

7th Triennial Vietnam Center and Archive Symposium

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WHAT HISTORIANS FAILED TO TELL ABOUT THE BATTLE AT LZ X-RAY

A MAJOR BATTLE

- ✘ Both sides - Americans and North Vietnamese Communists – regard LZ X-ray as their respective first major battle
 - US 1st Air Cavalry Division with 1st, 2nd and 3rd Brigades
 - NVA B3 Front with 32nd, 33rd and 66th Regiments
- ✘ LZ X-ray battle has been popularized by
 - Gen. Hal Moore: *We Were Soldiers Once ... And Young*
 - Mel Gibson: *We Were Soldiers*

CURRENT STATUS

✘ 1965-2011: 46 years = A sample bibliography

- ✘ Harry G. Summers, Jr., *The Bitter Triumph of the Ia Drang*, American Heritage (February 1984).
- ✘ Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once ... And Young*, 1992
- ✘ James Westheider E. *The Vietnam War*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007. pp. xix-xx, 15-17.
- ✘ John Burnam C. *A Soldier's Best Friend: Scout Dogs and Their Handlers in the Vietnam War*. Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 2008. pp. 22.
- ✘ Michael Stephenson. *Battlegrounds: Geography and the History of Warfare*. National Geographic Society, 2003. pp. 203-207.
- ✘ Donald Farinacci J. *Last Full Measure of Devotion: A Tribute of the Vietnam War*. AuthorHouse, 2007. pp. 28.
- ✘ Ron Steinman. *The soldier's story: Vietnam in their own words*. Barnes & Noble, Inc., 2002.

- ✘ 'We Were Soldiers': West Virginia veterans remember battle at Ia Drang Valley Newspaper article from: Charleston Gazette;
- ✘ A different war emerged from the Ia Drang Valley; A Minnesota native was a... Newspaper article from: Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN);
- ✘ Hurricane veteran recounts experiences in early Vietnam battle: Battle of... Newspaper article from: Charleston Gazette;
- ✘ Van Buren man to see first showing of Vietnam film Veteran was wounded in... Newspaper article from: Bangor Daily News Bangor, ME;
- ✘ Vietnam Pilot to Get Highest Award; President Will Present Medal of Honor... Newspaper article from: The Washington Post; Ia Drang Valley: the whole story.(mail call)(Letter to the Editor) Magazine article from: VFW Magazine;
- ✘ 40 years after battle, two Vietnam heroes recall horrors of Ia Drang.(News) Newspaper article from: The Boston Herald; The blood brothers of Ia Drang 30 years ago, the battle raged; today, the... Newspaper article from: The Boston Globe (Boston, MA);

CURRENT STATUS CONTINUED

= Merle L. Pribbenow - *The Fog of War's* bibliography

1. LG Hoang, Phuong: "Several Lessons on Campaign Planning and Command Implementation During the Plei Me Campaign," *The Plei Me Victory: Looking Back after 30 Years*. Military History Institute and 3rd Corps [hereafter cited as *The Plei Me Victory*] (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1995), 37-38; Nguyen Huy Toan and Pham Quang Dinh, *The 304th Division*, vol II, Editorial Direction: 304th Division Headquarters and Party Committee, (Hanoi, People's Army Publishing House, 1990), 21.
2. Toan and Dinh, 19-20.
3. Mai Hong Linh, "A Number of Issues Relating to Party and Political Activities During the Plei Me Campaign-1965," *The Plei Me Victory*, 110.
4. Military History Institute and 3rd Corps, *The Plei Me Offensive Campaign-1965* [hereafter cited as *The Plei Me Offensive*] (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1993), 33.
5. *Ibid.*, 35.
6. Phuong, 40; *The Plei Me Offensive*, 37.
7. J.D. Coleman, Pleiku: *The Dawn of Helicopter Warfare in Vietnam*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 168-84; *The Plei Me Offensive*, 39-40.
8. Phuong, *The Plei Me Victory*, 40.
9. Coleman, 189.
10. Hal Moore and Joseph Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once . . . And Young* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1993), 57; Coleman, 185.
11. *The Plei Me Offensive*, 41; Pham Vinh Phuc, "Special Characteristics of U.S. Helicopter Assault Landing Tactics During the Plei Me Campaign," *The Plei Me Victory*, 122.
12. *The Plei Me Offensive*, 44; Moore and Galloway, 39.
13. Toan and Dinh, 26-27.
14. Actual US losses were 4 killed and 25 wounded. US forces reported killing almost 100 NVA; Coleman, 163; Moore and Galloway, 33; Le Nhu Huan quoting Pham Cong Cuu, "The 66th Regiment Annihilates the US 2nd Cavalry Battalion in the Ia Drang Valley," *The Plei Me Victory*, 98; Phuong, 41.
15. Now, PAVN historians admit the Ho Chi Minh Trail was not the main source of supplies for this campaign; weapons and ammunition were shipped in from Sihanoukville, and food and supplies were purchased in Cambodia; *The Plei Me Offensive*, 27.
16. Toan and Dinh, 29; Huan quoting Cuu, 96-98.
17. Nguyen Quoc Dung, *The Plei Me Victory*, 129. This article contains the 1 January 1966 B3 Front "Report on Five Battles Against US Forces," 14-18 November 1965; Toan and Dinh, 29; *The Plei Me Offensive*, 45.
18. CG Nguyen Huu An and Nguyen Tu Duong, *New Battlefields: A Memoir* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1995), 36.
19. Toan and Dinh, 29-30; *The Plei Me Offensive*, 45.
20. *Ibid.*
21. MG Tran Ngoc Son, "A Few Thoughts on the Lessons of the Plei Me Campaign," *The Plei Me Victory*, 205; *The Plei Me Offensive*, 46.
22. Huan quoting Cuu, 98-99.
23. *The Plei Me Offensive*, 47; Toan and Dinh, 31.
24. *The Plei Me Offensive*, 47-48; An and Duong, 37-38.
25. Huan quoting Cuu, 99-101. The 7th Battalion's 3d Company, away on a work detail, did not participate in this attack; Toan and Dinh, 31-32; Moore and Galloway, 171, say the Viet Cong H-15 Battalion participated in this attack. Coleman, 274, says the H-15 Battalion made the later attack on LZ Columbus. Some PAVN histories place the H-15 east of Plei Me and do not mention it in either battle.
26. Huan quoting Cuu, 101-103; Toan and Dinh, 32.
27. Moore and Galloway, 193.
28. Toan and Dinh, 32; Huan quoting Cuu, 102.
29. *The Plei Me Offensive*, 49; An and Duong, 39-40.

CURRENT STATUS CONTINUED

- ✘ 30. Toan and Dinh, 33; Moore and Galloway, 214.
- 31. Toan and Dinh, 33-34; *The Plei Me Offensive*, 49.
- 32. Moore and Galloway, 223.
- 33. Toan and Dinh, 34; Do Trung Mich, "66th Regiment Develops the Traditions and Lessons of the Plei Me Victory," *The Plei Me Victory*, 152.
- 34. Moore and Galloway, 224; Coleman, 241-42.
- 35. *The Plei Me Offensive*, 50.
- 36. Moore and Galloway, 233.
- 37. Toan and Dinh, 35; *The Plei Me Offensive*, 50; Linh, 117-18.
- 38. Toan and Dinh, 35-36.
- 39. Moore and Galloway, 112; Coleman, 210. While elements of the 33d might have been at LZ X-Ray, PAVN accounts indicate that most of the regiment was not.
- 40. Coleman, 248; Moore and Galloway, 233, 251-53.
- 41. *The Plei Me Offensive*, 51; Moore and Galloway, 258, 262; Coleman, 253.
- 42. Toan and Dinh, 36.
- 43. *Ibid.*, 36-37.
- 44. Other, smaller NVA units might also have participated in the battle. See Moore and Galloway, 261, and [author not given] "Remembrances of the First Fight Against the Americans in the Central Highlands," *The Plei Me Victory*, 238-40.
- 45. Toan and Dinh, 37-39; Linh, 115; *The Plei Me Offensive*, 52-53.
- 46. Linh, 109-10.
- 47. *Ibid.*, 40; Dung, 131.
- 48. Phuong, 44.
- 49. Moore and Galloway, 366, 373-74.
- 50. *The Plei Me Offensive*, 85; Mich, 155.
- 51. Coleman, 274-77.
- 52. *The Plei Me Offensive*, 54-55; Mich, 152.
- 53. *The Plei Me Offensive*, 55-56; Coleman, 278-79.
- 54. *The Plei Me Offensive*, 60-61.
- 55. *Ibid.*, 69-70; Son, 205.
- 56. These included the 9th Battalion's battle of 14 November, the 7th Battalion's two attacks on 15 and 16 November, the LZ Albany fight and the LZ Columbus attack.
- 57. Dung, 126; *History of the People's Army*, 216 [no other publishing information given].
- 58. Coleman, 283; Moore and Galloway, 399.
- 59. Military History Institute of Vietnam, *The Saigon-Gia Dinh Offensive Theater* (1968), Hanoi, 1988, 86-87.

= Google search "Ia Drang Valley Battle" turns out *About 54,800 results (0.12 seconds)*

= *Still – in overall - an incomplete account because missing, among others, 7 significant points*

1. RIGHT NAME FOR THE BATTLE

- ✘ Not Ia Drang Valley battle
- ✘ But Chu Pong Massif battle

IA DRANG BATTLES MAP



2. NOT A FIRST STRIKE IN CHU PONG

- ✘ Nov 14, 1965: 1/7th Air Cav Bn
- ✘ Nov 03, 1965: Cavalry Squadron
 - + *The confidence of the newly-infiltrated 66th Regiment was badly shaken by the audacious ambush sprung by the Cavalry Squadron, in the very heart of the Chu Pong-la Drang complex. The 8th battalion had gotten itself bloodied before it had been in country for two days and, by losing a prisoner, tipped off its presence in South Vietnam.*
(Kinnard, Pleiku Campaign)

3. PRECISE KNOWLEDGE OF VC UNIT POSITIONS

Myth:

- ✘ US had *little intelligence* and did not know how many enemy. (Comment from [a person](#) after watching a video on the Ia Drang battle)
- ✘ The *sketchy American intelligence* Moore was provided said the area was home base for possibly a regiment of the enemy. ([Joseph Galloway](#), Oct 18, 2010)
- ✘ After arriving in Vietnam, he learns that an American base has been attacked, and is ordered to take his 400 men after the enemy and eliminate them, despite the fact that *intelligence has no idea* of the number of enemy troops. ([Wikipedia](#) on the movie We Were Soldiers...)

3. PRECISE KNOWLEDGE OF VC UNITS (CONTINUED)

Fact:

*The disposition of the 66th on 11th November had its three battalions, the 7th, 8th and 9th, strung along the north bank of the la Drang (**center of mass Vic 9104**).*

*The 33d Regiment still maintained its positions vicinity ANTA Village (**YA940010**).*

*The 32d Regiment was still north of the la Drang (**YA820070**)*

(Kinnard, Pleiku Campaign – Intelligence logbook 11/11/1965)

4. PREEMPTIVE ATTACK

- ✘ Intelligence report: B3 Front HQ decided to launch a second attack on Pleime camp on ***Nov 16*** with full strength (32nd, 33rd and 66th Regiments with the support of one battalion of 120 mm mortars and one battalion of 14.5 mm anti-aircraft.)
- ✘ Preemptive attack on ***Nov 14*** when enemy was at his weakest point with the 120 mm mortars and 14.5 mm anti-aircraft battalions still 2 day away on HCM trail.

5. GROUND PREPARATORY PHASE

- ✘ Nov 9: 3rd Air Cav Brigade replaced 1st Air Cav Brigade
- ✘ Nov 10: Operational direction switched from westward to eastward - away Chu Pong toward Pleime - as diversionary tactic

6. OPERATIONAL CONCEPT

- ✘ Blocking position at the south at LZ X-Ray (Nov 14-16)
- ✘ Systematic B-52 air strike up north (Nov 15-16) and at LZ X-Ray (Nov 17)

7. CONTROL OF THE BATTLE: ARVN II CORPS

✘ 1st Proof:



CG II Corps and Colonel Harold G. Moore



*The VN Gallantry Cross with Palm
to the Colors of the 1st Battalion*

7. CONTROL OF THE BATTLE: ARVN II CORPS (CONTINUED)

- ✘ 2nd Proof: ■ Why Pleime, Chapter IX - Reference Documents: 32. Headquarters 1/7 Cavalry Battalion, Combat After Action Report, Ia Drang Valley Operation, 14-16 Nov 65.
- ✘ Plagiarism of II Corps after action report
 - www.generalhieu.com/lzxrays_moore_hieu-2.htm

7. CONTROL OF THE BATTLE: ARVN II CORPS (CONTINUED)

- ✘ Control of the entire Pleime Campaign
 - + Initiative on Oct 26 meeting at II Corps HQ: US 1st Air Cav Div as main force and ARVN Airborne Brigade as reserve force
 - + Combined Operational Concept :
 - joint intelligence and support activities and commonly-shared concept of operations and results;
 - separate TAOR, command, deployment of forces, conduct of activities, reserve.
 - + Timing of troop maneuvers (due to holding precise and solid intelligence):
 - Oct 27: All The Way (1st Air Cav Bde)
 - Nov 09: Silver Bayonet I (3rd Air Cav Bde)
 - Nov 14: blocking position at LZ X-Ray (1/7th Air Cav Bn)
 - Nov 15: B52 air strike up North
 - Nov 17: B52 air strike at LZ X-Ray
 - Nov 18: Than Phong 7 (Airborne Bde) and Silver Bayonet II (2nd Air Cav Bde)

FIRST HAND DOCUMENTS

- ✘ Why Pleime (April 1966, II Corps)
- ✘ Pleiku Campaign (March 1966, Gen Kinnard)
- ✘ 1/7 Air Cav After Action Report (December 1965, Col Hal Moore)
- ✘ G3 Journal (October-November 1965)/US First Field Force Vietnam

in

www.generalhieu.com

CONCLUSION

- ✘ In summary, military historians failed
 - (1) to call the battle by its right name
 - (2) to emphasize the first strike in Chu Pong massif
 - (3) to recognize the precise knowledge of VC unit positions
 - (4) to notice the preemptive nature of the strike
 - (5) to see the ground preparatory phase
 - (6) to comprehend the operational concept
 - (7) to discern who was in control of the battle
- ✘ End result:
 - distorted account
 - detrimental to ARVN command (incompetent) and combatants (inefficient)

What Historians Failed to Tell About the Battle at LZ X-Ray

http://www.generalhieu.com/lzxrays_battle-2.htm