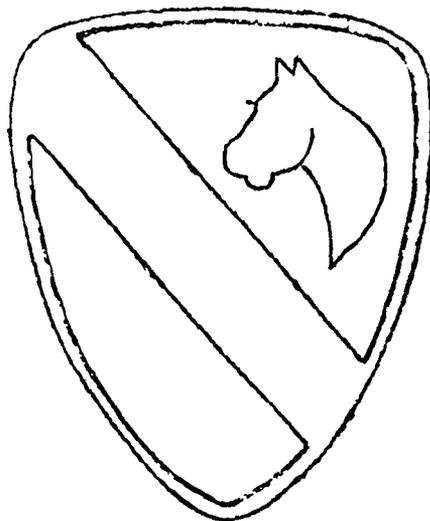
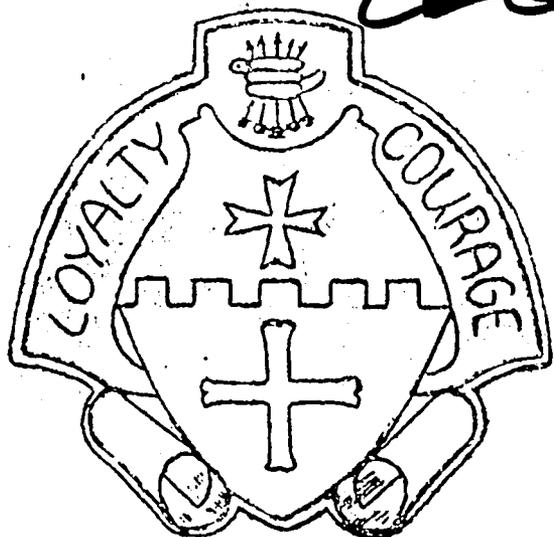
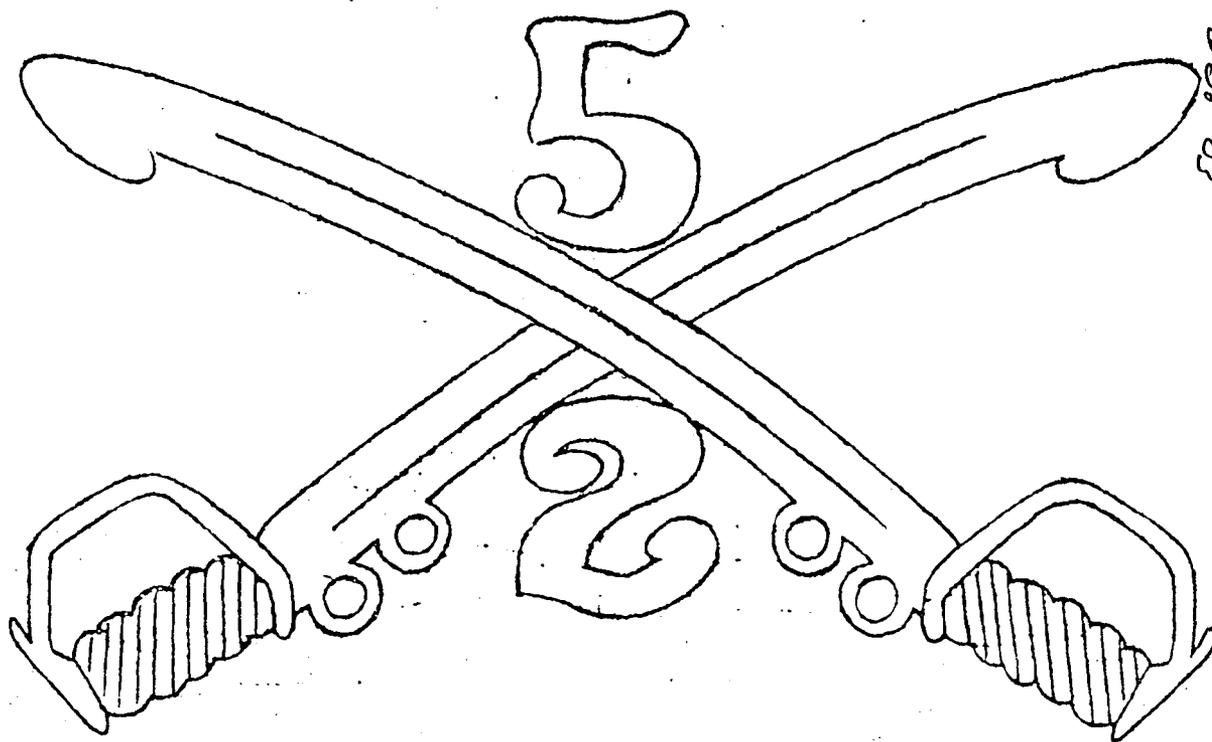


LOGS



The
History
of

THE SECOND BATTALION FIFTH CAVALRY



206-032
20-800

1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)
APO San Francisco 96490
Calendar Year 1967

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(1)

JANUARY 1967

During the month of January, as it had been for the past 18 months, the 2d Battalion 5th Cavalry was deeply set in the Bong Son area for combat operations in opposition to the Viet Cong and to the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). The enemy, as it was often described, took many forms, had many faces, and posed many different threats to the highly sophisticated organization of the 1st Air Cavalry Division and every smaller element incorporated therein; to include the individual soldier. While the 2/5 had the unquestioned advantage of fire power, direct fire support, maneuverability, tactics, logistic support, morale, and a well developed communications system, the enemy had the advantage of fighting for their homeland and for the belief that their indoctrinators had spoken the truth about the life of communism.

The enemy fought and lived on the fringe of lunacy; and they used a cloak of stealth, a narrow margin of error; and the demand for resourcefulness to believe the promise that Vietnam would be for the Vietnamese. They faced danger, incredible hardship and overwhelming military odds, yet they pressed on with a will that was stronger than all of that. Sometimes they were successful. For them a victory could be the death of a single U.S. soldier who fell prey to a booby trap or a sniper's bullet.

What were the objectives of the enemy? They all boiled down to one thing: to maintain the status quo of their lush and productive land so the communists could enter and develop it to satisfy their own needs and thereby keep the promises they had made for so many years. To them, Bong Son and all of Bien Dien Province was to be kept at all costs. For the 2/5, it was to be 'pacified and cleaned out.'

Operation Thayer II had been in progress for some time, and the mission of controlling the enemy forces and preventing them from occupying the area at odds had been quite successful, and after 18 months of combat, the enemy infrastructure had been dissolved to nearly a watery substance that trickled from the tops of the surrounding mountains to the lush rice paddy fields that were the prize for the communists. The area had been well searched and impeccably interdicted, and what was once the scene of vigorous aggression on the part of the enemy was now a place to hide as the Cavalrymen searched them out.

However, the area was not pacified, and certainly not cleaned out because if given the slightest chance, the enemy would return like bacteria to occupy the cavities and commence their buildup once again.

The 2/5, commanded by LTC Robert Stevenson, operated throughout the area and conducted various movements against the enemy to include search and clear of villages, minesweep details on roads, ambushes staged at points of suspected activity, and security of the many rear areas called landing zones (LZ) that served as forward command posts, fire bases and battalion/brigade trains areas.

As part of the 2d Blackhorse Brigade, the battalion was provided with the direct fire support of one battery from the 1st Battalion 77th Artillery, one battery from the 2d Battalion 20th Artillery (Aerial Rocket Artillery). For direct combat support, the battalion had the services of Co B 8th Engineer Battalion, and Co B, 15th Medical Battalion, and logistical support came from the 2d Forward Support Element (FSE) who supplied rations and other necessities. In short, the 2/5 had all the support it could use, and in the event of an emergency, the general support of the other elements in the division could be used.

Until the early part of February, the 2/5 had occupied secure areas for the purpose of base defense, and at the same time conducted local patrols to insure that the enemy was not in striking range. The companies normally took turns on the security missions while other operations were in progress. In essence, one or two companies would secure the LZ's while the others would hunt for the enemy wherever he might be lurking.

The year began at a slow pace, but the monsoon weather that was in effect at the time was a sure sign that a buildup of enemy activities was eminent. The weather played a very significant role in combat operations, and it was probably the largest advantage that the enemy had over the fast moving Skytroopers. This advantage was used to its greatest extent.

(4)

FEBRUARY 1967
End of Thayer II (1Cav)

11 February 1967 marked the end of Operation Thayer II and the beginning of what was to be the operation for the 1st Cav for the next year: Operation Pershing. The name was changed, but the mission and the results were somewhat the same: to search and clear the villages, to control the use of highways 1 and 505, and to interdict and harass the operations of the 1st and 2d NVA Divisions, whose presence was not only suspected but confirmed by intelligence, sightings and discoveries that continued throughout the entire year. In addition to the NVA, there were thoughts at the time that a mainforce VC was trying to recruit replacements for large-scale operations in the Bong Son area.

The AO for the 2/5 was basically from the Nui Mieu mountain complex to the ocean; an area that included the famous 'crescent'-----a site of significant findings for all of the companies in the 2/5. The terrain and the general topography for the area was quite a contrast as the steep jungle slopes of the mountains tapered off into plateaus and finally to the lush lowland paddy fields that were frequent hiding places for the VC/NVA. Also included were the sandy beaches that housed what later became known as the 'Rockpile'---a natural rock formation that was literally teeming with enemy soldiers who occupied the 'ant colony' of tunnels located therein.

The February weather was traditionally poor with frequent rain and relatively cold temperatures. The visibility was also quite poor and caused quite a detriment to the operations, especially at night. This was a boon to the enemy who used the concealment of the fog and rain to move at night without detection, and they also used the softness of the ground to plant mines and booby traps.

Even though the enemy managed to escape, their presence was now confirmed and the battalion was alerted to future contact. For the next several days all of the companies moved into the area of the contact to search and explore, and they found several weapons and other supplies that were stored throughout the area, but no definite clues in regard to the size, location or identity of the phantom VC clan.

On the 26th of the month, the battalion moved closer to the tunnels of the Nui Kho mountains on the strength of intelligence reports that indicated possible activity there. The Nui Kho mountains were part of the Crescent, and it was known that the VC/NVA had used the trails and tunnels to store and transport rice and equipment. Additionally, some of the recon helicopters in the division spotted movement in the area, and LTC Stevenson reacted by sending Co's C and D to investigate. The weather had cleared somewhat, and hunting conditions were favorable once again.

Co C established their forward operations base (F O B) on the slope of a large hill as the top was infested with poison ivy. This caused a slight disadvantage, but Co D was on the next highest ground, so there was little chance of a ground attack from above. Nevertheless, the company remained on alert and at 2300 3 men with weapons were spotted on a trail about 300 meters from the location of the company. They engaged with organics and took the trio by surprise and the following day 2 soldiers with green uniforms were found KIA—they were decidedly NVA.

This find prompted a patrol to find the third soldier, and tracing an obvious blood trail led to the discovery of one lightly wounded female who said that she was a cell leader for a local VC platoon, but did not know much about the NVA soldiers whom she was aiding.

(7)

MARCH 1967

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During the first few days of March the 2/5 continued their mission to search and clear the Nui Kho mountains, and at the same time, they moved closer to the heart of the Crescent. Most of the companies were well spread out, and LTC Stevenson was convinced that continued operations in the area would turn up more clues of the VC company, and perhaps, even some of the NVA.

The battalion gained the operational control (OpCon) of one company of the 40th ARVN Regiment who joined in the search. They were helpful in that they could interrogate detainees on the spot and determine their true identity. Additionally, psychological operations (dropping of leaflets from aircraft, and loudspeaker broadcasts) were being employed to reach the enemy who could easily disguise themselves as civilians. At the end of 4 days, 38 VC and 28 Civil Defenders (those who assist the VC/NVA) were interrogated. The information that was extracted from these individuals seemed to confirm the earlier suspicions that a mainforce VC unit and perhaps a sizable NVA force were in the area to prepare for an upcoming offensive. Although the particulars of this evidence was not prima facie, it did alert the battalion.

Along with tentative plans to remain in the mountains, the 2d Brigade also had anticipated a future parlay in the An Lao Valley that was located between the mountains and the Bong Son plain. Although there was no definite connection established between what was found in the mountains, and what was alleged to be in the valley, the captives all indicated that they had traveled in both places, but did not say what they were doing there. It was further indicated that a portion of the 9th Battalion, 18th NVA Regiment was in the area in force.

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On the 5th of March A and B companies were on base defense of LZ's English and Dog, and C and D companies searched in their assigned AO's. In the morning Co C spotted 3 NVA soldiers who were attempting to evade into the hack brush. All 3 were killed. Later that same day, Co D spotted 2 more soldiers; they killed one, but the other escaped. The companies were separated by several kilometers, but by the end of the day both had reported sniper fire from numerous locations. They no casualties and no further assessments, but because of the highly unlikely nature of this type of contact from so many locations, LTC Stevenson set out to recon the area with his command and control helicopter. While airborne between the location of the 2 companies, the craft received 3 hits wounding the copilot and the assistant operations officer. On the morning of the 6th, the sniper contact continued, and the division recon helicopters were dispatched to make an estimate of the situation, but they had negative findings. However the operations map at the battalion command post was dotted with the suspected enemy locations, and the Colonel retained his suspicions and anticipated a contact---he was right.

THE BATTLE OF HOA TAN

During the night of the 6th, the companies were subject to constant harrassment from sniper and mortar fire that was directed at them, but the enemy force was located by this action, and confirmed to be in the village of Hoa Tan, a typical farming community that is shown on map 1. During the night artillery was engaged, and the rocket equipped helicopters from the 2/20 (ARA) were sent to the scene to silence the snipers and the mortars. The tactic worked well, and by morning the 2/5 was prepared for the most significant action of the past year.--- an action that crushed the notorious 9th Battalion, 18th NVA Regiment.

As morning came, the ARA ships remained on station to fly cover for C and D companies as they moved forward into the village. At the same time, A and B were airlifted to the opposite side of the location to serve as a blocking force. All of the companies received heavy volumes of fire from the enemy who had occupied fortified positions with overhead cover, The weather had turned bad again and the advantage was given to the enemy who had 3 rifle companies fortified with mortars and rockets. Despite the heavy fire, the companies moved in suffering only light casualties, and they began neutralizing the enemy positions with organic weapons, artillery fire, and tactical air strikes from Air Force fighters.

In essence, the 2/5 literally strangled the enemy force, and as they tried to escape, they were caught in the human nets that surrounded the village and killed.

As night fell, it was thought that the remainder of the enemy force would make a last desperate attempt to escape, but the Battalion was ready for this as intensive final protective fire data for the artillery was established, and other

measures such as daylike illumination from organic mortar tubes. In addition to this, hundreds of Claymore command detonated mines were set on the likely avenues of escape.

At the outset, the battle resulted in 81 NVA soldiers KIA and several more WIA. Those who weren't captured or medically evacuated eventually escaped carrying with them a well learned lesson.

The real significance of the battle was the new intelligence obtained in regard to the identity and location of the enemy units that were now confirmed to be in the area. Plus, it gave most of the soldiers in the battalion their first chance at a large contact with a sizable enemy force.

Even though the battle of March 6th left the 9th Battalion sorely disorganized, the possibility of renewed contact seemed eminent because the reports of additional units that were in the area continued to flow in. As the companies searched the territory, they found new trails and other evidence that supported the suspicions that another NVA unit was still at large.

MAP
BR 976740
(11)
THE BATTLE OF PHU NINH

On the morning of March 11, Co C moved into a blocking position near the village of Phu Ninh while the elements of the 40th ARVN Regiment conducted a sweep of the interior. The sweep had progressed smoothly, and at 1000 hours, Captain Don Markham, the CO, instructed the 3rd platoon led by 1LT Dana Gerald and SSG John Kriedler to conduct a local patrol to the south to insure security to the rear. After they had moved about 1300 meters from the rest of the company, Kriedler spotted a man running from them down a trail. He took aim and killed the man who turned out to be a local hamlet guerrilla armed with a couple of hand grenades. This discovery did not cause any great excitement as the appearance of a local VC was not uncommon, and Markham ordered the platoon to continue its mission.

Kriedler and another man, SP4 Jose Garsa continued to root around some small huts that were near the trail when one enemy with an automatic weapon opened up and killed the pair on the spot. Gerald, who was about 200 meters away reacted quickly and brought the remainder of the platoon to the sound of the latest shots. When he arrived, all seemed clear, but another well concealed soldier fired and killed Gerald and 4 other men. The platoon took cover beside some of the huts and contacted Markham who estimated the situation to be a platoon pinned down by one squad of VC. He could not have known that Gerald had stumbled into the front door of the 18th NVA Regiment.

BR 976784
The Regimental Headquarters had occupied the high ground (hill 82) directly south of Phu Ninh (map 2), where the initial contact had been made. About half way down the hill was a trench that was over 600 feet long that was the main defense for the top of the hill because it was filled with enemy soldiers. There were numerous boulders that served as intermediary covered positions for the troops that occupied the hill below the trench. At the base of the hill were spider holes

bunkers and natural defilade positions that were the hideaways for the troops that not only killed Gerald and his men, but who held the rest of the platoon at bay.

Markham moved the remainder of the company to the vicinity of the Hamlet, but repeated trys to salvage the platoon failed because of the superior enemy positions and the fire power. The enemy had skillfully allowed the intruders to venture inside their killing zone and then held them as bait for the remainder of the elements. Markham now knew that he was up against a little more than he had originally estimated.

B2/20 (ARA) was called in to determine the extent of the enemy positions in relation to the pinned down platoon and to the rest of the company, and also to neutralize some of the more vulnerable positions. Their efforts were partially successful as the view from above gave Markham a more conclusive picture of the enemy situation. The employment of the high explosive rockets on the ARA ships allowed a 7 man rescue force to assist the pinned Skytroopers in moving by covering them from above and from below the enemy positions.

While the rescue effort was in progress, Co D, commanded by Captain Richard N. Mc Inerney was airlifted to assist Co C by establishing blocking positions to the east of their location. The plan was to effect the rescue of the platoon and then force the enemy off the hill by employing air strikes and artillery fire.

The rescue force succeeded in drawing close enough to the men in the platoon to place effective fire on the enemy positions while each man crawled to safety beneath the thick under brush. The entire move was complete in about 1 hour, but it

was only another hour before dark, and with the weather worsening, the time element became critical.

Both of the companies pulled back slightly and fanned out to complete their blocking positions while the Air Force fighters came on station to drop their ordnance on the trench and on the other positions. This action literally cast a stone in the hornet's nest as the enemy soldiers swarmed off the mountain into the hands of the 2 companies.

Cpt Mc Inerney occupied blocking positions with the second platoon. Sporadic clashes with the furious and frightened enemy erupted throughout the night. It became necessary to secure an LZ so that some of the wounded friendlies could be Medevaced, and since the second platoon was in the most favorable location for such an LZ, Cpt Mc Inerney ordered the platoon leader, SFC Albert Cuellar, to move back and get to work on it, but in so doing, a lone NVA soldier who was attempting to slip past their position fired his AK 47 and killed Cpt Mc Inerney. Cuellar instantly assumed command of the company and informed the other platoon leaders of this. Then, the entire platoon fired at the position of the lone sniper in an effort to finish him. His riddled body was found the next day. Cuellar then pulled back to secure the needed LZ for the Medevac choppers and fired signal flares to identify their location. However, as they attempted to land, several mortar shells were fired near the LZ to discourage them. Cuellar saw the flashes from the tubes and inspired the platoon to lay down a heavy base of fire to prevent any further firing. It worked, and in three minutes the 7 wounded men were on their way to a hospital in the rear.

The mortars never resumed firing and during the remainder of the night only shortlived contacts existed. By the following morning, the enemy units had left the battle field taking their dead and wounded with them and hiding them as they went. However, 36 bodies were found in addition to 53 wounded and 145 captured. A subsequent analysis of certain documents taken from an NVA political officer positively identified the unit as the 7th and what remained of the 9th Battalions of the 18 NVA Regiment and the Regimental security group.

The actual count of the dead was undeterminable because the bulk of the sold-who occupied the fortified positions on hill 82 were buried or simply laid in tangled heaps in various locations. But the interrogation of the prisoners revealed that if the unit was not completely wiped out, it was disorganized beyond repair.

March ended on a relatively low note as the battalion settled down after its action and as the enemy slipped back into oblivion to regroup for an appearance in another act in their war drama.... The 18th NVA Regiment was, at best, a machine with its main part missing, and would not pose another threat to the 2/5 or to the Bong Son area for several months.

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Although the battalion enjoyed unparalleled victory during those few days in March, she had also suffered the loss of several outstanding officers and men--- a loss that is never mitigated by the success of any battle. But such are the tragedies of war, and LTC Stevenson as well as the rest of the unit knew that their loss would serve as a constant reminder of the dangers that the communist forces in Vietnam could create until the day that their final battle would be fought.

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APRIL 1967

In the early days of April the OpCon of the 2/5 was was relinquished by the 2d Blackhorse Brigade and assumed by the 1st Air Cavalry Division as the battalion moved to Camp Radcliff (Division Headquarters) for the mission of security. In essence, this mission entailed the physical security of the well developed camp, and of the nearby village of An Khe with the adjoining overland supply route to Qui Nhon, a major seaport on the China Sea.

At the same time, the Marines, who occupied the I Corps, had decided to move there forces at Duc Pho to the Demilitarized Zone to control the infiltration of enemy troops. In order to do this, the 1st Air Cavalry Division was selected by General Westmoreland to replace the Marines at Duc Pho until a conventional division could move there permanently. On 7 April Operation Lejeune was commenced

The 2/5 spearheaded a brigade task force that, at the end of only 12 days, killed 177 enemy soldiers, established 2 fully operational hardtop airstrips, 2 major roads, a Sea Line Of Communication, and one of the 10 busiest sea ports in all of Vietnam.

The mission for the battalion was to secure and assist the round-the-clock activities of her organic support elements(2d FSE, 8th Engineers etc) and to seek and destroy the enemy who occupied the area. (Note: this was the first that Army troops had ever ventured into I Corps Tactical Zone.)

As the support elements began to take shape, the remainder of the battalion began making combat assaults from LZ Guadalcanal to the north east for the purpose of engaging the enemy. In just a few minutes, the Airmobility Concept had thrust the Cavalrymen much farther than the Marines had ever gone, and out of the reach of the mines and booby traps that had been set for the Leathernecks.

As a result, large groups of NVA soldiers were caught completely by surprise as the companies emerged from their helicopters and as the gunships and ARA ships raked and ranted in the confused mass of humanity. Without inflicting a single US casualty, the bulk of the 3rd NVA Division's advanced party was killed, wounded or captured in a single day of Air-Cavalry action, and those who escaped took with them an example of what to expect in II Corps.

In the meantime, the men from the 2/5 who had stayed behind to assist the men behind the scenes soon learned of a new miracle: the miracle of men and machines working together in a cooperative venture. One Skytrooper remarked that "I went to sleep in this open field and when I woke up there were planes taking off on a brand new airstrip".

Just 12 days after it had begun, Operation Lejeune came to an end for the 2/5 and for the Brigade Task Force. But they returned to Bong Son with the knowledge that in the light of a limited mission, their efforts had been most successful.

MAY 1967

April ended on a low note with negative action or finding in Bong Son. As May took over, 2 companies operated in the Dam Tra O Lake area while the remain- 2 companies worked in the Phu My valley. The mission for the battalion was to catch the enemy in the act at night and destroy his work during the day. The enemy was trying to regain the foothold they had lost during the battles of March and evidence of this revival was found over wide areas in the valley and in the low-land lake site.

The clearing weather allowed a new night tactic to be employed to halt the enemy from obtaining and transporting rice and equipment: the night hunter-killer team.

The helicopters from the 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion and 4 starlight scope equiped Skytroopers teamed up to find the enemy at night and destroy him. The 4 men rode in an UH-1H that flew at low altitudes and slow speeds to spot the enemy. Once spotted, the man fired a red tracer from his M-16 to mark the target for a gunship that followed close behind to finish the job. In the meantime, another UH-1H hovered high above to drop high intensity flares on command. Despite the relative success of this tactic, it was imposible to tell how much damage was actually done because by daylight, any bodies had been removed and other evidence hidden or destroyed. Nevertheless, captured VC confirmed the punishing and demoralizing it had on them and on the NVA soldiers who were attempting to operate in the area.

Although the crust of the enemy infastructure had been permiated, and the interior infested with the cancer of disorganization, they were trying for a comeback. The enemy, like the wilderness itself, will leap back with a vengeance unless constantly controlled. During Operation Lejeune they replanted their seeds.

On the 20th of May, the command of the battalion was relinquished by LTC Stevenson and assumed by LTC Joseph Mc Donough during a simple ceremony at LZ English. At the time a concentrated effort on the part of the enemy to regroup and resupply was in progress. LTC Mc Donough pledged to stop it.

It was felt that the status quo of the VC infrastructure could not support any large-scale offensives due to their relative weakness, and as a result, the core of the NV. forces was weakened considerably. Yet the intelligence reports continued to indicate the possibility of a notable build-up in the beach area--- a point on the map that had not received close scrutiny in several weeks. These reports carried a low credibility rating, but were not beyond the realm of possibility as was discovered later.

JUNE 1967

May slipped into June without incident as the companies continued their missions as before. In an effort to make use of the Air mobility concept, several air assaults were made daily to cover a greater area to catch the VC by surprise. It was a common practice for the enemy to observe a company as it moved into a location and then work in another location in relative safety. The battalion staff was aware of this practice, however, and plans were made to move a single company as many as 4 times a day to confuse and harass the enemy. On the 6th, Co A moved into an area of spotty treelines and open fields where 3 VC males were spotted and killed. A subsequent search revealed 8 bunkers and a small cache of mixed ammunition and rice.

The following week, the remainder of the companies made similar discoveries in separate locations finding rice, webgear and a few early Russian rifles. The bunkers, for the most part, were new and hastily constructed which suggested a crash effort to occupy this particular area. Later that week, C2/5 ^{± 13 Jun 67} detained 3 military aged males who later admitted they were VC. They stated that they and several others had worked their way south from another location using boats. Their mission was to bolster the local forces for an upcoming offensive in the Nui Mien Mountains. The Navy swift boats that operated on the waters along the beach had apprehended 29 VC in small boats the week before, and now a definite pattern of infiltration and subsequent preparation had emerged confirming earlier suspicions of enemy activity along the beach and at the base of the Nui Mien Mountains.

In addition to the large number of air assaults, the battalion gained the OpCon of the 1st Battalion 69th Armor that was instrumental in the capture of several VC who had participated in across-the-water infiltration.

In the light of these findings, LTC Mc Donnough was convinced that a major build-up was in progress.

On the 21st^{20th} of June, ^BA2/5 smashed into the location of an estimated company of NVN at the base of the Nui Mien Mountains. The initial contact was immediate and intense, and ^CB2/5 was sent into the area to assist. Several lift ships from the 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion received many hits from small arms fire but there were no casualties. The NVN company was situated on the high ground and had attacked the lead element of the company as they moved into the area. This gave them an advantage that was compounded by the fact that they (the friendlies) were too close for artillery or ARA to be engaged. A furious battle ensued as B2/5 closed on the enemy who were clustered in a relatively small area. 90MM recoilless rifles were used to penetrate the bulk of the enemy fortified positions. The contact diminished only 4 hours later and the casualties from the NVN company were heavy. The preponderance resulted from the large caliber direct and indirect fire that destroyed their only hope for survival: the bunkers.

The company was later identified as an advanced party of the ill-fated 16th NVN Regiment who, it was later discovered, had designs on reestablishing a foothold in what formerly was their prime recruiting ground. Obviously their efforts were seriously curtailed, but the NVN have an almost insurmountable will to be victorious, and the 2/5 was slated with the mission of overcoming this will by remaining in the immediate area to prevent any other buildup.

In addition to these efforts, the companies conducted methodical search and clear operations at the mountain complex in a large natural rock formation called the Rockpile. The battle of the 20th, it was then discovered, had yielded many

more enemy deaths than was originally assessed. Several bodies were found hidden in the caves and tunnels in various stages of decomposure. In addition to the bodies, several caches of rice and equipment were found.

JULY 1967

The month of July proved to be a quiet month for the battalion as they provided security for the local LZs and for the Bong Son Bridge Complex. The security mission is a guaranteed period of relaxation because very little threatened the fortress of even the smallest LZ. In the case of the bridge, even a nighttime probes would be ludicrous because of the development of its defenses. The bridge was inside tripple rows of heavy concertinas wire laced with trip flares, Claymore mines and other anti intrusion devices. In addition, close by were 2 major LZs, English and Two Bits, and constant mortar patrol missions were flown by Battery B 2/20 Artillery (ARA). The odds were sufficient to make it clear that any attack would spell certain disaster and untold retaliation. Thus, the Bong Son Bridge Complex and the surrounding LZs remained pacified throughout the Bien Dien Campaign.

During the day, the companies conducted local patrols with the National Police Field Forces, a government malitia group, whose primary function was to find, detain and classify VC suspects or Civil Defenders. However, the daily operations resulted in negative findings.

On the 26th, the battalion was relieved of its security missions and returned to the Cay Giep Mountains for methodical search and clear operations, and closed out the month with no significant action or findings. There were plans brewing to probe the 506 Valley that was to the west of the Cay Giep complex as the 1/5 had experienced several small contacts there and had found all the signs of enemy activity.

AUGUST 1967

Throughout the month of August, the battalion continued to work with the NFFF in search and clear missions and close screening of small fragments of the enemy who were scattered about the area from the Nui Miou Mountains, to the crescent and the expanses of flatland that was in between. Normally, the companies would cordon a village while the NFFFs swept through to interrogate the population and inspect the ID cards that are issued to civilians. Those who did not possess a card or who appeared suspicious in any other way were sent to IPW for further interrogation and classification. Out of 100 people found, it was easy to assume that at least one would be a CD (civil defender), and when one was found, it was a simple matter to extract more information from him for several reasons. First, a CD is not a hard core soldier and has not been indoctrinated or trained as one, and he is usually induced to serve the VC by force, intimidation or violence. He risks his life to traffic rice and supplies for the VC purely on the strength that his life and the lives of his family depends on it. If he fails, it is certain that his family will be killed, and his home burned---he fears the VC and he obliges. However, if he talks when he is apprehended he will be evacuated with his family to a refugee camp where he is safe.

As the month progressed, several CDs were captured and detained, and the subsequent information that was extracted from them revealed that there was activity in small amounts at various locations in the mountain complex and in the Rockpile.

By the 16th, LTC Mc Donnough decided to return to the area. The companies found fresh signs of the enemy---bunkers, small caches of munitions and equipment and assorted weapons. With the exception of a few US carbine rifles, most of the weapons were new AK47s that were hidden in the base of 2 wells that cleverly con-

sealed connecting tunnels. This discovery was made by Co MS Kit Carson scout, a former VC who abandoned his unit to join the American forces. He knew the common hiding places for most everything, and his assistance also led to other discoveries such as several cases of ChiCom gas masks and about 200 Russian-made gas grenades.

PRATT'S CORNER

Captain Clayton A. Pratt was in command of Co A, and while he was relative-

ly new his exploits in the Rockpile during the last 13 days of August had a far-reaching effect on the total effort of the Division for the 3rd quarter of 1967.

As his company continued to find fresh signs of the enemy, it became increasingly obvious to him and to LTC Mc Dormough that a contact with a

sizable enemy force was in the offing, and with intensive searches, methodical probes and exhaustive detective work, Pratt and his followers made a determined

effort to capture the enemy soldiers and destroy them. His visions of defeating the enemy began to materialize when the lead element of the company spotted 3 men

trying to evade by running up a trail. The lead platoon engaged with small arms, but the men ducked into a tunnel before the bullets could seek them out. The platoon

surrounded the entrance to the cave and warned the men that they would be killed if they didn't come out--there was no reply, so hand grenades were tossed

into the opening resulting in three NVA killed.

The enemy soldiers were dressed in tan uniforms and were armed with new AK 47s and very sophisticated gas masks, and were apparently new in the area as the

tunnel had another opening that could have effected their escape had they known about it. Later that same day, 2 more similarly equipped soldiers were spotted,

engaged and killed on the spot.

At first, this series of events appeared to be a stroke of luck for Pratt, but he knew that he was on to something big, and after 3 more days of similar

events, everyone else knew it too, and the area became known as Pratt's Corner, a name that would reach the commander of all allied forces in Vietnam, General

William Westmoreland.

The lead platoon engaged with small arms, but the men ducked into a tunnel before the bullets could seek them out. The platoon

surrounded the entrance to the cave and warned the men that they would be killed if they didn't come out--there was no reply, so hand grenades were tossed

The enemy force had apparently seen the danger that took the form of one company of Cavalrymen, and they separated themselves into small groups to resist capture, but in so doing, they sacrificed their organization which made them even more vulnerable to Pratt and his men who did not leave a single hiding place beyond suspicion. As the days went by, the assessments mounted and it came apparent that this was really a sizable enemy force, and that their staging area had been completely interdicted by the U.S. Cavalry.

After 10 days of continued contacts, more men were being captured or simply giving up than were being killed, and they all seemed to affirm that they had been caught completely off guard. Furthermore, their supplies of food had gone critically short, and the occupation of the area by the Skytroopers made replenishment nearly impossible.

All of these developments combined with Pratt's driving leadership netted a total of 35 killed, 45 captured, and 16 wounded with over 70 weapons captured. The enemy force was identified as 2 Infantry companies that belonged to the 3rd NVA Division, but who were to be assigned to the 8th Battalion, 18th NVA Regiment. In addition, 2 enormous AM radio transmitters were found with the complete and current Signal Operating Instructions for the 3rd NVA Division—a monumental find in itself.

Interrogation of the prisoners revealed that the 2 companies were given the mission of finding the 8th Battalion 18th NVA Regiment for the purpose of bolstering their strength for an upcoming offensive in opposition to some of the Cav. positions in the Bong Son area. Obviously their plans were completely curtailed by Pratt's action against them, and it would take a long time for the NVA to regain what was lost.

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Pratt's Corner became a matter of record from the 2/5 all the way to the Headquarters of MACV where it was considered to be the most significant event in Vietnam during the 3rd quarter of 1967, and it also turned the tables for any large-scale operations for the NVA.

SEPTEMBER 1967

On the 27th of the month, LTC Mc Donough was promoted to the rank of full Colonel and assumed the command of the 2d Blackhorse Brigade, and turned the reins of the battalion to LTC Joseph Blandi Love of Prescott, Arizona. Love had a motto that soon became the symbol of the battalion: to be READY at all times. The weeks that followed saw the 2/5 live, work and fight for that motto.

OCTOBER 1967

On the second of October, the battalion moved by C7-A to Camp Radcliff once again to assume the mission of base defense. As always, the mission was greeted with great favor by the men as the An Khe region was well known to be a pacified area, and the subsequent operations there were considered to be a pleasure.

The companies conducted routine missions on the outskirts of the fortified base area that included a mine sweep detail on HY 19 that led to Qui Nhon, and local patrols in the area. LTC Love made frequent visits to the field to get acquainted with his company commanders, and he spent considerable time with the men. He was extremely interested in their problems, and did everything he could to solve them, and he always gave the men encouragement when he left.

During the period, the action had been light throughout the entire area of operations, and the month ended with negative contact and assessments.

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NOVEMBER 1967

The battalion continued to operate at Camp Radcliff until the early part of the month when reports of VC activity in Bong Son began to seep in. LTC Love was concerned about getting the battalion back in the action, and so on the 5th, A2/5 moved from An Khe to LZ Two Bits where their OpCon was assumed by the 1st Squadron 9th Cavalry. In the days that followed, the remainder of the companies followed and began immediate operations in the mountains and in parts of the 506 valley. The contacts were limited in adjacent Ao's, but all the signs of an enemy build-up were present, and it seemed certain that there would be contact soon enough. However, there were no positive sightings during the daylight hours.

On the 7th, a LRP team established an ambush position on the apex of several trails, and by midnight they experienced a brief but lively contact with an unknown sized enemy force. The contact lasted about 5 minutes at which time the enemy withdrew. There were negative friendly casualties, and the LRP team was extracted without incident. The following day, C2/5 was sent into the area to investigate and they found 2 VC males armed with SKS rifles and D handled shovels. *8 Nov 67*

On the 9th, D2/5 set their FOB on the high ground near LZ English to confirm reports that the VC had reconned the area for an upcoming attack. At approximately 0130 hours, several grenades were hurled inside of the perimeter resulting in 2 friendly WIA's. The company answered with organics and engaged with artillery, and the enemy withdrew. The search of the contact area the following day revealed 3 NVA KIA and 2 VC females KIA who had apparently joined the NVA to serve as guides.

About 3 days later, a LRP team contacted approximately 10 VC moving north on a relatively large trail. The enemy was taken by surprise, and 3 were killed.

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They were heavily laden with rice and ammunition.

Those signs continued to appear during the first 2 weeks of the month, and LTC Love was convinced that these incidents were not accident as the contacts pointed to a well coordinated effort to lay the ground work for operations in the area. However, the problem was that the enemy did their work at night and traveled in small groups during the day to avoid detection. With this in mind, LTC Love employed a 1st Cav tactic designed to catch the enemy by surprise during the day: the Mini-Cav operation.

By using one platoon with 3 or 4 helicopters that swooped down on suspicious groups of people, the companies were able to apprehend detainees for interrogation.

The idea worked well, and on the 13th, B2/5 detained 41 military aged males in open fields in the 506 Valley area. Later interrogation revealed that 11 of these individuals were VC who belonged to a local sapper battalion. They all admitted that they had carried supplies for an unknown NVA Battalion who were infiltrating into the Bong Son area from the north. The following day, B2/5 discovered a small base camp in the foothills that included a set of bleachers, a small mess hall and a bamboo jail that contained 5 civilians and 4 PFs who said they had been abducted from their homes 4 days previous. The prisoners were released for further questioning that revealed that their captors had left the area just minutes before the company had arrived.

The MiniCav was also used by D2/5 on the same day, and they detained 14 males and 2 females who were part of a local VC booby trap platoon. LTC Love was satisfied that the VC/NVA were assembling in force, and he wanted to catch them in the open during their sinister activities, so he continued to use the MiniCav technique while the remainder of the elements continued to search during the day and set ambushes at night.

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While enroute to their FOB on the afternoon of 22 November, the second platoon of A2/5 contacted approximately 10 soldiers dressed in black pajamas who had packs and weapons. The enemy had been moving down a trail that was 200 meters from the point man of the platoon who engaged them at distance killing one. The remainder managed to escape as the platoon fanned out to an on line position, but even so, this action was the first time that any large enemy force had been engaged during the day and it meant that the enemy was now trying to rush their operations and were therefore becoming a little less cautious.

The following day, A2/5 established numerous ambush positions in the area in the hope that they could contact the same element. LTC Love was confident that they would---he was right. Just after midnight on the 24th, the company engaged an NVA platoon that was moving with large quantities of rice and other contraband. Captain Pratt had ordered the men to hold their fire until the last last minute, and when the platoon was about 50 meters away, he gave the order to fire. In 3 minutes 7 NVA soldiers met their death, and several more were wounded. Also, 2 females were captured and later admitted that they were leading the platoon to the site of a battalion command post that was alleged to be in the area.

B2/5 found 3 NVA bodies the next day in a tunnel near the scene of Co As contact. They had apparently died of wounds. In the same area, the company found 2 radio antennas that were destroyed in place in addition to several bunches of punji stakes, 40 grenade bodies, and assorted rice and supplies. This was apparently the battalion CP, but it was now too well interdicted to be of any value to its intended occupants.

The action subsided for the remainder of the month.

DECEMBER 1967

As November faded into December, the enemy also seemed to fade into their skillful oblivion once again, for the signs of them vanished as quickly as they had appeared, and Bong Son took on all the characteristics of a pacified area. And so it was in the adjacent AOs that surrounded those of the 2/5. However, the eyes and ears of the Cavalrymen, and the instincts of LTC Love remained alert to their inevitable reappearance in another time and another place under separate and new circumstances.

In the early part of the month, the companies enjoyed varied security missions throughout the whole of the Phu Ky District, but they continued routine daylight operations and occasional nighttime ambushes. However, there were negative findings.

The misery of the monsoon weather returned, and if there was any activity at all it slipped by unnoticed because of the endless rain and nighttime fog. Normally the enemy used such periods to harrass and probe friendly positions, but even that tactic seemed abandoned. Nevertheless, the enemy was still there, and everybody felt it, and so the patrols and other missions continued---if not to destroy the enemy, than at least to keep him honest.

The MiniCav operation was employed by Cos B and D as they searched the 506 Valley, and by the second week of the month, 58 detainees were interrogated resulting in the capture of 4 CDs and 3 VC males. In the process, several old bunkers and caves were destroyed along with numerous caches of rotting rice that was left behind.

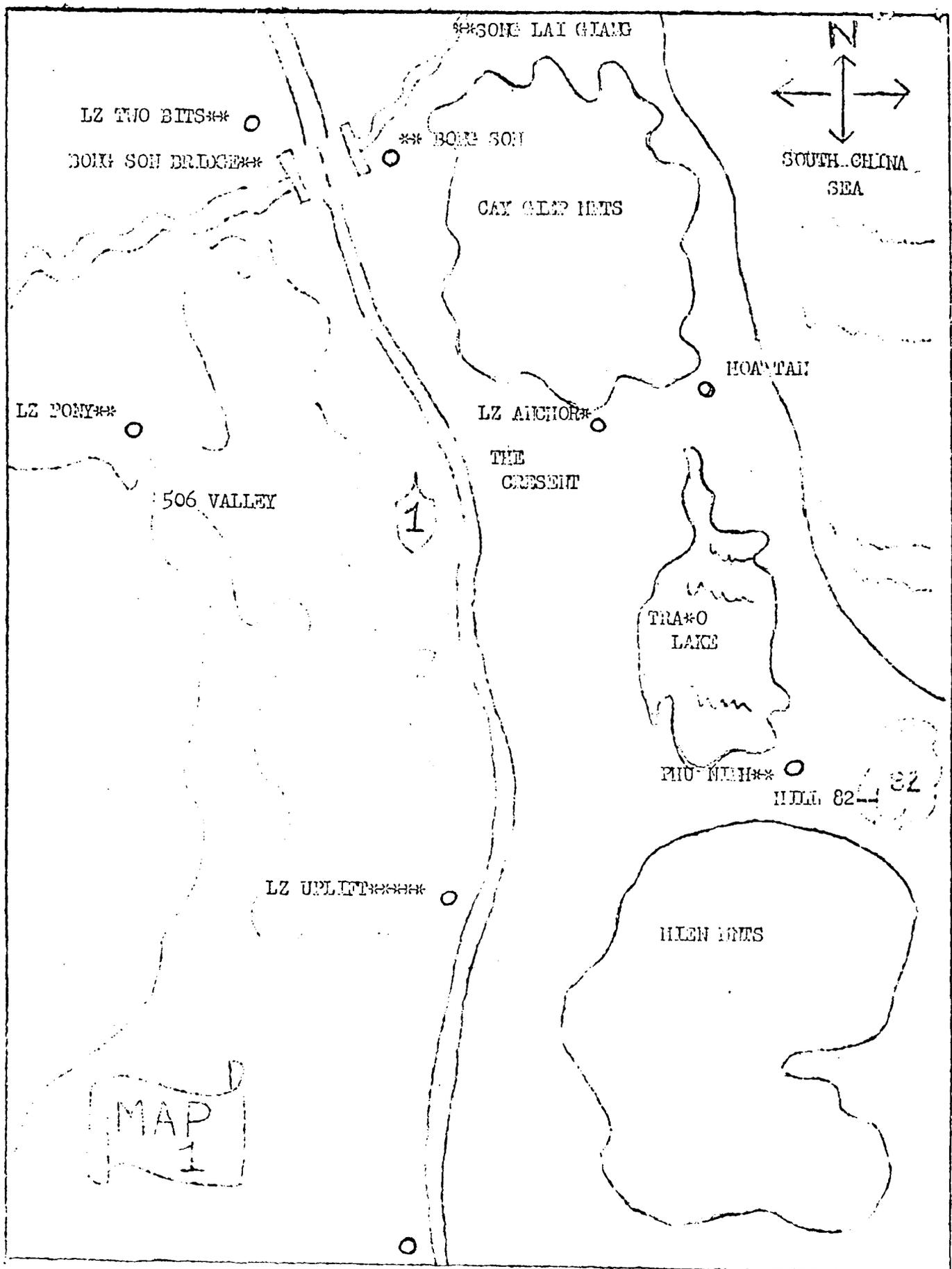
In the meantime, A and C Cos moved into the Rockpile to investigate speculation of VC activity there. They found several badly decomposed bodies from earlier

contacts, and 3 9MM Chicom pistols, but no fresh signs and no conclusive evidence. Both companies spent the bulk of their time destroying hooches and bunkers, and before long, their mission became one of a general clean-up of the area.

As the month progressed, the action remained at a near standstill, but reports of a country-wide offensive began to flow in from every major reporting agency in the II Corps Tactical Zone, and throughout all of occupied Vietnam. The offensive was to be a well coordinated attack on the major military installations and cities that lined the country from one end to the other. It was not known how the enemy would mass the resources for such an offensive because the action throughout the country was lighter than it had been in months, and the signs for such a build-up were almost nonexistent.

As 1967 came to a close for the men in Vietnam, and another chapter of the war came to a close for the 2D Battalion 5th Cavalry, all was quiet and all was calm. But LTC Joseph Blandi Love, the man who promulgated the spirit of the READY Battalion was quoted as saying "Now is the time to be really READY, because we shall see Charlie again very soon". He could not have known how right he was.

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