

UNIT HISTORY

2ND Bn. ABN 502INF



VIETNAM



1966



UNIT HISTORY

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

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DURING THE YEAR 1966

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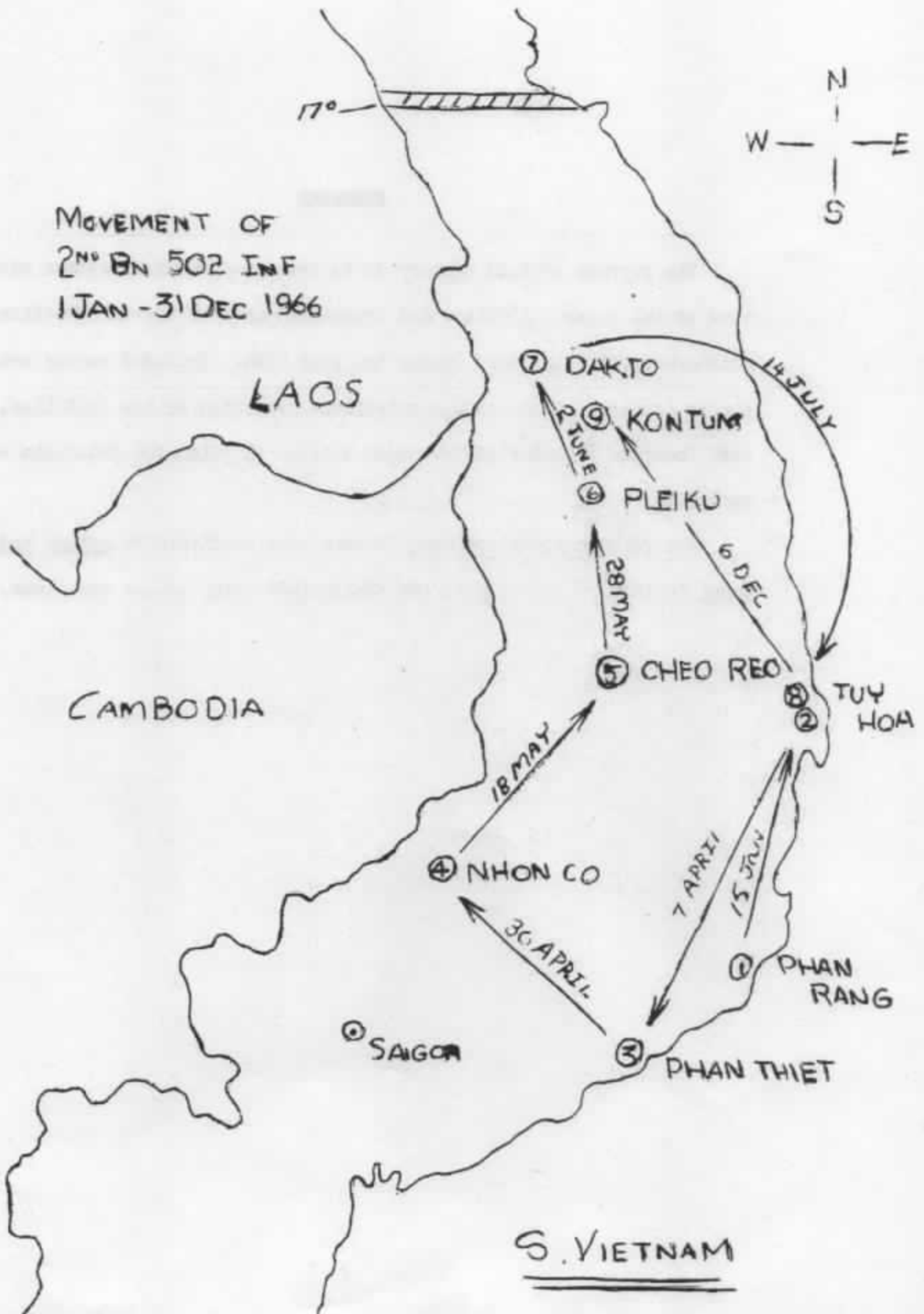
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MOVEMENT OF
2ND BN 502 INF
1 JAN - 31 DEC 1966





FOREWORD

The purpose of this history is to present a concise written narrative of the major activities and accomplishments of the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry during the year 1966. Included herein are accurate accounts of the combat operations conducted by the Battalion, with detailed accounts of the major battles in which the Battalion was engaged.

All figures given for enemy losses were confirmed by actual body count in the area of combat. No "estimated" enemy losses are given.

DEDICATION

This History of the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry is dedicated to the following members of the "STRIKER FORCE" who gave their lives in defense of freedom in the Republic of Vietnam.

<u>NAME</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>UNIT</u>	<u>DATE OF DEATH</u>
WEBB, Donald	E-5	Co B	16 Jan 66
SULLIVAN, Richard A.	E-3	Co B	24 Jan 66
WOUNGHEAL, Richard C.	E-5	Co A	24 Jan 66
CORRADO, Joseph	E-4	Co B	5 Feb 66
DEVLIN, Thomas E.	E-4	Co C	28 Jan 66
ELLEN, Jesse T.	E-5	Co B	2 Feb 66
WILLAGE, Frankie L.	1LT	Co A	4 Feb 66
PISER, Walter W.	E-4	Co B	6 Feb 66
OLSON, Duane	E-4	Co B	6 Feb 66
REES, Timothy	E-3	Co B	6 Feb 66
McELHANN, Steven P.	E-6	Co B	6 Feb 66
PAGZI, Alex B.	E-4	Co B	6 Feb 66
THOMAS, Roy E.	E-5	Co C	6 Feb 66
KOSTKA, Alexander	E-5	Co C	6 Feb 66
MURPHY, John E.	E-2	Co A	9 Feb 66
DEWROUET, Carlos D.	E-6	Co A	9 Feb 66
PRYDE, Johnny P.	E-3	Co A	9 Feb 66
COOLIDGE, William	E-5	Co A	9 Feb 66
DEWITT, John D. III	E-5	Co A	9 Feb 66
SEMMERLING, William D.	2LT	Co A	9 Feb 66
McFARLAND, Tommie	E-3	Co C	20 Mar 66
McEMMAN, Clifford L.	E-3	Co C	20 Mar 66
FRIEL, Lester G.	E-3	Co C	15 Apr 66
BROCKEN, Galen D.	E-3	MHC	16 Apr 66
LANE, Fancus L.	E-3	Co A	20 Apr 66
ALLEN, Warden	E-3	MHC	4 May 66
KARSTEN, J. D.	E-4	MHC	4 May 66
WISS, Howard D.	E-4	MHC	4 May 66
THEOPHILUS, Robert W.	E-3	Co C	4 May 66
SALVE, Joseph E.	E-3	Co C	4 May 66
SIMPSON, Michael	E-3	Co C	4 May 66
JACKSON, Melvin W.	E-3	Co C	4 May 66
GUTER, Earnest L. Sr.	E-4	Co C	4 May 66
FERRIS, Robert L.	E-3	Co A	4 May 66
CHAMBERLAIN, Robert L.	E-3	Co A	4 May 66

<u>NAMES</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>UNIT</u>	<u>DATE OF DEATH</u>
COLLESTER, Robert G.	E-3	Co A	4 May 66
FERG, Roger L.	E-3	Co A	4 May 66
HAWTHORNE, Gene	E-6	Co A	4 May 66
BROWN, John A.	E-6	Co A	4 May 66
SCOTT, David A.	E-4	HHC	4 May 66
JACKSON, Phillip P.	E-3	Co A	7 May 66
McHAIG, Robert L.	E-4	Co A	8 May 66
STRITTI, Stephen J.	E-3	Co A	8 May 66
PEPPERS, Willie W. Jr.	E-5	HHC	10 May 66
EVANS, Andrew C.	E-4	Co A	11 May 66
OTTO, William F.	2LT	Co A	11 May 66
TAYLOR, Wayne F.	E-4	Co A	11 May 66
CRACHER, Denton W.	E-3	Co A	3 Jun 66
MISHIYAMA, Melvin T.	E-3	Co C	3 Jun 66
DODSON, David L.	E-3	Co A	7 Jun 66
HUSTON, Terry	E-3	Co A	7 Jun 66
ROBINSON, George	E-5	Co A	7 Jun 66
WATSON, Bill P.	E-3	Co B	9 Jun 66
THOMAS, Walter J.	E-4	Co C	9 Jun 66
WAGNER, Edward	E-3	Co C	9 Jun 66
DYKSTER, Lawrence E.	E-3	Co A	9 Jun 66
ELLIOTT, Joseph R.	E-3	Co C	9 Jun 66
SCHILLER, James A.	E-3	HHC	9 Jun 66
REINER, Melvin	E-3	Co A	9 Jun 66
FOURMAN, Edward T.	E-3	Co C	9 Jun 66
WATSON, James H.	1LT	Co C	9 Jun 66
HANNA, Robert	E-7	Co C	9 Jun 66
MURPHY, Michael W.	E-3	Co C	9 Jun 66
MILLAGE, James	E-5	Co B	15 Jun 66
WATSON, Marshall	E-4	Co A	7 Jul 66
WATSON, A. T.	E-4	HHC	7 Jul 66
WATSON, Kenneth C.	E-3	HHC	7 Jul 66
PHILLIPS, Dennis	E-3	Co A	7 Jul 66
LEWIS, William	E-3	Co C	12 Jul 66
DAVIS, Robert O.	E-3	HHC	12 Aug 66
HARRIS, Robert B.	1LT	Co A	14 Aug 66
SMITH, Fred D. Jr.	E-3	Co A	15 Aug 66
SMITH, Derrel	E-5	Co A	15 Aug 66
SMITH, Bruce M.	E-3	HHC	29 Aug 66
WATSON, Mack A.	E-3	Co A	5 Sep 66
WATSON, Russell B.	E-3	HHC	5 Sep 66
WATSON, Tom	E-3	Co C	10 Sep 66
SPENCER, Alfred	E-3	Co C	11 Sep 66
RODRIGUEZ, Elias R.	E-5	Co B	20 Sep 66
WATSON, Charles J.	E-3	Co C	20 Sep 66
WATSON, Ronnie L.	E-3	Co C	25 Sep 66

<u>NAME</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>UNIT</u>	<u>DATE OF DEATH</u>
JOHNSON, Joe T.	E-4	Co A	22 Sep 66
BURTON, Stephen	E-3	Co B	24 Sep 66
BENWACH, Gerald	E-7	Co A	24 Sep 66
CARVEY, Vincent P.	E-3	Co A	7 Oct 66
COOPER, Horton S. Jr.	E-4	Co C	17 Oct 66
CTR, William L.	E-3	Co C	9 Nov 66
KIRBY, Randle	E-3	Co B	9 Nov 66
RYAN, George T.	E-3	Co B	9 Nov 66
DOUGAN, Robert	E-3	Co B	9 Nov 66
WILSON, Otis E.	E-4	Co B	9 Nov 66
DEAN, David H.	E-5	HEB	9 Nov 66
NICK, Carl L. Jr.	E-3	Co C	13 Nov 66
MURPHY, Lawrence D.	E-3	Co B	4 Dec 66
SMITH, Jarel	E-3	Co C	31 Dec 66

ORGANIZATION

The 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry is one of the three maneuver Infantry battalions of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. The STRIKE FORCE was deployed in the Republic of Vietnam as part of the 1st Brigade Task Force in July, 1965, and since that time has conducted combat operations against the Communist Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army Forces in South Vietnam.

On 15 May, 1965 the 2/502 was reorganized under Department of the Army TOE 7-35 F. Headquarters and Headquarters Company was organized under TOE 7-36 F, and the rifle companies ("A", "B", and "C") under TOE 7-37 F. This basic organization was utilized, with some modifications for training and combat.

Since jungle operations offer little opportunity for the use of heavy mortars or anti-tank weapons due to limited observation, the close-in nature of the fighting, and lack of mobility of these units in dense jungle terrain, some units designed to provide such support in a conventional environment were converted to light Infantry maneuver elements.

By one such modification, Headquarters Company is provided a reinforced rifle maneuver element (60-65 men) called the "Recondo Force", organized loosely into two sections. Members of the Recondo Force are chiefly volunteers and are drawn from all sections of Headquarters Company, though the personnel to man the unit are authorized for the Anti-tank and Reconnaissance Platoons. The Recondo Force provided added rifle

strength for the Battalion during jungle operations, and was also available for special missions.

Similarly, the "Weapons Platoon" of the rifle companies was principally used as a fourth rifle platoon, and was provided two machine guns through special authorization. For indirect fire support, two 60mm mortars were available in each company and were utilized as terrain and tactical considerations dictated.

During the year 1966 the STRIKE FORCE continually sought to tailor its organization and weaponry, and develop its tactics to better meet the special challenge of jungle and counter guerrilla warfare.

PHANG RANG

The beginning of 1966 found the STRIKE FORCE, commanded by Lt. Col. Henry E. (Gunfighter) Emerson in the base camp of the 101st Airborne's 1st Brigade at Phn Rang, Republic of Vietnam. Having completed five months of combat operations since deployment in Vietnam, the Battalion spent the first two weeks of 1966 improving living areas, training in small unit tactics, and patrolling its assigned area to provide security for the base camp and nearby USAF facilities.

On 13 January the Battalion began preparations to move to Tuy Hoa, Phu Yen Province, in support of combat operations in that area.

Operation VAN BUREN

The STRIKE FORCE began movement to Tuy Hoa on 15 January, 0730 hours. Movement was conducted by aircraft and LST and was completed on 17 January at 1100 hours. The Battalion initially relieved an Airborne Brigade of the Republic of Vietnam Army in blocking positions north of Tuy Hoa, near Phu Khe. The 2/502 then moved from these positions to establish a base camp near Tran Linh Chinh. On 18 January the Battalion began "Recondo" patrols from base camp to the north and northwest of Tuy Hoa while one company occupied a designated portion of the perimeter around TUY HOA NORTH Airfield.

On 21 January Company B secured a landing zone for the evacuation of Vietnamese children, nuns and priests from the Hung Lang Orphanage at Hoi Tin. The orphanage had been regularly terrorized by groups of armed Viet Cong who threatened to destroy the buildings and take the children. After the institution had been relocated in Tuy Hoa, the soldiers of the 2/502 made frequent gifts of food, clothes and money to help the people make a new start in Tuy Hoa.

The Battalion continued operations to the North, near Tuy An through 31 January with numerous small contacts with local guerrilla units.

On 1 February the STRIKE FORCE prepared for operations to the southwest along the Song Da Rang River Valley - the "Rice Bowl" of Phu Yen Province (See map, Incl. 1). Elements of the 95th NVA Regiment were believed to be in the vicinity, attempting to secure rice from the local

area during the harvest. On 2 February the Battalion conducted a heli-borne assault on two LZs and began search and destroy operations in the Area of Operation, which were to last for 18 days, and would involve several major engagements with North Vietnamese Army units.

Sharp but brief contact was made with the enemy on 2 and 4 February. On 6 February a platoon of B Company engaged an NVA force in prepared positions near the hamlet My Lam (later identified as elements of the 5th Battalion, 95th NVA Regiment). A second platoon from B Company moved overland to reinforce the element in contact and exploit by hitting the enemy on their northern flank. A third rifle platoon from B Company was helilifted into the battle area to block escape routes to the south and west. Each of the platoons subsequently became engaged, developing the outline of the enemy positions. During this period the first of 13 sorties of Tactical Air strikes hit the target area. Company C (-) conducted a heliborne assault to the south, with the mission of sweeping north to link up with B Company and assist in reducing the entrenched enemy force. B and C Companies linked at 1850 hours, effectively ending further resistance of the trapped NVA force. Enemy losses for this engagement were 39 killed and numerous weapons taken.

On the morning of 7 February B and C Companies conducted a sweep to the east in returning to the Battalion base area. Company C swept wide to the south to search an area from which sniper fire was received the day before, and encountered another well entrenched enemy force. After

C Company had closed with the enemy on three sides, the 1st Battalion, 327 Infantry committed Company B and Tiger Force (the equivalent of the Recono Force), and assumed OPCON over C Company, 2/502. A vicious action continued the rest of the day, the results of which were 63 enemy killed and 60 weapons captured. Of the total, C Company accounted for 18 enemy dead and 20 weapons taken.

The total enemy losses inflicted by the STRIKE FORCE during the period 6 - 8 February were 57 enemy killed, one POW. 30 weapons were captured, one FRC 10 radio, and assorted ammunition and equipment. From 9 February through 20 February the Battalion continued to search for the enemy in the western sector of the AO, finding many caches of weapons and equipment.

The 2/502 closed into the base area at Tuy Hoc South Airfield 0830 hours on 20 February, terminating Operation VAN BUREN. The STRIKE FORCE had accounted for 156 enemy killed and 11 prisoners taken. 109 weapons, 100,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, 200 hand grenades, and large quantities of medical supplies and other equipment were captured.

Operation HARRISON

Operation HARRISON, which was conducted during the period 22 February to 24 March 1966 consisted of six battalion-size operations and two operations smaller than battalion size. The operation was conducted essentially in two separate sectors, one sector to the north of Tuy Hoa and one to the south of Tuy Hoa. The 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne concept of operation was to conduct offensive operations to the north and west of Tuy Hoa initially, to locate, fix and destroy VC forces in the area.

Phase I

On 22 February the first phase of Operation HARRISON began with B Company, 2/502 and one rifle company of the 2nd ROK Marine Brigade conducting a combined mission, while the Battalion (-) continued with assigned security missions, maintenance of equipment, and "CMMI" inspection at Tuy Hoa South Airfield. This phase terminated 25 February and resulted in 2 VC killed, 1 wounded POW and one suspect. Four weapons were captured with 250 rounds of ammunition, and 1200 pounds of rice were destroyed.

Phase II

On 25 February the Battalion began the second phase of Operation HARRISON by displacing to an AO about 10 kilometers north of Tuy Hoa. The move was completed on the 26th, and the initial company objectives were taken with no enemy contact. Search and destroy operations were initiated the afternoon of the 26th and continued through the 28th, netting 5 VC

killed, 1 POW (wounded) and one weapon captured. All elements closed into the Battalion base and prepared to continue operations the following day.

Phase III

On 1 March the Battalion conducted a heliborne assault into an area about 15 kilometers further to the northeast. During the assault one helicopter crashed and burned, destroying the UH1-D and 3 M-16 rifles. The alternate LZ was utilized for the remaining lift of troops and all objectives were secured with no enemy contact. Search and destroy operations were begun immediately with A Company in reserve and securing the Battalion Tactical Command Post. These operations were completed on 2 March, resulting in 4 VC killed, 4 POWs and 3 weapons captured. Friendly losses were 2 WIA.

Phase IV and V

On the evening of 2 March, A and B Companies renewed operations, with C Company going into reserve. At the same time the Reconno Force began conducting combined operations with Civilian Irregular Defense Group forces from the Dong Tre Special Forces Camp. Very little contact was made with the enemy during this phase, and the total results for 3-6 March were 2 VC killed, 3 POWs and one weapon captured. On 6 March the STRIKE FORCE was helilifted to the Battalion trains area at Tuy Hoa and assumed the mission of Brigade reserve. Local security was established and maximum effort was placed on maintenance of weapons and equipment, and personal hygiene.

Phase VI

The remainder of Operation HARRISON was conducted in areas south of Tuy Hoa, on the southern edge of the "Rice Bowl", and in the mountains further south. From 9 - 12 March the Battalion had the mission of securing an artillery battery and engineer platoon working on Route 7. This was accomplished by providing perimeter security as well as conducting search and destroy operations around the positions. The results were 2 VC killed, 1 POW (wounded) and 1 weapon captured. Friendly casualties were two wounded.

Phase VII

On 12 March the Reconno Force was helilifted from the Battalion base area to an LZ to the west. That night they moved by foot to another LZ to secure it for the Battalion. At 0100 hours the Battalion began night movement by helicopter into this area. The Battalion had completed the movement into the LZ by 0240 hours 13 March, and the companies had moved out to exploit a planned B-52 strike to the south. The air strike took place at 0400 hours and two hours later the companies were entering the strike area. Company B found a training camp with three Browning Automatic Rifles, 100 rounds of ammo, two carbine magazines, eight packs and clothing, and 100 pounds of TNT. On 14 March all elements closed at the Battalion base in preparation for a helicopter assault to exploit another B-52 strike scheduled for the following day.

Phase VIII

On 15 March the Battalion conducted a heliborne assault into the new

AO. B and C Companies moved south to search the B-52 strike area while Company A remained in reserve and provided security for the Battalion Tac CP. Through March 19 contact with the enemy was sporadic. On 20 March Company A was committed and C Company began movement to the Battalion CP to take over mission of Battalion reserve. At 1425 hours C Company became engaged with an estimated reinforced VC squad and attempted to maneuver one of its elements to flank the enemy force. Movement proved difficult, as the VC were positioned among huge boulders on the side of a mountain. Tactical Air and armed helicopters were called in, and after the airstrike C Company could still make little progress. By 1700 hours friendly casualties were 2 KIA and 8 wounded. At that time B Company was moved in to protect C Company's rear, and A Company was attempting to get to the high ground above the enemy force, now thought to be at least platoon size.

On 21 March the Battalion elements were still in pursuit of the enemy force and C Company was helilifted forward to try and establish contact with the enemy. B Company's 2nd and Weapons Platoons discovered a VC hospital at which 4 wounded NVA soldiers were captured and several hundred pounds of medical supplies. Further operations during the period 22 - 24 March resulted in only sporadic contact, and the operation was terminated on the 24th.

During operations in the northern sector only local guerrilla units were engaged, and there were no further indications that any other type

forces were in the area. Intelligence information, prior to operations in the south, indicated the possible presence of the 4th or 5th Battalions of the 95th NVA Regiment. The presence of the 95th was confirmed by the capture of the Regimental hospital with the four wounded NVA soldiers. However, the main body of the battalions could not be located and the interrogation of the POWs indicated that the 95th had split up into small bands to escape into the mountains.

Total results for Operation HARRISON were 39 VC killed, 19 POWs (8 of them wounded), 24 weapons captured, 36 hand grenades, 153 pounds of demolition, numerous documents, medical and other supplies. Total friendly losses were 6 KIA and 29 WIA.

Operation FILLMORE

From 25 March to 7 April 1966 the STRIKE FORCE was again deployed in the rugged mountains south of the Tuy Hoa "Rice Bowl" as part of Operation FILLMORE. The operation was a sequel to HARRISON and was a further effort to fix and destroy elements of the 95th NVA Regiment, still thought to be in the area. On the basis of intelligence gathered during Operation HARRISON, it was known that the 95th had broken into small groups and dispersed into the mountains. Intelligence further indicated that the strength and morale of the 95th were low. Therefore increased psychological warfare techniques were employed by the Brigade Psychological Operations Team to persuade enemy elements to surrender, but these produced no significant results.

During the period 25 - 29 March the Battalion conducted search and destroy operations in the AO southwest of Tu Bong. On 25 March B Company hit several different enemy forces during the day, accounting for 12 enemy killed, 1 POW (wounded), three weapons and 17 hand grenades captured. B Company closed to the Battalion Tac CP and remained in Battalion reserve until 29 March. The rest of the Battalion killed 5 Viet Cong and captured 4 (3 wounded) during this period.

From 30 March through 2 April the Battalion (-) conducted search and destroy operations in the mountainous area west of Highway One with A Company remaining in reserve. There were only minor contacts and on 2

April the STRIKE FORCE closed at the base camp near Tuy Hoa to resume the mission of Brigade reserve.

The Battalion remained Brigade Reserve and I Field Force (Vietnam) Reserve on a one-hour alert until 7 April. Operation FILLMORE had accounted for 26 enemy killed and 3 POWs. Weapons captured included one submachinegun (AK-47, Chinese Communist), one mauser rifle, one US carbine, one .45 cal. pistol, 17 hand grenades, 4 mortar rounds (4.2") and one AT mine.

Operation AUSTIN II

On 7 - 9 April the STRIKE FORCE and one other Battalion of the 1st Brigade (1st Battalion, 327 Infantry) were airlifted to Phan Thiet, a coastal town southwest of Phan Rang and the capital of Binh Thuan Province.

The mission of the Battalion was to search out and destroy local guerrillas and a Main Force Viet Cong Battalion reported to be in northern Binh Thuan Province, astride the II and III Corps boundary. This operation, designated AUSTIN II, began on the night of 11 April as the Reconno Force and one platoon of B Company were committed by heliborne assault into the AO, with the mission of infiltrating during the night to secure three LZs for the Battalion (minus) to enter the next day.

The first contact occurred early the 12th when a Reconno section engaged a VC squad, killing one and liberating 2 persons who were found to be prisoners of the VC. B Company was committed to exploit this contact. Companies A and C were committed on the 13th. All elements conducted search and destroy missions in their respective sectors. These operations terminated 18 April, having produced only minor contacts with local guerrilla squads.

On 20 April, Companies A and C were lifted by heliborne assault into an AO further to the east. The Reconno Force, with a Cham CIDG unit attached, entered the AO by foot from the Luong Son Special Forces Camp. B Company initially remained in reserve. The STRIKE FORCE continued operations to the northeast of Phan Thiet until 25 April with only light contacts with local guerrillas, mostly snipers. By 26 April all elements had returned to the Battalion base area of Phan Thiet and were preparing for redeployment to

another area. The advance party of the Battalion departed 0900 hours 26 April for NHON CO, in Quang Duc Province.

Results of Operation AUSTIN II were: 15 enemy killed, 25 POWs (5 wounded), seven weapons, 5½ tons of rice and 2 tons of potatoes were captured. Friendly losses were 4 killed, 10 wounded.

Operation AUSTIN VI

Operation AUSTIN VI was conducted in the NHON CO area in Quang Duc Province from 30 April to 19 May. The mission assigned to the 1st Brigade (minus) was to conduct spoiling attacks against NVA Concentrations along the Cambodian border and astride the II and III Corps boundary prior to the monsoon season.

The first phase of the operation was essentially a screening action around the Pu Brang Special Forces Camp. This action lasted until 5 May and produced no contact with any enemy forces.

On 5 - 6 May, Companies A and B and the Recon Force were committed in a new area of operation near Bu Gia Map. C Company remained on perimeter security mission and Brigade reserve at Bu Gia Map Airfield. C Company was relieved of this mission by A Troop, 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry on May 7, and was deployed in the AO.

During the period 5 - 9 April numerous contacts were made with small NVA units which consisted of from 2 to 15 man groups. On 9 April a well-used trail running east to west was discovered by Company A. The next day, through the capture of an NVA sergeant, it was learned that a four-company ambush was set along the trail. Task Force "Brown", consisting of the Recon Force with one platoon of C Company attached was ordered to converge with A Company from the north. While moving toward the rendezvous point they engaged a company-size NVA force. Two airstrikes, gunships and artillery supported the action, and a sweep of the area turned up 18 bodies, all of

which had been stripped of weapons and equipment. At 1650 hours on 10 April, Task Force Brown linked up with A Troop, 2/17 Cav and the remainder of C Company. This force converged with Company A and the link-up was effected at 1700 hours that evening.

Company A continued to sweep west the next day, orienting on the trail, and with Task Force Brown and the Cav Troop under its OPCON. At 1025 hours, Company A engaged a dug-in NVA force, estimated to be a reinforced company. Troop A, 2/17 Cav was ordered to move around the enemy ambush to the north, and seal off escape routes to the west. Meanwhile, artillery was called in to the rear of the enemy force, preventing it from breaking contact, then was moved forward until it was hitting among the enemy positions with devastating effect. Fuse "delay" was used to penetrate the dense jungle canopy.

At 1155 hours the NVA attacked A Company. Airstrikes were called in to supplement the artillery and the enemy attack disintegrated. Company A had begun to pursue the retreating enemy force by 1400 hours. A preliminary search of the battlefield turned up 25 enemy bodies, 3 machineguns and 6 individual weapons. Troop A, 2/17 Cav had several engagements in their flanking maneuver, accounting for 2 enemy killed and 2 weapons seized. At 1700 hours on the 11th, Company A linked up again with the Cav and a further search of the battlefield turned up 25 additional bodies. Later an intelligence report indicated that three NVA companies were destroyed in the battle.

Occasional brief engagements continued as A and C Companies and the Reconos joined the chase to the west. B Company joined the chase on the 13th

while C Company went into reserve, following the advance of the other elements as they searched toward the Cambodian border. The remainder of the enemy force apparently continued their retreat into Cambodia. No further contact was made, and the operation was terminated on the 16th of May.

Through documents found on the dead, and the interrogation of POWs it was learned that the enemy unit engaged was the 3rd Battalion of the 141st NVA Regiment. The total body count for the operation was 95 enemy dead, though numerous blood trails indicated a much higher number of wounded or dead had been evacuated. 5 POWs, 3 machineguns, 3 40mm rocket launchers, 28 individual weapons and large amounts of ammunition and rice in caches were taken.

CHEO REO - PLEIKU

The STRIKE FORCE began to pack equipment on 17 May in preparation for an air movement to Cheo Reo, a town in the Central Highlands southeast of Pleiku, and the capitol of Phu Bon Province. The Battalion was airlifted to Cheo Reo on 18 and 19 May, where it was given the mission of I Field Force reserve. Patrols were conducted in designated areas around the town, but resulted in no contact with any enemy forces.

The 2/502 was airborne again by 28 May, this time on a move to Pleiku, where the Battalion remained on the same reserve status. A bivouac was established near the II Corps Headquarters - MACV compound outside Pleiku, and the next week was devoted to maintenance of equipment, training, and athletics and recreation. The STRIKE FORCE, still IFFORCEV reserve force, was airlifted by CV-2 "Caribou" to Dak To, Kontum Province on 2 June where the 1st Brigade (-) 101st Airborne Division was preparing for its next operation.

Operation HAWTHORNE

Operation HAWTHORNE began as a combined 1st Bde, 101st Airborne - ARVN effort to relieve a besieged Regional Forces garrison at the Tou Morong Outpost, about 20 kilometers northeast of Dak To. The 2/502 was restricted, by its IFORCEV reserve commitment, from being deployed initially. Company A was, however, placed under OPCON of the 1st Battalion, 327 Infantry and was deployed 3 June by heliborne assault to secure a 105mm Artillery battery which was positioned 4 kilometers west of Tou Morong. Light contact was made in the area with NVA forces which had been engaged by the 1st Battalion, 42d ARVN Regiment as it attacked north along Route 7 toward Tou Morong.

Company A continued to secure B Battery, 2/320 Artillery for the next three days. At about 0145 hours the morning of the 7th, the Artillery position was heavily attacked by a reinforced company of North Vietnamese using mortars (82mm), hand grenades, 40mm rocket launchers and satchel charges. During the vicious engagement the NVA hurled suicide charges against the defenders and at one point overran one 105mm gun position. The fight lasted until 0800 hours when the NVA force withdrew leaving 59 dead and nine weapons on the battlefield. Company A lost 2 killed and 6 wounded.

On the 7th the 2/502 was released entirely from its reserve commitment and immediately deployed in an airmobile assault to envelop the northern flank of an enemy force which was engaged with elements of the 1st Battalion, 327 Infantry. The assault was conducted at 0900 hours on 7 June, and B and C Companies began pressing southward and eastward. On 8 June

Companies B and C continued their movement to the southeast, attempting to find and block escape routes of an enemy force which was now heavily engaged by the 1st Battalion, 327 Infantry further to the south (see schematic, Incl 2). Company A was the Battalion reserve while providing security for the Tac CP.

Instructions to units for 9 June were generally as follows:

Company A: Remain present location, as Battalion reserve secure Tac CP.

Company B: Continue movement south along multiple axes.

Company C: Continue movement south and east in support of 1st Battalion, 327 Infantry which was heavily engaged.

2nd Platoon, Company C: Remain present location, block Dak Ta Kan Valley to enemy movement.

Recon Force: Search to the west for a reported VC hospital.

B Company and C Company (-) were now astride the sharp ridges to the east of the Dak Ta Kan Valley. The ridges ran generally northeast to southwest, rising gradually to higher mountains to the northeast, and tapering off to the southwest into narrow fingers of terrain, interspersed by deep ravines. The whole area was covered with dense bamboo thickets with occasional patches of tall trees, some rising to 200 feet in height. Somewhere among these ridges was the trail or trails which the enemy - now known to be the 24th NVA Regiment - would use to withdraw northward.

Company B began movement shortly after daylight on 9 June and began

making contacts, to include heavy automatic weapons fire, and killed one NVA soldier, probably a courier. At about this time one platoon from Company C found enemy positions on a ridgeline and reported these positions fresh but unoccupied. C Company killed 3 NVA soldiers prior to 1000 hours.

The 1st Battalion, 327 Infantry planned massive air and artillery strikes against a trail running north from their area of engagement and requested that C Company shift to a blocking position further to the north and east of their current location. In order to reach this new location and avoid the planned air and artillery fires, C Company was required to swing about one kilometer to the north before turning east towards the blocking position.

By 1530 hours the Company had turned to the east and was moving in a column formation, 1st Platoon, Company Headquarters, 3d Platoon, Weapons Platoon. The lead platoon had a "Reconno" element (10 men) approximately 500 meters forward of the main body.

At approximately 1530 hours the "Reconno" element reported hearing Vietnamese voices to their left front, or northeast, at an estimated range of 200 meters. The scout element halted and the company continued to close on their position.

The 1st Platoon was directed to deploy and advance in the direction of the voices; 3d Platoon was directed to be prepared to maneuver left to assist the 1st Platoon, and Weapons Platoon was to close on the 3d Platoon location and be prepared to assist either platoon by fire or movement. The Company Headquarters moved directly behind the 1st Platoon.

The movement of the 1st Platoon brought them along a ridge or finger in

such a manner that they were able to observe an estimated 10 to 15 NVA in a creek bed on their right flank. While the enemy soldiers were armed, they were in the process of cooking and washing along the creek. These enemy were immediately engaged and destroyed by the 1st Platoon. This occurred about 150 meters to the northeast of the location from which they had first heard the voices.

At the first outbreak of fire the 1st Platoon received a small volume of ineffective small arms fire from positions almost due north of them. The platoon then oriented on this fire and continued movement along the ridge. Within a period of minutes the fire gained in intensity to the point where it was estimated that the ridge was being held by the enemy by platoon strength. By 1550 hours the 1st Platoon was receiving accurate fire from at least two automatic weapons and an estimated platoon, and they had moved less than 50 meters from the point of initial engagement.

At this time the 3rd Platoon was committed to the west of the 1st Platoon. Within a period of 5 - 7 minutes the 3rd Platoon deployed in a line formation, had moved abreast of the 1st Platoon, approximately 30 meters to the west. Due to the base of fire laid down by the 1st Platoon and friendly artillery fire, the 3rd Platoon was able to continue movement, silence at least one machinegun position, and force the evacuation of enemy positions on the ridgeline.

As the 3rd Platoon reached the VC positions, they came under a heavy volume of fire from higher ground to their west. This fire was of such in-

tensity as to completely deny them freedom of movement. At the same time the 1st Platoon began receiving accurate fire from automatic weapons to their right rear. This fire was coming from the next hill mass to the east and the range was approximately 200 meters.

The 4th Platoon was then committed in an effort to neutralize these positions to the east. The movement placed the 4th Platoon in a posture moving due east or at right angles to the two previously committed platoons. The 4th Platoon was able to advance a distance of 150 - 200 meters before coming under intense fire from the same positions. In addition automatic weapons fire, to include 50 caliber machinegun fire, was received from positions on the high ground to their right flank.

By 1615 hours the position of the company had become critical. The 1st Platoon was pinned down in positions just north of where it had initiated the fire fight by automatic weapons fire from its right and right rear. The 4th Platoon, in an effort to eliminate this fire, had been pinned down by heavy automatic fire to its front and right flank. The 3rd Platoon while initially succeeding in eliminating the fire from the immediate north, was suffering heavy casualties from automatic weapons on their left flank and from grenadiers which had closed with them under cover of the automatic fire.

Despite intense friendly artillery fire, the majority of which was placed immediately forward of the 1st and 3rd Platoon's positions, by 1730 hours all platoons reported close engagement with the enemy, i.e., exchange of hand grenades. Withdrawal was considered unfeasible due to the heavy volume of fire being received, the proximity of the enemy, and the number of friendly WIA.

Shortly after 1630 hours the Forward Air Controller was directed by the Commanding Officer of Company G, Captain William S. Carpenter, to place an airstrike on the center of mass of the Company, as the NVN had succeeded in overrunning the 3rd Platoon, had penetrated the 1st Platoon, and had closed to within hand grenade distance of the 4th Platoon. At approximately 1645 hours the first aircraft dropped napalm in an area approximately 30 meters short and directly on line with the requested impact area. The napalm burst in the overhead cover at a height of about 30 feet above the ground and covered a wide area with patches of burning napalm.

All hostile fire ceased with the impact of the first napalm and the Company was able to immediately break contact and withdraw south a distance of 100 - 150 meters and establish a perimeter approximately 40 by 40 meters. While withdrawing the second napalm strike was placed on line with and 50 - 75 meters further north than the first strike. For a period of 10 - 15 minutes after the first airstrike the Company received no fire and was able to establish a perimeter, move the wounded, and recover equipment with no interference from the enemy. During this period F4C Phantom Jets continued to strike the enemy positions with 20mm fire.

In the initial organization of the perimeter only seven personnel, all wounded, could be accounted for from the 3rd Platoon. All other platoons, while suffering numerous casualties, were able to account for all personnel.

Enemy contact following the initial airstrikes and the establishment of a perimeter was limited to occasional automatic weapons fire and sniper fire during the remaining hours of daylight. One attempt to probe the perimeter

was made about 1730 hours, but continuous airstrikes and artillery prevented any serious attempt at overrunning the position. After dark there were several probes of the perimeter but the presence of a USAF flare ship and continued artillery fire was sufficient to deter any full-scale attack.

Meanwhile, A Company had been moving eastward since 1700 hours to attempt to reach C Company's position. After several sharp engagements enroute, A Company's 1st Platoon made contact with the perimeter about 2130 hours 9 June, and by 0200 hours the entire company had arrived within the perimeter. During the hours of darkness, eight additional wounded troopers, plus several who were not wounded, all from the 3rd Platoon, made their way into the two-company perimeter.

Friendly aircover, A1B Skyriders, arrived on station approximately 0800 hours on the morning of 10 June. With the addition of Company A the perimeter was expanded an additional 20-30 meters. By first light on 10 June it was determined that the three platoons of Co C had suffered 3 killed, 3 missing in action and 34 wounded. A 2-squad patrol left the perimeter at 0900 hours to attempt to recover the MIAs and equipment. The patrol advanced 150 meters north and succeeded in recovering some equipment and one missing KIA, but in the process lost one KIA from automatic weapons fire.

The remainder of the day was spent in improving the perimeter, caring for the wounded and clearing a small opening within the perimeter in preparation for sling evacuation of the wounded. While contact with the enemy was sporadic during the daylight hours, his presence was confirmed by the sound of digging and occasional firing. Air and artillery provided constant support during the daylight hours.

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At approximately 2000 hours on 10 June the Battalion Commander ordered Companies A and C to begin moving toward a LZ which had been secured that evening by a provisional company recruited from the Battalion's personnel at Phan Lang and rushed to the battle area. At 2300 hours a "H-D" helicopter dropped 17 litters and medical supplies into the perimeter. This triggered a heavy volume of automatic fire and a three round mortar attack on the perimeter. The mortar fire ceased as soon as artillery was called in and the small arms fire died out in 3 to 5 minutes.

At approximately 0300 hours 11 June "Recondo" elements were dispatched from the perimeter in an attempt to find a suitable route for evacuation of the dead and wounded to the LZ. Due to dense bamboo, poor weather and steep terrain, the patrol was unable to advance beyond 500 meters prior to daylight.

At 0600 hours A and C Companies began movement from the perimeter to an LZ about 1 kilometer away which was secured by the provisional company. The column, carrying the dead, wounded, and their equipment made contact with the friendly elements securing the LZ at 1115 hours. The 3rd and 1st Platoons, Company C and Artillery FO remained in the perimeter area until 1000 hours as a covering force. By 1315 hours all elements had closed on the LZ and air evacuation of the casualties was nearing completion. During the withdrawal A Company suffered 1 KIA from sniper fire and one man from C Company died of wounds received earlier. Extensive use was made of artillery fire to cover the withdrawal and a heavy volume of fire was placed on the evacuated perimeter upon completion of the withdrawal.

By 11 June, A and C Companies had been helilifted back to the Battalion
trains area at Dak To airstrip for a short rest and resupply. All engaged
elements were adjusting their positions away from the fixed enemy force in
preparation for a B-52 strike which was scheduled for the morning of 13 May.

The strike took place between 0820 and 0847 hours the morning of the
13th, devastating the area where C and A Companies had been engaged. Within
30 minutes after the bombing, A Company had been air-assaulted into the target
area, killing 4 NVA who attempted to flee. Large numbers of enemy dead, some
from the airstrike, some from C Company's battle, were found on the battle-
field, along with quantities of weapons and equipment. 7 dazed NVA soldiers
were captured, and psychological warfare efforts - including loudspeaker ap-
peals by POWs - brought 8 others out of the tangled bamboo. The clean-up
lasted until 16 June.

In Operation HAWTHORNE the 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry accounted for
273 enemy killed, by body count. 34 individual weapons, 6 crew-served wea-
pons and 15 POWs were captured, with vast quantities of supplies and equip-
ment. Intelligence indicates that the operation upset plans for a major of-
fensive by the 24th and 28th NVA Regiments in the Dak To - Ton Morong area. The
24th Regiment may have suffered over 50% casualties and was adjudged to be
rendered ineffective as a combat unit.

Operation BEAUREGARD

The second operation to be conducted in the Dak To area began 23 June and was intended to locate and destroy any remnants of NVA units engaged in Operation HAWTHORNE, and destroy their supply caches. The operation, designated "Beauregard", was executed in two phases, both of which were relatively uneventful.

During the first phase of BEAUREGARD the 2/502 accomplished the following missions in the Dak To area: search and destroy operations to the west; manning the defensive outposts around Dak To, and conducting refresher training in the base camp at the Dak To Airstrip. This was accomplished by mission rotation among the rifle companies at five-day intervals. The company conducting close-in training was also designated as Battalion ready reaction force. Extensive patrolling of the area between Dak To and the Laotian border produced no enemy contact, though 7½ tons of rice were destroyed. During the search and destroy operations, CIDG troops from the Dak To Special Forces Camp were integrated into the rifle companies down to squad level.

On the evening of 6 July the STRIKE FORCE was notified that a team from the Brigade Long Range Reconnaissance Platoon had made contact with an enemy force of unknown size in the Dak Sut District, about 30 kilometers north of Dak To. The LRRP team was extracted, and the 2/502 was ordered to exploit by conducting a heliborne assault into the area at dawn on 7 July. The operation was marred by tragic incident. Shortly after A Com-

pany's lead elements were on the ground, two troopers were injured when a land mine was detonated. Shortly thereafter a rescue party carrying the wounded tripped another mine and 5 troopers were killed. It was discovered later that the LZ was located adjacent to an abandoned Special Forces camp, the perimeter of which was an unrecorded mine field.

The operation was essentially a sweep to the northeast by A and C Companies toward blocks established by B Company. No contact was made by any friendly units for the next 3 days, though A Company located and destroyed 3 rice caches totalling 11 tons. A further sweep in an area to the northwest produced no significant results, and all units were returned to the base area on 13 June.

On 14 July, 1966, the STRIKE FORCE began air movement to Tuy Hoa South Airstrip, there to rejoin its sister Battalions, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 327 Infantry, for operations in the Tuy Hoa area.

Operation JOHN PAUL JONES

On 15 - 16 June the STRIKE FORCE established a Battalion Base near the beach, south of Tuy Hoa. Operation JOHN PAUL JONES was conducted during the period 19 July through 5 September in Phu Yen Province. It was executed in 5 separate phases: Phase I in the Vung Ro Bay area, Phase II north of Tuy An, Phase III in the Ky Lo Valley, Phase IV vicinity Tuy Hoa South Airfield, and Phase V in the area north of Cung Son Special Forces Camp.

The first phase of JOHN PAUL JONES was aimed at securing the Vung Ro Bay area and opening Highway 1 from Tuy Hoa into the Bay in preparation for the construction of LST landing sites by the 39th Engineer Battalion. B Company moved by helicopter assault into 2 LZs west of Vung Ro Bay, secured the high ground commanding Highway 1, and secured 2 LZs for the Battalion (minus) to be lifted in. On 24 July the rest of the Battalion was helilifted into the 2 LZs secured by B Company. Companies A and C, and the Reconno Force commenced Search and Destroy operations in the mountains north and northeast of Vung Ro Bay. No contact was made with the enemy, and Lt. Col. Emerson declared Vung Ro Bay secured for the 39th Engineers to begin their construction mission.

By 30 July the 2/502 had returned to Tuy Hoa Base Camp, having been relieved in the Vung Ro Bay AO by the 2/327 Infantry. This brought Phase I of JOHN PAUL JONES to a close.

On 31 July and 1 August the STRIKE FORCE prepared for Phase II. On

the morning of 2 August the Battalion made heliborne landings in the vicinity of two B-52 bombing raids north of the Tuy An area. Though 2 VC were killed and small amounts of documents and equipment were found, no significant contacts or enemy sightings were made. The Battalion was extracted from the area and closed into the base camp on 3 August.

From 4 through 9 August the 2/502 trained and assumed the mission of IFFORCEV reserve.

On the afternoon of 8 August the three rifle companies made heliborne assaults into 3 LZs in the Ky Lo Valley region about 20 kilometers northwest of Tuy An. Intelligence reports indicated that the 18B NVA Regiment was moving south through the area. During the period 10 - 15 August the Battalion had several small engagements with NVA/VC Forces resulting in 18 enemy killed, 2 captured, and 15 weapons seized. During this period the Battalion lost 4 killed and 5 wounded. On the 15th the Battalion, with the exception of the Recondo Platoon, returned to base camp. The Recondos remained in the Ky Lo Valley area to observe and report enemy activity until 24 August. The Recondos observed many mixed VC/NVA bands up to half-company size, and on the last day of the "Stay Behind" mission, the Recondos engaged and killed 4 NVA troops. Based on intelligence gathered during the operation, it was relatively certain the the 18B Regiment was on the move through the area, but had broken u into small bands. The technique of the "Stay Behind" proved so successful that it was to become a standard STRIKE FORCE tactic.

During the period 17 - 30 August the 2/502 Infantry conducted intensive

training, concurrent with security missions around Tuy Hoa South Airfield. This security commitment, including a small sweep operation near the perimeter, constituted phase IV of Operation JOHN PAUL JONES.

On 17 August the command of 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry was relinquished by Lt. Col Henry E. Emerson, known to all STRIKE FORCE troopers as "The Gunfighter". Assuming command was Lt. Col Frank L. Dietrich, who became known by his radio call sign, "The Gunslinger".

On 30 August the Battalion was lifted into an AO northwest of the Cung Son Special Forces Camp, and started Search and Destroy operations to the northeast, attempting to make contact with elements of the 18B NVA Regiment, still thought to be moving south. No contact was made with the enemy until 4 September, when 2d Platoon A Company struck an enemy base camp, occupied by an NVA force of unknown size. In the ensuing fight 5 NVA were killed and 11 weapons, plus large amounts of ammo, were seized. Several minor contacts were made in the same area on the 5th, resulting in 1 NVA killed, 1 prisoner, and 1 weapon.

Operation JOHN PAUL JONES ended on 5 September. The STRIKE FORCE had accounted for 33 enemy killed and 6 POWs taken. Captured weapons included 22 individual small arms and 6 crew-served weapons, large quantities of assorted ammunition, 25 packs, 2 radio receiver-transmitters (NVA), 7 pack horses, 180 hand grenades, and other equipment. Friendly losses were 6 killed, 13 wounded.

Operation SEWARD

Operation SEWARD was conducted in Phu Yen Province from 5 September to 25 October 1966. The primary mission of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne was to protect the rice harvest in the Tuy Hoa and Tuy An rice districts. In accomplishing this, the 2/502 performed a variety of missions, including Search and Destroy Operations around the periphery of the agricultural areas, aggressive night and daylight patrolling of the rice districts, and increased use of the "Stay Behind" force, night ambush, and night movement to seal and search villages. The further development of "Semi-Guerilla Tactics" by the STRIKE FORCE paid off in Operation SEWARD.

As the operation began, 2/502 was already deployed northeast of Cung Son, and had been conducting Search and Destroy operations in the area since 30 August. Intelligence from interrogation of the POW taken on the 4th led to the employment of a LRRP Team near the deserted village of Phu Tuan, near the center of the mountainous "Hub" area of Phu Yen Province (See map incl. 1). During the morning of 8 September the Reconno Force made a heliborne assault into the Phu Tuan area to exploit contacts made by the LRRP Team. By noon, A Company and part of C Company had been landed to the north and west of the original contact, and 1st Platoon, C Company was heavily engaged with the rear guard of an enemy force attempting to withdraw to the west. The elements not in contact were attempting to move around the enemy force to the north and south to cut off escape routes.

On the morning of 9 September B Company was helilifted into blocking

positions to the west, sealing off escape routes in that direction. All three companies made contact with the enemy on the 9th, and it was thought that a sizable enemy force had been encircled. At this time the Battalion received a priority mission which required removal of all units from the AO the next day. The operation was discontinued and the STRIKE FORCE moved to pickup zones.

During this first phase of Operation SEWARD, 19 enemy were killed, 5 VC and 3 NVA were captured. Six weapons, 3 grenades, 9 60mm mortar rounds, 3 40mm rocket rounds, one case of 7.62 (Chicom) ammo, and other equipment were seized.

The Battalion conducted heliborne movement of all units to the Tuy Hoa base camp on 9 September and all except A Company were redeployed in the Tu Bong area the following day. Documents had been captured which showed that NVA elements were planning an attack on Tu Bong - a coastal town south of Vung Ro Bay - to seize rice stored from the harvest. A Company remained in base camp as Immediate Reaction Force.

Phase II consisted of the Search and Destroy operations west of Tu Bong, which turned up no evidence of large enemy forces in the area. The Battalion (minus) was returned to Tuy Hoa on 16 September and spent the next three days resting, training and preparing for future deployment.

Phase III of SEWARD began with the Battalion exploiting contact made by a LRRP Team in the mountains west of Tuy An. On the 19th A Company went into multiple LZs to the east of the contact; C Company landed to the west, and Company B to the south. The Reconno Force was also committed, to the

south. The Reconno Force was also committed, to the southwest of the contact. Only light contact was made on the 19th, with 2d Platoon A Company reporting 2 kills and one AK-47 submachinegun captured. The rifle companies were unable to close with any sizable enemy forces, and on the 20th they turned eastward to conduct Search and Destroy operations.

During the week 21 - 28 September there were several sharp engagements with local guerrilla units who broke contact after sniping or after brief firefights. On the 21st A Company reported a sizeable contact as the 1st Platoon broke up an attempted enemy ambush, killing 8 and scattering the rest in a pitched battle. In a similar action on the 24th, 2d and 3d Platoons, B Company, killed 3 VC, captured a submachinegun and 60mm mortar base plate. The same pattern of sporadic and brief encounters lasted through 30 September. Phase III of Operation SEWARD ended with extraction of all units to base camp.

The next phase of SEWARD saw the STRIKE FORCE relieving the 2d Battalion, 327 Infantry in the Tuy An rice area on 4 October. For the next 20 days the 2/502 conducted saturation patrolling, night ambushes, with occasional sweeps of the adjacent mountain areas to the west and northwest of Tuy An. Most of the enemy encountered were local force squads, and the largest single engagement was made on 14 October when A Company killed 8 VC and captured 3 weapons. On 22 October the Battalion conducted a coordinated attack to search a village complex suspected of being a VC stronghold. The complex was "sealed" prior to dawn, and the subsequent sweep netted many detainees who were evacuated for interrogation.

On 24 October the Battalion began to return to Tuy Hoa Base Camp, and the 3d Battalion, 8th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division assumed responsibility for the Tuy An AO. The results of Operation SEWARD were 82 enemy killed (80), 40 POWs, 26 individual weapons, 30 hand grenades, 3 40mm AT rounds, 2200 rounds small arms ammunition, 9 60mm mortar rounds, and assorted medical supplies.

Operation GERONIMO

On 6 November the STRIKE FORCE was deployed by heliborne assault into an area west of the "Hub" to exploit intelligence that the 95th Regiment of the North Vietnamese Army was operating in the area. Throughout the operation clandestine movements, maximum deception and thorough searching of assigned areas were the techniques used to find, fix and finish enemy forces.

The rifle companies were deployed initially in a north to south alignment, with B Company in the north, C Company in the center, and A Company to the south. The 2/327 Infantry was deployed on an east-west line to the northeast of B Company and began Search and Destroy to the south while the STRIKE FORCE maintained a concealed posture, moving slowly eastward, avoiding trails and open areas, and receiving no helicopter resupplies.

On 6 - 8 November several small contacts were made, resulting in 3 enemy killed and 1 US shotgun captured. On the evening of 8 November a small section of the Recono Force discovered an occupied enemy base camp while moving eastward toward the village of Phong Cao. The terrain was rugged hills and heavy jungle; and the Recono section was able to withdraw undetected and report the discovery to Battalion Headquarters. To exploit this information, B Company and the full Recono Force were instructed to focus their attention in that direction. C and A Companies were alerted for possible deployment to that area if needed.

As the Recono Force and 2d Platoon, B Company moved to the south to establish blocking positions in preparation for the attack on the base camp,

the Reconcos made contact with an unknown size enemy force, killing one and capturing a chicom S&S carbine. The Reconco section turned eastward in pursuit of the enemy, and had moved for only 20 minutes when they encountered an enemy force in dug-in positions, on a finger of high ground running north-south. (For Scheme of Maneuver, see Incl. 3, 4, 5). The Reconco section now reinforced by 2d Platoon Company B, attacked the hill from west to east, engaging an estimated NVA Company. By 1030 hours the fighting was heavy, and the elements in contact (3d Platoon B Company and Section, Reconcos) had 4 US KIA and 10 WIA. At this time Company C was directed to move overland into blocking positions to the east and southeast of the hill mass the enemy was holding. The 3d and Weapons Platoons of B Company moved eastward into the area of contact, further developing the situation.

During the early afternoon of the 10th, artillery, airstrikes and helicopter gunships were directed onto the enemy positions. Meanwhile, A Company was lifted into an LZ about 2 kilometers northeast of the contact and began movement to establish blocking positions. At 1500 hours the 2d and 3d Platoons, Company B, and the Reconco section broke contact with the enemy force to evacuate the dead and wounded, and receive an ammunition resupply.

Gunships and artillery fire were used to keep pressure on the enemy while Company A moved in from the northeast, C Company moved in from the east and southeast, and the Reconco Force (minus) moved in from the north.

At 1825 hours 2d and 3d Platoons, Company B renewed the assault on the finger and were able to overrun the enemy positions. Results of the day's battle were 7 NVA killed, 1 SKS carbine and 2 RED machineguns captured.

By 1900 hours, A Company had established blocking positions to the east and northeast of the enemy-held hill mass. Company C was in position around the southeast, and B Company to the west and south. The Recono Force was holding the north and northwest. During the hours of darkness, the Battalion Mortar Platoon and flareships provided illumination of the battlefield.

During the day on 10 November B Company attacked to the north as A Company gained the summit of the hill from the east taking the NVA from their rear. C Company also closed in from the southeast, and the ring was closed around the still-trapped NVA force. All units reported contact as the enemy tried to break out of the encirclement. One probe of A Company's positions about 1230 hours cost the enemy 8 dead.

During the afternoon all maneuver elements closed into an area no larger than 1,000 meters square. A Psychological warfare team began broadcasting surrender appeals. The toll of enemy dead and weapons captured continued to rise. During the hours of darkness all units were probed by the enemy. The Recono Force ambushed an NVA column trying to escape about 0340 hours, killing 6 and capturing 10 weapons.

At 0730 hours the morning of the 11th, the Battalion Commander flew into the battle area by helicopter, and joined ground forces with a Psychological

Operations Team which used POWs to appeal to other NVA soldiers to surrender. By midafternoon a large number of the enemy had surrendered, many with weapons. At 1410 hours Company A attacked from east to west, sweeping the encircled area. A followup sweep by B Company completed the action on Phong Cao Mountain. The results of the day's fighting were 13 enemy killed, 35 captured, 22 individual weapons, 5 machineguns, one rocket launcher, 1 60mm mortar and large quantities of ammunition and other equipment captured.

Interrogation of prisoners revealed that the unit engaged was the 5th Battalion of the 95th NVA Regiment. Elements from all three companies, and the Battalion Headquarters of the 95th were identified among the POWs taken. 2 CH-47 "Chinooks" and several UH1-D helicopters were necessary to evacuate the prisoners and equipment captured.

On 12 November most elements received resupply and further searched the battle area. From 13 to 15 November Search and Destroy was resumed toward the east, with A Company re-entering the Phong Cao area as a "stay behind" force. Contacts with scattered enemy elements remained light and on 22 November all elements closed into the Tac CP to observe Thanksgiving.

Operations resumed on 24 November. A prisoner captured by C Company on the 26th stated that he was a member of the 4th Battalion, 95th NVA Regiment which was located several kilometers to the northwest. The 2/502 was oriented in that direction; Company A was lifted into the new area. Attention was focused on an area of rugged ravines, ridges and heavy jungle northwest of the deserted village of Thu Tuen. B and C Companies began to sweep to the

north, while A Company and the Recondo Force blocked along a stream in a deep valley to the east and northeast.

On the morning of the 30th, C Company contacted a carrying party of NVA soldiers, resulting in 1 enemy killed, 2 AK-47's submachineguns and 1 82mm mortar captured. Documents captured indicated that they were part of the Heavy Mortar Platoon of the 95th Regiment and were trying to escape to the east. Other equipment was uncovered in a nearby campsite. On the afternoon of 1 December B Company captured one NVA who said he was from the 18th Signal Company of the 95th Regiment.

On 2 December 1st Platoon, A Company ambushed a column of NVA soldiers trying to cross the stream from west to east, resulting in 17 NVA killed and one captured; 5 individual weapons, one RPG-2 rocket launcher, and three machineguns were taken.

On 2 December the STRIKE FORCE was ordered to displace all elements to Tuy Hoa in 24 hours and be prepared to move by airlift to Kontum Province.

On 3 December A Company and the Recondo continued to make contact with NVA units, resulting in 9 enemy killed and 5 weapons captured. Nevertheless, all units discontinued operations and converged on pickup zones. The STRIKE FORCE was extracted from the AO on 4 December.

In Operation GROUND the 2/502 had killed 83 NVA/VC soldiers and captured 46. Equipment taken included 61 individual weapons, 13 machineguns, 3 82mm mortars with baseplates (two minus bipods), 1 60mm mortar, huge quantities of drugs and medical supplies, large quantities of ammunition, 38

hand grenades, demolition equipment, a wide variety of field equipment food-stuffs and documents. Friendly casualties were 6 killed, 28 wounded.

The STRIKE FORCE closed into Tuy Hoc Base Camp after 28 days in the field, most of it during torrential monsoon rains. Equipment was prepared for movement and by 7 December the Battalion had been airlifted to Kontum, in the Central Highlands north of Pleiku. A base camp for the Battalion was established near the airstrip.

For the Battalion's part in Operation GERONIMO, the STRIKE FORCE was cited in a Brigade General Order (G. O. 1361, dated 11 December 1966) and was awarded the 1st Brigade "Operations Streamer". The award was presented to the Battalion at Polci Klong Special Forces Camp on 12 December by General William C. Westmoreland, Commander of Allied Forces in Vietnam.

The citation read as follows:

"The 2d Battalion 502d Infantry, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division distinguished itself by outstanding performance in action against hostile forces in the vicinity of Tuy Hoc, Republic of Vietnam during Operation GERONIMO I from 6 November through 4 December 1966. On 9 November 1966 the Battalion contacted elements of the 5th Battalion, 95th NVA Regiment and in a three day battle encircled that unit and rendered it ineffective. During Operation GERONIMO I the Battalion killed 83 of the enemy and captured 46 prisoners and 80 weapons. The devotion to duty, perseverance and outstanding performance in action against hostile forces by mem-

bers of the 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry are in the highest traditions of the United States Army and reflect great credit upon themselves, their unit, this Brigade, and the 101st Airborne Division."

Operation PICKETT

On 9 December the STRIKE FORCE was moved by convoy to Poley Klong Special Forces Camp, about 15 kilometers west of Kontum City. On the morning of the 13th, the Battalion was deployed by heliborne assault in an AO adjacent to the Cambodian Border. The mission of the Battalion was to detect infiltration routes and, if possible, NVA/VC troop concentrations in the area.

The area showed no signs of recent enemy presence or movement, and contacts with the enemy were negligible. The 2/502 returned to Kontum base camp for a short rest during the Christmas "cease fire" period.

The second portion of Operation PICKETT was begun on 27 December with a night heliborne landing into an AO northeast of Kontum City. This area was characterized by numerous enemy camp sites, elaborate fortifications, trail networks, rice caches and booby traps, indicating that VC/NVA forces had been using the area for some time.

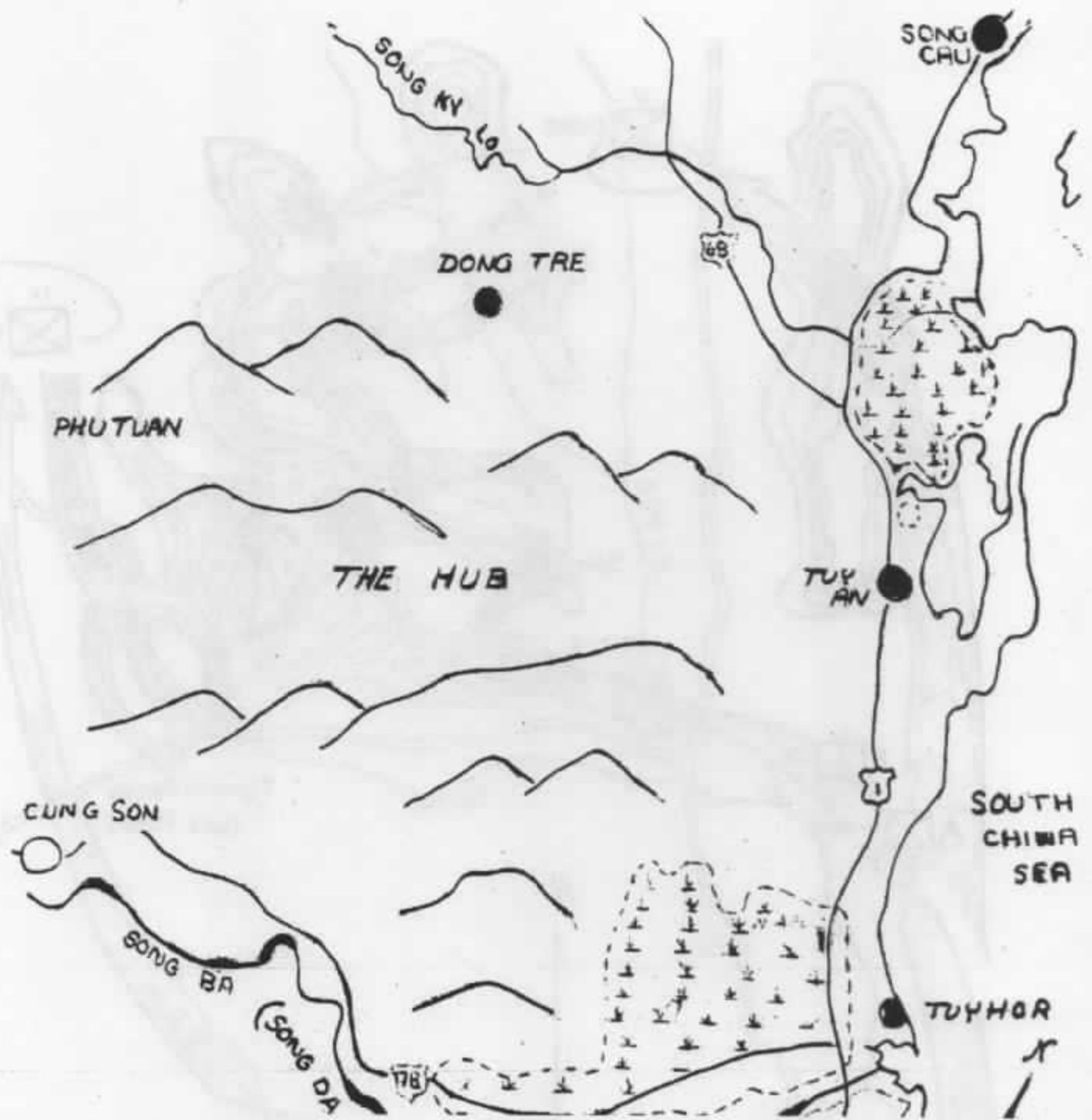
Several small contacts were made before 1 January 1967. The principle strategy of the enemy appeared to be fighting brief delaying actions and avoid becoming decisively engaged. On 23 December B Company killed 2 VC. The afternoon of 31 December, during the New Years "Truce", C Company was attacked with 82mm mortar and small arms fire on their LZ. Operation Pickett continued without major engagement through 19 January.

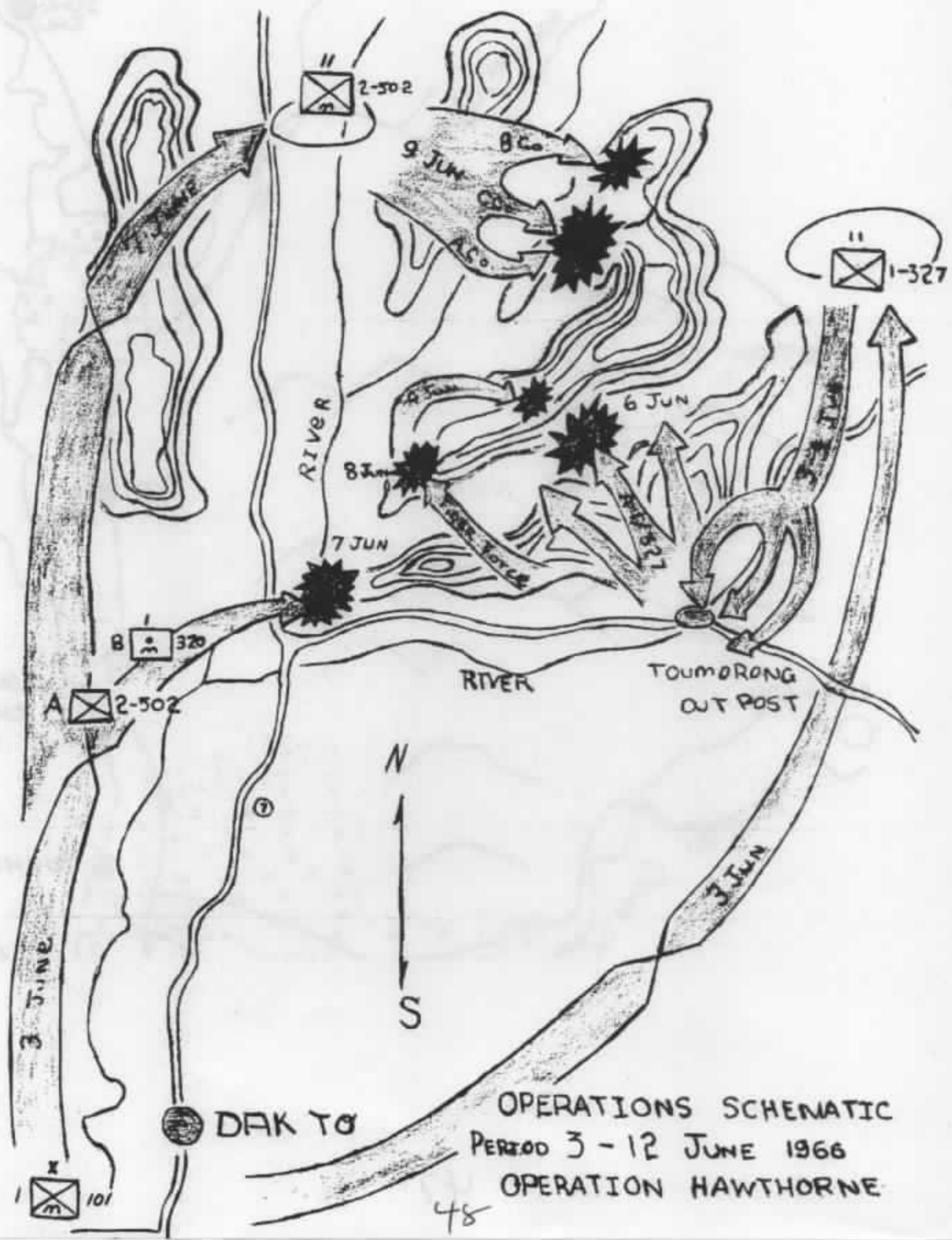
SUMMARY

During the year 1966 the STRIKE FORCE was on combat operations, or conducting movement to or from combat operations for all but two weeks of the year.

As the year ended, the 2/502 had not seen their base camp at Phan Rang for 11½ months. During that 50 weeks of combat over 800 enemy had been killed, by actual body count. 178 prisoners of war and 345 weapons of all types had been taken, with vast stores of enemy supplies. Uncounted numbers of suspects were sent to higher headquarters for interrogation, many of which turned out to be Viet Cong.

Under the guidance of Lt. Colonel Henry E. Emerson and Lt. Colonel Frank I. Dietrich the 2/502 constantly explored new tactics and weapons employment with a view to meeting and beating the guerrilla in his own element. The emphasis was increasingly placed on the principles of stealth, clandestine entry and movement in guerrilla-controlled areas by small elements, and employment of a number of deceptive tactics to confuse the enemy. These "semi-guerrilla" tactics were practiced and improved upon during the year 1966. The statistics amassed by the Battalion are an impressive testimony to their effectiveness.





OPERATIONS SCHEMATIC
 PERIOD 3 - 12 JUNE 1966
 OPERATION HAWTHORNE

REF ID: A66022
NOV 61

SCHEME of MANEUVER - BATTLE of Phong Cao 9 NOV.

