

A Personal Memoir
An Account of the 2d Brigade and 2d Brigade Task Force,
101st Airborne Division
September 1967 through June 1968



by

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This is my story of the 2d Brigade and the 2d Brigade Task Force,
101st Airborne Division, during my period in command
from September 1, 1967, until June 28, 1968

"Ready to Go!"

DRAFT of July 8, 1996

Printing of August 2009

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Reprinted in May 2008 for the 40th Anniversary gathering of 2d Brigaders of those days.

May 22, 2006

~~March 11, 1996~~

This account makes use of memory, of personal letters written at the time, of material from my files, of the contributions of others who participated in these events, and of unit journals and other records on file at the National Archives facility at Suitland, Maryland.

This draft reproduces, with minor changes, the draft that I wrote to share with those members of the 2d Brigade Task Force, 101st Airborne Division, of the period September 1967-June 1968 who gathered at Columbus, Georgia, on 2-3 August 1995, during the 50th Annual Reunion of the 101st Airborne Division Association. I revised it in July 1996 to offer to those members of our brigade task force who assembled at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for the 101st's Week of the Eagles, 8-13 July 1996, and have revised it further.

This draft remains incomplete. The final product, which will be edited for a more general readership and which I expect to complete eventually, will be written primarily for my own benefit and the benefit of my family. This draft therefore includes personal material not necessarily appropriate for an official history (for example, my working into the narrative certain of my award citations).

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A Biographical Note

(When asked for a short biography, I usually provide a text that leads off like this... JHC)

General Cushman was born in China in 1921, enlisted in the Army in 1940, and graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1944, commissioned in the Corps of Engineers. He served with engineer units in the Pacific and Japan and in 1946 joined the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project at Sandia Base, NM. In 1949-50 he earned a Masters degree in Civil Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, thereafter attending the U.S. Army Engineer and Infantry Schools and joining the 22d Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, in Germany where from 1951-54 he was battalion and regimental operations officer and battalion commander. He then attended the Army Command and General Staff College and was for three years on the College faculty.

1958-60, General Cushman was in the Office, Army Chief of Staff; 1961-62 in the Office of the General Counsel, OSD; and 1962-63 a military assistant to the Secretary of the Army. 1963-64 he was Senior Advisor, 21st Infantry Division, Vietnamese Army, in Vietnam's Delta region. 1964-65 he attended the National War College, reporting then to the 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, KY; he was successively Director of Supply, Chief of Staff, and commander of the 2d Brigade. In December 1967, General Cushman led the 2d Brigade to Vietnam where it fought in the Tet 1968 battles around Hue and earned the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm, the RVN equivalent of a Presidential Unit Citation.

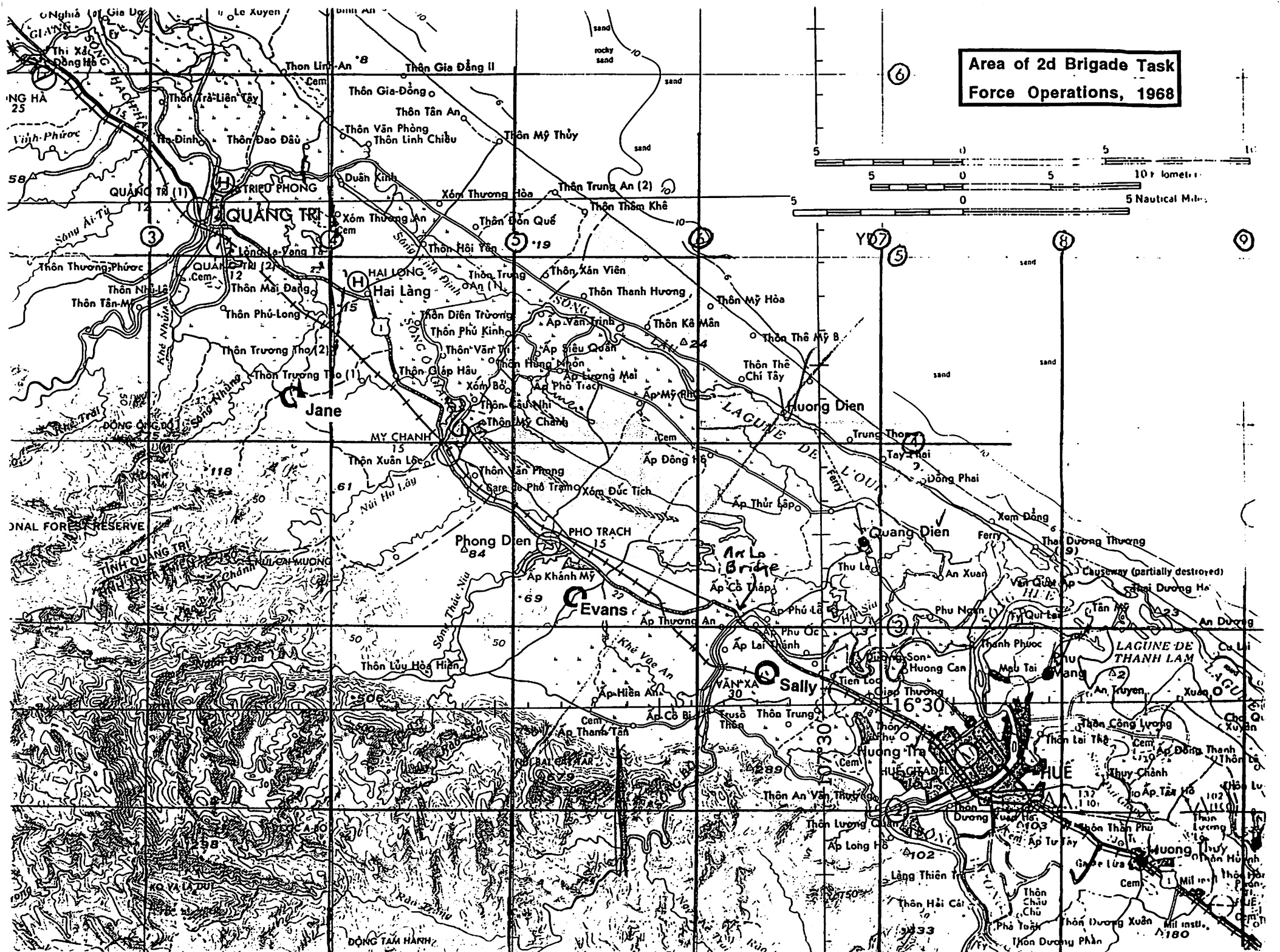
This personal memoir is the story behind that last sentence.

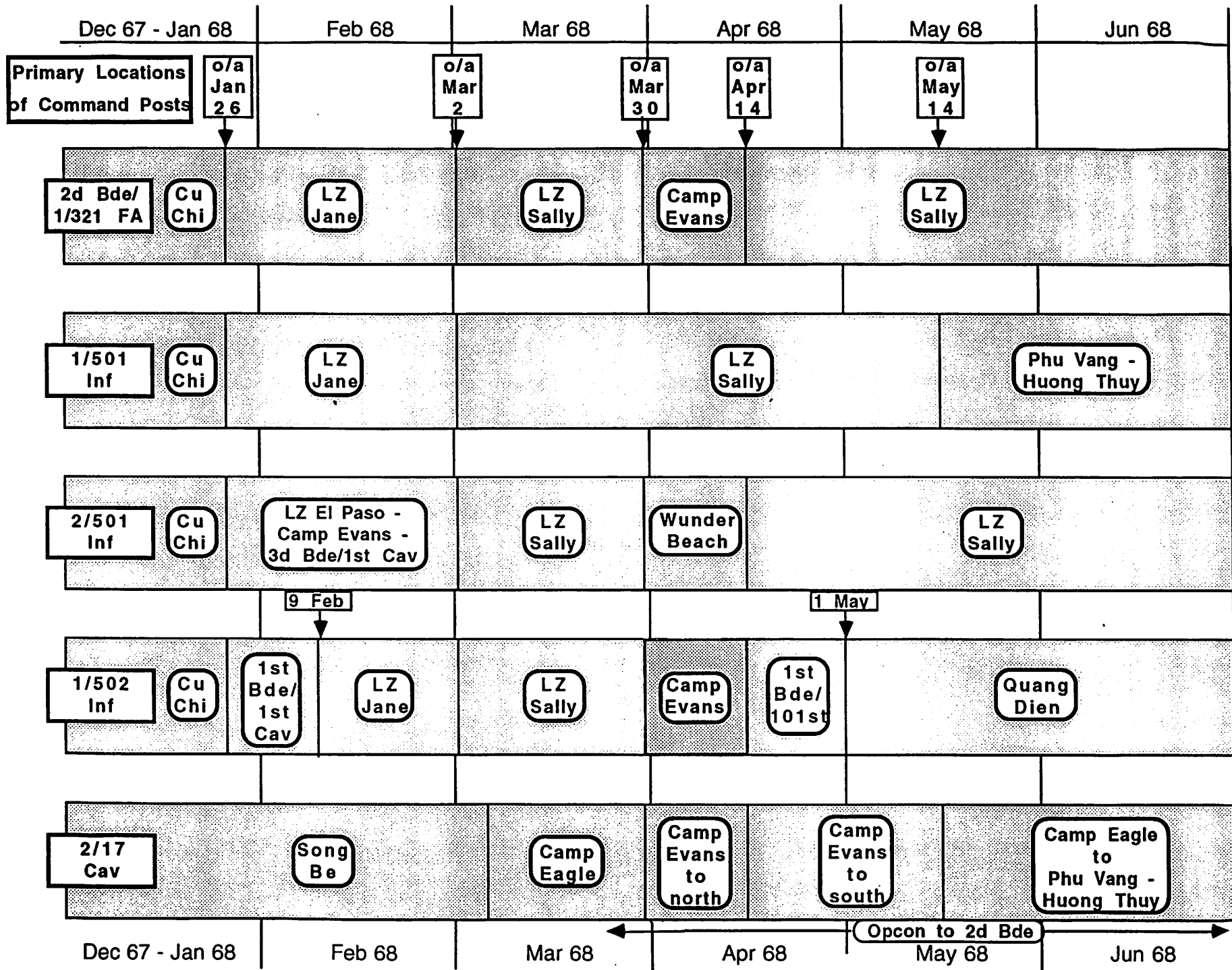
I will add that when I returned in April 1964 from Vietnam duty I gave many briefings that described what the ARVN 21st Infantry Division, the province chiefs in its division area, and US advisors to division and province had been doing in "pacification" -- which was what we called the program we developed locally for taking back the countryside from the Viet Cong. I said that the concept put into practice there should be extended and supported country-wide, but argued that the United States should not place ground forces in the populated countryside, where, unable to tell friend from foe, they could do grave harm; fighting in the countryside was properly a task of Vietnamese troops.

While a National War College student, I recommended that the United States commit air/land forces to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, extending the boundary that divided North Vietnam from the South. I said that this decisive blow should be coupled with an effective US-supported, Vietnamese-conducted, internal pacification effort like that of the 21st Division, that the South Vietnamese Army could be made capable of defeating North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces in-country, and that this two-pronged strategy would bring success in a reasonable time.

However, In mid-1965 the U.S. introduced its ground forces into the countryside, began a half-hearted air campaign aimed at leading Ho Chi Minh to end his external support, and adopted a self-defeating strategy of attrition of the enemy. Two years later I took command of the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. My task then became to train that brigade and lead it to Vietnam where along with other U.S. ground troops it would fight in the countryside.

Area of 2d Brigade Task Force Operations, 1968





Glossary of Selected Terms

abn	airborne
ACD	air cavalry division
ACR	armored cavalry regiment
AH-1	attack helicopter (Cobra), fires rockets, M-79 grenades.
AK-47	widely used, Soviet-developed rifle
AK-54	more modern version of AK-47
AO	area of operations
ARA	aerial rocket artillery (see footnote, page 28, Chapter 3)
ARP	aero rifle platoon, of the 2/17th Cavalry Squadron
arty	artillery
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
ASAP	as soon as possible
attached	pretty much the same as opcon, maybe a little tighter relationship
avn	aviation
AW	automatic weapons
BC	body count (see footnote page 14. Chapter 2)
bde, Bde	brigade (there are two or more battalions in a brigade)
bn, Bn	battalion (there are two or more companies in a battalion)
CA	combat assault, by airmobile troops in helicopters into a landing zone that may be contested
C&C	command and control (usually refers to C&C helicopter)
C-130	USAF transport aircraft
C-ration	a meal for troops in the field that comes in a box, with cans/packets of food inside that can be eaten as is, or heated; not bad, but can get tiresome
CG	commanding general
CH-47	twin-rotor cargo helicopter; can carry internal or sling loads
Chinook	nickname for CH-47
chopped	placed opcon to (e.g., "A Co was chopped to the 1st Battalion")

claymore	antipersonnel mine, consisting of pellets, backed by explosives, that are sprayed into a devastating swath when a soldier detonates the mine
closed	completed its (unit) movement to a certain location
cmd	command
CO	commanding officer
co, Co	company (a company has two or more platoons)
Cobra	AH-1 gunship
Conex	a large steel shipping container that can be loaded on a truck or ship, with a door that can be locked in transit
console	radios and intercom gear mounted on a frame inside a command and control helicopter (see footnote, page 35, Chapter 3)
div, Div	division; a self-contained organization that has, usually, three brigades, a "division artillery" with several artillery battalions, a division support (i.e., logistics) command, an aviation battalion or group, and other separate units, such as combat engineers, signal, cavalry (reconnaissance)
DTOC	division tactical operations center (or command post)
EM	enlisted man
enr	engineer
FASC	forward area signal center (a detachment of the division signal battalion that goes along with a brigade task force)
FO	artillery forward observer (accompanies a rifle company commander and calls in his artillery support)
FOB	forward operating base
frag order	fragmentary order (as distinguished from a complete "operation order")
FSB	fire support base
FSE	forward support element (a detachment of the division support command that goes along with a brigade task force)
G2	intelligence officer on a general (e.g., division commander's) staff
G3	operations officer, likewise
G5	civil affairs officer, likewise
GVN	Government of (the Republic of) Vietnam

H-13/23	two models of light observation helicopter
HHC	headquarters and headquarters company
hook	colloquialism for CH-47, or Chinook
Huey	likewise for UH-1, or Iroquois
indiv wpn	individual weapon
inf	infantry
journal	a daily log of messages sent and received in a headquarters
KHA	killed in hostile action (sometimes used instead of KIA)
KIA	killed in action
LFT	light fire team; a pair of Cobra gunships working together
LMG	light machine gun
LnO	liaison officer
loach	colloquialism for LOH-6 light observation helicopter
log bird	a UH-1 that responds to the logistic needs of troops in the field
LOH-6	light observation helicopter, more modern than H-23
LZ	landing zone for helicopters, usually several of them at a time
M-79	40mm grenade antipersonnel munition, launched by shoulder-fired grenade launcher that is carried usually by a member of rifle squad
maint	maintenance
med	medical, or medium depending on context
medevac	a helicopter that comes to the scene of a wounded soldier and takes him to medical treatment. Called "Dustoff" from their ubiquitous radio call sign.
MG	machine gun
mortar	indirect fire, relatively short range, weapon carried by battalions, sometimes companies, in battle
MP	military police
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NDP	night defensive position
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
O	officer

off	officer
Ontos	A tracked vehicle on which were mounted six 106mm recoilless rifles, a fearsome item of U.S. Marine equipment.
opcon	operational control (see discussion in footnote, page 20, Chapter 3)
opord	operation order
organic	items authorized by TOE and carried by a unit (a rifle company's "organic" weapons would be distinguished from its "supporting" artillery or gunships)
PF	Popular Forces; lightly equipped paramilitary units, platoon-size, at the village level
PK	"poste kilometer" (see footnote, page 54, Chapter 5)
plat	platoon (usually three or four squads)
POW	prisoner of war (also PW)
psyops	psychological (warfare) operations
QL	Vietnamese abbreviation for "highway"
range fan	the coverage of an artillery battery, extending to the limit of its range (a rifle company does not like to get outside of its supporting artillery range fan)
recon	reconnaissance
RF	Regional Forces; more heavily equipped paramilitary units, company size, at the province level
RPG	rocket propelled grenade, fired from rocket launcher, designed for use against armor and personnel
RTO	radio-telephone operator
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
S1	personnel staff officer at battalion and brigade level
S2	intelligence staff officer, same..
S3	operations staff officer, same..
S4	logistics staff officer, same..
sapper	enemy specially trained to penetrate barriers of defensive positions
satchel charge	demolitions carried by a sapper
SA	small arms (usually connotes rifles)

SeaBee	member of a U.S. Navy construction battalion (CB)
SGM	sergeant major
sgt	sergeant
sig	signal
SKS	rifle of Warsaw Pact origin
slice	that part of a division, such as its direct support artillery battalion and engineer company, that goes with a brigade when it becomes a brigade task force
slicks	troop transport UH-1s, so called because their sides are "slick" (unarmed)
sortie	one flight by one aircraft
spt	support
tac CP	tactical CP; a small command post that is in the field with the troops
TF	task force
TOC	tactical operations center; the main command post, usually rearward
TOE	table of organization and equipment; the document that prescribes the authorized personnel and materiel items of a unit, in great detail
trains	the logistics echelon of a battalion or brigade
troop	the cavalry unit equivalent of a company
UH-1	utility helicopter (also Iroquois)
VC	Viet Cong; indigenous Vietnamese communist
WHA	wounded in hostile action; sometimes used instead of WIA
WIA	wounded in action

Chapter 1. Fort Campbell

In a change of command ceremony on the Fort Campbell, Kentucky, troop line on September 1, 1967, I took command of the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, accepting the brigade colors from Colonel Douglas Mitchell who had been its commander for two years. I had been at Fort Campbell since July 1965, serving for two months as deputy chief of staff for garrison matters, then for nine months as Director of Supply, an installation billet, and for a little more than a year as Chief of Staff of the 101st Airborne Division and Fort Campbell. Since July 1, 1967, the division and post had been commanded by Major General Olinto M. Barsanti, who had replaced Major General Ben Sternberg.

General Barsanti, a mission-oriented hard driver with very high standards,¹ arrived with the mission to prepare the 101st Airborne Division, minus its 1st Brigade Task Force which had been there for two years, for movement within a few months to Vietnam. Soon after his arrival General Barsanti began to separate the then-combined division and post staffs. In mid-August I turned over my separated duties to Colonel William P. Tallon, the new division Chief of Staff, and to Colonel Burch, new post Chief of Staff. I then moved my family to Lexington, Massachusetts, returning to take command of the brigade. By this time the 101st had been alerted for late January air movement to Vietnam, soon to be changed to a mid-December departure.

My command consisted of the brigade headquarters and headquarters company and three airborne infantry battalions -- the 1st and 2d Battalions, 501st Infantry, and the 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry, each consisting of three (soon to be four) rifle companies, a combat support company, and a headquarters and headquarters company. In due time I would be responsible for the 2d Brigade Task Force, which included the 1st Battalion, 321st Artillery, B Company of the 326 Engineer Battalion and other elements of the brigade "slice."

Everything would depend on my battalion commanders, and here I was fortunate in having Lieutenant Colonels Joseph L. (Pete) Piotrkowski, (1/501), Richard J. (Dick) Tallman (2/501), and Bertram J. (Jack) Bishop (1/502), of whom Tallman and Bishop were new. Lt. Col. Earl L. Keesling was brigade executive officer, and Command Sergeant Major A. B. Cannon brigade sergeant major.

¹General Barsanti's demanding standards, ubiquitous presence, piercing comment, and short temper made an immediate impression and engendered among many a certain awe, even trepidation. Captain Jack Justice, of the 2d Brigade S-3 Section, was drop zone safety officer for General Barsanti's first jump at Fort Campbell, out of a helicopter. Justice's primary personal objective was to "make the jump uneventful for the new commander." From the ground and at the determined point in the helicopter's path, he gave the command "Execute" only to see General Barsanti, who was the second jumper to leave the helicopter, begin to drift toward a parking lot surrounded by telephone poles, just off the drop zone. At this point, writes Justice, "the young captain dropped to one knee as he watched his career drift out the window." General Barsanti missed the telephone poles, landed safely in the parking lot, and deemed the event a grand experience, whereupon Captain Justice resumed his military career -- to the benefit of the 2d Brigade.

Our first task was to organize, shipping out non-deployables and gaining fillers and creating in each battalion a fourth rifle company. From the 1/502 unit history:

"The 1/502 Infantry was alerted in early September 1967 for movement to Vietnam. The identification of non-deployable personnel and their shipment to the 82d Airborne Division and to Third Army units at Fort Campbell [was] the first major step. Personnel were considered non-deployable if they were RVN returnees, sole surviving sons, under 18 years of age, pending shipment to OCS, flight training, or USMA, or other more selective criteria.

"[Then] came the task of filling G Series TOE [note: later T Series TOE] vacancies with deployable personnel. The majority of fillers [came] from the 82d Airborne Division [note: also XVIII Corps units] and the 8th Infantry Division.

"Preparation for overseas movement began, including checking ID cards, ID tags, health and dental records, pay records, 201 files, wills, powers of attorney, etc. Soldier qualifications were methodically checked using [the brigade's] "Minit-Wash" system;² at various stations individual records were checked, compared with information furnished by the soldier himself, and then matched with the qualification needed according to his slot on the TOE. Records were then prepared for shipment.

"The first step in the materiel field was to requisition the increased equipment and vehicles authorized under the change from the F Series TOE [note: three rifle companies] to the G Series TOE [four rifle companies]. In October there was another change from G to T Series TOE. This involved turning in equipment and vehicles which this TOE deleted from the G Series TOE. In mid-October the T Series TOE was modified, requiring the requisitioning of added vehicles and equipment. Later in October the T Series TOE had another modification that deleted some of the vehicles and equipment required by the first modification."

I had decided that "Ready to Go" would be the motto for our brigade and was determined that we would live up to that motto in every respect. I was fortunate in having been assigned to Fort Campbell for two years, in duties that gave me a better than usual understanding of personnel and supply and maintenance administration down through the unit level. I had arrived at a conviction that unit excellence in these fields was essential to achieving excellence in training and operations.

From my first day in command I insisted on such excellence, directed its achievement, and inspected for it. I was also fortunate, in addition to Lt. Col. Earl Keesling and Command Sergeant Major Cannon, in having very competent brigade staff officers for these administrative functions to assist me: Major Jerry P. Allen, S1, and Captain James

²"Minit-Wash" was a one-time process of straightening out individual and unit personnel records that I had instituted for the division while Chief of Staff.

M. White, S4. Moreover, I soon gained a trained and very competent officer of the Military Intelligence branch as my S2, Major Raymond B. Riggan, Jr.

General Barsanti and I were of one mind in believing in troop discipline and a strong chain of command, and in the supreme value of these and of quality training in saving men's lives in combat. His own slogan was "Bring them back alive."

I said that we would make the chain of command strong by exercising it day and night. For example, no matter how thin the ranks when a company fell into formation and when it moved, I ordered that it would never deviate from its organization by squad and platoon. If one squad had only three men present, and another had eight, we would never "break it off" and even the ranks -- whether out for a run or marching to training. This was an article of faith, aimed at driving home the principle of squad and platoon integrity and the chain of command. A first sergeant would not gather the troops around him to give instructions; he would tell platoon sergeants, who would go through their squad leaders. Squad leaders would inspect, and be accountable for, their squads. And so on.

We devoted September to individual training, including physical training with a run every morning, weapons qualification for every soldier, and an inspection every Saturday. About mid-September we learned that we would deploy by air from Fort Campbell in mid-December. We would not complete our personnel fill until early October, when we would have only ten weeks to go. The last four weeks would be required for two weeks leave for each man, half the brigade at a time. So we would have only six weeks for unit training. This, despite the fact that more than half of my company commanders, several of whom were special forces and armor officers, were brand new to command.

I told my battalion commanders and Major Russell C. Miller, my highly competent brigade S3, that we would use three of those weeks for squad training, two for platoon training, and one for a three or four day field exercise in which we would concurrently conduct company, battalion, and brigade training. I said that each battalion commander would prepare one week of squad training lesson plans, complete with range, ammunition and other requirements, and that battalions would rotate their execution. One week would be exercises in "Squad in Attack," another would be "Squad in Defense," and the third would be "Squad on Patrol." Each battalion could thus have three weeks of superior squad training.

For platoon training, each battalion commander would prepare three days of training for either platoon in attack, or in defense, or on patrol and similarly rotate these; Friday of the second platoon week would be devoted to recovery and preparation for the final week of exercises. We had live fire exercises at both squad and platoon. Battalion reconnaissance platoons were trained separately, and training of the battalion 4.2-inch mortar platoons and company 81-mm mortar sections was centralized in each battalion.

Russ Miller acquired the necessary ranges and training areas, saw to the timely preparation and exchanges of lesson plans, and orchestrated the day-by-day execution of this six weeks of intensive unit training. In their final two weeks before departure each soldier rezeroed his rifle (new M-16s having been issued all around) and had another crack at field target firing. That was all we could get before arrival in country, where an additional month of unit training and acclimatization was visualized before combat.

General Barsanti had ideas of his own on training, one of which was the requirement for a rifleman's (or infantry squad's) "quick reaction course." Developed by the Division G2, Lieutenant Colonel Charlie Beckwith, this required course set up lanes, like jungle trails, for infantrymen to traverse and quickly engage by fire pop-out targets that appeared by surprise.

We distributed a "Vietnam Primer" written by S.L.A. Marshall and an infantry major named David Hackworth, a Korean War veteran who had served in the 101st at Fort Campbell and in its 1st Brigade in Vietnam. I was also able to acquire copies of a highly readable series of studies prepared by the Army's Human Resources Research Office (HUMMRO) branch at Fort Benning on the platoon leader in combat. It dealt with the full range of demands on platoon leaders in Vietnam; I especially remember one on how to cope with sleeplessness. We made this series required reading for each platoon leader and a mandatory text for the battalions' officer schools.

In September I had the opportunity to accompany General Barsanti and his party on a week-long orientation trip to Vietnam, where our host was the 1st Infantry Division. That division had perfected a technique in which at about 1600 daily each battalion in the field would halt operations to prepare a fortified defense position. CH-47 "hooks" would haul in barbed wire, sandbags, and so on so that by nightfall every soldier on the perimeter could complete a foxhole with overhead cover. Although the Big Red One had often defended such positions with considerable enemy body count, the tactic left the night to the enemy who used it to consolidate his hold on the people. General Barsanti and the rest of us vowed that we would not adopt this tactic.

We received first rate troops, officers and men. I saw each officer and many of the senior NCOs. One day Jerry Allen, S1, introduced a tall fine looking officer as 2d Lieutenant Pershing. When asked, young Pershing verified that he was the grandson of General John J. Pershing who had commanded the AEF. I was moved by our connection with his grandfather, whom I had long admired. I assigned Lieutenant Pershing to the 1/502.

In the final few weeks the troop line was a beehive of activity as companies and battalions organized separate loads for air and sea shipment and began packing the vehicles that we would take with us by air. The sea train, due to arrive many weeks after air movement, included Conex containers with less essential items; we would fight on

arrival by air with what we carried by air. (In our sea train I packed a priceless set of briefing charts that I had brought back from my 1963-64 Vietnam tour, where I had been senior advisor to the ARVN 21st Infantry Division; I never saw it again.) Jim White, S4, would be last to leave, remaining for a few days to complete shipment of the sea train and to turn over our barracks and station property to the 6th Infantry Division.³

We called the 1/501 "Geronimo Red" and the 2/501 "Geronimo White;" the 1/502 was "First Strike." At the end of our six weeks of unit training, I assembled the entire brigade in Mann Theater, told them where we now believed we were heading (to Cu Chi base camp near Saigon, home of the 25th Infantry Division), confirmed that we would wear the full-color division patch into combat as the Screaming Eagles always had,⁴ gave the troops a pep talk, ending with "Geronimo Red! Are you Ready to Go?" with "Yeaaaa" the responding shout -- and doing the same for the 2/501 and 1/502 in turn.

Meanwhile Russ Miller and Jim White oversaw the development of loading plans that would fit our personnel, weapons, and most vehicles into C-141 Starlifters for air movement. The brigade would be part of Operation Eagle Thrust, the unprecedented deployment by air of 10,000 troops and 5,000 tons of equipment of the 101st Airborne Division to Vietnam. (20,000 tons would move by sea.) Having departed November 20th, the division advance party, including a contingent from the 2d Brigade, was already in Vietnam. The division air movement would begin December 11th with the departure of the division commander and his party; they would arrive on the 13th, local time, with the Commander in Chief, Military Airlift Command, General Estes, piloting the lead C-141. An arrival ceremony involving General Estes and General Barsanti was scheduled.

Before leaving I acquired from the Gate Three Printers outside Fort Campbell a large quantity of Christmas cards for men of the brigade to send home from Vietnam upon arrival. They showed the brigade colors with the words "Merry Christmas from the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division -- Ready to Go -- On the Scene and On the Job."

Thanksgiving weekend I went home to be with my family, and the next weekend travelled to Charleston, SC, to visit my parents. From letters of our last two weeks to my wife:

"It's cold here. The troops shiver because they have turned in all their really warm clothes and have mostly their sweaters to keep them warm. We are gradually regaining our men as they come back from leave and morning PT runs look bigger by com-

³The delay suited Jim White, S-4, because on November 13, as he reminded me recently, he had become father of twins. Jim also reminded me that the next day I visited his wife, Maureen, in the Fort Campbell hospital and presented her with a "Grand Job Pennant," an award I used to recognize superior performance (I got the name for this award from an admired more senior colleague of an earlier time, George I. Forsythe). Accompanied by a certificate that the recipient could retain, the Grand Job Pennant, to be kept for a week, was a 10 inch high wood flagstaff on a round case, with a pennant at its top showing the brigade colors.

⁴Soon after the first combat troops arrived in Vietnam, and largely because the 1st Cavalry Division had a large yellow shoulder patch with a horse's head on it, the word went out to dye patches so that colors were subdued. The 101st's 1st Brigade did not dye its Screaming Eagle patch.

pany. The pressure is really on as we pack up and make up our aircraft loads. "We are about "Ready to Go" and remaining items will go ahead on schedule. The troops are ready -- more than ready actually. The problem this remaining week will be to keep their high spirits and natural tension under control. The young men like beer and shouting "Geronimo!" and roughhousing. I can't blame them, but we have to keep the lid on to keep them from fighting with 'legs'⁵ and such.

"Each battalion is having its review, and yesterday was 1/502's day. They retired Sergeant Strike Eagle, battalion mascot, to his new home at the Rod and Gun Club, ceremonially. Today the 2/501 has its review and church services. I give each battalion a talk with slides of our new home, which they appreciate. The 6th Infantry Division, which will replace the 101st at Fort Campbell, has its commanders here but they have no men.

"The post has been strangely different. It will be quite a different place without the airborne units. The big Christmas decoration on post headquarters shows the Third Army patch on one side and the Sixth Division six sided red star on the other. No sign of a 101st patch until night before last someone from the division sneaked up on the roof and hung a big division patch over the six pointed star!

"We leave this afternoon. I won't have time today to see anyone to say goodbye -- I've done that already. Time to go to work."

Late on the afternoon of December 13th, aircraft carrying the 2d Brigade began flying out of Campbell Army Airfield.

Twenty years later it was satisfying to read in Sergeant Charles Gadd's book, Line Doggie... "It was snowing lightly... when our C-141 Starlifter ascended from the runway at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. We were a well-trained group--A Company, 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry--an element of Uncle Sam's proud 101st Airborne Division... Most of us were replacements... from every aspect of training that the Army had to offer--military police, armor, artillery, mechanics, clerks, cooks... but three months of intense infantry training had honed us to the sharpness of expensive cutlery."⁶

While making due allowance for pride-based hyperbole on the part of Sergeant Gadd, he had it right. Our limited time to get ready reflected General Westmoreland's urgent need for reinforcements and so we were not fully-trained. But we were good and we felt good about ourselves. Above all, we were disciplined. With one exception, our mortar training (to be discussed in the next chapter), we had used well every hour of the time that had been given us.

⁵Paratroopers refer to non-jumper soldiers as "legs."

⁶Charles Gadd, Line Doggie: Foot Soldier in Vietnam, Presidio Press, Novato CA, 1987. p. 1

Chapter 2. Cu Chi

The Daily S3 Journal at the 2d Brigade command post at Cu Chi logged me in at 1615 December 15th 1967. The brigade colors and I had been met upon landing at Bien Hoa by Earl Keesling, who had very capably commanded our advance party and had things about as ready as could have been wished.

A later entry, at 1745, said that "1-502 [our lead battalion] closed Cu Chi base camp."

From a letter to my wife, 17 December:

"Two days at Cu Chi and it seems like two weeks. Lots to do and lots to be done. We have a fairly good area to settle into, but all battalions have plenty of work. We are concentrating on the basics -- water, lights, mess halls, showers. Very few days of this, then we must begin training again, shaking down our men to their new environment. We have begun to run early each morning before it gets too hot.

"We are about 15 miles NW of Saigon, in a big base of the 25th Infantry Division -- one of dozens of units and thousands of men in this camp. All battalions are about in, and two more days should see the end of the move -- artillery and all. The dry season has been on for a month now, and the place is dusty. And very busy -- helicopters all about."

Cu Chi was the home of the 25th Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Fillmore K. Mearns, and was in the area of responsibility of the Army of Vietnam (ARVN) III Corps, the commander of which also commanded the Vietnamese government's Military Region III and the province chiefs' military forces known as Regional Forces and Popular Forces. The 2d Brigade was not under General Mearns' opcon; except for perimeter defense, we got our orders from the 101st Airborne Division.

The U.S. command in the same area was known as II Field Forces, commanded by Lieutenant General Frederick M. Weyand. The Cu Chi camp had been built smack in the middle of one of the worst areas of VC control in the III Corps area. Indeed it was said that the camp had been built on top of some of the notorious VC tunnels. Our three battalions immediately took over sectors of the Cu Chi perimeter.

Each sector had in place several bands of barbed wire and concertina seeded with Claymore antipersonnel mines that when detonated could sweep the area with devastating small fragments. Spaced about ten meters apart along the perimeter were numbered two-man bunkers with overhead cover. Manned by two riflemen or by a machine gunner and assistant, these positions covered the obstacles with fire. Each bunker had a telephone to the battalion TOC (tactical operations center, or command post). The batta-

lion's mortars were in position to fire on close-in targets when ordered, and artillery batteries plotted deeper concentrations. In many bunkers the troops had a Starlight scope night vision device; this first generation equipment often gave an impression of movement in and beyond the wire where actually there was none.

Nights on the bunker line were rarely quiet. Occasionally the VC would probe the wire, or fire into the perimeter with small arms. Sometimes a bunker team would see shadows with its Starlight scope. The VC would often lob mortars, and occasionally fire 122 mm rockets, into the base camp.

Journal entries, from 2/501¹...

20 Dec, 1505: From Bde: Increase alertness for the period 201800-210700 Dec 67. Requires 4 men per bunker, 2 awake at all times. Sector reaction force on 15 min standby.

21 Dec, 1937: Bunker 46 fired M79 rounds at a person stripped to the waist. Individual turned to left.

25 Dec, 0230 From Bde: There continues to be considerable activity around the perimeter, some of it the result of personnel from the Cu Chi base camp engaging in unauthorized discharge of weapons and flares. Recent activities at bunker 12 may be an enemy penetration. Battalion commanders should be advised of the foregoing and should insure control in their sectors, with particular attention to fire discipline and rules of engagement.

25 Dec, 2159: Col Cushman enroute to bunker line.

Complying with orders we carried out shakedown inspections for unauthorized pyrotechnics and flares, with negative results. For both Christmas and New Year's Day, both sides declared a kind of "truce" or "cease fire." This proved meaningless; our people made no change in readiness, and the enemy continued to probe.

I made a practice of emphasizing sanitation, the mess halls, and other preventive medicine, and I reviewed the sick call data daily. From a letter of December 23d:

"Our troops are doing fine, impressing visitors no end with their ready smiles and high spirits. Less than one man in a hundred is going on sick call, and then mostly for colds brought on by a shift in climate. Major Allen is in the hospital with bronchitis -- a chronic cold in Fort Campbell, plus a long and fatiguing plane ride. He slept twenty hours

¹I copy journal entries exactly as written throughout without regard to their style or grammar, but correcting obvious misspellings and inserting ellipses (...) for words not copied.

straight and is feeling much better. Should be out in a day or two. The Bob Hope show comes the 28th, bringing all activities to a halt. It's nice of them to set this up, but I would rather be training. Troops with time on their hands in this environment get into trouble."

From a later letter:

"The troops enjoyed Bob Hope and his troupe.² He has quite funny lines, but it is disillusioning to see him have to read them from four-foot high prompter cards out there in front of him in the audience, shuffled by one of his assistants on the TV camera stand."

"We have TV here -- taped shows of several weeks back sometimes, and football games a week or so old. The comforts of home are well provided. Cold showers are one of the main unpleasant features of life for the soldier. You would think that in the tropics a warm shower would not be wanted, but it is very welcome."

We soon began our in-country training program. Special schools and training began for mines and booby traps, and so on. The 25th Infantry Division was running an excellent jungle warfare training school; we sent officers and NCOs there. The Cu Chi district advisor briefed our battalion and company commanders on the situation in his district. Company commanders and platoon leaders began helicopter reconns of the area.

On December 21st our platoon leaders and platoon sergeants began accompanying units of the 25th Infantry Division on local operations. The 2d Brigade's first casualty was an officer who had been with a platoon from the 25th Infantry Division.

Our small civil affairs staff began to link up with local authorities. From the brigade journal of December 29th: "Brigade Civil Affairs personnel purchased and delivered 60 kilos whitewash, 10 kilos green enamel, and 6 kilos yellow dye to the village office in Tan Phu Trung. This paint and whitewash is to be used to refinish medical dispensary in Ap Moi II hamlet. Work to begin Monday, labor provided by villagers. Civil Affairs personnel obtained medical supplies for maternity hospital at Son Loc hamlet."

The legendary John Vann was the director of CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development) for the Vietnamese Military Region 3 in which we operated, reporting to General Weyand, the II Field Force commander. Years later he told me that in a commanders meeting at about this time he told General Weyand that something unprecedented had happened in his region: Colonel Cushman, commanding the 101st's 2d Brigade, had actually visited Vann's local province senior advisor and asked what his brigade could do to assist him and the province chief. Remembering my experience as

²The 1/502, out on an operation that day that I describe later, missed the show.

division senior advisor in the Delta in 1963-64, I had thought this the natural thing to do. It was a measure of how skewed was our approach to the Vietnam problem that this was unusual for a brigade commander.

By December 23d, rifle squads were conducting squad technique of fire training with live ammunition in training areas beyond the perimeter. The night of 23-24 December, 2/501 sent out its first ambush patrol; negative results. On December 27th 2/501 conducted platoon live firing exercises in local training areas.

That same day the 1/502 went outside the perimeter for its first operation, and our in-country training suddenly became very realistic. 1/502 suffered, and division wondered about the 2d Brigade. From my 30 December report to General Barsanti:

"This action of the 1-502 Infantry was the battalion's first training operation outside the perimeter of Cu Chi base camp. The action took place in an area of operations around Xon Moi, Bao Cap, and Bao Tron. Inasmuch as this area some 3 kilometers east of the camp had been patrolled by elements of the 25th Infantry Division's 2d Brigade and 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry, for several weeks without significant enemy contact, it was considered to be appropriate for a limited battalion size sweep and night security mission.

"The battalion (minus one company held at base camp as a rapid reaction force), exited Cu Chi camp, moved southeast along a road for about a mile, then moved northeast across country to its planned night position another mile distant. The battalion formation was C Company on the left, A Company on the right, and B Company following, all companies with platoons in column. Necessary support had been arranged including air support on call, a light fire team standing by, artillery fire plans supporting the advance, artillery registered, and Chinook resupply.

"Halfway across country to the planned night position, the battalion command group, following C Company, encountered a booby trap and minefield. Two mines detonated, with no casualties. As the advance continued, A Company's lead platoon, moving in open formation with scouts well forward, came through low thick vegetation to an open field. Two scouts moved forward along the left (north) edge of this field. At 1450, when they were within ten meters of the hedgerow, the two scouts received heavy enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire at close range. One scout was killed instantly and the other wounded.

"An intense fire fight at close range ensued, with A Company bringing two platoons on line and delivering a heavy volume of fire against concealed and well dug in enemy positions. Artillery and air were not brought onto the enemy position because the friendly and enemy lines were too close together. Withdrawal would have left wounded men behind. Instead, the light fire team was called in and at 1545 began strafing the

enemy position. At 1551 one gunship of the light fire team was shot down by a large caliber projectile into its rotor blades. [Note: The two-man crew was killed. JHC]

"The fire fight subsided at approximately 1750, the killed and wounded were recovered, the helicopter was stripped, and all elements closed into the night defensive position by 1900 and dug in for the night. 630 rounds of 105mm artillery were fired during the night, around the defensive perimeter and into areas where the enemy had been encountered during the day.

"The two KIA and 6 of the 8 WIA in this action were from A Company. Four of these were from small arms fire and the remainder from booby traps and grenades. One C Company casualty was from a punji stake and the other by a grenade fragment.

"The following day, 28 December, D Company was lifted into the battalion position. Tunnel clearing teams were employed and an extensive tunnel complex, with bunkers, storage rooms, and a kitchen, was cleared and destroyed. Blood pools were found within these tunnels. Small arms fire was received and returned inside the tunnels by the tunnel clearing teams. Booby traps and mines were destroyed in place, including one antitank mine. Documents were taken. During this day, two additional men were wounded, one by a punji stake, and one by a booby trap.

"Beginning at 1400 the 28th, the battalion was extracted, closing into camp by 1715."³

We took this action very seriously. What had gone wrong?, I wondered. How could we have done better? Clearly the area around Cu Chi was dangerous VC-infested territory, with tunnels a VC specialty. Indeed, on December 23d the 25th Infantry Division had reported that its military police contingent was fired on as it was departing one of the Cu Chi camp's gates, with "one man WIA."

Jack Bishop had been a squad leader in World War II and a platoon leader and company commander in Korea. I trusted him to run a good battalion. I felt the same way about Dick Tallman -- who as a machine-gunner in the 42d Infantry Division in Europe had in

³In the mid-1980s I received this letter:

"Airborne. Hello sir, I am Harry Adams, life #145 [101st Airborne Division Association]. I see that you have a small life member number also...

"What I am writing about is this. I want to thank you for showing us, the common foot soldiers, something of the officer corps that we could be proud of as Americans.

"I was in Co. B, 1/502d Abn Inf. I deployed with the division on Operation Eagle Thrust Dec 12th, 1967.

"While operating around Cu Chi in late Dec. 1967 we had several men killed from Co. A including the commanding officer, first sergeant, and a platoon leader. The bodies were badly burned & blown apart. The usually helpful Dustoff [medevac helicopters] refused to transport them back to Cu Chi.

"The battle continued and then your chopper landed. You stepped out and ordered your personal crew to "take these boys home." You stayed there with us with pistol drawn.

"Sir, that was the finest act I saw by an officer in Vietnam. You gained the respect of the finest men in the world, the common foot soldier. No officer could have done better. H.R. Adams, Sr. All the way!" I remember that event. I did not think what I did was remarkable.

February 1945 earned a battlefield commission and had then resigned to enter West Point with the class of 1949 -- and about Pete Piotrkowski, the youngest of the three battalion commanders, but also a veteran of Europe in World War II and of Korea. And I was entirely confident in their people. So we took the pain of the 1/502's fruitless, casualty-producing contact, and vowed to do better.

Two days later disaster struck again. From the 2/501 operation order of 28 December:

"2/501 Inf moves by foot at 290730 to area one, establishes defensive perimeter and conducts Phase II training... Companies conduct search and destroy operations on order in assigned AOs..."

From a letter of December 31:

"We had an unfortunate accident in 2/501 day before yesterday. A mortar round was incorrectly aimed, through human error, and landed on our own men, killing four and wounding ten. This has been tough to take for the battalion and for all of us. Some fine men were hit."

This was A Company, 2/501. The 4.2 mortar platoon had made a 200 mil error in deflection. Immediate corrective action ensued. Journal entries, from 2/501...

- 31 Dec, 0927: From Bde: Delayed entry: All mortar plat ldrs must be at the Bde S3 at 1500 for a briefing on training to be conducted.
- 31 Dec, 1620: From Bde: All mortar platoon leaders and platoon sgts with no exceptions will met at Bde Conf room at 1900 tonight.
- 1 Jan, 0940 All personnel assigned to mortar plts (81 and 4.2) will be released for tng during the period 2 Jan 68 thru 8 Jan 68, 0700 to 1800... they must be exempt from other details during those hours.
- 5 Jan, 1440: From Bde: By 1500, have the number of personnel who are assigned to your mortar platoons who attended training at Fort Benning. Number assigned, and number who attended training.

Although mortar accidents were common in Vietnam, in retrospect to me it was clear that our mortar training at Fort Campbell had left something to be desired. Mortars are different. They call for zero-defects calculations at the fire direction center and for precise settings on the mortar sights. They call for checks. Their rounds, especially the 4.2, are devastating on impact.

Our time at Fort Campbell was short. I should have pulled together all of the brigade's mortar squads and platoons for at least three weeks training, and would have held at

least a week of refresher training for all mortarmen in the final four weeks before departure. The only special arrangements for our mortar training had been at Fort Benning.

Mortar problems, often caused by bad ammunition, had plagued us from the beginning. On December 23 we had received word on a suspended lot of 81mm mortar ammunition, and we continued to do so. On 10 January, for example, there was another.

January 3-5, the 2/501 conducted its first airmobile operation. Complete with air, gunship, and artillery support, this was a search and destroy operation and tunnel demolition operation into the Filhol woods, a VC-infested area not far from the Cu Chi camp, in which the 2/501 discovered a brand new enemy base camp.

We were now beginning to operate at greater distances from the Cu Chi base camp and to stay out on operations for two or three days at a time. These were what were known as "search and destroy" operations -- with rare enemy contact unless the enemy sought it. The advantage was with the enemy. We used ambushes. But results were few and casualties, while few also, were not outnumbered all that much by "body count"

We began to have changes in company command. On January 5th Captain John C. Speedy III moved from battalion S-2 of the 1/502 to take command of C Company, replacing Captain A.J. Jankovsky, who had been seriously wounded on January 4th. Speedy's successor in the S-2 slot was Captain Frank R. Dimmitt, formerly commanding E Company. 1st Lieutenant James P. Doogan replaced Dimmitt in command.

From a letter home of January 10th:

"I spend hours each day in a helicopter, visiting various places and looking at places we may operate. We have been given many planning missions, and a different one each week it seems. In another week or so our 'training' status will end and we will be on operations.... The US fights its own war over here. So far I have spoken only a few words of 'hello' in Vietnamese."

About this time we had a visit from General Westmoreland; I wrote my wife that "he seemed preoccupied." What happened was that he asked me what our casualties had been so far, and how many enemy we had to our credit -- then frowned when he heard the numbers.

From a letter of January 16th:

"We have a 'mission' now -- still around Cu Chi, but something that is ours... The battalions are doing fine."

This would be Operation Normandy, run by brigade from our Cu Chi command post. The 2d Brigade was no longer in the "in-country orientation and training" phase. On January 16th, a typical entry in the brigade journal reported...

"1-502... engaged five sampans in the Saigon River at 0100 vic [coordinates] -- all were sunk... Enemy losses were 4 VC KIA (BC)⁴ and 6 VC KIA (possible). At 1135, Co B, vicinity [coordinates] engaged ten VC in a tunnel complex with bunkers and overhead cover. Air strikes and artillery were called in. The area was searched resulting in three VC POW. At 1916, Co C engaged twenty VC with automatic weapons vicinity [coordinates]. Air, artillery, and 4.2" mortar fires were directed into the area resulting in six VC KIA (BC). At 2145 the unit, vicinity [coordinates] was subjected to an unknown number of rounds from automatic weapons. Fire was returned with artillery with unknown results. Contact was broken at 2212."

On January 18th, the brigade journal reported the 1/501 conducting search and destroy/clearing operations in its area of operations, with various sightings of VC, some VC fire received, but no known results. That day the 2/501, coordinating with the district chief and in company with two platoons of regional forces and two of popular forces, and the intelligence platoon from Phu Hoa province, conducted a cordon and operation at Tan Hoa village not far from Cu Chi. Intended to be a night (early morning) surprise, the operation produced "23 suspects detained and reported to province." The 1/502 was destroying tunnel complexes with demolitions, tear gas, tactical air, and artillery.

Early on January 18th division informed us of a proposed operation in "AO Attala," in and around Minh Thanh in the Michelin rubber plantation, near Minh Thanh to the north, to work with the 5th ARVN Division on riverine operations. The brigade journal of the 18th closed with this entry: "All TF elements were informed that Operation Normandy terminates on 19 Jan. Units will return to base camp and prepare for future operations." All brigade elements having closed Cu Chi, on the evening of the 19th the enemy attacked that base camp with 75mm recoilless rifle fire, killing three men of the 1/502 with a direct hit on a bunker and wounding five. Including those casualties, the short Operation Normandy had resulted in 3 KHA and 8 WHA and had netted 19 VC KIA (BC) and 14 (possible), plus 2 confirmed POW, 2 AK-47s, and 1 US carbine captured.

Using the 20th for preparation, on January 21st the 2d Brigade Task Force departed Cu Chi, moving by ground convoy and helicopter lift into the Attala area of operations "to conduct search and destroy operations, operating with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regi-

⁴The initials (BC) stand for "body count." Earlier in the Vietnam War, when unit claims of casualties suffered by the enemy were often viewed as exaggerated, the U.S. chain of command insisted that before casualties could be reported the enemy bodies must be seen and counted and, this having been done, that "(BC)" be added to the report. Before long "body count" became a measure of a unit's success, especially when compared with the casualties suffered by the American unit. In time, "body count" became a measure of the success of the entire Vietnam effort. Although adopted by authorities as high as the Secretary of Defense, it was an unsatisfactory measure.

ment in the area of operations of the US 1st Infantry Division, to locate and destroy the 165th Viet Cong regiment. Brigade Admin Order 1-68, prepared by Major White, S4, spelled out the movement details. The 12th Aviation Group provided 75 C-H 47 sorties, and the ground movement took place in four serials. At 0818 that morning I left Cu Chi by helicopter with a command group for a meeting at the command post of the 2/2d Infantry (Mech) battalion where with General Clay and some of the division staff we coordinated operations for Operation Casey that would begin the next day.

Operation Casey called for the 11th ACR and the 2d Brigade, cross-reinforced, to operate together in and near the VC-infested Michelin rubber plantation under the control of the 101st Airborne Division in a combined mechanized/airmobile infantry operation. The 11th ACR placed its 2d squadron under the 2d Brigade, and the 2d Brigade placed the 1/501st under the 11th ACR.

We were now operating, and for the rest of this history would continue to operate, as the 2d Brigade Task Force, which at this period in time was officially composed of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Brigade, and, usually, the following units:

1-501 Abn Inf Bn	2d FASC Plat, 501st Sig Bn
2-501 Abn Inf Bn	2d Plat, 101st MP Co
1-502 Abn Inf Bn	Team, 101st MI Co
1-321 Abn Arty Bn	2d Platoon, 265 Radio Research Co
A Btry, 1-11 Arty Bn	34th Photo Interpretation Team
C Co, 326 Engr Bn	Support Units, 101st Div Spt Cmd,
B Co, 326 Med Bn	incl 2d Plat, A Co, 801st Maint Co

The 2d Brigade Task Force closed into assigned locations near Minh Thanh by 1707 the 21st, occupied and defended its assembly areas, and prepared for operations. The brigade command post was at the village of Chon Thanh. The 1/501 had only its A Company in the area, already chopped to the 11th ACR; the remainder of the battalion would helilift into the area directly from Cu Chi the next day, January 22d.

A letter home of January 25th summarized what then happened:

"We have had four hectic days beating the bushes up-country, vicinity of An Loc, with no significant result but with lots of good experience. We came back yesterday and today are preparing to go much farther north. By the time you receive this we will be in the vicinity of Hue... working under the 1st Cavalry Division. It appears that they need us up there. It should be interesting."

That story began at 0915 on the morning of January 22d, while the 1/501 (-) was about midway in its helilift. Division at that hour ordered us to cancel the 1/501 move and to assemble the entire battalion back at Cu Chi, so that it could move by C-130 aircraft the

next day from the Cu Chi airstrip to "the vicinity of Da Nang" far to the north in the I Corps Tactical Zone of the RVN.

This was not a total surprise; we had known for a few days that General Westmoreland was concerned about an enemy buildup in the far north of the RVN, that he had been considering reinforcing his forces up there, and that our brigade might be involved.⁵ A Battery of the 1/321 and the 1/501 battalion trains moved by motor to Cu Chi, closing that evening. At 1700 on that very day, the 22d, a 40-man advance party of the 1/501 with three quarter-ton trucks and trailers departed by air.

Operation Casey continued nonetheless on the 23d. In the 2d Brigade sector, TF 1-502 attacked on the left with a troop of 2-11 ACR, TF 2-11 with two of our companies was in the center, and TF 2-501 was on the right, also with a cavalry troop. All units crossed the line of departure at 1100. Supported by 1/321 Artillery, units made sporadic contact, swept through previously occupied VC base camps in their assigned zones, and took no casualties. The night of 22-23 all units established ambushes.

The 2d Brigade journal, 23 January, datelined Chon Thanh, laconically reported that...

"Major activity this date centered around a change in mission of the Brigade TF. The Div CG arrived at 1000 hours to confer with CO 11 ACR, CO 2d Bde, and CO 1-321 Arty concerning Operation Casey and redeploying the 2d Brigade to Phu Bai, RVN, where it will come under the operational control of the 1st Air Cavalry Division...

"Essentially the Brigade deploys 1-501 by air on 23 Jan [this date] from Cu Chi; 1-321 moves to Lai Khe by air and road on 24 Jan and stages to Phu Bai from that location on 25 Jan; 2-501 moves to Cu Chi by road and air the afternoon of 24 Jan, re-equips and moves by air to Phu Bai on 25 Jan; HHC (-) conducts motor march from Chon Thanh to Cu Chi at 241000 Jan and prepares for movement to Phu Bai on 26 Jan. 1-502 continues current operations in assigned sector and redeploys to Cu Chi on 25 Jan for further redeployment to Phu Bai on 26 Jan. 2-11 ACR reverts to opcon 11th ACR, which assumes responsibility of the northern sector of AO Attala."

That journal for 23 Jan relates that "1-501 Inf and A 1-321 departed Cu Chi, with all essential fighting equipment, by C-130 aircraft for Phu Bai, RVN [no coordinates given but its airfield was located just south of Hue, in the next-to-northernmost province of South Vietnam] as the initial element of the Brigade which will deploy to the area during

⁵At our level we had not heard that on January 15th General Creighton W. Abrams, Westmoreland's deputy commander, had ordered Major General John J. Tolson III, commanding the 1st Air Cavalry Division, to move his division base and the entire division (minus one brigade task force) from An Khe in Vietnam's central highlands, where it had been since arriving in-country in mid-1965, 200 miles north to the I Corp Tactical Zone, north of Hue. MACV had never made a division-size move of this magnitude. The Cav's 2d Brigade task force would remain in the south for a while, and our brigade task force would be the Cav's third brigade.

the period 22-26 Jan 68. A total of 21 C-130 sorties lifted 806 personnel, 51 vehicles, and 7 equipment pallets. The first chalk⁶ departed 0835 hours, last chalk departed 1916 hours, rear detachment from 1-321 Arty and communications for Bde HHC will depart Cu Chi on 24 Jan for Phu Bai."

The summary also reported that "units deployed in AO Attala reported only sporadic contact this date. Task organization and sectors remained unchanged -- TF 1-502 deployed left, TF 2-11 Cav center, and TF 1-501 right.2400. -- Journal closed. Jerome F. Sullivan, SGM."

Sergeant Major Sullivan was our unflappable and indispensable operations sergeant. Russ Miller, Jerry Allen, and Jim White were our equally unflappable and valued S3, S1, and S4. An unsung hero was Earl Keesling, brigade executive officer, who kept things coordinated and moving on track back in brigade rear at Cu Chi. I simply do not know how we could have carried this operation off, orchestrating the departure on short notice of an entire brigade task force from four airfields, without the teamwork and sheer competence displayed by people like these throughout the brigade task force and all its units, from lieutenant colonel down to the last trooper.

The journal for the next day, 24 January, still datelined Chon Than, reported that all plans of the 23d were duly executed without significant incident. C Company, 326 Engineers, travelled to Cu Chi with the Brigade HHC. On the 24th, B/2-501, which had been providing security for the division command post at Bien Hoa, was relieved by C/1-502, which would not go to Phu Bai, yet. The final journal entry for 24 January: "2400. TF 1-501 remains at Phu Bai."

At 0800 on the 25th our CP closed at Chon Thanh and brigade rear assumed control of the brigade task force. An hour later I departed Chon Thanh by helicopter for Lai Khe to visit with the 1/321 Arty, thence to Cu Chi.

At 0733 on the morning of the 26th, with the brigade tactical command post, I left on the first aircraft from Cu Chi. Earl Keesling remained behind to push out the remainder of the brigade task force. The 1st Cavalry Division had decided that the 1/502, our last battalion to depart Cu Chi, would fly directly to Quang Tri where it would be opcon to the Cav's 1st Brigade. The rest of the brigade task force would continue arriving at the Phu Bai airfield, scheduled to complete its move by the 28th. By the evening of the 26th, the bulk of the 2d Brigade brigade task force that was scheduled for Phu Bai had arrived. That night our units would be going into their assigned positions at the airfield or at LZ El Paso, the Cav's base camp. The 1/502d task force would arrive at Quang Tri on the 27th.

⁶The term "chalk" derives from the practice of putting numbers in white chalk on the sides of the aircraft which an airborne unit was to use for an airborne assault, and then identifying members of the unit by "chalk number."

From the 2d Brigade Situation Report of 1500, January 26th, to the Commanding General, 101st Airborne Division:

"2d Bde CO and TAC CP group... arrived Hue-Phu Bai approximately 261000 Jan. CO and party moved to the 1st Air Cav Div CP. CO reported to CG, 1 ACD, at 261130 Jan. 2d Bde forward CP opened at 261200 Jan... [N]o difficulties encountered in the move from Cu Chi to Hue-Phu Bai... J H Cushman, Col, Inf, Commanding."

My letter home of January 25th had ended, "Well, tomorrow the 2d Brigade enters a new phase... Should be real interesting." True enough!

Glad to be out of Cu Chi, we were about to embark on our great adventure in northern I Corps.⁷

⁷How we happened to be selected for the move north I do not know. However it came about, I for one -- and I believe most of the brigade agreed -- was pleased to be leaving Cu Chi.

Chapter 3. LZ Jane; The First Ten Days

The 1st Air Cavalry Division (or 1st ACD, or 1st Air Cav) had been in Vietnam since mid-1965. It had started life at Fort Benning in 1964 as the 11th Air Assault Division, which had been organized from scratch to test the recommendations of the Howse Board. This board had been formed by the Army in 1962, with Secretary of Defense McNamara's encouragement, to determine if major increases in air mobility might produce a qualitative improvement in Army forces operations. The Howse Board, at Fort Bragg, had supervised a test program that used troops of the 82d Airborne Division and other units.

By the spring of 1965, the 11th Air Assault Division tests were essentially complete and the Army was about to disband the 11th Air Assault Division. However, in early 1965 the Johnson administration began seriously considering sending U.S. ground forces to Vietnam to shore up the rapidly deteriorating situation in the Vietnamese countryside. In June 1965, the Army exchanged the colors of the 1st Cavalry Division, which was then stationed in Korea, with the colors of the 2d Infantry Division, which was at Fort Benning. The 2d Infantry Division and the 11th Air Assault Division were then combined to form the new 1st Air Cavalry Division at Fort Benning, and the newly-named 2d Infantry Division took up its life in Korea where it is to this day.

Major General H.W.O. Kinnard, who had commanded the 11th Air Assault Division for more than a year, commanded the 1st Air Cavalry Division in its new configuration. The staff and commanders of the former 11th Air Assault Division were the nucleus of the commanders and staffs of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, which immediately began filling its ranks and preparing to deploy to Vietnam. In mid-July President Johnson announced that he was sending to Vietnam both the 1st ACD and the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division from Fort Campbell. Both contingents arrived in Vietnam in late summer, by sea.

Commanded for another year in Vietnam by General Kinnard, the 1st ACD had by 1968 established an excellent reputation. Uniquely equipped with far more UH-1 Hueys, AH-1 Cobra gunships, and CH-47 "hooks" than any other division (and even with twin-engine Caribou fixed wing aircraft), it had developed air assault operations to perfection and was also highly regarded for its infantry operations (as had been the case in World War II, its "cavalry" battalions were really dismounted cavalry, or infantry). Its "aerial rocket artillery" and "air cavalry squadron" gunships were a unique and powerful feature. It had plentiful two-man LOH-6s, or "loaches." The Cav called its fire bases "landing zones," or "LZs."

The 1st Air Cav, which had left its 2d Brigade down south, was the first Army division to deploy into the area of operations of the III Marine Amphibious Force, the two divisions of which (1st MarDiv and 3d MarDiv) were under the command of Lieutenant General Robert Cushman, USMC. General Abrams had decided that the Cav would take over the large Marine base north of Hue, known as Camp Evans. In the interim, the Cav's division

command post, along with some division support units, was temporarily located in LZ El Paso, which was partly in a graveyard just north of the Phu Bai airfield.

Although the 101st's 1st Brigade had established its own excellent reputation since 1965, we were ourselves new, without a reputation as yet. Late the morning of January 26, Major General John J. Tolson III, division commander, welcomed me in his office. I had lunch at his mess, then a G3 briefing, then got very busy.

The 1st Cav was with our arrival now a three-brigade division. Its 1st Brigade was based out of Quang Tri and its 3d Brigade out of Camp Evans between Hue and Quang Tri. General Tolson had already decided that the 1/502 (actually TF 1/502, with a battery of the 1/321 and other units), which would be our last battalion to arrive from the south, would fly directly into Quang Tri the next day, the 27th, to be opcon¹ to his 1st Brigade, and that the rest of our brigade would assemble at LZ El Paso.

From the 1st Cav's Operations Journal of 26 January:

"2nd Bde, 101st Abn: Bde became opcon 1st Air Cav Division upon closure of Bde CP at LZ El Paso at 1200, and assumed control of 1-501 Abn. 1-501 assisted in security of LZ El Paso with three companies while its D Company air assaulted to [an area outside the perimeter] and conducted operations in that vicinity. 2-501 Abn closed LZ El Paso at 1810, opcon to 2d Bde, 101st Abn."

The 1/501 took over its sector of the perimeter that evening, and the 2/501 went into its positions the afternoon of the 27th.

¹"Opcon" is short for "operational control" and differs from "full command." Opcon connotes that the opcon unit is responsive to the tactical direction of the headquarters to which it is opcon, but does not look to that headquarters for personnel matters (e.g., replacements, promotions, awards) and certain logistic support (e.g., repair parts, replacement weapons or vehicles); those are the responsibility of the commander with "full command" or "full command less opcon." However, "consumable" supplies (rations, ammunition, fuel, fortification materials) are the responsibility of the "opcon" commander. In this situation, Jack Bishop looked to Colonel Donald Rattan, commanding the 1st Brigade, 1st Air Cav Div, for his tactical direction and his consumable supplies. For units not under another headquarters' opcon, the CG, 101st Airborne Division had true "full command," which means "responsible for everything." For me, opcon to the 1st Cav, he had "full command, less opcon," which still meant a lot.

I, as brigade commander, had no logistic resources of my own; the weapons, radios, vehicles ("end items") and replacements for my three scattered battalions came through the 101st Division Support Command (even when we were as far away as LZ Jane), and the consumables came through the supply points of the 1st Cav Div's support command, or through the depots that provided the Cav logistic support. Because the efficiency report of a commander was usually written not by the commander to whom he was opcon but by the commander who exercised full command (or "full command less opcon") a commander who was opcon only could on occasion demonstrate a certain lack of concern for what his "opcon only" commander thought of him. That could be dangerous, inasmuch as the "opcon only" commander was free to give his opinion to the "full command less opcon" commander (but on the other hand the latter often took the side of his own man temporarily removed from his own opcon). The commander with opcon is responsible for the mission accomplishment of the force, through the opcon channel; this gives him great moral authority over all his units, opcon or not. Complicated business, but these matters lie at the heart of military force operations.

The 1st Cav, with its units strung out along highway QL 1 from Hue to Quang Tri, was responsible for the security of that vital route. The Cav had on January 21st initiated Operation Jeb Stuart, which entailed search and destroy operations against VC and NVA forces in the coastal lowlands as well as into the mountains to the west known as enemy Base Area 101. On the 27th A and B Companies of 1/501, using Cav helicopters, each conducted company-size heliborne assaults and extractions in areas near LZ El Paso -- seeking enemy contact in operations of six or seven hours duration.

Meanwhile the C-130s carrying the 2d Brigade Task Force continued to arrive from various bases in the south, being pushed out by Jim White and Captain Birdwell of the S3 Section who were still down there -- and being tracked on arrival at the Phu Bai airfield by Earl Keesling, who organized them for onward movement.

We were entirely dependent on the 1st Cav for helicopter support. I told the 101st that we must at least have the three H-23s that belonged to brigade headquarters company, and that I especially wanted my own C&C ship from the division aviation battalion -- a UH-1 with radio console set that I had used daily while at Cu Chi.

From the 2d Brigade journal of 27 Jan:

- "1545: From Division Avn O: H-23s are enroute and will remain overnight about half-way to your location... Bde Avn O departed for Hue at 0800 today...
- "1620: To 1st Cav: Plans for tomorrow. 2d Bde units will concentrate on establishing defensive positions and readjustment of defense perimeter..
- "1840 From Captain Birdwell. There will be no more acft today -- 25 have been requested for tomorrow -- HHC Bde will be in the last few acft tomorrow.
- "2240: From Bde Rear: Today shipped 4 sorties from 1-502, 21 sorties 1-502 will be sent out on 28 Jan, plus HHC, FSE, Arty trains, 1-501 trains & pallets of 2-501 for a total of 41 sorties from Cu Chi. Also approximately 25 sorties at Tan Son Nhut including HHC rolling stock and other wheel loads. Have shipped to date 21 sorties on 23 Jan and 3 sorties on 24 Jan from Cu Chi, 32 sorties from Lai Khe, plus 43 sorties from Tan Son Nhut, and 34 more from Cu Chi.
- "2325 From G5, 1st ACD: No gravesites are to be disturbed while in LZ El Paso. No VN personnel are allowed in this area by order of the Province Chief.

The brigade task force continued to roll in. Entries from the Jan 28 brigade journal:

- "0945 At 0740 hours, 2 1/4 [ton trucks], 1 3/4 [ton] and 12 pax [passengers] from MPs and Sig arrived. At 0750, 2 3/4 and 6 pax from 501st Sig arrived. At 0900, 1 1/4T and 5 pax from 501st Sig arrived and 1 1/4T and 2 pax from TACP. At

0905, 4 1/4T and pax from HHC arrived. Convoy departed Hue-Phu Bai airfield for El Paso at 0950.

"1145 C/326 Engr: Present strength at this location -- 5 Off/97 EM plus 9 EM attached."

Meanwhile the 1/502, opcon to the 1st Brigade, 1st Air Cav, which already had four dismounted cav squadrons under it, was assigned the mission of "base security" at that brigade's LZs Sharon and Betty near Quang Tri.

While I was busy with my brigade on the 27th and 28th, including visits (in a UH-1 provided by the 1st Cav's 11th Aviation Group) to Phu Bai airfield and to the 1/502, the 1st Cav was deciding how it would reconfigure. The decision: The division CP and its division-base units would move from LZ El Paso to Camp Evans; the Cav's 3d Brigade CP would move ten kilometers south of Evans to LZ Sally, which was itself ten kilometers north of Hue; and our 2d Brigade CP, with one battalion, the 1/501, would relieve the 1st Bde's 1/5 Cav squadron at LZ Jane, near Hai Lang (10 km south of Quang Tri and 15 km north of Evans). The 1/5 Cav would go to the 3d Brigade, 1st ACD, leaving the Cav's 1st Bde at Quang Tri with four battalions, including the 1/502. The 2/501, intended to join us at LZ Jane later, would in the interim be assigned to perimeter security at Camp Evans.

From the 2d Brigade Journal of 29 January:

"1136 To Bde Rear: Need from Captain Birdwell total number of sorties programmed today and tomorrow by unit. Request Major White come forward today. Have Captain Birdwell close out Rear and get up here ASAP.

"1740 The Tet cease fire will be from 291800 - 310600 hrs... Battalions will conduct short range plat-size patrols and establish night ambush patrols. No H & I's will be fired during this period. Firing will be restricted to illumination and defensive fires if fired upon."

And from the journal's summary of that date, the 29th, this kicker:

"At 2053 the Bde received notification that the 1/501 and bde tac CP would move to LZ Jane on 30 January, one day earlier than previously planned." Without this decision, Tet 1968 would have caught us at Camp Evans.

I have found Copy 11, of 64 copies, of the 2d Brigade Frag Order 2, to OpOrd 5-68 (Operation Jeb Stuart), issued at 2300 on that night, January 29th. It is signed by Russ Miller, and is accompanied by Annex E (Route Overlay), with routes, times, and check points for two serials, to fit the 1:250,000 scale map. That frag order is a beauty. Its paragraph 2:

"Mission: TF 2d Bde (-) moves by motor... commencing 300830 Jan to LZ Jane vicinity YD378430), establishes FOB (forward operating base) and prepares to conduct operations in AO to be assigned."

Its paragraph 5b: "Command Group will be airborne during motor march."

I would be flying that day, January 30th, for the first time up north, in my own 101st Airborne Division C&C, console-equipped, UH-1, Eagle 122, with its big Screaming Eagle patch on the front. It had just arrived.

Vietnam conforms to the ancient Chinese calendar, for which in 1968 the first day of the New Year was January 31st. The New Year's celebration is called Tet by the Vietnamese. Tet celebrations began nationwide on New Years Eve, January 30.

Sergeant First Class (Retired) Timothy O'Connor, who was the platoon sergeant of the 2d Platoon, A Company, 1/501st Infantry, writes about the trip north from LZ El Paso on that January 30th:

"We travelled about eight miles north on Highway One when we could see the Imperial City of Hue... The people were starting to celebrate the new year called Tet... Holiday flags were flying and people were jamming the streets... We made it out of Hue and continued our trip north... We could see the mountains and jungle to the west and the South China Sea to the east. Our destination was the village of Hai Lang, about thirty miles north of Hue... We crossed a major bridge over the Song Bo river and continued our trip north. There were numerous villages along the way... Tet banners and the people looked like they were having a good time.

"When we reached Hai Lang we turned left at the crossroads and headed west... for about five miles and came to a large sized hill. The battalion commander passed the word that this area was going to be our LZ and fire support base. The place was called LZ Jane. Each company was assigned a sector of the perimeter. Alfa company was assigned the southern part of the LZ. I called the platoon together and told them that 'Charlie is watching us so let's dig our bunkers deep.'"²

From the brigade journal for 30 January, datelined "Vic Quang Tri":

"1824 To 1st ACD DTOC: Forward CP open at 1824, located at YD377430 [this was LZ Jane].

"1922 To 1st ACD DTOC: All elements serial 1 and serial 2 closed this location by 1922 hrs, no incidents.

²From pages 92-93 of Blood Brothers: Till Death do Us Part, by Timothy O'Connor (Carleton Press, New York, 1988).

"2245 2d Bde LnO (at 1st Cav command post) reports that 2d Bde will receive 5 + 2 helicopters for 31 Jan. To serve as reaction force. The C&C ships will come out of the 5 + 2 helicopters." (Note: "5 + 2" signifies five UH-1 "slicks" and two CH-47 troop lift "hooks." This was a trademark 1st Cav lift package.)

"The 1-501 has the mission of security for LZ Jane [having relieved 1/5 Cav, which had departed]. 2-501 remains at LZ El Paso, with responsibility for security of [1st ACD] units remaining at that location. TF 1-502 remains under the opcon of 1st Bde, 1st ACD [vic QuangTri]. The majority of TF support units are at Hue-Phu Bai airbase under the command of Bde XO -- additional units are still arriving from Cu Chi.

"The Bde TF is deployed along a NW-SE line from vicinity Quang-Tri to Hue-Phu Bai -- a distance of approximately 70 km. Journal closed. Signed: Jerome F. Sullivan."

My trip northwest from Hue by helicopter gave me an opportunity to observe the countryside along Highway 1 (called QL 1 by the Vietnamese), which paralleled the coast of the South China Sea some six to ten miles inland. The lowland was well populated farmland, much of it in rice paddies. The ground rose toward the mountains in the west. An unused rail line followed the general track of the highway. Off to my right as I flew over QL 1 was the famed "Street Without Joy," a secondary road that ran along the coast just this side of the sand dunes and beaches.³

Touching down at LZ Jane at nightfall, I told my helicopter pilot that LZ Jane was too dangerous for Eagle 122 to spend the night there, so he should "go south to a spot where it will be safe overnight -- and come back in the morning."

On the night of 30-31 January the North Vietnamese Army in South Vietnam, together with the Viet Cong in the South which they controlled, opened their 1968 Tet Offensive. It would change the course of the war.

I did not see Eagle 122 for three weeks. When I did it was on the US helipad in Hue City, with RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) and other holes in it, destroyed.

* * * * *

On the night of 30-31 January the combined Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces in South Vietnam with some 100,000 troops launched a coordinated attack

³In the chapter "Street Without Joy," in his 1958 book of the same name, war correspondent Bernard Fall tells of a 1953 battle in which the French used a 30-battalion force of infantry, airborne, armor, and marines, the latter landed over the beach, in an attempt to destroy the Viet-Minh 95th Regiment, whose harrassing actions from bases in the villages along that road had severely hampered operations of the French Army. Most of the 95th Regiment succeeded in slipping out of the planned encirclement. That action took place along the coast due west of Quang Tri. In 1967 Fall was killed in an ambush while accompanying U.S. Marines in an operation along the Street Without Joy.

nationwide. The VC/NVA attacked Saigon, 36 of the Republic of Vietnam's 43 province capitals, 64 of the RVN's 242 district capitals, and an uncounted number of field positions of U.S., South Korean, and RVN forces throughout the countryside. Enemy forces penetrated into the cities of Saigon, Da Nang, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, Kontum, Ban Me Thuot, Dalat, Phan Thiet, Can Tho, and Ben Tre. In the 1st Air Cav's area of operations, the enemy established lodgments in both Quang Tri and Hue -- committing eight battalions of its regular forces to Hue alone, which would take almost four weeks to recapture. For me the Tet offensive began when mortar and RPG fire awakened me a few minutes before 4:00 on the morning of the 31st. I rolled out of my cot and moved swiftly from my tent to the sandbag-protected brigade command post nearby. From the brigade journal:

"0405 1-501: A Co receiving 3 incoming mortar rounds, C Co receiving small arms fire.

"0410: 1-501: E Co reports incoming mortar rounds.

"0412 1-501: D Co reports 4 incoming mortar rounds, 4 WIA, one machine gun position took a hit.

"0415 1-501: Co Co reports 1 enemy KIA.

"0440 1-501: C Co reports 11 enemy KIA, all carrying demolition kits.

"0455 1-501: D Co reports 2 enemy KIA, C Co reports 12 enemy KIA total.

"0540 1-501: D Co estimates having received 20 rounds of RPG-2 fire; A Co estimates 4 rounds of RPG fire; C Co spotted enemy in wire, set off claymores and observed 3 secondary explosions presumably from satchel charges. As a result of these explosions and small arms fire, C Co reports 12 VC KIA and 2 VC WIA POW and D Co reports 2 VC KIA.

"0555 1-501 requests total of 2 medevacs for 5 litters and 2 ambulatory."

Let Charles Gadd, of A Company, tell the story as he remembers it:

"War came calling during our second night at LZ Jane.⁴ I was asleep on the rocky ground just beyond our foxhole (when) explosions and machine-gun bursts erased the silence of the night. The attack had come on the opposite side of the perimeter from us, but we were receiving stray mortar shells... An artificial dawn erupted as artillery and mortar teams rushed to their guns and fired round after round of illumination

⁴Charles Gadd on page 17 of Line Doggie. Gadd, who built his book years later from memories triggered by photos he had taken almost daily, kept no diary. His memory here was off; this was his first night in LZ Jane. He also overstates the casualty figures from this action as "thirty-five dead NVA and thirteen dead GIs."

shells. The pale yellow light from the illumination gave the landscape an eerie glow that would enable us to detect enemy movement among the scattered brush..."

By dawn the fight was over and I went out to look at the perimeter with Pete Piotrkowski. His troops, from the positions that they had built the evening before, had done well. They were now policing up the battlefield, engaging that enemy trying to slip away, patrolling out to 300 meters, finding blood stains, more dead and quantities of ammunition and explosives, and completing the medevac of, now, a total of three litter and three ambulatory; our battalion medics were patching up the remaining wounded, who would soon be back with their units.

This laconic report was the last entry in the 2d Brigade summary for January 31st:

"LZ Jane began receiving mortar & RPG fire at approx 0405H from Vic YD87284211. At 0427, units reported enemy ground activity to their front, enemy tried to penetrate 1-501 perimeter. By 0455, elements reported all quiet. 1-501 elements had 6 friendly WIAs and 14 NVA KIA, 3 NVA POW (med-evaced), 11 indiv wpns captured, a crew served wpn (RPG-2 launcher) and one flare pistol. Negative further activity reported."

From what we heard that morning from our troops still at Cu Chi -- from the 101st at Bien Hoa, from the Cav at Camp Evans, from Earl Keesling and his people at Phu Bai, from reports from the 1/502 and 2/501, and from listening to Armed Forces Radio, Vietnam -- it was clear that the enemy had struck very hard.

The next day, I wrote my first letter home since leaving Cu Chi:

"I'm sitting in my tent, pitched on a hillside about six miles south of Quang Tri, in the most northern coastal region of South Vietnam. We moved up to near Hue on the 26th, then up here day before yesterday... We are pretty much out of touch with what's going on in Vietnam, other than right around here. I gather that the North Vietnamese have mounted a very large and coordinated offensive which has apparently met with much success, although information is sketchy..."

"We are doing all right. It's a mixed-up war, hard to comprehend from the inside, and I expect from the outside also... I have fine troops, who are doing well. We lost four last night to a direct mortar hit on their tent [the 2/501, at LZ El Paso]; it's always a tragic loss when something like that happens... But we also gave a good account of ourselves in an action last night, when the VC attacked one of our battalions to his regret..."

"One remarkable feature of the war is the tenacity and endurance of the enemy, and his evident professional tactical and logistical capacities. He is overcoming great obstacles and waging a very carefully laid out campaign with considerable skill."

"Sacks of mail are at Phu Bai, south of Hue. I am trying to get a chopper to haul the mail to the troops." [Note: I was successful; we got a large load of mail the next day. But it was my last letter home for ten days.]

Adding to our difficulties, the weather got bad -- uncomfortably cold, especially at night, rainy, and fog-ridden. To put the next several days into perspective, I'll quote from a situation report that I sent to General Barsanti on February 7th:

"The NVA Tet offensive, coupled with very bad flying weather (low ceilings primarily) since 1 February, has seriously affected operational and logistic capabilities of the 1st ACD. On the night of 30 January the enemy cut the road from Quang Tri to Camp Evans by blowing culverts in numerous places. Strong forces have been in and around Hue since 30 January. They are well equipped with anti-aircraft weapons. Aircraft flying under the low ceiling near Hue are without exception fired on and frequently hit. Both UH-1s and CH-47s have been shot down. As a result the highway through Hue has been blocked and air movement is severely limited. In addition the Phu Bai airfield has been attacked by mortars almost every day. I have flown at low level to Phu Bai and back, circling Hue to the east, without drawing fire. However, 1st ACD has told us that admin/log ships are not to be flown to Phu Bai until the weather improves.

"The NVA attack on Hue and the blocking of Highway 1 the night of 30-31 January caught the 2d Bde TF with half its planned move from LZ El Paso to LZ Jane completed. [Most of TF 1-501] was at LZ Jane, the 1-502 TF was complete at LZ Sharon/Betty, and the rest of the brigade TF was at LZ El Paso and the Hue-Phu Bai airfield. LZ El Paso was closed 2 February. Since that date the vehicles and trains of Bde TF elements have been at Phu Bai and the 1st ACD has been trying to move the combat elements of the 2-501 Inf by CH-47 from Phu Bai to Camp Evans. Because of poor flying weather, intensive anti-aircraft fire, and low CH-47 availability, the 2-501 has not yet completed its move. Four CH-47 sorties remain at the Hue Phu Bai CH-47 pad.

"The logistical situation at LZ Jane is fairly good now with the road from Quang Tri open. However, the FSA [forward support area] at Quang Tri has been short radio batteries and various types of ammunition and has literally no clothing stocks. Camp Evans ran out of fuel, was very low on ammunition, was feeding entirely C-rations, and was relying on C-130 air drops for emergency resupply until 6 February when the road from Quang Tri was repaired and a supply convoy moved to Camp Evans....The 1st ACD has taken substantial helicopter losses, most recently by mortars the night of 6-7 February at Camp Evans.

"At this time, only 1-501 Inf remains under my operational control..."

A lot of fighting had taken place in the days from February 1 to the time of this report. In due time the world would see that with his stunning Tet Offensive the enemy had struck a

psychological blow that would be the turning point of the war. But now his main force units, in sizeable numbers, were out in the countryside and open to attack. Fighting would be heavy. We would take casualties. But the enemy would suffer grievously.

For the 1st Cav Division the most serious problem in our area was at Quang Tri where province forces, the 1st Regiment of the 1st ARVN Division, and the Cav's 1st Brigade had reacted well to the attacks of early 31 January. By that afternoon the 1st Brigade had air assaulted two battalions directly onto the enemy force in Quang Tri city, supporting them with the Cav's aerial firepower, and assisting the 1st Regiment of the 1st ARVN Division "in their [as the Cav reported the next day] victory over the 812 Regiment of the 324B NVA Division." The Cav report continued, "A great psychological victory was also achieved... as the occupants of the besieged city witnessed the presence of U.S. infantrymen and the specialty aircraft of the First Cavalry Division."

Under the 1st Cav's 1st Brigade, commanded by Colonel Donald Rattan, the 1/502 (minus its C Company, which was still at Bien Hoa) had on the 31st without significant contact been securing LZs Sharon and Betty (one company had gone out on an operation). On February 1st the Cav's 1st Brigade journal had this item:

"1200 A 1-502 loc at YD355477 in contact with approximately a plt size ele. Have a white team (2 Cobra gunships) working with them. Have killed approx 10 NVA."

Jack Bishop had put together, under Captain Holland commanding A Company, a three platoon force -- one platoon from A Company, one from D Company, and the battalion reconnaissance platoon -- to sweep the area between the two LZs. Captain Holland's force had encountered a large NVA force in a village. Calling in Cobras from the 1st Cav, he ordered a platoon to assault heliborne into the area. It made immediate contact.

In the four hour fight that followed, the 1/502 lost four men killed, including Captain Holland and A Company's first sergeant, and five wounded.⁵ But, supported by the Cav's "aerial rocket artillery"⁶ AH-1s, this A Company team killed 35 and captured 2 NVA, and captured an 82mm mortar complete, two .50 cal. machine guns, one light machine gun, many AK-47s and Chicom carbines, some rocket launchers, and assorted ammunition, including 175 rounds of 82mm and 50 rounds of 60mm mortar.

Through the night of February 2d-3d, the 1/502 continued its perimeter security mission, conducting daylight sweeps and nightly ambushes without significant contact. On the 3d,

⁵We sent Captain Terry Spiegelberg, our brigade headquarters company commander who had wanted a rifle company, down to replace Captain Holland.

⁶Aerial rocket artillery, or "ARA," was a 1st Cav specialty. Organic to the Cav's division artillery, these Cobra gunships, equipped with two pods each carrying 19 2.75 rockets, came in pairs or larger teams. Responding to artillery forward observers or platoon/company commanders, they could fire a salvo of several dozen rounds that blanketed a target.

the 1/12th Cav Squadron relieved the 1/502, and the First Strike battalion (still minus its C Company) air-assaulted into search operations in the village and rice-paddy-land east of Quang Tri city, finding numerous bodies and weapons in the area of the 1/12th's contact of the day before.

Having blunted the NVA offensive in Quang Tri, General Tolson wanted to quickly open Highway QL 1 from Quang Tri, where a logistic base was located, to Camp Evans, where he badly needed resupply. Although US Marines were fighting to relieve Hue from the south and the 3d Regiment of the ARVN 1st Division and other forces were engaging the enemy inside the city, there was little hope for opening soon QL 1 through Hue. Only the compound that housed the command post of the ARVN 1st Infantry Division and one that housed its US advisors⁷ were in friendly hands.

On January 31st, in our hilltop command post with the 1/501st at LZ Jane, we had little knowledge of the broader situation that had been created by the VC/NVA offensive that morning. We were hearing that the enemy was still on the attack elsewhere, but our main concern was to understand the situation immediately around us.

By radio from the US advisor to the ARVN district chief in Hai Lang we heard that his compound was surrounded by NVA occupying Hai Lang, but we knew little else. I had lost Eagle 122 and we got no helicopters that day from the Cav, so I was grounded. At 1045 on the 31st the 1/501st began clearing the road to the main highway. When they declared it open three hours later, in my own jeep and accompanied by two machine gun equipped jeeps of our military police platoon, I ventured to the outskirts of Hai Lang, but decided not to go into that town to the district chief's compound.

On the evening of the 31st, we planned that on the 1st the 1/501st's B Company would assault into a landing zone three miles west of LZ Jane; this was cancelled because no helicopters were available. That night I told the 1/501st to send a patrol to Hai Lang the next morning and find out the situation there. (Early the morning of the 1st we heard from Earl Keesling at Phu Bai that the airfield there was coping with a heavy mortar and ground attack. The airfield was not damaged and our troops had no casualties.)

We had a tracked vehicle mounting four .50 cal machine guns (nicknamed the "duster") on LZ Jane (how this happened I do not know), so Pete Piotrkowski gave it to Charles Gadd's platoon from A Company for the mission. Gadd writes that on February 1st...

⁷The 1st ARVN Division was commanded by Major General Ngo Quang Truong, one of the ablest officers in the Vietnamese Army. On 29 January, General Truong, sensing that there might be an NVA attack that night, had ordered full alert status for his headquarters. No attack came, but he ordered the same for the night of the 30th, telling his US advisory team however that it was not necessary for them to participate. The attack that night found most advisors in their compound, with only a night duty team in the division command post. The crew of Eagle 122 spent that night, and three weeks more, with those US advisors.

"Our squad... climbed on the duster and headed.. down the road toward the small village... We moved into the ARVN camp [Gadd is referring to the district chief's compound] and talked with their... advisors, who told us that the NVA had attacked their camp the same night LZ Jane was attacked. A battalion of NVA soldiers had moved into Hai Lang and was there to stay. They advised us not to enter the village with such a small force... [The brigade journal reports that the NVA attacked A Company's platoon with small arms and mortars, and the battalion responded with artillery while the district chief called in an airstrike, which did not materialize.] We rode the duster back to LZ Jane before dusk."

We had learned that the enemy in and around Hai Lang were from the 5th NVA battalion. Pete Piotrkowski prepared his Frag Order 1-68, with the mission: "1-501 (Abn) Inf conducts coordinated attack in zone 020800 Feb 68 to destroy 5th NVA Bn."

Before dark, Pete also sent back to Hai Lang the duster with a platoon from A Company, to assist in night defense of the compound. From the 1/501 journal early on Feb 2:

"Compound receiving mortar and small arms fire... 5 man sapper squad routed by small arms and duster... est plat size force attacked from village... 4-6 VC KIA."

Our helicopters for the day having been cancelled, A, B, and C companies moved out on foot at 0800 from LZ Jane. The force arrived near Hai Lang in position for an attack, and Pete had set up his Tac CP a kilometer or so west of the village and was getting ready to fire an artillery preparation, but an 1121 entry in the battalion journal, without further explanation in the brigade journal, reads: "From Bde S3. Do not continue with mission."

The troops returned to LZ Jane, leaving the A Company contingent and the duster with the Hai Lang compound.

The 2d Brigade journal for February 2d reports:

"1400 Bde CO landing at Camp Evans to visit CG, 1st ACD.

"1435 Bde CO advised S3 that Tac CP should be prepared to move to Camp Evans by 1700; 1-501 will be opcon to 1st Bde.

"1510 To 1st ACD DTOC: 1st Bde assumed opcon of 1-501 and 2d Bde AO effective 1500 hours.

"1555 Bde CO: Effective 1600 hrs 1-501 returns opcon to 2d Bde, 101st. AO remains the same, move will probably be effected 3 Feb."

At his evening briefing on February 2d, General Tolson confirmed his intention to place LZ Jane and the operations around Hai Lang under the Cav's 1st Brigade, giving that brigade opcon of the 1/501 and, on the 3d, moving our brigade command post to Camp Evans where we would have opcon of the 2/501 and one battalion of the Cav.

The first three days of February were for me a low point. I was uncertain of the situation. My brigade was strung out from Quang Tri to Phu Bai. We had no helicopters. I was about to lose my mission. We were unfamiliar with the Cav's ways, we had very few of their renowned assets, and we seemed not to be seen as members of their team.⁸

Well, as so often happens in such a situation, my troops through a brave and professional effort at Hai Lang and in the days that followed, saved me -- and, what is more important, saved the 2d Brigade for a future of great accomplishment.

At 1030 in the morning of February 3d I was preparing to visit Dick Tallman at Camp Evans to verify his situation and to give him instructions (the 2/501st was midway in its move from Phu Bai to Evans). At that moment a supply convoy from Quang Tri to Camp Evans was stopped by the enemy just north of Hai Lang. These words are from the brigade journal: "2d Bde was tasked to reopen QL 1 because it was in our AO..."

I stayed at LZ Jane. B/1/501 left LZ Jane by truck at 1100. The journal continued: "At 1159 hrs B Co arrived at QL 1 and closed with the enemy. D Co arrived at 1240 hours and also closed with the enemy."

From the brigade journal:

"1340 1 ACD: Enemy well dug in in 2 and 3 man positions near village of Hai Lang... Bunkers appear to be well reinforced & camouflaged; heavy artillery should destroy them. There are dug in positions along banks overlooking rice paddies.

"1352 CO 1-501: Arty prep has started; attack should kickoff in 15 min.

"1400 Bde CO: Notify CO 1-501 to proceed with caution. Walk arty in front of troops. CO 1-501 reply was, walking arty in front of troops was unfeasible due to every house must be searched."

Sergeant O'Connor has described what happened with A Company that morning...

⁸In retrospect I can appreciate that General Tolson had his reasons for using the 2d Bde/101st as he did. We had come north with a bare minimum of support assets, and no helicopters; his 2d Brigade was far south with, I suspect, a greater portion of his own support assets, including helicopters. As a brigade, we were unfamiliar with the Cav's ways of operating, but under his own brigade commanders our battalions (which were in better shape than his strength-wise and, as in the case of the 1/502, quickly proved their mettle) could learn fast. The frustrations of a newly opcon brigade commander quite naturally mattered less to him than getting his urgent task done, making full use of the means on hand.

"My platoon was given the mission to clear the road from the LZ back to Hai Lang... We had some engineers attached to us with mine detectors. We had cleared about three miles of road when trucks started coming our way.

"Captain Shive (A Company commander) said, 'Get aboard. The NVA has taken most of Hai Lang and the ARVN compound is about to be taken.'

"About a mile out of Hai Lang we got off the trucks and got into tactical formation... Bravo and Charlie Companies led the attack on Hai Lang. Delta Company was behind them. Alfa Company was in the rear. During the assault all three companies got thrown back. There was an estimated battalion of NVA holding most of Hai Lang and they were well dug in...

"Battalion called in artillery from LZ Jane... (then) gunships from the 1st Air Cav... We got the word that it was Alfa Company's turn to attack... Captain Shive gave orders for the Third Platoon to attack and the First and Second Platoons to give them cover fire. As soon as the Third Platoon started into the village all hell broke loose. The sky above was loaded with flying lead... We could see that the Third Platoon was running into a meat grinder and Captain Shives told Lieutenant Rodriguez to pull back. Quite a few of the Third Platoon members were hit and Lieutenant Rodriguez's radio operator was killed... the first man in our company to get killed by the enemy."⁹

From the 1/501 journal...

"Bn commander advised Bde CO that situation was bad. Bde CO told CO, 1-501, to pull back Co B and D and call in artillery... The requested airstrikes to support 1-501 were cancelled at 1535 hrs due to rainy misty weather."

Pete Piotrkowski disengaged, sending A and C Companies back to LZ Jane. From the 1/501 operations summary for 3 February:

"Cos B & D were in contact most of the day, w/contact being broken at dusk. Losses: Friendly - 1 US KIA, 16 WIA, Enemy - 27 NVA KIA."¹⁰

The 2d Brigade journal for 3 February reported that..

"...the brigade HHC Company sent a tac CP party to Camp Evans at 0845 (on the 3d), but this group returned to LZ Jane later in the afternoon because of the attack by 1/501 on the Hai Lang village and the poor flying weather (fog and dense drizzle) which prevented the move of the 2-501 to Camp Evans.

⁹Blood Brothers, pages 95-97.

¹⁰Charles Gadd and Timothy O'Connor, both of whom were in A Company's fierce fight, can be forgiven for reporting the casualties in this action as higher than they actually were.

"During the afternoon the Bde Commander ordered that the perimeter defense of LZ Jane would be maintained by the personnel present at LZ Jane (and) informed CO, 1/501, that C/1-501 would be able to join the attack of B and D 1-501... He said that the attack on Hai Lang village was not to begin until 0800 hours in order to permit precise and thorough coordination of artillery fire support."

On the 4th Russ Miller was arranging with the Cav's G3 people for a CH-47 to move the 2d Bde Tac CP to Evans that afternoon. We asked that representatives of the Cav's 1st Brigade visit LZ Jane to coordinate the arrangements for taking over the 1/501st and our sector. At 1438 we got word that the CO and S3 of the 1st Brigade were inbound. By now the 1/501 was heavily engaged with three companies south of Hai Lang.

Entry 91 for the brigade journal for 4 February, at 1510:

"From CG, 1 ACD: Move to Camp Evans cancelled."

On February 4th, the 1/501st continued its attack. From my personal report to General Barsanti on February 6th (locations are described by coordinates in the actual report):¹¹

"(The night of 3-4 February), the 1-501 Tac CP and B and D Companies were in a night defensive position just outside Hai Lang to the west, and A and C Companies were securing LZ Jane. The mission of 1-501 on 4 February was to open Highway 1 from Hai Lang to the south. B Company moved out to the east at 0830 hours, clearing the road through Hai Lang and the village on both sides of the road. Progress was slow in the village, since this area had been fortified by NVA forces and had been the scene of heavy contact the previous day. In addition, GVN civilians had entered the area to search for their belongings, further complicating the situation. Artillery was systematically used in advance of the lead elements. D Company was in a supporting position, and C Company moved from LZ Jane to a position off the highway to the south of B Company. Upon reaching the road junction just south of Hai Lang at 1225 hrs, with only scattered resistance, B Company turned south and soon made heavy contact with NVA in fortifications in the village.

"B Company pulled back and the enemy position was pounded with artillery (600 rounds adjusted by C Co's FO alone). C Company then attacked north through the

¹¹Except for the mail, our only way to communicate with the 101st's division headquarters in Bien Hoa was by a trailer-mounted single sideband HF radio-teletype (I don't remember the model number) provided by our detachment from the 501st Signal Company. Its operator would type the message (taken to him through the pouring rain) onto a tape, then feed the tape into the machine for transmittal. It was necessary to cut the transmitter's antenna wire, which was strung between poles, to a precise length that varied with the frequency (wavelength) being used. The transmitter had a tendency to drift off frequency, thereby garbling the text. Garbled letters could usually be corrected on receipt, but numbers (such as coordinates) could not. Not only was this link to division our only way to keep them informed each day about our operational situation, but it was vital to us, and frustratingly inadequate, for administrative and logistic matters.

village, with B Company holding a blocking position. By 1445 hrs, C Company had advanced about 1,000 meters, killing approximately 15 VC and capturing assorted weapons, including an 81mm mortar. At this point, C Company held up in order to reorganize and continue the attack, and D Company moved to a position alongside B Company to the west. C Company resumed the attack with artillery support at 1700 hrs, and at 1718 hrs became heavily engaged with concealed and dug-in NVA at close range. The company commander and two platoon leaders were immediate casualties, and the advance was halted. D Company moved to the west of and alongside C Company, then attacked across the front of C Company. As the NVA fled their positions they were cut down by D Company's lead elements. D Company then discontinued the attack and from 1745 hrs to after dark assisted in the recovery of the dead and evacuation of the wounded."

The 1/501 had four men killed in this action, and 40 wounded, of which 20 were returned to duty. The confirmed enemy killed were 42.¹²

By nightfall, A Company from LZ Jane had relieved B Company, which along with D Company returned to Jane. The 1/501 made known its plans for a coordinated attack by all four companies against a reported VC battalion position northeast of Hai Lang the next day. The 1st Bde would provide two rifle companies for the security of LZ Jane.

February 3d and 4th had been busy days for the 1/501. It had done well.

But we still had a tough job to do. An emphatic message from the 1st ACD that morning read: "Priority for today is clearing of Hwy 1. Must be accomplished for resupply." That night we were told that ("prior to resuming our attack to the northeast of Hai Lang") our immediate task would be to clear QL 1. On the 5th we were to escort a US Navy SeaBee party that would arrive at Hai Lang from Quang Tri to a place three miles south where they would repair a blown culvert, and our planned attack was off.

I was not happy with the helicopter support we were getting from the 1st Air Cav. My UH-1 C&C ship had been shot up, and they were sending me, for a replacement, a UH-1

¹²For his heroism on this day, Captain Gordon H. Mansfield, commanding Company C, received the Distinguished Service Cross. The citation reads, "...When his company came under devastating enemy fire, he immediately maneuvered his elements into positions for an attack. Receiving word that one platoon had been pinned down by enemy automatic weapons fire, he led a second platoon into position for a frontal assault on the enemy. When the attack stalled in the face of ravaging fire, he led five men to the enemy's flank. With complete disregard for his personal safety, he led a savage charge upon the enemy position that completely destroyed it. Captain Mansfield repeatedly exposed himself to enemy weapons fire to evacuate his wounded men. While moving the casualties to safety, he was seriously wounded. Refusing aid, he continued to direct the evacuation of the wounded and coordinated with an adjoining company for aid. Only when he was certain that his men were safe did he agree to his own evacuation."

that had not only had no console¹³ but also had no seats. Our three two-place H-23s had flown into Phu Bai all the way from Cu Chi, but there was no maintenance there for H-23s (the Cav owned only the H-13). One H-23 had been shot down on the 31st, killing the pilot and a forward observer from the 1/321 Arty. I could live with makeshift C&C support; my RTO could pack a set of radios and we could sit on the deck. But, with far more helicopters than any division in Vietnam, the Cav allocated us hardly any day to day.

After objecting to this treatment without success, on February 4th I delivered to General Tolson a letter, with a copy by teletype, as I remember, to General Barsanti down south:

"The disposition of 2d Bde TF elements for a distance of 70 kilometers along a closed highway from Quang Tri to Phu Bai creates a serious situation from the viewpoint of administrative and logistic support. For example:

"Maintenance personnel are at Phu Bai, while vehicles and radios needing maintenance are at LZ Jane and elsewhere.

"Mail, administration, and critical supplies (e.g., batteries) are stacked up at Phu Bai, waiting helicopter movement to units....

"This situation can be resolved only with adequate helicopter support. UH-1 support for this brigade (minus 1-502 TF) since 1 February has been as follows:

"1 February: One C&C (w/o console) all day. Four log ships were requested. Two log ships arrived in afternoon after my telephone call to the Chief of Staff, but were diverted to the 1st Bde in mid-afternoon by 1st ACD.

"2 February: Two C&C ships (w/o console) all day. Four log ships requested, no log ships allocated.

"3 February: Two C&C requested. One reported (w/o console). Three log ships were allocated but never arrived.

"4 February: Two C&C requested. One reported (w/o console). Four log ships requested. Two log ships allocated. As of 1200 no log ships had reported.

"This... is inadequate. If there is no improvement, the present serious administrative and logistic difficulties will become intolerable and will reduce the combat effectiveness of my brigade. I am currently using C&C ships for logistic purposes and have inadequate C&C capability compared to like units of the 1st ACD."

¹³The "console" of a C&C (command and control) helicopter arranges the commander's radio and intercom gear on a frame facing his seat that makes it easy for the commander, while airborne, wearing a headset with earphones and a microphone, to talk by voice radio to his commanders on the ground, switching frequencies and channels as necessary, and to talk privately via intercom with the staff officers, the crew chief, and others who are in the cabin with him and to the pilots up front.

I soon had an office chat with the 1st ACD Chief of Staff at Camp Evans. The situation improved, but it took a while for the hard pressed 1st Cav to fully appreciate the 2d Brigade. General Barsanti never told me what he thought of my message.

Complicating the situation was the weather. We were in the cold northwest monsoon season. Its drizzling rain, low, misting cloud ceilings, and dense ground fogs lasted some twenty-seven days straight with only occasional breaks. Under these conditions a heliborne assault could only navigate at low level, flying slowly and risking ground fire. Artillery was called in by coordinates and often adjusted by sound alone. Air support was limited; airborne FACs could get overhead a few hours a day at best. Bad flying weather frequently cancelled gunship support and severely limited medevac and troop lift operations. (However, the Dustoff medevac choppers almost always found a way to get to the casualties and bring them out.)

The chopper situation improved right after my letter to General Tolson, and we quickly responded to his emphasis on getting Highway 1 repaired and open to daylight traffic. The 1st Cav was getting desperate; Camp Evans was now receiving supplies by airdrop and low-level extraction from C-130s. The next day, the 5th, the 1/501 protected the SeaBees at three more work sites. But at the same time the 1/501st was seeking to find and kill the enemy, both in daylight operations and night ambushes.

Now, let's get back to the 2/501st Infantry, which on the night of January 30th was at LZ El Paso preparing to move the next day by truck and CH-47 to LZ Jane where it would join the brigade command post and the 1/501st. When the VC/NVA Tet offensive opened on the morning of the 31st, mortars hit the 2/501, killing four troopers and wounding nine. The 1st Cav ordered one company of the 2/501 to be a quick reaction force and told the battalion to "hold convoys until further notice. Hwy 1 appears to be cut at this time."

On February 2d the 2/501st task force moved by truck to the Hue Phu Bai airfield. That night the battalion was told to prepare to move by CH-47 on the 3d to Camp Evans where it was planned (but soon cancelled) that the battalion would come under our 2d Brigade, whose command post would be moved to that location.

Only five Ch-47's lifted off Phu Bai on the 3d; one was shot down en route (no injuries; one man wounded by small arms fire; all safely moved to Camp Evans). It turned out that because of marginal weather and a shortage of CH-47s the move of the 2/501st task force would not be completed until February 7th. On the 5th, two of its rifle companies (A and C) went to the 3d Bde's 5/7 Cav at PK-17, on Highway 1 near the headquarters of the 3d Regiment of the 1st ARVN Division. Throughout this time the 2/501 was opcon to the 3d Brigade, 1st ACD.

Meanwhile the 1/502 had been busy. From the Cav's 1st Bde journal of February 4th:

"A Co, 1-502, conducted search and destroy operations from YD407520 to the northwest. The company was extracted and air assaulted to YD 378558. The company made contact with an estimated enemy battalion in the vic YD378564. The company pulled back to the southwest and artillery was fired into the area. B Co conducted search and destroy operations from YD 407520 to the northwest. The company was extracted and air assaulted to YD 391554 and conducted search and destroy operations to the northwest. D Co conducted search and destroy operations from YD 407520 to the northwest. One US was WIA (not serious) by a booby trap."

The next day was more productive. From the 1st Bde journal for the 5th:

"East of Quang Tri city, A Co and B Co came under mortar and ground attack at 0658, vicinity YD388547. The companies returned fire with organic weapons and artillery, ARA, and mortars and engaged the enemy positions. The two companies conducted search and destroy operations in that area and were in sporadic contact throughout the day. 25 NVA were KIA, and 2 MGs, 1 81mm mortar and 1 60mm mortar were captured during the operations. One US was KIA and thirty WIA. A Co was extracted and air assaulted to YD 362538 and secured the LZ for B Co which was airlifted to the LZ. The two companies conducted search and destroy operations in that area. D Co conducted search and destroy operations from YD 384527 to the east. The company was extracted and air assaulted to YD 356525 and conducted search and destroy operations in that area."

That night the 1/502d reported to the 2d Brigade command post that the day had started at 0326 with B Co's ambush of an NVA mortar platoon, and that the total VC losses that day had been "100 as reported by air observers, 25 killed directly by the 1/502d... This brings to a total of 250 NVA approximately killed in past 3 days."

On the 6th and 7th, the 1/502 continued with search and destroy operations east of Quang Tri city. On the afternoon of the 7th, D Company and the recon platoon made a contact that resulted in seven NVA KIA.

February 8th was a day of search and destroy operations for the 1/502, without significant contact. But on the morning of February 9th, the NVA struck back. An 0345 entry from the journal of the Cav's 1st Bde:

"A, B, and D Co 1-502 at YD409521 received approx 40 60 & 82mm mortar rounds from the north and 6 rockets from the west. Results: 9 US KIA, 25 US WIA (8 serious). Key personnel CO A Co WIA, 1st Sgt A Co KIA, FO A Co KIA. B Co had 3 NVA KIA after the enemy had infiltrated the perimeter and began throwing TNT around. Also captured 1 AK-47. At 0400 hours B Co heard movement to the front and engaged w/small arms. 0403 arty was called in on north and west. 0415 contact ceased and it was discovered that rockets had been received from the west. 0420 it became appa-

rent that A Co had taken most casualties. 1st medevac was called at 0545; all complete at 0610."

That evening the 1/502 was replaced east of Quang Tri by the 1/12 Cav and was heli-lifted to LZ Sharon, reporting its foxhole strength as A 91, B 104, D 136, and E 107. The plans summary for the Cav's 1st Brigade on the 9th had this entry for the next day:

"The 1-502 Abn Inf (-) will be released by the 1st Brigade and will move to LZ Jane by CH-47¹⁴ and motor convoy, opcon to the 2d Bde 101st Abn Div."

On the morning of the 10th, the journal of the 2d Brigade reported:

"To 1/502: C/1/502 will arrive at Quang Tri. Have an element meet them and inform this Hq when contact is made." We would now have all our rifle companies.¹⁵

By nightfall on February 10th the 1/502d -- except for B Company, which would join us the next day -- would move to LZ Jane by motor and CH-47 and would assume its sector of our perimeter (D Company occupied a night defense position about three kilometers to the east of Jane). Our 2/501st remained opcon to the Cav's 3d Brigade to the south, but we now had two of our three battalions with us.

Meanwhile, the Cav's 1st Brigade had sent us C Co, 1/5 Cav, to help secure LZ Jane and operate nearby, thus permitting the 1/501 to operate continuously along QL 1 with a four company battalion. We were beginning to work satisfactorily with the 1/9th Cav, who now had a liaison officer at our CP. The Cav was sending me a C&C ship daily and usually one for Pete Piotrkowski; I chafed when mine was late, as it often was, but it helped me get around.

By late afternoon on the 6th the SeaBees had repaired Highway 1 from Hai Lang to our boundary with the Cav's 3d Brigade. The road had been cut in many places, and repairs were complicated when a SeaBee crane was destroyed by a land mine.¹⁶ The first convoy went through late on the 6th. Although the road would remain in poor condition

¹⁴Jack Bishop attempted to "sling load" from a CH-47 a Conex container that he had filled with weapons that his companies had taken in battle (these were useful for swapping for supplies with rear echelon units). En route to LZ Jane, the door of the Conex came open, scattering enemy weapons across the countryside.

¹⁵C Company would have a story to tell. Early on January 31st a platoon of C Company, under the assistant division G2 and Captain Jack Speedy, company commander, had air assaulted to the roof of the US Embassy in Saigon with orders to take back the embassy if necessary. Upon landing in their "hot LZ" the Screaming Eagles contingent reinforced the military police and Marine guards who had been battling the enemy seeking to take it over.

¹⁶Sergeant O'Connor's platoon was providing security for this SeaBee party. He writes: "The enemy had planted a command detonated mine under the road and the CBs had parked a large crane where the mine was planted. Charlie detonated the mine and blew the crane off the road. Metal from the crane started flying all over the area. Alfa Company and the Navy CBs were lucky -- nobody was hurt -- but we had a mess on our hands. I sent out patrols to see if we could find the sapper who detonated the mine. We did find the detonator wire and a battery. Charlie had left the area without a trace." Blood Brothers, page 102.

because of heavy traffic and the incessant rain, the Cav's 8th Engineer Battalion kept it trafficable. From February 7th the 1st Air Cavalry Division could receive regular logistic support from Quang Tri during daylight hours.

Keeping that highway clear in our sector was still the task of the 1/501. But now the battalion went on the offensive against the NVAVC nearby.

That cost us a battalion commander. Flying over enemy-held territory at 300 feet on February 8th, Pete Piotrkowski and his S3, Captain Charles Harrell, were both hit by .50 caliber machine gun fire. Their helicopter landed safely, but Pete, with gunshot wounds in both legs and a compound fracture in his left leg, was evacuated, eventually all the way back to Fort Campbell. Harrell returned to duty in a few days. Major Jim Higgins, battalion executive officer, took command of the 1/501.

On the 8th our journal reported that Brigadier General Clay... "ADC, 101st Abn Div, will arrive tomorrow." It had been a busy ten days; the 1/501st alone had had 10 killed in action and 80 wounded. It had also killed 104 VC/NVA, captured five, and taken enemy weapons to match those numbers. And the 1/502 reported its record under the 1st Brigade, 1st Air Cav, as twenty troopers killed and 101 wounded and claimed 305 enemy confirmed killed with another 100 estimated, and six wounded prisoners taken.¹⁷

February 8th was our Day 10 at LZ Jane. We were finally about to become a two-battalion brigade.

¹⁷Our own losses were counted with precision. Enemy losses can be taken as reasonably accurate, given that the Cav's aerial firepower accounted for much of the "body count."