

HEADQUARTERS 1ST AIR CAVALRY DIVISION  
APO US Forces 96490

4 March 1966

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report

THRU: Commanding General  
Field Forces Vietnam  
APO US Forces 96240

TO: Commander  
United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam  
ATTN: J231  
APO US Forces 96243

1. NAME OF OPERATION AND TYPE: Operation LONG REACH; Search and Destroy. (1st Brigade: "ALL THE WAY"; 3d Brigade: "SILVER BAYONET I"; 2d Brigade; SILVER BAYONET II"; also known as the "PLEIKU CAMPAIGN.")
2. DATES OF OPERATION: 231200 October 65 to 261500 November 65.
3. LOCATION: PLEIKU Province, Republic of Vietnam.
4. COMMAND HEADQUARTERS: 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile).
5. REPORTING OFFICER: Maj. General Harry W. O. Kinnard
6. TASK ORGANIZATION: At the outset of the campaign the normal task organization of the division was as depicted below. However, because of the operational requirements during the ensuing campaign, frequent changes were made in the organization for combat and will be portrayed in detail during the development of Paragraph 11 (Execution).

<u>1ST BRIGADE (ABN)</u>	<u>2D BRIGADE</u>	<u>3D BRIGADE</u>	<u>DIVISION CONTROL</u>
H/H Co 1st Bde (Abn)	H/H Co 2d Bde	H/H Co 3d Bde	H/H Co 1st Cav Div
1/12 Cav (Abn)	1/5 Cav	1/7 Cav	191 MI DET (-)
1/8 Cav (Abn)	2/5 Cav	2/7 Cav	26 Cml Det
2/8 Cav (Abn)	2/12 Cav	1/21 Arty (DS)	13th Sig Bn (-)
2/19 Arty (Abn) (DS)	1/77 Arty (DS)	C Co 8th Eng (DS)	545 MP Co (-)
A Co (Abn) 8th Eng (DS)	B Co 8th Eng (DS)	3d Fwd Spt Elem Spt Cmd (DS)	Division Arty (-)
1st Fwd Spt Elem Spt Cmd (DS)	2d Fwd Spt Elem, Spt Cmd (DS)	Flat 545 MP Co. (2/17 Arty) (GS)	
Flat 545 MP Co (DS)	Plat 545 MP Co (DS)	Co (DS)	(2/20 Arty (ARA) (GS).
Tm 10th RRU	Tm 10th RRU	IPW/CI Tm, 191 MI Det.	(6/14 Arty)(GS)
IPW/CI Tm, 191 MI Det.	IPW/CI Tm, 191 MI Det	Tm 54th Inf, Det (Grnd Survl).	(3/18 Arty)(GS) (E/82 Arty)(GS)
Tm 54th Inf Det, (Grnd Survl).	Tm 54th Inf, Det (Grnd Survl).		(B/29th Arty) (Search Lite). Spt Command (-) 15th Admin Co (15th Med Bn)(-) (15th S&S Bn)(-) (15th Trans Bn)(-) (27th Maint Bn)(-)
<u>ATTACHED UNITS UNDER DIV CONTROL:</u>			
10th RRU (-)			
54th Inf Det (-)			

SUPPORTING UNITS:

34th QM Bn (DS/GS)

70th Engr (Const) Bn

DIVISION CONTROL

(17th Avn Co

(Caribou))

478 Flying Crane

Co

Aviation Group

(227 AHB)

(228 ASHB)

(229 AHB)

(Gen Spt Co)

1/9 Cav Sqdn

8th Eng Bn (-)

7. SUPPORTING FORCES: For the purpose of this report, supporting forces will be considered in two categories; organic and non-organic. Within those categories will be two sub-groups; combat and administrative/logistical. Statistics seem best suited to tell the story of supporting forces and so statistics, in quantity, will be used.

a. Organic. Support will be considered organic if the units providing the support were assigned or permanently attached to the 1st Air Cavalry Division prior to or during the campaign.

(1) Combat Support. Since the PLEIKU Campaign was an airmobile operation, the organic air combat support should be considered first.

(a) Division Aviation.

1. 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion. This battalion was placed in direct support of the 1st Brigade's operations at PLEI ME, in addition to its mission of positioning forces in preparation for the operation. During the campaign the battalion airlifted the equivalent of 65 infantry companies. A total of 6,066 sorties were flown in support of the 1st Brigade. Four aircraft were hit by ground fire, but none were lost due to enemy action. The 227th sustained two casualties (WIA) during the action. The battalion was relieved on station on 3 November by the 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion and reverted to general support of the 1st Air Cavalry Division at the AN KHE Base.

2. 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion. This unit assumed the mission of directly supporting the division's committed brigades in the PLEI ME tactical zone and remained in direct support until 26 November. During the period the 229th airlifted the equivalent of 128 infantry companies. A total of 10,840 sorties were flown and, although 14 aircraft were hit by hostile fire, and two shot down, none were lost permanently. The battalion sustained five KIA and five WIA in ground action during 3d Brigade operations. During the heavy fighting of 14-18 November, the battalion's lift ships provided the bulk of medical evacuation under fire.

3. 228th Assault Support Helicopter Battalion. The CH-47's of this battalion generally remained in general support of the 1st Air Cavalry Division throughout the campaign with priority of lift going to the committed brigades. On occasion, elements of the battalion would be placed in direct support of committed units. The battalion provided the airlift for the tactical displacement of all artillery utilized in support of the PLEIKU Campaign. The Chinooks airlifted the equivalent of 67 artillery batteries from 24 October to 27 November or, stated in another way, a total of 22 artillery battalions. The 228th also was instrumental in sustaining the logistical support of the campaign, with a total of 6,852 tons airlifted forward of the A-I-C-C terminus. A total of 7,692 sorties were flown in support of division operations. Ten aircraft were hit by ground fire, but none were shot down. Two crew members were wounded in action during the period.

4. 11th Aviation Company (General Support). The principal combat support element of this organization is the Aerial Surveillance and Target Acquisition (ASTA) Platoon, consisting of six OW-1 (Mohawks), equipped either with side-looking airborne radar (SLAR); infra-red sensing devices; or aerial photography equipment. The A-S-T-A Platoon was utilized constantly during the PLEIKU Campaign, flying a total of 23 I-R missions; 50 S-L-A-R missions and 13 photo missions, for a total of 4,862 hours.

5. Division Aviation Statistics:

Total Tons of Cargo Airlifted	13,257.6
Total Passengers Airlifted	88,221

Total Infantry Battalion Moves 40

Total Artillery Battalion Moves 67

<u>TYPE ACFT</u>	<u>TOTAL SORTIES</u>	<u>HOURS</u>
LOH	8,013	4,909.6
UH-1B	11,522	7,328.9
UH-1D	33,522	11,904.2
CH-47	7,026	2,741.7
CH-54	252	128.6
CV-2B	2,210	2,531.9
OV-1B	247	271.7
OV-1C	244	214.5
TOTALS	63,204	30,031.1

<u>TYPE ACFT</u>	<u>HIT BY ENEMY FIRE</u>	<u>SHOT DOWN</u>	<u>RECOVERED**</u>
LOH	11	3*	1
UH-1B	15	2	1
UH-1D	21	2	2
CH-47	10	0	0
CV-2B	2	0	0

\*--LOH destroyed on ground by enemy fire.

\*\*--Indicates aircraft was later restored to flying status.

(b) Division Artillery. During the campaign every element of division artillery was utilized at some time or other, with some artillerymen fighting in the role of infantry to defend certain positions. The artillery not only provided combat support for organic elements, but fired numerous missions in support of A-R-V-N forces, both at the PLEI ME C-I-D-G Camp and for the A-R-V-N Airborne Brigade.

The importance of the artillery in this campaign cannot be emphasized. The ability to place artillery fire power in massive support of infantry actions by the use of airmobile techniques clearly provided one of the keys to victory at PLEI ME.

In addition, the division's aerial artillery matured and came of age during the campaign. The utilization of A-R-A to supplement and, in some cases, to substitute for tube artillery became commonplace during the various phases of the campaign. As the infantry commanders became acquainted with the firepower potential of A-R-A in conjunction with its flexibility and immediate response, it was used with increasing frequency.

#### ARTILLERY STATISTICAL BREAKDOWN

(1) Total artillery rounds fired in support of campaign:

33,108	105mm Howitzer
7,356	2.75 inch aerial rockets HE.

(2) Total missions fired in support of operations.

3,354            105mm Howitzer

184             ARA

(3) Total enemy casualties (body count and estimations) credited to Arty:

KIA (BC) 562      KIA (Est) 868      WIA (Est) 995

(4) Total casualties sustained by artillery units during campaign:

KIA - 2 Off; 5 EM

WIA -10 Off; 21 EM

(5) Number of battery-sized moves by artillery units during campaign:

67 by air

12 by ground

(c) 8th Engineer Battalion. During the PLEIKU campaign the 8th Engineer Battalion conducted continuous combat support of divisional tactical operations. All lettered companies in the battalion were committed at some point during the campaign.

Throughout the entire operation the battalion headquarters maintained close supervision of all committed engineer units besides maintaining engineer support in the division base camp at AN KHE. Continuous reconnaissance missions were performed by the Commanding Officer, S-3, S-2 section, and the A-D-E within the tactical zone of operations. These missions consisted primarily of landing zone and airfield locations and road and bridge studies.

A water supply point was set up at STADLUM and provided the tactical units with a continuous water source throughout the operation. Organic heavy engineer equipment was provided and supported many clearing, repair and construction jobs in the tactical zone. In nearly every case, where engineer units were attached to infantry units, individuals filled in defense perimeters and were committed in an infantry role. During the campaign, six members of the battalion were killed in action, and another 13 wounded.

(2) Combat Service Logistical and/or Administrative Support (Organic).

(a) Support Command. upon initiation of 1st Air Cavalry operations in the PLEI ME area Support Command deployed the 3d Forward Support Element to CAMP HOLLOWAY in the vicinity of PLEIKU with the mission of providing combat service support to the brigade and all other 1st Air Cavalry units operating in that tactical zone. The 3d F-S-E provided continuous combat service support to divisional elements from 24 October to 20 November, when it was relieved on site by the 2d F-S-E. That element provided support to divisional units until the conclusion of the campaign. A typical F-S-E composition includes the F-S-E control section from Headquarters, Support Command; a company of the 15th Medical Battalion; a detachment from the 27th Maintenance Battalion; a platoon from the 15th Supply and Service Battalion; a section of the graves registration platoon of the 625th Quartermaster Company, 34th Quartermaster Battalion DS/GS; and radio and wire teams of the 13th Signal Battalion.

1. During the early phases of the operation, no surface line of communication was open between PLEIKU and the 1st Air Cavalry base location at AN KHE. Movement of initial resupply tonnages from the division base to the PLEIKU area was accomplished with attached

and organic divisional aircraft. As the operation progressed, U-S-A-F aircraft were phased into the A-L-O-C and, during the latter stages of the campaign, transported the majority of supply tonnages from supporting logistical installations into the forward support location at PLEIKU. On 9 November Route 19 was opened from QUI NHON to PLEIKU and a ground line of communication was established. During the campaign forward support elements at PLEIKU had wholesale receipt of 7,554.5 tons of supplies. Unit retail distribution of 5,048.2 tons was made by divisional and attached aircraft. All supplies were received, stored and issued by supply personnel of the 15th Supply and Service Battalion.

2. Detachments of the 27th Maintenance Battalion provided direct support maintenance to divisional and attached units operating in the PLEIKU area. Maintenance operations included evacuation of equipment for repair at the F-S-E locations, and on-site maintenance. On three occasions contact teams from the detachments replaced 105mm recoil mechanisms while the tubes were in firing positions.

3. Medical clearing stations were established in the tactical zone by elements of the 15th Medical Battalion. These clearing stations treated 1,246 patients during the campaign. They were augmented as necessary by surgical teams from the parent unit in the base area. Evacuation of casualties from unit aid stations and battlefield casualty collection sites was provided by the Air Ambulance Platoon. Medical helicopters from this platoon flew 243 casualty evacuation missions in support of combat operations.

4. Direct support sections from the 15th Transportation Corps Battalion (Aircraft Maintenance and Supply) were deployed to the PLEIKU area to provide responsive direct support maintenance for committed aviation units. Their operations also included recovery of aircraft downed in battlefield sites.

5. During periods of the campaign, CV-2B aircraft of the attached 17th Aviation Company flew around-the-clock in moving combat units and supply tonnages into the PLEIKU area. The company provided continuous airborne F-M radio relay for the division throughout the operation. The unit also provided responsive transportation for emergency resupply requirements and for evacuation of casualties from the division clearing stations.

6. The 478th Aviation Company (Heavy Helicopter) with its four CH-54 Flying Cranes, provided an excellent heavy lift, short haul capability to the division. In addition to moving critical high tonnage supplies into the PLEIKU area, and providing transportation for unit distribution of supplies, this company assisted in evacuation of downed aircraft.

7. The scope of the activities of the logistical support provided during this period can be seen by the following statistics:

QUANTITIES DELIVERED:

18,936 individual rations issued  
69,460 gallons of AVGAS  
1,478,600 gallons of JP-4  
50,530 gallons of MORGAS  
6,330 gallons of DIESEL  
1,119,080 rounds of 5.56mm ball ammunition  
14,936 40mm grenades  
40,280 105mm HE rounds  
8,266 rounds 2.75 inch Aerial Rockets

DOWNED AIRCRAFT RECOVERED & EVACUATED\*

OH-13	5
UH-1B	8
UH-1D	5
CH-47	<u>2</u>
TOTAL	20

\*--Not all Acft downed as a result of hostile fire.

MAINTENANCE STATISTICS

TOTAL JOB ORDERS 23 Oct - 26 Nov 63

	<u>RECV D</u>	<u>EVAC</u>	<u>COMPL</u>	<u>OPEN</u>
AUTOMOTIVE	106	0	104	2
ARMAMENT	69	17	60	9
ENGINEER	47	6	39	6
SIGNAL	178	19	164	7
QUARTERMASTER	2	2	1	1
SERVICE	<u>8</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>
TOTALS	410	44	375	26

(b) Other Divisional Support Activities.

1. 13th Signal Battalion. This battalion provided communications support to all units participating in the PLEIKU campaign. Most noteworthy was the overall performance of the CV-2 Airborne Relay (FM) which was utilized 24-hours-per-day on 28 of the 35 days of the campaign. It proved invaluable when it was found that the infantry units were having difficulty maintaining communications with higher headquarters because the range and terrain involved presented too great an obstacle for the AN/PRC-25 radio. The installation of a radio relay system (VHF) from Division Forward to each brigade headquarters was a definite asset and afforded each brigade with direct telephone contact with both Division Forward Tactical Operations Center and the Division Base T-O-C. Sole user circuits from Field Forces Vietnam T-O-C to the Forward D-T-O-C and from Direct Air Support Center-Alpha to the Division Air Liaison officer at the Forward D-T-O-C were installed. Equipment and personnel provided by the 13th Signal Battalion during the various phases of the campaign consisted of 29 specialized communications teams staffed by 89 personnel.

2. 54th Infantry Detachment (Radar Surveillance) provided three teams during the campaign. The mission of these teams was to detect and locate ground moving targets using AN/TPS-33 and AN/PFS-4 radar apparatus. The teams were located in the vicinity of each brigade headquarters and, at times, with the battalions.

3. 10th Radio Research Unit provided support to the division during the campaign. Although specific aspects of the support rendered and effectiveness thereof are sensitive information, an indice of the proximity of the teams to battle is the fact that five teams sustained 2 KIA and 2 WIA during the campaign.

4. 545th Military Police company provided T-O-C security during the period, both at brigade and division forward locations. Other activities included the maintaining of V-C-C enclosures, helipad guards, roadblocks, guards on captured weapons and materiel, in addition to occupation of perimeter defense when the situation so demanded.

5. 191 MI Detachment. This unit provided interrogation of V-C-C/V-C-S in support of the division. It supplied timely tactical intelligence to divisional units in addition to building up order-of-battle information for future operations.

6. Division Headquarters and Headquarters Company provided the personnel and equipment to staff the Forward D-T-O-C. Coordination with allied headquarters and maintaining communications with division headquarters could severely overtax brigade commanders conducting operations at extended distances from the division base. The 1st Air Cavalry Division solved the problem by using a CH-54 "people pod" equipped for operation as an airmobile forward command post. In the PLEIKU Campaign, the pod was co-located with A-R-V-N II Corps Headquarters at PLEIKU. Communications from the committed brigade terminated at the pod and from there information was relayed back to division base.

Because of the scope of the operations and complexities of support activities, division headquarters personnel also removed much of the logistical load from the shoulders of the brigade commanders, thus allowing them to devote full time to tactical operations.

b. Non-Organic.

(1) Combat Support. The primary non-organic combat support provided the 1st Air Cavalry during the PLEIKU Campaign was fire support rendered by the United States Air Force. A total of 741 tactical air sorties, at two tons of high explosive ordnance per sortie, were flown in support of ground combat missions of the 1st Air Cavalry. The bulk of these sorties came during the division's encounters with the North Vietnamese 66th Regiment in L-Z X-RAY and ALBANY. During the first 48-hours on 14-15 November, U-S-A-F fighter-bombers were on continuous air alert over the tactical area.

For the first time in the Vietnamese conflict, U-S-A-F strategic bombers (B-52's based in Guam) were used to extend and increase the firepower of a ground combat unit and were, in effect, placed in general support of the division's ground scheme of maneuver.

A total of 96 B-52 sorties were flown, with the first 18 on 15 November. The target area was only 5,000 meters from friendly elements. On 17 November, the target area was within a few hundred meters of a location formerly occupied by US Forces and which was vacated by ground maneuver to permit the strike to be consummated.

The initial target area had been fortified with bunkers and a trench system which, due to the heavy canopy, had resisted successfully all previous strikes by tactical aircraft and artillery. The fifty-one 750-pound general purpose bombs carried by each B-52 not only penetrated the canopy, but contained sufficient explosive force to destroy the bunker and trench system without scoring direct hits.

As the intelligence picture grew, the number and size of the lucrative targets outside the range of artillery increased significantly. Reaction time was reduced. Tactical commanders could plan for and utilize B-52 airstrikes as a part of the normal pre-planned T-A-C air missions. Thus the vastly improved firepower, beyond the range of the light artillery, was tied in with the rapid moving ground scheme of maneuver.



The original plan to employ strategic bombers in support of the division was presented by the Assistant Division Commander (ADC-A) through Field Force Vietnam Commanding General to the J-3 of US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

Another development by the division's 43-man Air Force Air Liaison Officer-Forward Air Controller team was the combined and coordinated use of division-assigned airborne forward air controllers in L-19's over the maneuver area and ground forward air controllers with each infantry battalion.

The division U-S-A-F team found that the only way to provide the requisite close air support for the fast-moving situation presented by airmobile forces was to maintain a continuous airborne alert of U-S-A-F fighter-bombers. Then, in order to insure fruitful secondary targets if close air support was either not needed or diverted, a system of primary interdiction target designation was designed.

Again, this involved close planning and coordination between the A-L-O, Division G-3 Air, Division G-2 and the Assistant Division Commander-A to insure not only that meaningful targets were designated, but that the targeting would also aid in support of the ground scheme of maneuver.

U-S-A-F aircraft that flew in tactical support of the 1st Air Cavalry Division during the PLEIKU Campaign included: F-100's; F4C's; A1E's; B-57's; F-102's. US Navy and Marine aircraft that flew in support of the division (guided by U-S-A-F Airborne controllers) included: F4B's; A4D's; A1H's.

One of the most valuable lessons learned during the campaign from the standpoint of close tactical air support was the technique of marking unit perimeters at night in order to provide supporting aircraft with not only a positive identification of the forward edge of the battle area, but a two-point azimuth for laying napalm as well. Units utilized expended artillery casings filled with sand and soaked in gasoline and fired by trip flares triggered manually. These, along with other similar expedients provided definite identification of front line traces during hours of darkness and allowed for close, continuous tactical air support of ground units on an around-the-clock-basis.

(2) Logistical Support. The primary non-organic logistical support was provided by C-123 and C-130 aircraft working in the A-L-O-C when it was the sole means of logistical support of the division. U-S-A-F aircraft delivered from logistical bases in Vietnam to the PLEIKU area a total of 6.5-million pounds of Class I, III and V supplies, primarily JP-4. In some cases, the aircraft made wholesale deliveries to forward airstrips, thus allowing the division to substantially shorten its own retail delivery lines of communication.

During the early stages of the A-L-O-C nearly all cargo was delivered at NEW PLEIKU airstrip, and A-R-V-N and Navy-leased trucks were required to transport the supplies to the division's logistical base at CAMP HOLLOWAY.

## 8. INTELLIGENCE:

a. General Background. Prior to 19 October, the available intelligence indicated strong enemy involvement to the east and north-east of the division's base area. Because of the threat to the rice harvest in the coastal regions from TUY HOA to BONG SON, the emphasis on planning for tactical operations was directed to that general area.

On 18 October the enemy situation in PLEIKU Province was as depicted in Inclosure 1.

Despite recurring reports in II CORPS Tactical Zone that the PLEI ME C-I-D-G camp would be attacked (most of which were discounted) the enemy attack at 191900 October was mildly surprising. But, even with the building feeling of major enemy involvement, there still was general consensus that the coastal lowlands remained the real target area of VIET CONG efforts in the corps area.

By the 21st the intelligence advisors at II CORPS headquarters had drawn the conclusion that the PLEI ME attack was being staged by a newly-infiltrated North Vietnamese unit, probably of regimental size, and that it likely was conducting a "baptism by fire" shakedown operation enroute to a permanent base area in South Vietnam. Strength was evaluated as one V-C battalion being utilized against the camp, with two or three battalions available for use against a relief force, should one be committed.

On 22 October, however, the advisors had revised their estimates upwards sharply. Based on reports available to them, they believed there were two regiments operating in the PLEI ME area. If this strength estimate was correct, it was reasoned, the V-C were capable of mounting an attack to destroy the C-I-D-G camp while simultaneously committing sufficient forces to destroy a relief column. This second course of action was considered most valid since the enemy had committed no additional forces against the camp and, additionally, certain C-I-D-G forces that were outside the compound when the attack started were successful in re-entering the camp without difficulty.

The knowledge that the enemy had two regiments in the PLEI ME area presented the A-R-V-N II Corps Commander with a dilemma. He could neither afford not to relieve the camp and thus risk losing it entirely, nor did he have enough troop strength in PLEIKU to effect a relief.

The probability of a regimental-sized ambush was fully anticipated and it was known that reaction forces would have to be committed in sufficient strength not only to be on a par with the ambushing element, but inflict punishment on the enemy in the process.

In order to mount relief in the requisite strength, the II Corps Commander had to commit his Corps reserve forces and, in the process, strip PLEIKU of troop defenses.

This, in turn, brought the 1st Air Cavalry Division into the picture, first as a guarantor of the defense of PLEIKU, and subsequently as the reinforcer of the II Corps relief force.

b. Developing Situation. On 27 October the 1st Brigade of the 1st Air Cavalry Division commenced offensive operations west of PLEI ME to find and destroy the enemy. By this time the identity of enemy units in the PLEI ME area were known as the 32d North Vietnamese Regiment, and the 101-B Regiment, an arbitrary designator given to the unit that had been attacking the PLEI ME camp. Later this designation was officially changed to the 33d Regiment.

During the next 12 days operations by the brigade and reconnaissance-in-force sorties by the 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry developed many targets, some of which resulted in fierce combat actions.

Throughout this period the vast majority of the enemy personnel encountered were North Vietnamese Soldiers, the bulk of whom were well clothed, equipped and reasonably well fed. Most had ample small arms ammunition supplies. Of those who surrendered or were captured as the campaign progressed the major causes of disenchantment appeared to be a lack of medicine or medical attention; continued sickness; lack of food and disillusionment with the empty promises and bleak future of the VIET CONG cause.

Additionally, a high incidence of malaria and malnutrition was reported among some N-V-A troops during the infiltration period.

While the results of the 1st Brigade's operations in the PLEIKU campaign will be summarized in greater detail later, it must be noted here that on 9 November division intelligence estimates indicated that 1,387 enemy personnel were lost to all causes during the 12 days of the division's involvement and that the bulk of these came from the 101-B/33d Regiment. The regiment was held at that time to be ineffective, as such, with only some 600-1,000 personnel remaining.

On 9 November the 1st Brigade was replaced by the 3d Brigade, but the division's overall concept of pursuit and destruction of North Vietnamese forces remained unchanged.

The presence of yet another newly-infiltrated N-V-A unit was revealed when a prisoner captured during a Cavalry ambush near the Cambodian border identified his unit as the 8th Battalion, 66th Regiment, which had arrived in South Vietnam only two days previously.

From the 14th through the 19th of November the 3d Brigade found and fought N-V-A units----the 66th Regiment, the remnants of the 3d the H-15 VIET CONG Main Force Battalion and an unidentified battalion-size unit. The total estimated strength of all enemy elements on 14 November was 3,631.

Again, a detailed statistical analysis of enemy losses will be provided later, but it should be noted here that the estimate of enemy strength made by the division on 20 November was from 1,200 to 1,900 effectives remaining from all units.

The division's ground elements apparently never were in contact with the 32d Regiment, although its artillery unit, firing in support of A-R-V-N forces, contributed to the losses sustained by that regiment. These estimates reveal a reduction in effectives to 450-650.

#### c. Terrain and Weather Considerations:

(1) Weather. In general the weather favored airmobile operations. Sky conditions were predominantly clear to scattered with high ceilings and unlimited visibility. This applied also for nights when visibility was obstructed only by darkness. The absence of extensive precipitation also allowed unrestricted use of night terminal guidance techniques, although aviation units possessed requisite field G-C-A facilities to overcome marginal weather conditions. Average temperatures were between 76 and 86 degrees and humidity was not a deterring factor. Moonrise, moonset and phase during the period 8-17 November favored night operations and security.

#### (2) Terrain.

(a) General. The battlefield covered approximately 2,500 square kilometers on generally flat-to-rolling terrain. The area is drained by an extensive network of small rivers and streams whose predominant direction of flow is west and southwest. Dominant terrain features included the CHU PONG massif in the southwest corner of the division's area of operations (YA9099) and CHU GO mountain in the southern portion of the area of operations (ZA2206).

Soil, for the most part, consisted of red clay which provided excellent trafficability during dry weather.

(b) Cover and Concealment. The density of growth of forests and grasslands provided superb concealment for both friendly and enemy forces. Cover was provided by numerous folds in the ground; grassy hills that were found in profusion throughout the battle area; ditches and paddy walls.

(c) Observation and Fields of Fire. The dense forests and lush fields of elephant grass made observation and fields of fire a critical factor in the zone of operations. The use of aircraft observer platforms, however, gave friendly forces a distinct advantage over the enemy.

(d) Obstacles. While there were no obstacles, per se, in the battle area that hampered airmobile operations (rivers and mountains are not a factor in air assault techniques) the density of forest growth presented definite problems in planning of airmobile operations and thus in effect, became a natural obstacle. The lack of good multi-aircraft landing zones presented the most persistent planning problem during the campaign. The sharply compartmentalized terrain, with ridges and valleys running in a northeast-southwest direction, had a potential effect upon the enemy's east-to-west cross-country mobility.

(e) Key Terrain. The CHU PONG massif unquestionably was the dominant key terrain feature in the battle area. Here was a strong point, far removed from roads or trails, where the enemy could and did construct unusually strong defenses and where his vulnerability to airmobile attacks was materially lessened. Furthermore, this massif lies astride the boundary between Cambodia and Vietnam and its "back door" in Cambodia gave the enemy a valuable route over which his forces could cross the border with little chance of detection.

(f) Roads and Trails. With the exception of National Highway 14, which generally bounded the eastern edge of the division's area of operations, the National Highway 19, which traversed from east to west the northern sector, and the access road to the PLEI ME C-I-D-G camp, there were no roads in the battle area. The absence of ground lines of communication required total dependence on the A-L-O-C for movement of artillery and re-supply; a definite factor in the planning of operations during the PLEIKU campaign. Trails, however, abounded throughout the area and served to guide the movements of enemy soldiers and formations.

d. Civil Affairs. Both Vietnamese and Montagnards lived in the area of operations. The majority of the Vietnamese had fled, however, leaving the area to the Montagnards and the VIET CONG. The Montagnards belonged primarily to the Djarai-Khoam Tribe. The civilians had not been pro-VC, but with loss of government control in the area, the V-C filled the power vacuum.

The V-C not only penetrated hamlets, but set up fighting positions inside villages. It is anticipated that the civilians again will become good pro-government citizens when permanent security and stability is restored. Many C-I-D-G personnel in Special Forces camps had relatives living in hamlets throughout the area controlled by the V-C. Because future government control and support of the populace were directly affected, great importance was attached in 1st Air Cavalry combat operations to minimize non-combatant injuries and to stress good civil affairs planning.

e. Evaluation and Comments.

(1) Morale. Although there were some indications of disaffection and a desire to surrender, the relatively low number of captives in ratio to the total number of N-V-A troops engaged indicated generally good morale existed initially in the units with which the 1st Air Cavalry had contact.

Another series of indices of high morale was the determination, aggressiveness and discipline of the troops facing US elements. There seemed, however, to be a general deterioration of morale following decisive defeat on the ground. For example, one captive from the 8th Company, 8th Battalion, 66th Regiment, reported after the engagement with the 2/7 Cavalry on 17 November that his unit sustained 30 KIA, 50 WIA and, most importantly, 50 deserters. Additionally, reports from A-R-V-N forces indicates that personnel captured from the 32d Regiment in late November believed the war was lost. Another blow to enemy morale was the use of B-52 strikes in close ground support. Captured enemy soldiers reported that the raids struck terror in the hearts of N-V-A troops and there was general belief that each strike covered 20 square kilometers and that normal entrenchments were of absolutely no protection.

(2) Leadership. Throughout the campaign, enemy leadership appeared good. There were, of course, adverse reports and, in one case, a report of an officer running away under fire. Continuation of mass attacks in the face of withering protective fires indicates either an absence of flexibility or the lack of control and command facilities--- probably a mixture of both. However, immediate-action drills when surprised, and sound organization of positions indicate a high degree of professionalism.

### (3) Tactics and Techniques.

(a) General. The average N-V-A unit appears organized along the same lines as the Chinese Communist Forces; that is, light infantry units armed with a preponderance of automatic weapons, reinforced by weapons companies and weapons battalions. (See organization chart of the North Vietnamese division, known as a FIELD FRONT, which is believed to have opposed the 1st Air Cavalry Division during the PLEIKU Campaign, included as Inclosure 2). Each soldier carries from three-to-five Chinese "potato masher" hand grenades. Most soldiers carried a light bedroll, consisting of a piece of waterproof plastic and hammock. Packs, which contained changes of clothing, additional first aid packets and eating utensils, generally were left in base or assembly areas before a fight.

(b) Camouflage. The N-V-A soldier is an expert at camouflage and uses every bit of cover and concealment to perfection. He attached foliage to his equipment to alter as much as possible his natural silhouette. Some soldiers also used camouflage face masks. The N-V-A soldiers habitually dig in, even during brief rest or messing stops and carefully camouflages his positions. Noise and light discipline are excellent. He also makes good use of trees as firing platforms.

(c) Offensive Tactics. Using only small arms, light mortars and anti-tank weapons, the North Vietnamese soldier attempts to close quickly with his objective area to render defensive fire support ineffective and to overwhelm and disorganize defenders. Some attacks were preceded by light mortar fire and, in some instances, rocket fire which was mistaken for mortar preparations. Attacks were characterized either by an attempt to overwhelm by mass at single decisive point or encircling maneuvers with 50-75 man groups; or by a combination of both. Other favorite offensive tactics by N-V-A forces seemed to be aggressive small-unit encircling maneuvers, and rapid assaults by small units---6 to 10---against small, isolated elements. Both ploys were worked as counters to encircling tactics employed by friendly forces.

Contrary to US forces' practice of firing mortars throughout the area, N-V-A mortar firing generally was conducted only in front of their route of attack and frequently in a creeping pattern.

At night enemy units expertly probe defensive perimeters and go to great lengths to infiltrate elements that can act as stay-behind sniping or killer groups. The close-in small arms fire of North Vietnamese regulars was characterized by unerring accuracy and determination to hit specific targets. These targets habitually were radio operators and identifiable leaders of all ranks.

It should be noted, however, that these tactics were predicated on an apparent doctrine that tactical air strikes would not be called in within 500 meters of the front line trace; and artillery fires not less than 150 meters from the foxhole positions. They discovered conclusively and fatally that 1st Air Cavalry units will not hesitate in calling both tactical air and artillery strikes within 100 meters of the front line trace if the situation warrants such action. This may precipitate a change in N-V-A offensive doctrine in future operations against American units.

(d) Defensive Tactics. In many cases defensive positions of small units were laid out in back-to-back inverted "L's" that provided enfilading fire in enlarged killing zones and tended to deceive attackers as to the exact trace of the position. The placement of crew-served automatic weapons indicated a sound knowledge of the use of grazing fire to deny utilization of avenues of approach.

(e) Miscellaneous. N-V-A troops often tried to confuse US forces during battle by shouting, "Friendly Forces" or "Friendly Troops" in conjunction with wearing captured US steel helmets and equipment. The momentary confusion caused by these stratagems sometimes allowed their users to fire first or take evasive actions.

(4) Logistics. Food supplies appeared adequate for most units except for some elements of the 33d Regiment which had been separated from their logistical base for several days. Some captured stragglers and deserters suffered from undernourishment. There were persistent reports that major re-supply depots existed in the area, particularly in the IA DRANG Valley. Small arms ammunition seemed plentiful. In fact, on the night of 14 November, elements in contact with the 1/7th Cavalry were re-supplied with 90 rounds each. A definite shortage of ammunition in larger calibers existed, particularly in mortars. Medical supplies also were a critical item for North Vietnamese forces.

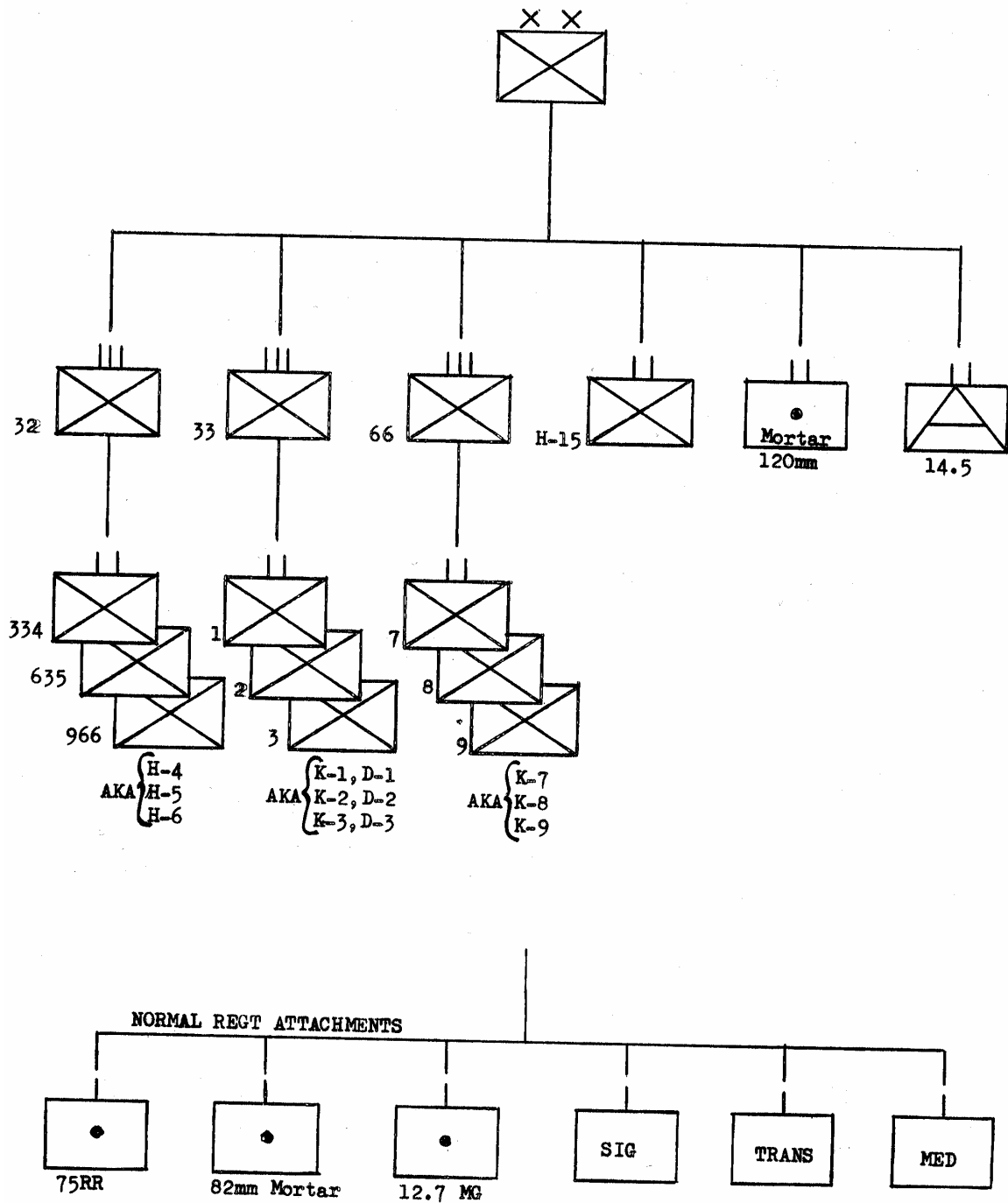
(5) Weapons. At least two occurrences of air bursts in the vicinity of aircraft were observed during the campaign. The presence of the 14.5mm twin-barrel anti-aircraft weapon, which is standard in the North Vietnamese division's anti-aircraft battalion, were reported on several occasions, but none were captured or otherwise identified.

Captured weapons ran the gamut of infantry arms employed by N-V-A forces. These included the 82mm mortar, 75mm Recoiless rifle, 12.7mm heavy machine gun, the RP46 and RPD light machine guns, the 7.62mm SKS semi-automatic carbine, and the 7.62mm AK47 assault rifle. Also captured were 7.62mm bolt action rifles and 40mm rocket launchers, which fired both 40mm and 82mm projectiles.

Nearly all weapons captured from N-V-A units were of Chinese Communist manufacture, with some coming from other Bloc countries. Weapons taken from local force V-C units along Highway 19 and in the old LE THANH District Headquarters were the assorted conglomeration of weaponry usually associated with local units.

(6) Intelligence Techniques. Special Agent Reports (SPAR) were used for targeting U-S-A-F and artillery interdiction fires. During the period of 18-23 November, there were 25 potential targets identified, of which 17 were engaged. Of these 13 were positively confirmed as targets either by observation of enemy personnel, structures, retaliatory fires or secondary explosions.

NORTH VIETNAMESE FIELD FRONT (DIVISION) ORGANIZATION



Inclosure 2 to Combat Operations After Action Report

9. MISSION. The mission of the 1st Air Cavalry Division in the PLEIKU-PLEI ME area was delineated in roughly two phases. Phase I, from 23 October through 26 October, placed the division elements in a defensive, reinforcing and/or limited offensive role.

Phase II, from 27 October until 26 November, placed the division in an unlimited offensive role to seek out and destroy V-C forces in an area of operations that, by conventional standards, was immense.

The missions were assigned either by the Commanding General, Field Forces Vietnam, or by the Commanding General, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, through Field Forces Vietnam. The two primary mission statements received by this division are as follows:

PHASE I: (Message 1097 from CG-FFV, dated 221421 Oct 65, to CG, 1st Air Cav)

"SUBJECT: CONFIRMATION VOCC FFORCEV TO CG 1ST AIR CAV DIV, 22 OCT 65.

"1. (Omitted)

"2. (Omitted)

"3. COMMENCING FIRST LIGHT 23 OCT 65 1ST AIR CAV DEPLOYS ONE BN TF (MINIMUM 1 INF BN AND 1 ARTY BTRY) TO PLEIKU WITH MISSION TO BE PREPARED TO ASSIST IN DEFENSE OF KEY US/GVN INSTALLATIONS VIC PLEIKU OR REINFORCE II CORPS OPERATIONS TO RELIEVE PLEI ME CIDG CAMP."

PHASE II: (Message 1312 from CG-FFV, to CG, 1ST AIR CAV DIV, dtd 310145 Oct 65)

"SUBJECT: CONFIRMATION OF VOCC FFORCEV TO CG, 1ST AIR CAV DIV, 28 OCT 65.

"REF: A. MSG 1097 FROM AVF-GC-OP, DTD 221421Z.

B. MSG 38215 FROM MAC J311, DTD 270629Z (NOTAL).

"ELEMENTS OF 1ST AIR CAV DIV CURRENTLY DEPLOYED VICINITY PLEIKU WILL COORDINATE WITH AND ESTABLISH AN AREA OF OPERATIONS VICINITY PLEI ME CIDG CAMP AND UNDERTAKE OPERATIONS TO FIND FIX AND DESTROY VC FORCES WHICH ENDANGER THAT GENERAL AREA."



10. CONCEPT OF THE OPERATIONS:

a. Phase I. The initial concept for this operation was to deploy by air to the vicinity of CAMP HOLLOWAY a reinforced infantry battalion to provide security for US units and installations in the PLEIKU area and to provide a reserve/reaction force for the PLEIKU area.

Within a matter of hours the estimate of the situation at PLEI ME was revised and the divisional commitment expanded to a brigade task force. The concept then developed to provide limited offensive operations, utilizing air assault techniques to provide artillery fire support for the A-R-V-N Armored Task Force moving to relieve the PLEI ME Camp as well as support for the camp itself; and to provide infantry security for artillery positions, while still maintaining a reserve reaction force of not less than one battalion for the defense of PLEIKU.

b. Phase II. This phase was conducted using one brigade, with three and four battalions, to conduct search and destroy operations within sector and through coordination with U-S-S-F, C-I-D-G and sector forces to develop targets to be engaged by rapid reaction forces. All means available were utilized to gather information. Other friendly forces within the area were encouraged to participate by developing targets, providing blocking forces or other support within their capability. Battalions conducted search and destroy operations by establishing company/platoon bases and developing the situation with squad size action. Each battalion maintained a reaction force laagered with aircraft when possible. Deceptive measures were employed to confuse the enemy and constant pressure was maintained to keep him on the run.

Commencing on 1 November, forces were employed in Area I and Area II (Reference Inclosure 3) to develop targets and block the enemy escape routes into Cambodia. Each battalion was prepared to commit one company within one hour with the remaining companies following at approximately one hour intervals to strike once a target was developed. Search and destroy operations continued into Area II when targets did not develop in other sectors. Continual attention was given to the security of the force, to include command posts and logistics bases.

11. EXECUTION: Because of the complexities of the airmobile operations in the PLEIKU Campaign, and the inherent difficulties in presenting the scope of the action in conventional narrative format, the following method of unfolding the action has been chosen.

Each day will be handled separately, with an accompanying map to show the major movements of maneuver elements during that period. Flag locations are as of the evening of the day in question, when units coiled for the night. In cases where the velocity of combat increased, inclosures, consisting of blow-ups of the specific map location, will be provided to better portray the key movements that influenced the action.

Each day's summary will also include an intelligence summary, the bulk of it after-the-fact information that was obtained following the battles or the campaign. It is included because it is important to show the enemy's actual movements in connection with the movements of the division.

A day-by-day tally, when possible, of enemy and friendly casualties also will be provided.

The friendly casualties are those that division records now indicate occurred on the date in question. Individuals dying of wounds are considered to have been killed on the date their mortal wound was inflicted. Enemy casualties, in the case of a two or three day rolling action can be only approximated on a day-to-day basis.

Additionally, a detailed task organization will be provided for each operational day.