

THE
FIRST BRIGADE
IN THE
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
JULY 1965 - JANUARY 1968

DAK TO VIETNAM

DEFENSE

TUY HOA

COUNTER OFFENSIVE

VIETNAM 1965 - 1966

COUNTER OFFENSIVE PHASE II

VIETNAM 1966 - 1967

PREFACE

The narrative that follows is based primarily upon the written records of the 1st Brigade's experience in Vietnam, supplemented with oral interviews and with supporting documents that assist in placing the brigade's records in perspective. The narrative, at this stage, is not intended to be a definitive account. Instead, the 322d Military History Detachment ("The Scribbling Eagles") hope that it can be circulated among veterans of the 1st Brigade's Vietnam odyssey for additions and corrections. The development of an historical account is a process. This effort is but one step.

The reader should be aware, for example, that neither the 1-327th or 2-327th unit histories for 1966 were available to the author. Therefore, the narrative for the first half of 1966 is lacking in detail. Several educated guesses have been made about the sequence and relation of some events. Such is true to a lesser extent of other portions of the narrative. Readers who have more intimate knowledge of events in this narrative than did the writer should make their information available to the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) Historian at Fort Campbell in order that future revisions of this draft may more accurately reflect the 1st Brigade experience in Vietnam.

This narrative was prepared by the 322d Military History Detachment, U.S. Army Reserve, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The detachment consisted of MAJ Robert H. McKenzie, MI-USAR, holder of a doctorate in history from the University of Alabama, then serving as Administrative Assistant to the President and Assistant Professor of American Studies at that University; SP5 Shelby R. Grubbs, a graduate of the University of Alabama Law School now practicing law in Chattanooga, Tennessee; and SP4 Jefferson S. Barganier, an undergraduate student at the University, majoring in history.

INTRODUCTION

Those who have lived through the United States' experience in Vietnam may find it difficult to realize that what was so real and so very immediate to the living patterns and attitudes of millions of Americans is rapidly passing into the twilight zone of history. It has been ten years since the United States build-up of combat units in Vietnam was initiated; ten years since the subject of this study, the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, was deployed to Southeast Asia.

Ten years may seem short in the long sweep of history, but much happens within the historical process in the span of a decade. Ten years is half of the minimum military career, one-third of the maximum for most military personnel. Furthermore, the nature of military service means rapid turnover and dispersal of personnel within a military unit. If, as the old song and General MacArthur asserted, "Old soldiers never die," neither do they remain together in groups with common missions for extended periods of time. The inherent mobility within the present U. S. Army means that stories of combat and of unit activity quickly become fragmented into personal reminiscences often isolated from each other. Records also become fragmented and scattered, even lost. The short twelve-month tour of duty for the U. S. soldier in Vietnam accentuated this difficulty in reconstructing the past. The average trooper who arrived in Vietnam with the 1st Brigade in July 1965 was on his way home by September 1966. In the twenty-nine months that the 1st Brigade was in Vietnam as a separate brigade, every position in the unit was theoretically filled by three persons in succession, without allowance for casualties or other extenuating removals from duty. The rapid turnover of personnel, coupled with the nature of combat operations in Vietnam, meant that after-action reports and other documentation concerning the conflict have an immediate emphasis and a lack of consciousness for either history or overall context. Anyone who compares the military records produced in World War II and the Korean and the Vietnamese conflicts will be struck by the evidence of successive decline in their historical usefulness.

The nature of operations in Vietnam is an additional obstacle to the historian seeking to find central themes upon which to build a readable narrative. The conflict not only involved military operations but nation building operations. U. S. military forces were given the extremely difficult tasks of simultaneously pursuing military objectives and "reconstruction" objectives. These sensitive, dual, often contradictory assignments, of course, accounted for many of the difficulties in conducting and understanding the conflict in Vietnam.

Even if one makes the choice to concentrate upon military activities, as is the case in the following study, several problems remain. Military progress in the conflict could not be measured easily by ground taken or engagements won. The enemy was elusive and allied manpower too thin to insure always that contested areas would not revert to the enemy once friendly forces

were withdrawn. The conflict was a series of small unit engagements, each significant to its participants, but difficult to distinguish in the aggregate. With lack of easily defined territorial objectives to use as indicators of success or failure, the conflict became one measured in quantitative terms; enemy killed, weapons captured, rice harvested, etc. These measures were often nebulous when cited without reference to their larger context. The controversy that grew to surround the conduct of the Vietnamese War in the United States reflected the great difficulty in determining what indeed was being gained in Southeast Asia. To the soldiers in the field and to those of their number who attempted to record their deeds, however, the meaning of the numbers was clear. The unit histories and other reports of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division's activities in Vietnam leave little doubt that the troopers of the brigade felt that they were inflicting punishment upon the enemy and that they were winning the conflict.

Because of the large number of personnel who served in the 1st Brigade from 1965 through 1967, the author found it difficult to identify properly the many individuals who deserve mention in this chronicle. Existing records often do not identify key leaders or individuals performing significant acts of heroism. In addition, although much of the combat action involved platoon and squad contact with the enemy, the general focus of the narrative has been upon the activities of the 1st Brigade as a whole. The narrative, in effect, seeks to place the reader in brigade headquarters and allow him to view the action from that perspective. This approach, it is hoped, will be of benefit both to the general reader and to the brigade trooper whose day-to-day activities were a succession of similar operations.

The author wishes to thank the staff of the Don F. Pratt Museum at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, which is the official custodian of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) history; former Division Historian and Museum Curator, George E. Hicks; current Division Historian, 1LT R. Cody Phillips; Mr. Paul Lawson, Museum Technician; and Mrs. Helen Stevens, secretary, who have made this account possible. The author also wishes to thank Mr. David A. Bagwell, a former member of the 322d Military History Detachment, who contributed to the research for this narrative, and to SP5 Shelby R. Grubbs and SP4 Jefferson S. Barganier, current members of the detachment, whose assistance has been invaluable.

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*The division is currently known as the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), an identification used by its troops since 4 October 1974. In World War II and until 1 July 1968, the division was simply the 101st Airborne Division. From 1 July to 29 August 1968, the Department of the Army designated it as the 101st Air Cavalry Division. On 29 August 1968 Department of the Army changed the identification to 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile).

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THE FIRST BRIGADE IN VIETNAM

On 29 July 1965 the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division became the third regular U. S. Army combat unit to arrive in Vietnam, when it came ashore from the USNS Leroy Eltinge at Cam Ranh Bay.¹ The political reasons for the Brigade's presence in Southeast Asia were many and complex, and were even then being debated at home, but the brigade stood ready to fulfill its mission and to live up to the distinguished heritage that had accrued to the Screaming Eagle Division and to the airborne tradition since World War II.

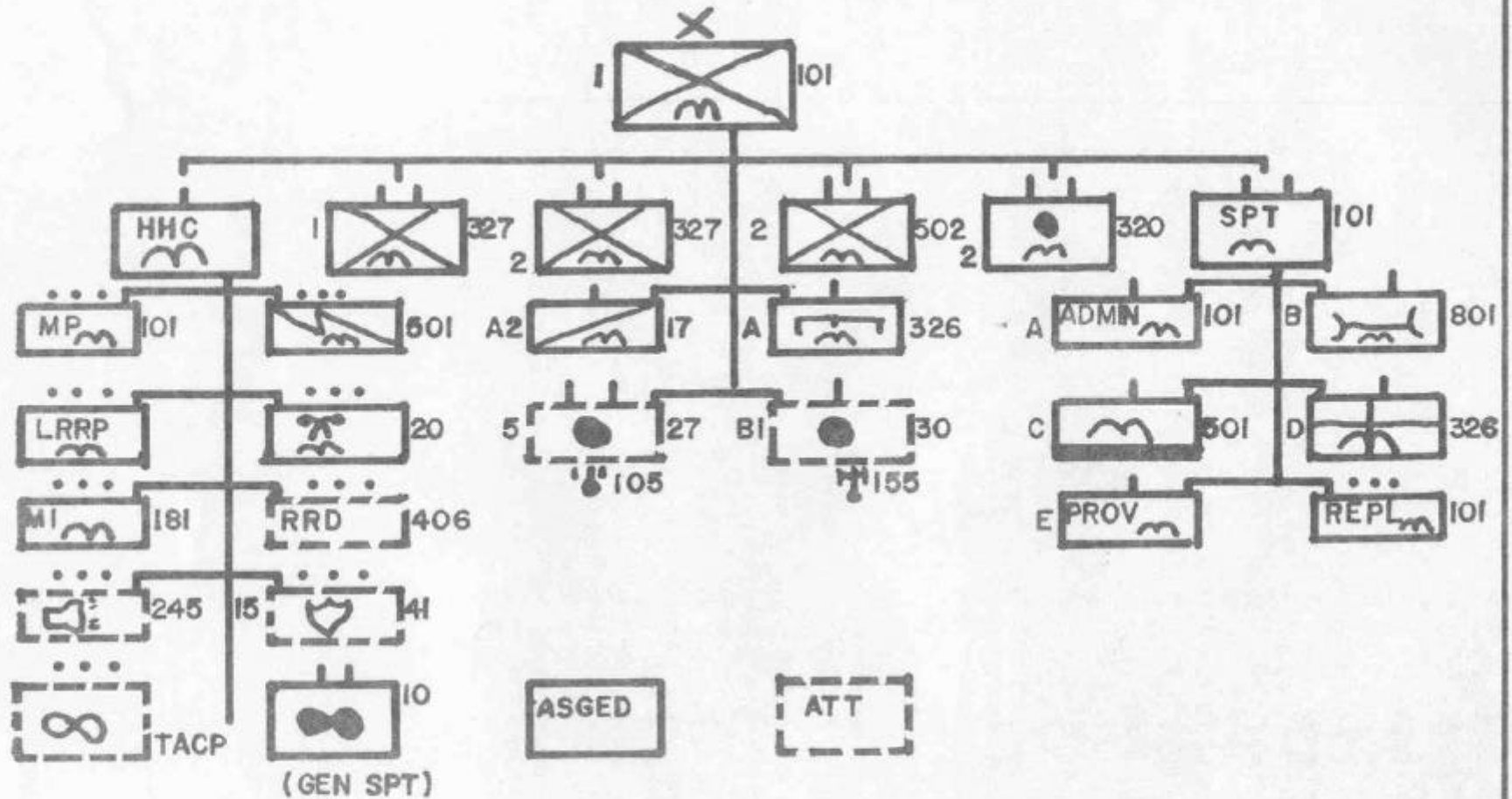
Every trooper knew that the 101st Airborne Division's first Commanding General, MG William C. Lee, had greeted the fledgling division at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, on 19 August 1942 with the assertion that the division had "no history but a rendezvous with destiny." Lee's words had been prophetic, as the 101st Airborne Division proved its mettle at Normandy, in Holland, at Bastogne, and in southern Germany during World War II. After the war, the division was inactivated in France on 30 November 1945. Between 1945 and 1956, the division was three times activated and inactivated as a training unit at Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky (twice from 6 July 1948 to 27 May 1949, and from 24 August 1950 to 1 December 1953), and at Fort Jackson, South Carolina (15 May 1954 to 15 March 1956). The division, therefore, was not used in combat in the Korean War. Although reorganized as a combat division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, on 16 March 1956 under the Pentomic concept, the 101st Airborne Division had had no opportunity to display its fighting capabilities, outside of numerous field exercises and two civil disturbance missions at Little Rock, Arkansas (1957), and Oxford, Mississippi (1962) -- prior to its arrival in Vietnam, twenty years and three months since the end of World War II in Europe.² The men of the 1st Brigade were destined for ample opportunities in Vietnam to match their fighting capabilities against those of their Screaming Eagle predecessors. During its two and one-half years as a separate brigade in Vietnam, the 1st Brigade was used as a highly mobile force over the length and breadth of the country. Paratroopers of the brigade made 31 tactical deployments, traveling more than 2,500 miles to conduct 25 major operations in three of the country's four tactical zones. They were indeed the "Nomads of Vietnam." This narrative is an account of their odyssey.

¹The 173d Airborne Brigade had landed by aircraft at Bien Hoa Air Base, north of Saigon, from Okinawa on 5 May 1965 and the 2d Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division had landed at Vung Tau on 12 July 1965. Even earlier, on 8 March 1965 the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade had arrived from Okinawa and had taken up defensive positions around the U.S. Air Base at Da Nang. In addition, the U.S. Army's 716th Military Police Battalion had arrived in Saigon on 21 March 1965, assuming security duties for selected U.S. installations. See William C. Westmoreland, "Report on Operations in South Vietnam, January 1964-June 1968"

in Westmoreland and U. S. G. Sharp, Report on the War in Vietnam (as of 30 June 1968) (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, n.d.), pp 108-109.

²The standard history of the 101st Airborne Division is Leonard Rapport and Arthur Northwood, Jr., Rendezvous with Destiny: A History of the 101st Airborne Division (Greenville, Texas: 101st Airborne Association, 1965), covering World War II. Other accounts of the Normandy Invasion are Donald R. Burgett, Currahee: A Paratrooper's Account of the Normandy Invasion (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967); Laurence Critchell, Four Stars of Hell (New York: Declan X. McMullen Company, 1947); George E. Koskimaki, D-Day With The Screaming Eagles (New York: Vantage Press, Inc., 1970); S. L. A. Marshall, Night Drop; and Francis L. Sampson, Look Out Below! (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 1958). See also the following volumes in the European Theater of Operations portion of the United States Army in World War II series published by the Office of the Chief of Military History: Gordon A. Harrison, Cross-Channel Attack (1951), pp. 278-365; Charles B. McDonald, The Siegfried Line Campaign (1963), pp. 145-200; and Hugh M. Cole, The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge (1965), pp. 73-336. Information concerning the division's post World War II history may be found in anon., History of the 101st Airborne Division, 1942-1964 (Fort Campbell, Ky.: Headquarters, 101st Airborne Division and Fort Campbell, n.d.).

FIRST BRIGADE



THE VIETNAM ENVIRONMENT

The country in which soldiers of the 1st Brigade found themselves on 29 July 1965 would prove not only dangerous but beautiful and varied. Located on the eastern portion of the Southeast Asia mainland, South Vietnam lies entirely within the tropics. The temperature is always hot, varying little at Saigon, the capital, from an 84-degree average. The seasonal monsoons, however, create dramatic climatic variations over the course of a calendar year. In May of each year, the summer monsoon gathers moisture over the Indian Ocean and begins moving up the 700 mile length of the country. From May through October, 58 inches of rain may be expected in the vicinity of Saigon. Farther north near the old imperial capital of Hue, 116 inches of rain may fall toward the end of the year as the monsoon moves farther northward and inland across Asia. Between September and November, Hue and its neighboring coastal plain are struck by typhoons, or tropical cyclones, which originate in the Pacific Ocean. While winter rains, mists, and tropical storms, often extending into March, prevail in the area of the ancient capital at Hue, summer weather favors the modern capital of Saigon. To compare this climate to that of a portion of the United States, consider that in Florida the average annual temperature is 70 degrees and the average annual rainfall is 53 inches. The climate of our most tropical state is therefore neither as hot nor as humid as is that of Vietnam.

Vietnam is about one-half the size of California and is long and narrow, as is that state. The terrain is varied and challenging, and with the exception of the Mekong Delta at the southern end of the country, the men of the 1st Brigade sampled all of it. The terrain consists of alternating mountainous and highland areas in the north, edged on the east by a narrow coastal plain curving along the South China Sea. North of Hue, where the long coastline, or eastern border begins, the country is only forty miles wide. The coastal lowlands are a series of small deltas and alluvial plains, broken by fingers of the Annamite Mountains (sometimes called the Annamese Cordillera) reaching toward the sea. The most important of these plains are those around Hue and Da Nang on the northern coast of South Vietnam and Qui Nhon on the central coast. The deltas rarely exceed twenty-four feet of elevation. Although numerous rice paddies dot the coastal plain, in some areas -- around Phan Thiet, Phan Rang, and Cam Ranh Bay, for example, the land has variable contours and consists of sparse scrub and infrequent trees, resembling the terrain of the western plains of the United States.

The Annamite Mountains, which extend southward from North Vietnam, rise to heights of 8,000 feet within thirty miles of the coast in some places and as far back as seventy miles in others. The mountains form the Central Highlands, a plateau area some one hundred miles wide and two hundred miles long, covering most of central South Vietnam. The plateau is centered around Pleiku, Kontum, and Ban Me Thuot. The main urban area is Dalat (population approximately 40,000), a commercial center for a vegetable growing region. This city was developed as a resort by the French and is 5,000 feet above sea level.

Below 3,000 feet elevation, the plateau is covered by seemingly endless stretches of pine trees, spotted by extensive savannahs of jungle grass. The grass grows to heights of five to six feet. Above the 3,000 foot level, the mountains are covered by a dense tropical-evergreen jungle. The trunks of the larger trees are 2½ to 3½ feet in diameter and clear of branches for thirty to sixty feet above ground. Beneath this growth is an understory of smaller trees with vines, ferns, orchids, and other plants forming a continuous mass from the ground to the lower branches of the larger trees. The double and triple canopies thus formed frequently cover large areas at heights of from 50 to 200 feet, often completely shutting out view of the sky for miles. In areas where the canopy does not exist, dense vegetation, or secondary jungle growth, makes movement extremely arduous.

The mountains rise steeply from the coastal plains on the east, but on the west, they descend gradually through a series of plateaus to the level of the Mekong Delta, forming the watershed between the Mekong River and the South China Sea. The steep seaward slopes form a partial barrier to inland penetration, and the mountains and highlands are therefore inhabited by groups culturally and racially distinct from the coastal Vietnamese.

The southernmost third of South Vietnam was once below sea level and receives the rich alluvial deposits of the Mekong River. The Ca Mau Peninsula or Mekong Delta and the Plain of Reeds or Saigon River Delta are the principal rice producing areas of Vietnam. The entire delta region abounds with tributaries and canals.³

The effect of these climatic and geographical conditions upon military operations was dramatic. The coastal sand at Cam Ranh Bay, for example, preceded enemy military forces as an obstacle to the 1st Brigade's effectiveness in Vietnam. Engineer units that preceded the 1st Brigade to Vietnam in June 1965 found the sand and lack of natural construction materials on the Cam Ranh peninsula to be major impediments. The sand made movement difficult and caused serious maintenance problems, as well as much personal discomfort.⁴ Men of the 1st Brigade encountered similar problems when they arrived in late July.

As the 1st Brigade moved into the Vietnamese countryside, it became further acquainted with the effects of climate and terrain upon movement and communication. During the dry season, dust generated by the operation of both air and ground vehicles became a constant maintenance problem. Unless arrested by diligent preventive measures, the dust wore out moving parts, clogged fuel and lubrication systems, and settled into food and open wounds. Heavy traffic over unsurfaced roads during dry months produced layers of fine dust which became thick, impassable mud during the rainy season. Most roads in Vietnam were unsurfaced, although some were macadamized and a few asphalted. U. S. Engineer efforts improved many roads as time passed. Heavy monsoon rains saturated and eroded all but the most carefully compacted and protected soil. Since most drainage basins in Vietnam are small, heavy rains produce frequent flooding. In lowland areas, floods frequently prevented cross-country move-

ment by wheeled vehicles. Even tracked vehicles often became road bound.⁵

Soldiers in the field were relatively unaffected by limitations upon vehicular movement because of the general use of helicopters for both tactical maneuver and combat supply. Heavy rains and cloud covers, however, at times were major hinderances to air movement. When not moving by helicopter, troopers, of course, most often moved by foot. Afoot on the Vietnamese terrain, soldiers of the 1st Brigade encountered additional obstacles. On the coastal plain, movement across rice paddies was dangerous since the open terrain provided the enemy with excellent observation and fields of fire. Movement through flooded rice paddies was slow, noisy, and -- during the rainy season -- dangerous. Running in water-covered rice paddies was almost impossible. Even when the paddies were not covered with water, in the dry season, the plowed ground was rough and also difficult to traverse on foot. Walking on the dikes provided little advantage, since they were narrow and the constant attention soldiers then had to devote to placement of their feet diverted attention from surrounding terrain where the enemy might be located. In the mountain highlands, and jungles, the monotonous appearance of the terrain and the many uncharted intermittent streams made it difficult for soldiers to locate their position on a map. The great stretches of jungle canopy hindered the ability of troops on the ground to identify their positions to friendly helicopters for resupply, reinforcement and medical evacuation. Movement through the jungle was difficult, particularly in areas of secondary growth, but not unmanageable. Observation, however, was limited to ten to twenty meters. As a result, initial, significant contact with the enemy tended to be sudden and violent. Closeness to the enemy upon first contact made the use of artillery support for a fire fight a ticklish procedure, but the limited visibility affected the enemy also and facilitated the unobserved movement of flanking forces. The nature of the jungle terrain made clearings, rather than high ground or communications junctions, important as critical terrain.

In all areas of the country, men moving through streams and other bodies of water were subjected to leeches. Persistent moisture encouraged fungus infections and rotted shoe leather, tentage, and clothing. The lush foliage associated with abundant rain meant that vegetation that had been cleared away to assist movement, increase observation, and open fields of fire replaced itself quickly.⁶

Tropical diseases, such as malaria, were constant threats, as were diseases associated with field duty, such as hepatitis and diarrheal ailments. Malaria was particularly severe in the early months of the 1st Brigade's tour in Vietnam, but, in general, the incidence of cases of most diseases associated with the Vietnam environment exhibited a downward and stabilizing trend during the period of the brigade's activities. Hepatitis was an exception.⁷

To the troopers of the 1st Brigade, heat and humidity were constant companions. During the dry season, temperatures climbed well over 100 degrees and humidity frequently exceeded 90%. Often plodding through difficult terrain and dense vegetation for successive days and carrying sixty or more pounds of equipment, the 1st Brigade soldier came to know well the debilitating effects of the Vietnamese climate.

Upon arrival in Vietnam, members of the 1st Brigade were exposed to an eastern culture. DA Pamphlet 20-198, "A Pocket Guide to Vietnam," provided the soldiers of the brigade with an introduction to the new culture. The population of South Vietnam in 1965 was approximately 14 million, four-fifths of them farmers. The majority of the people of South Vietnam are ethnic Vietnamese (formerly known as Annamese), a southern Mongoloid type. The Central Highlands are occupied by several hundred thousand (estimates range from 200,000 to 500,000) tribespeople, known generally as Montagnards, but actually belonging to some twenty-nine tribes. Approximately a half-million Chinese, most holding Vietnamese citizenship, lived in Vietnam in 1965, as well as approximately a half million ethnic Cambodians (Khmers) along the Cambodian border north of Saigon and in the Mekong Delta, and a few thousand each of French, Indians, Pakistanis, and Chams (the latter to be discussed below). Outside of the capital of Saigon, with a million and a half people, and such cities as Da Nang (population 110,000), Hue, and Nha Trang, at least 80 percent of the population lived in villages scattered between the district capitals and the forty-four province capitals. Most lived in the delta or along the coastal plain between the country's principal railroad line and the main north-south road. The farmers primarily raised rice, the country's chief export (before World War II only two countries in the world exported more rice than Vietnam). Outside of the cities, the economy revolved about hamlet and village markets, where fish products, pigs, chickens, rice, and small manufactured goods were bought and sold.

Men of the 1st Brigade found that the Vietnamese placed their primary allegiance to their family and village. An old Vietnamese proverb states that "...the power of the Emperor comes only to the bamboo hedge of the village." The intense localism of the majority of the South Vietnamese people, of course, was a major obstacle to developing a sense of national identity and loyalty to the central government in Saigon. Village life was centered around the growing of rice, market days which were generally conducted twice a week, and the celebration of annual festivals. Chief among the festivals was the New Year, Nguyen Dan or Tet, observed on the first through seventh day of the first month of the lunar calendar (usually toward the end of January or in early February by the solar calendar). Other important annual celebrations honored Vietnamese heroes such as Hai Ba Trung on the 6th day of the second month (February or March), and Tran Hung Dao and Te Toi on the 20th and 22d days of the 8th month (mid-autumn). Some holidays marked significant changes in the pace of the seasons (Doan Ngo or Summer Solstice on the 5th day of the 5th month -- June -- and Trung Thu or mid-autumn festival on the 15th day of the 8th month), or were connected with religious life (Trung Nguyen or Feast

of Wandering Souls on the 15th day of the 1st, 7th, and 10th months).

In the latter regard, Vietnamese people exhibited great affinity for religious life, although their practices were often found to be a mixture of animism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. This religious heritage, coupled with generations of being caught up in political and military conflict, produced personal philosophies emphasizing stoicism, patience, courage, and resiliency in the face of adversity. Family altars and village shrines were important aspects of daily life in the countryside. Approximately 10% of the population were professed Roman Catholics, but Christian influence was confined primarily to Saigon and other more settled areas.

³An excellent description of the environment of Vietnam may be found in Carroll H. Dunn, Vietnam Studies: Base Development, 1965-1970 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 3-12. See also Frederick P. Peterkin, "The Land: Vietnam," Infantry, LV (September-October, 1965), pp. 48-53.

⁴See Robert R. Ploger, Vietnam Studies: U. S. Army Engineers, 1965-1970 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1974), pp. 36-47.

⁵Dunn, Base Development, 1965-1970, pp. 7-12.

⁶For brief discussion of the military aspects of the Vietnamese terrain, see George E. Dexter, "Search and Destroy in Vietnam," Infantry, LVI (July-August, 1966), pp. 36-42. Dexter commanded the 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate). Dexter's article and subsequent articles in Infantry magazine in the years following 1966 provide a convenient introduction to the nature of combat operations in Vietnam. For example, another article containing information on the effect of terrain on operations is Patrick H. Graves, "Observations of a Platoon Leader," Infantry, LVX (May-June, 1967), pp. 34-38.

⁷Spurgeon Neel, Vietnam Studies: Medical Support of the U. S. Army in Vietnam, 1965-1970 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), pp. 32-48.

THE VIETNAM HISTORY

The modern history of the Vietnamese, emphasizing conflict, is a reflection of the area's past.⁸ What is now Vietnam (North and South) historically has been subjected to struggles between outside powers, intermingled with persistent internal efforts to achieve self-determination. The original inhabitants of modern Vietnam developed their civilization along the banks and in the Delta of the Red River (in present-day North Vietnam) several hundred years before Christ, in much the same way that Egyptian civilization developed along the Nile River. The population expanded southward, developing an economy based on the cultivation of rice. As the economy developed, the Chinese became interested in the growing importance of the region on their southern border. By 111 BC the Chinese had subdued the peoples of the Red River Delta and adjoining areas (present-day Hanoi and vicinity) and had organized the Kingdom of Annam, or the "Dominion of the South." The Annamese, ancestors of the modern Vietnamese, were thereafter molded and dominated by the Chinese civilization.

Much of what is now South Vietnam, however, in the first few centuries AD was part of the Kingdom of Champa, a Hindu civilization based on a sea-going merchant economy. The important coastal cities of Da Nang and Qui Nohn were both city-states within the Cham kingdom. The Annamese and Chinese exerted steady pressure upon the Chams, forcing them to displace their capital ever southward. In 1471, the Annamese, at that time having thrown off Chinese dominance, completed the conquest of Champa. The Chams disappeared from history as a distinct political unit in the 1700's, but about 25,000 Chams, who had never been assimilated into Vietnamese life, still lived in villages in 1965 near what became the 1st Brigade base camp at Phan Rang.

The period of Annamese independence coinciding with the conquest of Champa illustrated the recurring attempts to throw off Chinese dominion. Earlier, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Annamese had gained self-determination and had successfully repulsed a Mongol invasion. On the whole, however, periods of Annamese control were usually followed by reassertion of Chinese authority. The recurring revolts against the Chinese provided the Annamese with many of their cultural folk heroes and heroines. The Hai Ba Trung, Tran Hung Dao, and Le Loi festivals mentioned previously all commemorate persons who were leaders in resisting the influence of the Chinese and the Mongols.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the Annamese had reestablished control over their own land, under the leadership of two families, the Trinh in the north and the Nguyen in the south. The Nguyen family was associated with the city of Hue. Cleavage between the two families became so intense by 1613 that the southerners built two walls across the plains at Dong Hoi (at

latitude 18° N, just north of the 1954 demarcation line between North and South Vietnam).

As these events were occurring, the Annamese were developing increasing contacts with the western world, first through traders and missionaries. In the European scramble for economic and political spheres of influence in Africa and Asia, the Annamese came under the influence of the French, who put a French supported emperor on the Annamese throne in Hue in 1802. The emperor, however, sought and received formal investiture by the emperor of China. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Annamese political leaders played the Chinese against the French, culminating in a series of campaigns in North Vietnam between France and China in the 1880's. By the Treaty of Tienstin (1885), France came into undisputed possession of all of Vietnam.

From 1885 until well into the twentieth century, the history of Vietnam (and of French Indochina, including Cambodia and Laos) was primarily that of French efforts to consolidate the territory into a union under a central government. The historic efforts of the component parts of Indochina to remain distinct and separate and the rising spirit of nationalism with European colonies made the French efforts extremely difficult. During World War II, a Vichy French government cooperated with the Japanese. With the defeat of the Japanese, Communist Nationalist forces led by Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam" and began functioning as a provisional government in the north. In 1946, the French government began efforts to reassert control over its colonies in Indochina. Ho Chi Minh's followers in the north resisted, and war followed. In the south, the French supported the organization of a government for all Vietnam, having complete internal autonomy within the French Union. This government was established under the leadership of Bao Dai in 1949. In that year, also, however, the Communists took over the government of China, and Ho Chi Minh soon received military aid from Communist China. A bitter struggle between Ho Chi Minh's followers and the French continued, with the Bao Dai government striving to create a military force capable of assuming the French role in resisting the Communists' effort to unite the country under their leadership. In May 1954 the French lost their key fortress at Dien Bien Phu in northwest Vietnam. The war ended with agreements at Geneva to divide Vietnam temporarily at the 17th parallel and to hold elections to choose a unified government from the contending northern and southern factions by 1956.⁹

⁹There are a number of scholarly works available on the general history of Vietnam. See Joseph Buttinger's book, Vietnam: A Political History (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1968), for one such account which includes a detailed, annotated bibliography of works on Vietnam.

⁹The most noted analyst of the French post-World War II experience in Vietnam was Bernard Fall, who was killed by a booby-trap while accompanying U.S. Marines on patrol in Vietnam in 1967. His many books on the subject include Le Viet Minh, Street Without Joy, (4th ed.; Harrisburg, Pa.: The Stackpole Co., 1965), The Two Viet-Nams (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1967), and Hell in a Very Small Place (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1967). See also Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1955), as well as Buttinger, Vietnam: A Political History.

From 1955 until well into the twentieth century, the history of Vietnam (and of French Indochina, including Cambodia and Laos) was primarily that of French efforts to consolidate the territory into a unitary state. The French efforts at the component parts of Indochina to remain unified and separate and the rising spirit of nationalism with European colonialism made the French efforts extremely difficult. During World War II, the French government cooperated with the Japanese. With the defeat of the Japanese, Communist Nationalist forces led by Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and began functioning as a provisional government in the north. In 1955, the French government began efforts to reassert control over its colonies in Indochina. Ho Chi Minh's followers in the north resisted, but were followed by the south. The French supported the organization of a government for all Vietnam, having complete internal autonomy within the French Union. This government was established under the leadership of Bao Dai in 1955. In that year, also, however, the Communists took over the government of Laos, and in the same year received military aid from Communist Laos. A bitter struggle between Ho Chi Minh's followers and the French continued, with the latter government striving to create a military force capable of assuming the French role in restoring the Communist's effort to unite the country under their leadership. In May 1954 the French lost their forces at Dien Bien Phu in northwest Vietnam. The war ended with agreements to divide Vietnam temporarily at the 17th parallel and to hold elections to choose a unified government from the contending northern and southern factions by 1956.

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THE UNITED STATES ROLE IN VIETNAM

American involvement in the Vietnamese conflict had begun in the late 1940's with arms aid to the French. Old alliances from the World War II period and the outbreak of the Korean War placed the United States in a political position supporting French colonial policy, but the United States' greatest concern was that the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam had become a distinctively Communist-type state controlled by the Vietnamese Workers' Party, which claimed to be a revolutionary party upholding Marxist, Leninist, and Stalinist doctrines. In 1955 President Dwight D. Eisenhower, acting under extended provisions of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization protocol, pledged material and advisory assistance to the South Vietnamese to aid "in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state capable of resisting attempted subversion and aggression through military means." At the same time that U. S. aid was being extended to the South Vietnamese government, however, internal factionalism and stress placed upon its administration by as many as one million refugees fleeing from North Vietnam led to a change in its leadership and its organization. In 1955 Bao Dai was deposed, and Ngo Dinh Diem became the first president of the Republic of (South) Vietnam. A new constitution was adopted in 1956, and in that same year the new government refused to participate in arranging for national elections to unify the country, fearing that the control of the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam over the population in the north and its subversive efforts in the south would lead to a Communist victory. In 1955 and 1956 both Communist China and Russia announced agreements to aid North Vietnam. The stage was set for the final series of events leading to commitment of the 1st Brigade and other U. S. military forces to Vietnam.¹⁰

From 1954 until late 1963, the U. S. progressively expanded its support and assistance to the new government of South Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem and his successors (Diem was deposed by a military coup on 1 November 1963). Initial U. S. assistance was oriented toward organizing and training the South Vietnamese military forces. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy signed a Treaty of Amity and Economic Relations with the Republic of (South) Vietnam by which further military aid was extended. By the end of 1962, there were approximately 11,000 U. S. advisory and support personnel in South Vietnam, including a number of U. S. Special Forces advisors working with Civilian Irregular Defense Groups among the Montagnards in the Central Highlands.¹¹

The political turmoil following the demise of the Diem regime in late 1963 and increasing pressure from the Viet Cong, the Communist guerrilla organization in South Vietnam, led to the critical events of 1964. In late January 1964, a second military coup deposed the military leadership that had replaced Diem three months before. Over the next year and one-half, a series of coups, attempted coups, and counter-coups kept the South Vietnamese governmental machinery in constant turmoil. The effectiveness of the Army of the Republic of (South) Vietnam (ARVN) deteriorated. The Viet Cong were quick to capitalize upon their opportunities.

By the end of 1964 Viet Cong strength had resulted in the formation of a VC division, the 9th, composed of the 271st and 272d Regiments, formed in Communist strongholds in Tay Ninh Province near the Cambodian border and in the jungle north of Bien Hoa. Meanwhile, three regular regiments of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) were reported enroute to join the battle in the South. Military resupply of the VC units by infiltration into South Vietnam increased, due to a North Vietnamese decision to arm the VC with a standard family of weapons. On 28 December 1964, the 9th VC Division attacked the Catholic village of Binh Gia, forty miles east of Saigon, inflicting massive casualties upon the 33d ARVN Ranger Battalion and the 4th ARVN Marine Battalion. VC troops remained on the field of battle for four days rather than reverting to their usual hit-and-run tactics. This demonstration of strength and the movement southward of regular NVA units indicated to General William C. Westmoreland, Commander, U. S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV), and his staff that the Communist insurgency in South Vietnam was preparing to enter the third and final step in the pattern for revolution espoused by Mao Tse Tung, mastermind of the Communist take-over of China.¹²

During the early months of 1965, military activity on the part of both North Vietnam (including the VC) and the United States accelerated. In February, after a number of terrorist attacks against Vietnamese and U.S. installations, and with NVA regular units appearing on southern battlefields in increasing numbers, the U.S. began a limited aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam. In March, the U.S. deployed a Marine brigade to Da Nang and a U.S. Army Military Police battalion to Saigon to provide security for air bases and other U.S. installations. By late spring of 1965, ARVN forces were losing almost one infantry battalion a week to enemy action. In addition, the enemy was gaining at least one district capital town each week. General Westmoreland estimated the South Vietnamese could not survive for more than six months unless the U.S. increased its military commitment in the form of substantial numbers of ground combat forces. He therefore recommended the commitment of such forces.¹³ The 173d Airborne Brigade was readily available in Okinawa, and brigades of the 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas, and the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, were tapped for early deployment. Meanwhile, the 11th Air Assault Division, a provisional unit which had been testing at Fort Benning, Georgia, the airmobile concepts being developed through use of helicopters in Vietnam by U. S. Army advisors and South Vietnamese military forces, was tentatively selected as the first full division to follow the advance brigades.¹⁴

¹⁰For background to U. S. involvement in Vietnam see: The Military Assistance Institute, Department of Defense, Country Study: The Republic of Vietnam (Washington, D. C.: Department of Defense, 1965); Senate Committee on Foreign

Relations, U. S. Senate, Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, March 1966, 2d edition); Frank N. Trager, Why Vietnam (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966); and finally, Chester A. Bain, Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1967).

¹¹See Westmoreland, "Report," pp. 75-81, and Francis J. Kelly, Vietnam Studies: U. S. Army Special Forces, 1961-1971 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1973), pp. 4-44.

¹²Westmoreland, "Report," pp. 83-95. U. S. sensitivity to North Vietnamese actions was also heightened by the Tonkin Gulf incident in August, an encounter between North Vietnamese gunboats and a U. S. Navy destroyer. In retaliation, the U. S. conducted a bombing raid against North Vietnam on 6 August 1964. See U. S. G. Sharp, "Report on Air and Naval Campaigns against North Vietnam and Pacific Command-Wide Support of the War, June 1964-July 1968," in Sharp and Westmoreland, Report on the War in Vietnam (as of 30 June 1968) pp. 11-13. Westmoreland succeeded General Paul D. Harkins as Commander, U. S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, on 20 June 1964, after serving five months as Deputy Commander. Earlier, on 15 May 1964, the Military Assistance Advisory Group, which had supervised and coordinated U. S. logistical support to South Vietnam since 1954, had been merged with the U. S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

¹³Westmoreland, "Report", p. 98.

¹⁴For discussion of the airmobile concepts that were evolving from combat in Vietnam in the early 1960's and for information about the 11th Air Assault Division, see John J. Tolson, Vietnam Studies: Airmobility, 1961-1971 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Publishing Office, 1973), pp. 3-62.

17° 17°

LAOS

CAMBODIA

● DAK TO

I

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II

● PLEIKU

● AN KHE

● CHEO REO

● QUIN NHON

● TUY HOA

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III
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● NHA TRANG

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● PHAN RANG

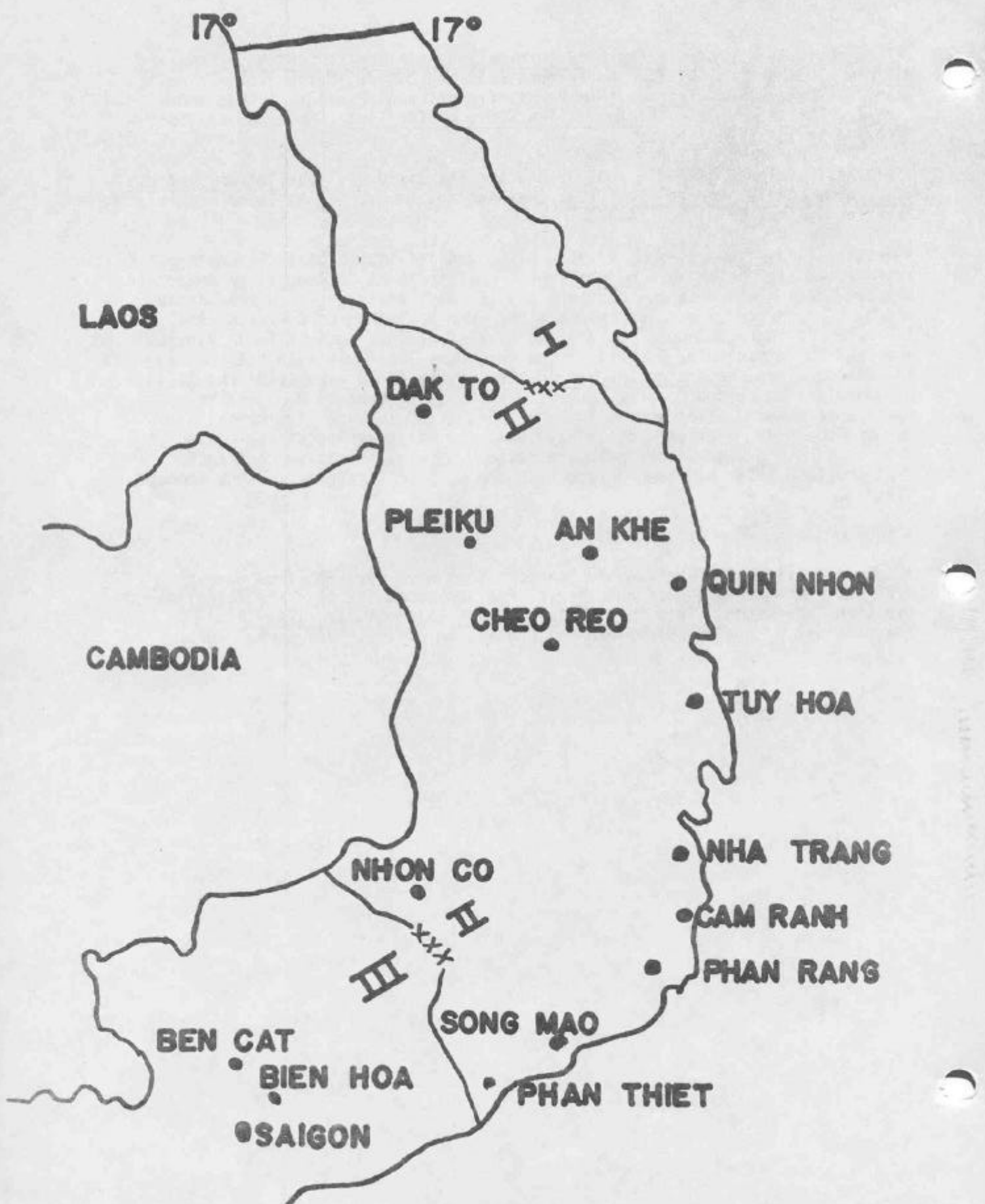
● BEN CAT

● BIEN HOA

● SAIGON

● SONG MAO

● PHAN THIET



THE 1ST BRIGADE MOVEMENT TO VIETNAM

At Fort Campbell, the 101st Airborne Division was alerted in May 1965 to ready a brigade for deployment to Vietnam. Division Commander, MG Beverly E. Powell, chose the 1st Brigade, led by Colonel James S. Timothy, for the assignment.

Colonel Timothy had graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1942. While serving with the 79th Infantry Division during World War II, he earned the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star, and two Bronze Stars. Towards the end of the war, Timothy served as an assistant G3 with the XV Corps and the 45th Infantry Division. One year after the war ended, he attended the Command and General Staff College. He was the Assistant Military Attache in Paris, France for two years until he was reassigned to Headquarters, Far East Command in 1950. From 1952 to 1955, he served at the United States Military Academy. In 1955, LTC Timothy assumed command of the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry of the 24th Infantry Division. The following year, he returned to the Far East Command for another two year tour of duty as an Assistant J3. Colonel Timothy returned to the United States in 1958 and was assigned to the Department of Defense. After attending the French War College in 1962, Colonel Timothy assumed command of the 1st Brigade in July 1964.

The 1st Brigade force that was organized for deployment was composed of the brigade headquarters, the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 327th Airborne Infantry, 2d Battalion, 502d Airborne Infantry, Troop A, 2d Squadron, 17th Cavalry, a Long Range Reconnaissance Platoon (LRRP), 2d Battalion, 320th Field Artillery, the Brigade Support Battalion (Quartermaster, Medical, Maintenance, and Administration companies), Company A, 326th Engineer Battalion, a platoon of the 101st MP Company, a platoon of Company B, 501st Signal Battalion, a radio research unit, and a Military Intelligence Detachment. The maneuver units of the brigade all shared in the 101st Airborne Division tradition. The 327th Infantry, known as the "Bastogne Bulldogs," and the 502d Infantry, known unofficially as the "O-Deuce," both had served with the 101st Airborne Division since 1942.¹⁵

The 1st Brigade experienced numerous difficulties in preparing for movement, but none that prevented timely deployment.¹⁶ Delay in receiving notification as to whether the movement would be temporary or permanent, for example, inconvenienced married men of the unit in settling personal affairs and in taking authorized leaves. Perhaps the greatest difficulty was caused by the fact that shortly before the movement, higher headquarters directed that the brigade's table of organization and equipment (TOE) be converted from the E series to the F series. This reallocation of resource authorizations and subsequent requisition procedures placed a heavy burden on supply personnel, who were already preoccupied with arrangements for moving. These arrangements

were facilitated by early and direct communication with officials in Vietnam. From 3 June to 12 June, key members of the 1st Brigade Headquarters visited Vietnam to develop liaison contacts. One officer remained in Vietnam and by telephoning directly to Fort Campbell every night, he was able to assist brigade personnel in expediting necessary actions. A few brigade members were attached to the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) already engaged in combat in order to gain experience for use by the brigade. In late June the 173d Airborne Brigade launched the first U. S. ground offensive action, north of Bien Hoa Airbase.

The emergency nature of the movement of the 1st Brigade resulted in strains on transportation services. Surface and air movement from Fort Campbell to San Francisco went smoothly, using commercial resources, but problems developed in moving from Oakland Army Terminal to Vietnam. After being flown from Fort Campbell to San Francisco on 6 July 1965, the men of the brigade greeted the USNS General Leroy Eltinge, a 510 foot long World War II liberty ship just out of mothballs designed to accommodate a maximum of 2,800 men. One of the 3,600 troopers awaiting boarding voiced the thought of many, "I wonder what battle General Eltinge lost to have it named after him?" A voice from the crowded assembly supplied the answer, "He was General Custer's intelligence officer." The soldiers would have been even more apprehensive had they known that on a previous voyage to Vietnam in May the Eltinge, with a number of engineer troops aboard, had suffered almost daily mechanical breakdowns and had been forced to transfer its passengers to another ship on Midway Island.¹⁷ The overcrowded conditions and plumbing, lighting, and ventilation malfunctions on board led to considerable inconvenience and discomfort for the troops during the twenty-one day voyage to Vietnam. The advance party travelled by C-124 aircraft but had little better success, due to frequent mechanical breakdowns on the obsolete aircraft.

Two former commanders of the 101st Airborne Division greeted the 1st Brigade upon its arrival in South Vietnam: Maxwell D. Taylor, U. S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, and General William C. Westmoreland, Commander, USMACV. Taylor led the division during World War II and Westmoreland commanded it from 1958 to 1960 at Fort Campbell. Taylor's son, Captain Thomas Taylor, was a member of the 1st Brigade when it arrived. The men of the brigade debarked from the Eltinge on 30 July onto the Cam Ranh Bay peninsula. The peninsula was alive with activity as engineer, transportation, and signal units were beginning the work that would transform the area into a major port and logistical complex. The brigade moved by truck across the peninsula to a ferry site and, after crossing the bay, marched to their temporary camp several kilometers inland. There the men conducted short sweeps outside their battalion perimeters, dug fox holes, established security, and settled in for their first, sleepless night "in country."¹⁸

The men of the brigade spent the next few weeks completing actions related to the move from the U. S., acclimating themselves to the Vietnam environment, and conducting small unit tactical missions to ready themselves for bigger assignments. Units of the brigade experienced supply shortages in the

early weeks due to delays in receiving equipment shipped from Fort Campbell. Radios, mortars, grenade launchers, and ammunition were in scarce supply. Hot patches for flat tires on heavily used trucks were quickly exhausted in some units. The brigade discovered that some items brought to Vietnam, such as camouflage nets, were not needed, and that many things not brought, such as additional water trucks, were essential.

As soon as base camp areas were established, the brigade began in-country combat training through the medium of patrolling. Patrols out from the base camp areas initially were made by squads, then platoons. By mid-August, companies were conducting heliborne assaults into suspected hostile locations, followed by helicopter extractions of the units involved. These patrols and assaults produced no contact with the enemy other than occasional sniper fire, but they served to accustom the men to the combat environment and to perfect operational techniques. On 16 and 17 August, the battalions conducted their first battalion-sized operations, clearing the Cam Ranh Bay-Nha Trang area. The most notable of these operations, BARRACUDA, involved securing two hill masses west of Nha Trang and resulted in the brigade's first enemy killed in action. Although enemy contact in these actions was light, the brigade had demonstrated in less than three weeks that it was ready for employment in the overall U. S. strategy. On 20-22 August, the 1st Brigade made preparations for movement to An Khe, 180 kilometers to the north in the Central Highlands.

¹⁵See John K. Mahon and Romana Danysh, Infantry, Part I: Regular Army in the Army Lineage Series (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 801-808, 817-825.

¹⁶For a lengthy analysis of lessons learned in moving the 1st Brigade to Vietnam, see letter from Colonel J. S. Timothy, Commanding, to Commanding General, 101st Airborne Division and Fort Campbell, dated 16 September 1965, Subject: After Action Report-Movement of 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division to Vietnam, copy in the files of the Division Historian, Fort Campbell. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations to manuscripts herein are located in the files of the Division Historian, Fort Campbell.

¹⁷Ploger, U. S. Army Engineers, p. 38. The troops comment about the USNS Eltinge is recorded in 101: A History of the Screaming Eagles (Camp Eagle, Republic of Vietnam: 101st Airborne Division, n.d.), p. 12.

¹⁸Unless otherwise noted, information concerning the 1st Brigade's activities has been developed from the numerous unit histories of brigade elements in the files of the 101st Airborne Division Historian at Fort Campbell, Kentucky or else on file at the Center of Military History, Washington, D. C.

OPERATION HIGHLAND

Initial USMACV strategy for the use of U. S. military forces in Vietnam involved three phases of execution. The first phase consisted of arresting the losing trend, stifling the enemy initiative, and providing security to populated areas to the maximum extent possible. General Westmoreland anticipated that this process would require the rest of 1965 for execution. The second phase would be to mount major U. S. and allied offensive actions, seizing the initiative from the enemy, destroying his forces, and thus improving the security of the population. The third phase would involve final destruction of the enemy's guerrilla structure and main force units remaining in remote base areas. To initiate the first stage of this strategy, USMACV committed Marine Corps units farthest north (in the zone of the South Vietnamese I Corps), where the Marines' ability to supply themselves over the beaches in an area of few ports and airfields could be best used, and U. S. Army forces in the Central Highlands and adjacent coastal areas (II Corps) and in the area around Saigon (III Corps). Initially, no U. S. troops were committed in the Mekong Delta (IV Corps), where regular NVA units were not as yet deployed, VC operations were a lesser immediate threat, and three ARVN divisions were already in the field. The U. S. ground command structure was built around a field force concept, rather than that of normal corps headquarters. USMACV chose this course for two reasons. First, it intended to organize and operate in conformance with the South Vietnamese corps zones and did not wish to confuse matters by introducing additional corps designations into those zones. Second, it desired a more flexible headquarters than a corps, which was structured to control several divisions rather than the separate brigades initially committed. As a result, the 1st Brigade's higher headquarters in 1965 was Field Force Vietnam (initially Task Force Alpha) established at Nha Trang to control operations in the II and III Vietnamese Corps areas.¹⁹

While the 1st Brigade was acclimating itself to Vietnam and securing the area at Cam Ranh Bay needed for developing a port capable of supporting deployment of additional U. S. military forces, the first major battle involving U. S. troops had occurred to the north at Chu Lai. There the III Marine Amphibious Force surrounded the VC 2d Regiment and defeated it decisively in Operation STARLIGHT. In spite of this success, USMACV headquarters was apprehensive in mid-1965 that the enemy intended to cut South Vietnam in half along a line from Pleiku in the highlands to Qui Nhon on the central coast. USMACV had already decided to deploy the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), formed on 1 July 1965 from assets of the 11th Air Assault Division (Test) and the 2d Infantry Division, to An Khe between Pleiku and Qui Nhon and to give it the mission of opening and holding Route 19, the major artery along the anticipated enemy axis. The 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division was given the mission of securing the An Khe base area in Operation HIGHLAND. The assignment was given urgency by the events of 18-19 August, when a battalion-sized VC force overran the U. S. Special Forces camp located at the district capital of Dak Sut in the Central Highlands, 100 miles northwest of An Khe. It was suspected, but not confirmed, that the attack had been supported by elements of the NVA 101st Regiment.²⁰ In addition, men of the 1st Brigade were aware

that An Khe's historic importance had been demonstrated a decade previously when an entire French regiment (Mobile Group 100) had been annihilated in a Communist ambush in the An Khe Pass.

The scheme of maneuver for Operation HIGHLAND called for the 1st and 2d Battalions, 327th Infantry, to secure the An Khe area; the 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry was to secure the An Khe Pass; and a composite force, Task Force Hansen, commanded by Major Marcus W. Hansen, Executive Officer, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry was to secure Highway 19 and provide convoy security from Qui Nhon to An Khe. The 2d Battalion, 327th Infantry moved overland from Cam Ranh Bay to Nha Trang, from whence it air assaulted into An Khe. The battalion encountered no resistance and by the evening of 23 August had secured the An Khe airfield. Between 22 and 25 August, other elements of the brigade moved by truck from Cam Ranh Bay to Nha Trang, then by LST to Qui Nhon. The 1-327th and the 2-502d assaulted westward to clear Highway 19, with the 1-327th then air assaulting to secure the An Khe Pass. Following link up with the 2-502d, the 1-327th moved on to An Khe to share responsibility for the defensive perimeter with the 2-327th. Meanwhile, Task Force Hansen consisting of Troop A, 2-17th Cavalry, and the reconnaissance platoons of the three maneuver battalions, moved up Highway 19, establishing strong points at critical terrain features. Having accomplished its mission without incident, the 1st Brigade settled in at An Khe to await the arrival of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). While tasked with security for the An Khe - Highway 19 - Qui Nhon line, the brigade developed a system of overlapping patrols and a series of sweeping operations to find, fix, and destroy the enemy. In the process of these twenty-three operations, most conducted in the Son Con Valley, northeast of the An Khe Pass, the combat soldiers of the brigade earned their Combat Infantryman Badges. The most significant of these actions was Operation GIBRALTAR.

¹⁹Westmoreland, "Report," pp. 100, 103.

²⁰Ibid, pp. 98-99, 108-109; Tolson, Airmobility, 1961-1971, pp. 61, 68.

OPERATION GIBRALTAR

On 18 September, the 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry, air assaulted into a suspected VC location in the Song Con Valley. Previous operations in the valley had developed considerable evidence of the VC presence and had resulted in several limited fire fights, but no major contacts had been made. Due to rainy weather and the nonavailability of CH-47 (Chinook) helicopters to move artillery across a swollen stream, the 2-502d made its assault out of range of supporting artillery fire. As soon as the helicopters began descending onto the landing zone, a heavy volume of small arms, automatic weapons, and mortar fire pounded the area. All three rifle company commanders were either killed or wounded. One and a half companies made it into the landing zone. The rest of the assault force was waved out of the area by a captain who was later killed by ground fire. The paratroopers had assaulted into what was later determined to be a VC battalion command post area. Although the enemy's initial resistance was vigorous, the VC were taken by surprise and were unable to reorganize their forces. The "Strike Force" soldiers in the landing zone reacted to their predicament with aggressive action. As a result, reinforcements from the 2-327th were able to maneuver into the area to rescue the men in the landing zone and to follow up the brigade's first significant contact with the enemy. Three days of tedious movement through the jungle resulted in several additional contacts but no major action. The enemy suffered 226 killed. Not only was this action the first major contact with the enemy for the brigade, but it was the first conquest of a VC main force unit by any U. S. Army element in Vietnam. Two years later, the 2-502d Infantry received its third Presidential Unit Citation for actions around An Khe during this memorable month of September.

Following Operation GIBRALTAR, the battalions of the brigade resumed routine patrolling of the area of operations and maintenance activities. On 21 September, the 1-327th relinquished its defensive responsibilities at An Khe to elements of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) which was in the process of moving inland from Qui Nhon. The 1-327th moved back to An Khe Pass to relieve the 2-502d, which moved back to Qui Nhon. The 2-327th remained at An Khe for another week, during which the paratroopers conducted parachute proficiency jumps north of An Khe. On 28 September, the 2-327th relinquished final brigade defensive responsibilities to the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). This division was to assume tactical responsibility for a zone 150 miles by 150 miles, encompassing three large provinces -- Pleiku, Kontum, and Binh Dinh -- across central South Vietnam.²¹ The 1st Cavalry had arrived at An Khe to assume its important mission without a casualty, courtesy of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division.

²¹For description of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) move to An Khe from that unit's perspective, see Tolson, Airmobility, 1961-1971, pp. 68-73. The 1st Cavalry's first significant campaign was in the Ia Drang Valley in November against the 32d, 33d, and 66th NVA Regiments.

OPERATION SAYONARA

Having successfully screened the arrival and deployment of a divisional sized combat unit, the 1st Brigade was next given a similar mission: to secure a base of operations for the Republic of Korea Capital (Tiger) Division at An Nhon, just north of Qui Nhon. Battalions of the brigade were in position around An Nhon by 2 October. Unlike the mountainous terrain at An Khe, the coastal area at An Nhon generally consisted of low, flat rice paddy areas interspersed with a few small hills and villages. Following establishment of base camp areas in a perimeter around An Nhon, the battalions began extensive patrolling westward toward the mountains. A series of ten battalion-sized operations were conducted throughout October and into November while the Korean division was establishing itself. The operations made sporadic contact with hostile enemy groups of squad and smaller size, garnered large numbers of VC suspects, and permitted the resettlement of an estimated 9,000 refugees. All activity took place in the midst of monsoon rains. The most significant event of the operation was the discovery of 200 tons of rice by the 2-327th Infantry on 10 October. The battalion discovered the rice cached in bins, false walls, and false floors in a small village. The effort to remove the rice was dubbed Operation RICEBIN and proved to be an arduous task. Helicopters, armored personnel carriers, and VC prisoners were used to transport the grain. After five days 192 tons had been denied to the VC; the rest was left for the villagers. On 14 November, the Binh Dinh district, in which the 2-327th had been operating declared a holiday celebration for the battalion in appreciation of its work in securing areas and assisting resettlement of refugees. On 15 November, the brigade transferred defensive responsibility for the area to the Capital Division, and the last of the brigade units moved south to join the rest of the brigade at Phan Rang where a permanent base camp was to be constructed. While the Capital Division was landing at An Nhon, the 2d Marine (Dragon) Brigade arrived at Cam Ranh Bay to assume the mission of providing security there. By spearheading the introduction of additional forces wherever it went, the 1st Brigade was leaving big tracks.

ESTABLISHMENT OF A BASE CAMP AT PHAN RANG

Phan Rang is twenty-five miles south of Cam Ranh Bay. A large open area nine miles northwest of Phan Rang was to become the 1st Brigade's base camp, although rarely were the "Nomads of Vietnam" to spend much time there. The brigade spent most of November 1965 constructing the camp area. Thanksgiving was celebrated, General Westmoreland visited, and the rains came. Although the area was isolated from known VC activity, patrolling continued, both as a precautionary measure and as a training device. One VC was captured by a 2-327th squad ambush on 10 December, but, in general, the brigade enjoyed its first respite from combat operations since arriving in Vietnam three months before. The paratroopers were also able to make parachute jumps needed to keep parachute proficiency pay current. The relief from combat was brief, however, as the 1-327th and the 2-502d were ordered to Bien Hoa near Saigon on 28 November.

OPERATION CHECKERBOARD

While the 1st Brigade had been settling in at Phan Rang, significant enemy activity was taking place northwest of Saigon in the vicinity of the Iron Triangle near Ben Cat and Lai Khe. There the ARVN 7th Regiment, operating in the Michelin Plantation area, had inflicted a serious defeat on the 271st VC Regiment only to be overrun several days later by the 272d VC Regiment. These two regiments comprised the 9th VC Division, the formation of which in 1964 had been an important factor leading to U. S. troop commitment in Vietnam. The opportunity to close with this division was an important one, and USMACV was quick to call upon the 1st Brigade to assist in engaging it. The effort was to involve not only the 1st Brigade (-), but the 1st Infantry Division, the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate), and Australian and ARVN troops.²²

The 1-327th and the 2-502d assumed defensive responsibility for the Bien Hoa air base on 30 November. Until 8 December, the battalions patrolled their perimeters with light enemy contact. On 9 December, the two battalions conducted motor marches to Lai Khe, where they were attached to the 1st Infantry Division for Operation CHECKERBOARD. The 1-327th encountered enemy command detonated mines approximately ten miles outside of Ben Cat on Highway 13. Three vehicles were destroyed, five troopers killed, and ten wounded. Upon reaching Lai Khe, the battalions prepared defensive positions and readied for offensive deployment.

Operation CHECKERBOARD consisted of three phases. In the first, the 1-327th conducted an air assault, secured a landing zone, and assumed a blocking position while the 2-502d and a battalion task force from the 3d Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division conducted a sweep toward the blocking position. In the second phase, the 2-502d assumed responsibility for the landing zone and the 1-327th initiated a search and destroy mission northward and then westward. In the final phase, the 1-327th and the 2-502d established a joint defensive perimeter from which platoon and company sized patrols were dispatched.

The 1-327th encountered enemy fire at the landing zone, but no sustained resistance. The search and destroy mission (phase 2) uncovered a cache of an estimated 15,000 pounds of rice, a large logistical complex containing food, clothing, and ammunition, and a small cache of gasoline. Booby traps encountered in the jungle and the time required to destroy the VC caches required the "Above the Rest" troopers to spend the night of 13 December in a hasty defensive perimeter. Ambush patrols outside the perimeter reported an estimated two VC companies moving toward the battalion, and time-on-target artillery was called in. Screams were heard and bloodstained trails were discovered the next morning, but no other enemy presence was detected. During the third phase, patrols uncovered a hospital complex and several VC villages in various stages of construction. In one mess hall, troopers found freshly pre-

pared food. Several encounters with small groups of VC took place, but there were no significant engagements. The VC 9th Division, although evidently present, exhibited no desire for engagement. On 16 December, Operation CHECKERBOARD was terminated and the 1-327th and 2-502d began their return to Phan Rang.

Operation CHECKERBOARD was a tactical success. The 1-327th and 2-502d achieved their objectives and returned to Phan Rang without significant losses. The VC 9th Division was not engaged and the 1-327th and 2-502d were able to maintain their positions throughout the operation.

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Operation CHECKERBOARD consisted of three phases. In the first phase, the 1-327th and 2-502d conducted an air assault on the landing zone and secured a beachhead. The 1-327th then moved inland to destroy the VC base and the 2-502d provided support.

The 1-327th encountered enemy fire at the landing zone, but no sustained resistance. The search and destroy mission (phase 2) uncovered a cache of an estimated 15,000 pounds of rice, a large logistical complex containing food, clothing, and ammunition, and a small cache of gasoline. Body traps encountered in the jungle and the time required to destroy the VC caches required the 1-327th to spend the night of 13 December in a nearby area.

²²Westmoreland, "Report," p. 111.

CHRISTMAS AT PHAN RANG

The battalions conducted road marches to Non Cat and then moved by truck to Lai Khe. On 19 December, they moved by truck to Bien Hoa, where they remained until 22 December. From 22 to 24 December, 3-130 aircraft transported the units back to Phan Rang for Christmas. While its companion battalions had been engaged in Operation CHECKERBOARD, the 2-327th had assumed responsibility for defense of the Phan Rang area, had dispatched long range reconnaissance patrols outside of that area, and had then made arrangements for transportation and security for the other two battalions in order that the entire brigade could celebrate Christmas Day at Phan Rang. The latter task was not easy in view of heavy rains which hindered air transport capabilities.

A thirty-hour Christmas truce had been agreed to by all parties involved in the Vietnamese conflict. U.S. forces suspended all offensive operations, including air strikes in North Vietnam. Upon expiration of the cease-fire period, U. S. and allied troops were ordered to maintain defensive positions, firing only if attacked. As VC and NVA attacks grew in intensity, U. S. offensive efforts resumed late on 26 December. The suspension of air attacks on North Vietnam, however, remained in effect.²³

For the 1st Brigade, resumption of combat activities meant continuation of routine patrols by the 1-327th and 2-502d, and special missions for the 2-327th. On 26 December, a reinforced rifle company from the 2-327th was sent by motor convoy to Nha Trang to conduct combat and reconnaissance patrols and to improve a task force operational base. This mission continued in effect until 5 January, when the task force returned to Phan Rang by motor march.

Meanwhile, the rest of the 2-327th was given the mission on 27 December of retrieving the bodies of ten U. S. personnel from a C-47 crash site south of Phan Rang. This mission was concluded on 30 December without incident, other than enemy fire received briefly by the motor convoy returning from the deployment area. A volley from an artillery battery silenced the fire. To cap off the assignment and the end of the year in Vietnam, the "We Aim To Kill" Battalion conducted a parachute proficiency jump on 31 December.²⁴

²³ibid.

²⁴Of the three infantry battalions in the 1st Brigade, the 2-327th was the least fortunate in finding a distinctive "unofficial" motto. When the 1st Airborne Battle Group, 327th Infantry was split into the 1st and 2d Battalions,

327th Infantry in 1964, the 1st Battalion seized upon the old Battle Group motto, "Above the Rest." The 502d Infantry became the "Strike Force" Battalion, and the 2-327th Infantry became, like every other 2d battalion in the U. S. Army, "Second to None." This unofficial motto stayed with the battalion until November 1965 when LTC Melvin Garten assumed command of the 2-327th. LTC Garten changed the motto to "We Aim To Kill." This motto lasted barely 6 months before the battalion turned to yet another distinctive phrase, "No Slack." To this day, the unofficial nickname of the 2-327th Infantry is the "No Slack" Battalion.

for defense of the main base area, had dispatched long range reconnaissance parties outside of that area and had then made arrangements for transportation and security for the other two battalions in order that the entire base could celebrate Christmas Day at Plein Lang. The latter task was not easy in view of heavy rains which hindered air transport capabilities.

A thirty-hour Christmas truce had been agreed on by all parties involved in the Vietnam conflict. U.S. forces suspended all offensive operations including air strikes in North Vietnam. Upon expiration of the cease-fire period, U.S. and allied troops were ordered to maintain defensive positions. On 23 December, the 1st and 2nd battalions were in tactical alert. U.S. forces were alerted to the possibility of an attack on North Vietnam, however, remained in effect.

for the 1st Brigade, resumption of combat activities meant continuation of routine patrols by the 1-327th and 2-327th, and special missions for the 2-327th. On 26 December, a reinforced rifle company from the 2-327th was sent to Plein Lang to conduct combat and reconnaissance patrols and to improve a task force operational base. This mission concluded in effect 2 January, when the task force returned to Plein Lang by motor march.

Meanwhile, the rest of the 2-327th was given the mission on 23 December of relieving the 1st Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division in the south of Plein Lang. This mission was concluded on 30 December without incident. After that time they were relieved briefly by the motor convoy returning from the 1st Brigade. A volley from an artillery battery silenced the 1st Brigade on 23 December. The 2-327th conducted a parachute proficiency jump on 21 December.

For the three infantry battalions in the 1st Brigade, the 2-327th was the last formation in finding a distinctive "unofficial" motto. When the 1st Brigade was split into the 1st and 2d Battalions.

REFLECTIONS

With the end of 1965, General Westmoreland estimated that the first stage of U. S. involvement was passing. Progress had been made in stifling the enemy's initiative at the same time that U. S. forces had been deployed and security provided to populated areas. With its allies, the U. S. had deployed and positioned forces equivalent to five combat divisions. U. S. strength had risen to 184,000. The 1st Brigade had played a significant role in making these deployments possible. The enemy, however, had redoubled his efforts. An anticipated 26,000 North Vietnamese had infiltrated into South Vietnam during the year, including some 8 NVA regiments. The NVA and VC had lost an estimated 35,000 men killed and more than 6,000 captured during 1965, but their combined strength²⁵-- as main forces, local forces, and guerrillas -- had risen to some 221,000.

During 1965 General Westmoreland believed that the first stage of U. S. involvement was passing. Progress had been made in stifling the enemy's initiative at the same time that U. S. forces had been deployed and security provided to populated areas. With its allies, the U. S. had deployed and positioned forces equivalent to five combat divisions. U. S. strength had risen to 184,000. The 1st Brigade had played a significant role in making these deployments possible. The enemy, however, had redoubled his efforts. An anticipated 26,000 North Vietnamese had infiltrated into South Vietnam during the year, including some 8 NVA regiments. The NVA and VC had lost an estimated 35,000 men killed and more than 6,000 captured during 1965, but their combined strength-- as main forces, local forces, and guerrillas -- had risen to some 221,000.

²⁵Ibid., p. 100.

PREVIEW OF 1966

The continuing enemy buildup meant that much was left for the 1st Brigade and its companion forces to do in 1966 in preparing to move into the second phase of the U. S. effort: the conduct of major offensive actions to seize the initiative from the enemy. Full implementation of such offensives was not possible due to the limited number of troops available and multiple tasks facing them: protection of the government and the people, protection and development of U. S. installations and logistic bases, and qualitative and quantitative improvement of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces. Still, American forces were able to mount spoiling attacks in 1966 against large enemy main force units building up in the border areas. The 1st Brigade participated in one such major attack, Operation HAWTHORNE in June.

During 1966 General Westmoreland deployed incoming U. S. and allied troops in areas he, his staff, and allied leaders judged to be most critical, primarily the populated area around Saigon in the III Corps, and the coastal lowlands of the I and II Corps. USMACV considered Saigon and the coastal provinces of Binh Dinh and Phu Yen most important, the coastal provinces because they were not only heavily populated and important sources of VC support, but because there was a continuing threat of the VC in the area linking up with NVA units in the Central Highlands and thereby severing the country. Accordingly, U. S. troops arriving in Vietnam in 1966 were deployed in these critical areas. The remainder of the 1st Infantry Division, which arrived in Vietnam in October 1965 was deployed north of Saigon and the 25th Infantry Division, arriving in late 1965, was positioned just northwest of the capital city astride a major access route. A new Vietnamese division, the 10th (later redesignated the 18th) was organized and positioned northeast of Saigon. The Korean 9th Infantry Division was deployed into the coastal areas of II Corps and the U. S. 1st Marine Division into the southern provinces of I Corps. One brigade of the 4th Infantry Division was initially stationed on the coast of Phu Yen Province, but the entire division was later deployed to the Central Highlands to counter the steady buildup of NVA units in that area. Since the enemy's estimation of the critical areas was much the same as that of USMACV, the major battles of 1966 developed around Saigon and in the Central Highlands adjacent to the populated coastal provinces.²⁶

As the 1st Brigade prepared to conduct operations in 1966, it had profited from its earlier combat experiences. Since jungle operations offered little opportunity for the use of heavy mortars and anti-tank weapons due to limited observation, the close-in nature of the fighting, and lack of mobility of mortar and anti-tank units in the jungle, some units within the brigade designed to provide such support in conventional warfare were converted to light infantry maneuver elements. By one such modification, the headquarters company of each battalion was provided with a reinforced rifle maneuver element of sixty to sixty-five men called a "Recondo Force" organized loosely into two sections. Members of such forces were primarily volunteers drawn from all sections of a

headquarters company. By manipulating personnel assignments, these volunteers were technically allotted to the anti-tank and reconnaissance platoons, which were then used to form a recondo force. This force added rifle strength to a battalion during jungle operations and was also available for special missions. In similar fashion, the weapons platoon of each rifle company was frequently used as a fourth rifle platoon, provided with two machine guns by special authorization. For indirect fire support, two 60 mm mortars were available to each rifle company for use as terrain and tactical considerations dictated. Another innovation was the use of recondo teams, first employed in Operation CHECKERBOARD in December 1965. These teams initially consisted of six men -- a leader, forward observer, radio operator, and three riflemen -- but often additional riflemen were added. These teams infiltrated areas of operation prior to entry by major forces and provided intelligence concerning terrain and enemy dispositions, thus reducing vulnerability to ambushes against maneuver elements.²⁷

Although the fire support capability of individual infantry companies was thus reduced, the overall fire power available to ground units was greatly increased as the brigade adapted to jungle warfare. Artillery was moved forward with infantry and positioned in interlocking and mutually supporting firebases. Intensive use of helicopters made possible rapid relocation of these firebases, enabling them to deliver fire progressively along the directions of patrolling ground forces. Helicopters themselves were sources of fire support, and their use was continuously improved during 1966.²⁸

Conceptually, the 1st Brigade tacticians had learned that objectives in the conventional sense were of limited value in jungle warfare. In the jungle, an objective served as a control measure for a scheme of maneuver, but to assign a unit the attainment of a terrain objective within a specific time frame was to invite haste, preoccupation with time rather than enemy and terrain, and possible ambush. Commanders found operations most effective when units were allotted adequate time to search areas thoroughly and to destroy any caches and emplacements discovered. An outgrowth of the foregoing was the concept of checkerboard operations in which companies were divided into groups of half platoon size, each of which was given the task of searching for enemy forces over a square of terrain. If no enemy contact was developed, the patrolling unit then moved diagonally to another square. LTC Henry Emerson, ²⁹ commander of the 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry originated this tactical concept.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 113-14.

²⁷See for example, Combat Operations After Action Report, Operation CHECKERBOARD, Headquarters, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, dated 10 January 1966, copy in files of the 101st Airborne Division Historian, Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

28 The refinement of airmobile concepts in Vietnam will be discussed at a later point in this narrative.

29 Willard Pearson, "Find 'em, Fix 'em, Finish 'em," Army Digest, XXI (December 1966), p. 18.

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Conceptually, the 1st Brigade tacticians had learned that objectives in the conventional sense were of limited value in jungle warfare. In the jungle, an objective served as a control measure for a scheme of maneuver, but to achieve a unit the attainment of a terrain objective within a specific time frame was to invite disaster. Coordination with the enemy was essential and positive action. Commanders found operations most effective when units were afforded adequate time to search areas thoroughly and to destroy the caches and emplacements discovered. An assumption of the foregoing was the concept of checkered operations in which companies were divided into groups of half platoon size, each of which was given the task of searching for enemy forces over a square of terrain. If no enemy contact was developed, the searching unit then moved diagonally to another square. LTC Henry Emerson, commander of the 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry originated this tactical concept.

For example, Combat Operations Area Action Report, Operation CHECKERBOARD, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, dated 10 January 1966, COMBAT OPERATIONS AREA ACTION REPORT, 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

OPERATION VAN BUREN

USMACV opened 1966 with spoiling attacks against the enemy in the vicinity of Saigon and in the Central Highlands and with protective operations for the rice harvests underway in the coastal areas of the central South Vietnamese provinces. The 1st Brigade was committed to the latter task in conjunction with the Korean 2d Marine Brigade and the 47th ARVN Regiment. The operation was named VAN BUREN. The 1st Brigade (-), consisting of the 2-327th and 2-502d, was ordered to take action against VC elements, believed to be of the 95th NVA Regiment, in the mountains southwest and north of Tuy Hoa in Phu Yen Province, approximately 100 miles north of Phan Rang. The VC in the area were exerting pressure against the population in this area to supply them with rice.

By 17 January, both the 2-327th and the 2-502d had established base areas near Tuy Hoa, after moving from Phan Rang by LST and Air Force C-130's and C-123's. (The 1-327th remained at Phan Rang.) Patrolling was initiated on 18 January north and northwest of Tuy Hoa. A Tet cease-fire was observed by both sides on 20-23 January. On 21 January, Company B, 2-502d secured a landing zone at Hoi Tin and assisted with the evacuation of Vietnamese children, nuns, and priests from the Mang Lang Orphanage to Tuy Hoa. The relocated orphanage was sponsored by the men of the 2-502d for the duration of their stay in the area.

On 28 January 1966, Colonel James S. Timothy relinquished command of the 1st Brigade to Brigadier General Willard Pearson, who had been serving as the Assistant Division Commander of the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell since July 1965. General Pearson was a native of Pennsylvania, who enlisted in the U. S. Army Reserve in 1935, was later commissioned, and entered on active duty in 1940. BG Pearson had served in the Pacific during World War II. After the war ended, he attended the Command and General Staff College. In 1946, LTC Pearson was assigned to the 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina where he served as a battalion commander and a staff officer for the Division G3, G4, and G1. After the Korean War broke out, Pearson was sent overseas to serve as the Senior Advisor of the Korean 6th Division. He later became a regimental executive officer in the 24th Infantry Division. The next twelve years were spent earning his masters degree in business, attending the Army War College, commanding the 1st Battle Group of the 9th Infantry Division, working at various general staff levels, and finally earning a second masters degree in International Relations. Prior to assuming duties as the Assistant Division Commander of the 101st Airborne Division, General Pearson was serving as the Chief of Staff of the Allied Land Forces in Southeast Europe.

With BG Pearson in command, units of the brigade intensified their activities. Between 6 and 8 February, for example, the 2-502d twice developed significant contacts with the enemy, and with the aid of a 1-327th Task Force on the second occasion killed over 100 VC. At one point in the fight, hand-

to-hand combat with the enemy took place. During this period also, the brigade's first Congressional Medal of Honor was earned by 1LT James A. Gardner. Gardner was leading a platoon of the 1-327th to relieve a company pinned down by the enemy near the village of My Canh. Without regard for his own safety, he led an assault across an open rice paddy, personally destroying two enemy bunkers with hand grenades. After reorganizing his platoon and resuming the advance, Gardner charged an enemy machine gun emplacement, which had pinned down his platoon for a second time. As he destroyed this position with a grenade, he came under fire from a fourth position. Advancing upon this bunker, he was mortally wounded but managed to destroy the position with another grenade as his last effort.³⁰

After three more weeks of continuous patrolling, which produced numerous VC supply caches and sporadic contact with the enemy, Operation VAN BUREN was terminated on 20 February. Residents of the Tuy Hoa area had been able to harvest over 30,000 tons of rice, much of which would have gone to the VC had not the 1st Brigade been watchful and aggressive. In addition, USMACV estimated that Operation VAN BUREN had resulted in 679 killed, 49 captured, and the relocation of 4,700 residents to safe areas. 177 VC defected to the Allies during the operation.³¹

³⁰General Order Number 49, Headquarters, Department of the Army, 30 November 1967.

³¹Westmoreland, "Report," p. 123.

OPERATION HARRISON

Following the rice harvest, the 1st Brigade remained at Tuy Hoa, re-joined by the 2-327th, which had been at Phan Rang. The brigade was ordered to continue offensive operations to the north and west of Tuy Hoa to find, fix, and destroy the 95th NVA Regiment. These actions bore the title Operation HARRISON and extended from 21 February to 25 March 1966. The brigade's battalions employed checkerboard patrolling operations, emphasizing night operations and ambushes. General Pearson's tactics for the brigade called for ground movement into suspected hostile areas without extensive artillery preparations. Pearson's theory was that advance artillery and noisy helicopter movement forewarned the enemy and hindered closure with them.³² Among the innovations employed by the brigade in this operation were expanded use of the long range reconnaissance patrols, and night airmobile assaults.

When determined resistance met elements of the 1-327th Infantry, one company was committed to hold the enemy down while another maneuvered around the opposing forces. The "Above the Rest" Tiger Force was inserted into a blocking position late in the evening, and by the following morning, 118 enemy dead lay on the battlefield.

Later during Operation HARRISON, the 2-502d Infantry conducted the first known battalion night airmobile operation. The 2-327th attacked a Viet Cong redoubt and seized a small weapons cache. By the time the operation terminated, the 1st Brigade was credited with having destroyed two North Vietnamese battalions and keeping several tons of rice from being used by the Communists.

³²Pearson, "Find 'em, Fix 'em, Finish 'em," pp. 15-21, and George McArthur, "101st Airborne Guerrillas' Whip Viet Cong with Own Weapons," The Commercial Appeal (Memphis, Tennessee), January 29, 1967, m.p.

OPERATION FILLMORE

Operation HARRISON was followed by a similar series of actions, Operation FILLMORE, in which the 1st Brigade continued to operate from its base at Tuy Hoa. Operation FILLMORE lasted from 25 March to 7 April for the 1-327th and the 2-502d and from 25 March to 21 July for the 2-327th. The first two battalions were airlifted, in mid-April, from Tuy Hoa to Phan Thiet, the capital of Bien Thuan Province. Phan Thiet was located 150 miles to the south of Tuy Hoa. The 2-327th remained at Tuy Hoa to provide a stabilizing force in that important rice-producing area. The most significant tactical innovation used in Operation FILLMORE was the clandestine entry into enemy areas of company sized units as immediate reaction forces capable of capitalizing on information gained by small reconnaissance elements. In one battle alone, the 1-327th killed over fifty enemy using this technique. In addition, the constant pressure exerted by the brigade against the enemy in Phu Yen Province resulted in significant increases in the number of VC defectors to the government of South Vietnam.

When determined resistance was met by elements of the 1-327th Infantry, one company was committed to hold the enemy down while another maneuvered around the flanking forces. The "Above and Below" tiger force was inserted into a blocking position late in the evening, and by the following morning, 118 enemy dead lay on the battlefield.

Later during Operation HARRISON, the 2-502d Infantry conducted the first night attack against enemy positions. The 2-327th attacked a Viet Cong base and seized a small weapons cache. By the time the operation terminated, the Viet Cong was crushed with heavy losses and the North Vietnamese battalions and company several tons of rice from being used by the Communists.

1-327th Infantry, "The Commercial", 15-51, and George McArthur.
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OPERATION AUSTIN II

The arrival of the 1-327th and the 2-502d in Phan Thiet on 9 April was the first presence of major foreign military units in the area since the Communists had defeated two French regiments there in 1954. The mission of the 1st Brigade (-) was to search out and destroy local guerrillas and a main force VC battalion reported to be in northern Binh Thuan Province, astride the II and III Corps boundary. The operation involved cooperation with ARVN forces, Civilian Irregular Defense Groups, Popular Forces, Regional Forces, and National Policemen of Binh Thuan Province. The brigade's principal contribution were long range patrols into the suspected sanctuary and positioning of reaction forces. The patrols were made arduous by a shortage of potable water. The 1-327th conducted a night airmobile assault, but little contact with the enemy was made. The operation netted 21 enemy dead, destruction of over one hundred VC emplacements, and the praise of General Westmoreland for the brigade's ability to coordinate operations with Vietnamese military and paramilitary forces "more effectively than any other U. S. unit."³³ Operation AUSTIN II was concluded on 21 April 1966.

³³Vietnam Odyssey: The Story of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, In Vietnam (Texarkana, Ark. - Tex.: 101st Airborne Division Association, 1967).

INCREASING ENEMY PRESSURE

While the 1st Brigade had been deployed in Phu Yen and Binh Thuan provinces on the coast, important developments had been occurring in other areas of South Vietnam. Beginning in February, the enemy stepped up infiltration across the Demilitarized Zone and the Laotian and Cambodian borders. Two NVA divisions -- the 324B and 341st -- infiltrated into Quang Tri Province at the northern end of South Vietnam in March. At the same time, enemy infiltration through Laos into the next province to the south, Thua Thien, threatened the ancient imperial city of Hue, the provincial capital. The situation was critical. Only the 1st RVN Division and a battalion of U. S. Marines were deployed in these two northernmost provinces separated from the rest of the country by a mountain barrier cut only by the narrow Hai Van Pass. To counter the threat, USMACV shifted most of the U. S. 3d Marine Division north of the Hai Van Pass and deployed a battalion of the 173d Airborne Brigade and additional artillery to the two northern provinces. Ultimately, these provinces became the location of operations by both the 1st Brigade (in 1967) and the entire 101st Airborne Division (after 1968).

In the Central Highlands, increased enemy activity required the positioning of a portion of the 25th Infantry Division in Darlac Province in February. During March, the 95B and 101C NVA regiments forced the abandoning of a Special Forces Camp in the A Shau Valley. It was to be two more years before U. S. troops returned to the A Shau, and those troops would be soldiers from the 1st Cavalry Division supported by paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division. In March, however, the units of the 25th Infantry Division located in the Central Highlands reoccupied a Special Forces Camp between Pleiku and Ban Me Thuot and cleared Route 14 from Pleiku southward almost to the Cambodian border.

In late March and early April, USMACV began spoiling attacks east and west of Saigon to disrupt enemy buildups threatening the capital. The remainder of the 25th Infantry Division operated in Quang Ngai Province along Highway 1, and the 1st Infantry Division and the First Australian Task Force moved against the 5th VC Division east of Saigon. On 24 April, the 1st Infantry Division entered War Zone C near the Cambodian border in Tay Ninh Province -- the first major foray into that enemy stronghold since 1962. The operation uncovered large quantities of rice, clothing, medicine, and other supplies, obviously being infiltrated from Cambodia.³⁴ USMACV called upon the 1st Brigade to exert additional pressure before the onset of the monsoon season.

³⁴Westmoreland, "Report," pp. 123-25.

OPERATION AUSTIN VI

On 1 May 1966, the 1st Brigade, less the 2-327th still at Tuy Hoa, began Operation AUSTIN VI in the Nhon Co area in Quang Duc Province near the Cambodian border north of Saigon, with the mission of conducting spoiling attacks against NVA concentrations along the border and astride the II and III Corps boundary. For the first week of the operation, the 1-327th and 2-502d operated clandestinely in the jungles along the Cambodian border without result. Then intelligence indicated that enemy activity was taking place near Bu Gia Map in Phuoc Long Province to the southwest. The Recondo Force of the 2-502d was first inserted into the area, followed by the rest of the 2-502d, then the 1-327th, and finally a task force from the 173d Airborne Brigade, which moved from Song Be to link up with the 2-502d. In the course of checkerboard patrolling by the 2-502d, an NVA prisoner revealed the location of a four-company sized ambush site while the Recondo Force executed a flanking movement. The trap thus formed produced an hour-long fire fight in which thirty-five enemy were killed. Artillery fire along the route of the retreating enemy badly mauled an NVA company, according to another captured enemy soldier. A B-52 strike on the following day added to the enemy toll, as the 2-502d pursued the retreating enemy to the Cambodian border. Meanwhile, the 1-327th conducted a sweep to the south and east, during which a VC provincial headquarters and an abandoned prisoner-of-war camp were discovered and destroyed. The operation terminated on 18 May 1966.

A RESPITE FROM COMBAT

From mid-May to early June, the battalions of the 1st Brigade were dispersed in three separate locations, and enjoyed a well-earned rest from sustained operations. The 2-327th remained in Tuy Hoa, while the 1-327th and the 2-502d were moved by air to Cheo Reo, the capital of Phu Bon Province, south-east of Pleiku, to serve as I Field Force reserve. (In March 1966, a second Field Force command had been created by USMACV to assist in controlling the increasing U. S. troop strength; I Field Force operated in the II Corps zone, II Field Force in the III Corps zone, and the III Marine Amphibious Force served as the equivalent command in the IV Corps zone.³⁵) On 28 May, the 2-502d moved from Cheo Rheo to Pleiku and bivouaced near the II Corps USMACV compound. Both battalions conducted patrols, without incident, but most of their effort was devoted to maintenance of equipment, training, and recreation.

The brigade training program emphasized "save lives and save limbs." The training conducted during lulls from combat such as that at Cheo Rheo and Pleiku consisted of cross-training in weapons skills, perfection of crew-served weapons techniques and the ability to request artillery and tactical air supporting fires, and critiques of unit actions previously conducted. For example, following Operation AUSTIN VI, BG Pearson assembled the brigade staff and the principal subordinate commanders, together with MG Harry W. O. Kinnard, Acting Commanding General, I Field Force, for a thorough discussion of problems encountered and lessons learned from that operation. One outcome of this critique was a "thought paper" on the use of large U. S. units along the Cambodian and Laotian borders, a direction in which U. S. forces were being pressured by the nature of enemy infiltration activity. Critiques such as this one extended down to the squad level.³⁶

The type of training discussed above built upon that received by every replacement reporting to the brigade in Vietnam. Each brigade replacement received eighty hours of instruction during six days and nights of "P" (proficiency) Training at Phan Rang to enhance his ability to survive the dangers of a guerrilla war. The training period improved physical conditioning, promoted acclimatization to the tropics, familiarized the soldier with both U. S. and enemy weapons and tactics used in Vietnam, stressed intelligence collection and relations with the Vietnamese, and capitalized upon the soldier's motivation to learn prior to entering combat. Instructors were selected combat-seasoned officers and non-commissioned officers. This initial training was further supplemented by additional work for squad leaders. Each week, the rifle companies, cavalry troop, and engineer company sent one squad leader to the brigade base camp for six days of intensive training in a Squad Leaders' Combat Reaction Course. In this course, squad leaders faced a series of realistic combat situations requiring immediate decisions and actions.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 103

³⁶ See "Informal After Action Critique, Operation AUSTIN VI," Headquarters, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, dated 27 May 1966, copy in files of 101st Airborne Division Historian, Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The brigade training program is discussed further in Willard Pearson, "Take Care of Your Men," Infantry, LVII (January-February, 1967), 38-42.

The 5-802d retained its mission as a light force reserve until 7 June while the 1-327th, the 42d ARVN Regiment, and the 1st AVN Ranger Battalion began the relief of Tay Ninh. Initial fighting developed on 7 June, when an artillery position west of Tay Ninh was hit by a 105mm mortar round. The 5-802d Infantry, and elements of the 328th Engineer Battalion were alerted by an estimated position of the 24th NV Regiment. One gun position was hit by mortar fire and was destroyed by the artillery. Down revealed 85 air men, 13 of whom were killed in the artillery position.

The 1-327th pressed on to relieve the Tay Ninh outpost and then moved north to maintain contact with the enemy. Another force party entered in which all three of the battalion's companies were engaged simultaneously in separate fire fights. Meanwhile, the 5-802d was released from its reserve mission and directed to envelope the northern flank of the enemy in contact with the 1-327th. The companies of the 5-802d moved along river running northeast to southwest, rising gradually to higher ground to the northeast. On the afternoon of 8 June, Company 1 was pinned down by heavy enemy fire. The opposing forces were in such close proximity that each was in hand grenade range of the other. After one platoon had been overrun by the NVA and the other platoons were in imminent danger, the commander of Company 1, Captain William S. Carpenter, called for an airstrike on the center of his company in order to stop the NVA advance. The first airstrike delivered again thirty meters short of the target into the jungle canopy. Enemy firing ceased, and Company 1 was able to break contact and withdraw approximately 125 meters as the second airstrike was delivered. The company established a new position and resisted renewed attempts to probe its position until Company 1 reached it during the night. These two companies formed a larger perimeter and awaited relief.

Help came from an unexpected quarter. With all maneuver units committed, the 5-802d assembled a provisional company from volunteers at the Phan Rang base camp. Dispatched hurriedly to Dak To, this provisional company secured the high ground above the encircled company position, where a landing zone was established and the besieged units were evacuated.

OPERATION HAWTHORNE

Sharpened by a rest and additional training, the brigade (minus) next moved to Dak To in Kontum Province in the Central Highlands. The initial mission was to relieve a besieged RVN Regional Forces garrison at the Toumorong Outpost about twelve miles northeast of Dak To. The action, however, developed into a major spoiling attack against the 24th NVA Regiment, which intelligence indicated was building up for a major drive from Toumorong overlooking the Dak Tan Kan Valley through Dak To to Kontum.

The 2-502d retained its mission as I Field Force reserve until 7 June, while the 1-327th, the 42d ARVN Regiment, and the 21st ARVN Ranger Battalion began the relief of Toumorong. Intense fighting developed on 7 June, when an artillery position west of Toumorong manned by Battery B, 2-320th Field Artillery, Company A, 2-502d Infantry, and elements of the 326th Engineer Battalion were attacked by an estimated battalion of the 24th NVA Regiment. One gun position was twice overrun by the enemy and twice regained by the artillerymen turned infantry. Dawn revealed 86 slain enemy, 13 of whom were inside the artillery position.

The 1-327th pressed on to relieve the Toumorong outpost and then moved north to maintain contact with the enemy. Another fierce battle erupted, in which all three of the battalion's companies were engaged simultaneously in separate fire fights. Meanwhile, the 2-502d was released from its reserve mission and dispatched to envelop the northern flank of the enemy in contact with the 1-327th. The companies of the 2-502d moved along ridges running northeast to southwest, rising gradually to higher mountains to the northeast. On the afternoon of 9 June, Company C was pinned down by heavy enemy fire. The opposing forces were in such close proximity that each was in hand grenade range of the other. After one platoon had been overrun by the NVA and two other platoons were in imminent danger, the commander of Company C, Captain William S. Carpenter, called for an airstrike on the center of his company in order to stop the NVA advance. The first airstrike delivered napalm thirty meters short of the target into the jungle canopy. Enemy firing ceased, and Company C was able to break contact and withdraw approximately 125 meters as the second napalm strike was delivered. The company established a new perimeter and resisted renewed attempts to probe its position until Company A reached it during the night. These two companies formed a larger perimeter and awaited relief.

Help came from an unexpected quarter. With all maneuver units committed, the 2-502d assembled a provisional company from volunteers at the Phan Rang base camp. Dispatched hurriedly to Dak To, the provisional company secured the high ground above the encircled companies position, where a landing zone was established and the besieged units were extracted.

The work of the 2-502d and the 1-327th had fixed the position of an estimated NVA regiment, well dug in on the ridges lining the Dak Tan Kan Valley. The battalions had executed a double envelopment, moving the equivalent of nearly 15,000 troops in 33 separate airmobile operations exerting continuous pressure against the enemy for sixteen days and nights. I Field Force turned to B-52 strikes on 13 June to complete the work begun by the 1st Brigade. The 1-327th and the 2-502d air assaulted into the valley thirty minutes after a massive air strike by twenty-four waves of B-52 bombers. Large numbers of enemy dead were found, as well as a systematic series of tunnels, some as deep as fifty feet. The follow-up action continued until 20 June.

Operation HAWTHORNE was one of the most successful of the Vietnam conflict in that a major enemy unit had been engaged, fixed, and rendered combat ineffective. In a war of squad-against-squad engagements in which progress was often measured in very small increments, such an achievement was impressive. USMACV estimated that the 24th NVA Regiment had suffered 531 killed, compared to U. S. losses of 48 dead and 239 wounded. MG Stanley R. Larsen, Commanding General, I Field Force, then on a trip to the U. S. publicly stated that the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division was the "best fighting unit in Vietnam."³⁷ In September 1968, the 1st Brigade received the Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism during Operation HAWTHORNE.

³⁷Vietnam Odyssey, n.p. This source credits Operation HAWTHORNE with inflicting over 1200 enemy casualties. Westmoreland, "Report," pp. 126 and 282, indicates there were 531 known enemy casualties.

OPERATION BEAUREGARD

After a brief rest, the 1st Brigade sent the 1-327th and the 2-502d back into the area recently occupied by the 24th NVA Regiment to locate and destroy any of its elements which might be regrouping and moving away from the battlefield. The battalions rotated companies into the area of operations at five-day intervals. Many of these companies entered the area on foot at night carrying five days' rations to preclude the need for helicopter resupply which might alert the enemy to the presence of an American unit. Although several small caches of rice were discovered, extensive patrolling of the area between Dak To and the Laotian border produced only light enemy contact. While companies were not in the field, they manned defensive posts around Dak To or conducted refresher training in the base camp at the Dak To airstrip. On 6 July, a possible contact with the enemy was developed eighteen miles north of Dak To by a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol. The 2-502d air assaulted into the area using two companies to make a sweep toward a blocking position established by a third company. No contact with the enemy was made, but five men were killed when one company entered an abandoned Special Forces camp defensive mine field. All units returned to their base camp on 15 July, and the operation was concluded. The 1-327th and the 2-502d prepared to rejoin the 2-327th at Tuy Hoa.

OPERATION NATHAN HALE

While the 1-327th and the 2-502d were engaged in Operations AUSTIN II, AUSTIN VI, HAWTHORNE, AND BEAUREGARD, the 2-327th had continued at Tuy Hoa the objective of Operation FILLMORE: to protect the coastal area of Phu Yen Province. On 19 June, the 2-327th, less one company that had joined the rest of the 1st Brigade for Operation HAWTHORNE, was placed under the operational control of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), and given the mission of fixing a suspected enemy force west of Tuy An. The operation was designated Operation NATHAN HALE. Two companies moved into position by helicopter and began search operations. Both companies were attacked and prevented from linking up. The battle continued for two days, during which the enemy launched fanatical assaults. On the third day, Company B arrived from Dak To, and together with every available man from the battalion headquarters, enabled the battalion to resume the offensive. A brigade from the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) also attacked the enemy. The two U. S. forces thereby destroyed two NVA battalions, later identified as belonging to the 188 NVA Regiment. The 2-327th accounted for 237 enemy killed and 14 captured before the operation ended on 1 July 1966.

OPERATION JOHN PAUL JONES and OPERATION SEWARD

With all three of its battalions together for the first time since early April, the 1st Brigade prepared in mid-July 1966 for participation in Operation JOHN PAUL JONES in Phu Yen Province. The brigade's mission was to secure Vung Ro Bay and the highway north of Tuy Hoa, at the same time protecting the harvesting of rice in the area. This operation continued until 5 September. It was succeeded by Operation SEWARD, involving a similar mission of providing security for the rice harvest in Phu Yen Province. This operation extended from 5 September to 24 October. The enemy suffered over 200 casualties.

Brigade activity during these two operations consisted of saturation patrolling and night ambushes, with occasional sweeps of the adjacent mountain areas to the west of Tuy Hoa and Tuy An. Most of the enemy encountered were local squads. From 24 August to 10 September, Company C, 1-327th, was assigned a special security operation for an engineer base camp area in the Ninh Hoa area on the coast forty miles south of Tuy Hoa. When not committed to offensive operations, units of the brigade conducted perimeter defense, maintenance, training and recreational activities. In addition, the civil affairs sections and medical platoons of the battalions coordinated civic action projects and administered medical treatment to the local civilians. On 17 August, during a lull in Operation JOHN PAUL JONES, LTC Frank L. Dietrich assumed command of the "O-Deuce" from LTC Henry E. Emerson, the "Gunfighter," who had commanded the battalion since its arrival in Vietnam. In late October, battalions of the brigade relinquished responsibility for their areas of operations to elements of the Korean 9th (White Horse) Division and the U. S. 4th Infantry Division, the latter having just arrived in Vietnam in early October.

OPERATION GERONIMO

After several days of maintenance, training, rest, and recuperation on the beach south of Tuy Hoa, the 1st Brigade readied for Operation GERONIMO I with the mission of exploiting intelligence indicating that the 95th NVA Regiment was operating in the mountainous areas of western Phu Yen Province. The 1-327th first infiltrated south of the Son Be River on 31 October, using small reconnaissance patrols to develop contacts with the enemy. On 6 November, the 1-327th air assaulted to the Dong Tre area, along with the 2-327th and 2-502d. There were significant contacts with the enemy as the three battalions advanced from three different directions. On 8 November, elements of the 1-327th engaged in a vicious fight with an estimated 100 NVA. On 10-11 November, the 2-502d surrounded what proved to be the 5th Battalion of the 95th NVA Regiment. Relentless combat pressure and psychological warfare appeals resulted in 13 enemy killed, 35 captured, and large amounts of equipment confiscated. The battalions continued search and destroy operations until 4 December, with a brief respite for Thanksgiving dinner. In early December, the brigade moved back to Tuy Hoa for a much needed rest. The latter portion of Operation GERONIMO I had been characterized by constant rain. Mountain streams in the area of operation were swollen, and the feet of the men had suffered severely during the constant patrolling. In the 1-327th, for example, forty-seven troopers were evacuated from the operation with foot problems. For its efforts in the operation, particularly its work in decimating an NVA battalion, the 2-502d was cited in a brigade order, a practice instituted by BG Pearson to recognize superior combat performance.

OPERATION PICKETT

As the 1st Brigade concluded Operation GERONIMO I in the coastal province of Phu Yen, intelligence sources indicated that large concentrations of enemy troops existed in the Plei Trap and Dak Aloi Valleys northwest of Kontum in the Central Highlands. To initiate Operation PICKETT, designed to close with this enemy concentration, the brigade conducted an air movement from Tuy Hoa on the coast to Kontum in forty-nine hours. This rapid movement was made possible by around-the-clock flying and by turn-in of excess equipment by all units prior to making the move.

Combat operations began on 9 December with deployment of battalions into landing zones some twenty-four miles west of Kontum. The brigade's three battalions then initiated search and destroy operations, which revealed numerous enemy trails, camps, and weapons and food caches. Enemy contact was light. On 26 December, the 2-327th was withdrawn from combat patrol activity and entered a training period near Kontum to include a parachute jump. On 2 January 1967, the 2-327th returned to the field to engage in semi-guerrilla search and destroy missions. On 3 January, the 1-327th withdrew from the field to engage in a training phase, also including a parachute jump. The 1-327th returned to combat operations on 9 January, at which time the 2-502d entered the training phase. Throughout Operation PICKETT, the enemy avoided contact and only small, squad-size actions developed.

1967: THE YEAR OF THE OFFENSIVE

As 1967 began, General Westmoreland felt that allied forces had gained offensive momentum. During 1966, U. S. troop strength had risen from 184,000 to 385,000. Major U. S. combat units committed to Vietnam in 1966 included two brigades of the 9th Infantry Division, the 196th and 199th Light Infantry Brigades, the 25th Infantry Division, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and the 1st Marine Division. In late 1966, USMACV had initiated the largest U. S. operation to that time (Operation ATTLEBORO) in Tay Ninh Province on the Cambodian border, northwest of Saigon, with over 22,000 U. S. and allied troops participating.³⁸

At the beginning of 1967, however, the enemy still was relatively secure in the III Corps area outside the immediate Saigon area. Operation ATTLEBORO had been the only significant allied incursion into these enemy areas. Allied activity had been effective in denying to the enemy the rice-producing coastal regions of the II Corps and much of the Quang Nam Province in I Corps, but allied forces were not numerous enough to maintain firm control of the Central Highlands. USMACV strategy for 1967 was to continue to protect the populated centers on the coast but to deploy quickly to the Central Highlands to counter enemy troop buildups resulting from infiltration across the Laotian and Cambodian borders. On the coast, USMACV intended to expand control into Quang Ngai and Quang Nam provinces, thus linking relatively secure coastal areas between I and II Corps. The enemy too faced the problem of employing limited forces. If he moved out of the safer mountain areas to attack the South Vietnamese population centers, he risked exposure to large Allied troop concentrations and superior allied fire power. If, on the other hand, he remained in the mountains, and continued to launch small scale attacks he risked piece-meal defeat due to superior allied mobility and fire power. As 1967 progressed, the enemy ventured into larger scale offensives further from his base areas. Moreover, allied strength increased from 385,000 to 486,000 and available maneuver battalions from 256 to 278. Principal U. S. combat additions in 1967 were the 23d Infantry Division (Americal), formed primarily from assets already in Vietnam; the 11th and 198th Light Infantry Brigades, which were attached to the 23d Infantry Division; the 2d Brigade of the 9th Infantry Division; and the remainder of the 101st Airborne Division, which arrived in December 1967.³⁹

³⁸ Westmoreland, "Report," p. 129.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 131-34.

OPERATIONS FARRAGUT AND GATLING

The 1st Brigade entered 1967 by participating in a number of fast-moving operations typical of its Vietnam Odyssey. Following the conclusion of Operation PICKETT in the Central Highlands, Headquarters, I Field Force ordered the brigade to move 400 miles south to its base camp at Phan Rang and to prepare for Operation FARRAGUT against enemy secret base camps in Binh Thuan, Ninh Thuan, and Lam Dong provinces. On 21 January, the movement from Kontum began by both air and land. The motor convoy, consisting of vehicles from all elements of the brigade, completed the trip in six days, without incident, arriving in Phan Rang on 26 January. The trip was the longest military convoy made along Highway 1 to that date. For many elements of the brigade, the arrival at Phan Rang was the first time they had been at the base camp area in over a year.

The respite at Phan Rang was brief and was devoted primarily to change-of-command ceremonies, as BG Pearson relinquished command to BG Salve H. Matheson. The latter, born in Seattle, Washington, and educated in California (UCLA, class of 1942), had served as a lieutenant with the 101st Airborne Division during World War II in Normandy, Holland, and Bastogne. Most of his early career was spent with airborne units. Prior to assuming command of the 1st Brigade, Matheson had served as Assistant Division Commander of the 101st at Fort Campbell. BG Pearson left the 1st Brigade to serve as Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations (J3), United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

Matheson quickly found that his brigade was a work horse, as it immediately initiated Operation FARRAGUT on 26 January. Following a feint by elements of the 2-502d on 26 January, against a suspected enemy base camp approximately fifteen miles north of Phan Rang, the 2-327th conducted airmobile assaults into a second nearby suspected enemy base camp. These assaults followed a B-52 strike. Meanwhile, the 2-502d moved overland to the second area also. Both battalions conducted search and destroy operations in their areas of operation on 28-29 January, but with minimal enemy contact. On the night of 30 January, the 2-502d was extracted from the area by helicopters and prepared to participate in Operation GATLING with the 1-327th. The 2-327th continued search and destroy efforts as part of Operation FARRAGUT until 16 February.

Operation GATLING developed as a companion to Operation FARRAGUT when intelligence indicated a suspected meeting place for a high level enemy command conference in Lam Dong Province. Stringent security measures were employed to achieve surprise, but a B-52 strike on the suspected area on 1 February, followed by a raid by the 1-327th and 2-502d and subsequent search and destroy efforts to 15 February produced no evidence of the suspected conference or heavy enemy concentrations. From 8-12 February, a TET cease fire was observed.

On 17 February, the 1-327th and 2-502d rejoined the 2-327th in the conduct of Operation FARRAGUT. Search and destroy patrolling continued in the Le Hong Phong forest and Di Linh areas until 28 February, with only a few enemy contacts developed. The final phases of Operation FARRAGUT broadened the area of operations but failed to elicit willingness on the part of the enemy to stand and fight. The operation was terminated on 23 March.

Although contact with the enemy had been limited, the operation was not without its successes. The brigade destroyed both a VC province headquarters and a district headquarters, as well as other facilities, and disrupted VC tax collection efforts. The operation also revealed that scarcity of water made it unlikely that significant numbers of the enemy would use the area in the dry season and that NVA troops were for the first time being integrated with VC troops. In addition, a significant increase in the number of enemy voluntarily surrendering to the South Vietnamese government during the course of the operation indicated that VC control of the local population was lessening.

OPERATION SUMMERALL

Headquarters, I Field Force, next directed the 1st Brigade to move from Phan Rang to Khanh Duong further north along the coast in Khanh Hoa Province and to prepare for Operation SUMMERALL in Khanh Hoa, Phu Yen, and Darlac Provinces. The move, beginning on 29 March, involved the brigade in its seventh and eighth ambush-free convoys of the year. It consisted of a battalion sized convoy from Tuy Hoa, a multi-battalion convoy from Phan Rang, and an airlift from Phan Rang. The convoy from Tuy Hoa more than doubled in size as additional units joined it enroute. The total number of vehicles reached 166. The larger convoy from Phan Rang totaled 248 vehicles, travelled 110 miles, and took a day and a half to reach the forward area base camp. To retain secrecy, the main convoy rendezvoused at Duc My with a 1st Logistical Command convoy from Cam Ranh Bay, and the men and supplies arrived at Khanh Duong together. The airlift from Phan Rang involved forty-two sorties by C-130 aircraft.

On 30 March, the 2-327th, began Operation SUMMERALL with an airmobile assault northeast of Khanh Duong as a diversion, covering the brigade's primary intent to move upon the Buon Mi Ga area. Three days later, the 1-327th and 2-502d launched operations in the latter area. Operation SUMMERALL was much like Operation FARRAGUT: continual patrolling producing little contact with the enemy. On 29 April, the operation was concluded.

OPERATION MALHEUR

From 29 April to 1 May, the 1st Brigade was in a "stand-down" status at Khang Dong. In early May, the brigade began movement to Quang Ngai Province on the coast in I Corps area, where it was placed under the operational control of Task Force OREGON.

Task Force OREGON came into existence in response to the overall military situation in South Vietnam in early 1967. While the 1st Brigade had engaged in operations in the coastal provinces of II Corps, the major USMACV effort had been to relieve enemy pressure against Saigon to the south in III Corps. Operation CEDAR FALLS and Operation JUNCTION CITY were developed north of Saigon against well-developed enemy complexes. Operation JUNCTION CITY, lasting from 22 February to 14 May, involved twenty-two U. S. and four ARVN battalions, the largest allied effort of the war to that time, and resulted in over 2,000 enemy dead.⁴⁰ As USMACV attempted to consolidate these advances in the III Corps area, the enemy began exerting increasing pressure in Quang Ngai and Quang Tin provinces in the I Corps area to the north. A major reaction force was needed in the north, but USMACV could not spare a division from operations in the II and III Corps areas. Contingency plans had been prepared, however, resulting in the activation of Task Force OREGON. This task force was assembled by creating a provisional headquarters out of I Field Force assets, borrowing division support troops from various U. S. Army units, and bringing together three separate brigades: the 196th Light Infantry Brigade from the II Corps area, and the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, also deployed in the II Corps area. The arrival of Task Force OREGON in I Corps in April 1967 permitted the Marines in Quang Ngai to move units further north to reinforce the DMZ vicinity and hastened the northward extension of pacification efforts by the 1st Cavalry Division in the coastal area of Binh Dinh Province, leading to the opening of Highway 1 to Da Nang.⁴¹

The first mission given to the 1st Brigade upon attachment to Task Force OREGON (in May 1967), was to find and destroy VC/NVA forces, and to neutralize VC/NVA base camps in the areas west and northwest of Duc Pho in Quang Ngai Province, beginning 11 May.

The first phase of the operation began with air assaults by the 1-327th and 2-502d west of the base area followed a day later by an air assault by the 2-327th. Most of May was spent in operations against the 2d VC Regiment in this area. It was during the early portion of this phase of the operation that the 1st Brigade was awarded its second Congressional Medal of Honor. SP4 Dale E. Wayrynen of B Company, 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry was assisting in the evacuation of wounded personnel from an earlier conflict when his platoon stumbled upon a fortified enemy bunker. A violent firefight erupted in which the point man was wounded. Specialist Wayrynen rushed to his aid and brought him back to safety. Suddenly, an enemy hand grenade was dropped among the men of his squad. Wayrynen shouted a warning to his fellow soldiers and

smothered the deadly blast with his body. His courageous act was credited with having saved the lives of his platoon leader and fellow squad members. When intelligence indicated that remnants of the 2d VC Regiment were moving northwest in an attempt to evade the brigade, the three maneuver battalions were redeployed in early June in order to entrap the fleeing enemy.

On 8-9 June, the 2-327th and the 2-502d conducted assaults west of the Song Be Valley. The number of enemy contacts were initially high but declined over a period of days. Intelligence indicated that the enemy was withdrawing from the area. At the request of Province officials, the 1st Brigade turned its attention to evacuation of the civilian population from the Song Tra Can and Song Be Valleys, rich rice-growing areas from which the VC had been extracting food and taxes for many years. The valley clearing operation lasted from 15-22 June, during which time civilian refugees were evacuated to Nghai Hanh. During the course of the valley sweep, the 1-327th developed contact with what was believed to be elements of the 1st VC Regiment on the high ground north of the mouth of the Song Tra Can Valley. In addition, elements of the 2d VC Regiment were suspected to be in the vicinity of the Song Be Valley. On 25 June, the 1-327th launched assaults against the former enemy position and the 2-327th against the latter. The 2-502d assisted the 2-327th. After a fruitless search for the 1st VC Regiment to the north, the 1-327th moved southwest on 29 June to aid the other two battalions.

On 3 July, the 1-327th was removed from the search to conduct Operation LAKE. This operation, directed by Task Force OREGON, consisted of providing road security for engineer units working on Route 1 from Dien Truong to Sa Huynh. This assignment lasted until 12 July. Meanwhile, the other two battalions aggressively sought to fix and destroy the 2d VC Regiment. The 1-327th rejoined the effort on 14 July. The operation continued until 2 August, as significant enemy contacts declined.

Over the three month period of Operation MALHEUR, the enemy exhibited a weakening resolve to engage the brigade. Early in the operation the brigade made contacts with company and battalion sized enemy units, which often stood and fought. Over a period of time however, the size of enemy units engaged became smaller, until only two to five man parties were being encountered.

Overall, the operation had been successful in making contact with the enemy. Over 800 enemy were confirmed dead during the course of the operation; nearly 300 weapons had been collected and 133 tons of salt and 260 tons of rice confiscated. The 1st Brigade lost 81 dead and 594 wounded. Because of the sustained length of Operation MALHEUR, the men of the 1st Brigade were increasingly threatened by general loss of resistance to malaria, fevers, and fatigue, particularly since much of their activity took place in the low valley floors which were or had been inhabited by the local population and their animals.

40 It is worth noting that on 22 February, elements of the 173d Airborne Brigade initiated Operation JUNCTION CITY ALTERNATE in the first mass combat parachute jump of the Vietnam War. This was a bitter pill for the proud soldiers of the 1st Brigade for they had originally been earmarked to make this parachute jump, but were precluded from participation because they were already committed to ground operations elsewhere.

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The 1-25th conducted search and destroy operations in the area south of the base area. The 1-25th conducted search and destroy operations in the area south of the base area. The 1-25th conducted search and destroy operations in the area south of the base area.

The area of operations was steep and heavily vegetated. These conditions coupled with temperatures ranging at times above 100° F., slowed movement in the area of operations considerably. The operation, an interim assignment, lasted only eleven days and was characterized by sharp, small-unit clashes. Heavy units were encountered in places of earlier configurations, which often demanded further completion for short periods of time, especially to allow escape from the area and eventual, eventually, escape routes were effectively blocked by weapons sniper fire. The area was that after said to evacuate base complex before maneuver elements could reach the base line.

The nature of unit activity during Operation HOOD RIVER was generally typical of much of the 1st Brigade's combat experience in Vietnam, and some examples of the actions of the 1-25th during this operation are illustrative of the way of the brigade during its stay. In carrying out its part of the brigade scheme of maneuver, the 1-25th based its effort upon intelligence derived from their officers and the order of battle section of the 5th ARVN Division. Most of this intelligence was dependent upon reports of agents operating both overt and covert collection networks within the Vietnamese population. The battalion discovered these reports to be only 50 percent reliable. Urban suggested that at least locations were later verified to be one-half to one mile off. Although intelligence indicated that elements of the 1st VC Regiment or the 5th ARVN Division were in the area, neither battalion or brigade operations as a whole produced any indication of the presence of main force units. First operations during Operation HOOD RIVER were, without exception, from local force units.

The 1-25th opened its part in the operation on 2 August with its assault on the assigned area of operations, code named VENTURE. Upon completion of the combat assault, each element began search and destroy operations in its

OPERATION HOOD RIVER

Operation HOOD RIVER was initiated immediately upon the completion of Operation MALHEUR, with the objective of continuing pressure against the enemy in Quang Ngai Province. Operation HOOD RIVER consisted of a four pronged allied attack converging on an enemy base area, believed to be the location of elements of the 1st VC Regiment of the 2d NVA Division. Beginning on 2 August, two battalions of the 2d ARVN Division conducted an overland assault from Quang Ngai; two battalions of ARVN Rangers air assaulted the high ground south of the suspected enemy base area; two battalions of the ROK Marine Brigade conducted an overland assault from the northwest; and the 2-327th and the 2-502d of the 1st Brigade air assaulted the high ground west of the base area. The 1-327th conducted search and destroy operations six miles south of the suspected enemy base area, concentrating upon likely avenues of enemy egress from it.

Terrain in the area was steep and heavily vegetated. These conditions, coupled with temperatures ranging at times above 100° F., slowed movement in the area of operations considerably. The operation, an interim assignment, lasted only eleven days and was characterized by sharp, small-unit clashes. Enemy units were encountered in platoon or smaller configurations, which often defended bunker complexes for short periods of time, apparently to allow evacuation of equipment and personnel. Frequently, brigade troops were effectively blocked by accurate sniper fire. The enemy was thus often able to evacuate base complexes before maneuver elements could flank the hostile fire.

The nature of unit activity during Operation HOOD RIVER was generally typical of much of the 1st Brigade's combat experience in Vietnam, and some examples of the actions of the 2-327th during this operation are illustrative of the work of the brigade during its odyssey. In carrying out its part of the brigade scheme of maneuver, the 2-327th based its effort upon intelligence derived from civilian officials and the order of battle section of the 2d ARVN Division. Most of this intelligence was dependent upon reports of agents operating both overt and covert collection networks within the Vietnamese population. The battalion discovered these reports to be only 50 percent reliable. Often supposed plots of unit locations were later verified to be one-half to one mile off. Although intelligence indicated that elements of the 1st VC Regiment of the 2d NVA Division were in the area, neither battalion or brigade operations as a whole produced any indication of the presence of main force units. Prisoners taken during Operation HOOD RIVER were, without exception, from local force units.

The 2-327th opened its part in the operation on 2 August with air assaults into its assigned area of operations, code named VEGHEL. Upon completion of the combat assault, each element began search and destroy operations in its

assigned zone. Sporadic contact with the enemy occurred throughout the day. Company A made the initial contact just before noon, engaging three Viet Cong, killing one. Two hours later, 200 meters west of the first contact, Company A engaged an estimated enemy platoon lodged in dug-in positions. Company A sustained two killed and five wounded before the enemy broke contact. Although the company's advance had been covered by artillery and air strikes, nothing could be found in the abandoned position but blood trails, discarded equipment, and documents.

Similar activity occurred over the next ten days. Eleven prisoners were taken, twenty-three enemy killed, and eighteen weapons captured. The 2-327th lost two killed and fifteen wounded, only three of whom had to be medically evacuated. Overall, the 1st Brigade killed sixty-three enemy in the brief operation, which was terminated on 13 August. The brigade suffered two killed and twenty wounded, most of whom were members of the 2-327th.

The following day (12 August), Company A of the 2-327th air assault
into the 2-327th area. All three maneuver battalions continued to make
sporadic contact with the enemy throughout the operation, which ended on 12
August. A tactical pattern had been reported; initial heavy contact with
the enemy followed by days of diminishing contact with local force units as
the main enemy units split into small groups, and moved away from the
battle area of operations. 815 enemy were killed, 133 weapons were captured,
and 55.2 tons of rice was confiscated. With the conclusion of operations
operations by helicopter to Chu Lai and then transported by C-119's to Duc
the for a standdown.

OPERATION BENTON

Having had little success in engaging enemy main force units in Quang Ngai Province, Task Force OREGON next ordered the 1st Brigade northward to Quang Tin Province with the mission of finding, fixing, and destroying VC/NVA forces, believed to be the 21st NVA Regiment of the 2d NVA Division, the 70th Battalion of the 1st VC Regiment, supporting units, and local security forces. Although not engaging the enemy directly, the 1st Brigade's pressure was forcing the break-up of main force enemy units, thereby blunting their offensive potential.

Operation BENTON began on the morning of 13 August with an air assault by the 2-327th, followed that afternoon by a 2-502d air assault. The 1-327th was designated as the brigade immediate reaction force. Neither the 2-327th nor the 2-502d encountered hostile fire on their landing zones, but contacts with the enemy began shortly after units moved away from the landing areas. The 2-327th tactical command post area was set ablaze by a smoke grenade, and by mid-afternoon, the blaze had roared out of control and had destroyed the artillery battery supporting the battalion. At approximately the same time, Company B of the 2-502d had pulled back to its landing zone after its platoons encountered stiff resistance. During the night, the third platoon's position was attacked by an estimated company. The 2-327th also received night attacks. There was little action on 14 August.

The following day (15 August), Company A of the 1-327th air assaulted into the 2-327th area. All three maneuver battalions continued to make sporadic contact with the enemy throughout the operation, which ended on 29 August. A familiar pattern had been repeated: initial heavy contact with the enemy followed by days of diminishing contact with local force units as the main enemy units split into small groups, and moved away from the brigade's area of operations. 676 enemy were killed, 138 weapons were captured, and 52.5 tons of rice was confiscated. With the conclusion of Operation BENTON, the 1st Brigade's fighting units were extracted from the area of operations by helicopter to Chu Lai and then transported by C-310's to Duc Pho for a standdown.

OPERATION STRIKE FORCE AND OPERATION COOK

The early days of September were rest days for most of the 1st Brigade, with two exceptions. The 2-502d participated in Operation STRIKE FORCE, a raid on two enemy prisoner-of-war camps. Although both camps had been moved about two weeks prior to the raid, sixteen Vietnamese were liberated, and the camps were destroyed.

Meanwhile, the 1-327th participated in Operation COOK from 4 to 9 September in the northern portion of the Song Be River Valley. This brief mission resulted in six enemy killed and the capture of two weapons.

OPERATION WHEELER

Operation WHEELER, the most significant operation in which the 1st Brigade participated in 1967 and the largest in which it was involved during its tenure as a separate brigade in Vietnam came next. Task Force OREGON, now redesignated as the 23d Infantry Division (Americal), directed the 1st Brigade to conduct search and destroy operations northwest of Tam Ky in Quang Tin Province, beginning 11 September.

The area of operations, thought to be a base for the 2d NVA Division, was dominated by rugged mountains, covered with dense tropical jungle. Two major rivers, the Song Chang and Song Traur, traversed the area and provided the enemy with lines of infiltration and supply. These rivers also were an obstacle to U. S. troop movement. The area of operations was bounded by a major valley in the north, serving as a natural boundary between Quang Tin and Quang Nam provinces, and by Highway 1 along the coastal lowlands in the east. The enemy had taken advantage of natural terrain features by constructing numerous bunkers on the lower mountain slopes near supply sources in the valleys. Large open rice paddies provided the hidden enemy with both food and clear fields of fire. The weather also favored the enemy, particularly in the early portion of the operation, when frequent afternoon rain storms hindered observation and forced curtailment of U. S. air activity, including resupply efforts. Enemy attacks frequently coincided with these rains. Temperatures often reached 94 degrees, and 99 per cent humidity and thick mud made overland movement and combat extremely fatiguing activities.

The 2d NVA Division consisted of an estimated 5,000 men. Its major subordinate units were the 3d and 21st NVA Regiments, the 1st VC Regiment, and support units, including engineer, artillery, anti-aircraft, and signal battalions. Other VC forces in the area included the 70th VC Battalion, attached to the Quang Nam Province headquarters; the 72d Local Force Battalion, and seven local force companies. These units also had the support of much of the local population, since some districts in the province had been under Communist control for twenty years.

On 11 September 1967, the 1-327th began the operation with an air assault into multiple landing zones in the southern hills of the area of operations. On the next day, the 2-327th and the 2-502d moved into the northern and western portions of the area. The 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry, under the 1st Brigade's operational control, was reserved to exploit quickly any intelligence gained during the initial stages of the operation. The brigade's maneuver battalions assumed a semi-guerrilla role, using saturation patrolling, ambushes, stay-behind patrols, raids, a large and flexible area of operations, and limited resupply procedures, to elicit contact with the enemy. Contact with the enemy, however, for the first weeks of the operation was light. Intelligence reports

from numerous sources began to indicate that large size enemy forces, including the 2d NVA Division Headquarters, were located some ten miles west of the brigade's initial area of deployment.

On 26 September, Operation WHEELER entered a second phase, as brigade units were redeployed to exploit developing intelligence. Between 27 and 30 September, several significant encounters took place. Meanwhile, enemy activity was noted in the area initially explored by the brigade, and the 23d Infantry Division placed an additional battalion under the 1st Brigade's operational control for use in that area.

On 8 October, Company A, 2-327th, encountered two NVA companies, and in a fierce fight, including hand-to-hand combat, lost seventeen men. These casualties comprised one of the largest single encounter losses suffered by the brigade since arriving in Vietnam. Seven Silver Stars and a Distinguished Service Cross were awarded as a result of this action.

Aided by bad weather, the enemy avoided contact in the western portion of the area and sought to move eastward. On 9 October, the 1st Brigade reoriented its activities to the east on the original area of operations. Simultaneously with reorienting units, the brigade began rotating companies back to the brigade base camp at Chu Lai for standdown.

By 14 October, after thirty-three days of contact under adverse weather conditions, enemy units were contacted. On the following day, SSG Webster Anderson of Battery A, 2d Battalion, 320th Artillery, added his name to the honor roll of 101st Airborne Division Congressional Medal of Honor winners. When his battery's defensive perimeter was breached by an NVA unit, Anderson directed the defense while heroically exposing himself to enemy fire. Seriously wounded by three grenade explosions -- one resulting from his throwing an NVA grenade back at the enemy -- he refused medical aid until his unit's position was secured.

On 22 and 27 October, significant contacts were made with battalion sized enemy units, but lack of contact from 28 October to 4 November indicated that the enemy was attempting to break up into small units and flee the battle area. The 1st Brigade intensified efforts to locate the 2d NVA Division. Intelligence sources estimated the enemy division headquarters to be north of the brigade, and the Americal Division developed a new scheme of maneuver. The 1st Brigade was employed as a blocking force to the east and southwest of the suspected enemy position. A U. S. Marine battalion was stationed as a blocking force to the northwest, and elements of the 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) served to block to the northeast and to attack in that direc-

tion. This phase of the operation produced numerous small unit contacts with the enemy, and one more significant action on 11 November when Company C of the 2-327th encountered an estimated NVA Company.

1st Brigade intelligence estimated that approximately one-third of the 2d NVA Division was either killed or wounded. Confirmed enemy losses amounted to 1,105 killed. By the end of the operation, the "Always First" Brigade had destroyed a battalion base camp, numerous weapons, and almost 200 pounds of marijuana valued at \$100,000. From 23-25 November, the 1st Brigade's three battalions were relieved in place by elements of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade. The 1st Brigade displaced to Tam Ky Airfield and moved by U. S. Air Force C-130 aircraft to the brigade base camp at Phan Rang for a four-day Thanksgiving standdown.

After three grueling months of Operation WHEELER, the men of the 1st Brigade welcomed the brief rest at Phan Rang before embarking upon a new operation. Intelligence sources indicated that a VC regional headquarters, reinforced by the 482d VC Battalion and local VC forces, was operating in Tam Dong and Bien Thuan provinces south of Phan Rang. Operation KLAMATH FALLS, beginning on 2 December, was designed to find and engage this enemy force. The battalions of the 1st Brigade found many evidences of the enemy presence in their assigned sectors, but actual contact with the enemy was light. A truce allowed the men of the brigade to celebrate Christmas in the field. The operation was terminated on 7 January 1968. After one month of operations, the enemy suffered only 156 killed in action.

52 major operations in the four Vietnam tactical zones, 6,000 enemy killed, enough weapons captured to equip eight enemy battalions, 5,000 tons of rice captured, 25,000 Vietnamese given medical treatment, 12,000 refugees relocated, and 4,000 miles of road cleared of enemy control. The men of the brigade had given of their dedication and of their substance. In the annals of war, there was a significant chapter of destruction and skill.

ARRIVAL OF THE 101ST: THE END OF THE ODYSSEY

While the 1st Brigade was engaged in Operation KLAMATH FALLS, the 2d and 3d Brigades of the 101st Airborne Division, plus divisional support units, moved from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to Bien Hoa, Republic of South Vietnam, in Operation Eagle Thrust. It was the largest and longest military airlift ever attempted. On 13 December 1967, the Commanding General of the 101st Airborne Division, Major General O. M. Barsanti, reported to General Westmoreland in elaborate ceremonies at Bien Hoa that the 101st Airborne Division was "ready for combat in Vietnam." In mid-January 1968, the 1st Brigade began operations as part of the full division. The odyssey of the 1st Brigade had ended. The quantitative statistics compiled by the brigade in its two and one-half years as a separate brigade were impressive: 31 tactical deployments, 2,500 miles travelled, 25 major operations in three of the four Vietnamese tactical zones, 6,000 enemy killed, enough weapons captured to equip eight enemy battalions, 2,000 tons of rice captured, 25,000 Vietnamese given medical treatment, 15,000 refugees relocated, and 4,000 miles of road cleared of enemy control. The men of the brigade had given of their dedication and of their substance. In the annals of war, theirs was a significant chapter of determination and skill.