower raining down on the North Vietnamese during the night would keep them in place until the Americans could attack the next day. If the North Vietnamese somehow eluded the encirclement and withdrew to the west toward Cambodia, they would still have to pass through or around the forces that stood between them and the border.⁷⁸

When the fighting began the next day, 15 August, units under Siegrist's control met the enemy three times. The first to fight was Captain Taylor's Company B, 2d of the 5th. Moving from their overnight position to begin the hunt, the troops were pelted by mortar rounds around 0800 and then assaulted from the north and west. Taylor pulled his men back and called for fire support. He was on the radio when a mortar round burst nearby, killing him, his radio operator, and his first sergeant. An enlisted man picked up the radio and relayed orders and suggestions to platoon leaders from Lombard's operations officer, Maj. Wesley G. Jones. As the attack continued, the Americans began to run dangerously low on ammunition. Responding to pleas for more, two helicopters crisscrossed the jungle before finding the company and delivering what was needed.⁷⁹

About an hour after Company B had started its fight, Captain Shea's company was also hit. While operating about five hundred meters northeast of Hill 534, his men began to receive heavy automatic weapons fire. Over the next two hours the two sides exchanged fire, but neither could gain an advantage over the other. Later in the morning the enemy pulled back.⁸⁰

Fighting broke out at yet a third spot toward midafternoon. Colonel Siegrist had ordered Captain Sims' Company C to move southwest to relieve Company B. The platoons were closing in on the perimeter when machine gun fire forced them to take cover. With one platoon pinned down, Sims called in artillery fire and an air strike. Bombs landed between the two companies, forcing the enemy to withdraw and allowing the Americans to link up.⁸¹

At that point, Colonel Berenzweig threw another company into the fight, placing Company C, 2d of the 5th, under Siegrist. With the initial

⁷⁸ AARs, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Cav Div, p. 5, 1st Bn, 5th Cav, an. A, and 2d Bde, 1st Cav Div, p. 14.

⁷⁹ AARs, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 2d Bde, 1st Cav Div, pp. 5, 15, and 1st Bn, 5th Cav, pp. [2-3], [6-7], and an. A; Hymoff, *First Air Cavalry Division*, pp. 98-99.

⁸⁰ AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Bn, 5th Cav, p. [6].

⁸¹ Ibid., p. [2].

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mission of assisting the reinforcement of Company B, the unit helicop- tered to the western slopes of Hill 534 and pushed eastward. By late afternoon Siegrist had four companies on the slopes. The next morning, assuming that the enemy was still lurking around, the Americans launched a coordinated sweep of the area. Paced by artillery fire and air strikes and wielding flamethrowers and tear gas grenades, Siegrist's men moved methodically up Hill 534 from the south and then down the other side. They found nothing. Those North Vietnamese who had survived the fight had withdrawn in the night.

In policing the battlefield over the next two days, the troops un- covered living quarters, messing facilities, documents, graves, and scores of unburied bodies. The communications gear they found indicated the presence of at least a battalion and probably a regimental headquarters. Counting 126 enemy dead, they estimated that they had killed another 300, basing that judgment on "the volume of fire" U.S. forces had brought to bear. By comparison, 23 Americans died in the action and 27 more had been wounded. Colonel Berenzweig concluded that he and his men had disrupted an important way station that had been responsible for resting and refitting North Vietnamese forces for some time.⁸²

Prisoner interrogations later revealed that Colonel Siegrist's force had fought all three battalions of the 32d *Regiment*. Although there was no way to prove it at the time, Siegrist and the other American commanders believed that they had rendered the three units ineffective. Even so, Siegrist was convinced that no matter how much the Americans hurt the enemy, he would return to his old haunts as soon as they departed. To take advantage of this habit, he recommended a B-52 strike within forty days on a three- by one-kilometer rectangle, with Hill 534 at its center.⁸³

While the action at Hill 534 progressed, Walker's brigade continued to search the northern sector, primarily to the west and south of Duc Co, and Daniel's brigade to the south in the Ia Drang Valley. Neither achieved significant results, though there was a modest battle on 17 August. Two companies, one from the 1st of the 69th Armor and the other from the 2d of the 35th Infantry, responded to an attack on CIDG elements west of Duc Co near Highway 19. The appearance of the tank- infantry force scattered the enemy.⁸⁴

The dwindling number of sightings and clashes suggested that the North Vietnamese had withdrawn to their Cambodian sanctuaries. With no one to fight, General Norton saw no reason to keep a division-size force in the area. PAUL REVERE II began to wind down on 22 August, be-

⁸² AARs, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Cav Div, p. 18 (quoted words), 1st Bn, 5th Cav, p. [2], and 2d Bde, 1st Cav Div, p. 27.

⁸³ AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Bn, 5th Cav, pp. [6-8], [10-11]. See also AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE IV, 2d Bde, 1st Cav Div (Ambl), 25 Jan 67, p. 4, Historians files, CMH.

⁸⁴ AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Cav Div, pp. 20-21; ORLL, 1 Aug-31 Oct 66, I FFV, p. 19.

Raising the Stakes on the Border

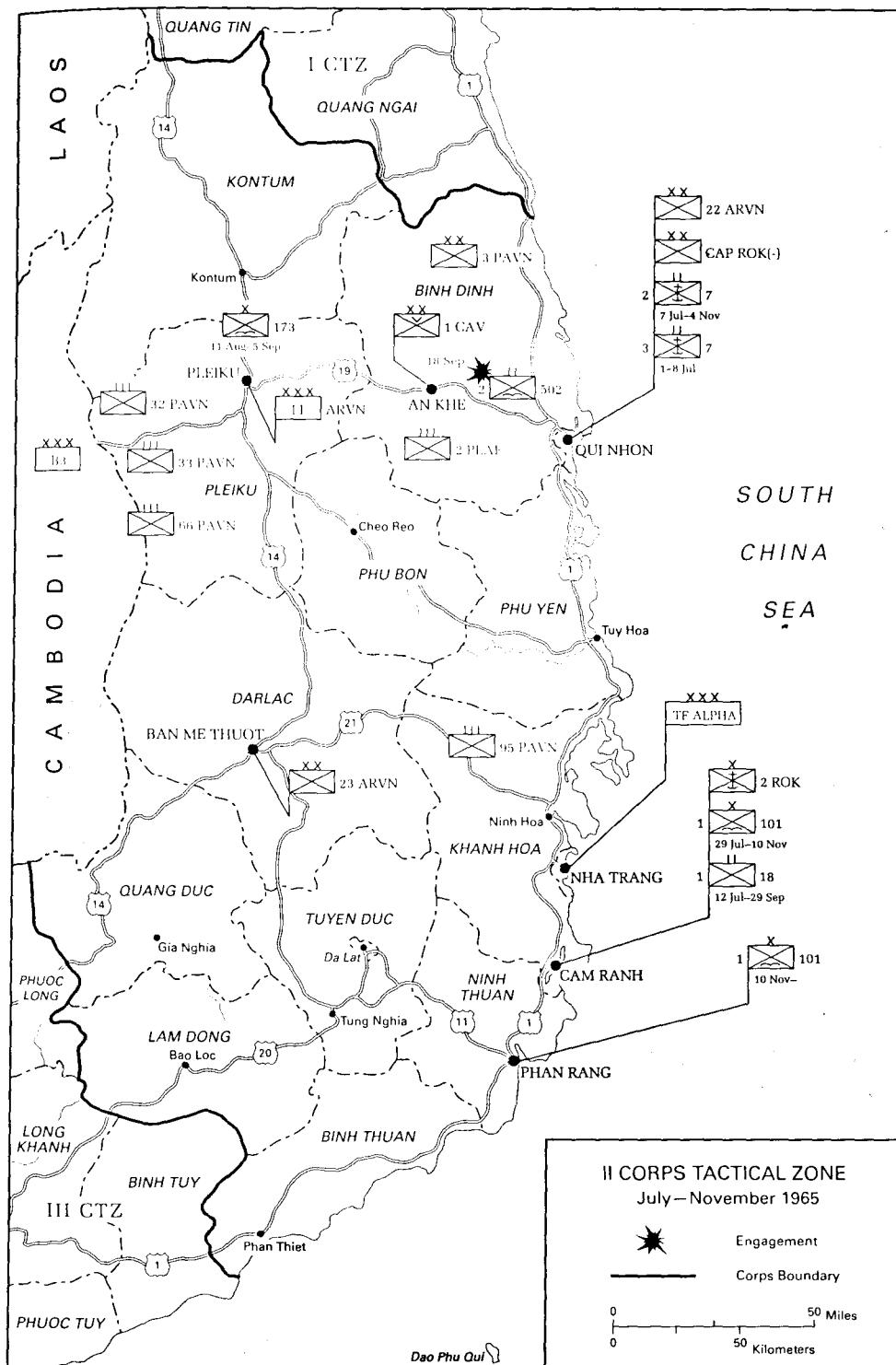
ginning with the withdrawal of the South Korean battalion. Three days later the cavalry units returned to An Khe or deployed elsewhere, and the operation came to an end.

In Norton's opinion, the three- to five-thousand soldiers committed by the 1st PAVN Division had presented one of the finest targets that American forces had yet to find on the South Vietnamese battlefield. If the weather had been better, he asserted, the body count would have doubled. As it was, he felt that by killing 861 of the enemy with a loss of 90 Americans and 7 South Koreans, his forces had reduced the North Vietnamese to marginal effectiveness and had forced them back into Cambodia. The "marriage of the helicopter to conventional ground capabilities," he concluded, had allowed his division "to mass quickly when the enemy massed, to defeat his forces, and to conduct the pursuit of fleeing groups with devastating results."⁸⁵

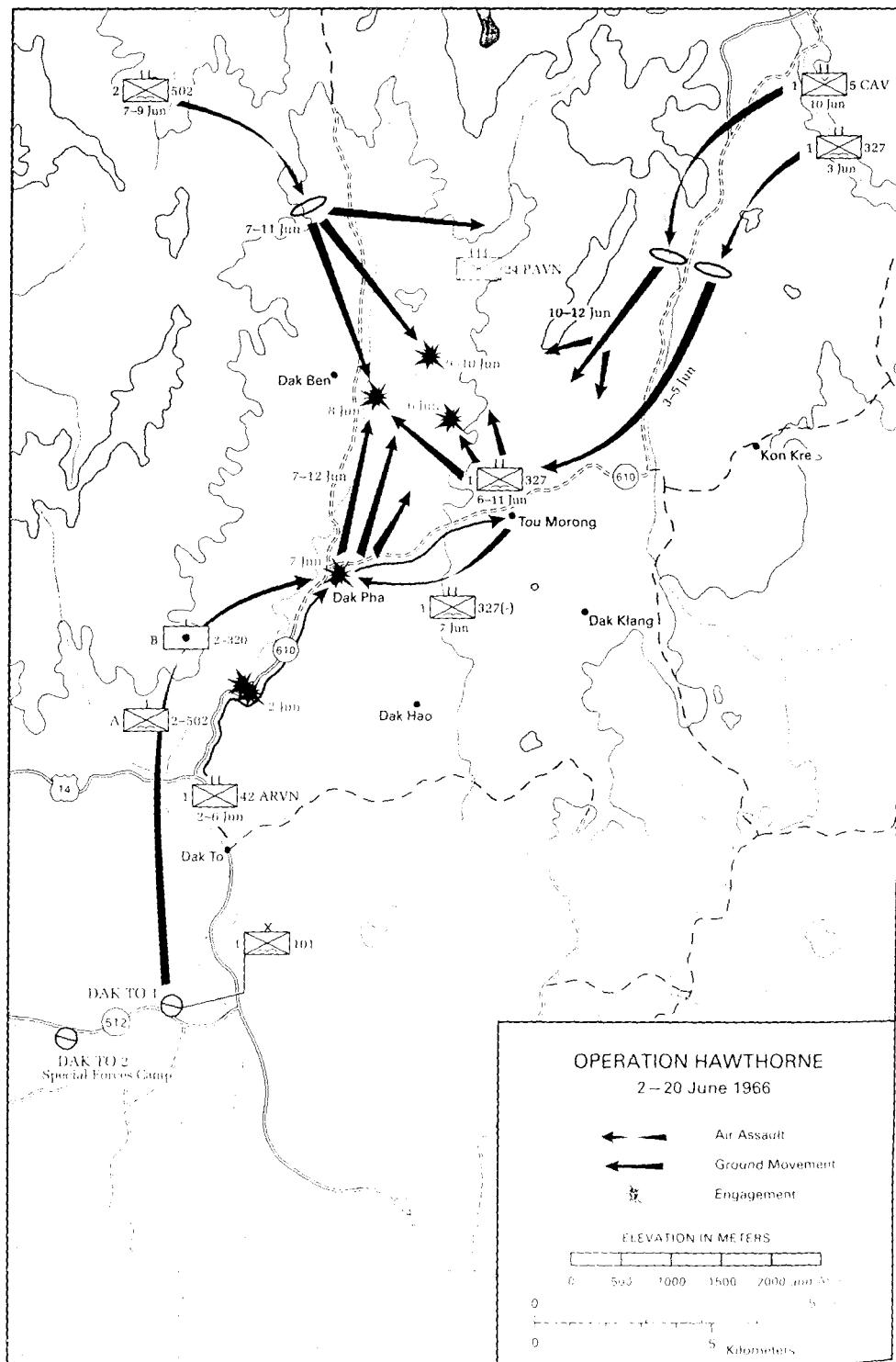
Norton's main criticism was that the reaction forces did too little when it came to hitting the enemy. A firm believer in the pile-on concept, he felt that too often his subordinate commanders were content with simply relieving pressure on beleaguered friendly units. "I know that's a big part of it," he said. "But we have reaction forces to exploit, cut off, chop-up, that's what I want to hear about. . . . When they [the Communists] concentrate, let's make the most of it. All of our reaction forces must be used with the consideration of being decisive." Still, Norton believed that overall, "we did damn well."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Critique, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Cav Div (Ambl), 25 Oct 66, p. 8, Historians files, CMH; AAR, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Cav Div, pp. 24-25, 31 (quotations).

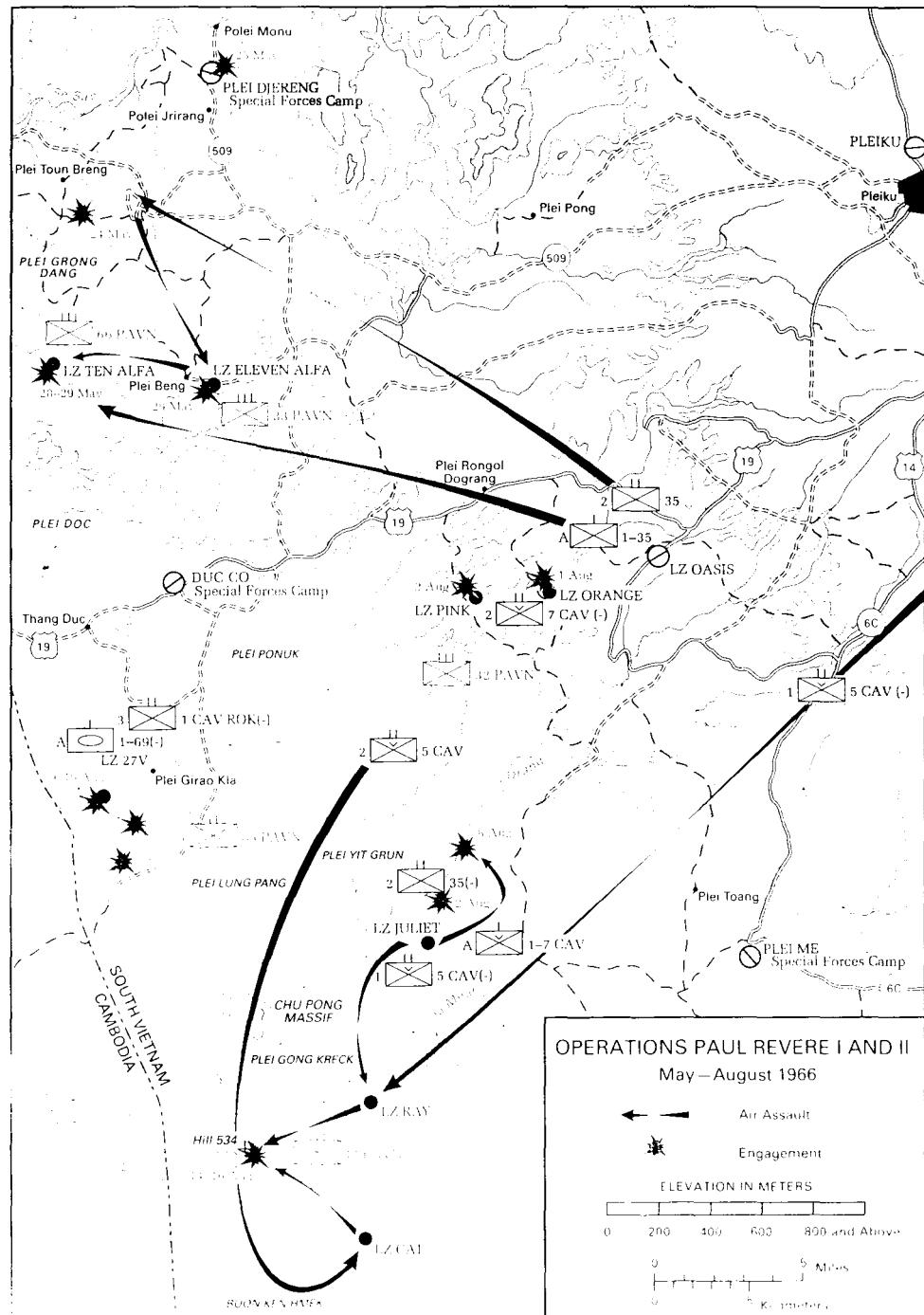
⁸⁶ Critique, Opn PAUL REVERE II, 1st Cav Div, p. 8.



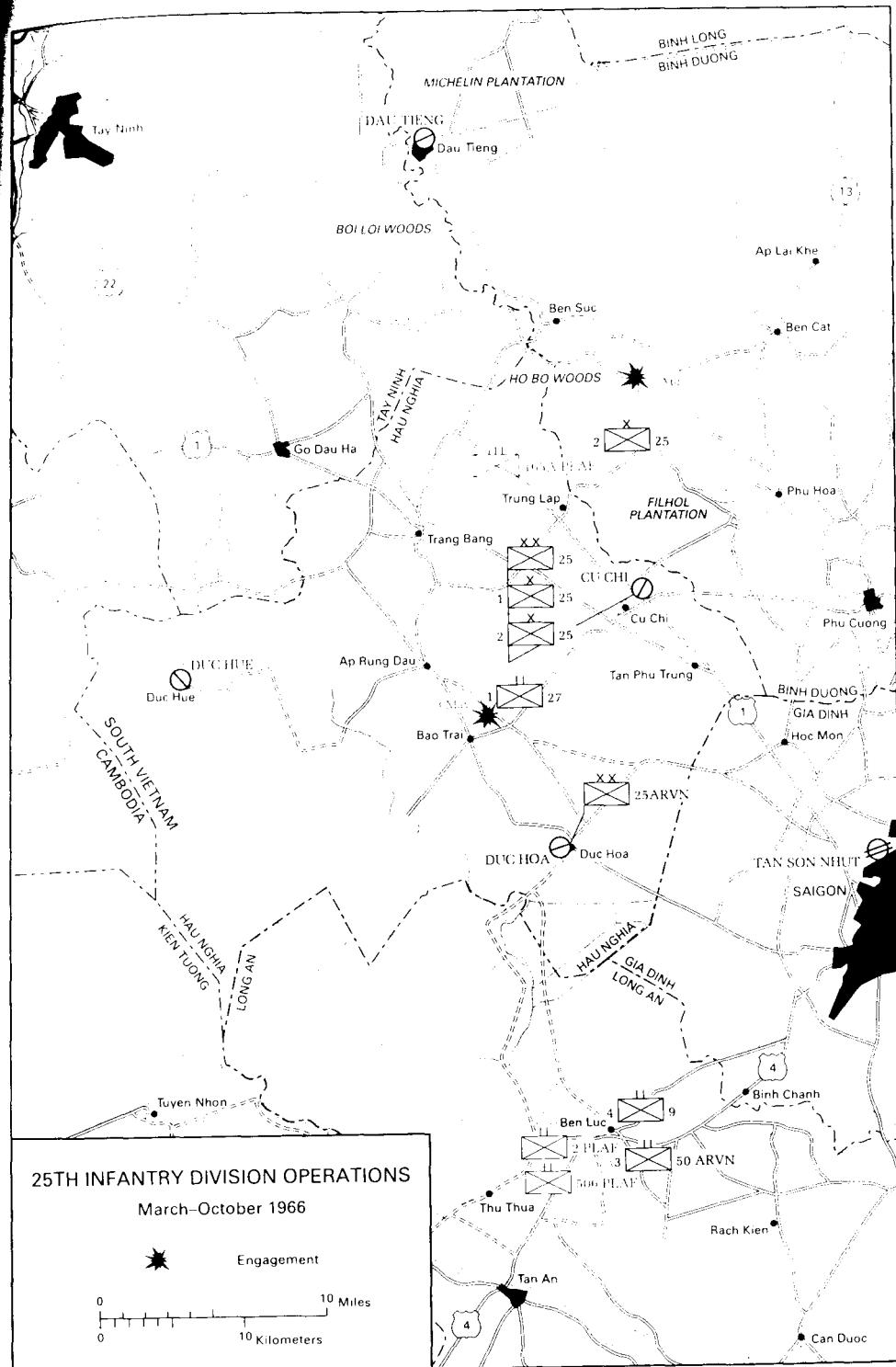
MAP 3



MAP 22



MAP 23



MAP 27