

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS, 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE (SEPARATE)  
APO U. S. Forces 96250

RIABN

7 July 1965

COMMANDER'S COMBAT NOTE  
NUMBER 66

DUTY IN VIETNAM

Last week the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) participated in the largest troop lift operation conducted in the Republic of South Vietnam. Over 144 Army aircraft which included 77 troop carriers using 10 sorties each lifted two battalions of the Vietnamese 2d Airborne Brigade and the 1st and 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry deep into War Zone "D". This was the first time friendly troops had been that deep into War Zone "D" in many months. The 3d Battalion (Airborne), 319th Artillery, protected by Troop E, 17th Cavalry, Company D, 16th Armor, and later the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, provided fire support for the infantry units.

Despite a three hour weather delay, elements of the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry began landing on LZ North at 1400 hours on 28 June. Prior to this landing the 3d and 8th Vietnamese Airborne Battalions landed on LZ South and began their drive northwards. Only small arms fire and scattered mortar rounds were encountered on the LZ which was quickly secured by the 2d Battalion.

Following the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry came the troopers of the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry who rapidly began their operations to the east and south of the LZ.

The 3d Battalion (Airborne), 319th Artillery's Task Force had moved into position Bravo at 0800 hours, 28 June following a stop over in Tan Uyen for the night of 27-28 June. Their supporting fires in conjunction with United States Air Force close air support and armed helicopters prepared LZ North.

Captain Moore's Cavalry Troop, while screening to the north of position Bravo, made one of the most significant finds of the operation. The normally swift moving Cavalry Troop made a thorough search of the area and discovered four cache points which contained an estimated 200 tons of rice, and quantities of cigarettes, tea, milk, corn, barley, and tobacco. After our troops had suffered five casualties due to booby traps in the area, the Engineers under Lieutenant Grubbs, thoroughly cleared the cache areas of booby traps. Several members of the Cavalry Troop distinguished themselves during the search operation. Lieutenant Karr and Lieutenant Hanson, who was wounded at the initial cache, did a fine job. In addition Staff Sergeant David Yellow Robe, Sergeant Daniel and Sergeant Parsons, were instrumental in discovering and disarming the booby traps. Specialist Fourth

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Class Member of the 173d Engineer Company and Private First Class Chiaffino, the mine detector operator, were notable for their professional jobs. On 29 June more than 50 tons of rice were sent back to friendly hands with ARVN trucks, the remainder had to be destroyed in place.

The majority of the activity on the night of 28-29 June centered around Position B where the Artillery Task Force received mortar fire and several probing attacks.

Lieutenant Hill, of the Royal Australian Armor Corps attached to Company D, 16th Armor, received a small arms wound in the side when the VC apparently attempted to capture him, but after treatment returned to lead his men throughout the conduct of the operation. Quick reaction by all forces answered these attacks with small arms, mortar, artillery and 90mm fires and the Viet Cong was forced to withdraw. The tail fins of the incoming mortars identified the round as 81mm U.S. Mortars made in 1955. The shell craters were closely examined, three of them indicated that the rounds were coming from 725 to 730 mils. Artillery and mortar fires were delivered along this line up to the maximum range of the 81mm mortar. The enemy firing stopped.

The Infantry Battalions continued their operation on D+1 and several more caches were discovered.

At 1200 hours on D+1 the decision was made to commit the 1/RAR in the Position Bravo area to help thoroughly search the area and to assist with the security. The quick reacting Australians were brought in on the helicopters which extracted the Vietnamese Airborne, and were on the ground by 1630 hours, rapidly took up defensive positions and began patrolling.

The 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry swung south after securing its northern objectives and carefully reexamined the ARVN areas of responsibility.

Again the night of 29-30 June found most of the action in Position Bravo. 20 mortar rounds were reported but once again the quick reaction of our forces halted what would have been a serious problem. On both nights in Position Bravo the medics of the 3d Battalion (Airborne), 319th Artillery did an outstanding job of treating the wounded under fire and assisting in the evacuation of troopers when appropriate.

On D+2, the last day of the operation, solid contacts were again encountered. The 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry killed two Viet Cong, wounded one, and captured two weapons in a clash around 1200 hours.



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In addition the 1st Battalion discovered more cache points while the Bravo Bulls of the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry discovered and destroyed two trucks in their area. These were in addition to a truck they destroyed on D-Day. Company D, 16th Armor shot a Viet Cong out of a tree with .50 caliber fire and blasted five fleeing VC with 90mm SPAT fire.

At 1415 hours on D+2 the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry began extraction from LZ South under the protection of the 2d Battalion which had secured the LZ. The 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry followed the 1st Battalion under the protective fires of the 3d Battalion (Airborne), 319th Artillery. The 3d Battalion closed trails after firing their last volley at 1700 hours and began the long 50 kilometer overland movement back to Bien Hoa. The 1st Royal Australian Regiment had moved out early and in conjunction with the ARVN 48th Regiment cleared the most dangerous portion of the route. After the Artillery moved through, the 1/RAR mounted trucks provided by Lieutenant Colonel Staiger's Support Battalion and rolled into Bien Hoa closing at 2040 hours.

Several troopers of the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry distinguished themselves by their outstanding performance during the four day operation.

The 1st Platoon of Bravo Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry under Platoon Sergeant Adam A. Bernosky kept alive the most impressive record in the Brigade - a VC kill on every operation in which they have participated. They got their man on the last day of the operation as they were fired upon by four Viet Cong near a trail. The point man, Private First Class Robert Pedrotti, was struck in the helmet by an enemy round and knocked to the ground. Although stunned, PFC Pedrotti immediately jumped to his feet and vigorously joined his platoon in the assault on the enemy position. One Viet Cong body and a weapon and documents were recovered and blood trails on the ground indicated that at least two more were dead or wounded.

Sergeant Hector Membrano also of Company B, 1st Battalion reacted quickly when his squad was engaged by an enemy land mine and small arms fire. Although wounded and somewhat dazed by the mine explosion, Sergeant Membrano led his squad forward and by aggressive fire and maneuver forced the Viet Cong to flee.

Staff Sergeant Sundborg and Sergeant Wooten, the operations NCO and Communications NCO of Company B, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry, on their own initiative constantly scouted the flanks during the company

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movement. On one such excursion they discovered an enemy position and the resulting action produced one Viet Cong kill plus a weapon and documents.

Acting as point squad for the 3d Platoon of Company A, 1st Battalion, Staff Sergeant J. B. Strange's squad came under enemy fire from dug in positions. The lead men quickly returned fire and gained fire superiority. Staff Sergeant Strange maneuvered the remaining men of his squad against the VC emplacements employing hand grenades and AR fire. This violent action routed the VC from their position. During the actions Staff Sergeant Strange was wounded in the stomach.

Sergeant First Class James Akuna's, the Platoon Sergeant of 3d Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, keen observation detected a VC hamlet. SFC Akuna's attention to detail caused him to take a recon patrol outside of the Battalion perimeter to investigate animal sounds that he had detected at dawn and in doing so he discovered a VC hamlet that contained food and medical supplies.

While Company A, 1st Battalion was destroying a cache Staff Sergeant Vicars of the 2d Platoon, upon his own initiative, took a patrol out on recon and found an extremely well camouflaged cache of rice. Staff Sergeant Vicar's investigation resulted in the destruction of this cache as it was off the intended company route.

This operation was unique for us in several ways:

1. It was the largest force we have committed in combat here in Vietnam. In all, nine battalions were involved: Five infantry, one artillery, one support and a composite battalion of cavalry, armor and engineers.

2. The Australians took their place with us as a part of our combat formation.

3. For the first time we worked with the very fine troops of the Vietnamese Airborne Brigade and the ARVN 48th Regiment.

4. Besides being our first large scale probe into War Zone "D", this operation represented the first time any large size friendly troops have operated in this area for over a year.

5. The cache points we destroyed or recovered represent a serious logistical setback to the Viet Cong.

Our total results were of course quite satisfying. By conservative estimate we:

1. We killed over 25 Viet Cong.



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2. Wounded 50 or more Viet Cong.
3. Destroyed over 200 tons of rice plus medical supplies, corn, barley, quantities of cigarettes, milk, tea, raw tobacco.
4. Recovered over fifty tons of rice that can be used to feed friends.
5. Destroyed three trucks and eight bicycles.
6. Destroyed many Viet Cong villages, defensive positions, and livestock.

Lessons learned:

1. We have been operating daily for the past two months with some of the most lethal weapons known to the soldier. Familiarity must not breed contempt. Be careful with these weapons!
2. In order to effectively place counter battery fire on incoming mortars we must know the direction these mortars are coming from. This information or Shell Rep as it is called must come in promptly and accurately. As a minimum we need to know where the shells landed, type of weapon (60mm or 81mm Mortar) and general direction the rounds came from.
3. Squad leaders and fire team leaders must keep track of the individual men in their units. Valuable time has been wasted in recent operations because of "lost" individuals.
4. Artillery is a valuable weapon in jungle warfare. Use it to secure flanks, rear, and the front when moving. It is also quite effective as a close-in defensive wall when stopping for the night.
5. Once again the need for flexibility has been emphatically pointed out. Remember plans are guidelines for operations and we must always be ready to adapt to any change that our enemy, terrain, or mission may present.
6. Checking the direction of stream flow in conjunction with your map will give you another means of sure navigation in the jungle.
7. We must concentrate on keeping fire low when engaging the enemy. Our encounters thus far have been brief and fleeting - We must get first round hits.
8. Safety in helicopters cannot be overstressed. On the extraction one trooper from the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry with his feet dangling outside the helicopter was wounded in the foot by a bamboo sliver

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when the ship made a low take-off over a thicket. Keep your feet inside the helicopters. In addition do not depart the helicopter until it has firmly touched down. The rapid shift of weight of departing troopers before touch down makes the helicopter very difficult to control and has caused the ships to crash.

9. The medical evacuation ships (Dustoff) cannot take improvised stretchers if they are too long. Be prepared to shift wounded personnel to the stretchers that are on the evacuation helicopters.

Once again I can only reiterate my words of praise for your outstanding performance. By your actions in this operation you have proved conclusively that you are fast becoming real professionals in this deadly business. Our superiority over the Viet Cong is quite evident for all to see. Well done.

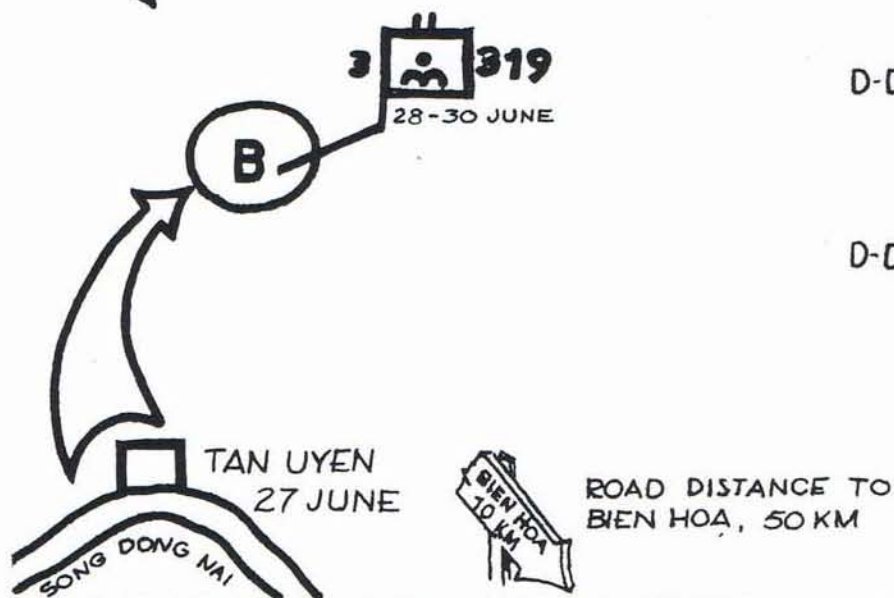
AIRBORNE, "ALL-THE-WAY"

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ellis W. Williamson".

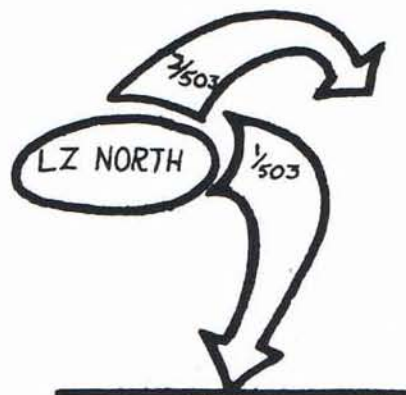
ELLIS W. WILLIAMSON  
Brig Gen, U.S. Army  
Commanding

# D-1, D-DAY

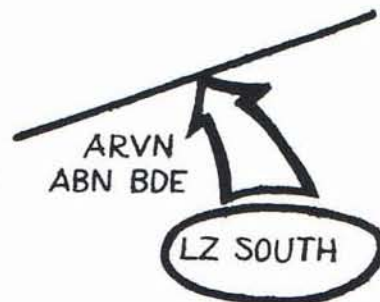
CACHES DISCOVERED BY  
E/17 CAV. ON D+1



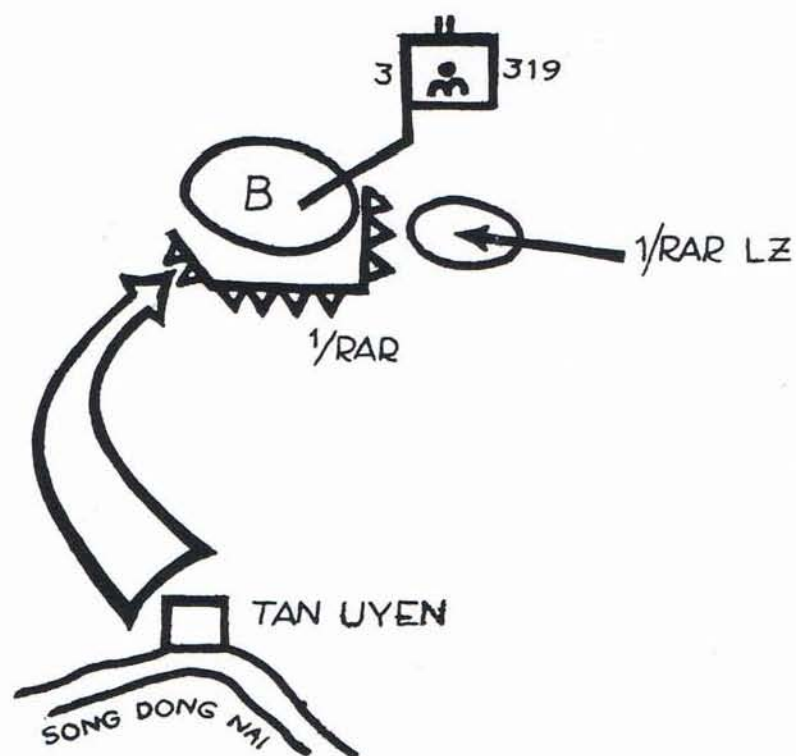
D-DAY



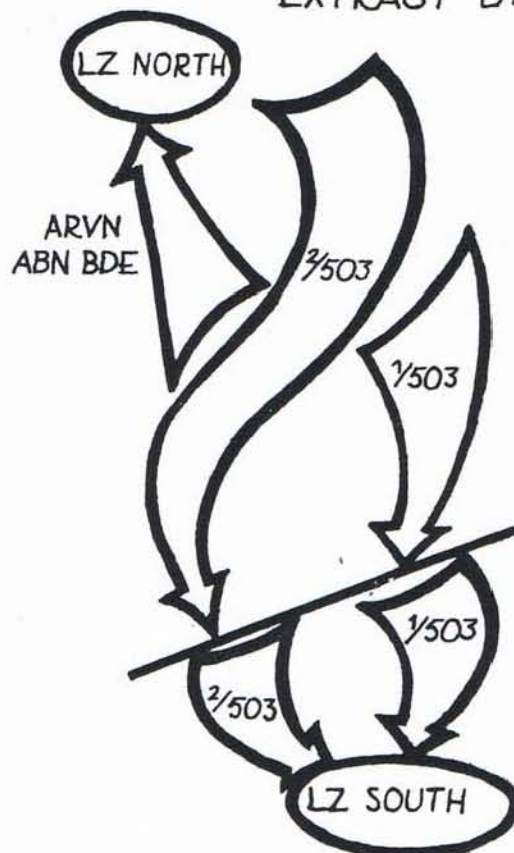
D-DAY



# D+1, D+2



EXTRACT D+1



EXTRACT D+2