101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION (AIRMOBILE)

FINAL REPORT

AIRMOBILE OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF
OPERATION LAMSON 719
8 February - 6 April 1971

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

A. (C) BACKGROUND

In the Fall of 1971, joint USARV, RVNAF and GVN intelligence estimates, coupled with current enemy actions, strongly indicated that the enemy had two primarily goals for the approaching dry season in Laos, October 1970 to April 1971. He would conduct an intensified resupply and reinforcement operation in southern Laos and also build up supplies and equipment in northern Military Region 1 to support large scale operations in that area during the 1971 dry season. December 1970 and January 1971 brought a sharp increase in the amount of supplies moved into the southern Laotian areas known as Base Area 604 (adjacent to Quang Tri). The intelligence community further noted that only a small portion of these supplies had been moved to the south. In previous years the enemy had reached his peak efficiency in February and March in moving supplies to the south. Accordingly, an attack against Base Area 604 and 611 during these months presented the highest probability of inflicting the greatest damage to the enemy. Operation LAMSON 719 was conceived, developed and implemented to react to this intelligence information.

B. (C) OBJECTIVE

Operation LAMSON 719 was designed to interdict the enemy's supply and infiltration routes into southern Laos and northern Military Region 1, to destroy his logistic facilities and supplies and to inflict maximum damage to his units. The depth of the operational area was limited to Tchepone in the west, and the width of the area varied from 10-20 kilometers north and south of Route 9 in Laos. I Corps (ARVN) forces, supported and assisted by XXIV Corps, conducted combined air-ground operations to destroy enemy forces and supplies in Base Areas 604 and 611 in Laos. The 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) mission was to provide support and assistance to US and Vietnamese forces participating in LAMSON 719 operations in western Quang Tri Province and in Laos while continuing the Division's Winter Campaign in Thua Thien Province.
C. (C) SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. A XXIV Corps and I Corps planning group was formed at XXIV Corps Headquarters in Da Nang in early January 1971 to develop the operations order for LAMSON 719. Information of the operation was tightly held with just the Commanding General of the 101st Abn Div (Ambl), the Chief of Staff and the G3 initially being familiar with the plan. The G3 participated in preparing the first drafts of the operations order, but it soon became apparent that specialized knowledge in aviation and logistics support from the 101st Abn Div (Ambl) was required. However, the necessary restriction of information to only those division personnel complicated the preparations for LAMSON 719, especially in those areas where long lead-time for planning was necessary.

2. Planning for LAMSON 719 was a combined effort from the beginning, but integration of US commanders and staff members into the I Corps decision-making process was accelerated as Phase I of the operation began. Three weeks after Vietnamese troops crossed the Laotian border, a US-Vietnamese high level staff in support of I Corps was formed at I Corps Headquarters at Khe Sanh, and at that time a combined tactical command post became a reality.

3. The rules of engagement for operations in Laos restricted US helicopters from landing except where inserting or extracting Vietnamese troops and supplies or equipment. US personnel were not permitted to exit the helicopters while in Laos. Thus, advisors and those providing support to I Corps forces did not have access to Vietnamese commanders at the regiment and battalion levels. Support coordination was appreciably restricted.

4. The support provided to I Corps forces in Laos as well as the US forces operating in Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces could not have been maintained at the high level it was throughout LAMSON 719 had not USARV devoted the major portion of its assets in support. Damaged or destroyed aircraft were quickly replaced and maintenance support gave priority to those aviation units assigned to or under the operational control of the 101st Abn Div (Ambl).
D. (C) INTELLIGENCE

1. General

Detailed information regarding weather, terrain, lines of communication and changing enemy disposition as they affected LAMSON 719 may be found in ANNEX A (Intelligence) to this introductory section. Information extracted here is to emphasize certain salient points.

2. Weather

The transitional effects of the monsoon weather in both Laos and South Vietnam had a direct bearing on the conduct and timing of all airmobile operations in support of LAMSON 719. Weather often varied from staging area to pickup zone (PZ) to landing zone (LZ). This same weather variance had an even greater effect on the employment of Air Force TAC air due to the more stringent minimum weather standards required for effective employment.

3. Terrain

The higher elevations of the Annamite Mountain chain in the operational area combined with marginal weather in having a decided effect on airmobile operations. The river valleys, such as the east-west oriented XE PON, became natural flight routes due to navigational requirements in marginal weather. The escarpment running generally east-west approximately two kilometers south of the XE PON River furnished natural objective/staging areas for the thrust toward Tchepone.

4. Lines of Communication

The intensive road improvement effort by the NVA during the Laotian dry season was one of the factors governing the decision to conduct LAMSON 719. The increased vehicular traffic afforded by these improvements allowed a corresponding increase in the infiltration and stockpiling effort; hence, the increased threat in northern Military Region 1.
5. Enemy Strengths/Disposition

Enemy forces in and near the operational area prior to the initiation of LAMSON 719 on 8 February 1971 were estimated to total 22,000. Of this total, 13,000 were in main line combat units and 9,000 were primarily engaged in supporting, maintaining and defending the extensive infiltration networks. Later, during the peak of enemy activity in early March, it is estimated that the enemy had committed approximately 36,000 troops total to counter LAMSON 719 operations. This figure includes the reversion of the infiltration support troops to their secondary combat role. Of major importance was the increasing density, mobility and sophistication of the antiaircraft defenses used by the NVA to counter the airmobility of LAMSON 719. Particularly effective was the emplacement of these weapons very close to RVNAF forces; this hugging tactic made neutralizing fires difficult if not in some cases impossible. Resupply and extraction missions became extremely hazardous. Detailed discussions of this threat and its effect can be found in Annex A (Intelligence) and throughout this report. In addition LAMSON 719 resulted in the third confirmed appearance of NVA armor against FWMAF and RVNAF. Unlike the first two armor engagements, the NVA used armor in LAMSON 719 in both a fire support role and as part of a coordinated tank/infantry assault, (i.e., the attack on FB 31)

E. (C) XXIV CORPS AND I CORPS CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

1. I Corps forces conducted all combat operations on the ground in Laos. The maneuver units were provided light and medium artillery support by Vietnamese artillery units. XXIV Corps, assisted by 7th AF, provided support and assistance to I Corps consisting of:

a. Ground and airmobile operations by infantry, armor and airmobile units to secure Quang Tri Province in Vietnam for the staging and supplying of Vietnamese forces.

b. All aerial lift, escort, armed reconnaissance and aerial rocket artillery for I Corps operations in Laos.

c. Heavy artillery at the Vietnamese-Laotian border for I Corps units in range.
d. Tactical air and heavy bomber strikes throughout the Laotian area of operations.

2. The XXIV Corps plan for LAMSON 719 had four phases. However, the first phase, the securing of western Quang Tri Province by US forces, was renamed DEWEY CANYON II and the last three phases became Phases I, II, and III of I Corps LAMSON 719. The four phases as planned were:

a. Operation DEWEY CANYON II

On D-day, the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) would attack into the Khe Sanh Plateau to the Laotian border in order to secure Route 9 and seize and secure staging areas and artillery positions to support future phases. The brigade then was to conduct screening operations to the south of Khe Sanh. The 1st ARVN Armored Brigade, following the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mech), would seize and secure objective HAM NGHI (just south of the Khe Sanh airfield) and then screen the northern flank. Meanwhile the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) continued operations in Thua Thien Province and prepared to counterattack in the central and eastern DMZ area on order with one brigade of two infantry battalions and two light artillery batteries.

(1) The 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mech) consisted of:

1st Bn, 11th Inf
1st Bn, 77th Armor
3d Sqdn, Cav
5th Bn, 4th Arty
3d Bn, 187th Inf, 101st Abn Div (Ambl) (OPCON)
4th Bn, 3d Inf, 23d Inf Div (OPCON)
1st Bn, 82d Arty, 23d Inf Div (Attached)

(2) In addition to passing the 3d Battalion (Airmobile), 187th Infantry to the operational control of the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mech), the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) was tasked to:

(a) Conduct two artillery raids to forward fire bases in western Thua Thien Province from D-day to D+4.

I-5
(b) Provide up to two aerial rocket artillery batteries in general support, reinforcing 5th Battalion, 4th Artillery, 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mech).

(c) Coordinate with the 2d Infantry Regiment, 1st ARVN Infantry Division and prepare counterattack plans for defense of the central and eastern DMZ area.

(d) Provide one air cavalry squadron, less one air cavalry troop, in support of the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mech).

(e) Receive operational control of two air cavalry troops provided by the 1st Aviation Brigade; receive operational control of the HAC BAO (Black Panther) Company of the 1st ARVN Infantry Division.

(f) Provide assault, medium and heavy lift helicopter support to include pathfinders to the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division, (Mech) as required on a mission basis.

(g) Provide supervisory personnel and equipment for rigging helicopter external loads.

(h) Operate forward rearm and refuel points as required.

(i) Prepare to accept operational control of all helicopter lift support by non-divisional units.

(j) Provide a control group for Army aviation and Air Force air lift to Khe Sanh.

(k) Provide Engineer Task Force 326 to open Route 9 from the vicinity of Bridge 33 (XD 9242) to Khe Sanh, construct an assault airfield for C-130 aircraft at Khe Sanh, construct fire bases as required and provide combat engineer support to maneuver elements on request.

b. LAMSON 719 - Phase I

I Corps (ARVN) forces were to conduct airmobile and ground attacks in the southern panhandle area of Laos. The main attack would
be conducted along Route 9 to Objective ALUOI by the 1st ARVN Airborne Division and the 1st ARVN Armored Brigade with the 7th, 11th and 17th Armored Cavalry Squadrons. One airborne battalion was to conduct an airmobile assault to Objective ALUOI while one airborne brigade occupied the high ground north of Objective ALUOI to establish fire bases. The 1st and 3d Infantry Regiments, 1st ARVN Infantry Division, by a series of battalion-sized airmobile assaults, were to establish fire bases on the high ground south of Route 9 and secure the left (south) flank. The 1st Ranger Group with the 21st, 37th, and 39th Ranger Battalions would conduct airmobile assaults to establish blocking positions and screen the right (north) flank. On order, the 1st Armored Brigade continued to attack west of Objective ALUOI along Route 9 with a third airborne brigade conducting an airmobile assault to Tchepone. The 147th and 258th VNMC Brigades were I Corps reserve at Khe Sanh.

(1) The 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mech) continued operations in western Quang Tri Province.

(2) The 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) continued operations in Thua Thien Province and remained prepared to defend the central and eastern DMZ area in coordination with the 2d Infantry Regiment, 1st ARVN Infantry Division on order. Additionally, the division was tasked to provide up to two aerial rocket artillery batteries as general support, reinforcing the 108th Artillery Group, a XXIV Corps unit; provide one air cavalry squadron with four air cavalry troops in general support of I Corps and XXIV Corps with priority to I Corps, then to 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mech); continue aviation lift support with priority to I Corps, then to 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mech); and release engineer equipment, particularly bulldozers, to ARVN engineers on order.

c. LAMSON 719 - Phase II

Upon seizure of Tchepone, all forces were to consolidate throughout the area. The 1st ARVN Airborne Division with three brigades of three airborne battalions each would establish multiple small unit blocking positions north and south of Tchepone along Routes 91 and 9F. Detailed search and attack operations would be conducted to destroy enemy forces and supplies. The 1st and 3d
Infantry Regiments, 1st ARVN Infantry Division were tasked to continue searching the left (south) flank while the 1st ARVN Ranger Group continued blocking and screening operations along the right (north) flank. The 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division(Mech) and the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) continued their LAMSON 719 - Phase 1 tasks.

d. LAMSON 719 - Phase III

I Corps forces were to withdraw on order with two options. The first option would task the 1st ARVN Airborne Division and 1st ARVN Armored Brigade to withdraw east along Route 9 to Objective ALUOI in order to support and cover the 1st ARVN Infantry Division forces as they moved southeast and attacked into western Base Area 611. The 1st ARVN Airborne Division would then follow the 1st ARVN Infantry Division forces on order. The 1st ARVN Armored Brigade and the 1st ARVN Ranger Group were to withdraw to Khe Sanh and revert to Corps reserve with the 1st ARVN Ranger Group passing to the operational control of the 1st ARVN Armored Brigade. Meanwhile, the 147th and 258th VNMC Brigades were to attack into the Laotian salient and into Base Area 611. The second option was the same except that after attacking into western Base Area 611, the 1st ARVN Infantry Division forces and the 1st ARVN Airborne Division were to turn north and attack through the Laotian salient. The 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mech) and the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) were to continue LAMSON 719 Phase I tasks with the 101st being prepared to conduct a brigade-size attack west of Hue to the Laotian border in coordination with one regiment, 1st ARVN Infantry Division.

F. (C) INITIAL GROUND FORCE TASK ORGANIZATION

I Corps (ARVN)

HQ I Corps
1st ARVN Inf Div (2 Regts w/ 3 Inf Bns, Div Arty)
1st ARVN Abn Div (3 Bdes w/ 9 Inf Bns, Div Arty)
1st VNMC Div (3 Bdes w/ 8 Mar Bns, Div Arty)
1st ARVN Ranger Group (3 Engr Bns, 1 Bn Arty)
1st ARVN Armored Bde (3 Sqdns)
10th ARVN Engr Gp (2 Engr Bns)
XXIV Corps (US)

HQ XXIV Corps
101st Abn Div (Amm) - (1 Inf Bn, Cav Sqdn (-), ARA, Avn Gp (-), DISCOM (-)
23d Inf Div (1 Inf Bn, 1 Cav Sqdn, 1 Bn Arty)
1st Bde, 5th Inf Div (M) (1 Tk Bn, 1 Cav Sqdn, 1 Inf Bn, 1 Bn Arty)
Reserve: 1 Bde (with 2 Inf Bns) plus supporting DS Arty, 101st Abn Div (Amm)

G. (C) COMMITMENT OF ADDITIONAL FORCES

DEWEY CANYON II and LAMSON 719 - Phase I went as planned up to the initiation of the 1st ARVN Armored Brigade's attack to Tchepone from Objective ALUOI (last step in Phase I). At this point, CG 1 Corps determined additional Vietnamese forces would be required to continue the assault to Tchepone. Those forces already deployed in Laos commenced consolidation on 24 February and plans were developed to relieve the 2d Infantry Regiment, 1st ARVN Infantry Division from its area of operation in central and eastern Quang Tri Province in order to commit them in Laos. An additional Vietnamese Marine Brigade (the 369th Marine Brigade) was airlifted from Saigon. In order to release the 2d Infantry Regiment of its responsibilities in Quang Tri Province, additional XXIV Corps forces were deployed to Quang Tri. On 20 February, Headquarters, 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) deployed to central Quang Tri and passed to the operational control of the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mech) until 24 February when they reverted to the operational control of the 101st. Constituting this brigade, the 1st Battalion (Airmobile), 501st Infantry deployed from Thua Thien Province to Quang Tri Province on 24 February, followed a day later by the 2d Battalion (Airmobile), 502d Infantry and the 2d Battalion (Airmobile), 327th Infantry on 28 February. The 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) then established a tactical command post at Quang Tri Combat Base. It became operational on 1 March. The 23d Infantry Division was tasked to provide a brigade headquarters element, one battalion size infantry unit and necessary support units to include artillery. These elements arrived in Quang Tri Province on 2 March and deployed to the eastern DMZ area on 3 March, passing to the operational control of the 101st. The 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mech) also passed to the operational control of the 101st. Thus, as of 3 March, all US ground forces deployed in
Quang Tri and Thu Thien Provinces were either organic to or under the operational control of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile). During the period 10 to 21 March, the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) also deployed the 2d Battalion (Airmobile), 506th Infantry and Hqs A and B Companies 1st Battalion (Airmobile), 506th Infantry to Quang Tri Province, while the 2d Battalion (Airmobile), 327th Infantry returned to Thua Thien Province and to the control of the 1st Brigade of the 101st. XXIV Corps forces continued to conduct combat operations in support of LAMSON 719 and the Winter Campaign in this disposition until 8 April when LAMSON 719 was terminated. From 7 to 10 April, all US ground forces in Quang Tri Province redeployed to their normal areas of operation and reverted to the control of their parent organizations.
extractions. They used additional firepower, changed approach and departure routes and altitudes, shifted aircraft touchdown points, or changed the landing or pickup zone itself. Troops in the landing or pickup zone assisted by attacking and destroying enemy forces and weapons and by directing supporting fires on lucrative targets, and by securing the original or an alternate landing or pickup zone.

r. Senior Commander Aloft

A senior airmobile commander was aloft over the operational area during the crucial phases of airmobile operations, particularly during combat assaults and extractions. This senior commander was separate from and senior to the Ground and Air Mission Commanders. His presence expedited decision-making and coordination and facilitated acquiring additional resources needed to support the operation. The senior airmobile commander monitored appropriate radio nets, followed the action closely, provided guidance to the Air Mission Commander, kept higher headquarters informed, and called for additional resources for support as needed. He was a decision-maker and expediter. Most importantly, the senior airmobile commander aloft received the recommendations of the Air Mission and Ground Commanders and personally make the crucial "go" or "no go" decision for crucial combat assaults and extractions. This command arrangement was essential for LAMSON 719. This principle may be equally valid for unilateral US Army airmobile operations.

The Assistant Division Commander's dual role as coordinator of United States aviation resources and as de facto aviation officer to I Corps Commander made it possible for him to carry out the role of senior commander aloft. On several of the raids which concluded LAMSON 719 a senior Vietnamese commander accompanied the Assistant Division Commander (Operations). This was the ideal situation.

12. (U) LOGISTIC SUPPORT OPERATIONS

a. General

Although the report covers in detail the period commencing

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with the first airmobile assault into Laos, that assault could not have taken place without considerable preparation and logistic support well in advance.

b. Planning

Initial logistic planning in the Division was limited to only three individuals: The Assistant Division Commander (Support); Commanding Officer, Division Support Command; and the Commanding Officer, 426th Supply and Service Battalion. Because of this limited access to knowledge of the operation it was necessary for these three, to personally develop all requirements in detail during a very short time period. The entire tactical and stationing plans were carefully analyzed to determine optimum locations of support operations and the size and types of support required. Once this was accomplished personnel requirements and detailed equipment listings were prepared.

Planning for supply requirements included calculation of refueling equipment needs. It was recognized early that the additional petroleum supply equipment required would not be available until subsequent to the time needed. A calculated risk was therefore taken with approval of the Assistant Division Commander (Support), to partially dismantle some existing facilities within the Division's normal area in order to provide the necessary equipment. This was done with full knowledge that the tactical situation and support required within the Division area of operations in Thua Thien province might be equally as heavy as that envisioned in Quang Tri.

It was also recognized by the logistic planning group that large quantities of air items would be required for delivery of supply and support of ARVN forces by helicopter. Planning was based on the assumption that ARVN forces would have little or none of this type equipment available. Based on the planned strength by type battalion to be supported and an estimated safety factor, a listing of quantities or air items was prepared. The quantities issued to ARVN forces in most cases closely approached the requested quantities.

Planning also was required for aerial rockets and ammunition (Class VA). Based on an analysis of aircraft density, operational areas

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and anticipated utilization, an estimate of initial stockage of aerial rockets and ammunition was developed. These estimates again proved adequate to support the operation.

An expedient requirement/requisitioning system was planned for employment, consisting of simply preparing handwritten lists. The Commanding Officer, Division Support Command, delivered them personally to the Commanding General, Da Nang Support Command, for further delivery to USARV.

Another major planning consideration was determining the number of personnel and type skills required to support the rearm/refuel facilities. Availability was complicated by the fact that all refuel facilities in the Division area of operations prior to LAMSON 719 would continue to operate during the operation.

The planning groups recognized early that organic aircraft maintenance units would not be adequate to support the anticipated aircraft density. An additional company size element plus augmentation was recommended for attachment to the Division.

c. **Conduct of support operations**

It was recognized early that the large scale airmobile operation required to support LAMSON 719 could not be undertaken without adequate and timely logistic support. The bulk of the effort expended by DISCOM elements occurred during the period 28 January to 8 February. Subsequent to that, the supply functions were more or less routine. During the initial phase, however, there was constant pressure to get facilities operational on time. Establishment of the facilities was complicated by the fact that prior reconnaissance was not usually possible. This necessitated a hasty reconnaissance, immediate development of a layout of facilities and continuous day and night effort to meet established deadlines. The Commanding Officer, Division Support Command, operated out of field locations. The Assistant Division Commander (Support) was located at Quang Tri supervising the movement of all elements that were arriving into the area as well as establishing liaison with the XXIV Corps Forward. The CO, DISCOM, met with the Assistant Division Commander (Support)
twice daily (0900 and 1600) to report on progress, request assistance, and receive guidance. When the DISCOM Forward Command Post was established at Khe Sanh, the Assistant Division Commander (Support) spent the majority of the day at that location or visiting the other four DISCOM facilities.

In setting up refuel facilities, the largest and most difficult refuel point to establish was at Khe Sanh. This facility included 38 refuel points for all types of aircraft and a bulk storage capacity eventually reaching 300,000 gallons. The initial stockage of this facility was accomplished using 500-gallon collapsible bags which were filled and rigged for external loading by DISCOM personnel at Fire Support Base VANDERGRIFT, and then delivered by helicopter to Khe Sanh. An around the clock effort for almost five days was required to construct the facility and place it into full operation.

Rigging support by DISCOM personnel included the rigging of the engineer equipment required to construct the airfield at Khe Sanh, rigging the large quantities of culvert and equipment used to reopen Route 9 to the Laotian border, rigging of the hundreds of 500-gallon collapsible bags previously mentioned, rigging of the entire quantity of the matting used to construct the assault airstrip at Khe Sanh, and the technical assistance provided ARVN forces throughout the operation.

Another major area contributing to the success of LAMSON 719 was the highly responsive aircraft maintenance system functioning in support of the operation. The organization, location, and functioning of the operational activities insured successful accomplishment of the overall mission. Aircraft were repaired and returned rapidly to using units. A very high operational rate of aircraft availability was maintained throughout the operation.

Dustoff support for medical evacuation was characterized by the total dedication of the aircrews, who assumed severe risks on a routine basis to accomplish their mission. Early in the operation the Division was tasked to supervise all dustoff operations in support of both US and ARVN operations. Joint operational facilities with divisional and MEDCOM aircraft and personnel were established at Khe Sanh and Quang Tri. The magnitude of their effort is fully described in Volume II.
d. Withdrawal Phase

The CO, DISCOM, was initially tasked with the planning and coordination of the withdrawal of all 101st Airborne Division elements located in the vicinity of Khe Sanh and VANDERGRIFT. This mission was later expanded to include all units at Khe Sanh. A movements control center was established on 26 March 1971 and functioned until 1 April 1971. This center coordinated and supervised all US Army and US Air Force truck and air movements into and out of the Khe Sanh area during that period. The system functioned rapidly and smoothly as the entire assault airfield matting was airlifted out. Several thousand tons of ammunition and supplies were moved by air and surface, and thousands of troops were also moved. Convoys consisting of more than four hundred trucks were not unusual. The road was carefully controlled and only a minimum of difficulty was encountered. This was especially critical between Khe Sanh and VANDERGRIFT since Route 9 could handle only one-way traffic in that area.

To reduce helicopter blade time while effecting a rapid withdrawal, a plan was devised whereby all disabled vehicles were transported by helicopter to Quang Tri while all rolling stock, CONEX's, and bulk supplies were lifted only to VANDERGRIFT or Mai Loc and then transported further to the rear by surface means.

13. (U) OBSERVATIONS

The following observations are based upon the experience of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) acquired while conducting airmobile operations in support of LAMSON 719.

a. Airmobility concept and principles sound

Although LAMSON 719 should be considered a special case, the Division’s experience in conducting airmobile operations in support of LAMSON 719 confirms the soundness and validity of the concept and principles of airmobility developed and practiced by the United States Army.
b. Requisites for success

There are several conditions necessary for any airmobile operation to realize its full potential for success. Paramount among these are unity of command of ground and aviation units, and combination of ground and airmobile operations into a single, integrated campaign.

c. Air Ground Operations System

Although the unique conditions and circumstances of LAMSON 719 altered and modified some details of the implementation of the Air Ground Operations System agreed to by the United States Army and Air Force, the Division's experience reaffirms the soundness of the system as it normally operates. In view of the great flexibility of the airmobile division and its ability to operate over large areas and in view of the special capability of the air cavalry squadron to reconnoiter large areas and to acquire targets, it would be well to reexamine the provisions of the Air Ground Operations System as it applies to the airmobile division. Specifically, the air cavalry squadron would benefit and be far more effective if it were authorized its own Tactical Air Control Party specially tailored and equipped to support its reconnaissance and security operations.

d. Reconnaissance and firepower

Timely, thorough reconnaissance and responsive, massive firepower are essential to successful airmobile operations, particularly the combat assault and extraction. Air cavalry is the key to adequate reconnaissance. The combination of artillery, armed helicopters, and tactical air strikes effectively coordinated is the key to adequate firepower.

e. Air cavalry

Air cavalry is a versatile, valuable asset with great growth potential for the future. Combining into a single package reconnaissance and firepower, under a commander who can assume many additional responsibilities, the air cavalry squadron and its troops
can perform a wide variety of missions. The airmobile division would gain in strength and capability by having a second air cavalry squadron, thus giving the division commander the wherewithal to use one air cavalry squadron for division reconnaissance missions and the troops of the second squadron in support of the infantry brigades.

f. Tactical air

The firepower provided by tactical air is essential to the success of airmobile operations. Tactical air delivers heavy ordnance accurately. Air Liaison Officers play key roles in assisting the United States Army in planning use of tactical air. Forward Air Controllers play key roles in employing tactical air in support of airmobile and ground operations. In addition to the recommended attachment of a Tactical Air Control Party to the air cavalry squadron, an Air Liaison Officer should be attached to the Aviation Group. The effectiveness of tactical air support of airmobile operations would be further improved by providing tactical air fighter-bombers with longer on-station time over the objective area.

g. Armed helicopters

Without the armed helicopter, there could be no airmobile operations. The more effective the armed helicopter and the greater its capabilities, the more effective will be airmobile operations. The Army needs more armed helicopters with improved capabilities. The armed helicopter provides a capability for responsive, continuous, accurate, close fire support offered by no other weapons system within the US inventory.

Airmobile operations in an environment approaching mid-intensity conflict require more armed helicopters than in low-intensity conflict. Increased numbers of enemy antiaircraft weapons and high effectiveness of enemy air defense systems combined with close combat between ground units require more armed helicopters for reconnaissance missions, for suppressive and destructive fires, and for helicopter escort. The number of armed helicopters available for support was a limiting factor in the airmobile operations during LAM-SON 719. The Division often was capable of flying more missions simultaneously than available armed helicopters could support.
The Army needs now tank-defeating armed helicopters. Had the Division entered LAMSON 719 with a helicopter armed with an accurate, lethal, relatively long-range anti-tank weapon, it would have destroyed many more NVA tanks and would have rendered more effective close support to RVNAF ground forces:

h. Armed helicopter-tactical air team

The armed helicopter and fixed-wing fighter-bomber form a natural, effective fighting team. Each weapons system has unique, complementary characteristics essential in support of the ground soldier and his operations.

Living and operating in the ground soldier's environment, the armed helicopter escorts troop-lift helicopters flying the soldier to and from his operations, escorts helicopters delivering ammunition, food, water, supplies, and mail to the soldier, and escorts the medical evacuation helicopter rescuing the wounded soldier from battle. The armed helicopter flies underneath ceilings measured in hundreds of feet to locate targets threatening or attacking the soldier to deliver timely, responsive, accurate fire within tens of feet of the soldier's position.

The fighter-bomber flies underneath ceilings measured in thousands of feet, to deliver heavy bombs within hundreds of feet of the ground soldier's position and lighter ordnance even closer.

The armed helicopter and fighter-bomber team worked effectively in LAMSON 719. Armed helicopters of the air cavalry recon-nottered objective areas, landing and pickup zones, and their approach and departure routes; acquired and marked targets on which the Forward Air Controller directed air strikes; conducted low-level bomb damage assessments; and worked with the Forward Air Controller in developing additional targets for air strikes. Armed helicopters and tactical air worked closely together to prepare the objective area, landing and pickup zones and approach and departure routes for safe passage and landing of the troop-lift helicopters. The armed helicopters then escorted troop-lift and heavy-lift helicopters in and out of the landing zone while the Forward Air Controller directed air strikes into adjacent target and danger areas.
i. Joint Coordinating Group

Establishment of the Joint Coordinating Group at the I Corps Tactical Headquarters led immediately to improved effectiveness in coordinating and conducting airmobile operations in support of LAMSON 719. Use of a similar technique would be worthy of consideration for any combined operation.

j. Combat extraction of heavy equipment

Combat conditions during LAMSON 719 made it infeasible to extract artillery, bulldozers, and other heavy supplies and equipment from several positions and fire bases. The risk to the crew and to the heavy-lift helicopter was not worth the relative value of the equipment left on the ground. This situation may not be uncommon in airmobile operations conducted in mid-intensity conflict. In future conflicts of the nature of LAMSON 719 commanders must seriously consider alternatives to establishing artillery fire bases as was done in LAMSON 719. Some alternatives are to operate without establishing airmobile artillery fire bases, to establish artillery fire bases only for brief periods of time and then move them, or to operate without any artillery support and depend upon infantry weapons, armed helicopters, and tactical air. Another option is to consciously accept the likelihood of being unable to extract artillery and heavy equipment and be prepared to write it off in return for whatever advantage it offered while providing fire support. Still another option is to provide artillery support from secure bases and to plan ground linkup with the artillery fire bases established by airmobile assault.

k. Radio consoles for command control

The airmobile commander needs better, more dependable, more versatile command radio communications than offered by the current radio console mounted in command and control helicopter. Inclusion of UHF and VHF radios in the radio console used by the Airmobile Task Force Commander and his Fire Support Coordinator and Air Liaison Officer would provide the ground command party the capability of talking with and monitoring air cavalry, tactical air, and aviation operations. Thus the Airmobile Task Force Commander
would have access to more information and be better able to command and control.

1. Protection against small arms fire

A helicopter and crew provided protection against .30 caliber small arms fire from a distance of 300-400 meters will have an appreciably greater chance of survival in an operational environment similar to that of LAMSON 719.

m. Instrument equipment and training

All aviators should be qualified as instrument pilots and proficient in instrument flight, and all helicopters should be equipped with the latest and best equipment for instrument flight. This would ensure a higher mission completion rate with a lower accident rate. As things now stand, aviators fly missions before first light, after last light, and in marginal weather conditions at considerable risk.

n. Air items and airmobile equipment

The experience of planning, conducting, and supporting airmobile operations during LAMSON 719 can usefully be reviewed and studied to determine the adequacy of issue and suitability of design of air items and airmobile equipment authorized the airmobile division.

o. Airmobile division organization

That the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) accomplished successfully its diverse tasks and responsibilities during LAMSON 719 attests to the soundness of the Division's organization and capabilities and suggests that further refinements of the airmobile division's organization can materially expand its already significant capabilities.

p. Helicopter damage and losses

The helicopter and its crew have proven remarkably hardy and survivable in the mid-intensity conflict and hostile air defense environ-
ment of LAMSON 719. There were remarkably few helicopters and crew members lost in view of the heavy small arms, antiaircraft, and mortar and artillery fire aircraft and crews experienced while conducting extensive airmobile operations on NVA home ground. This is even more remarkable in view of the numerous airmobile operations conducted in support of RVNAF ground units located in small perimeters, surrounded by NVA units and weapons, and often in heavy contact with the enemy.

To assess and evaluate properly aircraft and crew losses, one must measure these losses against the command campaign plan, arrangements, mission, total sorties, and number of exposures to enemy fire, and accomplishments. When viewed in this perspective, losses were few.

 Logistic support

Use of extensive helicopter logistic lift during the early phase of the operation was necessitated by several factors including lack of fixed-wing airfield and poor road conditions. The operation could not have been launched on time without the thousands of tons of supplies and gallons of fuel delivered by heavy lift helicopter.

LAMSON 719 demonstrated that a definite requirement exists to establish theater contingency stocks of helicopter refueling equipment in support of airmobile operations. This equipment must be readily available, as far forward as possible, to support both additional operational requirements and replacement of combat losses.
SECTION II

AVIATION ORGANIZATION

A. (U) GENERAL

The 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) was charged with the responsibility of providing for the command and control of all aviation elements employed in support of LAMSON 719. Additionally, the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) was to accept operational control of all additional aviation support committed in support of the operation.

B. (U) SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. General

In arriving at the optimum task organization to support LAMSON 719, several special considerations or factors influenced the structuring of the aviation task organization.

2. Units to be Supported

Three division equivalents were to be supported. It was envisioned that troop movement and resupply would be accomplished primarily by helicopter.

3. Assets Available

Only those assets organic to the 101st Abn Div (Ambl) were so located as to be capable of supporting LAMSON 719 without displacing from their home station. Additional facilities for aviation units in the Quang Tri area were very limited; therefore units not organic to the Division committed in support of the operation would be required to operate under field conditions.

4. 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) Operations

The Division was expected to commit a maximum number of aviation assets in support of the operation and concurrently perform
assigned missions in current area of operation.

5. Impact of Drawdown on USARV Assets

All aviation units were fully committed in their assigned areas of operation. The diversion of assets to support LAMSON 719 would adversely affect operations elsewhere in the theater.

6. Air Cavalry Assets

The area of operation and environment for LAMSON 719 dictated maximum use of air cavalry assets; however, the area of operation and enemy situation in the area assigned to the 101st Abn Div (Ambl) also dictated maximum use of air cavalry.

7. Heavy Lift Requirements

Projected heavy lift requirements, particularly those requiring CH-54 aircraft, by far exceeded the organic capability of the 101st Abn Div (Ambl).

8. Distance

Troop lift and resupply operations were to be conducted over extended distances. The one-way distance from Khe Sanh to Tchepone is 53 kilometers.

C. (U) TASK ORGANIZATION

1. Assault Helicopter Battalions

Four assault helicopter battalions with 10 assault companies and four aerial weapons companies were included in the task organization. Two additional assault helicopter companies, 116th and 282d, were added to the task organization for the periods 5 - 7 March and 22 - 24 March.

2. Assault Support Helicopter Battalion

One assault support helicopter battalion consisting of five medium (CH-47) lift companies, a heavy (CH-54) lift company and one
3. Air Cavalry

Two additional air cavalry troops were placed OPCON to the 2d Squadron, 17th Cavalry.

4. Aerial Rocket Artillery

Aerial Rocket Artillery (ARA) support was to be provided by the 4th Battalion (Aerial Artillery), 77th Artillery (Airmobile).

5. Command

All assault and assault support units were commanded by Commanding Officer, 101st Aviation Group. All air cavalry and ARA units were commanded by Commanding Officer, 2/17 and 4/77 ARA Bn respectively.

6. Unit Designations and Aircraft Authorizations

(See Figure II-1) Units designated with an asterisk were OPCON units. All others are organic to the 101st Abn Div (Ambl).
101st AHB

A/101  (20 UH-1H)
B/101  (20 UH-1H)
C/101  (20 UH-1H)
D/101  (12 AH-1G)
* 235 AWC  (21 AH-1G, 3 UH-1H)

158th AHB

A/158  (20 UH-1H)
B/158  (20 UH-1H)
C/158  (20 UH-1H)
D/158  (12 AH-1G)
* D/227  (12 AH-1G)

14th CAB

* 71 Co  (23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C)
* 174 Co  (23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C)
* 116 Co  (23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C) (5-7, 22-24 March)

223d CAB

* 48 Co  (23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C)
* 173 Co  (23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C)
* 282 Co  (23 UH-1H, 8 UH-1C) (5-7, 22-24 March)
* 238 Co  (12 UH-1C)

159th ASHB

A/159  (16 CH-47)
B/159  (16 CH-47)
C/159  (16 CH-47)
478 Co  (10 CH-54)
* 179 Co  (16 CH-47)
* 132 Co  (16 CH-47)
* 463 Sqdn  (16 CH-53)

163d GS Co  (10 UH-1H, 12 OH-6A)

* OPCON to 101st Avn Div (Ambl)

FIGURE II-1 (U) Task Organization, 101st Aviation Group (U)
### 2d Squadron, 17th Cavalry

- **A 2/17**: (8 UH-1H, 9 AH-1G, 10 OH-6)
- **C-2/17**: (8 UH-1H, 9 AH-1G, 10 OH-6)
- **B 7/1**: (8 UH-1H, 9 AH-1G, 10 OH-6)
- **C 7/17**: (8 UH-1H, 9 AH-1G, 10 OH-6)

### 4th Bn (Aer Arty), 77th Arty

- **Btry**: (12 AH-1G)
- **Btry**: (12 AH-1G)

* OPCON to 101st Abn Div (Ambl)

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**FIGURE II-2** (U) Additional Division Aviation Committed (U)

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<th>Aircraft</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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<tr>
<td>CH-54</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Totals reflect command and control aircraft from battalion headquarters not elsewhere indicated)

**FIGURE II-3** (U) Total Aircraft Assets Available to Support LAMSON 719 (U)

II-5
D. (U) CO, 101ST AVIATION GROUP COMMENTS

1. Adequacy of Task Organization to Support LAMSON 719

a. UH-1C Aircraft

The major shortfall in aviation support was in the gunship category. The UH-1C gunship was not capable of performing satisfactorily in the LAMSON 719 environment. Performance limitations and the hostile antiaircraft environment encountered limited the effectiveness of the 60 UH-1C aircraft assigned in support of the operation. The 235 AWC and D/277 were added to the task organization to compensate for the ineffectiveness of the UH-1C.

b. Gunships for Escort

All cross border aircraft operations required gunship escort. CH-47 and CH-54 resupply missions used the assets of one aerial weapons company daily. Additional gunship requirements emanated from medical evacuation missions. The foregoing requirements were in addition to continuing requirement to provide gunships for the many combat assaults that were conducted.
A. (C) ATTACK TO ALUOI AND CONSOLIDATION

8-10 February

The attack into Laos was initiated on 8 Feb from bases established on the Khe Sanh Plain. The 1st Armored Brigade Task Force crossed the border at 1000 hours and advanced 9 kilometers westward along Route 9 the first day. Three battalions of the 3d Regt, 1st ARVN Inf Div air assaulted into LZ's south of Route 9 (LZ's HOTEL and BLUE). North of Route 9, two battalions of the 1st ARVN Abn Div air assaulted to objectives 30 and 31, and one ranger battalion landed in the vicinity of RANGER SOUTH LZ. Additionally, 105mm howitzer batteries were air landed on LZ HOTEL and objectives 30 and 31 on 8 Feb. On 9 Feb all air moves were cancelled due to adverse weather. The armored TF moved forward 2 kilometers. On 10 Feb, the 1st ARVN Abn Div air assaulted a battalion into objective ALUOI; the armored TF linked up with the battalion at 1555 hours. Also the 1st ARVN Inf Div landed a battalion on LZ DELTA. The initial objectives had been seized.

11-13 February

During this period the armored TF consolidated its position around objective ALUOI. The 1st Regt, 1st ARVN Inf Div inserted two battalions on LZ DON and one on DELTA. A ranger battalion air assaulted to RANGER NORTH LZ. Additional forces, artillery and supplies were air lifted into objective ALUOI and other established LZ's. An airborne battalion was inserted north of objective 31 on 13 Feb as the forces flanking the armor drive moved abreast of objective ALUOI.

14-18 February

With the armor column making no further progress to the west, the 1st ARVN Inf Div turned south expanding its search for enemy supplies and facilities. Elements of the 3d Regt, 1st ARVN Inf Div and accom-
panying artillery moved to fire base HOTEL II and LZ GRASS. Attempts to insert a battalion on LZ GREEN were broken off because of intense enemy fire. Forces in the vicinity of LZ GRASS made increasing contacts with the enemy.

19-22 February

The northern flank of the penetration came under heavy attack with the enemy successively concentrating his forces on the RANGER LZ's and airborne objectives. Resupply to these locations was limited by intense enemy fire on the LZ's. On 20 Feb the 39th Ranger Battalion positions on RANGER NORTH were penetrated by the NVA. Elements of the battalion were able to reach RANGER SOUTH the next day. RANGER SOUTH and objective 31 then came under increasing enemy pressure.

23 February-2 March

During the period, preparations were made to regain the initiative and continue the drive west. 1st ARVN Inf Div elements were repositioned north and west. 3d Regt forces were moved from FB HOTEL II to FB DELTA I and from LZ GREEN to LZ BROWN. On 25 Feb, the ranger battalions were extracted. Objective 31 came under heavy attack which included the use of tanks by the enemy. The 1st Armored TF attacked north to relieve the airborne positions on objective 31. The 1st ARVN Inf Div forces on the extreme southern flank continued to be under heavy pressure until withdrawn on 1 March. An airborne battalion was inserted at FB ALPILIA to secure Route 9 and hold open the I Corps penetration into Laos.

B. (C) ATTACK TO TCHEPONE AND CONSOLIDATION

3-6 March

The drive to Tchepone was accomplished in a series of airmobile assaults by the 1st ARVN Inf Div westward along the escarpment which overlooks Route 9. Division forces were released for this operation by inserting two brigades of the 1st Vietnamese Marine Division, one in the vicinity of FB HOTEL and the other around FB DELTA. Additionally, the 2d Regt, 1st ARVN Inf Div, with 5 battalions was made available from
eastern Quang Tri Province (relieved by the 3d Bde, 101st Abn Div (Ambl) and the 11th Bde, 23 Inf Div). The 1st ARVN Inf Div units air assaulted successively into LZ's LOLO, LIZ, and FB SOPHIA WEST. By 5 March, the 3d Regt had occupied FB DELTA I and LZ BROWN and the 1st Regt was conducting operations in the vicinity of LZ's LIZ and LOLO. The 2d Regt had landed at FB SOPHIA WEST and was moving westward along the escarpment. On 6 March, 2 battalions air assaulted into LZ HOPE, north of Tchepone. These units then attacked south and west occupying the town. During this period the airborne division and the armored task force operated north and east of objective ALUOI, and FB BRAVO was opened by the airborne division.

7-10 March

During this period the forces which had been operating from LZ HOPE into Tchepone linked up with elements to the south on the escarpment. As enemy pressure began to build in the Tchepone area, all friendly elements withdrew south of Route 9 and began moving toward SOPHIA WEST.

C. (C) EXTRACTION

11-14 March

The withdrawal from forward positions in the vicinity of Tchepone and FB SOPHIA WEST was accomplished overland to the vicinity of LZ LIZ. On 11 March, two battalions and the 2d Regt CP, 1st ARVN Inf Div were extracted to FB SOPHIA EAST and subsequently to FB DELTA I, with two additional battalions moving the next day to the vicinity of LZ BROWN. The 1st Regt continued operations south and west of FB LOLO and the 3d Regt SW of FB DELTA I and LZ BROWN. The 1st VNMC Div conducted operations with two brigades in the areas of LZ DON, FB DELTA, and FB HOTEL. Resupply to all units was curtailed because of indirect and small arms fire on the LZs.

15-18 March

Increased enemy pressure and lack of success in resupplying or conducting medical evacuation at FB LOLO forced the defenders to abandon the base and move overland to the east. By the end of the 16th,
the 3d Regt, less 1 battalion, had been extracted by air from Laos. On the 18th, the 1st Regt was extracted from multiple LZ's around FB DELTA I and FB SOP:HA EAST. The battalions had been in continuous contact for several days and were forced to move to new pickup zones on several occasions in order to break contact with the enemy. Extractions were completed only after intensive air, artillery, and aerial rocket artillery preparation and under the protection of air cover.

19-22 March

With the majority of the friendly forces off the escarpment west of Obj ALUOI, the evacuation of Obj ALUOI and elements of the airborne division commenced. By the end of the 21st, the 1st ARVN Inf Div had been completely withdrawn from Laos, with the extraction by air of the 2d Regt. As before, the units were forced to move overland, often at night, in order to break contact and make the extraction feasible. Elements of the airborne division were lifted out of Laos under similar circumstances. Meanwhile, the armor column had run into resistance on its push toward TABAT. It initially moved to FB ALPHA on 19 March with no difficulty but ran into enemy resistance and road blocks east of FB BRAVO.

23 March - 6 Apr

On 23 March the armor column crossed the border and one V.I.MC brigade was extracted from the vicinity of FB DELTA. The following day the last friendly forces left Laos with the extraction of all elements on FB HOTEL, although two reconnaissance teams were subsequently inserted on FB HOTEL for two additional days. Subsequently, raids into Laos were planned. The first was scheduled for 28 March but was postponed because of submarginal weather and relocated because of enemy ground fire in the objective area. On 31 March, 300 men of the 1st ARVN Inf Div Hac Bao (Black Panther) and division recon companies were inserted deep in Base Area 611. They were extracted the next day with virtually no casualties. A second raid was conducted on 6 April with 150 men successfully inserted and extracted on the same day in the Laotian salient.

III-4
Figure III-1 (C). Phase 2: Attack to ALUOI and consolidation (U)

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Figure III-2 (C). Phase II: Attack to Tchepone and consolidation (U)
Figure III-3 (C). Phase III: Extraction (U)