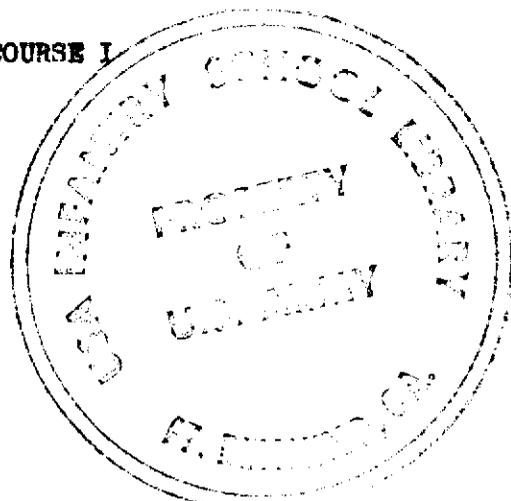


INFANTRY OFFICERS' CAREER COURSE I
1966-1967



OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A, 2D BATTALION, 7 TH CAVALRY
(1ST AIR CAVALRY DIVISION)
NEAR BONG SON, AN THI, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
25-29 JANUARY 1966.
(WASHER OPERATION)
(PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE COMPANY COMMANDER)

Type of operation described: RIFLE COMPANY ATTACKING
THROUGH PALM GROVES AND RICE PADDIES TO LINK UP
WITH A SURROUNDED RIFLE COMPANY

Captain Joel E. Sugdinis, Infantry
INFANTRY OFFICERS' CAREER COURSE I

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1 Document, 1st Air Cavalry Division - 1st Air Cavalry Division Operations in Song Lai Giang River Valley (TIS Library)
- 2 After Action Report - Masher White Wing Operation dated 19 February 66, Headquarters, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry (personal possession of author).

NOTE—There is little documentation available concerning the details of this particular portion of the Masher/White Wing Operation. Several documents describe what generally happened but contain very few specifics. Since this monograph is based upon an hour by hour accounting of certain events which occurred, the author, as the commanding officer of the rifle company involved, relied to a great extent upon his own memory to put this monograph into writing. All so-called facts, opinions, and conclusions which are not ^{referenced} based upon the personal experiences of the author.

OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A, 2D BATTALION, 7TH CAVALRY,
1ST AIR CAVALRY DIVISION, NEAR BONG SON, AN THI, VIETNAM
25-29 JANUARY 1966
(MASHER OPERATION)

(Personal Experience of the Company Commander)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph describes, analyzes, and reflects upon the varied actions of Company A, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Air Cavalry Division, while attempting to execute a link up with a second rifle company engaged, divided, and surrounded by the Viet Cong. This action takes place from 25 January, 1966 through 29 January, 1966, on the coastal plains of the Republic of South Vietnam. The scene of the action is a large valley in the northeast corner of Binh Dinh Province, just north of Bong Son District Headquarters. (See Map A)

TERRAIN

The northern area of Bong Son District is best described as a large coastal plain covered by waist deep rice paddies and dotted with small sandy islands. This flatland is vast, and extends like a table top from the base of the mountains to the sandy beaches of the South China Sea.

The scattered islands of sand and coconut trees harbor the homes of literally thousands of people who work the rice paddies, attempt to plant dry crops in the sand, or just idly stand-by tending to their water buffaloes. The area is extremely beautiful. A person's eyes can wonder from the golden yellow of the rice paddies to the rich green of the coconut groves. The pure white sand is blinding as the brilliance of the sun's rays reflect back at you. It's a picture of peace and quiet.

FORTIFICATIONS

A closer look, however, at this scene of beauty immediately reveals the ugly Viet Cong trademark, entrenchments. Every sandy island, many covered with houses and coconut palm trees, is virtually a spider web of

trench lines, bunkers, and small round holes. It almost appears that every square foot of dry ground has been prepared for defensive combat. Oddly enough, though, the fortifications are not oriented in any one direction. Instead, all fighting positions, trenches, etc., are emplaced for the conduct of an all-around defense of each and every single island.

INTELLIGENCE

The coastal plain of Bong Son is just about as complete a Viet Cong stronghold as one can imagine. The influence of the government is practically nil except for the government outpost and district headquarters at the U.S. Special Forces Camp in Bong Son. Even Bong Son village seems to give up its spirit at the first signs of darkness. Bong Son presents the appearance of expecting to be completely annihilated by the hands of the Viet Cong at any given moment. The people seem to have capitulated even before the fight has begun.

The valley, itself, is a well organized home for the Viet Cong. Intelligence reports had concluded that the 18th North Vietnamese Army Regiment, the 2d Viet Cong Main Force Regiment, and possibly the E210 and E28 Battalions were located in the valley, along with the local guerrillas who habitually populate the area. (I:2,3) The Viet Cong were so downright adamant about this area being liberated territory that they erected a Viet Cong barrier across Highway I just a few hundred meters north of the district headquarters at Bong Son. This barrier was proudly manned by a Viet Cong guard element who openly dared anyone to intervene. According to the American Advisors at Bong Song no one dared go near that barrier until the troops of the 1st Air Cavalry Division drove the Viet Cong from this position.

THE PLAN

Colonel Harold G. Moore's 3d Brigade received the mission to

conduct the operation. The brigade, commonly referred to as the "light brigade" in the 1st Air Cavalry Division, possessed its own two maneuver battalions, the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 7th Cavalry. The 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry was attached, the 1st Battalion, 21st Artillery was placed in direct support, and elements of the 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Squadron and certain other routine support elements were also made available to the 3d Brigade. (2:3)

The operation commenced with a deception phase on D-4, 24 January 1966. The purpose of this phase was to convince the Viet Cong that the 1st Air Cavalry Division was going to commence operations in the huge Suoi Ca Valley area to the south of Bong Son. Also, on D-4, the 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry was airlifted to Phu Cat to secure an area which could be used as an aircraft laager site and a forward support base, and also to act as the 1st Air Cavalry Division reserve. The 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry departed by truck convoy on D-4 from the 1st Air Cavalry Division base camp at An Khe for Phu Cat. The convoy travelled east on Highway 19 to Highway 1, proceeded north on Highway 1 to Phu Cat, and then rendezvoused with the 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry. The 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Squadron and the 2d Battalion, 20th Aerial Rocket Artillery Battery provided overhead coverage for the convoy with their rocket and gun mounted helicopters. The move was made without incident. (See Map B) (2:3)

On 25 January 1966 the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry air assaulted into Landing Zone TAMBO to conduct a short deception operation. Simultaneously, the 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Squadron conducted search operations in the Suoi Ca valley to the west, landing their organic infantry platoon for thirty or so minutes at a time before moving elsewhere. The 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry did make sporadic contact with several small groups of two to five Viet Cong. (See Map B)

A PLATOON IS LOST

Back at An Khe the men of Company A, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry moved through the confusion, which habitually precedes a major air move, like professionals. The men had already executed several of these moves and considered the requirement as routine. However, several field grade officers from the division headquarters had arrived and were attempting to get involved in the loading of troops aboard aircraft. These "extra" supervisory personnel were constantly running up and down the air strip shouting to each other to make sure the troops were prepared to board, etc. At one point these several individuals became quite humorous as they argued over who controlled what. The men of Company A chuckled to themselves and did what they knew they had to do, regardless of the constantly conflicting instructions. One good thing about this spectacle of frustration is that it relaxed the minds of the men.

Company A was loaded aboard three C-123 type Air Force aircraft for the twenty minute flight to Bong Son. The weather was overcast, and the surrounding jungle covered hills had already disappeared in the haze. However, this was the monsoon season and the troops had been moved by air in weather worse than what was being experienced that day at An Khe.

The company commander departed the An Khe air strip in the second C-123 air craft with the 2d platoon. The 1st platoon had departed a few moments earlier. A part of the 3d platoon and the weapons platoon were to follow in the third aircraft, and one squad of the 3d platoon and two squads of the weapons platoon were to be transported in a fourth aircraft.

The company commander's flight progressed as planned. However, approximately five minutes from the Bong Son airstrip a member of the crew in the rear of the aircraft suddenly rushed forward to the pilot's compartment. He, with a second member of the crew, put his

ear to a head set and appeared to be listening to something of an exciting and unusual nature. This occurrence lasted about a full minute. The company commander was to find out very shortly that one of his platoons had just been involved in an airplane crash.

As the aircraft descended over eastern Bong Son, the announcement was made to stop smoking and fasten seat belts, and everyone aboard prepared themselves for the expected rough landing. The troops had learned to accept this as routine when landing on a short dirt runway. Suddenly, a small explosion came from the rear of the aircraft, and the inside of the rear ramp area of the aircraft became filled with dust. A large caliber round had hit the aircraft from below and gone out through the top leaving a gaping hole the size of a fist in both the bottom and top of the aircraft. Even though the round came up between the knees of one soldier no one was hurt, nor was any functional part of the aircraft seriously damaged.

Upon landing, the company commander was immediately notified that the third aircraft had crashed somewhere in An Khe Pass. This was followed, within minutes, by the report that the crashed aircraft was an inferno of fire. It was also confirmed, later the next day, that there were no survivors. Company A had lost 40 men, the bulk of the 3d platoon and half of the weapons platoon. The entire fire direction center and one 81 mm mortar squad were lost. This event just about broke the back of the company, morale wise. (The airplane crash occurred at approximately 0930 hours on 25 January 1966 along Highway 19 on the east side of An Khe Pass)

The company commander immediately attached the remaining eleven people of the weapons platoon to the 2d platoon as an additional rifle squad. The remaining six people of the 3d platoon were attached to the 1st platoon. Company A was now organized as a force consisting of

two rifle platoons of approximately 40 men each.

SECURE OPERATIONAL BASE

The 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry's mission upon arriving at Bong Son was to move north clearing the many villages for about two kilometers. Also, the mission included a specific task to seize and occupy a piece of high, solid, and open ground which was code-named DOG. Position DOG was the proposed location for the 3d Brigade command post, the supporting artillery, and the logistical support elements. (See Map C)

At 1345 hours on 25 January 1966 the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry commenced moving north with three companies on line, Company A on the left, Company B in the center, and Company C on the right. There was no enemy contact, just frightened and bewildered stares from the villagers. The battalion stopped and assumed a perimeter defense posture at 1645 hours in an area of high ground and dry crop plots. The night was spent without incident. (See Map C)

26 January 1966, D-2, was to be the day that position DOG was to be secured. An air assault was conducted at first light with ~~Companies B and C.~~ There was no resistance. ~~Company A~~ made a routine move by helicopter into position DOG at about 0830 hours.

Meanwhile, to the south of Bong Son, the deception moves by the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry and the 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Squadron continued without major contact.

The 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry made its first contact with the Viet Cong when Company B, patrolling to the northeast of DOG, was engaged by scattered sniper fire. As a result of this action, the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry minus Company A pushed on to the north to clear the snipers to guarantee the security of DOG from the north.

That night, the battalion minus Company A coiled up into a perimeter in an area called LZ 2 and Company A remained at DOG.

On 27 January 1966, D-1, Company A upon being relieved by advance security elements from the brigade moved to LZ 2 to join the remainder

of the battalion. The rest of the day was spent in patrolling to the northwest with Company A, to the west with Company B, and to the southwest with Company C. There was sporadic contact with snipers, and several visual sightings were made of small groups of Viet Cong. They appeared to be mostly interested in getting out of the area.

The 3d Brigade Command Post became firmly established at DQG, the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, was assembled at Phu Cat to the south, and everything was made ready for D Day, 28 January 1966.

D DAY

The plan for 28 January was quite simple. The 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry was to seize and secure an artillery position on the high ground to the west called STEEL and conduct search and destroy operations in the southern half of the Bong Son valley. The 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry was to conduct search and destroy operations in the northern half of the Bong Son valley.

At this point, we will discuss only those troop elements which participated in the engagement at Landing Zone 4, at An Thi.

AIR ASSAULT

The battalion commander planned to air assault Company B into Area STEEL to secure it for the artillery, to air assault Company C into LZ 4, and then sweep west-southwest to rid their portion of the valley of Viet Cong, and Company A was to depart on foot from LZ 2 and sweep north to LZ 4. There, the company would be recovered by helicopter and flown to the southwest corner of the valley to link up with Company C for the night.

At first light, Company B air assaulted into position STEEL without meeting any Viet Cong resistance. Immediately, Company C

commenced an air assault into LZ 4 in two lifts of twelve ships each. Because the area was so heavily populated no artillery preparation was fired. As the lift ships approached the landing zone they received some ground fire but did not come under any fire upon landing. However, the ground fire received during the approach landing did cause the flight formation to become scattered and the troops were landed in small groups over an area about 1500 meters long from north to south. The dispersed landing was completed about 0845 hours.

The company commander, realizing that a Viet Cong force, of undetermined size was nearby, knew that he had to regroup his forces as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, at approximately 0850 hours, Company C received sporadic small arms and mortar fire, which grew steadily in intensity and accuracy. The seriousness of the situation became apparent within minutes. Company C was forced to coil up into three separate and non-mutually supporting perimeters. The Viet Cong forces had moved quickly through the maze of trenches and had effectively surrounded each of the three groups. It also became quite obvious that Company C was not only divided and surrounded, but that they were outnumbered as well.

The weather had turned extremely bad with low fog, a drizzle, and a chilling cold. Such weather prohibited the use of close air support, and artillery could only be used sparingly because of the confusion on the battle field. It was difficult to accurately locate the friendly troops. The situation was pretty desperate.

Air lifted reinforcements could not be brought in due to the way friend and foe were located. The area was a large palm grove island surrounded by open rice paddy. Company C was scattered down the center of the island while the communist troops held the perimeter of the island. Any firing into the perimeter of the island by U.S. troops on the outside would only cause fire to go into the positions of Company C.

COMPANY A MOVES TO CONTACT

Company A departed LZ 2 at approximately 0815 hours to conduct its sweep to the north. The company moved forward in a column formation with the 2d platoon in the lead deployed over an approximate frontage of fifty meters. The company command group followed. The command group consisted of the company commander, two radio operators, one medic, one artillery forward observer with a radio operator and reconnaissance sergeant, the company 1st sergeant with one radio operator, three Republic of Korea Army officers, two American and one French civilian photographers, two American and one Austrian reporters, and one official Army Photographer. Needless to say, the command group was huge when you include all the news media personnel. Following this rather large command group was the 1st platoon, also deployed over approximately fifty to seventy-five meters of ground.

The terrain that faced Company A as they moved north to attempt a link up with Company C was a series of palm grove islands saturated with perimeter trenches, spider holes, and tunnels. The company, expecting to meet Viet Cong resistance at any time, heard no shots. Apparently, the Viet Cong forces had consolidated in the vicinity of LZ 4 and were not using their positions to the south. The abandoned Viet Cong fortifications were extremely well built and prepared.

By 1000 hours Company A had progressed to a low ridge overlooking the battle scarred area of LZ 4, and could see the paths of tracer fire going in all directions. Company C was throwing smoke grenades in an

attempt to point out its locations to the battalion commander circling above in his helicopter. At first this technique seemed to help the company commander of Company A, but then became confusing as the Viet Cong began to throw smoke grenades.

For some unexplainable reason no provision was made for a reconnaissance of this area on the 27th. Thus, the Company A Commander did not thoroughly understand the type of terrain facing his advancing elements. From the vantage point of ^{the} clear ridge the area of the fighting appeared to be a large palm grove on a jut of dry land which extended out from the ridge. Company A still had not seen any of the enemy forces, nor had they been fired upon.

At this point, the Company A Commander changed his formation and put his two platoons abreast of each other, 2d Platoon on the left and 1st Platoon on the right. Since there had not been any enemy contact, especially when the enemy was only about five hundred meters away, the company commander suspected an ambush situation. With the company now spread across a wide front, the extreme flanks of the formation would stumble into any planned ambush positions.

As the Company moved forward, observation suddenly became severely restricted by a series of bamboo hedgerows, each honeycombed with defensive trench line and numerous spider holes. As the company entered the palm tree area the ground sloped down quite rapidly, a fact which was not obvious from the ridge line. Suddenly, the company commander discovered that a relatively narrow rice paddy separated Company A from the palm grove island where the fighting was taking place. The company approached the paddy area with both platoons abreast.

Without warning an automatic weapon opened up on the far side of the rice paddy firing into the left flank of the 2d Platoon.

The platoon leader's radio operator was killed outright with the radio being rendered useless. Within a few seconds several other automatic weapons and numerous semiautomatic weapons commenced firing from the far bank. The majority of the fire was concentrated against the 2d platoon and the command group. The 1st platoon leader reported fire coming into his position but he felt that it was solely the result of the fire being directed at the 2d platoon's left flank. About this time the 2d platoon reported that two soldiers had been wounded, one in the chest and the other in the leg. Both were litter cases.

THE ASSAULT

The company commander crawled forward to the edge of the rice paddy behind the concealment offered by a bamboo clump to try and obtain a better estimate of the situation which confronted Company A. He was still not too certain how close he was located to any of Company C's forces. The aerial observer knew Company A's location but could not pinpoint Company C's southern position due to the varied smoke being thrown by the Viet Cong forces. Therefore, the use of artillery was out of the question for the moment. Also, the company commander now realized that the Viet Cong trenches on the sandy island were looking down into his positions.

At this point, a single round from above hit the front lip of the company commander's steel helmet, spinning the helmet around and off of his head. The round went on to nick the commander's radio operator in the right arm throwing the soldier off balance. From the high velocity of the round and the closeness of the report of the weapon the commander quickly realized that not only were the Viet Cong well concealed but they were in very close proximity to the men of Company A. The Viet Cong definitely had the upper hand in this situation.

A quick check with the 1st platoon revealed that they were receiving only ineffective fire from across the rice paddy. When questioned by the company commander about the possibilities of assaulting his platoon across the paddy to the Viet Cong side and occupying the trenches on the island the platoon leader answered, almost casually, that he believed that his platoon could do it. The platoon leader was then issued instructions to move his platoon across the paddy while the 2d platoon put down a heavy base of fire. Within minutes all was arranged and both platoons indicated that they were ready.

The company commander gave the signal by radio. The 2d platoon put out devastating fire into the observed trenches, into the trees, and into the bank itself to seek out the cleverly concealed enemy. Suddenly a loud police whistle sounded and in a beautiful movement the entire 1st platoon moved on a dead run across the paddy. To everyone's surprise not a single man was hit as the 1st platoon stormed right up into the trenches. The Viet Cong could be seen leaping up and fleeing down the trench line to the north. Unfortunately, the Viet Cong were able to reach a very well concealed portion of trench which permitted most of the twenty or so Viet Cong to escape.

The men of the 2d platoon, seeing this successful maneuver, immediately grew careless and exposed themselves to a hail of automatic weapons fire from the left front and flank. Another soldier was wounded.

Meanwhile, the 1st platoon, now unopposed, moved straight into the palm grove for a distance of fifty meters. Everything was quiet, at this point, but the 2d platoon and the company command group were still drawing fire from the left front. The company commander called the 1st platoon back to the initial trench line and directed them to sweep north along the trench line to clear the enemy and to put out a large volume of covering fire as they moved. The company commander

hoped that a moving base of fire would allow the 2d platoon and the company command group to cross the rice paddy.

The 1st platoon quickly moved against the Viet Cong, firing from the shoulder as they advanced through the trenches and palms. The 2d platoon still received sporadic, small arms fire from the far left. Due to the seriously wounded they did not try to cross the paddy. Seeing that the 2d platoon was now returning the fire the company commander led his command group out into the rice paddy and attempted to cross. The company commander, the company radio operator and the 1st sergeant and his radio operator ~~only~~ the only ones to successfully cross the paddy on the first try. The Viet Cong had opened fire from about one hundred meters causing the majority of the group to seek cover in the water behind the paddy dikes. The company commander and the other three who had made it simply ran as fast as they could without ever stopping until they reached the cover of one of the abandoned Viet Cong trenches.

The situation was now somewhat confused. The 1st platoon was now stopped in a Viet Cong trench with several casualties, the command group was scattered in the rice paddy, and the 2d platoon was still in its original position with two badly wounded soldiers and one dead soldier.

The 1st platoon was urged to make every shot count and to reduce or eliminate the effectiveness of the flanking fire covering the length of the rice paddy. The rest of the company had to come across that rice paddy. Under the outstanding leadership, drive, and determination of the 2d platoon leader, the squad leaders, and individuals, the entire 2d platoon and command group ran, crawled, and inched their way across that rice paddy and up into the abandoned Viet Cong trenches.

The entire company, including the dead and wounded, were now on the island fortress and intact as a fighting unit.

SECURING A LANDING ZONE

Company A still had not linked up with any of the elements of Company C, even though elements of Company C were reporting that they were receiving fire from Company A. The Viet Cong had been forced back to an excellent set of fortifications, and had also moved into the positions just abandoned by Company A. The Viet Cong virtually surrounded all of the American forces. Fortunately, Company A now had a pretty good bearing on Company C's location and was able to bring in some artillery fire and eventually tac air support.

Realizing that ammunition supplies were getting dangerously low, that the numbers of wounded and dead were increasing steadily, and that reinforcements would be arriving soon, the company commander faced the difficult problem of locating and securing a landing zone for the helicopters. In the southern end of this battle scarred palm grove island was a large cemetery with numerous mounds of sand. This area was chosen to be the landing zone.

The 1st platoon consolidated its forces in the present positions and also extended east into the cemetery. There was only sporadic sniper fire. The 2d platoon was now regrouped and started a push out into the cemetery against increasing automatic weapons fire. The entire platoon could not move in one big sweep, but individual fire team leaders and squad leaders were able to make their elements move in short advances.

One soldier darted forward with a machine gun and secured a firing position behind a christian concrete tomb. This position was extremely effective until a forty millimeter rocket exploded on the tomb throwing debris in every direction.

Instructions were issued by the company commander to conserve ammunition. All weapons would be placed on semi-automatic and each

shot would be sniper style against a definite target. There was no way of knowing how or when we would be resupplied. Also, to make the day even more dismal and drab, it started to rain, hard and steady.

By 1530 hours, Company A completely encircled a landing zone. The 1st platoon was on the north and west, and the 2nd platoon was on the east and south. In a deep wide trench, running generally north and south, was found the company command post and the collecting position for all the wounded and dead. Also, under the control of the 1st Sergeant was an equipment salvage point. All the weapons, Ammunitions, grenades, radios and other assorted equipment, both functional and nonfunctional, collected from the battlefield and from casualties were cleaned, repaired where possible, and sent back out on the company perimeter as needed.

Once the company had completely dug itself in, all it could do was trade sniper shots and plan for an after dark link up with Company C. Company A was now down to about 50 fighting men at this point.

The entire area seemed to be quiet about 1700 hours and a decision was made to reinforce by helicopter Company A with Company B. The troops of Company A literally fired a "mad minute" with one magazine from each weapon as the ^{first} six helicopters came in to land. The Viet Cong had been waiting and released a volume of fire which was unbelievable, hitting three of the six ships and wounding two of the crew. It was immediately decided not to bring in any more troops that night. Miraculously, twenty-eight troops of Company B jumped into the friendly trenches with fresh supplies of ammunition without the loss of a single man.

Company B was positioned in the southwest corner of the perimeter. Company C was still holding its own in three separate perimeters, and as long as they didn't move, the Viet Cong did not fire. The entire area was so well designed and constructed, using the most perfect techniques of camouflage, that it was virtually impossible to analyze their defenses.

After the heavy exchange of fire when the twenty-eight reinforcements of Company B arrived, things again quieted down. However, it soon became apparent that the perimeter would need additional supplies should the Viet Cong launch an all-out attack that night. There had been very little fire on the west side of the perimeter, and the sunken rice paddy offered some cover for an approach route in and a fairly good exit out. The area was pounded with artillery fire and rockets from armed helicopters. At 1830 hours, three resupply helicopters approached from the north flying fast and only a few feet above the rice paddies. Company A's 1st Sergeant organized a group of troop laborers to retrieve the crates of ammunition as they were kicked out by the crew. As the helicopters closed into the drop off area, they slowed down considerable. The Viet Cong opened up with a heavy volume of automatic fire from seemingly everywhere. All three helicopters were hit with the third one being shot down.

The helicopter crews were outstanding in that they managed to throw into the rice paddy all the ammunition, food, medical supplies and water. The crew of the downed helicopter managed to escape unharmed.

THE LINK UP

That night, it continued to rain, and the Viet Cong made light probes on the south side. Around midnight, the Company C commander reported that he had regrouped his company and was prepared to move en masse towards the Company A perimeter. The problem which existed at this point was identifying Company C as they approached from the north. Since no one possessed any confidence in the assigned challenge and password, the Company A commander issued instructions that any sightings on the north side of the perimeter would be greeted with a "Garry Owen" yell for recognition, the battalion motto.

At approximately 0200 hours there were several grenade probes on the south side of the perimeter. The Viet Cong used typical potato masher styled grenades which did not cause much of an explosion. However, this particular bunch of grenades consisted mostly of duds. The heavy rain had apparently soaked the fuzes to the point that they wouldn't work. Since the soldiers quickly realized that most of the grenades were too saturated with water to work, the soldiers began a contest to see who could snipe the best with their M-16 rifles. In the morning there were nine new bodies in this area.

Company C continued to move very slowly towards Company A's position. The company commander reported that there were many Viet Cong in the area, talking very loudly and acting confused, as if they didn't know which way to go. The instructions in Company C were to move with extreme caution and to avoid contact.

At approximately 0430 hours the troops of the 1st platoon of Company A detected movement outside the north-east corner of perimeter. At first it appeared to be two or three people moving towards the perimeter in short dashes. This fact was reported company commander who in turn contacted the Company C commander by

radio to question his progress and location. Company C reported that they were almost to our perimeter and that his point had just stopped reporting movement between his location and Company A.

This siting immediately caused some concern for the successful link up of both forces. Then, one of the 1st platoon soldiers reported that three individuals were now walking in an up right position towards the Company A perimeter. The next report, which was received about three minutes later, was that three fully armed Viet Cong had walked up to the perimeter and surrendered. All three were wounded, though not badly.

At 0451 hours Company C entered the perimeter carrying all their wounded and dead. Because Company C's status was one of extreme fatigue and anxiety, and because the perimeter was already firmly established, the commander of Company A placed Company C in perimeter reserve in an area of relatively good concealment and cover.

THE FINAL DAY

When dawn arrived on the 29th the men of Company A, one platoon of Company B, and Company C, were all dug in shoulder to shoulder in one solid perimeter. A "mad minute" was fired as soon as it was light enough to see the entire perimeter area. Much of the friendly fire was directed at the trees and some into the trenches and bushes. Two snipers were observed to fall from the same tree on the east side of the perimeter.

As was expected, the Viet Cong were still there in large numbers. Throughout the early hours of daylight the shooting continued. However, with a stroke of luck, the weather began to clear at about 1030 hours, and by 1100 hours there were fighter aircraft circling the perimeter. Utilizing air and artillery the Viet Cong positions were pounded without mercy.

The final body count was in excess of one hundred uniformed

North Vietnamese of the 7th Battalion, 18th North Vietnamese Army Regiment. Company A's casualties were nine killed in action and twenty wounded. The platoon from Company B did not suffer any casualties, and Company C's casualties were considered to be as light as Company A's. Numerous prisoners, assorted weapons to include two heavy machine guns on wheels large quantities of ammunitions, packs and other assorted equipment were captured,

SUMMARY

It should also be pointed out the 1st Battalion, 7th cavalry also fought a major battle to the north of LZ4, attempting to block and destroy all enemy forces attempting to escape from LZ4.

Looking back on this action Company A did accomplish its mission. Company C was a divided and heavily engaged unit. After Company A, with only two platoons, had fought its way into LZ 4 Company C was able to regroup and move the last several hundred meters to complete the link up.

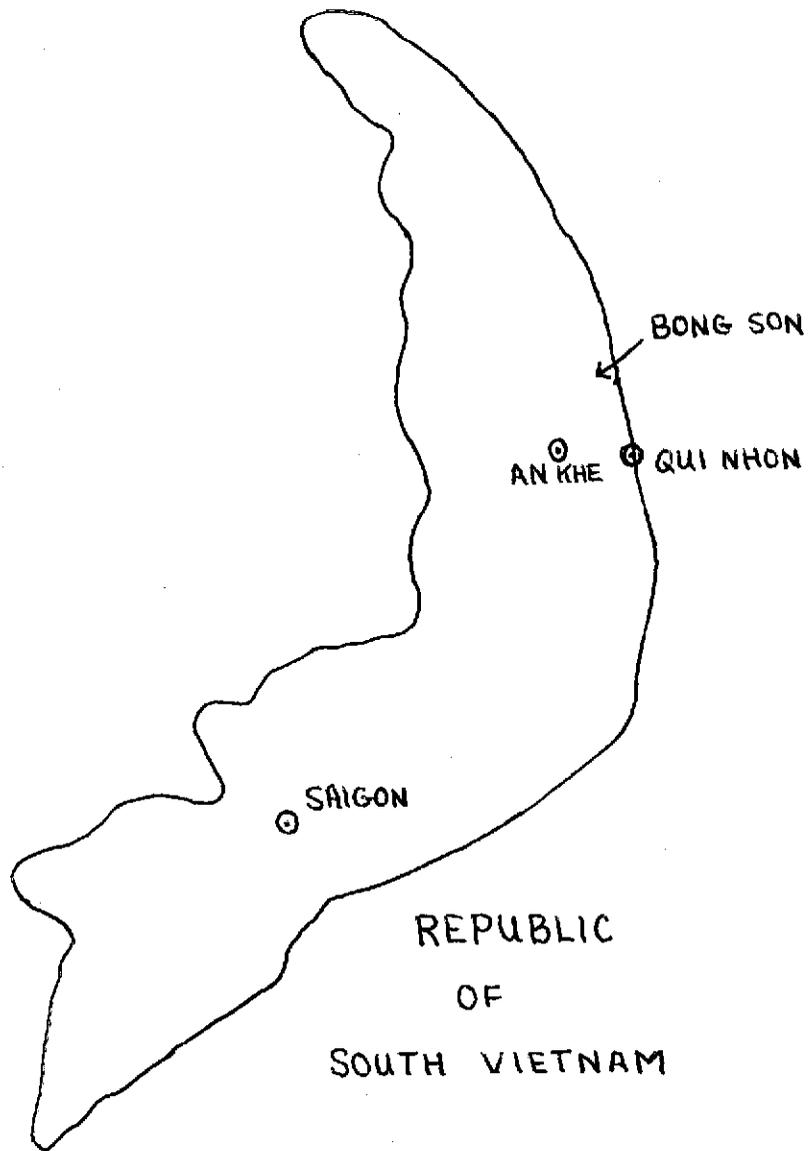
Perhaps the most difficult portion of the entire fight was the effort to get the 2d platoon across the rice paddy. There were many young soldiers and leaders who showed that they could produce under fire.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. Definite consideration must be given to subject populated areas to an air and artillery preparation prior to an air assault, especially if the area is know to be Viet Cong dominated.
2. When a unit is landed over a wide area in dispersed fashion the use of supporting fires becomes extremely difficult.
3. Fast and continuous movement over open ground proved, in several cases, to be the best method of movement when caught in the open by automatic weapons fire.

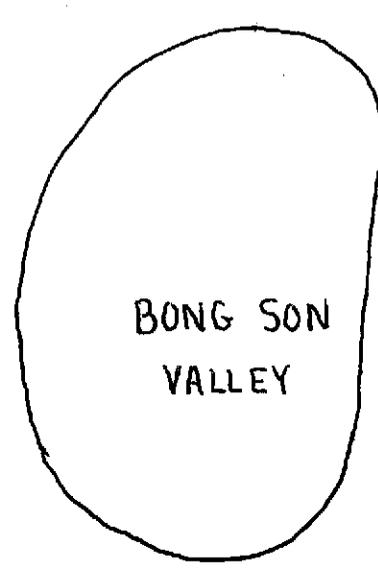
4. Whenever possible, unit commanders should be afforded the opportunity to see the terrain from the air prior to moving over that terrain on the ground.
5. Units, when faced with resupply problems, can discipline themselves to conserve ammunition.
6. A unit, depleted of strength, can still fight effectively.
7. When a unit is forced to coil up in a defensive perimeter and fight, the company commander must provide for a salvage collection point to recover equipment and other assorted supplies from the battlefield for reissue on that same battlefield.
8. The Viet Cong will not always break contact with American forces when he gets the opportunity. Instead, he will stand and fight if he believes that he has the upper hand.



MAP A
LOCATION OF BONG SON

MAP B

BINH DINH PROVINCE



BONG SON VALLEY

HIGHWAY 1

BONG SON



APPROX 85 KM



SUOI CA VALLEY



SOUTH CHINA SEA

PHU CAT

HIGHWAY 1

AN KHE PASS



AN KHE

HIGHWAY 19

APPROX 35 KM



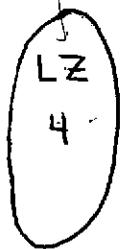
QUI NHON

MAP C

HIGHWAY 1

SOUTH
CHINA
SEA

D DAY →



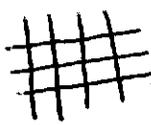
D-1 →



D-2 →



US SPECIAL FORCES
CAMP
AT
BONG SON



BONG SON

HIGHWAY 1