

THE FIRST



THREE YEARS

*A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE
173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE
(SEPARATE)*







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(SEPARATE)*

published by
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This is not a history of the 173d Airborne Brigade, nor a year-book in which everyone's picture is a feature. Instead, this book is designed to give everyone, soldier, scholar, and layman, a feeling for what the Brigade has done and how we have done it.

It has been my pleasure to command the Brigade for nearly three years. The concept of an independent brigade (from which we received our "Separate" tag) was new to Army policy when it was promulgated, and we were, quite frankly, an experiment. We have proved the validity of the concept beyond doubt.

I am intensely proud of the Brigade's achievements. It has been first in almost all it has done in Vietnam. It is my firm belief that it will continue to be first and extremely successful in all of its endeavors.

Brigadier General Ellis W. Williamson

There can be no doubt that the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) is one of the finest fighting units ever fielded by the United States Army. Equally professionally qualified are our two allied elements which make up the Brigade—the first Battalion (Group) of the first Royal Australian Regiment and the 161 Field Artillery Battery of the New Zealand Army.

As the first U.S. Army ground combat unit committed in Vietnam, the Brigade has distinguished itself in combat and played a decisive role in dispelling for the Vietnamese people the myth of Viet Cong invincibility.

Units, however, are composed of people—and this book is intended to portray the people who made and are making the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) famous. The achievements of the Brigade's officers and men reflect the aggressiveness and professionalism with which the true soldier strives to be associated. Accordingly, every man—American, Australian or New Zealander—who contributed to the story that this book tells should be intensely proud of a job well done.

I am honored to command this elite unit and am confident that it will continue in its fine tradition of being "Airborne—All the Way".

Brigadier General Paul F. Smith

For almost three years since its formation, the Brigade knew but one commander, Brigadier General Ellis W. Williamson, who was born at Raeford, North Carolina, 2 June 1918. He attended high school at Raleigh, N.C., and Atlantic Christian College where he was graduated in 1940 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree. Following graduation that year, he entered the federal service as an enlisted man with the North Carolina National Guard. He rose from the rank of private to Regimental Commander with the 20th Infantry during World War II. Later, in the Korean Conflict, he served as Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations (G3) of the Tenth Corps and participated in the amphibious landing at Inchon.

General Williamson's military schooling includes the Command and General Staff College, The Armed Forces Staff College, and The National War College. His continued civilian education includes the Graduate School of Business at Harvard University and a Masters Degree in International Affairs from George Washington University.

General Williamson's many decorations and awards include six Silver Stars, four Bronze Stars, three Purple Hearts, and decorations for valor from the governments of France, Belgium, Great Britain, Korea and Vietnam.

General Williamson is married to the former Margaret McNeill of Charlotte, North Carolina. They have two children, a son Dan and a daughter Nan.

Brigadier General Paul F. Smith, a master parachutist with two combat jumps, assumed command of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep) from Brigadier General Ellis W. Williamson on 21 February 1966. Prior to taking command of the 173d, General Smith served as Deputy Commanding General and Chief of Staff of U.S. Army Task Force Alpha, later designated as U.S. Army Field Force, Vietnam.

An enlisted reservist for seven years, General Smith was commissioned a second lieutenant and called to active duty in April 1942. Participating in the Normandy, Ardennes-Alsace, Rhineland and Central Europe campaigns with the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment, he rose from Company Commander to Battalion Commander and made combat jumps at Normandy and Wesel and was awarded a Silver Star, three Bronze Stars, the Purple Heart, Combat Infantryman's Badge and the Distinguished Unit Citation.

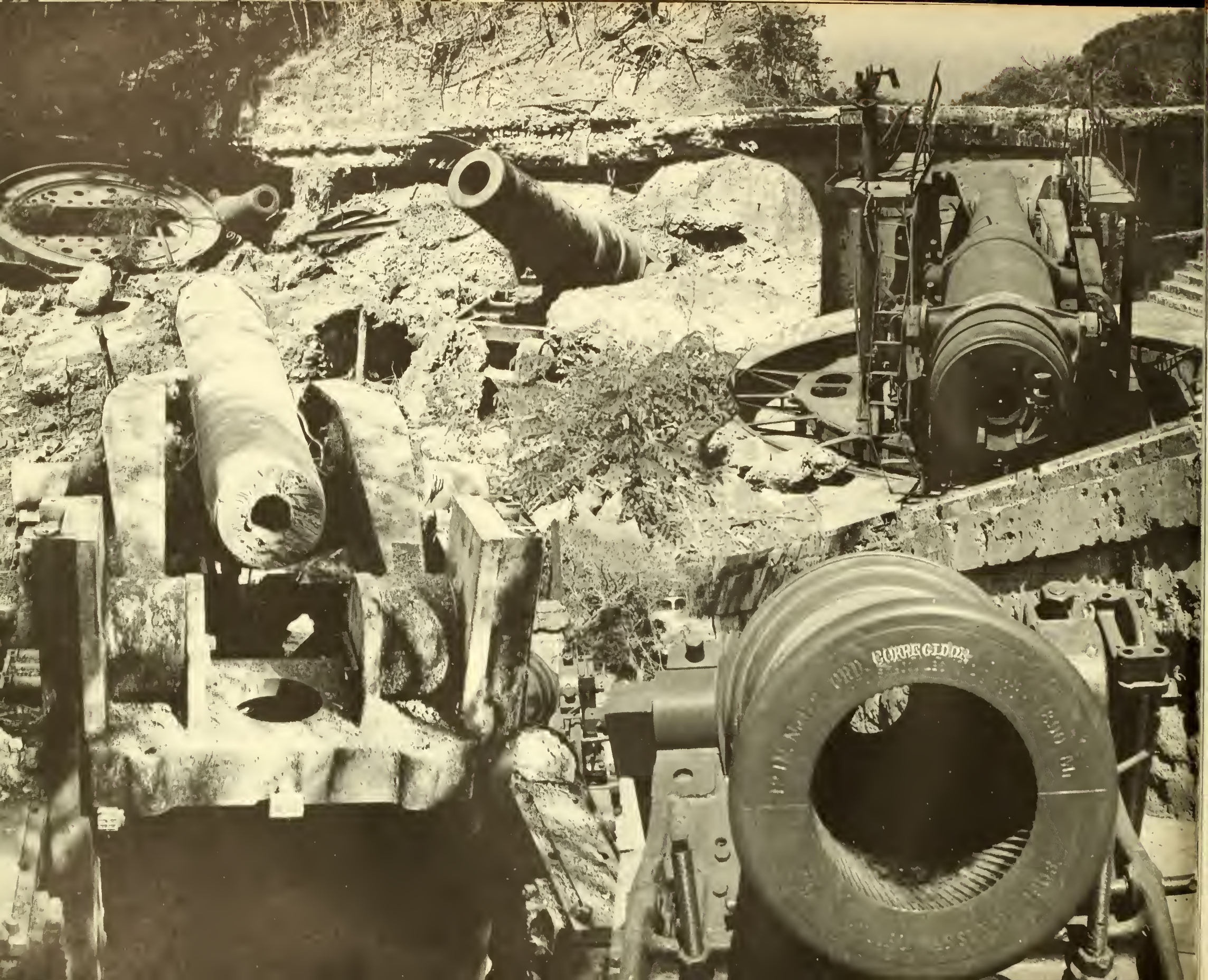
He has served as Executive Officer and Commanding Officer of the Airborne School, Commander of the 2nd Airborne Battle Group, 504th Infantry, as a deputy brigade commander and Chief of Staff of the 24th Infantry Division in Germany, and as an instructor at the Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia.

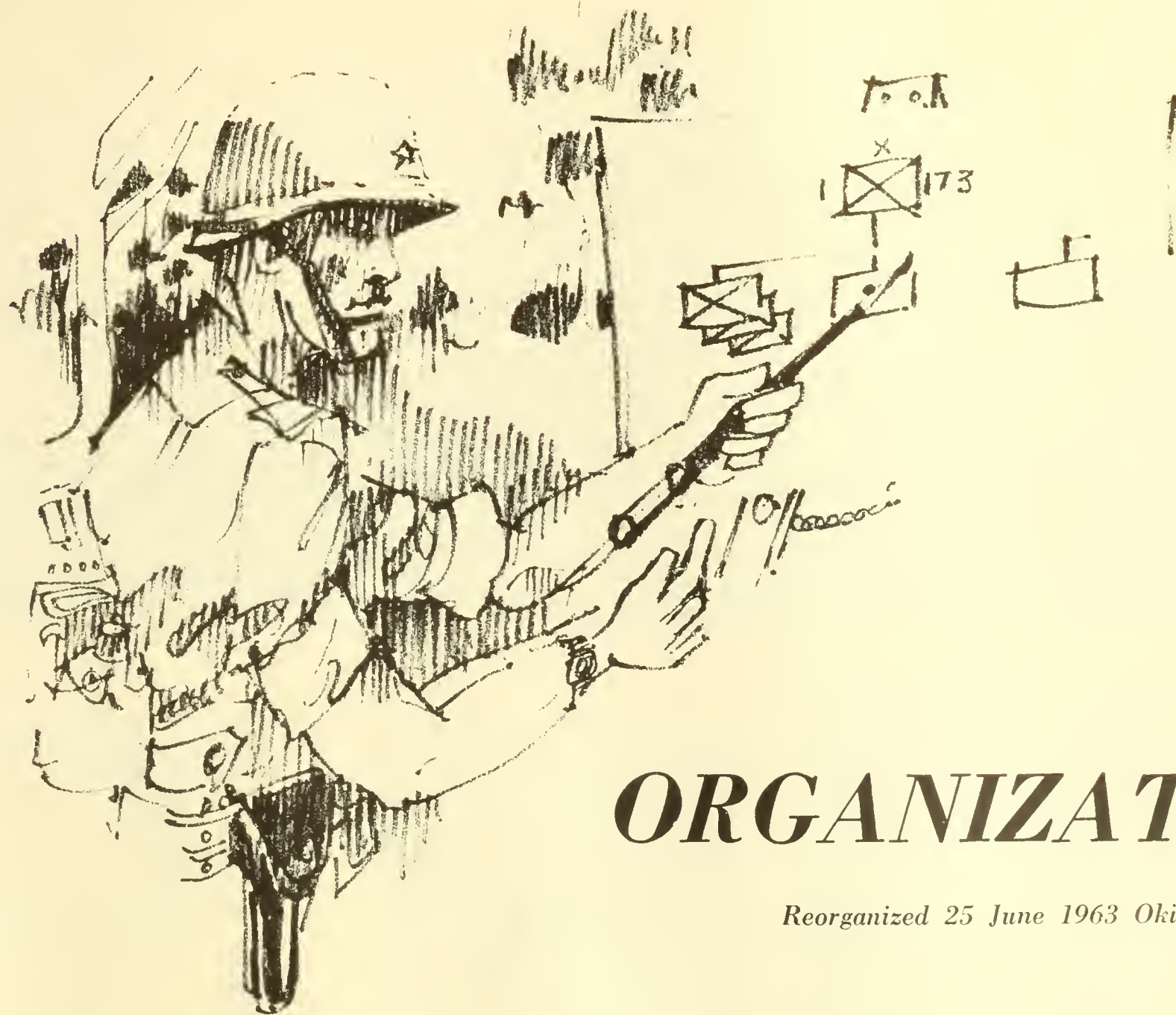
General Smith is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College, and the Army War College.

Before coming to Vietnam in July 1965, he served concurrently as Chief, Army Section, MAAG, Republic of China and Commanding General, U.S. Army Force, Taiwan, the U.S. component of the Taiwan Defense Command.

General Smith was born 15 November 1915 at Taunton, Mass., and is married to the former Margaret McClintock of Richmond, Va. They have two daughters, Sonja and Sandra.







ORGANIZATION

Reorganized 25 June 1963 Okinawa

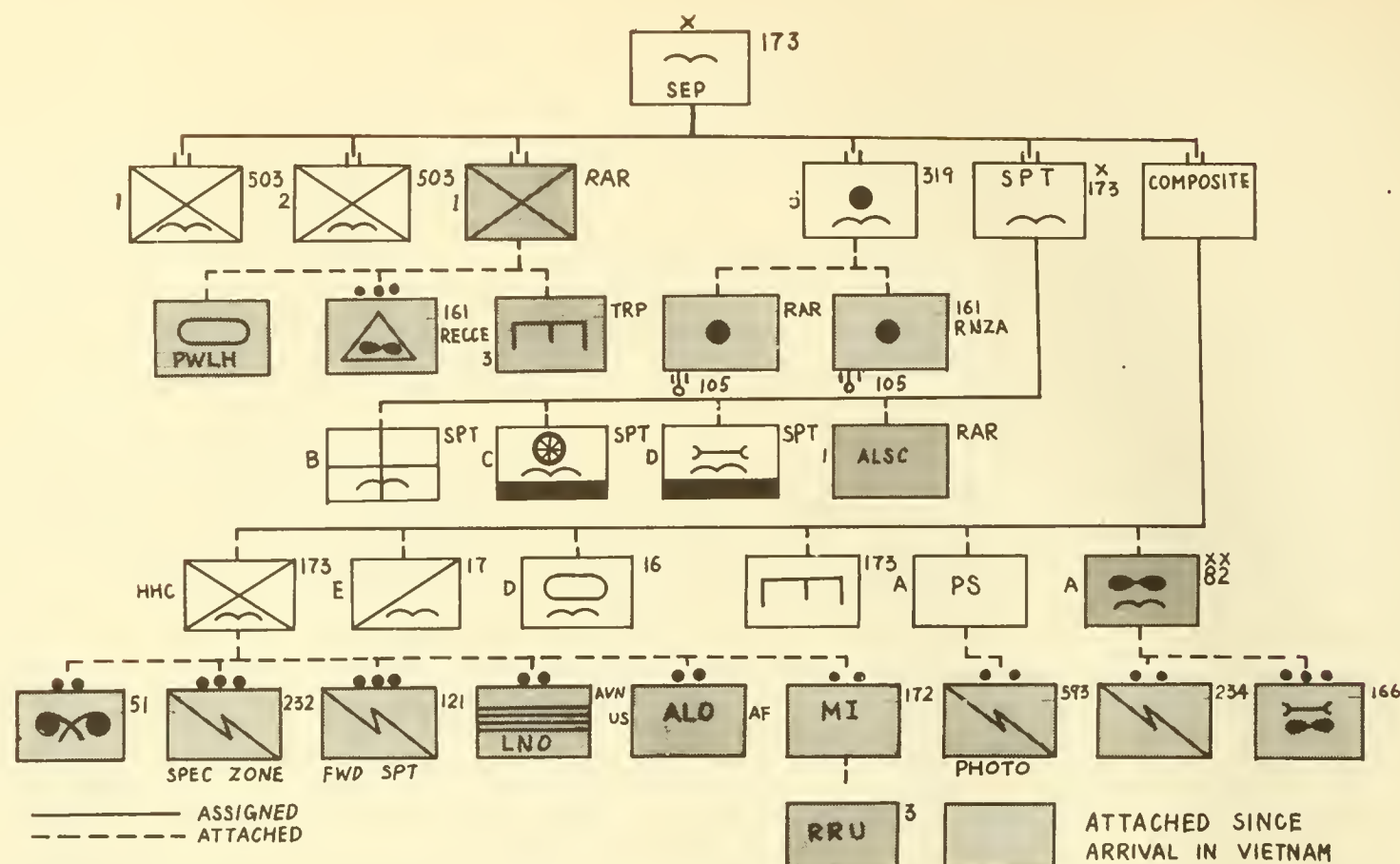
ORGANIZATION

The 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) was activated 25 June 1963 and was formed around the nucleus of the 2nd Airborne Battle Group 503d Infantry, a lineal descendant of the World War II 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment of Corregidor fame. It was organized as a balanced airborne combat force consisting of two infantry battalions, an artillery battalion, a support battalion, an engineer company, a cavalry troop, an armor company, and a headquarters company.

Upon activation, it became the first and only separate airborne brigade in the United States Army. This was the beginning of a long series of "Firsts" for the Brigade. It underwent extensive jungle training on Okinawa and made mass parachute jumps on the Island of Taiwan, in Thailand and on the Island of Mindoro in the Philippines. Through such training, the men of the Brigade were honed to razor sharpness and prepared for deployment to any trouble spot in Southeast Asia.

On 5 May 1965, it became the first U.S. Army ground combat unit committed to the war in South Vietnam, where further organizational changes were to take place. Attached to the Brigade were: 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment and support troops, the Prince of Wales Light Horse Troop, a Royal Australian Artillery Battery, 161st Royal New Zealand Artillery Battery, Company "A", 82nd Aviation Battalion, plus special intelligence, transportation, chemical and signal detachments.

The Brigade and attached units distinguished themselves as fierce fighters on the battlefield against the Viet Cong (VC). They have smashed the VC whenever and wherever they found him, and,



when not doing battle, they have conducted extensive civic action programs to assist the South Vietnamese people in the attainment of a better life and to bolster their hope for a future of peace and progress.

These programs include medical assistance, support of orphanages, distribution of food and clothing and repair of churches, schools, roads and construction of wells.

The shoulder insignia (patch) worn by the men of the Brigade came into being with the activation of the Brigade in June 1963. The red bayonet signifies a strike force borne by a white wing denot-

ing that the strike force can be flown by transport aircraft and dropped by parachute onto any assigned objective. The tab reading "AIRBORNE" above the shoulder patch indicates that the men are paratroopers and all equipment of the Brigade is air transportable. The patches' colors, red, white and blue are our national colors.

"All the Way" is the traditional motto of the paratroopers and was born out of the annals of World War II. It reflects the spirit, drive and resoluteness of the paratroopers to carry out any assigned task or mission, no matter how difficult, to a successful conclusion.

The paratroopers of the Brigade are called "Sky Soldiers." This nickname was given to the troopers by the people of the Republic of Nationalist China (Taiwan) because of a series of mass parachute jumps conducted on the Island of Taiwan in conjunction with the Chinese airborne forces. The people of Taiwan began calling the paratroopers "Tien Bing" which is Chinese for "Sky Soldier." The name stuck and has since been made the official nickname of the paratroopers of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep).



INFANTRY

The Brigade's two infantry battalions, the First Battalion of the 503d Infantry and the Second Battalion of the 503d Infantry (1/503d and 2/503d) and the attached First Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment (1/RAR) constitute the infantrymen available to the Brigade. Their mission is to close with and destroy or capture the enemy.

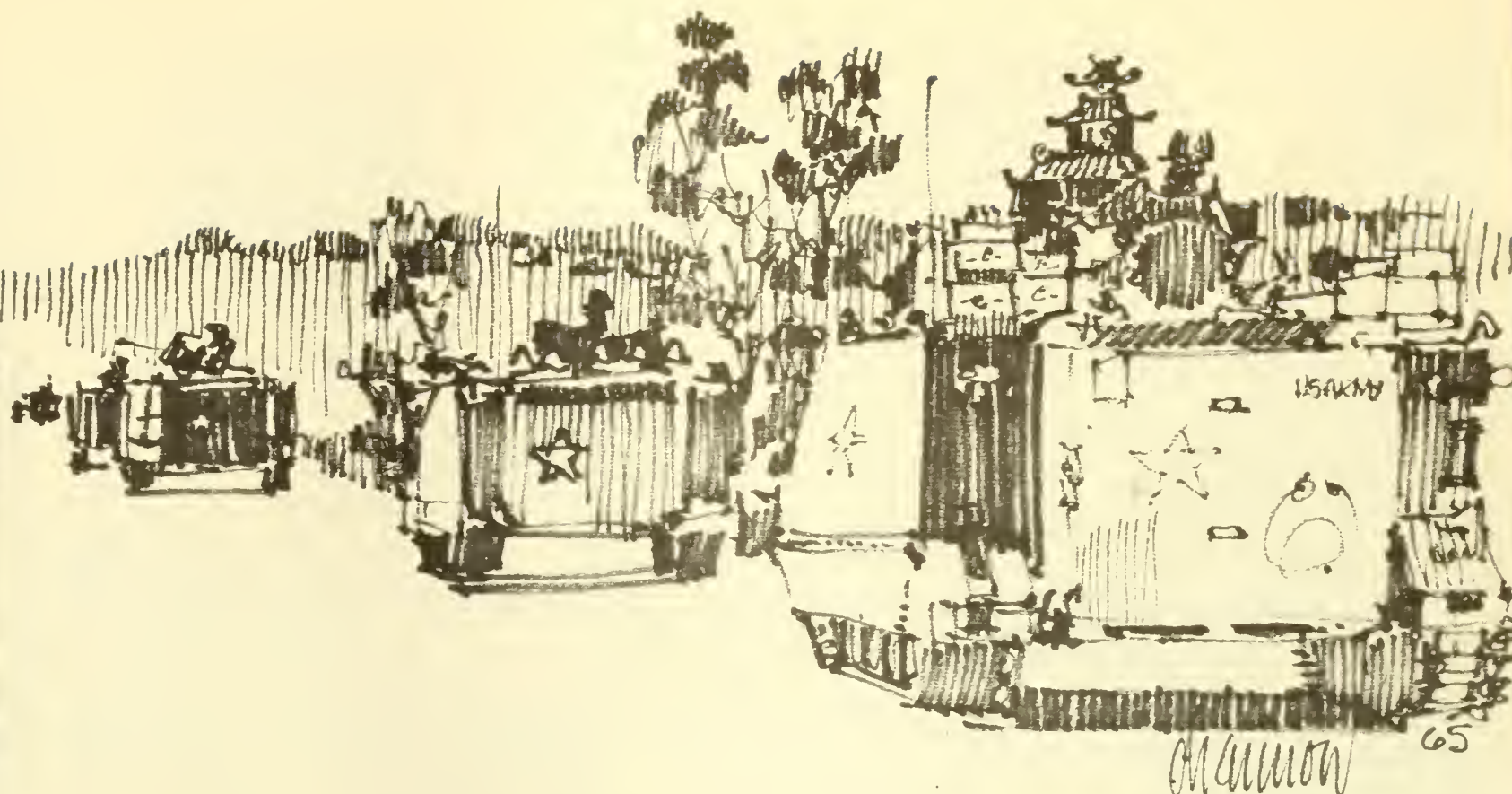




ARTILLERY

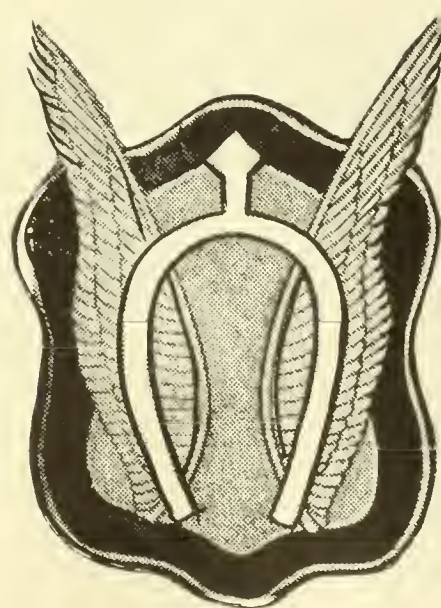
The three firing batteries of the Third Battalion of the 319th Artillery (3/319th) have been joined by the 161st Field Battery of the Royal New Zealand Army (RNZA) and the 105mm Battery of the Royal Australian Artillery (RAA). All five of the batteries fire the thirty-five pound 105mm projectile at ranges up to 11,000 meters. Their mission is to provide the maneuver elements swift, accurate and continuous fire support.





ARMOR AND CAVALRY

When an economy of force, road reconnaissance or convoy protection mission is needed, Troop "E" of the 17th Cavalry (E/17th) is called upon. Their jeeps, manned with machine guns or recoilless rifles, swiftly dart down each side road or trail, screening the convoy's advance. For armor protection or troop transportation the Armored Personnel Carriers (APC's) of "D" Company of the 16th Armor (D/16th) or the attached Australian Prince of Wales Light Horse Troop (PWLH) are utilized. "D" Company also has a platoon of 90mm anti-tank guns available for assault fire when necessary.





COMBAT SUPPORT

Within the 173d Support Battalion are three companies without which the Brigade could not function. "B" Company (Medical) provides teams of doctors and aidmen to operate the Brigade Clearing Station. "C" Company (Supply and Transport) hauls and stores the Brigade's supplies and its Aerial



Equipment Support Platoon furnishes parachute support. Third echelon maintenance of all equipment is accomplished by "D" Company (Maintenance). Formerly part of support battalion but now separate Company "A" (Administration) handles all the personnel services for the Brigade including Special Services and the post office. The 1st Australian Logistical Support Company provides special support for the Australian troops.

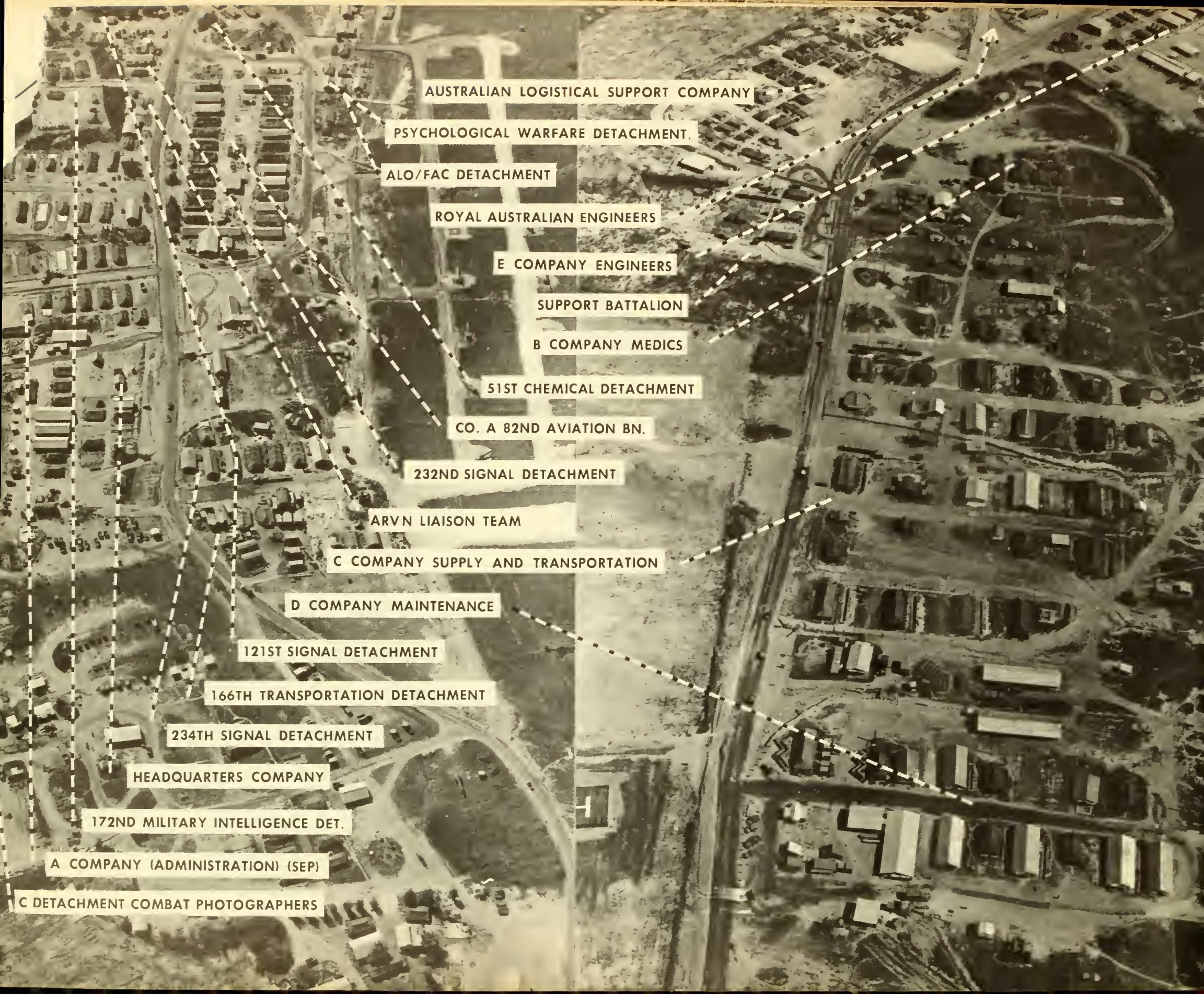
Whether its a shower point being built or a Viet Cong mine destroyed, the 173d Engineer Company does it. Attached to them is a special detachment of the Third Field Troop of the Royal Australian Engineers. Charged with the responsibility of housing and providing for all the personnel of Brigade headquarters is Headquarters and Headquarters Company.

The two troopship platoons and one gunship platoon of Company A of the 82nd Aviation Battalion furnished the much needed independence for the Brigade. With the Hueys of its own helicopter company the Brigade is now certain that its helicopter support will be available as needed. Part of the aviation company are three specialized detachments designed to supplement the company's support platoons. The 166th Transportation Detachment and the 234th Signal Detachment provide the critical third echelon maintenance on the helicopters and signal equipment, while the 25th Medical Detachment provides aidmen and a flight surgeon.

The Brigade's smallest unit is the 51st Chemical Detachment which provides the chemical support needed in clearing tunnel complexes.



Providing special intelligence and counterintelligence efforts for the Brigade's is the 172nd Military Intelligence Detachment. A special Air Force Liaison and Forward Air Controller team controls all Air Force strikes for the Brigade. The 121st and 232nd Signal Detachments operate a communications center and furnish in-country telecommunications functions. Accompanying the Brigade on all recent operations have been the combat photographers of Detachment "C" of the Combat Photographers Platoon of the 69th Signal Battalion. A special Vietnamese Liaison team assists the Brigade in cooperating with various Vietnamese units.



AUSTRALIAN LOGISTICAL SUPPORT COMPANY

PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE DETACHMENT.

ALO/FAC DETACHMENT

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ENGINEERS

E COMPANY ENGINEERS

SUPPORT BATTALION

B COMPANY MEDICS

51ST CHEMICAL DETACHMENT

CO. A 82ND AVIATION BN.

232ND SIGNAL DETACHMENT

ARVN LIAISON TEAM

C COMPANY SUPPLY AND TRANSPORTATION

D COMPANY MAINTENANCE

121ST SIGNAL DETACHMENT

166TH TRANSPORTATION DETACHMENT

234TH SIGNAL DETACHMENT

HEADQUARTERS COMPANY

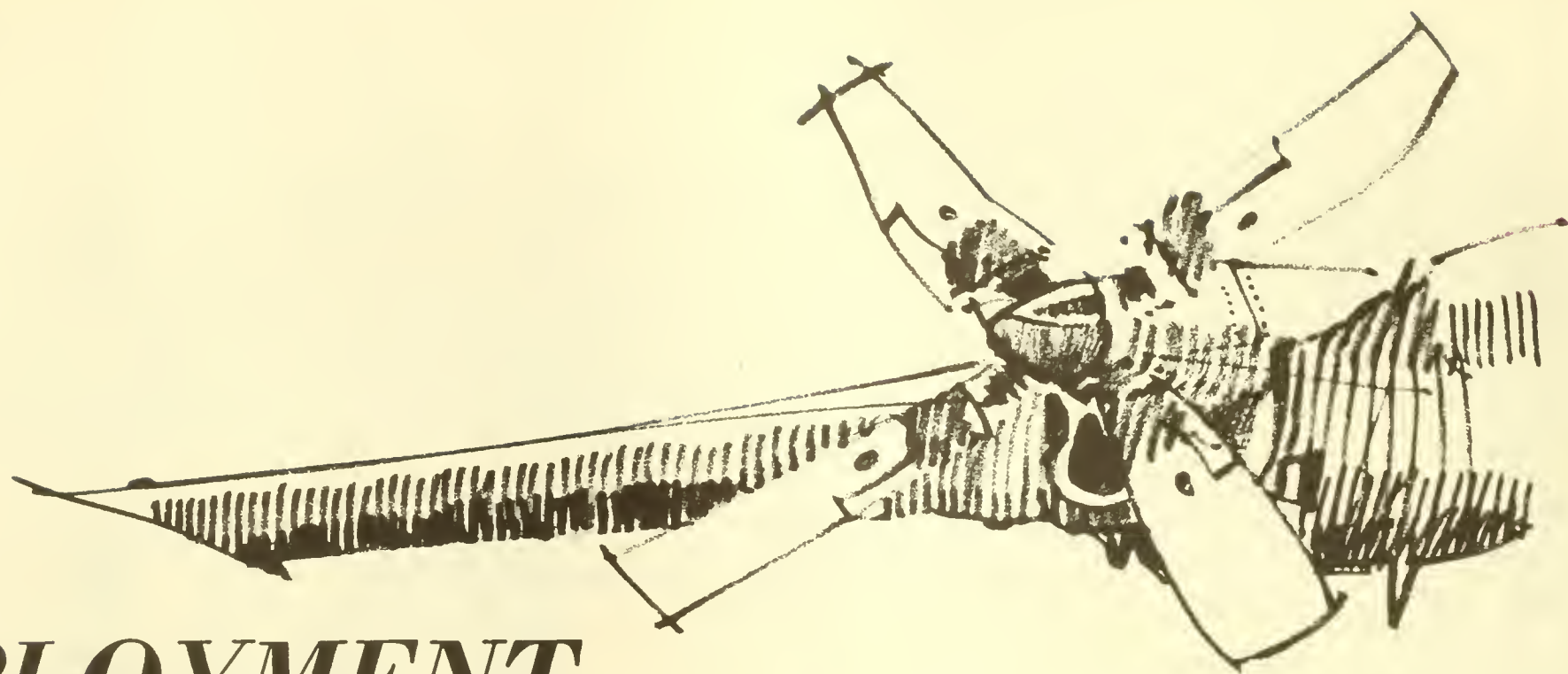
172ND MILITARY INTELLIGENCE DET.

A COMPANY (ADMINISTRATION) (SEP)

C DETACHMENT COMBAT PHOTOGRAPHERS

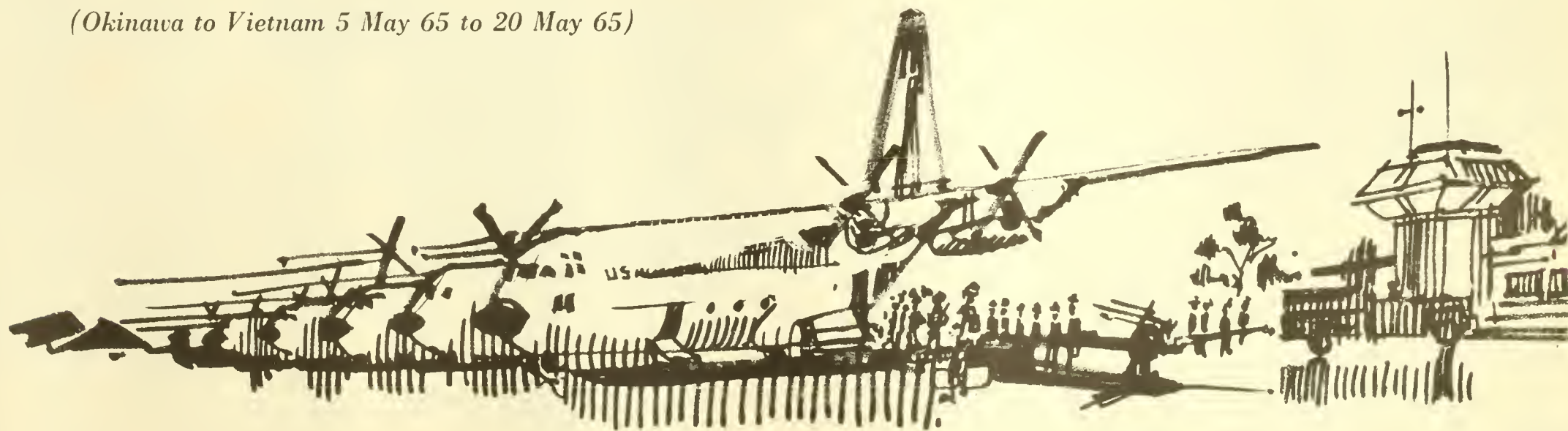


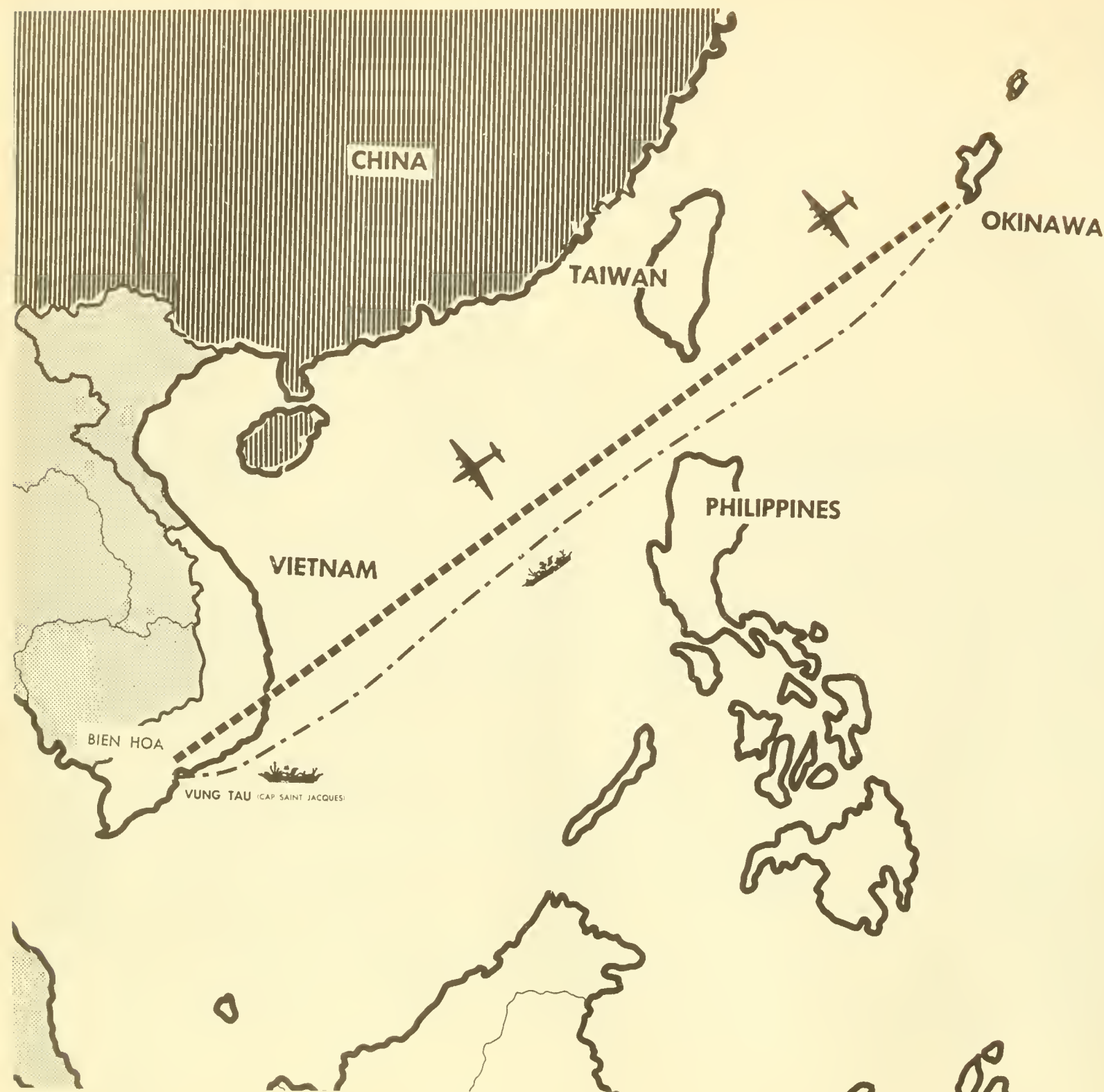




DEPLOYMENT

(Okinawa to Vietnam 5 May 65 to 20 May 65)





DEPLOYMENT

The silvery C-130 lifted off from Naha Air Base, Okinawa at one minute past midnight on the morning of 5 May 1965. Aboard was Brigadier General Ellis W. Williamson and the lead elements of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate).

Their flight was yet another first for the Brigade for their destination was Bien Hoa, Vietnam and they were to be the first American Army combat troops committed to this strife-ridden country.

In two days, utilizing 150 C-130 and eleven C-124 sorties landing every fifteen minutes around the clock, the swift moving Brigade soon had in Vietnam 98 officers and 1,863 enlisted men with supporting equipment, supplies and ammunition.

At Bien Hoa the Brigade minus one infantry battalion took up defensive positions around the strategic air base, while at Vung Tau a battalion task force composed of the 1/503d with engineer and medical attachments secured the area's key airfield.

On 7 May the remainder of the Brigade sailed from Naha Port, Okinawa. Aboard the U.S.S. General Mann were the 3/319th, 173rd Support Battalion, D/16th and elements of Brigade headquarters company and the engineers. By 13 May, all of the Brigade's combat and combat support elements plus necessary in-country administrative units had closed in Vietnam.

When the Brigade's status was changed on 5 August to a permanent change of station the dependents were returned to the United States and the remainder of the Brigade's rear detachment on Okinawa closed in with the Brigade.

On 19 June the Vung Tau based task force returned to Bien Hoa after fulfilling its mission of securing, patrolling and neutralizing the threat to the area.





THE CITY OF BIEN HOA

Eighteen miles northeast of Saigon lies the town of Bien Hoa along the banks of the Song Dong Nai River. The provincial capital of Bien Hoa Province and the headquarters for one of the province's seven districts, Duc Tu, the name Bien Hoa literally translated means "Land of Peaceful Frontiers".

Approximately 60,000 people live in the town and its numerous hamlets, deriving their livelihood from farming, chiefly rice and fruit, and shopkeeping. Although a number of manufacturing concerns have recently located in the area, the Bien Hoa market is still the focal point of the local economy, serving all of the province as a central place of exchange.

Adjacent to the town is the Bien Hoa Air Base, formerly a key French airfield and now a strategic base for both the Vietnamese and American Air Force. Deployed around the northern and eastern flanks of the air base are the units of the Brigade.

A large French fort dominates the airfield and the French influence is evident throughout the town with its many fine parks, boulevards and buildings.

The area surrounding Bien Hoa is a plaid of rice paddies, rubber plantations, truck gardens, and jungle, with the dense rain forests lying largely to the north and east. Immediately north of Bien Hoa is the infamous War Zone "D"

Bien Hoa is served by an extensive road network and, since the pacification of the area by government forces, the railroad is once more in use.

Bien Hoa is affected by two seasons, the rainy and the dry. The rainy season extends from middle May until November.



Vung Tau is also an active R&R center which boasts wide sandy beaches, a variety of fine restaurants and nightclubs, many shops and a well furnished R&R hotel for the troops.

(CAP SAINT JACQUES)

THE CITY OF VUNG TAU

A popular sea resort and now the location of a key Army airfield, the town of Vung Tau was the location of the 1/503d Task Force from early May until the middle of June.





CONSTRUCTION

Since the Brigade's arrival coincided with the start of the rainy season construction programs were hindered by torrential rains, impassable roads and swamped storage and living areas.

Initial efforts were directed towards building defensive structures, erecting zig-zag personnel bunkers for mortar protection, digging trenches, clearing fields of fire and erecting barbed wire barriers. In a few days, thousands of sand bags were filled, miles of wire laid, forests cleared, and acres of stump blown.

When the initial defenses were constructed, an all out building program began that is still in progress. The engineers initially established a water and shower point, laid out the road network, and repaired the sole steel bridge in the area.

With very few building materials available through normal supply channels the paratroopers' ingenuity and resourcefulness were fully taxed. In a few months using ammunition boxes, spare and discarded lumber from Saigon, and a few purchased materials, tents were floored and framed, mess halls constructed, and the troops moved out of pup tents.

Working through the daylight hours, the Brigade's engineers built and supervised the construction of many buildings and laid concrete floors for the semi-permanent facilities, while their road construction crews coped with the inundated road network.

In time, generators were acquired and units soon boasted refrigerators, lights and stereo music, while the nightly movies became the popular evening's entertainment.

At the present time a complete cantonment area is under construction for the Brigade.





COMBAT

(5 May 65 to Jan 66)



The 173d's first mission was to secure and defend the Bien Hoa Air Base. When asked the morning of his Sky Soldiers' arrival at the base on 5 May 1965, how soon he expected to initiate action against the Viet Cong (VC), General Williamson replied, "Tonight". And that night the Brigade set its first ambush patrols and the security and defense of Bien Hoa Air Base began.

Areas of responsibility were immediately assigned to subordinate units, defensive fires were planned, barriers erected and check points established. But rather than sit and wait for the VC to attack, the Brigade moved out to secure the area by continual, thorough and aggressive patrolling. Twenty four hours a day, the Bien Hoa area was saturated by the Sky Soldiers, and in support, the howitzer crewmen of 3/319th Artillery remained on alert. Ranging in size from a rifle squad to a company, patrols combed the area, examining trails for recent use, investigating likely assembly and ambush sites and recording every new trail and clearing. Usually each patrol had a mortar or artillery forward observer with it, and when needed, specially trained demolitions men were included. In addition, Vietnamese policemen accompanied the patrols as interpreters and to interrogate suspected VC.

While securing the immediate area, the troopers simultaneously moved into adjacent areas, patrolling and clearing a series of zones extending in radials out to 15 kilometers from the air base. Once cleared, a "measle" approach was used extensively in conjunction with other tactical concepts to maintain the security of the Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR.)

This approach entailed the selection of numerous helicopter landing zones and patrol base positions throughout the TAOR out to 105mm artillery range. These areas

were coded and plotted on the Brigade's immediate defense map, which became commonly known as the "Measle Sheet". Eagle flights and motor and foot moves were employed in positioning elements up to company size in these preselected areas. The exact areas to be occupied were arbitrarily selected, but when possible, the selection was based on available intelligence. Several areas were selected for occupation at a time and the units occupying them would remain there from one to three days. In this way the VC was kept guessing. He never knew where the Sky Soldiers would show next and was caught by surprise time and time again by the fast moving resolute troopers.

While the infantry battalions were employing eagle flights and foot patrols, E/17th Cavalry and D/16th Armor were making a show of force, scouting the road networks, selecting fording sites and checking the banks of the Dong Nai Rivers, or conducting a reconnaissance in force in the TAOR. By varying the time, type and manner of patrols, the Brigade was able to secure the roads. Once secure, the roads sprang alive with bicycles, ox carts, Lambretta scooters, buses and trucks as the grateful Vietnamese people journeyed to visit long abandoned markets, friends and families.

In conjunction with the securing of Bien Hoa Air Base, the Brigade perfected techniques in airmobile operations such as the movement of artillery by helicopter and establishment of a fire support base prior to the introduction of the infantry into objective areas by helicopters. Outmoded procedures were revamped and the Brigade began preparation for battalion and larger size operations.

In less than two weeks after its arrival in Vietnam, the first battalion size operation was conducted. The 2/503d Infantry was heli-lifted

into an LZ in the extreme eastern sector of the Brigade TAOR, and conducted an overnight sweep through the thick jungles, emerging the next day in the adjoining rice paddies. The 3/319th Artillery with E/17th Cavalry and D/16th Armor attached moved out by convoy to a location from which it could support the operation and was in position well before the first heliborne troops of 2/503d Infantry were landed in the selected LZ. Very light enemy resistance was encountered.

One week later, the 1/503d Infantry with C/3/319th Artillery struck out from Vung Tau against the VC. The battalion task force swept through an area near the resort, meeting only sporadic sniper fire from the VC.

At the end of May 1965, the Brigade committed almost all its combat assets in an airmobile operation for the first time as the 1/503d Infantry and 2/503d Infantry swept through an area just south of the junction of the Song Be and Dong Nai Rivers. The four day operation included airmobile assaults on three different objectives and security of a fourth. It was the largest and most unusual airmobile operation ever conducted in Vietnam.

Brigade elements were organized into three task forces (TF): Task Force SURUT, composed of 3/319th Artillery (less two batteries), reinforced by E/17th Cavalry, one platoon of Brigade engineers and one composite platoon made up of volunteers of the administrative, supply and maintenance personnel of the Support Battalion; Task Force DEXTER, consisting of 2/503d infantry, plus attached Brigade engineers; and Task Force BOLAND, made up of the 1/503d Infantry, plus attached Brigade engineers.

All individuals in TF SURUT, even the artillery gun crews, made

an Infantry type airmobile assault to secure LZ BLUE. The TF landing area was pounded by U.S. Air Force and U.S. Army Aviation 25 minutes prior to the first touch down of troops. As soon as the area was secured, H-37 helicopters brought in six 105mm howitzers with their ammunition. The howitzers were promptly laid and fires for the landing of TF DEXTER on LZ RED were initiated.

Three hours after the landing of TF SURUT, TF DEXTER began landing on LZ RED. Its landings were protected by a twenty minute artillery preparation, a fifteen minute air strike and five minutes of reconnaissance and suppressive fires from the armed helicopters. The initial assault was supported by fire from armed helicopters and all door gunners of the personnel carrying HUIB and D's (Hueys).

While landings were going on in objective BLUE and RED, TF BOLAND was being flown by C-130 and C-123 aircraft from Vung Tau to Bien Hoa Air Base. Bien Hoa served as the staging field for all helicopter lifts.

The next day at first light, fire support from objectives BLUE and RED were used to support landings of TF BOLAND on objective WHITE. After support from ground weapons, the U.S. Air Force again assisted in paving the way with a high volume of bombs, rockets and machinegun fire. Again under the protective fires of helicopters, the TF landing was accomplished against light opposition.

A total of 7 VC were killed as the swift moving Sky Soldiers encountered light resistance. They uncovered and destroyed many VC camps and bunkers, but found the VC unwilling to stand and fight.

Thus the mold was cast. Many of the techniques and procedures employed in this operation would be used again in later operations.



The Sky Soldiers were now ready to press the "offensive defense" of the Bien Hoa area, and began planning for thrusts into infamous War Zone "D" which lay just across the Dong Nai River to the north of the Brigade TAOR.

On 31 May 1965, the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, arrived in country and was attached to the Brigade. Many of the men of this experienced and highly trained battalion were veterans of the Malayan counter guerrilla campaign and were eager to show their mettle in battle against the VC.

Early in the morning of 13 June 1965, the Brigade was alerted for possible movement to assist ARVN forces heavily engaged in a fierce battle with the VC near the town of Dong Xoai north of War Zone "D". The decision was made to send a battalion task force. Within hours the 1/503d Infantry and A/3/319th Artillery were lifted from Vung Tau and Bien Hoa to the vicinity of Phuoc Vinh on the northern edge of War Zone "D". By dusk the battalion task force had set up blocking positions and secured the town and vital airstrip there.

In spite of aggressive patrolling, TF 1/503d had no VC contact as the enemy chose again to avoid the Sky Soldiers. After four days, ARVN forces had secured the Dong Xoai area and TF 1/503d returned. The Brigade had successfully demonstrated its ability to respond to combat operational requirements on a moment's notice and had proved to all its eagerness to carry the battle to the VC.

On 19 June, the 1/503d and attachments were moved permanently from Vung Tau to rejoin the Brigade at Bien Hoa.

In late June, the Brigade penetrated War Zone "D" for the first time. Long a VC stronghold and formerly used as a redoubt by the Vietminh and Vietnamese bandits,

War Zone "D" reportedly was an impregnable VC fortress. Here the VC trained, treated their sick, stored supplies and relaxed.

Preceded by artillery, air and armed helicopter strikes, the 2/503d assaulted War Zone "D" by helicopters on the morning of 23 June. Their mission was to search and destroy, and the fast moving troopers fanned out quickly from their LZ. With the artillery support based just south of the Dong Nai River, the men of the 2/503d Infantry were assured of continuous fire support. Again the VC chose not to fight as the troopers swept through the area. Hot chow and glowing fires were abandoned by the VC. Bunkers, camps and supplies were destroyed by the Sky Soldiers and tons of rice rendered useless. A few VC suspects were detained but no significant contact was made with the enemy. But the Sky Soldiers proved that War Zone "D" was not an impregnable VC position.

As American troop strength in Vietnam increased the Brigade was assigned the responsibility for clearing and securing the base areas for incoming units. The first mission was to secure the base area for the 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. On 25-26 June the newly arrived 1/RAR, on its first major operation, cleared an area southeast of Highway 1A. The Aussies found only a few VC camps and made no contact with the VC. Within days elements of the 2nd Brigade moved into the area without a shot being fired at them.

On 27 June, the Brigade participated in the largest troop lift and its first joint American-Vietnamese combat operation of the war. In all, nine battalions were involved: five infantry, one artillery, one support and a composite battalion of cavalry, armor and engineers. The targets were objectives deep inside War Zone "D". With the 3/319th

fire support base established north of TAN UYEN in War Zone "D" and secured by the 1/RAR, D/16 Armor, with E/17th screening, the 1/503d Infantry and 2/503d Infantry were heli-lifted to the west of TAN UYEN deep into the VC redoubt—farther than any sizeable friendly force had ventured in over one year. The two infantry battalions swept south while two battalions of ARVN airborne troops, who landed south of the Sky Soldiers, swept north in an adjacent zone of operation. The operation lasted for four days and was the first time the newly arrived 1/RAR had taken their place with the Brigade as part of its combat formation. Killing 25 VC and destroying or capturing over 200 tons of rice and food stuff plus three trucks, the Sky Soldiers mapped enemy installations for future actions and proved again that the enemy redoubt was not impenetrable.

From 6 to 9 July, the Brigade again attacked into "D" Zone. With the fire support base (3/319th, D/16th, and the 173d Engr Co) south of the Dong Nai River, the 1/503d, 2/503d with E/17th attached and 1/RAR, conducted successive heliborne assaults north of the Dong Nai River just south of the combined operation of 27-30 June. They swept south to trap the enemy against the river. On the west flank, the ARVN 48th Regiment blocked enemy escape routes and coordinated their movements with the Brigade. The ARVN 3d Battalion, 43d Regiment was attached to the Brigade on the second day of the operation and blocked VC escape routes to the east along the Dong Nai River. This was the first time that an ARVN combat unit had been attached and under the direct command of a U.S. commander. This thrust into War Zone "D" was the most complex yet most successful operation to date and resulted

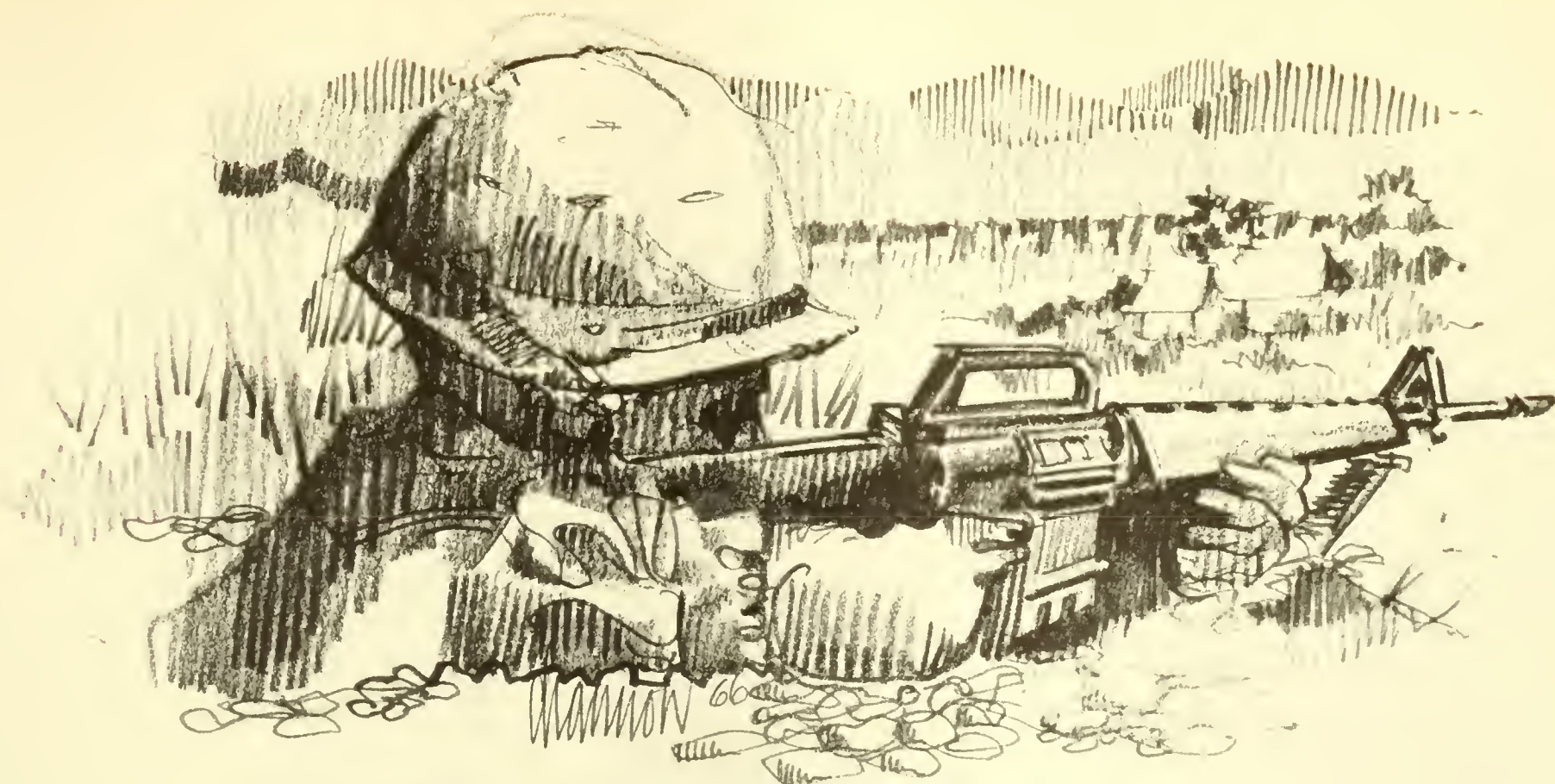
in over 400 VC casualties (later intelligence indicated, in fact, over 600 casualties), 28 VC captives, the destruction of over 300 VC buildings, 100 tons of rice and many domestic animals, and the recovery of a ton of documents, thirty weapons and four radios.

In the first major engagement with the VC, the men of the Brigade had the satisfaction that they emerged eminently victorious. The hard core VC battalion they encountered had been decimated. The enemy had proved no match for the tough, hard driving Sky Soldiers in spite of their well prepared entrenchments and booby trapped facilities.

During the period 10 to 27 July, the Brigade conducted patrols up to two companies in size in its TAOR at Bien Hoa as shows of force and in conjunction with the Measle Sheet. The 161st Field Battery of the Royal New Zealand Army (RNZA) arrived in country on 17 July and was attached to the Brigade.

The Brigade's next major operation from 28 July to 2 August was in Phuoc Tuy Province where a VC supply route was believed located. Task Force 6A (3/319th, E/17th, D/16th, and elements of the Engineers and Support Battalion moved by convoy down Highway 15 to Position NICKLE in Phuoc Tuy Province on 28 July (D-1) and in the process cleared the highway for the first time in months which allowed the ARVN to resupply their Binh Gia garrison near Vung Tau. The 1/503d moved by C-130 aircraft to Vung Tau early in the morning of 29 July.

The airmobile assault on 29 July was preceded by a massive B-52 strike. Following this, the normal Air Force and artillery fires prepared the LZ for the landing of the first troop lift of the 2/503d from Bien Hoa. The seventy-five Hueys



BRIGADE OPERATIONS

COMBAT OPERATIONS BATTALION SIZE OR LARGER

OPERATIONS	DATES	AREA	OPERATIONS	DATES	AREA
OPORD 9-65	19-20 MAY	EAST OF BIEN HOA	OPORD 25-65	8-14 OCTOBER	IRON TRIANGLE
OPORD 10-65	26-27 MAY	VUNG TAU	OPORD 26-65	21-27 OCTOBER	DI AN-PHU LOI
OPORD 11-65	31 MAY-3 JUNE	EAST OF BIEN HOA	(NEW ONE)		
TF 1/503D	13-18 JUNE	PHUOC VINH	OPORD 27-65	23-26 OCTOBER	WAR ZONE "D"
FRAG ORDER 4-64	23-24 JUNE	WAR ZONE "D"	OPORD 28-65	5- 9 NOVEMBER	WAR ZONE "D"
OPORD 15-65	25-26 JUNE	HIWAY #1A	NEW LIFE	21 NOVEMBER-	VO DAT AREA
OPORD 16-65	27-30 JUNE	WAR ZONE "D"		17 DECEMBER	
OPORD 17-65	6- 9 JULY	WAR ZONE "D"	SMASH I	17-23 DECEMBER	COURTENAY
OPORD 19-65	28 JULY-2 AUGUST	PHUOC TUY			PLANTATION
FRAG ORDER 12-65	7-11 AUGUST	WAR ZONE "D"	MARAUDER	1- 8 JANUARY	PLAIN OF REEDS
PLEIKU	10 AUGUST-	PLEIKU-KONTUM			BAO TRI
	7 SEPTEMBER		CRIMP	8-14 JANUARY	HO BO WOODS
OPORD 24-65	14-28 SEPTEMBER	BEN CAT	ROUNDHOUSE	4- 7 FEBRUARY	WAR ZONE "D"
FRAG ORDER 15-65	4- 6 OCTOBER	WAR ZONE "D"			

used to lift the battalion then moved on to Vung Tau and in two lifts placed the 1/503d on the LZ. Then the helicopters returned to Bien Hoa and picked up the rest of the 2/503d. In this manner, the 145th Aviation Battalion was able to complete the entire troop life with only two refueling stops.

On 30 July the 2/18th Infantry, 1st Division relieved E/17th and D/16th from their security mission of Position NICKLE and allowed the cavalry and armor units to establish blocking positions for the infantry's push through the valley. D/16th mounted patrols with composite platoons of the Support Battalion and Engineers to check out reported VC locations and caches.

The Brigade logistics operation center operated out of Vung Tau throughout the operation. For the first time in Vietnam, the Brigade used parachutes for the delivery of supplies. Low Level Extraction (Lolex) was used partially to supply TF 6A at Position NICKLE.

This complicated operation was conducted smoothly and effectively. The Brigade showed its flexibility and proved that it was not tied to the Bien Hoa area, and the Sky Soldiers dispelled the myth that this Phuoc Tuy area was a heavily fortified VC fortress and encouraged the ARVN military forces to conduct bolder and more ambitious operations in the area.

During the period 7 to 11 August, the Brigade again invaded "D" zone as the 1/RAR supported by B/3/319th moved through on another search and destroy operation. Only light contact was made with the VC, but the Aussies killed 4 snipers and destroyed numerous VC camps and installations.

On the morning of 10 August, the Brigade received a warning order to move to the Pleiku area for possible airmobile operations. Minutes later came the movement order and

within hours the first elements of the Brigade were landing by C-130 and C-123 aircraft in the Montagnard country in central Vietnam.

Under siege was the Special Forces CIDG camp at Duc Co, only 5 kilometers from the Cambodian border. With the VC strength estimated at more than regimental size, immediate reinforcements in the Pleiku area were necessary to allow the ARVN II Corps Commander to commit his reserves to relieve the VC pressure at Duc Co. The 173d provided the reserve and secured the strategic Thanh Binh pass, allowing ARVN relief forces to pass through to Duc Co. While securing the pass, the Brigade conducted numerous eagle flights and patrols throughout the area seeking out the VC.

A total of 43 company, 116 platoon and 22 squad size operations were conducted in the area, thoroughly saturating every hill and valley with Sky Soldiers, but the enemy again chose to run rather than fight. After the VC siege of Duc Co had been broken, the ARVN relief column was ordered to return to the Pleiku area. The Brigade was given the mission to secure the passage of the relief force back to Pleiku. This force returned through the Brigade secured area without a shot being fired at them. Brigade planning and coordination for the security of the ARVN forces served as an outstanding example as to how this type mission should be carried out. The ARVN Task Force Commander was so impressed that he told his staff to learn the technique employed by the Brigade. Having mastered the technique the favor was later returned in kind when the same ARVN task force secured the return of Brigade elements from Kontum.

The Brigade returned to Pleiku and was immediately alerted for commitment to the Kontum area. A VC buildup there was in pro-

gress and an attack at any time was feared. The Brigade dispatched 1/503d, C/3/319th and E/17th to Kontum, opening the Pleiku-Kontum road for the first time in five weeks. At Kontum the VC again chose not to fight the Sky Soldiers.

During the Brigade's presence in the highlands, VC activity decreased to its lowest rate in 18 months. Consequently most of the Brigade's efforts there were directed towards civic action. Over 50 villages were visited by medics who treated over 5,000 patients. A leprosarium was refurbished, and many schools were repaired, painted and cleaned. After 28 days, the Sky Soldiers moved back to Bien Hoa from the highlands.

One week later, 14 September 1965, War Zone "D" was penetrated again as the Brigade moved into the Ben Cat sector north of the Iron Triangle and conducted search and destroy operations until 28 September. Saturation patrolling was employed utilizing squad and platoon size units from battalion patrol bases.

An impressive list of accomplishments marked this operation. In order to extend the fire support base, A/3/319th and the 161st RNZA Battery were moved into the center of the TAOR with the indispensable help of the APC's of the Prince of Wales Light Horse Troop. Acting on intelligence garnered from a VCC, the 1/503d was heli-lifted into the northern operational area. In four days the swift moving Sky Soldiers destroyed two hospitals, a signal school, several large training camps and numerous VC buildings. C/1/503d captured 62 Russian sniper rifles with telescopic sights and 36 military radios plus 4,500 Chinese hand grenades and 91 bangalore torpedoes. One of the sniper rifles was to later be permanently displayed in the Presidential Library in Washington, D.C.

In all, the VC lost 46 killed and 80 captured. Over 9,000 documents and 500 pounds of medical supplies were captured and twenty-three VC camps were located for future air strikes or destroyed as found.

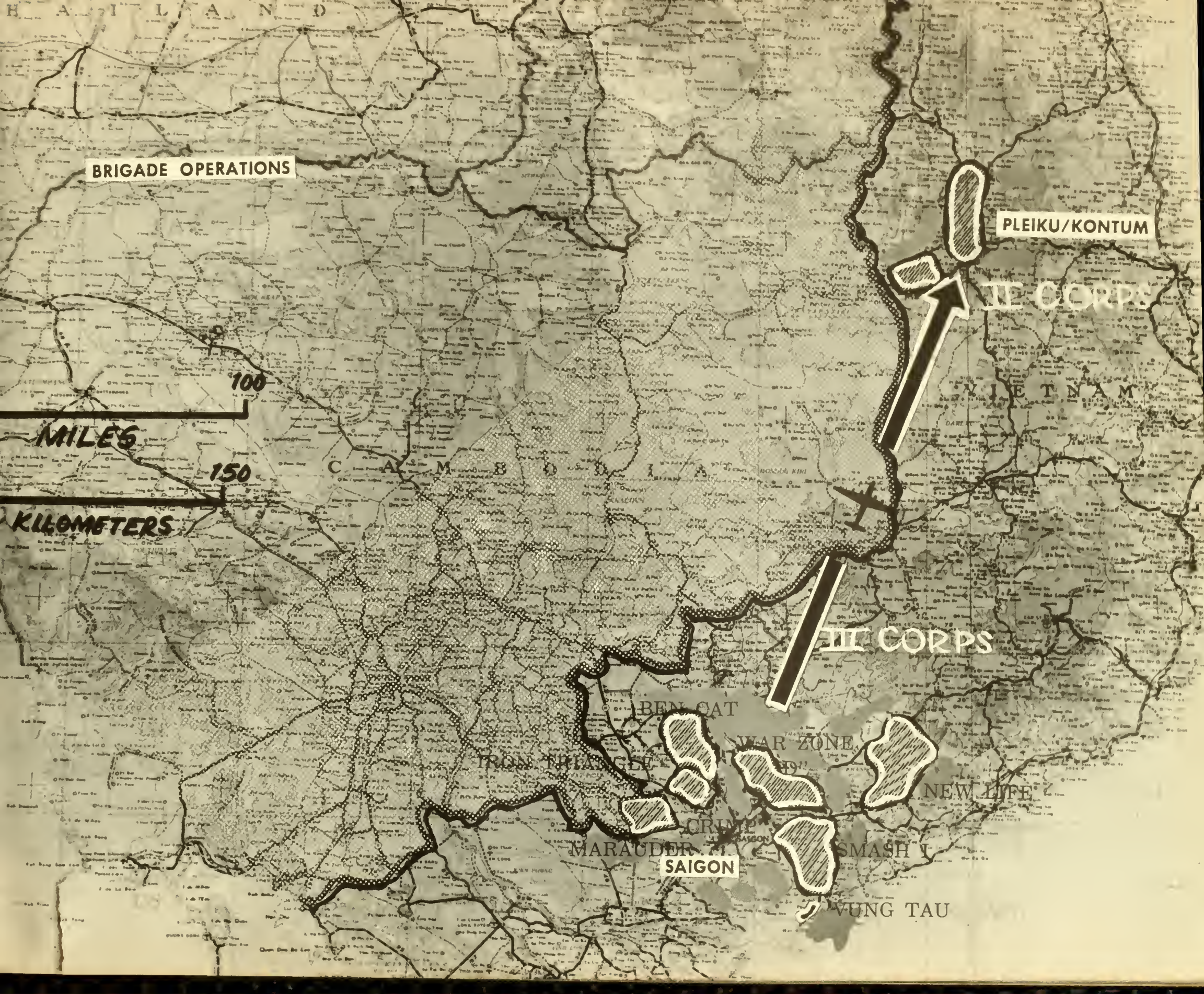
Concurrent with combat operations, an extensive civic action program was conducted. Seventeen village chiefs who had not ventured out of Ben Cat in over a year returned to their villages, elections were held and Mass was said for the first time in a year. The roads sprung alive as long abandoned markets were supplied with fresh produce. Tons of foodstuffs were distributed along with 900 magazines for the news starved villagers.

During September 1965, the 1/RAR was reinforced by the 105 Field Battery, Royal Australian Artillery (RAA), the 3d Field Engineer Troop, the 161st Reconnaissance Flight and the 1st Australian Logistical Support Company (ALSC).

From 4 to 6 October, the 1/503d supported by 3/319th conducted another search and destroy operation into "D" Zone. On this rapidly moving three day operation, the battalion killed 15 VC, destroyed numerous VC camps and bunkers and captured many documents.

Two days later, the Brigade returned to the Ben Cat area but met only light and scattered VC resistance northwest of Ben Cat. The Brigade then turned south to challenge the "Iron Triangle"—a VC physical, psychological and military bastion. Many stories had been told about the Triangle and it was believed by the Vietnamese that the area was impenetrable.

Employing all three infantry battalions and the first B-52 strike of the war in direct support of ground troops, the Sky Soldiers and Aussies moved into the Iron Triangle and cracked it wide open. The fast moving Brigade elements killed 106 VC,



BRIGADE OPERATIONS

PLEIKU/KONTUM

II CORPS

VIETNAM

MILES

100

CAMBODIA

CAMP KINH

KILOMETERS

150

III CORPS

BEN CAT

WAR ZONE

IRON TRIANGLE

NEW LIFE

CRIMP

SMASH I

SAIGON

VUNG TAU

destroyed numerous camps, a VC hospital and sank 7 sampans. The fifty square kilometers of the unknown no longer existed. The few VC installations which could not be destroyed were pin-pointed for destruction at will by air attacks. As Brigadier General Williamson stated succinctly to his troops after the operation, "The Iron Triangle is no more". Another myth of VC invincibility was laid to rest.

On 19 October, the Brigade received its own aviation company, Company "A", 82nd Aviation Battalion. This was to be a most valuable addition to the Brigade for it provided much needed mobility and greatly enhanced the operational capability of the Brigade.

From 21 to 27 October, the 2/503d and B/3/319th cleared the Phu Loi-Di An area, a future location for elements of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division. The seven day operation resulted in slight contact and only two VC were killed. At the same time the 1/RAR supported by the RAA and RNZA batteries combed War Zone "D" again, encountering only occasional sniper fire from the VC. Three VC were killed.

From 5 to 9 November, the Brigade again invaded "D" Zone in Operation HUMP, which resulted in the biggest single U.S. ground engagement of the war to date. The 1/RAR entered south of the Dong Nai River while the 1/503d was heli-lifted in northwest of the river. The first three days of the operation were quiet with most of the action occurring in the Australian sector where two enemy were killed and one captured.

On the fourth day, the 1/503d, acting on an intelligence report, moved westerly and immediately encountered a large enemy force. The lead elements of C/1/503d made contact first and soon Charlie Company was enveloped by the

larger force. B/1/503d moved up to secure Charlie Company's flank and quickly had to fight to secure its own flanks. With this, A/1/503d was committed, attacking the enemy's left flank. The 1/503d was now engaged with a regiment of hard core VC and the battle raged for four hours.

Shortly past noon Bravo and Charlie Companies were able to consolidate and readjust their lines to allow heavy artillery and air strikes to pound the entrenched enemy. As the Sky Soldiers moved back in to attack, the enemy, leaving their trenches and blowing bugles, counterattacked. Combat raged at close quarters throughout the afternoon and when the VC withdrew at dusk they left behind 403 dead, most of whom were killed by small arms fire. Hundreds of VC were killed and carried away and many wounded escaped on their own. Later reports indicated that the three companies of Sky Soldiers had decimated a front line regiment, armed with the latest Communist bloc automatic weapons and clothed in standard uniforms with steel helmets. The Sky Soldiers, though seriously outnumbered and in the enemy's home ground, had routed and destroyed a major VC force.

Operation NEW LIFE in the La Nga River valley north of Vo Dat commenced on the morning of 21 November. Moving by helicopter, C-130, CV-2 and C-123 aircraft, within a few hours three infantry battalions, four artillery batteries, the cavalry troop and command sections had landed on the Vo Dat airstrip.

The mission of the Brigade was to prevent the rice harvest in the rich Rice Bowl from falling into the enemy's hands and to return the valley to government control.

Moving south on the road to Gia Ray the 2/503d cleared the area, eventually joining up with the overland elements consisting of two in-

fantry battalions and two artillery batteries of the 1st Infantry Division, and brigade armor, logistical and engineer elements. With the road cleared, 600 troop-filled vehicles of the ARVN 10th Division passed through the Brigade to the eastern part of the Rice Bowl and began operations.

The 1/503d with C/3/319th was helilifted across the unfordable La Nga River into the northwest corner of the Rice Bowl. Through close cooperation with the village chief of Phuong Lam and acting on intelligence received, a series of highly successful night attacks were employed, proving to the startled villagers that the night did not belong to the VC.

All units carried out saturation patrolling, and the constant activity with supporting artillery and air strikes coupled with the active civil affairs program resulted in 207 VC ralliers to the government side and 63 weapons turned in.

Used extensively for the first time were the Long Range Patrols (LRP) of the Cavalry Troop who conducted a river patrol on the La Nga River. Twice the LRP swam rivers to get into their patrol areas and some patrols ranged out as far as 12 miles in their intelligence efforts.

The intensive civic action program resulted in the relocation of the people of entire villages to safer areas, and cultivated a friendly attitude among the people throughout the area. Soon the villagers assisted Brigade elements in locating VC caches of rice, weapons, and ammunition and were volunteering to tape broadcasts for psychological warfare missions.

From Operation NEW LIFE, the Brigade moved on the morning of 17 December directly to Operation SMASH in the Courtenay Rubber Plantation area 35 miles southeast of Bien Hoa. Intelligence sources indicated a sizeable VC buildup there.

The 1/503d, 2/503d and 1/RAR were moved into three LZ's and immediately began saturation patrolling to find the enemy. On the next day the 2/503d ran into a strongly defended VC trench system manned with heavy machine guns. First encountered by the reconnaissance platoon and then C/2/503d, the battalion size VC force stubbornly held on. As B/2/503d came forward to reinforce the reconnaissance platoon, it smashed and overran an enemy position.

In the late afternoon, both Bravo and Charlie Companies 2/503d assaulted the trench system and the enemy chose to pull out rather than fight. The heavy firepower brought to bear on the enemy cost him 62 dead.

On 22 December, the Brigade returned to the Bien Hoa area to celebrate Christmas, host the Army Chief of Staff and watch the Bob Hope Show.

The Brigade launched the New Year with a swift move into the Mekong Delta and the notorious "Plain of Reeds". Operation MA-RAUDER I marked the first time American ground combat troops had fought in the Delta. The Brigade's mission was to cut the VC Oriental River supply route and seek out and find a hard core VC battalion long known to operate in the area.

With the fire support base and logistical and command elements set up at Bao Trai air strip 30 miles west of Saigon, the 1/503d and 1/RAR were heli-lifted into two LZs west and east of the Oriental River. With the employment of these two battalions the Oriental River was effectively cut.

The next morning the 2/503d landed east of the Oriental River and immediately the Sky Soldiers met strong resistance between the LZ and the river. The battalion fought through a series of fortified positions and employed tear gas, and

air and artillery strikes to dislodge the enemy. Late in the afternoon a strong coordinated assault by the battalion routed the VC and they fled under the cover of darkness leaving behind 93 of their dead and machinegun tripods and mortar base plates.

Meanwhile the 1/503d continued the mop-up on the west side of the river with numerous platoon size patrols. The 1st Battalion Sky Soldiers found extensive fortifications, brought back 326 VC suspects and destroyed quantities of VC equipment and supplies. On the east side of the river the 1/RAR also found numerous enemy positions and heavy entrenchments while encountering only light resistance.

E/17th and D/16th conducted search operations around the support base area. They made a systematic search of a 4,000 meter radius of Boa Trai accompanied by Vietnamese National Policemen. In one operation, E/17th conducted a search of 22,000 meter area on the eastern edge of the Brigade TAOR. Attached to E/17th was D/16th, two companies of the 38th ARVN Ranger Battalion, a light fire team, and one OH-13 helicopter for command and control. This was the Brigade's first experience with controlling all ground elements entirely from the OH-13. This technique proved very successful and was used on subsequent operations. Twenty-one VC were captured and two VC killed.

In another instance D/16th, with two companies of ARVN Rangers attached rapidly surrounded a village into which personnel were

observed fleeing. A number of military age suspects were captured and one, who had a powder burn on his cheek, proved to be a sniper who admitted that he had been firing on aircraft in the Bao Trai area.

The effectiveness of E/17th and D/16th efforts was such that the province Chief informed the Brigade commander that the VC had issued orders to cease firing upon aircraft in the area because it had become too costly in personnel and equipment.

During this operation a further exploitation of the helicopter's mobility produced a variation of eagle flight tactics termed "Hopscotch". As an eagle flight of company size or smaller touched down on an LZ another eagle flight was airborne, ready to react to reinforce the first flight if needed. If not, it landed on a second LZ while a third eagle flight was airborne serving as its reaction force. In this manner a large area could be rapidly saturated with troops and quickly covered and all of the troops could be within fire support range. In one day the Hopscotch tactics enabled the Brigade to cover an area that would normally take two or three days to cover with the same size force.

When Operation MARAUDER terminated early in the morning of 8 January the Brigade had killed over 111 VC and literally torn up the VC 267th Battalion and headquarters of the VC 506th Battalion. Many important documents were taken, including the roster of the 506th personnel who lived by day in the villages and on the farms and

fought at night as guerrillas. With proper followup, this spelled the end of the 506th.

The 173d, the first allied unit to operate in the Mekong Delta, proved again that the Brigade could go anywhere, anytime, and decisively defeat the enemy whenever contact was made.

At 0630 hours, 8 January, the Brigade swung immediately into Operation CRIMP, the largest U.S. operation conducted in the war to date.

The mission was to drive through the Ho Bo Woods region in Binh Duong Province and to destroy the political-military headquarters of the VC Military Region 4 which controlled enemy activities in the greater Saigon area.

The 1/RAR moved in first, initially encountering light resistance, but a few hours later a VC company engaged them in a vicious fight that continued into the night with the Australians overrunning successive bunker and trench systems. As the operation progressed, the Aussies and Sky Soldiers uncovered a multi-level labyrinth of underground tunnels. The Aussies captured dozens of weapons, including four new 12.7-mm anti-aircraft machineguns and more than 100,000 pages of important documents.

In all, 128 VC were confirmed killed, 91 captured and 509 suspects detained. The enemy lost 90 weapons, 22,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, grenades, 9 sampans, 57 tons of rice and various items as diverse as tape recorders, a duplicating machine, and four typewriters.

The headquarters of the VC Mili-

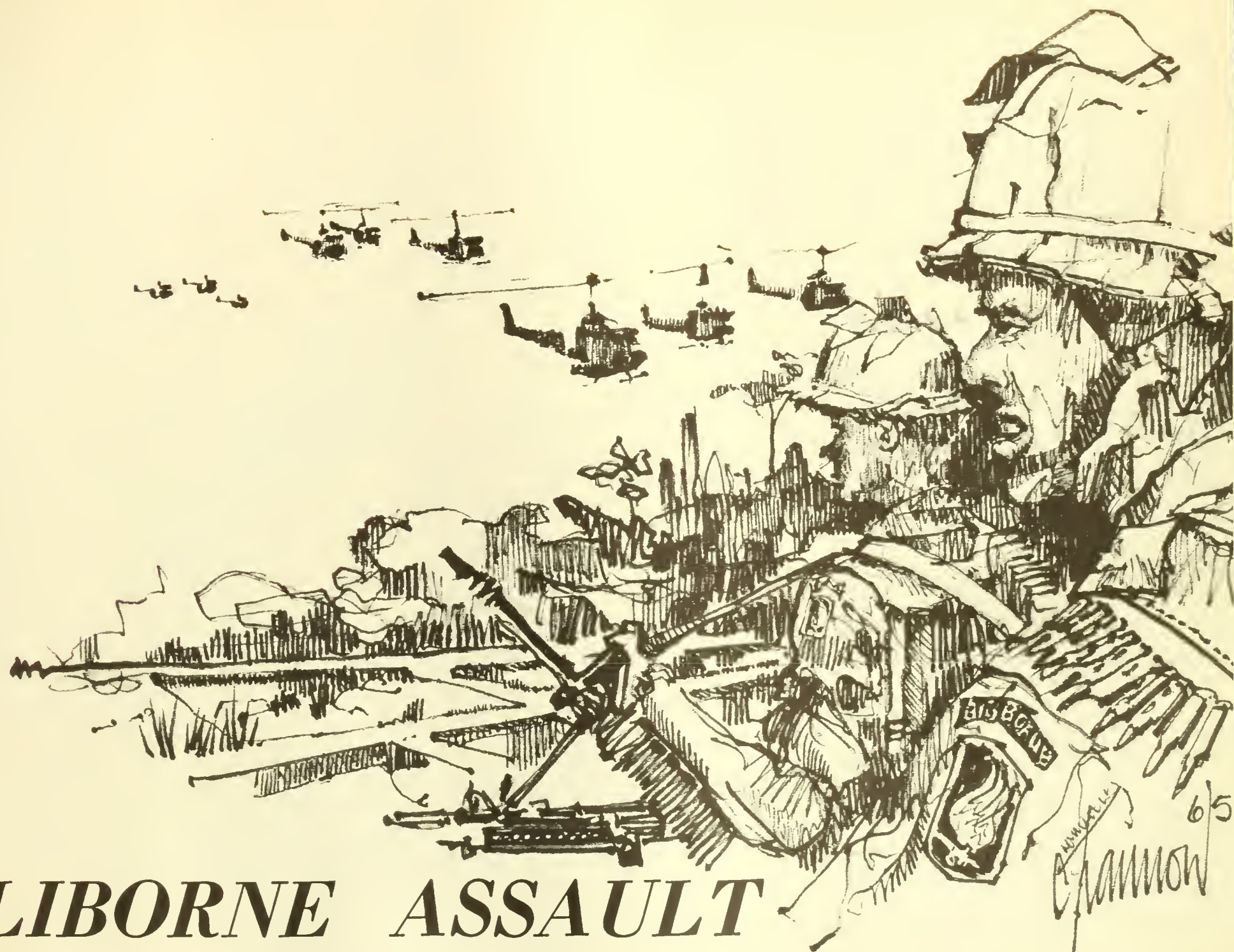
tary Region 4 was found, fixed, and destroyed by the Brigade, thus causing the enemy untold damage by destroying one of his most secure base areas in Vietnam and taking from him many of his weapons and capturing thousands of documents and records which revealed his organization, plans, and much of his past activity.

To make sure use was not made of the tunnel complexes again, crystalized CS tear gas was placed on detonation cord and exploded throughout the system.

From 4 to 7 February the 1/RAR and E/17th supported by B/3/319th, the RAA and RNZA, conducted Operation ROUNDHOUSE in the vicinity of Phuoc Loc. It was a costly one for the VC as three VC were killed with a possible 17 more, and captured were 235 tons of rice, 5,250 pounds of salt, 700 lbs of peanuts, seven 5 ton and one ¼ ton trucks, 9 bicycles, 2 typewriters and a quantity of weapons, ammunition and documents.

Throughout the Brigade's ten months in Vietnam, it and its attached units have proved themselves time and time again in battle. They beat the VC at his own game in his own back yard, and through their courage and drive, the VC have suffered heavy losses of personnel and equipment. To date Brigade has killed enough guerrillas and hard core enemy to form a regiment, and over two battalions of VC surrendered rather than face the Brigade in battle.





HELIBORNE ASSAULT

(Mobility for the Infantryman)

6/5
C. Hannon



THE TROOP LIFT

To the Brigade's Company "A", 82nd Aviation Battalion goes the dangerous job of transporting the Sky Soldiers to the objective area. At the staging area, whether Bien Hoa or in the field, the units to be lifted are broken down into a series of "lifts". The size of the lift depends upon the number of helicopters available, the size of the objective landing zone (LZ), and the number of troops to be lifted. Generally about 12 Hueys are used in a lift. For each lift the troops are separated and prepositioned on the LZ within a few feet of where their helicopter will land.

In just a few well coordinated seconds, the helicopters will land, the troops pile aboard, and the entire lift will rise from the departure LZ at once and head for the objective area.

As the helicopters approach the LZ the gunships fan out, circling the LZ and waiting to suppress any hostile fire. On board the troopships the door-gunners are alert for any enemy activity in the surrounding treeline. As the troopships land the Sky Soldiers spring from the Hueys and quickly take up defensive positions around the LZ or move out immediately into the thick jungles and the troopships return to the departure LZ for another lift.

A variation of the planned lift employed by the Brigade is an "Eagle Flight" consisting of a reinforced company or less which moves by helicopter to an LZ that generally has not received preparatory fires. Such a flight is made in reaction to a hot intelligence report. During the operations around Pleiku the Brigade employed many eagle flights to deposit quickly platoon-size patrols around the country side.

PHOUC TUY OPERATION









BEN CAT OPERATION

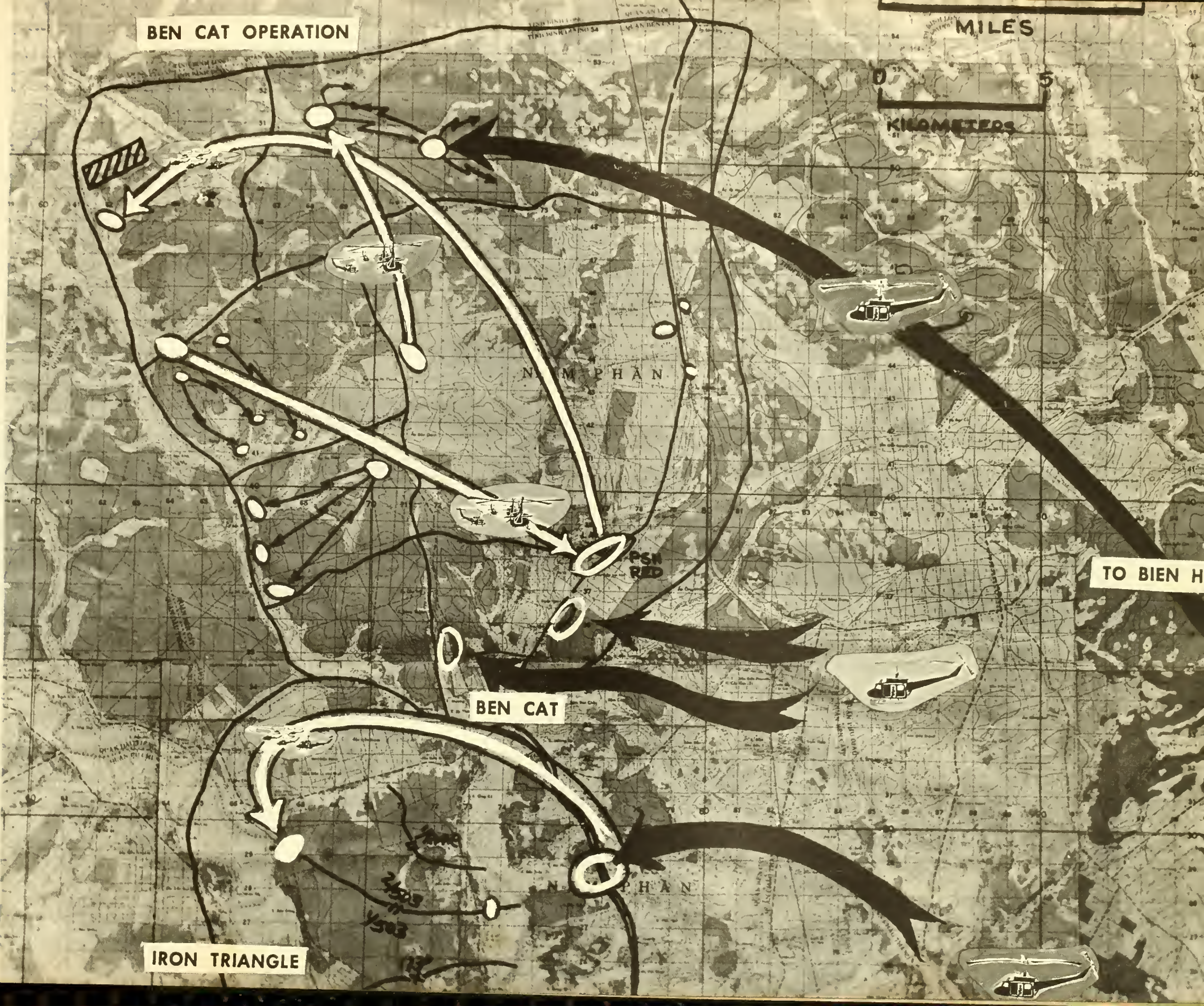
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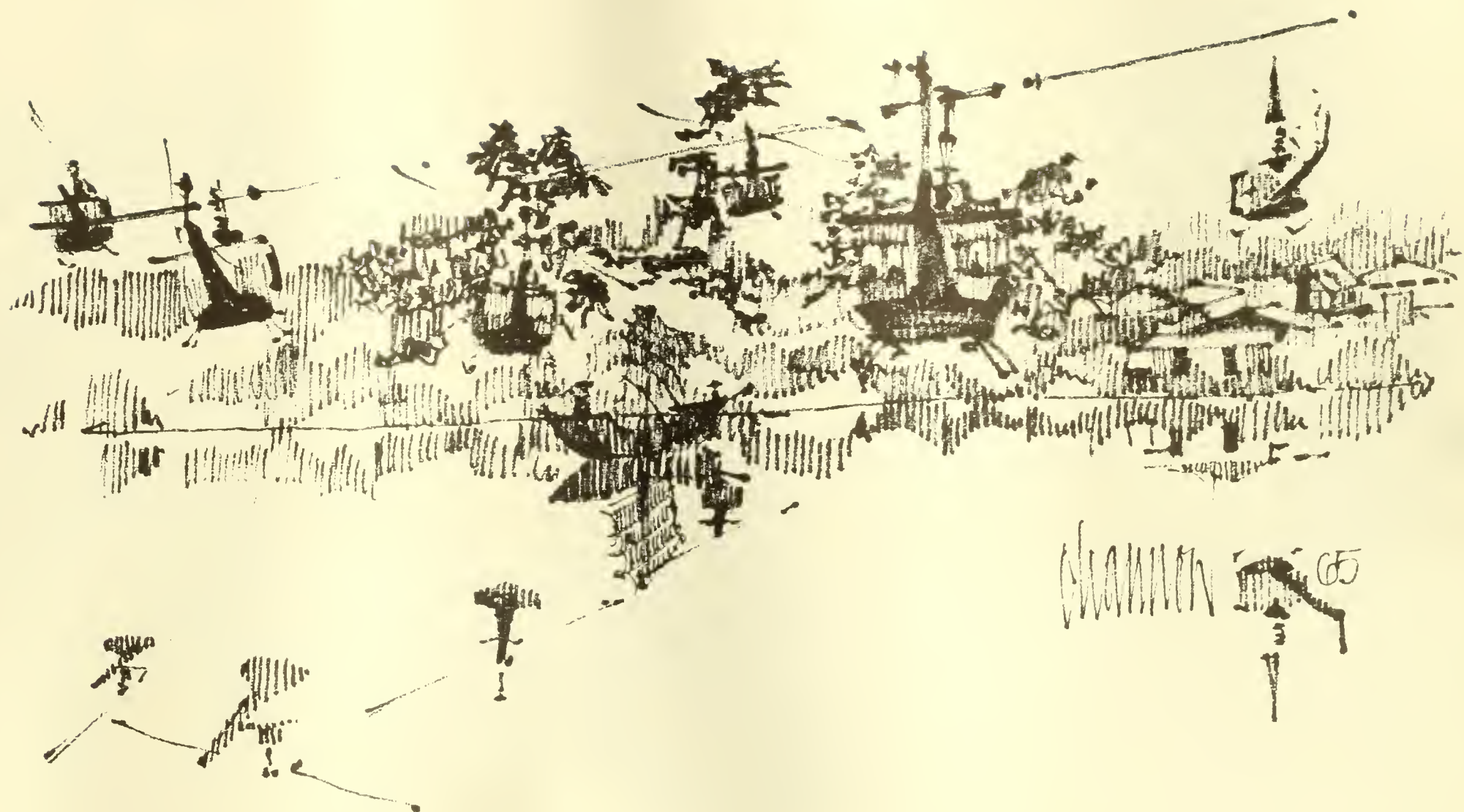
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BEN CAT

IRON TRIANGLE





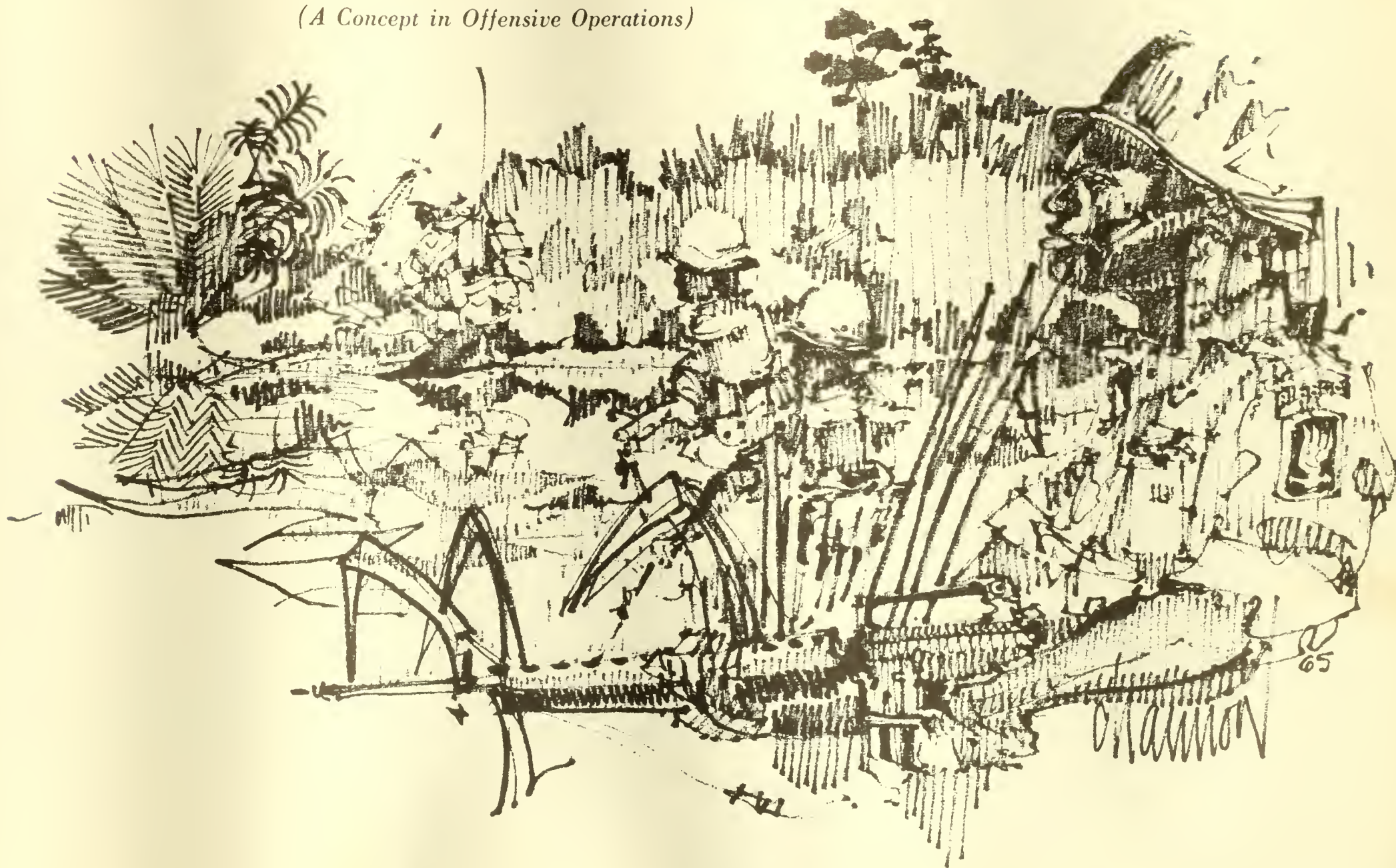


Channon 65



SEARCH AND DESTROY

(A Concept in Offensive Operations)





THE CLASSIC SWEEP

Many of the first operations the Brigade conducted were termed "search and destroy". The purpose of such operations is just as its name implies: to search an area and to destroy or capture all the VC and/or VC equipment encountered. Generally these operations are used in initial sweeps through areas adjacent to base camps or airfields where it is important that all of the terrain be covered thoroughly as soon as possible.

In War Zone "D" search and destroy sweeps were used because a lack of intelligence about the area prevented the Brigade from initially pinning down the enemy and because the VC installations uncovered could be pinpointed for later artillery and B-52 strikes.

In such operations the units are placed on line as much as possible with every attempt made to insure that all the ground is searched. In effect, scores of parallel patrols are being conducted simultaneously. If one platoon or squad encounters stiff opposition reinforcements or a blocking force are available from either flank.

The progress of such an operation is entirely dependent upon the terrain, the VC, and on how much the VC leaves behind for the troops to destroy. Tunnels are checked, caches explored and camps thoroughly probed. Demolition experts and sometimes chemical experts are employed to render the VC camps and tunnels uninhabitable.

ZONE D OPERATIONS

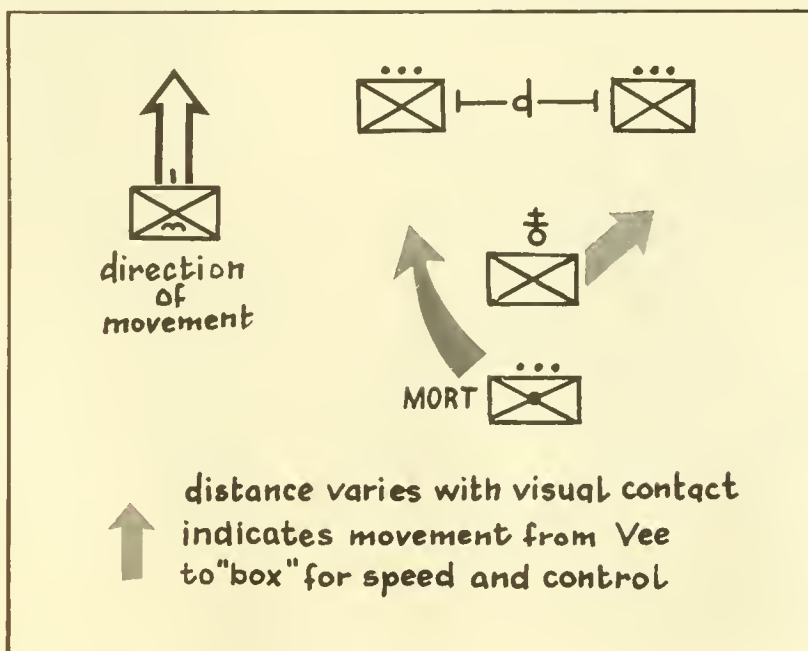
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ZONE D

BIEN HOA

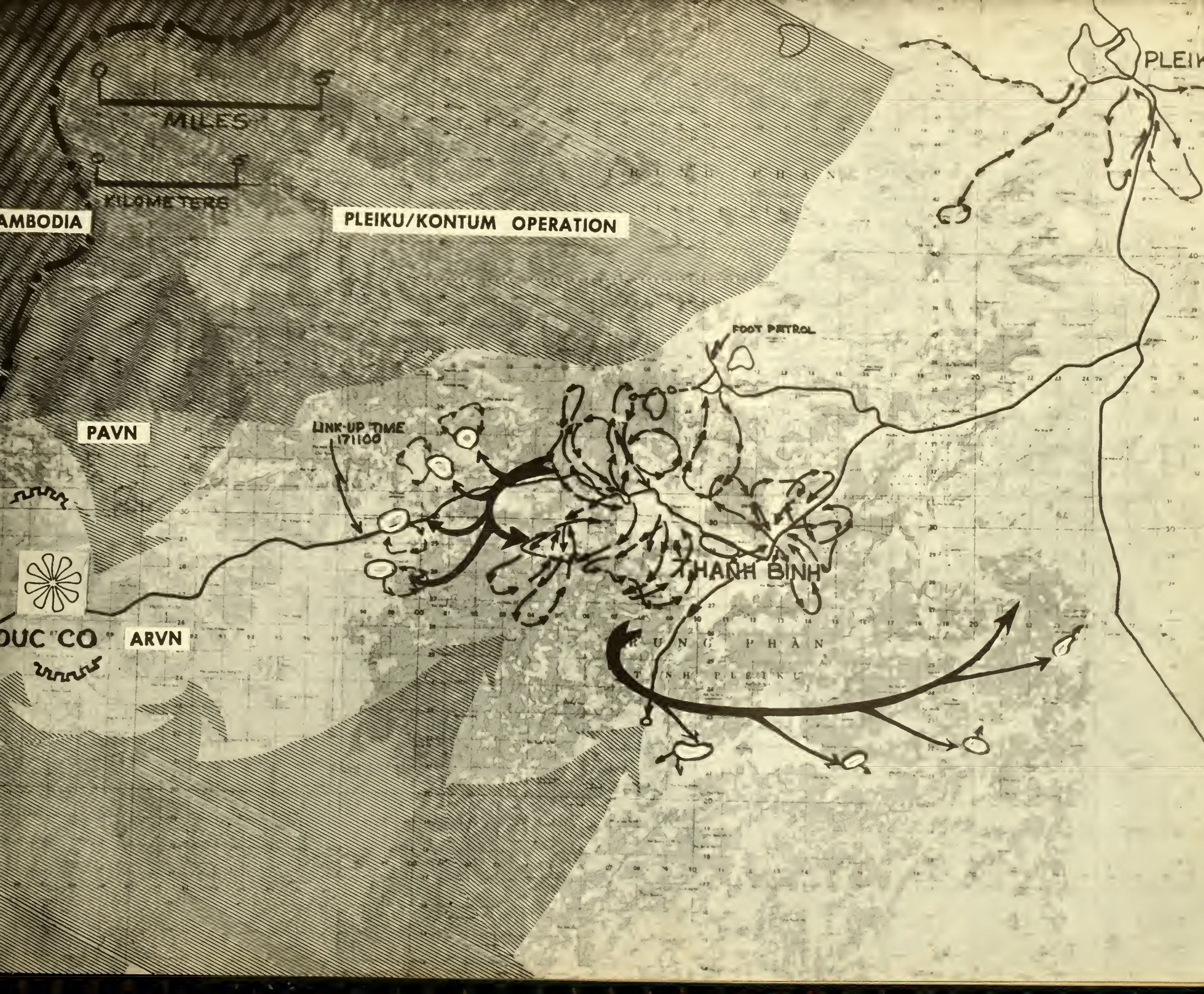








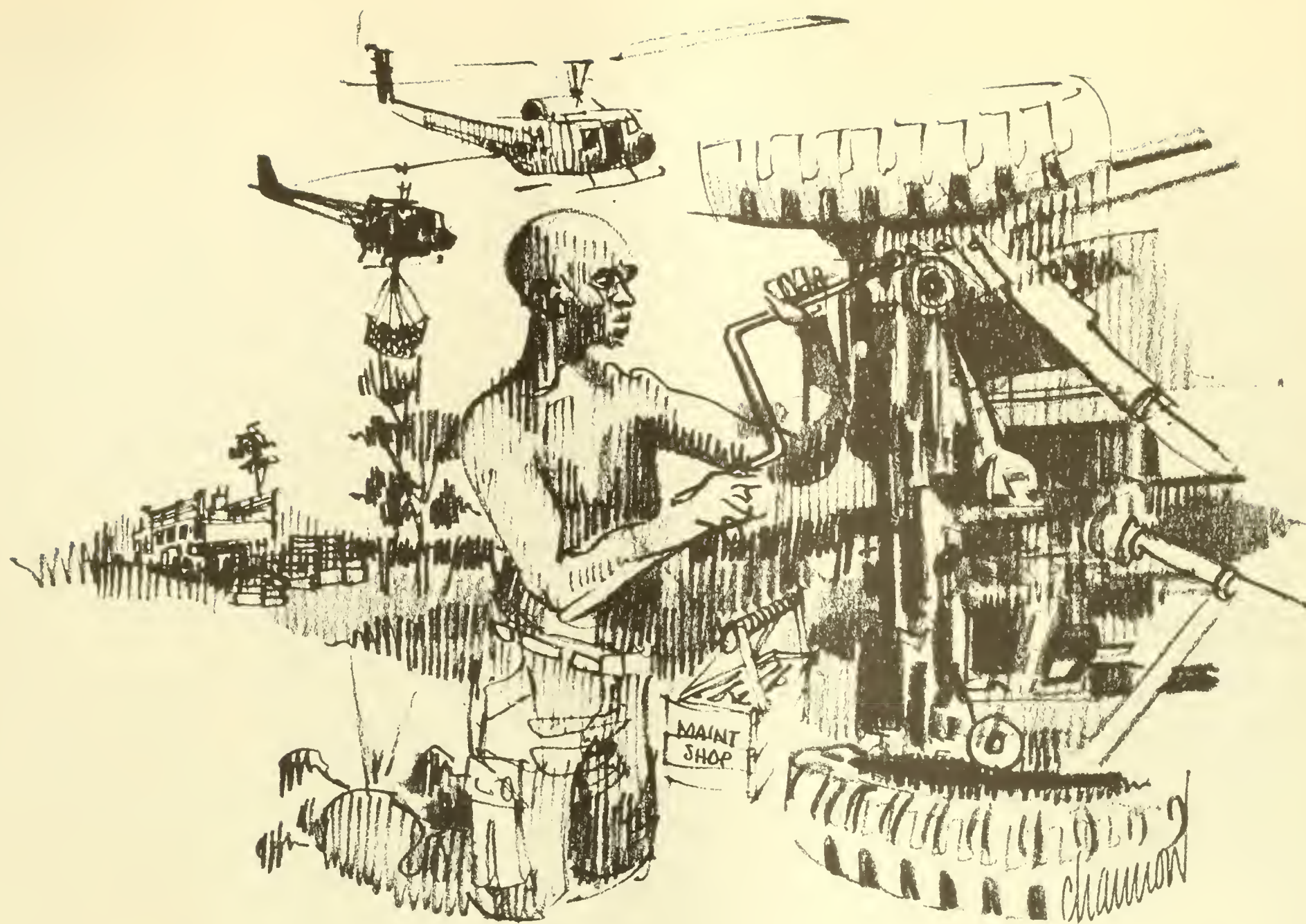
SATURATION PATROLLING











BATTLEFIELD LOGISTICS

(supplies take to the air)

BATTLEFIELD LOGISTICS

The heart of the Brigade's operational resupply system is the Supply Operations Center (Forward). Generally located adjacent to the artillery fire support base, it consolidates and forwards all resupply and maintenance requests of the maneuver and supporting elements.

From Bien Hoa, the Supply Operations Center (Rear) forwards the supplies as requested. For transportation, the Brigade has employed trucks, Armored Personnel Carriers (APC's), C-130's, C-123's, CV-2's, CV-7's, and a variety of helicopters, such as CH-37's, CH-47's and Hueys. When possible, road convoys are employed, and when necessary, priority items are rushed forward by helicopters.

At the Supply Operations Center (Forward) all units maintain representatives to handle and supervise the distribution of their supplies. From here the supplies reach the distant maneuver elements by helicopters, convoy, or by low level extraction (LOLEX) from Caribous.

A constant flow of the goods needed to sustain the Brigade in combat—ammunition, "C" rations, fresh food, gasoline, spare parts, and the all important bags of mail—reach the paratrooper when needed with a minimal amount of delay and handling.



VO DAT OPERATION

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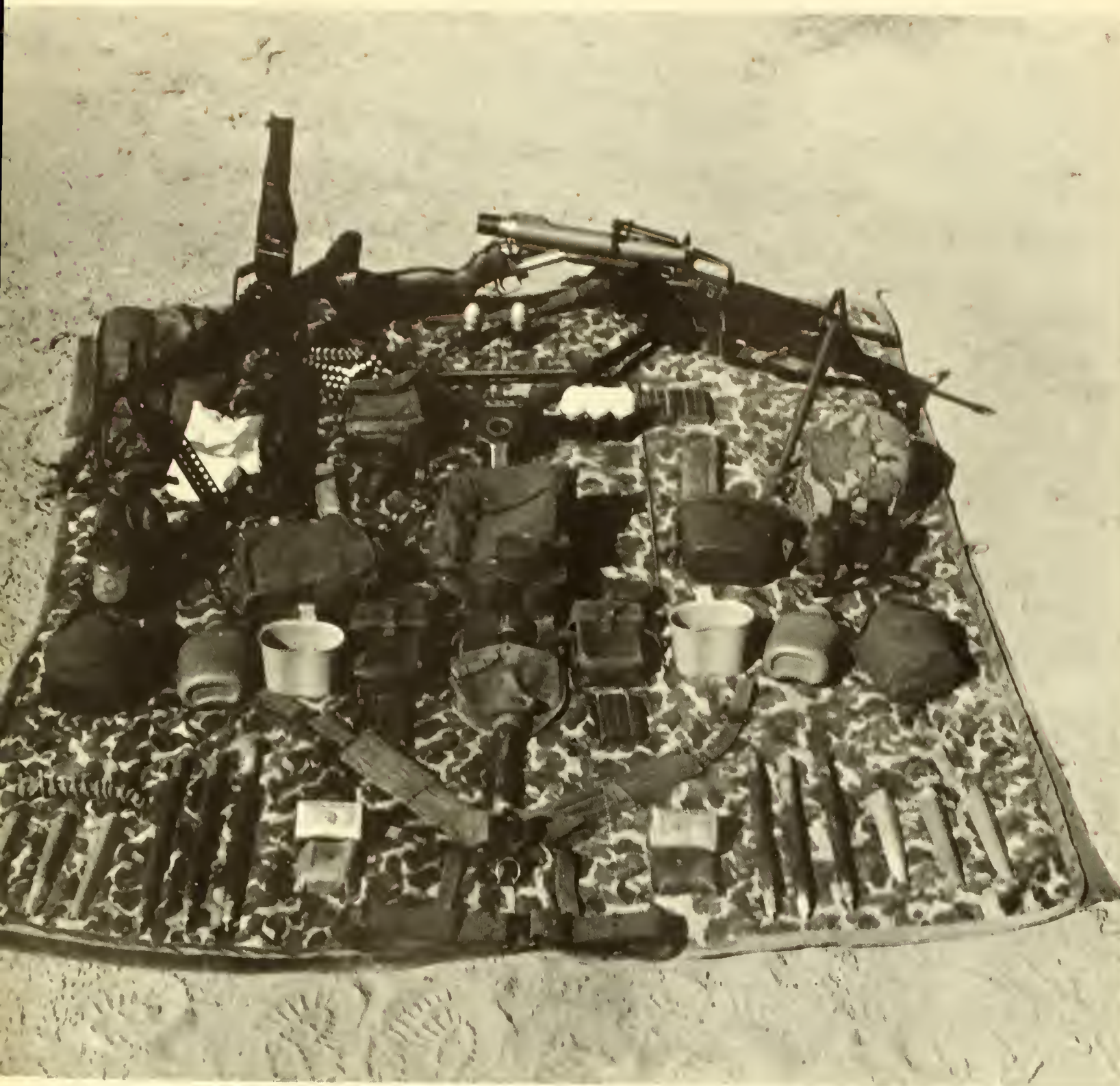
VO
DAT

RICE BOWL

TO
BIEN HOA







CHOW

THE C-RATIONS

Officially, the Army has three types of meals: "A" rations, "B" rations and "C" rations.

The "A" and "B" rations are prepared by unit mess halls. "A" rations include fresh foods such as fruit, vegetable and milk, while "B" rations consist of canned or dried food like powdered eggs and canned bacon. Any experienced trooper can quickly distinguish between an "A" meal and one consisting of "B" rations.

By far the most familiar meal is the "C" ration, issued to the paratrooper in the field for his own preparation. "Charlies", as the troops call "C" rations, come 12 meals to the case.

A veteran paratrooper knows what each of the twelve different meals contain, and to prepare them he knows that a bottle of hot sauce, a huge onion, and some rice and a large pan are indispensable. With a little patience and GI ingenuity, even the most tasteless can of Charlies can be made palatable, and when a trooper is tired and hungry, the meals have even been compared favorably with Mom's best cooking.

On the more recent operations, through the efforts of supply and mess personnel it has been possible for the troops to eat one meal of "A" rations in the field. Generally served in the evening, the meal is prepared in the rear area and shipped to the troops in insulated containers.

During Operation New Life at Vo Dat, the men of the Brigade ate a Thanksgiving Dinner in the field, complete with all the trimmings, save cranberry sauce. The roast turkey was as delicious as any served at home.





MEDICAL EVACUATION

To the wounded, the valuable minutes between the time he has been injured and the time he received adequate medical treatment can mean the difference between life and death.

At the Brigade's Clearing Station the wounded are initially treated, and those with minor injuries are returned to duty. The more serious cases are evacuated to the rear, either to the hospital located in the Brigade or to those in Saigon.

For the evacuation helicopters are employed, thereby drastically cutting the transportation time and eliminating entirely the hazards of a bumpy, dusty road trip.

Known throughout Vietnam by their code name "Dust Off", the Huey aerial ambulances are able to

GOOD OLE DUST OFF

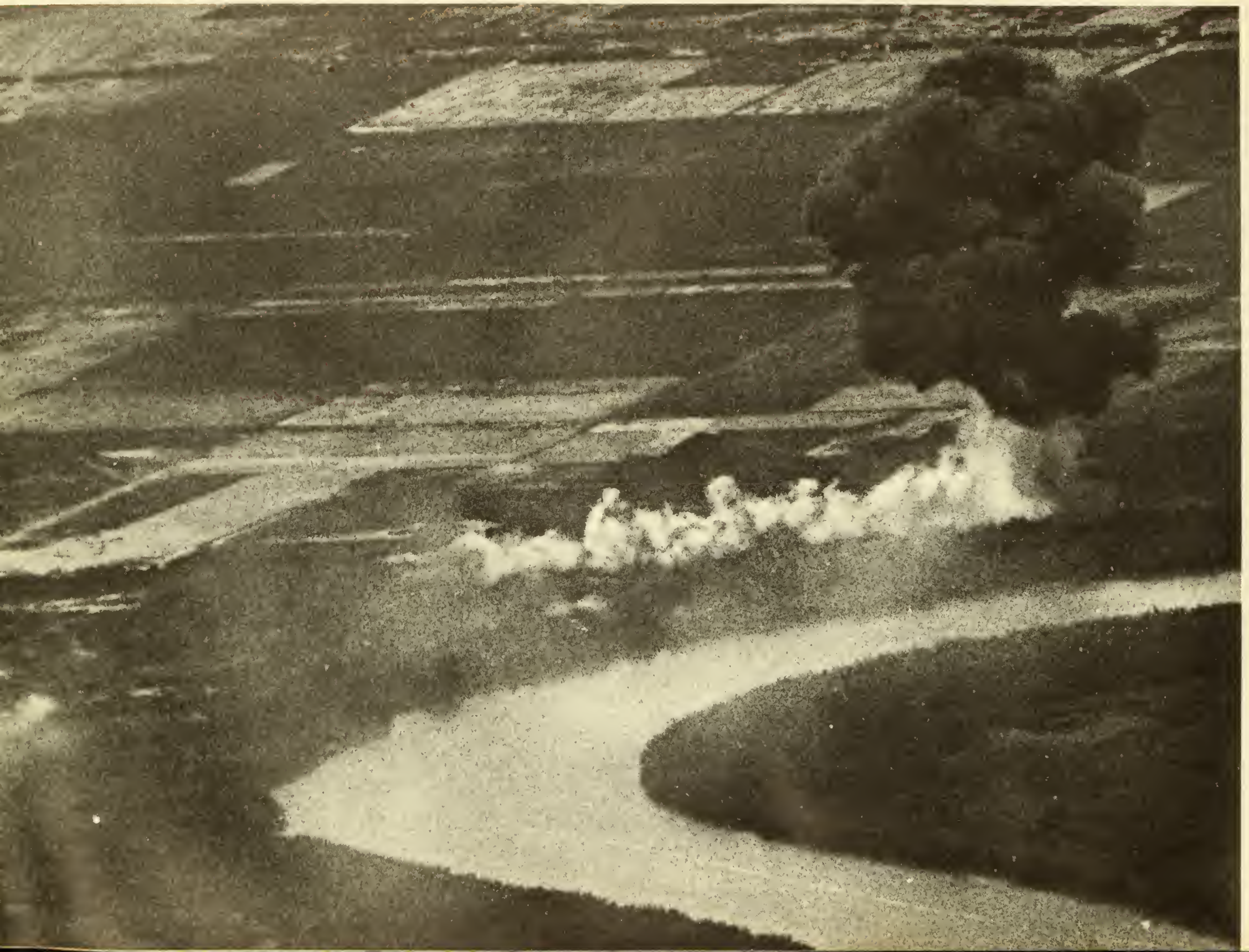
continue treatment of the wounded since at least one member of the crew is a qualified aid man. The bravery of their crews has been proven many times by their landings under fire and in seemingly inaccessible places. As a result, the process of medical evacuation has speeded up.

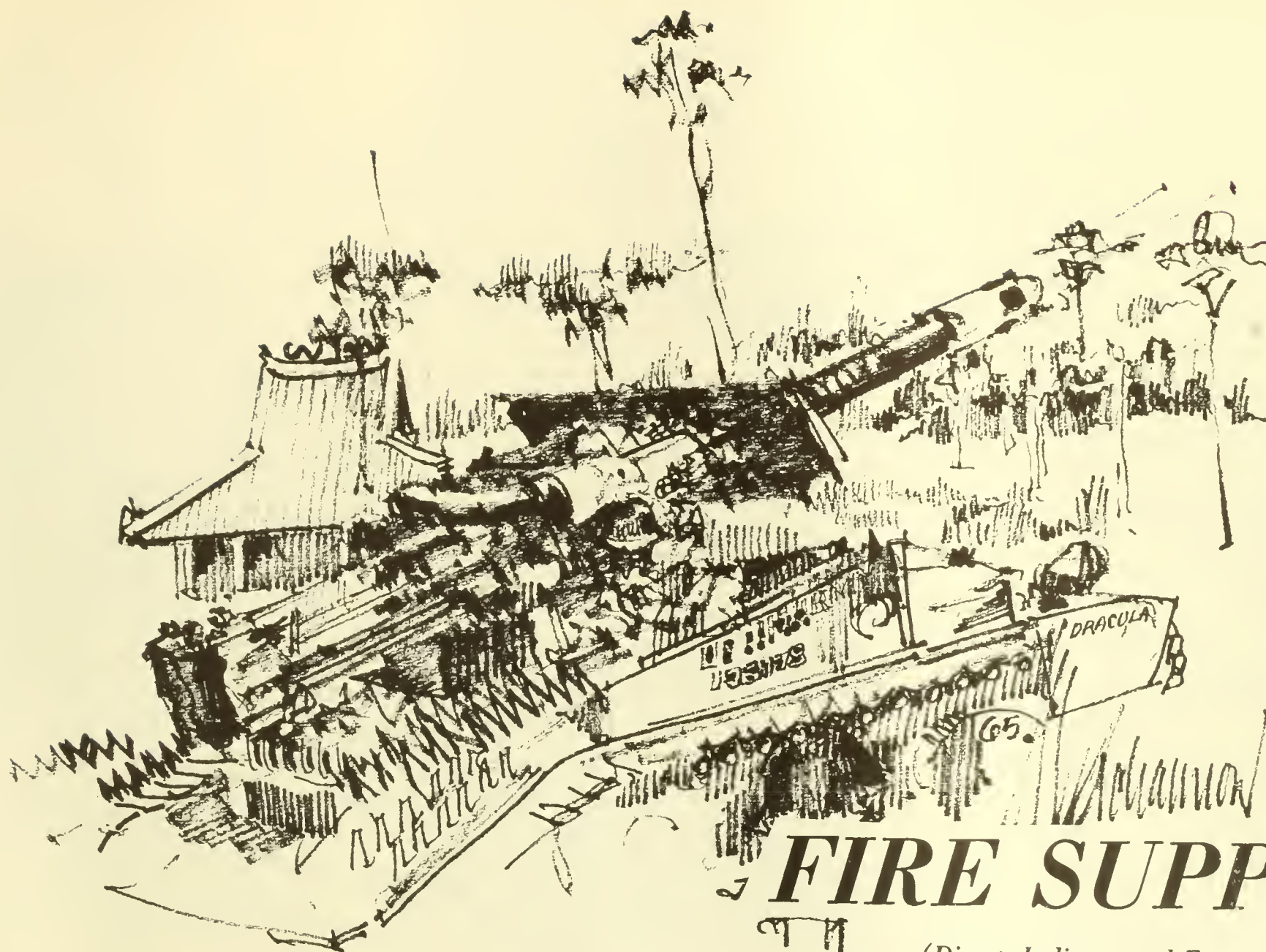
To provide medical support for the Brigade, "B" Company (Medical) is capable of providing, in addition to the units' normal medical teams, four doctors, a dentist, and 90 enlisted men trained in medical procedures.

While at Bien Hoa the company works actively in civic action programs, bringing modern medical care to the surrounding villages and hamlets.









FIRE SUPPORT

(Direct, Indirect, and From the Air)

SECOND LIFT

FIRE SUPPORT CO-ORDINATOR

TAC AIR PREPARATION H-5

HELICOPTER ESCORT SUPPRESSIVE FIRES
AS FIRST LIFT ARRIVES H HOUR.

ARMED HELICOPTER PREPARATION H-2

FORWARD
AIR CONTROLLER

ARTY F.O.

LZ

ARTILLERY PREPARATION

H-15

SEPARATION INDICATES
5 MILES IN DISTANCE.

JBC

FIRE SUPPORT

By utilizing the operations center of the 3/319th to control all the indirect firepower available to the Brigade, the maneuver elements have been assured of continual and effective fire support. Available are five artillery batteries firing the 105mm howitzer round, and three 4.2" mortar platoons (including one platoon mounted inside "D" company Armor's A.P.C.'s.)

In many instances, the artillery task force has been employed as a fire support base and blocking force for the infantry sweeps with the cavalry and armor units frequently affording perimeter security. Whenever necessary, an artillery battery has been attached to an infantry battalion task force and is helilifted into the battalion's operational area via CH-37's, CH-47's or Hueys.

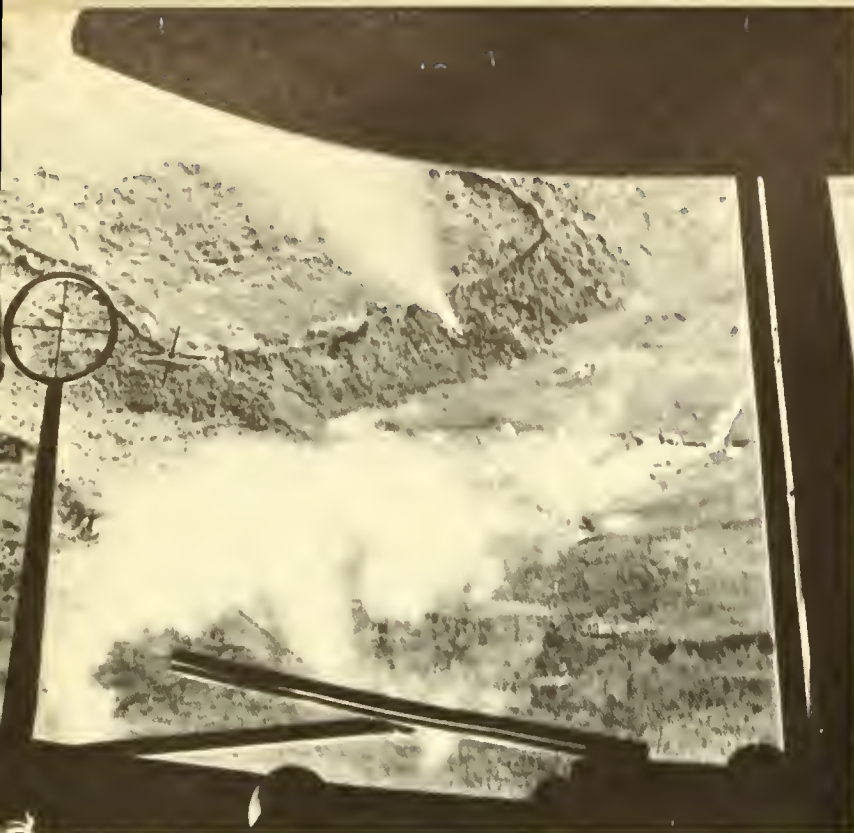
When roads have been impassable and airlift impossible, the Italian pack howitzers of the Australian and New Zealand batteries are broken down and carried inside APC's. Quickly deployable, the mobility of the howitzers allows the Brigade to extend its firepower base without a difficult or time consuming road march.

To coordinate all of the fire support available—heavy mortar, artillery, Army aircraft and Air Force—a fire support center (FSCC) located within the Brigade's Tactical Operations Center (TOC) clears all requests for fire support. With the FSCC control it has been possible to fire high angle fires on the back side of an LZ while an extraction by helicopters from that landing zone is in progress. Also, air strikes and artillery fire have been carried out simultaneously with close coordination.









HEAVY FIRE TEAM

LIGHT FIRE TEAM

The major innovation in this conflict has been the use of the armed Army helicopter. Originally armed for defensive purposes, the four man UH1B (Hueys) have evolved into a sophisticated aerial fire support system.

A gunship platoon such as the Falcons of "A" Company 82nd Aviation Battalion, attached to the Brigade, has eight UH1B's heavily armed with 2.75" rockets and 7.62mm machine flexguns with a total of 6,000 rounds. Six of the ships mount four M-6 kit 7.62 machine flexguns, two pods with seven rockets each and two door mounted M-60 machine guns with 1,500 rounds each.

The heavy ships, nicknamed "Frog" and "Hog", provide the saturation fire. The Frog has two 12 rockets pods, the door mounted M-60's, and a nose mounted M-5 grenade launcher containing 150 40mm grenades. The beast, the Hog, bears two pods containing 24 rockets each plus the standard door guns. Firing the rockets in pairs, salvo or singly, the heavy ships augment a light gunship fire team, furnishing tremendous suppressive fire against an LZ, a trench system, or an ambush site.

At 80 knots air speed, the Hueys are able to spot targets of opportunity, provide aerial reconnaissance, and protect a long motor convoy all during its one and a half hour flying time, and its ability to refuel and rearm wherever it lands drastically shortens its down time.

The employment of the gunships and their aerial tactics have been under constant revision as new techniques are devised and tried. Like the fighter pilots of WWII, the Falcons represent the daredevils of modern aerial warfare.







TAC AIR SUPPORT

Whether it be a prop driven A1E Skyraider or the new supersonic F-5 Freedom Fighter, a Navy F-8 Crusader or a Vietnamese Air Force A1H, all air strikes in support of the Brigade are controlled by the Brigade's US Air Force Liaison Officer and Forward Air Controller (ALO/FAC) element.

The first to use ground FAC's with maneuver battalions, the Brigade depended upon air power to prepare LZ's, fly air cover over the battle area, provide close air support, protect convoys, and maintain a strip alert force for immediate reaction.

The most commonly used aircraft have been the Bien Hoa based F-100 Super Sabres and the A1E Skyraiders. Whether on strip alert or flying air cover, when contacted by the airborne or ground FAC the fighters are able to be on target within a few minutes. The FAC identifies the target, guides the aircraft in, and gives an immediate surveillance of target damage.

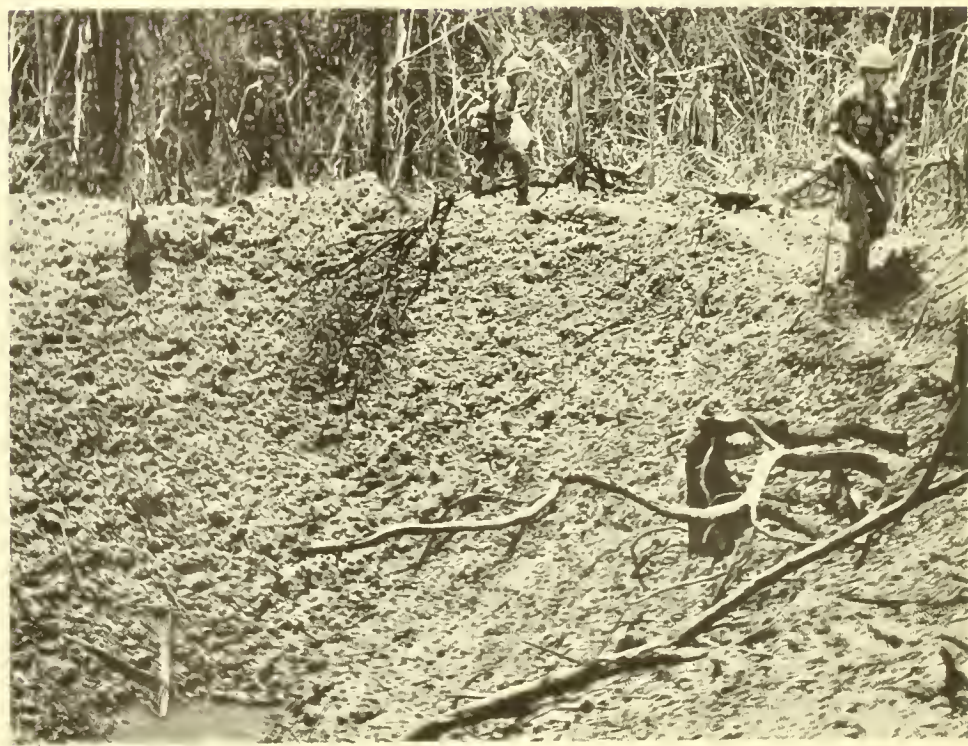
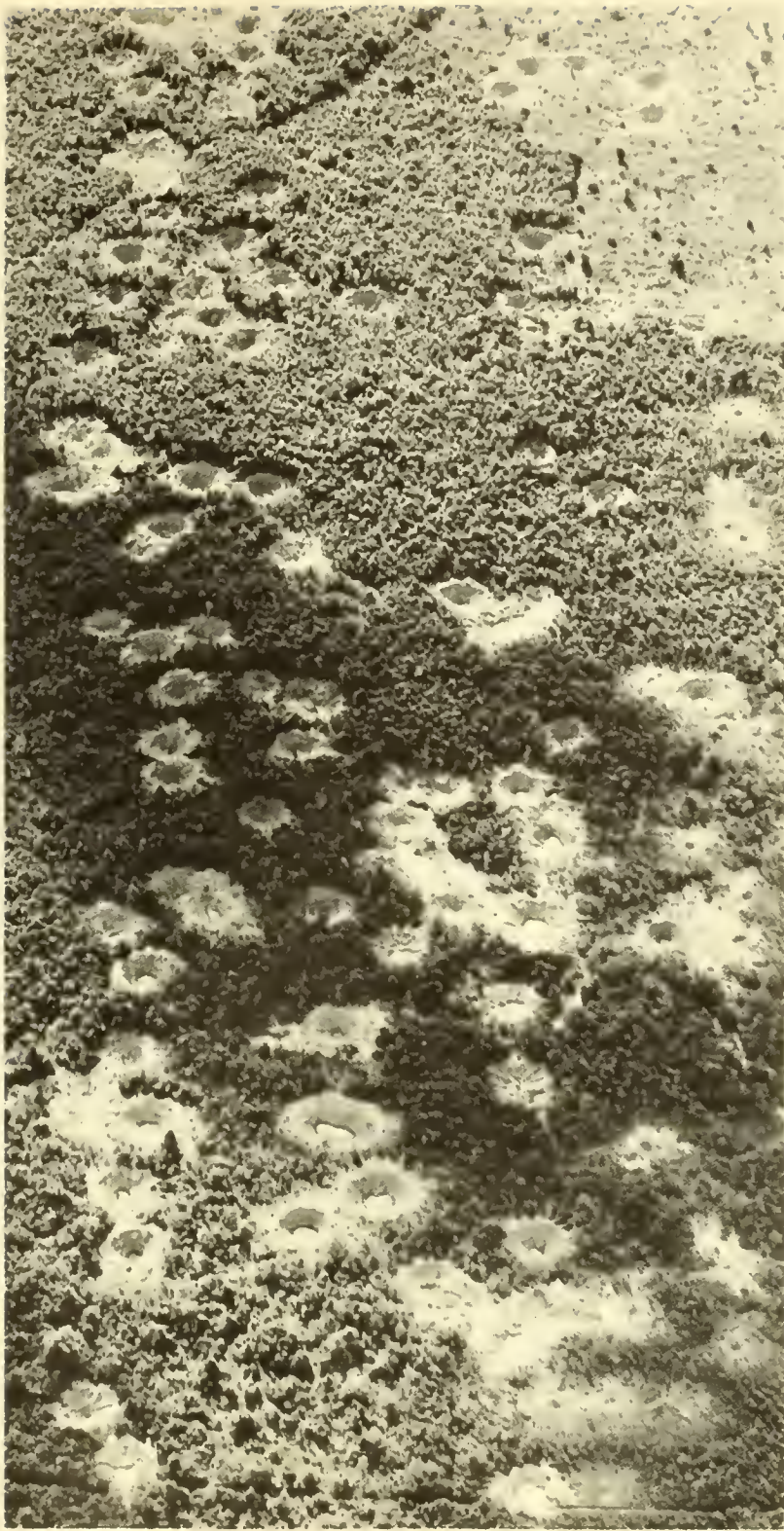
By utilizing pre-planned air strikes the Brigade can insure that the ordnance it wants is aboard when necessary. The available ordnance ranges from 1,000 pound bombs to 20 pound fragmentation cluster bombs, CBU, napalm and 20mm cannon fire. Generally, the A1E and F-100 carry 500 and 750 pound bombs plus napalm.

At night the Brigade has available the C-123 and C-47 flare ships to illuminate a portion of the battle area, while the intelligence gained by flights of RB-57's and RB-66's has provided the latest reports on Viet Cong movements and installations. Aerial photography provided by the Air Force has been used to supplement existing maps making the latest information on villages, roads and terrain available to the ground commander.











CIVIC ACTION

(into the hands of the needy)





CIVIC ACTION

Winning the loyalty of the Vietnamese people to the government of Vietnam is as critical as fighting the VC. For once the people realize that their government is sincere in its efforts to pacify the country, to build the economy, and to administer and govern justly, the VC will be deprived of any support from the people.

To assist in winning the people to the Vietnamese government, the Brigade has instituted in the Bien Hoa area a dynamic, well-rounded civic action program involving all of its units and many hundreds of Vietnamese. By splitting the area into six zones each major unit has assumed responsibility for all the projects in its zone.

In the Bien Hoa area, projects range from the repair or construction of schools, wells, roads, bridges, and dispensaries to English classes attended by over 630 eager Vietnamese of all ages.

When on combat operations the Civil Affairs Section (C-5), which is responsible for civic action, moves with the Brigade. Its civil affairs, psychological operations, and civic action specialists work throughout the operational area, providing visible evidence of our concern for the people's welfare through medical and dental teams, by road and bridge repair, by distributing food and clothing, and by securing roads and market places.

The Brigade's civic action program has been highly successful. Over 60,000 patients have been treated by the Brigade doctors and medics, one dispensary built and one repaired, and a number of babies have been delivered by Brigade medics.

Over 5,700 refugees have been relocated by Brigade transportation and one refugee camp built and





one is under construction. To these refugees and to thousands of villagers, 489 tons of foodstuffs including rice, salt, cornmeal, wheat and cooking oil have been generously distributed. This includes hundreds of tons of rice captured from the VC by the Sky Soldiers.

Out of their own pockets the Sky Soldiers donated over 580,000 piastres to the Vietnamese people to support a hospital, widows of ARVN soldiers, and 73 scholarships for students in the Bien Hoa area.

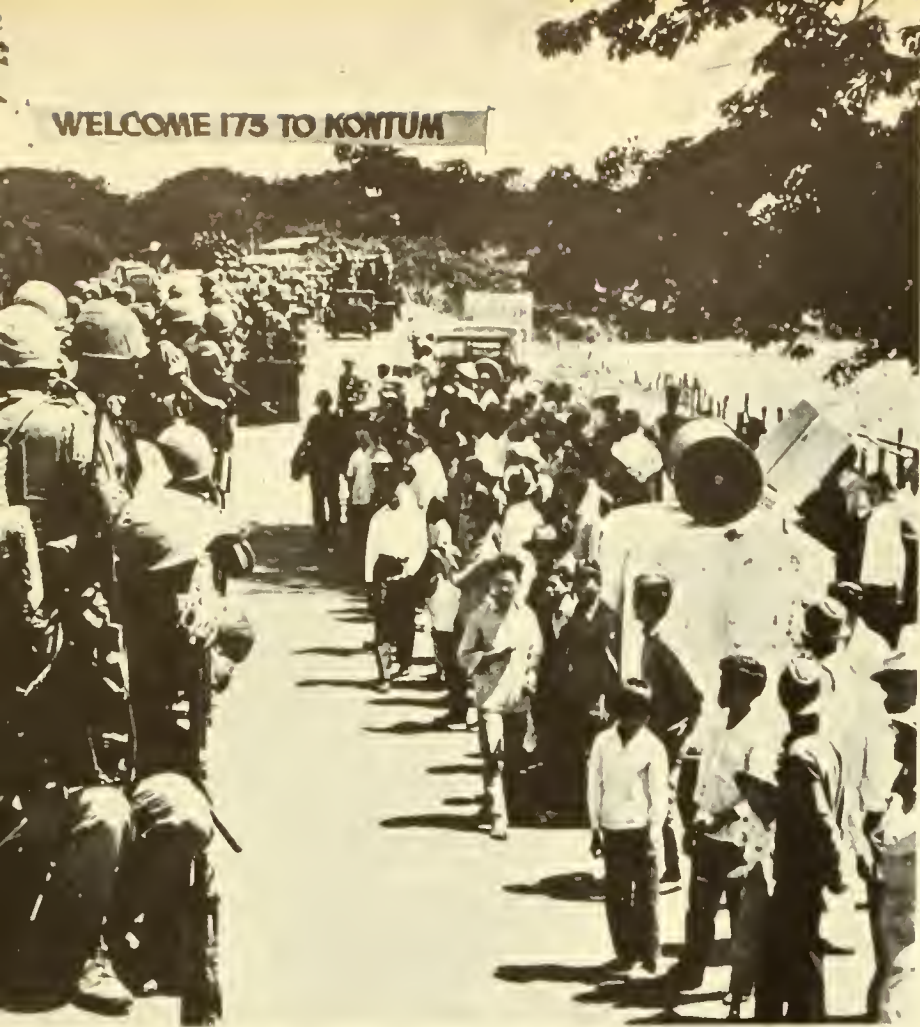
The Brigade's engineers have built eleven bridges and repaired, graded and surfaced miles of roads, dug culverts, and cleared areas for new villages and camps.

Operation NEW LIFE at Vo Dat allowed the Vietnamese to harvest rice without VC interference, opened new roads to commerce, provided security for relocating hamlets, and won the local people for the government. At Pleiku and Kontum the Brigade wired and repaired a hospital and donated \$1,000 to its maintenance. In the Ben Cat-Iron Triangle operations thousands of villagers were treated by the medical and dental teams.

Wherever the Brigade went its troopers demonstrated a concern for the health and welfare of the Vietnamese people, and the people responded in every instance. After an operation near Ben Cat, a young Vietnamese wrestled a VC to the ground to prevent a grenade from being thrown into a Brigade vehicle. At Vo Dat, the local people led the Sky Soldiers to VC rice, salt, peanut and weapons caches and appealed to their relatives and friends associated with the VC to come over to the government side. As a result of such appeals, a 22 man platoon surrendered with weapons.



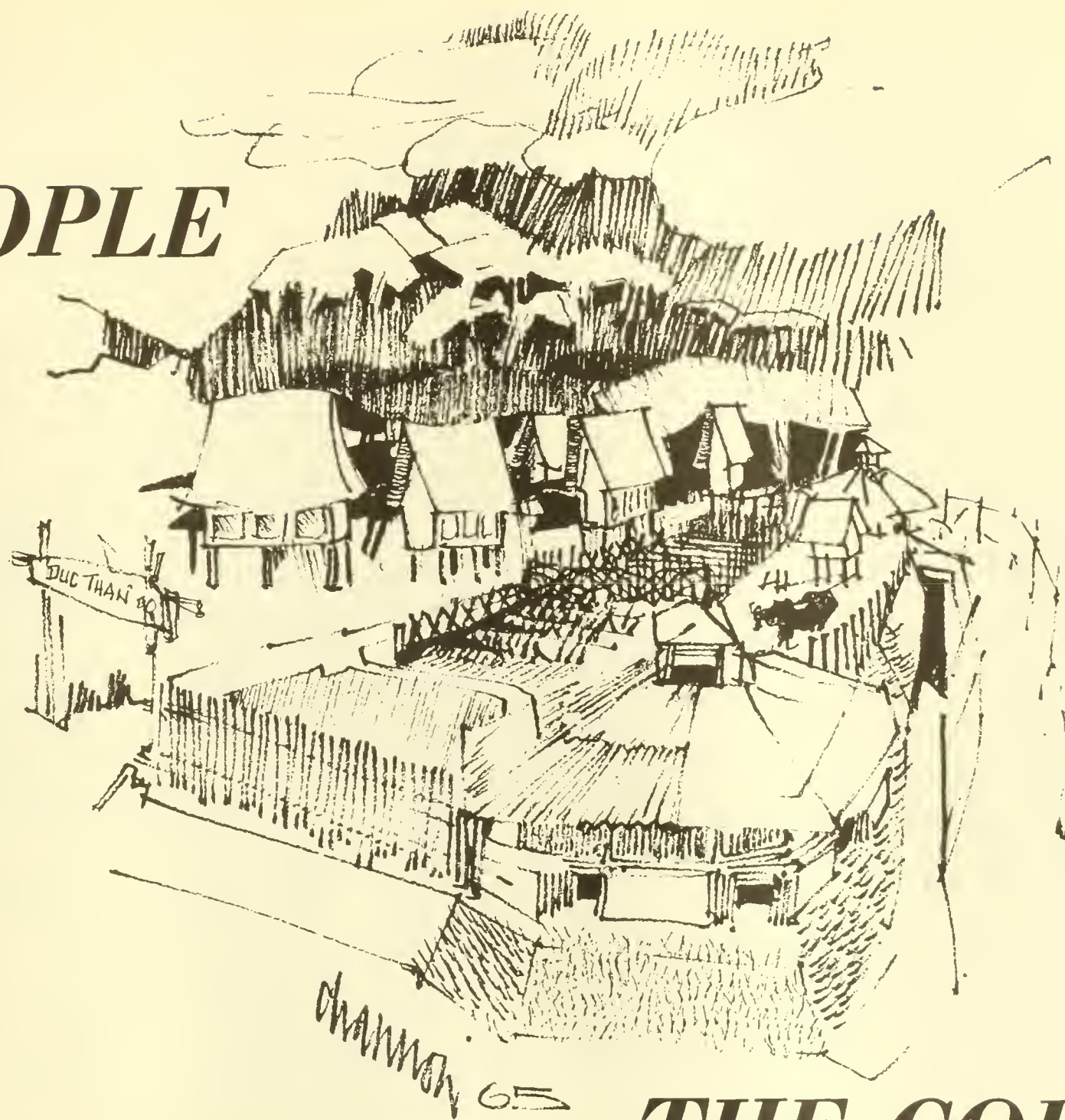
WELCOME 173 TO KONTUM







THE PEOPLE



THE COUNTRY



THE VIETNAMESE

Vietnam, the Country and People—

Vietnam, nearly 1,500 miles long, lies along the eastern coastal rim of the Southeast Asian Peninsula, on the South China Sea. The width of the country varies from a little more than 25 miles to approximately 300 at the Northern border.

China borders the country in the North, and Laos and Cambodia lie on the Western boundaries. The Red River in the North, and the Mekong in the South, terminate in large, fertile deltas where great quantities of rice are grown.

Connecting the two fertile deltas is a region of mountainous plateaus and a fertile coastal strip. Approximately one-third of Vietnam is covered by forests. Nonforested parts of the country are under extensive cultivation except for the savanna areas.

At least 85 percent of the people of Vietnam are ethnically Vietnamese. As a group, they exert a paramount influence on the national life through their control of the political and economic affairs and their role as perpetuators of the dominant cultural tradition. Among the remainder of the population, the largest minorities are the Chinese, the great majority of whom live in the South, and various indigenous highland groups collectively known as *montagnards*. In addition, there are smaller numbers of Khmers and Chams, both of whom figure prominently in the population of neighboring Cambodia, as well as Indians, Pakistani, Eurasians, French and other Europeans, and Americans, all heavily concentrated in the cities of the South.

The majority of ethnic Vietnamese are nominal Buddhists, although their religious belief and practices include Taoist and Confucian elements as well as remnants of an earlier belief in spirits and magic. A sizable and influential

minority is Roman Catholic.

Like their forebearers in Vietnam for well over a thousand years, the more than 25 million ethnic Vietnamese in the country are predominantly village-dwelling skilled rice cultivators or fishermen. A minority live in urban centers, such as Hanoi, Hue and Saigon, where they are engaged in a variety of occupations and occupy positions at all levels on the socio-economic scale. The educated elite of both North and South — composed of high government officials, military officers, professionals, and in the South wealthy landowners — consists almost exclusively of ethnic Vietnamese.

With 2,000 years of cultural and political history, Vietnam was, until the middle of the nineteenth century, a model of "traditionalist society." Economic life was sustained by agriculture, and peasant communities were cohesive social units which prescribed the behavior of their inhabitants.

Through centuries of foreign contact, alien domination and military penetration, the Vietnamese have held tenaciously to their own national identity. The cultural impact of a long succession of Chinese invasions and periods of domination is evident in Vietnam.

The impact of French colonial rule, coming in the late 1800's, precipitated the decline of traditionalism and gave rise to new ideas, new attitudes toward authority, and new social relationships.

Government in Vietnam traditionally has been authoritarian and highly centralized. The long period of Chinese rule was followed by an uneasy independence under a succession of Vietnamese emperors presiding over a powerful bureaucracy of the Chinese type.

The French, much more than the Chinese before them, remained alien to their subjects. The Vietnamese,





as they always had, reacted to foreign control with reluctant acquiescence and, when they could, with open resistance. French rule exercised during World War II by the representatives of the Vichy regime, continued at the sufferance of Japan until 1945 when it was ended by Japanese imperial declaration.

After Japan's surrender, the French returned to a position which the events of the war years had made irretrievable. In the Indochina War, which broke out at the end of 1946 and ended nearly eight years later in French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the French found themselves confronted by the skillful and determined leadership of the Viet Minh.

With the achievement of their independence and the partitioning of the country in 1954, the Vietnamese entered a new phase of conflict. The struggle is now between the non-Communist government of the South, supported by the United States and its allies, and the Communist regime in the North, backed by the Soviet Union and Communist China.











THE ENEMY

(the Viet Cong)



THE ENEMY

The Hanoi-based Lao Dong (Communist party), led by the enigmatic Ho Chi Minh, dictates policies and strategies to the "National Liberation Front", for the conquest through aggression of South Vietnam. The chain of command runs from the Central Committee of the Lao Dong to the Central Office for South Vietnam, through the Reunification Department to six regional zones plus the special zone of Saigon and its environs.

Regional committees in the various zones direct propaganda, training, espionage, and other activities based on the directions of Hanoi. Below each regional committee are similarly structured units at the province and district levels. At the base of the Communist pyramid are the individual party cells.

The military section of the Central Office directs, generally, the efforts of Communist fighting units in South Vietnam. These units are classifiable as: Main Force, District Force and Village Defense Force.

The Main Force units are the best trained and equipped of the three types of organizations, and they operate full-time as a fighting organization. District Forces are equipped and trained for part time operations, and members of these units are often farmers or merchants by day . . . guerrillas by night.

Village defense forces are usually small, ill-trained and ill-equipped. Their functions are to serve as guards, messengers and informers. A typical village force might number 10-25 men who share a few hand grenades and two or three old weapons.

Arms for Main Force and District Force outfits range from the 75mm pack howitzer down to sub machine guns of Communist bloc manufacture and old weapons left



over from WW II and the Indochina war. All VC units are adept at devising effective weapons from materials readily available. Punji pits, filled with fire hardened bamboo stakes, foot spikes coated with excretion and most bizarre of all—poisonous snakes tied to the roofs of tunnels and caves—are employed by the Communist to injure or kill allied personnel.

VC tactics run the gamut from Hannibal to Mao Tse Tung, and terrorism is often used. To bring unwilling villages to heel, the guerrillas systematically eliminate chiefs, teachers and other influential leaders. Beheadings and other atrocities are common; and the Viet Cong show no mercy for children or women.

In battle, defensive or offensive, the Viet Cong employ fire and maneuver, human wave and infiltration techniques. Ambush is a favorite tactic, and they have brought it to a state of near perfection, often starting battle in an isolated district in order to draw relief forces into well planned and executed surprise attacks.

Viet Cong bases, whether built for training, storage or hospital areas, are usually elaborately defended with trenches, mines and bunkers. During a 173rd operation near Ben Cat, a complex of underground tunnels and storage rooms, six stories deep and several miles in length, was uncovered. Built low to the ground and cleverly camouflaged, a clandestine camp, capable of housing a battalion of guerrillas, is usually impossible to see from a distance of more than ten feet.

The individual Viet Cong soldier weighs a little over 100 pounds and is used to the rigors of life in Asian jungles. He can survive on two pounds of rice per day, march incredible distances, fight with fanatic courage one day and run away the next. "Charlie" travels light, with



little more equipment than his rifle and ammunition.

Many of the fighters for the National Liberation Front are veterans of war against France, Japan and China, and they have a heritage of skill and courage dating back 2,000 years to conflicts with neighboring China. Officers and NCOs are all veterans, and usually are trained in North Vietnam. As losses mount for the Viet Cong, more conscripts are taken by force from their villages for service with the guerrillas.



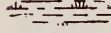
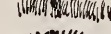

Daily lectures by cynical political officers touch on themes which appeal to the unsophisticated peasant. "Reunification, Liberation, pie in the sky . . . just a few more years."

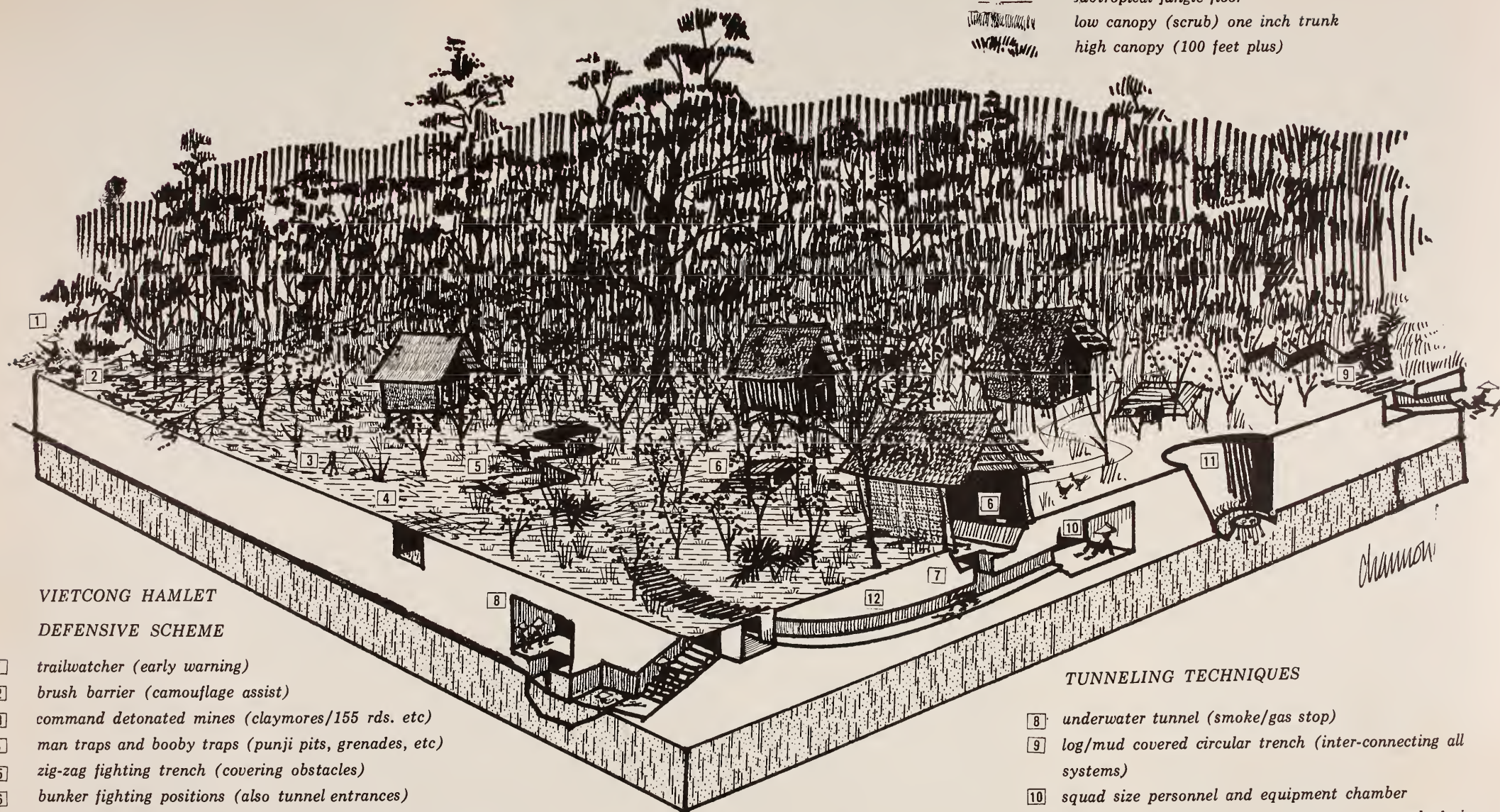
As the war wears on, and the soldiers of the Viet Cong bring their minds to focus on what is actually going on, increasingly large numbers of them are defecting to the forces of the republic.



VIET CONG CLANDESTINE COMPLEX

LEGEND

-  below water level
-  clay composition soil
-  subtropical jungle floor
-  low canopy (scrub) one inch trunk
-  high canopy (100 feet plus)



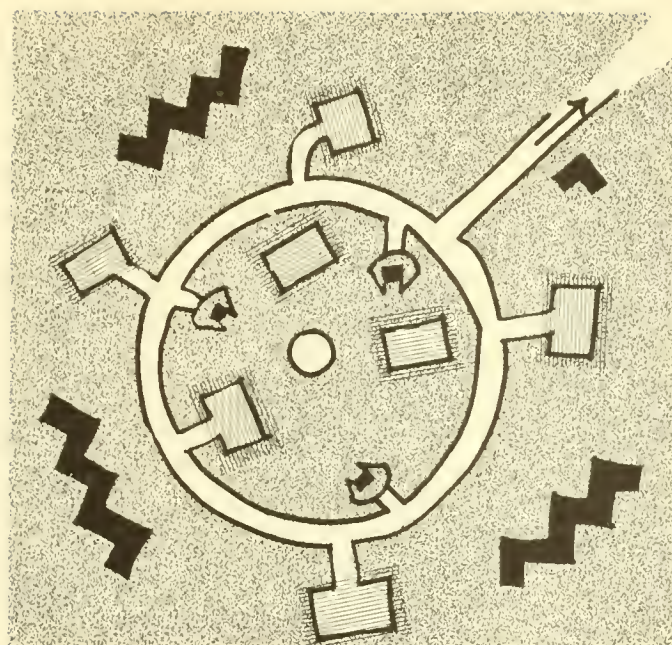
VIETCONG HAMLET

DEFENSIVE SCHEME

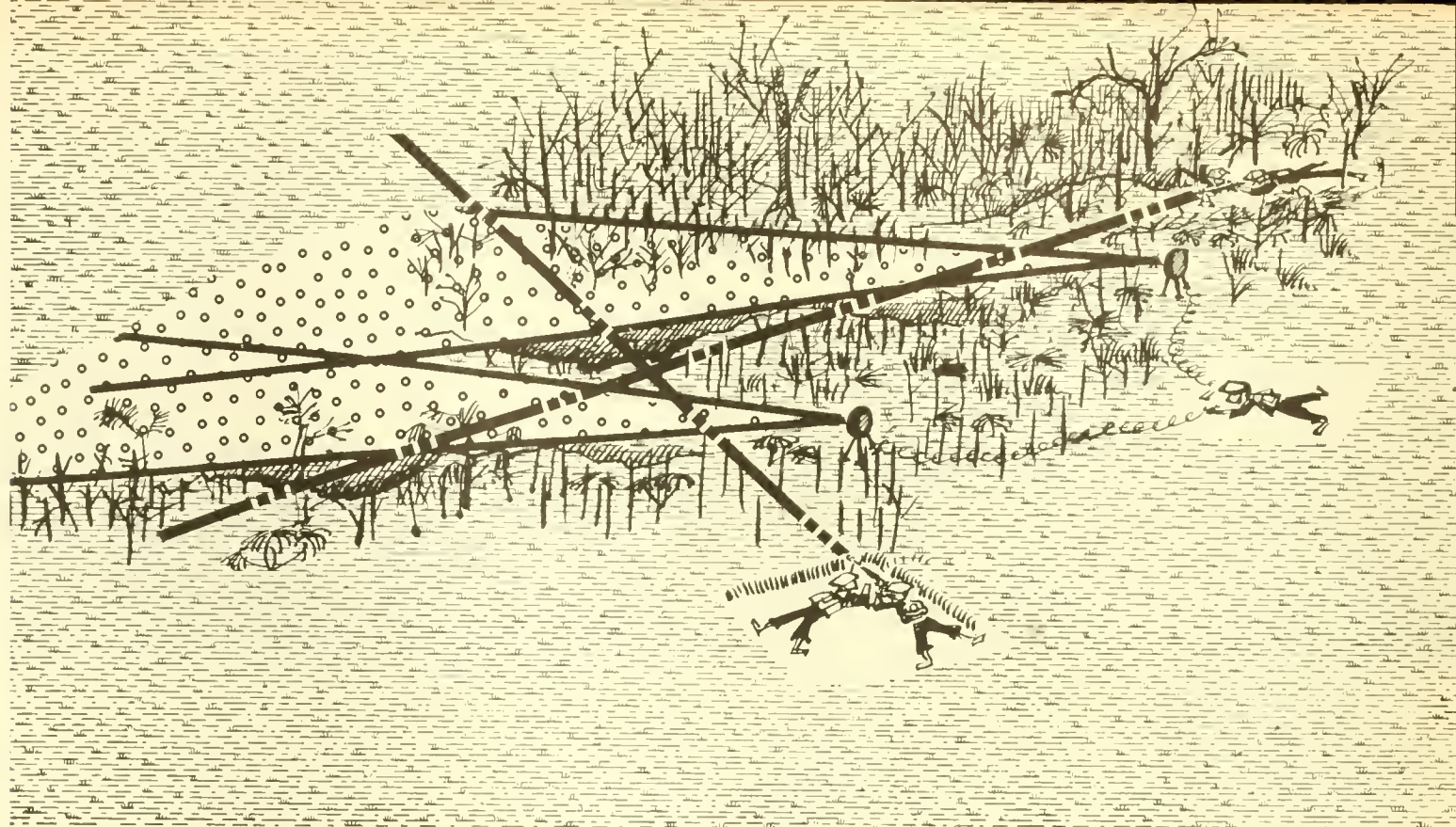
- 1** trailwatcher (early warning)
- 2** brush barrier (camouflage assist)
- 3** command detonated mines (claymores/155 rds. etc)
- 4** man traps and booby traps (punji pits, grenades, etc)
- 5** zig-zag fighting trench (covering obstacles)
- 6** bunker fighting positions (also tunnel entrances)
- 7** underground chambers (he may remain beneath the complex to harrass you with periodic appearances or he may move to an escape tunnel exiting as far as one kilometer from the complex)

TUNNELING TECHNIQUES

- 8** underwater tunnel (smoke/gas stop)
- 9** log/mud covered circular trench (inter-connecting all systems)
- 10** squad size personnel and equipment chamber
- 11** water-fill (assists in water drainage from tunnels during monsoon)
- 12** tunnel inclination (to allow drainage) this requires periodic drop-offs



0 25' 50'



VC HASTY AMBUSH (example)

Once the direction of movement of allied forces has been determined the VC set command detonated mines in the path. The dead-space is then covered with mobile automatic weapons teams.



VC DEFENSIVE TACTICS

VC attempt to prepare all probable landing zones within their area of operations in this fashion so they can be occupied on short notice.

VC move to protective bunker 300 meters from Landing Zone when prestrike begins or if assault is expected.

When allied prestrike is complete VC rush to positions surrounding LZ in an attempt to catch assault force in a cross fire and damage maximum aircraft.

VIET CONG SCOREBOARD as of 1 March 66

VC KILLED IN ACTION
(body count)
1173

VC KILLED IN ACTION
(estimated)
752

VIET CONG CAPTIVES
551

WEAPONS
263



Bolt action rifles	146
Semi-automatics	23
Automatic rifles	50
Submachine guns	21
Light machine guns	10
Heavy machine guns	7
Mortars	2
Recoilless rifles	2
Shotguns	8
Grenade launchers	2

AMMUNITION	
Small arms rounds	33,647
Recoilless rifle rounds	25
Mortar rounds	81
Rifle grenades	31
20mm rounds	143
Hand grenades	5094
Flares	11
Mines/Booby traps	161
Demolitions (TNT)	793 lbs
MK 605 fuzes	92

COMMUNICATIONS	
Radios	43
Batteries	72
Transformers	1
Generators (4 1/2 hp)	2
Wire (miles)	6
Field telephones	3

TRANSPORTATION	
Motor vehicles	16
Sampans	83
Tug boats	1
Ox carts	1
Bicycles	39

FOOD	
Rice (Tons)	993
Salt (Tons)	25
Fertilizer (lbs)	6700
Wheat (Tons)	3
Peanuts (Tons)	12
Coffee (lbs)	700
Miscellaneous (Tons)	4

MEDICAL SUPPLIES	1,520 lbs
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DOCUMENTS	18,849
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INSTALLATIONS	
Training	3
Camps	49
Medical	4
Arms Repair Shop	1
Communication	
School	1
Huts	300
506th Bn Hqs	
SCGSS Hqs	

MISCELLANEOUS	
Clothing (Tons)	2
Gas masks	17
Miscellaneous supplies (Tons)	8
Cement (Tons)	8
Gasoline engines	4
Gasoline (gallons)	240
Oil (gallons)	190
Fifty-five gallon drums	60

On the first Ben Cat operation the Brigade uncovered a cache of Russian manufactured Mosin Nagant M1891/30 bolt action rifles with specially designed sniper scopes. Included in the caches were instructions in Vietnamese that the weapons were intended for use against American troops and American advisors. The significance of the cache was obvious for it meant that the VC intended to increase their terrorist activities via assassination.

One of the rifles accompanied the Brigade's delegation which in November lectured at the Airborne Convention and at various Army posts and service schools. While in Washington the delegation gave the rifle to Army Chief of Staff Harold K. Johnson who in turn presented the rifle to the President of the United States.

The president's reply to the gift in part stated: "I deem it a privilege to be honored in this way, particularly by the courageous fighting men of the 173d Airborne Brigade, and welcome this memento as a valuable addition to the Presidential Library."



The Brigade is proud that one of its fallen has received the Congressional Medal of Honor. Sergeant Larry Pierce of the Reconnaissance Platoon, 1/503d is the second soldier in this war to be awarded our nation's highest award for valor.

While on patrol during the first Ben Cat operation in late September, Sergeant Pierce threw himself on top of a Claymore mine. His quick actions and words of warning saved the lives of three others in his squad. But his act of bravery cost him his life.

In late February, 1966 the President of the United States presented the Congressional Medal of Honor to Sergeant Pierce's widow.

The Brigade is very proud of Sergeant Pierce.

The character and courage of the men of the Brigade have been demonstrated many times in combat and out of combat, but nothing serves more to illustrate their nature than to list the many awards and decorations received by them in their first ten months in Vietnam. The decorations range from our nation's highest award for bravery, the Congressional Medal of Honor, to medals for outstanding service in military jobs.

In all, 228 decorations for bravery have been given to men of the Brigade, but this does not include the many decorations given by the Vietnamese government.

Congressional Medal of Honor	1
Distinguished Service Cross	2
Distinguished Flying Cross	7
Silver Star	26
Soldiers Medal	3
Bronze Star with "V" for Valor	128
Bronze Star	18
Air Medal with "V" for Valor	11
Air Medal	667
Army Commendation Medal	
with Valor	50
Army Commendation Medal	62







THE TROOPER

(he may die but he will never be beaten)



THE TROOPER

Behind the terse reports of "American paratroopers" and their operations and exploits there are countless stories and small incidents that are never publicized. Each day is filled with fleeting moments of courage, boredom, and truth that are found only in war. Life is intense and immediate for these men because it can be so very precious and yet so cheap.

Beneath the uniformity of the drab jungle fatigues and combat gear rests a cross section of our nation whose individuality is molded and directed by two dominant forces. Each man is an American; each man is a paratrooper.

For a few moments live with these men and visualize them as they are.

The heaviest load falls upon the young enlisted man, still in his teens or barely out of them. His experience in life has not yet begun, but in this time and place he is very old.

Carrying on his back the heavy weight of combat though so many miles of jungle, across the mire and muck of rice paddies, and under the relentless sun or torrents of tropical rain, he endures when others would fall.

In the humid climate there is no idle time to be found for weapons must be cleaned and oiled over and again. Night time offers but a few precious hours of sleep, wrapped in a poncho lying in the chilly night air, and demands hours of mental alertness listening and watching for an enemy who claims the night as his own. Before him is the ultimate task, the moment when he must close with the enemy and destroy him.

One has only to glance at one of the smaller ones and wonder how he ever got to be a paratrooper. There he stands, clutching the

heavy mortar base-plate, the heaviest item carried, waiting for the column to push on. He looks loaded enough with all of his combat gear hanging on his back. Yet he doesn't complain, and only laughs and retorts to a buddy who is razzing him about his size and load. Someone observed that the force that compels men to jump from airplanes prompts him to wear a neater uniform, try a little harder, and carry a heavier load. This tough little paratrooper is one of the ones they were talking about.

Staying dry is a dream. Even on that rare day when it doesn't rain at least one neck-deep stream crossing is made and an hour spent wadding through rice paddies. Wherever there is water there are leeches, in the streams, in the paddies and on the jungle brush, but a little mosquito repellent or a cigarette gets them off. Wet feet are a way of life and someday the feet will grow webs and no one will be surprised. Skin that has been soaked for days wrinkles and turns white like dishpan hands. All this is part of the problem, something to be accepted.

Sometimes it seems as though the sun is going to burn the shirt off a back, and it probably would if it wasn't for the sweat pouring out of the body. Relentless is mild for the heat of the day, the weakening, sapping, skin burning heat that pursues. The tropical sun beats most men to their knees. A new paratrooper, from the city streets or the mid-west farms, has his paratrooper's pride and words of encouragement from the veterans to keep him going. He's been filled with the war stories, jump stories and personal heroics of his comrades which are part of the bravado of being a paratrooper, and he isn't about to sag under the pressure. He knows that paratroopers never quit. Those that do are no longer paratroopers.





"SPREAD OUT", "CLOSE THE GAP", "LOOK ALIVE". Sergeants are always shouting something, finding something wrong, changing the way something is done, or are just there. Young "Buck Sergeants" who not too long ago were doers are now the leaders, and the ones who finally see that the job is done and done correctly. Squad Leaders with three or four assignments under their belts always seem to know what to do, which way to go, and how to fix a broken piece of equipment.

Finally there are the time tested NCO's who were jumping out of airplanes when most of the Privates were still in their mother's arms. The Master Jump Wings speak for them and many boast the bronze stars on their wings that signify a combat jump. Korea and World War II were their training ground and their combat experience shows through quickly in any situation. Gold chevrons mean experience and leadership, guidance and understanding.

It isn't enough to tell a young soldier what to do. He must be shown, guided, and led through the rigors of military life. Responses that are not instant or acts that are careless too often are fatal and mean the loss the NCO cannot afford . . . one of his men.

At the first sound of an ambush or sniper's round, it is too late for a leader to pass on his wisdom and experience, for by then his squad or fire team must have reacted or some will be dead. Success is measured in the simplest yet harshest of statistics . . . casualties. The sergeant who has molded each man into his place on the team gets results and as each new replacement joins the team, the intense instruction begins immediately for tomorrow may be the first test of the new paratrooper.

Late in the day of a long, hot, frustrating patrol, spirits start to sag, rifles begin pointing towards the ground rather than to the right or left, and shoulders ache from the heavy load of ammunition, grenades, food and water. The tough, experienced NCO comes into his own. Passing among his men he knows which one to chew out, who needs encouragement, or who needs a bit of assistance with his load. Up and down the squad he goes, giving his strength to each man until they look like a fresh patrol starting out. You know he is good and because he is, so is his squad.

A good Platoon Sergeant is invaluable. He has four squads to look after. Taking some of the pressure off the platoon leader, putting his experience and combat savy to work, handling the small problems, and setting an example for his squad leaders and his men, the Platoon Sergeant's value is written all over his platoon. It could be his second tour in Vietnam, most likely his second war. He has the cautious gait of an old infantryman, steady and apparently effortless, and his senses, like antennas, are straining for the enemy.

Standing around the tell-tale radio antennas of the command and control group is always an officer, receiving a situation report or sending one, giving orders or receiving them. A preferred target of the sniper's rifle, the enemy knows that the probing feelers of infantry squads are controlled from here. This is where you'll find the young lieutenants who have trained and trained for this guerrilla war and the tough company commanders who know how to maneuver 180 men deep in Viet Cong territory. Behind them all is the Colonel directing his columns of men searching out and destroying the elusive enemy. These are the men who make the decisions, give the orders, and lead the





paratroopers into the face of the enemy.

It makes no difference whether they come from the Officer Candidate School, from college ROTC programs, or from West Point, they are all professionals, and this war is the test of their profession. If they are good their organization is good and victory after victory proves their worth.

The battle broke slowly, and very clearly, as the lead platoon came upon increasing enemy resistance deep inside the Viet Cong stronghold of War Zone "D". Ahead was a hill bristling with the enemy. When the Company Commander ordered a platoon to flank the enemy's position there was no question in the Platoon Leader's mind that that was exactly what his platoon had to do.

Two squads moved across the stream at the bottom of the hill before withering enemy machine gun fire opened up separating the assaulting paratroopers. The lieutenant had to zig-zag his way across the stream through the tracers that sped past him, but he was going to be with his platoon and soon he was in front of it. Paratroopers, his paratroopers, were hit and falling, but in the maze of flying steel and exploding shrapnel they drove on towards their objective. One by one the platoon reached the trenches of the enemy.

Throughout the action the urgings of the Platoon Leader never ceased, and the enemy pulled back beaten by the strength and determination of the rifle platoon. Some awfully good paratroopers died on that hill, but those that did, did so assaulting an enemy they were determined to destroy.

Later, back at the medical evacuation site, the Colonel walked among his wounded thanking them for their efforts. One young paratrooper wounded in the face was unable to

talk, and as the Colonel spoke with him he urged the injured man not to try answering. But as the Colonel left the trooper made a great physical effort and mouthed, almost inaudibly, the cry of every paratrooper, "AIRBORNE"! Paratroopers are never beaten. They may die, but they are never beaten.

The whir of the helicopters heralds the return of weary paratroopers from the most recent operation in a Viet Cong stronghold. As the Hueys touch down in a cloud of dust, wet, dirty, unshaven combat veterans pile off and trek towards their tents and the welcome thoughts of a shower, shave and a clean set of fatigues. A good hot meal and a cold beer wipes out the memory of "C" rations and treated water. Gone for awhile are the sounds of the close-up war, the cracking rounds of a fierce fire-fight, the exploding artillery shells, and the air strikes

Mail is read, and the thoughts of loved ones and home relaxes senses strained by the search for the enemy. Talk is of women so far away and the life that was and will be once the job is done. Bent over a guitar, a young trooper sings songs known to all and brings back memories of another day and another place. War stories are recounted, tales told of fallen comrades, and boasts fill the air about the superiority of one platoon over another. It is the common talk of men at war.

No generation is exempt from its country's call to meet the challenges of the power hungry, the war lords, or the misguided. To some, the patriots cry is a reason for scorn, but to those upon whose backs our country has risen there has never been a more noble sound. Deep within each man is a restless urging that prompts him to step forward when the cry is sounded. The paratrooper's step is a little quicker and

a bit firmer.

The paratroopers who wear the red, white and blue patch of the "Sky Soldiers" are just such men. Together they seek to leave their mark on history and history has left its mark on them. The veterans have a tradition they must fight to uphold and the newly arrived have a battle for the right to share in it—it is the tradition of being a paratrooper.











