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initially shot down were later recovered and could become operable after repair. <sup>65/</sup> Total losses to the 1st ACD were 33 KIA, 248 WIA, and 2 MIA. <sup>66/</sup>

Operation THAYER I was supported by a total of 222 TAC air missions comprising 425 sorties. These sorties expended 232.5 tons of bombs, 69.5 tons of napalm, 800 pounds of WP, 847 rockets, and 54 tons of CBU. Eight ARC LIGHT strikes produced 45 B-52 sorties which dropped 702 tons of bombs and six plane loads of BLU-3B. <sup>67/</sup> Airlift was accomplished by 27 C-130 sorties and 42 C-123 sorties. <sup>68/</sup>

Few of the more than 400 TAC air sorties were flown as immediate strikes in support of troops in contact and, as a result, KBA was almost non-existent, especially since many of the strikes were used for H&I in areas of heavy foliage and trees. A great many sorties were also expended in LZ preps which did not produce significant results, since the enemy was apparently taken by surprise and did not challenge the 1st ACD in their LZ deployments. Most of these conditions, along with the additional factor of bad weather, continued to exist through Operation IRVING and denied evidence of significant results from the massive employment of airpower. <sup>69/</sup>

Through the end of Phase I on 1 October, Operation MAENG HO 6 produced 249 VC KIA, 128 captured, and 316 VC suspects detained. This was accomplished at the loss of 9 Koreans KIA and 42 WIA. <sup>70/</sup>

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## CHAPTER III

### OPERATION IRVING

#### Prologue

When Operation IRVING terminated on 24 October 1966, it was considered one of the most successful Allied operations to that date. The 1st Air Cavalry Division (ACD) had accounted for 681 VC/NVA KIA and 220 captured; ARVN forces in DAI BANG 800 AO, their part of IRVING were credited for 221 KIA and 681 CIA; and ~~Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CRID)~~ <sup>CAPITAL ROK INFANTRY DIVISION</sup> forces added another 922 KIA and 380 enemy prisoners during the phases of MAENG HO 6 between 2 October and 9 November. Thus in the space of about a month, enemy forces in northeast Binh Dinh Province suffered losses of nearly 2,000 confirmed KIA and nearly 1,300 captured. <sup>1/</sup>

During the American phase of Operation IRVING alone, more than 700 tactical air sorties were flown and two B-52 strikes were carried out. <sup>2/</sup> There was no single confirmed KBA from these sorties and BDA was relatively insignificant. These results were due to many factors, including terrain, weather, troop tactics, and especially the general mission given to TAC air support. All of these combined factors provided very minimal concrete results from the air effort.

#### The Enemy in a Bind

By 2 October, when Operation IRVING opened, the enemy forces in northeast Binh Dinh were extremely vulnerable and conditions were excellent for a successful operation. The CRID forces had completed cordoning off the

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Phu Cat Mountains by land, and enemy forces there were effectively trapped.<sup>3/</sup> The enemy was further menaced by four ARVN Battalions (5th, and 6th Airborne, 1/41, 3/41) which were poised along Highway 1 ready to begin a sweep to the sea along the north edge of the Phu Cat Mountains, an area heavily infested with VC LF units.<sup>4/</sup>

Meanwhile, the 2d VC and 18th NVA Regiments had been forced out of their western mountain sanctuaries east into the coastal mountains and flooded lowlands. They were prevented from returning to their mountain bases by the continuing presence of 1st ACD elements there, and were extremely vulnerable to exposure by aerial reconnaissance due to the open nature of the coastal plains.<sup>5/</sup> At the same time, sea escape routes were cut off by two Vietnamese Naval Junk Forces; the 21st and 22d Coastal Groups; U.S. Navy Swift Boats; and the destroyers USS HALL and USS FOLSOM.<sup>6/</sup>

### The 18th NVA Regiment is Hard Hit (2 - 3 Oct 66)

By 0700H on 2 October, Operation IRVING was in full swing, with elements of five battalions of the 1st ACD air assaulting into positions east and south of the Nui Mieu Mountains. The A/19th Cav was given the assignment of aerial scouting the Hung Lac Peninsula, the north end of Nuoc Ngot Bay, and up the coastline opposite the Nui Mieu hill masses.<sup>7/</sup>

As the scout choppers, lead by Apache 6, the commander of A/19th Cav, moved up the peninsula from the south, they began to spot small groups of armed men attempting to hide. The helicopters rounded the north edge of the bay, and more groups of armed NVA were spotted and taken under fire.

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By this time, the armed gunships had killed eight uniformed NVA and captured one VC sergeant. The "A" troop commander therefore decided to commit a Blue Team, which was put down southeast of the little village of Hoa Hoi at 0830H. <sup>8/</sup>

Within minutes, as the four squads moved forward to search the area, heavy contact developed with a heavily entrenched NVA force. While the Blue Team probed from the east, several armed helicopters hovered west of the village area to prevent enemy forces from exfiltrating to the west. Meanwhile, the four squads had been pinned down by heavy automatic weapons fire and were unable to move forward. To relieve the pressure on his forces, the "A" troop commander began to hover his UH-1 slowly through the village at an altitude of 20 feet, while his gunners sprayed the enemy with fire from the M-60 door guns and M-79 grenade launchers. These fires killed 30 NVA. <sup>9/</sup>

There was no doubt now that a major enemy force had been encountered, so B/1/12th Cav was air assaulted on the beach directly to the east of Hoa Hoi. They, too, became heavily engaged in a fierce firefight with ~~the~~ <sup>an</sup> force which was now estimated at 200-300 NVA. These were the battered 7th and 8th Battalions of the 18th NVA Regiment which had taken such serious losses on 23 September and had been eluding Allied forces ever since. <sup>10/</sup>

Now that the Blue Team had pinpointed and developed the situation, they were ordered by their commander, Apache 6, to withdraw. One squad was completely pinned down, however, and Apache 6 therefore hovered his chopper at an altitude of 20 feet between his squad and the enemy bunkers, permitting

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the squad to withdraw to less exposed positions. Nevertheless, the enemy positions were so close when Apache 6 was setting down to evacuate the squad's two KIA and one WIA, an NVA soldier ran up behind the chopper. The pilot spotted him in time, and swung the tail rotor into him a moment before the chopper touched down.

The casualties were loaded aboard under heavy fire and the chopper began lift-off despite four hits in the fuel tanks, hydraulic and transmission lines. As it became airborne, the ship was hit by an additional two 12.7-mm rounds in the skids. Despite this damage, the helicopter made it to the LZ which was less than 200 yards away. <sup>12/</sup>

Meanwhile, nearby, two more choppers, Apache 15 and 16, were attempting to mark two enemy machine gun nests. In the process of marking one of the guns, Apache 15 was riddled in the fuel tanks by the other. Before the chopper went down, the crew managed to destroy one gun with a hand grenade and mark the other for destruction by two other helicopters. A few minutes later, a third chopper, which had been covering the downed helicopter and screening for B/1/12th Cav, was hit by heavy fire and also went down, although without damage other than by ground fire. <sup>13/</sup>

By 1150H, Apache 6 was airborne in another ship and had regrouped his Blue Team in the LZ for extraction. Five minutes later the downed helicopters were helilifted out and within an hour, the Blue Team had also been evacuated. <sup>14/</sup>

The A/1/9th Cav helicopters continued to support ground elements during the afternoon, since B/1/12th Cav was still in heavy contact and "it was

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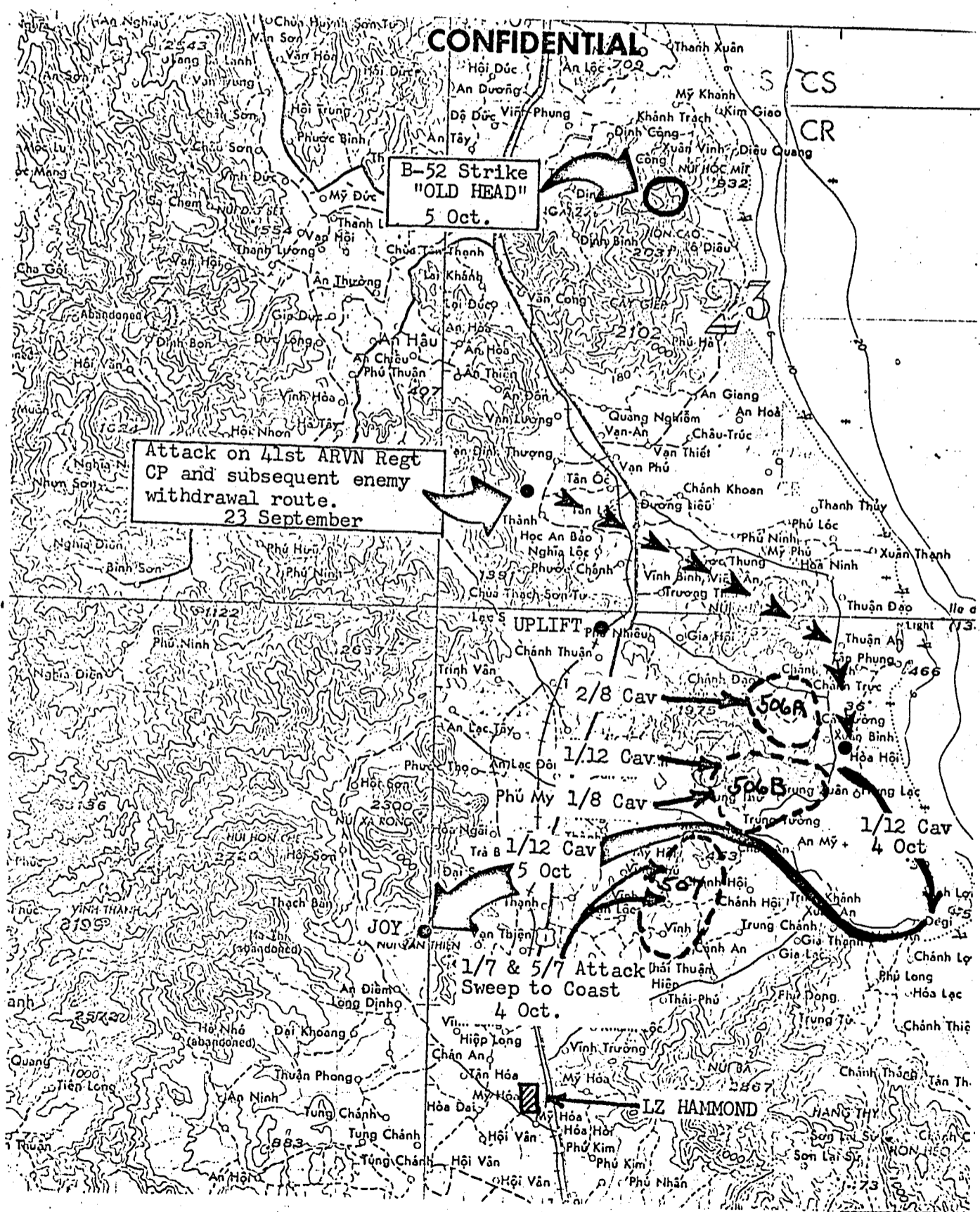
decided by Apache 6 and S3 1/12th Cav that an airstrike would be too dangerous because of the proximity to friendlies." As a result of the day's actions, the armed helicopters and Blue Team of A/1/9th Cav had accounted for 92 NVA KIA, 35 of whom were killed from the "A" troop commander's <sup>15/</sup> helicopter.

Throughout the afternoon, contact continued as "A" and "C" companies 1/12th Cav were helilifted into encircling positions. These units were followed by two more companies from 1/5th Cav who were air assaulted onto the beaches to the east of the village just after dark. Friendly forces completed linking up and the enemy was then effectively trapped. <sup>16/</sup>

The enemy repeatedly attempted to break out of the encirclement during the night, while overhead an AC-47 expended flares and minigun fire. Several C-47 flaeship sorties followed to keep the battle scene lit up. These efforts, plus constant illumination from artillery rounds provided enough light for the American ground troopers to effectively repulse all enemy attempts to break through the cordon around them. <sup>17/</sup>

That night, according to 1st Lt. Johnnie Hohenshelt, FAC 2d Bde, <sup>18/</sup>  
1st ACD:

"...The Brigade Commander asked the Brigade ALO to provide him with a plan for the Air Force to annihilate the village at first light...The ALO went through channels and requested that A-1Es at Pleiku be loaded with specific ordnance for very close support. The birds were uploaded and all cocked, ready for a first light take off (when) reevaluation of the ground situation at first light in the morning...determined that the ground troops who were surrounding the village were in such close proximity



OPERATION IRVING - 2-6 October  
Figure 11

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that supplies could not be used."

It is interesting to note, however, that during the night an artillery barrage totaling 81 rounds was poured into the village. <sup>19</sup>

At 0700H on 3 October, the two A-1Es, ready to take off from Pleiku with 10 MK-81 bombs each, were cancelled. This ended the Air Force's role in the battle of Hoa Hoi. <sup>20</sup>

During the night slug, American forces stormed into Hoa Hoi and in hand-to-hand fighting wiped out the remaining enemy forces. The total enemy losses, exact numbers, NVA, were 233 KIA by body-count. The 1st Cav took 20 NVA prisoners and an additional 15 suspected of being NVA Regulars. The 19th Cav also took a small number of prisoners, with losses to the 1st ACD in the engagement totaling three KIA and 29 WIA. <sup>21</sup>

An interesting comparison can be drawn from statistics of air sorties for these, the two busiest days of contact during Operation IRVING. On 2 - 3 October, a total of seven F-100s flew to CAS over the entire IRVING AO and six more F-100s flew Sky Spot (now called Combat Probe) missions. <sup>22</sup> Weather conditions were favorable during these two days but during later periods, when the weather became extremely poor, 25 - 40 sorties a day were being expended throughout the AO. <sup>23</sup>

HOA: THROUGH CHINA ISLANDS (4 - 13 Oct 66)

Sizeable contact continued with the enemy on 4 October as 1st and 19th Cav conducted sweeping operations west of North Night Bay. The A/5/7

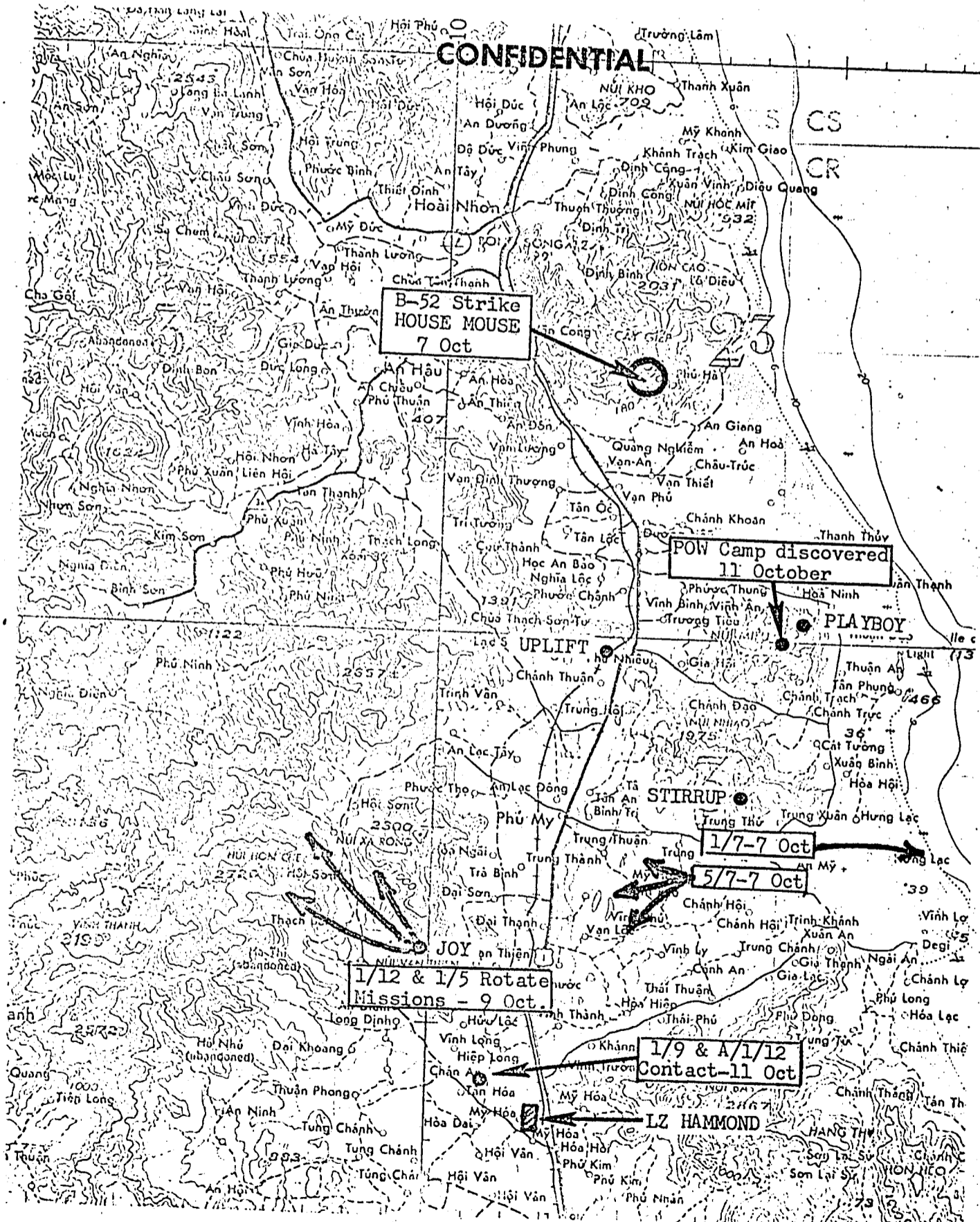
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became engaged when it moved into the DAI BANG 800 AO to secure a downed OH-13. More troops were dropped into blocking positions and 30 enemy were KIA. During the day, A/1/8th Cav air assaulted into LZ Firefly and 1/12 Cav conducted a sweep of the Hung Lac Peninsula. <sup>24/</sup>

Airpower continued to play a minor role in operations as poor weather and lack of targets limited air sorties on 4 October to two F-100s on a Sky Spot mission. <sup>25/</sup> Employment of tactical airpower after that date was considerably stepped up, although contact with the enemy continued light and scattered for several days, with the enemy breaking into small units and attempting to exfiltrate back to the western mountain bases. This tactic, however, left them extremely vulnerable to armed helicopters of the 1/9th Cav which killed many VC/NVA in small contacts during this period. <sup>26/</sup>

An ARC LIGHT strike was conducted on the northern slopes of the Tiger Mountains on 5 October. The strike slightly damaged an enemy storage area but ground exploitation by C/1/9th Cav revealed no signs of enemy casualties. The same day, armed helicopters of 1/9th Cav killed 30 enemy west of Nuoc Ngot Bay and 1/12th Cav moved into the Cuoi Ca Valley to search for enemy base camps and facilities. <sup>27/</sup> The F-100s flew 14 CAS and six Sky Spot sorties, but weather continued to hamper air operations. <sup>28/</sup>

The air sortie rate increased daily from 13 sorties on 6 October to 35 on 10 October. <sup>29/</sup> During this period, however, there was no major ground contact with the enemy in the IRVING/DAI BANG 800 AOs and most air strikes



OPERATION IRVING - 7-12 October

Figure 12

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were utilized as well (there were 43 Sky Spot sorties between these dates), <sup>30/</sup>  
LZ preps, and in the LZ construction program. By 10 October a total of 161  
strike sorties had been flown to the ARVN AG with both K3A and ~~K3A~~ <sup>BDA</sup> report-  
ed as negative.

Another ARVN "GHI," "GHI," strike on the southern Tiger Mountain  
area on 10 October resulted in no evidence of enemy casualties but the  
area appeared to be occupied by at least an enemy battalion within 48  
hours of the strike. The strike did cause considerable destruction to the  
camp areas.

A search of the area resulted in the result of sweeps in the  
Cuoi Ca Valley on 9 October and 15 VC were captured without a  
fight in the area.

An enemy camp in the Cuoi Ca Valley was discovered on 11  
October, and the camp was destroyed. VC and NVA soldiers who had been slain by  
insurgent forces were also recovered. <sup>34/</sup> Allied operations.

Early in the morning of 11 October a VC captured one VC  
who revealed that he had been ordered to move on a mission, would be  
moving north. The VC was captured and the platoon was hunted down by  
armed helicopters. All 10 members of the 2d Platoon, Phu  
Cat LF VC Camp were subsequently killed or captured. <sup>35/</sup>

The target BDA in the Cuoi Ca Valley was destroyed on 11 October, with one  
secondary target also destroyed with an air effort of 25.

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strike sorties. Tactical air strikes took no part in the annihilation of the enemy platoon. <sup>36/</sup>

### Back to the Mountains (13 - 18 Oct 66)

On 13 October, operational emphasis was again shifted to the enemy bases in the western mountain area. The 3d Brigade concentrated three battalions in the Cuoi Ca Valley and located the VC Binh Dinh Province Headquarters northwest of the valley. A large VC medical facility was also discovered in the valley area. At the same time, other units began conducting sweeps of the Kim Son Valley in hopes of trapping enemy units returning to this area after Operation THAYER I. <sup>37/</sup>

The major contact of Operation DAI BANG 800 occurred on 13 October, when the ARVN Airborne Task Force fought a major battle with a company of the 95th Bn, 2d VC Regiment. The battle left the enemy unit decimated with 102 confirmed KIA and no friendly losses. Fire support, in the form of ARA, was provided by 2/20th Art, 1st ACD, and apparently accounted for a large portion of the enemy casualties. <sup>38/</sup> The ALO for the ARVN Airborne unit, in the unit After Action Report, confirmed 63 KBA during 5 through 14 October, but the notation "helicopters" appeared after the figure and it is probable that most of these were the result of the ARA support in the 13 October engagement. <sup>39/</sup>

The period 14 through 18 October produced the peak number of air sorties in support of Operation IRVING. During these five days, 215 tactical air sorties were logged with the high point reached on 17 October when 57 sorties, nine of them immediates, were flown. <sup>40/</sup>



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### Diversion Attack (18 Oct 66)

At 0225H on 18 October, the 8th and 9th Bns of the 22d NVA Regiment initiated a 37-minute attack against positions of 1/40th ARVN Regiment about 12 miles north-northeast of Bong Song. This attack was a possible diversion north of the main IRVING operating areas designed to relieve some of the pressure on the 18th and 2d Regiments which were trying to evade Allied forces south of Bong Song. The attack was not successful, however, as friendly casualties were only six wounded, while 11 enemy bodies were found on the battlefield. Forty-six additional bodies were found nearby in shallow graves the next day, and two enemy prisoners were captured in the engagement. <sup>41/</sup>

The 1/9th Cav conducted helicopter sweeps over Area LION on 18 October, in a search for the attacking units. In addition, two troops of 1/9th Cav deployed to LZ Two Bits to counter the enemy threat north of Bong Song, but no further major contact was made with the 22d NVA Regiment until early November during Operation THAYER II. <sup>42/</sup>

### The LZ Construction Program

One of the most controversial aspects of airpower application during Operation IRVING was the extensive use of air strikes in LZ construction programs. The After Action Report of the 1st ACD for THAYER/IRVING mentions that on 18 October "Four TAC Air LZ construction strikes were completed under control of A Troop (1/9th Cav)." <sup>43/</sup>

Concerning this type of mission, Capt. Lawrence L. Miller, FAC for the

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1st Bde, 1st ACD during IRVING and later Division FAC stated: <sup>44/</sup>

"Probably the most numerous target (during IRVING) was the LZ construction. In many cases we worked along the coast attempting to clear the trees off mountain tops and ridge lines...One of the things I noticed...was that to build an LZ might take twenty bombs. The ideal bomb would be a thousand pounder with a delayed fuse that would not impact in the trees but would impact after it hit the ground and would blow everything out.

"On one occasion I recall working three flights one day on one target....the same target another FAC had worked with several other flights.... Finally toward the end of the day we had four connecting craters out of...at least 20 attempted bombs, but the final evaluation by the ground commander was that although we had cleared the area, the terrain was too much of a slope or too rough to use as an LZ anyway, so there was a waste of about four sorties."

1st Lt. Johnnie Hohenshelt, FAC, 2/8th Cav, 1st ACD reported: <sup>45/</sup>

"During this period, we expended a great deal of ordnance in that area (the Tiger Mountains), usually on peaks...And in many cases the weather was such that our fighters couldn't get very good dive angles...and as a result, much of the ordnance that we expended on the LZ construction program was not particularly effective because of the pinpoint nature of the target....

"I remember one particular incident of...FACing for...the fifth flight of fighters to go in on one LZ construction peak, and after expending five flights of fighters, we still didn't have an LZ that you could land a chopper in...In many cases we expended a great deal of ordnance in an area and never actually constructed an LZ...."

Capt. Earl C. Mizell, a 2d Brigade, 1st ACD, FAC, had this to say: <sup>46/</sup>

"On one occasion, I was asked to do a weather reconnaissance for an LZ construction mission in the Tiger Mountain complex. I was given the

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coordinates and they were on a pretty steep slope. I informed the tactical air control party...that I didn't think it would be suitable for an LZ construction...because the slope was so steep there that a chopper would never set down...Then I was informed that I would look around in the immediate vicinity for a spot which we could hit to make an LZ.

"Later I was told that the division was trying to establish a large number of helicopter LZs in the Tiger Mountains so that in five or six months... they could come back in and have access...without having to do anything at the time...

"I personally felt...this...was a gross misuse of TAC air and if they wanted to build LZs that they ought to lower satchel charges out of helicopters, place them exactly the way they wanted them, and blow them up.

Capt. Owen O. McIntyre, FAC for 1/5th, 1st ACD, gave much the same estimate of the situation: <sup>47/</sup>

"I put in one flight of B-57s that had a total of twelve 1,000-pound bombs and they were dropped on top of a peak...One of them went a long way toward making the LZ, however, the other eleven were virtually wasted....

"We talked a great deal about this and felt that the tactical air effort to make LZs or construct LZs for the Army was quite a waste of tactical airpower."

Maj. James Ryan, ALO, 1st Brigade, 1st ACD, had a different viewpoint. <sup>48/</sup>  
however:

"Air support is also extremely useful in preparing landing zones. An Army engineer team dropped from a Chinook can spend a half a day with heavy equipment clearing a landing zone. We can go in with 500 and 1,000-pound bombs and clear enough jungle so the Army engineers can clear an area in half an hour using hand tools."

Capt. Lawrence Miller brought out a further implication of the LZ

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construction program during Operation IRVING when he stated: <sup>49/</sup>

"Because of the number of air strikes that we requested on these LZ constructions, I think that the one side effect was that the Cav always had one flight in the air during day operations. One flight of F-100s was available in case something more important came up... Oftentimes flights were diverted from their pre-planned target to more significant targets.

"After a few days of this type work, it became apparent that the LZ construction type target was used merely as a means of having TAC air available, where it wouldn't normally be available under the present request system."

### The Enemy Evades (19 - 24 Oct 66)

There were 16 VC KIA and 16 prisoners captured on 19 October, but the enemy continued to avoid major contact. The next day, intelligence reports pinpointed two VC battalions in the Kim Son Valley and a massive artillery and TAC air effort was poured into the suspected location. Seven TAC strike sorties expended three tons of ordnance and 2,020 rounds of artillery were directed on the target. The cavalry expected to exploit the kill zone with three companies on 21 October, but because of bad weather, only one platoon was inserted into the area and no successful results were achieved. <sup>50/</sup>

No further contacts of any significance occurred, but on 22 and 24 October, the last day of the operation, major enemy base complexes were located, including an abandoned POW camp and extremely large quantities of enemy supplies and material. <sup>51/</sup>

### Results of Joint Allied Operations

Operation IRVING terminated with a total of 681 VC/NVA KIA, possibly

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128 enemy KIA, 220 VC/NVA captured, 1,172 Civil Defendents (persons detained as violators of GVN laws, including terrorists, VC agents, VC political cadres, draft dodgers and deserters), turned over to GVN officials for disposition, and 59 Chieu Hoi Returnees. The 1st ACD units also captured 191 s/a, 19 c/s weapons, 377,417 rounds of small arms ammunition, 350 pounds of TNT, 350 mines, 226 grenades, 6 telephones, 18 transistor radios, 3 military switchboards, 1 ordinary switchboard, 107 packs, 460 linear inches of documents, 43 tires, one-half ton of cloth, 4 typewriters, 4 sewing machines and 5,000 reams of paper. Also captured were a half-ton of medical supplies, 66.6 tons of rice, and 496 tons of salt. The 1st ACD losses were 19 KIA and 150 WIA. <sup>52/</sup>

Operation DAI BANG 800 cost the enemy 221 KIA, 681 VC captured, 64 Chieu Hoi Ralliers, 95 s/a, 5 c/s weapons and 115 tons of salt. The ARVN losses were 3 KIA and 18 WIA. <sup>53/</sup>

In Operation MAENG HO 6, terminating on 9 November, the enemy lost 1,161 KIA by body count, 518 captured, 653 VC suspects taken in, 454 s/a, 43 c/s weapons, nearly 1,000 grenades, 234 mines, almost 55,000 rounds of s/a ammunition, and large quantities of foodstuffs and other equipment were captured. It is interesting to note that 690 CBU-bomblets were also recovered from the enemy. All this was accomplished as contrasted with Korean losses of 30 KIA and 115 WIA. <sup>54/</sup>

### Evaluation of Air Effort--Operation IRVING

In 23 days, Operation IRVING received the support of 701 tactical air

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sorties which expended 488.2 tons of bombs, 76.7 tons of napalm, 400 pounds of WP, 266 rockets, and 40 cans of CBU. Two ARC LIGHT strikes were conducted in the Tiger Mountains complex employing 324 tons of GP bombs. 55/

Of the 701 air sorties, there were 204, or 29 percent of the IRVING sorties, in the Sky Spot category. Such a high percentage was largely attributable to poor weather conditions, particularly toward the end of the operation. More than half the total of Sky Spot sorties were flown during the final week of operations. A significant night H&I program also made a contribution to this high figure. 56/

Maj. James Ryan, commenting on the use of Sky Spot during IRVING 57/ stated:

"Sky Spot pilots might hate to fly their missions, but they're doing a lot of good for our GIs on perimeter defense. When the VC see the terrain in front of them erupt at night, they get pretty scared. They stop to think and reorganize and our Army troops are a lot safer. The Army thinks Sky Spot is great. It keeps the enemy off balance and saves the night..."

"One VC prisoner said that he belonged to a company which was lined up to hit the rear forces of the U.S. However, Sky Spot strikes from behind him (the VC) and all around him, kept his company from striking at the U.S. troops. His company was broken up and made ineffective by the air strikes, he said."

The H&I program, which included air, artillery, and naval gunfire, accounted for a large portion of the air expended during the operation. In a large measure, it accounted for the lack of BDA/KBA feedback. Speaking about this interdiction program, Capt. Earl Mizell said: 58/

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"Most of the missions I FACed during Operation IRVING fell into one of...three categories. These were suspected exfiltration and infiltration routes. I think my missions were about divided equally between the three and my personal opinion of them that the daylight raids on trails--exfiltration/infiltration routes were basically a waste of time. I felt that strikes against suspected or known enemy locations were of more benefit than the hitting of exfiltration/infiltration routes."

1st Lt. Dale H. Strawn, FAC, 5/7th, 1st ACD, shed some light on the paucity of BDA feedback on these missions: <sup>59/</sup>

"I would say that the majority of my targets were suspected infiltration routes and suspected exfiltration routes or suspected way stations or rest areas... I would believe that the air expended may have done some good, however, the BDA feedback was limited to what I could see from the air, which was very little, and the Army very seldom went in on the ground to see what the actual BDA was."

The significance of the interdiction program and how it fit into the overall 1st ACD operational strategy was summed up by Lt. Col. Harry T. Warwick, ALO, 1st ACD during Operation IRVING: <sup>60/</sup>

"In connection with Operation IRVING...there was not considerable airpower used in the classic sense of killing enemy or relieving pressure on friendly troops. In Operation IRVING, the enemy was trying to escape rather than fight. The only fighting was done when the enemy was trapped. However, although there was considerable VC and NVA killed during Operation IRVING, they were only found in very small groups with few exceptions.

"We did use a considerable amount of air in what we call the interdiction program. When the 1st Cav went through the valleys, the VC and the NVA naturally went into the hill masses. The 1st Cav kept considerable pressure on them by going into the hill masses with their troops and then extracting them and then keeping constant pressure on them with heavy

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artillery fire. The Cav used airpower in this interdiction program by striking those targets that they were unable to hit with the artillery. This kept the VC and NVA in small groups, therefore, they were unable to organize any kind of attack...I believe that this had quite a lot to do with the number of POW and Returnees that were generated in IRVING. With the constant pounding by air and artillery, it had a definite effect on the morale of the enemy and to a certain effect destroyed his will to fight."

LZ preps also constituted a significant number of the total air sorties expended during IRVING. Capt. Herbert Somerder, ALO, 3d Brigade, 1st ACD, <sup>61/</sup> commented on this:

"Some of the close air support missions were used as landing zone preparations. They would work it in with the regular artillery and ARA preps...In most cases it was probably well used."

Lt. Col. Harry T. Warwick summarized: <sup>62/</sup>

"I think one of the most important roles we played was to insure that the LZ was safe, as safe as could be possible for the landing of troops...In order to get the troops on the ground, an LZ must be prepared. In the preparation...it gives away the position of where the Cav troops will be put on the ground. This makes it quite easy for the VC or NVA to be prepared for the landing and inflict serious and heavy casualties during the initial landing phase. This is why we put so much importance on LZ preparation and feel that during the initial stages of the landing we should have fighters in the Air Cap capacity. Once enough troops are on the ground to secure the LZ, then you can take the aircraft away and expend them on an alternate target and...rely on immediate air strikes to handle any situation that develops after that."

In evaluating the total tactical air effort during Operation IRVING, Lt. Colonel Warwick concluded that "although the body KIA was not significant,

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the pressure that was applied to the enemy throughout IRVING played a tremendous part in his defeat in this area." <sup>63/</sup>

A similar statement was made by Major Ryan, ALO, 1st Bde, when he said "there may have been no KBA in Operation IRVING for the record, but KBA is not the most significant element of a ground support operation. Without air support, the ground forces could not have moved about as they did." <sup>64/</sup>

Capt. Lawrence L. Miller, 1st ACD FAC, indicated the Army's satisfaction with the air support they received during IRVING: <sup>65/</sup>

"In talking to the Army Commanders at all levels, all feel that the work performed by the Air Force during Operation IRVING and in continuing operations is outstanding. But... trying to measure (it) in terms of KIA or BDA you just can't because the main effect, to them, the main value...has been to keep the enemy broken up...keep him on the move, and disallow him to function as the type of unit he would like to."

Concrete evidence of the effectiveness and the psychological value that the constant threat of air strikes has on the enemy was strikingly revealed in a detailed analysis of the interrogation reports of enemy prisoners taken during Operation IRVING. This analysis, undertaken by the Research and Analysis Branch of the Combined Military Intelligence Center, Vietnam (CMIC), revealed that "all of the prisoners who responded to the question 'what weapon do you fear most?' replied that they feared most air and artillery firepower." <sup>66/</sup>

### Evaluation of Air Effort-Operation MAENG HO 6

Operation MAENG HO 6 terminated on 9 November and, although it lasted

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nearly twice as long as Operation IRVING, a total of only 22 strike missions were flown, two immediate and twenty pre-planned, as compared with 357 strike missions during Operation IRVING. This striking variance in strike mission figures was due largely to differences in the operations themselves. No small credit was also due to the completely different concept of the role of tactical airpower held by Korean forces. <sup>67/</sup>

Another factor which impeded the employment of airpower during Operation MAENG HO 6, even more than during IRVING, was extremely poor weather. According to Maj. Robert Stuart, Assistant ALO, CRID, "If we hadn't had such poor weather during the operation, three times as much air would have been employed. But nevertheless the Koreans just don't depend that much on TAC air." <sup>68/</sup>

The BDA and KBA for MAENG HO 6 was listed as 21 VC KIA, four bunkers and three trenches destroyed, four secondary explosions, 11 structures destroyed, and ten structures damaged. The Air After Action Report for the operation credited these figures to artillery and friendly aircraft, <sup>69/</sup> but Major Stuart stated this was in error and these were KBA and BDA feedbacks from air strikes and not artillery. <sup>70/</sup>

### Air Psy-War Program Evaluation

The Air Force participated in an intensive psy-war program throughout all three AOs of the IRVING series. The 1st ACD relied heavily on their own helicopters for this purpose, but the U.S. Air Force also conducted successful operations with numerous U-10 sorties throughout the IRVING AO. <sup>71/</sup>

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In Operation DAI BANG 800: "A USAF U-10 psy-war support aircraft was placed under operational control of the Division G-5. This aircraft was used effectively in support of 22d Division, Binh Dinh Sector and CRID operations...A total of 55 sorties were flown using standard leaflets and pre-cut tapes. Included were six special tape and personal appeal missions.<sup>72/</sup>"

The U.S. Air Force psychological operations (psy-ops) were also very successful during MAENG HO 6. The CRID forces surrounded An Thang village, located at the northeast corner of the AO, between the mountains and the sea. For five days they subjected the heavily VC-oriented population of 7,000 to a massive psy-ops campaign utilizing, among other things, U.S. Air Force U-10 aircraft. As a result, when the Koreans moved in, they were met with almost no resistance.<sup>73/</sup>

In addition, "A total of 14,000 refugees were peaceably interned during the operation, so the use of this aircraft was very effective."<sup>74/</sup>

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## CHAPTER IV

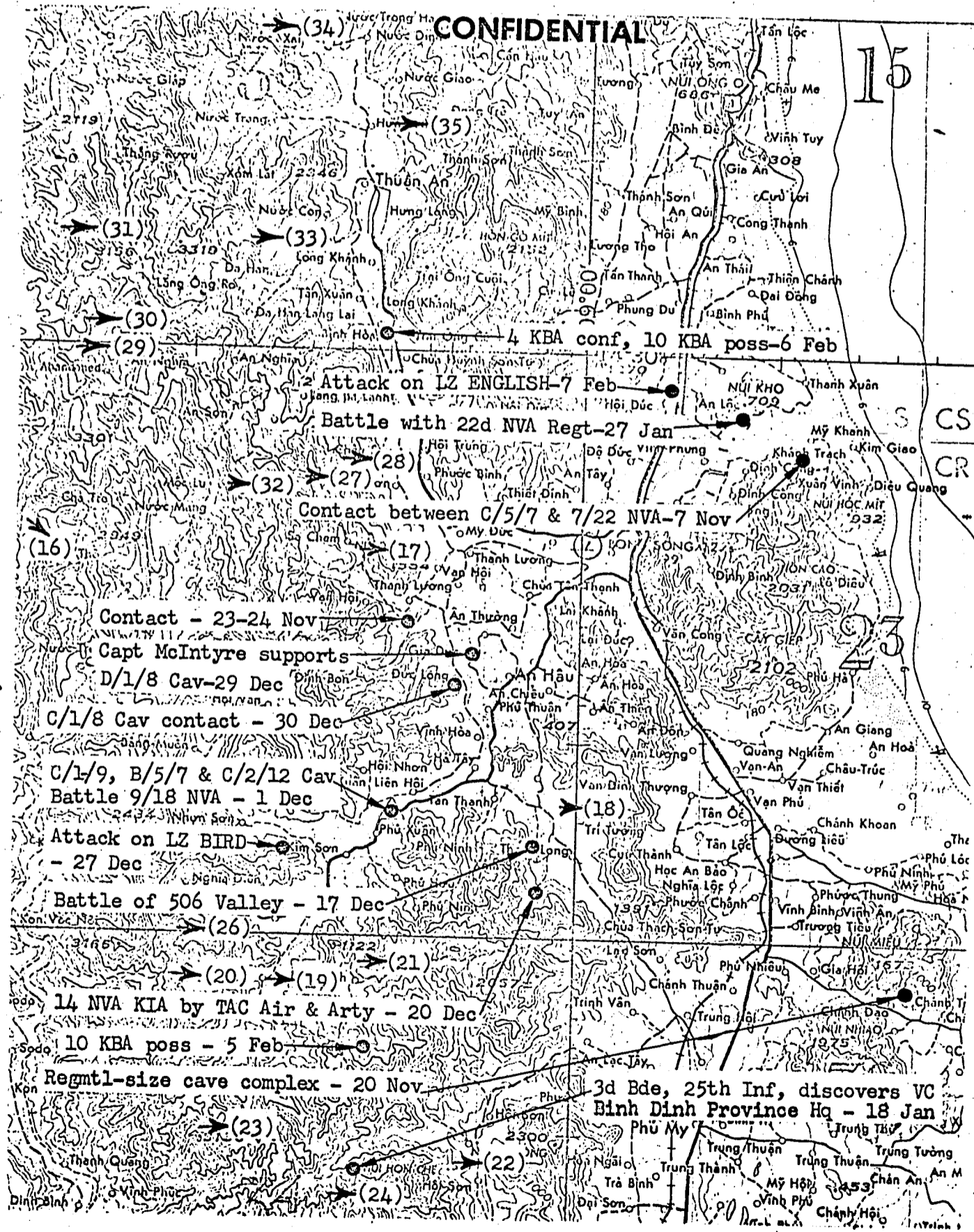
### OPERATION THAYER II

#### Background of Operation

Operation THAYER II began as a two-brigade effort to exploit the success of the previous five weeks of almost continuous contact with the enemy in the rich coastal plain and the Kim Son and Cuoi Ca Valleys to the west.<sup>1/</sup> It became necessary on 31 October, however, to commit a division brigade to Operation PAUL REVERE IV in Pleiku Province, thus temporarily reducing the size of THAYER II to three battalions and supporting units.<sup>2/</sup>

Enemy forces had been badly mauled during the previous two months. The E2B MF Battalion was nearly wiped out during MAENG HO 6 and B-52 strikes, and the E210 MF Battalion, having suffered moderate casualties moved south to avoid further contact. Two battalions, the 7th and 8th ~~Co~~ of the 18th NVA Regiment, experienced severe casualties and were considered combat ineffective. Nearly all the 18th NVA Regimental support facilities, bases, and supplies had been captured or destroyed.<sup>31/</sup> The 2d VC Regiment had suffered moderate casualties during previous action and was moving north to avoid further contact. This left the 22d NVA Regiment as the only major enemy unit whose effectiveness had not been seriously impaired during earlier operations.<sup>4/</sup>

Light contact continued throughout most of THAYER II, with major battles sporadically flaring up. Air support continued heavy throughout the operation with both tactical support sorties and ARC LIGHT strikes. A



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TAC air strikes were requested. Meanwhile reinforcements began moving in to encircle the enemy positions. <sup>45/</sup>

Weather conditions were again unfavorable, but by 1130H, the FAC, Rash 11, was over the area waiting the arrival of two A-1Es which had been scrambled from Pleiku. In the words of the FAC, 1st Lt. Johnnie Hohenshelt: <sup>46/</sup>

"While the fighters were enroute, I tried to sort out where the friendly locations were and work with the fire support coordinator and make sure he was in a position to monitor the air strikes...In this particular case, he was airborne in a Charlie Charlie chopper (Command and Control Helicopter).

"I had both friendly positions marked with smoke...and I had talked to the fire support coordinator and I was fairly certain of their exact location...I got contact with my A-1s, got the artillery shut down, (and) got confirmation from both lead and the A-1s...that they knew where the friendlies were.

"I then marked with smoke the area on the ridge line southwest of the finger and got confirmation from the fire support coordinator that he saw my smoke and that was indeed where he wanted the fighter's ordnance.

"We worked the ridge line to the west-southwest...The friendlies down at the tip of the finger were very obvious down under a big tree, and while we were working the southern end, we had no trouble with them at all.

"The fire support coordinator wanted us to work the ordnance on further to the north...We had napalm and fragmentation bombs...(and) the first fragmentation bomb was dropped on the contour line up to the north. The people at the base of the finger...immediately called and wanted us to back the fragmentation off as some of the fragments were going through the trees above them.

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"Throughout the engagement, I didn't see any of the enemy (and) I didn't see anything significant...One of these strikes I think netted a couple of KBA and during the engagement in the area I think we got quite a bit of KBA out of it." (No KBA credit was ever reported to 7th Air Force for this engagement. Nevertheless, it seemed probable that the six fighter-bomber sorties which expended directly on the enemy positions, and the two additional sorties delivered over nearby egress routes very likely accounted for a significant portion of the 116 KIA reported for this engagement.)

Lieutenant Hohenshelt was relieved by Rash 09 who put in two more A-1Es and two F-4Cs. <sup>47/</sup> While the air strikes were being carefully worked in on enemy positions, C and D/1/12th Cav had taken up positions to the north, with A/1/12th on the east. The B/1/8th Cav came up to block from the south, while the C/1/8th Cav maintained its position on the west. <sup>48/</sup>

By 1800H, Rash 09 was replaced by Lt. Colonel Warwick, the division ALO, and two more scramble sorties were nearing their target. <sup>49/</sup>

"I...had a set of F-100s there that had napalm and 500-pound high drags and I tried to assure the Army... that we could put this ordnance as close in as the Army choppers were putting their rockets. But I was unable to get a firm position on all the enemy as well as the friendlies.

"Finally, there was about an 1,800 foot ceiling and darkness (so) we expended these fighters on a very likely egress route. We never did get any results from it however....

"I might mention that this was an outstanding job of ordnance delivery. I marked the valley and I told them I wanted them to start from the Willy Peter (White Phosphorous) marker and put two bombs..., 200 meters up put two more, and then come back around and put two naps (Napalm), and 200 meters up from that two more. And they just stepped it right up the valley...Each time when they pulled off the target,

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They pulled up into the clouds at approximately 1,800 feet. There were choppers all over the area and it was in darkness, yet this ordnance was delivered...exactly where they were told to put it."

Initial reports put enemy losses at 50 KIA and three POWs, but bodies continued to be discovered, including 40 found on 19 November. This brought total enemy losses for the battle to 116 confirmed KIA from the 7th and 8th Battalions, 18th NVA Regiment. <sup>50/</sup> These losses put all three battalions of this regiment out of commission and total strength for the 7th and 8th Battalions was subsequently estimated at under 150 men each. <sup>51/</sup> This victory had not been without cost, however, as the 1st ACD had four UH-1 and three OH-13 choppers downed by ground fire during this engagement. <sup>52/</sup> For the entire day's operations over the AO, 11 choppers were hit by ground fire and eight of these were downed. <sup>53/</sup> Personnel losses were nine KIA and 63 WIA. <sup>54/</sup> Sporadic contact continued in the area over the next two days and four more immediate sorties struck enemy positions in the same vicinity. <sup>55/</sup>

On 20 December, C/1/8th Cav observed an enemy company moving along the floor of a small open valley a mile south of the previous battlefield. Maneuver units were unable to make contact, but TAC air and artillery took the enemy under fire. <sup>56/</sup> Eight F-100s and two F-4Cs blasted the enemy unit with GP, napalm, rockets, and then strafed with 20-mm mortar fire. <sup>57/</sup> As a result, air and artillery were jointly credited with 14 NVA KIA/KBA by body-count. <sup>58/</sup>

The same day, a North Vietnamese second lieutenant from the 18th NVA Regiment turned himself in with a Chieu Hoi pass, bringing with him a

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7.62-mm light machine gun. This and numerous other sources--agents, returnees, and prisoners--confirmed the near-desperate condition of the 18th Regiment. <sup>59/</sup> Several reports tended to confirm that the regimental support units, including the AA Company, had been broken up to provide line officers for the depleted battalions. <sup>60/</sup> One prisoner stated that "all original officers of the 7th and 8th Battalions have been KIA." <sup>61/</sup>

As early as November, there was evidence that the 400th Mortar Battalion, the 200th AA Battalion, and the 135th Recoilless Rifle Company had been broken up to provide the 610th Division's maneuver battalions with replacement officers and men.

The condition of the 18th NVA Regiment was the most critical, however. One prisoner reported that one of its companies had 80 men sick <sup>62/</sup> while the NVA Lieutenant, who returned on 20 November, claimed his company had 20 men WIA. <sup>63/</sup> Information also indicated that the normal policy for the NVA battalions and regimental headquarters was to displace every seven-to-ten days but because of pressure from allied operations and constant harassment from air and artillery strikes, units were sometimes forced to change locations daily. <sup>64/</sup> This need for constant movement to avoid detection and the constant attrition from Allied operations, artillery, and air strikes was fast bringing the 18th NVA Regiment near the point of dissolution.

LZ Bird (27 Dec 66)

The commanders of the 610th Division were well aware of the critical condition of the 18th NVA Regiment, and so, by 20 December, the 22d NVA

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Regiment's plan was to  
Regiment make an attack against a forward position of the 1st ACD following the Christmas-truce period.

The LZ Bird was a 1st ACD forward artillery fire base perched above a sharp bend in the Suoi Lon River about one kilometer west-northwest of the village of Kim Son I on the floor of the Kim Son Valley. On 27 December, the LZ was manned by C/1/12th Cav, C/6/16th Artillery, and B/2/19th Artillery, equipped with 105-mm and 155-mm howitzers. <sup>64/</sup>

At 0104H on 27 December, an intense barrage of 60-mm and 81-mm mortar fire slammed into the camp. <sup>67/</sup> Minutes later, the 91st Company, 9th Battalion, 22d NVA Regiment, led a two-battalion assault against the LZ, penetrated the outer perimeter, and engaged the American defenders in a pitched battle around the gun positions. <sup>68/</sup> Some of the guns were overrun, but the remainder were lowered to point-blank range and raked the enemy ranks with Bee Hive and high explosive rounds. <sup>69/</sup>

A "Spooky" flareship was immediately dispatched to the scene and arrived overhead by 0200H, dropping 45 flares. This aircraft was relieved an hour later by a second AC-47, which continued to light up the battle scene using 38 flares. <sup>70/</sup>

ARA was also sent to the area and C/1/5th Cav and B/1/9th Cav were helilifted into positions near the LZ and began working their way in. At the same time, a continuous barrage of artillery from other fire bases rained shells all around the LZ. <sup>71/</sup>

In desperate hand-to-hand fighting, the enemy, their ranks ripped by

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artillery, were finally forced back out of the LZ. A short time later the enemy began a withdrawal toward the north-northeast under continuous pounding from artillery, ARA, and Sky Spot air strikes. <sup>72/</sup>

Seven immediate air strikes were requested and four F-4Cs and six F-100s were scrambled, but the entire area was completely weathered in and all sorties delivered their ordnance through the thick cloud cover under Sky Spot control. <sup>73/</sup>

The 8th and 9th Battalions of the 22d NVA Regiment left 45 NVA and 12 VC KIA on the battlefield. Additional bodies discovered in the next two days brought the enemy dead to 79, confirmed by body-count, for the early morning assault. The enemy also lost 14 s/a and six c/s weapons on the field. American losses were also heavy. The 1st ACD lost 27 KIA and 65 were WIA; three 155-mm howitzers were damaged, and one 155-mm was destroyed. <sup>74/</sup>

Although the enemy had sustained a high number of casualties during their assault on LZ Bird, subsequent enemy prisoners and Chieu Hoi Returnees stated that the enemy considered the attack a success. <sup>76/</sup>

### The Hunt Continues (28 Dec 66--2 Jan 67)

Poor weather continued to hamper air operations on 28 December, but ground forces engaged a dug-in enemy company about four miles southwest of Bong Song. A sweep of the contact area over the next two days netted 37 NVA bodies. <sup>77/</sup>

The weather improved considerably on 29 December, and numerous air

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steady attrition of enemy forces, together with several major engagements, ultimately cost the enemy an additional 1,700 KIA and more than 300 POWs, thus further affecting the already debilitated condition of the 610th Division and its supporting forces. <sup>5/</sup>

### ARC LIGHT Support (27 Oct - 4 Nov 66)

While 1st ACD forces made steady light contact and continued to uncover base and logistic support facilities of the 610th Division, a series of four ARC LIGHT strikes were directed against enemy base and supply areas during the first two weeks of THAYER II. These strikes reflected the improved quality of Allied intelligence as all but one strike achieved immediate significant results. <sup>6/</sup>

On the morning of 27 October, an ARC LIGHT strike was conducted by nine B-52s on the evergreen-forested slopes of the Vinh Thanh Valley about 20 miles due west of Bong Song. What lay below the expending aircraft were two large enemy base complexes with numerous large thatched huts, tunnels, bunkers, and shelters.

A third base complex was later discovered nearby and the whole area was later identified as probably having contained elements of the 610th Division and Binh Dinh VC Provincial Headquarters. <sup>7/</sup> In the next three days, the reconnaissance force, B/1/9th Cav, thoroughly explored the entire area, and confirmed destruction or heavy damage to approximately 40 structures; numerous bloodstains in several of the huts pointed to enemy occupancy and their casualties caused by the strike. It wasn't until three days later that

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fifteen mangled and dismembered bodies, one in a basket, were discovered several hundred meters from the strike scene. <sup>9/</sup> Light skirmishes occurred between small groups of enemy in the strike area and the ground search team, but the enemy apparently made a successful escape although probably taking with them numerous wounded as a result of the bomb strike.

The following day, another nine-plane raid dumped tons of ordnance on a suspected enemy base some eight miles west of Bong Song, but no significant results were observed. <sup>10/</sup>

Fifteen additional ARC LIGHT sorties hit a suspected enemy base area eight miles south of Bong Song on 29 October. Again a major enemy base complex suffered massive devastation when it took a direct hit. One dead VC, clad in a khaki uniform, was found by the exploitation team crumpled in a bomb crater. <sup>11/</sup>

Five days later, on 4 November, the enemy's peace was again unexpectedly shattered as 18 planeloads of bombs crashed into their camp, destroying dozens of bunkers, foxholes, and huts. <sup>12/</sup> In one large bunker "which had been used by approximately 28 personnel," search teams found the camp fire ashes still warm when they moved in to sweep the target area. A large quantity of medical equipment, including heavy duty surgical tools, 23 hand grenades, four small arms and numerous personal items were found throughout the strike area.

As a result of the air strike and subsequent ground exploitation, 11 enemy were confirmed KIA/KBA, 30 enemy were estimated KBA, two VC turned

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themselves in with Chieu Hoi passes, and 50 VC suspects were detained. <sup>13/</sup>

### Elements of 22d NVA Regt Located (7 Nov 66)

About noon on 7 November, C/5/7th Cav fixed <sup>the positions</sup> position of a company sized element of the 7th Battalion, 22d VNA Regiment between the north slopes of the Tiger Mountains and the south bank of the Lai Giang River. The enemy was armed with automatic weapons and put up stiff resistance as they attempted to withdraw in small groups through trenches and huts. Artillery and naval gunfire were called on enemy positions and air strikes were requested. <sup>14/</sup>

Capt. Herbert Somerder, ALO, 3d Bde, 1st ACD, was airborne in his O-1 when he received word of the engagement over his radio. By the time he arrived over the battle scene, two F-100s had scrambled from Bien Hoa and were on their way north. <sup>15/</sup>

"It took fifty-five minutes for the fighters to arrive from the first immediate request. Upon their arrival, I ascertained the position of the ground troops. They were located to the south, southeast, and southwest of the villages from which the ground fire was being received. Coordinating with the LNO (Liaison Officer), we got our position marked...and I put the first flight of fighters...in the village just to the north of the friendly position."

Directed by the FAC, the two F-100s put in napalm, 500-pound bombs, and then strafed enemy positions. As the first flight departed, a second arrived over the target and strikes commenced 500 meters to the east of the original point of heavy contact, since by this time the exact positions

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of all friendly elements were in question. <sup>16/</sup>

"I started to put the fighters in there...and then the LNO called and said they were in heavy contact again slightly to the south of where I had put the other strikes in...Again we had to re-mark the friendly positions because they had moved slightly, and I put the flights (in) with 500-pound bombs.

"There were three fighters and we put them about 100 meters from the troops because the gunfire we were seeing now was from trench lines and tree lines...near the next northernmost village. After we dropped the bombs, we...(put) napalm in there and...strafed also.

"Immediately after these flights left, the LNO said he saw ten bodies lying in the area we had bombed and strafed, and the automatic weapons fire was about all stopped at that time."

Following this strike, Captain Somerder was relieved by Captain Duvall, who then put in a third flight of fighters. <sup>17/</sup> This series of firefights throughout the small villages cost the 7th Battalion, 22d NVA Regiment, 11 KIA by ground fire and 23 confirmed KIA "by TAC air, ARA, and 1/9 Cav gunships." <sup>18/</sup> Total enemy losses to that unit during the entire day totaled 46 KIA. Friendly forces lost one KIA and two WIA. <sup>19/</sup>

Enemy Attrition Continues (8 - 31 Nov 66)

By the second week in November, the 610th NVA Division had their fill and the 2d VC and 22d NVA Regiments, along with Division Headquarters, began withdrawing north to the vicinity of the Binh Dinh-Quang Ngai Province borders. From this area, the 22d NVA Regiment continued farther north into base camps located in southern Quang Ngai Province. <sup>20/</sup> This move was evidently prompted by the relentless search for the 610th Division by the

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1st ACD during the previous two months. The remaining enemy regiment, the 18th NVA, was believed at this time to have dispersed throughout the Kim Son Valley area and was considered to be combat-ineffective. <sup>21/</sup>

ARC LIGHT strikes continued to support the Binh Dinh campaign with strikes on 8, 15, 21, and 23 November. Results from these strikes were not as impressive as were those from the strikes during the previous two weeks, but at least two of the strikes caused moderate damage. <sup>22/</sup>

The ARC LIGHT conducted on 8 November hit a medium-sized enemy camp with nine sorties and this is an extract from the BDA report. <sup>23/</sup>

"The following installations were destroyed by the bomb strikes: one hut..., one old fighting bunker..., 10 foxholes with overhead cover..., and 15 bunkers...One hut was destroyed by burning..., with the nearest crater being 20 meters away. Scattered rice around the hut indicated a possible minor explosion...

"Two VC were killed as a result of the bomb strike. Two VC were wounded during the ground search..."

The next strike was conducted on 15 November and did heavy damage to a base area on the east side of the Kim Son Valley. <sup>24/</sup>

"All three bunkered areas were hit by the bomb strike, and the bunkers were destroyed. Bunkers in the immediate vicinity of bomb craters were collapsed from within, had overhead covers caved in, and were full of debris. Bunkers located in cleared areas, but away from craters, had overhead cover blown away and were relatively free of debris.

"There were no indications of enemy casualties due to the strike."

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A steady attrition of enemy forces, particularly from the 18th NVA Regiment, continued throughout this period although there were no major engagements. On 20 November, a completely furnished cave complex, capable of supporting a regiment, was discovered on the slopes of Nui Ngiao Mountain. <sup>25/</sup>

Direct air support was continuous during this period but there were no significant CAS missions flown until 23 November. On that afternoon, A/1/9th Cav sighted ten to 15 enemy in a trench system in the lower An Lao Valley. <sup>26/</sup> Two A-1Es from the 1st Air Commando Squadron (ACS) were scrambled from Pleiku and expended napalm on the enemy emplacements. <sup>27/</sup> The enemy lost five KIA/KBA as a result of this encounter and the air strikes opened up a tunnel system and destroyed three huts and six bunkers. <sup>28/</sup>

An hour later, three F-100s were scrambled as a consequence of further enemy sightings by A/1/9th Cav in a nearby location. <sup>29/</sup> As a result, three VC were KIA/KBA, and another tunnel complex was uncovered by the air strikes. <sup>30/</sup> Enemy losses for the day totaled 26 KIA/KBA.

Heavy contact flared again the following day when enemy forces were fixed in the same general area, and pounded by tube artillery and TAC air strikes. When the engagement ended, 30 enemy bodies were left on the field and another 11 enemy soldiers were captured. <sup>31/</sup>

Enemy forces continued to be encountered throughout the AO on the next day and in scattered engagements, 32 enemy were KIA. The 1st ACD losses were nine KIA and two aircraft destroyed. <sup>32/</sup>

A private from the 18th NVA Regiment was captured on 28 November, and

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he revealed that "morale in his unit is low due to fear of B-52 raids, helicopters, and artillery. Most of the men in his unit have malaria, and two men recently died of the disease." <sup>33/</sup>

A second prisoner, 2d Lt. Vo Thanh Phong, attached to the financial section of division headquarters, indicated the effects of continuing Allied operations against the 610th Division and gave some aspects of future objectives of enemy forces in the area.

"The 2d VC and 22d NVA Regts remain marginally combat effective, and the 18th Regt lost equivalent of two bns during Sept and Oct 66. Latter part of Oct 18th Regt received 150 local replacements. Most of these persons were confused and the desertion rate is high. Overall strength of each company is 50 men." <sup>34/</sup> 2d Lieutenant Phong stated further that "the entire forces of Military Region (MR) 5 (a geographical area comprising several provinces), will be brought to bear to annihilate the 1st Cav Div during Jan, Feb, and Mar 1967." <sup>35/</sup>

The source revealed also that the 610th Division had received limited numbers of replacements during 1966, but the I Field Forces' Intelligence Summary (INTSUM) report contained an additional editorial comment that "it is felt that the unknown number of losses to all three Regiments of the division from B-52 raids, TAC air strikes, Allied ground actions, malaria, and desertion have negated any recent gains from replacements." <sup>36/</sup>

### Decimating the 18th NVA Regt (1 - 26 Dec 66)

December began ominously for the enemy with the 9th Battalion, 18th NVA Regiment, suffering heavy losses in an engagement with the 1st ACD. At mid-morning on 1 December, C/1/9th Cav made contact with a seemingly small group

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of enemy troops. The battle grew throughout the day and B/5/7th and one platoon of C/2/12th moved into an encircling position. By nightfall, the enemy force had sustained 70 KIA by body count, further decreasing the estimated strength of the already hard-hit 9th Battalion, 18th NVA Regiment to 165 men <sup>38/</sup> as opposed to an authorized strength of 600. <sup>39/</sup> A 60-mm mortar and numerous automatic weapons, equipment, and documents were also captured. <sup>40/</sup> Tactical air support was unable to provide close air support during this battle due to poor weather conditions, but one Sky Spot mission was flown against a probable enemy escape route. <sup>41/</sup> Losses to the 1st ACD for the day were three KIA and 21 WIA. <sup>42/</sup>

ARC LIGHT strikes, totaling 30 sorties, supported THAYER II on 6, 7, and 11 December, but no significant BDAs were reported. <sup>43/</sup>

Light contact continued throughout the AO with small groups or individuals. Most of these were deserters or persons separated from their parent units. Other elements were pinpointed and destroyed as the hungry 18th NVA Regiment sent out numerous small parties to collect rice and supplies. <sup>44/</sup>

Heavy ground action again occurred on 17 December, during a search of the western slopes of the 506 Valley (named thusly because it was traversed by Highway 506), by elements of the 1st ACD. On a small finger of forested land jutting into the valley from Nui Hon Giang Mountain, C/1/8th Cav made contact with small groups of well dug-in enemy soldiers. Although the original contact was quickly broken off, it was soon reestablished, this time with an estimated battalion-sized force. Artillery was called in and

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sorties were flown throughout the THAYER II AO. During the afternoon, D/1/8th Cav got into a firefight while searching the battle area of the previous day. Several immediate sorties had already been flown in a nearby area around noon, but action flared again about mid-afternoon and Capt. Owen <sup>78/</sup> McIntyre was notified to proceed to the area in his O-1.

"I flew over the area and observed that elements of the 1st Air Cav were occupying a small hill...There was a burning village (and) I was advised that I would put in an immediate air strike on a small village defined as Gia Duc 2.

"...While waiting for the fighters to arrive, I recced the battle area. One of the more startling things that I noticed were the four or five American dead laying along the edge of the ridge line waiting to be evacuated out of the area.

"About one click (kilometer) upstream, I noticed people were leaving the western side of the river and moving over to the east side...The target description was such that anything west of the river was considered VC and anything east of the river was considered to be friendly...

"These people were moving across the river as fast as they could. I commented to the controlling agency, which was Slashing Tiger, that these people were crossing the river in boats and he said that was affirmative, and we would have to let them go as they had women and children. However, it was also obvious that they had two or three men of military age and strong VC suspects with them.

"Eventually two B-57s arrived. I was almost in position to mark the target when I noticed a man in black pajamas walk into the village. I advised the clearing authority that this man had gone into the village and they said he was Charlie and we were cleared to strike anyway. So I rolled in and marked the target, and the mark hit very close to where he entered the village and where the B-57s

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dropped their napalms right on the mark and continued to work the village over from one end to the other.

"Air worked the village over quite effectively, destroying something like seven hootches and damaging eight. They actually laid the ordnance quite effectively into the small village area."

The two B-57s were subsequently credited with one KBA, probably the lone "Charlie" Captain McIntyre observed entering the village just prior to the strike. <sup>79/</sup>

Rash 17, Captain McIntyre, was called to the same area on the following day: <sup>80/</sup>

"This time it was C/1/8th...in contact along the small ridge line. I was asked if I thought we could put in an immediate air strike into the area. I advised I thought we could put in some close air, particularly if they were A-1Es.

"However, the first set of fighters I received were diverted and they were F-100s. Even though they were not A-1Es, they were not handicapped particularly by weather (overcast from 2,500-3,000 feet with scattered showers in the area), as their ordnance was high drag bombs and napalm...

"I sensed that the people on the ground were apprehensive in using the F-100 in close air support... (since it) had been requested that their first pass be made with 20-mm so they could check their accuracy. I felt that this was unnecessary since I knew where the friendlies were and I knew where they wanted me to put the bombs...It was considerably out in front of where they were...(Then) they requested we move in closer and put in eight 500-pound high drag bombs."

When this ordnance was successfully delivered, the ground forces suggested that the napalm be brought in even closer to around 150-to-200

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meters of their positions as they were still receiving heavy automatic weapons and recoilless rifle fire from the enemy positions. While this strike was in progress, Captain McIntyre called for more air which arrived almost immediately in the form of the originally scrambled flight of A-1Es from Pleiku. <sup>81/</sup>

The A-1Es had napalm and CBU, but because of the terrain, the CBU was not used. Captain McIntyre decided "we would use the ten cans of napalm and make as many passes as possible. The napalm was again dropped with extreme accuracy..." <sup>82/</sup>

After eight of the ten cans of napalm had been expended, the ground commander decided to attempt disengagement as it appeared that the enemy was moving in closer to the Cavalry positions to avoid the air strikes. Captain McIntyre kept his fighters making dummy bomb runs over the enemy positions to keep the enemy down while the friendly forces disengaged. <sup>83/</sup>

After the friendly ground forces had successfully drawn back, the remainder of the napalm was expended and "we got a comment from the ground commander that it was excellent." <sup>84/</sup>

"By this time I could distinguish beyond any doubt that as the A-1s came over, there were a large number of flashes coming up along the ridge line. I kept these places in mind and when the next flight of A-1s showed up--they had...ten cans of napalm and 20-mm--the lead rolled in (and) the first napalm drop was extremely effective. The friendly troops commented they could feel the heat but if we could keep it up we could burn Charlie out of there."

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Captain McIntyre continued to put in the A-1s, who followed each napalm run with a strafing pass. <sup>85/</sup> Finally, his rockets expended, he turned the flight over to Lt. Colonel Warwick and, after three and a half hours of continuous air strikes, returned to Hammond. <sup>86/</sup>

"Follow-up inquiry determined that the next day when they moved through, they found eight VC killed and numerous weapons...There was quite a significant weapons cache...picked up out of the area and we were given credit for eight to ten VC killed by TAC air.

"Overall I felt that the TAC air was not as effective as it could have been, because they insisted that the bombs be dropped too far out in front of them, until they were convinced of their accuracy. And then by this time, the bombs had been used up. I felt that if they had marked their position and let me use my judgment as to where the bombs should go, we would have gotten heavier ordnance down into the jungle... into the prepared positions of the enemy, and been more effective.

"However, we were obligated to do as they requested, and even so TAC air was quite effective. The overall coordination took a little more time than it should have, however, during situations such as this--in close support within 50 meters in front of the friendly position--it is much more prudent to be careful than possibly have an error."

On 30 December another ARC LIGHT "Quick Run" strike was flown by six B-52s approximately ten miles west of Bong Song. <sup>87/</sup> The C/1/9th Cav reconnoitered the strike zone and found numerous signs of very recent occupation and captured small amounts of equipment, arms, food, and supplies. <sup>88/</sup>

In the ground sweep of the area where Captain McIntyre put in the air strikes on the previous day, three NVA were encountered. Two of them were

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killed and the second was wounded and captured. This captive turned out to be Senior Captain Le Phuoc, the Plans and Training officer of the 18th NVA Regiment and Regimental Deputy Chief of Staff. He proved to be very cooperative and provided complete intelligence on his unit as well as the 610th Division. Information included future plans of the division and tactics the enemy intended to employ against effectiveness of the 1st ACD. <sup>89/</sup>

Information from Captain Phuoc and other sources indicated that the 610th Division had been recently reinforced by many local recruits, but their quality was poor. Good intelligence reports indicated that as many as 1,300 North Vietnamese replacements reached the Division in November, but by the end of Operation THAYER II, these reports were not confirmed. <sup>90/</sup>

### The Search Steps Up (3 Jan - 12 Feb 67)

On 3 January, the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division was placed under Operational Control (OPCON) of the 1st ACD and deployed by road to the vicinity of the Cuoi Ca Valley to conduct offensive operations. This move expanded search forces in the THAYER II AO by two battalions and one battery of artillery. <sup>91/</sup>

There were no other large engagements with the 610th Division until late January, but large quantities of enemy supplies and equipment were captured and destroyed. Daily enemy personnel losses continued at a high rate during most of the period.

Five ARC LIGHT strikes were conducted during January with a total of

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33 B-52 sorties flown. <sup>92/</sup> Eight KBA were recorded as a result of two strikes conducted on 16 January, in the mountains west of the An Lao Valley. TAC air sorties continued at a high rate but there were no significant instances of close air support.

Huong Van The, a squadron leader of the 8th Battalion, 22d NVA Regiment, was captured on 6 January and he subsequently provided information indicating additional unrecorded enemy losses over the previous month. The prisoner was WIA in the attack on LZ Bird on 27 December, and was taken to a hospital that contained "50 seriously wounded and 20 slightly wounded personnel." The POW further stated that the hospital was attacked on 3 January, killing its 15 wounded patients.

By 10 January, the condition of the 18th NVA Regiment had deteriorated to such a degree that the following flash letter, written by the 610th Division's commander, was sent from Song Kon Station in Binh Dinh Province to his division. <sup>94/</sup>

"After suffering repeated failures, soldiers and cadre of the 18th Regiment are demoralized and possess the intention of rallying to the enemy side. Order the various security sections to survey all cadre, especially the cadre from squad leader level to battalion commander level, to calm and improve the morale of the aforementioned disaffected men."

Before intercepting this message, the 1st ACD had received a report indicating an entire squad ~~was~~ from the 18th NVA Regiment intended to surrender. <sup>95/</sup> This intelligence data became the basis for an intensive

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Chieu Hoi psy-war effort against the 18th NVA Regiment which was conducted on 18 - 19 January. <sup>96/</sup> A Chieu Hoi Returnee from that regiment, who surrendered on 12 February, stated that "on these two days the unit was assembled and that no one was allowed to leave the immediate area." <sup>97/</sup> He further revealed that his "company political officer told the unit that they were now subordinate to Binh Dinh Headquarters instead of the SAO VANG (610th) Div because the Regt was very weak." <sup>98/</sup>

Meanwhile the 3d Brigade Task Force of the 25th Infantry Division was on the verge of a major discovery. On 11 January, B/1/35th killed two enemy in the lower Cuoi Ca Valley. The enemy were found to be carrying the unusual sum of 100,000 Vietnamese Piasters (in U.S. money, \$800). <sup>99/</sup>

"This unusual find and the large number of weapons captured in the following days indicated that the 3d Brigade Task Force had struck close to a major headquarters. On 18 January, a series of caves, formed by granite boulders piled upon one another, were discovered in a ravine (in the western section of Area PYTHON). This complex provided shelter for the financial section, psychological operations section, ammo warehouse, hospital, and intelligence section of the BINH DINH Province Headquarters. In addition, part of the medical and signal support of the 18th NVA Regiment is believed to have been located here."

As a result of this discovery, a large portion of the headquarters administrative staff was either killed or captured and most of the equipment and material from this headquarters was captured or destroyed. The haul included 10,500,000 VN Piasters (about \$90,000 U.S. dollars), in National Liberation Front (NLF) payment certificates and large quantities

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of radios and signal equipment. <sup>100/</sup>

An attempt was made on 20 January to blow up the cave complex with demolitions. The result was a secondary explosion that moved a 30-foot-in-diameter rock, ten feet. A subsequent attempt on 23 January, with 250 pounds of explosives, caused "six or seven massive secondary explosions lasting for two or three minutes and blowing a gap in the side of the hill 100 meters long." Additional caves were uncovered by the secondary explosions. <sup>101/</sup>

Agent reports and those of prisoners later indicated that the effectiveness and presence of the 3d Brigade, 25th Division, in the Cuoi Ca Valley and nearby hill masses, prevented the 18th NVA Regiment from attempting a major attack on LZ Hammord in late January. <sup>102/</sup>

Heavy contact with the enemy again occurred on 27 January, when C/2/12th Cav became heavily engaged upon moving into an LZ four miles northwest of Bong Song. About the same time, ARVN Marines were engaged a mile south of these locations. <sup>103/</sup> The area was hit during the day by immediate sorties with six F-100s and two A-1Hs. An AC-47 was on station after dark and continued support by expending flares and 15,000 rounds of minigun fire. <sup>104/</sup> A sweep of the battle area and sporadic contacts in the same vicinity the next day, cost the 7th and 8th Battalions, 22d NVA Regiment, 45 KIA and loss of eight small arms and one light minigun. <sup>105/</sup> Machine gun.

TAC airpower was again utilized in close air support on 5 February, when B/1/9th Cav engaged 20 armed enemy on the mountain ridge between the

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Cuoi Ca and Kim Son Valleys. TAC airpower was credited with an estimated ten KBA according to the I Field Forces Vietnam (IFFV INTSUM) for 5 February. <sup>106/</sup> One secondary explosion was also observed during the strike. <sup>107/</sup>

On 6 February, a FAC was conducting a visual reconnaissance (VR) mission in the lower An Lao Valley, when he spotted occupied trenches, bunkers, and foxholes. An immediate air strike confirmed four enemy KBA and ten enemy estimated KBA. <sup>108/</sup>

The same day, the 3/40th ARVN Regiment battled an estimated NVA Battalion ten miles northeast of Bong Song. Four A-1Es, two A-4s, and two F-100s supported the action with immediate sorties. As a result, 45 VC structures were destroyed, 14 were damaged, there were ten secondary explosions, <sup>109/</sup> and probably elements of the 22d NVA Regiment suffered 81 KIA in the attack. <sup>110/</sup>

The enemy struck back hard early the next morning, however, with a heavy mortar attack against LZ English and its Army airfield. The camp, located only three miles north of Bong Song, was raked by an estimated 50 rounds of 82-mm and four rounds of 60-mm mortar fire. <sup>111/</sup> Three AC-47s supported the friendly forces, comprised of the 2/12th Cav and elements of the 40th ARVN Regiment, by lighting up the area with 132 flares and expending <sup>112/</sup> 16,500 rounds of ammunition against suspected mortar positions.

Enemy casualties were unknown but friendly losses were heavy. U.S. losses were one KIA, 53 WIA, three UH-1D helicopters damaged, one 10,000-gallon fuel bladder destroyed, a second damaged, five 500-gallon fuel pods damaged, a quarter-ton truck destroyed, and two 2½-ton trucks damaged. ARVN

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Regiment losses were six WIA. <sup>113/</sup> This action was the last major contact of Operation THAYER II, which terminated on 12 February 1967.

### Results of Operation THAYER II

Operation THAYER II terminated after the Tet truce on 12 February. The northeast-Binh Dinh Province pacification program continued in full swing as the 1st ACD focused their efforts north of Bong Song with Operation PERSHING--still in progress as of 1 April 1967. <sup>114/</sup>

THAYER II cost the enemy, confirmed by body-count, losses of 1,100 VC KIA and 657 NVA KIA. An additional 89 VC and 63 NVA were taken prisoners during actual combat, while another 152 individuals, <sup>115/</sup> from a total of nearly 4,000 detained as suspects, <sup>116/</sup> were subsequently classified as POWs. Large scale defections of enemy-combat personnel never materialized as only 145 VC and 16 NVA were classified as Chieu Hoi Returnees. <sup>117/</sup>

It is known, however, that the enemy desertion rate was, and continued to be, extremely high. <sup>118/</sup> Rather than turn themselves in, the majority of VC deserters merely returned to their villages. THAYER II left enemy morale at a very low point, and continuing high losses during Operation PERSHING, undoubtedly, increased this problem.

In addition to personnel losses, 426 individual and 53 crew-served weapons were captured from the enemy. Losses in supplies and material were also high, with an additional 145,000 rounds of small arms ammunition captured. <sup>119/</sup>