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OPERATION
JUNCTION CITY
VIETNAM 1967

BATTLE BOOK

PREPARED FOR
ADVANCED BATTLE ANALYSIS
U. S. ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE
1983

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<p>(A) Operation JUNCTION CITY was the largest search and destroy operation of the Viet Nam war as of the spring of 1967 when the battle took place. Forces of the United States Army and Air Force, in conjunction with elements of the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam sought to clear Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces from the area known as "The Iron Triangle" by establishing a cordon with airmobile forces and driving the enemy into the cordon with ground elements. The operation eliminated a communist haven within South Vietnam and resulted in the capture or destruction of great quantities of supplies. (auth)</p>			

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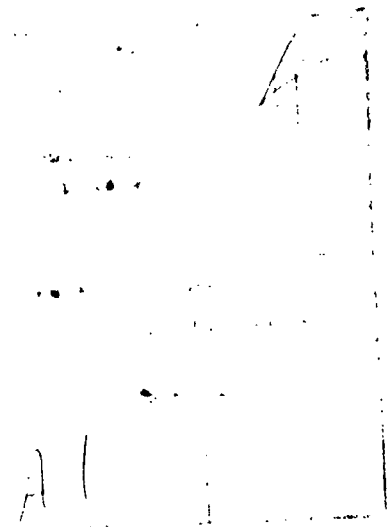
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OPERATION JUNCTION CITY BATTLE BOOK

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I. Introduction to Operation JUNCTION CITY

A. Operation JUNCTION CITY was a three phased military combat operation executed by United States Army forces and forces of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) against forces of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army (NVA). This battle took place from February through May in 1967, in the region known as War Zone C northwest of Saigon. United States Air Force elements also took part in the operation.

B. The predominant sources used for this account were US Army unit after action type reports from brigades/regiments that participated in the operation. The edition of the Vietnam Studies that specifically dealt with Operation JUNCTION CITY was invaluable, but research revealed that it was directly derived from the aforementioned after action reports. Various intelligence documents and operational summaries of that time frame also proved useful. A notable scarcity of reliable Viet Cong/NVA sources limited the balance of the research and possibly skewed it in favor of the Americans. However, it is also notable that all of the US after action reports were published within a few months of the conclusion of the operation and therefore reflect raw, timely information.

The "authoritative" work, if one exists, is the Vietnam Studies book Cedar Falls-Junction City by LTG Bernard W. Rogers. It was published in 1974, some seven years after the battle, and is a faithful military tactical account of the battle. However, the distance of time has shown the inaccuracy of some of the conclusions and analysis in that document. On the other hand, the few VC/NVA sources have the obvious trappings of propaganda and are almost unusable in the tactical accounts, although their conclusions have an air of truth.

There was no shortage of sources for the strategic setting although they had to be approached with caution as the personal biases of the authors concerning American involvement in the war heavily influenced their approaches and conclusions. As discussed in George Herring's article, "American Strategy in Vietnam: The Postwar Debate," three schools of thought have emerged regarding the US failure in Vietnam, and these schools seem to apply also to what Herring termed "the causes and wisdom of American involvement."

The first school of thought holds that America failed in Vietnam because the military power was not used correctly, that it fought with too many civilian-imposed restrictions. This "hawk" point of view also agrees on the wisdom of the US commitment in Vietnam. This school of thought is well developed in the memoirs of General William C. Westmoreland (A Soldier Reports) and by Dave R. Palmer in his Summons of the Trumpet. The few strategic remarks of General Rogers' official history of the battle indicate that his work also professes the "hawkish" viewpoint. Each of these three books, however, was a very valuable source if approached correctly.

The second school of thought identified by Herring was what he termed the "counterinsurgency school." Writers of this persuasion espoused the belief that the war could have been won if the US had "adapted its strategy to the type of conflict it was engaged in." This group also generally supported American involvement in Vietnam and in our research the counterinsurgency theme was found to be espoused by Guenter Lewy's superb America in Vietnam, Cincinnatus' Self Destruction, and to a degree, Colonel Harry G. Summers' On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context.

The final school of thought that has emerged argues that the US should not have become involved in a conflict that was unwinnable at any acceptable cost. To such authors the Vietnam War was a classic no-win situation for America. During our research this view emerged in several sources, among them the excellent discussions in Anthony Lake's The Vietnam Legacy, Patricia Krause's Anatomy of An Undeclared War, and Charlton and Moncrief's Many Reasons Why--which each represented all views to varying degrees.

Finally, to get a feel for the flavor of Vietnam and the French experience in Indochina, the books of Bernard Fall are incomparable. We also found John M. Van Dyke's North Vietnam's Strategy for Survival very helpful in evaluating the Communists' war aims and strategy. The books by Facts on File provided a wealth of data and the many pictorial accounts of the war were surprisingly helpful in the area of maps and photos of equipment and battle scenes.

A final note on sources concerns oral histories. Although there are many US survivors of this operation still on active duty, it was disappointing that none were located who could provide additional information. Several personal inquiries turned up empty, and even a newspaper advertisement did not elicit a single response. The few interviews that were conducted were of little value as the subjects had such a vague recollection of the battle that they were unable to provide any substantive information or answer any of the unresolved questions that emerged during our research.

II. The Strategic Setting

A. The Seeds of American Involvement

The seeds of American involvement in Vietnam were planted in 1945 when the United States adopted a hands-off policy as France "reasserted her colonial sway over Indochina" following World War II. Although concerned when Communist dominated forces known as the Vietminh rebelled against the French in the late 1940s, "US aid remained discreetly indirect, taking the form of economic assistance to Paris."¹ However, the administration began sending significant amounts of aid directly to Indochina in 1949 following the triumph of Mao Tse-tung's Red Army in China. In 1950 Red China and Moscow extended diplomatic recognition to the Vietminh and its leader, Ho Chi Minh, and in so doing convinced President Truman of the communist coloring of the insurgency cause in Vietnam. When war erupted in Korea in 1950, the American fear of global aggression from a monolithic communist world seemed confirmed. US aid to Indochina was increased and an American military mission entered the region to oversee the expanded program.

When President Eisenhower inherited the situation in 1953, the United States was paying over half the cost of the French-Indochina War, amounting to 400 million dollars a year.² The war was not going well for the French who had been unsuccessfully seeking "the big set-piece battle in which they could outmaneuver and outgun the enemy."³ By 1954, the escalation from guerilla to regular warfare was under way, and before the officials in Washington could agree on the level of American commitment in Vietnam, the French found their set-piece battle in a small mountain village named Dien Bien Phu.

Having just ended the Korean War, and finding no Allied enthusiasm for another Asian conflict, President Eisenhower decided against committing American combat forces. Dien Bien Phu fell, and French involvement in Indochina ended. Peace was negotiated in a conference at Geneva which separated Vietnam at the 17th Parallel, giving the northern half to Ho Chi Minh and the southern half to Emperor Bao Dai. American policy then took the form of support for the emerging leader of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, who was consolidating his hold on South Vietnam with the reluctant approval of Emperor Bao Dai who was holding court on the French Riviera. In October 1954, President Eisenhower pledged "to assist the Government of Vietnam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means."⁴ The United States provided aid directly to Diem and American advisors arrived to help train the Vietnamese Army. When talk of a coup surfaced, a special ambassador was sent by President Eisenhower to let it be known that Washington would not support any leader but Diem.⁵

In 1955 Ho Chi Minh was enraged when Diem refused to hold the elections called for by the Geneva peace accord. As a result, insurgency was

renewed. Though the start was slow, insurgent cadres were established by mid-1957 and began an aggressive recruiting campaign.⁶ Despite progress by Diem, South Vietnam was fertile ground for an insurgency, especially as Diem failed to recognize the ultimate objective of the battle--the people. As the Viet Cong influence expanded, South Vietnam's central government in Saigon failed to realize the extent and nature of the threat. From Hanoi, his capital city in the north, Ho Chi Minh began establishment of an infiltration network into the South--soon to be known as the Ho Chi Minh trail. American civilian and military officials in Vietnam also failed to grasp the true essence of the situation. By the end of 1960, however, the sense of complacency began to disappear and the internal menace was gradually revealed in the form of stepped-up insurgent activity.

The early days of 1961 were filled with manifestations of the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union which had great significance for the increasingly shaky situation in South Vietnam. A few days before President Kennedy's inauguration, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev belligerently pledged Russian support for what he termed "wars of national liberation."⁷ In North Vietnam, during a broadcast timed to coincide with Khrushchev's statement, Radio Hanoi announced the formation of the National Liberation Front, the political apparatus that would direct the insurgency in Vietnam.⁸ To such challenges President Kennedy provided an answer in his inaugural address, declaring that: "To those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny." Kennedy proclaimed the arrival of the "New Frontier," and pledged that America would "pay any price, bear any burden, support any friend, oppose any foe, to ensure the survival and the success of liberty."⁹

B. "Support Any Friend, Oppose Any Foe"

As if to test the resolve of the new US administration, the situation in South Vietnam grew steadily worse. It was becoming evident that a Communist triumph was imminent without hasty American action to forestall it. With urging from the nations of the region, from New Zealand to Australia to Thailand, President Kennedy answered Hanoi's challenge. His numerous observers and study groups returned from Saigon with wide ranging recommendations, among them calls for increased military assistance, to include several thousand troops. The Pentagon reacted swiftly. By the end of 1961, 3200 Americans were at work in Vietnam, and in early 1962 the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam began coordinating and directing the US commitment.¹⁰ The objective of the United States' involvement emerged as defeat of North Vietnam's effort to impose a Communist state on an unwilling South Vietnam, thus allowing South Vietnam to choose its own government.¹¹

The American military buildup, new equipment, and intent to remain were a tonic to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. After a shaky beginning in 1962, "by year's end they had snatched the military initiative from the Viet

Cong." With American advised and supported ARVN units holding the upper hand on the battlefield, a quick win was wrested from the grasp of the Viet Cong. "The VC retrenched for the long haul" as disenchantment racked their ranks.¹²

Then, just when President Diem seemed to have his country and the Viet Cong under control, rioting broke out in Saigon over a claimed religious imbalance of power. With 17,000 Buddhists demonstrating in his capital, Diem declared martial law and the Viet Cong took advantage of the distraction to rebuild their ranks. The religious revolts also brought to light shortcomings of the insensitive Diem regime. The sentiment of America's leadership began to drift toward Diem's ouster. In November 1963, with US approval, a coup was carried out which resulted in Diem's assassination and made the American commitment to Vietnam "virtually irrevocable."¹³ Shortly thereafter President Kennedy was also assassinated and President Lyndon B. Johnson inherited a confused situation in Saigon where several South Vietnamese governments changed hands in quick succession.

Finally the situation stabilized, but not before Hanoi was able to rearm the VC, send Northerners to the South, and direct terrorist activities against US advisors and installations. The result was that throughout 1964 the revolutionary movement escalated ominously and the insurgents enlarged their base areas and displayed newfound military aggressiveness. In a major change of high-level US personnel, General Maxwell D. Taylor became Ambassador to South Vietnam and General William C. Westmoreland took over as the Commander of MACV. Shortly after they had settled into their new positions, North Vietnamese torpedo boats allegedly attacked two American destroyers patrolling the international waters of the Gulf of Tonkin. In response, the United States Senate, "in a near unanimous vote, passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, signifying its acquiescence in the use of American power in Southeast Asia and reaffirming the importance of South Vietnam to interests the United States held vital."¹⁴

With the US buildup continuing, by December 1964 some 23,000 American military men were in South Vietnam and the Vietnamese government had regained some stability. At that point Hanoi committed to overt military intervention in the South. Miscalculating the American response, underestimating the ARVN, and overly optimistic about precipitating the collapse of South Vietnam, North Vietnam launched its regiments into battle in the South. When Viet Cong sappers attacked the American advisors' compound at Pleiku, President Johnson unleashed the US Air Force and ordered Marines to Vietnam. When the Marines waded ashore near Danang in 1965 "a new war was on."¹⁵ Americans would henceforth not only advise, but would fight as well.

The war escalated quickly throughout 1965 as Hanoi tried to achieve victory before the US buildup blunted their offensive. However, American units repulsed the invasion from the North and by mid-1966 General Westmoreland noted that the war had evolved into a protracted war of attrition.¹⁶ The Americans in Vietnam had achieved a great deal and in recognition of their accomplishments, Time magazine selected their commander, General Westmoreland, as the 1965 recipient of its prestigious "Man of the Year" award.¹⁷

The buildup continued throughout 1966, and by the end of that year sufficient forces had been deployed, together with their logistic support, so that the Allied military establishment was in a position to go over to the offensive on a broad and sustained basis. As 1967 began, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces totalled nearly 300,000 soldiers. At the same time, counting 625,000 South Vietnamese, well over a million men bore arms for the Allies.¹⁸ While the amount of economic and military aid received by the North was quite small relative to American aid to the South, it is worthy of note. Over the ten-year period covering 1963-1973, North Vietnam received over one billion dollars (of which 650 million were military assistance) from Communist nations.¹⁹ The majority of the aid came initially from the People's Republic of China, but after Khrushchev's ouster in 1964, the Soviet Union increased its aid considerably. In the end, the Soviet Union contributed over 600 million dollars to the North Vietnamese cause. By contrast, the US was to spend over 150 billion dollars during the course of the war.²⁰

C. Search and Destroy

An analysis of the military forces involved in the Vietnam war gives the edge to the Allies who were superior in both numbers (by over 3 to 1) and equipment. However, the North Vietnamese level of experience and their guerilla tactics did much to offset the statistical advantages of those defending the South. Recognizing his numerical inferiority, after mid-1966 General Vo Nguyen Giap, the North Vietnamese military leader, returned to a strategy aimed at wearing out the United States, emphasizing two basic principles. First, he assembled his forces only at the time and place of an attack, and then primarily conducted operations such as ambushes and harassment of supply lines. Second, he sought to use his forces' superior knowledge of the terrain in order to move without detection and to establish necessary hideouts, weapons and food caches, and bases.²¹ Obviously, Giap's tactics were hardly original, having been used as early as the 13th Century. However, having honed his tactics and developed his subordinate leaders during twenty years of fighting against the French and South Vietnamese, Giap's strategy was to prove quite formidable.

During the latter part of 1966, a number of Allied tactical offensive operations were conducted--the first of the war since the American buildup. The tactics that evolved came to be known as search and destroy. Although

subsequently criticized for fostering a ground war of attrition and likened to elephants stomping on ants, search and destroy tactics had developed logically. Hindered by policy constraints which denied him the authority to strike enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam (although US aircraft did intermittently fly missions over North Vietnam beginning in 1955), General Westmoreland was limited to waging a strategic defensive behind friendly borders. To win such a contest, Westmoreland determined that he had to protect South Vietnam's population and make aggression so costly that General Giap would call the NVA units home.²² To accomplish these tasks, the ARVN forces were given the mission of protecting and pacifying population centers while US and Allied units sought to engage Communist elements in the less settled stretches near the Western border and in the insurgent strongholds throughout the South. Thus, American field commanders found themselves attacking fortified base areas in generally hard-to-reach sections of the South in massive search and destroy operations--worrying all the while about the statistical results of body counting.

By definition, search and destroy operations were attacks conducted away from populated areas and in localities where the enemy was strong. They entailed violent assault by infantry and armor, capitalized on allied airmobility, and, with the use of heavy supporting fires, sought to destroy an armed opponent who was expected to defend himself in a conventional way. Normally, to minimize friendly casualties, only very large units were used to execute this type of attack. In short, search and destroy operations were large scale, tactical offensives seeking an opponent to fight, a base to destroy, or both.²³ During 1966, numerous operations of this type were conducted, including eighteen which each netted over five hundred enemy dead.²⁴ In fact, both sides took heavy losses as the enemy tried to maintain the pressure, and as each side sought to exploit its tactical advantages: the Allies, their firepower and mobility; the NVA and VC, the ability to nimbly disengage and slip away into havens in Cambodia and Laos.

Operation Junction City was to be the largest search and destroy operation of the war to that time, and would seek to destroy one of the major enemy bases forty-five miles northeast of Saigon--just north of the area which had earned the foreboding name of "The Iron Triangle."

ENDNOTES
(The Strategic Setting)

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20. Douglas Welsh, The History of the Vietnam War (New York: Galahad Books, 1981), p. 189.
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III. TACTICAL SITUATION:

A. AREA OF OPERATIONS

(1) GENERAL:

The operational area for JUNCTION CITY, WAR ZONE C, is generally defined as the 80x50 kilometer area bounded on the west and north by Cambodia, on the east by Highway 13, and on the south by an east-west line drawn through Ben Cat and Tay Ninh and extending to the Cambodian border. The area lies 45 miles northwest of Saigon.

(2) WEATHER:

The weather was clear and dry throughout the entire period of the operation. Light fog occasionally appeared in the early morning hours but dissipated prior to 0800. Temperature ranged from a low of 59° to a high of 95°. The mean temperature was 72°. The average relative humidity during the operation was 71%. The total amount of rainfall during the entire operation was 2.11 inches, resulting from occasional heavy late afternoon thunderstorms. The number of days in which visibility was restricted to five miles or less was 39. The number of days with a ceiling below 4000 feet was 24. Weather during the period had no adverse effects on tactical operations and can be generally characterized as ideal for ground operations throughout the entire period.

(3) TERRAIN:

The JUNCTION CITY area of operations is characterized by relatively flat land with gently rolling hills. Terrain in the northern and eastern portions rises to approximately 150 meters while the southern and western portions range in elevation from 5-50 meters. The generally flat, marshy land in the west changes to gently rolling terrain finally becoming irregular near the eastern province boundary.

There are only two prominent land features in the area. NUI BA DEN, a 986-meter mountain, is located at XT 2858. NUI ONG, NUI CUA CONG, and NUI THA LA form a continuous ridge which extends from XT 5259 to XT 4853.

The drainage pattern is formed by the Van To Dong in the west and the head waters of the SAIGON in the east. Neither river was fordable during the period of the operation. Numerous streams and intermittent waterways were interlaced throughout the area of interest. The principal streams had steep banks and muddy bottoms. Minor streams were very shallow or even interrupted.

Vegetation in the area ranges from dense forest, to light forest, brush wood, and bamboo thickets. In the dense areas the canopy was usually

discontinuous. The broad leaf evergreen forests formed single and double canopy. The undergrowth was dense consisting of low trees, shrubs, bamboo and vines. There are, however, large open rice fields around NUI BA DEN and a large rubber plantation, the DON DIEN MICHELIN, southeast of the NUI ONG mountain ridge.

Highways 13 and 22 are the only paved roads in the area of operations. There were several secondary roads, in particular 244, 245, and 246 in the east, and 247 and Route 4 in the west. Additionally, numerous well used trails criss-crossed the area of operations. Most bridges in the area were destroyed prior to the beginning of the operation.

Trafficability in the area varied from good in the rubber plantations to difficult in marshy areas in the north, particularly the northeast, where movement was difficult because of the heavy forest and dense undergrowth and bamboo. In this area foot movement by ground troops was fair at best and movement by vehicles was largely restricted to roads. In the northern and western portions of the area of operations trafficability improved because of the relatively thin forests and scattered open areas.

Observation was largely dependent upon the vegetation of the area as opposed to the elevation. Observation ranges from good in the rice and grassland areas to poor in the dense forested areas.

Fields of fire were extremely limited in the dense forests and other areas of heavy undergrowth. In the rice lands dikes tended to limit the fields of fire for flat trajectory weapons.

Cover was provided by dikes, shell craters and ravines from flat trajectory weapons. Caves in the NUI BA BEN area and the enemy bunker and trench system provide cover from high trajectory weapons.

All forested areas provided good concealment from air and ground observation. Bamboo areas provided good concealment from ground observation while small villages provide good concealment for small foot mobile elements from aerial and ground observation.

Dense forested areas and bamboo croppings provided formidable obstacles to both foot and vehicle movement. Dense jungle slowed track movement to one kilometer per hour or less.

B. OPPOSING FORCES

The US forces consisted of the II Field Force, headquartered in Long Binh and with a tactical command post at Dau Tieng. It was commanded by Lieutenant General Jonathan O. Seaman until 24 March and Lieutenant General Bruce Palmer for the remainder of the operation. It consisted of the 1st Infantry Division commanded by MG John Hay and the 25th Infantry

Division commanded by MG John Tillson III. Collectively, these two divisions had the commitment of as many as twenty-two maneuver battalions, fourteen artillery battalions, and three South Vietnamese battalions. The approximate troop strength of this force was 25,000 men.

Although these divisions had organic brigades assigned and in-country, commitments to missions in other areas prohibited some of the organic brigades from participating in JUNCTION CITY. The task organization at the beginning of the operation is as follows:

1st Infantry Division
1st Bde, 1st ID
3d Bde, 1st ID
173d Abn Bde
TF Wallace (South Vietnamese)

25th Infantry Division
2d Bde, 25th ID
3d Bde, 4th ID
196th Light Infantry Bde
11th ACR (-)
TF Alpha (South Vietnamese)

For this operation, the 1st Bde, 1st ID and the 2d Bde, 25th ID both had four infantry battalions; the 173d and the 196th Brigades had three infantry battalions apiece; the 3d Bde, 1st ID had one infantry battalion, 1 mech battalion, 1 cavalry squadron and one armor company; the 3d Bde, 4th ID had two infantry battalions, one armor battalion (less one armor company), and one cavalry troop; and the 11th ACR was committed with its assigned units less the 2d Squadron. Task Force Alpha consisted of the 1st and 5th South Vietnamese Marine Battalions while Task Force Wallace consisted of the 35th South Vietnamese Ranger Battalion and one troop from the 1st Cavalry Regiment (South Vietnamese).

This task organization facilitated task force operations in which combined arms operations at battalion and squadron level were commonplace. Armored task forces with attached elements of infantry, artillery, tanks and cavalry roamed throughout the operations area. The infantry rode on the track vehicles and went into action as tank-infantry teams.¹

The opposing forces were the 9th Viet Cong Division and elements of the Committee of South Vietnam (COSVN) Headquarters. The approximate strength of this force was 7,000 men. The task organization of this force is:

COSVN
9th VC Div
271st Regt
272d Regt

101st NVA
273d Regt
70th Guards Regt

The COSVN was the supreme headquarters in the South which tied together the various elements of insurgency and provided direction to both the military and civilian Communist organizations. The 9th VC Division was subordinate to the COSVN and apparently had the territorial responsibility for the area corresponding to War Zone C.

The US forces held a tremendous advantage in the quality and quantity of weaponry. They faced no armor nor air threat while themselves possessing almost 100 M48A3C tanks, well over 400 armored cavalry assault vehicles (ACAVs--a M113 modified with armor shields and M60 gun kits), helicopter gunships, and plenty of US Air Force support in the form of B-52, A-1, F-4, F-100, and C-47 "spooky" gunship sorties. Additionally, the maneuver units were supported by 105-mm towed howitzers, 155-mm, 175-mm, and 8-inch self-propelled howitzers. Mortar organic to the maneuver units were the 4.2-inch and the 82-mm mortars. Tremendous firepower was also provided by M42 twin 40-mm Dusters and M55 Quad .50 machine guns. US forces also had the advantage in the type of ordnance available. Beehive artillery rounds which were cannisters filled with 8,000 metal darts and the cluster bomb units of the Air Force were both extremely effective against troops in the open or even in the jungle. CS and smoke were used effectively in flushing the enemy from tunnels and destroying captured rice.

On the other hand, VC forces had just received a standard infantry rifle, the Soviet-made AK-47. They possessed some 7.62 machine guns in each battalion and very few .51 caliber machine guns, if any at all. They had a healthy respect for US armor as evidenced by a pronounced increase in the use of antitank weapons such as RPG-2s, recoilless rifles, and Chinese-manufactured antitank mines. Fire support was provided by 60-mm, 82-mm, and for the first time in the war, 120-mm mortars. The artillery supporting the 9th VC Division were 82-mm, 120-mm, and 130-mm towed howitzers. Of these, it was the 130-mm howitzer which outranged the US 105-mm howitzer that proved most effective.

The corollary to firepower is mobility and again the US forces had the advantage of being able to move large numbers of men and supplies great distances rapidly--this being the result of the helicopter. JUNCTION CITY was initially supported by elements of three aviation groups which used 250 helicopters on D-day in displacing men, equipment, and supplies. This was the largest single day helicopter operation in the history of army aviation to date and also included a record number of Air Force sorties flown in a single day--575. Thirteen airmobile companies were used for the first four days of the operation. Thereafter the 12th Combat Aviation Group, with all its assets, was the sole source of support for JUNCTION CITY. By the end of the operation, army aviation had flown over 80,000 sorties and airlifted 19,000 tons of resupply.²

To assist mobility on the ground, extensive use of tankdozers, bulldozers, and Rome Plows (a large tractor with a specially configured dozer-type blade developed specifically for heavy duty, land-clearing operations) proved very effective in jungle-clearing operations, especially when teamed with infantry. Armored units provided road security and convoy escorts for travel along the main supply routes and AVLBs greatly assisted the timely movement of mechanized forces across streams and ravines.

The Viet Cong lacked the means to move great distances rapidly; however, they possessed an intimate knowledge of the terrain which allowed them to "melt into the jungle" and thus escape decisive combat. Having occupied the area for over twenty years, they had been able to develop an extensive underground network of tunnels and facilities. More importantly, the Cambodian border played a vital role in mobility; for once the Viet Cong made it across the border, they had nothing to fear.

The Viet Cong main line forces fought according to the doctrine of avoiding decisive combat unless they were convinced that through the use of surprise and well-planned attacks, they could achieve the defeat of a US force. Otherwise, they were content to use their knowledge of the terrain and the cover of darkness to harass US forces with booby traps, ambushes, mines, and mortar fires. This tactic was well suited to an enemy who was outgunned and outmanned and gave the VC forces an effectiveness out of proportion to their size. When the VC did conduct battalion or regimental size attacks, they showed evidence of careful planning and displayed professionalism in execution. They achieved tremendous volumes of small arms fire and advanced by leaps and bounds and normally conducted their attacks at night. The fortifications encountered were capable of sustaining very heavy artillery and air attacks and had well-planned defenses.⁴ Depending upon the circumstances, these fortifications could be stubbornly defended or simply abandoned.

To combat the Viet Cong, the US developed the offensive tactic of "search and destroy" operations. These operations were designed to find, fix, fight, and destroy enemy forces and their installations. These operations were normally executed with a heliborne force landing on a landing zone that had received either artillery or air (or both) preparatory fires. It was not uncommon to use sixty helicopters to move a battalion into an area which was still within range of supporting artillery. Upon landing, the infantry would establish an operating base and run patrols throughout the area in the attempt to locate the enemy or enemy installation or enemy supplies. Oftentimes, the operating base would become a fire support base at which artillery was located, the artillery having been conveyed or airlifted (105-mm howitzers only) to the site. Fire support bases such as these were usually located within range of another fire support base thereby allowing for mutually supporting fires. In search and destroy patrols, the role of the infantry and artillery was usually reversed. For the infantry would find and fix the enemy while calling in artillery and close air support to destroy and defeat the enemy.

Logistically, both forces seemed to be supported adequately. The Viet Cong relied on an unsophisticated but extremely effective supply and transportation system to provide their requirements. Foraging provided their subsistence, captured and stolen weapons and ammunition augmented the resupply of these items from the north, and homemade articles made from locally available resources accounted for some of their clothing and booby traps. On the other side, the American 1st Logistical Command established a forward logistical operations control center at Tay Ninh and three forward support bases in Soui Da, Trai Bi, and French Fort to support the US forces in JUNCTION CITY.⁵ Aerial resupply was used on a massive scale for Phase I and on a backup basis for most of the units during Phase II. The newness of this procedure is evidenced in the lessons learned remarks of the after action reports which list seemingly routine and commonplace procedures as improvements for use in the future. In addition to Army helicopters, C-130s were used extensively with excellent results and a great savings in Army aircraft and time. Through-putting artillery ammunition from the Long Binh Ammunition Supply Dump directly to fire support bases was a novel idea that was tried in Phase II and resulted in considerable savings in personnel, MHF, transportation, and time while providing the drivers and shotguns with some exciting memories.⁶ Suspension problems and a lack of repair parts to correct them degraded track availability somewhat while helicopter availability was adequate. The infusion program, a policy designed to relieve the pressure of the 100% rotation of experienced personnel one year following their arrival in country by the monthly transfers of 10% of a unit's personnel to another unit in-country, impacted adversely on unit morale and training, but it was a far better alternative than to allow the 100% turnover once every year. It was also found that American soldiers required refresher training and a period of acclimation prior to entry into combat.⁷

Intelligence for both sides played an important role in JUNCTION CITY. The VC depended upon an intricate and unusually reliable network of informants to predict US movements and to be able to either attack, ambush, or avoid US forces. The US forces employed aerial observation and photography, SLAR, sensors, infrared devices, and patrol reports in their attempt to find the enemy and to forecast his actions. Pattern activity analysis came into vogue just prior to JUNCTION CITY with its great success during CEDAR FALLS. It was an intelligence system consisting of detailed plotting on maps of information on enemy activity obtained from a variety of sources over an extended period of time. As more data was plotted, patterns of activity and locations emerged. It thereby became possible to focus prime attention on those areas of intensive or unusual activity.⁸ As a result of additional intelligence in January that indicated some movement of the 9th VC Division regiments, the thrust of the operation was changed from the eastern area of War Zone C to the west central portion of the area.

C. IMMEDIATE MILITARY OBJECTIVES

JUNCTION CITY was a search and destroy operation, one that used more troops to cover a larger area than ever before and one which employed the use of more helicopters than any previous operation in the Army's history. The mission of the II Field Force was to search and destroy to eradicate the COSVN and the 9th VC Division and their installations. Additionally they were to build CIDG/Special Forces camps and C-130 capable airfields. For the Viet Cong, their objectives seemed to be maintaining business as usual while attriting the enemy as much as possible and avoiding the risk of being defeated in detail.

D. FEASIBLE COURSES OF ACTION

The US forces had three basic feasible courses of action:

1. continue to ignore enemy activity in War Zone C;
2. commit even more combat forces while abandoning operations in other areas; or
3. commit forces as done so in JUNCTION CITY.

The Viet Cong options were to:

1. stand and fight with forces available in the area;
2. reinforce the 9th VC Division with up to three regiments; or
3. to defend when required to protect the withdrawal of key personnel, equipment, and records; otherwise harass US forces with mortars, snipers, booby traps and mines and when tactical superiority or surprise was gained, conduct limited attacks.

Operation JUNCTION CITY was a three-phase operation that took place from 22 February 1967 to 14 May 1967. It followed Operation CEDAR FALLS, a search and destroy operation by the same two divisions in the Iron Triangle, during January. CEDAR FALLS consisted primarily of small unit contacts and the onerous tasks of finding and destroying base camps, storage facilities, and tunnels and of clearing jungles. It was unique, however, in that one of its missions was to evacuate some 6,000 inhabitants of the Iron Triangle area and destroy their villages. JUNCTION CITY, on the other hand, was more varied in view of its scope and the fact that there were five battles interspersed among the air assaults and the numerous search and destroy activities.⁹ Immediately prior to JUNCTION CITY, two deception operations were conducted to cover the movement of troops and supplies to the areas adjacent to War Zone C. Operation GADSEN was conducted by the 25th Infantry Division along the Cambodian border in the extreme western portion of War Zone C, while the 1st Infantry Division conducted operation TUCSON in the area east of the Michelin rubber plantation.¹⁰

ENDNOTES

(Tactical Situation)

1. Starry, Donn A. Armored Combat in Vietnam New York: Arno Press 1980.
2. Combat Operations After Action Report II Field Force Vietnam, 9 Aug 1967.
3. Rogers, Bernard W. Cedar Falls-Junction City Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1971.
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5. Ibid.
6. Rogers, Bernard W. Cedar Falls-Junction City.
7. Farley, Roy W. "Blackhorse Report." Armor March-April 1968.
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9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.

IV. THE FIGHT

A. Initial disposition of forces.

1. Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army (VC/NVA). The lack of published sources concerning actual VC/NVA troop dispositions and actions presents a shortfall in performing a definitive analysis of Operation JUNCTION CITY. However, a careful survey of US intelligence sources before the battle portrays an enemy Order of Battle that subsequent events were to prove fairly accurate. Therefore, it was decided to reflect the US perceptions of the enemy rather than speculate as to their location, strength and intentions without adequate justification. The enemy Order of Battle is drawn specifically from the Periodic Intelligence Report (PERINTREPS) published by II Field Force in the two weeks preceding the initiation of Operation JUNCTION CITY.¹ Until such time as VC/NVA sources become available, it is left to the reader to determine the accuracy of US intelligence. As stated previously, the intelligence of enemy dispositions was proved by later events to have been at least feasible. Principal VC/NVA units involved in the battle were the Central Office in South Vietnam (COSVN), the 9th Viet Cong Division with three infantry regiments under its control (the 101st NVA, the 271st VC, and the 272d VC), the 273d VC Regiment under COSVN control, and the 70th Guards (or Security) Regiment, also under COSVN control.² A brief description of each of these elements follows.

(a) COSVN. The COSVN was the major Viet Cong military/political headquarters in South Vietnam. As with most high level headquarters, it was a diverse organization comprised of command and control, communications, logistics, civil affairs, transportation, and psychological operations elements. Its strength was believed to be 3,000, with its location in the northern portion of War Zone C.³ (See Map IV-A). It was also believed that the actual command and control cell was a highly mobile group of 50-70 personnel, who when threatened would literally go to ground or infiltrate into Cambodia.

(b) 9th VC Division. This division had operated in War Zone C since 1966 and was very familiar with the terrain.⁴

(1) 101st NVA Regiment. This NVA Regiment was rated at C-3, with a strength of 1,250. The Regiment was believed to be located west of An Loc and north of Highway 246.⁵ (See Map IV-A).

(2) 271st VC Regiment. This regiment was rated at C-2, with a strength of 2,400. The Regiment was believed to be located east of Lo Go and west of Highway 22.⁶ (See Map IV-A).

(3) 272d VC Regiment. This regiment was rated at C-3, with a strength of 1,850. Its location was plotted as south of Suoi Tre and west of the Saigon River.⁷ (See Map IV-A).

(c) 273d VC Regiment. This regiment, under direct control of the COSVN, was rated at C-3, with a strength of 1,700. Its location was plotted in War Zone D, east of Lai Khe and Ben Cat.⁸ (See Map IV-A.)

(d) 70th Security Regiment. This regiment was believed to have the mission of securing the COSVN and was directly controlled by that Headquarters. It was rated at C-4, with a strength of 1,000. It was believed to be located between Prek Lok and Katum.⁹

2. US/Allied forces. The United States and Allied forces that took part in Operation JUNCTION CITY operated under the control of II Field Force. The major combat forces were task organized under two US Army divisions: the 1st Infantry Division with headquarters in Di An, and the 25th Infantry Division with headquarters in Cu Chi. The initial task organization is depicted in Enci IV-1.¹⁰ A brief description of each of these brigade size elements follows.

(a) 1st Infantry Division

(1) 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. This Brigade was initially organized with four US infantry battalions (1st Battalion 2d Infantry, 1st Battalion 26th Infantry, 1st Battalion 28th Infantry, and 2d Battalion 18th Infantry) and Task Force Wallace, a South Vietnamese formation composed of the 35th Ranger Battalion and the 3d Squadron 1st Cavalry Regiment. Prior to D-Day, 1st Brigade forces were marshalling at Minh Thanh in preparation for their airmobile assaults.¹¹

(2) 3d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. This Brigade started the operation with three battalion-size elements: 1st Battalion 16th Infantry, 2d Battalion 2d Infantry (Mechanized), and 1st Squadron 4th Cavalry. Prior to D-Day, the 3d Brigade was located in the Vicinity of Soui Da.¹²

(3) 173d Airborne Brigade. This separate Airborne Brigade was organized with three parachute infantry battalions: the 1st, 2d, and 4th Battalions 503d Infantry (Airborne). The 1st and 4th Battalions had already moved to Quan Loi in preparation for their airmobile assaults on D-Day. The 2d Battalion remained at Bien Hoa and staged there for their airborne assault.¹³

(4) 1st Brigade, 9th Infantry. This Brigade became OPCON to the 1st Infantry Division on 3 March. The Brigade consisted of one infantry battalion, (4th Battalion 39th Infantry), one mechanized infantry (2d Battalion 47th Infantry (Mechanized)) and one cavalry squadron (3d Squadron 5th Cavalry).¹⁴

(b) 25th Infantry Division

(1) 2d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division. This Brigade consisted of two infantry battalions (1st and 2d Battalions 27th Infantry), and the 1st Battalion 5th Infantry (Mechanized). Prior to D-Day, the Brigade was moved from Cu Chi to Trai Bi.¹⁵

(2) 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division. This Brigade had terminated Operation Gadsden and was located in the Trai Bi area. It consisted of the 2d Battalion 12th Infantry, the 3d Battalion 22d Infantry, the 2d Battalion 14th Infantry, and the 2d Battalion 22d Infantry (Mechanized).¹⁶

(3) 196th Light Infantry Brigade. Prior to D-Day, this Brigade was located at Tay Ninh and Trai Bi. The Brigade's principal maneuver elements were the 2d Battalion 1st Infantry, the 3d Battalion 21st Infantry, and the 4th Battalion 31st Infantry.¹⁷

(4) 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (-). The 11th ACR was made up of the 1st and 3d Squadrons, and the 4th Battalion 23d Infantry (Mechanized). Prior to D-Day, the 11th ACR assembled its elements in the vicinity of the French Fort.¹⁸

(5) Task Force Alpha. This unit consisted of the 1st and 5th Marine Battalions (ARVN) and was located in Saigon prior to D-Day.¹⁹

3. Concept of Operation. II Field Force planned to drop a sixty-kilometer, horseshoe-shaped cordon into War Zone C. The open end of the horseshoe faced south; powerful ground elements would sweep from south to north, crushing enemy forces against the cordon. (See Map IV-A.) The 1st Infantry Division was responsible for the northern and eastern portions of the horseshoe. The 25th Division was responsible for the western portion and for the forces sweeping from south to north.²⁰ Missions for brigade-size elements are listed below.

(a) 1st Infantry Division

(1) 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. Conduct three battalion-size airmobile assaults into the northern sector of the horseshoe and conduct search and destroy operations in assigned areas of operation.²¹

(2) 3d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. Secure Highway 4 from the French Fort to south of Katum and conduct search and destroy operations in assigned areas of operation.²²

(3) 173d Airborne Brigade. Conduct two battalion-size airmobile assaults and one battalion-size parachute assault into the northeast portion of the horseshoe. Conduct search and destroy operations in assigned areas of operation.²³

(b) 25th Infantry Division.

(1) 2d Bde, 25th Infantry Division. Attack in zone from south to north in the western portion of the horseshoe to destroy COSVN facilities and VC/NVA forces and then conduct search and destroy operations in assigned areas of responsibility.²⁴

(2) 3d Bde, 4th Infantry Division. Establish blocking positions in the southeast sector of the horseshoe and conduct search and destroy operations in assigned areas of operation.²⁵

(3) 196th Light Infantry Brigade. Conduct three battalion-size airmobile assaults to seal escape routes in the northwest portion of the horseshoe and conduct search and destroy operations in zone.²⁶

(4) 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (-). Attack in zone from south to north in the eastern portion of the horseshoe to destroy COSVN facilities and VC/NVA forces and then conduct search and destroy operations in assigned areas of responsibility.²⁷

B. D-Day, 22 February 1967. At 0811, lead elements of the 1st Battalion 28th Infantry made the first airmobile assault of Operation JUNCTION CITY into LZ 5 on the northern portion of the horseshoe. A single lift of seventy helicopters carried the men of the Big Red One into battle.²⁸ Two minutes later, the first of four lifts of ten helicopters, separated by thirty-second intervals, carried assault troops of 2d Bn 1st Infantry into a LZ near FSB Mustang.²⁹ There was sporadic contact during each of these insertions. Meanwhile, in the northeast corner of the horseshoe, the first US airborne assault of the war was about to take place. At 0900, troopers from Task Force 2-503 jumped from thirteen C-130 aircraft into Drop Zone C, north of Katum. The jump was unopposed, but eleven minor injuries were sustained.

Thirty minutes later, seventy UH1D helicopters departed Quan Loi, carrying the bulk of 1st Battalion 503d Infantry. At 1035, this unit combat assaulted into LZ 11 and LZ 12 against no opposition.³⁰

Because no single brigade controlled enough airmobile assets to carry more than one infantry battalion at a time, the remainder of the day found the 1st Brigade, 1st Division, the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, and the 173d Airborne Brigade shuttling aircraft in battalion-size airmobile assaults. In the northwestern portion of the horseshoe, 3d Battalion 21st Infantry air assaulted into FSB Panther at 1000 and was engaged by a small enemy force who quickly withdrew. The final airmobile assault in the 196th Brigade sector began at 1335 with 4th Battalion 31st Infantry landing east of OBJ Cougar, with no opposition.³¹

In the 1st Brigade, 1st Division area, the final two infantry battalions were inserted in turn without incident: 1st Battalion 26th Infantry into LZ 1 at 1130, and 1st Battalion 2d Infantry into LZ 3 at 1630. Each battalion used a single lift of sixty aircraft.³² Meanwhile, the last battalion of the 173d Airborne Brigade (4th Battalion, 503d Infantry) assaulted into LZs B and C at 1415 without enemy contact.³³

As the aerial net was being thrown, ground forces were maneuvering on either flank of the inverted horseshoe, and into position to sweep into the open end.

In the east, the 3d Brigade 1st Infantry Division sector, the cavalry squadron attacked north along Route 4 at 0630, followed by a mechanized infantry unit. No significant contact was made although ten tanks were damaged by mines. By 1510, the cavalry squadron had linked up with elements of the 173d Airborne Brigade. In the wake of the cavalry/mechanized sweep, infantry and artillery established a string of Fire Support Bases.³⁴

In the west, the 3d Brigade 4th Division, continued battalion search and destroy operations both east and west of Highway 22. Light contact was made with small enemy elements.³⁵

The 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (-) and the 2d Brigade, 25th Division, maneuvered to jump-off positions generally south of Highway 247. Their attacks were to start the following day.³⁶

As D-Day of the largest military operation of the war to date drew to a close, the planners must have enjoyed at least a moment of satisfaction. Eight battalions had assaulted by helicopter, one by parachute, with negligible enemy interference. Ground elements had maneuvered quickly to assigned positions. US casualties had been extremely light, four killed and twenty-three wounded. A total of twenty US battalions had been committed around the horseshoe. D-Day had been the largest single-day helicopter operation in the history of Army Aviation--a total of 249 helicopters had been used.³⁷ Extensive preparation of LZs by B-52 and close air support aircraft succeeded in protecting Army helicopters in initial airmobile assaults.³⁸

C. D+1, 23 February 1967. Early on D+1, the 2d Brigade, 25th Division and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (-) attacked north into the open end of the horseshoe. Opposition was again light, with some tanks and APCs damaged by mines and RPG fires. Both units began to uncover significant caches of enemy supplies and equipment, and numerous fortifications and base camp areas.³⁹ Similarly, the Brigades operating on the periphery of the horseshoe also uncovered enemy installations. 1st Brigade, 1st Division discovered a battalion-size base camp complete with shower facilities. Contact was still light, with enemy forces reported at squad size or smaller.⁴⁰ At 0905, 3d Brigade, 1st Division air assaulted an additional

battalion, 2d Battalion 28th Infantry into an LZ southwest of Katum.⁴¹ (See Map IV-B.) The 25th Division received the attachment of TF Alpha, which had been lifted from Saigon to Trai Bi.⁴² The units on the periphery of the horseshoe spent D+1 improving local security and conducting company-level search and destroy operations.

D. D+2, 24 February 1967. On this day, the Commander, II Field Force, sent a message to the Commanding Generals of the 1st and 25th Divisions congratulating them on the emplacement of the cordon and directing that a thorough search be made of western War Zone C.⁴³ The 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and the 2d Brigade, 25th Division continued the drives northward. More base camps and installations were found, some built underground.⁴⁴ Contact remained light and sporadic. In the southeast, 3d Brigade, 1st Division committed its last battalion, 1st of the 16th Infantry, to the periphery of the horseshoe. Prior to that movement, however, from Soui Da, the battalion with attached elements from the 173d Airborne Brigade had sustained an 82-mm mortar attack. US casualties were three killed and thirty wounded.^{45,46} In the northwest portion of the horseshoe, the Vietnamese Marine TF Alpha air assaulted into AO Cougar near the Cambodian border, and attacked south. Resistance was light. The amount and diversity of enemy equipment captured began to mount. Significant amounts of ammunition, weapons, rice and miscellaneous supplies, ranging from fish sauce to dynamite to electronic equipment was taken.⁴⁷

E. 25-28 February 1967. During this period, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and the 2d Brigade, 25th Division completed their sweeps into the horseshoe, and settled down to extensive search and destroy operations. The 11th ACR had turned west to operate in the 2d Brigade sector on the 26th. Increasingly larger amounts of supplies were being discovered, including a large hospital complex with two operating rooms and space for 150 patients.⁴⁸ Contact with VC elements within the horseshoe were characterized by US vehicles detonating mines, isolated RPG fire and brief engagements by small elements. On the periphery of the horseshoe, the tempo of action began to increase. On 25-26 February, a company from the 3d Brigade, 4th Division had successive contact against an estimated reinforced VC Company in the area of a discovered base camp (XT 046830). The VC showed a willingness to fight, and inflicted thirty-seven casualties (eight killed) on the US forces. Eleven VC KIA were found. The VC unit was the 3d Battalion, 271st Regiment.⁴⁹ On 28 February, the 173d Airborne Brigade discovered a PIO/PSYOPS installation of the COSVN, including an underground photographic laboratory containing 120 reels of motionpicture film and numerous still photographs.^{50,51} On this same day the first major battle of Operation JUNCTION CITY occurred in the sector of the 3d Brigade, 1st Division. A detailed description of that action is attached at Enclosure IV-2.

F. 1-9 March 1967. During this period, the units inside and on the periphery of the horseshoe conducted extensive search and destroy

operations. On 4 March, the 1st Brigade, 9th Division became OPCON to 1st Division and had missions of securing Highway 13 from Lai Khe to Quan Loi.⁵² 1st Brigade, 1st Division found a COSVN Propaganda center northeast of Katum.⁵³ On 3 March, around noon, a company from the 173d Airborne Brigade made contact with an estimated enemy company in the vicinity of XT 3694, east of Katum. The enemy force employed considerable firepower which was countered by the US paratroopers. In the intense engagement which lasted about thirty minutes, casualties were high on both sides: 20 US KIA, 28 US WIA, and 39 VC KIA (BC). The enemy unit withdrew and was later determined to be an element of the 70th Guards Regiment. On the 6th of March, the 173d Airborne conducted three battalion-size airmobile assaults into LZs south of Bo Tuc on Route 246 southeast of Katum.⁵⁴ On 6 March also, the two Squadrons of the 11th ACR began a sweep southward along the Cambodian border toward Lo Go. Early on 6 March, the mechanized infantry battalion attached to the 11th ACR had been motored in its firebase at XT 039789 and suffered forty-one casualties.⁵⁵ The 1st Brigade 1st Division relocated to Quan Loi on 4 March, terminating its participation in Phase I.⁵⁶

G. 10-17 March 1967. The second major engagement of the operation occurred on 10 March in the 3d Brigade, 1st Division area. A detailed description of that action is attached at Enclosure IV-3. On 11 March, while sweeping near the Cambodian border (VICWT 9279), a troop from the 11th ACR struck an enemy force in well-prepared, fortified positions. Supported by air strikes and gunships, the cavalry trapped some of the Viet Cong east of the river and maintained contact throughout the night. The enemy left twenty-eight dead and thirty-one weapons on the battlefield, and a large amount of COSVN propaganda material was captured, including two electrically powered Chinese printing presses, weighing a ton each.⁵⁷ With Phase I of the operation winding down, major units began to shift positions. TF Alpha terminated its participation in JUNCTION CITY on 11 March and returned to Saigon.⁵⁸ The 173d Airborne, operating southeast of Katum had continual, if sporadic, contact with elements of the 101st NVA Regiment until it returned to Bien Hoa on 15 March.⁵⁹ The 3d Brigade, 1st Division turned over responsibility for the security of Prek Lok Special Forces Camp, the old French Fort, and Highway 4 to the 196th Brigade on 14 March, and departed to relieve its sister brigade (2d) of its Revolutionary Development mission.⁶⁰ The 11th ACR continued search and destroy operations until 15 March when it returned to its regimental base camp.⁶¹ The 3d Brigade 4th Division returned to its home base, Dau Tieng, on 15 March.⁶²

H. Phase I of Operation JUNCTION CITY terminated at 172400H March 67. US forces had combed the area inside the horseshoe. At least 835 VC/NVA had been killed, 15 captured, along with 264 individual and crew-served weapons and enormous amounts of supplies and equipment.⁶³

I. Phase II. The plan for Phase II was for the eastern portion of War Zone C to undergo the same rigorous search and destroy operation that had been applied to the western portion. The targets remained the COSVN and the 9th Viet Cong Division. On the US Side, the two control headquarters under II Field Force remained the 1st and 25th Divisions. Brigades were shifted about and the task organization is reflected at Enclosure IV-4. Missions of each brigade-size element are listed below.

(1) 1st Infantry Division

(a) 1st Brigade, 1st Division. Secure Route 246, the bridge over the Saigon River, the Special Forces and Civilian Irregular Defense Group camp and airfield, and fire support patrol bases.⁶⁴ (See Map IV-C.)

(b) 2d Brigade, 1st Division. Airmobile assault into OA Faust, conduct search and destroy missions south to Route 246, then continue operations into OA Sioux.⁶⁵

(c) 1st Brigade, 9th Division. Secure Route 13 from Lai Khe to Quan Loi and defend assigned fire bases in operation areas.⁶⁶

(d) 173d Airborne Brigade. Attached on 20 March, secure staging area at Minh Thanh, conduct airmobile assaults into eastern War Zone C commencing 23 March.⁶⁷

(e) 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (-). Attached on 1 April, assumed mission of 1st Brigade, 9th Division.⁶⁸

(2) 25th Infantry Division (See Map IV-C.)

(a) 196th Infantry Brigade. Secure installations vicinity Prek Lok, keep Route 4 open, conduct search and destroy operations in assigned areas of responsibility.⁶⁹

(b) 3d Brigade, 4th Division. Establish fire support bases and conduct search and destroy operations in assigned areas of responsibility.⁷⁰

J. 18-21 March 1967. The initial operations of the 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division resulted in heavy contact with the 272d VC Regiment. A detailed description of the third major engagement of Operation JUNCTION CITY is attached at Enclosure IV-5. The fourth major engagement had been fought on 19-20 March by elements of the 1st Brigade, 9th Division securing Route 13 north of Lai Khe. See Enclosure IV-6 for a detailed description of that action. On 21 March, the 2d Brigade, 1st Division air assaulted infantry battalions into LZs Bravo and Charlie and began search and destroy operations southward.⁷¹

K. 22-30 March 1967. Brigades conducted mostly company-size search and destroy operations. The 3d Brigade 4th Division concentrated on the area around FSB Gold, making light sporadic contact and uncovering Viet Cong base areas and caches.⁷² East of FSB Gold, the 173d Airborne Brigade had established FSB Parry, and conducted air assaults, southwest, west, and northwest of Parry. The paratroopers located numerous small base camp areas and had frequent light contact with small enemy elements.⁷³ The 1st Brigade 9th Division continued its security mission of Route 13 until 29 March when it was released from Operation JUNCTION CITY and reverted back to 9th Division control.⁷⁴ The 196th Brigade and the 1st Brigade, 1st Division continued their local security and search and destroy operations, with enemy contacts mostly limited to mortar and sniper attacks, and persistent mining of prominent roadways by VC infiltrators. During this period, 2d Brigade, 1st Division secured Fire Support Base Thrust and launched two battalion-size air assaults into LZ George.⁷⁵ Extensive supply dumps, fortifications and tunnel complexes were discovered during these operations.

L. 31 March-9 April 1967. In the afternoon of 31 March, one of the battalions of the 2d Brigade, 1st Division operating northwest of LZ George made contact with the Viet Cong 271st Regiment. This precipitated the fifth and final major engagement of Operation JUNCTION CITY. The Battle of Ap Gu is described in detail at Enclosure IV-7. To the east of Ap Gu, the 1st Brigade, 1st Division continued to be harassed by mine laying parties, snipers and occasional intense mortar barrages. Two such barrages caused sixty-four US casualties (two KIA) at FSB Charlie on 7 April.⁷⁶ The 173d Airborne Brigade continued operating around FSB Parry, now to the east and southeast. Contact was frequent against small enemy elements employing hit and run tactics.⁷⁷ The 196th Brigade employed its "Mobile Brigade" concept during this period, operating in the northern sector of its assigned area, while the 3d Brigade 4th Division began sweeping southward toward Dau Lieng. Both brigades had no significant contacts, but continued to find VC equipment, installations and fortifications.

M. 9-15 April 1967. This period saw a wind down in operations, as VC/NVA forces became increasingly hard to find. II Field Force units phased out of the operation until Phase II was officially terminated on 15 April.⁷⁸

N. Phase III. 15 April-14 May 1967. In Phase III, Operation JUNCTION CITY scaled down to a brigade size operation. Under the control of the 25th Division, the 3d Brigade 4th Division conducted search and destroy missions north of Tay Ninh and throughout the lower western half of War Zone C. On the 21st of April, this brigade was replaced by the 1st Brigade 9th Division, reinforced with US armor and some South Vietnamese Rangers. Continued operations in Tay Ninh-War Zone C netted little gain; VC/NVA units avoided contact and became increasingly difficult to fight. Only very small enemy forces were encountered, and US casualties were caused primarily by mines and booby traps during this phase. At midnight 14 May, Operation JUNCTION CITY was officially brought to a close.⁷⁹

O. Key Events. Although the five major clashes between US and Viet Cong forces certainly constitute key events of this battle, other events, more subtle, were perhaps more telling in the final outcome. First, the Allied plan for the pitching of the horseshoe was brilliantly planned and executed in a tactical sense. Using Operation CEDAR FALLS, Gadsden and Tucson as a deceptive measure to position forces prior to D-Day permitted an unprecedented massing of forces in III Corps. The multiple assaults on the periphery of the horseshoe achieved tactical surprise on the ground. However, by the end of D-Day, the shape and purpose of the cordon must have become clear to the Viet Cong in the area. Thus, these elements were permitted a 12-36 hour period to infiltrate through the cordon to sanctuaries in Cambodia or perhaps more accurately to disperse and disappear into underground fortifications and installations. It is significant that no major contact with VC forces occurred within the confines of the horseshoe. In contrast, during Phase II, without the elaborate cordon, US units air assaulted directly into suspected enemy areas were violently attacked by regimental-size VC forces at Soui Tie and Ap Gu, leading to one of the ultimate US purposes of the operation--destruction of major Viet Cong tactical formations. The final key event was the survival of the COSVN. Although ancillary sub-units of this headquarters were located and destroyed, the main headquarters element suffered only temporary disruption, at worse.

P. The Outcome. The termination of Operation JUNCTION CITY brought on victory claims from both sides. Curiously enough, the arguments of both sides contained substantial merit. From the US perspective, an in-country safe haven had been eliminated, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces had been beaten soundly and driven from the field in five separate major engagements, enormous quantities of supplies and installations had been captured or destroyed, CIDG and Special Forces camps had been established and finally, a combined arms tactic of infantry, armor, artillery, and aviation had been adeptly applied in bringing an elusive foe to battle.⁸⁰ From the Viet Cong perspective, they had survived this massive onslaught of Americans and Vietnamese, inflicted substantial casualties on the attackers, and in the end remained in possession of the vast majority of territory that they had controlled at the onset.⁸¹ Casualties became an arguable point for both sides. Listed below are the totals given from the After-Action Report of II Field Force.⁸²

US LOSSES

Personnel: 218 KIA
1,576 WIA

Materiel Damaged: 55 APC
27 ACAV
1 VTR
50 Tanks
3 2-1/2T Trks
4 1/4T Trks
7 5T Trks
3 3/4T Trks
4 Tank Dozers
1 M88
1 155 How, SP
5 105 How
2 Bulldozers
1 AVLB

Materiel Destroyed: 3 Tanks
14 APC
7 ACAV
2 3/4T Trks
2 2-1/2T Trks
7 5T Trks
2 155 How
3 105 How
2 Quad-50s
1 M577

VC LOSSES

Personnel: 2,728 KIA (BC)
34 PW
137 Ralliers
65 Detainees

Equipment: 491 individual weapons
100 crew-served weapons
754 artillery and mortar rounds
6,576 grenades
100,450 small arms rounds
508 assorted mines
811 tons rice
641 lbs medical supplies
17,361 assorted batteries
475,000 pages of assorted documents
4,313 bunkers
1,463 military structures

From North Vietnamese sources published in 1967, a heavily propagandized version of the battle gives only Allied casualties:83

14,000 killed or wounded (mostly Americans)
801 tanks or APCs destroyed or damaged
200 other vehicles destroyed or damaged
167 aircraft shot down or damaged
90 artillery pieces destroyed or damaged

Hanoi's practice of publishing ludicrously inflated numbers is evident in these figures.

In the final analysis, neither side won a clear cut victory. From the American vantage point only one of the three missions of the operation was clearly accomplished--the establishment of CIDG and Special Forces Camps. The destruction of the 9th Viet Cong Division was at least partially successful, if only temporary. Destruction of the COSVN was clearly not achieved. War Zone C was traversed from end to end with much booty captured or destroyed. From the Viet Cong side, the success of survival was tainted with high casualties and lost equipment and supplies.

In a tactical sense, both sides fought skillfully. The Americans exploited their airmobility and massive firepower to seek out the enemy, then to overcome him when found. The Viet Cong exploited their small unit mobility with both hit-and-run harassment and massing for major attacks. The Viet Cong must be faulted for their questionable tactic of attacking armored vehicles and infantry in defensive positions. The attack at Prek Lok II may be excusable as a tactical experiment, but the subsequent similar attack at Bau Bang could have been avoided. However, it is possible that these expensive attacks in fact achieved their intended purpose; i.e. to focus US attention away from threatened areas. Although highly speculative, this may in fact have been the motive for the violent Viet Cong reactions to US forces air assaulted into Soui Tre and Ap Gu. The intent of the Viet Cong may have been to sacrifice its maneuver forces by attacking and then drawing the pursuing Americans off in a direction away from more vulnerable elements. Destruction of the defending American force, then, may have been desirable but not necessarily required. Another theory argues that Hanoi wanted a military tactical victory to gain political leverage on the international scene.84

It is to the American units' credit that tactical security was generally high, especially in countering the major Viet Cong attacks. Similarly, credit is due to the Viet Cong small units who continuously harassed US armor and mechanized forces with RPG-2 fires and antitank mines.

The morale of both sides must be rated as high. The Americans were confident in their abilities to conduct mobile aggressive operations away from heavily populated areas. Down to small unit level, units were quick to

counterattack, reinforce, and to pursue a withdrawing enemy. Logistical and medical support for the American forces was outstanding and contributed significantly to maintaining the high morale of the fighting soldiers. The Viet Cong had the confidence of fighting on familiar ground, well fortified and camouflaged, and had the reassurance of a proximate safe haven, the Cambodian border. Even in the face of the unprecedented scale of Operation JUNCTION CITY, Viet Cong leaders refused to relinquish the initiative. Down to the lowest level, VC units attacked, ambushed and mined the American attackers. Although specific units were badly mauled in the major battles, in all cases, these units were able to extricate themselves from the battlefield, carrying many of their dead and wounded, and most of their weapons. It is interesting to note that both US and North Vietnamese sources rated their respective adversaries morale as low and worsening.

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(The Fight)

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25. COAAF, 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, p. 12.
26. COAAR, 196th Light Infantry BVRigade, p. 11.
27. COAAR, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, p. 15.
28. AAR, 1st Infantry Division, (1st Brigade attachment), p. 2.
29. COAAR, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, p. 13.
30. COAAR, 173d Airborne Brigade, pp. 16-17.
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33. COAAR, 173d Airborne Brigade, p. 17.
34. AAR, 1st Infantry Division, (3d Brigade attachment), pp. 2-3.
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44. COAAR, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, p. 21.
45. AAR, 1st Infantry Division, (1st Brigade attachment), p. 3.
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48. COAAR, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, p. 23.
49. COAAR, 3d Brigade, 4th Division, pp. 9, 16-17.
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51. COAAR, II Field Force, p. 22.
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V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTION

A. Immediate. The immediate impact of Operation JUNCTION CITY was a lessening of Viet Cong activity in War Zone C. Within III Corps, during the three phases of the operation, Viet Cong activities were focused against the US units operating in the area, thereby reducing the pressure against other more populated areas within the Corps. Any offensive operations contemplated by the 9th Viet Cong Division were disrupted, and time and resources would be required to replenish the supplies and to replace the installations lost during the Americans' search and destroy operations. The few Special Forces and CIDG camps remained as the Allied legacy to the operation, a tangible reminder to both sides that War Zone C was no longer a safe Viet Cong refuge. That distinction was now reserved only for Cambodian territory proper. From a high level Viet Cong perspective, its units in War Zone C provided an economy of force operation that attacked eight US brigades for two to three months. That US/GVN forces could not sustain that concentration was evident in the systematic reduction of forces following D-Day. The operation was far from decisive, despite the clear tactical successes in the five major engagements previously detailed. In a strategy of attrition, to which each side was ascribing in its own fashion, an opponent must be dealt losses which he can not replace or reconstitute fast enough. In Operation JUNCTION CITY, both sides expended the assets that it could most afford, and successfully protected those that were most difficult to replace. Consistent with the American concept of war-fighting, lavish amounts of ammunition were expended by artillery, tac air and B-52 bomber missions; also armored vehicles were used up in moderately high numbers. These expenditures and losses were militarily and politically palatable as long as the most precious resource was conserved--the lives of American soldiers. From the American side, JUNCTION CITY was not perceived, nor was it in fact, an inordinate expenditure of American lives. On the other hand, the Viet Cong gave up what it could most easily replace, the lives of its soldiers, and supplies, installations and fortifications. With the stream of personnel and logistics running almost uninterrupted from North Vietnam into eastern Cambodia, these elements were truly expendable. The Viet Cong demonstrated their capability to protect those assets that in fact were valuable and extremely difficult to replace--command, control, and communications elements, headquarters of battalions, regiments, divisions and higher and mortar/artillery units. This is not to imply that either side was completely successful. The American command was certainly distressed to suffer over 200 soldiers killed, and the Viet Cong demonstrated in lives its commitment to protect headquarters elements.

B. Long Term

Operation JUNCTION CITY, like the other major Allied tactical offensives, did support the long-term, Allied objectives by at least delaying North Vietnam's effort to impose a Communist state on an unwilling South Vietnam. JUNCTION CITY set back the progress of the NVA and VC in the

border regions north of Saigon, although it is hard to tell how significantly the operation really affected the Communist effort. The NVA/VC regiments which were virtually destroyed during the operation reappeared on the battlefield within six months, and suspected VC were observed back in the area within weeks.¹ Further, since no large allied forces were left behind after the operation, it is doubtful that any lasting impression endured in the region. JUNCTION CITY certainly did not place the communists in a position from which they could not recover, and thus the operation did not decisively influence the outcome of the war.

JUNCTION CITY was also not one of the most important battles during the Vietnam War. It lacked the strategic significance of the early battles in 1964 and those during the 1968 Tet offensive. JUNCTION CITY was in no way as important as the siege at Khe Sanh nor did it achieve the political impact of even the relatively small actions in Saigon during the Tet offensive of 1968. However, JUNCTION CITY was of tactical significance because it was the largest Allied operation of the war up to that time, and did show that such large-scale operations were possible. And, for what it is worth, it also included the only airborne assault of the war. But, none of these factors can earn JUNCTION CITY greater importance relative to many of the other battles of the war.

C. Military Lessons Learned. The primary military lesson to be learned was clearly apparent to both sides after the battle. The density of forces required to effectively man a sixty-kilometer cordon in dense jungle and forest is prohibitively high. Despite the largest massing of Allied forces in the war to date, the numbers were simply inadequate. General Hay, Commander of the 1st Infantry, stated as one of three factors contributing to the failure of destroying the COSVN, "The extreme difficulty of establishing a seal with sufficient troop density to deny infiltration routes to VC units thoroughly familiar with the dense jungle terrain."² North Vietnamese sources gave a similar appraisal. A second important lesson that was recognized but perhaps not learned was the bankruptcy of the search and destroy operation. Although undeniably successful in immediate execution, the transitory nature of this tactic permitted neither a semi-permanent presence on which the populace could depend, nor a systematic detailed "cleansing" of an area, to include underground structures, caves and tunnels. Operation Cedar Falls, with its bulldozing, jungle clearing emphasis was indicative of the level of effort required even when area was pinpointed and isolated. The dilemma of Cambodia as an inviolate sanctuary continued to cripple Allied military strategy, and that lesson was well learned and exploited by the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. However, the problem remained insoluble on an operational level and only three years later under a new Presidential Administration were Allied ground forces unleashed westward. The final lesson learned is perhaps the most subtle and the most easily forgotten. The crux of that lesson explains many of the apparent illogical results of battles between militarily unsophisticated armies and technologically superior armies in the twentieth century. A

resourceful and determined enemy, adequately armed with small arms, mines, mortars, light artillery and antiaircraft, whose strategic objectives in the short or mid-term are to survive and to avoid defeat, can force a technologically superior army attempting to eliminate it, to fight on terrain and under conditions in which technology and firepower are nullified. The Americans should have learned this fighting the Chinese in Korea. They experienced it time and again in Vietnam. The Israelis recognized it in the suburbs of Beirut, and the Russians have discovered it in the hills of Afghanistan.

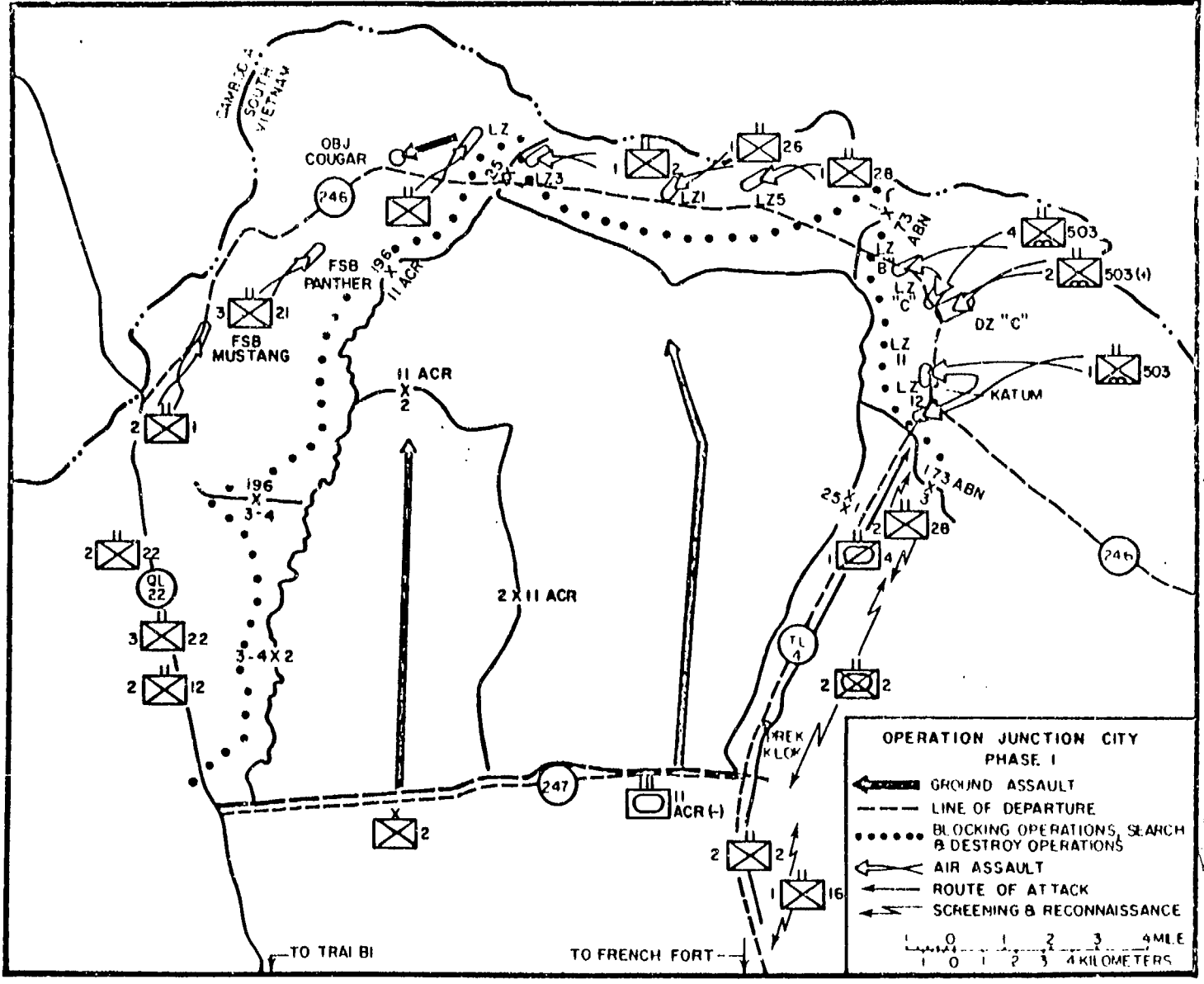
D. Strategic Lessons Learned. JUNCTION CITY is representative of many of the large-scale operations of the 1967-1969 time frame, and as such illustrates the shortcomings of search and destroy tactics and a strategy of attrition in this type conflict. Except during the Communist offensives in 1965, 1968, and 1972, such attrition-oriented tactics could not be decisive. Though large numbers of the enemy were killed, they were quickly replaced. When, as in JUNCTION CITY, the enemy were driven from their strongpoints in South Vietnam, they returned after US troops moved elsewhere. Other than during the Communist offensives, large unit tactics do not appear to have been appropriate for what was primarily a political war and an insurgency. Ardant du Picq stated a century ago "that you cannot hold a country militarily if you cannot control it politically."³ There remains the unanswerable question of whether American military effort would have been better spent in pacification rather than large-scale operations such as JUNCTION CITY. Large-scale search and destroy tactics, essentially a strategy of attrition, could prevent the Communists from winning a military victory. However such a strategy was not one by which the South could eventually win the war. In conclusion, Operation JUNCTION CITY in 1967 was not the "turning point" ascribed to by General Rogers,⁴ but was more closely akin to a staircase in what General Palmer characterized as "an escalating military stalemate."⁵

ENDNOTES

(Significance of the Action)

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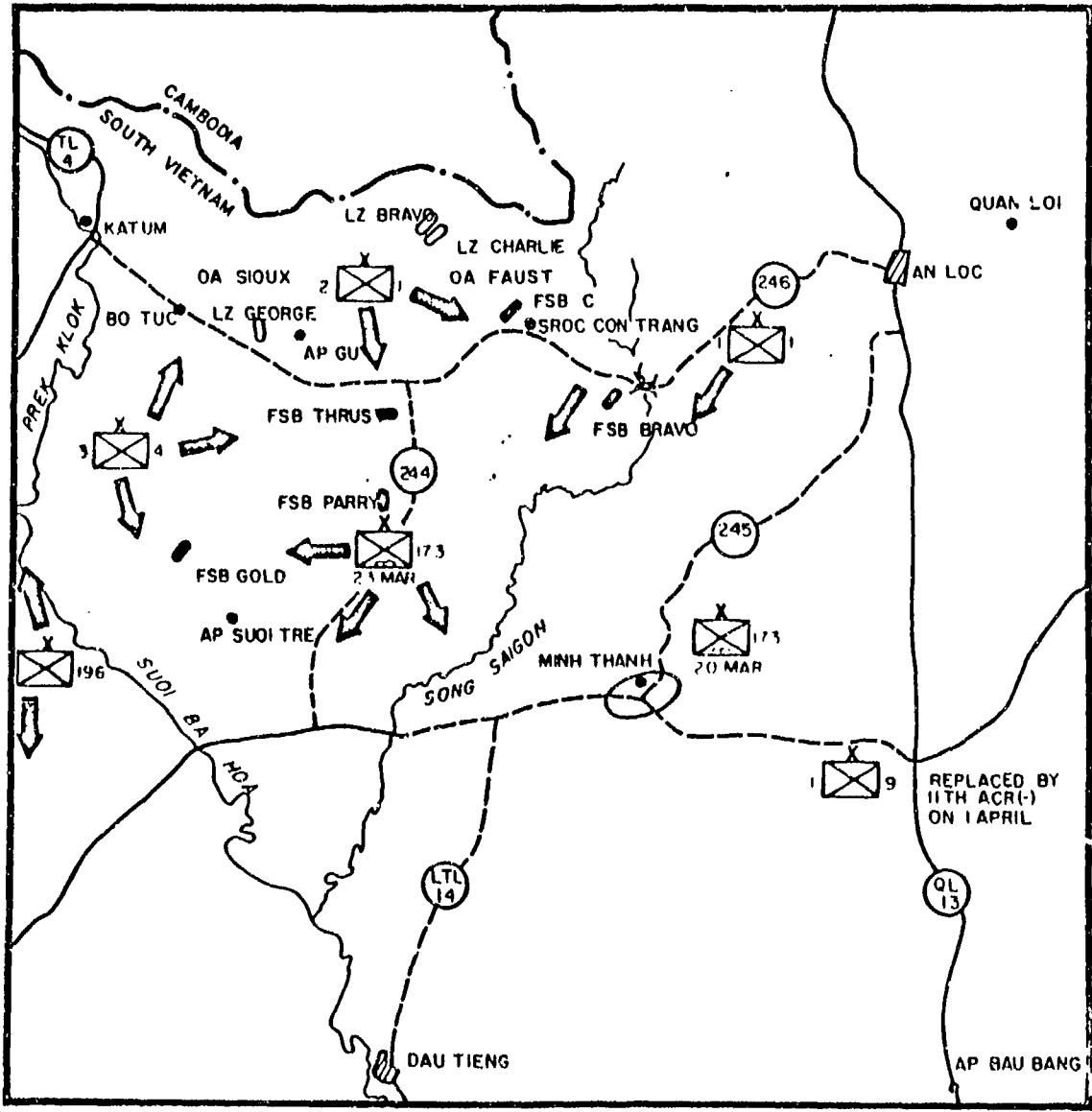
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 CLASS. _____
 COLOR-REVERSE _____
 COLOR-REVERSE _____
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 LIGHT _____
 DARK _____
 DARK _____
 THAT _____
 THAT _____



37.13

MAP 77-5

CLASS _____
 CLASS _____
 COLOR - REVERSE _____
 COLOR - REVERSE _____
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 DARK _____
 ON - LIGHT _____
 ON - LIGHT _____
 ON - TINT _____
 ON - TINT _____



39-C-

IV C
MAP IV-C

OPERATION JUNCTION CITY
TASK ORGANIZATION PHASE I

II FIELD FORCE

1st Inf Div

1st Bde

1-2 Inf
1-26 Inf
1-28 Inf
 Inf
TF Wallace (ARVN)
 35th Rgr Bn (ARVN)
 3-1 Cav (ARVN)

3d Bde

1-16 Inf
2-2 Mech
1-4 Cav
2-28 Inf

173d Abn Bde

1-503 Inf
2-503 Inf
4-503 Inf

1st Bde 9th Inf Div

4-39 Inf
2-47 Inf (Mech)
3-5 Cav

25th Inf Div

2d Bde

1-27 Inf
2-27 Inf
1-5 Mech

3d Bde, 4th Inf Div

2-12 Inf
3-22 Inf
2-14 Inf
2-22 Mech

196th Lt Inf Bde

2-1 Inf
3-21 Inf
4-31 Inf

11th ACR (-)

1-11 ACR
3-11 ACR
4-23 Mech

Encl IV-1

3WPC0609j/MAY83

Prek Klok I

The 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, commanded by LTC Rufus C. Lazzell, became a part of JUNCTION CITY on D+1 (23 February) when it was airlifted from its base camp at Lai Khe to Suoi Da. There it had a two-fold mission; it would serve as the reserve battalion for 3d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, while also providing a portion of the Suoi Da defenses. The battalion was scheduled to move out the next day to secure Route 4 in its assigned sector and to conduct search and destroy operations.

In the early morning hours of the 24th, the battalion received approximately 120 rounds of 82-mm mortar, which killed two (including a company commander) and wounded five. Six hours later after evacuating the wounded and completing preparations for the upcoming operation, the 1st of the 16th was airlifted to positions along Route 4 north of Suoi Da. After considerable jungle clearing, the battalion began preparing a night defensive position, which was located on the east side of the road, six kilometers south of Prek Klok.

The next few days passed fairly quietly for the battalion, with the exception of two unfortunate incidents. On the 25th, one of the battalion's own mortar rounds fell short and wounded two personnel. On the same day, one of the battalion's positions caught some .50-caliber fire from a friendly mechanized unit conducting recon by fire to their north; luckily no one was hurt this time.

At 0800 on 28 February, Company B left the battalion's night defensive position located along Route 4 and proceeded east on a search and destroy operation.

The movement through the thick and tangled jungle was extremely slow. The unit moved in two columns with the 3d Platoon in the lead, followed by the 2d and 1st Platoons. The company commander, CPT Donald S. Ulm, and his command element were between the 2d and 1st Platoons.

The Company employed patrols in a cloverleaf pattern as it moved through the thick jungle and deadfall. Two such patrols had been completed by the time that the unit had progressed a little over one kilometer from its starting point.

At 1030, the lead element of the third platoon received small arms and automatic weapons fire from its front. It was initially reported that the enemy force was company-size, but when the company commander learned that the enemy was employing three heavy machine guns, he correctly concluded that the VC force was much larger. The enemy was well concealed, but not dug in; the ensuing battle was essentially a meeting engagement between the two forces.

Encl IV-2

3WPC0610J/MAY83

The 3d Platoon, still in the lead, continued to receive heavy fire and was unable to gain fire superiority. Then the platoon was attacked on its right flank (south) as well as from its front.

As was the division SOP, artillery marching fire had been preceding the company as it moved east; it was being fired by the 2d Battalion, 33d Artillery (105 mm) located at FSB II in Prek Klok. As soon as contact was made, the artillery forward observer shifted the fires to the enemy position. Within minutes, one of the command and control helicopters of the division was over the point of contact and in touch with both the division TOC and the unit on the ground. The TOC was alerted to get a forward air controller airborne over the area and to request close air support, preferably armed with cluster bomb units.

Twenty minutes after the first contact, the enemy launched a new attack from the northeast. Radio contact was lost between the 3d Platoon and the company command group. CPT Ulm theorized that the 3d Platoon and possibly the 2d Platoon would be flanked from the direction of the new attack and directed the 1st Platoon to move to the left flank of the 3d Platoon. As the platoon moved into position, the entire company area was hit by small arms fire, rifle grenades, rockets and 60-mm mortar rounds. The firing was intense, but it resulted in few friendly casualties. The 2d Platoon continued to move to the right.

At 1230, communications were re-established with the 3d Platoon. The company was now in an arc-shaped formation with the 3d Platoon in the center, 2d on the right, and 1st on the left. This information was transmitted to the airborne FAC who had arrived in the area. As each close air support flight arrived over the target area, the FAC and CPT Ulm directed the air strikes against the enemy.

At approximately 1300, the 2d Platoon detected movement to the west and it appeared that the enemy was attempting to encircle the company and attack the open end of the perimeter. To meet this threat, CPT Ulm directed a fire team from the 1st Platoon to move to the northwest and a squad from 2d Platoon to move to the southwest. As the squad from the 2d Platoon moved into position, it received heavy automatic weapons fire from the trees. The squad returned fire and artillery was called in on the western side of the company.

As the company tightened its perimeter, CPT Ulm continued to employ air strikes against the enemy in conjunction with supporting artillery fires. By 1400, the battle had subsided into sniper fire, and by 1500, contact was broken.

In the meantime COL Marks, the brigade commander, at 1430, brought another company of the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, into an LZ approximately 600 meters to the northwest of the point of contact following the firing of preparatory fires around the zone.

Encl IV-2

3WPC0610J/MAY83

A second company from another battalion securing Minh Thanh was lifted into the LZ immediately after the first had secured it; this second company was dispatched to assist CPT Ulm's unit. By 1645, a third company, also from the 1st Battalion, landed to assist in securing the LZ and in assisting B Company in evacuating its dead and wounded.

It was not until 2130 that CPT Ulm and B Company reached the LZ with their 25 dead and 28 wounded. A sweep of the area of contact by the relieving company that evening and another sweep the following morning revealed 167 enemy dead and 40 enemy weapons captured or destroyed. A prisoner captured in the battle area the morning after turned out to be the assistant commander of a company in the 2d Bn, 101st NVA Regiment of the 9th VC Division. It was his battalion which had met Company B. It appeared that the meeting engagement with CPT Ulm's company prevented the NVA battalion from reaching Route 4 and attacking one of the many U.S. convoys traveling between Suoi Da and Katum.

The next morning, B Company loaded onto choppers and headed for Suoi Da to be refitted and receive replacements. They would return to action in less than five days.

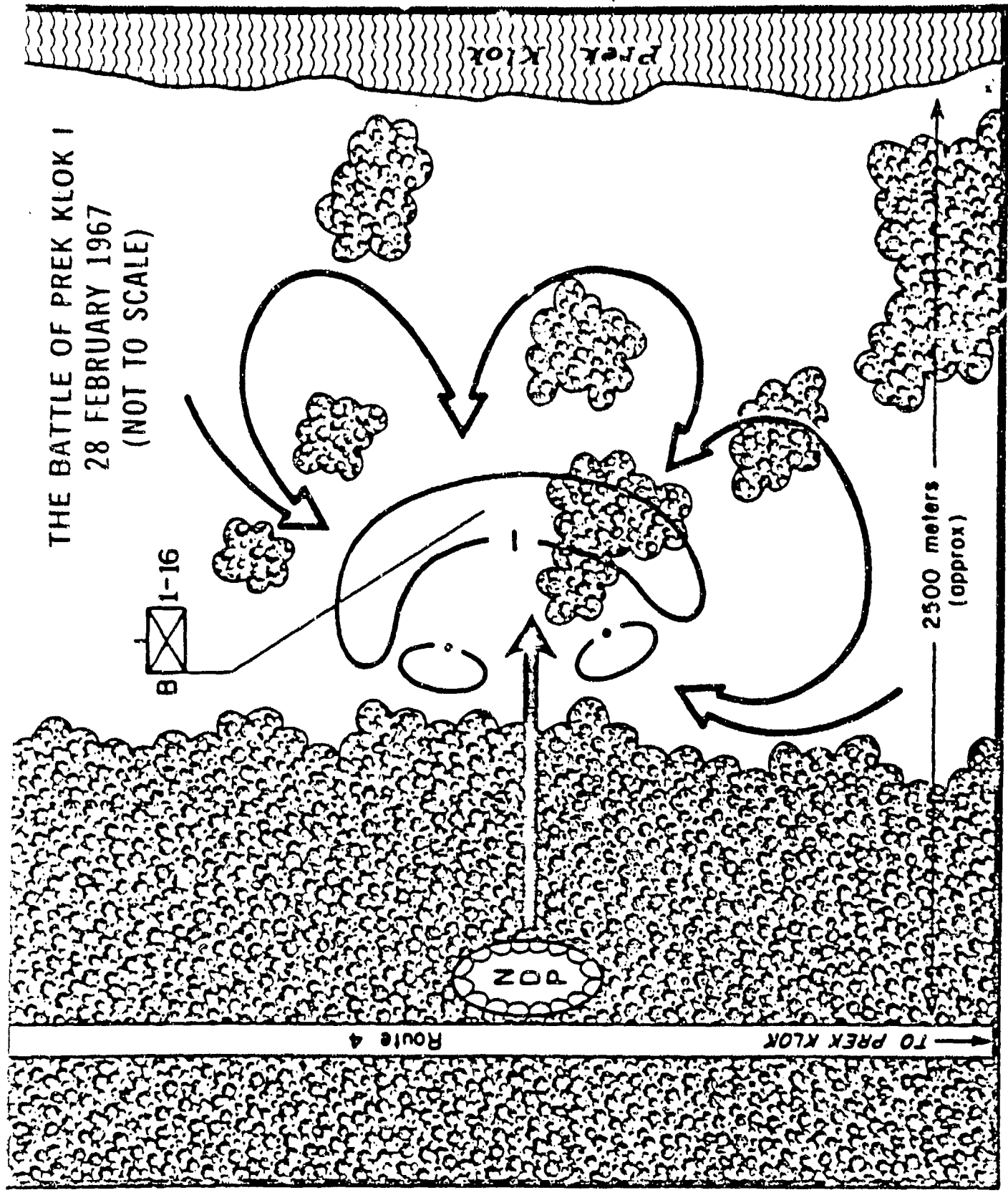
Account extracted from:

Cedar Falls-Junction City, A Turning Point by Bernard W. Rogers.

Encl IV-2

3WPC0610j/MAY83

1B 93-12112
 BARK BARK LIGHT COLOR-REVERSE GLASS
 BARK BARK LIGHT COLOR-REVERSE GLASS
 ON Claxton ON Claxton



THE BATTLE OF PREK KLOK I
 28 FEBRUARY 1967
 (NOT TO SCALE)

H 1.7

□ X906 I

Prek Klok II

On the evening of 10 March, the 2d Battalion (Mech), 2d Infantry (minus B Company), commanded by LTC Edward J. Collins was securing the perimeter of Artillery Fire Support Patrol Base II located at Prek Klok on Route 4. The 2d of the 2d was arrayed in a circular "wagon train" perimeter of the base which also included the Battalion headquarters, B and C Batteries of the 2d Battalion, 33d Artillery, (105 mm), plus elements of the 168th Engineer Battalion. The engineers were busily engaged in building a Special Forces and Civilian Irregular Defense Group Camp and airstrip.

The 2d Battalion's APCs were placed at 50-meter intervals around the base perimeter. The areas between the tracks were protected by foxholes manned by infantrymen, engineers, and artillerymen.

Just after dark, the troops on the perimeter fired a "mad minute" to test their weapons and provide a show of force to the enemy. Ambush patrols and listening posts left the perimeter for their positions in the surrounding jungle. At about 2030, men of an A Company listening post were moving into a position to the east of the perimeter, when they saw and engaged three VC with unknown results. LTC Collins placed the battalion on 75% alert as preplanned artillery harassing fires commenced.

At 2200, the VC began a heavy mortar attack on the small circle of U.S. troops. Within two minutes after the first round impacted, counterbattery fire was initiated by the battalion heavy mortar platoon led by SFC Kenneth D. Davis; Davis and his platoon fired a total of 435 rounds during the ensuing battle. For some thirty minutes, over two hundred 120-mm, 82-mm, and 60-mm mortar rounds exploded inside the base. Additionally, the VC employed 75-mm recoilless rifles and RPG-2 antitank rockets against the battalion perimeter. Although the vehicles were positioned behind a low berm, three were struck by RPG-2 rounds and one received a direct hit from a mortar round; twenty U.S. troops were wounded during this initial action. Cooks, maintenance crews, and medical personnel began carrying the wounded to the airstrip for evacuation by "Dust Off" helicopters.

As soon as the mortar barrage ended, LTC Collins directed his units to conduct a reconnaissance by fire of the area from 200 to 600 meters beyond the perimeter. At 2220, the recon by fire had no sooner ended when the enemy launched a two-battalion ground attack along the eastern sector into the positions held by A Company. The defenders answered with devastating fire from vehicle mounted and ground machine guns, small arms and artillery.

The 3d Brigade tactical CP at Suoi Da had been requested to provide close air support, artillery, medical evacuation for the wounded, and ammunition resupply. The response to these requests was immediate. Medical evacuation and resupply were provided with the dispatch of five Hueys and a light fire team; sixty-four sorties would be flown under fire into the fire base. With their landing lights on, the aircraft brought in sixteen tons of supplies by sling load.

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The battle continued with the main attack coming from the east, the VC launched limited attacks from the northeast and southeast. Intense fire from enemy recoilless rifles and automatic weapons struck the A Company positions. Several APCs were hit by enemy antitank fire, but still the defenders held their ground and continued to pour machine gun and small arms fire into the attackers.

On the southeast side of the perimeter, C Company met the enemy's secondary attack head on. Moving parallel to the highway along the western side of the road, the VC rushed across 500 meters of open ground to hit C Company's positions from the southwest. Continuous fire from the American weapons quickly gained fire superiority and slowed the momentum of the VC attack.

When the mortar attack had started, the artillery defensive concentrations which ringed the entire perimeter of the base were fired. As the enemy attacks commenced, the artillery was adjusted to block the ground assaults. Nearby artillery units swept the area with over 5,000 artillery rounds. Additionally, an armed C-47, "Spooky", trained its miniguns on the VC forces to the east of the perimeter as it orbited the area.

Route 4 was declared a fire support co-ordination line between the artillery and tactical air support. To the west of the road, the artillery fired and broke the enemy's assault and prohibited him from regrouping while to the east the fighters covered the area with bombs, rockets, and 20-mm cannon fire. The massive and devastating use of air strikes and artillery broke the back of the attack.

After over an hour of fierce fighting, the brunt of the VC attack had been repelled. Sniper fire continued as the VC withdrew, and it was about 0430 before the last enemy round was fired. Early morning sweeps and aerial observation of the area disclosed 197 enemy killed; additionally five wounded VC were captured. U.S. losses were three killed and 38 wounded. The enemy left a considerable amount of weapons and other equipment on the battlefield.

It was determined that the attack had been made by two battalions of the 272d Regiment of the 9th VC Division. By now in JUNCTION CITY, two of that Division's regiments had attacked and been badly defeated.

Account extracted from:

Cedar Falls-Junction City, A Turning Point by Bernard W. Rogers.
Armored Combat in Vietnam by Donn A. Starry.

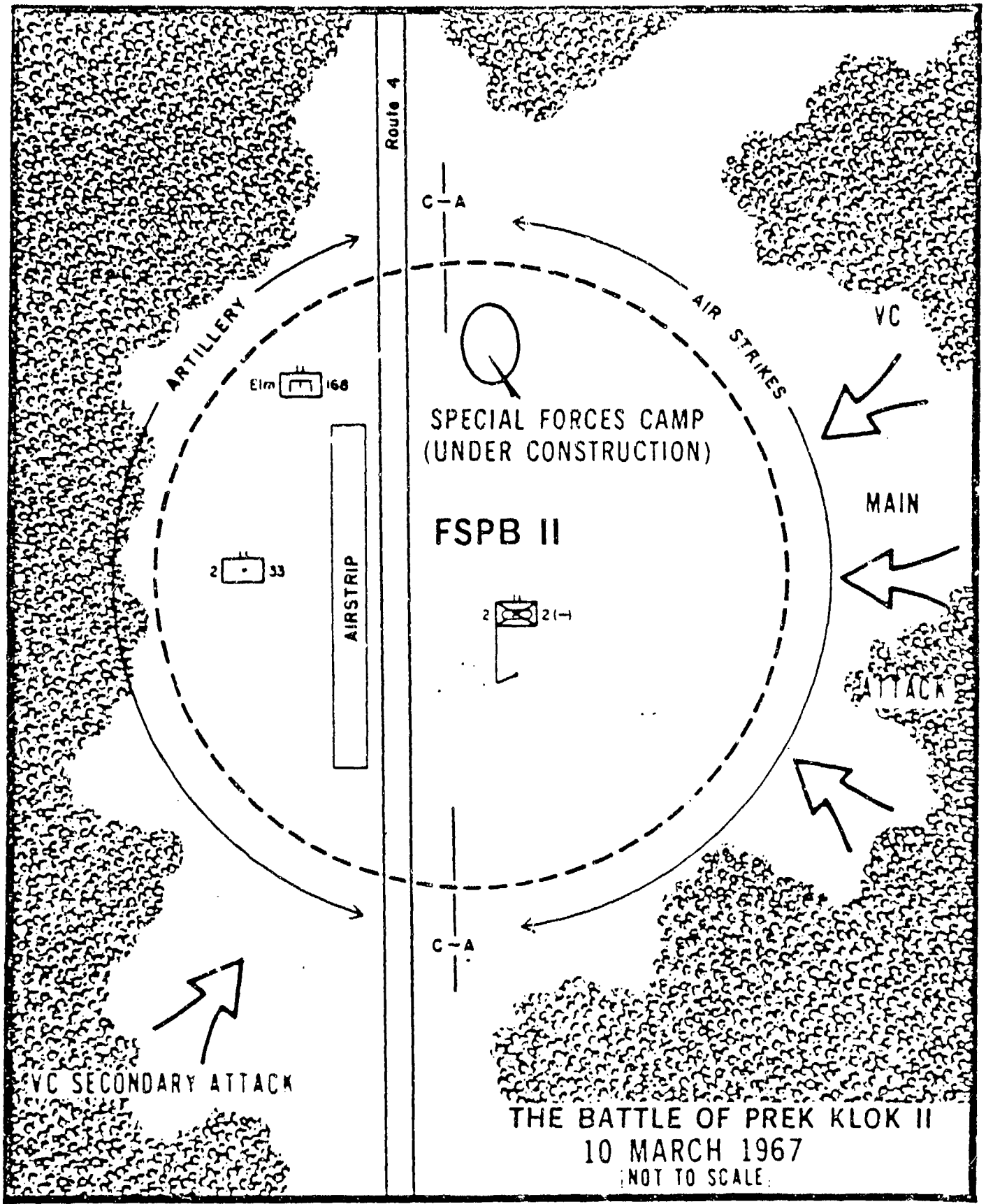
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THE BATTLE OF PREK KLOK II
 10 MARCH 1967
 NOT TO SCALE

48 A

OPERATION JUNCTION CITY
TASK ORGANIZATION PHASE II

II FIELD FORCE

1st Inf Div

1st Bde
2d Bde
1st Bde 9th Div
173d Abn Bde (20 Mar)
11th ACR (1 Apr)

25th Inf Div

196th Lt Inf Bde
3d Bde 4th Div

Encl IV-4

3WPC0613J/MAY83

SUOI TRE

On 19 March, in an area near Suoi Tre, near the center of War Zone C and ninety kilometers northwest of Saigon, U.S. helicopters airlanded the 3d Battalion, 22d Infantry(-), and the 2d Battalion 77th Artillery (-), led by LTCs John A. Bender and John W. Vessey, Jr., respectively. These units under the control of COL Garth, Commander, 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, were to establish Fire Support Base GOLD to support Phase II of JUNCTION CITY. Heavy action in this area was not anticipated, but events would soon prove otherwise.

As the three lifts of choppers touched down, five heavy command-detonated charges were set off by the VC in the small clearing that was serving as the LZ. Three helicopters were destroyed and six more were damaged with a toll of 15 killed and 28 wounded.

Company B of the 3d Battalion, 22d Infantry was assigned the eastern portion of the defensive perimeter. Company A was assigned the western half. Later that day the 2d Battalion, 12th Infantry landed at FSB GOLD and moved to the northwest. Its last lift drew enemy fire on the way out and another seven choppers were damaged. Work progressed rapidly to improve the FSB perimeter defenses and fortunate it was for the occupants of the base because on the next day the battle for Suoi Tre began.

At 0430, a night patrol from Company B operating outside the battalion perimeter reported movement around its ambush site; however, the night passed with no incidents. However, as the patrol prepared to return to the camp at 0630 the next morning, the area exploded with a massive attack by the VC. At the same time, the base camp came under intense enemy fire from 60-mm and 82-mm mortars. Within five minutes, the patrol was overrun and all of the men were either killed or wounded.

Meanwhile, the first enemy mortar round had impacted on the doorstep of a company command post; seconds later, another exploded just outside the battalion headquarters. In all, an estimated 650 mortar rounds fell while the VC advanced toward the perimeter. As they moved closer, enemy machine guns and recoilless rifles joined the attack while the VC made final preparations to assault the position.

Within minutes the entire perimeter came under heavy attack by waves of Viet Cong emerging from the jungle and firing recoilless rifles, RPG-2 rockets, automatic weapons, and small arms. The heaviest attacks were concentrated on the northeastern and southeastern portions of the perimeter. As the attack increased in intensity, the three artillery batteries initiated counterbattery fire in an effort to neutralize the heavy mortar concentrations which continued to rake the Fire Support Base. During the initial assault, Company B reported that its 1st Platoon positions on the southeastern perimeter had been penetrated and that the reaction force

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from the 2d Battalion, 77th Artillery, was needed to reinforce that sector. Artillerymen responded to the call, rushing to help repulse the continuing attacks.

At 0700, the first forward air controller arrived overhead and immediately began directing air strikes against the attackers. At the same time, two 105-mm batteries located at nearby fire bases began firing in support of the defenders. At 0711, Company B reported that its 1st Platoon had been overrun and surrounded by human wave attacks. Air strikes were called in all along the wood line to the east to relieve the pressure on the company; while directing these strikes, the FAC was shot down by heavy automatic weapons fire. At 0750, the beleaguered B Company commander requested that the artillery fire "beehive" rounds directly into the southeastern and southern sections of his perimeter. At 0756, the company commander reported that complete enemy penetration have been made in the 1st Platoon sector and that they were desperate for ammunition resupply. Ammunition and a 20-man reaction force from Company A were sent to assist B Company. At 0813, the northeastern section of the perimeter was overrun by yet another human wave attack. Two minutes later, elements of Company A which had established an ambush just outside the perimeter the previous night charged into the camp's perimeter and assumed defensive positions. Somehow all of the men had managed to elude the surrounding Viet Cong.

The commander of Company A reported the VC had penetrated the northern sector of the perimeter in his area. Ten minutes later, a quad-.50 machine gun located in that sector of the base was hit by RPG-2 rocket rounds and overrun. As the attacking Viet Cong swarmed over the weapon and attempted to turn it on the friendly positions, the gun was blown apart by a well placed round from a 105-mm howitzer crew who had witnessed the whole action from their position some 75 meters away. By 0840, the northeastern, eastern, and southeastern portions of the perimeter had withdrawn to a secondary defensive line around the guns of the artillery batteries.

The northern, western, and southern sectors were managing to hold despite intense pressure from large numbers of Viet Cong who had advanced as close as fifteen meters from their positions. Attackers had infiltrated to within hand grenade range of the battalion command post and only five meters from the battalion aid station.

The howitzers of the artillery battalion, with their tubes leveled, began firing "beehive" rounds into the VC. At point blank range, round after round of direct fire was delivered into the attacking enemy.

Air strikes were brought to within as little as fifty meters of U.S. positions and supporting artillery batteries threw up a continuous wall of shrapnel around the battalion perimeter. When the artillery inside the perimeter had exhausted its supply of "beehive" rounds, it began to fire

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high explosive rounds at point blank range. By 0900, the northern, western, and southern sectors of the perimeter were holding, but were still under intense enemy pressure. The positions in the east had withdrawn even closer, but the line was still intact.

The 3d Brigade headquarters had earlier alerted its other units which were conducting operations to the west. These included the 2d Battalion, 12th Infantry; the 2d Battalion, 22d Infantry (Mech); and the 2d Battalion, 34th Armor(-). When word of the attack and the order to move out was received, these forces reacted immediately. The 2d of the 12th moved to the northeast traveling cross country. The mechanized infantry and armor battalions moved from the southwest until they reached the Suoi Samat (stream) where an intensive search revealed only one suitable crossing site.

While the mechanized and armor forces attempted to cross the stream, the relief column from the 2d of the 12th broke through at 0900 and linked up with battered B Company. With the added forces and firepower, the units were able to commence a counterattack to the east to re-establish the original perimeter. Still the VC continued their relentless attack. As they advanced on the perimeter, many of them could be seen wearing bandages from earlier wounds. Some, so badly wounded that they would not walk, were carried piggyback into the assaults by their comrades.

Twelve minutes after the first relief unit arrived, the mechanized infantry and armor column broke through the jungle from the southwest. Into the already chaotic battle came the tanks and APCs crashing through the last few trees into the clearing. The noise was overwhelming as the new arrivals opened up with their machine guns and 90-mm tank main guns. The ground shook as tracked vehicles moved around the perimeter throwing up a wall of fire to their outside flank. They cut through the advancing Viet Cong, crushing many of them under the tracks. The VC, realizing that they could not overrun the encircling vehicles, charged them and attempted to climb aboard but were quickly cut down. Even the tank recovery vehicle of Company A, 2d Battalion, 34th Armor, crashed through the trees with its machine gun chattering. Most of the crew, who were all mechanics, were throwing grenades, but one calm mechanic sat serenely atop the vehicle with his movie camera grinding away.

Under this assault, the Viet Cong began to break contact and attempted to withdraw. By 0930, the original perimeter had been fully reestablished and by 1000, resupply choppers began to arrive and the wounded were evacuated. Elements of the mechanized and armor battalions pursued the fleeing enemy, while artillery and air strikes continued to pound the routes of withdrawal. By 1045, the battle of Suoi Tre was over.

The attacking unit had been decimated; 647 VC bodies were recovered, 7 prisoners were taken, and 65 crew-served and 94 individual weapons were captured. U.S. losses were 31 killed and 109 wounded.

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Documents found in the area revealed that the attacking force consisted of the 272d Regiment of the 9th VC Division reinforced by elements of U-80 Artillery. The 272d was considered one of the best organized, trained, and equipped enemy units and was one of the few VC units at this time that dared to make daylight attacks. On this day, however, they had more than met their match.

Account extracted from:

Cedar Falls-Junction City, A Turning Point by Bernard W. Rogers.

Armored Combat in Vietnam by Donn A. Starry.

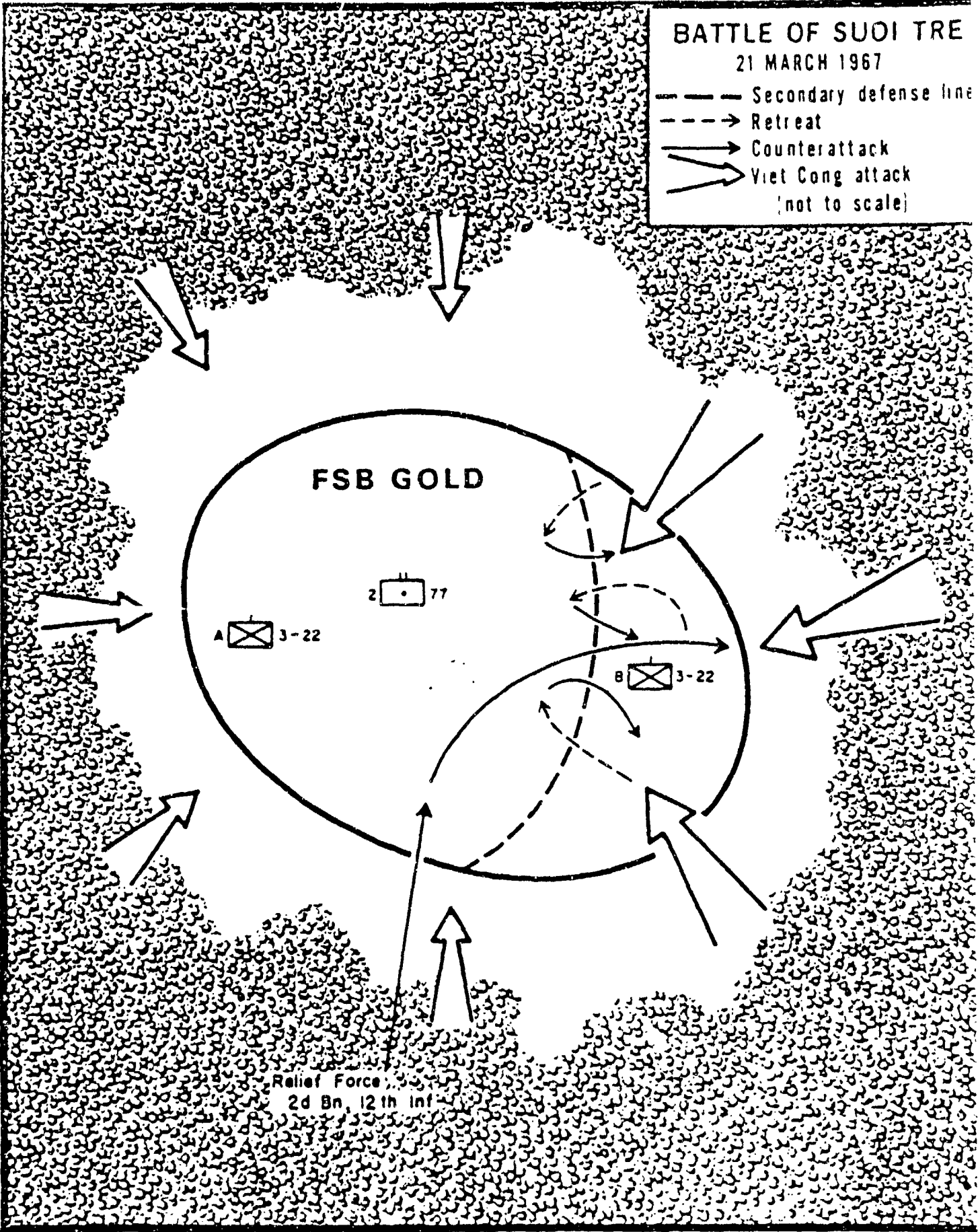
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AP BAU BANG II

At 1150 on 19 March 1967, A Troop, 3d Squadron, 5th Cavalry, commanded by CPT Raoul H. Alcalá, deployed to Fire Support Base 20. The unit was part of the 9th Infantry Division, but at this time, it was attached to the 1st Infantry Division. The 129-man company had six tanks, twenty M113 APCs, and three 4.2-inch mortars. The unit formed into a circular perimeter defense with the mission of securing the base for B Battery of the 7th Battalion, 9th Artillery (105 mm).

FSB 20 was located in relatively flat country 1,500 meters north of Ap Bau Bang, which was sixty kilometers north of Saigon on QL 13. To the south of the position was a rubber plantation, while it was surrounded by wooded areas to the north and west. An abandoned railway track ran parallel to and thirty meters east of the highway.

Intelligence sources had indicated that the Ap Bau Bang area was infested with local force guerrillas. CPT Alcalá sent his 2d Platoon commanded by 1LT Harlan E. Short to establish an ambush along the trail at a point 1,500 meters north of the fire support base and approximately 350 meters west of Route 13. The ambush was in position by 1800. The perimeter was manned on the west by the 1st Platoon under 1LT Roger A. Festa; occupying the eastern portion was the 3d Platoon under 2LT Hiram M. Wolfe.

At 2250 that night, a VC probe signaled the start of the second battle of Ap Bau Bang. The probe was spearheaded by a herd of fifteen cattle being driven across Route 13 at a point 150 meters northeast of the perimeter. Ten minutes later, the VC started raking the northeast section of the perimeter with a wheel mounted .50-caliber machine gun located on the railway track embankment. One of the U.S. tanks trained his search light on the VC position and returned fire with all its weapons. The firefight was joined by weapons of three APCs and continued for about three minutes. The enemy gun sprayed the perimeter with only five bursts before it was silenced by A Troop's response.

During the lull that followed, the unit assumed a state of increased readiness. Reconnaissance by fire was conducted along the woodline, but no return fire was received.

At 0030, the Viet Cong assault resumed as FSB 20 was hit with mortar rounds, rifle grenades, rockets, and recoilless rifle fire. Within twenty minutes of the beginning of the mortar attack, the VC ground assault began with the main attack coming from the south and southwest supported by a diversionary attack from the northeast. The massed VC troops emerged from the rubber trees and moved steadily forward under a heavy base of fire in coordination with the mortar barrage. The magnitude of the attack soon became apparent as large numbers of VC troops came into the open. The

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defenders placed a heavy volume of fire on the advancing VC using tank mounted searchlights and mortar illumination to light the battlefield.

CPT Alcalá advised his squadron commander, LTC Sidney S. Haszard, located to the south, that he could handle the attack, but he also requested that a ready reaction force be set up in case it was needed. LTC Haszard acknowledged the message and alerted the 1st Platoon of B Troop to the north of Ap Bau Bang and the 3d Platoon of C Troop located to the south to prepare to move to FSB 20 on order. He also gave CPT Alcalá permission to move his 2d Platoon at the ambush site back to the perimeter. The Squadron Commander noted the growing size of the enemy attack and decided to move with his command element to A Troop's position.

At 0100, CPT Alcalá was advised that a "Spooky" flareship armed with miniguns and a light fire team of helicopter gunships were on the way.

During the exchange between CPT Alcalá and LTC Haszard, the battle had intensified as enemy troops reached the vehicles on the southwest portion of the perimeter, but with the help of more than 2,500 rounds of sustained artillery fire, the cavalry troopers held their positions. At times enemy soldiers were blasted off ACAVs by 90-mm canister fire from nearby tanks. When the tanks ran out of canister, they fired high explosive rounds set on delayed fuses into the ground in front of the enemy; the result was a ricochet round that exploded overhead and showered fragments over the enemy units. Several defending vehicles were hit and destroyed by RPG-2 fire; many others were hit, but the crews continued to fight. However the gaps left in the line by the destroyed vehicles forced the troop to pull back to realign its perimeter.

The troop's 2d Platoon came charging down Route 13 from its ambush site, firing as they came. Upon arrival inside the perimeter, the platoon members manned the gaps in the hard-pressed southern half of the perimeter. As they took their positions, they were hit with recoilless rifle fire and grenades.

The element of B and C Troops alerted earlier received the order to move and immediately raced to join the battle. The 3d Platoon of C Troop, attacking up QL 13 from its troop's position five kilometers to the south, ran through a barrage of enemy fire before reaching the perimeter at 0127. At the direction of CPT Alcalá, the platoon swept 1,500 meters south of the defenders along the rubber-tree line. Firing continually during their sweep, the cavalrymen swung west, then north, then doubled back and entered the perimeter from the southeast. The vehicles pulled into positions between A Troop's vehicles on the eastern portion of the perimeter.

At this same time, the 1st Platoon of B Troops was tearing down Route 13 from its position eight kilometers north. After blasting through a hastily built ambush just north of the perimeter, the troopers moved around to the

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south, firing as they went. Moving into the perimeter, the platoon took up positions between A troop's vehicles on the western half of the defensive ring.

The perimeter now contained the artillery battery, all of A Troop, and the two relief platoons--a total of five cavalry platoons in a relatively small perimeter. At 0220, CPT Alcala ordered a counterattack which was successful in expanding the perimeter by some forty meters.

Two of the tracks hit previously continued to burn throughout the battle. 1LT Festa moved forward with two APCs to evacuate the wounded lying nearby. Several VC attempting to remove the .50-caliber machine guns from one of the burning tracks were killed, as were other attacking foxholes containing the wounded. 1LT Festa and SP4 Abelardo Penedo, while under intense fire, dismounted and loaded the wounded into Festa's carrier.

Meanwhile LTC Haszard, in an APC followed by another M113 bearing his command group, moved up Route 13 to the perimeter. Just short of the perimeter, Haszard's track was hit and disabled. CPT Alcala sent a tank out of the perimeter to assist the disabled track.. LTC Haszard dismounted in heavy small arms fire and attached the tow line. The command track, with all its valuable communications equipment, was pulled into the perimeter.

At 0300 another attack was developing to the south of the perimeter. It appeared to CPT Alcala that this attack was an attempt by the VC to recover their dead. Behind a line of skirmishers, unarmed troops advanced carrying ropes and wires with hooks attached to recover the bodies left on the battlefield. The attacking force was stopped within fifteen meters of the perimeter.

During the attack, and for the next four hours, the Air Force flareship kept the area continually lighted and miniguns and airstrikes pounded the enemy from above.

During the battle, resupply and "Dust-off" missions continued under the direction of LTC Paul F. Gorman, G-3 of the 1st Infantry Division. Because of the nature of the battle, and the preponderance of automatic weapons on the armored vehicles, two and in some cases, three basic loads of .50-caliber and 7.62-mm ammunition were expended during the night. At 0330, the enemy fire slackened; resupply of the units and evacuation of the wounded was completed during the next hour and fifteen minutes while the artillery and air strikes continued. Twenty-six of the sixty-three men wounded during the night were evacuated; many of the slightly wounded chose to stay in their positions and man their weapons.

By 0450, under the illumination of flares and tank searchlights, the enemy could be seen massing for an attack on the south and southeast of the perimeter. The VC commenced their attack at 0500; artillery fires were

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shifted and newly arrived aircraft dropped napalm, cluster bomb units, and 500-pound bombs on the attackers. This blunted the VC efforts and the noise of battle began to subside, as the enemy broke contact and withdrew.

The Battle of Ap Bau Bang II resulted in 227 enemy dead, three prisoners taken, and the capture of much enemy equipment and weapons. Blood trails stood as mute evidence that many more VC had been wounded or killed and hauled away. U.S. battle losses were three men killed and 63 wounded.

Enemy prisoners identified the attackers as the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 273d Regiment of the 9th VC Division. Intelligence experts believed the whole regiment participated in the battle.

Account extracted from:

Cedar Falls-Junction City, A Turning Point by Bernard W. Rogers.

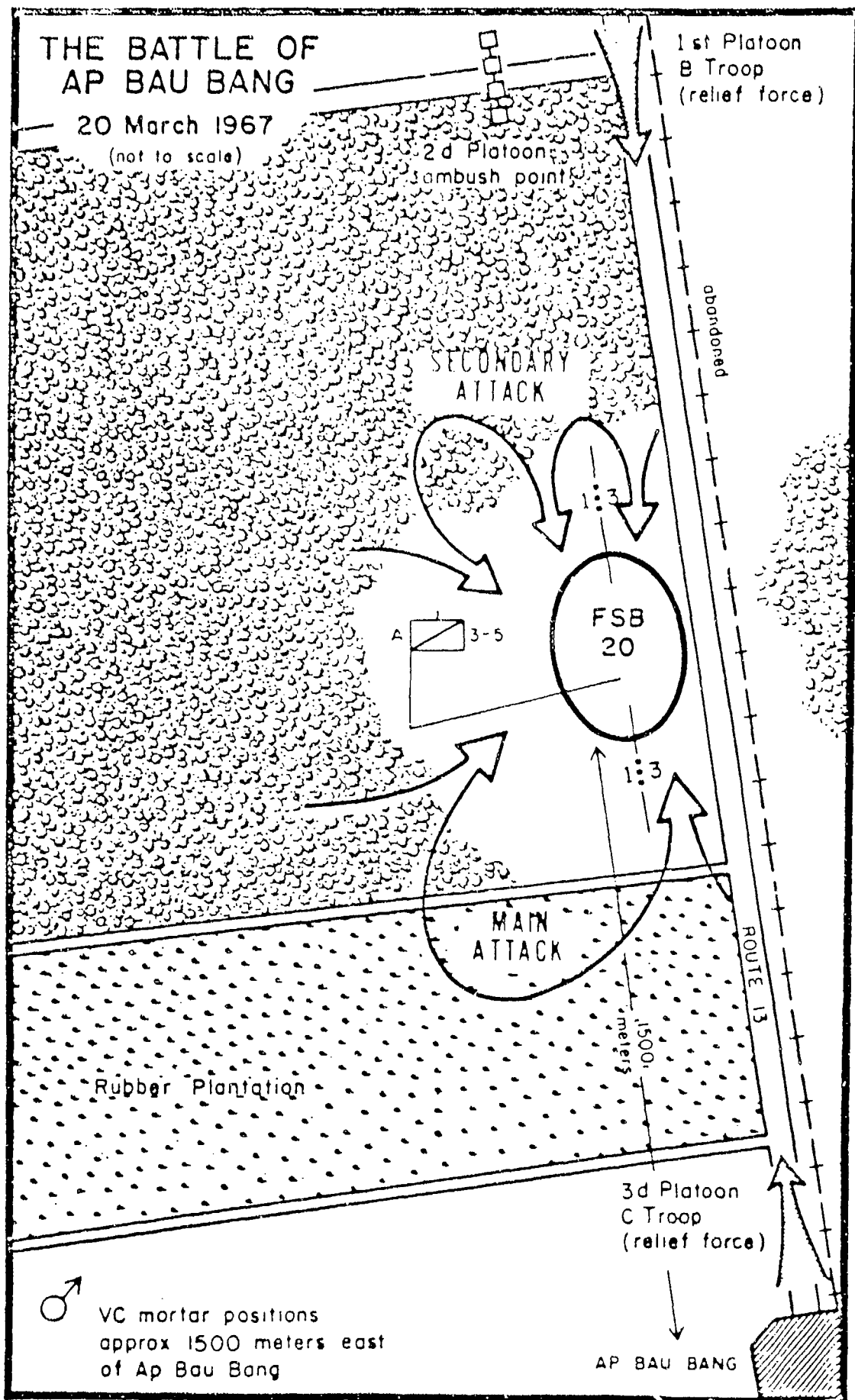
Armored Combat in Vietnam by Donn A. Starry.

"The Second Battle of Bau Bang," by CPT Hiram W. Wolfe, IV, in Armor, July-August 1968.

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On 26 March, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, commanded by LTC Alexander M. Haig, was alerted to prepare for an assault deep into War Zone C near the Cambodian border. At that time the battalion was attached to the 2d Brigade of the 1st Division and was located at Fire Support Patrol Base C at Sroc Con Trang. The assault was to be made in late morning on 30 March into LZ GEORGE, some fourteen kilometers to the west in AO SIOUX. The battalion would secure the zone for a follow-up landing by the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry, and then conduct operations in their assigned sector. Intelligence indicated that they could expect to make contact with the enemy in that area.

On the day scheduled for the assault, poor weather delayed the preparatory air strikes around and on the LZ, resulting in a two-hour delay in H-Hour. Accordingly, the assault of the 1st of the 2d was postponed a day. It was not until early afternoon that the initial elements of the battalion touched down on LZ GEORGE. The remainder of the battalion closed within an hour. Upon landing the battalion immediately dispatched cloverleaf patrols to seek the enemy. The patrols uncovered fortified positions in and around the LZ; however, they made no contact. That evening, the unit organized its night defensive position in the vicinity of the LZ. Fighting positions with full overhead cover and interlocking fires were dug. Listening posts were established and ambush patrols were sent out. The night passed with no significant contact.

The next morning, 31 March, the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry, LTC William C. Simpson commanding, was airlanded in LZ GEORGE without incident. Having landed, the 1st of the 2d moved to a position two kilometers southwest of the LZ. The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry began search and destroy operations in the surrounding area. Company A went south and C Company east; B Company remained in reserve, manning and patrolling the battalion perimeter at the LZ.

The battalion recon platoon was searching the woods northwest of the perimeter. There it became obvious that the Americans were expected; from the trees hung small signs in English warning that U.S. troops going beyond that point would not return.

At 1300 the platoon moved farther to the north into a wooded area and was approximately five kilometers south of the Cambodian border when the first contact was made. The platoon's point man was hit by enemy fire. 1LT Richard A. Hill, the platoon leader, went forward to check the situation and was hit and mortally wounded. Only Hill's radio operator was left in contact with the battalion S-3. Before being hit, Hill had advised the battalion that the platoon was heavily engaged with automatic weapons, small

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arms and grenades. LTC Haig called for artillery support and, when advised that the platoon leader had been hit, immediately took action to coordinate the artillery fire and air strikes in support of the platoon.

At the same time, B Company was just closing on the perimeter after a sweep of its assigned area. When advised of the recon platoon's desperate position and that its leader had been hit, the company commander, on his own initiative, swung his unit to the north and proceeded to the aid of the embattled platoon.

LTC Haig boarded his helicopter, and it was not until he was airborne that he learned of B Company's move north. As Haig pointed out later, while this move to extract the platoon was necessary, the subsequent lack of accurate control of the artillery fires and air support complicated the problem. As a result, B Company had entered the engagement without sufficient preparation and found itself heavily engaged along with the recon platoon.

The B Company commander confirmed that he was confronting at least a battalion-size enemy force. His initially optimistic reports became progressively more pessimistic; the company was pinned down by heavy machine gun fire, rockets, mortars, and recoilless rifles, and was running low on ammunition. LTC Haig realized that he had to reinforce the units in contact. Accordingly, he ordered Company A to move forward to pass through and relieve B Company.

LTC Haig landed near the point of contact and had his S-3 go airborne to control fire direction. Haig found 1LT Hill dead and the B Company commander in mild shock. He was soon joined by the A Company commander who had moved his unit through B Company and gained fire superiority over the enemy force.

The intensity and accuracy of the artillery and air strikes increased, permitting all units, except two platoons of A Company still in contact, to be withdrawn. As the units moved back, the VC left their bunkers and moved forward to maintain contact; this exposed them to the incoming bombardment which caused them to break contact. The engagement was over by 1705 and resulted in seven Americans killed and 38 wounded. Enemy casualties were unknown at the time.

Meanwhile, the division commander, General Hay, had ordered reinforcements into the area. At 1555, the first element of the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry (less Company C) touched down at LZ GEORGE under heavy sniper fire and occupied positions to the west and northwest of the 1st of the 26th. The battalion, commanded by LTC Lazzell, established its night defensive positions. The two battalions coordinated defensive plans, improved their fighting positions, established listening posts, and sent out ambush patrols.

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During the night, friendly harassment and interdiction artillery fires were placed in the area surrounding the perimeter. From midnight until 0400 on 1 April, listening posts to the north, east, and south reported movement to their front; however, there was no significant contact during the night. Mortar fire was directed into the areas of suspected enemy activity.

At 0455, a single mortar round exploded to the front of the perimeter of the 1st of the 26th. LTC Haig heard it and correctly interpreted it to be a registration round for a VC mortar attack. Accordingly, he immediately ordered his units to full alert posture and directed them to take cover and prepare for an attack. He also called LTC Lazzell and recommended that he do the same; the 1st of the 16th immediately followed suit, and assumed an increased defensive posture.

Five minutes after the enemy registration round had detonated, the first of several hundred 60-mm, 82-mm, and 120-mm mortar rounds were fired into the northern portions of both battalions. So many mortars were firing at once that the noise they made "sounded like loud, heavy machine guns." Because of the early warning and the rapid response of the men to their commanders' orders, only twelve men were wounded.

At the same time that mortars were falling on LZ GEORGE, a coordinated attack started on Fire Support Patrol Base C, where much of the supporting artillery for the 1st of the 26th and the 1st of the 16th was located. With incoming mortar and 75-mm pack howitzer rounds exploding around them, the U.S. artillerymen were understandably not so efficient as usual in getting off the requested fires; however, they did not cease firing. In addition, artillery located at Fire Support Patrol Base THRUST also provided fire support to LTCs Haig and Lazzell. Why the enemy did not bring this base under attack was never determined, but it would prove a grave mistake on their part.

The heavy mortar attack on the two battalions ended at 0515, but the attack at FSPB C lasted another hour. Meanwhile, flareships, a light helicopter fire team, and forward air controllers were requested from 2d Brigade.

At 0522, the VC ground attack was launched against the northeast edge of the perimeter. The main attack struck primarily B and C Companies of the 1st of the 26th, but A Company and the recon platoon of the 1st of the 16th received the brunt of a secondary attack. In both cases, when the soldiers manning the friendly listening posts withdrew to their perimeters, the enemy had followed them in.

It soon became apparent that an enemy company had moved unobserved through the woods and tall grass in front of Company C of 1st of the 26th. This movement in coordination with the mortar attack enabled the enemy to use surprise in his attack, which resulted in the rapid capture of three bunkers and a penetration roughly forty meters deep and a hundred meters wide in the C Company sector.

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The men of Company C withdrew under intense pressure. The company commander, CPT Brian H. Cundiff, without regard to the intense enemy fire, moved among his men and mustered an effective defense which held the shoulders of the penetration. Although wounded three times, CPT Cundiff refused medical aid and continued to fight and rally his force.

At 0630, the recon platoon of the 1st of the 26th was moved into a blocking position behind C Company and, along with B Company, fought to re-establish the perimeter. Meanwhile, the enemy was launching diversionary attacks from the east and west.

The Air Force air strikes were now arriving over the target area at the rate of one flight every fifteen minutes, thus providing much needed continuous air support.

It appeared that the main VC attack was slowly beginning to falter under the heavy volume of fire placed upon it. Light and heavy helicopter teams had arrived and were firing rockets and miniguns on the wood line to the northeast; artillery was massing fires along the east flank and in depth to the east. This, coupled with close air support delivering cluster bomb units, proved to be a withering combination that broke the VC attack, with many of them throwing down their weapons and running.

In the meantime, CPT Cundiff led elements of C Company, reinforced by the 1st Platoon of B Company in a counterattack which was pushing the remaining VC back into the deadly artillery fire and air strikes. By 0800, the perimeter was restored.

As the VC broke contact, the 1st of the 2d and 1st of the 16th passed through the 1st of the 26th to pursue the enemy to the east and northeast. However, no significant contact was made. Artillery, air strikes, and two B-52 strikes were shifted to likely routes of withdrawal.

After contact was broken and the enemy routed, the 1st of the 26th began to police the battlefield, evacuate casualties, and bury the VC dead. A total of 491 bodies were found in and around the two battalions' defensive positions. After sweeps of the area had been made, more enemy dead were found and the total rose to 609 VC killed. They were identified as being from all three battalions of the 271st Regiment of the 9th VC Division reinforced elements of the 70th Guard Regiment. U.S. casualties were 17 killed and 102 wounded.

Account extracted from:

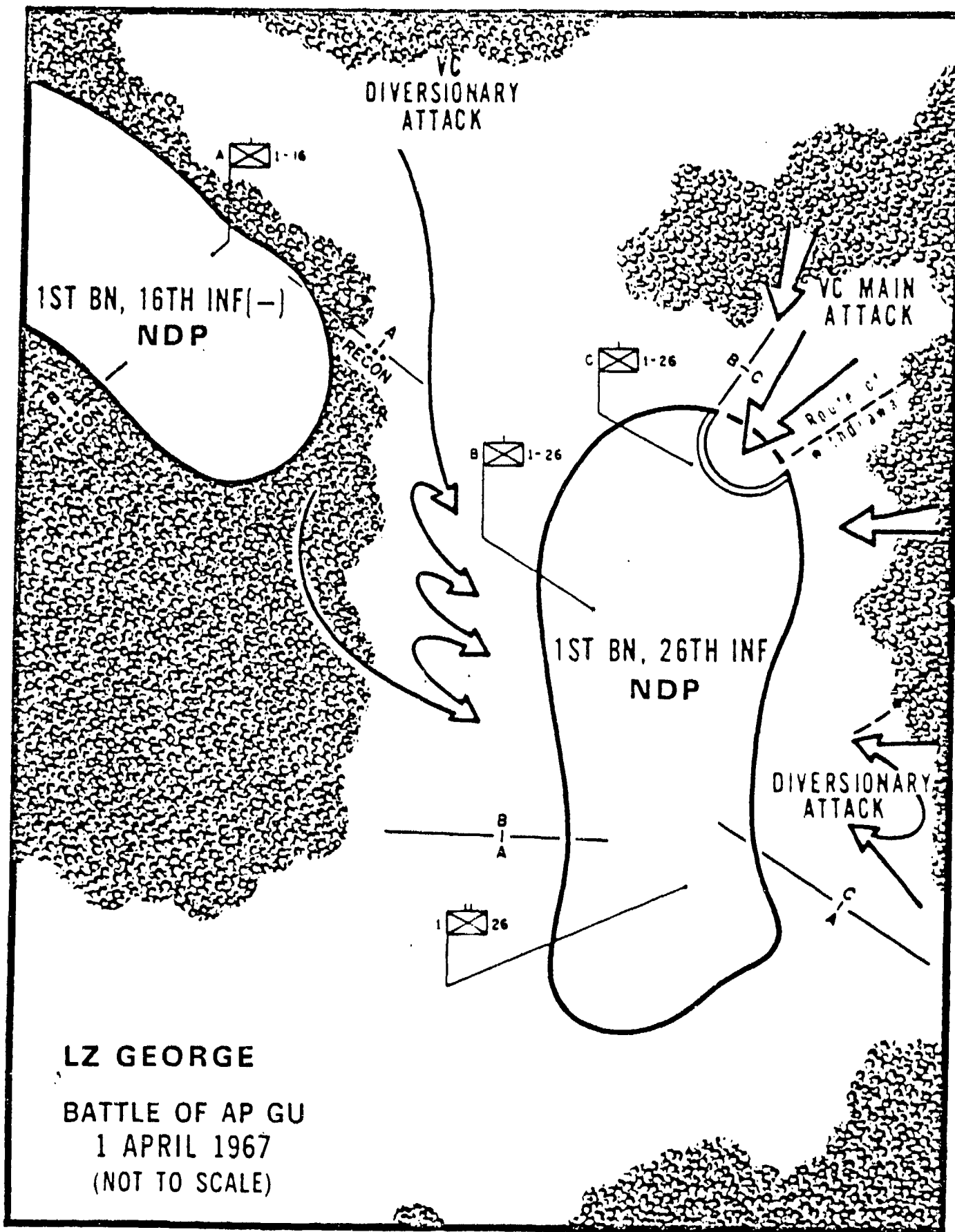
Cedar Falls-Junction City, A Turning Point by Bernard W. Rogers.

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I.B. 8.3-12017

CLASS.	GOLD-REVERSE	LIGHT	DARK	ON	TINT
CLASS.	GOLD-REVERSE	LIGHT	DARK	ON	TINT



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TRANS. NO. _____ FLIP ON _____ OVERLAY _____ TO NO. _____ CLASSIFIED BY: _____ CATEGORY _____ DECLASSIF _____

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