

26 OCTOBER

1. OPERATIONS SUMMARY:

The Armored Task Force commander was given a mission order to conduct a sweep of the PLEI ME area early on the 26th. Initially the task force was to move out in two columns. The tank company and the 22d Rangers were on the right and the A-P-C troop, 1/42 Inf and 21 Ranger Bn, were on the left. Upon arrival at ZA164055, the tanks and tracks were unable to negotiate the terrain. The two columns then turn around and approached the camp from the northwest. At 1205 hours the enemy opened up with a heavy volume of mortar, small arms and recoilless weapons fire, which resulted in friendly casualties totalling 27 KIA and 80 WIA. Although the A-R-V-N wavered during the assault, immediate support by the two batteries of 2/19 Artillery at HOMECOMING enabled the task force to withstand the attack, and later move offensively against the N-V-A. Total enemy casualties reported by the A-R-V-N for that day were 148 KIA (BC) and 5 captured.

At 1315, while the task force was heavily engaged, the 2/8 Cav was alerted to move to the PLEI ME area and support efforts of A Co, 8th Engineers, in repairing the airstrip. The engineer recon team was unable to land due to the fires.

The decision was then made by the division and brigade commanders to attack the hill mass just south of PLEI ME (ZA154039). An enlarged Area of Operations was obtained and the planning begun. The brigade received the mission at 2145 hours and worked all through the night planning the assault.

One of the most agonizing decisions that had to be made was the choice of a landing zone. With enemy fire still being placed on the airstrip, that was ruled out. Moreover, the N-V-A force at PLEI ME was well equipped with heavy anti-aircraft machine guns, and had already shot down seven aircraft, including two B-57 fighter-bombers. It finally was decided that the best landing zone that offered a degree of protection against anti aircraft weapons ringing the PLEI ME camp, and yet not too far away from the objective, was a clearing north of the camp.

Meanwhile, A 2/12 Cav was attached to the 1/9 Cav Sqdn and was airlifted to ZV115915 from whence it moved by foot to ZV105905. At this point the unit established numerous night ambush patrols.

2. TASK ORGANIZATION:

1ST BRIGADE
No Change except:
Add 1/9 Cav (-)

DIVISION
No Change

3. INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY:

Intelligence officers, while now definitely identifying the unit involved in the ambush of the armored task force as the N-V-A 32d Regiment, still had no real positive identification of the unit in and around PLEI ME. There were several references by captives to the 101 Regiment, but there were dismissed because of non-agreement with current order of battle holdings.

The 32d meantime, was well underway back to its regimental base at PLEI THE (YA820070). By this time there were strong suspicions that a N-V-A divisional headquarters was controlling the enemy action. In fact, later determined that this headquarters was at this time moving from its battle location at PLEI BON GA (ZA057155) to PLEI LAO TCHIN (YA807078) where it would be co-located with the 32d.

Meanwhile, the first elements of the unit in contact at PLEI ME was beginning its movement westward to its advance base at KRO Village (Enemy designation) at (ZA080030).

4. ACTIVITIES STATISTICS:

<u>FRIENDLY LOSSES</u>	
KIA	0
WIA	4
MIA	0

<u>ENEMY LOSSES</u>
Still no significant ground contact, although the 2/19 Arty assuredly can take credit for some of the enemy casualties counted by the armored task force.

5. ADDENDUM:

October 26-27 marked the turning point in the division's operation at PLEI ME. On the 26th, General William C. Westmoreland, Commanding General, US Forces, Vietnam, visited the Brigade Forward command post at HOMECOMING. Even with the limited intelligence available at that time, it was apparent that the N-V-A effort at PLEI ME had been something more than a routine, "baptism of fire" operation. In the conference between General Westmoreland and division officers the theme was expounded that US Forces must now do more than merely contain the enemy; he must be sought out aggressively and destroyed.

So the division's scope of operations changed from one of reinforcement and reaction to that of unlimited offense. It was released from a small zone of operations and provided a tactical area of operations that covered nearly 2,500 square kilometers. It was given the mission of searching out, fixing and destroying enemy forces that provided a threat to PLEI ME, PLEIKU and the entire central highlands.

The 1st Brigade assumed the divisional mission. Its concept was to conduct an intensive search for the enemy, looking everywhere--- in the villages, in the jungles and along the stream beds. By wide-spread dispersion, made possible by excellent communications and helicopter lift, the Brigade was to sweep large areas systematically. Each battalion was to be deployed with supporting artillery and was to further disperse its companies. Vigorous and intensive patrolling from company bases was to be conducted. When contact was established, a rapid reaction force was to be assembled swiftly and lifted by helicopters to strike the enemy. Rapid air movement of artillery batteries, plus extensive use of tactical air strikes, would provide the fire support.

Here was airmobility's acid test. The next few days would reveal whether three years of planning and testing would bear the fruits of victory---for a concept and a division.