

Chapter 8. LZ Sally; April 15 - May 13, 1968

The night of April 14th we had, under our opcon from our LZ Sally command post, the 1/501 which was in the AO it had never left, the 1/502 which had just closed into LZ Sally from the north, and the 1/505 Abn of the 3d/82d. Division had told us that the 1/502 would move on the 15th to FSB Henry south of Hue in the AO of the 1st Brigade/101st, to assist in a strike by the 101st Airborne and 1st Cav divisions into the A Shau Valley.

From the brigade journal for April 15th...

- "1018 G3: LTC Garrison called and said not to let 1-502 move to Henry until he gave the word, area is presently being contested by the enemy.
- "1025 G3: It's OK for 1-502 to move to Henry.
- "1045 1-502: D Co abn from Sally at 1044 hrs.
- "1047 1-502: A Company departed Sally at this time by convoy.

The 1/502d would not be back until May 1st.

On April 17th B Troop, 2/17 Cav, motor-marched south from Camp Evans into the 2d Brigade AO and secured bridge sites along QL 1. The remainder of 2/17 Cav would move south from Camp Evans the next day, the 18th.

On the 17th the 1/505th Abn moved to fire base Bastogne south of Hue, back under the control of the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division.

On April 17 and 18 the 2/501st moved in from the north, locating its artillery battery and B Company at Quang Dien and its command post and other units at LZ Sally.

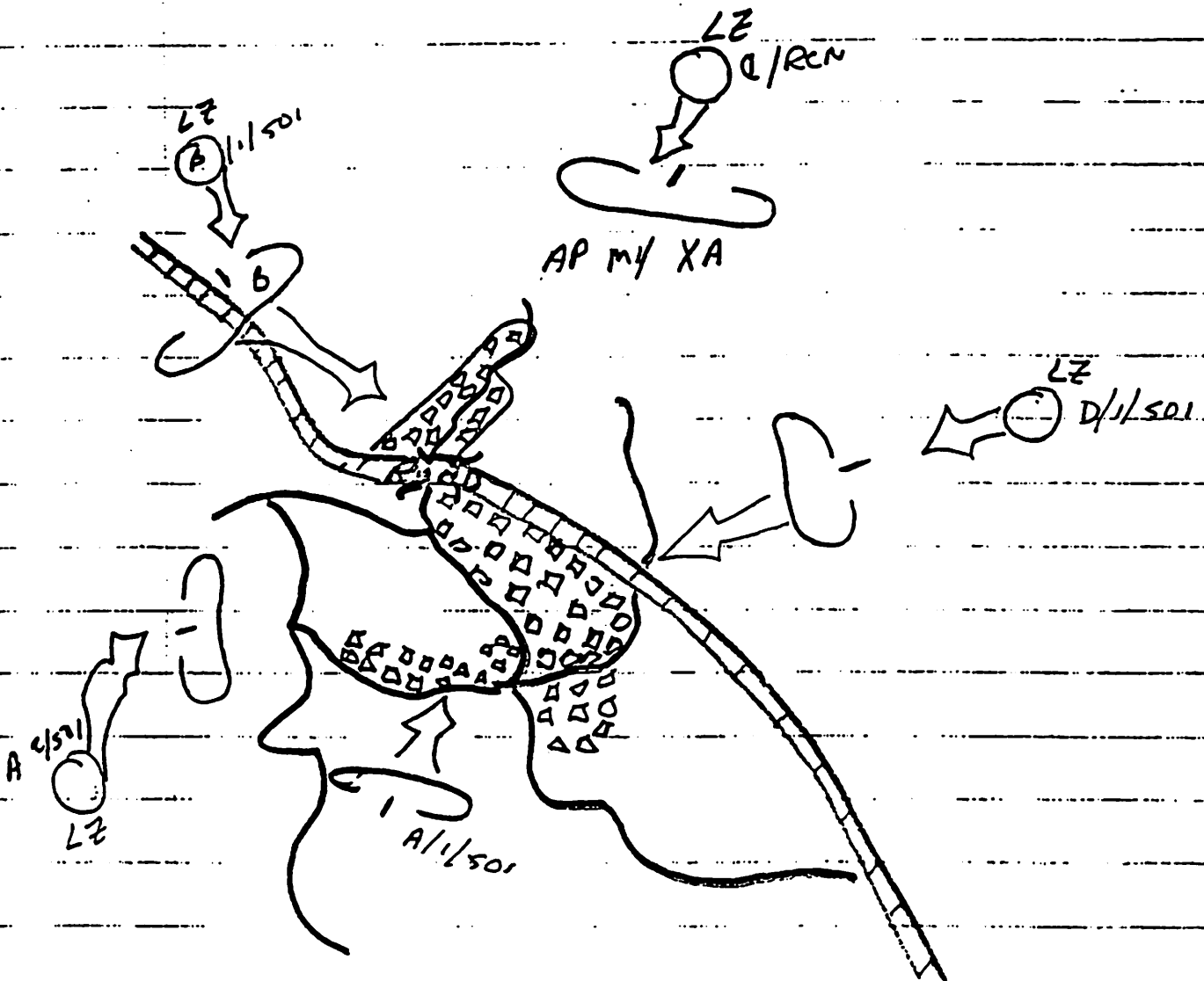
On the 20th I had a new S-3, Major James J. Waldeck, who had come to us from the 2/327. Jim had been a G-3 advisor in my advisory detachment with the 21st ARVN Division in 1963-64. Russ Miller, whose steady hand, good humor, willingness, professional competence, and sound judgment had been invaluable to me since my first day in command, moved to the division G-3 Section; Frank Garrison was getting a good man.

We also lost Dick Tallman, commanding the 2/501, who would soon make colonel and had gone to a higher headquarters down south that wanted him very much. His replacement lasted only a few days; General Barsanti soon sent down newly promoted Lieutenant Colonel James A. Heiter of the division G-3 Section. Tony was an old hand in the division; I was confident that he would be a fine battalion commander.

Just as we were settling into our new AO, we executed another encirclement operation, at Ap My Xa and Ap Dong Xuyen, five kilometers southeast of Quang Dien. From the brigade summary of April 17th...

"1-501 Inf. At 1330 hrs vic YD728307 an informer told Co D [the brigade log says that the informant told Co A] that 2 NVA companies were located vic YD723314 and YD726305. During the afternoon the Bn deployed to blocking positions around the objective area. 4 air strikes were flown into the objective area between 1555 and 1642 hours. Continuous illumination will be provided throughout the night."

This sketch and text is from the S3 report of June 22d (see page 79, Chapter 6)...



"[On April 17th] Co A 1-501 moved overland by foot and established a blocking position to the south of the objective area. [This seems incorrect; the brigade journal has A Company making a combat assault from a position at YD689284 and engaging the

enemy at 1015 hrs.] Company D conducted a combat assault at 1123 hrs and established a blocking position to the east. Co C and the Recon Platoon, at 1722 hrs, conducted a combat assault to the north of the objective and established a blocking position. Co B conducted a combat assault at 1837 hrs to the west of the objective and established a blocking position." (These other unit actions are consistent with the brigade journal of the 17th).

From the brigade journal for the 17th...

"1450 Bde CO departed CP for Quang Dien."

I don't remember this action at all. I'm certain that I must have been frustrated that B and C Companies, 1/501, were so slow moving into position around the enemy on the 17th (we pulled B Company off the An Lo Bridge, where it had been opcon to the 2/17th, who assumed bridge security). In any event, when night fell we had not encircled the village. Indeed, its southern sector was open.

I had no reserves. 1/502d was with 1st Bde/101. 2/501 was not relieved of its Wunder Beach security mission until 1800 on the 17th; its tac CP arrived at LZ Sally only by dark. The brigade journal for the 17th reported that one platoon of B Company moved with B/321 Arty to secure the fire base at Quang Dien, opcon to 1/501. A and C Companies were still up north.

But the 17 April journal reported that, after securing bridges up north during the night, "Co D... moved by UH-D from bridges to LZ Sally and established NDP and local ambushes..." Why I did not yank them as soon as they arrived at Sally on the 17th and make them available to 1/501 I do not know; there must have been a reason.

Evidently the first rifle company that I could get my hands on was A/2/501, which moved the next day, the 18th, by truck from its security mission at FSB Hardcore near Wunder Beach, closing at LZ Sally at 1442. At 1610 on the 18th, opcon to the 1/501, A/2/501 lifted off in a combat assault and closed into its LZ on the southwest portion of the "encirclement" at 1642.

It was really not an encirclement. The units had not locked arms around the enemy with no gaps whatever, and had not lined themselves up in two man foxholes placed no more than 10 meters apart. Along with constant illumination, this had been our recipe for success in the cordon done by 2/501 near Wunder Beach (page 105). Allowing no escape, this technique would characterize each future great success. In addition, we probably needed one more rifle company.

We used a lot of firepower, even tear gas. We had one man killed and 13 wounded. The enemy lost 48 NVA killed and we gathered 10 individual weapons, but we took no pri-

soners. Brigade S2 believed from an agent report that the two hamlets contained an estimated 200 NVA, in two companies of the 7th Battalion, 90th Regiment. Considering the opportunity presented, our results were disappointing.

It is clear to me as I write this years later that after this experience I decided that, most of all, my brigade's exploitation of an opportunity for encirclement called for intense yet controlled energy on my part, not necessarily in the encirclement's detailed tactical direction (although I would occasionally have to be quite specific with my encirclement battalion commander) but in the gathering and the direction of resources -- helicopters, firepower, reinforcing units, including ARVN and RF/PF forces from wherever they could be found -- and in my driving motivation of all concerned to insure that the loop was tightly closed around the enemy before dark.

On April 20th both 1/501 and 2/501 had sharp engagements, for a total of 7 US KIA and 42 WIA, with an enemy assessment of 53 NVA KIA and 6 NVA POWs. We heard that the 1/502, with the 1st Brigade, had moved from FSB Henry to FSB Bastogne.

On the 21st we built our fourth cordon. The villages were Thon Thanh Trung and Thon Kim Doi, on the road seven kilometers southeast of Quang Dien, to which the 2/501 had moved its command post the day before. I will copy the S3 report of 22 June in its entirety.

***Task Organization:**

2-501 Inf

Co A
Co B
Co C
Co D

ARVN

Black Panther Co, 1st ARVN Div
5 PF plats
222d RF Co

"Initial tactical situation, scheme of maneuver (Diagram 1, next page)

"On 21 April, in reaction to intelligence reports, Co C was conducting a RIF operation in the vicinity of the objective area. Contact was made initially at 1430 hours with an estimated squad-size enemy force (1). Co D, operating to the NE, was ordered to the area of contact as it became apparent that Co C was in new contact with an estimated company of NVA. As Co C developed the situation and utilized artillery to support, Co D maneuvered into a blocking position to the NE (2). At approximately 1900 hours, Co A was combat assaulted to an LZ (3) on the NW of the village area. Co B was combat assaulted to an LZ (4) on the SW side of the village. The four companies firmly established the cordon and occupied blocking positions as indicated on the diagram by 2030 hrs. The area was illuminated continuously with a combination of artillery, helicopter, and USAF flare aircraft. Throughout the night, cordon elements received sporadic SA, AW, and RPG fire, as several unsuccessful attempts were made by the enemy to escape.

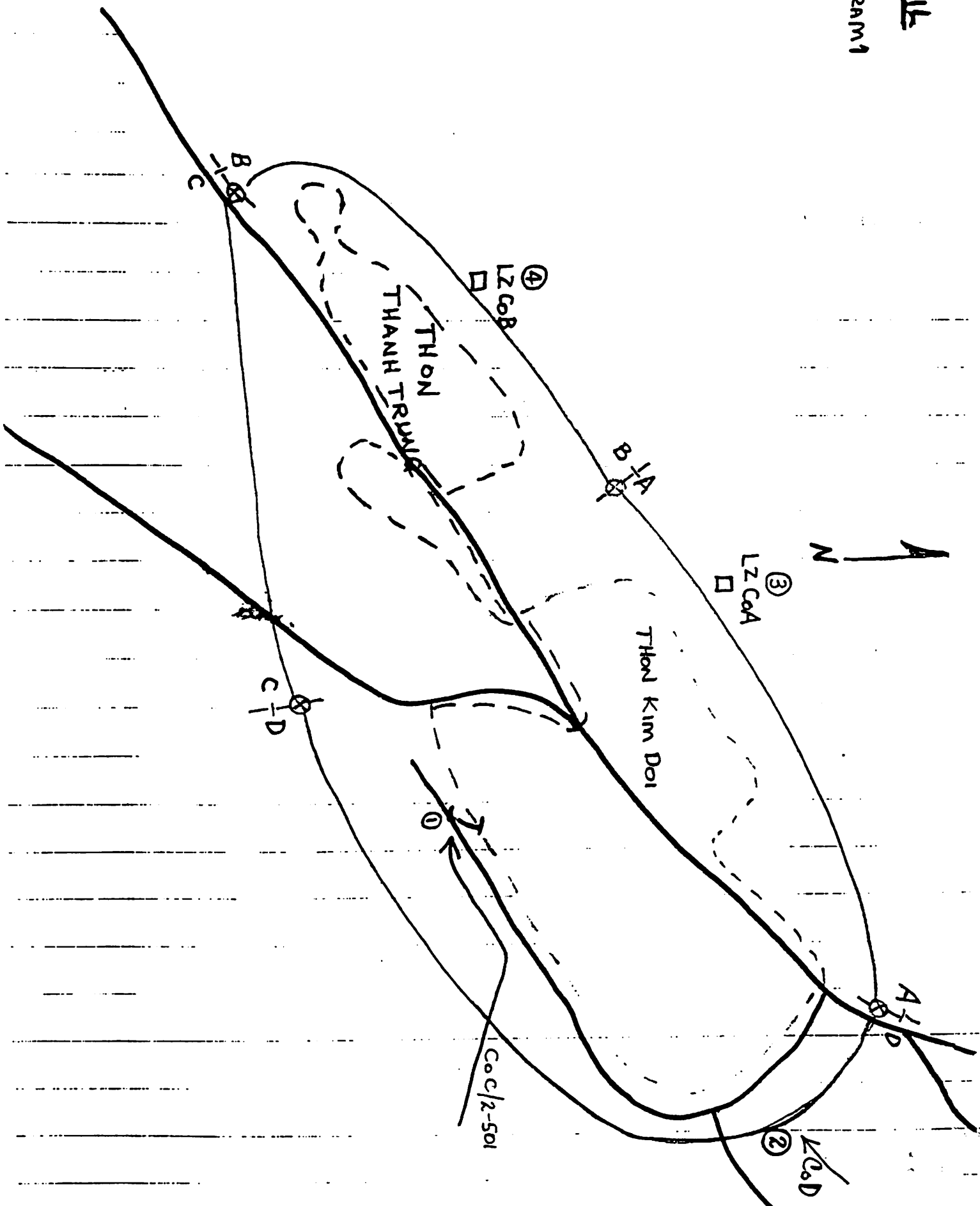
21 APRIL

Diagram 1

AFT

114

8 July 1966



"Execution (Diagram 2, next page):

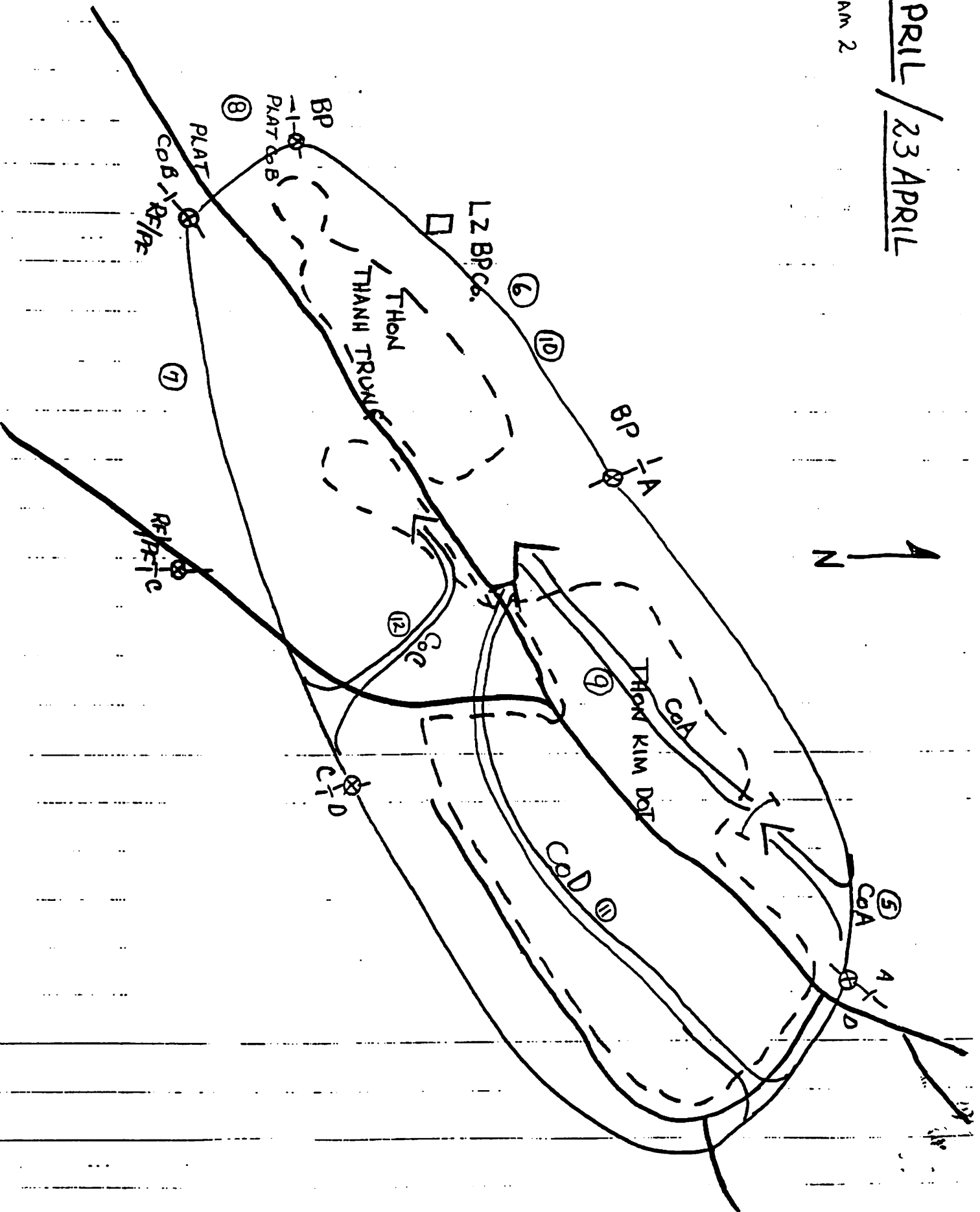
"On 22 April a psyops team broadcasted to the encircled enemy. 106mm RR were flown in to reinforce the direct firepower capability of the infantry units. An air and arty preparation preceded an attack by Co A to the SW (5) that was initiated at approximately 1500 hours. An intense volume of fire prevented Co A from advancing through the village. During this period other companies continued to maintain blocking positions and received periodic intense volumes of SA fire. At approximately 1600 it was decided to divert Co B to another area. The Black Panther Company, 1st ARVN Div, was combat assaulted to assume the blocking position manned by Co. B. An RF company and 5 PF platoons were also moved to fill the gap (7) as Co C adjusted its position. At 1900 hrs, Co B was moved out of the cordon area. At 2100 hrs a plat of Co B was assaulted to the cordon to fill a gap (8) between Co B and the RF/PF elements.¹ Throughout the second night the various elements received sporadic SA fire as the vigil continued with the assistance of continuous illumination from USAF flare aircraft.

"On 23 April, Co A swept thru the village to the SW (9). This sweep was preceded by an air and artillery preparation and only light sporadic resistance was met. The company then relieved the Black Panther Company of their blocking position (10) so that the Black Panther could be extracted at 1500 hrs. At this time, Co D swept the northeastern portion of the objective area (11) and then crossed the stream and prepared to attack SW. Co C swept the village in the southeastern portion of the objective (12) and departed for another operation. The platoon of Co B was also extracted to rejoin Co B. Throughout the day, only sporadic light contact was made with the remnants of the enemy force. By nightfall, the RF Co, Co A, and Co D had reduced the cordon as indicated (diagram 3). A series of strong points and ambushes were established along possible escape routes. On 24 April, Co A and Co D swept thru the remaining portion of the objective by 1100 hrs (13) with the RF company blocking on the SE side of the stream (14). Only sporadic sniper fire was received by lead elements of Co A as they entered the village.

¹The frequent use of passive voice throughout these chapters often obscures the fact that events did not happen by themselves; usually someone ordered an action, then someone else made it happen (or failed to do so). In this case it was no doubt I who decided to move B Company, arranged the use of the Black Panther Company and the 5 RF platoons, and saw to their insertion. I remember clearly how "a plat of B Company was assaulted to the cordon" because on return to my CP that night I was told that someone in the TOC listening to the radio traffic was writing me up for the Distinguished Flying Cross; it was awarded 1 June 1968. The citation reads... "...on 22 April 1968... during a cordon operation around the village of Thon Thanh Trung... One battalion had established a cordon around the village... Late in the afternoon, an Army of the Republic of Vietnam company relieved one of the U.S. rifle companies in place. Colonel Cushman noted that a large gap in the cordon had resulted and immediately alerted a rifle platoon from the recently deployed U.S. company to be airlifted back into the cordon area. Using his own command and control helicopter and two other helicopters, Colonel Cushman began lifting the rifle platoon to the cordon. Both the pickup zone and the landing zone were subjected to fire every time a helicopter approached. Although darkness had closed in on the operation and the other two helicopters were forced to return for fuel, Colonel Cushman continued the airlift... (until the cordon was complete, etc, with typical citation language...)"

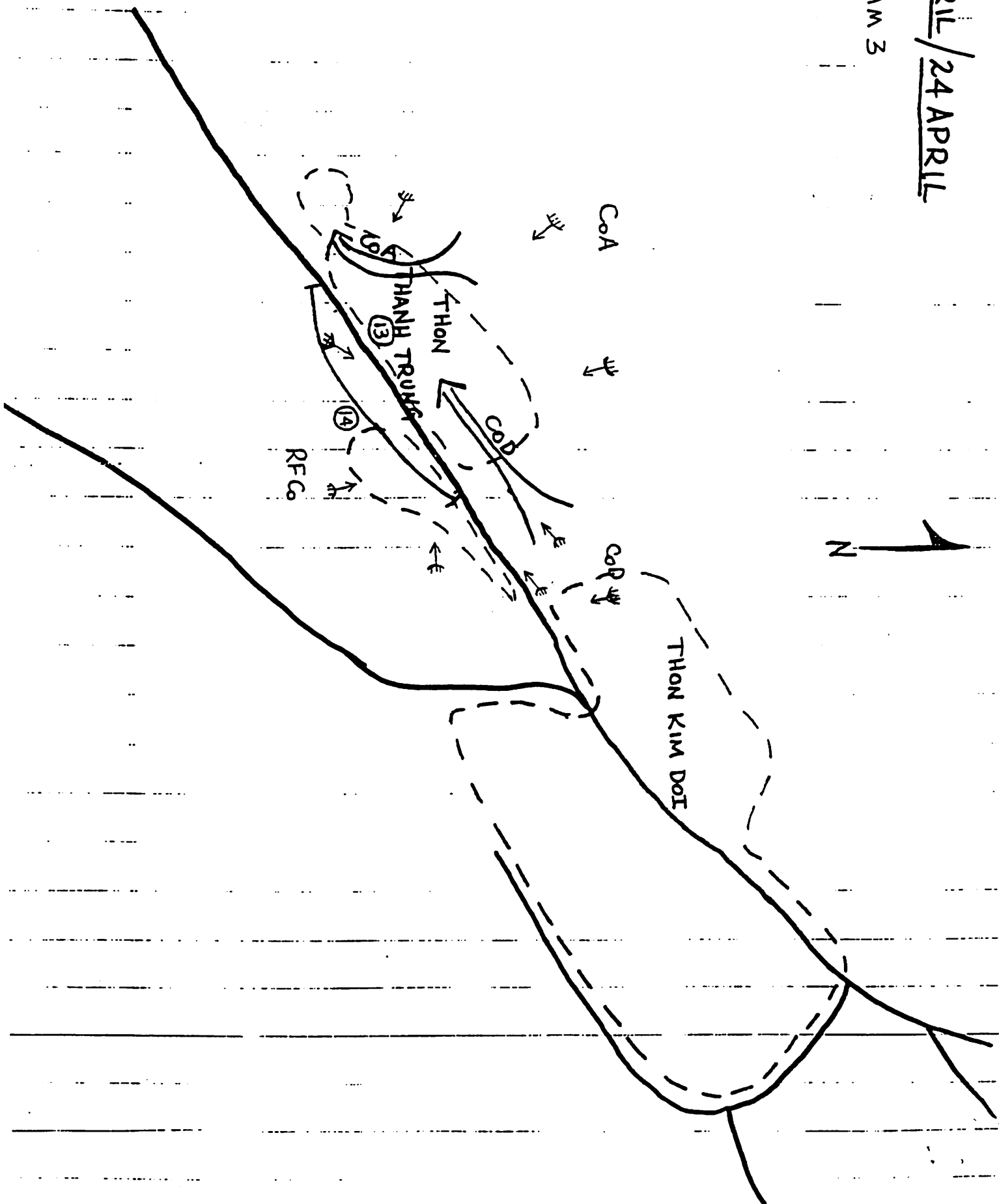
22 APRIL / 23 APRIL

DIAGRAM 2



23 APRIL / 24 APRIL

DIAGRAM 3



"Results: 21-24 April:

Friendly casualties: 12 WHA

**Enemy losses: 74 NVA KIA and 1 NVA POW
7 indiv weapons captured and 1 CS weapon captured**

"Special techniques and lessons learned:

"This operation exemplified the necessity of extremely close coordination and fire control by ground commanders. Because of the narrow, elongated nature of the objective area, it was essential that commanders be constantly aware of adjacent unit locations to prevent exchanges of fire between friendly units.

"Individual artillery pieces were registered during daylight because of the proximity of friendly elements. Little if any shifting of these fires could be accomplished because of the close friendly troop proximity.

"In this situation, it was found that the 106mm RR, to a degree, compensated for the inability to mass artillery fires and was a valuable asset in augmenting the direct fire capability of the rifle company."

While this encirclement took place, operations continued elsewhere, and the enemy was dangerous. Items from the brigade journal of April 23d...

- "1335 2-501: Vehicle ambushed vic An Lo bridge, 3 WIA, request medevac and light fire team, UH 1 in area, doorgunners placing suppressing fire.**
- "1412 Bde CO: 4 evacuated from vehicle ambush, vehicle is still there, received fire from across the river, indications that personnel were approx 1500 meters SW of river washing vehicle.**
- "1528 2-501: At 1515 hours vehicle was retrieved, no damage to vehicle.**
- "2010 S3 1-501: Vic YD683276 bridge, A Co ambush was moving into position, spotted 15-20 NVA. All had weapons, dressed in khaki uniforms, engaged and saw 3 fall, enemy did not return fire, ran to north, will assess after arty is fired. (Later report: 7 NVA KIA and 4 AK-57 and 1 SKS captured)**
- "2140 From 2-17: C Co 1-501 ambush. Time 2133, grid YS619300, engaged 2 VC, 2 VC KIA, captured 1 weapon, contact broken 2140, firing arty.**

On April 24th, the 2/17 Cav, reinforced by B Company, 4/31 Infantry, from Camp Evans, launched an operation northwestward into a village complex southeast of My Chanh.

This operation, outside the normal 2d Brigade AO, was evidently designed to keep pressure on the enemy in the 1st Cav Division area, in the absence of its units that were fighting alongside the 101st Airborne Division in the A Shau valley. The 2/17 Cav task force lost 1 KIA and 10 WIA and assessed 12 NVA KIA in this three day operation. The squadron operation order is copied below and on the next two pages.

Copy 10 of 12 Copies
2d Squadron (Abn), 17th Cav
Camp Evans (YD526312), RVN
231800H April 1968
YZ 51

OPORD 15-68 (DELAWARE)

Reference: Map, 1:50,000, Sheet 6442 II

Task Organization:

B 2/17 Cav (CPT Rozzelle, Cmdg)

Mine Sweep Tm

RF/PF

B 4/31 Inf (CPT Wolf, Cmdg)

A 2/17 Cav (CPT Ingram, Cmdg)

Mine Sweep Tm

GSR Tm A

TF Control

1 C&C UH-1H

1 H-23

1 Log UH-1B

Aero Rifle Plat

GSR (-) GS

1. SITUATION:

a. Enemy Forces: (Annex A - Intell) Omitted.

b. Friendly Forces: 2/101 continues its mission of the security of LZ SALLY and conduct of opns in AO.

c. Attachments & Detachments: Task Organization.

2. MISSION: 2/17 Cav conduct a reconnaissance in force into the village complex along river from YD480400 to YD493462 and locate and destroy VC/NVA forces and supplies found within area.

3. EXECUTION:

a. Concept of Operation: Annex B (Overlay). TF 2/17 Cav will attack with two trps abreast, B Trp on the left seize obj Y, W, V and T. B 4/31 Inf conduct combat assault vic YD483397 seize obj Z, X and V.

b. Fires: Annex C (Fire Support).

c. Trp "A": Continue to conduct RIF opns within Co Bang area vic YD615329. ONO reinforce Squadron in zone.

d. Trp "B": Conduct overland displacement to attack psn. Cross LD 240900. Attack northeast to seize obj Y, W, V and T.

CONFIDENTIAL
(CLASSIFICATION)

OPORD 15-68 (DELAWARE)

- e. B 4/31 Inf: Conduct combat assault into LZ via YD483397 beginning at 240800H. Move to atk psn. Cross LD 240900, attack northeast to seize obj Z, X and V.
- f. 2d Plt, A/3/5 Cav: OPCON to C 1/501 Inf.
- g. ARP: ONO conduct combat assault to reinforce B 2/17 Cav or B 4/31 Inf.
- h. C 1/501 Inf: Continue to secure An Lo Bridge and conduct RIF opns within AO.
- i. Surveillance Section: GS 2/17 Cav.
- j. Coordinating Instructions:
 - (1) ACL - 6 pax per aircraft.
 - (2) No recon by fire into obj Y or Z unless fired upon.
 - (3) SP at YD549327 at 240630H.
 - (4) PZ time for B 4/31 Inf is 240800 Apr; assemble at YD533319.
 - (5) Downgraded to "FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY" upon execution.
- 4. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS: Annex D (Admin Order) Omitted.
- 5. COMMAND AND SIGNAL:
 - a. Current SSI and SOI in effect.
 - b. Command Group will follow B Trp.

Acknowledge:

Annexes:
 A-Intell (Omitted)
 B-Overlay
 C-Fires
 D-Admin Order (Omitted)

BECTION
ITC

DISTRIBUTION: Special

OFFICIAL:

GRUMP
S-3

(2)
CONFIDENTIAL
(CLASSIFICATION)

BECTON

SPECIAL

CAMP
EVANS

FSB
BELCHER

101 ABN
XX
ACD

JEAN

ATK
PSM

ATK
PSM

PL KENTUCKY

PL INDIANA

PL OHIO

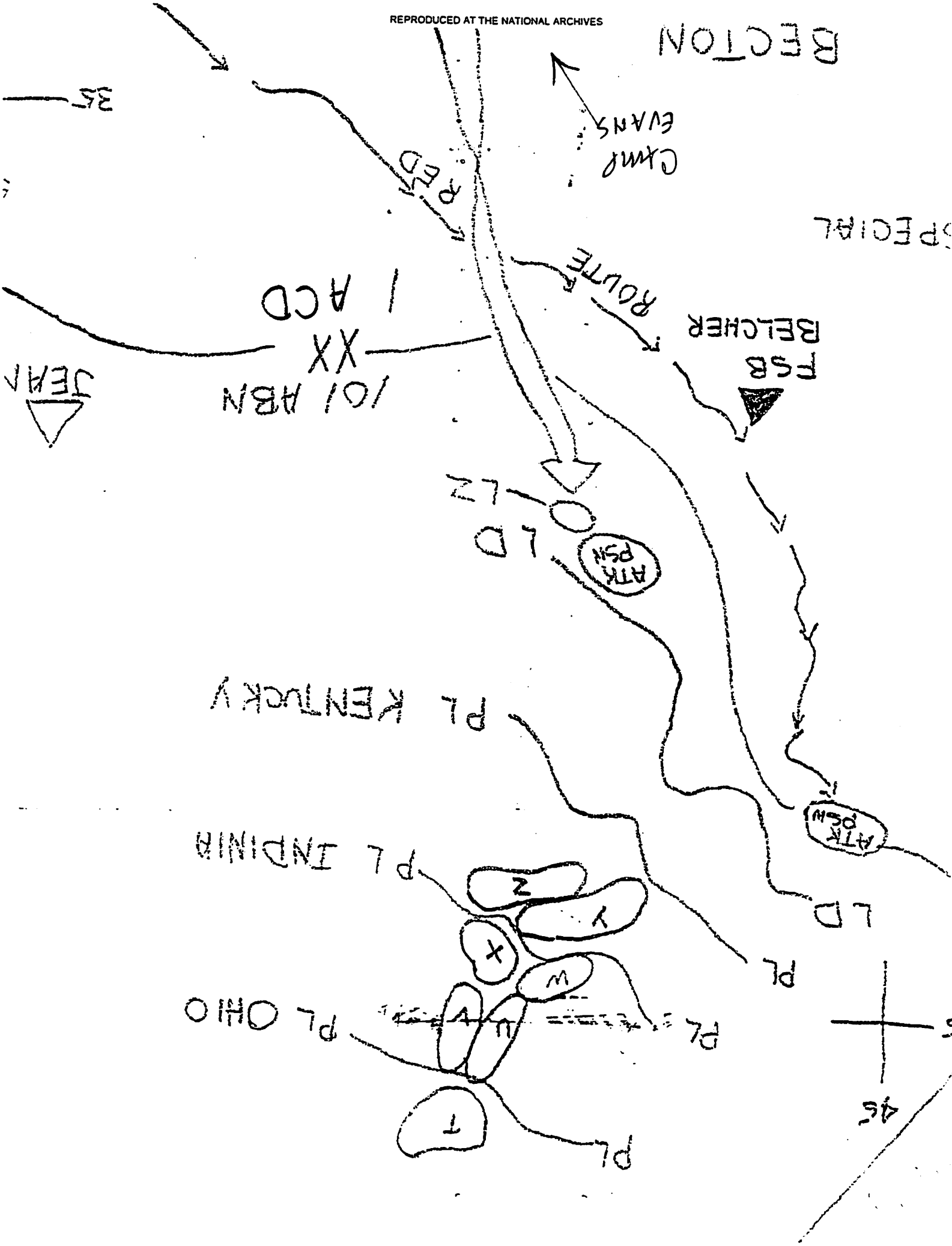
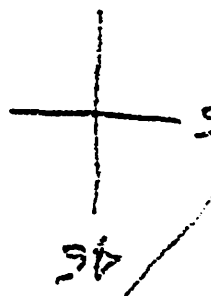
Z
Y

X

W

V
U

T



35

The 101st Div operations summary for April 26th described actions of the 2/501 that day...

"B/2/501 Abn Inf engaged an est NVA reinforced company in the village of Nam Phu. The enemy, entrenched in fortified bunkers, employed SA, AW, and RPG fire. Co B immediately employed organic weapons fire, artillery, LFTs, and tac air, resulting in 16 NVA killed. In the same general vicinity, C/2/501 Abn Inf established a hasty ambush position to capitalize on a target of opportunity, and engaged an NVA squad moving toward a suspected enemy strong point killing 4 enemy. While pursuing the remainder of the enemy force, Co C made heavy contact with an est NVA company, and received SA, AW, and RPG fire. Maximum supporting fires (including artillery and tac air) were placed on the enemy's fortified positions, resulting in 20 enemy killed."

The brigade journal for April 26th noted the cost of this action: 7 US KIA and 23 WIA.

On April 27th the 2/17 Cav task force operating to the north of Camp Evans went into action on the Street Without Joy seven kilometers north of Phong Dien. The 2d Brigade operations summary for the 27th reported that, after a day of relatively light contact...

"...at 1650 hours vic YD585415 (Troop B made contact) with an estimated NVA Co as heavy SA and AW fire was received. NVA were in fighting trenches and bunkers (one bunker was estimated to have contained 14 to 18 NVA). The 2d plat of B Troop moved to reinforce. A heavy volume of fire was placed on the enemy positions as the units were supported by the .50 cal machine gun and M-60 machine guns mounted on the 2d plat of Trp B. The elements withdrew to medevac the wounded and fire arty on the enemy positions... (then) moved to a night position. Results: 1 US KIA, 6 US WIA (medevac); enemy assessment - 44 NVA KIA, 2 7.62mm HMG, 1 AK-47, 1 SKS."

April 28th was the day -- according to the May 20 issue of Eagle Line, the 2d Brigade's weekly newspaper, reporting the remarks of the Quang Dien district chief at a "thank you, airborne" ceremony -- that "... an NVA POW named Quang The Hau, captured by the Quang Dien Popular Forces, said that the VC commander gave the order that when his unit gets in heavy contact with airborne troops they must make every effort to stop the advance of the airborne during day-time and retreat out of the objective during the night time because the paratroopers fight through the night and will defeat them."²

I think that it was at about this time that, upon returning to the LZ Sally pad and heading from my helicopter to the brigade TOC, I passed by the interrogation of an NVA, or

²I had remembered this story differently, namely that a message found on an NVA soldier who was killed in an ambush at about this time had said, in effect.. "if you make contact with the airborne, get out fast; they will surround you and kill you." In any event, Bill Robertson, who was the communications officer of the 2/17 Cav in those days and who has written his personal account of the squadron's first year in Vietnam, recently told me of his recollection that, over the operations map in our 2d Brigade TOC at LZ Sally, the words of that message (or of that VC commander's guidance, whichever it was) were inscribed for all to see.

possibly VC, prisoner. I saw him pointing at the Screaming Eagle patch on a nearby trooper and I asked what he was saying. The interpreter's reply was, "He is saying that that little bird is real mean." So we built a little archway over the steps leading down into our TOC and placed our new brigade slogan, "That Little Bird Is Real Mean," across the top of the arch.

April 28th was the first day of the 2d Brigade's classic cordon at Phouc Yen. The next few days would show just how accurate was that VC commander's warning, and just how mean was that "little bird."

I will copy the 22 June S3 report of that operation in its entirety, adding footnotes of my own.

"Control Hqs: 1-501 Inf³

"Task Organization:

1-501 Inf

Co A
Co B
Co A 1-502
Co B 2-501
Co D 2-501

ARVN

1st ARVN Black Panther Co
Three PF Platoons
25 Catholic Militia⁴

"Intelligence: On 25 April 1968, an agent report indicated 50 NVA were located in the village of Phuoc Yen (YD679283). On 27 April 1968, another agent report indicated 2 NVAVC companies were located in the vicinity of the village.

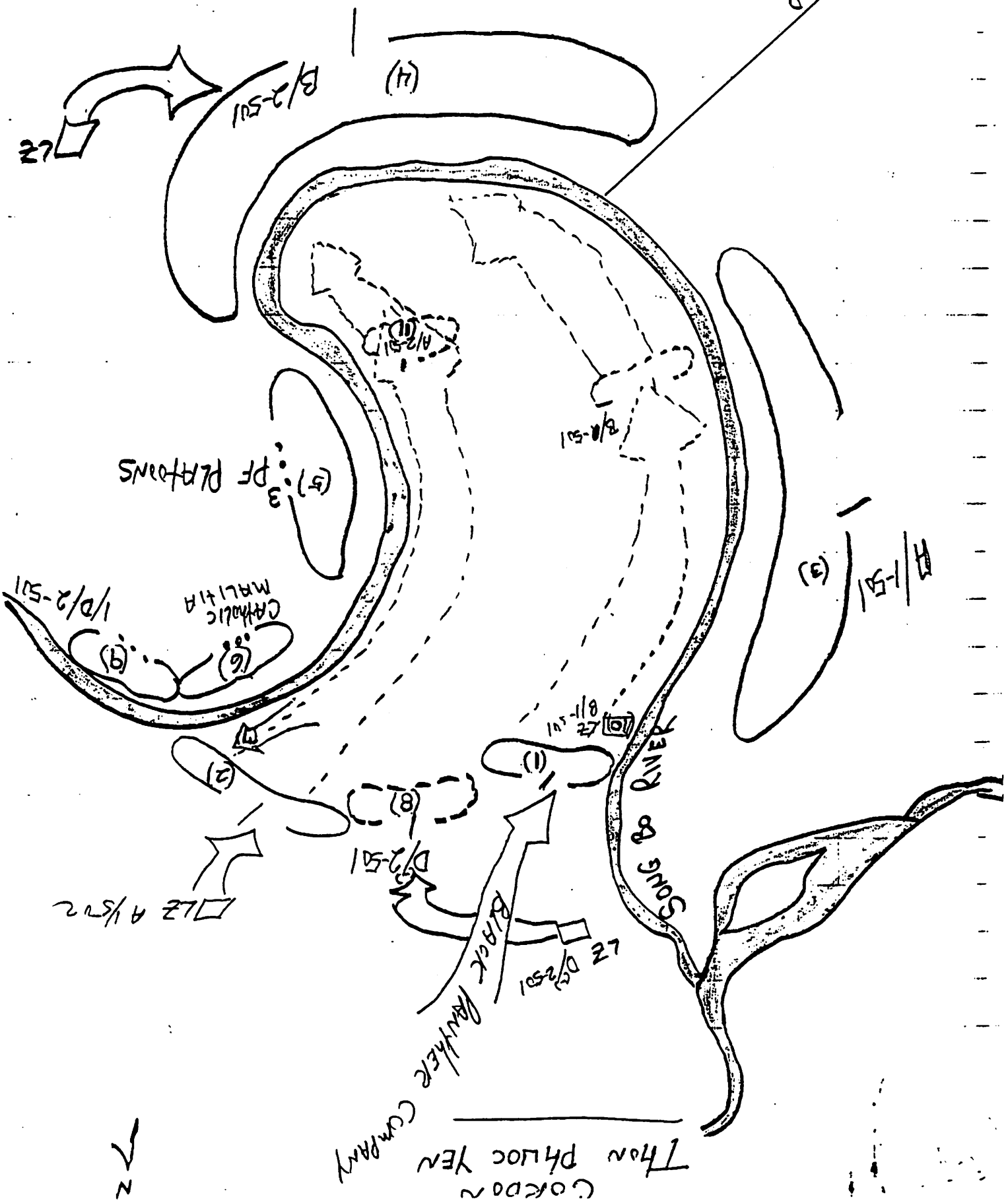
"Tactical situation, scheme of maneuver (Diagram, next page)

"Based on the information mentioned above, and guidance from the CO 1-501 Inf, the 1st ARVN Div Black Panther (BP) Co initiated a reconnaissance in force into the village from the north. At 281359 April, the BP Co received intense SA, AW, and RPG fire from an estimated rifle company (1). The BP Co called for and received a light fire team (LFT) to suppress the enemy fires. Because of the intense enemy fire coming from the village, it was estimated by the commander on the ground that he was opposing a battalion size enemy force. The CO, 2d Brigade, directed the CO, 1-501 Inf, to establish a cordon around the enemy force. A/1-502 was immediately inserted into an LZ to the east of the BP Co and established a blocking position (2). Co A/1-501 moved overland and established a blocking position to the west (3). Co B/2-501 conducted a combat assault at 1810 hrs and occupied a blocking position to the southeast of the

³Lieutenant Colonel Jim I. Hunt had assumed command of the 1/501st at mid-morning, April 27th.

⁴Hamlet militia (who unlike RF and PF received no pay but were farmers by day and fighters by night) were the last armed element down the scale of paramilitary forces. Responsible to the hamlet chief, they established local security and saw to it that the VC guerrillas did not disturb the hamlet's peace at night.

Song & Young Road



village (4). At 1823 hrs Co A/1-502 attacked south in an attempt to develop the situation, however their advance was met by intense enemy SA, AW, and RPG fire from the village. They then disengaged and returned to their original blocking positions on the left flank of the BP Co (2). Three PF platoons plus 25 Catholic Militia established blocking positions to the east (5 and 6) and shortly after dark all the units had joined their flanks and the cordon was established.⁵

"Execution

"During the night of 28 April, constant illumination was provided by CH-47 and UH-1 flareships. All units remained alert as 105mm, 155mm, and 8" howitzer rounds im-

⁵By now I had established an operating style for a cordon. The controlling battalion commander would be on the ground (or from time to time in a C&C helicopter as he saw fit) directing the units in contact and calling for specific air, artillery, and gunship support. In close touch with him, I would be in the air, and occasionally on the ground with him or his troops. I arranged the delivery of his reinforcements, insured his support, kept abreast by monitoring his command channel, and counseled him from time to time.

Entries from the brigade journal for the 28th...

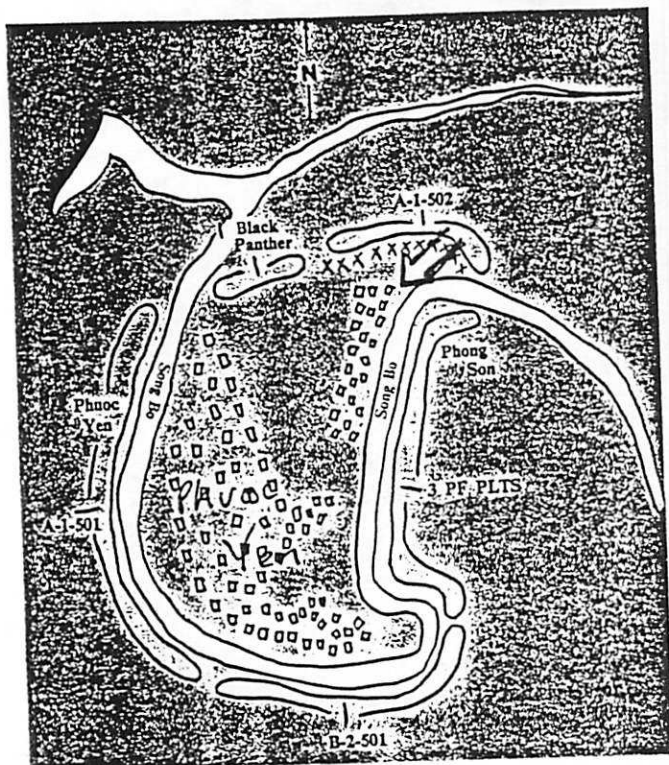
- *0904 From 101st: Lift for Black Panther Co has been approved.
- *0940 To DTOC: Cancel CA of ARVN Co. Will ford river [actually used footbridge] and move to objective.
- *1227 1-501: All elements of ARVN Co across river (a USMC captain, company advisor, was reporting)
- *1327 1-502: ARVN Co receiving sporadic fire. Estimate platoon to their front. Arty called.
- *1400 1-501: ARVN Co received 2 RPG and small arms fire. Request gunships, neg casualties.
- *1415 To DTOC: B/2-501 is immediate action force to cordon village of ARVN contact. A/1-502 opcon 2/17 Cav, assumes mission C/1-501 on An Lo bridge.
- *1445 To DTOC: Mission of A/1/502 changed. They will remain at Sally as IAF.
- *1456 1-501: Gunships left station at 1454 rs. ARVN Co have 1 KIA, 3 WIA. Now estimate Bn size force. Received 57 RR fire. ARVN FAC on station."

A Co 1/502, commanded by Captain Terry Spiegelberg, former commander of the 2d Brigade headquarters company, was alone at Sally (the rest of the 1/502 was still with the 1st Brigade). It began its lift at 1716. Meanwhile, with A/1/501 moving to the position to which Jim Hunt had ordered it, I had been arranging the lift of B/2/501. I had also taken Major De, Huong Tra district chief, to the village just across the Song Bo River from where A/1-502 was to go in, so that he could order three PF platoons to get down on the river bank and secure that sector of the cordon. (The Song Bo was the district boundary with Quang Dien.) Among other actions, I had Jim White, S-4, bring in concertina wire for the Black Panther Company to use in front of its position. From the brigade journal:

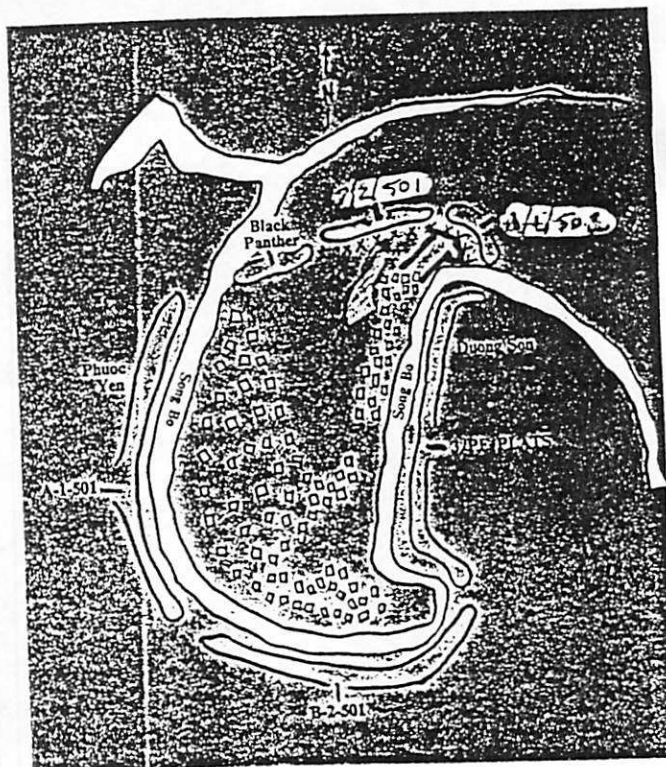
- *1803 1-501: Lift of A/1-502 complete.
- *1810 1-501: 1st lift of B/2-501 abn at this time.
- *1825 1-501: A/1-502 has 1 KHA & 1 WHA.
- *1848 1-501: Last lift B/2-501 on LZ at 1847 hrs."

At the A/1/502 LZ I briefed Terry Spiegelberg; Jim Hunt, by radio, then ordered him to attack along the river (see arrow on the left sketch, next page) to shrink the cordon. When resistance was too strong, Jim Hunt told Spiegelberg to break off the attack, recover his troops, and slice through to the river along a hedgerow. Meanwhile I took Major De to the village where he had obtained his PF platoons so that he could find hamlet militia to take care of the river bank for the more extended cordon. By nightfall he had the bank secured on his side of the river with three PF platoons and 25 or so hamlet militia, and Jim Hunt had that force on the radio though a US district advisor.

It was getting dark for Terry Spiegelberg. I reached him on (as I remember) his company command frequency. I told him to look for my C&C helicopter overhead; that, to guide him in the growing darkness, I would fly at low level straight down a hedgerow to the river. I told him that his was the final element of the cordon and that when he reached the river he was to plant his men on the river bank and to put his men in two-man foxholes along the hedgerow no more than 10 meters apart, and that we would turn on the lights. He did all that, and we had a cordon, arms locked.



April 28th



April 29th

First Breakout Attempt

pacted within the cordon. During the early morning hours of 29 April three separate attempts were made by the enemy to rupture the left flank of Co A/1-502 blocking position (7), at the hedgerow that came to the river bank (sketch at the right above). These attempts were repulsed with a heavy volume of fire and courageous determination by the men of Co A.⁶ Shortly after 0800 hrs Co A attempted to gain a foothold in the northeastern section of the village, however this maneuver was met with a heavy volume of fire from a well entrenched and well camouflaged NVA platoon. Co A resumed its blocking position and adjusted artillery fire on the enemy positions. At 1215 hrs, the BP Co advanced approximately 100 meters into the village where they made heavy contact with the enemy... At 1850, Co D/2-501 (minus a platoon) made a combat assault into an LZ northwest of the cordon and moved into a blocking position between Co A 1-502 and the BPCo (8). One rifle platoon from D/2-501 landed on the east side of the cordon to reinforce the PF platoons and militia (9).

⁶I have recently come to know William F. Lux. Bill Lux, then a Specialist Four in A/1/502, was defending the critical hedgerow that morning. He was awarded a Bronze Star for his actions April 28th. His citation reads: "A Company was conducting an assault on Phuoc Yen, Republic of Vietnam, a village north of Hue. Moving through fields and hedgerows... the company encountered enemy mortar, rocket propelled grenades, and machine gun fire. Suddenly the point element came under intense fire from automatic weapons and rocket propelled grenade rounds. The point man, Specialist Lux, immediately began to return the enemy fire. Despite his exposed position in front of his platoon and the large amount of enemy fire, Specialist Lux remained in his forward vantage point with complete disregard for his personal safety and indicated to the platoon leader the location of the enemy positions. When the remainder of the platoon had reached his location, Specialist Lux joined with them in assaulting the enemy positions. Specialist Lux's personal bravery and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army."

Troopers like Jim Hunt, Terry Spiegelberg, and Bill Lux made this cordon happen.

"The cordon was sealed throughout the night of 29 April under continuous illumination. Small arms and automatic weapons fire was exchanged during the night as the enemy attempted to find a gap in the friendly positions. At first light on 30 April, the BP Co again penetrated the village from the north. This action was met by strong enemy resistance which hampered the company's advance. Artillery and tac air were placed on the enemy positions and by mid-afternoon the BP advanced toward the south against light enemy resistance. At 1718 hrs, because of other operational commitments, the BP Co was airlifted from the cordon to the city of Hue. Co B/1-501 conducted a combat assault to an LZ in the northern sector of the cordon and replaced the BP Co (10).

"In the early hours of 1 May, during a short break in the illumination⁷ caused by the time lapse between the expended flareship going off station and artillery illumination being placed over the cordon, the enemy made an all-out effort to penetrate the area occupied by Co A/1-502 (7). This attack was repulsed by intense fire from SA and AW and by 0610 hrs, Co A reported that the enemy had withdrawn into the village. This effort by the enemy cost him 35 NVA KIA while A Co suffered 3 KHA, and 12 WHA.

"At 0800 hrs a psychological warfare team began broadcasting appeals to surrender which resulted in 16 NVA surrendering. Afterwards tac air and artillery fires were resumed and at 1330 hrs a CS [tear gas] grenade drop was climaxed by a TOT [for "time on target," or the simultaneous delivery of the massed fires of many batteries of artillery). At 1345 hrs, Co A/1-502 began to move south against light resistance. During the afternoon friendly elements shifted their positions in order to tighten the cordon and at 1600 hrs, Co B/2-501 relieved Co A/1-502 in place, and Co A/1-502 was extracted by helicopter to LZ Sally.

"The cordon, now consisting of A/1-501, B/1-501, A/2-501, D/2-501, 25 Catholic militia, and 3 PF platoons remained in place throughout the night of 1 May. Sporadic SA fire was again exchanged as the enemy desperately attempted to find a way out. At first light of 2 May, Co A/2-501 and Co B/1-501 began moving south and were met by a heavy volume of SA and AW fire. The two companies held in place and called in artillery and tac air in an attempt to destroy the the enemy's well fortified positions. At the end of the day, the cordon was maintained in the north by B/1-501 on the right (west) and A/2-501 on the left (east). Co A/1-501 composed the west flank of the cordon while Co D/2-501 covered the south and the militia and 3 PF platoons the east.

"During the early morning hours of 3 May, the enemy made another futile attempt to break out of the cordon but was repulsed again by superior friendly fires. A 55 gallon drum CS drop was made over the village from a CH-47 after which further appeals were made by loudspeaker for the enemy to surrender. Companies B/1-501 and A/2-501 made the final sweep of the village overcoming small pockets of resistance and completed the cordon operation.

⁷My cot was just off the TOC where during the night I could hear the radio traffic. I had no trouble sleeping, but when the radio voice pitch rose because of urgency I would awake. Here the 1/501 voices raised pitch when the flareship departed and the enemy attacked. In minutes we restored illumination, with artillery.

***Results:**

Friendly casualties: 8 US KHA and 44 US WHA
2 ARVN KHA and 12 ARVN WHA

Enemy losses: 429 NVA KHA, 107 NVA prisoners, 117 weapons captured."

Also captured were the radios and signal operating instructions of the 8th Battalion, 90th NVA Regiment, which was totally eliminated in this action.

The Second Brigade had executed a classic.

During the six days of this cordon operation, the rest of the brigade AO was also active. The night of 28-29 April the 1/501 recon platoon sprung an ambush, 2 PF WIA, 5 NVA KIA. That night ground surveillance radar on the LZ Sally perimeter several times detected "enemy tanks" to the disbelief, or alarm, of many; the 1/501 recon platoon reported finding "tracks" the next day but that was the end of it. The brigade journal reported General Barsanti slightly wounded in the leg, returned to duty. In the Cao Bang area, north of the An Lo bridge, the 2/17th Cav, reinforced, on May 1st had a sharp and well-supported contact that cost them 2 KIA and 26 WIA, with an enemy assessment of 82 NVA KIA. On 2 May D/1/501 sprung an ambush. The same day B/2/501 made contact with an estimated company, with 2 US WIA and 8 NVA killed by air.

Then came another cordon. Documents captured at Phuoc Yen revealed that the trapped 8th Battalion, 90th Regiment, had called for reinforcements to move into Ap Pho Nam, a hamlet two kilometers north of Phuoc Yen. The 2/501st, its command post at Quang Dien, began a cordon of that hamlet on May 3d. On May 4th the 1/502 returned from duty with the 1st Brigade, its CP replaced that of the 2/501 in Quang Dien, and the 1/502 took over the second day of the cordon. The sequence of the first day (sketch, next page)...

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| (1) is a combat assault by B/2/501 at 1215 | (7) is A Co's sector of the cordon |
| (2) is heavy contact inside the hamlet | (8) is D Co's combat assault, 1700 |
| (3) is where B Co withdrew, after contact | (9) is D Co's cordon sector |
| (4) is a C/2/501 combat assault | (10) is C/1/501's LZ |
| (5) is C Co's sector of developing cordon | (11) is C/1/501's cordon sector |
| (6) is an A/1/502 combat assault, 1645 | (12) is 2/501's recon platoon LZ |

At (13), at 1910, the recon platoon completed the cordon. We were getting good at this.

That night the enemy attempted to break out of the cordon, without success. On May 4th B/1/502 relieved D/2/501 and the 1/502d's recon platoon replaced that of 2/501. Artillery and 20 sorties of tac air pounded the enemy during the day, and illumination was overhead the following night. The trapped enemy fired small arms and 60 mortars and tried

Friendly casualties: 2-501 Inf: 2 KIA; 13 WIA
 1-502 Inf: 1 KIA; 1 WIA
 Enemy losses: 33 NVAVC KIA; 2 NVA POW

results: to escape. He could not; the cordon was tight (sketch, next page) And we had learned that to block escape through water routes, those securing the river banks must "have one foot in the water" and must explode grenades and M79 rounds in the water as well. The

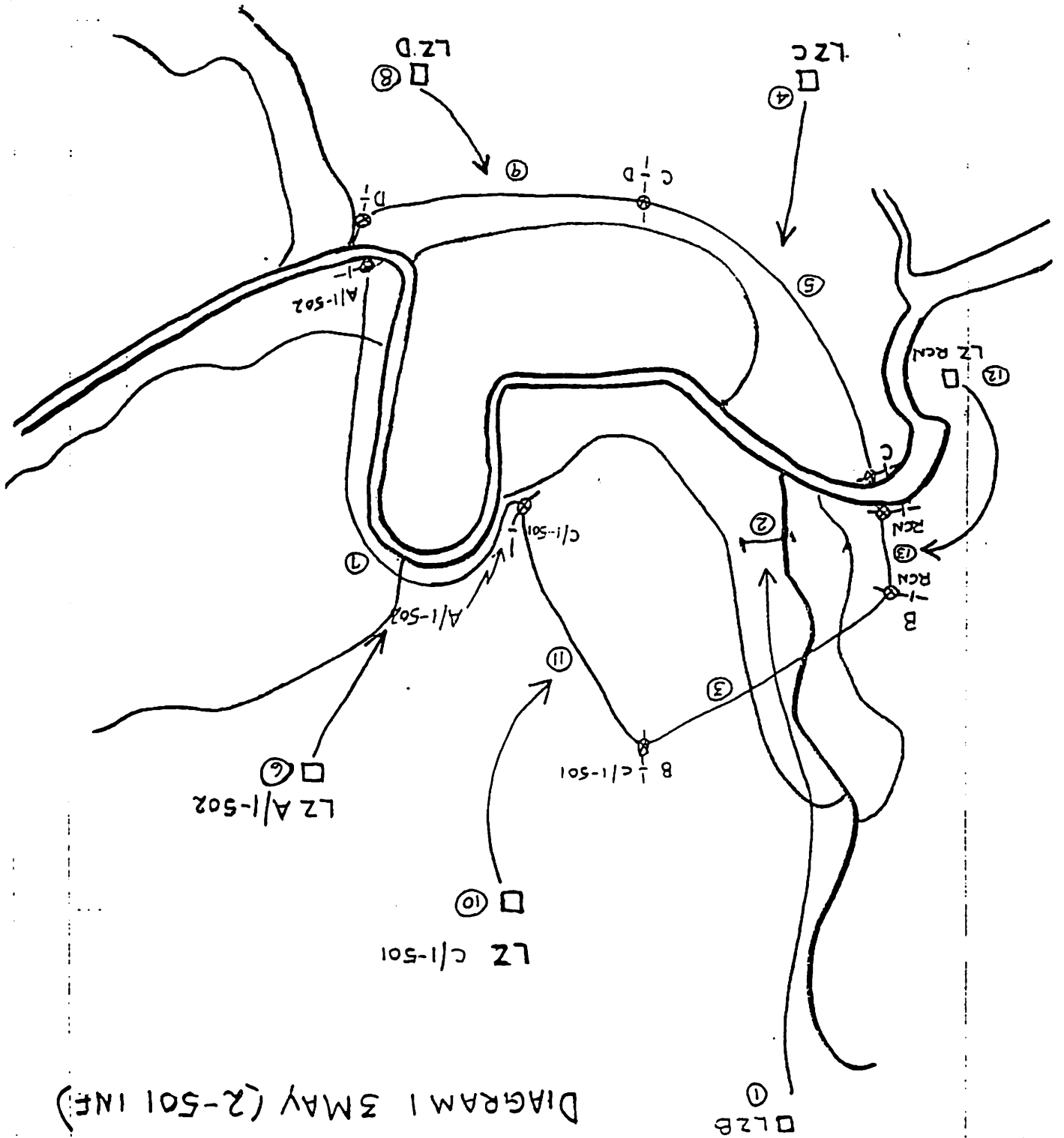
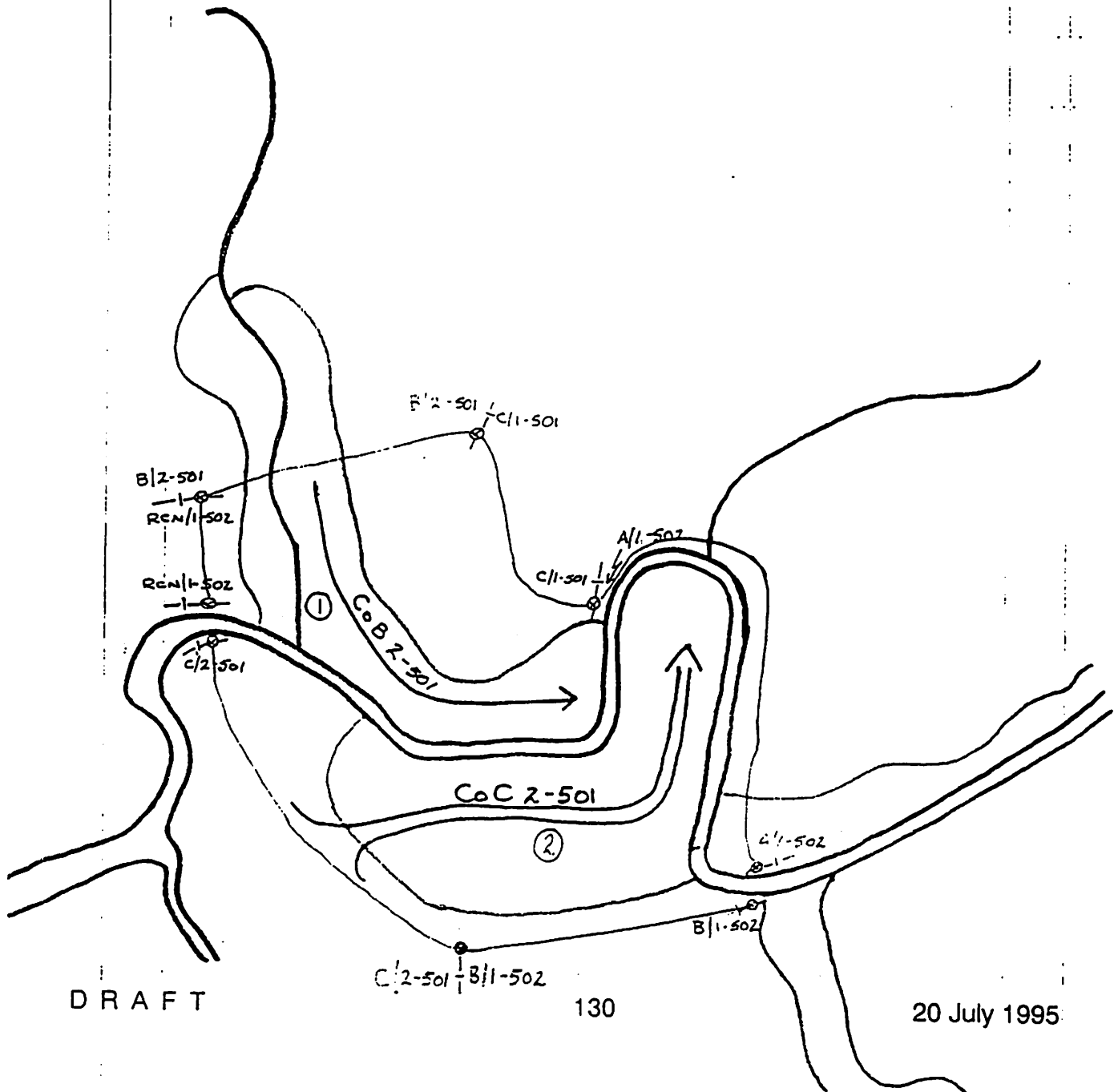


DIAGRAM 1 3 MAY (2-501 INF)

DIAGRAM 2 4-5 MAY (1-502 INF)



D R A F T

130

20 July 1995

The night of 4-5 May, the enemy tried to mount a region-wide attack. Quang Dien, Hue, Camp Eagle, Da Nang, the An Lo and other bridges, all were mortared; many were probed. From the May 5th brigade journal, May 5th...

- "0030 From 1-502: Quang Dien.. placed all elements on an increased alert.
- "0205 From 1-502: Quang Dien reports Hue is receiving mortar and rocket fire.
- "0225 From 101st: Put all units on 100% alert.

D R A F T

129

27 July 1995

- "0239 S2: Received from Div G2; Hue is under mortar attack.. Da Nang is under rocket and ground and mortar attack.
- "0035 From 1-502: From Phong Dien; NE corner of Hue under heavy ground attack
- "0349 From 2-501: D Co [on the Hue bridge] reports that NW corner of Hue is under ground attack, tracers going into and out of city.
- "0405 From 2-17: An Lo bridge under RPG and mortar attack.
- "0409 From 2-17: CO has moved 2d plat reinf to A Trp location to reinforce bridge."

That night we were somewhat scattered. The 1/502, just back from the south, was completing its cordon at Ap Pho Nam, near Quang Dien. The 1/501, CP at Sally, had repositioned after Phuoc Yen; its D Co was southeast of Sally. The 2/501st's CP and one company was at FSB Geronimo, out of position on the edge of the mountains west of Hue. The 2/17, CP at Evans, had not fully returned from its operations on the Street Without Joy. I sent the Brigade S2, Major Upchurch, out to find out what was going on so that we could react -- and then made my decision. From the brigade journal, May 5th...

- "0850 Bde CO: Bde S2 at Huong Tra district headquarters indicates NVA Bn attempted to destroy bridge at Hue, they failed, withdrew 1 Co south, Bn (-) in village discussed earlier vic 6924. [Note: this village was La Chu, just off QL 1, 6 kilometers SE of Sally] D 1-501 [which had moved to secure Pinky, between Sally and La Chu] opcon to 2-501 effective 0900. [To 2-501...] Establish FSB at Pinky. Move D 1-501 toward village, try and establish contact to locate NVA Bn (-)... Plan to receive C 1-501, B 2-501, and C 2-501.

We would put into place a four-company cordon (this would make three cordons for the 2d Brigade, back to back). By noon Tony Heiter, his CP, B/1/321 Arty, and A/2/17 Cav were established at FSB Pinky between LZ Sally and La Chu. The sketch, next page, shows that, at 1215, D/1/501 made contact (1), then withdrew to its cordon sector (2), after which C/2/501 went into its LZ (3), then took up its cordon sector (4). C/1/501 followed into its LZ (5) and sector (6), followed by B/2/501 into its LZ (7) and sector (8). By nightfall the cordon around La Chu was complete, and we turned on the lights.

Again we pounded the enemy inside the cordon with artillery, and again the S3 report reads... "Numerous unsuccessful attempts were made to exfiltrate the cordoned area as units received sporadic but intense SA and RPG fires."

This was the La Chu cordon's Phase One. Phase Two (sketch, second page down) would be an attack the next day into the defended village by the full 2/17 Cav and its opcon D/1/501.

DRAFT DIAGRAM 1 (5 MAV)

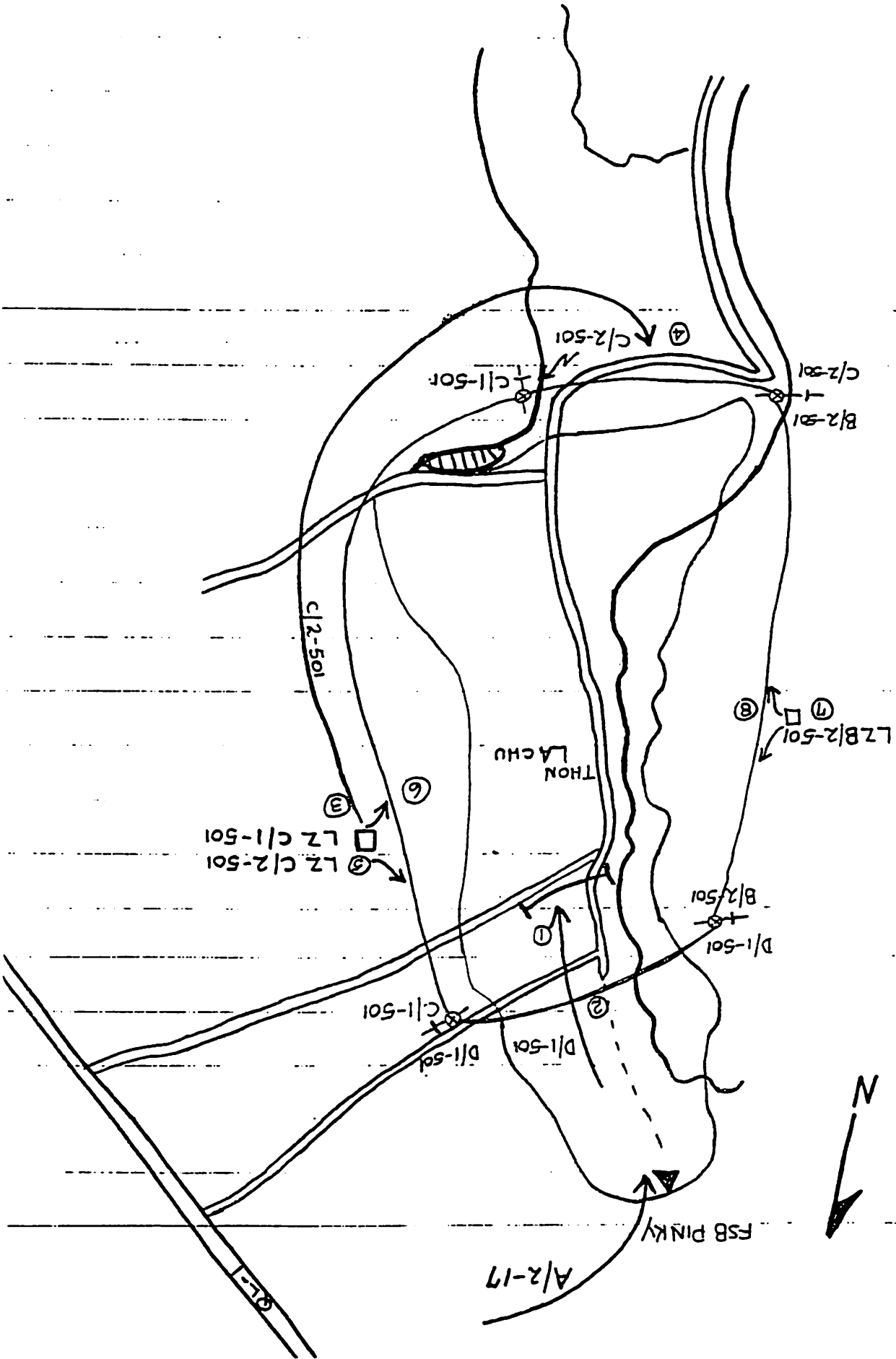
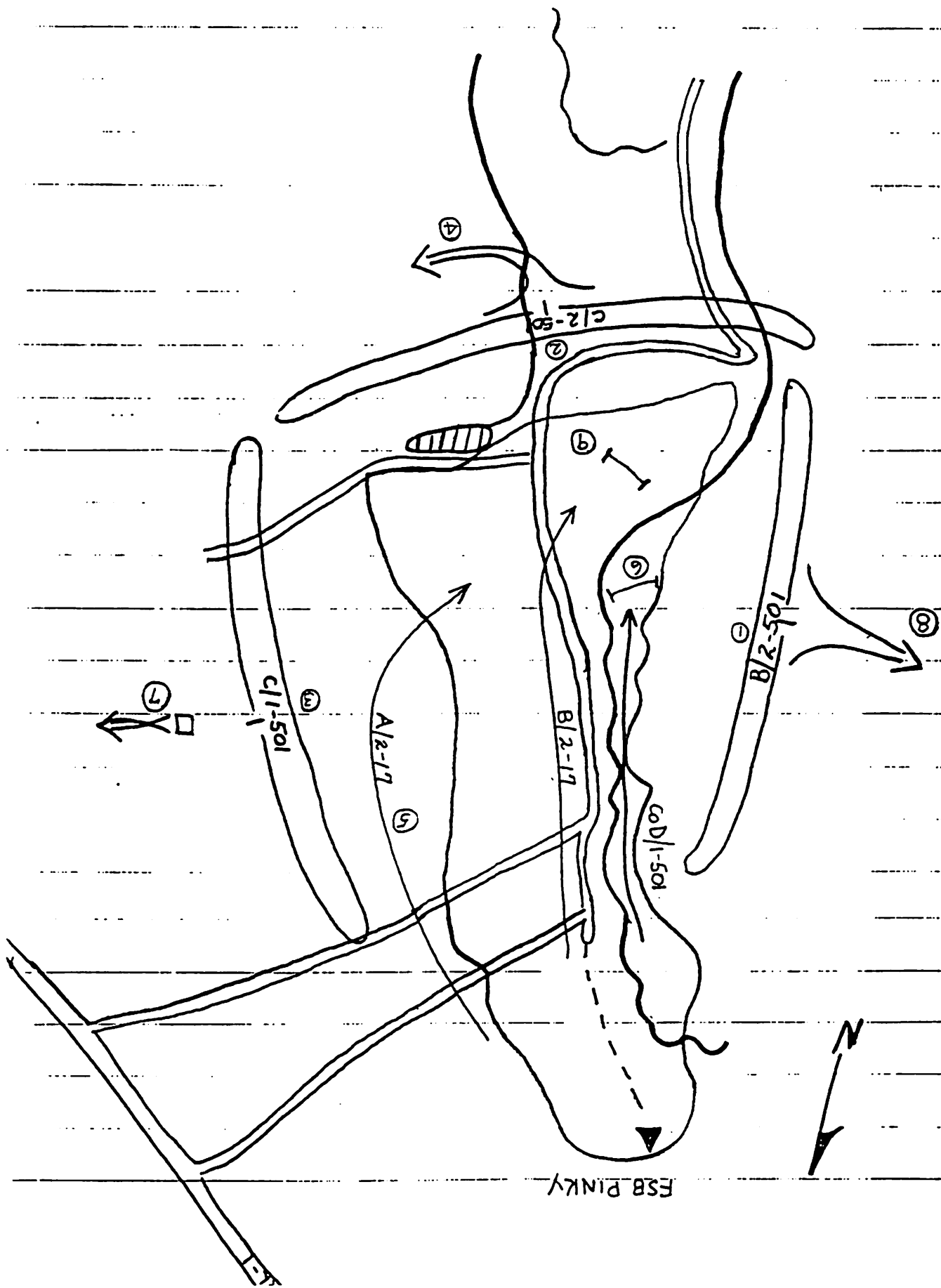


DIAGRAM 2 (6-7 MAY)



As 2/17 called in an artillery preparation and four tac air strikes, B/2/501, C/2/501, and C/1/501 backed away from the objective area, remaining in overwatch. The armor-infantry attack jumped off at 1150, May 6th. D/1/501 attacked down the west side of the stream that ran through the village; B Troop, with its organic machine-gun-equipped M-113's and its attached tank platoon, attacked directly into the village east of the stream, and A Troop went around the village's eastern side to enter the village further south. Artillery and gunships supported the attack.

From the S3 Report:

"Progress was slow as the troops made a thorough search of a vast network of bunkers and trenches... As the attack bypassed the blocking positions of C/1/501 and B/2/501... [...these units departed the area for other missions and C/2/501 returned to FSB Pinky in mid-afternoon to provide overnight security...]. Troop A came abreast of Troop B on the east and continued the attack. [D/1/501 engaged a bunker complex at (6)...] At 1920 hours, Troop B met heavy resistance (9) and it was apparent that the primary enemy positions had been located and engaged. Intense fighting continued under continuous illumination and the units advanced slowly and attacked the well entrenched enemy."

Entries from the brigade journal, May 6th...

- "1526 From 2-17: D 1-501 in contact N of river, B 2-17 sending APC on S side where fire is coming from. No estimate of size of force. SA and AW fire.
- "1650 From 2-17: B Trp 3 WIA, 2 serious, all medevac, still do not know size of enemy. A Trp to make contact with B Trp, sweep across their front.
- "1900 From 2-1: B Trp below stream pushing along, fairly heavy contact.. D 1-501 opcon to 2-17 effective 1858 hours [Note: This is a surprise; D Co should have been opcon since early that morning]. D 1-501 has some elements across stream, also element to north of stream.
- "1918 From 2-17: B 2-17 pushing along, receiving stiff resistance, also receiving RPGs, 1 tank stuck in bomb crater... enemy pinned in 150 by 150 meter area in SW corner of village.
- "2235 From 2-17: B Troop, C 1-501, and ARP, 2d plat A Trp are clearing Ton La Chu. Have all cleared except approx 50 meters."

Continuing with the 22 June report...

"By 2400 only a small pocket of the village remained to be cleared. However, the remnants of the die-hard enemy fought stubbornly and it was not until approximately 0100 hrs that the final series of bunkers had been overrun. The intensity of contact

dwindled to sporadic SA fire and all firing ceased at approximately 0200. A sweep of the area at first light revealed that a company size force composed of elements of the C115 Local Force Co and the 9th Bn, 90th NVA Regt had been destroyed.

"Results Friendly casualties: 2 KIA; 14 WIA
Enemy losses: 53 NVA KIA; 2 NVA/VC POW
23 individual and 3 crew-served weapons captured"

The citation for the award of the Medal of Honor to Sergeant Robert M. Patterson of B Troop, 2/17th Cav, ~~on the next page~~^{below} gives an idea of the intensity of combat at La Chu.

GENERAL ORDERS
No. 65

HEADQUARTERS
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
WASHINGTON, DC, 25 October 1969

AWARD OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR



By direction of the President, under the Joint Resolution of Congress approved 12 July 1862 (amended by act of 3 March 1863, act of 9 July 1918 and act of 25 July 1963), the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty is awarded by the Department of the Army in the name of Congress to:



Sergeant *Robert M. Patterson*, 244-78-4310 (then Specialist Four), United States Army, who distinguished himself on 6 May 1968 while serving as a fire team leader of the 3d Platoon, B Troop, 2d Squadron, 17th Cavalry during an assault against a North Vietnamese Army Battalion which was entrenched in a heavily fortified position near La Chu, Republic of Vietnam. When the leading squad of the 3d Platoon was pinned down by heavy interlocking automatic weapon and rocket propelled grenade fire from two enemy bunkers, Sergeant *Patterson* and the two other members of his assault team moved forward under a hail of enemy fire to destroy the bunkers with grenade and machinegun fire. Observing that his comrades were being fired on from a third enemy bunker covered by enemy gunners in one-man spider holes, Sergeant *Patterson*, with complete disregard for his own safety and ignoring the warning of his comrades that he was moving into a bunker complex, assaulted and destroyed the position. Although exposed to intensive small arm and grenade fire from the bunkers and their mutually supporting emplacements, Sergeant *Patterson* continued his assault upon the bunkers which were impeding the advance of his unit. Sergeant *Patterson* singlehandedly destroyed by rifle and grenade fire five enemy bunkers, killed eight enemy soldiers and captured seven weapons. His dauntless courage and heroism inspired his platoon to resume the attack and to penetrate the enemy defensive position. Sergeant *Patterson* by his conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his own life has reflected great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army.



We had evidently been upsetting the enemy. That afternoon, May 6th, he attacked LZ Sally with 122mm rockets. From the brigade journal..

- *1700 Bde: Incoming rounds (rockets).
- *1703 From 1-502 (rear): Have 2 incoming rounds, unknown cal.
- *1705 From 326 Med: Have 7 WIA in clearing station.
- *1710 From 1-502: Estimate 122mm, landing between TOC and mess hall, 1 KIA, 4 WIA.
- *1915 Final report on rocket damage. 1-501 1 WIA (cut getting in hole), 1-502 1 KIA, 12 WIA. Damage back of orderly room, 2 field desks and chairs, 2 122mm rockets received in area. 1-321 2 WIA (minor), 2 10KW generator damaged, received 1 122mm rocket. HHC 2d Bde, 2 GP medium tents damaged. TACP 1 WIA (broken leg getting into a bunker).

On May 6th we assumed opcon of the 2/1st Infantry, a battalion of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, which had moved by UH-1 to the vicinity of the An Lo bridge where it established its command post and prepared for operations in that vicinity. The 2/501 continued closing out FSB Geronimo, secured the Hue bridges, and operated in its zone. The 1/502 had several sharp contacts near Quang Dien, taking casualties of 4 KIA and 8 WIA.

For the week May 7th-May 13th the 2d Brigade would have five battalions. The 2/1st Infantry, with its CP and one company from time to time at the An Lo bridge, would have a zone about five kilometers east-west and 10 kilometers north-south, with LZ Sally in the midpoint of its eastern edge. The 1/501 would operate northeast of Sally, and the 1/502 was northeast of that, around Quang Dien and beyond. The 2/501, operating out of Pinky, would be in familiar territory northwest of Hue to the mountains, except that ARVN units would be immediately around that city. The 2/17th Cav, its CP at Camp Evans, was assigned an area north of the 2/1st, but would, with brigade's permission and the necessary coordination, on occasion operate in another battalion's AO.

On May 7th, the 1/502 continued its action around Quang Dien; all companies were engaged and 17 tac air strikes were called in. By the end of the day four troopers of the 1/502 had been killed, four were missing (their bodies later recovered), and 20 wounded.

The 101st's division summary for May 7th noted that "Continuing the 101st Abn Div's program of extensive and aggressive night opns, 4 ambush psns, in the vic of the Perfume River, 5 km north of Hue, were activated killing 17 enemy. This continuous pres-

sure applied by airborne troopers has denied the enemy the protection of darkness as a means for unrestricted movement."

Entry in brigade journal, 8 May...

"0735 From 1-502: Co B found a total of 14 enemy bodies, 1 AK-47, 5 SKS from ambush last night, Co C found total of 5 NVA bodies, 1 AK-47."

For May 8th the 101st Airborne Division summary read in part... "A (2d Brigade) ambush psn established 6 km north of Hue, along a known enemy LOC, observed 20 NVA moving toward the canal. The plat from B/1-502 allowed the enemy to move well within the killing zone, then violently executed the ambush employing claymore, SA, AW, and M-79s. A first light sweep of the area revealed a total of 17 NVA killed and 6 wpns captured during the night action... Acting on intelligence information A/1-502 conducted RIF operations in the vic of Phu Luong A village. As the paratroopers approached the village contact was gained with an estimated NVA Co. Swiftly massing firepower in the area of contact, C/1-502 Abn Inf and B/1-502 Abn Inf were air assaulted into psns surrounding the village, establishing a tight cordon⁸ by nightfall. 7 airstrikes and supporting arty were employed on the enemy psn as opns continue throughout the night."

Action continued throughout the brigade AO during May 9th through 11th, with all battalions reporting contact. The May 10th division summary reported that...

"Co C, 1/502 Abn Inf, made contact with an NVA reinforced platoon 9 km N of Hue. Co C immediately employed heavy volumes of organic weapons fire as the enemy struggled to disengage. Co C maneuvered, pursuing the withdrawing enemy until by mid-afternoon the NVA platoon was trapped against the Pha Tam Ciang bay. Heavy volumes of artillery and tac air were employed on the trapped enemy force which, together with the fires from airborne troops, resulted in 21 enemy killed."

On May 12th and 13th, the 1/501 Inf and 17th Cav both took part in an action around Ap Co Thap two kilometers northeast of the An Lo bridge that is worthy of description.⁹

The night of May 11-12 the full 2/17 Cav was in a squadron base at YD609379, in the sand dunes just south of the Street Without Joy and seven kilometers north of the An Lo bridge. The 2/17th's plans summary that night called for A troop to conduct a reconnaissance in force generally eastward and for B Troop to do the same generally westward from that location. The tank platoon of C/2/34 Armor that had been overnight, 11-12 May, at the An Lo bridge was to join the squadron the next day.

⁸The 2d Brigade records do not reflect this "cordon" operation, probably, I suspect, because no mention is made in the journals about night-long illumination, which a true brigade cordon always called for.

⁹I have pieced together this account from the brigade and division journals. Limited discussion at our 2d Brigade assembly, August 1995, Columbus, GA, and since have led to no better an understanding.

The division summary for May 12th reported...

"As intelligence information began to indicate increased enemy activities and the presence of a Regt Hqs in or around Ap Co Thap hamlet, paratroopers of the 2d Bde were dispatched to conduct RIF operations to determine the exact location of the enemy force..."

I ordered 2/17 Cav into this operation. From the 2d Brigade journal for May 12th...

"0755 2-17: Will move SW to QL 1, when cleared will move to SE.

"0945 2-17: Lead presently 2.5 km from Evans main gate. Estimate lead element will not be in position until between 1030 or 1100 hours.

"1010 2-17: Move tac CP to Evans.

"1125 2-17 Cav: A Trp NDP YD620315 [Note. 2 km N of An Lo bridge], B Trp NDP YD600314 [2 km west of A Trp].

"1155 CO: At 1230 hrs 2-17 Cav will receive opcon of C and D/1-501."

The division summary for May 12th continued...

"C/1/501, while moving from the SE toward Ap Co Thap hamlet [Note: C Co had been at the An Lo bridge, under the direction of 1/501], began to receive sporadic SA fire from within the hamlet."

From the 2d Brigade summary for May 12th:

"Co C, 1-501. Conducted RIF operation to vic YD640314. At 1115 received intense SA and AW fire from vic YD641317 [Note: Ap Co Thap] resulting in 1 US KIA. Co withdrew to be supported by tac air. At 1152 hrs contact had broken. At 1230 opcon to 2-17 Cav.

"Co D, 1-501. (From vic YD659305, two kilometers SE of Ap Co Thap...) Opcon 2-17 Cav effective 1230 hours.

"Co A, 1-501 Inf. Conducted RIF opn to An Lo bridge. At 1431 hrs 1 plat opcon 2-17 Cav. At 1740 Co (-) began moving to vic 637308, opcon 2-17 Cav.

"Co B, 1-501. At 1629 hrs conducted a combat assault to LZ vic YD651315. Closed LZ 1547 hrs. Opcon 2-17 Cav effective 1633.

"Co C, 2-501. Opcon to 2-17 Cav at 1700 hours. Moved by vehicle to An Lo bridge."

I do not remember this action well, but it is evident to me from the record that I decided to attack the Ap Co Thap position with the 2/17th Cav and that I gave its commander, Julius

Becton, five rifle companies --all four companies of the 1/501 and C Company of the 2/501 -- with instructions to encircle the hamlet before nightfall so that we could destroy the enemy within it during the night and the next day.

Using the journals of the 2d Brigade and the map of the brigade AO that I retain from those days, I have reconstructed this action as best I can on a sketch map (next page).

The brigade summary for May 12th reported on one more company...

"Co D, 1-502. Moved to a PZ vic YD728297 (5 kilometers SE of Quang Dien) and conducted a combat assault at 1727 hrs to vic YD629314, closed 1824 hrs. Opcon 1-501 effective 1800 hrs."¹⁰

Continuing the division summary of May 12th...

"A/2/17 Cav together with B/2/17 Cav attacked eastward and engaged elements of an NVA company. Massed firepower, consisting of SA, AW, 90mm tank guns, and 106mm RR together with artillery and tac air were employed, as the enemy returned SA, AW, RPG, and mortar fire. As the contact developed, indicating the presence of a sizeable enemy force, four additional maneuver companies were rapidly air assaulted into the area to encircle the enemy position. As the cordon was being established, paratroopers of A and B Trp, 2/17 Airborne Cavalry, continued the savage close in fighting as the enemy, now estimated to be elements of a battalion, made a determined effort to escape before the cordon could be closed. The enemy employed a heavy volume of intensive mortar, RPG, and AW fire."

The brigade summary of May 12th continues, building a picture of a "cordon" that, as my sketch that reconstructs the action reveals (next page), was open at its top...

"Co A, 1-501. Returned to opcon of 1-501 Inf 1800 hrs and occupied a blocking psn vic YD644309 to YD634313.

"Co B, 1-501. Returned to opcon of 1-501 Inf 1800 hrs. Occupied a blocking psn vic YD644323 to YD646316.

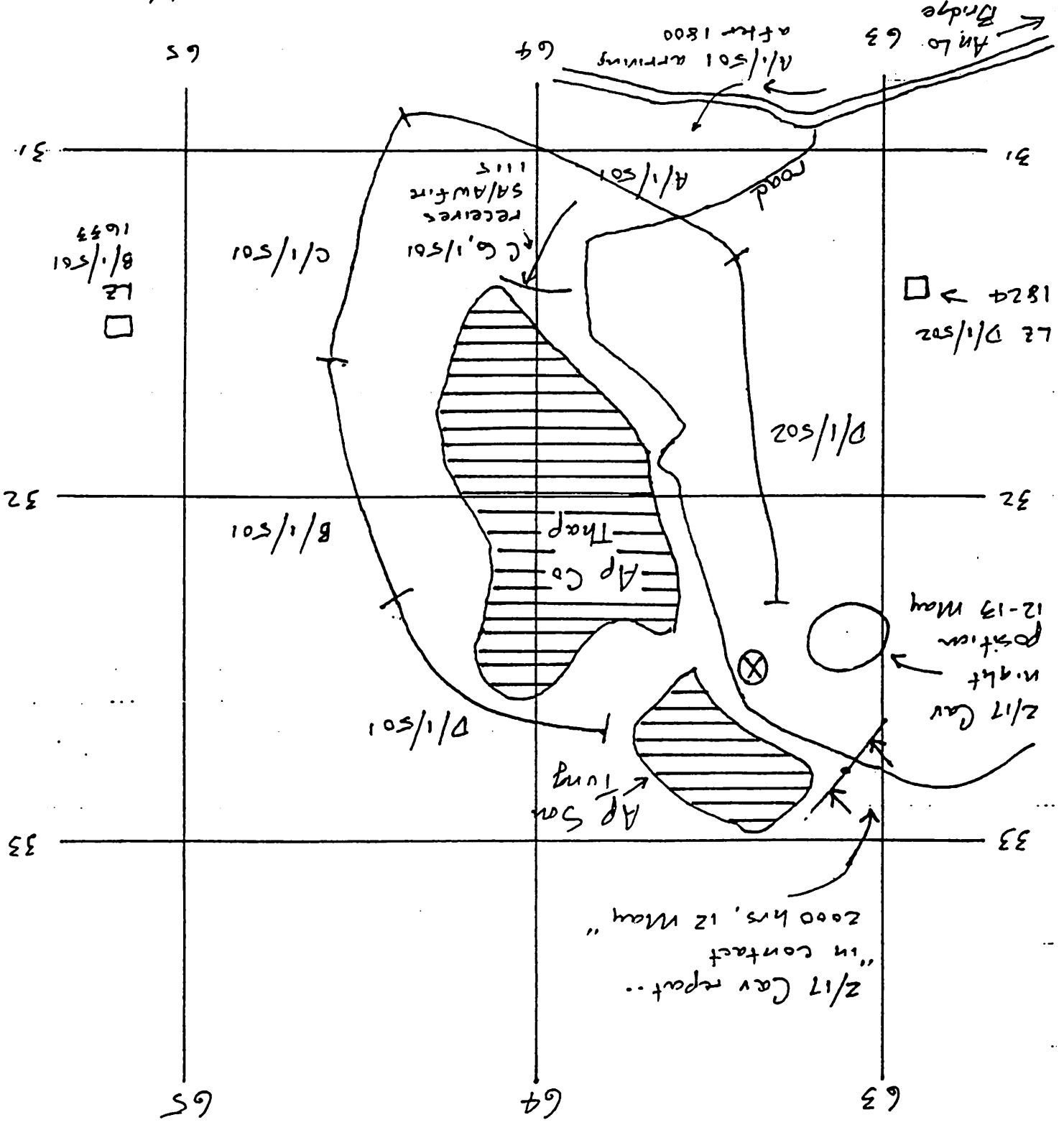
"Co C, 1-501. Returned to opcon of 1-501 Inf 1800 hrs and occupied a blocking psn vic YD646316 to YD644309.

"Co B, 1-501. Returned to opcon of 1-501 Inf 1800 hrs. Occupied a blocking psn vic YD638327 to YD644327.

¹⁰The brigade journal is confusing, probably inaccurate, in that it reports an 1840 request by 2/17 Cav "to receive opcon of A/2-501 to place them on W side of cordon" and an 1845 reply by the brigade S3: "A/2-501 opcon 2-17 effective this time." However, A/2/501 was operating around FSB Geronimo far to the southwest that afternoon. The unit that made this move was clearly D/1/502, which on its arrival was opcon 1/501. This confusion of units tells me that during the afternoon and evening of this battle those involved were under considerable stress.

bridges; not employed

Reconstruction of action, according at 1230 to 2d Bde journals of 12 + 13 May



C/2/501

An Lo 63
Bridge

A/1/501 arriving after 1800

64

65

31

31

L2 D/1/502
1824

L2
B/1/501
1633

D/1/502

32

32

2/17 Cav
night position
12-13 May

B/1/501

D/1/501

AP Son Tung

33

33

2/17 Cav report...
in contact
2000 hrs, 12 May

65

64

63

"Co D, 1-502 Inf. Opcon to 1-501 Inf effective 1800 hrs. Occupied a blocking psn vic YD634313 to YD633323.

"2-17 Cav.

"Trp A. At the close of the reporting period Trp A was in contact vic YD631328.

"Trp B. At the close of the reporting period Trp B was in contact vic YD631328.

The "reporting period" ended at 2000 hours daily. Continuing with the division summary for May 12th...

"After the encirclement was completed, Trp A and B were redeployed outside the cordon in order to establish an attack position in preparation for an assault on the enemy position 13 May. At the close of the reporting period continuous illumination, together with heavy volumes of artillery fire, were being employed as the action continues. Thus far, during the vicious action 27 enemy have been killed and 7 weapons captured."

From the brigade summary of the next day, May 13th...

"2-17 Cav. At the beginning of the reporting period [Note: 2000 hrs 12 May] and until 0206 hours [13 May] continued to engage elements of an NVA Bn vic YD633328. Troop A, Troop B, and A/2/501 [Note: this was probably A/1/502; see footnote 10] received intense MG, RPG, and 82mm mortar from the enemy positions. The enemy defended from trenches and bunkers with overhead cover. The intensity of enemy fire prevented the link-up with Co D 1-501 to complete the cordon of villages vic YD638313 and YD640320. The squadron elements withdrew to a night position vic YD631324. Arty was fired into the open portion of the cordon throughout the night."¹¹

Something had gone wrong, and the bulk of the enemy had slipped away. A sweep of the area the next morning, May 13th, revealed 36 NVA KIA and 1 AK-47. The 2/17th and C/2/501, with the 2/17th in the attack, had lost a total of 6 killed and 52 wounded.

I am reported to have been furious at the lost opportunity.¹²

¹¹The use of the term "cordon" here is inaccurate. In the 2d Brigade, there was no concept of a "cordon" with an "open portion."

¹²Jim White, brigade S4, told me in a 1995 telephone call of his recollection that, back in our brigade mess, I was, in his words, "furious" at Julius Becton for his part in our failure to exploit an opportunity for a major encirclement. I probably was at that moment, but I got over it.

Bill Robertson, who was the communications officer of the 2/17th Cav, has written a book, with the help of other members of that unit, on the 2/17th Cavalry Squadron's first year in Vietnam. Describing the action discussed here he writes that on the night of May 12-13th the action was intense and that I was in the air overhead, monitoring the Cav's command channel. Julius Becton was seeking to seal a specific part of the cordon by inserting a rifle company (Robertson does not name the unit or its commander) between A and B Troops. Becton ordered one troop to slip sideways (a difficult maneuver when under fire) so that the rifle

Reflecting on these events 28 years later with the benefit of the reconstruction, page 139, I would say that I should have seen during the late afternoon of May 12th that we had a bigger cordon target than I had thought, and that I should not have let 2/17 Cav get so deeply engaged in attacking into Ap Son Tung. The brigade journal for the afternoon of May 12th has these entries...

- "1745 2-17: B Trp location YD634325 [Note: marked with (X) on the sketch map], center of mass on right flank of A Co. 1 WIA; 2 tanks hit.
- "1750 WIA was from RPG frag that hit tank. One tank burning. Do not know condition of other tank at present.
- "1755 1 tank inoperable, burning inside and outside. One tank operative, stuck in dirt."

The fact that the enemy in Ap Son Tung was strong enough to stop our tanks should have led me to disengage Julius Becton's 2/17th at that point in the battle, to decide to put even more troops into the cordon, to enlarge the encirclement to include Ap Son Tung, and to direct that the 1/501 and 2/17th would together and under my direction in a brigade-controlled encirclement would form an airtight barrier to the enemy's escape. As at Phuoc Yen we would then begin to attack and reduce the trapped enemy the next day.

But I think that I did not dwell on the matter, and put the events of 12-13 May behind me not to be thought about until I began writing this part of this history. The 2d Brigade, with the 2/17th Cav along, was headed for a new challenge.

company commander could move forward to fill the gap. Roberston relates that the rifle company commander would not move his unit forward (this may have been a matter of who had the opcon of the company), and that Becton was then required to order the troop commander to move his force laterally back. The troop commander, using an expletive, said into his radio, "I see, just like the f----- Charge of the Light Brigade." The story goes that, monitoring that channel, I then told Becton to "meet me on my push" (meaning "on my brigade command frequency"). When Becton came up (and of course the 2/17th commanders and Robertson had also switched frequencies), I was heard to say, "I want that troop commander relieved." Whereupon Colonel Becton was heard to say, in effect, "Sir, you can relieve me, but I do the relieving of my troop commanders." Given the intensity of the fight and the passions of the moment, I do not doubt this story, but do not remember it either. He was in the right of course; I had no fit reason to relieve a troop commander, and Joe Rozelle, commanding B Troop, was in any event a superior combat leader. But such is the stress of war. My outburst, in anger at what I may have thought was the troop commander's imputation regarding my brigade, must have stemmed in some part from my frustration at being unable to execute an encirclement.

This story illustrates the significance of "opcon," which I had over the 2/17th, versus "full command," which I approached having over my three infantry battalions (see footnote, page 20, Chapter 3). With the latter commanders, I could summarily relieve a company commander for cause, without explanation to the division commander (see the last paragraph, page 67, Chapter 5). Only if the misbehavior were exceptionally grave and flagrant, did this freedom of action exist for me with the 2/17th Cav. And of course, a troop commander in the 2/17th was aware that his squadron commander had a degree of independence not possessed by the three infantry battalion commanders of my brigade, as Julius Becton demonstrated on this occasion (although the personalities of more than one of my battalion commanders would surely have caused them to challenge so unjustified an outburst on my part in an instance like this -- but probably not on the command net).

Chapter 9. LZ Sally; May 14 - June 28, 1968

After the hectic days of May 12th and 13th, May 14th was for the 2d Brigade Task Force a day of modest enemy assessment and of "no friendly casualties," our first since arriving at LZ Jane. We had lately heard talk of an expansion of the task force AO into Phu Vang district east of Hue, and into Huong Thuy district south of Hue. This area of operations was the responsibility of a U.S. Marine Corps command called Task Force X-Ray, at Phu Bai. On May 14th, talk had become reality; from the brigade journal...

"1408 From 1-501: 1st lift Co C landed LZ YD845321 at 1505."

C Company's LZ was on Col Co Beach (sometimes called "Cocoa Beach") on the South China Sea 10 kilometers northeast of Hue. Here a tank farm stored fuel that it unloaded from tankers, and from here a pipeline took that fuel to depots near Hue, with pumping stations along the way. Later that afternoon, the brigade journal reported...

"1524 Bde CO departed for Thua Thien Sector."

The purpose of my visit was to work out with the Thua Thien province chief a scheme by which the two of us, and his district chiefs in Phu Vang and Huong Thuy, could cooperate to accomplish the mission to be assigned to the 1/501st and its A Battery, 1/321 (plus one MP squad). Five days later the brigade opord spelled out that 1/501 mission:

"Secure the following installations/areas:

Tan My refuel area, dredge area, landing support area, and fuel farm

Col Co Beach SeaBee vehicle park

POL pipeline from Tan My to Hue in assigned AO

QL 1 and QL 551 [Note: which ran from Hue to Col Co Beach] in assigned AO

SeaBee work parties in assigned AO as required

"Provide security for daily minesweep on QL 1 and QL 551 in assigned AO.

"As required, provide fire support and/or reaction forces for Combined Action Platoons [these USMC units assisted village chiefs in local security and pacification].

"Establish close liaison with Combined Action Platoons and district headquarters to insure full utilization of all available military and paramilitary forces.

"Establish liaison with Task Force Clearwater (a U.S. Navy patrol boat unit, whose call sign was "Pistol Pete") and provide fire support and/or security for patrol boats along the Perfume River to Hue."

Inasmuch as the same operation order assigned the 2/17 Cav the mission: "On order, initiate combat operations in 1-501 Inf AO," Jim Hunt, 1/501 battalion commander, also on occasion had opcon over units of the 2/17th in his area of operations.¹

When I visited the command post of the Marine battalion near Phu Vang, I was surprised to hear from the battalion commander that he was accomplishing his security mission (top subpara above) by placing three of his rifle companies on static security -- detachments on the beach, at his fire base, along the road and pipeline, and so on -- and was using only one rifle company mobile in his area of operations. (With 13 man rifle squads and a much larger TOE strength, USMC rifle companies had a field strength of about 160-175, while ours were at about 125 at best.)

The consequence of this was immediately evident to me; the enemy roamed the countryside at night without interference from the Marines.

I told Jim Hunt that we would use one company in static positions (he decided that a platoon, along with the fire base's occupants, would secure his artillery fire base and take care of the daily QL 551 minesweep, and that the rest of the company would take care of Col Co Beach) and that he would use the other three companies on the offensive night and day out in the battalion AO. Jim was familiar with that concept; he had been operating that way since he took command of the 1/501.

From our experience working with district chiefs and their PF platoons, I was confident that, if we gave them fire support and a rapid reaction force, we could rely on them for road and pipeline patrols, for protection of the pumping stations, and for ambushes that would imperil any enemy sneaking around localities that it was our duty to protect.

On May 15th, B/1/501 moved by air to secure FSB Mongoose, near Phu Vang, so that A/1/321 Arty could come in that afternoon by CH-47 and occupy a position there. On the same day D Company helilifted into the new AO, A Company moved there by truck, and Jim Hunt set up his Tac CP at Mongoose. That night, the 1/501 set out four ambushes, one per company. The next day, May 16th, companies of the 1/501 began patrolling. Snipers shot at an A Company patrol; the company commander reported "negative casualties - engaging with arty - contact broken immediately."

From the 1/501 on May 17th, the brigade journal at 0820 reported: "A Co had 4 personnel from 2-17 link up at 0815 hrs." That day, the 17th, the 1/501 engaged the enemy in four minor contacts during the day and sprung one night ambush.

On the 17th, 2/17 Cav moved by convoy from Camp Evans to establish its new base of operations at Camp Eagle. The brigade journal for that day, the 17th, had this 0800

¹In due time, visitors to Jim Hunt's command post would be impressed with the function that the 1/501 commander performed in bringing together and coordinating the many military and paramilitary activities taking place in his AO, under a common concept of operations.

entry: "To all units: There will be a planning meeting at Bde Hqs at 1600 hours today." At this 17 May planning meeting we laid out the new areas of operation:

The 1/501st AO would be east of the Perfume River to the coast and southeast of Hue to the district town of Huong Thuy, four miles from Hue, where the battalion recon platoon would secure a vital bridge on QL 1 and where its platoon leader would provide liaison with the district chief and especially with his intelligence officer.

Based at Camp Eagle,² the 2/17th would operate in the 1/501st AO -- either coordinating with the 1/501 under brigade control or, when necessary, placing its units opcon to the 1/501. (Early the next morning, May 18th, 2/17 Cav moved to a departure area just across the Perfume River from Hue and -- with its two troops and its aerial rifle platoon, plus a platoon of M48 tanks from C/2/34 Armor and a USMC Ontos platoon -- swept eastward across the rice paddies for six kilometers with minor contact and established a position for the night, prepared to conduct RIF operations in four directions from that position the next day, the 19th.)

The 1/502d, Jack Bishop commanding,³ would continue to operate eastward and westward from the An Lo bridge, but primarily in Quang Dien district to its east. Jack would keep his command post alongside the district chief in Quang Dien.

The 2/501st, Tony Heiter commanding, with its command post at LZ Pinky, would operate south and east of LZ Sally, primarily in Huong Tra district, as far as Hue. Tony would secure the Hue bridges and keep a liaison officer at the district headquarters.

I laid out the brigade task force mission and concept of operations. They appeared in the operation order two days later:

"Mission: 2d Bde... continues RIF operations in the coastal plains rice producing areas within AO, provides security and support for rice collection within capabilities; finds and destroys NVA/VC base areas and logistical installations; interdicts enemy movement into and within the AO; protects Hue from attack; assists in building the capabilities of paramilitary forces; conducts daily minesweeps of QL 1 and QL 551; provides security for designated installations; assists paramilitary forces in securing An Lo bridge, Hue bridge, and (two bridges on QL 1 south of Hue).

"Concept of operations: 2d Bde employs maneuver units in assigned AOs to find, fix, encircle, and destroy NVA/VC forces. During the hours of darkness, units employ saturation ambushes astride NVA/VC routes to deny him freedom of movement, hamper his operation, and dominate the night by offensive action. When the enemy is fixed, 2d Bde employs heavy air and artillery fires and other means to destroy the enemy. Priority of fires to unit in contact."

²The 2/17 based itself either at Camp Eagle or Camp Evans, where there was maintenance backup for its many vehicles, and never at LZ Sally, where there was not.

³Jack would soon become division G-3, turning his battalion over to Lt. Col. Leslie D. Carter, Jr.

Three paragraphs from the opord's "coordinating instructions"...

"Establish liaison with district headquarters in assigned AOs, and coordinate operations with local RF/PF and ARVN forces to insure maximum utilization of all available forces and unity of effort.

"Place emphasis on aggressively gaining accurate and timely intelligence from all sources, especially district and ARVN sources; maximum effort to acquire prisoners and documents. Report intelligence promptly.

"Assist GVN in securing rice harvest and denying rice to the VC/NVA."

The 101st's Operation Nevada Eagle began at noon May 18th. Division emphasized that a primary objective was to protect the rice harvest and deny it to the enemy. But division agreed with us that the best security for a farmer was to reduce the enemy presence in his part of the countryside to the point that village PFs could protect his rice harvest.

On May 20th, one day after brigade published its operation order, the 1/501st executed its first encirclement operation in its new AO. Based on an agent report that an enemy force was in the objective area, on May 19th A, B, and D Companies had been operating with little significant contact toward Ap Dong Gi Tay, YD 835217 (sketch, next page).

From the 22 June 1968 report of the brigade S3 (see page 79, Chapter 6)...

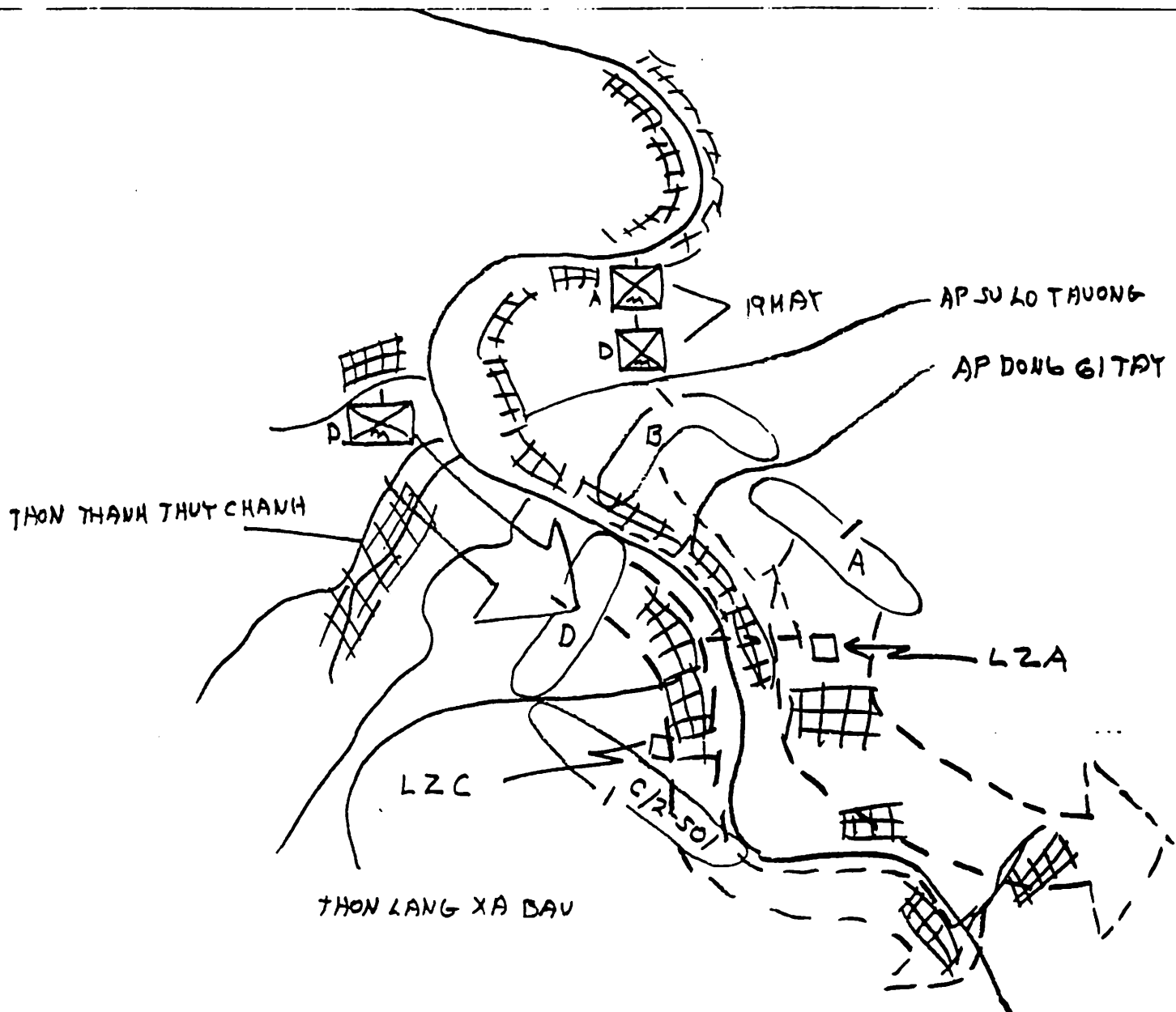
"At 0522 the following morning (May 20th), Co B received SA and RPG fire from the east, vic Ap Dong Gi Tay. Shortly afterwards, at 0600, Co B engaged an enemy squad in bunkers vic the same location. Contact was broken at 0730 hrs as Co B withdrew to the west and directed tac air strikes on the enemy positions. Co D, moving generally to the SE towards Co B's contact, also received sporadic SA and sniper fire from the same area. Based on these contacts and the agent report received 19 May, CO 1-501 decided to cordon the enemy force, now estimated to be a reinforced company. While continuous artillery, tac air, and LFT fires fixed the enemy, CO 1-501 deployed Co A, B, and D into blocking positions as indicated on the diagram (next page). Co A, upon landing at LZ A at 1610 hrs received intermittent SA and 60mm mortar fires until 1930, at which time a partial cordon was established with Co B to the N, Co D to the W, Co A to the E, and Co C 2-501 to the SW. Co C 2-501 was placed opcon 1-501 and was inserted into LZ C at 1829 hours. By last light 20 May, a cordon⁴ consisting of four rifle companies (plus one PF plat opcon Co D), and SA interlocking fires between the right flank of Co C 2-501 and the left flank of Co A, was established.

⁴The "cordon" was not airtight, so the term here is again inaccurate, according to proper 2d Brigade usage. And the final sentence of the report, next page, is incorrect in that small arms and artillery cannot effectively seal a gap.

"During the night of 20-21 May, constant illumination was provided over the cordon by USAF flareships, UH-1 flareships, and artillery illumination, as the encircled enemy force, now identified as elements of the 810th LF Bn, vainly tried to escape. At first light, after an intensive tac air and artillery preparation, Co A, B, and D swept through the enemy positions from the NW to SE and by mid-afternoon had completed their search of the objective area.

"U.S. casualties totaled 12 WHA. The enemy lost 65 KIA, two PWs, and 12 weapons captured.

"Although CO 1-501 did not have enough forces to completely encircle the enemy force, he effectively sealed the gap with SA and artillery."



The night of 18-19 May, the 2/17th Cav, complete, was in a night location two kilometers northeast of where the 1/501 would execute the operation just described on the 20th. It was dangerous territory. The brigade journal reported that at 0015 the 19th the 2/17th...

"...received SA, RPG, and approx 30 82mm mortar rounds. Incoming fire ceased at 0035 ours. Arty was fired on suspected enemy position. Results: 19 US WIA (11 medevac), negative enemy assessment."

Meanwhile the 2/501st and 1/502d had been establishing themselves in their assigned AOs. The 1/502 AO was relatively quiet. From the brigade journal for May 17th...

- "0206 1-502: At 0200 PFs conducted raid on 2 VC squads reported at YD708330, presently in contact.
- "0300 1-502: C/1/502 captured 2 VC at 0253 hrs (YD718342) walking past C Co night position, the two were part of a 6 man patrol Co C ambushed earlier last night (16 May), killing 2, they are local VC from village vic YD714323 that Co C and PF RIF through earlier yesterday.
- "0620 1-502: At 0400 hrs, 1 PF plat conducted raid on target YD709330, killed 1, captured 3, all were political cadre group.
- "0625 1-502: At 0600 hrs Co C ambush was returning to NDP and as they neared the Co psn an OP [meaning a member of an outpost that had been set out for local security] stood up to return to Co NDP also, one man from the ambush opened fire on the OP as he stood wounding one man in the head, medevac complete at 0623 hours, condition was serious."⁵

On May 22d the 2/501st had a sharp action. From the brigade journal for that day...

- "1721 From 2-501: D Co at 1716 hours made contact with 30 VC/NVA at YD604268, killed 10 (BC), captured a AK-47 and 2 RPG rounds, VC/NVA fled east - are presently being engaged with gunships.
- "1914 From 101st: Gunships in support of Co D 2-501 report 6 NVA/VC KIA."

Cleo Hogan's diary tells more about this action, and gives an account of a later entry in the brigade journal...

⁵I remember this report. In my small office in the LZ Sally TOC, doing paperwork and monitoring the brigade channels, I heard the 1/502 call for a medevac. I immediately called Jack Bishop on the land line (we had long had one in to Quang Dien) and asked about the medevac. I understood him to say that the outpost member had fired on the returning ambush (which with good practice can be avoided), not the reverse as reported here. I growled at him; I said that his people should not make that avoidable mistake. He replied, "Sir, those things happen in combat." I instinctively said sharply, "Not in this brigade, they don't!" -- wanting to leave him in no doubt of our standards. Only when I encountered this journal item did I realize that the accident resulted from an understandable quick reaction by a surprised ambush patrol member, which made it an entirely forgivable act. Jack Bishop is years dead, so I can't tell him that I was too harsh.

22 May

The company CA'd into the area north of the Song Bo. Intelligence indicated that the enemy was building up in this area. Lt Trabert and 5 of his men attacked several NVA and killed them. At 1800 hrs when the choppers brought us in our night chow and supplies, the NVA let go with a mortar attack. We moved about 1000 meters and at 2200 hours they attacked. We killed 18 and had no losses. General Barsanti came out and Colonel Cushman. They were really pleased...

An item from Cleo's diary entry the previous day caught my notice...

21 May

Yesterday we conducted live firing training exercises just outside La Chu. So many of the men in the company are new that they decided to have a live fire exercise for those men who have not yet been in a real battle.

From the brigade journal of May 23d, a report from 1/502 (typical of reports on PF actions from 1/502)...

"0830 1-502: Report from Quang Dien. At 0600 hours 2 plat of PF conducted raid at YD720347 - killed 2 VC/NVA (smudges on journal) 2 of the women were NVA nurses, captured 5 weapons, 2 AK-47s, 2 AK-44s, 3 AK-55s, have 22 POWs, 4 women, 18 men - one of which is an NVA from 2d Co, 16th Bn, 2d Regt."

Later in the day, this report...

"2200 1-502: At 2145 hours PF sprung ambush YD862325, 3 VC KIA, 3 weapons captured, negative casualties."

Companies of the 1/501 had begun operating with PRUs (provincial reconnaissance units, which were specially trained to go after VC infrastructure, i.e., political cadres). Both 1/501 and 1/502 sprung ambushes the night of the 23d. And on the 23d we learned that 2/17th would get its own artillery battery. C Btry, 6/33d Arty, was on the way to the 2/17th location, which was a triangular promontory that jutted out into a lagoon about nine kilometers east of Phu Vang and had been the night location of TF Sabre. The position, now with artillery, would be known as FSB Forward. It would often be the location of the 2/17 tac CP.

On the 26th activity erupted in the 1/501 AO. According to the brigade journal, a Troop B, 2/17th Cav, listening post near FSB Forward "...observed movement, engaged with 106RR. First light check 11 NVA KIA, 3 NVA POW, 3 AK-47, 2 RPG-7, 1 RPG-2, 23 B-40 rds, 22 RPG-7 rds, 30 lbs explosives..."

A/1/501 went opcon to the 17th Cav and at 1245 made a combat assault into an LZ six kilometers south of FSB Forward. Late that afternoon and into the evening B Troop with Ontos and tank reinforcements was working with A/1/501 in a contact with an estimated enemy company, sustaining 2 KIA and 8 WIA.

That activity would continue the following day. The 2/17's plan, according to the brigade journal for the 26th..

"Trp B, Co A 1-501 (plus one PF platoon), 3 companies from 3d Bn 3d ARVN Regt and C Trp 3d Sqdn 7th ARVN Regt. Maintain blocking positions around the villages vic YD876235 to vic YD887226 [this was the village of Thon Le Xa Dong]. At approx 0730 Trp B [Note: reinforced with a Marine Ontos platoon, a Marine amphibious tractor platoon, a Marine tank platoon, and the 2d platoon, C Co, 2/34 Tank Battalion] will attack obj at YD880230 from the NW to the SE toward a blocking position occupied by ARVN elements." (The remainder of an elaborate blocking and attacking plan involving Cav, Marine units, tanks, ARVN troops, and a night combat assault by A/1/501 is not repeated here.)

Called a "cordon" operation and supported during the night with illumination, it was not really that. On 27 May this force met only scattered resistance and sustained 2 KIA and 8 WIA, including 4 Marines, 1 ARVN, and 1 PF.

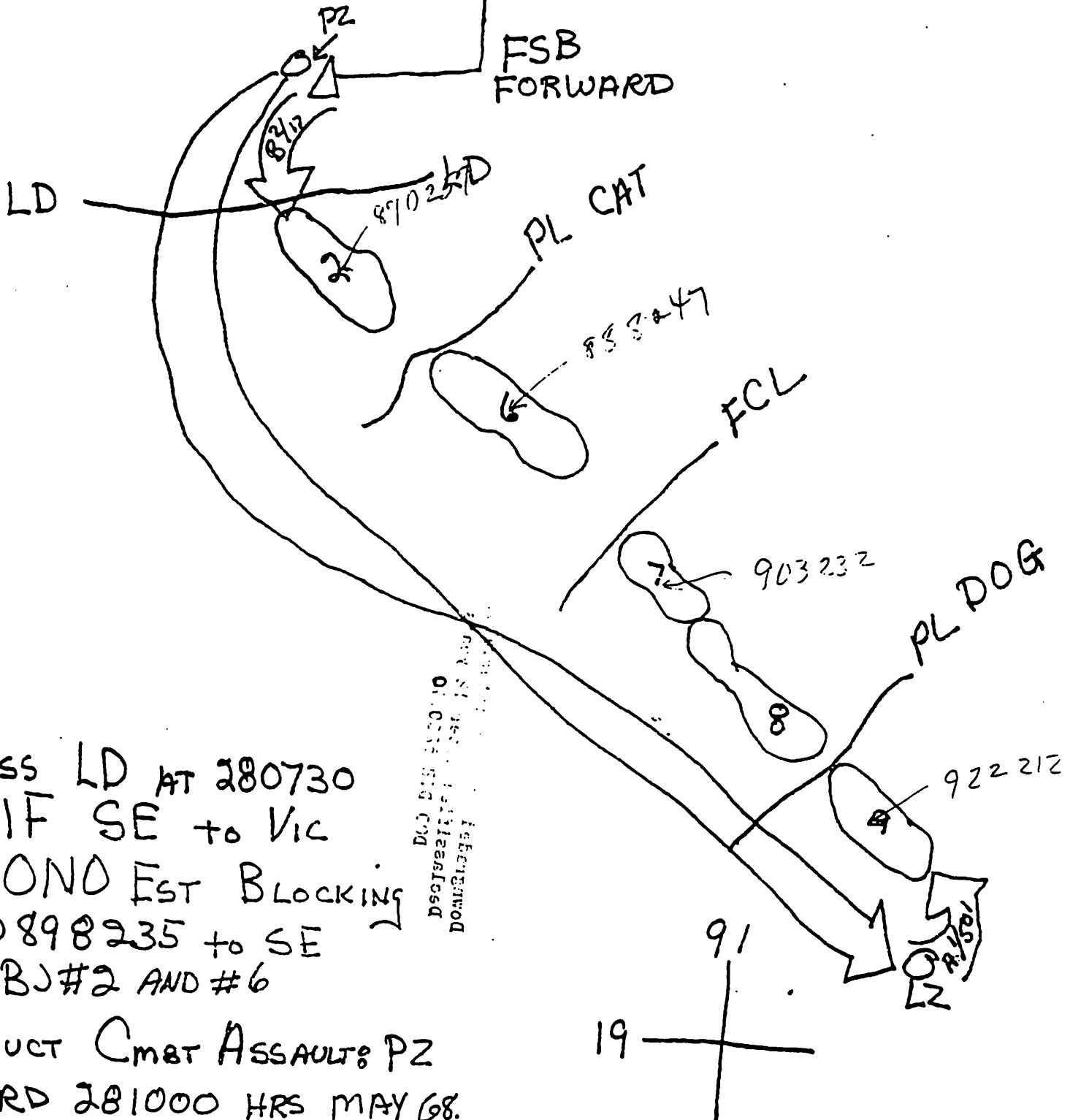
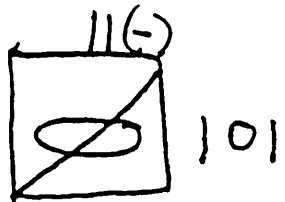
The following day the same force had considerable success sweeping for eight kilometers southeastward down a chain of villages along the shore from FSB Forward, with A/1/501 making a combat assault into a blocking position at the far end of the sweep (see operation overlay, next page). At a cost of one man killed and seven wounded (the KIA was from a booby-trapped 155mm round, and two WIAs were from a booby-trapped AP mine), 2/17, with attachments and fire support, assessed 32 VC KIA, 8 NVA KIA, and 1 VC POW.

Meanwhile an agent report on the 27th that "an unknown number of VC/NVA" were located in Thon Xuan Hoa village, YD789242, had led Jim Hunt to carry out a cordon operation that night. The encircling force was two companies of the 1/501, the battalion recon platoon reinforced with a PF platoon, and D/1/502 which combat assaulted at 2103 that evening and completed the encirclement. Illumination was continuous, but when a sweep was made the next day, the count was disappointing: 2 NVA KIA, 8 VC KIA, 2 NVA POW, 1 VC POW and 12 weapons. 1/501 had one man wounded. D/1/502 was helilifted back to the 1/502 AO.

May 28th completed ten days of Operation Nevada Eagle for the 2d Brigade Task Force. Friendly losses for our two battalions (the 1/502 was with the 1st Brigade) and cav squadron had been 4 KIA and 117 WIA, of which 86 had been medevaced. The enemy assessment was 120 NVA KIA, 63 VC KIA, 7 NVA POW, and 7 VC POW, and 82 individual and crew-served weapons.

30

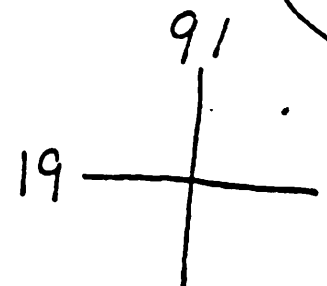
2/17



CROSS LD AT 280730
 RIF SE to VIC
 35, OND EST BLOCKING
 YD898235 to SE
 D OBJ#2 AND #6

CONDUCT CMBT ASSAULT: PZ
 FORWARD 281000 HRS MAY 68.
 YD928200, EST BLOCK PSN

DOWNGRADED
 UNCLASSIFIED
 DATE 08-11-2010
 BY 60322/UC/STP



May 29th was a relatively quiet day in the 2d Brigade Task Force AO. But on the 30th the 2/17th had an opportunity to go back to Thon Le Xa Dong, above. This time we would do it with a proper cordon.

Troop A,⁶ 2/17th, was on a RIF operation southeast from FSB Forward. From the 22 June after action report (see sketch, next page)...

"At 0750 hrs, as Trp A approached the NW end of the village complex, one platoon made contact with an unknown size force (1). The platoon attacked and by 8045 hours had eliminated enemy resistance. As one platoon continued the attack SE other elements of Trp A (with attached Marine units)⁷ maneuvered south and then east to attack the enemy from the rear or eastern [actually western] side of the village (2). Suspecting the presence of a sizeable enemy force in the area CO 2d Brigade requested assistance from the CO, 3-3 ARVN. Coordination was effected to have one company of the regiment establish a blocking position (3) on the SE end of the village. At 1050 hours, the advancing forces were subjected to a mortar attack (4) from the center of the village area. At 1305 hrs, Trp A, having advanced still further SE into the village, made contact (5) with an unknown size force. Tac Air, artillery, and a LFT were used to support Trp A. As the contact grew in intensity, the Bde CO, reacting rapidly, directed Co B/1-501 Inf be placed opcon to 2-17 Cav and to conduct a combat assault to a LZ (6) north of the objective. Co B established a blocking position (7) and linked up with the blocking position (3) of the 3-3 ARVN Regt company on the SE. Troop A continued to attack SE until approximately 1830 hrs, and then positioned elements in blocking positions (8) to complete the cordon. At 1932 hours, one platoon of Co C/1-501 was placed opcon 1-17 Cav and landed at a LZ NW of the cordon. The rifle platoon was used to assist in completing the encirclement.

"Continuous illumination was provided by artillery fire, naval gunfire, helicopter flare-ships, and USAF flare aircraft. During the hours of darkness numerous attempts to escape were driven back by alert and vigilant troopers. At first light, 15 enemy attempted to escape thru the ARVN position. When the attempt failed, the group turned and in desperation attempted to break thru Trp A's position on the north [Note: where the platoon from C/1501 had been deployed]. This attempt also failed and a LFT arrived on station to engage the fleeing enemy. Following an artillery preparation, the Aero Rifle Platoon and the platoon of Co C/1-501 began a sweep into the objective area (10) from

⁶Julius Becton's 2/17th Cav had only two troops; from time to time one of them would rotate out of the area of operations to Camp Eagle (or in earlier weeks to Camp Evans) for "maintenance and preparing for future operations." Troop A had just replaced Troop B in the AO. The two troops were identical except that B Troop had a platoon of six M-113 armored personnel carriers, each equipped with a .50 caliber machine gun and two M-60 machine guns.

⁷These consisted of an Ontos platoon from A Company, 1st Marine Antitank Battalion, and a tank platoon from the 1st Marine Tank Battalion.

NW to SE, as Trp A, Co B11-501 Inf and the 3-3 ARVN Regt company maintained blocking positions. The sweep met no significant resistance. Cordon units advanced toward the center of the objective and captured defeated and demoralized VC and NVA and numerous weapons. A psyops broadcast was credited with the surrender of 12 enemy. By 1150 the entire area had been swept and captured personnel and equipment evacuated.

"Results:

Friendly casualties: US: 6 WHA. ARVN: 2 PF KHA and 2 PF WHA

Enemy losses:

By US forces: 91 NVA KIA, 7 NVA POW, 12 VC POW, 30 individual and 6 crew-served weapons captured

By ARVN forces: 65 VC KIA, 22 VC POW, 30 individual and 9 crew-served weapons captured"

We had dealt a devastating blow to the 10th Local Force Battalion.⁸

⁸When General Barsanti once again pinned a Silver Star medal on me later, I told my people, for its citation, to write up my actions in this cordon. With some typical hyperbole, and with slight inconsistencies/inaccuracies as to the troop deployment, the citation conveys the intensity of direction that was called for, in order to make our kind of encirclement happen. It reads...

"Colonel Cushman... on 30 May 1968 (was) directing combat operations in the village of Thon Le Xa Dong, Thua Thien Province, Republic of Vietnam. The Second Squadron, 17th Cavalry, which was under the operational control of the Second Brigade, made contact with an enemy force in the western end of the village. By noon it was evident that a strong enemy force was occupying the village. Colonel Cushman was over the battle area in a light observation helicopter, and sensing an opportunity to encircle and destroy the enemy force, he ordered a rifle company from a nearby battalion to be combat assaulted into a position north of the village. He then persuaded Army of the Republic of Vietnam authorities to order an infantry battalion to a cordon and blocking position west and northwest of the village. Despite hostile fire throughout the battle area, he remained aloft personally directing devastating air strikes and artillery fire, and on many occasions joined United States and Army of the Republic of Vietnam commanders on the ground to determine the situation, give them counsel, and arrange for their support. Disregarding the hazards of night flight in the light observation helicopter, Colonel Cushman stayed aloft for several hours after darkness, counseling his commanders, adjusting the cordon positions, and insuring flare ship and artillery support. During the night the trapped enemy attempted in vain to break out of the ring of troops. The following morning the systematic destruction of the enemy force was completed. Included among the enemy losses were the command groups of a battalion and a regiment. These losses coupled with the large number of enemy casualties and prisoners rendered the enemy battalion and its regimental headquarters ineffective as remnants of the force fled to the mountains... This action, which was the tenth in a series of successful cordon operations conducted by the brigade under Colonel Cushman, brought the total enemy losses in these ten operations to eight hundred and twenty (820) killed and two hundred (200) captured, with remarkably light friendly casualties...."

Julius Becton was the commander on the ground in this action, directing the units in contact and calling for specific air, artillery, and gunship support; I was arranging his reinforcements and insuring his support, keeping abreast by occasionally monitoring his command channel, and counseling him from time to time. This was a good division of effort.

Before the action of 30-31 May, and working with the 1st ARVN Division, the 2d Brigade had been planning for an extension of combined US/ARVN operations southeastward from Phu Vang into Phu Tu district. While the 30-31 May action was in progress, 2d Brigade published its operation order, dated 1500 hours, 30 May. D-day was 1 June.

Extracts from the operation order...

The task organization:

TF 1-501 Inf

1-501 Inf (- B&C Cos)

A/2-17 Cav

ARP/2-17 Cav

2/C/2-34 Armor

2-501 Inf

1-502 Inf

TF 2-17 Cav

2-17 Cav (- A Trp)

B/1-501 Inf

C/1-501 Inf

Scty Plat, Bde HHC (for scty, FSB Forward)

Onton Plat/1 Tk/1 Mar

Plat/A/1 Tk/1 Mar

Plat USMC Amtrac

We would be working with the ARVN TF 7, commanded by the Sector Commander, Thua Thien Sector (who was also the Province Chief, Thua Thien). TF 7 consisted of...

3d Squadron, 7th Cav Regt (ARVN)

3d Battalion, 3d Inf Regt (ARVN)

Black Panther Co, 1st ARVN Division

12th Coastal Group, RVN Navy (Supporting)

13th Coastal Group, RVN Navy (Supporting)

Copied below is an extract of the intelligence annex to our brigade order...

1. (C) ENEMY SITUATION:

a. General: The exact enemy units and locations within the area are unknown. A major operation has not been conducted in the SE part of PHU TU District in over a month and in VINH LOC District since February. In view of this fact, it is possible that a Regimental(+) size enemy force could be located in the area of interest. Also effective saturation operations in PHU VANG District in the NW part of PHU TU District has possibly driven the major units to the SE and into the area of interest.

b. Disposition: In PHU TU District, the C117 LF Company is one of the most active units and is believed to be combat effective. The 117 Company was last contacted on 27 May 1968 vicinity YD925208. It is believed that 2 to 4 local VC platoons operate within PHU TU District. An agent stated that on 19 May 68 an unidentified VC/NVA Battalion was located vicinity YD9615. On 29 May, agent reports stated the 802d Bn located vic YD963156, 804th Bn vic YD970170, the C117 LF Co vic YD948167 and 2 VC companies located vic YD960145 to YD973152. In VINH LOC District it is believed that from 3 to 6 local VC platoons have been conducting harassing operations and gathering food which is to be taken to the mountains to supply NVA units. An agent report on 25 May 1968 stated that the K4 Battalion was located vicinity ZD0712 to ZD0812. Another agent report on 28 May 68 stated that an enemy battalion had moved into the area vicinity ZD0415 and that the personnel spoke with a northern accent and had numerous mosquito bites on their arms. On 29 May, an agent reported the C118 LF Co located vic YD9718.

At the National Archives I have had copied the operation overlay of this 30 May order. It shows the command posts of the 2/17 Cav and the ARVN TF 7 colocated at Phu Tu where their commanders could coordinate with and gain intelligence from the district chief. TF 2/17 and TF 7 are shown attacking abreast to the southwest, with the Cav on the left along the coast and TF 7 about 3 kilometers inland. The Black Panther Company, in the zone of TF 7, and D/1-501 in the zone of the 2/17 Cav are shown executing combat assaults under 2d Bde control into LZs fifteen kilometers southeast of the Cav and ARVN TFs line of departure; the Black Panthers to occupy a blocking position in the TF 7 zone, and C/1/501 to do the same in the Cav zone. Each would revert to parent TF control upon closure in their respective LZs. The RVN Navy's two coastal groups would be screening the coast alongside the 2/17th Cav. TF 1-501 is in reserve.

At first light 1 June, Jim Waldeck and I were over the area in my C&C ship. From the brigade journal for 1 June...

- "0545 DTOC [the 101st Div CP]: Naval gunfire reports 3 secondary explosions, 1 large white smoke at YD967141, other 2 at YF983137 (firing LZ prep)
- "0653 Bde S3: 1st lift of C/1-501 LZ (YD989138) at 0651 hrs.
- '0710 Bde CO: Lift for C/1-501 started at 0645 hrs - 2d lift complete at 0710 hrs.
- "0712 Bde CO: 1st lift C/1-501 moved into woods NE of LZ - received light fire, LFT engaged, no further fire received.
- "0750 2/17: C Co presently receiving sporadic sniper fire from the W end of the LZ, have 1 US WIA, medevac has been requested.
- "0808 Bde CO: 1st lift Black Panther Co abn at this time.
- "0820 2-17: B Trp at YD918212 receiving heavy volume of SA fire and 6 RPG rounds, neg cas, calling arty and returning fire with organic weapons.
- "0845 Bde CO: 2d lift Black Panther Co landed at 0841 hrs - 3d lift abn at 0845 hrs.
- "0847 Bde CO: Check with Div on availability of acft for move of B/2-501 later this AM.
- "0851 2-17: B Trp still receiving SA & AW fire and occasional RPG round - fire is coming from village to E, neg cas.
- "0900 2-17: Lift for Black Panther Company complete at 0858 hrs.

"0945 Bde S3: TF 7 reports heavy contact, enemy located at YD945160 - received heavy fire from obj 1 area YD947167.

"1000 2-17: FAC overhead waiting for fighters. Amtracks at YD810252 moving to B/1-501 location. C/1-501 receiving neg fire - searching area."

From the 22 June S3 after action report (see sketch, next page)...

"(Trp B's contact with force estimated to be company size...) continued throughout the morning as Trp B advanced slowly. At 1145 hrs Co B 1-501 Inf moved SE utilizing Marine amtracks to assist Trp B. At 1508 hrs Co B made contact (2) and was able to penetrate several hundred meters into the village. At 1513 Trp A was returned to the control of 2-17 Cav and began moving to the area of contact from FSB Forward. At 1840 Hrs Co B 2-501 was placed opcon to 2-17 and conducted a combat assault to an LZ (3) SW of the village area. All units then established blocking positions to cordon the area of contact as indicated."

Inasmuch as B/1/501 had penetrated inside the village, the "cordon" at its northeast end was not airtight (although it developed that during the night few if any enemy attempted to escape through those infantry lines). B/2/501 and A and B Troops of the 2/17 were however in open rice paddies; continuous illumination enabled them to establish an effective cordon to the southwest and southeast. RVN patrol boats screened the coast along the inland bay.

Meanwhile, as the brigade journal for June 1st reported...

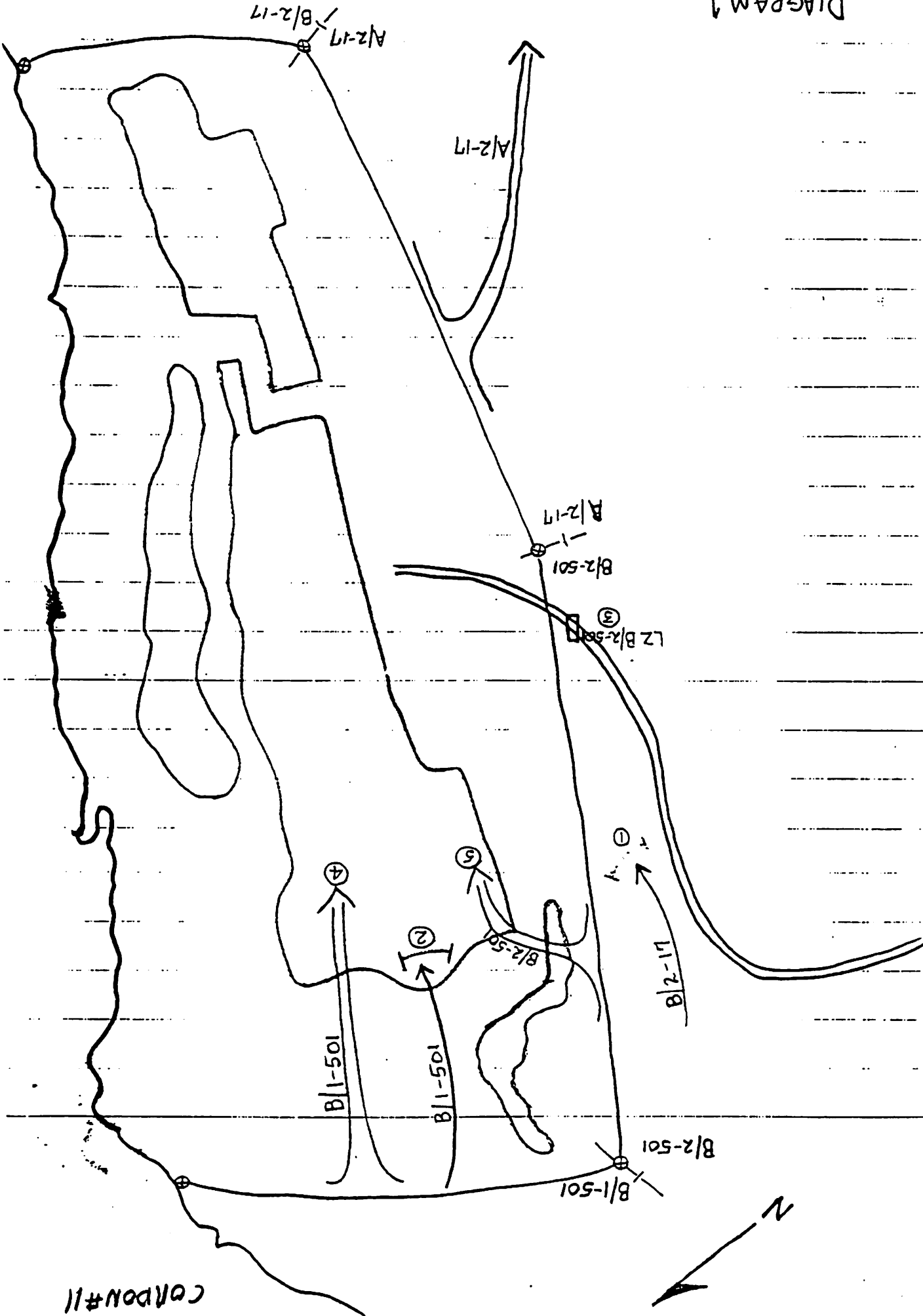
"TF 7 (ARVN) conducted operations to the SW of 2-17 Cav elements. The Black Panther Co made a combat assault and occupied a blocking position. 3-3 ARVN and 3-7 ARVN attacked SE and made contact with an estimated 100 VC. Enemy assessment was 10 VC KIA, 2 VC POW, 6 individual weapons captured, and 1 crew served weapon."

Without attempting to describe the unit actions and contacts of TF 2/17 on the next day, June 2d, in detail, suffice it to say that by nightfall it was possible for Julius Becton to establish an effective cordon of three rifle companies and two cavalry troops, as shown by the lines connecting limiting points on the sketch, two pages down, of larger scale.

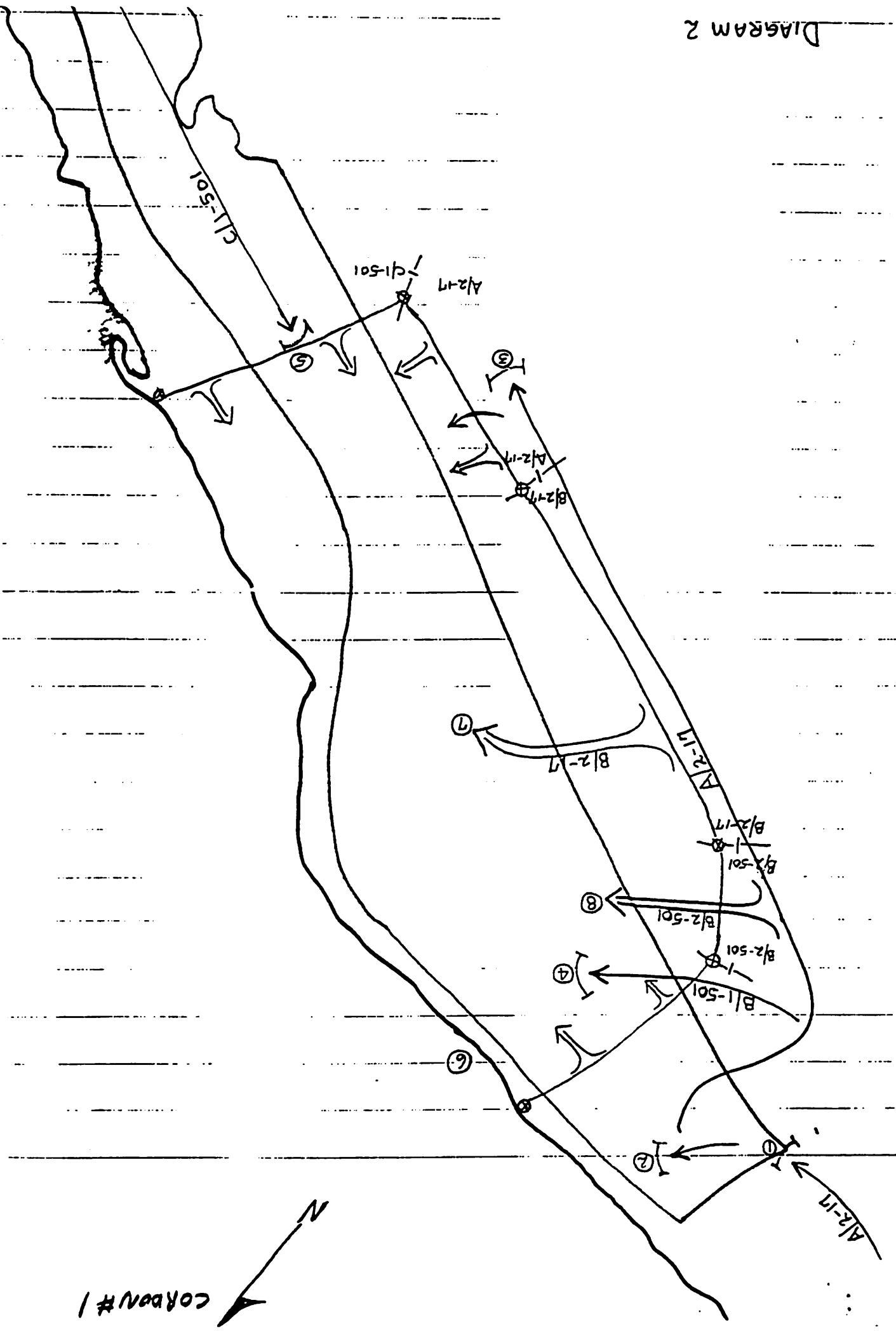
The 22 June S3 report relates that...

"Illumination was provided during the night. At 0305 hrs on 3 June, movement was detected to the front and rear of Trp A's position. Both areas were engaged with 106mm recoilless rifle fire. At 0515 hrs Co B 1-501 Inf observed personnel moving toward the

DIAGRAM 1



CADON#11



4. May 1968

Cordon by A, B, & Recon with other 2nd Dde elements at vic 692303. Contact was heavy during the night by elements seeking to escape the Cordon. Artillery was called for and adjusted as well as use of small arms. At first light a sweep of the area revealed.

Enemy: 26 NVA KIA (BC)
2 VC KIA (BC)
3 VC POW

5. May 1968

Battalion continued RIF and security missions. A & B cordoned vill vic 700304 and had 1 WIA from grenade while enemy losses were 1 NVA KIA (BC), 2 NVA WIA/POW.

6. May 1968

Battalion continued it's pacification operations. A company NDP was under sporadic contact from 0335 till 0545 and had 2 WIA from SA fire from est, reinforced squad. First light check revealed 1 NVA KIA (BC). B company established 3 ambushes. At 2140 one ambush fired on 4 NVA across the river from them. No assessment could be made. At 0745 another ambush fired on 5 NVA in a sampan. Results 5 NVA KIA (BC) and sampan sunk. Bravo combat assault vill vic 750291 and encountered heavy fire. Formed a cordon of the vill with Delta and called in airstrikes and artillery. C company ambush killed 2 NVA KIA (BC). Delta combat assault to 748294 and were pinned down by heavy fire. Went into cordon with Bravo suffering 2 KIA, 7 WIA.

Results: 2 KIA Enemy: 8 NVA KIA (BC)
9 WIA 4 NVA WIA (Est)

7. May 1968

Bravo swept vill at first light vic 750290 and made contact. Results 3 WIA: 5 NVA KIA (BC). Charlie made contact at 0600 and remained in contact throughout the day vic 748307. The fire was heavy MG, lightMG, AW & SA. Called in artillery and airstrikes.

Results: 2 KIA Enemy: 5 NVA KIA (BC).
11 WIA
4 MI: later confirmed and recovered as KIA

8. May 1968

Battalion continued RIF and security missions of An Lo and QL #1. A made contact at 715294 cordoned the village and called in airstrikes. B company sprung an ambush on 30 NVA with organic weapons. First light check revealed 16 NVA KIA (BC). C 2 KIA and 2 WIA from sniper fire.

DRAFT

Results: 2 KIA 16 NVA KIA (BC)
 2 WIA
 2 MIA (KIA) found by C 1/501 also 2 NVA KIA from airstrike

9. May 1968

Bravo found 15 NVA KIA (BC) from airstrike at 724294. Charlie CA to 715302 made heavy contact and had 2 KIA and 3 WIA. Established ambushes around the area of contact and captured 1 NVA who crawled up to one of the positions while trying to escape. Delta made moderate scattered contact during the day and killed 8 NVA (BC). Recon found 3 NVA KIA (BC) in a grave at 723311.

Results: 2 KIA 26 NVA KIA (BC)
 2 WIA 1 POW

10. May 1968

Battalion continued RIF and security missions in AO and made moderate to heavy contact. Charlie had a running fight with 2 NVA snipers that led into a village at 729333 where they received heavy fire that killed their point man and prevented his recovery. Airstrikes were called in and caused 10 NVA to leave their bunkers and run into Charlie's positions. Results: 1 KIA, 1 WIA, and 1 MIA (KIA), 11 NVA KIA (BC). Delta made contact at 715328 and called for an airstrike after the strike a sweep of the area revealed 13 NVA KIA (BC). Recon found 8 NVA KIA (BC) at 720296 killed by airstrike the day before.

Results for day: 1 KIA 32 NVA KIA (BC)
 1 WIA
 1 MIA Later recovered as KIA

11. May 1968

Light contact was made during the day and Charlie recovered the MIA (KIA) and found 1 NVA KIA (BC).

12, 13, and 14 May 1968

Light contact made during this time as the battalion continued the RIF and security missions in the AO. On the 14th Recon and Bravo operating with PF's from Quang Dien killed 1 NVA (BC), 2 VC (BC).

15, 16, and 17 May 1968

Light contact made as the battalion was credited with 6 VC KIA (BC) and 2 VC POW.

18, 19 May 1968

Light contact and the Battalion received 2 WIA from snipers.

D R A F T

20, 21 May 1968

The Battalion continued RIF operations and security mission of An Lo and QL #1. During these 2 days only light contact was made.

Results: 1 WIA
4 VC KIA EC
1 VC WIA (Escaped)

Delta while conducting the road sweep from An Lo to Evans spotted a mine but before they could remove it a civilian bus ran over it. Results no one injured and the bus was heavily damaged.

22. May 1968

Bravo company while on a RIF vic of 694305 received fire from the vill. After returning fire and artillery they swept the area and found 2 NVA KIA (BC) and 5 NVA/VC POW's in their bunkers. Delta fired artillery on suspected enemy positions then swept thru the area and found 3 VC KIA and 1 NVA KIA.

Results: 3 NVA KIA (BC)
5 POW

23, 24. May 1968

Battalion made light contact throughout the period while conducting RIF and security missions throughout the AO.

Results from these operations were:
1 WIA BBT 8 VC KIA (BC).

26. May 1968

As the Battalion continued operations in the AO Charlie suffered 6 WIA from a BBT (BC) and Delta made heavy contact vic 691312. They returned fire and called in artillery and estimated the enemy element as an NVA company (-). 14 WIA.

Results: 20 WIA.

27. May 1968

The Battalion made light contact during the day's operations.

Results: 1 WIA BBT 1 VC KIA (BC)
1 KIA BBT 1 VC POW

28, 29, 30, and 31 May 1968

The Battalion continued RIF operations in the AO and security mission of An Lo and QL #1. During this period contact was very light and resulted in 7 VC captured with weapons.

Results from 19 December 1967 to 1 June 1968
Friendly: 59 KIA
393 WIA
Enemy: 852 KIA (BC)
250 KIA (Est)
129 WIA/POW

1. June 1968

Light contact Bravo company caught 2 VC coming out of bunkers 2 VC KIA (BC).
Delta company ambushed 6 VC, 1 VC KIA later found 2 more trying to run away 2 VC KIA.

2. June 1968

Battalion RIF with PF, Bravo joint RIF with PF vic YD7140 and found that almost all of the gates entering the vill were DBT with grenades. These grenades were blown in place. As they swept thru the village they received light contact and returned fire wounding 1 VC who fled. They also blew several DBT's in place but 1 PF was killed when he stopped on a 105 BET.

3. June 1968

Battalion continued operations. Alfa secured An Lo and conducted RIF with 1 Platoon of PF's. At vic YD6231 PF's attach and killed 3 VC and had 3 WIA. Bravo combined operations. Sweep resulted in 1 WIA from fire at vic YD7132 and 3 NVA KIA in bunkers at vic YD7131 by H/G. Recon 1 KIA 105 BET.

4. June 1968

Battalion continued operation and road sweep. Co B conducted a C/A to vic 699288 and conducted S&C operations with negative contact.

5. June 1968

Contact was light with 2 Ho Chi Minh coming into Co A MDP. They had 1 AK47 and 1 SKS.

6. June 1968

Battalion continued operations with Delta working with some plow. Contact was light capturing 1 VC, and 10,000 pounds of rice, 1 SKS and 2 VC KIA, and wounding 1 more who escaped.

(7 and 8 June missing)

9. June 1968

Co "C" and Co "A" combined for a cordon search of an area vic YD7030. The cordon resulted in 2 VC KIA and a large cache containing weapons, ammo, clothing and food. There were 23 bunkers in the area, 15 had been used recently, (all destroyed). In vic YD7133 numerous punji pits were encountered. Co C found 5 tons of rice. Co D and PF continued operating with some plow. Their progress report showed, 200 meters hedgerow, 45 bunkers destroyed. During the day 8 VC KIA, 6 VC captured, 1 of these was a messenger who had document from his commander stating his men could not fight due to lack of food, weapons, and ammo. There were 5 friendly WIA from BBT.

10. June 1968

Co "C" and Co "A" continued sweep of cordon established 9 June while D Co continued some plow operations. They requested and received an airstrike vic YD6931. Co "C" and "A" had light contact capturing 7 VC, 5 tons of rice while they had 1 friendly KIA and 4 WIA. The some plow destroyed another 36 bunkers. The PSYOPS plane flew over the AO making leaflet drops and loud speaker broadcasts.

11. June 1968

The cordon operation was completed with 6 more VC KIA 1 Hoi Chanh, 9½ tons of rice were discovered. Also a directive came out on this day from Brigade that said all elements operating independently would have compass, map, radio, and strobe light. Co "A" had one friendly WIA (US).

12. June 1968

Very light contact 2 VC KIA. Co "C" found 19 tons of rice 1 PF was WIA by a BBT.

13. June 1968

The PF joined Co A and B in a joint operation resulting in 5 VC KIA, 5 VC captured, 1 Hoi Chanh, 2 AK47, 1 M-16, and 1 B40, were captured 1 PF and 1 US were WIA. Co D continued to support some plow which destroyed 5 acres of village. 75 bunkers and 300 meters of hedgerow.

Meanwhile, as the article beginning next page, from the Fall issue of the 101st Airborne Division magazine, Rendezvous With Destiny, relates, the "liberation of Quang Dien" was proceeding. While this article focuses on the 1/502d, which went into Quang Dien district as soon as the 2d Brigade came to LZ Sally in early March and which was there continuously from May 1st, all three battalions of the brigade had operated in Quang Dien, and each under the same concept of operations. I reproduce this article because what it says about Quang Dien describes what went on in March through June 1968 throughout the area of operations of the 2d Brigade, including its expansion east and south of Hue.

The 1/502d's operations around Ap Dong Lam, second page of the article, are treated on page 64 of Chapter 5, LZ Sally; March 1968.

LIBERATION OF QUANG DIEN

2nd Brigade paratroopers fought bravely for four months so 50,000 South Vietnamese people would not have to choose between death and slavery as a way of life.

By Spec. 4 Robert P. Johnston

The story of Quang Dien District is a story of South Vietnamese people who learned that life without freedom is no life at all. It also concerns a brigade of American airborne soldiers who gave their strength and some of their lives so that the district's 50,000 people would not have to choose between death and slavery.

Early in February, during the stormy weeks surrounding the Communist Tet offensive, this patchwork of flat, coastal ricelands only an afternoon's walk from Hue's Citadel was the undisputed home of two North Vietnamese Army regiments and a strong infrastructure of local Viet Cong.

Feeding like giant leeches from the lifeblood of the cone-hatted farmers, fishermen and small merchants, the enemy soldiers and Viet Cong ruled absolutely. The people did not have to build bunkers and give up their rice; but the alternative was always a bullet in the head.

The only American presence then was a five-man MACV advisory team, holed up like prisoners at the district headquarters with only a small contingent of district Popular Force (PF) soldiers for protection.

"They could have overrun us any time they wanted," said the team's commander, Capt. Robert A. Selzer, Merritt Island, Fla. "We asked a captured prisoner why the NVA didn't come and massacre us, and he said it was because nobody told them to."

On March 1, the 2nd Brigade moved south from Quang Tri and pushed the NVA off an abandoned French airstrip along Route 1 a few kilometers west of Quang Dien. Springing up there almost overnight, the brigade's base camp was dubbed Landing Zone Sally, the new home of the "Ready To Go" paratroopers.

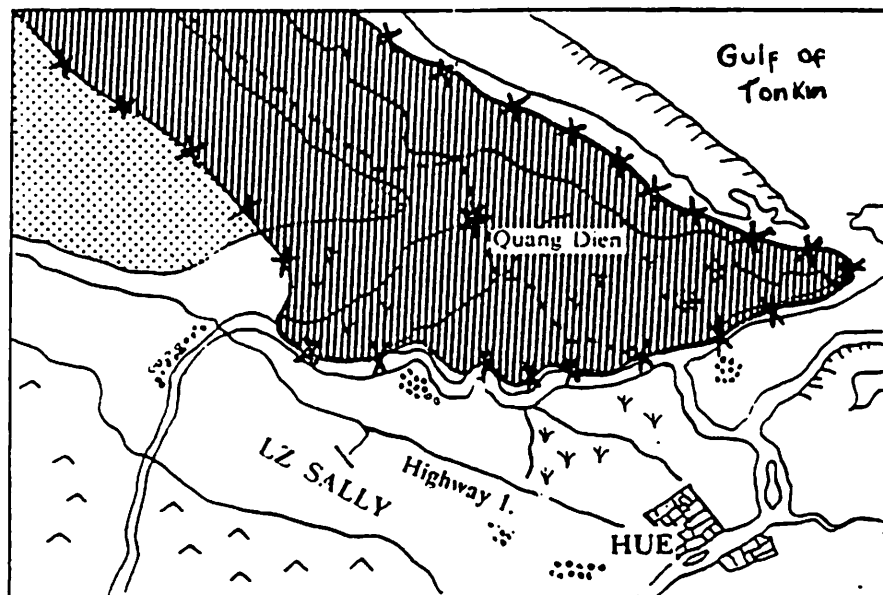
For the liberation of the district, brigade commander Col. John H. Cushman, Lexington, Mass., chose the 1st Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf., commanded by Lt. Col. Bertram J. Bishop, Springfield, Va.

The first thing Col. Bishop noticed

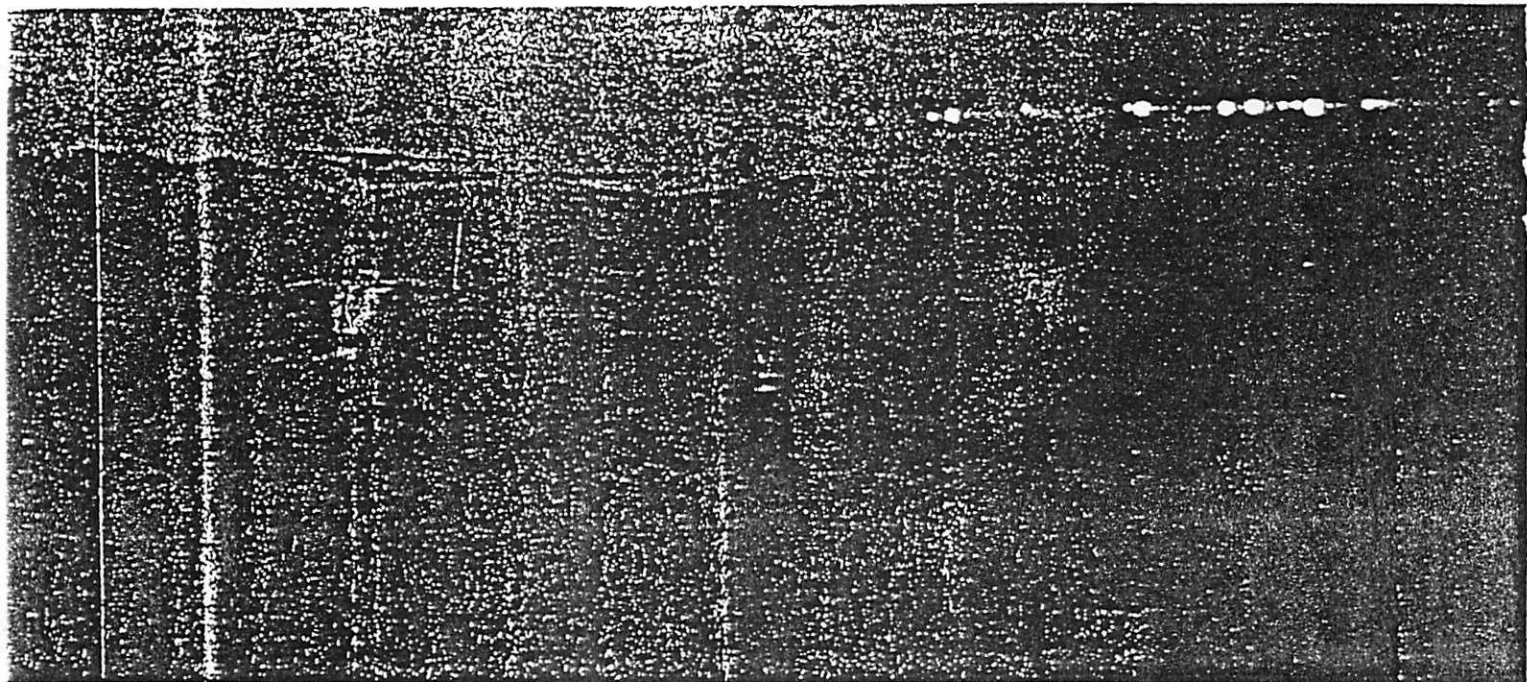
was the steady, silent streams of villagers leaving his new turf. Sensing a fight, many of the people hastily migrated to the homes of friends and relatives farther south.

Then began some of the most bitter and bloody fighting of the Vietnam Conflict as the "First Strike" Battalion mounted a war of attrition against the wily and well-dug-in NVA and VC. Every village and hamlet meant another prolonged battle; every hedgerow meant another fight. A single error or misjudgment could have cost an entire company of paratroopers.

With the Airborne providing the



Quang Dien District north of Hue.



2nd Brigade paratroopers invade rich rice basin of Quang Dien district in search of harassing NVA soldiers. H122

muscle and mobility, and the PF's furnishing the intelligence reports, detainee interrogation, and scouting knowhow, the allies hounded the NVA in every known sanctuary in the district.

"Col. Bishop used the PF's just as they should be used," Capt. Selzer said, "and he treated them with the same consideration and respect as his men."

It was the PF intelligence officer, the young and talented Nguyen Van Hue, whose accurate and timely information led to the two landmark battles of the Quang Dien campaign.

The first was Ap Dong Lam, where the "First Strike" battalion, plus D Co., 2nd Bn. (Abn), 501st Inf., and the PF's hemmed in an estimated reinforced battalion of the 803rd NVA Regiment. The four-day struggle cost 222 dead enemy soldiers and put the NVA on the run throughout the district.

It also helped accomplish something totally unexpected by the Americans. One afternoon in late March, some 2,000 district citizens gathered in the Sia market place to pay tribute to the Airborne combat successes, and to condemn the terrorist tactics of the local Viet Cong. Vowing to fight the VC to the death, the people themselves recorded a stirring moment in their country's history with shouts of "Vietnamese Government Number One! Down with

the VC!"

Such bravado in a secure marketplace would be meaningless unless reflected in the countryside where people were still dying. But it was in the countryside—in the paddies and along the distant canal banks—that a subtle evolution was beginning.

As word of each fresh enemy defeat flashed through the district, the iron grip of fear which had held the people for so long loosened a little more. It became apparent that the enemy's days were numbered, as were those of anyone who voluntarily aided their cause.

Even small children and old women would point out enemy weapons caches and booby-traps. The once-familiar blank stare and shrug of helpless ignorance was gradually replaced by the Vietnamese equivalent of "He went that-a-way."

In late March, April and early May, the 1st and 2nd Airborne Battalions of the 501st Infantry each took a crack at the reeling NVA. In the first week of May, the grim process of extermination culminated in the now-famous cordon of Phuoc Yen.

For four days, companies from all three battalions, plus PF's and the "Black Panther" Co. of the 1st ARVN Division lay siege to the stocking-shaped village complex that intelligence sources

said was harboring an NVA battalion.

The paratroopers were joined by the batteries of the 321st Artillery, helicopter gunships and Air Force fighter-bombers. By morning of the fifth day, the NVA body count reached 419, and another 104 became the largest NVA force to surrender en masse to an American unit thus far in the history of the war.

Except for a few scattered pockets of die-hards, Phuoc Yen marked the end of the NVA in Quang Dien District. Of approximately 1,500 that Lt. Hue estimated to be occupying the district before Tet, more than 800 were killed and the rest fled west to the mountains to lick their wounds and contemplate the "mean little bird" worn on the left shoulders of the Airborne enemy.

Phuoc Yen was also a beginning. "Our PF's had neither the numbers nor the weapons to fight the NVA," said Capt. Selzer. "But now the enemy are Viet Cong, and no one can fight the VC better than the PF's can."

In the last week of May, the Quang Dien PF's pulled a coup that shocked the local Viet Cong. Just before dawn, with the night mist still hanging over a VC stronghold, a small PF band burst through the hedgerows, yelling and shooting. Twenty of the Viet Cong who tried to fight or run were killed.

Six other VC, plus a small arsenal of weapons were easily captured.

To avoid further bloodshed on both sides, a co-ordinated psychological operations (Psy-ops) program was initiated by the 2nd Brigade psy-ops officer, Lt. David Hendry, East Hartford, Conn. The team dropped leaflets and broadcast appeals from former VC, imploring the hardcore Communists to give up a hopeless cause.

"This district is now ripe for psy-ops," said Capt. Donald E. Smalley, Peebles, Ohio, a MACV co-worker of Capt. Selzer. "The Airborne and the PF's have made the remaining VC want to give up safely."

During the first five days in June, 15 former VC decided there was no future for their line of work in Quang Dien District. Marching timidly forward with Chieu Hoi safe-conduct leaflets held protectively aloft, the VC surrendered in two's and three's to the paratroopers of the 1st Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf. and the government troops.

With most of the enemy dead or on the run, the allies turned their attention to the endless fields of rice, ripe and ready for the spring harvest. Before the Airborne came to Quang Dien, everybody knew that the great bulk of the harvest would be confiscated by the NVA and VC to feed their troops stationed in the villages and mountain base camps.

But now there were no more NVA, and the remaining VC were in no mood to challenge the Airborne companies who threw protective perimeters around the areas being harvested. At the end of May, Capt. Selzer estimated that 90 per cent of the crop was safe in the hands of its rightful owners. By direction of the fiery district chief, Capt. Tran Hhu Hung, the rice was shifted to three secure collection points where each farmer was given a receipt for his crop. Throughout the coming year, the farmers will come to the collection points and receive enough of their rice for their families but not enough to tempt the remaining Viet Cong.

Though he is first a soldier, Capt. Hung is a man of his people. Whenever an important decision loomed, he hop-

ped in his unpredictable jeep with balding tires and drove over miles of unsecured roads to consult with citizens whose lives depended upon his judgment.

Lt. Col. Leslie D. Carter, new battalion commander, gave his medical officer, Capt. David H. Leeper, Padukah, Ky., a free rein in giving the district the best medical service available. The young "Bacsi" discarded the usual one-shot MEDCAL approach and set up a regular schedule for himself and his staff at the district's three hospitals.

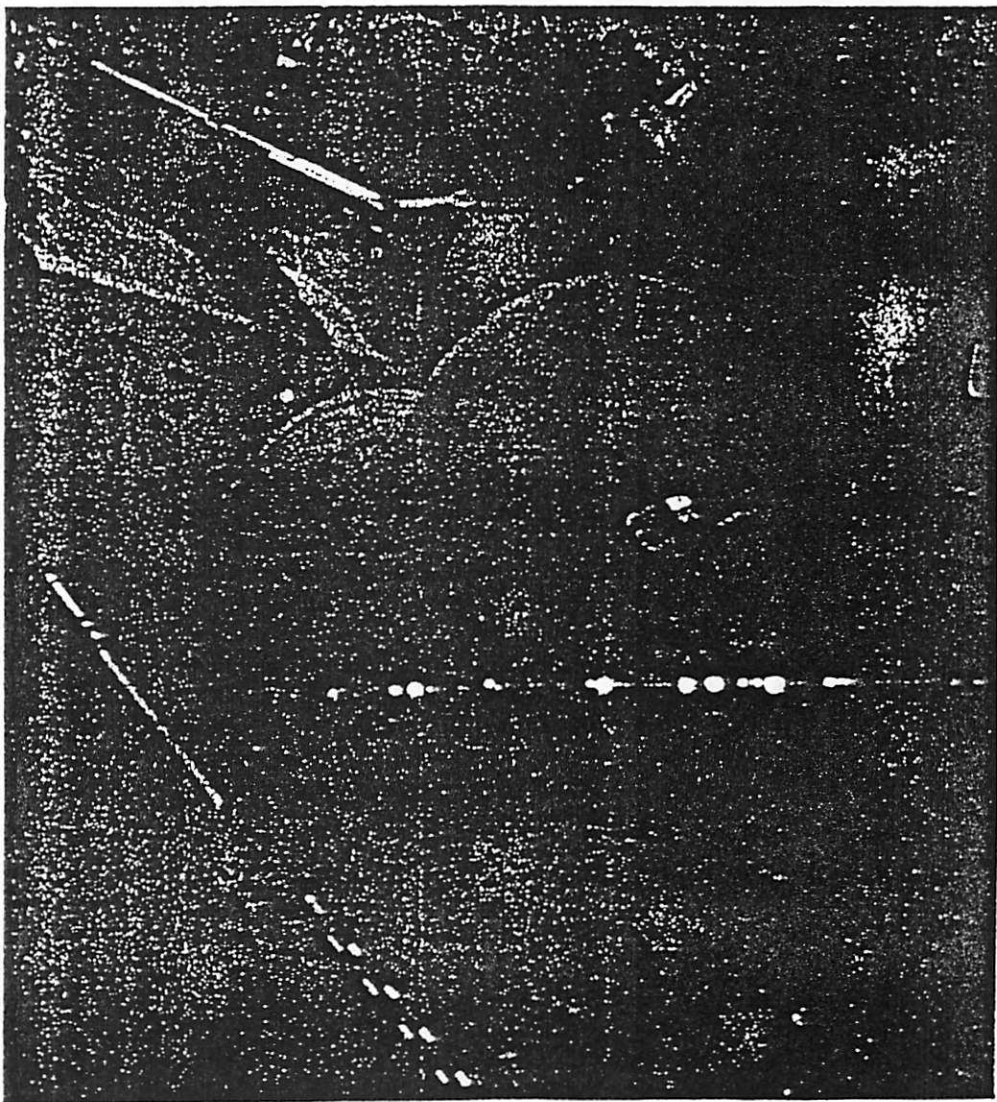
Now Quang Dien District bears no resemblance to the field of terror it became under the heel of the NVA.

The people's smiles, once masks of fear and distrust, became the expressions of good feeling and good times. The "big-footed" Screaming Eagles and the wiry native country folk came face to face, and found not monsters and minatures, but merely international variation of themselves.

Today when the people of Quang Dien District speak of the American soldiers who helped transform their homeland from a hell to a haven, they do not say, "the Americans," "the U.S. Army, or "the GI's." They say, "the Airborne," and they say it with a mixture of gratitude and respect.



Morrow



2nd Brigade paratroopers seek protection of a concrete wall near Quang Dien during heavy firefight with NVA regulars.

The area of the 2/501 had become fairly quiet as well. From a record of the daily actions of D/2/501...⁷

June 2, 1968

Co. D moved to FB Pinky and assumed security for the firebase. At 0810H 1/D moved by CH-47 to OP T-Bone and assumed security mission, and 1 platoon with 1 PF PLT provided security for MEDCAP at YD724264.

June 3, 1968

1 platoon from Co. D provided security for MEDCAP at YD693243.

June 4, 1968

Co. D(- 1/D) provided security for FB Pinky and secured minesweep from FB Pinky South to Hue, and 1/D provided security for OP T-Bone.

0306H (FB Pinky): Co. D reported a trip flare went off around bunker #19, but nothing was sighted. 1/D near FB T-Bone found and destroyed 2 Chicom grenades, 1 NVA canteen, 3 carbine magazines, and 1 charge of C-4 wrapped in bamboo.

June 5, 1968

Co. D(-1/D) continued security mission for FB Pinky and 1/D continued security mission for OP T-Bone, with both elements conducting RIFs in the adjacent area.

June 6, 1968

1032H (YD637191): 1/D found 6 bunkers with concrete sides (2 large enough to hold 6-8 personnel), 3 well camouflaged huts (2 of which were partially built), 1 rucksack, and 1 pair of PJs. Results: 1 rucksack and 1 pair of PJs captured and evacuated, bunkers and huts destroyed

1850H (YD681711): 1/D at OP T-Bone observed 3 mortar flashes outside their AO. This information was passed on to the 1st BDE.

June 10, 1968

1040H (YD646216): A Co. D patrol found a 250 lb bomb.

June 11, 1968

1145H (YD693275): The Pathfinders with Co. D received small arms fire from the East as they swept down from the Northwest. Small arms fire was returned silencing the enemy fire. A sweep of the area met with negative results.

1330H (YD678288): The Pathfinders engaged an estimated VC squad with small arms and automatic weapons fire. The enemy force returned 1 M-79 round and automatic weapons fire before fleeing West.

⁷Ron Soubers, a member of D/2/501 in 1969 and now Senior Archivist at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, has compiled a daily record of the Delta Raiders from their arrival in Vietnam in 1967 to their departure in 1972. These extracts are copied from that record.

1408H (YD680282): Co. D while sweeping the area of the 1330H Pathfinder engagement received 8-10 rounds of M-79 fire. The company returned small arms and automatic weapons fire silencing the enemy fire. Results: negative US casualties, enemy casualties unknown

2125H (YD653203): 1/D received 2 unknown type mortar rounds (both duds) impacting 200m outside their NDP. Fire was not returned since the source could not be determined.

June 12, 1968

0001H The battalion reports they are unable to contact Co. D by radio, finally establishing contact at 0030H through artillery channels. They were informed that the Co. D RTO had fallen asleep.

1130H (YD682282): Co. D found 2400 lbs of rice.

1320 1/D moved by air from OP T-Bone to Co. D CP location, YD646247.

1700H Co. D returned to FB Pinky.

June 13, 1968

0200H Acting on a tip from an NVA informer and under orders from LTC Heiter. Co. D, along with an ARVN PLT (Pathfinders), followed an NVA informer into the hills where he said 5 other NVA were located. At 0712H (YD628196), the Pathfinders with Co. D engaged and killed 2 VC running from a bunker while sweeping Southwest from their NDP. 1 AK-47 and 1 SKS were also captured. At 0945H at the same location Co. D received small arms and automatic weapons fire from an estimated enemy squad to the Southwest (vic. YD625191). Organic weapons fire was returned silencing the enemy fire at 1015H. A sweep of the area was conducted with negative results. Results: 1 Pathfinder WIA, 2 VC KIA, 1 AK-47 and 1 SKS captured

From the 101st Division summary of 8 June...

"In the late afternoon information from a Hoi Chanh (returnee to GVN) indicated the presence of a substantial VC force base camp and tunnel complex 12 km west of Hue. Reacting to this information... paratroopers of C/2/501 Abn Inf⁸ augmented with 50 RF from Huong Tra district, air assaulted into the area. Upon insertion of the first lift, 20 VC were engaged with organic weapons..."

The brigade journal reported 4 VC KIA in this action, which continued through the night. A journal entry for the next day read..

"0838 2-501: Co C at YD623199 found what they believe to be a base camp, with many weapons and 1000 lb of rice (polished). NV/VCA had been drinking

⁸In its reporting, division called its troops "paratroopers." The truth was that we had many a non-jumper imbued with the airborne spirit wearing the Screaming Eagle patch.

San Miquel beer." (The journal reported that "RFs working with Co C found an additional 24 individual weapons and (number obscured) crew-served weapons.)

Cleo Hogan's diary sheds light on the tempo in the 2/501 AO in June...

4 June

Providing security for FSB Pinkie with 1st Platoon on T-bone¹¹...

7 June

Still at Pinkie. Nothing happening. None of the companies are having any contact. In fact no contact in the Brigade AO...

14 June

Still looking for the NVA that are supposed to be in this area. Nothing here. Today we got cold cokes. It's amazing how the simple things mean so much.

17 June

Last night the Raiders conducted another succesful ambush. We killed 6 VC and captured rifles and hand grenades. Back at LZ Sally. Bn Hq wanted us to go back into the mountains and they brought us in for showers, clean clothes. Let the men go to the PX and rest a day. Had an awards ceremony today.

18 June

We're back in the mountains again...

19 June

Well we found out why we are back in the mountains. We are strung out across the mountain tops providing security for the visit of the South Vietnamese President to the city of Hue. The 2d Brigade is to receive an award...

The Second Brigade was indeed to receive an award. Here is how it came about.

Since March our brigade task force had been working closely with the 1st ARVN Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Ngo Quang Truong (who also commanded the 11th Division Tactical Area, which included the provinces of Thua Thien and Quang Tri). We worked closely also with the Thua Thien province chief, who was responsible to General Truong for military operations, and with the district chiefs of Thua Thien province. I visited General Truong regularly, our staffs cooperated, and our battalion commanders worked well with his regimental commanders and with the RF and PF units in the districts.

One morning in mid-June I was with General Truong in his Hue headquarters. As I began to leave, he invited me to the ceremonies that would take place in Hue in a few days, on

¹¹T-bone, west of LZ Sally and with a spectacular view, was the mountain top for the possession of which Cleo Hogan and his company had fought so hard in March (page 73, Chapter 5).

June 19th, which was the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Day. When I accepted, he added, "Bring your brigade colors."

Puzzled, I stopped by to see General Truong's deputy division commander to learn more about this request to bring my brigade colors. He told me that General Truong had recommended to the President of the Republic of Vietnam that the 2d Brigade Task Force be awarded his country's Cross of Gallantry with Palm, which was the Republic of Vietnam's equivalent of the U.S. Presidential Unit Citation, and that President Nguyen Van Thieu had approved General Truong's recommendation.¹²

Extraordinarily pleased and proud as I was at this news, I realized that I must inform General Barsanti, division commander; I did so by telephone immediately. His reaction was understandable; he asked me why the award was not to be presented to the entire division. I could not answer that question.

On June 19th in Hue, in the presence of General Abrams, Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, and a host of other dignitaries, President Thieu placed the streamer of the Cross of Gallantry with Palm on my brigade colors and presented me personally with the same award.

On the next page, from the files of the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), is what I take to be both the recommendation that General Truong submitted through channels to the President of the Republic of Vietnam and that was approved by President Thieu, and the citation that was read in Vietnamese and English at the ceremony.

In the subsequent processing of General Truong's recommendation through channels to the Department of the Army, the period for which the award was to be made was extended to August 15th. This might have been because Operation Nevada Eagle, cited by General Truong, went to that date.¹³

Dates matter. A member of a unit that is given an award like this, who served in the unit during the period covered in the award, is entitled to wear the decoration over his uniform's right breast pocket for the rest of his military service, and on civilian clothes for the rest of his life. I would have preferred that the period covered by the award include all our time in General Truong's division tactical area, from Tet onward. But I was gratified that the 2d Brigaders of my time had contributed to the right of those who came into the brigade for some time after that to wear the decoration indefinitely.

¹²This was not surprising. Although only a division commander, General Truong was -- by virtue of his leadership, example, tactical skill, dedication to duty, and absolute incorruptibility -- extraordinarily well regarded by Americans and Vietnamese alike.

¹³When Colonel John A. Hoefling took command of the 2d Brigade he retained its characteristic operational style and led it to further victories around Hue, including a brilliantly successful US/ARVN/province forces surprise assault on and elimination of a long held enemy base area at Vinh Loc on the South China Sea.

TRANSLATION OF VIETNAMESE CITATION FOR 2D BDE, 101ST AIRBORNE

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N

Republic of Vietnam
RVN Armed Forces
1st Inf Division
Staff - AG

Citation Armed Forces Level
For The Unit Flag And The
Commandant Of The 2nd Brigade, Task Force
101st US Airborne Division
- COL John H. Cushman

The Second Brigade Task Force, 101st Airborne Division, is an allied well-fighting unit led by Colonel John H. Cushman, an outstanding field officer who is highly experienced in Viet Cong tactics and has gained many successful victories in the Eleventh Division Tactical Area.

During Operation Lam Son 216 (CARENTAN II), organized and conducted from 19 April 1968 to 17 May 1968 in the Delta of the Quang Dien District, the Second Brigade Task Force, 101st US Airborne Division, bravely attacked and destroyed the enemy command post and interdicted the hostile attempt against the ancient imperial city of Hue.

During Operation Lam Son 224 (NEVADA EAGLE), organized and conducted from 16 May 1968 to present, this unit was successful in defending the people's crop, causing many casualties to hostile units of the fifth Viet Cong work site, and destroying the 803rd Regiment of the 324B North Vietnamese Army Division.

As a result of these operations:

- 2382 Viet Cong were Killed in Action
- 257 Viet Cong were Captured, and
- 724 Weapons of which 119 were crew-served weapons were captured.

In these glorious victories, the Second Brigade Task Force, 101st US Airborne Division, Colonel John H. Cushman are deserving of the citation at Armed Forces level, on the occasion of the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces Day, on 19 June 1968 at Hue.

APD 48.96 Dated 10 June 1968
Major General Ngo Quang Truong
Commander First Infantry Division
Eleventh Division Tactical Area

28-08, 7

What follows is an extract from General Orders No. 21, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., 8 April 1969...

II. 5. The Cross of Gallantry with Palm has been awarded by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam for outstanding service during the period 19 April 1968 to 15 August 1968 to:

THE 2D BRIGADE, 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION (AIRMOBILE) and its assigned and attached units:

- 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile),
 - Headquarters and Headquarters Company
 - 1st Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry
 - 2d Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry
 - 1st Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry
 - 1st Battalion (Airborne), 321st Artillery
 - 2d Squadron, 17th Cavalry
 - Company C, 326th Engineer Battalion
 - Company B, 326th Medical Battalion
 - Company B, 501st Signal Battalion
 - 2d Platoon, Company A, 801st Maintenance Battalion
 - Forward Support Element, 501st Supply Company
 - 265th Radio Research Company
 - 34th Public Information Detachment

The 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), United States Army, under the command of Colonel John H. Cushman, is an excellent, veteran unit which always displays an enthusiastic spirit of dedication to destroying the Communists. While participating in battles in the 11th Division Tactical Area, the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), along with various organic and attached units, fought courageously and achieved splendid victories through two outstanding operations. The first operation, Lam Son 216-Carentan II, was conducted from 19 April 1968 to 17 May 1968... Operation Lam Son 224-Nevada Eagle was conducted from 16 May 1968 to 15 August 1968... Through these splendid achievements, the soldiers of the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), contributed significantly to the fight against Communism to preserve freedom in Vietnam and, at the same time, displayed the indomitable will and the heroic tradition of the United States Armed Forces.

The ceremony done, we went ahead with our work. From the operations summaries of the 2d Brigade for the next several days..

"19 June: Contact was light with a total of 4 contacts..."¹⁴

¹⁴The division summary however read: "...in the early morning hours of 19 June 68, ambush patrols from D/2/501 and D/1/502 Abn Inf, located in the coastal plains northwest and north of Hue respectively, observed enemy movement and violently executed their ambushes, killing 5 enemy."

"20 June Contact was light with a total of 4 contacts...

"21 June Contact was light with a total of 3 contacts...

On June 21st, the 2d Brigade issued a new operation order. It included these instructions:

"2/17 Cav: Close out FSB Forward and occupy FSB Pinky NLT 221800 June 1968."

The 2/17th was no longer needed south of Hue. The enemy had gone away.¹⁵

One evening during this period, General Barsanti invited me and my senior commanders to his mess at Camp Eagle for my farewell dinner. In my remarks I responded to a mention of the 2d Brigade's record of cordon operations by reminding the commanding general that our success really began with Cordon Nr. 2 (see footnote, page 107), which would not have taken place had he not ordered us to stay in contact and asked us what we needed -- whereupon I had said "helicopters" so that we could make an encirclement. I then presented General Barsanti, who would soon be departing himself, a gift from the 2d Brigade; it was an AK-47 rifle inscribed "Captured by the 2d Brigade in a night ambush."¹⁶

Continuing with the brigade summaries...

"22 June Contact was light with a total of 4 contacts...

"23 June Contact was light with a total of 7 contacts...

"24 June Contact was light with a total of 10 contacts...

"25 June Contact was light with a total of 4 contacts...

"26 June Contact was light with a total of 6 contacts..."

¹⁵In 1971, General Truong, by then a lieutenant general, took command of the ARVN IV Corps and Military Region 4, responsible for the territory south of Saigon; I was his senior advisor. In April 1975, when the Republic of Vietnam fell, General Truong and his family came to live with my family at Fort Leavenworth, KS, where I was Commandant of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. During these periods, General Truong reminded me of how the 2d Brigade Task Force had by its operations in May and June 1968 forestalled an enemy attack from the south on the city of Hue.

¹⁶Although General Barsanti's leadership style left a great deal to be desired, I had a high regard for him as a soldier and commander -- as did many of the subordinates who suffered under his frequent chastisements. A fighter to the end, he died of cancer in 1971. When I commanded the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell in 1972-73, I memorialized General Barsanti by naming as "Barsanti House" the quarters that we maintained for senior official guests. At the dedication ceremony, at which his wife and daughter and some of his former subordinates were present, I noted his demanding standards, his integrity, and the magnificent record of the division that he took to war (at that time he was only the second of its commanders to take the 101st Airborne Division to war).

And on June 27th, my last full day in command...

"Contact was light with a total of 2 contacts..."

As General Barsanti and our visitors assembled the next morning for the brigade change of command ceremony, Major General John J. Tolson III, commanding the 1st Air Cavalry Division, landed in his helicopter at the LZ Sally pad. When I greeted him, he told me that, while he was not able to stay for the ceremony, he wanted to thank me for all that the 2d Brigade had done for his division. I told him that we had liked working with him.

On June 28th, the 2d Brigade journal contained this entry, Nr. 56, verbatim...

"1046 Col Hoefling assumed Command of 2d Bde from Col Cushman at 0947 hrs. Col Cushman departed Bde AO at 1050 hrs."