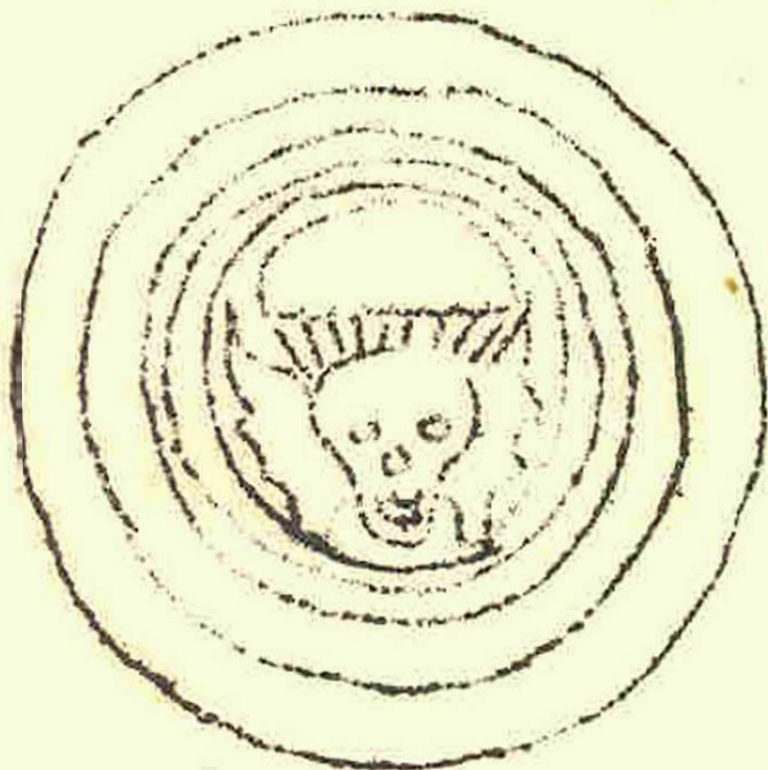


# UNIT HISTORY

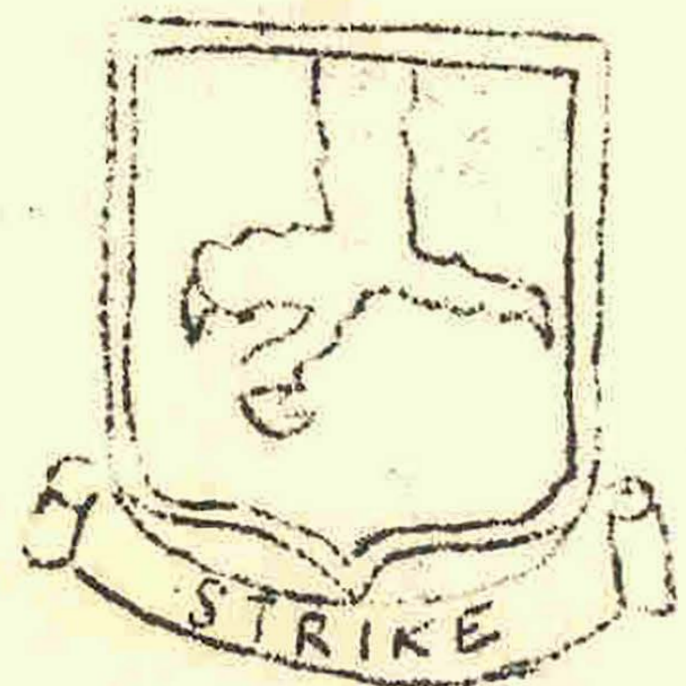
2<sup>ND</sup> BN. ABN 50<sup>TH</sup> AVN

## THE NEW STRIKE FORCE

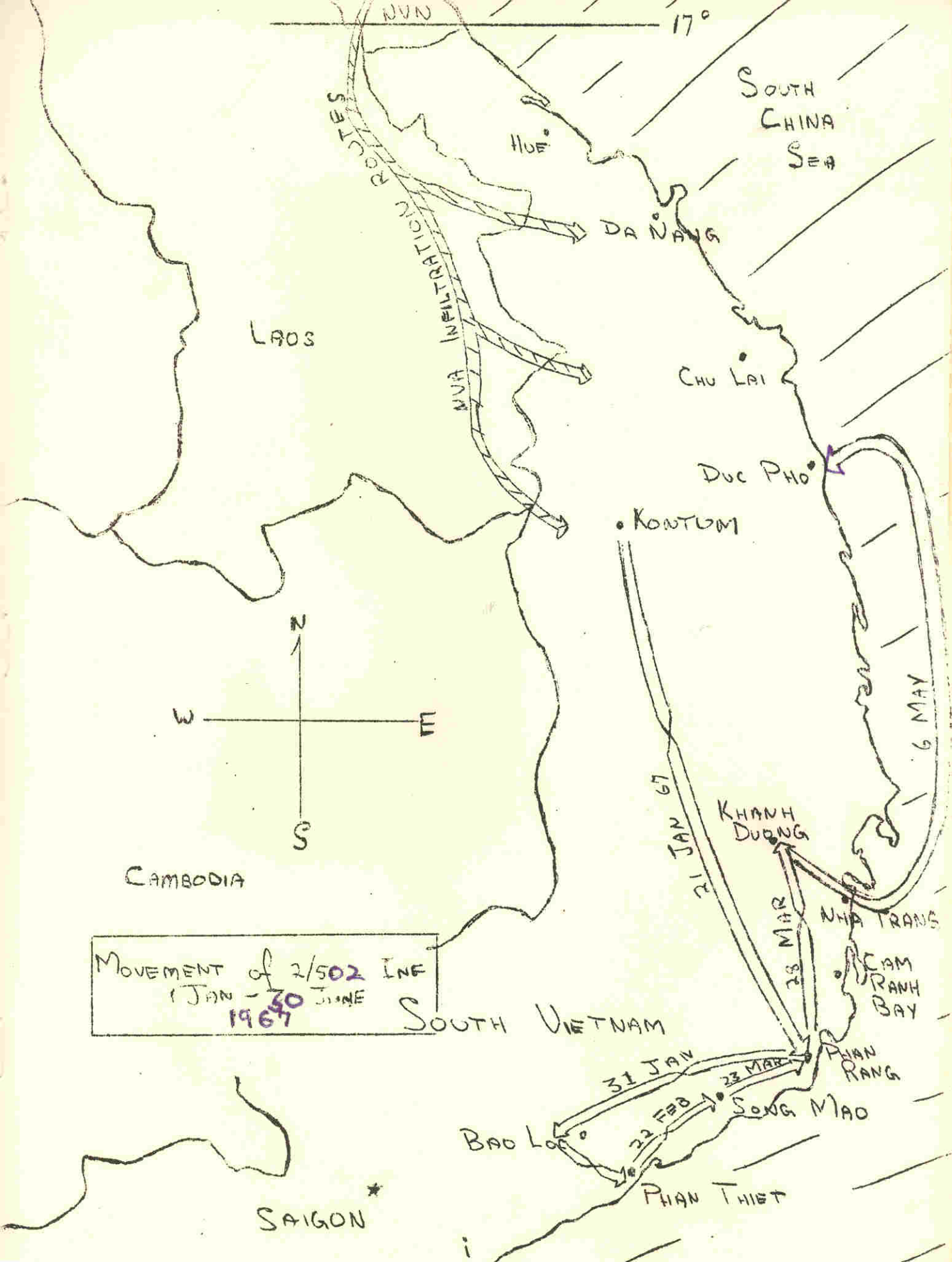
VIETNAM



1 JAN.  
THRU  
30 JULY







UNIT HISTORY

2D BATTALION (AIRBORNE), 502D INFANTRY  
1ST BRIGADE, 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION  
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96347

APPROVED:

HARRY A. BUCKLEY  
Colonel, Infantry  
Commanding

AUTHOR:

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1LT, Infantry  
S-3 Air

## Preface

The objective of this history is to set down in the narrative form an account of the activities and accomplishments of the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry from 1 January to 30 June 1967.

Primary emphasis is placed on combat operations and major battles fought. All enemy losses are determined by physical body count in the battle area.

Information sources for this history include the daily journal, daily situation reports, after-action reports, and interviews with personnel who served in the STRIKE FORCE during the operations conducted in the first half of 1967.

## Dedication

This history is humbly dedicated to those fighting men of the 2d  
Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry who gave their lives in the defense  
of freedom in South Vietnam, 1 January to 30 June 1967.

<u>NAME</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>UNIT</u>	<u>DATE OF DEATH</u>
Norman Vincent	PFC E-3	Co C	2 Jan 67
Dennis G. Nicola	PFC E-3	Co C	2 Jan 67
Walter L. Goshorn	PFC E-3	Co C	2 Jan 67
Elmer Juckett	PFC E-3	Co C	2 Jan 67
John H. O'Brien	SP/4 E-4	Co C	2 Jan 67
Wilbur L. Kohn	PFC E-3	Co C	2 Jan 67
Larry D. Earls	LIT	Co C	3 Jan 67
Reinaldo Delgado	PFC E-3	Co C	5 Jan 67
Ronald Parker	PFC E-3	Co A	6 Jan 67
Vennial Smith	PFC E-3	HHC	9 Jan 67
Alan D. Whitlock	PFC E-3	Co B	10 Jan 67
Henry J. Stuckey	PFC E-3	Co B	10 Jan 67
Dennis P. Neeley	PFC E-3	Co B	12 Jan 67
Henry J. Teasley	PFC E-3	Co B	13 Jan 67
William J. Frank	PFC E-3	Co B	25 Feb 67
Calvin B. White	SSG E-6	HHC	11 Mar 67
Elijah Smith	SGT E-5	Co B	23 Mar 67
George Tallman	SGT E-5	HHC	9 Apr 67
Allen W. Porter	PFC E-3	HHC	9 Apr 67
John W. Charleton	PFC E-3	HHC	9 Apr 67
Kenneth James	SP/4 E-4	Co B	11 Apr 67
William Proctor	SP/4 E-4	Co B	22 Apr 67
Earl K. Easterling	SSG E-6	HHC	22 Apr 67
Ray Turner	PFC E-3	HHC	22 Apr 67
Randy L. Heerd	PFC E-3	HHC	26 Apr 67
Charles Seefeldt	PFC E-3	HHC	7 May 67
Carl R. Konopa	PFC E-3	Co C	13 May 67
John C. Silver	SP/4 E-4	Co C	16 May 67
Roy C. Chitwood	SSG E-6	HHC	18 May 67
Leon Thornton	SP/4 E-4	Co A	18 May 67
Stanley Janrozy	SP/4 E-4	Co C	18 May 67
John W. Hudgens	SP/4 E-4	Co B	18 May 67
Dale E. Wayrynen	SP/4 E-4	Co B	18 May 67
Alvin R. Spider	PFC E-3	Co B	18 May 67
Willie R. Griffith	PFC E-3	Co B	18 May 67
Phillip J. Olofson	PFC E-3	Co B	18 May 67
Calvin L. Taylor	PFC E-3	Co B	18 May 67
William C. Freund	PFC E-3	Co B	18 May 67
Oliver A. Ware	SSG E-6	Co B	18 May 67
Coil Edmond, Jr.	PFC E-3	Co B	18 May 67

<u>NAME</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>UNIT</u>	<u>DATE OF DEATH</u>
Florentino Barron	PFC E-3	Co B	18 May 67
James C. Martin, Jr.	SP/4 E-4	Co A	9 Jun 67
Henry J. Wilhemi	PFC E-3	Co B	10 Jun 67
Joseph L. Park	PFC E-3	Co B	11 Jun 67
Darrel F. Gaskins	SGT E-5	HHC	11 Jun 67
Robin P. Milovich	PFC E-3	Co B	11 Jun 67
James W. Hicks	SGT E-5	Co B	11 Jun 67



## Organization

The 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division arrived in the Republic of Vietnam in July 1965 with three Infantry Battalions: the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry, and the 1st and 2nd Battalions (Airborne), 327th Infantry. Since that date the 1st Brigade Task Force had conducted virtually continuous combat operations against Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army Forces in South Vietnam.

In May 1965, prior to its arrival in Vietnam, the 2-502 was reorganized under Department of the Army TOE 7-35 F. Headquarters and Headquarters Company was reorganized under TOE 7-36 F, and the rifle companies under TOE 7-37 F. This basic configuration, with minor changes, was still in effect 30 June 1967.

The purpose of the above modifications was to tailor the 2-502 for jungle and mountain fighting in a counter-insurgency role. Due to heavy vegetation, limited observation, the close-in nature of the fighting, and the need for clandestine movement in enemy areas, some mechanized elements such as the Anti-tank and Reconnaissance Platoons were converted to light infantry. Thus the "Recondo Force" was borne. Organic to HHC, it is deployed as a rifle maneuver element, with a strength of approximately 50 to 60 personnel operating in two sections. This force has, to a degree, given this battalion a badly needed fourth maneuver element and has enabled it to put a maximum number of riflemen in the field.

A similiar change was effected at company level. The 81mm mortar and 106mm recoilless rifle was removed from the weapon's platoon, leaving the letter companies with a fourth platoon-size maneuver element.

The 4.2 inch and 81mm mortars were occasionally employed by HHC at the TAC CP when conditions permitted, (as at Tuy Hoa, July-November 1966) but in general they were not taken out to the field due to weight limitations and airlift capacity. After Tuy Hoa, the 4.2 inch mortars were not utilized until FIRE BASE CHAMPS was established during operation MALHEUR II, June-July 1967. The semi-permanent nature of the fire base, its commanding position in relation to the surrounding terrain and the deadspace in artillery defensive fires made it practical to employ the mortars both in support of combat operations and in defense of the fire base and TAC CP.

Attempts were made to employ single squads of the mortar platoon in an airmobile reinforcing role during MALHEUR I. The concept envisioned an immediately ready mortar squad with an FDC capability and a basic load of ammunition that could be flown in a single HU-1D to an LZ in a rifle company area when required. The concept was tested on several occasions and found to have merit in steep terrain where artillery adjustment is a problem. However, as long as a rifle company operates under an artillery fan as is required by the Bde SOP, it can almost always get the heavy fire support it desires, and as the limitation on mobility of the 81mm mortar squad restricts the movement of at least some element of the company, the gain in firepower is usually not worth the price.

The 106mm RR also made a reappearance during MALHEUR II, first in clearing the Song Ve Valley and later at FIRE BASE CHAMPS. The jeep mount was found to be not compatible with field operations; it could not operate in a mobile role even in dry rice paddies because of the dikes. It was found that only static positions such as the TAC CP could employ the 106mm RR and its movement must depend on helilift capabilities.



One other organizational concept emphasized during the last several months of this period was the division of the battalion TAC CP into essentially two functions; a Tactical Operations Center directed by the S-3 and an Administrative and Logistical Operations Center managed by the assistant S-4. Both of these agencies reported directly to the Bn CO and their activities were coordinated at a nightly conference. This concept has proved increasingly effective in insuring a carefully controlled and efficient supply and transportation process and in improved operational reports and procedures.

During 1 January-30 June 1967, as previously, the STRIKE FORCE continued to adapt its organization (and tactics) to the changing nature of the Areas of Operations and the varying degrees of sophistication of the enemy, which ranged from the relatively untrained and ill-equipped local VC to the well disciplined and full-equipped NVA soldier.

## OPERATION PICKETT

The year 1967 opened with the 2-502 under command of LTC Frank L. (GUN-SLINGER) Dietrich. The STRIKE FORCE was conducting the second phase of Operation PICKETT, in an AO northeast of Kontum City, Kontum Province. PICKETT had begun in the jungle covered mountains of the Ple Trap Valley area along the Cambodian border, on 9 December 1966, but prior to 1 January the battalion contacts had been primarily with elephants and tigers. The PICKETT II AO consisted of high cloud shrouded ridges; flying conditions were difficult and the enemy had long held the area unhindered, apparently a training and staying area. The enemy had an extensive trail-watcher system in the AO and his tactics consisted of delaying actions and disengagement when contact was made. Numerous campsites, rice caches, livestock pens, booby-traps, and fortifications throughout the area indicated that VC/NVA elements had been active in the AO for quite some time.

On 2 January the enemy threw 30-4- hand-grenades into C Company's night defensive perimeter resulting in 6 US KHA. The enemy withdrew immediately with unknown losses.

PICKETT continues with small contacts until 14 January, when 2-502 was extracted to its base camp in Kontum City by helicopter. VC/NVA losses during the operation were negligible, reflecting the brief nature of all contacts with an elusive enemy, who operated in small groups and successfully avoided decisive engagement. The final count was 13 VC/NVA KHA, 1 POW, and 5 weapons captured. US losses were 13 KHA, 35 WHA, and 3 weapons.



## Kontum to Phan Rang

Following Operation PICKETT, the 2-502 participated in parachute training, with the rest of the 1st Brigade, at Kontum. Range firing and small unit tactics were taught concurrently, to prepare for coming operations. The 2-502 jumped on George Perry DZ, just south of Kontum, from 16-18 January. The DZ was a dry, very hard, rice paddy area, and high winds caused some injuries when jumpers landed on the dikes.

On 21 January the entire 1st Brigade moved from its bivouac on the airstrip at Kontum to the base camp at Phan Rang in a combined land, sea and air operation. The Brigade had been in the field for 53 weeks, the longest period of time any major unit has remained away from its base area during the Vietnamese Conflict. While the 2-502 was gone, wooden barracks had replaced tents, and overall facilities at Phan Rang were considerably improved. These facilities included "The Strip", whose new buildings offered rock and roll, beer, and tea girls in almost adequate quantities.

Training and preparation continued until 26 January, when 2-502 moved out by convoy to begin Operation FARRAGUT III.

### OPERATION FARRAGUT III

Intelligence reports indicated a possible enemy buildup directed at Phan Rang Air Base was taking place to the south. To preclude any possibility of an attack on the base, the Brigade deployed to determine the extent of enemy activity in that area. FARRAGUT III began on 26 January with TF Doherty (C Btry 2-320 Arty and C/2-502 [7]) making a motor march south to area ALABAMA, where it set up for the night and fired H & I into VC Secret Base 35. The following day the 2-502 Battalion (-) left Phan Rang by convoy for its AO in Ninh Thuan Province, about 25 km south of Phan Rang. TF Doherty rejoined the 2-502 (-) there.

The action actually got under way when 2 rifle companies and the Reconos moved out to the west of the TAC CP on foot. The 2-502 was deployed on the southeastern edge of a suspected VC base area; the 1-327 and 2-327 Battalions were in positions to the north and northwest. As elements moved into the area, minor contacts were made with small groups, believed to consist of local VC with some NVA cadre interspered. The enemy made use of secondary trails in the area, and located his campsites near streams.

On 30 January, the brigade received a warning order, and that evening the 2-502 began extraction from AO to TAC CP by helicopter, and then by motor convoy to Phan Rang. The STRIKE FORCE closed on its home base 31 January, after only 5 days in the field, and began preparation for immediate deployment to a new AO.

Results of FARRAGUT III were 7 VC KHA and 5 weapons captured. No friendly losses were taken.



## OPERATION GATTLING I & II

Arriving at Phan Rang upon completion of FARRAGUT III, 2-502 went almost immediately to Phan Rang air strip, and was lifted by C-130 to Phan Thiet as part of the deception plan for GATTLING I, which was to begin the next day, 1 February. The purpose behind the seemingly haphazard extraction from FARRAGUT III, and the swift movement to Phan Thiet, was to confuse the enemy as to our intentions; hoping to conceal the troop buildup and the location of the target area.

GATTLING I, unlike the usual "Search and Destroy" type operation, had a specific purpose; destruction and capture of VC and NVA political and military officials, believed to be meeting at a hidden jungle base in Bao Loc Province. If the mission was compromised by early and visible troop movement, the meeting would be called off.

Following a massive B-52 strike on the target, STRIKE FORCE made a combat air assault, in conjunction with 1-327 Battalion and Mike Forces, to seal off the area. This was accomplished after a brief delay, caused by difficulty in determining that the B-52 strike was concluded, and all units began to converge. Negative contact was made, and no signs of recent enemy activity were found in the area. On 4 February 2-502 was extracted to Phan Thiet.

GATTLING II was initiated on 5 February with an air assault into 3 LZ's in Bao Loc Province. As in GATTLING I, the initial phase of the mission was to exploit a B-52 strike made on a suspected enemy position. All elements moved off their LZ's with negative contacts, and began "Recondo Checkerboard" operations in the AO.

That afternoon "A" Company located an extremely large rice cache, containing some 158 tons of unhulled rice. This was the first of a number of discoveries which in the following 10 days resulted in 310 tons of captured rice. 10 tons were extracted and the remainder destroyed.

All units continued to search and destroy finding several large hootch complexes and food caches. Minor contacts were made, but the enemy had broken down into small groups and appeared to have left the area.

On 10 February, a POW camp was found, and 16 indigenous prisoners were liberated. It appeared that the camp had held more than 100 people, including VC jailers and staff; the bulk of whom had been removed. The brief action involved in taking the camp resulted in 1 VC KHA and 2 weapons captured.

During the remainder of the operation units were extracted from the AO one at a time to return to Phan Rang and bring their gear to Phan Thiet, which became the 2-502 forward base camp. Having moved their baggage, the companies returned to the field.

No significant contacts were made, and the 2-502 was extracted by helicopter to Phan Thiet on 15 February. Final results of the operation were 7 VC KHA, 50 detainees, and 3 weapons captured. US losses amounted to 7 US WHA, mostly due to booby traps.

Although the results of the operation seem negligible, the mere presence of Allied troops in this area (known as Military Region Six) served to let the VC know that they could not consider any area secure from invasion. MR 6 had been unchallenged VC control for several years. During GATTLING II, other elements of the 1st Brigade captured a large amount of signal equipment, indicating that a headquarters of some importance had been operating there prior to Allied penetration of the area.



## OPERATION FARRAGUT IV

After spending 2 days on maintenance and training at the Phan Thiet Base Camp the STRIKE FORCE initiated Operation FARRAGUT IV with an air assault into 3 LZ's to the northeast of Phan Thiet in Binh Thuan Province. The area under attack permitted the enemy to dominate Highway 1 from Phan Thiet to Song Mao and allowed them free access to a long portion of coast line. Platoons of CIDG from Long Son were attached to both A and B Companies. The artillery moved overland behind a major road opening operation to the new TAC CP, located at Long Son.

As the maneuver elements began Search and Destroy operations to the south, rice and water caches were discovered in the vicinity of small VC campsites. C Company conducted a successful night ambush on a carrying party of 12 VC on 19 February, killing 4 and capturing 1 AK-47. During the period of 17-22 February, several other small contacts were made, generally involving carrying parties. These parties consisted of 2 to 4 armed VC escorting male and female bearers; they moved at night along major and secondary trails.

This AO was a low, rolling sandy, brush covered area characterized by extreme dryness, and for the first time units had to be resupplied with water every other day. Since LZ's had to be cut with machetes, (this requiring several hours) movement was seriously curtailed. The CIDG were under a very severe handicap, as they carried only 2 canteens, instead of 4 as the GI's did. To make matters worse, soldiers began to suffer from vomiting and stomach cramps. This was attributed to impure water being used to resupply the troops.

On 22 February, all units were moved to the vicinity of TAC CP by helicopter, ending Phase I of FARRAGUT IV. That afternoon, the 2-502 airlifted to Song Mao to prepare for Phase II. On arrival at Song Mao airstrip, the companies set up a bivouac in an area covered by dry brush, and there a mishap occurred which cost STRIKE FORCE dearly. A cooking fire got out of control, and immediately spread over a wide area, engulfing rucksacks, weapons, ammunition, hand-grenades, 60mm mortar rounds, and LAW's. Efforts to put the fire out failed, and troops began trying to carry equipment out of the danger area across a dirt road. Captain Steve Sylvasy, CO of Charlie Company, was right in the middle of the fire trying to supervise removal of LAW's and mortar ammunition, when the first large explosion was triggered by heat. Captain Sylvasy received severe shrapnel wounds in his chest and stomach, putting him out of action for over two months. Everyone moved across the road, and for the rest of the night sporadic explosions kept all personnel at a safe distance from the remains of the fire. The next day resupply operations began, and by 24 February the 2-502 was once again ready to conduct operations against the enemy.

The sudden and unexpected mission that initiated Phase II of FARRAGUT IV was to assist an ARVN Ranger Battalion which was heavily engaged with an estimated battalion size VC Main Force Unit in the Di Linh-Bao Loc area on Highway 20. Two ARVN relief columns had been ambushed, and a MACV Advisor Team was missing, believed captured. Local ARVN officials claimed adamantly that the VC were withdrawing to the west. Other sources indicated a possible move to the south and east. Playing a hunch the Bn CO committed only one company to the west of Di Linh and two to the south and east. A feature of this operation was the very rapid deployment of the STRIKE FORCE over a distance of over 70 km without any prior recon.

The first indication of trouble was received at Brigade at approximately 1230 hours and the battalion was in position by dark.

Southeast of Di Linh. C Company ambushed 4 VC on the morning of the 25th, killing 3 and capturing 1. The POW stated that he was an intelligence squad member belonging to C 200 Battalion, and that 3 other battalion size forces were in the Di Linh area. Acting on his information B Company was air-lifted to interdict the suspected withdrawal route of one of the main force units. That evening a platoon of B Company was caught in a three-sided ambush by an estimated company armed with heavy automatic weapons. The enemy did not withdraw, and fighting was extremely heavy throughout the night. Gunships and illumination were employed, but fighting was too close-in to utilize the gunships effectively. The enemy finally withdrew on the early morning of the 26th, leaving 9 VC KHA and 5 weapons. US losses were 1 KHA and 8 US WHA.

No other contacts were made with the enemy, and the 2-502 was extracted by helicopter to Song Mao on 27 February.

The third phase of FARRAGUT IV lasted from 3-6 March, taking place to the northwest of Song Mao in Binh Thuan Province. Several minor contacts resulted in 4 VC KHA and 5 weapons captured. In addition, one, large tiger was shot just before extraction to Song Mao on 6 March. This ended FARRAGUT IV, a rather unrelated series of operations involving no major engagements. While at Song Mao, the S-5 section of 2-502 held a number of sick-calls for indigenous civilians, and assisted in movement of refugees to the Song Mao refugee center. Food-stuffs, clothing, and soap were distributed, including rice and grain that had been captured from the enemy in the field. A vigorous leaflet and poster campaign



was conducted in near-by hamlets, and 50 detainees were taken to Phan Rang for questioning. Of these, 18 were confirmed as VC, 21 as VC suspects, and 4 as draft-dodgers.

## OPERATION FARRAGUT V

Operation FARRAGUT V was conducted 9 through 23 March, beginning in the VC Secret Base 35 area southeast of Phan Rang, and then moving slightly northwest to the same AO used by the 2-502 in FARRAGUT III. The mission was to fix and destroy a VC company reportedly operating in the area. This whole region is in Ninh Thuan Province.

The operation was initiated 9 March with an air assault to Son Hoi, a VC controlled hamlet, by elements of the STRIKE FORCE. Landing near the ocean, B Company and the Recon Force conducted a "cordon and search" of Son Hoi, collecting 30 detainees and 1 VC POW with weapon. Then A and C Companies made a combat air assault to the south of Son Hoi, and all elements began search and destroy operations to the west. A Company received fire on the LZ, and called in gunships, resulting in 1 VC KHA with weapon. Units continued to sweep west, finding a small number of old campsites but making no enemy contact.

On 15 March, acting on information gained from local Vietnamese Officials, elements of the STRIKE FORCE were lifted to an area south of Phan Rang in the same general AO of FARRAGUT III. It was believed that a VC District Headquarters Company and Local Force Unit was operating in the area.

Sporadic contact made during the next 6 days resulted in 6 VC KHA, 1 NVA POW, and 5 weapons captured. Information gained from the POW, who had come to SVN 6 months before, indicated that the unit he was with was a VC District Headquarters Company consisting of 70-80 personnel (12 of whom were VC). The unit had broken down into 6 man groups and split up when the 2-502 entered the area.

when 2-502 entered the area.

On 23 March A and B Companies closed on the TAC CP and moved by tactical motor march to Phan Rang, while C Company and Recondo made air-mobile extraction. 2-502 prepared for future operations.



## Phan Rang to Khanh Duong

For 5 days the 2-502 trained in small-arms and tactics and took a well-earned holiday and picnic on Phan Rang Beach. Ceremonies were held to honor the dead and to decorate the living.

On 27 March a change-of-command took place: LTC Harry A. (BUCKSHOT) Buckley took command of the STRIKE FORCE, and GUNSLINGER (LTC Frank L. Dietrich) said farewell to a command that would never forget him.

The next day the 2-502 moved by C-130 and motor convoy to Khanh Duong, a village northwest of Ninh Hoa in Khanh Hoa Province. The convoy carried the material needed to establish a base camp at Khanh Duong, and 2-502, with the mission of securing the new brigade base, began patrolling the surrounding area and planning for Operation SUMMERALL. Khanh Hoa Province is classified as Central Highlands, and most of the 2-502's operations were conducted in very mountainous terrain during the rainy season. This combination of conditions put a considerable strain on troops and equipment, especially during the campaign on Hon Ba Mountain against Regiment 18-B.

On arrival in Khanh Duong, the 1st Brigade assumed the mission of road security for Route 21. This task initially fell on the 2-502 which had C Company, 2-327, under its OPCON for this purpose. The military security along a portion of Route 21 allowed traffic to proceed from Duc My to Khanh Duong without paying VC road tolls, and helped bring the Montagnard Villages near the highway under RVN control.

## OPERATION SUMMERALL

On 3 April the 2-502 was deployed southwest of Khanh Duong in the eastern tip of Darlac Province to determine if VC forces were hiding in the area or using it as an infiltration route. No intelligence was available concerning this area, and no signs of enemy activity were discovered. The area was rugged and beautiful and heavily populated with elephant, tiger and very large deer. A CIDG Company from Loc Thien was attached to the battalion and remained with it throughout Operation SUMMERALL.

On 7 April the 2-502 was re-deployed near Den Dien as a result of IRRF's contacts in that area. No large enemy forces were found, though several sharp contacts took place with local VC forces. As a result of the battalion's wide ranging operations in the area it is felt that these local forces were scattered and badly disrupted. Initially A Company and then C Company left the AO to perform road security on Route 21. On 15 April the 2-502 was extracted to Khanh Duong to prepare for Phase III of Operation SUMMERALL.

Numerous SPAR's reports and Hoi Chan informers indicated that the 7th and 8th Bn, 18-B Regiment (NVA) and a company-sized VC Province Unit were based on Hon Ba Mountain. 18-B was an old foe of the STRIKE FORCE, and was reportedly once again operational as a result of replacements from NVN. On the morning of 17 April, the 2-502 was deployed along the north and east sided of Hon Ba following air assaults onto 6 separate LZ's. The initial plan sent two units directly against the assumed enemy position and two other units came in on the flanks. Contact was made immediately with what appeared to be delaying elements, as friendly

units moved into the AO.

In the next 14 days, the battalion searched the rugged north and eastern faces of the mountain from its base to its cloud shrouded crest, learning the trail system and driving the enemy from his hiding places. Except for one sharp encounter in a rocky cul de sac between the Recondo Force and a platoon from the 8th Bn, 18-B Regiment, contacts were meeting engagements with individuals and small groups. It appeared that the enemy in moving from one area to another to avoid contact was becoming critically short of food and several successful ambushes were conducted on sump areas. Contacts during this Phase accounted for 15 VC/NVA KHA and 11 weapons captured. The type of weapons captured substantiated other intelligence that an NVA unit was operating in the area.

On 27 April in a test of area saturation capability, the battalion had the Brigade Chemical Section drop 692 CS grenades from a helicopter on the north slope of Hon Ba, covering an area of 6 grid squares believed to contain the enemy base camp and hidden remnants of the 18-B Regiment. Two platoons of A Company were deployed in the area with protective masks, but apparently the CS was not effective in driving the enemy into the open as only two contacts were reported.

On 28 April one platoon of A Company conducted stay-behind operations while other elements moved west. Two VC, searching for food in GI trash, were killed by the stay-behind force.

On 30 April the 2-502 began extraction to Khanh Duong, and began preparing for the move north to Duc Pho.



## Duc Pho

The move from Khanh Duong to Duc Pho began on 5 May with a motor convoy to Nha Trang. LTG Larson, CG IEFV, bid farewell to the STRIKE FORCE at a formation on the beach at Nha Trang. The next morning the 2-502 embarked on 2 LST's and sailed north in calm weather to Duc Pho, arriving 7 May on excellent beach there. At this point the 1st Bde, 101st Abn Div became a part of Task Force Oregon. The next several days were spent building and fortifying CARENTAN BASE CAMP, just to the east of Duc Pho, and preparing for Operation MALHEUR.

The MALHEUR area of operations is in the southern portion of I CORPS, and the enemy had been very active there for a long time. Virtually all of the countryside and most of the hamlets were under VC control, and the Special Forces CIDG camps to the west were accessible only by air.

While establishing its base camp, the 2-502 suffered 1 US KHA and 5 WHA resulting from a booby-trap in the battalion perimeter. During this period, 7-11 May, STRIKE FORCE patrolled the surrounding area and set up night ambushes in the vicinity of CARENTAN BASE. Intelligence was compiled from inhabitants of the area, as well as from friendly units that had been operating there. The 3d Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division, also part of TFO, had arrived several months before the SCREAMING EAGLES, and had already made a tremendous number of contacts with squad and platoon size enemy units.

## OPERATION MALHEUR I

On 11 May the 2-502 conducted an airmobile assault into NORMANDY AO, 20 kilometers to the west of Duc Pho. From 4 LZ's, elements began Search and Destroy operations toward the east, discovering many signs of recent enemy activity. In the valleys, there were neat farms and well tended fields of mountain rice and in the hills, large VC/NVA base camps were discovered, and storage hootches containing food and clothing were hidden in the woods near trails. The enemy appeared to be east of the STRIKE FORCE, and only minor contacts were made until the 15th.

On 15 May, the Recono Force ambushed 15 VC, killing 6 and capturing an 82mm mortar tube and 1 SKS. The following day A Company ambushed 4 VC, killing 2 with weapons, and B Company followed up with 2 more that afternoon. Late the night of 16 May the Recono perimeter on a major trail in a deep valley was heavily probed. One round of friendly artillery fire unfortunately fell in the Recono position causing several casualties. Some additional casualties were caused by enemy grenades and several enemy bodies were later found just outside the perimeter. One of the dead enemy had been killed in a hand to hand encounter. On 17 May the 2d Platoon, C Company ran into a battalion-size fortified base camp on hill 399, apparently still occupied by a considerable force, and was forced to pull back a short distance to evacuate casualties and bringing in supporting fires. Before reinforcements, including A Company 1-327, could be brought to the aid of the 2d Platoon, the enemy evacuated the camp.

On 18 May the battalion commander felt that it was likely that the

enemy would be found on the heavily forested slopes of Hill 424 (BS 705322) caught between the eastward sweep of the STRIKE FORCE and the western push of the 2-327 Inf. Consequently a coordinated attack was planned with B Company in the center driving over the hill from west to east, A Company clearing the lower slopes on the south flank and C Company positioned to attack from the north and east. During the morning B Company encountered what appeared to be an enemy medical unit on the north western slope of Hill 424 and aggressively pursued, killing eight and capturing one nurse. This successful action tended to make the lead platoon of Bravo, and the CIDG platoon working with them, overconfident and as a result during the afternoon they were split into several groups and pushed ahead of the company. This set the stage for one of the three largest engagements in which the STRIKE FORCE has participated in over a year. Through the remainder of the afternoon and into the rain sodden dark night, in an improbable location on the steep eastern slope of Hill 424, the enemy held his ground in a heavy engagement with elements of all 3 companies of the STRIKE FORCE. The conflict began when LT Booth in command of the 1st Platoon, B Company sent a squad and part of the CIDG<sup>G</sup> platoon to secure an LZ on the east side of 424. This patrol encountered a large enemy force that was well dug in and armed with automatic weapons, as it moved down a ridge. 6 Americans were killed and the 6 others wounded; the CIDG were scattered, some being captured and others escaping. As LT Booth moved to reinforce with the rest of his element, he was taken under fire. The Company commander with two more platoons of B Company arrived from the northwest and also became heavily engaged. A Company, in a brilliantly aggressive action swept through what appeared to be a



part of the same force south of 424, capturing a machinegun, and then turning to block the enemy escape. Meanwhile C Company made a very rapid move to the south and a slashing counter attack into the enemy's north flank. This action accounted for eleven enemy soldiers and probably turned the tide in favor of the STRIKE FORCE.

B Company continued in contact throughout the rainy night, by morning the enemy had abandoned his positions and in spite of a tight ring composed of four companies, disappeared. A thorough police of the area by all elements revealed 45 VC/NVA KHA, 16 weapons, 12 US KHA, and 38 US WHA. Enemy fortifications on Hill 424 were mutually supporting, many had overhead cover and firing ports low to the ground.

During the rest of May units continued making contact as they moved back into the valleys to the west then east to the edge of the coastal plain. As the SF departed a heavy odor hung in the valley from the large number of bodies, both VC and water buffalo, that lay rotting in the sun.

The operation concluded on a positive note when B Company uncovered 54 tons of rice and in over 30 hours of hard, hot work, extracted the majority of it to government control to feed refugees. On 4 June the last elements of the 2-502 was lifted back to CARENTAN BASE, to prepare for MALHEUR II.

The final body count for MALHEUR I was 152 VC/NVA killed, and 3 POW and 45 weapons were captured. Friendly losses were 13 US KHA and 65 wounded. Intelligence gathered during the operation indicated that the enemy belonged to the 93rd, 95th, and 97th Battalion's, 2d Regiment, 1st NVA Division; as well as local VC forces in the area.

## OPERATION MALHEUR II

Operation MALHEUR II was initiated 7 June 1967, with an airmobile assault by C Company into the western portion of BASTOGNE AO, about 30 kilometers northwest of CARENTAN BASE to establish FIRE BASE CHAMPS. B Battery 320th (Abn) Artillery (105 how) and C Battery, 11th Artillery (155 how) were moved into the fire base and used in support of the operation. On 9 June the 2-502 (-) made air assaults onto 3 IZ's in BASTOGNE AO, and a CIDG Company from Minh Long Special Forces Camp joined the operation under 2-502 OPCON. The TAC CP was located at CHAMPS, and all maneuver elements began search and destroy operations toward the Song Ve Valley.

That evening A Company engaged a well dug-in company-sized force. After advancing to within hand-grenade range of the enemy without being observed, the 1st Platoon began throwing grenades into his forward trenches. A Company immediately suffered its only KHA in the engagement, as a faulty grenade exploded in the hand of the lead squad leader. The battle continued sporadically through the night, and the next morning A Company found 17 VC/NVA KHA, 3 POW's, 3 weapons, 27 rucksacks, and large amounts of medical equipment in the battle area.

On 10 June a small advance patrol from B Company was taken under fire by an estimated enemy company. In pulling back to the main body of troops, the squad left 1 US MHA, 2 weapons, and several rucksacks in the hands of the enemy. By the time B Company was able to assemble sufficient force, the enemy disengaged, taking the trooper (believed dead) and equipment. The next morning a sweep of the area was planned to re-

locate the enemy and recover the MHA. Prior to B Company's advance, 5 batteries of artillery and Tac Air prepared the area. Disaster struck, however, as several rounds fell on B Company, killing 3 and wounding 21. This tragedy, coupled with that of the 10th, reduced B Company to a strength of 69 men in the field.

Until 17 June, the STRIKE FORCE continued to make contacts in the AO, increasing the body count but capturing fewer weapons as time went on. Leaflet drops and Psy War broadcasts were made, urging the people in the Song Ve Valley to co-operate so they would not be hurt, and informing them that they would be re-settled in a secure area.

On 17 June the 2-502 entered the valley area and began cordon and search operations of villages there. The farmers and their families were evacuated to Ngia Hanh refugee center, and a cattle drive succeeded in collecting 520 head, also bound for Ngia Hanh. The clearing took several days, and during this period units ambushed small groups of VC nightly. The most significant ambushes, conducted by A Company and Recon Force on 18 June, resulted in the capture of 2 82mm mortar tubes. By 21 June over 1200 refugees had been cleared from the valley.

On 25 June this phase of MALHEUR II ended with the 2-502 accounting for 55 VC/NVA KHA, 18 weapons, 37 VC/NVA POW's, and large amounts of medical and signal equipment. Captured documents revealed that enemy elements in the area belonged to the 40th, 60th, 70th, and 90th Battalions of the 1st VC Regiment, 2d NVA Division; and several smaller, local units from Quang Ngai Province.

On 25 June the 2-502 oriented to the west, and focused its attention on the Song Ne Valley. MALHEUR II continued until 28 July, with several



more important engagements, before STRIKE FORCE returned to CARENTAN Base Camp, having spent 51 days in the field.

The presence of large enemy units and a stepped up rate of contact in the Duc Pho area necessitated some change in the STRIKE FORCE's method of operation. More use was made of supporting fires, both Artillery and Tac Air, and the companies kept platoons within easy supporting distance of each other instead of separating over wide distances. Night movement was extensively employed, as it was difficult to cross the many open areas in the AO during daylight without risking enemy observation. In the area of logistics, ammunition resupply and casualty evacuation put a heavier burden on helilift capability than in the past.

As this period drew to a close, the 2-502, under Colonel Buckley, continued to experiment with new tactics and techniques that would make the STRIKE FORCE ever more capable of finding and destroying the enemy under whatever type of conditions the mission would require.

## Glossary

- AO -- Area of Operation
- ARVN -- Army of the Republic of Vietnam
- CIDG -- Civilian Irregular Defense Group -- Indigenous mercenaries with Special Forces Advisors
- DZ -- Drop Zone -- for paratroop assault
- IFEV -- 1st Field Forces, Vietnam
- KHA -- Killed in Hostile Action
- LAW -- Light Antitank Weapon
- LST -- Navy troop and vehicle carrier
- LZ -- Landing Zone, generally for helicopter assault or extraction from AO
- Mike Forces -- Montagnard Forces with US Advisors
- NVA -- North Vietnamese Army
- TAC CP -- Tactical Command Post (Battalion)
- WHA -- Wounded in Hostile Action

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