

'Lightning' raid lifts chopper from VC area



AN INFANTRYMAN from the 2nd Bn., 12th Inf. watches as a smoke ship provides concealment for a downed chopper.

CU CHI—Some of the men of the 25th Infantry Division's Co. A, 2nd Bn., 12th Inf. were delayed during a recent Eagle Flight mission.

The Huey helicopter carrying the Tropic Lightning soldiers experienced a rare turbine malfunction and was forced to leave the ten-ship formation and set down in an available clearing.

The chopper, piloted by WO Lance L. Blair, lost its power. Since the craft was fully loaded, Blair had to find a place to land quickly.

The chopper was brought down gently in a clearing near Fire Support Base Pershing north of here.

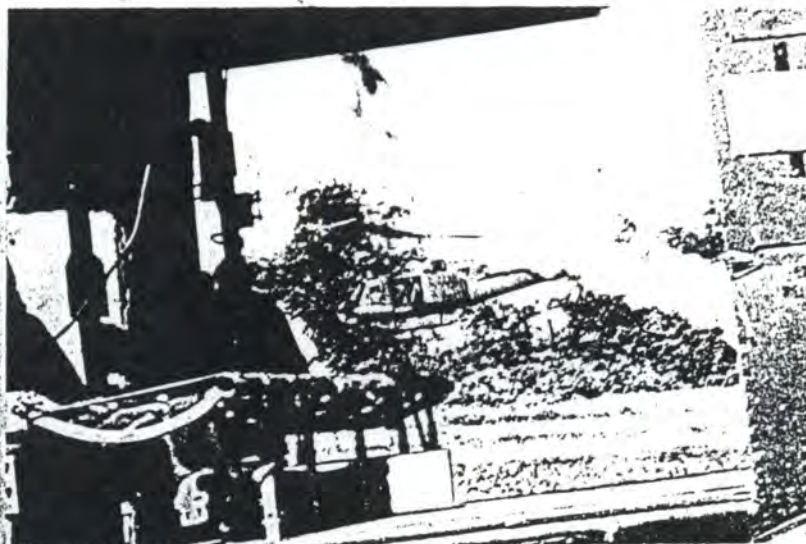
Air Mission Commander Capt. James Cunningham said that gunships were inserted in the area to give cover while a Chinook carried the damaged Huey back to Cu Chi base camp. "Recovery operations were underway before the ship touched down," he said.

Cunningham added, "Blair did a great job landing the chopper under hazardous conditions."

Smoke ships provided concealment for the downed chopper during rescue operations while the infantrymen secured the position.



DRAPED WITH STRAW the pilotless craft is towed to the 25th Infantry Division's Cu Chi garage for an overhaul.



A SMOKE SHIP gives concealment to 2nd Bde., 25th Infantry Division soldiers who were waiting for a Chinook to pick them up.



A 25TH INFANTRY rigging team scrambles over the damaged helicopter preparing it for pick-up.

25th Inf Photos

LRPs strike Viet Cong, leave by chopper in time

HIGHLANDER HEIGHTS — The mission only lasted hours but to the long range patrol team from Co. E, 20th Inf., 4th Infantry Division it was almost a lifetime.

And for seven of the eight Viet Cong they encountered it was more than a lifetime — it was sudden death.

The LRP team from I Field Force, working hand in hand with the 4th Infantry Division's 2nd Bde. in the Central Highlands, knew from the moment they left their helicopter just north of the Dak To-Kontum

Province line that they were in Communist-infested territory.

"We were dropped on a mountain top," said Sgt. Pete Lazcano, the team leader, "and as we moved to lower ground we ran across bunkers and foxholes. They were empty and appeared some weeks old."

"I was forced to keep the team on trails as we made our way down the mountain," the sergeant continued, "which is something we don't like to do. But the vegetation was so thick we had no choice."

As the team reached lower ground, fresher signs of the enemy began to show. The patrol ran into punji stakes and fresh-cut bamboo.

The team spent the night at the base of the mountain and the following morning continued moving southwest until they came across a trail heading east, up a nearby hill.

"The trail was hard-packed and looked well-used so we decided to check it out," said Lazcano. "But before going very far we attempted to call in to our base camp and found we had no communication with one unit."

With no communication, the team quickly got off the trail and set up positions about five yards into the thick jungle.

"We had been off the trail maybe five minutes when the VC began moving past, almost close enough to touch," said Sgt. Steven H. Hightower, the assistant team leader.

The team was in no position to initiate contact, so the men waited quietly for the enemy to pass. Only they didn't pass but walked up and down the trail a number of times.

According to the team, movement ceased about 30 minutes later. The LRP team then moved east onto higher and more open ground, where they could set up an ambush.

Still without radio communication, the LRP team planted their claymores and waited. Five hours later they began hearing movement again.

Hightower saw two heads move into the kill zone. When he gave the signal Lazcano detonated the Claymore. At the same time the patrol's Kit Carson scout, Hightower and Marr let fly with grenades.

As the LRP team was checking the bodies, they heard movement from their east and west. Apparently there were more VC in the area and after hearing the explosion they wanted to see what the commotion was about.

"I got the team moving toward higher ground right away," Lazcano said. "The RTO was on point so as soon as we got high enough we could get ammo and call for gunships and extraction."

"As I rounded a bend in the trail there were two VC right in front of me," reports Marr. "They had their rifles at sling arms and appeared to be out for a stroll. They were more surprised to see me than I was to see them. I shot one before he could get over the shock. The other one ran into the jungle."

When the team reached the summit of the hill they established radio communications and called for gunships as well as an extraction helicopter.

After Binh Tay 48

Kontum hails its troops

KONTUM — Returning from three weeks of hard fighting, soldiers of the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the ARVN 42nd Inf.

were greeted with a hero's welcome when they arrived here.

Both battalions had posted impressive records during the first three weeks of Operation Binh Tay 48. The total enemy killed reached 186 since the search and clear operation began Jan. 4 in the Central Highlands 25 miles southwest of here.

Equally impressive have been the many enemy caches captured during the operation.

Most of the soldiers had big smiles on their faces as they strained under the weight of their field packs and weapons. The people of Kontum, packed six-deep along the route of march, cheered and waved signs as the troops passed by.

Students, who had been dismissed from school for the

day, sang songs as the returning soldiers marched by. Many of the younger children had to be held back by guards as they attempted to join the line of march.

Young girls in white dresses hugged and kissed the infantrymen and placed brightly flowered wreaths around their necks.

Many of the young boys wore smaller versions of the 42nd Regiment uniform, given them by their older brothers and fathers.

Like soldiers in any army, the men of the 42nd Infantry are also husbands and fathers. When the march ended, they quickly returned to their homes. Last night, for the first time in three weeks, they enjoyed home-cooked dinners.



9th Inf Photo

ONE SLIP and this 9th Infantry Division soldier took an unexpected bath. Balance and skill are key items for negotiating Delta waterways.



25th Inf Photo

SLOW PROGRESS guarantees safe progress as this mine sweep team from the 2nd Bn., 34th Armor, 25th Infantry Division

leads an early morning convoy run through the Filhol plantation north of Cu Chi.

New postal system speeds first letters

LONG BINH — The Army postal system has started a new program to deliver mail to new arrivals as soon as they reach replacement companies.

Men being sent to Vietnam are now having included on their orders directions to have their mail sent to the Personal Mail Section APO 96381.

As each flight leaves CONUS for Vietnam a flight roster is

sent to the mail section. There a search is made to determine if anyone on the roster has mail waiting for them.

If they do their mail is delivered to them at one of their first formations at the 90th and 22nd Replacement Bns.

Until Christmas when the program started, newly arrived soldiers had to wait approximately 14 days for their first mail.



25th Inf Photo

ANOTHER MONTH COMPLETED, Spec. 4 Clyde Pless crosses it off on his helmet calendar. The 25th Infantry Division soldier is a medic with the 2nd Bn., 17th Inf.

Kick sand in Charlie's face

Beachcombers play rough

QUANG TRI — Beachcombers traditionally have been known as a rather lazy bunch, content to roam up and down the coastlines of the world, looking for any valuable or unusual flotsam carried in on the tides.

But today, on the northern-most beaches of the Republic of Vietnam, the men of the 1st Bn., 61st Inf., 1st Inf. Bde, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) are beachcombing for another, more deadly purpose. They are seeking out and tracking down the remnants of a Viet Cong battalion—one that for years has made the beaches and sand dune areas of Quang Tri Province its stamping grounds.

By day the heavily-armed personnel carriers and attached tanks of the 1st Bn., 77th Armor sweep the sandy stretches, searching for hidden bunkers, spider holes and tunnels that the enemy has built where there is seemingly no place to hide. On line, the infantrymen probe the sand with long poles, waiting for the poles to suddenly

sink into a hole that doesn't appear to be there, or feeling the "clunk" that tells them something is buried beneath the surface. At the same time, the tanks and personnel carriers flatten the many small hillocks in the area that frequently hide bunkers or arms or food caches.

At night, the same infantrymen and tankers quietly slip out of their fire bases and fan out over the sandy wastes to set up ambush sites along known trails. The harassed enemy cannot rest. By day he lies in his hole, dreading the roar of the approaching armor. At night he slips out of his hiding place in search of food or drink, and as many times as not, he hears the deadly crack of a bullet that is seeking him. Sometimes he never hears the crack. The American seems to be everywhere.

Not long ago, the Viet Cong and their North Vietnamese bosses were able to roam this area freely. It consists of not only barren beaches and sand dunes, some towering more than 80 feet high, but also of deep streams and canals, quicksand, seemingly endless miles of rice paddies, tombs and temples, and hundreds of tiny hamlets where they could easily find abundant food and shelter. The black-clad guerrillas were secure from all but powerful attacks from overwhelming mechanized, infantry and airborne forces. And then, likely

as not, he could slip away in the night. The frustrated French soldiers who fought here unsuccessfully in the Indochina war of 1950-1954, called the area the "Street Without Joy."

Today his large, main-force units have been destroyed, his shelter is gone. The people of the area no longer give him food or a place to rest. They are more likely to tell the American where he is hiding. His leaders are disappearing in numbers, with frightening regularity.

Last week he carefully buried his prized Chinese communist automatic rifle under a grave. Yesterday he watched the Americans, with their tanks and long poles, dig it up. This morning he found a Chieu Hoi pass. He read it with interest. Instead of throwing it away, he carefully folded it and put it in his pocket. If his leaders found him with it, it would mean death. But his leaders are no longer around. Maybe tomorrow he'll read it again.

The beachcombing units of the brigade are finding what they are looking for. In a 10-day period their ambushes claimed two Viet Cong lives, including a platoon leader. They captured 17, including a captain and several high ranking political cadre. And they deprived the enemy of 13 weapons. The beaches of Quang Tri Province are no longer the place for the Viet Cong and his cronies from the North to have-fun in the sun.

Cav scout job goes to the air

CU CHI — Years ago, the horse cavalry employed a handful of men to travel in front of the main unit. Their purpose—to scout the area ahead for possible enemy concentrations.

Today, the 1st Air Cavalry Division employs such men. Instead of riding horses and brandishing Winchester rifles, they use a more sophisticated means of travel and modern weapons. The purpose, though, is still the same — find the enemy.

In the division's 1st Bde, this job falls upon the men of the aviation platoon. Better known as the Brigade Scouts, they ride light observation helicopters (LOHs) equipped with mini-guns capable firing 4,000 rounds per minute and observers carrying M-40 machineguns. Smoke canisters are used to mark enemy positions. The mission, according to Maj. Robert Elton, the scout commander, is simple.

"Basically," he stated, "it is to conduct aerial reconnaissance for the infantry elements we are supporting."

While on a recent mission, a team of two LOHs spotted a Vietnamese male carrying a rake. Circling back to where the man had come from, the Skytroopers noticed a sandy area covered with fresh rake marks. The mini-guns blazed, blowing away a layer of sand and revealing an enemy bunker complex. A quick call to the infantry netted 13 enemy suspects.

"We don't go out to register kills," Elton explained. "We go out to find the enemy. That is our objective, and we have found numerous enemy troops. We let the infantry get the kills."

The scout operation is fairly simple. The two ships work together, with a lead ship looking for "Mr. Charles" and the wing ship acting as his cover should the first craft draw fire.

"The wing man flies behind and to the left of the lead ship," stated WO John Hewitt, who flew with the scouts for eight months. "If the lead ship draws fire, the wing man can usually observe where the fire came from," he continued. "The wing man then will bring the necessary firepower on the enemy position."

If the situation gets a bit too hot, the pilots have the alternative of calling in ground artillery or aerial rocket artillery gunships from the 2nd Bn., 20th Arty. This is usually enough to shake even veteran enemy troops.

Though the job has its obvious

dangers, the observers and pilot find it satisfying.

"It's a very rewarding job, because we're helping the ground units," explained Crosby. "We're doing something positive and it's a good feeling to know we're doing our part. Besides, if we get into a bind, the infantrymen will pull us out and many times, vice-versa."

The pilots and observers may take the risks, but a forgotten group of men keeps them flying. According to Staff Sgt. Merlin Dede, the maintenance supervisor, his men work from dusk to dawn and sometimes longer. "We are the troubleshooters and if there's a problem, we are usually capable of taking care of it," he said.

Bullet hits soldier, VC quits

AN KHE — A Viet Cong soldier had no choice but to drop his weapon and surrender in bewilderment after a bullet he fired bounced off a paratrooper of the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

The incident occurred after Cpl. Ronald K. Rosenberg and Sgt. William A. Finder had spotted some thatched roofed huts while moving up a hillside trail with his platoon of Co. A, 2nd Bn., 503rd Inf.

Expecting the village to be friendly, the two paratroopers, point men for the lead element of the company, walked directly into the clearing and heard laughing and talking in one of the huts.

While Finder looked into the hut, Rosenberg went around to the back and saw a pajama-clad VC grab his weapon and start to run. He shot the Viet Cong and began to search the village for others.

When he spun around he spotted a VC shooting at him.

"The bullet hit my ammo belt and pierced one of my magazines knocking me down," Rosenberg said. "When I got back up, the VC was so shocked he just threw up his hands."

"I couldn't figure it out either at the time because when you're hit that solidly you don't usually get up," he added, "but I wasn't asking any questions."

Boys give big for orphans

QUI NHON — When Spec. 4 Douglas Nelson of the 527th Personnel Service Co. received his weekly letter from his young stepbrother, Jeff, he was pleasantly surprised. Inside was a money order for \$5.04 with explicit instructions to donate the funds to a Catholic orphanage.

Jeff and ten of his close friends, all sixth graders, decided they wanted to help, so they sold their toys to raise money to help the Vietnamese.

"I was really surprised," said Nelson. "I thought it was great of those kids. You know \$5 is a lot of money to them."

Blondie



by Chic Young