



**Harold G. Moore**

*Lt. General, U.S. Army, Ret.*



**Richard T. (Dick) Knowles**

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Lt Gen H. G. Moore, USA-Ret.  
[REDACTED]

Dear Hal:

Enclosed is my write-up of LZ X-Ray as best I can recall it. Please feel free to use any portion or all of it as you see fit and let me know if you would like any portions amplified.

I am sure you have a copy of General Kinnard's "Concept to Combat". If not, it would make an excellent reference.

I have not included a great deal about the withdrawal from X-Ray and McDade's fiasco; however, the reason and manner in which we left the area are important. Gallaway will recall the briefing held in the MACY Compound on this subject.

I am sure you will include details on your "Mad Minute" in X-Ray and the "Saga of Sergeant Savage". (Trust I have the name right.)

You should consider the briefing we held for Secretary McNamara and General Wheeler. That was a dramatic climax to the X-Ray story. I also remember your briefing of General Johnson about a year before X-Ray when he came to Fort Benning to decide for himself if the Army needed or wanted an Air Mobile Division. Then just about one year later you proved the value of the air mobile concept on the battlefield.

I am sure you will get comments from Colonel John Stoner and General Bill Becker. It might be helpful to get copies of Charlie Black's articles if you can.

Let's stay in touch, Hal; and if I can be of further assistance please let me know.

Most sincerely,



Richard T. Knowles

LZ - X-RAYTHE M-16

The story of LX-XRay really started back at Fort Benning, Georgia, when we were known as The 11th Air Assault Division, an experimental division charged with developing the air assault concept. One of the tasks included was the field testing of rifles the army had under consideration - the M-1, M-14 and M-16. After months of strenuous field testing we were certain that the M-16 was the worst of the lot. When we were getting ready to go to Viet Nam we sent a select group of officers to Viet Nam to visit our troops (173<sup>D</sup> Airborne Brigade and Special Force elements) in order to obtain first hand battle information on tactics, techniques and their views on equipment and weapons.

When this team returned to Benning I was acting Division Commander. They briefed me in detail and recommended we equip the Division with M-16's. Knowing our test results and General Kinard's strong feelings against the M-16 I balked at making a decision on the spot, but it had to be made quickly because the Army had to ship thousands of rifles to us and we were limited in training time.

I arranged for a chopper and flew up to a lake northeast of Atlanta where Harry Kinard was taking a short well-deserved break. I joined him in a boat where he was water skiing with his family and briefed him on all the Division's activities, saving the toughest recommendation for last. Finally, I sprung the M-16 issue. His first comment was, "You have to be kidding!" I hung in there with all the rationale I could

muster, plus the comments of Bob Shoemaker.

After intense questioning and a long awkward pause, General Kinard said, "O.K., Dick, under one condition." "Yes, Sir. What?" "That you take on the responsibility for training the entire Division in the firing, care and maintenance of the M-16."

I accepted the challenge, flew back to Fort Benning and set the machinery in motion. But, that was not the end of the problem. A few days later I got a call from General Lincoln, the DCS for logistics in the Pentagon. He came right to the point. "Dick, I have four or five carloads of M-16's that I understand you ordered. Knowing how Kinard feels about that weapon I can't release them to you."

After some fast talking, I persuaded General Lincoln that we really wanted them and that General Kinard had given his personal O.K.

A word about the training problem. The weapons department at Fort Benning responded magnificently. They made the finest instructors available and the army brought additional experts in from all corners of the world. No unit ever had better training in their basic arm as they prepared for war, and it paid off handsomely.

THE BEGINNING

We had a lull in the battle. The 1st Brigade, under Harlow Clark, had just completed a highly successful battle in the highlands and General Kinnard decided to switch the 3<sup>D</sup> Brigade, eager to get into the fight, with the 1st Brigade. The conventional wisdom indicated that the enemy had drifted into an area southeast of Pleiku and we were directed to conduct operations there. Shortly after the operation started Swede Larson, the Corp Commander, visited us and asked how things were going. I told him we were drilling a dry hole. We had no contact to speak of and I didn't expect any. He then said, "Why are you conducting operations there if it's dry?" My response, with all due respect, was, "That's what your order in writing directed us to do." The General responded that our primary mission was, "Find the enemy and go after him."

Shortly thereafter Tim Brown, the Brigade Commander of the 3<sup>D</sup> Brigade, and Hal Moore visited my Command Post in the field and, based on strong instinct and some flimsy intelligence, I told them to come up with a plan for an air assault operation at the foot of Plei Mei Mountains. They returned that afternoon with an excellent plan which they had thoroughly reconnoitered from the air. I gave them a green light for the operation to start at first light the next day. The plan, called LZ-X-Ray, jumped off as scheduled; and as soon as the hornets nest reacted, we knew we had struck gold. I called General Kinard and asked for more infantry, artillery and lift helicopters. He said, "They are on the way. What's going on?" "We have a good fight going. Suggest you come up as soon as Possible."

When General Kinnard arrived I showed him a situation map braced against a palm tree. He took one look and said, "What the hell are you doing in that area?" "Well, General, the object of the exercise is to find the enemy and we sure as hell have!"

After another awkward pause and a few questions he said, "O.K., it looks great. Let me know what you need."

In consideration for the magnitude of the action I worked closely with Bill Becker, our Divarty Commander; and for all practical purposes, we put a ring of steel around Hal Moore's battle area. We gave him and Tim Brown all the fire support they requested and then backed them up with artillery, air support and aerial rocket artillery. We also laid on some B-52 strikes and hit hard every jungle route into and out of the area around the clock.

I was in close contact with Tim Brown and Hal Moore from my Command Helicopter; and on the second day, asked Hal if I could come into his LZ for a short visit. The request was granted and Hal had his fire support coordinator lift the firing of artillery and shift the close air support so we could come in and hover over his LZ. He did not want my helicopter to actually land nor to stay in the area for more than a few seconds because of the intense fighting. We came in fast. I jumped out and my chopper departed.

It was good to see Hal Moore and he was in fine spirits. Morale was high and the 1st of the 7th Battalion was doing a great job. I gave Hal a cigar and he quickly briefed me on the situation. John Stoner, our A-F Liason Officer, accompanied me and I had been riding him to get the air support in close. As Hal finished his briefing an air strike hit their

targed adjacent to the Command Post. The ground trembled and a bomb fragment flew into the CP area landing ten or fifteen feet away from where we were standing. John Stoner walked over and tenderly picked up the smoking fragment, came back, and handed it to me, saying, "General, is this close enough?"

I briefed Hal on the activities we were conducting outside his immediate area to help his battle. Also updated him on the status of Bob Tully's battalion which was coming in over land to reinforce him, as well as all other actions being conducted to assist his operation.

We called for my chopper. I jumped aboard, and we departed with considerable haste.

THE CHALLENGE

We had a tiger by the tail and did not want to let go. It was obvious we had to take the high ground dominating the LZ and we had several contingency plans to do just that. However, in coordinating the details we discovered that the key terrain we wanted had been hit by B-52's, after aborting a strike in another area, with numerous 5000 pound bombs with delayed fuses. They were still active and the last one would go off in about five days.

We did not want any part of that situation so decided to pull out of LZ X-Ray and maneuver to grab the tiger by its tail from another direction.

LOGISTICS

I had established a Jump Command Post inside the MACY Compound at Pleiku in order to control operations and the essential logistics. We picked this location because of its proximity to the battle area, to conserve security troops and the fact that it was adjacent to an air field. The Command Post consisted of our people pod that had been lifted in with our Sky Crane. It was loaded with communications equipment and had just enough room for a skeleton staff. We kept track around the clock of all the essential factors pertinent to the battle: strengths, casualties, beans and bullets, aircraft available, artillery and JP-4 fuel. We were at the end of the longest logistical pipeline the US Army had ever maintained. As a case in point, one of our troops posted a sign outside a company CP which had two arrows. One pointed East and read "Los Angeles - 12,500 miles". The other pointed West and read "Los Angeles - 12,500 miles".

The logistical people back at Division and the entire chain back to the States performed numerous miracles daily to keep us supplied with the vital implements of war.

It was during the over-all battle in that area when we started to run short of JP-4 fuel. We got down to a point where we only had enough to refuel the aircraft in the operation one more time, and that was my fail-safe level. I talked to Kinnard and Swede Larson and requested permission to call Jack Norton in Saigon. Jack was the top Army General on the logistics side in Viet Nam. I told Jack I had to

have J-4 flown in during the night and if it did not come in I would close down the operation, lift all the troops out that I could with the fuel available, abandon the equipment we could not carry and walk back to the coast with the balance of the troops. It took some convincing, but Jack got the message; and before dawn C 130's came flying in in a stream all loaded with JP-4 bladders. That broke the shortage and the operation continued.

Worthy of note was the fact that the support command had a cracker jack Warrant Officer at our airfield in charge of evacuating the wounded and the dead. He had a hot line to my jump CP and whenever an unusual number of casualties came in by Med-Vac helicopter he would call me. This frequently gave me an indication of troops in action before the normal chain of command got into the act. Once he called me I would fly to the scene and get a first hand view of the situation. This frequently led to shifting troops to reinforce a particular action and to increase our fire support.

PERSONNEL

We took troops to Viet Nam that only had a short time left in their service contract. We could not afford to break up a highly trained team and felt we could rotate these men with replacements from the U.S. on a gradual basis. During the peak of our campaign, the G-1 of the Division requested that we send some of these men back for processing. I told the G-1 I would give them one day at Division rear before sending them to Saigon for the trip home.

Bob Tully told me that this created an interesting situation in his battalion when they were moving up to reinforce Hal Moore. One night one of his outposts started firing grenade launchers and they fired all night long. After taking appropriate action they found out in the morning, when they brought the men in, that they were due to leave for the U.S. that day and they did not want to become casualties on their last night. So, they conducted their own H & I firing coupled with judicious change of position to get through the night.

THE ENEMY

There is no question that we were in a death struggle with regular NVA troops, highly trained and determined. Every man knew North Viet Nam's strategic objectives- "Defend the North, liberate the South and reunite the country."

We suspected from the intelligence we could gather that we were involved with a Division. This was later confirmed from documents captured by US forces in a successful attack against MR-4 Headquarters outside Saigon.