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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE  
APO San Francisco 96250

AVBE-SC/MED

14 February 1970

SUBJECT: Operational Report-Lessons Learned Headquarters, 173d Airborne Brigade,  
Period ending 31 January 1970, RCS OSFOR-65 (22)

Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development  
Department of the Army  
Washington, DC 20310

I. (C) Operations: Significant Activities

a. General: Operation WASHINGTON GREEN II continued as the 173d Airborne Brigade's primary operational effort during the reporting period. Operation WASHINGTON GREEN II, begun on 11 Oct 69, is the second phase of Operation WASHINGTON GREEN begun on 15 April 1969. The operation is designed to provide regular force support to GVN agencies and territorial elements as they carry out the pacification program in the Brigade's Area of Operations, AO LEE. AO LEE, consisting of the northeastern four districts (TAM QUAN, HOAI NHON, HOAI AN, and PHU MY) of BINH DINH Province, is shared by the 173d Airborne Brigade and the 22d ARVN Infantry Division. Under the second phase of the operation, the 173d Airborne Brigade continues to conduct operations in cooperation with ARVN and FVMAF forces, and GVN authorities in order to accelerate the pacification program and to maintain the security of lines of communication. On 22 January 1970, Operation WASHINGTON GREEN II A went into effect to counter the expected 1970 Tet Offensive while still providing security for the populated pacification areas in the AO.

b. The main force element opposing the Brigade is the 3d NVA Division, consisting of the 2d, 18th, and 22d NVA Regiments. The 3d NVA Division Headquarters and the 2d NVA Regiment deployed to BINH DINH (P) in late September and late October respectively. By late December the 22d NVA Regiment was located along the northern boundary of AO LEE in the area of the BINH DINH (P) - QUANG NGAI (P) border and the upper AN LAO Valley. The 18th and 2d NVA Regiments currently occupy locations in the VINH TRUONH mountains and numerous local force units operate in the mountainous areas contiguous to the populated areas. The 3d NVA Division has an estimated strength of 6000 personnel and is well armed, to include both medium and heavy indirect fire weapons. The enemy made no concerted efforts to disrupt the pacification program during the reporting period; however, enemy movement, mortar attacks, and platoon to company size contacts have increased with the approach of the expected Tet Offensive 1970 as the reporting period came to a close. The local force guerrillas continued their attempt to harass US/GVN installations, property and personnel. Their methods were mortar attacks, sniper attacks, small unit ambushes, and an active program of booby trap emplacement.

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c. The Brigade's security screen, which restricts enemy movement and influence on pacification operations, is essentially a program of intense small unit actions. Employing fire teams and squads, usually combined with territorial forces, the Brigade saturates the populated areas of the AO with numerous patrols and ambushes. This technique, dubbed the HAWK concept, daily employs up to as many as 140 separate HAWK patrols dispersed throughout the AO, and has been extremely effective in severely restricting the enemy's freedom of movement, particularly during the hours of darkness.

d. On 13 December 1969, the 3d Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry was released from its pacification responsibilities in northern PHU MY District which it shared with 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry. The 1-503d (Abn) Inf took over the pacification mission for the entire US Area of Operations in the district, moving into the area vacated by the departing 3-503 (Abn) Inf. The purpose of the AO change was to free the 3-503d to conduct combat operations throughout AO LEE. The 3d Battalion with its rear remaining at LZ UPLIFT (R927754) was initially redeployed with the mission of reconnaissance in force in the VINH THANH Mountains with its forward tactical command post located at FSB ABBY (R748815). On 18 January the 3-503d relocated to the AN LAO Valley, establishing its forward CP at LZ BEAVER (R767984). The rifle companies deployed on reconnaissance in force missions against the NVA units in the lower AN LAO Valley with the mission to disrupt enemy movement and to capture or destroy all NVA personnel, equipment, and supplies found, thus denying enemy access to the populated areas of HOAI AN (D), HOAI NHON (D), and TAM QUAN (D).

e. The 3d Battalion (AIRMOBILE), 506th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division was placed under operational control of the Brigade on 23 December 1969. The forward CP of the 3-506th was initially located at LZ ABBY collocated with the forward CP of the 3-503d (Abn) Inf. The unit's mission paralleled that of the 3-503d in reconnaissance in force operations in the VINH THANH Mountains. On 17 January 1970 the 3-506th relocated and occupied LZ TAPE (BS745134) which was vacated upon the withdrawal of the 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry when the 2d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division withdrew from the AN LAO Valley to return to AN KHE. The rifle companies undertook reconnaissance in force missions to deny enemy forces routes of access to the AN LAO-AN DO Valley areas from the north and west.

f. One contact during November is worthy of mention. On 5 November 1969, while on a screening mission involving the 3-503d; C Troop, 17th Air Cavalry spotted five VC running into a cave located in the eastern NUI NIEU Mountains (CX028760). The 17th Air Cav immediately inserted their Aero Rifle Platoon into the area, sealing off escape routes in the vicinity. Elements of the 3-503d reacted and established blocking positions and effected a cordon around the area. A search of the area resulted in 1 VC KIA (VC), 28 VC CIA, and 15 small arms and miscellaneous equipment captured. The VC captured were later identified as one platoon of C-1 Company, PHU MY (D) Local Force.

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g. The statistical results of Operation WASHINGTON GREEN since its beginning on 15 April 1969 through 31 January 1970 are: US - 104 KIA and 1085 WIA; enemy - 892 KIA, 65 POW, and 261 small arms captured.

h. District Operations: The following is a synopsis of operations by districts:

(1) Tam Quan District: The 4-503d base camp remained at LZ NORTH ENGLISH while its Tactical Operations Center (TOC) remained collocated with the district TOC at LZ TOM, TAI QUAN (D). By 17 October, battalion elements had completed their final expansion effort and all inhabited portions of the District within the US AO were under the security influence of troops of the 173d Airborne Brigade. In general, operations by the 4th Battalion during November, December, and January were primarily combined "control and search" as elements of the Battalion joined the territorial forces and on several occasions elements of the 40th ARVN Regt. Extensive combined HAWK operations with RF/PF also continued during the reporting period. The 4th Battalion made increased use of the NPFF in many control and search operations, employing them as the search element along with the RF/PF. The NPFF also combined with the 4th Battalion on joint NPFF/US checkpoints established on QL-1. Training assistance continued to be provided to the RF/PF and PPDF. Artillery FOs attached to the Battalion continued to achieve encouraging results from instruction presented to the local forces. Rifle companies and battalion Security Training Assistance Groups (STAG) continued to assist the 3 district NAT teams in the training of RF/PF and the instruction of PPDF in small unit tactics and weapons familiarization.

(2) HOAI KHON District: The 2-503d Inf TOC remained collocated with the district TOC at BONG SON (H). This arrangement as in all districts, facilitated planning, coordination and execution of operational and intelligence activities and expedited clearance for supporting fires. The DIOCC, established in April, has continued to be effective in gathering, processing, and disseminating intelligence. A large measure of the effectiveness is attributed to the efforts of the 2d Battalion staff. US and territorial forces participated in a number of combined operations. The training program for territorial forces focused mainly on the subjects of small unit tactics and weapons familiarization. During the reporting period the 2d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division had responsibility for the AN LAO Valley portion of HOAI KHON District. On 17 January the 2d Bde was relieved of responsibility for the Valley and began relocating to the 4th Inf Div MOP. The 173d again assumed responsibility of the AN LAO Valley, deploying the 3-503d and 3-506th to LZ BEAVER and TAPE respectively.

(3) HOAI AN District: 2-503d (Abn) Inf, became the Brigade's coordinating headquarters in HOAI AN on 29 October. In this responsibility Co B, 2-503 (Abn) Inf continued support to HOAI AN in a coordinating capacity, providing joint operations with local forces and LOC security to populated areas of the district.

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Territorial forces continued to provide their own security for hamlets and villages. On 13 November the 3-503d was released of pacification responsibilities in PHU MY District, and began reconnaissance-in-force operations in southern HOAI AN District and established a forward CP at FSB ASSY. On 23 Dec, 3-506th came under operational control of the 173d Airborne Brigade, established a forward CP at FSB ASSY, and their rifle companies conducted reconnaissance-in-force operations in the southern VIEN THANH Mountains. On 17-18 January both 3-503d and 3-506th relocated to the AN LAO Valley of HOAI NHON District.

(4) PHU MY District: The 1-503d (Abn) Inf assumed operational control of the entire US AO in northern PHU MY (D) with the redeployment of the 3-503d (Abn) Inf. The district chief, Captain Can, aided the phasing out of the 3d Battalion by appraising the situation and shifting territorial forces as required to ensure complete coverage of the vacated area in conjunction with the entering 1st Battalion. The 1-503d forward TOC remained collocated with PHU MY District Headquarters and continued coordinated operations with territorial forces. The Battalion undertook more extensive training of Regional Force/Popular Force and Peoples Self Defense Force personnel by instituting formal and informal training programs to increase their effectiveness.

#### i. Combat Support:

(1) Artillery: Headquarters, 3d Battalion, 319th (Abn) Field Artillery, the Brigade's organic artillery battalion, remained at LZ English. Its firing batteries continue to support the Brigade from fire support bases dispersed throughout the AO. D Btry, 2-320th FA gave direct support to the 3-506th (Abn) Inf.

(2) Air: The Brigade Forward Air Controllers flew 714 hours while controlling 198 airstrikes in support of Brigade operations. Limited visibility due to poor weather conditions limited the number of airstrikes during the reporting period. A total of 63 combat Skyspot sorties were flown and "Shadow" or "Stinger" aircraft, AC-119 aircraft equipped with sophisticated target acquisition systems and heavy air-to-ground fire capabilities, were employed on 28 occasions.

(3) Naval: Naval gunfire support for AO LBS was coordinated by Team 2-2, SUB UNIT ONE, 1st ARLICO. During November, December, and January, 4 US Destroyers and 1 Australian Destroyer were on station for a total of 12 days. 639 5 inch observed rounds were fired on 32 targets and 531 5 inch H and I rounds were fired on 165 targets.

#### j. Combat Service Support:

(1) Engineer: Though deeply involved in the many civic action projects inherent in a search pacification program, the 173d Engineer Company continued to provide direct support to all Brigade units. This support included daily

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minesweep operations along the major roads in AO LEE, the operation of 3 water points along with the LZ ENGLISH water point operated by the 299th Engr Bn providing a total daily capacity of 52,000 gallons, furnishing of technical advice and support of unit self-help projects, and the attachment of one squad of engineers to each maneuver battalion for routine engineer missions.

(2) Chemical: The Brigade Chemical Section, in conjunction with the 51st Chemical Det, executed the following missions in support of Brigade operations:

(a) Airborne Personnel Detection: 59 missions were flown for a total of 62 hrs.

(b) Herbicide Missions: 181 hectares of crops and dense vegetation were defoliated.

(c) Riot Control Agent: CS was employed against known enemy base camp and tunnel complexes and was used prior to tactical airstrikes to restrict enemy movement. A total of 9,280 pounds of CS2 were air delivered from UH-1H helicopters in terrain denial operations and 2,864 pounds of CS2 were ground employed in tunnel contamination operations.

(d) Incendiary Missions: A total of 7,865 gallons of thickened fuel incendiary was expended employing CH-47 and UH1H helicopters as delivery aircraft in instances when TAC air was not practical or not available.

2. (C) Lessons Learned: Commander's Observations, Evaluations, and Recommendations:

a. Personnel: None

b. Intelligence: None

c. Operations:

(a) OBSERVATION: In some instances there has been a delay in obtaining illumination from supporting units when a chance night contact is made by a Ranger team in their night laager position. This is particularly true when the team's area of operations is out of range of artillery illumination.

(b) EVALUATION: Delay in obtaining illumination can be eliminated if the team clears the grids of their location for illumination and requests that the artillery data be precomputed as soon as the laager sites are reached. If the grid is out of range of artillery, the TOC makes a notation and is prepared to request a helicopter flare ship immediately should the team make a contact.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: Prior preparation should be made for use of illumination in night laager sites.

(2) Silent Bridge Security:

(a) OBSERVATION: A method was needed to release troops from bridge security for other operations while still maintaining adequate security for bridges.

(b) EVALUATION: The 173d Airborne Brigade is employing acoustical sensors means

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of establishing security on certain bridges within its AO. With an increased responsibility of a larger AO, one battalion needed a method of securing certain bridges which would require less troops yet maintain adequate standards of security. The troops released from the selected bridges could then be used for employment in a more active combat role in the battalion's AO. The concept of emplacing sensor fields around the bridges was considered and several different types of sensor devices were tried without finding an acceptable solution. Finally an acoubouy sensor was suspended from the stringers of a bridge and tests were conducted. A 100% activation rate for 360 degrees around the bridge was obtained. The acoubouy has proven so sensitive that individuals talking on or about the bridge have been monitored as far away as twelve kilometers. The "D" model acoubouy has the added advantage of being able to shut itself off during the day when the threat is reduced and normal traffic is heaviest and to activate itself at night. This timing prolongs the sensor's life to 45 days. The acoubouy will self-destruct if subject to tampering. The sensor acts as a bridge guard in detecting movement near the bridge which in turn brings a response from night patrols in the area and reaction forces at nearby strong points. By employing the acoubouy the battalion has been able to reduce the force required to secure bridges from 72 personnel to 18 personnel and 4 APC's. The APC's provide the mobility to react to acoubouy sensings and bring rapid troop security to the bridge.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: That acoubouy sensors be used as an aid to bridge security where the situation permits, thus freeing troops for more active operations.

(3) Double Sweep Cordon and Search

(a) OBSERVATION: Using stay behind forces has not yielded satisfactory results due to compromise by local inhabitants and enemy OP's.

(b) EVALUATION: In cordon and search operations, VC and local guerrillas have consistently been forewarned of US presence in a hamlet area through observation posts and hamlet agents. They have therefore been highly successful in avoiding contact simply by avoiding the area of friendly activity. The VC have also established a pattern of returning to an area shortly after friendly troops have departed. In order to take advantage of both of these situations the 1st Bn (Abn), 503d Inf has developed a "double sweep" technique. An element moves into a village, conducts a sweep or cordon and search, and remains in or around the village for one or two days. A second element of comparable size operates several kilometers away. The search force makes preparations to leave the village in full view of the population and then departs around mid-afternoon, in full view of possible enemy OP's. After dark the second force moves around the village and establishes ambushes for unsuspecting VC returning home to what they now consider a safe area. The "Double Sweep" technique has produced several profitable contacts. If troop strength or density does not permit the use of two forces, the force departing an area can backtrack to the same area after dark. These techniques have proven more successful than stay behind forces which are too easily compromised by inhabitants of the village.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: Units should use the double sweep cordon and search method of operation in lieu of leaving stay behind elements.

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(4) Combine Cordon and Search Operation

(a) OBSERVATION: The use of territorial forces on cordon and search operations significantly aids in the results of the mission.

(b) EVALUATION: On a cordon and search operation involving one US rifle company and one RF company, the RF soldiers were used as the primary search force. This concept of using RF to search is not new and this instance is not intended as a new technique, but rather as an illustration of the importance of its use. During the operation, with a large measure of credit to the RF, 3 VC/NVA were KIA and CIA, and 26 VC/NVA suspects were detained, rather significant results for a routine cordon and search. On several occasions the US troops accompanying the RF on the search by-passed VC suspects and hidden tunnel entrances that were immediately obvious to the RF.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: Territorial forces should be used in conjunction with US forces in cordon and search operations since they are usually familiar with the area of search, the customs of the people, and the language.

(5) Scout Dogs on Listening Posts.

(a) OBSERVATION: Scout dogs proved valuable as early warning systems on listening post.

(b) EVALUATION: Scout dogs proved valuable to the security of fire support bases of the 173d Airborne Brigade when they were utilized on night listening posts. One night in November a dog team on LP security detected movement outside a FSB perimeter at 2310 hours. The battery commander was notified and the unit was placed on alert. While no other basis for alarm other than the dog's warning was noted, the base was attacked at 0110 hours by a platoon size unit. Thanks to the early warning provided by the dog, the enemy was engaged while still outside the wire. As a result the enemy lost 9 KIA and numerous weapons CIA.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: Scout dogs should be used on listening posts in isolated areas providing they receive the same rest considerations as other sentries and the duty does not distract from the dog's primary mission of patrolling.

(6) LZ Construction Using 750 Pound Bombs.

(a) OBSERVATION: The location of friendly troops or the nature of the terrain often prevents the using of heavy ordinance to clear landing zones in vegetated areas.

(b) EVALUATION: A battalion of the 173d Airborne Brigade was successful in constructing a one helicopter LZ in moderate vegetation using 750 pound bombs with three foot extensions delivered by MC air. LZ's had previously been constructed in the 173d Abn Bde AO using 10,000 and 2,000 pound bombs. This particular LZ was to be constructed on a narrow ridgeline with moderate vegetation. Trees in the area were 20 to 50 feet high with diameters of 6 to 12 inches. Single canopy existed and scrub brush on the ground was 2 to 8 feet high. Heavy bombs were not favorably considered for the mission since delivery aircraft had to fly in proximity to the target in order to achieve the required accuracy. Therefore, 750 pound bombs with three foot extensions were selected as test ordinance for the mission. A very adequate one ship LZ, the desired result, now exists in an area previously available only by ladder or foot.

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(c) RECOMMENDATION: 750 pound bombs with 3 foot extensions should be used for LZ clearance when heavier ordnance cannot be used.

(7) Fixing the Enemy.

(a) OBSERVATION: One of the major problems associated with the war in Vietnam is the finding and then fixing of the VC long enough for friendly troops to close with and destroy them.

(b) EVALUATION: Recently while conducting a search and clear operation in an area known to be a haven for VC, a unit of the 1-503d made contact with 3 VC in lightly vegetated terrain at a range of 400 meters. The unit had to maneuver thru 100 meters of newly planted rice paddy in order to close with the enemy. During previous contacts in the same area the enemy had ample warning and time to escape into the mountains. The circumstances of this contact suggested that the same escape would occur. Yet when the element arrived at the area of the sighting, the enemy was still there and one was killed. While trying to establish a reason for the enemy staying in the area instead of running, it was remembered that there had been an observation aircraft overhead on another mission during the contact. It was therefore surmised that the VC had failed to run for fear of being spotted by the airplane and having artillery or gunships called on them. With this in mind a subsequent operation in the same general area was conducted with an observation aircraft purposely overhead. Visual contact was again made at an extended range and again the VC remained fixed until the friendly elements closed with them resulting in one VC KIA. The VC had ample warning of the friendly approach and could have easily run for cover.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: When possible, an observation aircraft should be used in conjunction with ground troops when a lightly vegetated area is suspected of harboring enemy troops.

(8) Use of NPTF.

(a) OBSERVATION: The addition of National Police Field Force Teams to US units greatly enhances both tactical and pacification objectives in populated areas.

(b) EVALUATION: National Police Field Force perform specific operations against Viet Cong infrastructure as an action arm of the Special Branch. They establish police operations to prevent VC activities, maintain civil security and order, and serve as a reserve force for the National Police in the control of riots and other civil disturbances. NPTF may be attached to US units on a daily operational basis or a specific mission basis, such as a Cordon and Search.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: Combined US/NPTF operations improve rapport with the local populace as well as provide effective coverage of rural populated areas. NPTF should be requested through District channels and used whenever feasible in support of US operations.

d. ORGANIZATION: None

e. TRAINING: None



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- f. LOGISTICS: None
- g. COMMUNICATIONS: None
- h. MATERIAL: None
- i. OTHER: Listening to the Grievances of the Local People.

(a) OBSERVATION: Taking time to listen to the local people near friendly positions can solve problems important to the natives with little effort on the part of the Commander.

(b) EVALUATION: An old woman was seen to stand near a rifle company's helipad each time a helicopter would land. She would speak and wave her arms at the soldiers working at the helipad. The previous Commander had said she was crazy and not to bother with her. The Regional Forces had said essentially the same thing. The new Company Commander tried to talk to her through an interpreter, but the interpreter said he could not understand her. This questioning was tried again several days later with instructions to the interpreter to translate the woman's conversation literally, word for word. It was learned that she was upset about the soldiers kicking dirt in her water supply as they moved to or from the helipad. The Company Commander asked where the path could be moved and moved it to the area she indicated. The old woman was subsequently pleased with the new arrangement.

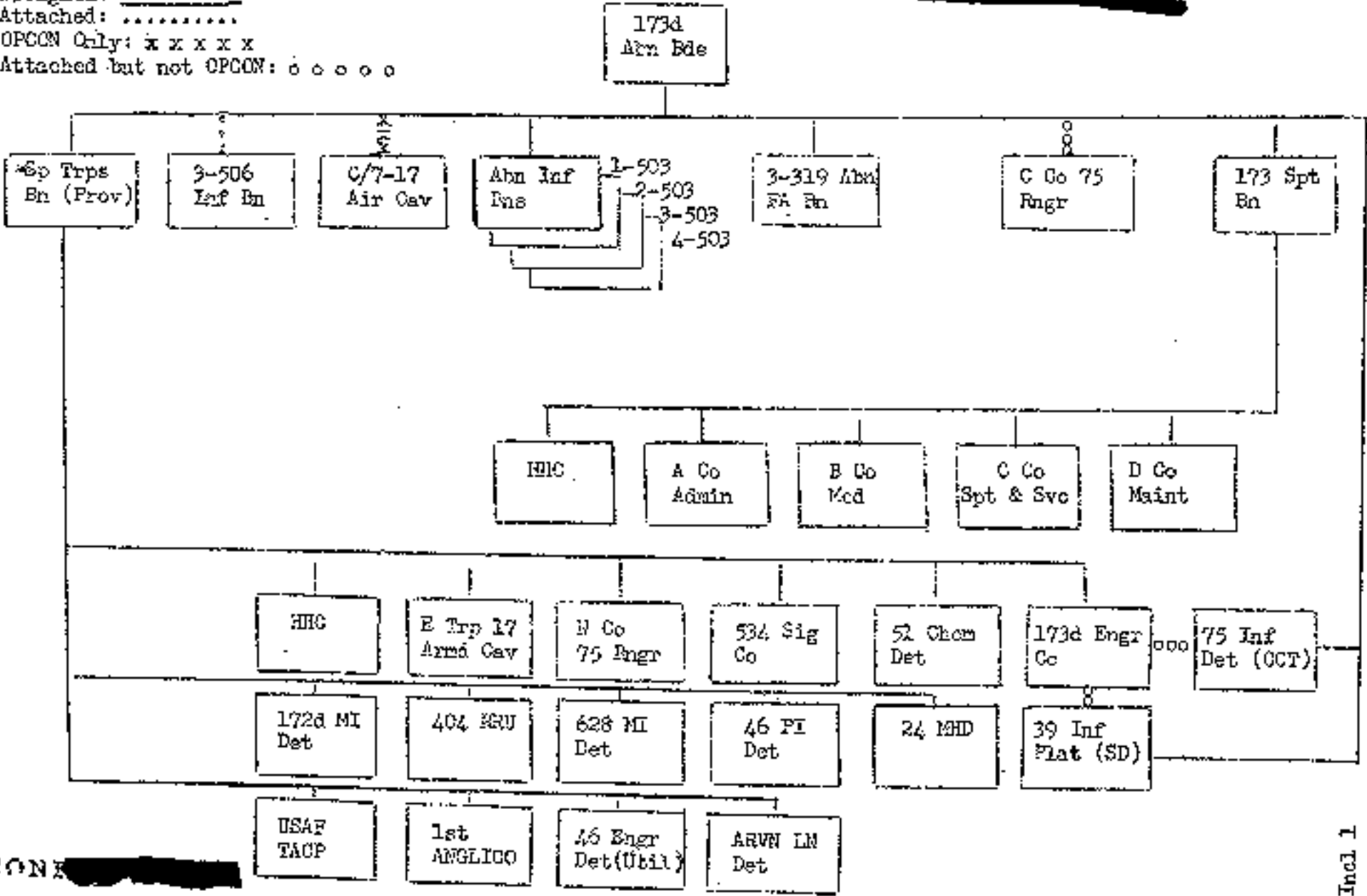
(c) RECOMMENDATION: Consider the feelings of the local people. Often with small effort on the Commander's part, what seems a dire problem to Vietnamese can be easily solved.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

  
T.W. SROCZYNSKI  
1LT, AGC  
Asst AG

- 2. Incl
- 1. Organizational Chart
- 2. Roster of Key Personnel

LEGEND:  
Assigned: \_\_\_\_\_  
Attached: .....  
OPCON Only: x x x x x  
Attached but not OPCON: o o o o o



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 HEADQUARTERS 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE  
 KEY PERSONNEL

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>1 NOVEMBER</u>	<u>31 JANUARY</u>
Commanding General	BG H. S. Cunningham	N/C
Bde Deputy Commander	COL D. F. Bletz	COL E. N. Ochs
Bde Executive Officer	LTC L. E. Zimmerman	N/C
Bde S1	MAJ J. D. Wagelstein	N/C
Bde S2	MAJ L. S. Gossett	N/C
Bde S3	MAJ J. J. Clark	LTC J. R. Martina
Bde S4	MAJ D. G. Rewerts	MAJ H. C. Kammer Jr.
Bde S5	MAJ K. L. Sannicks	CPT W. S. Wink
Bde Aviation Officer	MAJ J. T. Willard	N/C
Bde Engineer	MAJ A. H. Wilson	N/C
Bde Signal Officer	MAJ F. M. Boberek	N/C
Bde Surgeon	MAJ J. J. Treanor	N/C
Bde Chaplain	MAJ P. J. Hessian	N/C
Bde Provost Marshall	MAJ B. E. Meurrens	MAJ R. H. Carson
Bde Adjutant General	MAJ T. M. Partin	N/C
Bde Finance Officer	MAJ C. F. Ageo	N/C
Bde Information Officer	MAJ L. G. Taylor	N/C
Bde Historian/CO, 24th MH Det	CPT L. R. Byers	N/C
Bde Inspector General	MAJ A. L. Walls	MAJ B. G. Hallow
Bde Chemical Officer	CPT N. J. Adams	N/C
CO, 1-503d Inf	LTC P. D. Fisher	LTC M. H. Cooper Jr.
CO, 2-503d Inf	MAJ R. G. Rokland	LTC G. W. Krause
CO, 3-503d Inf	LTC B. A. Lowrey Jr	N/C
CO, 4-503d Inf	LTC K. W. Accousti	LTC P. S. Lawrence
CO, 3-506th Inf		LTC J. N. Jaggors
CO, 3-319th FA	LTC J. R. Martina	LTC J. B. Tenzor
CO, 173d Spt Bn	LTC J. F. McCluskey	N/C
CO, Sp Trps Bn (Prov)	MAJ J. M. Devitt	MAJ J. R. Trdla
CO, E/17th Cav	CPT J. M. Weaver	N/C
CO, C/7-17th Air Cav	MAJ J. Tobin	MAJ J. S. Hahn
CO, G/75th Inf	MAJ B. V. Holt	N/C
CO, H/75th Inf	CPT J. P. Lawton	CPT S. G. Stuart
CO, HHC 173d Abn Bde	CPT J. F. Esau	N/C
CO, 173d Engr Co	CPT T. M. Deputy	N/C
CO, 534th Sig Co	CPT J. P. Grandicconi	CPT A. G. McGrae
CO, 172/628 MI Det	MAJ H. L. O'Kane	MAJ T. J. Minnehan
CO, 404th RRU	CPT D. W. Cairns	N/C
CO, 39th Inf (SD)	LT R. W. Krauel	N/C
HCOIC, 75th Inf (CCT)	SSG C. B. Henseth	SGT B. L. Miller
CO, 51st Chem Det	CPT F. H. Mack	N/C
CO, 46th PI Det	CPT G. A. Reynolds	N/C
CO, 173d Abn Bde Postal Sect	1LT J. P. Webber	N/C
AFO, USAF	CPT R. R. McWilliams	N/C
TALO, USAF	MAJ C. A. Nelson	N/C
XSLO, USN	LT (JG) J. H. Alocco	N/C
CO, 46th Engr Det (Util)		1LT A. G. Sossong

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE  
APO San Francisco 96250

15 November 1970

AVBE-SC/AHD

SUBJECT: Operational Report-Lessons Learned, 173d Airborne Brigade, Period  
Ending 31 October 1970, RCS CSFOR - 65 (R 2)

Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development  
Department of the Army  
Washington D.C. 20310

1. (C) Operations: Significant Activities

a. On 1 September 1970 the Brigade entered Phase V of Operation Washington Green, continuing to support the Vietnamization Program by upgrading Territorial Forces (TF/RF) and directly supporting the GVN Pacification Program. In addition, Washington Green V accelerates the program of destruction of the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) in coordination with anti-VCI operations being conducted throughout Binh Dinh Province by the GVN. Priority has been given to the destruction of the VCI. This is accomplished in coordination with GVN forces by quick reaction to intelligence and information provided by Hoi Chanh. Commanders employ a "hard seal" cordon of US and GVN forces around a hamlet complex and then enter and seize known VCI residents. Maximum use of Psywar media and prisoner interrogation tactics is made. The Brigade has also continued to refine and implement contingency plans to deny the enemy his objectives while simultaneously inflicting maximum enemy casualties and exploiting lucrative airstrike targets.

b. Significant Operations:

(1) During August, 2-503 conducted Reconnaissance operations in the upper An Lao Valley, the periphery of the Tiger Mountains in the vicinity of Lo Dieu Sa ch, and continued the LZ English - Bong Son Bridge - Phu Cu Pass security mission. The 1-503 also provided security for the elections in conjunction with RF/RF units.

(2) On 12 August, one platoon of D Company 3-503 and one RF platoon, acting on information from a Hoi Chanh, conducted a search operation in the Phu Ho Du area. This operation was under the control of the RF platoon leader. As a result, a small arms and ammunition cache was captured at BR806934.

(3) Contacts had been generally limited to small units, but on 28 Aug, reconnaissance by the 3-503 disclosed 180 VC and EVA near the mouth of the Soui Ca Valley in the vicinity of grid BR839717. At the same location, re-

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commissary elements of the 3-503 ambushed an estimated 50 to 60 VC/NVA. Results from this were 12 VC/NVA killed and 1 POW taken. It was later determined that the ambushed unit was the Phu My C-4 District Force.

(4) On 29 August, 3-503 captured documents which identified several units of the 2nd NVA Division.

(5) On 6 September, the 2-503 emphasized blocking force operations in the vicinity of the Monster Mountains. These operations supported the Land Clearing effort and included the 4-503 and the 40th NVA Regiment.

(6) As part of the Brigade's continuing effort to turn over bridges to GVN forces, the 2-503 Inf terminated its security mission at the Song Son Bridge on 30 September. Hai Phong District Forces assumed responsibility for the security of this new major bridge on Q. 1.

(7) During September, the 3-503 Inf continued combined operations with RF and PF units to deny the VC/NVA vitally needed rice during the harvest period. Also in order to upgrade Territorial Forces, the 3-503 Inf continued its PF training program.

(8) During the first part of October, the 3-503 continued combined operations with RF and PF units to deny the enemy rice during the rice harvest. After the harvest, these were temporarily terminated although further combined operations are to be conducted during November, because of the rice harvest, the PF training program was halted, but it will be reactivated during November.

(9) On 5 October the 320 and 447 RF Companies engaged an estimated NVA company in which 20 NVA were killed and a variety of equipment was captured, including 1 pound of documents. The document readout revealed that the NVA were from the G2 Company of the 1st Battalion, 2nd NVA Regiment.

c. Breakdown of casualties:

The critical figures for the period of 1 August to 31 October 1970 are as follows:

US TROOPS:	August	September	October	Totals
MIA	6	25	7	38
NIA	84	125	48	257
MED	0	0	0	0
REMIY TROOPS	August	September	October	Totals
MIA	90	105	75	270
CIA	6	8	9	23
DETAILED	211	177	118	506
SEALMS	94	68	30	192
GREEN SERVED	5	2	7	14

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VC/NVA

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c. Enemy: During August, it was noted that the enemy was continuing to operate in small units and avoiding contact as much as possible. However, during September the enemy began to initiate contact when he believed the advantage was in his favor. In October, the 3-503 reported that with the advent of the monsoon rains enemy activity had declined sharply. In fact, from 24 October to 31 October the 3-503 had no enemy contact whatsoever. The enemy appears to have limited his movement and operations to the low ground and populated areas. He is quite possibly relocating in his mountain sanctuaries for the monsoon season. There is however, evidence which indicates that small numbers of VC/NVA continue to enter and sometimes remain in hamlets undetected or unreported by GVN forces. Known enemy units operating within the Brigade's AO during the period of 1 August to 31 October 1970, were located as follows on 31 October 1970:

<u>UNIT</u>	<u>Est location</u>	<u>Est strength</u>
1st Bn 2nd NVA Regt	BR880850	130
2nd Bn 2nd NVA Regt	BR785635	200
3rd Bn 2nd NVA Regt	BR820810	200
5th Bn 2nd NVA Regt	BR840665	200
8th Bn 22nd NVA Regt	B8899124	200
300th Arty Bn	BR870734	40
90th Sapper Bn	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
400th Sapper Bn	BR845625	160
200th Anti-Aircraft Bn	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
D40 Sapper Co	B89009	70
C1 Co	B88313	40
C2 Co	BR958977	60
Phu Ly Local Force Bn	BR9470	120
Hoa Thon (D) Force	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
Hoa An Force	BR848858	60

e. Combat Support:

(1) The 3-319th Field Artillery Headquarters remained at LZ English for the reporting period. Battery A continued to occupy FSB Peggy (BR-9170) and is in direct support of 1-503 and 3-503. Battery B displaced from FSB Kelly (B88004) and joined with the two gun raid at FSB Salem (BR9380) on 3 October and is in direct support of 1-503 and 3-503. Battery C continued to occupy FSB Two Bits (BR8495) with priority of fires to 3-503. Battery D continued to occupy FSB Shamrock (B88412) with priority of fires to 2-503 and 4-503. A two gun raid from Battery D remained at FSB Tape (B87413) with priority of fires to 2-503d Infantry.

(2) Tactical Air Support: (a) Brigade Forward Air Controllers flew a total of 790.1 hours in support of operations during the reporting period.

(b) Air Support Missions:

<u>Type of Mission</u>	<u>Sorties</u>
Preplanned FAC Airstrikes	113
Immediate FAC Airstrikes	105

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Preplanned Combat Sky Spot	3
Immediate Combat Sky Spot	11
Spooky or Shadow (AC-119) Missions	34
Total	48

In response to guidance from COMUSMACV, this Brigade has initiated a program to emphasize austerity in the employment of combat assets. Foremost has been a reduction in the use of USAF aircraft on targets where the effectiveness of resources expended cannot be measured. Now a detailed target reconnaissance is conducted prior to each preplanned air strike. Following the strike, a ground or aerial bomb damage assessment (BDA) is conducted.

(3) The Brigade received no naval gunfire support during the reporting period. The Naval Gunfire Liaison Team was withdrawn from the Brigade in late August due to infrequent availability of US Navy warships for ground support missions. When US Naval warships are required, an ANGLICO team will be made available.

f. Combat Service Support: (1) The 173d Engineer Company continues to provide combat engineer support to Brigade maneuver battalions and attached units. Several fire support/surveillance bases were constructed as well as assorted base camp, base defense, road repair and civic action projects.

(2) Radio Research Unit Support: The 404th RRU, located at LZ English, provides spot reports and intelligence readouts to the Brigade S2. These reports and readouts are compared with the other intelligence gathering sources and then incorporated into operational planning. The physical location of the unit and close liaison have permitted timely reaction by fire support and maneuver forces in response to the intelligence information provided.

(3) The 51st Chemical Detachment continued to provide the Brigade with mission-related support. A breakdown follows:

(a) Airborne Personnel Detection: 72 missions were flown for a total of 83 hours.

(b) Herbicide spray missions: There were no such missions flown during this reporting period.

(c) Insecticide spray missions: There were no such missions flown during this reporting period.

(d) Riot control agent: A total of 107 E-158 tactical CS cannister clusters were used against known and suspected enemy positions.

(e) Incendiary fougasses drum drops: A total of 228 missions were flown to drop 3648 drums of thickened and unthickened fuel.

(4) Weather Support: Since no weather detachment is located in AO Lee, weather information is primarily obtained from Detachment 31, 5th Weather Squadron at An Khe. Such information is sometimes obtained from Detachment 23, 30th Weather Squadron at Phu Cat AB. During the monsoon season, the effects of weather are most prominent because radio relay stations and fire support bases are often "weathered in" due to poor visibility.

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2. (C) Lessons Learned: Commander's Observations, Evaluations, and Recommendations.

a. Personnel: Experienced Small Unit Leaders.

(1) Observation: There exists an inadequate number of experienced small unit leaders due to casualties and the short 12 month RVE tour.

(2) Evaluation: Although there is an adequate supply of MGOC trained personnel, the number of experienced small unit leaders is critically low. There still remains a period after arrival in RVE when the MGOC gains combat experience. This is a most critical period. In small unit operations (especially team and squad size) the element leader is crucial to successful completion of the unit's mission. In jungle warfare small unit operations are quite often the most practical. In this environment the squad or team leader must have a wide and thorough knowledge of his element's purpose, capabilities, and numbers.

(3) Recommendation: Each new member must be cross-trained in all the vital functions of his unit element in order to fill the position of leader, if necessary, and gain leadership experience.

b. Intelligence: None.

c. Operations:

(1) Utilization of Small Units.

(a) Observation: After a terrain study of an area which was in close proximity to enemy staging areas, a six man Hunter-Killer (H&K) team from the 1-503d Infantry was inserted by APCs to interdict the area. The team was undetected and on the second day, it killed a Viet Cong communication liaison chief. In the third day, it severely wounded another VC and killed an NVA. A platoon of the 1-503d was inserted as a reaction force and the next morning, it wounded and captured a VC courier. The initial reconnaissance team was extracted by air on the same ship that inserted a new team. The platoon was extracted and the recon team continued reconnaissance of the area. The next morning, it killed another VC courier.

(b) Evaluation: There were several reasons for the above mentioned successes: 1. The area had not recently been patrolled by friendly troops; 2. Due to dense foliage, the team was well protected from observations; 3. The first insertion was undetected; 4. The platoon broke into six (6) man teams and interdicted other trails; 5. When the team and platoon were extracted, the insertion of a fresh stay-behind reconnaissance team was undetected.

(c) Recommendation: Team-size operations should become more extensively used in jungle terrain. Large platoon size operations seldom result in kills. In small and hard to detect teams, American forces can hide and disrupt VC teams and capture single man couriers.



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(2) Searching Enemy Base Camps.

(a) Observation: While sweeping a base camp bunker complex, two US soldiers were wounded when they received fire from a bunker which, supposedly, had already been cleared.

(b) Evaluation: cursory checks of enemy base camps are unacceptable. The enemy continually uses fake walls and floors in bunkers as well as camouflaged spider holes adjacent to the bunkers.

(c) Recommendation: Bunkers must be carefully entered and probed in order to properly clear them. Extreme caution must always be used when operating in recently occupied enemy base camps.

(3) Utilization of Armored Cavalry.

(a) Observation: A reconnaissance team became heavily engaged with a numerically superior enemy force after dark. An armored cavalry platoon, located four (4) kilometers away, was dispatched to relieve them. The route was across low rolling terrain with small hedgerows and streamlines. After one hour, less than one-third (1/3) of the distance had been covered and an airmobile relief force was committed to relieve the reconnaissance team.

(b) Evaluation: Cross-country navigation by tracked vehicles, even under good conditions of visibility, is a tedious and time-consuming process. Under poor visibility it is an exercise in futility.

(c) Recommendation: When it is necessary to move tracked vehicles across the terrain rapidly, the cavalry unit commander should be provided with a helicopter to conduct route reconnaissance and to assist in directing the vehicles around major obstacles. Under conditions of poor visibility, other means of reaction must be considered or extended reaction time must be accepted.

(4) Cave Operations.

(a) Observation: Viet Cong and local force guerrillas use numerous caves for base camps. Some of these caves are so complex that, once found, they can never be searched completely.

(b) Evaluation: In order for such caves to be properly cleared, a cordon of the area should be made. Then, fougasse (thickened fuel) or some other incendiary should be dropped at the mouth of the cave in order to clear away the brush. A Mighty Mite could be employed with CS, but recent operations within the Brigade have shown that the Mighty Mite is not very effective when the cave complex descends more than twenty (20) feet. If a cave is quite deep, thickened fuel can be poured into it by hand. After allowing the fuel to burn, smoke should be thrown into the cave prior to troops entering, to reduce the enemy's visibility.

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(c) Recommendation: Cave-clearing operations must not be done in haste. Proper detailed planning, organization and equipment must be utilized for successful results.

(5) Employment of Snipers.

(a) Observation: Units within the Brigade have been employing snipers in pairs in order to achieve first round hits. The snipers engage the same target simultaneously then shift to the next target. On two occasions, this method has resulted in multiple hits.

(b) Evaluation: Snipers employed in pairs greatly increase the chances of making a first round hit, even at extended ranges. Also, it allows one sniper to sleep while the other is awake during hours of darkness.

(c) Recommendation: Snipers should be employed in pairs whenever the situation permits.

(6) Use of Scout Dogs.

(a) Observation: During September, the 2-503d Infantry used nineteen Scout Dog Teams. This was generally done in areas which were suspected to contain many booby traps.

(b) Evaluation: As a result of booby trap incidents, three handlers were wounded while two dogs were killed and a third dog was wounded. No members of 2-503d Infantry were wounded. The utilization of Scout Dogs improves both the morale of the men and the probability of detecting booby traps before they are tripped. When the dogs fail to alert it is better to lose a dog than a human life, although the loss is still felt.

(c) Recommendation: The training and utilization of Scout Dog Teams for booby trap detection should be continued and, if at all possible, increased.

(7) Enemy Contact.

(a) Observation: At approximately 1900 hours on 13 September 1970, a platoon from the 3-503d Infantry came under heavy small arms, grenade and automatic rifle fire. The VC/NVA initiated the contact when the platoon's point man was only about five meters from the enemy. As a result, two US soldiers were killed and three more were wounded.

(b) Evaluation: Obviously, the point man was neither very observant nor alert. It was quite possible that he was overconfident since he had been through the same area just a short time before.

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(c) Recommendation: The point man, as well as everyone else, must be constantly on the alert for the unexpected. The VC/NVA know that the American soldier is often prone to return on his original route of departure because it is usually easier and faster. Units, particularly small one, should never return along a previously traveled route.

(8) Contact of Elements.

(a) Observation: In a night combat operation, an element left their Fire Support Base. When it was approximately one-half of the way to its destination, the element leader made a check of his unit. His tail squad had been separated from the rest of the element.

(b) Evaluation: The element had not properly organized for night movement. There were no emergency steps planned in case individuals of the element became separated from the main body. Also, what-to-do in case of radio equipment failure was not covered.

(c) Recommendations: Alternate plans must be made prior to an actual emergency to include rally points, ambushes and day lagers. These plans should also include distress signals in event of radio failure. It should also be clearly understood that each person is responsible for contact with the individual to his rear in night operations. Precise and planned procedures must be understood by all whenever contact is broken.

(9) Evacuating Base Camps.

(a) Observation: Because of recent rains and subsequent flooding, many of the RF/FP were forced to leave some of their base camps. As the people were preparing to be lifted out by helicopter, squad and team leaders were directed to check the entire compound to insure that all ordnance had been recovered. When the last lift was picked up it was noticed that much equipment and ammunition (of value to the enemy) had been left by the RF. In order to remedy this situation, a patrol had to be sent by boat across very dangerous flood waters to retrieve this equipment.

(b) Evaluation: Due to the urgency of the situation, some very important equipment was left behind - equipment which could have possibly been used by the enemy had it not been discovered by friendly forces.

(c) Recommendation: Evacuation of base camps, whether under emergency or normal conditions, must include a thorough search of the area to insure that nothing is left behind for use by the enemy.

(10) Security for Land Clearing Operations.

(a) Observation: Providing security for Reno Flows during land clearing operations requires more than one technique or method, depending on the enemy situation and activities and the terrain.

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(b) Evaluation: During initial land clearing operations by the Brigade, it appeared that the major threat to tracked vehicles and Rome Plows was B-40 rockets. Therefore, security was provided for APC's and Rome Plows by a screen of dismounted infantry at a distance sufficient to prevent the vehicles from being engaged with B-40 rockets. The enemy was evidently thwarted by this tactic, or else he merely chose not to attack. However, after several days of land clearing, he began to heavily booby trap the area. These booby traps varied in size from a hand grenade to a 175mm artillery projectile. They represented a substantial threat to the dismounted infantry screen and brought about a reevaluation of the employment of the security force. To counter the booby trap menace, a Rome plow would cut a swath around the area to be cleared. Following the plow were APC's carrying infantry. The APC's would halt at varying intervals in order for the troops to observe the area. The infantry would then dismount, disperse and provide security. Neither the APC's nor infantry would move out of the cleared area. Since Rome Plows are virtually immune to explosives as large as a 155mm howitzer shell, booby traps were neutralized by the plows. This technique proved highly effective and no further casualties were suffered.

(c) Recommendation: After careful evaluation of the area to be cleared, a detailed examination of all available intelligence should be made to determine the enemy's most probable course of action to halt or delay the land clearing operation. Once a technique is adopted, it is imperative that a constant reevaluation be made to preclude the possibility of adhering to a security technique which protects the Rome Plows only at the cost of unacceptable casualties among the security force. The two principal dangers are rockets and booby traps. A third possibility is an enemy small arms attack, but this is improbable due to the tremendous fire power afforded by an infantry-armor security force. Enemy snipers are also a threat, but they can be easily eliminated unless they are firing from a village or inhabited dwelling. Flexibility oriented on enemy activity and available intelligence is the key to success in such operations.

#### (1) Length of Ranger Operations.

(a) Observation: During extended Ranger team operations the teams tend to become extremely fatigued and lax after seven or eight days.

(b) Evaluation: Protracted exposure to danger and the elements dulls a Ranger team's physical condition and mental alertness. As a result, the team becomes increasingly vulnerable, and its efficiency is impaired.

(c) Recommendation: Ranger team missions should not last longer than seven days.

d. Organization: None.

e. Training: None.

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- f. Logistics: None.
- g. Communications: None.
- h. Material: None.
- i. Other.

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OF THE SEC ARMY BY YAG  
PER 3-7  
21 APR 1981

(1) Securing Enemy POWs.

(a) Observation: While being transported in a medivac helicopter, one of two wounded enemy prisoners, unconscious from a head wound, apparently awakened during evacuation, became frightened and jumped to his death from the aircraft.

(b) Evaluation: This action demonstrates the necessity for more stringent controls of enemy prisoners transported in aircraft. In this case it was incorrectly assumed that both wounded POWs were sufficiently rational to realize that it was in their own best interest to remain docile while being carried to a medical aid station. This assumption was invalid in this case. There is also the possibility that an able-bodied POW might escape or interfere with the crew if not bound or closely guarded.

(c) Recommendation: Whenever possible, an armed escort should accompany wounded prisoners during helicopter travel. Amputatory wounded POWs should have their hands and feet tied.

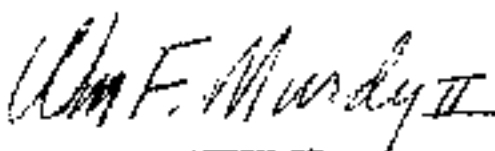
(2) Weather Casualties.

(a) Observation: Emphasis on wet weather casualty prevention is needed to help minimize such casualties during the rainy season.

(b) Evaluation: Units continuously exposed to inclement weather conditions can suffer general physical debilitation and attendant injuries and casualties.

(c) Recommendation: Tailored plans should be developed at battalion level whereby subordinate units might rotate into base camps and still be useful to other units conducting operations during the rainy season. For example, in this brigade an infantry battalion rotates companies into the battalion base camp for mandatory training and to serve as the Brigade and Battalion Ready Reaction Force. In this system a company has a five day respite from the unseason weather every 15 or 20 days while continuing to support the parent unit's mission.

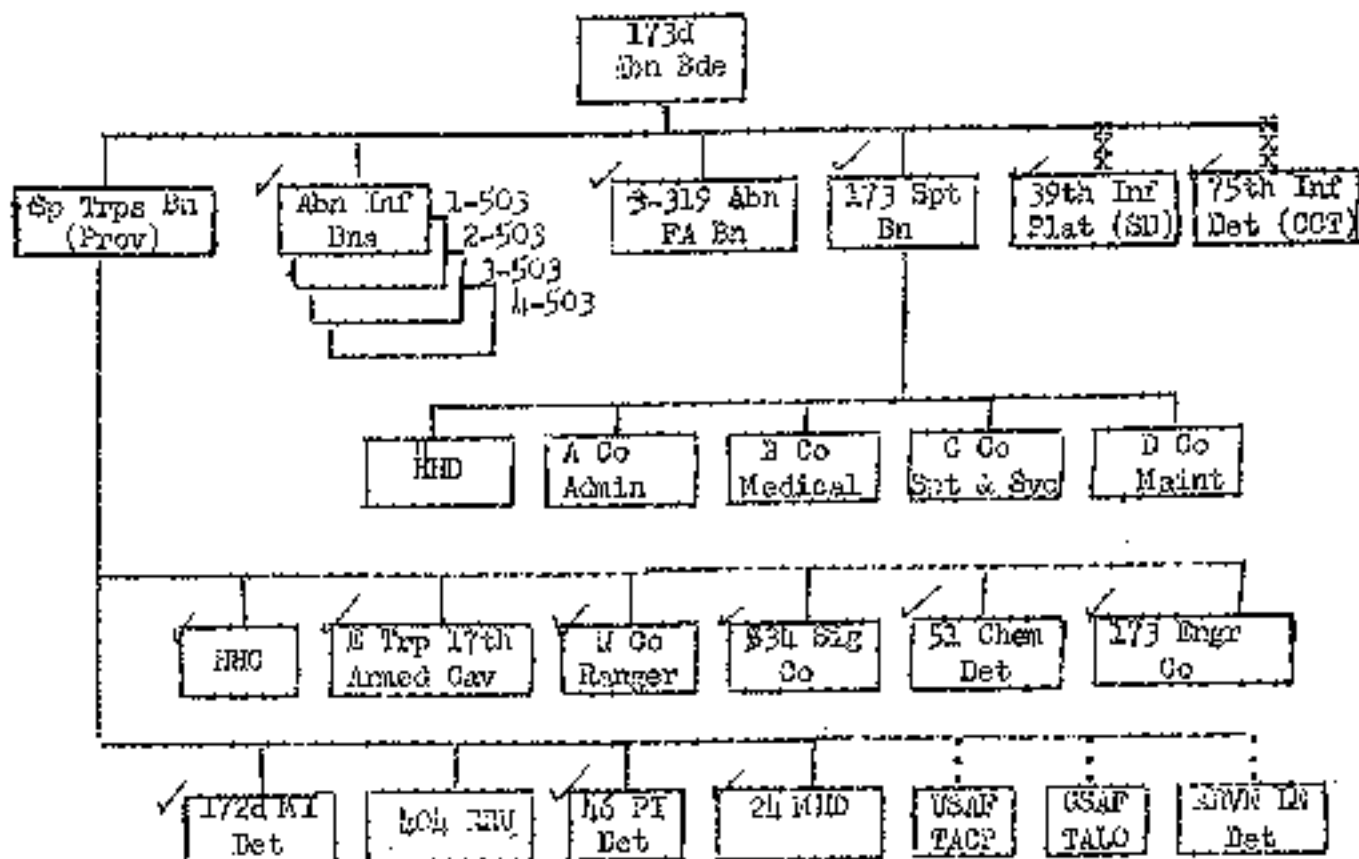
FOR THE COMMANDER:



WILLIAM F. MURDY II  
Captain, CG  
Acting Asst AG

1 Incl  
Brigade Organization

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



LEGEND:

Assigned: \_\_\_\_\_

Attached: .....

OPCON only xxxxxxxx