

15. ADVISOR/COMMANDER ANALYSIS:

a. Lessons learned.

(1) Many friendly casualties have been caused by punji stakes; by snipers firing from trees; and by lead elements tripping booby traps. The use of two-man teams operating on the "buddy" system greatly reduced the occurrence of these incidents. One man watches primarily for punji stakes and booby traps, while his buddy searches the trees and the area to the front and flanks for snipers.

(2) Search and destroy operations where the enemy and innocent civilians are intermingled continues to present problems. If an operation is imminent, women and children normally will hide in holes for protection against artillery and small arms. In areas where it is suspected that innocent personnel are involved, a recommended solution is to have Vietnamese interpreters call into holes before clearing them. Smoke and/or C-S is effective in clearing holes and tunnels, where small arms are not particularly suited.

(3) Experience indicates that troop landings for search and destroy operations should begin, when feasible, on high ground and extend toward blocking forces located at the base of the hills. The downward movement preserves the strength of personnel, allows for complete coverage of the terrain and prevents the enemy from using the hills as an escape area.

(4) Pathfinders should always be included in the initial lifts into landing zones to assume responsibility for navigational assistance and L-Z control. The pathfinders are particularly useful in directing the aircraft into and out of the L-Z between enemy and friendly fires, both during daylight hours and in darkness. The pathfinders are equipped with beacons to assist in night resupply and are also used as a reference for U-S-A-F flare ships in support of night tactical operations.

(5) Despite the fact that many aircraft receive hits by enemy ground fire when flying at low altitudes, experience indicates that there are times when the best chance to successfully complete a mission is when assault altitude (50 feet absolute or lower) is used. The situations which favor the use of assault altitude are:

(a) When weather limits altitude to less than 2,000 feet absolute height.

(b) Minimum restriction to friendly support fire is desired.

(c) Maximum surprise is required.

(d) Vector control aircraft are available.

(6) When aircraft from many units must be pooled to execute a mass lift as well as several ancillary missions, it is best to execute a mass lift initially and then allow specific units to revert to their separate missions. Except when cogent reasons dictate contrary actions, it is especially important that air assault be accomplished by a minimum number of multiple lifts, scheduled into the landing zone at the maximum rate that the L-Z will accommodate. These procedures greatly reduce the exposure time of aircraft and assure placing maximum combat power on the L-Z in the minimum time, while providing the enemy with the least chance to react to the landing.

(7) Density altitudes in excess of 3,000 feet reduce considerably the maximum allowable loads. For example, a CH-47 departing AN KHE (1,500 feet) to QUI NHON (sea level) can safely transport 9,000 pounds. The same aircraft departing AN KHE to PLEIKU (2,500 feet) can safely transport only 7,000 pounds. All aircraft loads for divisional aircraft had to be recomputed for each area of operations and the information disseminated. This became a particular problem when UH-1D loads

were recomputed, reducing the infantry loads from seven to five combat troops.

(8) Time is the essence when helicopters are loading or unloading under enemy fire. Vehicles which are loaded in a secure area and are destined for a "hot" landing zone, should be backed into the aircraft for a speedy exit. Vehicles picked up at a "hot" pick-up zone should be driven on forwards for speedy loading.

(9) The importance of having supplies pre-palletized cannot be over-emphasized. For example, the normal loading time for 200 rounds of 105mm howitzer ammunition into a CH-47 was about one hour. The same load on 4-by-4 pallets could have been loaded internally in 20 minutes. The same load in a cargo net, could have been moved in minutes when slung externally. Because both UH-1D and CH-47 aircraft can sling load, the pre-palletizing is limited to 1,200 pounds per pallet, thus allowing flexibility in scheduling retail deliveries to smaller units.

b. Civil Affairs. The 1st Air Cavalry Division, since arriving in the Republic of Vietnam, has had a firm policy of treating civil affairs/civic action as a vital adjunct to combat actions. The PLEIKU Campaign was no exception to this standing procedure. All division, brigade and battalion operation plans and orders contained civil affairs annexes that spelled out in detail all available intelligence concerning the indigent population, in addition to plans for handling the people affected by combat actions.

Approximately 2,700 refugees from VC dominated villages were taken to the new LE THANH District Headquarters, where a new village had been established. This movement, from four locations and, in many cases, with farm animals and household goods, required a total of 40 sorties by CH-47 helicopters. Food and clothing was drawn by the division from United States Operations Mission and distributed at the refugee camp. In addition, 600 other residents of PLEIKU Province were given medical assistance at daily sick calls and several thousand pounds of rice that had been captured from the enemy were distributed to the hungry. The medical supplies captured at the N-V-A hospital were in turn given to the hospital in PLEIKU and the dispensary in AN KHE.

c. Psychological Warfare. The division made extensive use of psy war teams attached to the division or made available through II Corps. In one case, the cavalry squadron followed up a combat action with a leaflet drop within hours of initial contact. Loudspeaker systems, mounted on helicopters, were utilized urging the enemy to give up. In many cases the voices were provided by surrendered N-V-A personnel.

16. SUMMARY. During the period 23 October to 25 November 1965, elements of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) supported by U-S-A-F and other US Army Units and in cooperation with A-R-V-N forces, conducted a highly successful campaign against major enemy forces in PLEIKU Province. This campaign destroyed major elements of three N-V-A regiments and had the strategic importance of interrupting the planned future operation of the N-V-A in the central highland region of Vietnam.

The PLEIKU Campaign was the first real combat test of the First Team" as a unit, and for the airmobile concept. The results clearly indicate that both came through with flying colors.