

Interim Report of Operations
FIRST CAVALRY DIVISION

JULY 1965 TO DECEMBER 1966



Published by
1st Cavalry Division Association
P. O. Box 11201, Albuquerque, N. M. 87112

R. CARMODY

Interim Report of Operations
of the
1st CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMObILE)

JULY 1, 1965, TO DECEMBER 31, 1966



This Report was compiled by

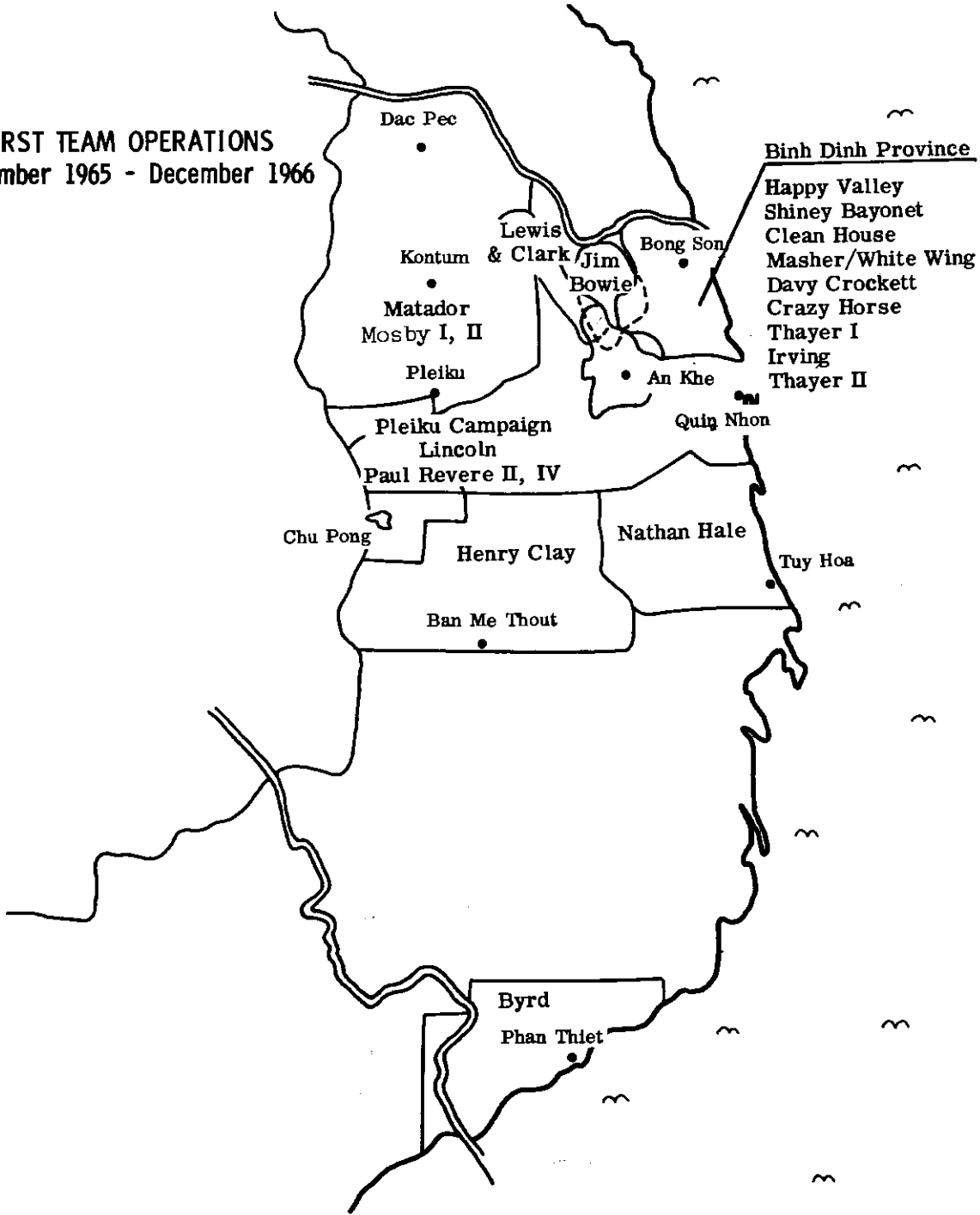
CAPTAIN CHARLES S. SYKES, JR.

Office of Information and History, Headquarters 1st Cavalry Division
(Airmobile)

It is edited and published by the 1st Cavalry Division Association and is distributed without charge to members of the Association who served in THE FIRST TEAM in Vietnam in 1965 and 1966.

The Association acknowledges the assistance and contributions of the men who made the history, and their help in its compilation, and in particular acknowledges the invaluable contributions of Major John J. Madigan, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), for accurate and painstaking research which has contributed significantly to the completion of this Report.

FIRST TEAM OPERATIONS
September 1965 - December 1966



MAP 2

It was my privilege and great good fortune to serve with the 11th Air Assault Division (Test), and to remain in command when that experimental unit was designated the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) at Fort Benning in July 1965.

Fully aware of the proud traditions of the 1st Cavalry Division, I knew that our new Division, conceived in the heritage of Cavalry firepower and mobility, would glory in the name of THE FIRST TEAM and would add new laurels to the glorious record of the Division.

After the reorganization we moved fast, as befits Cavalry. On 28 July President Johnson announced we would go to Vietnam; by August our advance party was hand-carving our base in Vietnam; by September we had closed, had met the enemy, and had aided in repulsing his drive to divide South Vietnam.

Against adverse terrain, climate, and ruthless enemy, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) went on and on, to attain all objectives, complete all missions, defeat the guerrillas, the Main Force Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese regulars, and earn the highest commendations of our commanders.

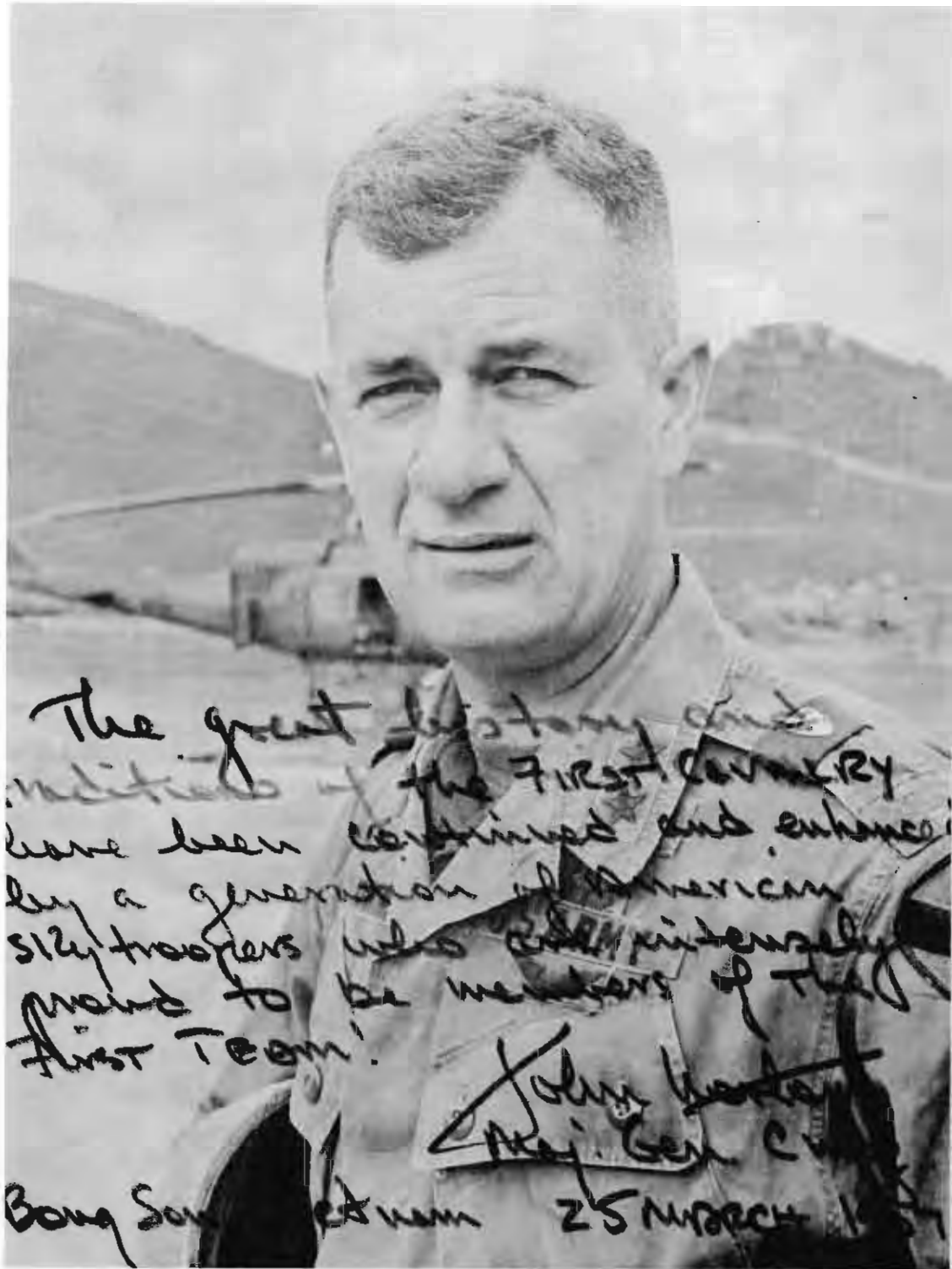
These victories were not without cost. Many brave men fell in battle; many were wounded and maimed in the very difficult fighting. The dedication and sacrifice of our young Americans to the ideals of freedom and democracy was magnificent.

All of us who have learned to revere our patch appreciate the unique distinction that is ours; we served in THE FIRST TEAM. Let us always remember that service -- and our comrades -- with dignity and hope for a brighter future for our Division, for the Army, for our Country, and for the World.

Harry Kinnard
HARRY W. O. KINNARD
Major General. GS



MAJOR GENERAL, HARRY W. O. KINNARD, U. S. Army
(TIME - LIFE Photo)



MAJOR GENERAL JOHN NORTON, U. S. Army
Commanding General, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile),
May, 1966, to April, 1967



BRIGADIER GENERAL WILLIAM A. BECKER, Assistant Division Commander
General Becker also served with the 1st Cavalry Division in World War II



LIEUTENANT WALTER J. MARM, JR.
Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery above and beyond the call of duty while
leading a platoon in the Ia Drang Valley campaign, 14 November 1965

APPRECIATION

The Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Commander-in-Chief, the senior commanders, and most Americans have repeatedly saluted the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) for exemplary services and achievements in Vietnam in 1965 and 1966.

All thinking citizens of the Free World who realize that terrorism, murder, and subversion, if allowed to prevail in South Vietnam to the destruction of that Republic and to the seizure of its wealth for Communism, would then be applied in Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and beyond in the same vicious strategy, have had occasion to recognize and appreciate achievements of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) in Vietnam. The Division's contribution to the security of the Free World has been magnificent.

The host Government of the Republic of Vietnam has expressed great admiration and sincere appreciation for the outstanding performance of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). Honoring the men who have traveled 10,000 miles or more to join in the fight for the security of the Republic and the preservation of its freedom, Lt Gen CAO VAN VIEN, Chief of the Joint General Staff, RVNAF, wrote in October 1966:

"During the VN, US, and ROK combined operations north of QUI NHON, the US 1st Air Cavalry Division has recorded accomplishments which are worthy of praise, both in the destruction of the enemy and in civic actions. . . . The Division provided RVNAF and local authorities with effective assistance in relocating some 30,000 anti-communist refugees. . . . I ask that you convey to all soldiers of the US 1st Air Cavalry Division who participated in Operation IRVING, the deepest appreciation from the RVNAF and myself."

The 1st Cavalry Division Association is proud to avail itself of this opportunity to join in the acknowledgment of a deep sense of gratitude to each man who served in THE FIRST TEAM in Vietnam. The achievements and sacrifices of Troopers in defeating Communism have helped and are helping to keep the enemy from our doorstep.

"Mother" of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)

The 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) has another unique distinction in having the only "Mother" among U. S. Army Divisions. Mrs. Gladys Dorcy collaborated in the design of the 1st Cavalry Division Patch in 1921 with her husband, the late Colonel Ben Dorcy, who was then the Commanding Officer, 7th U. S. Cavalry Regiment. Now a resident of Washington, D. C., "Mother" Dorcy is greatly in demand for speaking engagements as an authority on heraldry. When she is not busy lecturing, much of her time is spent (as it has been spent during the past 25 years) in writing letters to her Troopers—the men who wear the Big Bright Patch, the Men of THE FIRST TEAM.



Mrs. Dorcy is shown here with the color bearer (unidentified), then General William C. Chase who commanded the 1st Cav Div in 1945-1947 (partly hidden by the color bearer); then General Paul Freeman, Continental Army Commander (who accompanied the 1st Cav Div into Manila in February 1945); then General Harry W. O. Kinnard, Commanding General, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), at ceremonies at Fort Benning, Georgia, on July 3, 1965, marking the transfer of the colors.

PART I

GETTING THERE FIRST WITH THE MOST

From Hannibal and his elephants, and Genghis Kahn and his mounted hordes, to Patton and his tanks, victory on the battlefield rewarded the Army with the most effective combination of mobility, firepower and shock action.

In the 19th Century the United States was explored, settled, developed, and expanded into a world power, with Cavalrymen preceding and protecting the pioneers in the westward surge, distinguishing themselves and extending the chivalrous traditions inherited from antiquity by their service and sacrifice, contributing their blood and sweat and often their lives to the growth of the United States.

The 20th Century found Cavalry units fighting in the pacification of the Philippines, but technology in transportation on the ground and in the air marked the diminishing usefulness of the horse in battle. In World War I, Cavalry was still useful, and in 1921 the 1st Cavalry Division was organized at Fort Bliss, Texas, with four regiments of Cavalry—the 5th, 7th, 8th, and 12th—and with supporting Artillery, Engineers, and other Services.

In the twenties and thirties, on penurious military budgets, the 1st Cavalry Division developed the esprit and the skills to maintain its proud heritage, and to prepare for the battles to come. World War II demonstrated the new techniques in mobility based on trucks, tanks, and airplanes; massed automatic weapons, mortars, artillery, and aerial bombardment eliminated the effectiveness of Horse Cavalry.

In 1943 the 1st Cavalry Division moved into the Southwest Pacific Theater of Operations, without its horses, and thereafter fought, as Sixth Army Commander General Walter Krueger, described the Division, as "My Incomparable Infantrymen." During the Second World War the 1st Cavalry Division gained battle honors and laurels, earning the approbation of General Douglas MacArthur:

"No greater record has emerged from the war than that of the 1st Cavalry Division—swift and sure in attack, tenacious and durable in defense, and loyal and cheerful under hardship. My personal connection with it in many moments of crisis has especially endeared it to me."

In the occupation of Japan, in the Korean operations, and in the surveillance of the Demilitarized Zone in Korea, from 1945 to 1965, the

1st Cavalry Division served with distinction, consolidating its reputation as THE FIRST TEAM. The Division was 22 years old when it went overseas in 1943 for the next 22 years.

VISION

Meanwhile, in the United States, leaders with vision planned new and bold steps to combine firepower and mobility into new high levels of combat effectiveness. General Hamilton H. Howze headed a board that explored concepts of using helicopters and Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL) aircraft to lift men into battle, to provide them with fire support, and to reinforce, resupply, and when necessary to evacuate them. General Howze and his associates, in brief, were preparing to overcome terrain obstacles in the achievement of tactical mobility. A Cavalryman of long standing, and son of the first Division Commander, General Howze provided a profound impetus toward the adaptation of modern technology to military uses.

By 1963 the concepts developed and refined by the Howze Board had resulted in the organization of the 11th Air Assault Division (Test) under the leadership of General Harry W. O. Kinnard, who told his men:

"Ours is a proud heritage. We have the history and traditions of an illustrious fighting unit on which to model ourselves. It is rare that men are afforded an opportunity such as ours to really pioneer and grow in new and exciting territory. We propose to make our future a bright one, and to make a significant contribution to the Modern Army."

In January 1964 General Kinnard established an Idea Center, creating the intellectual climate for bold thoughts and startling techniques. Also in January 1964, General Kinnard accepted for the Division the Grover E. Bell award for research and experimentation in helicopter development and heard the 11th Air Assault Division cited for its pioneering work in the application of the mobility and firepower capability provided by the helicopter to extend the Army's ground combat capabilities.

TEST

Dedicated and diligent work of all the men of the 11th Air Assault Division tested all facets of the concepts involved at all levels up to Brigade,

and endorsed these concepts as feasible. By 2 July 1964 the testing units had achieved full strength and status as a Division, and could take pride in the commendation of General Earl G. Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

"Since its establishment, the 11th has pioneered a program aimed at opening a new dimension in warfare which would increase the battlefield mobility and capability of Army units to fight land battles. In testing this concept, you have played a significant role in updating traditional ideas and have developed new and impressive techniques which will unquestionably increase the overall combat effectiveness of the Army."

Division level tests from 15 October to 15 November 1964 confirmed the feasibility of the Howze Board concepts and established the proficiency of the Division, which had completed the test task ahead of a rugged original schedule and in a manner which won the admiration and thanks of the Army's leaders.

In the fall of 1964, however, budget considerations threatened the existence of the 11th Air Assault Division. The Department of Defense announced that the experimental Division had fulfilled its purpose, and would be eliminated.

But events 12,000 miles away, in Vietnam, influenced Pentagon thinking at this time. Communist insurgents in South Vietnam had effectively infiltrated southward beyond the 17th parallel, with the unmistakable objective of overwhelming the Southern Republic. It was obvious that unless the Free World came to the assistance of Vietnam, this rice-rich lush country would fall under Communist domination.

Under these circumstances the decision was made to build up United States Forces in South Vietnam, for operations to defeat the aggression from the North. On 16 June 1965 Secretary of Defense McNamara announced that the Army had been authorized an Airmobile Division as part of its 16 Division force structure, to be formed at Fort Benning, Georgia. At this point the Secretary complimented those who had worked tirelessly in developing and testing the air mobility concept.

1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMOBILE)

On 1 July 1965, and in formal ceremonies on 3 July, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) was activated at Fort Benning with men from the 11th Air Assault Division, from the attached Air Transport Brigade, and from the 2d Infantry Division. On the DMZ in Korea the old 1st Cav-

alry Division was redesignated the 2d Infantry Division as the two sets of colors crossed the Pacific.

After 22 years of overseas service, the 1st Cavalry Division was back in the United States—but not for long. Secretary McNamara had announced that the new Airmobile Division would be combat ready within eight weeks. On 1 July the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) was told to achieve a status of RECON I—readiness condition of the highest combat priority—by 28 July.

It was a tremendous problem. Many units faced reorganization under new TO&E; equipment had to be exchanged; new personnel had to be trained in heliborne tactics and techniques; 1st Brigade men had to be jump qualified and 600 newly assigned men had to qualify as paratroopers in an abbreviated, intensive course. Night and day preparations went forward—gas chamber exercises, swimming lessons, classes in jungle warfare, rappelling from helicopters, sniping, helicopter door gunnery, aerial weapons firing, artillery adjustment by forward observers in helicopters, communication procedures. In all, there was so much importance attached to efforts to provide each soldier as much additional training as possible, that civilian personnel were employed to work in the mess halls.

Concurrently, the tedious process to POR/POM qualify all men continued. Processing was handled in a large field house at Harmony Church, using the country fair system of stations that handled 850 men daily. The 11th Aviation Group had a particularly tough job—many of its pilots and helicopters were still supporting the XVIII Airborne Corps in the Dominican Republic.

Families of members of the Division had to be relocated in these few short weeks. With the assistance of citizens of Columbus, Georgia, and Phenix City, Alabama, and the Division's Family Assistance Groups, under the auspices of The Infantry Center's Army Community Service Agency, the job was done.

At his news conference on the evening of 28 July, the President explained why the United States was concerned in Vietnam and had assumed the commitment to aid in the defense of the Republic; he demonstrated also why the Free World had a stake in the outcome of the struggle. Then in solemn tones President Johnson announced:

"I have today ordered to Vietnam the Air Mobile Division."

This was the first time an American President had publicly announced the deployment of an Army Division to a combat zone before departure of the Division. The 1st Cavalry Division (Air-

mobile) was the first full division committed to the Vietnam effort.

Confirmation by the President of the rumors rife at Fort Benning did not provide details, but efforts to be ready were redoubled; the new M16E1 rifle was issued, studied, fired, zeroed, fired again. Towels, handkerchiefs, and underclothing were dyed green; it is said that the public washing machines in the Fort Benning area provided a green tint for weeks after the Division had left.

After these feverish weeks of preparation, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) was ready, on time, to go; ready to flex its muscles; ready to show the world that it was by far the best; eager to show off airmobility and make officials wonder how they ever got along without it.

And so, at the end of these harried weeks, commanders strove to give each man a few days leave before actual departure; a few days to spend with their families before the long, hard year ahead. For the men, and for the families, leave provided a tremendous morale boost before the men were to leave their country, their loved ones, their families, for at least a year—and some of them, forever.

DEPLOYMENT

Actual movement of personnel was called Operation PAT and was scheduled in three increments: an Advance Liaison Detachment, an Advance Party, and the Main Body. The first echelon to depart was the Advance Liaison Detachment composed of 32 key officers and men. Led by Brigadier General John S. Wright, ADC-B, the detachment departed the United States by air on 2 August 1965 and arrived in the Republic of Vietnam two days later.

Of the 32 men in the Advance Liaison Detachment, 28 were pilots including, of course, General Wright. In most cases these men were executive officers of their units, and their mission was to coordinate with, and gain experience from, aviation units already in Vietnam. They were to acclimatize themselves to terrain and weather, and become familiar with flying conditions in Vietnam's central highlands.

The Advance Party was made up of about 1,040 officers and men, and left Fort Benning during the period 14-20 August. Moving with 152 tons of cargo (including nine UH-1B helicopters), the Advance Party travelled to Warner Robbins Air Force Base at Macon, Georgia, and from there were deployed by aircraft of the Military Airlift Command. The Air Force C-130's and C-124's flew via Travis AFB, California; Hickam Field, Hawaii, Clark AFB, Philippines,

arriving in Nha Trang on the eastern coast of Vietnam from 19 to 27 August. These two advance forces joined at An Khe, 36 miles inland from the coastal city of Qui Nhon, north of Nha Trang, and began to establish a temporary base camp near the An Khe air strip. The 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, provided security during this initial settlement phase.

The third and final phase of troop and supply movement found the bulk of the Division departing Fort Benning and deploying by troop and cargo ships of the Military Sea Transport Service. Approximately 13,500 men left Columbus, Georgia, in mid-August. Moving by train and bus, they headed for Atlantic and Gulf ports of embarkation.

Six troop carriers, four aircraft carriers, and seven cargo ships were employed in the over-water movement. The 1st Brigade loaded out on the USNS GEIGER, the 2d Brigade on the USNS BUCKNER, and the 3d Brigade on the USNS ROSE. The remainder of the Division including elements of the Support Command, the battalions of the Aviation Group, and the various combat support units, loaded on the USNS DARBY, PATCH, AND UPSUR. Troop ships departed on 16 August as the BUCKNER and DARBY pulled away from Charleston, South Carolina. The other four troop carriers departed during the next four days from Charleston, and from Savannah, Georgia.

More than 470 of the Division's rotary and fixed wing aircraft were crowded on the carriers USNS BOXER, KULA GULF, CROATON, and CARD. The BOXER itself had over 220 aircraft, to include the four flying Cranes from the attached 478th Aviation Company; over fifty CH-47 Chinooks, and all of the ASTA platoon's Mohawks. The first of these carriers—the CROATON—sailed from Mobile on 11 August; the remaining three departed in subsequent days, the CARD also from Mobile, and the BOXER and KULA GULF sailing from Mayport Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida.

Although the packing began in early July and continued on a round-the-clock basis, the general cargo did not move until 7 August when the first of the seven cargo ships sailed from New Orleans.

ON THE WAY

The sea movement of this third echelon traversed the world moving both East and West. While the BOXER sailed eastward into the Mediterranean and through the Suez Canal to arrive at Qui Nhon on 9 September, the other aircraft carriers and the troop and cargo ships sailed westward through the Panama Canal, stopping

at Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines, and arriving at Qui Nhon beginning on 12 September.

Four weeks at sea provided little idle time. Additional training and preparation for jungle service filled the hours. Subjects discussed hurriedly during the last days at Fort Benning were reviewed. Physical fitness was emphasized thru daily PT in cramped space between aircraft and other equipment. Skull practice in guerrilla tactics, patrolling, jungle navigation aided mental alertness. The "lessons learned" by other units already in Vietnam were analyzed. Weapons testing and familiarization continued from the aft decks of the BUCKNER and ROSE, with home-made targets towed behind the ships. Fire Direction Center and Forward Observer teams fired "match box" Artillery missions.

Every young Cavalryman was determined to be as knowledgeable and in as good physical shape as possible; they were getting ready for combat—physically, mentally, and spiritually.

August 31 at sea was a moneyless payday—troops had been paid before departure. Two weeks before arrival in Vietnam, weekly doses of malaria suppressive tablets began—a routine that became the favorite, is not the best, method of counting off the passing months in the jungle.

While the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) was crossing the Pacific, the Cavalrymen of World War II and Korea gathered in Kansas City for the 18th Annual Reunion of the 1st Cavalry Division Association. General Kinnard and key staff officers took time from their busy schedule to explain the new Division concepts to the old timers. The members of the Association who had helped establish the reputation of the 1st Cavalry Division in the Southwest Pacific, in the Philippines, and in Korea, wanted to know the new Division.

As the troop ships approached Vietnam a second echelon in the main body deployment departed Fort Benning. The 18 Caribou aircraft of the 17th Aviation Company flew from Lawson Army Airfield 3 September enroute to Hamilton Air Force Base in California. This first, and longest, leg of the trip took an average of 17 hours and was completed without incident. Shortly thereafter on 6 September the aircraft departed for Southeast Asia, with fuel, maintenance, and crew stops at Hawaii, Wake, Guam, and the Philippines. On 18 September the 18 Caribou arrived at Vung Tau and then made the short flight to An Khe—the first time an entire Caribou Company had ferried its organic aircraft across the Pacific.

On the 13th of September the DARBY dropped anchor in Qui Nhon Harbor. This was the Division's birthday, or Organization Day, and it is

unlikely that anyone concerned in the Division's activation in September 1921 foresaw the 44th birthday. General Kinnard, with customary foresight, had prepared an Organization Day message which newspapers of the ships carrying the Troopers published. He proclaimed:

"The eyes of the world are fixed on this Division. We are the embodiment of an exciting new tactical doctrine. Whatever lies ahead, we will prevail. We are THE FIRST TEAM."

Earlier, on 9 September, the BOXER had arrived with the giant Chinooks of the 228th Assault Support Helicopter Battalion. Preparations began several days prior to arrival with the de-cocooning process. When the BOXER dropped anchor at Qui Nhon the Chinooks were "Go." The first CH-47 left the deck on 11 September with Captain Harold E. Gonyer and CWO (W3) William A. Ralston at the controls—the first deployment of a helicopter from a carrier into the combat zone. Sixty nine hours later the last CH-47 departed, registering the Company as 100% flyable.

WELCOME TO VIETNAM

The other troop ships arrived in due course and the troops put their debarkation drills to good use. Completing their voyage in the amphibious tradition, LCM's and LCU's transported the men from the ships to the beaches, where they were greeted by the Honorable Henry Cabot Lodge, Ambassador of the United States to Vietnam, and a lieutenant and captain in the Horse Cavalry reserves in the 1920's and 1930's. He welcomed the new members of THE FIRST TEAM—a new generation of Cavalry Troopers entering a new kind of war.

Stopping only briefly on the beaches, the men boarded the waiting CH-47's for the short 25 minute flight from Qui Nhon to An Khe, eager to rejoin their comrades in the Advance Party who had prepared a place for them. The troop lift from the beach to the base camp was entirely an organic air movement, involving an average of 21 Chinooks daily, with the movement completed 22 September. Over 1,100 flying hours supported this mission, while general cargo and vehicles moved to the base camp on National Highway 19.

While the main body was crossing the sea, the Advance elements had been hard at work developing the base camp at An Khe, a small hamlet in the southwestern sector of Binh Dinh Province, although the name was applied generally to the entire area. An Khe is equidistant from the coastal city of Qui Nhon and the inland city of

Pleiku, the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) Headquarters for the II Corps Tactical Zone.

Under the Saigon Government, Vietnam is divided into four Corps Tactical Zones, each commanded by a Vietnamese general responsible for all Vietnam forces within his Zone. From the DMZ in the north to and including Quang Ngai Province, I Corps is in control. The II CTZ lying immediately South of I Corps includes South Vietnam's Central Highlands (Map 1). It is the operational area of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and is by far the largest of the four Corps, encompassing 45% of the South Vietnam land mass. The III CTZ lies further south and includes the area generally to the west and north of Saigon. The IV CTZ is still further south and includes the Mekong River Delta. (Page 14)

THE GOLF COURSE

The 1st Cav advance elements were required to carve out the world's largest helipad, soon to be the hub of activity for the Division. Surrounded by flat terrain, except for Hong Kong mountain on the camp's western perimeter, what was to become the base camp was initially dense undergrowth, bamboo and thorn thickets, and ant hills as much as 12 feet high. Dust had to be minimized; dust in whirling rotors would quickly destroy the fine machinery of the helicopter engines. Consequently, the entire area was cleared and leveled and smoothed using only hand tools, thus preserving the turf and topsoil.

It was a strenuous task, but after a few hours practice the men became proficient in the use of axes, entrenching tools, machetes, and Vietnamese brush hooks. After the blisters healed and hardened into callouses they were even more proficient.

Dominating the area was an old, very large banyan tree which was spared and kept as a rallying point. Here announcements were made, instructions given for the work parties, progress charted and plans developed. Here, General Wright, commander of the Advance elements, challenged the men with the task in store which he described as "making the rugged area as smooth as a golf course." The name took hold and the helipad—largest in the world—was soon world-famous as "The Golf Course."

BASE BUILDUP

Even while the Division was closing, Viet Cong sniper fire and light probing attacks began. The valley and the route into the base camp were secured by the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, but the 1st Cav Div (AM) was responsible

for its own immediate perimeter from the outset. The Division supported the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division in Operation GIBRALTAR, but the official date for assuming complete responsibility for the defense of An Khe was 28 September. General Kinnard had noted:

"This was 104 days from the date Secretary McNamara announced the formation of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, and 90 days after General Orders activated the unit on 1 July 1965. . . . Somewhere in the annals of military organization there may have been outfits activated, organized, and moved 12,000 miles to combat, all within the space of 90 days, but none comes immediately to mind. That the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) did just that not only is a remarkable achievement, but a tribute to the men of the Division who devoted an unbelievable amount of time and effort to accomplish the task."

Now the whole Division was on hand to establish the perimeter, to complete the clearing of the helipad, and to erect buildings and tents, field fortifications and storage sheds. These efforts undertaken in oppressive climate, under adverse jungle conditions, and in the face of constant irritations, were successful only through the intensive and dedicated efforts of the Troopers.

Heat is oppressive in Vietnam in September and October, but the intensity of the sun and the danger of sunburn kept shirts on sweating backs. Ant and insect bites plagued the men and were often infected; vines snagged and tripped men at work; impenetrable hedgerows required killing labor in their removal. Scorpions, spiders, and snakes, fortunately, were less prevalent than had been imagined. Tigers stayed back in the brush, but rats infested the areas where the troops worked. Rabies and plague had to be warded off; malaria prevention had top priority. Mosquito netting was used without any question, and provided nighttime protection against any creature that might creep, crawl, slither, or fly. Men learned to inspect, bedding—usually merely a blanket or sleeping bag protected by the mosquito netting—before crawling in; snakes and scorpions appreciated the soldier's belongings.

Men lived under ponchos or in shelter tents until late November. Darkness came early—about 1830 hours, and letter-writing and preparations for the night were done in candle-light—just as in old Horse Cavalry Days when electricity and even gasoline lighting were luxuries true Cavalrymen did without.

Daily sanitation measures were also geared to the elements. For months, an afternoon down-

INTERIM REPORT OF OPERATIONS

pour seemed to be inevitable, and men used the rains for shower baths. More than once a man was caught completely lathered and hopefully waiting for more rain which never came.

During the first weeks practically all supplies were brought in by air. There was very little

refrigeration, and the C Ration was the steady diet. The comforts and amenities of Fort Benning and the far off USA were in the past, and in the future—for now, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) would put up with the Combat Zone and its adversities.



Tactical Road March, Georgia, July 27, 1965



The AC-1 CARIBOU, largest fixed-wing transport aircraft in the Army Aviation program (now operated by USAF), is preparing to land at The Army Aviation Center, Ft. Rucker, Alabama. The CARIBOU carries 32 combat-ready troops or three tons of cargo and features short take-off, short landing, and ease of loading through the rear ramp.



This AGGRESSOR is taking on three UH-1B helicopters during test exercises at Fort Benning in July 1965



The versatile UH-1B IROQUOIS is blowing out a brush fire sparked by muzzle blast of 105mm howitzer at Fort Benning



1965: Troops boarding IROQUOIS assault helicopters in the final phases of the test of the air mobility concept



The AC-1 CARIBOU unloading a jeep at Fort Benning



Georgia, 1965. Loading a 2.75 inch rocket into the weapons system mounted on a UH-1B helicopter in preparation for a firing demonstration during test exercise SKY SOLDIER I



The CA-54A SKYCRANE with pod which can carry 64 troops (at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, November, 1964)



Georgia—July 25, 1965. Army Sgt. Philip Maddox, 1st Sq 9th Cav, learns mountain climbing techniques of rappelling as he makes his third jump from a 35-foot tower at Fort Benning. After five drops from the tower, Troopers move to helicopters and make three more descents from a height of 60 feet. Sgt. Maddox makes his home at Lincoln, Nebraska.



Georgia—July 1965. Another shot of rappelling technique demonstrated by Sp4 Charles Ames, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Thorough training at Fort Benning made Cavalrymen skillful in this technique which proved its value in combat in Vietnam.



The CH-47 CHINOOK disgorges a laden Army "MULE"



USNS CROATON waiting at Mobile to load troops of the 1st Cavalry Division (Air-mobile) for the journey to Vietnam



"Take care of your rifle and it will take care of you." Troopers trained during the leisurely pleasure cruise across the Pacific. A blindfolded Cavalryman strips his M-16 rifle.



Qui Nhon. BRIGADIER GENERAL WRIGHT, CG of the Advance Party, greeted troops of the 1st Cavalry Division arriving after the long sea voyage



FINAL MOVE BY WATER, on the way to the beach via LSU. (September, 1965)



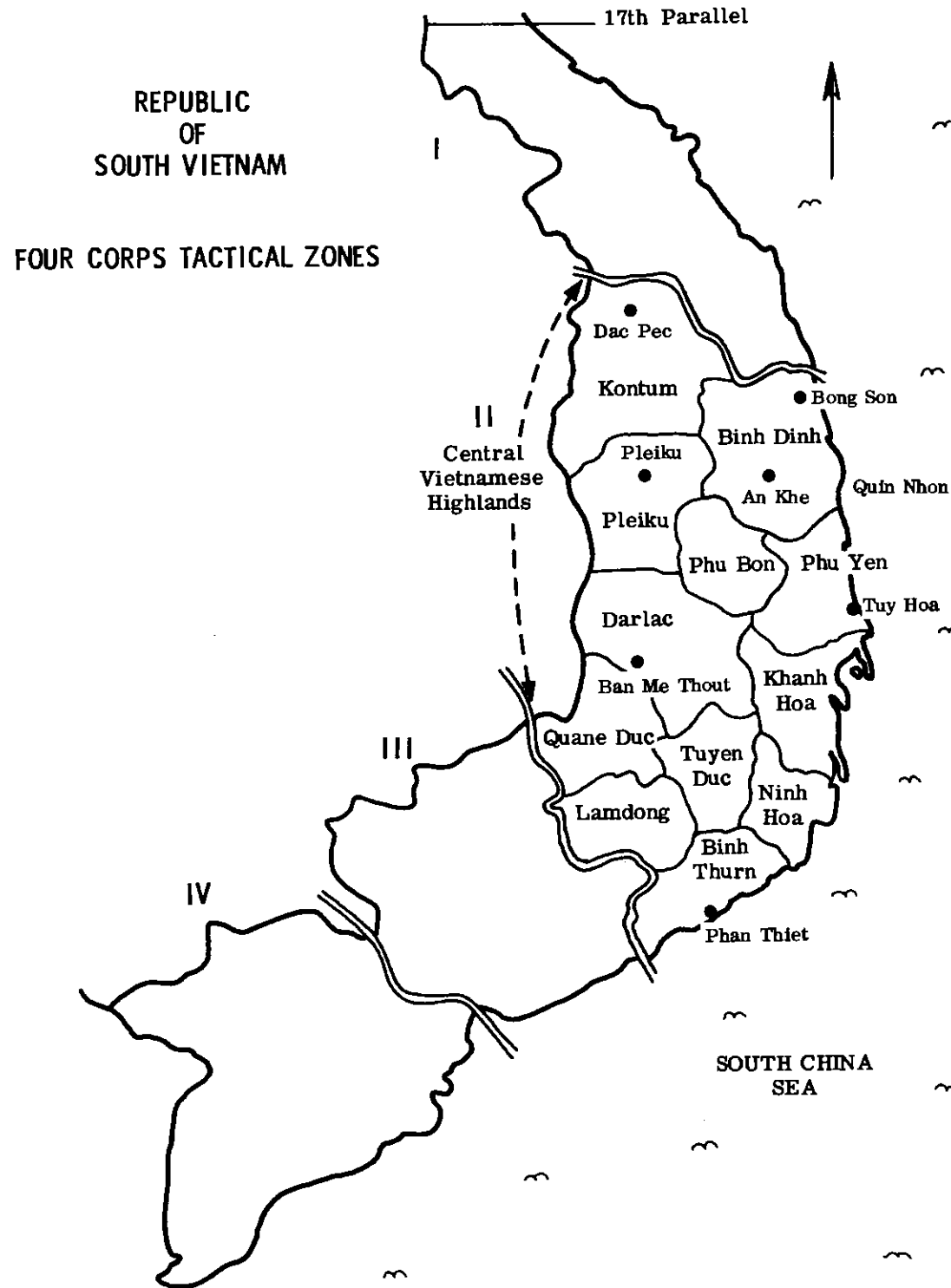
An Khe, 25 August 1965. Troops waiting to load aboard C130 for trip from Qui Nhon to An Khe.



Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland greet Skytroopers of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) as they arrive at Qui Nhon.

PART II

COMBAT



MAP 1

On 18 September, just four days after the main body had arrived at An Khe, elements of the 1st Cav were supporting offensive operations against the Viet Cong, in the first of 54 operations conducted by the Division before the end of 1966. Of these 54 operations, 32 were classified as "major" and involved battalion task forces or larger units. During these fifteen months the 1st Cav had aggressively pursued its mission of clearing the II Corps Area for return to control of the Saigon Government. Principally responsible for the largest of the four Corps areas, the Division operated over an area covering about 15,625 square miles, extending from the South China Sea along the axis of route 19 to the Cambodian border, and from north of Bong Son to Tuy Hoa along the coast, and from Dak Pec to Ban Me Thout along the ridgeline marking the Cambodian border. The terrain within the Tactical Area of Operations Responsibility (TAOR) varies from the rugged double-canopy forested mountains in the west and in the Kim Son and Suoi Ca valleys in the east to the fertile rice plains and the sandy beaches along the coast. (Map 3). The central highlands are affected by both the Northeast and Southwest monsoons, with the heavy rainfalls that inundate much of the coastal plain and make life more miserable everywhere.

Only because of its total airmobility could the Division operate, destroy the Vietcong, control the area, and neutralize the guerrillas in such a vast area.

Generally the Division operated with two Brigades, generally with a total of seven Battalions, outside the base area, mostly in search and destroy operations while the remaining (or Stay-Behind) Brigade conducted base camp and Route 19 security and local offensives in the TAOR.

FIRST OPERATION

As mentioned, the 1st Cav Div (AM) began its combat career on 18 September, when the 2d Battalion 12th Cavalry (2/12) was put under the operational control (OPCON) of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. This OPCON relieved the 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry, of the An Khe area defense responsibility to permit its commitment into the Vinh Thanh Valley, 10 miles northeast of An Khe. To assist in the initiation of Operation GIBRALTAR the 11th Aviation Group assembled all available aircraft to lift troops of the 101st into the operational area. Battery B 1st Battalion 77th Field Artillery was moved to support the

operation while other batteries of that Battalion provided direct support for the 2d Brigade in its assigned sector in the Base Camp defenses. On 20 September when the 2/12 Cav was relieved from OPCON 1st Brigade 101st, the 2d Battalion 5th Cavalry (2/5 Cav) came under its operational control for the An Khe base security, and remained so until the 28th of September when the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) formally took over its TAOR.

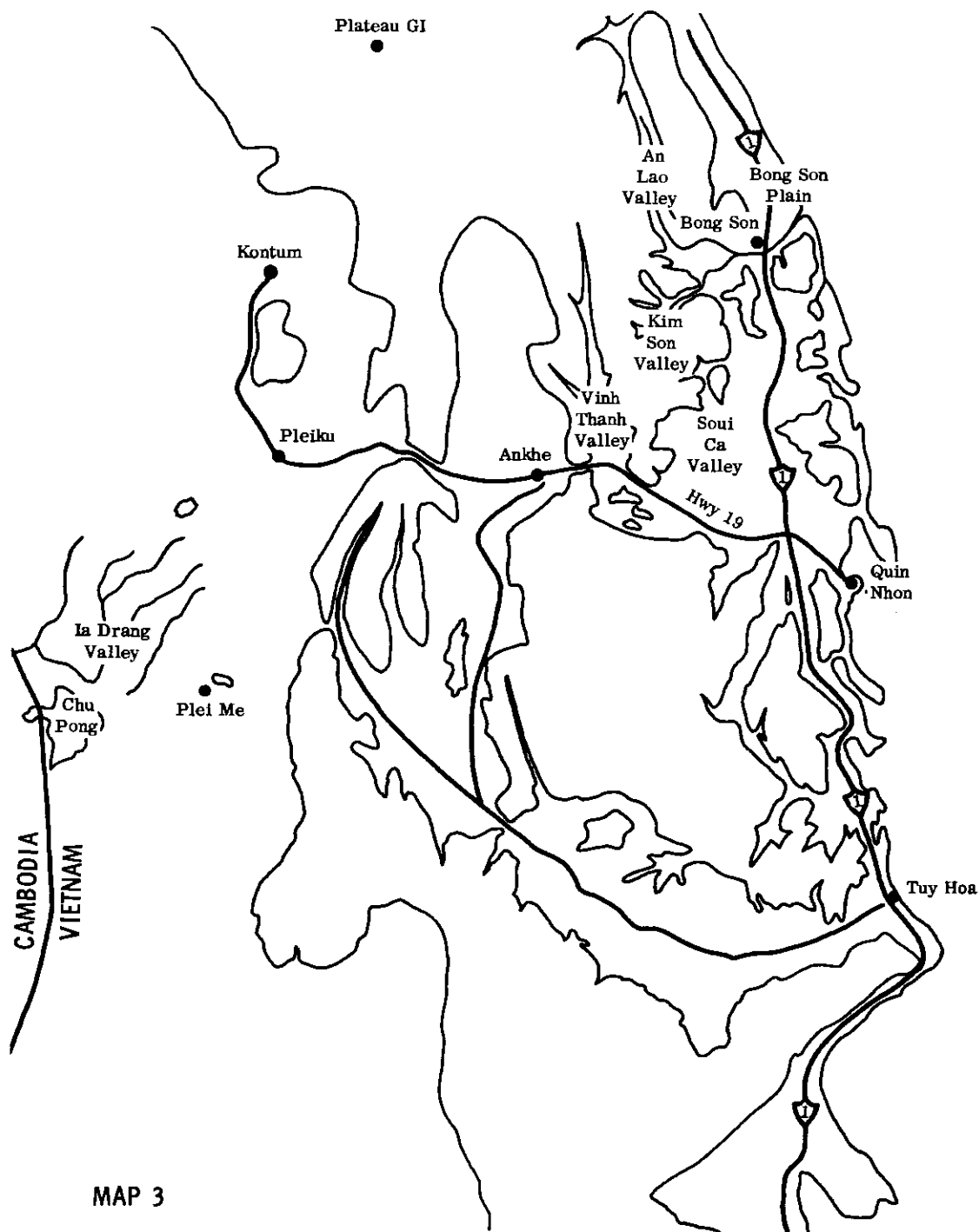
From that day forward there has been no question of who has been in charge. In its first operations, to secure its doorstep before leaving its home, the Division entered in force in the Vinh Thanh Valley (scene of Operation GIBRALTAR) which was then strongly dominated by the Viet Cong. Although its dimensions (1½ to 3 miles wide and 12 miles long) are relatively small, it was one of the best developed and most heavily populated areas in the Binh Khe district of Binh Dinh Province before the influx of the Viet Cong in March 1965. By methodically burning and destroying hamlets, schools, and churches, the enemy subjugated the population by terrorism. In May 1965 the Viet Cong were in complete charge, and all available males were conscripted into their ranks.

HAPPY VALLEY

Operation HAPPY VALLEY, from 3 October to 1 November, was the first concentrated Allied effort to regain control of this valley for the Vietnamese, as well as to insure the security of the Division TAOR. The operation was conducted in three successive phases—Domination, then Resettlement and Reconstruction, then Consolidation and Pacification.

The Domination phase was geared primarily to search and destroy, with large show of force operations by one- and two-company size forces. There was very little heavy contact, as the enemy preferred to hide rather than face the Cavalrymen. All troops were lightly equipped, and usually only one 81mm mortar was carried forward because of its weight and the weight of the ammunition. Similarly the 106mm recoilless rifle, being roadbound, was not usefully employed. Even without these supporting weapons, the Division quickly completed the Domination phase of the operation; although the bag of Communist killed was meager. The Viet Cong had fled the valley.

Phase II of the operation aimed at encouraging the Vietnamese population to return to the valley



MAP 3

and resettle in their hamlets. At first it was difficult to gain the confidence of the people, who were inclined to flee and hide at the sight or sound of the helicopters, but within a few days the humanitarian actions of the US force led to the return of the people to their homes, particularly in the vicinity of the Cavalry Command Post.

National police worked with the Division to reestablish the civil police structure. A new CIDG (Civil Irregular Defense Group) Camp was constructed to assist in the control and pacification. Meanwhile, daily air assaults of company and platoon sized elements continued to flush the enemy from his lairs.

Phase II eased into Phase III and the action focused then on civic action programs, which included medical treatment, distribution of clothing, and the repair of buildings and roads. The Psy-Ops effort also increased with extensive propaganda leaflet distribution. Each of these efforts was significant, and Cavalry operations beyond the base camp made indelible impressions in the campaign for the hearts and minds of the people.

A good will program culminated HAPPY VALLEY on 30 October and 1 November and was designated Operation FRIENDSHIP. It was icing on the cake, designed to aid the needy and to demonstrate the US friendship and desire to help. The Division Band played for the occasion, and was followed by speeches by Vietnamese officials as well as by Lt. Col. Frederic Ackerson, CO 1/5 Cavalry.

SUOI CA

Meanwhile, the 3d Brigade had moved further east into the enemy-saturated SUOI CA Valley, on 10 October, for Operation SHINEY BAYONET. Special intelligence reports in conjunction with the Army of the Republic of Vietnam intelligence sources indicated that bases for two battalions of the 2d Viet Cong Main Force Regiment were in the valley. The intelligence was accurate, but the two battalions were able to exfiltrate before the arrival of the helicopters. The plan of action called for the committed units—a task force consisting of the 1/7th Cav, 2/7th Cav, and elements of 1/9th Cav Sq, to act as a blocking force while units of the 22d ARVN Division drove the enemy into the vise. Contact was light because of the prior exfiltration, but when the operation ended four days later major enemy rest areas had been destroyed and the Cavalrymen received invaluable training in jungle warfare against the elusive enemy.

Throughout, the stay-behind Brigade worked to improve its living area, the base perimeter, and

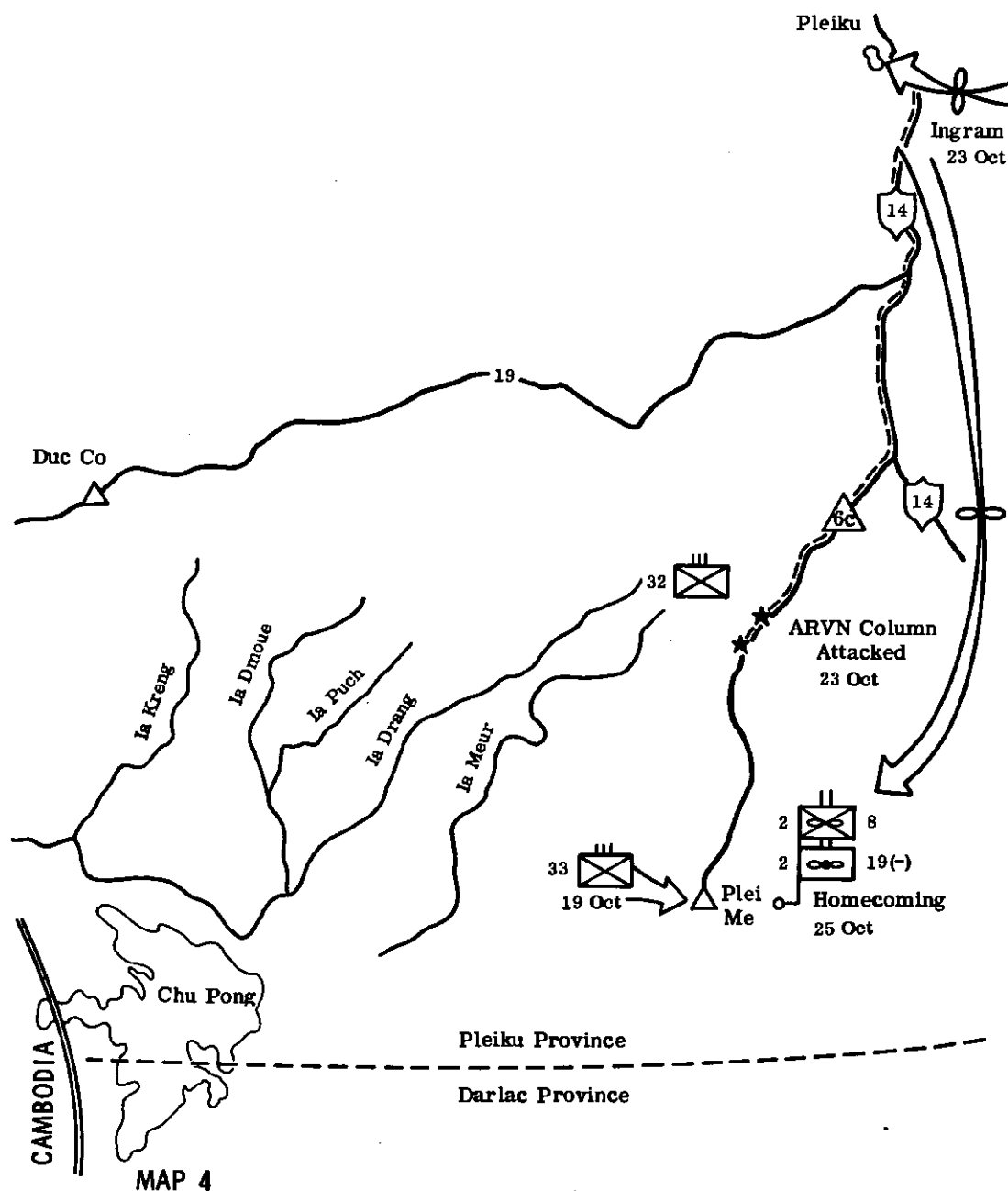
the base camp in general. More and more of the men were moved out of poncho and lean-to shelters into more permanent, drier quarters. Locally procured bamboo matting was used for tent walls and helped to double the normal capacity of the GP (General Purpose) Medium and Aerofab tents. Floors were made with cut timber. Repaired but unserviceable parachutes became the overhead covering of outdoor chapels under which logs were laid for pews.

The appearance of electric generators made jungle life somewhat more tolerable. Fans, coffee pots, and refrigerators were at a premium; those who had them made friends easily. As usual, the GI adapted readily to the environment and the shortages. Language was colored by the circumstances: the GI was here to "Help Arvin," a superlative expression was "Numbah One" and a lousy performance was "Number Ten." His hootch was his living quarters, whether a tent, bunker, hut, or corner of a hole, regardless of the degree of sophistication. And, always, "Charlie" was the adversary.

Concurrently, the defense barrier was taking shape with four rows of triple concertina separated by 75 to 100 yards of defoliated jungle. Access and perimeter roads were built, but often became precarious because of heavy rain. During November and December it was not uncommon to see several trucks which had slid off the road and were up to their truck beds in mud.

One of the most unique as well as difficult construction jobs was the leveling of the top of Hong Cong mountain. A platoon of C Company 8th Engineers, was airlifted to its top to begin construction of a combined communications and observation station. A small area was cut away by hand so that the Engineer's lightweight bulldozer could be lowered in for the heavier work. After 45 days of felling trees of all dimensions, moving tons of rock, igniting over 1,000 pounds of dynamite, and warding off several VC snipers, the Sky Beavers of the 8th Engineers had leveled ten feet off the mountain top. Communications and radar equipment was then emplaced and the Division commanded the flatlands in four directions.

In retrospect, the operations conducted during September and up to the end of October 1965 were merely a prelude to the first meaningful operation by the Division—the Pleiku campaign. The arrival of the Division at An Khe had blocked the planned communist offensives, and had contributed materially to the security of the An Khe area and the welfare of the population. Operations had been largely defensive, and even the search and destroy missions nearby had as a



primary objective the increased security of the base. With Highway 19 fairly secure, and with no immediate Viet Cong threat to the base, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) was ready for offensive operations.

PLEIKU

The Pleiku campaign extended from 23 Oct until 28 Nov and was characterized by heavy, close-in fighting, and swift decisive airmobile tactics.

On 19 Oct the enemy attacked a CIDG Camp at Plei Me, an opening bid in his attempt to take over the Central Highlands. Originally it appeared that the attack was an enemy regiment's "shake-down" immediately following its infiltration across the Cambodian border. But by 22 October, the intelligence estimate was revised upward to show two NVA Regiments in the area: the 33d at Plei Me, and the 32d in an ambush position to destroy an expected relief column from Pleiku. The planned ambush of the relief column was an integral part of the enemy's Plei Me attack.

Obviously if the attack on Plei Me were successful enough to attract the relief column, then the destruction of that column would open vulnerable Pleiku, and control of Pleiku would provide control of the Western part of the Central Highlands, and threaten An Khe.

The ARVN II Corps Commander was confronted with a difficult choice. He could refuse to go to the relief of Plei Me and lose the camp; or he could commit the reserve from Pleiku, stripping that area of defense troops. If he lost the relief column Pleiku would be easy prey to the Communists.

Aware of the ambush and of the potential consequences, ARVN II Corps applied for help from the US Forces. CG IFF-V (Commanding General, First Field Force, Vietnam) sent the following message to General Kinnard:

"Commencing first light 23 Oct First Air Cav deploys one Bn TF minimum 1 Inf Bn and 1 Arty Btry to PLEIKU mission be prepared to assist in defense of key US/ARVN installations vic PLEIKU or reinforce II Corps operations to relieve PLEI ME CIDG CAMP."

Operations of the 1st Cav Div (AM) in the Pleiku-Plei Me area were delineated in two phases. Phase I, from 23 to 27 Oct, placed Division elements in a defensive, reinforcing, and/or limited offensive role as reflected in the above message. Phase II, from 28 Oct until the end of the operation, saw the Division assume an unlimited offensive role to actively seek out and destroy the enemy units. Phase II activity was divided: the

1st Brigade conducted the operation from 28 Oct to 9 Nov; the 3d Brigade from 10 to 19 November and the 2d Brigade took over the culminating search and destroy operation from 20 to 28 November.

Task force INGRAM was airlifted from base camp, early on 23 Oct, to Camp Holloway at Pleiku, closing by 1300 hours. The force consisted of 2/12th Cav, Btry B 2/17th Artillery, a weapons section of 1/9th Cav, and a company (-) of the 8th Engr Bn. While this move was underway, the Division Commander, sensing that a decisive operation was imminent at Plei Me, obtained permission to deploy the 1st Brigade to Pleiku and terminated its operation, SCRIMMAGE, in the Binh Khe area east of An Khe along Route 19. The 1st Brigade Hq, 2/8th Cav, and two firing batteries of the 2/19th Artillery were extracted from the Vinh Thanh Valley by 1500 hours 23 Oct and closed by air at Camp Holloway by midnight to assume operational control of TF INGRAM.

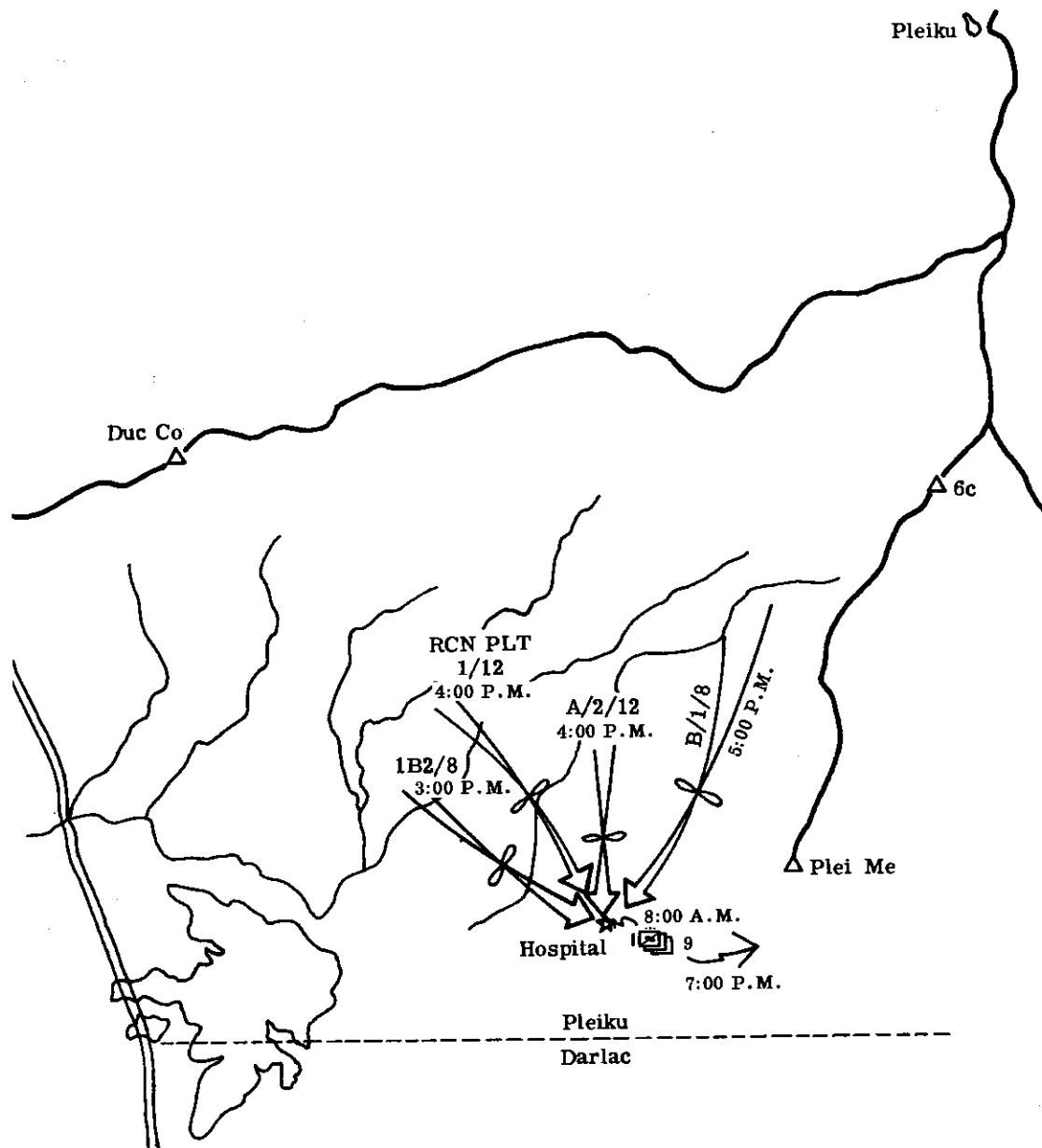
While the 1st Brigade was still charged with securing Pleiku, it had two additional missions: to provide artillery support for the ARVN relief of Plei Me, and to provide a reserve/reaction force for possible commitment to Plei Me.

While some of the elements of the 1st Brigade were moving to Pleiku the armored relief column ARVN began moving down provincial road 6C toward Plei Me. The enemy had underestimated and allowed one hour for the 32d Regiment to neutralize the relief column, and at 1730 the column met a heavy ambush simultaneously at two points. 1st Cav Div Arty was called in on the ambushing enemy with deadly accuracy and was a decisive factor in repulsing the attack. On the afternoon of 24 Oct the 1st Bde placed an Artillery liaison party with the column which further strengthened the support and morale of the ARVN units.

The enemy ambush failed to fragment and destroy the relief column, but meanwhile Plei Me was still under siege.

On the evening of 25 Oct the relief column arrived at the camp at Plei Me and immediately reinforced the defensive perimeter. 1st Cav Infantrymen and Artillery had also air assaulted from Pleiku on the 24 and 25 Oct into Landing Zones (LZ's) within close support of Plei Me. It was now apparent that the original enemy plan had failed, for that plan called for the 32d Regiment to destroy completely the ARVN relief column, and then, in concert with the 33d Regiment, to fall on Plei Me and reduce it.

At 2200 hours on 25 Oct the 33d Regiment at Plei Me was ordered to withdraw to the west,



MAP 5

leaving behind a reinforced battalion to maintain pressure and cover the withdrawal.

At this point a significant decision was made. General William C. Westmoreland visited the 1st Bde Forward CP at HOMECOMING, the LZ 5½ kilometres northeast of the Plei Me CIDG Camp, and authorized the 1st Cav Div (AM) to pursue, seek out, and destroy the enemy. These orders were confirmed on 28 Oct by message from CG IFF-V:

"Elements 1st Cav Div (AM) currently deployed Vic Pleiku will coordinate with and establish an area of operations VIC Plei Me CIDG Camp and undertake operations to find, fix, and destroy VC forces which endanger that general area."

The Division's scope of operations changed from one of reinforcement and reaction, to one of unlimited offense, the initiation of Phase II. It was to have responsibility for searching out and destroying all enemy forces that threatened the entire central highlands.

IA DRANG

The battlefield area covered approximately 1,500 square miles on generally flat to rolling terrain. The area is drained by the Ia Drang, Ia Puch, and Ia Kreng rivers, and an extensive network of small streams flowing to the west and southwest across the border and into the Mekong River in Cambodia. The dominating terrain feature is the Chu Pong Massif in the southwestern corner of the AO, straddling the Cambodian-Vietnamese frontier. For long periods it had been an important enemy infiltration area and one of his many strongholds, where he could mass and construct strong defenses under the heavily canopied jungle.

Intelligence suspected that a Field Front (divisional headquarters) was controlling the enemy regiments. If so, this was the first time any US unit in Vietnam had opposed a NVA divisional sized unit under a single commander.

The 1st Bde assumed the new Division mission as a continuation of operation ALL THE WAY, which began on 23 Oct with the reinforcement of Pleiku and Plei Me.

The first significant contact was made on 1 Nov, when a platoon of B 1/9th Cav Sq overran a regimental aid station 6 miles southwest of Plei Me, killing 15 enemy and capturing another 15. This rifle platoon had been air assaulted into the area in response to sightings of scattered small groups by 9th Cav Sq scout helicopters. The other two rifle platoons ("blue" platoons) from Troop B were landed to exploit the contact and began to sweep through the area. At just after 1400 hours

scout helicopters reported a battalion-size force moving from the northeast toward the friendly platoons, which were then heavily engaged until 1800 hours with this large enemy force. The fighting was at close quarters—too close for rocket support from the Aerial Rocket Artillery, or for Tactical Air support. At the time, also, the position was beyond range of available tube artillery. Reinforcements were committed as platoons from 1/12th Cav, 2/12 Cav, and 2/8th Cav, landed late in the afternoon, followed by two additional platoons from 2/12th Cav. (Map 5).

Ground fire was intense on all reinforcement, resupply, and evacuation choppers, and seven ships were hit by hostile fire. By 1700 hours B 1/8th Cav was committed to the battle, and by 1900 hours the Blue Platoons of the 9th Cav Sq, having found and fixed the enemy, turned the requirement of destroying the enemy over to the 2/12th Cav. The Blue Platoons were then extracted from the area.

This operation cost the 33d Regiment its aid station, many patients, and over \$40,000 worth of important medical supplies, as well as 99 killed and an additional 183 estimated wounded.

This operation, also, demonstrated the Cav Sq at its best: scout ships reconnoitering and locating enemy groups, followed by rifle platoons fixing him in place, followed by heliborne units finishing him. This tactical concept and theory worked to perfection when implemented by the skilled personnel of the 9th Cav Sq and its backup units, not only at Plei Me but again and again during Div operations.

On 2 Nov Division intelligence learned that the NVA Field Front could expect its third regiment, the 66th, which had already arrived in South Vietnam but still had to move into assembly areas in the Chu Pong-Ia Drang area.

AMBUSH

On the night of 3-4 Nov, the rifle platoons of the 1/9th Cav Sq again drew blood; this time with a well-executed ambush at 2100 hours. The southernmost ambush position (all of which were located just north of Chu Pong mountain) sighted a heavily laden NVA unit estimated at company strength moving along an east-west trail. Deciding to take a break just 100 meters short of the ambush site, the column loitered outside the killing zone for 90 minutes, with the ambushing men of the 9th Cav Sq lay quietly in wait. At 2100 hours the NVA unit moved noisily along the trail westward. The first element was allowed to pass, and then the trap was sprung with eight Claymores along a 100 meter kill zone. It was perfectly executed and the enemy's weapons pla-

toon with machine guns, mortars, and recoilless rifles was caught in a wall of lead as the 9th Cavalrymen fired continuously for two minutes. There was no return fire.

The ambush patrol returned immediately to the patrol base and went to work to strengthen its perimeter. By 2230 hours this base perimeter was under heavy attack by an estimated two or three companies of NVA regulars. A CIDG Company, which had accompanied the 1/9th Cav Sq in earlier operations that day, remained in its ambush position to the north for the patrol base leader decided it was better to leave them there, than to try to bring them in during a firefight when recognition would have been difficult. They wore different uniforms, and of course spoke Vietnamese and Montagnard. By midnight the perimeter was in grave danger of being overrun, but reinforcements were on the way. Co A 1/8th Cav, on stand-by alert at Duc Co USSF (US Special Forces) Camp, 12 miles of roadless jungle to the north, had been alerted for commitment. The first platoon was on the ground and in combat within forty minutes after midnight. (Map 6). The entire company had closed by 0240. While this type of relief and reinforcement is now routine, it was a unique experience in November 1965, and the efficiency of its execution attests to the skill, daring, and esprit of the Cavalrymen. The operation was unique in that it was the first time a perimeter under heavy fire had been reinforced by night by heliborne troops air assaulted into an LZ which none of the assaulting forces had previously seen. It was also the first time that ARA had been employed at night and in such close support—50 meters—of the friendly troops.

By dawn the enemy attack had lost momentum, and contact diminished to occasional sniping from surrounding trees. The tangible results were 98 NVA killed by body count, 10 captured, and over 100,000 rounds of 7.62 ammunition, two 82mm mortars, and three 75mm recoilless rifles destroyed in place, as well as 20,000 rounds of 7.62 and large quantities of mortar and recoilless rifle ammunition evacuated. The implications of an ambush deep within what was expected to be secure territory must have stunned the NVA high command.

Within two days, on 6 November, Companies B and C, 2/8th Cav, became heavily engaged with another NVA battalion 6½ miles to the northeast of the Chu Pong Massif. Once again there was close-in fighting which diminished as darkness fell and reinforcements were brought in. The enemy suffered another 77 dead, and many wounded were carried and dragged away from the battlefield.

SILVER BAYONET

On 9 November, after the completion of the 1st Brigade's search throughout the operational area, the 3d Brigade took control in Operation SILVER BAYONET I, with the 1/7th Cav, 2/5th Cav, and 1/12th Cav and replaced the 1st Brigade and its battalions. At this time, the enemy regiments were attempting to regain secure positions to rest and reorganize after the failure at Plei Me, the failure of the relief column ambush, and the subsequent stunning defeats of the NVA forces. On 11 November the enemy took stock and found the 32d Regiment was still a cohesive fighting force despite casualties sustained during the ambush of the ARVN relief column during its advance to Plei Me. The 33d Regiment had 890 killed out of its original 2200 men, with another 100 missing. The regiment had lost thirteen of its eighteen anti-aircraft machine guns, and five of nine 82mm mortars. Its depleted ranks required reorganization and a melding of units to form a composite fighting force. The 66th Regiment had taken no casualties other than the 98 killed during the battle of 3-4 November, and as a result provided the major cutting edge of the Field Front.

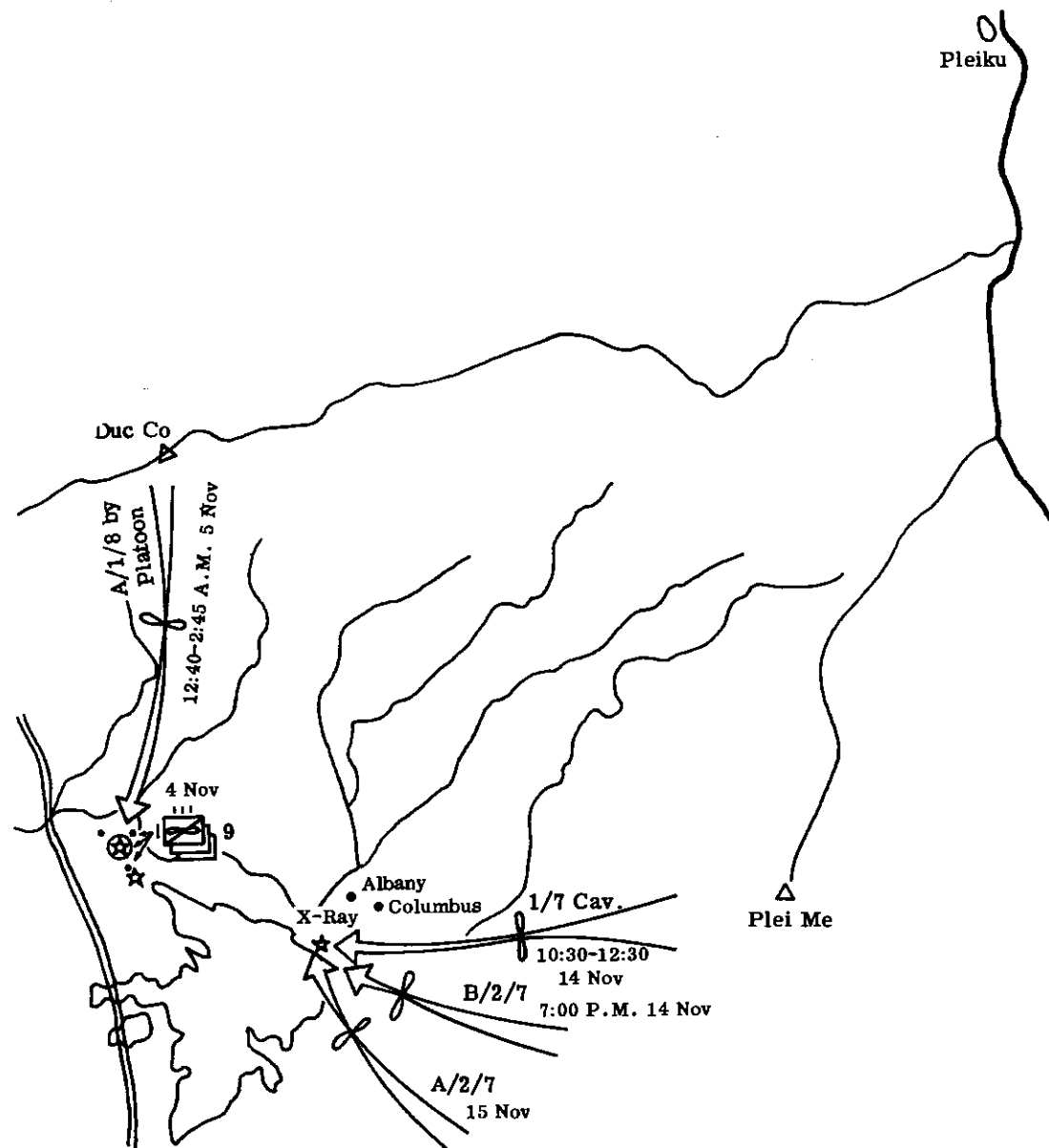
The 32nd was located north of the Ia Drang, the 33rd maintained its positions just north of the Chu Pong, and the battalions of the 66th were strung along the northern bank of the Ia Drang.

While the 3rd Brigade was replacing the 1st, the NVA Field Front had also made plans to attack Plei Me again on 16 Nov with these three regiments. This decision was made as an attempt to regain its earlier advantages in the east. It also decided to support the attack with a 120mm mortar battalion and a battalion of 14.5mm twin-barrel anti-aircraft machine guns, both of which units were on infiltration routes headed into RVN. Another turning point in the War had been reached, for this was to have been the first time a full NVA division was to attack a target in South Vietnam.

What followed was a period of heavy combat, as the mobility of the 1st Cavalry once again enabled us to seize the initiative from the enemy and deal him an overwhelming defeat.

GARRY OWEN

On 14 Nov Lt. Col. Harold G. Moore, the CO 1/7 Cav before moving up to take over the "Garry Owen" Brigade, received the mission to air assault near the Chu Pong mountains to conduct search and destroy operations to upset enemy formations in the area. Bravo Company was on the ground at LZ X-Ray, 1 mile north of the massif, by mid-



MAP 6

morning and within two hours the remainder of the battalion had closed unopposed. (Map 6). A prisoner was captured and admitted that he was a member of the NVA and further stated that there were three battalions on the ridge above the LZ. While C Company secured the LZ, Bravo Company had meanwhile moved north and west. At 1330 Bravo Company reported it was under heavy attack by at least two companies and that its forward platoon was in danger of being overrun. This platoon remained an isolated island of resistance until it was retrieved the following day. Alpha Company on Bravo's left flank likewise became engaged with a company size force that was attacking Bravo Company. The LZ itself was hit by mortar fire forcing C Company off to the east where it soon came under a two company attack. Elements of D Company were moved to reinforce and combined with tactical air, aerial and tube artillery within 100 meters of friendly positions, were able to crush the attacks. (Diagram A).

Meanwhile 2/Lt. Walter J. Marm Jr., 1st platoon leader in A/1/7 had taken charge in his area of responsibility. Finding that his platoon was pinned down by deadly accurate machine gun fire, Lt. Marm took matters in his own hands, moved from his position of relative security and single-handedly assaulted the well-entrenched, bunkered positions. After personally killing several enemy with grenades and small arms fire, Lt. Marm was seriously wounded as an enemy round smashed through his jaw. For his heroism that day, Lt. Marm was awarded an interim Silver Star and a year later the division's first Congressional Medal of Honor for gallantry in Vietnam.

By 1545 sufficient troops had landed to consider another attempt to reach the cut-off platoon since the first had been stopped by upwards of 300 enemy. A combination of terrain and the numerical superiority of the enemy once again stopped the companies short of their goal. By 1900 B/2/7 Cav. had landed at the LZ and was initially placed in reserve as a battalion reaction force. Later one platoon from B/2/7 reinforced C/1/7 and its recon platoon was pulled back to join the reaction force. The decision was then made to place the isolated platoon in a defensive position and to establish a battalion perimeter before dark. (Diagram C).

The enemy made three separate attacks on the isolated platoon during the night, each of 50 man strength. The main perimeter was also under repeated probes, but each was repulsed by intensive artillery protecting fires that ringed the two positions. The 105 howitzers of A and B Batteries of the 1/21 Artillery at Falcon, a nearby LZ,

pumped more than 4,000 rounds of high explosives in close support of X-Ray. Throughout the night an C-47 Air Force ship remained on station providing continuous illumination. Air strikes and artillery resulted in numerous secondary explosions.

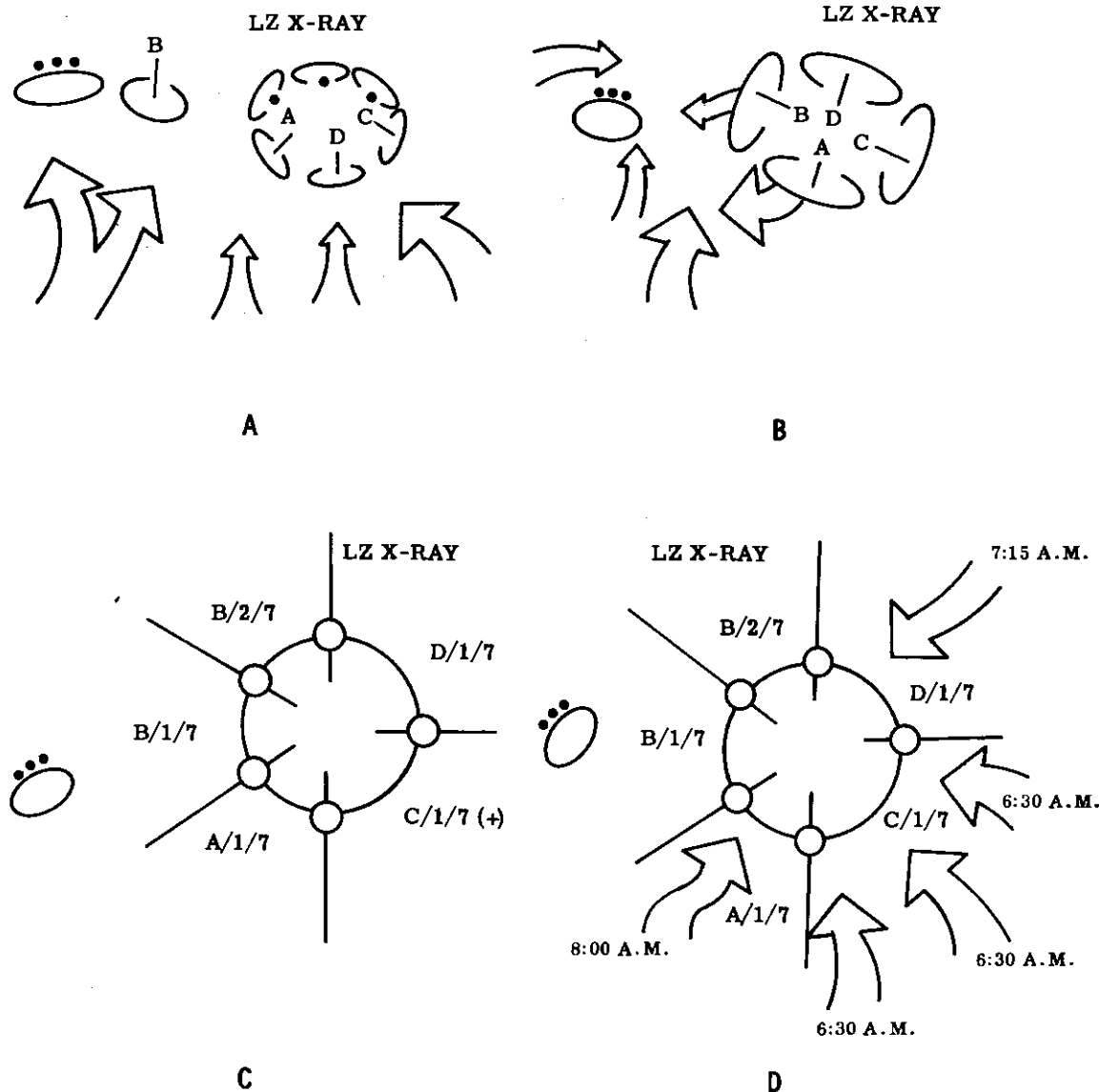
The division had achieved complete surprise with the air-assault at the foot of the Chu Pong mountains, which forced the enemy to abandon his plan to attack Plei Me in order to defend his own base area. This threat at the Chu Pong presented the first attempt to penetrate the massif since 1954. Since 1954 it had been a secure rear area in which the enemy stored supplies, conducted training, manufactured and repaired arms and equipment, and provided an operational base for combat units. Reacting swiftly to the Cavalry landings, the Field Front ordered the 66th Regiment to attack the LZ with its 7th and 9th Battalions and a composite battalion organized from the remnants of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 33rd Regiment. There has been no explanation why the 32nd Regiment remained in its positions 8 miles to the northeast of X-Ray.

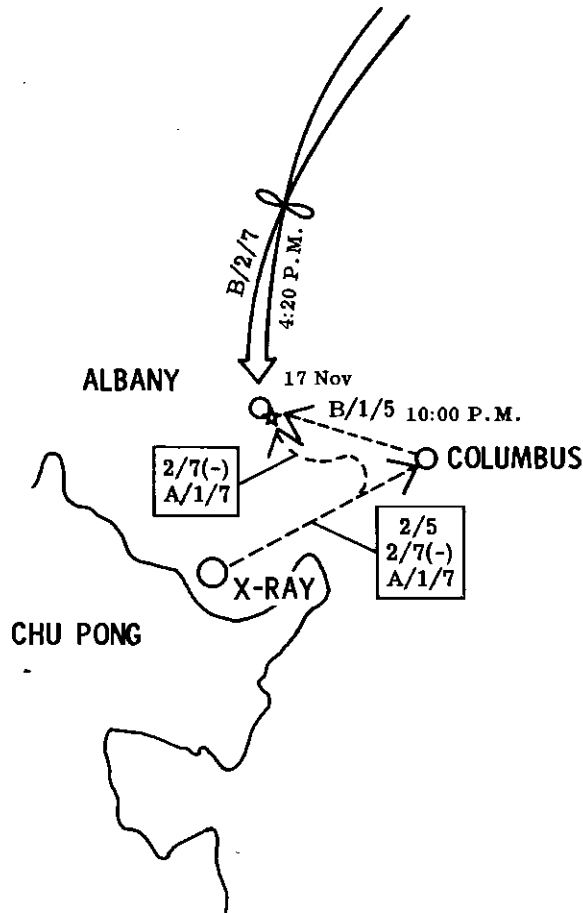
On 15 Nov the Field Front sought to redeem its failure on the 14th by adding to the attack the 8th Battalion of the 66th Regiment and the H-15 Main Force VC Battalion.

VIOLENCE

The morning of the 15th erupted in violence as the enemy continued the fight with multi-company attacks, probing the LZ's perimeter for weak spots. Most severely hit were two platoons of C/1/7 on the southern portion of the LZ when the enemy closed for hand-to-hand combat. (Diagram D). The eastern portion was similarly hit forty-five minutes later at 7:15 a.m. and within another forty minutes A Company on the west came under attack. Elements of B/2/7 which had assaulted into X-Ray the prior evening were committed as reserve to reinforce C/1/7's area. After two hours of fierce fighting, the attack abated making it possible to land A/2/7 Cav to beef up the perimeter. By 1000 hours the enemy attack was over as he withdrew into the Chu Pong.

The men of the Black Knight battalion, the 2/5 Cav, also moved overland from LZ Victor to X-Ray, a distance of two miles, and had closed by 1245 hours. It was assigned the mission of sweeping to the northwest to spring loose the isolated platoon of B/1/7. The attacking echelon included A and C Companies of the 2/5 Cav and B/1/7 Cav. They reached the platoon without serious resistance, and all the forces returned to the LZ perimeter by 1600 that afternoon.





MAP 7

Meanwhile the companies which remained at LZ X-Ray had screened 300 meters to their front and found NVA dead, body fragments, and weapons and equipment around portions of the perimeter. There was massive evidence of the high number of casualties taken during the fight. Bloody trails and bandages told of NVA who had been dragged and carried from the battle area. Enemy bodies were found stacked behind ant hills. We also found that wounded NVA had to be approached with caution, for they became fanatical in their resistance to capture, and the division took a few casualties before we learned to appreciate this fact.

All the forces at X-Ray were under OPCON of Lt. Col. Moore, CO 1/7 Cav and each went into assigned areas for a nighttime perimeter.

THE B-52's

15 Nov, while the battle was raging at X-Ray, marked the introduction of a new weapon against these NVA units in the Central Highlands and one which struck terror in the hearts of even the most hardened North Vietnamese regulars. Shortly after noon, a large area in the Chu Pong erupted with hundreds of thunderous explosions that moved across the ground like a giant carpet being unrolled. The B-52 bombers had struck and for the next five days the big bombers systematically worked over large areas of the Massif.

At 0400 on the morning of 16 Nov, the enemy began a series of probes around the perimeter, gradually increasing in intensity. By 0640 the several attacks had been beaten back, and the order was given for a "mad minute" at 0655 during which all weapons on the perimeter opened up. They systematically sprayed trees, bushes, and ant hills to their front. The shock of this firing caused a group of 40-60 NVA, who had been creeping toward the perimeter, to launch their attack prematurely. The attack from 150 meters forward of the perimeter was beaten back without difficulty.

Sweeps around X-Ray that morning revealed more enemy dead and confirmed that still more enemy dead and wounded had been carried off. At 0530 before the mad minute the 2/7 Cav landed at the LZ. After the fight the 1/7 withdrew by air from X-Ray to Holloway for rest and refitting. The 2/7 Cav and the 2/5 Cav then made plans to leave X-Ray on 17 Nov as it was in an area scheduled to be hit by a B-52 strike. The fight at X-Ray had been another costly one to the NVA which suffered 834 killed and an additional 1,000 estimated killed. Over 100 individual and crew served weapons were destroyed in place while many others were evacuated.

These two days of intense combat have been rated as the biggest battle in Vietnam for 1965.

The cavalymen at X-Ray received outstanding fire support as tube artillery fired over 6,000 rounds and ARA expended more than 2,000 rockets in the two-day period of heavy fighting. The Air Force maintained its aircraft on strike runs on an average of one every 15 minutes for more than 40 hours. There is little doubt that the outcome would have been different without this overwhelming weight of metal.

1/7 UNIT CITATION

Because of the unit heroism and brave determination of the men of the 1/7 Cav. during these two days, Lt. Gen. (then Maj. Gen.) Vinh Loc, CG II CTZ, recognized the American effort on the behalf of the Vietnamese people and subsequently awarded the "Garry Owen" battalion the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm.

After his defeat at X-Ray, the enemy decided he had had enough of the infantry positions and decided to turn his attention to what he thought would be less well-protected positions—the artillery at LZ Columbus and LZ Falcon, 1½ and 5½ miles respectively to the northeast of X-Ray.

As the friendly battalions left X-Ray for overland movement on 17 Nov and headed toward the northeast, the 8th Bn, 66th Regiment and the H-15 VC Bn began their move in that direction to attack these artillery positions.

The 2/7 Cav and A/1/7 Cav followed the 2/5 Cav toward Columbus for one and a half miles before splitting off to the northwest to recon a proposed LZ, named Albany. (Map 7). About 300 meters short of the objective two POW's were taken, and the column continued. As the lead element entered Albany, heavy fire was received from the right and left front as well as from its right flank. There was close hand-to-hand fighting in the positions of C and D companies and in a few cases the enemy penetrated through the ranks of the column.

The fight was an infantry battle at close quarters for several hours until perimeters could be marked and identified in order that air and artillery fire power could be brought to bear. The first strikes were made by ARA which were followed by a napalm run which helped to break up a company attack forming on the western portion of the perimeter.

By 1620 the firing had diminished sufficiently to permit B/2/7 Cav to air assault into the perimeter. By 2200 that night B/1/5 Cav had marched overland from Columbus giving the perimeter needed reinforcements. There were no major threats for the rest of the night.