

# The Ia Drang Valley Battle? Which One?

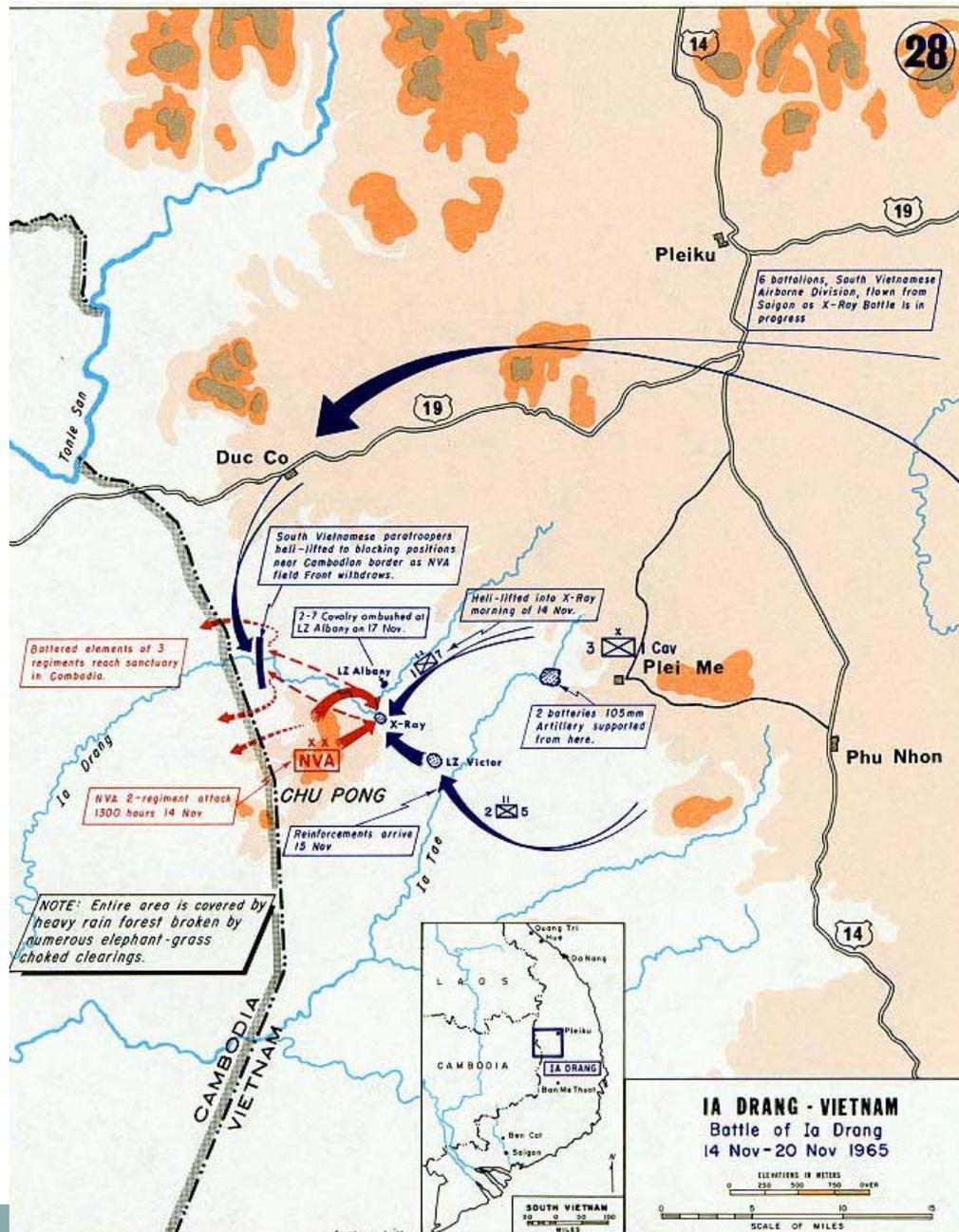


**COLONEL NGUYEN VAN HIEU AND  
THE PLEIME CAMPAIGN**

# Introduction



- The US 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division and the Ia Drang Valley Battle, 11-14 to 11-17-1965
- The ARVN 3<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade and the Ia Drang Valley Battle, 11-18 to 11-26-1965
- Location of both battles: areas bordered by Chu Pong Massif ridge edges and the Ia Drang river
  - The first one in the east
  - The second one in the west , near Plei The , close to the Cambodian border.



# A Trilogy of Battles: Pleime, Chu Pong & Ia Drang



Pleime

Chu Pong

Ia Drang

10/19

10/26

11/14

11/17

11/26

LZ X-Ray

LZ Albany

- Operation Dan Thang 21 (VN), 10/20—10/26
  - Operation Ingram (US), 10/23---10-27
- Operation Long Reach (US), 10/27 – 11/17
  - Operation All the Way, (US) 10/27 – 11/09;
  - Operation Silver Bayonet (US) 11/09 - 11/17
- Operation Than Phong 7 (VN) 11/18—11/26

# The American Ia Drang Battle (1)



- Popularized by General Hal Moore and Joseph Galloway's book *We Were Soldiers Once...And Young* and by Mel Gibson's movie *We Were Soldiers*
- Unknown to the public and minimized by American military establishment:
  - The US Operation Long Reach was decided by and remained under ARVN II Corps' control and involved US 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry (main force) and ARVN 3<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade (reserve force), supported by ARVN Airborne Rangers.
  - ARVN II Corps provided to US 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division the NVA's position at Chu Pong
  - ARVN Ia Drang Valley Battle followed through and concluded US Ia Drang Valley Battle.

# The American Ia Drang Battle (2)



- General Westmoreland noted the joint efforts between the US Armed Forces and the ARVN Armed Forces under ARVN II Corps' Operational Control during the entire Pleime Campaign (Preface, *Why Pleime*)
- The ARVN II Corps' concept of “highly organized, closely integrated, cooperative effort: joint intelligence and support activities, commonly shared concepts of operations and results, separate TAOR, separate command, separate deployment of forces, separate conduct of activities and separate reserve.”

# The American Ia Drang Battle (3)



- ARVN Special Forces Rangers teams gave support to US 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division troops: reconnaissance and security of landing zones and deep into enemy's territories.
- Sources of information of these ARVN Special Forces Rangers' team support activities: North Vietnamese military source (NVA B3 Front HQ, Chief of Section 2, 12-28-1965)
- LTC Harold More, commander of 1/7 Air Cavalry Battalion at LZ X-Ray, acknowledged the ARVN II Corps' intercept of NVA troops' radio message and information pertaining to their hiding positions in Chu Pong mountain.

# The ARVN Ia Drang Valley Battle



- General Schwarzkopf's account of the Ia Drang Valley Battle conducted by the ARVN 3<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade (his memoir *It doesn't Take a Hero*)
- ARVN II Corps' account of the same battle (*Why Pleime*, Chapter VI: Phase 3, The "Than Phong 7" Operations from 18 to 26 November 1965, The Coup de Grace at Ia Drang).
- Noteworthy: the effective support role of the ARVN Special Forces Rangers teams.



# Dissipating the “Fog of Histories”



- The ARVN Ia Drang Valley Battle was a huge military exploit (General Schwarzkopf) but remained unknown.
- It was buried under the “fog of histories” by both North Vietnamese and American authors.
  - Playme-**Iadrang** Campaign
  - Pleiku-**Iadrang** Campaign

*Pleime Campaign: Pleime-Chu Pong-Ia Drang*

# A Final Note (1)



- As ARVN II Corps Chief of Staff, Colonel Nguyen van Hieu orchestrated the entire Pleime Campaign.
- He coordinated in person the actions of
  - The Commander of the Armor-Infantry Task Force
  - The Battalion Commanders of 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Battalions and 1/41 Infantry
  - The Battalion Commanders in the Vietnamese Marine Alpha Task Force
  - The Brigade Commanders of the 1<sup>st</sup> US Air Cavalry Division
  - The US Artillery Battalion Commanders
  - The US Air Force Pilots and Observation Officers, and US Army Pilots, the US Special Forces Officers,
  - The ARVN Airborne Ranger Officers
  - The Airborne Battalion Commanders of ARVN 3<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade.

## A Final Note (2)



- Colonel Hieu detected the NVA B3 Front Command's switch from "static waylays" to "mobile ambush" tactics at Pleime.
- He took a counter-ambush measure by delaying the advance of the Armor-Infantry Task Force from October 21 to October 23.
- He accurately foresaw the enemy's withdrawal route and inserted the ARVN 3<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade at precise block positions in order to successfully box-in two remnants NVA battalions.

# Reference



- Why Pleime (April 1966)
- [www.generalhieu.com](http://www.generalhieu.com)
- [www.generalhieu.com/iadrang\\_arvn-2.htm](http://www.generalhieu.com/iadrang_arvn-2.htm)