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HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 7TH CAVALRY
1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMOBILE)
APO San Francisco, California 96490

9 December 1965

SUBJECT: After Action Report, IA DRANG Valley Operation 1st Battalion,
7th Cavalry 14-16 November 1965

TO: Commanding Officer
3d Brigade
1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)
APO US Forces 96490

I. GENERAL:

During this operation, I was the Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry. On 23 November 1965, I was promoted and turned over the battalion to my successor.

II. BACKGROUND:

A. On 10 November the battalion moved from the base camp at An Kha, coordinates BRA76476, by CV-2 to a forward airstrip and assembly area south of Pleiku, coordinates ZA198340. From there, all companies were shuttled the same day by UH-1D into a search and destroy operation in an area to the east of Plei Me, vicinity coordinates ZA2007 to ZA7606. We conducted saturation patrolling through the 12th with light contact by only Company A. We also conducted a civic action program supplying medical aid and USOM food to Mentagnard village, population 200, coordinates ZA237073. On the 12th, the Assistant Division Commander - A, during a visit to the battalion, indicated to the Brigade Commander that he had no objection to the latter sending a battalion into the IA DRANG Valley. This we took as an alert and began a map study. On 13 November, the battalion was moved on brigade orders to a new area of operations south and southwest of Plei Me. Once again saturation patrolling was conducted out of company bases throughout the day with no contact. Company B was airlifted after 1500 hours into the Brigade CP area as security, and for an immediate reaction force under Brigade control. It closed into position by 1800 hours.

B. At approximately 1700 hours, the Brigade Commander and I visited the Company A CP south of Plei Me. During the visit, the Brigade Commander gave me orders to execute an assault by helicopter into the IA DRANG Valley, north of CHU PONG Mountain early the next morning with a mission of conducting search and destroy operations

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through the 15th. The area of operations was pointed out on the map and he informed me that we would be supported from LZ FALCON, coordinates ZAO23032, by two batteries of 105mm howitzer artillery - one of which would be moved by air from PLEI ME early on the 14th prior to our assault.

C. I returned to my CP near Plei Ma; formulated a tentative plan; issued instructions to my staff; procured further details from 3d Brigade Headquarters and the supporting helicopter unit; and issued a warning order to my unit commanders, staff, and supporting elements. By 2200 hours, 13 November, all preparations had been accomplished which were possible without an actual air reconnaissance. Arrangements included an early morning airlift of Company B back to PLEI ME; directions to the commanders of A and C Companies to concentrate their elements at first light in the largest pick-up zone(s) in their respective sectors; and plans for a first light air recon by all key commanders and staff officers. A time of 0830 hours was set for issuance at my CP of the operation order.

D. At this time, the "fighting" strength of my lettered companies as they went into the operation was as follows:

	<u>NUMBER COMMITED TO OPERATION</u>		<u>TO&E</u>	
	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Men</u>
Co A	5	115	6	164
Co B	5	114	6	164
Co C	6	106	6	164
Co D	4	76	5	118

The shortages were primarily due to malaria and ETS discharges. Each company also had 3 - 5 men at base camp at An Khe as guards, sick, administrative retention, and base camp area development workers. There were 8 - 10 men on R and R or about going back to prepare for R and R.

III. OPERATIONS ON 14 NOVEMBER:

A. THE AIR RECON AND RESULTS:

(1) 14 November dawned bright and clear. Shortly after first light at 0630 hours, Company B was returned to battalion control at Plei Ma and began making final preparations for its role as the assault company. The Chinooks which had carried B company back were commencing to move Battery A, 1st Battalion, 21st Artillery to LZ FALCON as planned. The air recon party had assembled and after a

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brief orientation on the purpose of the recon, flight route, and items to look for, we took off in two UH-1D's escorted by two gun ships. The flight route is shown on the attached sketch (Tab A). We made one south to north pass at about 4500 feet actual; flew north past Duc Co, coordinates YAB45255, orbited five minutes, then flew south generally over the same route and at the same altitude, and returned to Plei Me. The air recon party included the Battalion Commander; S-3; Battalion Artillery Liaison Officer; Commanding Officer, Battery A, 1st Battalion, 21st Artillery; Commanding Officer B Company (Assault Company); Scout Section Leader, Troop C, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry; and the Commanding Officer, Company A, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion (Avn Co, 7th Special Forces, 1st Special Forces Group).

(2) During the air recon, several open areas were selected by members of the recon party as possible landing zones in and around the IA DRANG Valley. Upon return from the recon at about 0815 hours, we received a written Frag Order from Brigade which specifically defined the area of operations. The area is shown on the attached map (Tab B). I then received comments as to the LZ to be used. Three possibilities fell out of this discussion - LZ's TANGO, X-RAY, and YANKEE (See Tab B). TANGO was discarded as the primary LZ for being too tight, e.g. a "wall" - type LZ with tall trees around it, and for being too small - capacity of three to four UH-1D's. It was agreed that X-RAY and YANKEE could both probably accommodate eight UH-1D's at one landing. I tentatively decided on LZ X-RAY and prepared to issue my operation order based on that selection. Concurrently I dispatched the Cavalry Scout Section for a low-level flight up the IA DRANG Valley area to gain detailed information on X-RAY, YANKEE, the surrounding terrain, and to look for signs of enemy activity. The Cavalry Section returned in approximately 40 minutes with the information that YANKEE was spotted with high stumps and would be difficult to use as a landing zone. The Cavalry Section confirmed that LZ X-RAY could take eight to ten UH-1D's at one time. No signs of enemy activity were detected around X-RAY, and the Cavalry Section was not fired on during its low-level recon. Several trails were picked up and their locations were noted. The Cavalry Section also reported seeing commo wire on a trail north of X-RAY which led east and west. No trails led through LZ X-RAY. I made my decision to land at X-RAY with TANGO and YANKEE as alternates to be used only on my order. I then issued an oral operation order. Reduced to writing, it is attached at Tab C. Present to hear the order were all my Company Commanders; the battalion staff and special staff; the lift Company Commander and his Liaison Officer to the battalion, the Cavalry Scout Section Leader; CO, Battery A, 1st Battalion, 21st Artillery; and the 3d Brigade S-3. The Brigade Commander arrived during the issuance of the order and was separately briefed shortly thereafter. It was then reported to me that the two artillery batteries were in position, and I set a time of 1030 hours for the assault landing with the 20 minute tube artillery preparation to be timed to be

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Commander secured the landing zone by having one of his platoon leaders dispatch his squads into different areas, 50 to 100 meters off the landing zone to reconnoiter, while he retained the balance of his company concealed in a clump of trees and high grass near the center of the LZ area as an offensive striking force. At approximately 1120 hours, one of the recon squads took a prisoner. I immediately took my S-2 and the Vietnamese, Mr. Nik, and went to the location and questioned him. He was unarmed, dressed in dirty khaki shirt and trousers with a serial number on one of the shirt epaulets, and carried an empty canteen. He stated that he had eaten only bananas for five days, and that there were three battalions on the mountain above us who wanted very much to kill Americans but had been unable to find them. He stated that he was in the North Vietnamese Army. The B Company Commander was directed to intensify his reconnaissance in the area where the prisoner had been taken (near the mountain), and to prepare to assume the C Company mission of searching the lower portion of the mountain area with emphasis on the finger and draw to the northwest. My command chopper was called in and the prisoner was taken back immediately for interrogation at the Brigade CP. By then, 1210 hours, sufficient elements of Company A had landed (unopposed) to take over the LZ security mission from Company B. Also elements of the reconnoitering platoon of B Company had made contact with scattered enemy riflemen near the mountain. The B Company Commander was ordered to assume the C Company searching mission; to move up the finger leading down towards X-RAY; and to develop the situation. B Company moved out, and I directed the commander of A Company to prepare to move up into the same area on order when Company C had arrived in X-RAY in sufficient strength to take over LZ security. At that time, 1230 hours we were taking no fire in the LZ. Around 1245 hours, lead elements of Company B began to engage in a fire fight of moderate intensity. Shortly afterwards at approximately 1330 hours, Commanding Officer, Company B reported that he was being attacked heavily by at least two companies of enemy and that his right platoon was in danger of being surrounded and cut off from the rest of the company by a numerically superior force. The fire fight became intense. Also a few rounds of 60 and 81 mm mortar fire began falling in the LZ and on B Company. B Company also received some rocket fire.

(2) Shortly after the heavy fire fight began, the last platoon of A Company and the Company Commander and lead elements of C Company landed. The Commanding Officer, Company A was ordered to move his company up on the left of B Company; to establish physical contact with it; to protect the B Company left flank; and to send one platoon up to B Company to assist B Company in getting to the B Company platoon which was in danger of being cut off. The Commanding Officer, Company C was ordered to take up a blocking position off the landing zone to the south and southwest to prevent the LZ from being overrun from that direction, and to give protection to A Company's left flank. I called the S-3 in the command chopper and told him to

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have my Forward Air Controller bring in air strikes beginning on the lower fringe of the mountain foothills and work over the mountain and enemy approaches to the LZ from the west and south in that priority. The same instructions were to be given to the ARA and to the artillery. Priority of fires were to go to fire missions and requests from companies. When not firing in response to a specific request, fires were to be poured in as directed above. The Company Commanders, forward observers, the forward air controller, and the artillery Liaison officer were all having difficulty getting coordinated as to the locations of the forward elements of the companies. There were no well-defined terrain features to help and the scrub and trees all looked alike. The air was heavy with smoke and dust. B Company had more problems than any other company since it had one platoon separated from the rest of the company in the jungle, and could not precisely pin point its location for purposes of close-in fire support. The platoon was in a moving fire-fight against a force of 75-100 enemy. The fact that this platoon was forward of B and A Companies delayed delivery of effective fires in support of these two companies. However, using the technique of "walking" fires down the mountain from the south and west, fires were placed where they gave some help to these two companies - especially Company A. I specifically defined several draws leading down from the mountain, and wanted fires placed on enemy mortar positions sighted or suspected out to 81 mm mortar range. Two air strikes were also brought in on the valley floor to the northwest on and near the location of the suspected enemy battalion reported by higher headquarters the previous day. At this point, the most critical period of the afternoon began.

(3) The A Company Commander sent up on platoon to B Company as directed. This platoon headed out, became engaged, and ended up on the right of B Company rather than the left. This was confusing to both the A Company Commander and myself until later in the afternoon when the location of this platoon became sorted out. The B Company Commander pushed out in an effort to reach his platoon which by that time had been completely surrounded. B Company (-) plus the A Company platoon was able to get to within 75 meters of the cut-off platoon but could get no further. The A Company platoon made it closer than any other element. B Company was taking moderate casualties. Concurrently as Company A (-) was heading up towards the left and rearmost elements of B Company, it made heavy contact with a large force of at least one PAVN Company which was driving in and along a dry creek bed parallel to the western edge of the LZ. These enemy were headed directly towards the left rear of Company B. A very heavy fire fight immediately broke out. A Company was taking light casualties, and extracting a heavy toll from the enemy. One of the A Company platoons was in such a position that it was able to bring close-in flanking fire on 50 - 70 PAVN as they continued moving across their front. Many of them were killed, as when the lead few were dropped, the remainder kept coming right into

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the field of fire. A Company took two prisoners who were later evacuated to Brigade.

(4) Just as the A Company fire fight broke out, the last elements of C Company and the lead elements of D Company landed. As they landed, the helicopters took numerous hits but none were shot down. The C Company Commander directed his elements into position along side his other elements which had landed previously. Within five minutes, a force of 175 - 200 enemy, headed for the LZ, ran headlong into C Company. C Company held them off, killing numerous of them in the process as they continued trying to get to the landing zone. One prisoner was taken and evacuated. The C Company action continued for approximately 1 1/2 hours until the enemy, disorganized and decimated, pulled off under heavy friendly artillery and air fires, dragging many of his dead and wounded.

(5) Concurrent with all of the above, as the first elements of D Company landed (with the last elements of C Company), they immediately became engaged in the fire fight near A Company. One of the D Company Commander's radio operators was KIA in the lift Company Commander's helicopter before he could dismount and the door gunner and one pilot were wounded. I stopped the other eight UH-1D's from landing by radio. The D Company elements consisted of the command group, part of the mortar platoon and the antitank platoon. The D Company Commander led them towards the sound of the heavy firing in the A Company area. They made it to the stream-bed area; immediately engaged 25 - 30 PAVN headed down the stream-bed and killed most of them. A Company elements killed the rest. During this fight, the D Company Commander and Mortar Platoon Leader were seriously wounded but continued to fire their rifles personally killing several PAVN. After the enemy were stopped, the D Company Commander alternately lost consciousness and came to. He turned over the command of the company to the Antitank Platoon Sergeant, a Staff Sergeant, E-6. Dispositions of units at that time are shown at Tab F. The Commanding Officer, C Company made physical contact with this Staff Sergeant and with my approval directed the D Company elements to the left of C Company tying in tightly around the southeastern edge of the LZ off in the brush.

(6) By then we were taking numerous casualties throughout the battalion, and it was apparent that we were fighting 500 - 600 enemy. These were only the ones we were in contact with and I figured others were headed our way. I requested the Brigade Commander to send me another rifle company. He immediately approved this request. In fact I later learned that he had already alerted B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry and was assembling it at pick-up zones.

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(7) During this fire fight, the Cavalry Scout Section was given specific areas to reconnoiter. They concentrated on routes of egress down the mountain to the northwest and southwest, and also approaches from the north and northwest on the valley floor. The Cavalry reported results to me on my command net. At this time, approximately 1500 hours, I decided that it was necessary to continue to land the remainder of the tactical elements of the battalion consisting of the recon platoon, 3 UH1D loads of C Company men, and the XO and 1st Sergeant of D Company. Although the eastern portion of the landing zone was under enemy fire it had slacked off considerably due to the C and D Company actions. These elements landed safely. I turned D Company over to the Company XO and directed him to dispose the recon platoon around the north and east fringe of the LZ for LZ security and as battalion reserve. The C Company Commander had previously, with my approval, set up all rifle company mortars on the eastern fringe of the LZ. The D Company Commander was directed to add his mortars to them and take over their control from a central FDC. Principal direction of fire was toward A and B Companies. The mortarmen also had the mission of LZ defense to their east. All went quickly into position.

D. THE 2ND ATTACK TO REACH THE SURROUNDED 2D PLATOON COMPANY B:

(1) The time was now approximately 1545 hours and the disposition of the opposing forces was as shown at Tab G. The first attempt by Companies A and B to reach the cut-off platoon had been stopped by approximately 300 enemy. We were taking moderate casualties especially among leaders and radionmen. These enemy were aggressive and they came off the mountain in large groups. They were well-camouflaged and took excellent advantage of cover and concealment. They were good shots. They were armed with numerous automatic weapons and small "potato-masher" grenades. Even after being hit several times in the chest, many continued firing and moving for several more steps before dropping dead. I ordered Companies A and B to evacuate their casualties; withdraw under covering fires out of close contact; and prepared for a coordinated attack supported by heavy preparatory fires to get back the surrounded platoon. Meanwhile Company C was continuing to hold off the enemy to their front with the help of some magnificent artillery and close air support. The Battalion S-2 was wounded and later shot again and killed during this enemy attack. The surrounded platoon of B Company stood off numerous PAVN efforts to overrun it. Carrying their dead, their wounded, and their equipment the men of the platoon established a small 25 meter wide perimeter on a slight rise of ground and redistributed their ammunition under heavy enemy fire.

(2) At approximately 1620 hours, the second attack by Companies A and B to reach the surrounded platoon began. This attack was preceded by artillery and ARA preparatory fires. Between the first and second attacks and despite heavy fires from artillery and air, the enemy had moved well up towards A and B Companies. Some were in trees.

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Company B, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry to C Company as C Company had a wider sector to defend. The recon platoon was placed in battalion reserve. Dispositions were as shown at Tab A.

E. OTHER ACTIVITIES DURING THE AFTERNOON:

(1) While all of the above described actions were in progress, numerous other activities were going on. A major problem was care and evacuation of the wounded. Early in the afternoon, the battalion surgeon, medical supplies and four aid station personnel were brought in. They arrived around 1400 hours and under heavy fire treated the wounded in my CP area. I did not call in Med Evac helicopters too frequently because most of the afternoon the landing zone was under fire. At about 1330 hours a small two-chopper open area was selected in the northeastern portion of X-RAY, as my supply and evacuation link to the rear. This we had to defend at all costs. This area is shown at Tab A. I requested the helicopter lift company commander to evacuate the wounded, bring in supplies, and set up a system whereby every helicopter coming to X-RAY with troops, with supplies, or for wounded would call me for landing instructions. This system worked very well; throughout the afternoon and early evening, numerous UH-1D's were brought in - each from a specific direction at a prescribed altitude to land at a specific place and go out on a prescribed heading. I have the highest admiration, praise and respect for the outstanding professionalism and courage of the UH-1D pilots and crews who ran a gauntlet of enemy fire time after time to help us. They never refused to come in; they followed instructions beautifully; they were great. We in turn called them in when fire was the lightest and tried to have everything ready for each landing to keep them on the ground a minimum time. None were shot down and destroyed although most of them took hits. Two aircraft were brought in which did not get out. One received enemy fire in the engine and had to land in an open area just off the northern portion of the LZ; the other clipped a few tree tops with the main rotor on landing in the LZ and had to be left. Crews of both aircraft were immediately lifted out by other helicopters. Both downed helicopters were immediately secured by elements of Company D without orders per battalion SOP - they being the nearest troops. Both were slightly damaged only and were slung out two days later by CH-47 Chinooks. During the three day battle, those were the only two downed helicopters. By 1350 hours, it had become apparent that we would need a night landing capability - that I needed a pathfinder team to assist me on the ground. I called the A Company, 229th lift company commander with a request for pathfinders and was gratified to learn that he had anticipated the requirement. They arrived shortly thereafter and with engineer demolitionists cleared the LZ into a fairly safe two-chopper landing area and set up lights to be turned on if necessary for night landings. Although under enemy observation and fire, it was less vulnerable than the southern portion of X-RAY where we were still cleaning out enemy riflemen.

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artillery fire. Several of the wounded men of the platoon continued to fight. The second attack, at approximately 0345 hours was preceded by bugle calls around the platoon and up on the mountain 200-400 meters above the platoon. I requested and received a TAC Air strike in the area above the platoon. It was conducted under Air Force flareship illumination. It was right on target and greatly assisted in breaking up the second attack on the surrounded platoon. This was the only illumination used all night since it exposed the men in the surrounded platoon as well as the foxholes in the open areas of the battalion perimeter. Also, there was a fairly bright moon from 2315 onwards. When day-light broke, numerous enemy dead were seen around the surrounded platoon. These were only the dead who could be seen by the men as they lay prone in their positions. Other bodies were possibly concealed by the high grass which dotted the area. During the night, the men of the platoon saw and heard the enemy dragging off many dead and wounded.

D. First light came at 0630 hours. I had tentatively decided on my plan of attack to reach the surrounded platoon while simultaneously securing the perimeter. I directed by A, B, and C Company Commanders to meet me at the C Company CP to finalize the plan and to receive my orders since that was the best point of vantage. The time was approximately 0640 hours. I also directed each company to check around their positions carefully for infiltrators and snipers.

V. ENEMY ATTACKS OF 15 NOVEMBER:

A. At approximately 0650 hours the recon elements of the 1st and 2d platoons of C Company (the two left platoons) which were searching and screening approximately 100 - 200 meters forward of their positions began receiving rifle fire from their front and left front. They returned the fire and began pulling back to their defensive positions. At this time, they were attacked by a force of 2 - 3 Companies. The enemy was well-camouflaged; crouching low; and in some cases crawling on hands and knees. The recon parties from the two platoon positions right of the company CP encountered no enemy but pulled back immediately to their defensive positions. An intense small arms fire fight broke out. The weight of the enemy attack was directed at the left portion of the C Company sector. The recon parties of the 1st and 2d platoons began taking casualties including some KIA as they pulled back. Other men were hit trying to get to them. Some were recovered; however, by then - 0730 hours the enemy had moved almost to the perimeter foxholes despite taking severe losses from artillery, mortar, and close air. Savage close-range fighting went on for the next two hours in the C Company sector - primarily in the left three platoon areas and forward of the Company CP. There was considerable hand-to-hand fighting. For example, the 1st platoon leader was found later KIA and five dead PAVN around him in and near his CP foxhole. One man was found KIA with his hands at the throat of a dead PAVN. Numerous enemy bodies were found intermingled with the killed and wounded of C Company. At approximately 0715 hours, the enemy attacked the D Company sector near where the

mortars were emplaced. This put the perimeter under attack from two directions. Artillery, Aerial Rocket Artillery, and TAC Air were called in and their fires were accurate and extremely effective. ARA and TAC Air was also used to ring the perimeter with fires. Priority of all fires was given to C Company. The artillery FO with C Company was pinned down by rifle fire in the company CP area. Hence the artillery was adjusted by my artillery liaison officer from my CP. There was good observation.

B. At approximately 0715 hours, the Commanding Officer, C Company requested reinforcements. I took a platoon from Company A (it being the closest to C Company) and dispatched it for the C Company CP area. It came under fire while moving over the open ground, lost 2 KIA and WIA, but made it to the right center of the C Company sector. At about 0745 hours, the A Company sector was attacked by what was later determined to be a small force. We were now being attacked from three different directions with firing of equal intensity in all three areas. Grazing fire from enemy small arms and automatic weapons was criss-crossing the interior of the perimeter into the landing zone, battalion CP area and aid station. Twelve to fifteen HE explosions of either enemy mortar or rocket fire occurred in the perimeter. Several men were wounded in and near the CP by small arms fire. One was KIA. I alerted my reserve for probable commitment in the C Company area or D Company Sector - both of which contingencies we had planned for the night before. I radioed the brigade commander, informed him of the situation, and in view of the losses being sustained by C Company and the heavy attack, I requested an additional reinforcing company. He had already alerted Company A, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry the previous night and assembled it with helicopters ready for movement. My request was approved but I did not bring the company in at that time due to heavy fire in the LZ. See Tab I for dispositions of opposing forces.

C. The heavy fire fight continued only in the C and D Company Sectors. At one time, approximately 0800 hours, the anti-tank platoon was heavily engaged and the LZ was severely threatened. The mortar men were firing both their mortars and their rifles and taking heavy small arms fire. One mortar was hit and put out of action by enemy fire. I committed my reserve, the Recon Platoon, which moved into the left of the C Company sector; headed towards D Company and cleaned it out. They joined up with the rest of D Company and from then on throughout the rest of the attack, that portion of the perimeter was under control. This permitted me to take the risk of commencing to bring in A Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry. Although the LZ was under fire, it was reduced somewhat. I needed A Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry in, so that I could reinforce or possibly counterattack or block in or behind the C Company sector. I ordered the commander, B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry to pull one additional rifle platoon plus his command group off his line; turn the sector over to his remaining platoon; assemble the Company (-) dispersed near my CP; and prepare, on order, to reinforce,

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the battalion reserve in the center of the perimeter and A Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry was in position in the former B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry sector.

VI. THE RELIEF OF THE SURROUNDED 2ND PLATOON, COMPANY B, AND REDISPOSITION OF THE PERIMETER:

A. Date in the afternoon of 14 November, the brigade Commander had moved the 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry, into LZ Victor. At approximately 0800 hours it headed, on foot, for LZ X-RAY. See Tab J for routes used. At 1205 hours, it closed into X-RAY. The Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry and I coordinated on the disposition of forces. It was agreed that his A and B Companies which were south and west of LZ X-RAY on the lower slopes of the mountain headed northwest plus B Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry would conduct a coordinated attack behind artillery, ARA, TAC Air preparation to relieve the surrounded platoon. The route of attack was as shown at Tab K. It was agreed that I would assume operational control of Company B, 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry and be in overall control of all units at LZ X-RAY plus responsibility for its defense. B Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry moved forward of D Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry on the perimeter. All 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry mortars went into position and registered. D Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry (minus the mortar platoon) was added to C Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry in reserve. The attack by A and C Companies of the 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry and B Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry under control of Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry jumped off at 1315 hours. There was little enemy resistance. B Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry reached the surrounded platoon at 1510 hours. At the location there were 8 KIA, 12 WIA and 7 unwounded. The platoon still had ammo left and were in good morale. The wounded were evacuated and all units disposed and dug in for the night. Dispositions were as shown at Tab L. Ammunition, water, and rations were brought in and distributed. The dead were all evacuated.

VII. ENEMY NIGHT ATTACK, 0400-0630 HOURS, 16 NOV:

A. At approximately 0100 hours, B Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry was probed by 5 enemy. Two were killed and the other three dispersed. The moon was up at 2320 hours and there were no clouds. Fire discipline, as during the previous night, was excellent. All aiming stake lights on the mortars were extinguished, and no mortar fire was permitted, as during the previous night, without approval from me. All fires were coordinated by my Artillery Liaison Officer. Continuous, close-in H and I fires were conducted all around the perimeter. Some were placed on the mountainside, and firing in two areas resulted in a series of secondary explosions.

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B. At approximately 0400 hours, the enemy began probing the B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry sector. At 0422 hours a force of 250 - 300 enemy attacked B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry in the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry sector. The route of attack was from the southeast as shown at Tab M. Flareship illumination was called for and continuous until 0545 hours. The attack was beaten off by small arms and artillery fires. At 0431 hours another attack by 200 enemy came in on B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry. Each time a flare would light up, the enemy would hit the ground or fall back into the cover and concealment offered by the high grass and trees. The artillery took a heavy toll. There were four batteries firing. The PAVN could be seen dragging off numerous bodies. By 0503 hours, the weight of his attack had shifted more to the southwest with approximately 100 enemy attacking. This was repulsed by 0535 hours. At 0550 hours, the flareship ran out of flares. Artillery illumination was then employed. The mortars of both battalions had been firing HE since the attack began. Mortar illumination was then permitted. At 0627 hours, another attack came directly towards the CP. At 0641 hours the enemy had been beaten off and was dragging off bodies under fire. B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry had performed magnificently, and had suffered only 6 lightly wounded. During the attack, two separate resupply runs of ammo were made by the Recon Platoon, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry under fire and one by the XO and radio operators of B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry.

C. At 0641 hours, orders were given for all men on the perimeter to spray the trees and the anthills and bushes forward and over their positions at 0655 hours for two minutes to kill infiltrators, snipers, etc. Immediately upon firing, a force of 30 - 50 PAVN exposed themselves 150 meters forward of Company A, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry and began firing their weapons. Apparently the "mad minute" free spraying, prematurely triggered a possible enemy attack. HE and VT artillery was brought in and the attack was beaten off in twenty minutes. The tactic of spray firing accounted for 6 PAVN dead. One hung from a tree forward of the left platoon of B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry. Another dropped out of a tree immediately forward of the B Company CP. One PAVN was killed about one hour later attempting to climb down a tree and escape. My company commanders reported to me that the men liked this spraying. In addition to killing enemy, apparently it affords a release of tension built up through the night, and clears any doubts as to enemy nearby. At 0716 hours, a cautious and deliberate sweep was made by Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry and the Recon platoon, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry throughout the interior and fringes of the LZ. I ordered this conducted on hands and knees to search for friendly casualties and PAVN infiltrators in the high elephant grass. The trees were also searched. There were negative results.

D. At 0810 hours, all units on the perimeter were ordered to coordinate with their flank units, and prepare to move out on a search

and clear sweep 500 meters commencing in order. The movement began at 0955 hours, however, after moving 50 - 75 meters B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry came under fire. One platoon leader was seriously wounded. All movement was stopped. B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry pulled back to the perimeter foxholes and close-in artillery and TAC Air was called in. We then moved back out; eliminated all resistance and policed the area. 27 more PAVN were killed on this sweep. Enemy dead were lying throughout the area. I saw massive evidence of dead and wounded evacuation -- blood, body fragments, bloody garments, etc. We also brought in three friendly KIA. Numerous enemy weapons were collected. Many were seen which had been fragmented by fire.

E. At approximately 0930 hours, the first elements of the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry (-) began arriving at X-RAY. They closed at approximately 1200 hours. At 1040 hours, the Brigade Commander ordered me to move the battalion; Company B, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry; and the 3d Platoon, A Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry by UH-1D to FALCON LZ, then to Camp Holloway at Pleiku for two days of rest and reorganization. He ordered me to relieve my elements on line with elements of the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry and the 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry. This I did. However, before moving B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, I had them conduct one final lateral sweep across their front out to 150 meters. This was the scene of extremely heavy action and I wanted the battlefield thoroughly policed. The extraction by UH-1D was completely successful, and was covered throughout by artillery and TAC Air delivered around X-RAY, on the flight routes in and out, and on the slopes of the mountain. There was no enemy fire at any time during the extraction. The choppers were not brought in until aircraft loads were spotted on the LZ. Hence the UH-1Ds were only on the ground a few seconds. Concurrently with troop extraction, excess supplies, enemy weapons, casualty gear and weapons, and casualties were evacuated. Enemy hand grenades, ammo, anti-tank weapons, etc were placed in a large hole and arrangements were made with CO, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry for demolition by his engineer teams. Many other enemy weapons had previously been destroyed elsewhere in the battle area. By 1456 hours all elements of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry; B Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry and the 3d Platoon, A Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry had been extracted from X-RAY bound for LZ Falcon. By 1830 hours all elements had left LZ FALCON by air and closed into Camp Holloway, vicinity of Pleiku.

VIII. ENEMY, FRIENDLY CASUALTIES, CAPTURED:

EQUIPMENT

A. ENEMY:

Killed, body count - 634
Killed, wounded (Est) - 1215
Captured, evacuated - 6

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(2) When a unit gets into an objective area, as soon as possible after landing, artillery fires should be brought in. This will maybe kill some PAVN nearby and certainly will cut down time on target when a fire mission on known enemy is called for.

(3) Aerial rocket artillery is extremely effective especially if the pilots knew the exact location of Friendly. It has a tremendous shock effect on the enemy. The thing about ARA which makes it at times more effective than artillery is the fact that it does not have to be seen by ground observers to be adjusted. If the front lines or a friendly position is marked and can be recognized by the pilots, quick, accurate fire support is the result.

(4) The LAW was effective against the anthills behind which the PAVN were hiding. Training on use of LAWS must be emphasized.

(5) If PAVN are encountered close-in during a friendly attack, the best solution to an attack may be to back up under artillery and ARA, let the artillery and ARA work the area over and then start again, loading off with plenty of M-79s in the trees and grass and LAWS into the anthills.

(6) Whenever illumination was in the air many of the enemy ceased firing.

(7) Careful placement of M-79 men should be emphasized in order to give them the best possible fields of fire. They must always be on the lookout for enemy in trees. It was found that the M-79's were extremely effective against enemy in trees as well as troops in the open. M-79's must be fired into trees and the high grass even when no enemy are seen.

(8) In this operation all mortars were combined under a central FDC. This was very satisfactory. The mortars were very effective. Mortar illumination firing was carefully controlled at battalion level. The mortar illumination round has a very high dud rate and it would take many rounds to provide a battalion perimeter illumination for one hour. Therefore it was used to fill the gap for illumination between the artillery and the flareship. The mortars alone could not have come close to providing the desired amount of illumination.

(9) Artillery, TAC Air, and ARA can be used at the same time without loss of aircraft or effectiveness. The ARA and TAC Air flew perpendicular to the artillery gun-target line in these cases where they simultaneously struck the same target areas. Other striking aircraft flew parallel to the gun-target line and beyond it. This called for close teamwork between the FAC and the artillery liaison officer.

(10) Artillery must be used against possible avenues of reinforcement as well as on the enemy in either an attack or a defense. Close-in continuous defensive H and I fires are a must in a defensive situation where the enemy is known to be present even if he is not attacking.

(11) Great emphasis should be placed on the ability of all personnel down to and including fire team leaders to adjust artillery and mortar fire.

(12) Each platoon must carry many colored smoke grenades and a panel for marking friendly lines and landing areas.

(13) The technique of having all units on the perimeter throw a colored smoke grenade on order greatly helped TAC Air and ARA to locate the perimeter.

C. MOVEMENT

(1) Movement must be cautiously aggressive. The enemy must be pinned down by fire. Small unit, squad sized fire and movement must be conducted to perfection. This is extremely important. If not conducted correctly, men will get hit and the problem is then compounded when other men stop firing to try to recover casualties. Then they also get hit in many cases and soon, combat effectiveness of the squad, platoon, etc. is in danger of being lost. In this connection, when enemy contact has been made or is strongly suspected, recon by fire or actual fire and movement should be conducted to forestall the enemy firing first. This is particularly important for a unit moving up alongside a unit which is in contact and in a fire fight.

(2) Platoon and company fire and maneuver must be conducted to perfection. Flanks must be secure. Open flanks can be secured to a degree by fire support. Squads and platoons must be tied together as close as the situation permits. The tighter the better against the PAVN, as he will hole up in concealed firing positions, let friendly go by, then open up.

(3) Close-in artillery, ARA, and TAC Air front, rear, and both sides is a great help in moving through an area where there are known enemy. This normal but sometimes overlooked.

(4) When companies conduct sweep and clear operations together out of a perimeter, or over a certain route, battalion must check on the company formations to be used to insure that the terrain will be adequately covered and the companies are properly coordinated and fitted to the terrain and the enemy situation.

D. TECHNIQUES:

(1) The technique of holding a company (-) as an offensive striking force while recon elements of one platoon check specific areas out 50-100 meters from the landing zone worked out very well in this case. For one thing until the assault unit is actually on the ground and sees and feels the terrain and the environment, the commander of the unit charged with LZ security does not finally know which areas he will check out in priority. Also and most important, the assembled company (-) enables the battalion commander to hit any enemy attack quickly with a controlled unit. In this operation we were also able to move quickly with Company B to develop the contact made by one of its platoons as soon as Company A had sufficient force to take over the LZ security mission. In retrospect, the fact that Company B was in a posture for a fast move off the landing zone undoubtedly gave us the jump on the PAVN. Had not B Company surprised them with their aggressive move up the finger, we might well have been fighting the PAVN from the fringes of the LZ with our backs on it -- and the enemy in turn would have had good fields of fire on the incoming helicopters carrying the last elements of A Company and all of C and D Companies. I feel that the fact that we had first B Company, then A Company, off the landing zone moving against the PAVN, then C Company in a good blocking position took the initiative away from him. From then on, for three days and two nights, he was reacting to our presence.

(2) At night, units must form tight perimeters, use Claymore mines, trip flares and dig in. The use of outposts and listening posts depends largely on the terrain and the enemy situation. In this operation, it would have been suicidal as the cover and concealment afforded the enemy too many opportunities to take the outguards by stealth. Camouflaged foxholes with cleared fields of fire are recommended. Normal, but sometimes hard to execute under fire.

(3) In a perimeter defense, it is necessary to check the front with small recon parties at first light and periodically through the day for 100-200 meters to clear out infiltrators, police the battlefield, and to insure that the enemy is not massing for an attack. This action should be preceded by having all troops on the perimeter spray the trees, grass, and anthills to their front and overhead at a specified time for two-three minutes. When the recon elements screen to the front, it should be preceded by artillery and recon by fire, Air Cav Scouts overhead can assist by observation. Units should move as in the attack with fire and movement. All men must give the enemy the capability of being to the front and overhead as infiltrators, snipers, or massing for an attack.

(4) The battalion command group must carry a 292 antenna in on the assault and set it up as soon as possible. D Company, my

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alternate CP, carried one in on the assault -- set it up, and it was invaluable.

E. SUPPLY, SUPPORT, SERVICES:

(1) The minimum amount of gear should be carried into an assault. This should be one meal, a poncho, two canteens of water, salt tablets, and plenty of ammunition.

(2) Casualties are a critical problem. When fire is pinning down individuals, one casualty will cost one or two more men attempting to get to him. Heavy cover fire must be employed to try and cover the attempt to recover the wounded men and get him out of the danger area. Leaders at all levels in contact under fire must act cautiously in getting casualties out. I lost many leaders killed and wounded while recovering casualties. Wounded must be pulled back to some type of covered position and then treated. Troops must not get so concerned with casualties that they forget the enemy and their mission. Attempting to carry a man out requires up to four men as bearers which can hurt a unit at a critical time.

(3) Evacuation of casualties from the areas of contact in this action was a problem. TO&E litter bearers would have been a big help. As it turned out, fighting strength had to be used to carry out a wounded man (3-4 men required) or to assist many walking wounded. (one man at least required in many cases).

(4) When a man is wounded or killed, his weapon and some of his equipment get separated from him in many cases. An S-4 representative - officer or NCO with assistants, must be present at least in the battalion forward aid station and at the collecting company at Forward Support. Some of our equipment was evacuated with men all the way to Qui Nhon. Also we had many M-16's shot up and had to have replacements in the area. Therefore we kept a lot of weapons in the battle area for re-issue. When we were pulled out we brought all excess weapons and equipment with us. Many enemy weapons which were captured and sent out with friendly KIA and WIA were never seen again. The unit commander fighting the battle in the objective area loses control of equipment, friendly and enemy, once it leaves the forward area by helicopter. A more effective "backstop" system must be set up to catch this gear and control it when it arrives at various unloading points in the rear.

(5) Rations are no problem. Few men eat much when in a heavy action; however, water is extremely critical. It must be present in quantity particularly when there is no stream source available.

(6) The pathfinder team was tremendous. Until they could get in around 1630 hours, 14 November, all incoming aircraft had to be

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guided in and out by the battalion commander on the battalion command net. A pathfinder team should go into every battalion-sized assault.

(7) It took time to reload M-16 magazines one round at a time. In the heavy action we encountered, this took excessive time at critical periods. It was particularly critical during the enemy night attack. Also it was difficult to keep track of empty magazines in a heavy fire fight. The solution may be an expendable, plastic type magazine which is resupplied to the riflemen fully loaded in a bandoleer as was the old M-1 clip of eight rounds. Also, the present M-14 ammo pouch makes crawling on the stomach difficult.

(8) The individual soldier must become at least as good as the PAVN in camouflage techniques and use of terrain and foliage to cover and conceal his movements. This must be emphasized.

F. THE PAVN ENEMY:

(1) He appeared to be well-trained. He was aggressive. He was equipped with a preponderance of automatic weapons and plenty of ammunition. He carried 3 - 5 Chinese potato masher hand grenades. He carried a softball-sized wad of cooked rice, most of them carried a bed roll consisting of a piece of waterproof plastic and a hammock. His weapons were well maintained.

(2) He was an expert at camouflage and used every bit of cover and concealment to perfection. With only small arms, mortars, and antitank weapons he obviously sought to close with us in strength quickly-before we could discover him - possibly to render our fire support less effective and certainly to overwhelm us and force us to fight on his terms. Without much overhead fire support, he probably has to fall back on expert camouflage techniques, attacks in mass, infiltrators, and stay-behind killer parties.

(3) He was a deadly shot. In caring for my men who had been killed and wounded, I was struck by the great number who had been shot in the head and upper part of the body -- particularly in the head. He definitely aimed for the leaders -- the men who were shouting, pointing, talking on radios. He also aimed for the men carrying radios. He also appeared to concentrate on men wearing insignia of rank -- particularly non-commissioned officer with stripes on their arms. In this war, I question if it is necessary, possibly even foolish, or inviting fire, for non-commissioned officers to wear insignia of their grade -- or any enlisted man for that matter. Within the small units, all men know their leaders. In base camp the leaders should wear their insignia. On operations against the enemy, they should wear clean-sleeve fatigues.