

*copy #2*  
~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

*Official Use only*  
DS 557

A 6

U 317 3

# 85

DU

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS, 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE (SEPARATE)  
APO U. S. Forces 96250

AVPCG

14 November 1965

COMMANDER'S COMBAT NOTE  
NUMBER 85

DUTY IN VIETNAM

On the eighth day of November 1965 a main line enemy force was destroyed with its few survivors being forced to flee into the jungle, leaving their dead and equipment behind.

Operation "Hump", which produced the heaviest single day's fighting of the war in Vietnam, began on 5 November 1965 approximately 25 kilometers northeast of Bien Hoa. The search and destroy operation had the mission of sweeping a portion of War Zone "D", still a Viet Cong stronghold, and also of enabling a special team to carry out a reconnaissance and survey mission in the general area. (See Chart).

Early on 5 November 1965 the 3d Battalion (Airborne), 319th Artillery, protected by Troop B, 17th Cavalry, and Company D, 16th Armor, moved by motor convoy to Position ACE, a few kilometers southwest of the operational area, and registered its batteries in preparation for the helicopter assaults later in the morning. The artillery position was as close to the operational area as the existing road network and surrounding terrain would permit. Because of the distance of Position ACE from the northern area of operations, one battery of the Royal Australian Artillery was to be heli-lifted into a forward position in the southern TAOR (tactical area of responsibility) after the First Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment had secured the area.

The First Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, scheduled to assault LZ QUEEN from helicopters at 0800 hours and begin operations in the southern TAOR, was delayed because of heavy ground fog which obscured the landing zone area. One and one-half hours later the Australians executed their landings on alternate LZ JACK with no opposition. They were preceded by a 45 minute LZ preparation by air strikes, artillery, and armed helicopter fires. They landed in three lifts of three elements each. The Australian 105mm howitzer battery followed shortly after the infantry battalion was on the ground.

Worthy of note was the flexibility and accuracy of the tactical air preparation. When it was decided on short notice to both delay the initial landing and then to use the alternate LZ (LZ JACK), the tactical air reacted quickly and efficiently. At the last minute an intelligence report indicated that a large enemy force was just south of the primary LZ. The twelve USAF planes that were aloft for the LZ preparation were called down on the reported force. Twelve more planes were called up from ground alert and the preparation on the alternate LZ was completed in accordance with the revised schedule.

*Sw Brown*  
*Doc clerk*



14 November 1965

COMMANDER'S COMBAT NOTE  
NUMBER 85

The 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry, also preceded by an intense LZ preparation, began the assault on LZ KING, on the north bank of the Song Dong Nai River, at 1245 hours. This landing also met no resistance on the ground; however, the helicopters did receive ground fire prior to landing.

Two long range patrols (five men each) were employed on this operation, being helilifted into the south and to the east of LZ LUEN. These sighted and reported several groups of Viet Cong and, when possible, directed air strikes against them. Both patrols were extracted by D+2 by helicopter.

The two battalions cleared their immediate areas during the remainder of the first day. The 1/RAR sent a unit into the village of Kom Cay Xoi, north of LZ JACK. This village had figured in several previous operations. The area was found to be completely evacuated.

On D+1 and D+2 the 1/503d Infantry extended its search and destroy operations to the north; the 1/RAR, to the south and southeast. The 1/503d Infantry had no contact till late on D+2 but found and destroyed a number of small enemy installations. Of particular interest was an open area, to the north of LZ KING, that was also suitable for use as an LZ. Fortified positions had recently been prepared by the enemy around this area about thirty meters in from the woodline, having excellent observation and fields of fire into the open area.

The portion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail just northwest of the confluence of the Song Be and Song Dong Nai Rivers, long reputed to be a heavily-used Viet Cong supply route, revealed no indications of recent traffic. Signs of useage which had appeared in aerial photographs were actually the results of rain water erosion on the open trail. *Need for ground reconnaissance.*

The 1/RAR pushed east and southeast against sporadic opposition, sniper fire and small groups of VC. They found several isolated enemy positions and shelters, and five enemy grenades were found. In the late afternoon of D+1 Company A of the 1/RAR became engaged in a fire fight with an enemy unit of unknown size. There were no friendly casualties but two VC were killed and one was wounded and captured. The prisoner was carrying a plan for an attack on an outpost in the Bien Hoa Area. He revealed that he was a member of a larger force and he confirmed the plan before he died of his wounds. The rounding up and capture of this small enemy force was a fine display of cooperation. A small Australian patrol that was being overwatched by an Australian pilot in a fixed wing aircraft made first contact. The Australian artillery battery was in direct support. Soon the U.S. artillery batteries added to the firepower and a U.S. Air Force controller joined and brought in an air strike. The artillery and air fires, coupled with the movement of the small Australian patrol, forced the enemy to move into a complete Australian company that was waiting to make the capture.



14 November 1965

COMMANDER'S COMBAT NOTE  
NUMBER 85

Late on the third day of the operation the Brigade S-2 informed the 1/503d Infantry that hard intelligence had been received indicating that a VC force was less than 2,000 meters to the west of the battalion. Small patrols were dispatched just before dark. These soon made contact with the enemy and the patrols were withdrawn to the battalion perimeter. As the night settled the stage was set for the climactic events of the following day.

Early on D+3, Lieutenant Colonel Tyler, Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry, moved Company C, followed by Company B, toward the hill where the enemy was located. The enemy positions had been confirmed by the intelligence reports and the patrols of the previous evening. Captain Tucker moved Company C with two platoons forward. At approximately 0800 hours his right platoon came upon an enemy fortified area. The enemy and our troops used heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire. The Company C platoon was soon joined by the remainder of the company and it became evident as the fight progressed that they had engaged a battalion-sized or larger force. The enemy began an attempt to envelop the flanks of Company C. At 0930 hours the battalion commander moved Company B, under Captain Bittrich, into the battalion from the northeast of the hill where the initial contact was made. Company B immediately encountered strong resistance in the form of heavy automatic weapons fire. After a period of intense fighting Company B penetrated the thickening enemy circle around Company C. This fighting was frequently at eye-ball contact and hand-to-hand in an extremely dense jungle area. Captain Bittrich secured Captain Tucker's right flank. A short time later, Captain Bittrich found his open flank being enveloped also. Elements of Company A were committed at this time, attacking toward the enemy's left flank. Captain Bittrich took the major portion of his unit and twice broke the encirclement. Shortly after noon Company B and Company C consolidated their position and directed intense artillery fire and air strikes against the enemy. The enemy's successive futile assaults on B and C Company caused him severe losses. The fighting was so close during the morning that supporting fires generally had to be employed in depth rather than in close support. The forward area of the enemy was relentlessly chewed on by small arms fire while his rear was pounded by our artillery and tactical air support.

Enemy slugging tactics.

Activity slowed to sniper fire and sporadic machine gun fire in the late afternoon and evening around the perimeter of Company B and Company C. The battalion CP perimeter, approximately 1,000 meters to the east, was brushed several times throughout the night. This was later learned to be VC elements attempting to withdraw from the area of the battle.

The 1/RAR, south of the river, after meeting no opposition during most of the day, encountered a well dug-in enemy force estimated to number 100 at approximately 1630 hours and became engaged in a heavy fire fight before the enemy broke contact.

why delay  
use of  
arty?



14 November 1965

COMMANDER'S COMBAT NOTE  
NUMBER 85

The dense jungle canopy made evacuation of casualties from the 1/503d area virtually impossible on the 8th. Well off to the flank of the perimeter, where two casualties were, it was discovered that the jungle canopy was not as high as in most other areas. An Air Force H-43 helicopter with a 200-foot lowering cable was used to evacuate these two men. During that night and the early morning of 9 November all men worked quite hard to make a helicopter landing zone for casualties to be evacuated. Seven power saws were lowered into the area and some trees 250 feet high and up to six feet in diameter were cut down. A funnel 250 feet deep and approximately 80 feet in diameter was cut into the jungle for casualty evacuation. A great feat of skill and courage was performed by our Army and Air Force helicopter pilots as they maneuvered their planes in such a restricted area. Each casualty and all equipment that was not needed for the remainder of the operation was evacuated through this "Helicopter Funnel".

Throughout the day small patrols continued to operate in all directions. It was very evident that the enemy had retreated from the battlefield leaving his casualties and a great deal of equipment.

No significant enemy activity developed on the 9th. In the morning the special survey team was withdrawn. In the afternoon the 1/503d Infantry and the 1/RAR consolidated and reorganized in preparation for helicopter evacuation. This was initiated at 1330 and was completed by 1925 hours. The 3d Battalion, 319th Artillery Task Force returned to Bien Hoa by motor convoy, though not without incident. Troop B, 17th Cavalry fired upon and sank two enemy sampans on the Song Dong Nai River with five persons aboard as the convoy moved back to base camp from Position ACE.

During the helicopter extraction phase the flexibility of our organization was dramatically demonstrated. The 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry was being evacuated from an LZ that could accept only three planes at a time. One helicopter developed mechanical trouble and could not get off the LZ. The extraction of the 1st Battalion was temporarily suspended and the Australian artillery began its lift-out in a matter of minutes. By the time the artillery was out of the LZ on the south side of the river new helicopter blades had been flown in, the helicopter was repaired, and the lift-out of the 1st Battalion, 503d was completed. As darkness began to fall, the First Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment was lifted from its area of operation on the south side of the river and returned to base camp.

Intelligence reports indicated that in the area of the 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry a main line VC regiment had been soundly defeated. The enemy killed came to 403 by body count. This was the largest kill, by the smallest unit, in the shortest time in the war in Vietnam to date. Heavily engaged by overwhelming numbers, the members of the 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry proved the superiority of the American Paratrooper beyond any question of doubt. They decisively defeated a determined and numerically



AVPCG

14 November 1965

COMMANDER'S COMBAT NOTE  
NUMBER 85

superior enemy force despite all handicaps.

Men of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate), I am extremely proud of your performance. Our pride in the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry is without bounds. It was this unit that was in closest contact and actually locked horns with the enemy. Men of the 1st Battalion, I salute you.

All of us must realize, however, that this battle was won by the cooperative efforts of many units and individuals. It took a lot of fine work in fire support, supply and medical efforts, administration, command and control and other areas to contribute toward this great victory.

The following are examples of some of the things that were going on that were physically removed from the immediate vicinity of the 1/503d Infantry perimeter. The United States Air Force flew 117 sorties putting 158 tons of bombs, rockets and machine gun fire on the enemy. The artillery fired 5352 rounds that came to 160 tons of ammunition. The helicopters flew 1737 sorties. Even with this going on our civic actions teams, all on the south side of the Dong Nai River, treated 258 civilian patients and distributed 750 pounds of food to the needy. All of these actions contribute toward winning the war and the peace that follows.

AIRBORNE, "ALL-THE-WAY"

*Ellis W. Williamson*

ELLIS W. WILLIAMSON  
Brig Gen, U.S. Army  
Commanding



Range 6 1053

Ho Chi Minh Trail

Range

Song Be River

12 1053

503

Dong Nai River

LZ King

LZ Jack

LZ Queen

RAR

8 Nov

0 500 1000

Scale in meters

Movement to contact

VC Withdrawal

★ Engagement

○ LRP

3 319

Position  
ACF

○



~~TOP SECRET~~

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS, 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE (SEPARATE)  
APO U. S. Forces 96250

AVAB-CG

19 November 1965

CRITIQUE OF OPERATION HUMP

1. A critique of this operation was conducted on 13 November 1965. Present for the critique were the Commanding General, the brigade staff, and battalion and separate company commanders.
2. The purpose of the critique was to identify in each functional area, those techniques and procedures which require modification in order to improve the system and increase combat effectiveness for future operations.
3. This has been reproduced for study purposes. Through this approach it is hoped that we can improve future operations.

*Ellis W. Williamson*  
ELLIS W. WILLIAMSON  
Brig Gen, U.S. Army  
Commanding



RANGE 6 105mm HOW

~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

~~ONLY~~

HO CHI MINH TRAIL

RANGE 12 105 mm

HOW

5030

SONG DE RIVER

DONG NAI RIVER

LZ KING

LZ JACK

LZ QUEEN

8 NOV

1 RAR

3 3F5th

POSITION  
ACE

0 500 1000 SCALE IN METERS

- MOVEMENT TO CONTACT
- VC WITHDRAWAL
- ENGAGEMENT
- LRP

~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~



15 November 1965

## I. SITUATION.

1. Mission. The 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) conducted a search and destroy operation in the Viet Cong dominated War Zone "D" in Tan Uyen District of Bien Hoa Province near the junction of the Dong Nai and Song Be River. The operation which began on 5 November 1965 and ended on 9 November 1965, was the fifth operation conducted in War Zone "D" by this Brigade. During the operation the 1st Battalion 503d Airborne Infantry met and virtually annihilated a Viet Cong unit that was later proved to be composed of three battalions.

a. Brigade Headquarters and Staff (Brig Gen Ellis W. Williamson Commanding) Air Force AIO/FAC Section (Operated from Bien Hoa).

- 1



- ~~TOP SECRET~~
- e. Task Force Rear
    - 2/503d Infantry
    - 173d Spt Battalion
    - 161st Artillery Battery (RNZA)
    - Admin Company
    - HHC 173d Abn Bde
    - Engr Co (-)

### 3. Description of Operational Area.

a. The terrain found in the 1/RAR operational area was open paddy in the vicinity of the N-S trail; their west flank. As the unit progressed easterly the paddy gave way to small hill masses seldom reaching an elevation of over 70 feet. The vegetation consisted of rice paddies on the west flank and low shrubbery became predominant as the unit moved generally east. Once the small hill masses were reached a semi-jungle vegetation was encountered. The canopy level was approximately 30 feet to 40 feet in height but open in many places. The undergrowth consisted of many low vines and entanglements but observation was good to approximately 50 meters. Cover and concealment were excellent. Fields of fire were generally poor. The critical terrain features were the hill masses which overlooked the avenues of approach and the numerous E-W trails leading into the area.

b. The terrain in the 1/503d operational area consisted of low paddy initially but as the unit progressed N and NW small hill masses became prominent. These hill masses seldom exceeded 70 feet in height. The vegetation found on the LZ was tall grass/reeds reaching a height of 6 to 10 feet. As the unit moved generally W and NW a semi-jungle vegetation was encountered. The vegetation consisted of thick undergrowth in the vicinity of the stream beds, however, as the streams were crossed the undergrowth became sparse. The canopy was thick, almost without openings and the first canopy reached a height of 40 to 50 feet. While a second canopy was 250 feet high. Observation was good up to approximately 50 meters when maneuvering away from the stream beds. Vegetation within the stream beds limited observation to 5 to 10 meters. Cover and concealment were excellent and fields of fire generally poor. The small hill masses were considered critical terrain because they overlooked the avenues of approach into the area. Numerous E-W trails led from the hill masses to the Song Dong Nai and Song Be Rivers.

### B. Summary of Operations:

#### 1. D-Day (5 November 1965).

a. Implementation of OPORD 28-65 (Operation Hump) began at 050530H when the lead elements of TF 3/319th crossed the start point and moved by motor convoy to Position ACE (See Chart) a few kilometers south west of the operational area, and registered its batteries in preparation



~~TOP SECRET~~

for the helicopter assaults later in the morning. The artillery position was as close to the operational area as the existing road network and surrounding terrain would permit. Because of the distance of Position ACE from the northern area of operations, one battery of Royal Australian Artillery was to be heli-lifted into a forward position in the southern TAOR (tactical area of responsibility) after the First Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment had secured the area.

b. The First Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, scheduled to assault LZ QUEEN from helicopters at 0800 hours and begin operations in the southern TAOR, was delayed because of heavy ground fog which obscured the landing zone area. One and one half hours later the Australians executed their landing on alternate LZ JACK with no opposition. They were preceded by a 45 minute LZ preparation by air strikes, artillery, and armed helicopter fires. They landed in three lifts of three elements each. The Australian 105mm howitzer battery followed shortly after the infantry battalion was on the ground.

c. The 1st Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry, also preceded by an intense LZ preparation, began the assault on LZ KING, on the north bank of the Song Dong Nai River, at 1245 hours. This landing also met no resistance on the ground; however, the helicopters were fired upon from the ground prior to landing.

d. Two long range patrols (five men each) were employed on this operation, being helilifted into the south and to the east of LZ QUEEN. They sighted and reported several groups of Viet Cong and when possible, directed air strikes against them. Both patrols were extracted by D+2 by helicopter.

e. The two battalions cleared their immediate areas during the remainder of the first day and encountered only light sniper fire. The 1/RAR sent a unit into the village of Xom Cay Xoai, north of LZ JACK. This village had figured in several previous operations. The area was found to be completely evacuated.

## 2. D+1 (6 November 1965).

a. TF 1/503d continued to search its sector using platoon sized patrols, operating from three Company patrol bases. Only light contact was made, with several abandoned VC Camps discovered and destroyed. Tear gas was used in a VC tunnel but no enemy were found to be present. Of particular interest was an open area, to the north of LZ KING, that was also suitable for use as an LZ. Fortified positions having excellent observation and fields of fire, had recently been prepared by the enemy around this area about thirty meters in from the woodline.

b. That portion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail just north-west of the confluence of the Song Be and Song Dong Nai Rivers, long reputed to be heavily-used Viet Cong supply route, revealed no indications of



~~SECRET~~

recent traffic. Signs of usage which had appeared in aerial photographs were actually the results of rain water erosion on the open trail.

c. TF 1/RAR pushed east and southeast against sporadic opposition from sniper fire and small groups of VC. They found several isolated enemy positions and shelters, and five enemy grenades. In the late afternoon of D+1, Company A of the 1/RAR became engaged in a fire fight with an enemy unit of unknown size. There were no friendly casualties but two VC were killed and one was wounded and captured. The prisoner was carrying a plan for an attack on an outpost in the Bien Hoa area. He revealed that he was a member of a larger force and he confirmed the plan before he died of his wounds. The rounding up and capture of this small enemy force was a fine display of teamwork. A small Australian patrol, that was being observed by an Australian pilot in a fixed wing aircraft, made first contact. The Australian artillery battery was in direct support. The US artillery batteries added to the firepower and a US Air Force controller brought in an air strike. The artillery and air fires, coupled with the movement of the small Australian patrol, forced the enemy to move into a complete Australian company that was waiting to make the capture.

3. D+2 (7 November 1965).

a. TF 1/503d moved to a battalion base position and continued to search its sector. At 070955H a VC tunnel system was located and destroyed.

b. Late on the third day of the operation the Brigade S-2 informed the 1/503d Infantry that confirmed intelligence indicated that a VC force was less than 2,000 meters to the west of the battalion. Small patrols were dispatched just before dark. They soon made contact with the enemy and were withdrawn to the battalion perimeter. As the night settled the stage was set for the climactic events of the following day.

c. TF 1/RAR continued to search its sector east of Tue Dong Nai. No contact was established with the enemy.

4. D+3 (8 November 1965).

a. On D+3 TF 1/503d fought and won a major battle. The initial contact was made as C/1/503d moved toward what intelligence reports and patrols of the previous day had indicated as a VC installation. At approximately 0800 hours the right flank platoon came upon an enemy fortified area. The enemy and our troops exchanged a large volume of small arms and automatic weapons fire. The platoon was soon joined by the remainder of the company and it became evident as the fight progressed that they had engaged a battalion-size or larger force.







~~TOP SECRET~~

Brigade Staff, Battalion, separate company commanders and representatives of all supporting elements.

2. The purpose of the critique was to identify those techniques and procedures that worked well and those that require modification or substitution in order to improve our combat effectiveness for future operations.

3. A summary of the significant items identified during the critique and proposed corrective action is as follows:

B. Operations:

1. Movement.

a. Ground movement. The ground movement of the artillery, cavalry and tank company to position ACE was conducted without incident. Movement to and from this position was conducted during darkness. Air cover and air relay were available during the moves. (Movement of the artillery during darkness was necessary in order to have the guns in position and registered in time to support the assault landing on D-Day. The return movement during darkness was necessary, since the last forces were extracted from the operational area after darkness fell, requiring the artillery to remain in position to support the extraction. After other movements were completed the artillery fired several missions on the extraction LZ's and on reported and suspected enemy locations.)

b. Airmobile Assault.

(1) Assault of LZ JACK by 1/RAR began one and a half hours later than scheduled, due to ground fog in the objective area. This LZ alternate was chosen for the assault after intelligence was received that two VC Battalions were positioned on a ridge line immediately south of primary landing zone QUEEN. This change, approximately one half hour prior to H-Hour, created no problems or confusion. Air support and artillery preparations were planned for the primary and alternate LZ's, therefore the change to the alternate LZ caused no requirement to designate new preparatory concentrations.

(2) The airmobile assault lift for 1/RAR consisted of 29 UH1D and 8 UH1B helicopters. This lift was formed into three elements, with the initial touchdown at 0930 hours and the last element to close the Battalion in the objective area landing at 1021H. A total of 671 personnel were lifted in the assault.

(3) Troops of 1/RAR were in position on the east bank of the river, to provide protection from that direction, while 1/503d landed across the river at LZ KING using the same amount of airlift. The landings at LZ KING began at 1245 and were completed at 1335, with troops committed in the assault.



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

(4) Extraction of 1/503d elements began with the lift-out of the reconnaissance elements of 40 personnel at 1130 9 November from an unnamed LZ north of LZ KING. It was necessary for our elements to clear an LZ, with three helicopter capacity to extract the main force. One of the helicopters in the first element became disabled when a counter-weight became disconnected and damaged a rotor blade. This necessitated the repair of the helicopter on the LZ and reduced the capacity to two helicopters. The extraction continued at this reduced rate.

(5) Simultaneously with the extraction of 1/503d, 1/RAR extraction began from LZ JACK. Whenever helicopters were diverted to pick up personnel at LZ JACK some adjustments of the troop formation were required. These were readily made with the minimum of confusion. (This operation displayed the flexibility that is inherent in the use of helicopters to move ground forces, when directed from an aerial command and observation post. This aerial command post containing the ground commander, his army aviation and artillery representatives and Air Force ALO, provides the means to divert airlift, direct and coordinate armed helicopter, artillery and TAC airfire support as the tactical situation demands. The operation also displayed the need of the ground forces to be able to respond rapidly to changes with the minimum of confusion. To achieve this response, clear, concise and meaningful orders must be transmitted to all elements involved in the change.)

(6) The extraction of 1/503d continued until there were just enough forces remaining to secure the LZ and the disabled helicopter being repaired. When no more forces could be lifted out without risking the capture of the helicopter, the complete lift was diverted to 1/RAR. When the helicopter was repaired and capable of flying out, helicopters were again diverted from 1/RAR to complete the lift-out of the remaining 1/503d forces. A sufficient lull in the activity on the 1/503d LZ had attracted the VC to move forward and investigate the LZ area. He obviously thought that the extraction was completed. The 1/503d security elements killed several of the enemy during the extraction of its remaining elements. A door gunner on one lift helicopter was able to claim three enemy kills while sweeping the area with fire on departure of his lift. No friendly casualties or damage to helicopters was inflicted during the extraction.

(7) Several lessons were learned and proposals made for future extractions that extend into darkness:

(a) All fires in the proximity of the extraction zone must be extinguished. They can readily confuse the lift pilots as the LZ location, or be so bright as to impair their night vision.



~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

(b) To mark LZ's at night, railroad fuzes, or thermite grenades would be suitable as distinctive lights. The electric batons used for ground control of aircraft are also suitable for marking of the extraction force forward elements. These batons held by the lead man of each lift will enable pilots to land at the intended pick-up point. The batons can be sent into the extraction LZ with the pathfinder element. Another idea for lighting pick-up points proposed was the use of C-4 compound mixed with sawdust in a shoe polish can. This mixture burns well for an extended period; is readily available and light in weight.

(c) During any extraction it is imperative to know how many troops remain in the objective area and where they are located. During the conduct of extraction at night, this becomes even more important to preclude leaving personnel in the area and to insure that supporting artillery and airfires can be pulled in close to the perimeter.

(8) The replacement blade required for the damaged helicopter was available only in Saigon and was flown to the operational area and installed. If a longer replacement time were required a decision would have to be made to air evacuate the damaged helicopter, secure it with ground elements until it could be repaired, or destroy it. An estimate of the time required to repair a downed helicopter must be made immediately in order to determine which course of action should be taken.

#### c. Airlift of Artillery.

(1) The Royal Australian Artillery Battery was airlifted by helicopter to LZ JACK after that area was secured by TF 1/RAR. There was approximately a half-hour delay in lifting the initial battery into the objective area. Departure control was holding the lift until word came from the objective area, while in the objective area it was assumed that the battery would be lifted as soon as aircraft were available (Everyone must be well read into the operation).

(2) Other than the above mentioned incident the move into and out of the objective area went rapidly and efficiently. A/82d Aviation company conducted the lift. This being our own attached company, they had previously lifted this unit, and therefore had developed techniques and procedures which expedited the lift.

#### d. Tactical Movement in the Objective Area.

(1) Movement to contact.

(a) TF 1/RAR formed a search pattern similar to other operations. The movement by companies to get into positions

~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~



~~SECRET~~

to establish patrol bases, however, was conducted along ridge lines because the enemy was located in the low ground near sources of water and fish. Contact on two occasions by A Company was made at very close range which is not desirable but difficult to overcome in that type of terrain. Moving with a very narrow front appears to be the only assurance that the entire unit will not become engaged at a very short range before the formation is completely prepared for contact.

*Dispersion in depth. pcty full maneuver space.*

(b) TF 1/503d had reconnoitered and prepared by fire to their objective area the night before and on the morning of the day of contact. The enemy was there however, and contact was made at 15 to 30 meters from the enemy. Once contact is made with enemy having automatic weapons the contact forces are relatively glued to their spots and it is difficult to pull them back to allow heavy fire support to be brought to bear on enemy front line forces. Artillery and TAC Air fires brought on the enemy's rear areas after contact was made by 1/503d did not make the enemy's front line withdraw. The enemy stood his ground by getting into holes and continued to fire even while his rear area was being hit.

*Hugging tactics*

(c) It was proposed that on the approach march that approximately five fire teams of five men each precede the main body by 100 to 200 yards. The main body would then move to the location of the fire teams and the same pattern repeated, using the same five fire teams or different ones. In this manner the minimum of forces will be committed when contact is made, enabling the maximum freedom of maneuver for the main body. The leading echelon must be thinned out in dense terrain. Another proposed solution was to echelon columns right or left in order to keep a minimum of forces making the contact. The difficulty with such a maneuver is the inability to maintain a true formation in dense jungles. Keeping a formation is virtually impossible unless we maintain a continuous chain of eye contact from the rear man to the man in front of him.

(2) Maneuver after contact. The difficult problem for the battalion commander is to determine where all his forces are located after contact is made. He must know this before committing any more forces to movement or using his heavy fire support. The lead company, in contact with the enemy, must also be given enough time to develop the situation before a decision is made to maneuver other elements. If contact is broken by pulling back in order to get heavier fire power on the enemy forces in contact, the situation will not develop properly. It remains a choice of breaking contact or maintaining contact and maneuvering forces out of contact to hit the enemy's flank. Whenever the situation cannot be developed without excessive personnel losses it was agreed that breaking contact and striking the enemy with artillery and air, with an immediate follow up by friendly maneuvering is the most effective approach. If we can take an objective by fire power, we should do so.



~~TOP SECRET USE ONLY~~

e. Unit Tactics.

(1) A significant situation in this operation was that we were not in a hurry to take an objective. We are on a time schedule when we deliver forces into an objective area and at times during the movement to contact. After contact is established the time table should be discarded and the battle should be adjusted to the pace of the local commander in contact.

(2) In the dense jungle terrain, there is always a danger that friendly forces are being maneuvered to positions where they will mask the fires of other friendly forces.

(3) It is an advantage to be able to set up a battalion base and operate from that base rather than constantly move the battalion as a whole. This procedure expedites logistical support and command and control. Heavier weapons such as 4.2 mortars can also be delivered into the base if needed. This procedure has been found to be the best way to search an area.

(4) There is a slight disadvantage to the battalion patrol base concept in that the forces that are on patrol and exposed to the enemy are thin. In a sweep-type concept with the entire battalion moving, maximum strength is immediately at hand, however, if contact is made in the sweep-type formation the enemy often avoids contact merely by moving to one side or the other.

(5) It was noted that in our tactic of the sweep and the patrol base concept, not enough use is made of blocking forces in the maneuvers. The enemy has the ability to evade our patrols under either concept unless some forces block, while the other forces move toward the blocking positions. As a substitute to using personnel, artillery or mortar fires can be used as the blocking force.

f. Use of Scout Dogs. The value of scout dogs in the operation was limited. They were used on several occasions to go through bunkers, however, no enemy was found in these bunkers. Another way the dogs were used was to help select the best route back to the base camp as the patrol was returning. It is advisable to use the same dogs and dog handlers with each unit. It was also believed that dogs working with ARVN forces on a continuous basis, as these did, and then brought into the operation to work with American Forces disrupts their sense of smell.

2. Firepower:

a. Infantry weapons.

(1) This operation was the Brigade's first battle where it appeared as if the majority of enemy casualties were caused



~~SECRET~~

by our rifle and machine gun fire, rather than by mortar, artillery and air as in other battles. Interviews with a number of individual riflemen from 1/503d after the battle, revealed that they fired anywhere from 150 to 200 rounds from their M16 rifles during the period of the fire fight. Many of those questioned attested to the fact that they saw the enemy fall after being hit by their rifle fire. Both of these facts are dramatic reversals over World War II post battle analyses.

(2) The M16 rifle performed well during the battle, with relatively few stoppages experienced. Trouble that may have been experienced can be attributed to an accumulation of carbon in the chamber. This has resulted from a lack of chamber brushes for the M16. There are none available for this weapon, therefore, field expedients must be used. Another item needed for the weapon is a ruptured cartridge extractor. Immediate action for the weapon stoppage has been found to be pouring a great amount of oil down the bore several times a day.

(3) In several instances flame throwers could have been used by 1/503d however, the problem of getting the weapon into the area in time was prohibitive. Flame thrower teams are available with the Support Battalion and are being trained in rappeling from helicopters into operational areas.

(4) Two 81mm mortar rounds were exploded in the 1/503d CP area. An investigation revealed cleat marks on tree trunks. This indicated that the rounds were hung in trees and booby trapped by jungle vine tripwires. It is recommended that tree trunks in battalion patrol and base areas be examined for cleat marks in the future.

#### b. Artillery.

(1) The artillery fired a total of 343 missions with 5352 rounds of 105mm Howitzer ammunition.

(2) As usual the artillery was frustrated by the many cease fires but realized that the man on the ground was king. It is frustrating to the artillery to get a prime target and not be able to fire because a friendly force is maneuvering into position and cannot give troop clearance. *Use of high air bursts for adjustment and orientation.*

(3) 1/RAR used covering fire frequently which facilitated maneuver.

(4) During the extraction of the forces, high angle fire could not be employed due to the location of the flight corridors and the simultaneous extraction from two LZ's.

(5) During one period communication was interrupted between the FSCC and the helicopters in the operational area. Com-



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

munication from FSCC was transferred to the artillery air observer who provided information on helicopter traffic in the area and gave clearance to fire artillery. This expedient appeared to work well and may shorten the period of cease fire when helicopters are in the area of operations.

(6) It is a common practice to strike the extraction LZ periphery with artillery when the last element becomes airborne.

(7) There was never a shortage of artillery ammunition during the entire operation.

(8) One of the most significant revelations from the critique was the fact that during the height of the 1/503d engagement, which lasted four to five hours, only six artillery missions were capable of being fired in support. Of the 117 TAC Air sorties used during the operation only 36 were employed on the day of the big battle, and the majority of those were employed after the action had ceased. We must find a way to use the firepower that is at our disposal. The ground commander must, during contact, be obsessed with finding ways to employ artillery and air firepower to assist his forces. On occasions it may be necessary to stop everything in order to carefully adjust artillery fire to place it exactly where its needed. Walk the fire into where you want it. The same can be done with air support. We must use bombs and bullets instead of bodies.

NAVIGATION  
ORIENTATION

(9) A recurring problem is for the man on the ground to identify his location. Adjustment by calling-in phosphorus rounds to a position is time consuming. Marking rounds for the M-79 are urgently needed. A marker that will designate to the man in the air and to the man on the ground the same location, is needed.

TRNG AMMO  
YELLOW SMOKE

#### c. Armed Helicopters.

(1) As indicated above, a marking round in the form of a smoke streamer is needed to identify the location of forward ground elements for the armed helicopters in order to provide closer supporting suppressive fires.

RIFLE GRENADE SMOKE STREAMERS

(2) The armed helicopters performed exceptionally well in support of the airmobile assault landings, escort of lift helicopters and during the extraction phase. They are also extremely fine reconnaissance vehicles.

#### d. Tactical Air.

(1) Worthy of note was the flexibility and accuracy of the tactical air preparation. When it was decided on short notice to both delay the initial landing and then to use the alternate LZ (LZ JACK), the tactical air reacted quickly and efficiently. At the last minute an intelligence report indicated that a large enemy force



~~TOP SECRET~~

was just south of the primary LZ. The twelve USAF planes that were aloft for the LZ preparation were called down on the reported force. Twelve more planes were called up from ground alert and the preparation on the alternate LZ was completed in accordance with the revised schedule.

(2) The following tactical air missions were employed to support this operation:

- (a) 5 November 65 - 46 Sorties
- (b) 6 November 65 - 10 Sorties
- (c) 7 November 65 - 10 Sorties
- (d) 8 November 65 - 35 Sorties
- (e) 9 November 65 - 16 Sorties

TOTAL: 117 Sorties

Total ordnance expended - 158.5 tons.

(3) The concept of attaching a FAC, a radio operator, and a radio maintenance technician to each infantry battalion has proven effective. The functions of the ground FAC are to provide close air support to the infantry battalion commander by assisting the airborne FAC in the control of direction of strike aircraft and to advise the ground commander in the planning and execution of tactical air support. This advice is often the FAC's most important function. Communication between the ground and airborne FAC has increased tactical air response and has enhanced friendly troop safety from TAC air fires.

(4) The air preparation of LZ KING for the assault consisted of napalm. Bombs could not be used because 1/RAR was located immediately across the river.

(5) All commanders were unanimous in their praise for the responsive and accurate TAC air support received during the operation.

(6) There was a certain amount of confusion in obtaining and directing AF rescue helicopters for the evacuation of casualties. Request for Air Force helicopters should be treated the same as an immediate tactical air request. The request goes from the ALO to the DASC, is scrambled, and picked up by the requesting ALO. (The Air Force H-43 has a 200 foot cable hoist that can be used to extract casualties from jungle areas where there is no LZ, if the trees are not too tall.)



~~TOP SECRET USE ONLY~~

C. Logistics:

1. Preparation of landing zones in jungle terrain. A formidable task confronted 1/503; to cut a hole into the jungle to enable medical evacuation helicopters to land. Movement of friendly wounded and dead to a suitable LZ was impractical in the dense terrain. The hacking-out of an evacuation LZ began on the afternoon of 8 November and was completed on 9 November. One helicopter (with extraordinary skill on the part of the pilot) could descend vertically for 250 feet in an 80 feet diameter space to pick up casualties. The task of cutting large trees was difficult, because of inexperienced personnel, even with the use of chain saws. Seven chain saws were lowered to the ground the evening before the evacuation and work progressed most of the night. It is interesting to note that accompanying the 1st Battalion was a civilian photographer (making a documentary film) who had spent 15 years as a lumberjack. He immediately offered his services to help cut trees. His efforts produced almost five times the results of any other person. He knew what he was doing and therefore obtained better results. It was recommended that a special team be trained in cutting LZ's in the jungle. This team would have available the necessary equipment and during operations be on-call to rappel from helicopters into the proposed LZ area. It is anticipated that a team would consist of eight members. Experiments will also be conducted by this team on the use of explosives for clearing LZ's. Power augers must be obtained to place explosives in the wood.

2. After the casualties were evacuated 1/503d moved to an area which afforded a better extraction LZ. When this area was selected, work was begun to improve its size to enable three helicopters to land simultaneously. It is worthy to note that from an airborne helicopter direction can be given to the personnel on the ground as to which trees or brush constitute the obstacles to landing. A smoke grenade dropped on these locations marks the specific area requiring additional clearance. It was determined that the construction of an oval shaped LZ was the most efficient design, however, each pilot that comes into the area for the first time must be specifically informed as to where to place his tail boom. *azimuth parallel to length of LZ*

3. The dense jungle canopy made evacuation of casualties from the 1/503d area virtually impossible on the 8th. Well off to the flank of the perimeter, where there were two casualties, it was discovered that the jungle canopy was not as high as in most other areas. An Air Force H-43 helicopter with a 200 foot lowering cable was used to evacuate these two men. During that night and early morning of 9 November all men worked quite hard to make a helicopter landing zone for casualties to be evacuated. Seven power saws were lowered into the area and some trees 250 feet high and up to six feet in diameter were cut down. A funnel 250 feet deep and approximately 80 feet in diameter was cut into the jungle for casualty evacuation. It took great skill and daring for our Army and Air Force helicopter pilots



to maneuver their planes in such a restricted area. Each casualty and all equipment that was not needed for the remainder of the operation was evacuated through this "Helicopter Funnel."

4. The supply lift consisted of 112 helicopter sorties during the operation. There was a three-hour delay but this had no effect on supply availability to committed forces.

5. It was recognized early after the Australian artillery battery was heli-lifted into the objective area that they required some form of transport to haul ammunition. The IOLEX parachute drop did not always place the ammunition exactly at the gun positions. A mechanical mule (M274) was lifted to them to alleviate this problem.

#### D. Intelligence:

1. The two-way Intelligence/Admin/Log net employed during the operation functioned well. The command emphasis on the need to keep information flowing to the rear was evident.

2. A weapon that was captured a great distance from the main battle area was turned in to the Brigade S-2 a couple of days after the operation. It was determined from the type of weapon captured that the unit encountered was another main force unit. Emphasis must be placed on turning in captured equipment immediately for identification.

3. Our long range patrols were launched in conjunction with this operation. This was their first use in combat a great distance from the main force. They made several sightings and gained valuable experience by testing operational procedures.

4. Sufficient cameras are being obtained to provide each company size unit a camera for intelligence purposes. Recording of what we see for later study is important.

#### E. Command, Control and Communication:

1. Care must be taken that rumors are not started and spread during the heat of battle. There were several instances where personnel received partial and distorted information and passed it on with further magnification. No harm came of these incidents, however, this has a potential danger. Newspaper correspondents may not be desirous of checking the validity of the information before disseminating it.

2. Experience has shown that in requesting a Tactical area of operational responsibilities for a specific operation it must be larger than the area of maneuver. It must encompass the area on the periphery of the intended maneuver area to include those areas from which action may be generated. We must not restrict our fires outside the maneuver area.



~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

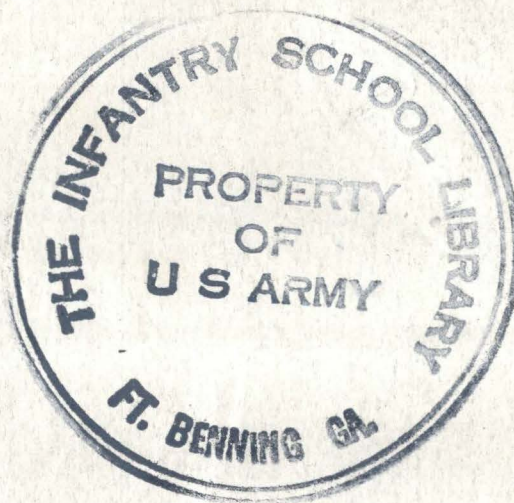
F. Civic Action: While TF 3/319th occupied position ACE it conducted certain civic action activities in the villages on its periphery. A doctor and MEDCAP team treated 258 civilians and a dentist extracted 27 teeth. Seven hundred and fifty pounds of food stuffs were distributed to needy civilian families.

### III. SUMMARY.

A. On 8 November 1965 a main line enemy force was destroyed with its few survivors being forced to flee into the jungle leaving their dead and equipment behind. Intelligence reports indicated that in the area of the 1st Battalion 503d Infantry a main line VC Force of three battalions had been soundly defeated. The enemy killed came to 403 by body count. This was the largest kill, by the smallest unit, in the shortest time in the war in Vietnam to date. Heavily engaged by overwhelming numbers, 1st Battalion 503d Infantry, proved the superiority of the American Paratrooper beyond any question of doubt. They decisively defeated a determined and numerically superior enemy force despite all handicaps.

B. There were many things done correctly which are taken as normal which have not been mentioned in the critique. There are, however, many procedures and techniques that we must improve to achieve greater combat effectiveness.

C. It is characteristic of this war that while the battle raged, the supporting artillery for the operation was engaged in civic action operations in an attempt to win the people of these villages for the GVN.



~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~



~~TOP SECRET~~

HEADQUARTERS  
173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE (SEPARATE)  
APO San Francisco 96250

15 November 1965

OPERATION HUMPI. SITUATION.A. Tactical Situation:

1. Mission. The 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) conducted a search and destroy operation in the Viet Cong dominated War Zone "D" in Tan Uyen District of Bien Hoa Province near the junction of the Dong Nai and Song Be River. The operation which began on 5 November 1965 and ended on 9 November 1965, was the fifth operation conducted in War Zone "D" by this Brigade. During the operation the 1st Battalion 503d Airborne Infantry met and virtually annihilated a Viet Cong unit that was later proved to be composed of three battalions.

2. Task Organization:

a. Brigade Headquarters and Staff (Brig Gen Ellis W. Williamson Commanding) Air Force AIO/FAC Section (Operated from Bien Hoa).

b. Task Force 1/503d - Lt Col Tyler, CO  
1/503d Infantry  
RRU Team  
FAC Team  
Engr Squad  
2 Vietnamese Police

c. Task Force 1/RAR - Lt Col Brumfield, CO  
1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment  
Royal Australian Regiment  
Royal Australian Artillery Battery  
RRU Team  
FAC Team  
2 Vietnamese Police

d. Task Force 3/319th - Lt Col Surut, CO  
A Btry 3/319th Arty  
C Btry 3/319th Arty  
E/17 Cavalry  
D/16 Armor  
RRU Team  
2 Vietnamese Police



- ~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~
- e. Task Force Rear  
2/503d Infantry  
173d Spt Battalion  
161st Artillery Battery (RNZA)  
Admin Company  
HHC 173d Abn Bde  
Engr Co (-)

### 3. Description of Operational Area.

a. The terrain found in the 1/RAR operational area was open paddy in the vicinity of the N-S trail; their west flank. As the unit progressed easterly the paddy gave way to small hill masses seldom reaching an elevation of over 70 feet. The vegetation consisted of rice paddies on the west flank and low shrubbery became predominant as the unit moved generally east. Once the small hill masses were reached a semi-jungle vegetation was encountered. The canopy level was approximately 30 feet to 40 feet in height but open in many places. The undergrowth consisted of many low vines and entanglements but observation was good to approximately 50 meters. Cover and concealment were excellent. Fields of fire were generally poor. The critical terrain features were the hill masses which overlooked the avenues of approach and the numerous E-W trails leading into the area.

b. The terrain in the 1/503d operational area consisted of low paddy initially but as the unit progressed N and NW small hill masses became prominent. These hill masses seldom exceeded 70 feet in height. The vegetation found on the IZ was tall grass/reeds reaching a height of 6 to 10 feet. As the unit moved generally W and NW a semi-jungle vegetation was encountered. The vegetation consisted of thick undergrowth in the vicinity of the stream beds, however, as the streams were crossed the undergrowth became sparse. The canopy was thick, almost without openings and the first canopy reached a height of 40 to 50 feet. While a second canopy was 250 feet high. Observation was good up to approximately 50 meters when maneuvering away from the stream beds. Vegetation within the stream beds limited observation to 5 to 10 meters. Cover and concealment were excellent and fields of fire generally poor. The small hill masses were considered critical terrain because they overlooked the avenues of approach into the area. Numerous E-W trails led from the hill masses to the Song Dong Nai and Song Be Rivers.

### B. Summary of Operations:

#### 1. D-Day (5 November 1965).

a. Implementation of OPORD 28-65 (Operation Hump) began at 050530H when the lead elements of TF 3/319th crossed the start point and moved by motor convoy to Position ACE (See Chart) a few kilometers south west of the operational area, and registered its batteries in preparation



~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

for the helicopter assaults later in the morning. The artillery position was as close to the operational area as the existing road network and surrounding terrain would permit. Because of the distance of Position ACE from the northern area of operations, one battery of Royal Australian Artillery was to be heli-lifted into a forward position in the southern TAOR (tactical area of responsibility) after the First Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment had secured the area.

b. The First Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, scheduled to assault LZ QUEEN from helicopters at 0800 hours and begin operations in the southern TAOR, was delayed because of heavy ground fog which obscured the landing zone area. One and one half hours later the Australians executed their landing on alternate LZ JACK with no opposition. They were preceded by a 45 minute LZ preparation by air strikes, artillery, and armed helicopter fires. They landed in three lifts of three elements each. The Australian 105mm howitzer battery followed shortly after the infantry battalion was on the ground.

c. The 1st Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry, also preceded by an intense LZ preparation, began the assault on LZ KING, on the north bank of the Song Dong Nai River, at 1245 hours. This landing also met no resistance on the ground; however, the helicopters were fired upon from the ground prior to landing.

d. Two long range patrols (five men each) were employed on this operation, being helilifted into the south and to the east of LZ QUEEN. They sighted and reported several groups of Viet Cong and when possible, directed air strikes against them. Both patrols were extracted by D+2 by helicopter.

e. The two battalions cleared their immediate areas during the remainder of the first day and encountered only light sniper fire. The 1/RAR sent a unit into the village of Xom Cay Xoai, north of LZ JACK. This village had figured in several previous operations. The area was found to be completely evacuated.

## 2. D+1 (6 November 1965).

a. TF 1/503d continued to search its sector using platoon sized patrols, operating from three Company patrol bases. Only light contact was made, with several abandoned VC Camps discovered and destroyed. Tear gas was used in a VC tunnel but no enemy were found to be present. Of particular interest was an open area, to the north of LZ KING, that was also suitable for use as an LZ. Fortified positions having excellent observation and fields of fire, had recently been prepared by the enemy around this area about thirty meters in from the woodline.

b. That portion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail just north-west of the confluence of the Song Be and Song Dong Nai Rivers, long reputed to be heavily-used Viet Cong supply route, revealed no indications of



~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

recent traffic. Signs of usage which had appeared in aerial photographs were actually the results of rain water erosion on the open trail.

c. TF 1/RAR pushed east and southeast against sporadic opposition from sniper fire and small groups of VC. They found several isolated enemy positions and shelters, and five enemy grenades. In the late afternoon of D+1, Company A of the 1/RAR became engaged in a fire fight with an enemy unit of unknown size. There were no friendly casualties but two VC were killed and one was wounded and captured. The prisoner was carrying a plan for an attack on an outpost in the Bien Hoa area. He revealed that he was a member of a larger force and he confirmed the plan before he died of his wounds. The rounding up and capture of this small enemy force was a fine display of teamwork. A small Australian patrol, that was being observed by an Australian pilot in a fixed wing aircraft, made first contact. The Australian artillery battery was in direct support. The US artillery batteries added to the firepower and a US Air Force controller brought in an air strike. The artillery and air fires, coupled with the movement of the small Australian patrol, forced the enemy to move into a complete Australian company that was waiting to make the capture.

### 3. D+2 (7 November 1965).

a. TF 1/503d moved to a battalion base position and continued to search its sector. At 070955H a VC tunnel system was located and destroyed.

b. Late on the third day of the operation the Brigade S-2 informed the 1/503d Infantry that confirmed intelligence indicated that a VC force was less than 2,000 meters to the west of the battalion. Small patrols were dispatched just before dark. They soon made contact with the enemy and were withdrawn to the battalion perimeter. As the night settled the stage was set for the climactic events of the following day.

c. TF 1/RAR continued to search its sector east of Tue Dong Nai. No contact was established with the enemy.

### 4. D+3 (8 November 1965).

a. On D+3 TF 1/503d fought and won a major battle. The initial contact was made as C/1/503d moved toward what intelligence reports and patrols of the previous day had indicated as a VC installation. At approximately 0800 hours the right flank platoon came upon an enemy fortified area. The enemy and our troops exchanged a large volume of small arms and automatic weapons fire. The platoon was soon joined by the remainder of the company and it became evident as the fight progressed that they had engaged a battalion-size or larger force.

~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~



~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

The enemy began an attempt to envelop the flanks of Company C. This fighting was frequently at eye-ball contact and hand to hand in an extremely dense jungle area. B Company was effective in securing C Company's right flank. A short time later C Company found its open flank being enveloped also. Elements of Company A were committed at this time, attacking toward the enemy's left flank. The major portion of B Company, twice broke the encirclement. Shortly after noon Company B and Company C consolidated their position and directed intense artillery fire and air strikes against the enemy. The enemy's successive assaults on B and C Company were futile, causing him severe losses. Activity slowed to sniper fire and sporadic machine gun fire in the late afternoon and evening around the perimeter of Company B and Company C. The battalion CP perimeter, approximately 1,000 meters to the east, was brushed several times throughout the night. It was later discovered that these were VC elements attempting to withdraw from the area of the battle.

b. TF 1/RAR, south of the river, after meeting no opposition during most of the day, encountered a well dug-in enemy force estimated to number 100 at approximately 1630 hours and became engaged in a heavy fire fight before the enemy broke contact.

#### 5. D+4 (9 November 1965).

a. During the morning, the primary concern was to determine enemy locations and evacuate friendly casualties from the battle area of 8 November. Elements of 1/503d searched the battle area for any remaining VC forces and to ascertain VC casualties. Only light contact was made and a total of 391 VC bodies were counted in the immediate vicinity. The remainder of the VC force had withdrawn from the area.

b. At 091300H Recon Platoon 1/503d which was located along the river, to protect the battalion rear, was extracted independent of the main body. At 091438H extraction of the remainder of TF 1/503d began and was completed at 091845H.

c. The RAA Battery and TF 1/RAR were extracted from LZ JACK to Base Camp, closing at 091250H.

d. The 3d Battalion, 319th Artillery Task Force returned to Bien Hoa by motor convoy, though not without incident. Troop E, 17th Cavalry fired upon and sank two enemy sampans, with five persons aboard, on the Song Dong Nai River as the convoy moved back to the base camp from Position ACE.

## II. CRITIQUE OF OPERATION.

### A. Introduction:

1. A critique of this operation was conducted on 13 November 1965. Participating in the critique were the Commanding General, the

~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~



~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

Brigade Staff, Battalion, separate company commanders and representatives of all supporting elements.

2. The purpose of the critique was to identify those techniques and procedures that worked well and those that require modification or substitution in order to improve our combat effectiveness for future operations.

3. A summary of the significant items identified during the critique and proposed corrective action is as follows:

B. Operations:

1. Movement.

a. Ground movement. The ground movement of the artillery, cavalry and tank company to position ACE was conducted without incident. Movement to and from this position was conducted during darkness. Air cover and air relay were available during the moves. (Movement of the artillery during darkness was necessary in order to have the guns in position and registered in time to support the assault landing on D-Day. The return movement during darkness was necessary, since the last forces were extracted from the operational area after darkness fell, requiring the artillery to remain in position to support the extraction. After other movements were completed the artillery fired several missions on the extraction LZ's and on reported and suspected enemy locations.)

b. Airmobile Assault.

(1) Assault of LZ JACK by 1/RAR began one and a half hours later than scheduled, due to ground fog in the objective area. This LZ alternate was chosen for the assault after intelligence was received that two VC Battalions were positioned on a ridge line immediately south of primary landing zone QUEEN. This change, approximately one half hour prior to H-Hour, created no problems or confusion. Air support and artillery preparations were planned for the primary and alternate LZ's, therefore the change to the alternate LZ caused no requirement to designate new preparatory concentrations.

(2) The airmobile assault lift for 1/RAR consisted of 29 UH1D and 8 UH1B helicopters. This lift was formed into three elements, with the initial touchdown at 0930 hours and the last element to close the Battalion in the objective area landing at 1021H. A total of 671 personnel were lifted in the assault.

(3) Troops of 1/RAR were in position on the east bank of the river, to provide protection from that direction, while 1/503d landed across the river at LZ KING using the same amount of airlift. The landings at LZ KING began at 1245 and were completed at 1335, with troops committed in the assault.

~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~



~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

(4) Extraction of 1/503d elements began with the lift-out of the reconnaissance elements of 40 personnel at 1130 9 November from an unnamed LZ north of LZ KING. It was necessary for our elements to clear an LZ, with three helicopter capacity to extract the main force. One of the helicopters in the first element became disabled when a counter-weight became disconnected and damaged a rotor blade. This necessitated the repair of the helicopter on the LZ and reduced the capacity to two helicopters. The extraction continued at this reduced rate.

(5) Simultaneously with the extraction of 1/503d, 1/RAR extraction began from LZ JACK. Whenever helicopters were diverted to pick up personnel at LZ JACK some adjustments of the troop formation were required. These were readily made with the minimum of confusion. (This operation displayed the flexibility that is inherent in the use of helicopters to move ground forces, when directed from an aerial command and observation post. This aerial command post containing the ground commander, his army aviation and artillery representatives and Air Force AIO, provides the means to divert airlift, direct and coordinate armed helicopter, artillery and TAC airfire support as the tactical situation demands. The operation also displayed the need of the ground forces to be able to respond rapidly to changes with the minimum of confusion. To achieve this response, clear, concise and meaningful orders must be transmitted to all elements involved in the change.)

(6) The extraction of 1/503d continued until there were just enough forces remaining to secure the LZ and the disabled helicopter being repaired. When no more forces could be lifted out without risking the capture of the helicopter, the complete lift was diverted to 1/RAR. When the helicopter was repaired and capable of flying out, helicopters were again diverted from 1/RAR to complete the lift-out of the remaining 1/503d forces. A sufficient lull in the activity on the 1/503d LZ had attracted the VC to move forward and investigate the LZ area. He obviously thought that the extraction was completed. The 1/503d security elements killed several of the enemy during the extraction of its remaining elements. A door gunner on one lift helicopter was able to claim three enemy kills while sweeping the area with fire on departure of his lift. No friendly casualties or damage to helicopters was inflicted during the extraction.

(7) Several lessons were learned and proposals made for future extractions that extend into darkness:

(a) All fires in the proximity of the extraction zone must be extinguished. They can readily confuse the lift pilots as the LZ location, or be so bright as to impair their night vision.

~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~



~~TOP SECRET USE ONLY~~

(b) To mark LZ's at night, railroad fuzes, or thermite grenades would be suitable as distinctive lights. The electric batons used for ground control of aircraft are also suitable for marking of the extraction force forward elements. These batons held by the lead man of each lift will enable pilots to land at the intended pick-up point. The batons can be sent into the extraction LZ with the pathfinder element. Another idea for lighting pick-up points proposed was the use of C-4 compound mixed with sawdust in a shoe polish can. This mixture burns well for an extended period; is readily available and light in weight.

(c) During any extraction it is imperative to know how many troops remain in the objective area and where they are located. During the conduct of extraction at night, this becomes even more important to preclude leaving personnel in the area and to insure that supporting artillery and airfires can be pulled in close to the perimeter.

(8) The replacement blade required for the damaged helicopter was available only in Saigon and was flown to the operational area and installed. If a longer replacement time were required a decision would have to be made to air evacuate the damaged helicopter, secure it with ground elements until it could be repaired, or destroy it. An estimate of the time required to repair a downed helicopter must be made immediately in order to determine which course of action should be taken.

#### c. Airlift of Artillery.

(1) The Royal Australian Artillery Battery was airlifted by helicopter to LZ JACK after that area was secured by TF 1/RAR. There was approximately a half-hour delay in lifting the initial battery into the objective area. Departure control was holding the lift until word came from the objective area, while in the objective area it was assumed that the battery would be lifted as soon as aircraft were available (Everyone must be well read into the operation).

(2) Other than the above mentioned incident the move into and out of the objective area went rapidly and efficiently. A/82d Aviation company conducted the lift. This being our own attached company, they had previously lifted this unit, and therefore had developed techniques and procedures which expedited the lift.

#### d. Tactical Movement in the Objective Area.

##### (1) Movement to contact.

(a) TF 1/RAR formed a search pattern similar to other operations. The movement by companies to get into positions

~~TOP SECRET USE ONLY~~



~~TOP SECRET - USE ONLY~~

to establish patrol bases, however, was conducted along ridge lines because the enemy was located in the low ground near sources of water and fish. Contact on two occasions by A Company was made at very close range which is not desirable but difficult to overcome in that type of terrain. Moving with a very narrow front appears to be the only assurance that the entire unit will not become engaged at a very short range before the formation is completely prepared for contact.

(b) TF 1/503d had reconnoitered and prepared by fire to their objective area the night before and on the morning of the day of contact. The enemy was there however, and contact was made at 15 to 30 meters from the enemy. Once contact is made with enemy having automatic weapons the contact forces are relatively glued to their spots and it is difficult to pull them back to allow heavy fire support to be brought to bear on enemy front line forces. Artillery and TAC Air fires brought on the enemy's rear areas after contact was made by 1/503d did not make the enemy's front line withdraw. The enemy stood his ground by getting into holes and continued to fire even while his rear area was being hit.

(c) It was proposed that on the approach march that approximately five fire teams of five men each precede the main body by 100 to 200 yards. The main body would then move to the location of the fire teams and the same pattern repeated, using the same five fire teams or different ones. In this manner the minimum of forces will be committed when contact is made, enabling the maximum freedom of maneuver for the main body. The leading echelon must be thinned out in dense terrain. Another proposed solution was to echelon columns right or left in order to keep a minimum of forces making the contact. The difficulty with such a maneuver is the inability to maintain a true formation in dense jungles. Keeping a formation is virtually impossible unless we maintain a continuous chain of eye contact from the rear man to the man in front of him.

(2) Maneuver after contact. The difficult problem for the battalion commander is to determine where all his forces are located after contact is made. He must know this before committing any more forces to movement or using his heavy fire support. The lead company, in contact with the enemy, must also be given enough time to develop the situation before a decision is made to maneuver other elements. If contact is broken by pulling back in order to get heavier fire power on the enemy forces in contact, the situation will not develop properly. It remains a choice of breaking contact or maintaining contact and maneuvering forces out of contact to hit the enemy's flank. Whenever the situation cannot be developed without excessive personnel losses it was agreed that breaking contact and striking the enemy with artillery and air, with an immediate follow up by friendly maneuvering is the most effective approach. If we can take an objective by fire power, we should do so.



~~TOP SECRET USE ONLY~~

e. Unit Tactics.

(1) A significant situation in this operation was that we were not in a hurry to take an objective. We are on a time schedule when we deliver forces into an objective area and at times during the movement to contact. After contact is established the time table should be discarded and the battle should be adjusted to the pace of the local commander in contact.

(2) In the dense jungle terrain, there is always a danger that friendly forces are being maneuvered to positions where they will mask the fires of other friendly forces.

(3) It is an advantage to be able to set up a battalion base and operate from that base rather than constantly move the battalion as a whole. This procedure expedites logistical support and command and control. Heavier weapons such as 4.2 mortars can also be delivered into the base if needed. This procedure has been found to be the best way to search an area.

(4) There is a slight disadvantage to the battalion patrol base concept in that the forces that are on patrol and exposed to the enemy are thin. In a sweep-type concept with the entire battalion moving, maximum strength is immediately at hand, however, if contact is made in the sweep-type formation the enemy often avoids contact merely by moving to one side or the other.

(5) It was noted that in our tactic of the sweep and the patrol base concept, not enough use is made of blocking forces in the maneuvers. The enemy has the ability to evade our patrols under either concept unless some forces block, while the other forces move toward the blocking positions. As a substitute to using personnel, artillery or mortar fires can be used as the blocking force.

f. Use of Scout Dogs. The value of scout dogs in the operation was limited. They were used on several occasions to go through bunkers, however, no enemy was found in these bunkers. Another way the dogs were used was to help select the best route back to the base camp as the patrol was returning. It is advisable to use the same dogs and dog handlers with each unit. It was also believed that dogs working with ARVN forces on a continuous basis, as these did, and then brought into the operation to work with American Forces disrupts their sense of smell.

2. Firepower:

a. Infantry weapons.

(1) This operation was the Brigade's first battle where it appeared as if the majority of enemy casualties were caused



~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

by our rifle and machine gun fire, rather than by mortar, artillery and air as in other battles. Interviews with a number of individual riflemen from 1/503d after the battle, revealed that they fired anywhere from 150 to 200 rounds from their M16 rifles during the period of the fire fight. Many of those questioned attested to the fact that they saw the enemy fall after being hit by their rifle fire. Both of these facts are dramatic reversals over World War II post battle analyses.

(2) The M16 rifle performed well during the battle, with relatively few stoppages experienced. Trouble that may have been experienced can be attributed to an accumulation of carbon in the chamber. This has resulted from a lack of chamber brushes for the M16. There are none available for this weapon, therefore, field expedients must be used. Another item needed for the weapon is a ruptured cartridge extractor. Immediate action for the weapon stoppage has been found to be pouring a great amount of oil down the bore several times a day.

(3) In several instances flame throwers could have been used by 1/503d however, the problem of getting the weapon into the area in time was prohibitive. Flame thrower teams are available with the Support Battalion and are being trained in rappelling from helicopters into operational areas.

(4) Two 81mm mortar rounds were exploded in the 1/503d CP area. An investigation revealed cleat marks on tree trunks. This indicated that the rounds were hung in trees and booby trapped by jungle vine tripwires. It is recommended that tree trunks in battalion patrol and base areas be examined for cleat marks in the future.

b. Artillery.

(1) The artillery fired a total of 343 missions with 5352 rounds of 105mm Howitzer ammunition.

(2) As usual the artillery was frustrated by the many cease fires but realized that the man on the ground was king. It is frustrating to the artillery to get a prime target and not be able to fire because a friendly force is maneuvering into position and cannot give troop clearance.

(3) 1/RAR used covering fire frequently which facilitated maneuver.

(4) During the extraction of the forces, high angle fire could not be employed due to the location of the flight corridors and the simultaneous extraction from two LZ's.

(5) During one period communication was interrupted between the FSCC and the helicopters in the operational area. Com-



~~CONFIDENTIAL USE ONLY~~

munication from FSCC was transferred to the artillery air observer who provided information on helicopter traffic in the area and gave clearance to fire artillery. This expedient appeared to work well and may shorten the period of cease fire when helicopters are in the area of operations.

(6) It is a common practice to strike the extraction LZ periphery with artillery when the last element becomes airborne.

(7) There was never a shortage of artillery ammunition during the entire operation.

(8) One of the most significant revelations from the critique was the fact that during the height of the 1/503d engagement, which lasted four to five hours, only six artillery missions were capable of being fired in support. Of the 117 TAC Air sorties used during the operation only 36 were employed on the day of the big battle, and the majority of those were employed after the action had ceased. We must find a way to use the firepower that is at our disposal. The ground commander must, during contact, be obsessed with finding ways to employ artillery and air firepower to assist his forces. On occasions it may be necessary to stop everything in order to carefully adjust artillery fire to place it exactly where its needed. Walk the fire into where you want it. The same can be done with air support. We must use bombs and bullets instead of bodies.

(9) A recurring problem is for the man on the ground to identify his location. Adjustment by calling-in phosphorus rounds to a position is time consuming. Marking rounds for the M-79 are urgently needed. A marker that will designate to the man in the air and to the man on the ground the same location, is needed.

#### c. Armed Helicopters.

(1) As indicated above, a marking round in the form of a smoke streamer is needed to identify the location of forward ground elements for the armed helicopters in order to provide closer supporting suppressive fires.

(2) The armed helicopters performed exceptionally well in support of the airmobile assault landings, escort of lift helicopters and during the extraction phase. They are also extremely fine reconnaissance vehicles.

#### d. Tactical Air.

(1) Worthy of note was the flexibility and accuracy of the tactical air preparation. When it was decided on short notice to both delay the initial landing and then to use the alternate LZ (LZ JACK), the tactical air reacted quickly and efficiently. At the last minute an intelligence report indicated that a large enemy force



~~CONFIDENTIAL USE ONLY~~

was just south of the primary LZ. The twelve USAF planes that were aloft for the LZ preparation were called down on the reported force. Twelve more planes were called up from ground alert and the preparation on the alternate LZ was completed in accordance with the revised schedule.

(2) The following tactical air missions were employed to support this operation:

- (a) 5 November 65 - 46 Sorties
- (b) 6 November 65 - 10 Sorties
- (c) 7 November 65 - 10 Sorties
- (d) 8 November 65 - 35 Sorties
- (e) 9 November 65 - 16 Sorties

TOTAL: 117 Sorties

Total ordnance expended - 158.5 tons.

(3) The concept of attaching a FAC, a radio operator, and a radio maintenance technician to each infantry battalion has proven effective. The functions of the ground FAC are to provide close air support to the infantry battalion commander by assisting the airborne FAC in the control of direction of strike aircraft and to advise the ground commander in the planning and execution of tactical air support. This advice is often the FAC's most important function. Communication between the ground and airborne FAC has increased tactical air response and has enhanced friendly troop safety from TAC air fires.

(4) The air preparation of LZ KING for the assault consisted of napalm. Bombs could not be used because 1/RAR was located immediately across the river.

(5) All commanders were unanimous in their praise for the responsive and accurate TAC air support received during the operation.

(6) There was a certain amount of confusion in obtaining and directing AF rescue helicopters for the evacuation of casualties. Request for Air Force helicopters should be treated the same as an immediate tactical air request. The request goes from the ALO to the DASC, is scrambled, and picked up by the requesting ALO. (The Air Force H-43 has a 200 foot cable hoist that can be used to extract casualties from jungle areas where there is no LZ, if the trees are not too tall.)

~~CONFIDENTIAL USE ONLY~~



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

C. Logistics:

1. Preparation of landing zones in jungle terrain. A formidable task confronted 1/503; to cut a hole into the jungle to enable medical evacuation helicopters to land. Movement of friendly wounded and dead to a suitable LZ was impractical in the dense terrain. The hacking-out of an evacuation LZ began on the afternoon of 8 November and was completed on 9 November. One helicopter (with extraordinary skill on the part of the pilot) could descend vertically for 250 feet in an 80 foot diameter space to pick up casualties. The task of cutting large trees was difficult, because of inexperienced personnel, even with the use of chain saws. Seven chain saws were lowered to the ground the evening before the evacuation and work progressed most of the night. It is interesting to note that accompanying the 1st Battalion was a civilian photographer (making a documentary film) who had spent 15 years as a lumberjack. He immediately offered his services to help cut trees. His efforts produced almost five times the results of any other person. He knew what he was doing and therefore obtained better results. It was recommended that a special team be trained in cutting LZ's in the jungle. This team would have available the necessary equipment and during operations be on-call to rappel from helicopters into the proposed LZ area. It is anticipated that a team would consist of eight members. Experiments will also be conducted by this team on the use of explosives for clearing LZ's. Power augers must be obtained to place explosives in the wood.

2. After the casualties were evacuated 1/503d moved to an area which afforded a better extraction LZ. When this area was selected, work was begun to improve its size to enable three helicopters to land simultaneously. It is worthy to note that from an airborne helicopter direction can be given to the personnel on the ground as to which trees or brush constitute the obstacles to landing. A smoke grenade dropped on these locations marks the specific area requiring additional clearance. It was determined that the construction of an oval shaped LZ was the most efficient design, however, each pilot that comes into the area for the first time must be specifically informed as to where to place his tail boom.

3. The dense jungle canopy made evacuation of casualties from the 1/503d area virtually impossible on the 8th. Well off to the flank of the perimeter, where there were two casualties, it was discovered that the jungle canopy was not as high as in most other areas. An Air Force H-43 helicopter with a 200 foot lowering cable was used to evacuate these two men. During that night and early morning of 9 November all men worked quite hard to make a helicopter landing zone for casualties to be evacuated. Seven power saws were lowered into the area and some trees 250 feet high and up to six feet in diameter were cut down. A funnel 250 feet deep and approximately 80 feet in diameter was cut into the jungle for casualty evacuation. It took great skill and daring for our Army and Air Force helicopter pilots



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

to maneuver their planes in such a restricted area. Each casualty and all equipment that was not needed for the remainder of the operation was evacuated through this "Helicopter Funnel."

4. The supply lift consisted of 112 helicopter sorties during the operation. There was a three-hour delay but this had no effect on supply availability to committed forces.

5. It was recognized early after the Australian artillery battery was heli-lifted into the objective area that they required some form of transport to haul ammunition. The IOLEX parachute drop did not always place the ammunition exactly at the gun positions. A mechanical mule (M274) was lifted to them to alleviate this problem.

#### D. Intelligence:

1. The two-way Intelligence/Admin/Log net employed during the operation functioned well. The command emphasis on the need to keep information flowing to the rear was evident.

2. A weapon that was captured a great distance from the main battle area was turned in to the Brigade S-2 a couple of days after the operation. It was determined from the type of weapon captured that the unit encountered was another main force unit. Emphasis must be placed on turning in captured equipment immediately for identification.

3. Our long range patrols were launched in conjunction with this operation. This was their first use in combat a great distance from the main force. They made several sightings and gained valuable experience by testing operational procedures.

4. Sufficient cameras are being obtained to provide each company size unit a camera for intelligence purposes. Recording of what we see for later study is important.

#### E. Command, Control and Communication:

1. Care must be taken that rumors are not started and spread during the heat of battle. There were several instances where personnel received partial and distorted information and passed it on with further magnification. No harm came of these incidents, however, this has a potential danger. Newspaper correspondents may not be desirous of checking the validity of the information before disseminating it.

2. Experience has shown that in requesting a Tactical area of operational responsibilities for a specific operation it must be larger than the area of maneuver. It must encompass the area on the periphery of the intended maneuver area to include those areas from which action may be generated. We must not restrict our fires outside the maneuver area.



~~TOP SECRET~~

F. Civic Action: While TF 3/319th occupied position ACE it conducted certain civic action activities in the villages on its periphery. A doctor and MEDCAP team treated 258 civilians and a dentist extracted 27 teeth. Seven hundred and fifty pounds of food stuffs were distributed to needy civilian families.

### III. SUMMARY.

A. On 8 November 1965 a main line enemy force was destroyed with its few survivors being forced to flee into the jungle leaving their dead and equipment behind. Intelligence reports indicated that in the area of the 1st Battalion 503d Infantry a main line VC Force of three battalions had been soundly defeated. The enemy killed came to 403 by body count. This was the largest kill, by the smallest unit, in the shortest time in the war in Vietnam to date. Heavily engaged by overwhelming numbers, 1st Battalion 503d Infantry, proved the superiority of the American Paratrooper beyond any question of doubt. They decisively defeated a determined and numerically superior enemy force despite all handicaps.

B. There were many things done correctly which are taken as normal which have not been mentioned in the critique. There are, however, many procedures and techniques that we must improve to achieve greater combat effectiveness.

C. It is characteristic of this war that while the battle raged, the supporting artillery for the operation was engaged in civic action operations in an attempt to win the people of these villages for the GVN.