

Chapter 6

THE EARLY MODERN BRIGADE, 1958-1972

Pentomic Era

Following World War II, the US Army retained the organizational structures, with minor modifications, which had won that war. This organization—which did not include a maneuver unit called the brigade after the two brigades in the 1st Cavalry Division were eliminated in 1949—was also used to fight the Korean War in 1950-1953. Despite the success of the triangular infantry division in two wars, the Army radically changed the structure in 1958 by converting the infantry division to what became known as the Pentomic Division. Ostensively, the Pentomic structure was designed to allow infantry units to survive and fight on an atomic battlefield. Structurally it eliminated the regiment and battalion, replacing both with five self-contained “battlegroups,” each of which were larger than an old style battalion, but smaller than a regiment. A full colonel commanded the battlegroup and his captains commanded four, later five, subordinate rifle companies.

The Pentomic Division structurally reflected that of the World War II European theater airborne divisions. This was no surprise since three European airborne commanders dominated the Army’s strategic thinking after the Korean War: Army Chief of Staff General Matthew Ridgway, Eighth Army commander General Maxwell Taylor, and VII Corps commander Lieutenant General James Gavin. Though theoretically triangular in design, the two airborne divisions Ridgway, Taylor, and Gavin commanded in the war, the 82d and 101st, fought as division task forces reinforced with additional parachute regiments and separate battalions. For most of the Northern European campaign, both divisions had two additional parachute regiments attached to them, giving them five subordinate regiments, each commanded by colonels. Parachute regiments were smaller than standard infantry regiments by organization and attrition often made them even smaller, giving the 82d or 101st commander a perfect prototype of the structure that later became the Pentomic Division.¹

The Pentomic organization, officially known as the Reorganization of the Current Infantry Division (ROCID) went through frequent modifications from its conception in 1954 to 1958 when it was finally adopted, and even after adoption. The original tables of organization (TOE) which were implemented included a small brigade headquarters commanded by the brigadier general assistant division commander. This headquarters was designed to provide command and control of attached units from the division as directed by the division commander, and to act as an alternate division command post. The concept was not really used in practice and when Pentomic TOEs were modified in February 1960, the brigade was eliminated.²

Except for minor structural modifications, the armored division, with its three combat commands, was unaffected by the Pentomic changes. The division was considered already well suited for atomic operations and senior armor commanders favored the flexible combat command structure.³

As part of the Pentomic reorganization, the regiment and separate battalion were eliminated as tactical units in the infantry, field artillery, and tank units. The battle group, and later the battalion, became the basic maneuver unit. These units were, however, designated as components

of historic regiments that became notional units. The new system, CARS, and a later variation of it, the Army Regimental System, is still in use by the US Army today. In this designation system, battalions in the infantry, armor, cavalry, and artillery, later field and air defense, were designated as numbered battalions belonging to a particular regiment. Separate companies would be lettered companies of a specific regiment. The regiments themselves were administrative entities, except in certain units, like armored cavalry, where the regiment was retained as a combined arms unit commanded by a colonel. This will be discussed in greater detail later in this work.

With the adoption of the new Pentomic divisional structure and the elimination of the regiment as a tactical unit, the force structure required a replacement for the now defunct RCT. The brigade was revived to fill this role. Accordingly, two brigades, numbered 1st and 2d, stationed at Fort Benning, and Fort Devens, Massachusetts, respectively, were established in the active Army force structure. The Army created three additional brigades. The 29th in Hawaii, the 92d in Puerto Rico, and the 258th in Arizona, were created in the Army National Guard to replace existing RCTs.

When established, the new nondivisional Pentomic brigade became the first permanently organized combined arms brigade in Army history. The brigade commander was a brigadier general and the brigade had two subordinate battlegroups commanded by full colonels, as well as a field artillery battalion and a support element, the brigade trains. Each battlegroup contained four rifle companies and a 4.2-inch mortar battery. While brigade organization varied in other units, the brigade established at Fort Devens in 1958, the 2d Infantry Brigade,

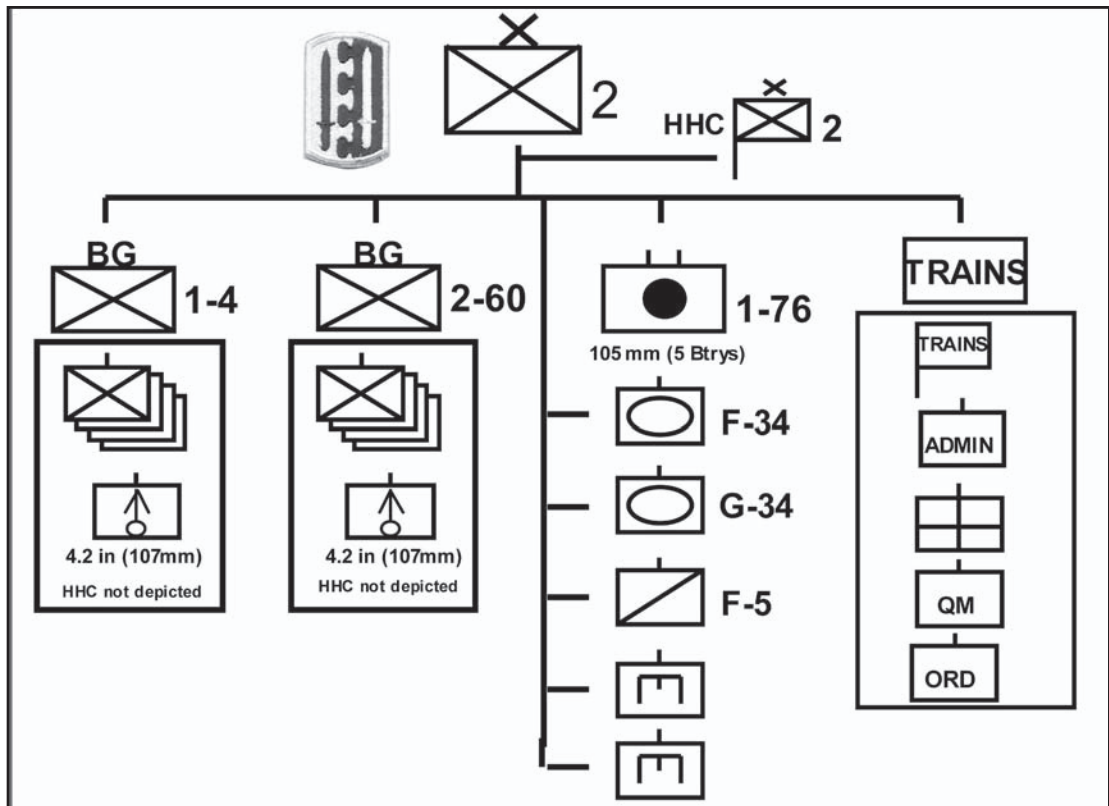


Figure 20. The Pentomic Brigade

also included two tank companies, two engineer companies, and a reconnaissance company. Its organization is illustrated in Figure 20.

ROAD Brigades and Airmobile Brigades

There were concerns about the Pentomic concept almost immediately. The span of control for the division commander was great and not compensated by advances in communications technology. Armored personnel carriers (APCs) were centralized in a transportation unit and assigned with drivers to infantry units as needed, though only one battle group at a time could be so mechanized. The command structure jumped from captain to colonel without any intermediate levels of command in between. And the infantry and armored divisions remained in two completely different organizational structures.

While the Army adopted the inventive Pentomic structure, most of the rest of the world's armies retained or adopted more traditional organizations. In the British army, the brigade had traditionally contained subordinate battalion-sized units, called regiments in the armored force, cavalry, and artillery branches, and called battalions in the infantry. During World War II, brigades were augmented with support elements and called brigade groups. To the present day, the British have maintained this concept. Brigades and brigade groups have, since 1945, become the basic operational unit in the British army in lieu of the division.⁴

When the new West German army, the *Bundeswehr*, was established in the mid-1950s, it, like the French army of the same era, used the combat command structure of the US armored division. However, starting in 1957, the Germans reorganized into a brigade structure. The brigades were combined arms organizations and fixed in structure, with permanently assigned combat battalions and support elements. While brigades still belonged to divisions, the brigade here too replaced the division as the *Bundeswehr's* basic tactical unit at the operational level.⁵

The US Army's Continental Army Command (CONARC) began formal studies for a new divisional structure in December 1960, only two years after the adoption of the Pentomic structure. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy approved CONARC's proposal, the Reorganization Objective Army Divisions (ROAD), for immediate implementation. The Army was reorganized between 1961 and 1963.⁶ With later modifications, the ROAD structure is basically still in use in the Army today.

Unlike the previous organizational structure, ROAD created a universal divisional structure, which depending on the mix of combat battalions, could be armored, mechanized infantry, infantry, or airborne. ROAD restored the brigade as a command, both in divisions and separately. ROAD established three brigade headquarters in each division, the 1st, 2d, and 3d. The new brigade combined features of the former divisional regiments and the armored division's combat commands. Like the former regiments, the new divisional brigades controlled battalions, were commanded by colonels, and reported directly to the division commander. Like the combat command, the ROAD brigade was a headquarters with no organic troops, being task organized by the division commander for particular missions. The brigade was not to be part of the division's administrative or logistical chains of command. Maneuver combat battalions (infantry, mechanized infantry, armor) would be assigned to the brigade in a mix of from two to five battalions, to complete specific missions. One of three divisional direct support field artillery battalions would normally be assigned to support each brigade. A slice of combat support and combat service support elements assigned to the division would be placed in support of the brigade.⁷

A new type of infantry, mechanized, was established with the ROAD reorganization. This type of infantry was the lineal descendent of the armored infantry formerly found in the armored divisions. Unlike the old armored infantry, mechanized infantry battalions could now be part of organizations other than armored divisions. And unlike the APC-mounted infantry in the Pentomic division, the new mechanized infantry had its APCs assigned directly to the unit, with one per infantry squad. In brigades with a mix of tank and mechanized infantry battalions, the old task force concept was codified into battalion task forces and company teams. A battalion task force was a tank or mechanized infantry battalion with one or more companies of the battalion cross-attached to an equivalent battalion of the other branch. Therefore, a battalion task force could consist of a mix of tank and mechanized infantry companies. Once formed, a battalion task force could in turn combine mixes of tank and mechanized infantry platoons under its companies, the resulting unit being referred to as a company team.⁸

In armored divisions, lineages for the new brigades were created by the redesignation of the former combat commands. In infantry, mechanized, and airborne divisions, the third brigade was created from scratch or from the former divisional headquarters company, which had been eliminated in the Pentomic division. The 1st and 2d brigades were created based on the lineages of the old square division brigades. While some of these had been disbanded, many had been converted to all or part of the divisional reconnaissance troop in the triangular division. Some Army National Guard divisional brigades were given special numbers, to reflect historical designations. This was done particularly in divisions that were formed of contingents from multiple states. Active Army separate brigades were named using the designations of former Organized Reserve/Army Reserve divisional brigades no longer in the force structure.

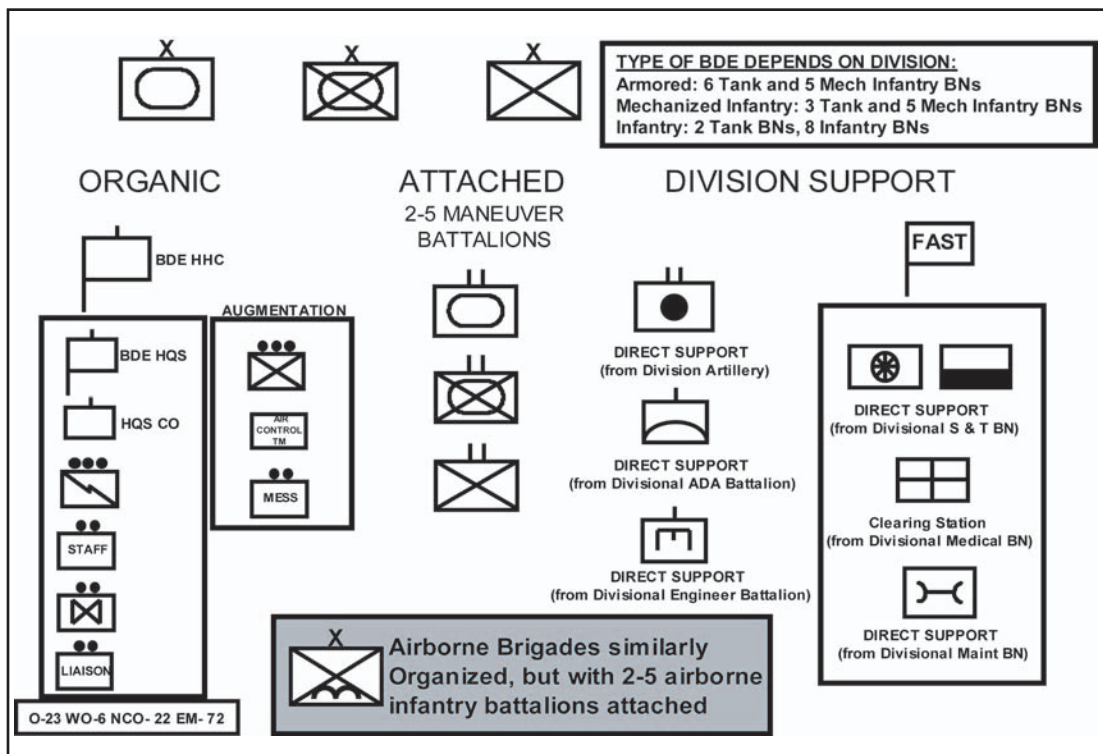


Figure 21. The ROAD Divisional Brigade

Four separate infantry brigades were also created from inactivating Army Reserve divisions, designating them with the lower brigade number formerly associated with the division under the square organization (before 1942). In both cases this was done so as to give the brigades numerical designations high enough not to be confused with the numbers used in divisional brigades. ARNG separate brigades were designated either with old square division brigade designations or, if they were replacing an inactivated ARNG division, by using the former division number. Several ARNG brigades were designated with the number of former infantry regiments that had been replaced in the force structure. Army Reserve training divisions, which formerly had training regiments directly under the division headquarters, concurrently converted these regiments to sequentially numbered brigades. A complete listing of all brigades since 1958 may be found in Appendix 4.

Separate, nondivisional brigades were part of the ROAD concept from the start for missions requiring less than a division or for the reserve components. Unlike divisional brigades, which were commanded by colonels, the separate brigade retained the tradition of being commanded by a brigadier general. While planners envisioned these brigades to be like divisional ROAD brigades, a bare bones headquarters with two to five attached maneuver battalions, and support provided either by a corps or a division to which the brigade would be attached, one brigade, the 173d Airborne Brigade on Okinawa, was established from the start with organic support troops. This was because Army planners envisioned the airborne brigade as a special task force that could deploy rapidly and act independently. Within a year similar support elements were applied to all separate brigades. As with the earlier RCTs, the separate brigades were also given their own unique shoulder patches.⁹

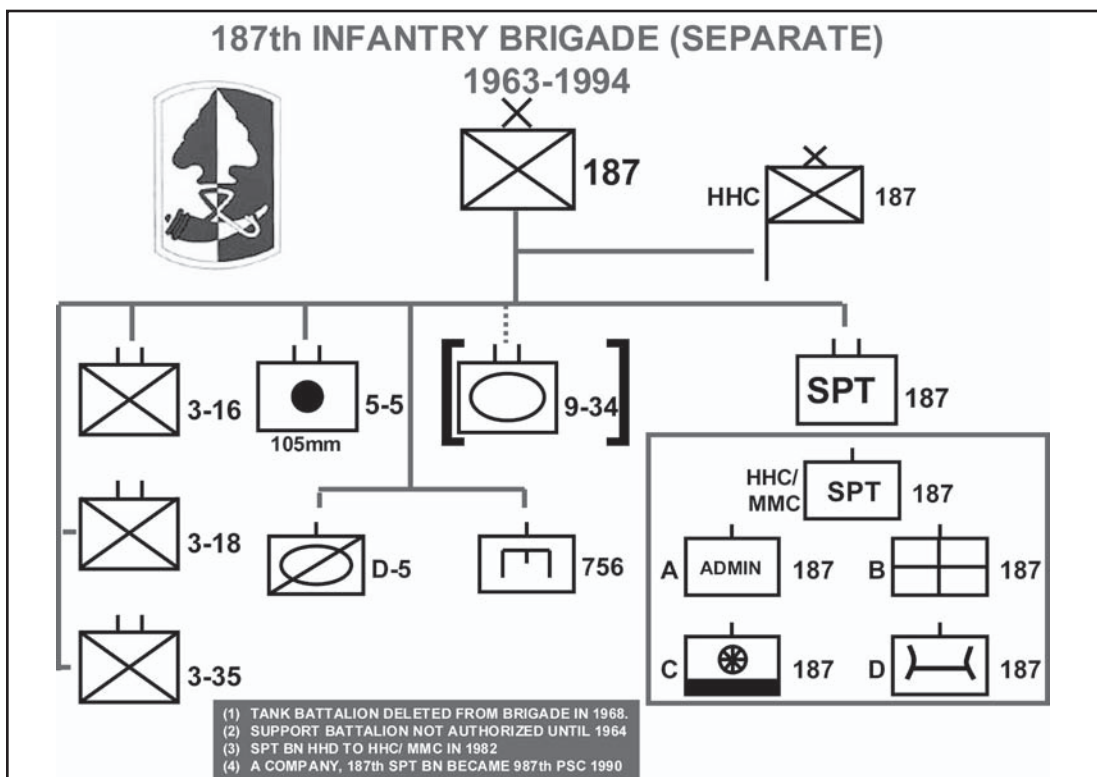


Figure 22. Example of a Separate Brigade Organization

The standard separate ROAD brigade, thereafter, in addition of having between two and five maneuver battalions, consisted of a small headquarters company, an armored cavalry troop, an engineer company, a direct support field artillery battalion, and a support battalion. The support battalion consisted of a small headquarters and administrative, medical, maintenance, and supply and transportation companies. The 173d Airborne Brigade additionally contained a separate tank company. An example of a typical brigade organization is found in Figure 22. The brigade illustrated was a US Army Reserve (USAR) brigade located in New England.

While the Army reorganized under ROAD at Fort Benning, an experimental organization was formed to test the incorporation of the helicopter directly into the divisional structure. This test unit, designated the 11th Air Assault Division, was ultimately redesignated as the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) in mid-1965, becoming an additional type of ROAD division: the airmobile division. The airmobile division was designed with helicopter, and originally fixed wing, assets to provide operational troop movements and fire support. Two aspects of the organization and employment of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) relates specifically to the employment of brigades. One brigade of the division, including a brigade headquarters and three of the infantry battalions, was qualified additionally as paratroopers, along with one of the field artillery battalions and slices of the division's support command. This unique composition of one brigade within a division lasted only until 1968, when the paratrooper qualification was dropped.¹⁰ The second brigade-specific feature of the airmobile division was in its inherent structure. Assigned to the division was an aviation group which consisted of two assault

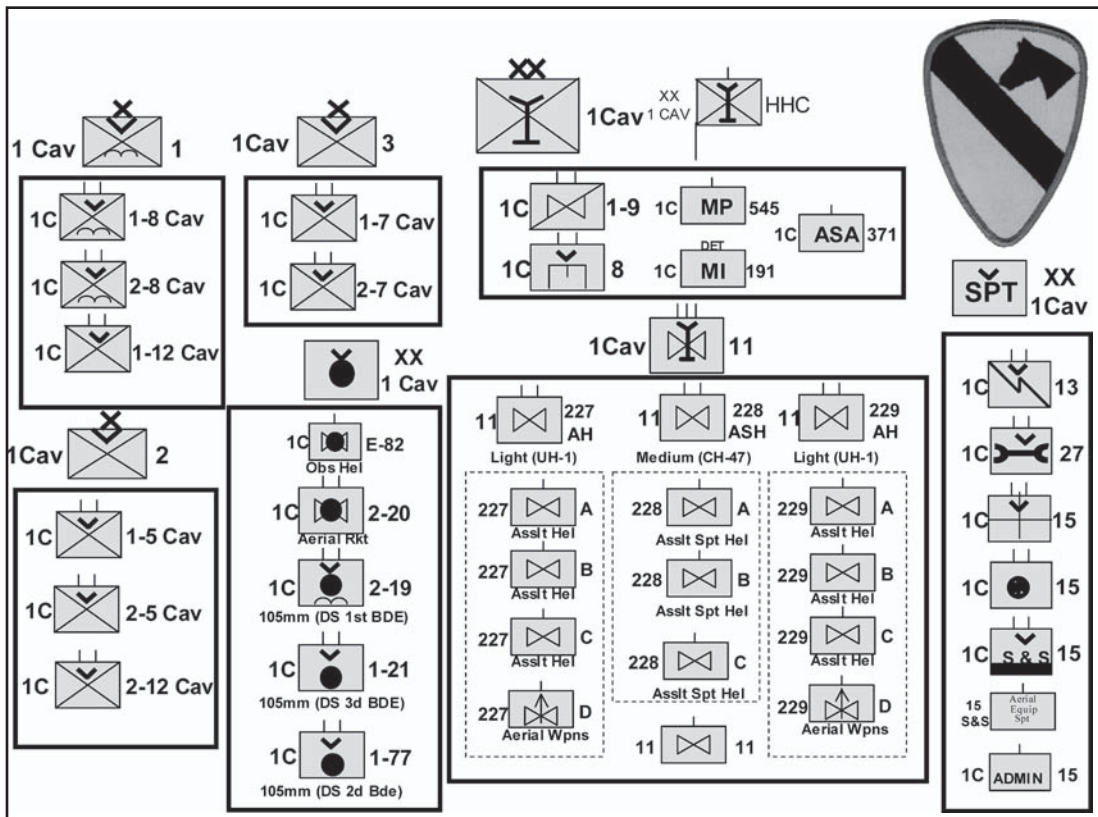


Figure 23. The First Cavalry Division (Airmobile), 1965

helicopter battalions equipped with the UH-1 Huey light transport helicopter and one assault support helicopter battalion equipped with the medium CH-47 Chinook transport helicopter. Each aviation battalion could carry a comparable sized infantry or artillery unit. Accordingly, the airmobile division was designed so that the aviation assets could move only one brigade at a time. The division, therefore, was naturally fought by maneuvering brigades. One brigade was in contact, one was in reserve, and one was reequipping and guarding the division's large base camp. The 1st Cavalry Division's organizational structure upon its deployment to Vietnam in 1965 is illustrated in 23.¹¹ In 1968 the 101st Airborne Division became the second Army airmobile division, a role it continues to the present day, with the tag "airmobile" being changed to "air assault" in 1974.¹²



Figure 24. The 196th Infantry Brigade Ships Out to Vietnam, Boston, 1966

The Brigade in Vietnam

The ROAD reorganization had barely been effected when it was given its first test in Vietnam. Earlier units that arrived were either separate brigades or brigade elements of deploying divisions. The first Army unit deployed was the 173d Airborne Brigade in May 1965, followed closely by the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, and 2d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. From then until the end of the US ground involvement in the war in 1972, 18 divisional brigades, including one detached from its division for a long period of time, five separate brigades, including three later made part of the Americal Division, and two brigades detached from their parent division served in Vietnam at one time or another. In June 1972, the 196th Infantry Brigade departed Vietnam as the last brigade in country.

In many ways Vietnam was a war of brigades. Brigades, especially in the early days, were moved from one part of the country to another or from one mission to another with a flexibility and celerity that quickly validated the ROAD concept. The flexibility of the ROAD brigade

with its subordinate, self-contained battalions, greatly facilitated the use of the helicopter to transport infantry. Several times in the course of the war, brigade elements operated far from their parent unit for extended periods. In one case, in August 1967, the 4th and 25th Infantry Divisions swapped brigades including subordinate infantry, armor, and field artillery battalions, with the brigades changing designations.¹³ One division was created in Vietnam by assigning three separate brigades, the 11th, 196th, and 198th Light Infantry, to a single new command. The new division so cobbled together, was given the designation of the Americal Division, as that division had been created in World War II under similar circumstances. The early organization of the Americal, whose official designation was 23d Infantry Division, is illustrated in Figure 24. The division was later reorganized as a standard ROAD division, except that its brigades retained the 11th, 196th, and 198th designations. The Americal Division also retained an attached aviation group throughout its stay in Vietnam.¹⁴

For duty in Vietnam, both separate and divisional brigades were modified, either prior to deployment or in country. A new type of brigade, the light infantry brigade, was created specifically for service in the counterinsurgency environment of Vietnam. The brigade contained less than half of the number of vehicles found in the standard infantry brigade. The infantry battalions were organized with a structure similar to the airmobile infantry battalions of the First Cavalry Division, to facilitate the conduct of airmobile operations.¹⁵ Most light brigades had four assigned infantry battalions, instead of the more typical three.

There were additional attachments found in Vietnam. Early on brigades acquired provisionally organized long-range patrol companies. These were later standardized and then redesigned as ranger companies. The 173d Airborne Brigade received its own aviation company in

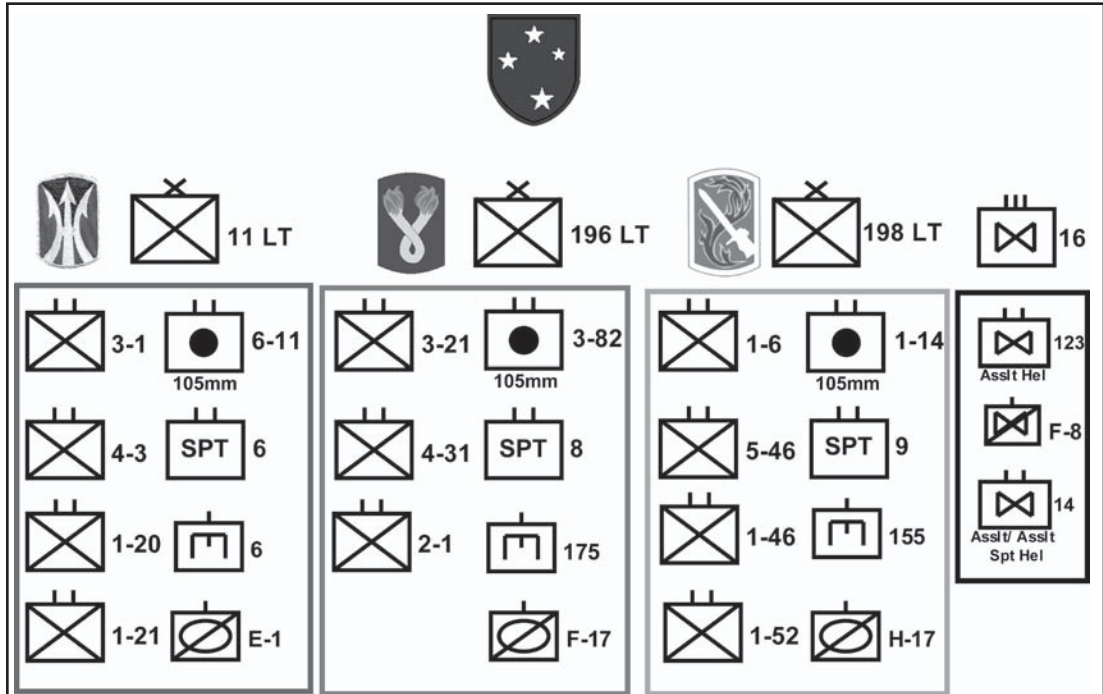


Figure 25. The Americal (23d Infantry) Division as Originally Organized in 1967

1966, making the brigade a de facto airmobile brigade. During the course of the war, several divisional brigades were detached from their parent divisions and deployed to Vietnam. These separate divisional brigades were given a slice of division support elements, typically a direct support field artillery battalion, an engineer and a signal company, and an armored cavalry troop. For these geographically separate brigades, the parent divisions also organized a provisional support battalion made up of companies from the division support battalion, similar to those found in the support battalion of the separate nondivisional brigades, i.e., an administrative, medical, maintenance, and supply and transportation company.¹⁶

The ubiquitous use of the helicopter and the area, rather than linear, nature of warfare in Vietnam gave brigade operations a unique flavor. Typically a brigade in counterinsurgency mode would be given a geographically based tactical area of operations (TAOR). In its TAOR, a brigade would defend any fire support bases (firebases or FSBs) established in the TAOR, as well as any helicopter landing zones (LZs) and any other larger bases located in the TAOR. A brigade would also secure any land supply routes between the bases and to sources of supply outside the TAOR. Aside from these defensive missions, the brigade conducted offensive operations within its TAOR to destroy any Communist forces and assisted in the internal development and defense of the civilian populace and infrastructure in the TAOR.¹⁷ In Vietnam, the brigade usually fought from a series of LZs and FSBs. Initial operations were designed to find and fix the enemy. FSBs would be established within artillery range of probable or known enemy positions and artillery batteries would be airlifted into the FSBs. Follow-on operations would air assault troops into LZs whose locations were designed to surround the enemy. Then the brigade commander would coordinate the maneuver of the battalions toward the enemy positions. Once the exact positions were found, the battalions would either assault them directly or attack them by fire support assets followed by an assault, usually from two directions. A good example of this type of operation can be found in the actions of the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), in the A Shau Valley in May 1969, this action codenamed Operation APACHE SNOW, culminated in the Battle of Hamburger Hill, which is highlighted in the next section of this chapter.

Sometimes combat operations in Vietnam consisted of multiple brigades and a combination of air assault and ground assault operations. A good example of this was the first phase of Operation JUNCTION CITY, conducted by the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions in War Zone C, Tay Ninh province, in February and March 1967. Executed over two years earlier than Operation APACHE SNOW and several hundred miles to the south, Operation JUNCTION CITY was a much larger operation in both concept and execution. In fact, its initial air assault, which utilized 249 helicopters to insert eight battalions, with a ninth parachuted in by Air Force aircraft, was the largest airmobile operation of the Vietnam War. The nine battalions were under the control of three brigade headquarters. The three brigades, plus another in the southwest which had deployed via ground transportation, were maneuvered to set up a massive cordon around War Zone C, the sparsely settled, heavily vegetated area of Tay Ninh province directly adjacent to the Cambodian border. In 1967 the major headquarters controlling Communist operations in the south, Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), was believed to be in War Zone C. The 9th Viet Cong (VC) Division also operated out of War Zone C, though the 1st Infantry Division had, in 1966, kept the division's two subordinate regiments away from the heavily populated areas to the south and east.¹⁸ Two additional

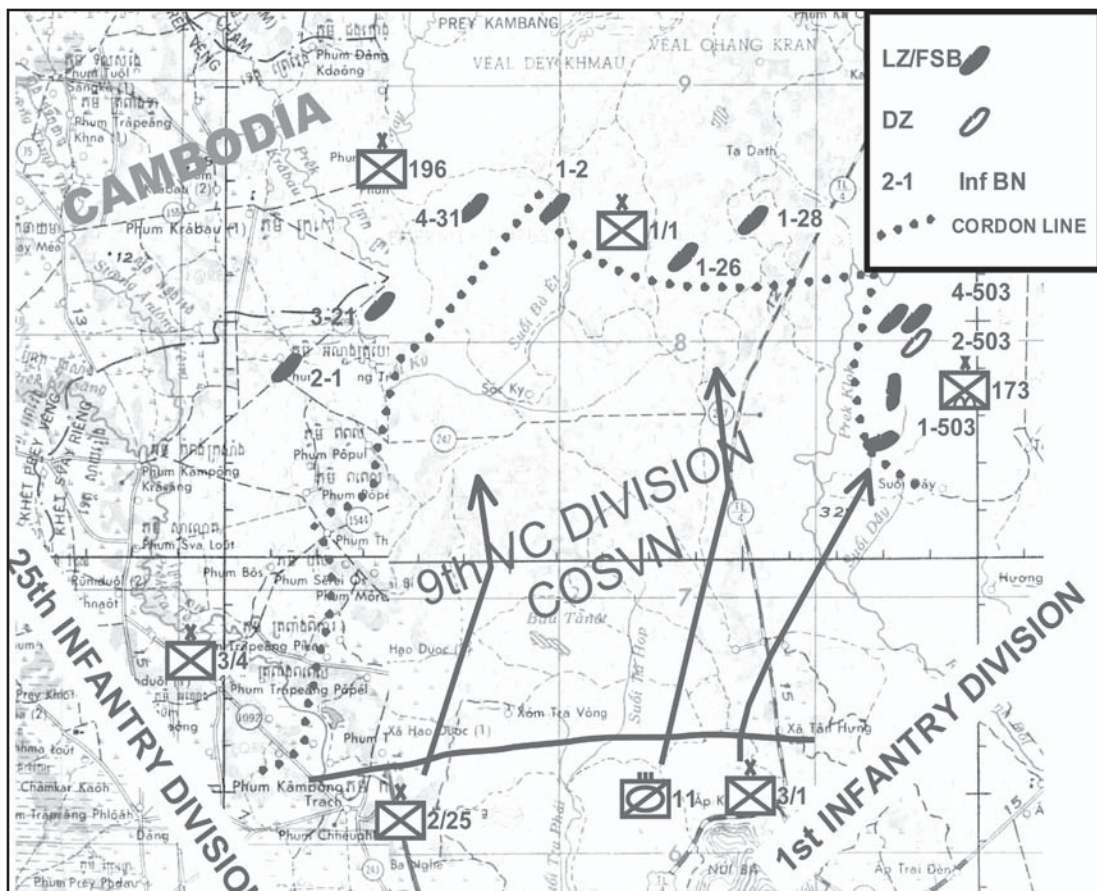


Figure 26. Phase 1 of Operation JUNCTION City, February 1967

brigades, along with an armored cavalry regiment (ACR), executed a ground attack the next day from the south into the area previously cordoned off. Two divisions, the 1st Infantry and 25th Infantry, controlled the six brigades and one ACR assigned to the operation under the overall command of the corps-equivalent headquarters, II Field Force Vietnam. The brigades included a separate infantry, a separate airborne brigade, and a brigade from the 4th Infantry Division attached to the 25th Division.¹⁹

While only traces of COSVN were found, the operation battered the 9th VC Division, whose response, aside from fleeing, was a series of small scale assaults on US positions that appeared to be isolated, but in fact were not. Operation JUNCTION CITY validated the flexibility of the ROAD brigade concept with its mix of forces, ground and air assaults, and paratrooper drops. This flexibility was the hallmark of US brigade operations in the Vietnam War.

Foreshadowing postwar plans for brigades of different capabilities in the same division, the Army organized one brigade of the 9th Infantry Division as a special amphibious force to operate in the densely populated and enemy infested Mekong River Delta area south of Saigon. The 2d Brigade, 9th Infantry Division, referred to as the Mobile Riverine Force (MRF), consisted of the 3d Battalion, 47th Infantry; 4th Battalion, 47th Infantry; 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry; and the 3d Battalion, 34th Artillery; along with slices of divisional support elements.

The MRF was specially organized for its mission in the United States prior to deployment and served on the Mekong River from 1967 to 1969. The Army selected a brigade-sized unit for the mission because experience had taught that the brigade was the smallest unit capable of operating independently in the Delta. The force worked out of a base on an island in the river at Dong Tam. The Navy directly supported the brigade with five self-propelled barracks ships, two landing ship, tank (LST) landing craft, two large harbor tugboats, and two landing craft repair ships. Additionally, two Navy river assault groups, each capable of transporting a battalion at a time, provided mobility for the force. The river assault groups, which were redesignated later as river assault squadrons, were each equipped with 52 LCM-6 armored landing craft, for use as troop carriers.²⁰

The operations of the MRF were highly successful. Viet Cong forces were pushed away from the populated areas of the Delta and the main roads were kept open, allowing farm produce to reach markets in Saigon. The brigade was so successful, that the 9th Division's headquarters eventually moved to Dong Tam as the brigade shifted operations farther south. During the 1968 Tet Offensive, the MRF successively ejected communist forces from the cities of My Tho, Vinh Long, and Can Tho, effectively saving the Delta area from enemy takeover. The brigade was a unique organization in the Army and in Vietnam.²¹

Operation APACHE SNOW: Brigade Employment in Vietnam

The 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) executed Operation APACHE SNOW in the northern portion of the A Shau Valley in Thua Thien province between 10 May and 7 June 1969 with its 3d Brigade and elements of two regiments from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam's (ARVN) First Infantry Division. This was the middle of three operations that the 101st conducted in different sections of the narrow, 30-mile long valley in 1969.

In May 1969, the A Shau Valley, located on the Laotian border west of Hue, had been a North Vietnamese-controlled sanctuary since a Special Forces camp had been driven out of the valley in 1966.²² Since then, the valley and its adjoining jungle-covered ridgelines had become a major Communist base area and supply route into the coastal regions of Thua Thien province, Hue, and Quang Tri province to the north. The enemy forces that attacked Hue city during the Tet Offensive in 1968 had assembled in the A Shau Valley and infiltrated out of there. The valley's location next to the safe haven of Laos and the Ho Chi Minh Trail made it of great importance to the North Vietnamese. Later in 1968, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) had conducted operations in the valley, but did not establish a permanent presence there. After the air cavalry's departure, the Communists restored their infrastructure, which included a main supply route running down the middle of the valley on an improved road, Route 548. Jungle-covered mountains surrounded the valley itself. One of these, the 937-meter high Dong Ap Bia, would become the focus of the 3d Brigade's activities during Operation APACHE SNOW.

The 3d Brigade, commanded by Colonel Joseph Conmy, consisted of three airmobile infantry battalions: 1-506th Infantry, 2-506th Infantry, and 3-187th Infantry. Each battalion had one or more companies detached for FSB security or in a reserve role during the operation. One field artillery battalion, 2-319th Artillery, was in direct support of the brigade, with an additional three batteries in general support, reinforcing. The divisional aerial rocket artillery battalion was also in direct support of the brigade. In addition, an engineer company and two assault helicopter companies from the division's 160th Aviation Group were supporting the brigade.

Troop A, 2-17th Cavalry, from the divisional air cavalry squadron, support the brigade with air reconnaissance and related activities. Companies from the division medical, maintenance, and supply and service battalions were assembled to support the brigade as Forward Service Support Element (FSSE) 3. Supporting brigade operations to the north was the 1st ARVN Infantry Regiment of the 1st ARVN Infantry Division.²³

The objective of Operation APACHE SNOW was to locate and destroy any enemy found in each battalion's assigned sector, destroy any enemy infrastructure, and, if necessary, fix the enemy in place until reinforcements could arrive. The operation was called a reconnaissance in force (RIF), as the North Vietnamese locations, bases, camps, and defensive positions, would have to be found as the operation progressed. Battalions normally separated into company-sized elements to conduct RIF operations, massing as a battalion as necessary. At the brigade level, airmobile assets would be used to shift battalions to large enemy locations. LZs for the battalions were selected in the hilly area west of the A Shau Valley on the Laotian border, the theory being to get US forces between the Communists and their Laotian sanctuary area, to which, upon contact, they would naturally tend to try to move. All operations were conducted within the range of preemplaced field artillery located at FSBs established in the hills on the eastern side of the valley and at one FSB, Currahee, built on the valley floor south of the area where the battalions were to operate.²⁴

Unidentified enemy forces were known to be located in the northern A Shau Valley. The large troop concentration near Dong Ap Bia turned out to be the 29th North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Regiment, a well-trained and reconstituted unit that had not been located since 1968. Two battalions, the 7th and 8th, plus part of the regimental headquarters, defended a hilltop fortified area with extensive bunker and trench line complexes. Farther to the northwest in the A Shau Valley were elements of the 6th NVA Regiment's 806th Battalion and the separate K10 Sapper Battalion.²⁵

In preparation for the operation, the infantry battalions were shifted from LZs and FSBs near Hue to FSBs Blaze and Cannon, located on hilltops east of the A Shau Valley near the main ground supply route into the area, Route 547. The brigade command post moved from its large base camp near Hue, Camp Evans, to FSB Berchtesgaden. Three new or formerly abandoned FSBs were quickly built to support the operation: FSB Bradley, located to the north and to be primarily used by the ARVN 1st Regiment; FSB Airborne, located in the hills overlooking the valley from the east, north of FSB Berchtesgaden; and FSB Currahee, built on the valley floor itself at its broadest section, 3,000 meters wide near the village of Ta Bat, . The new FSBs, plus FSBs Cannon and Berchtesgaden, were designed to be mutually supporting and allow the entire area of operations to be within the range of field artillery. On 9 May (D-1), 10 batteries were shifted to these FSBs to support the initial insertions of the infantry.

As mentioned above, the brigade command post was located at FSB Berchtesgaden during the operation. The brigade commander controlled the overall operations of the brigade through the extensive use of nonsecure and secure FM radio, with VHF radio being used between the brigade and division. He augmented radio communication with personal observation from a command and control light observation helicopter and personal visits to unit locations.

Logistics support for the brigade in Operation APACHE SNOW was tailored for the operation. While most logistics assets remained back in the division support command base

A three-company advance the next day also got bogged down, with the third company, advancing to the left of the other two, getting pinned down by heavy enemy fire. A day later, on 14 May, Honeycutt again tried with three companies. Two squads of one company actually reached the summit, but with the other two stopped cold, had to withdraw. The next day the advance began again with three companies. A combination of stiff resistance from NVA soldiers in bunker complexes and a friendly-fire incident with aerial rockets stopped the attack. Honeycutt's original estimate of two companies on the hill was now raised to two battalions. The enemy also seemed to be reinforced nightly from additional forces across the border in Laos. For five days the 3-187th Infantry had attacked Dong Ap Bia without success and against stiff resistance.²⁸

Elsewhere in the brigade operational area, early in the morning on D+ 3, 13 March 1969, two company-sized elements of the enemy's 806th NVA Battalion and K12 Sapper Battalion infiltrated FSB Airborne, supported by mortar and rocket propelled grenade fire. Stationed at the firebase were three field artillery batteries: C/2-11th Artillery, four 155 mm howitzers; C/2-319th Artillery, four 105mm howitzers; and a composite battery from B and C/2-319th Artillery, four 105mm howitzers. The firebase was defended by Company A, 2-501st Infantry. The defenders drove off the attack with the attacking force suffering heavy casualties, but five howitzers were damaged and 22 American soldiers were killed and another 61 wounded.²⁹ With enemy forces obviously in the area of FSB Airborne, the brigade commander pulled the rest of the 2-501st out of its area on the Laotian border and airlifted it to FSB Airborne to commence RIF operations near the firebase.

After the heavy repulses of the 3-187th on Dong Ap Bia, clearly a larger enemy force held the hilltop than could be ejected or destroyed by a single battalion. As early as noontime on 13 May, the brigade S3 (operations) staff alerted Lieutenant Colonel J.M. Bowers that his battalion, the 1-506th infantry, then conducting RIF operations south of Dong Ap Bia, was to plan for immediate movement overland to attack the hill from the southwest in conjunction with 3-187th's attacks from the northwest. Bower's movement commenced on 14 May for a projected two-battalion attack on the 16th.³⁰ At first, the 1-506th advanced with little contact, while the 3-187th paused to await its arrival. But soon Bower's advance was stopped by a large NVA bunker complex on Hill 916, a peak on the same ridgeline as Dong Ap Bia's 937-meter summit, roughly 1,500 meters to the southwest. This delayed the combined two-battalion attack until the 17th, as the 506th soldiers cleared Hill 916 and then began advancing up Hill 937 itself.³¹

The concept of the 17 May attack was for the companies of the 3-187th to hold blocking positions to the northwest of the fortified enemy position and support by fire the 1-506th's three-company, on-line advance from the southwest. Extensive artillery, rocket, and air strike preparation would precede the attack. As part of this prep, about 200 105mm artillery rounds of CS gas (tear gas) would be used to force the NVA troops out of their bunkers before the conventional high-explosive artillery barrage. Despite the preparatory fires, the attack met stiff resistance near a small knoll on the ridge, Hill 900. The intense enemy fire prevented the 1-506th from advancing farther than 300 meters.³²

The renewed attack the next day, 18 May, used both battalions with six companies advancing. Bowers' three companies advanced slowly against heavy fire. Honeycutt's three companies advanced anyway and one company took over 50-percent casualties in short order.

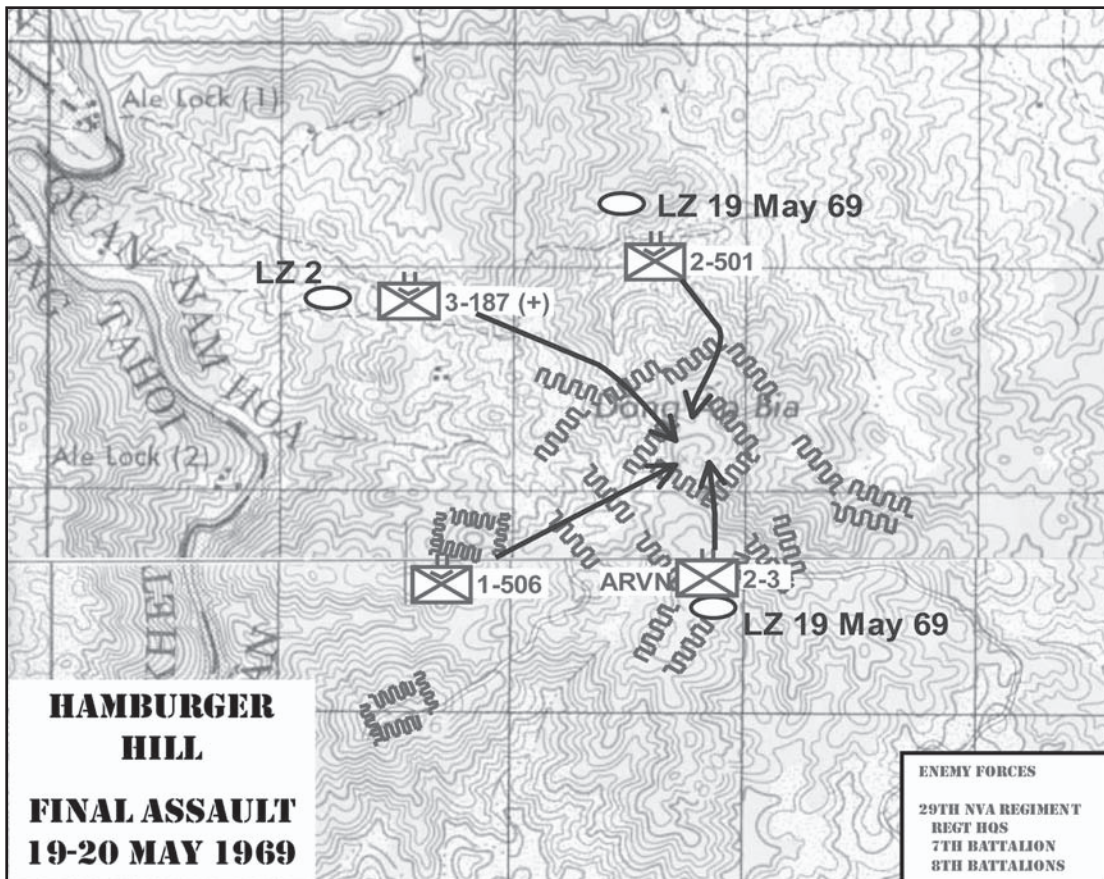


Figure 28. Final Assault on Hamburger Hill, 19-20 May 1969

Nevertheless two companies of the 187th were on the hilltop, while part of the 506th was just below the top on the opposite side. At this point, torrential rain started to pour hindering operations and forcing Honeycutt to withdraw his two unsupported companies from the top to more defensible positions.³³

The enemy force and the terrain indicated that two reduced battalions would need reinforcement to take Dong Ap Bia. Accordingly, the division commander gave the 2d Brigade's 2d Battalion, 506th Infantry, to the 3d Brigade for use in the operation. The battalion moved to FSB Blaze and its A Company was airlifted into LZ 2 for attachment to the 3-187th on 19 May. The 1st ARVN Division supplied its 2d Battalion, 3d Infantry Regiment, which was airlifted to FSB Currahee the same day for use by the 3d Brigade. The 2-501st, which had been conducting RIF operations near FSB Airborne, in the wake of the sapper attack, was also added to the Dong Ap Bia force for the 20th. Both battalions were airlifted into LZs around the hill on the 19th, the 2/3 ARVN on south and the 2-501st on the north side of what was now being referred to as "Hamburger Hill."

The combined force of four battalions was in its attack positions at nightfall on the 19th and attacked after preparatory fires from all sides on 20 May, destroying the remaining enemy forces on the hilltop and securing the position 11 days after the start of the operation.³⁴

APACHE SNOW officially continued until 7 June 1969. After the conclusion of the Battle of Hamburger Hill, most enemy contacts, except for several additional sapper attacks on firebases, consisted of much smaller contacts than was had on Dong Ap Bia.³³ During the operation, the 2d Brigade showed its flexibility and, once the size of the enemy force was appreciated, its capability to mass multiple battalions against a large, well-dug in enemy force. The operation was typical of many of the airmobile brigade operations conducted in Vietnam between 1965 and 1972.

NOTES

1. Lalev I. Sepp, "The Pentomic Puzzle: The Influence of Personality and Nuclear Weapons on U.S. Army Organization 1952-1958," *Army History* 51 (Winter 2001), 8-11. The organic regiments in the 82d were the 504th and 505th Parachute Infantry Regiments and the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment. For most of 1944 and 1945, the nondivisional 507th and 508th Parachute Infantry Regiments were attached to the division. The 507th was later assigned to the 17th Airborne Division. The 101st originally had as organic the 502d Parachute and 401st and 327th Glider Infantry Regiments. The 401st was later broken up to provide third battalions for the 325th and 327th as glider regiments originally only had two battalions. The 501st and 506th Parachute Infantry Regiments were attached to the 101st for most of the war, with the 506th becoming organic in March 1945. See *Order of Battle, United States Army, World War II, European Theater of Operations: Divisions* (Paris: Office of the Theater Historian, European Theater, 1945), 283-84, 383-85.
2. Glen R. Hawkins and James Jay Carafano, *Prelude to Army XXI: US Army Division Design Initiatives and Experiments 1917-1995* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History (CMH), 1997), 14.
3. Sepp, 11.
4. *Ibid.*, 5; Jonathan M. House, *Combined Arms Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 223
5. Sepp, 6.
6. *Sixty Years of Reorganizing for Combat: A Historical Trend Analysis*. Combat Studies Institute (CSI) Report No. 14 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: CSI, 1999), 23.
7. John B. Wilson, *Maneuver and Firepower: The Evolution of Divisions and Separate Brigades*. Army Lineage Series (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office (GPO), 1998), 169, 190-91; Wilson, *Armies, Corps, Divisions and Separate Brigades*, 297.
8. House, *Combined Arms Warfare*, 213.
9. Wilson, *Firepower and Maneuver*, 300-303; John J. McGrath, *History of the 187th Support Battalion*. Brochure created for the inactivation of the battalion, Brockton, Massachusetts, 1994.
10. Shelby Stanton, *Vietnam Order of Battle* (Washington, DC: US News Books, 1981), 71-72, 101.
11. Shelby Stanton, *Anatomy of a Division: The First Cav in Vietnam* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1987), 195-201. Despite its organization, original employment plans for the division in Vietnam was to split it up by brigade and send it to different parts of the country. To retain a limited airmobile capability in each brigade, the aviation group would have had to provide a slice to each brigade. See Stanton, *Anatomy of a Division*, 39.
12. Wilson, *Firepower and Maneuver*, 356.
13. Stanton, *Vietnam Order of Battle*, 75-77, 81-82. The battalions were transferred back to their original divisions after the war, as these divisions were considered their "traditional" assignment.
14. *Ibid.*, 79-80.
15. Wilson, *Maneuver and Firepower*, 325.
16. Stanton, *Vietnam Order of Battle*, 77-78, 82-83, 85.
17. Duquesne A. Wolf, *The Infantry Brigade in Combat: First Brigade, 25th Infantry Division ("Tropic Lightning") in the Third Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army Offensive, August 1968* (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1984), 3.
18. Romie L. Brownlee and William J. Mullen III, *Changing an Army: An Oral History of General William E. DePuy, USA Retired* (Washington, DC: CMH, 1985), 163.
19. George L. MacGarrigle, *Taking The Offensive: October 1966 to October 1967*. The United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: CMH, 1998), 115-17.
20. Major General William B. Fulton, *Riverine Operations 1966-1969*. Vietnam Studies (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1985), 31-33; Stanton, *Vietnam Order of Battle*, 77-78.
21. Fulton, 190-93.
22. As a major, Colin Powell served as an advisor to the ARVN forces which evacuated the A Shau Valley in 1966.
23. 22d Military History Detachment, *Narrative Operation "Apache Snow" 101st Airborne Division*, 1969, 8 (hereafter referred to as *Apache Snow*).
24. 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), *Operational Report—Lessons Learned, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) for Period 31 July 1969, RCS CSFOR-65 (R1) (U)*, dated 9 December 1969, 4 (hereafter referred to as *101st ORLL*).

25. *3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), Combat Operations After Action Report—Summary APACHE SNOW*, dated 25 June 1969, (hereafter referred to as *3d Bde AAR*), Enclosure 2, Intelligence, 2.
26. *3d Bde AAR*, 2, and Enclosure 4, Logistical Support.
27. *Apache Snow*, 2.
28. *Ibid.*, 4-12; 3d Battalion, 187th Airborne Infantry, *Combat Operations After Action Report, Operation Apache Snow*, dated 20 June 1969, 30, 32-33 (hereafter referred to as *3-187th AAR*).
29. *101st ORLL*, 8-9.
30. 1st Battalion, 506th Airborne Infantry, *Combat Operations After Action Report, Operation Apache Snow*, dated 18 June 1969, 6 (hereafter referred to as *1-506th AAR*).
31. *Apache Snow*, 12-15.
32. *1-506th AAR*, 9; *Apache Snow*, 16; *3-187th AAR*, 36.
33. *Apache Snow*, 18.
34. *Apache Snow*, 19-20.
35. 3d Brigade commander, Colonel Joseph Conmy, considered one of the sapper attacks, which was aimed at the brigade headquarters at FSB Berchtesgaden on 13-14 June 1969 to be an attempt to personally kill him in revenge for Hamburger Hill. See Joseph B. Conmy, Jr., "Crouching Beast Cornered," *Vietnam* (December 1990), 36.