Operation
Junction City

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FOREWORD

Operation JUNCTION CITY was a massive two and one-half month sweep of War Zone "C" aimed at opening the area for continued clearing operations which would permanently eliminate this major enemy sanctuary. This was to be accomplished by rooting out the Central Office South Vietnam (COSVN) Headquarters and crippling the 9th Viet Cong Division. Under the control of II Field Forces, Vietnam (FFV), about 35,000 men were deployed in the field during various stages of the operation. When it ended, more than 2,700 enemy had been confirmed KIA by body-count, and hundreds of base camps, defensive positions, supply depots, and training areas had been uncovered and destroyed. Several of the main base camps for COSVN Headquarters had been located and destroyed, and tremendous quantities of arms, ammunition, supplies, and equipment had been captured.

One NVA and three Viet Cong infantry, one guards, and one artillery regiment engaged American forces in five major battles, which cost the communists 1,824 KIA by body-count and 19 prisoners. This compared with 76 U.S. KIA and 305 WIA for the same encounters—a kill ratio of 24:1, in favor of friendly forces.

Air support was used extensively throughout JUNCTION CITY, providing more than 5,000 tactical air sorties, 126 ARC LIGHT sorties, and one of the most massive air logistical supply efforts of the war. The major battles saw immediate and divert sorties flown continuously for periods of several hours, with as many as 77 sorties flown in immediate close support of a single
In each one of the five major ground contacts, tactical air was one of the major factors responsible for turning a potential disaster into an allied victory.

Operation JUNCTION CITY was a segment of the continuing allied campaign to destroy the 9th VC Division, COSVN Headquarters and clear the enemy from the largest and most important area in South Vietnam, War Zone "C". This thousand-square-mile stretch of land, bordered on the north and west by Cambodia, had been a major communist base since the French Indo-Chinese War. It remained impervious to large-scale penetration until the spring of 1966, when the U.S. 1st Infantry Division conducted a relatively fruitless search of part of the zone during Operation BIRMINGHAM.

The 1st Division, with several attached brigades, returned that fall with Operation ATTLEBORO and inflicted more than a thousand confirmed enemy losses of the 9th Division and COSVN. They also destroyed a large number of important enemy base areas and supply complexes. As was typical of guerrilla warfare, however, as soon as the friendly troops withdrew, the area once more became an enemy sanctuary.

Coupled with recurring ground operations against the area, the USAF waged a constant war of harassment and interdiction within the zone. Numerous preplanned airstrikes were carried out daily, and repeated ARC LIGHT strikes devastated the thick jungle canopy over much of the area, destroying many important camps and installations. Defoliation was also effective in denying vi
selected areas to the enemy.

The tremendous size of the zone, however, with its nearby safe sanctuary in Cambodia, precluded any true deprivation of the area to the enemy without physical occupation by friendly forces. Thus the 196th Light Infantry Brigade boundary of the war zone; the 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, moved into a permanent base camp at Dau Tieng near the southeast corner. The east side was hemmed in by the 2d and 3d Brigades of the 1st Division, which established permanent operating bases at Quan Loi and Lai Khe, respectively. Special Forces Camps along the fringes further increased the allied challenge to VC control of Zone C.

For 1967, allied planning called for a continuous series of multi-division-sized operations against major VC bases northeast and northwest of Saigon, including War Zones "C" and "D", the Iron Triangle, and the Boi Loi Woods. The major search-and-destroy efforts were to be continuously supplemented by smaller operations designed to keep maximum pressure against these critical areas.

The first of the 1967 series was CEDAR FALLS, directed against the heretofore uncleared Iron Triangle. This operation tied up a two division-sized force from 8 to 26 January. No major battles resulted with communist forces, but the Iron Triangle was walked through, foot-by-foot, and purged of a fantastic network of enemy base areas, supply complexes, and training camps. Several major enemy headquarters were also forced out of their densely-jungled hideouts. To facilitate reentry of friendly forces for
future operations, numerous landing zones (LZs) and a large strip of barren land, from one end of the Triangle to the other, were bulldozed out. To deprive the enemy of any population control and qualify the area for a free-fire zone, its 6,000 civilian inhabitants were evacuated for resettlement elsewhere, and their villages and crops were totally destroyed.

CEDAR FALLS cost the enemy personnel losses of 720 killed (body-count), 213 taken prisoner, and 503 returnees. An additional 512 enemy suspects were detained. Communist equipment and installation losses were probably the highest of the war for a single operation. Included were 555 individual weapons, 23 crew-served weapons, 2,000 grenades, tremendous quantities of mortar, small arms, and recoilless rifle ammo, quantities of machinery, large stores of medical supplies, 334 sampans, 424 tunnels, 1,111 bunkers, 509 buildings, 6 bridges, and more than 3,700 tons of rice, the largest quantity captured to date.

The enemy made no concerted effort to resist the allied incursion, but rather fragmented their units and attempted to exfiltrate through the encircling friendly forces. Nevertheless, the enemy lost heavy casualties and suffered uprooting and destruction of the entire political and guerrilla infrastructure within the area. Friendly losses were 72 KIA and 337 WIA, a kill-ratio of 10:1 in favor of the allies.

Air support of CEDAR FALLS comprised some 1,113 tactical and 102 ARC LIGHT sorties. Total munitions thus expended amounted to more than 3,900 tons. In support of the operation, the 308 C-123 and C-130 sorties hauled 1,456 tons of cargo and 2,710 passengers. Confirmed enemy killed by air
(KBA) were relatively insignificant in number, but verification was greatly
hampered by the nature of the terrain and type of target. Air support was
particularly important, however, in keeping the communists fragmented and
incapable of concerted action against the friendly ground forces. Furthermore,
air softened and opened up the meticulously fortified complexes and
rendered them indefensible in many instances.

In preparation for a massive and detailed sweep of the entire War Zone
"C" to begin in late February, two smaller operations were conducted along
the fringes of the projected area of operation (AO). Three brigades swept
positions of southern and far western Zone "C" between 2 and 21 February
during Operation GADSDEN. Besides positioning units for JUNCTION CITY, this
operation confirmed the presence of the 271st VC Regiment in the northwestern
part of the zone. Only 163 enemy were killed with friendly losses totaling
29 KIA and 107 WIA; there were, however, 386 tons of rice uncovered and
destroyed, as well as numerous base camps.

Elements of the 1st Division conducted Operation TUCSON along the eastern
edge of Zone "C" during the period 14 through 22 February. Along the VC
northern rice route, while positioning themselves for the jump-off into
JUNCTION CITY, they captured 1,400 tons of rice. No significant contact was
made during TUCSON, and only light casualties were experienced by both sides.

Both GADSDEN and TUCSON saw a continuing high level of sophisticated
air support. During GADSDEN, 496 tactical and 57 ARC LIGHT sorties expended
more than 2,100 tons of ordnance. Since contact was light, most of this
effort went into harassment, interdiction, and strikes against enemy base camps and storage areas. TUCSON saw much the same utilization with 132 tactical and 21 ARC LIGHT sorties expending some 764 tons of ordnance.
OPERATION JUNCTION CITY

1. Concepts and Strategy

   The massive invasion of War Zone "C" in Operation JUNCTION CITY was a three-phase multidivision-sized search-and-destroy operation conducted under the direct control of II Field Forces Vietnam. The 1st Division operated with all three brigades and held operational control (OPCON), at various times, of the 173d Airborne Brigade and the 1st Brigade, 9th Division. The 25th Division committed its 2d Brigade, and was also OPCON over the 3d Brigade, 4th Division, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, a Vietnamese Marine Brigade (-), and at times the 1st Brigade, 9th Division.

   JUNCTION CITY was scheduled to begin at 0700 hours on 22 February 1967, with the first major U.S. combat paradrop of the war. Phase One continued through 17 March, with the objective of sealing off northern Tay Ninh Province along the Cambodian border with a force of several brigades. This blocking action included the combat paradrop of a reinforced battalion from the 173d Airborne Brigade along the Cambodian border to prevent escape of the COSVN forces. With the blocking force thus established, the 25th and 1st Divisions drove up from the south through the central and western portions of the area of operation (AO). At the same time, blocking forces to the north formed a pincer and swept across the northern portion of the zone, attempting to snare Viet Cong Headquarters.

   Phase Two lasted from 15 March through 15 April. The 25th Division
continued searching the western portion of the enemy's secret zone, while 1st Division forces swept the eastern portion. It was during this period, the enemy accepted the challenge and initiated three major battles. After the last effort to challenge U.S. forces on 1 April, the enemy withdrew to the north and east, avoiding contact for the remainder of the operation.

The third and last phase of JUNCTION CITY was conducted from 16 April through 16 May. The 1st Brigade, 9th Division, assumed OPCON and was the only major force employed after withdrawal of the 3rd Brigade, 4th Division, to their Dau Tieng Base Camp on 20 April. As almost no enemy contact was made during Phase Three, the major friendly effort was directed toward upgrading and clearing roads, building bridges, and setting up the Prek Klok Special Forces Camp.

2. JUNCTION CITY I

Air support was one of the most outstanding ingredients of the operation from the very beginning. Two B-52 strikes, totaling 15 sorties, were launched as pre-strikes for D-Day. In support of logistical preparations for the operation, between 10 and 22 February, Detachment 5, 8th Aerial Port Squadron, transported 970 tons of cargo to Quan Loi and 1,075 tons to Minh Thanh. Troops began moving into jump-off positions on 18 February, and the next day, 7AF transports, airlifted 1,764 passengers to support the buildup. On 22 February, D-Day, 845 paratroopers boarded 16 C-130s at Bien Hoa, and were dropped over landing zones (LZs) in northern Tay Ninh Province. Logistical support was provided throughout the day by 20 C-130 cargo sorties from Bien Hoa, which airdropped tons of supplies to the
C-130 transports taxi for first major U.S. paratroop mission.
rapidly deploying forces. Six C-130s on airdrop missions sustained a total of eight hits by enemy ground fire during the day.

Preplanned strike sorties in support of the first day of operations totaled 111 F-100, 13 F-5, 53 F-4C, and 18 B-57 sorties. Immediate strike support was flown by 14 F-100s, 2 F-5s, 3 F-4Cs, and 2 B-57s--a grand total of 216 strike sorties in direct support of the ground operation. Results of these efforts were 17 killed by air (KBA) (estimated), 15 structures destroyed, 10 damaged, 9 bunkers destroyed, 1 secondary explosion, and 3 secondary fires.

By the second day, tactical strike support dropped to 175 sorties, and continued to decrease over the next few days as no major ground contacts developed. On 26 February, the daily rate was down to 73 preplanned and 11 immediate strike sorties. The first major contact occurred on 28 February, and was reflected by a total of 45 immediate sorties being flown over the AO during the day. After one strike by three F-100s in support of the Battle of Prek Klok I, ground forces gave the FAC an estimated KBA of 40 enemy troops.

Ten ARC LIGHT strikes, consisting of 69 B-52 sorties, were conducted throughout Phase One of the operations. Heavy raids were conducted against elements of COSVN and the 70th Guards Regiment on 4 March. Fifteen aircraft hit the target area in the morning, exposing 80 bunkers, 1,500 meters of trenches, tunnels, trails, and AA positions. The bombers returned that afternoon with six more sorties and further devastated the area pinpointed earlier.
Paratroopers ready for jump from C-130 during D-Day

Figure 3
For several days between the first Battle of Prek Klok and the second battle fought in that area, daily tactical strike sorties ranged between 58 and 113 sorties. Extensive logistics and resupply support was also accomplished by C-130 and C-123 aircraft. These efforts produced small numbers of estimated and confirmed KBA. The second major ground battle developed during the night of 10-11 March. Sixteen immediate strike sorties flew in support, but no breakdown of KBA was recorded. Three AC-47s also supported this action with flares and minigun fire. The Battle of Prek Klok II, as this engagement was termed, assisted in boosting the immediate strike sortie rate to 55 on 11 March, with preplans numbering just under 50. After this battle, and until Phase One closed on 15 March, preplans declined from nearly 50 per day to under 25, and immediates varied between 7 and 12 per day.

At the termination of JUNCTION CITY I on 15 March, 1,541 preplanned and 433 immediate strike sorties had expended ordnance, with results of 71 confirmed KBA, 287 estimated KBA; 145 structures destroyed, 25 damaged; 542 bunkers destroyed, 434 damaged; 5,595 meters of trenches destroyed, 2,090 meters damaged; 15 sampans destroyed, 3 damaged; 3 bridges destroyed; 1 truck damaged; 26 secondary explosions; and 6 highway cuts.

3. The Battle of Prek Klok I

Ground forces employed in JUNCTION CITY made no contact with any large enemy units during the first few days of operations. The 3d Brigade, 1st Division, worked to set up three artillery fire support bases along Route 4, and began conducting sweeps along both sides of the highway to clear and secure it. Although the brigade made no significant contact during the
Airdropping supplies to ground troops in War Zone "C"

Figure 4

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first four days, mined vehicles were a daily occurrence.

On the morning of 28 February, B Company, 1/16th Infantry, radio call-sign Devour, was working through heavy jungle a mile and a half east of Route 4 and approximately four miles south of Artillery Base Two. At 1000 hours, a tank from 1/4th Armor was lightly damaged by a mine, as it traveled along the highway to the southwest of the company positions. About 40 minutes later, a B Company platoon was working through dense undergrowth near the Prek Klok River, when it came under heavy fire from a well dug-in and concealed enemy force. After pinning the platoon down with heavy fire, the Viet Cong initiated a ground assault which overran the American position within five minutes, killing or wounding nearly every soldier. The multi-battalion force from the 101st NVA Regiment, then shifted its attack to the rest of the company, which formed a hasty perimeter and fought back desperately.

Airstrikes and artillery were requested immediately, and the brigade's airborne forward air controller (FAC), Hussy 33, was immediately diverted to the scene. Capt. Raymond K. Seip, the FAC, arrived overhead within minutes and began coordinating with Devour to set up an airstrike. Blade 05, a flight of F-100s from Phan Rang, reached the target area at 1119 hours, and Captain Seip began to direct them in with 500-pound bombs and 20-mm cannons. Two B-57s from the 13th Tactical Bomber Squadron at Phan Rang arrived within ten minutes of the first flight and were also put in. Captain Seip was then relieved by another FAC, Hussy 34, who worked in two more scramble flights of F-100s during the next hour.
The continuous airstrikes successfully kept the enemy forces at bay, while reinforcements were quickly gathered to relieve the embattled company. In preparation for the heliborne assault of reinforcements, Hussy 34 expended the ordnance of three flights of fighters around a nearby clearing which was to be used as an LZ. A Company, 1/16th Infantry, was air assaulted into the LZ at 1413 hours, followed immediately by B Company, 2/18th Infantry. While this assault was in progress, Hussy 31, Maj. Clay B. Jackson, relieved the FAC, and put in another close support strike for the besieged company a half mile distant from the LZ. The three diverted 352d Tactical Fighter Squadron F-100s struck a large concentration of attacking enemy troops with 750-pound napalm and bombs. As the fighters pulled off target, the ground commander exclaimed to the FAC that a reinforced enemy platoon, which had been assaulting his perimeter, was wiped out in the strike. The ground commander gave the flight an estimate of 40 enemy killed by air.

Upon landing, B Company, 2/18th Infantry, immediately moved out through the jungle to link up with the remnants of Devour, which by this time had taken casualties of nearly 50 percent. Airstrikes continued with Hussy 34, his O-1 rearmed and refueled, again directing.

The relief company linked up with Devour at 1637 hours and together they began withdrawing toward the LZ. The FAC put in ten sorties with bombs, napalm, and CBU, and strafed to cover the link-up and subsequent withdrawal. Under this fierce pounding, the enemy was finally forced to break contact at 1700 hours. Maj. Clay Jackson, ALO for the 3d Brigade, 1st Division, was the
FAC for the last airstrike on enemy withdrawal routes to end the action. All elements had regrouped into the LZ by 2030 hours, and flareships were stationed overhead to provide light for medevac of the dead and wounded. The area remained quiet throughout the night.

Summing up the air support for this action, Major Jackson stated:

"...The air was absolutely effective in this incident... There were several napalm drops by Yellowjacket Flight (the three divert F-100s) which broke the back of the attack and from that point on, pressure on the company was relieved and we started winning instead of having the issue in doubt as to whether the company was going to survive at all...."

A police of the battlefield the next morning located 144 communist bodies and 40 enemy weapons, several of which had been destroyed by airstrikes. Most of the enemy losses, including an unknown number which had been carried away and buried, were the result of heavy artillery support and the 29 tactical strike sorties flown by USAF aircraft. American casualties were also heavy in this engagement, including 25 killed and 28 wounded from B Company, 1/16th Infantry. The only other American casualty was one wounded during the LZ assault by the reinforcements.

An intelligence analysis of the contact later indicated that the American company had probably stumbled into an enemy staging area for a planned attack against convoy activity along Route 4. As a result of this battle, the enemy force withdrew and only small harassing activities were subsequently directed against the road in this area.
4. **Battle of Prek Klok II (10 Mar 67)**

During the next ten days, many daily contacts were made throughout the JUNCTION CITY area of operations with enemy platoons or smaller sized elements. Although a large toll of enemy casualties was thus being accumulated, the enemy combat battalions avoided contact. With the enemy making no concerted effort to defend his bases, friendly forces uncovered dozens of major base camps and captured enormous quantities of enemy equipment and supplies.

The enemy decision to again commit large elements against an American position was possibly prompted by the entrapment of an element of COSVN Headquarters in the pincer movement along the Cambodian border. A prisoner report later indicated that the attack was a diversion to draw off forces which reportedly threatened the military staff section of COSVN.

The target for the multi-battalion attack on the evening of 10 March was Artillery Base Two, located on the east side of Route 4, 17 miles northeast of Tay Ninh City. The base was then manned by elements of the 108th Engineers and secured by the 2d Battalion of the 2d Mechanized Infantry. Among the latter unit's equipment were armored personnel carriers, (APCs), track-mounted twin forties, and quad-fifties. Against this firepower, the enemy threw a two-battalion force from the 272d VC Regiment, supported by 120-mm mortars from the 69th VC Artillery Regiment.

Commenting on the composition of forces, Major Jackson stated:

"...They probably picked the toughest outfit to attack."
They could have easily wiped out several other company-sized positions that were up and down the highway who were just plain infantry. The Second of the Second Mech was well dug-in and they were fighting out of armored personnel carriers. They had their machine guns well bunkered and so consequently when the attack started, they weren't overwhelmed by the ferocity of the initial attack. They were able to hold it off until artillery and air could get in on them."

The attack began at 2208 hours the night of 10 March, with a heavy bombardment by 60, 82, and 120-mm mortars. After 20 minutes of prep fires, the shelling lifted and a determined ground assault commenced against the entire eastern perimeter. A secondary attack fell against C Company, 2/2 Mech, from the southwest.

FAC and flare support was requested as soon as the mortar attack began. An AC-47 was promptly diverted, while the FAC was being scrambled from the small airstrip at the Suoi Da Special Forces Camp. Major Jackson maintained a single night alert FAC at that location for just such an emergency. But before Hussy 32, Maj. Everett K. Terrell, could arrive, the ground attack commenced, and the battalion put in an immediate request for strike support. The first request was made at 2235 hours and the Tactical Air Control Center (TACC) had fragged two alert missions from Bien Hoa by 2237 hours. Buzzard 01, two 510th TFS F-100s, and Dice 01, a pair of 90th TFS F-100s, were scrambled out of Bien Hoa and headed north for the 10-minute flight.

Meanwhile Major Terrell had arrived over the target and witnessed a spectacular fireworks display as voluminous tracer fire crisscrossed between
the mortar-wracked perimeter and the nearby woodline. In addition to the mortars and automatic weapons, the communists were lobbing RPG antitank rockets and 75-mm recoilless rifle rounds into the American fortifications. Spooky, the AC-47, was over the area and soon had the battlefield illuminated with strings of two million candlepower flares. The pilot then turned his aircraft into a left-hand bank and strafed the tree lines opposite the east perimeter with thousands of rounds of minigun fire.

Buzzard 01 was on target by 2337 hours, smashing the woodline with 750-pound bombs. Wheeling around for another pass, the fighters dived low over the jungle, sending hundreds of rounds of 20-mm into the trees. As the first set of F-100s pulled off target, Dice Flight swept in and repeated the performance with napalm, CBU, and more 20-mm. The main enemy ground assault had begun to disintegrate under Buzzard’s bombs and strafing, and by the time Dice pulled off target, the enemy was pulling out. Numerous snipers continued to harass the perimeter until 0200 hours, but the main enemy force was beginning to withdraw. Three more flights of F-100s followed one another in immediate succession, shattering the tree lines and jungle with 500-pound bombs and 750-pound napalm, then sowing the entire area with CBU.

While the main assault was in progress against Base Two, the enemy also launched a secondary attack against Artillery Base One at 2237 hours, in an apparent attempt to tie down artillery fire, which might otherwise have been employed against their main attack. The communists walked mortar rounds through the perimeter and shot it up with small arms and automatic weapons.
fire for an hour and a half, but broke off contact shortly after the main attack against Base Two failed. Friendly casualties were light from these enemy fires.

After putting in five flights of F-100s, Major Terrell was relieved by Major Jackson who arrived from Lai Khe with a second FAC in the back seat to handle radio traffic. These officers continued to alternate FAC sorties for the next four hours, during which time they expended four more F-100s on withdrawal routes and around the perimeter to prevent the communists from retrieving their dead.

In the four and a half hours that immediate strike support was required, the USAF flew 22 sorties: 16 F-100 scramble sorties, two AC-47s, and four FACs. A police of the battlefield the next day produced an enemy body-count of 197, many of whom were killed by airstrikes. No official breakdown as to KBA was ever attempted, however. Five enemy soldiers were taken prisoner and large amounts of their equipment were recovered from the battlefield. Friendly casualties were only one killed by hostile action (KHA) and 31 wounded by hostile action (WHA), providing one of the most favorable friendly-to-enemy kill ratios of the war.

5. **JUNCTION CITY II**

Three of the five major battles fought during JUNCTION CITY took place during Phase Two: Bau Bang, Suoi Tre, and Ap Gu. These three battles were the last concerted enemy opposition and following Ap Gu, the enemy for the most part withdrew to Cambodia.
The daily tactical sortie rate continued low from 15 through 17 March, totaling less than thirty per day. As enemy activity built up to the major engagements of Bau Bang and Suoi Tre, however, the sortie rate jumped to 65 on 18 March (45 preplanned and 20 immediates). During the battle of Bau Bang, it remained high with 40 and 57 sorties on 19 and 20 March, respectively. The battle of Suoi Tre caused a tremendous increase on 21 March, when 80 preplanned and 37 immediates were flown. This rate was to remain high through the end of the month with the lowest daily figure at 49, during this period.

The Battle of Ap Gu from 31 March through 1 April, brought the figures to the highest level during Phase Two. Fifty-three preplanned and 59 immediates were flown over the AO on 31 March, with a further increase of 42 preplanned and 72 immediates flown the next day. Thereafter the sortie rate declined steadily, reaching 28 preplans and no immediates occurred on 14th April.

When Phase Two terminated on 15 April, an additional 2,002 tactical strike sorties were flown in direct support of JUNCTION CITY, bringing the cumulative figure to 3,974 sorties. The results for this effort were 118 structures destroyed, 37 damaged; 634 bunkers destroyed, 428 damaged; 2,002 meters of trench destroyed, 1,360 damaged; 3 sampans destroyed; 2 bridges and 1 truck damaged; and 63 secondary explosions.

This tremendous strike support effort was responsible for a large number of KBA during Phase Two. The Battle of Suoi Tre was credited with 108 confirmed KBA and 100 probable for the tremendous level of strike support.
The breakdown as to KBA was not made in either the Battle of Bau Bang or Ap Gu, but the Army Battalion S3, after the Battle of Ap Gu, estimated that 80 percent of the 608 confirmed enemy dead were killed by "air and artillery." Other reports tended to indicate that the tremendous strike support was producing effective results. For example, on 3 April, A Company, 2/22d Infantry picked up a Vietnamese national policeman who claimed to have been held prisoner by the VC since November 1966. The man was badly burned and claimed that he and his captors were wounded "in a recent airstrike." He reported seven VC were KIA from the strike, at least two others would die, and seven more were less seriously wounded.

The repeated ARC LIGHT missions which continued through Phase Two were also producing results. Almost every strike was destroying or damaging substantial numbers of fortifications and camp sites. One Viet Cong who rallied on 20 April revealed that his supply outfit, Unit 160, Group 82, COSVN Rear Services was hit by an ARC LIGHT strike about 5 April. According to his interrogation report:

"The strike destroyed all the supplies that were sitting out under ponchos and killed 17 VC. Source stated that there were about 30 men in 160 (his unit) but that now there are only 10 or 11... Source stated that his unit had no prior warning to the B-52 strike and that the strike was right on the base camp."

6. Battle of Bau Bang II (20 Mar 67)

By mid-March, American ground commanders were beginning to fear that the massive commitment of forces into War Zone "C", would fail to precipitate
a major confrontation with the enemy combat forces located there. However, just when it appeared that these fears might be realized, all three regiments of the 9th VC Division were engaged in fierce showdowns with the U.S. Army. The first of these regimental-sized confrontations, pitted more than a thousand men from the 273d VC Regiment, supported by three VC district force companies of 50 men each, against approximately 160 Americans from A Company, 3/5th Cavalry, and a 1st Brigade, 9th Division unit.

The APCs and tanks of the company had lagered (a circle of armored vehicles with the guns pointing outward) just north of the village of Ap Bau Bang II, at approximately 1600 hours on 19 March. Their mission was to provide security for an artillery fire support base located only a few hundred yards farther on Highway 13.

Ap Bau Bang, located about five miles north of the 3d Brigade, 1st Division Base Camp, at Lai Khe, was not technically within the JUNCTION CITY area of operations. Highway 13 was a critical line of communication, however, for support of JUNCTION CITY, and the 1st Brigade, 9th Division, was at the time OPCON to the 1st Infantry Division and directly committed to the JUNCTION CITY operation. This battle, therefore, was considered part of JUNCTION CITY.

The enemy began envelopment of Bau Bang shortly after dark. Occasional small arms rattled from the tree line as the Communist regiment took up positions opposite the circle of armored vehicles. Shortly after midnight, the preparations were complete and at 0030 hours on 20 March, a 60-mm
mortar attack was initiated against the company perimeter. The firing
built up in intensity as communist recoilless rifles, antitank rockets, and
grenade launchers joined the bombardment. After 18 minutes of prep fires,
a full-scale ground assault began from the southwest, west, southeast, and
northeast.

From the hatch of his APC, Col. Sydney S. Haszard requested a flare-
ship, artillery support, and armed helicopters, while at the same time direct-
ing the cannon and heavy machine gun fire of armored vehicles against the
masses of enemy soldiers, many of whom were advancing across a hundred yards
of open ground beyond the north perimeter. The initial assault carried some
elements of the 273d Regiment through the first tangle of concertina wire
to within fifty yards of the American defenders.

Inside the perimeter, several vehicles were taking hits from the
heavy weapons fire. Colonel Haszard's APC, stationed on the north perimeter,
took a direct hit from a B-40 antitank rocket. The projectile pierced the
vehicle's thin armor and exploded in the stomach of the driver, killing him
instantly. The colonel immediately bailed out of the striken carrier and
dodged into a bunker, where he continued to direct the defense.

Defensive fires thrown up by the American armor gradually drove
back the first Viet Cong assault, taking a heavy toll of the khaki-clad
attackers. Exploding artillery rounds soon joined the battle, pounding the
rubber plantation beyond the laagered armor where the enemy was massing.
Heavy fighting continued for the next two hours despite the arrival of re-
inforcing platoons from the other two companies of the armored battalion.
Shortly after 0200 hours, just before reinforcements reached the perimeter, the ground commander decided that air support was necessary to break the repeated enemy attacks. Two 1st Brigade, 9th Division, FACs were scrambled from Lai Khe in an O-1 at about 0230 hours and were overhead within five minutes. The first immediate airstrike request was processed through the III Corps Direct Air Support Center at 0250 hours, and two F-100s were quickly scrambled from the alert pad at Bien Hoa.

As the two Tamale FACs circled over Bau Bang, the Viet Cong again began assaulting the now-reinforced coil of armor. Colonel Haszard utilized tank-mounted searchlights to pinpoint the direction of the attack for the FACs, who had little trouble lining up Buzzard 01 flight for the ordnance run. The two F-100s trailed each other over the Viet Cong positions with napalm and CBU. The CBU runs caught enemy formations in the open and hundreds of grenade-like explosions completely broke up the attack. The enemy withdrew again into the plantation and directed heavy fire against the perimeter and the attacking aircraft. Tamale 17 called for additional air and three more F-100 flights responded on target at 30-minute intervals. The FAC utilized these flights to bomb and strafe the surrounding rubber trees, striking at concentrations of enemy fire and heavy weapons positions. The enemy threw up a furious barrage of small arms fire each time an F-100 made a firing pass.

The fourth flight of aircraft to arrive over the target was Blade 01, two 614th TFS F-100s, from Phan Rang. Under the flarelight, Blade Lead streaked in at 500 feet to expend CBU. Looking back as he pulled away from
his ordnance run, the pilot glimpsed a large fireball exploding across the ground. Blade 02, Capt. Barry R. Delfin, had apparently been hit by the heavy ground fire and went down with a full load of CBU and bombs.

Just after the F-100 crashed, Hussy 31, 1st Lt. George R. Davis, arrived to relieve the two Tamale FACs. Riding in the back seat to assist with the radios was Capt. Raymond K. Seip, who later recalled the mission:

"...We arrived about the time the F-100 crashed. We went over and took a good look at what was left of the F-100 and Spooky came over and lit up the area a little bit. It didn't look like there was any chance for survival so all of us went back over to the artillery base and proceeded to get our briefings from the other FAC as to what was going on... In about five minutes, we got all our briefings.

"On the first two (sorties) the ground commander had tanks set up with spotlights out in the direction he wanted us to hit. And he said, 'Okay, the southwestern spotlight there, out about two to three hundred meters.' And it worked out pretty well in this respect. On the first bomb he did mention the fact that when it went off, he saw bodies flying. Same thing on the second one. It seems...the VC were getting up to extract their buddies or to come in to attack more just as the bombs had hit...."

The two FACs worked in four sorties southeast and southwest of Bau Bang. By this time, it was beginning to get light, and the enemy activity gradually diminished.

"...About six-thirty in the morning, we finally quit putting in the strikes. We stayed around controlling Spooky and watching artillery go in. One of the generals decided that he wanted to wait until seven o'clock and then put some more in. I guess it worked pretty well from what I understand. Charlie came back in to retrieve some more of his men and about that time, they put in some more air.

"Our total mission was only about an hour and fifty-five
minutes. It was a pretty simple mission as far as I was concerned. The man in the front seat was getting his check-out more or less, first time for him at night. It was about the fourth time for me. Of all of them that I'd had, this was the easiest to work. The VC picked on our place that was too obvious from the air. Nice road and rubber plantations all around us with pretty much straight lines. It was no problem to orient yourselves at all from either our standpoint or the fighters, plus the fact that the tanks were out there with their spotlights showing on it. They turned all the rest of them off and just left one on in the direction they wanted the fire...."

Strike sorties ceased about 0830 hours, at which time policing of the battlefield began. Around the American perimeter, 227 enemy bodies were found. Of the three prisoners taken, one listed his unit as the 2d Battalion, 273d VC Regiment, another the 7th Binh My Guerrilla Company, Tan Uyen VC District Forces. The third man, who subsequently died from head wounds, identified his unit as the 1st Battalion, 273d VC Regiment. Besides these casualties, trails of blood a foot wide were discovered leading off into the jungle, pointing to substantially higher enemy losses. As recorded in the friendly casualty report, three U.S. were KIA and 63 wounded, only two of which required evacuation. In addition to Army casualties, Captain Delfin's body was later recovered from the wreckage of his F-100.

During five hours of continuous support, 17 F-100s and two F-4Cs carried out strike sorties around Bau Bang. Flareships were also active throughout the entire night and three FAC sorties were flown.
7. Battle of Suoi Tre (21 Mar 67)

As Phase Two of Operation JUNCTION CITY moved into full swing, the 2d Brigade, 4th Division, prepared to sweep up through an area approximately 18 miles northeast of Tay Ninh City. The original plan called for a fire support base to be set up in LZ Silver by 3/22d Infantry and 2/77th Artillery. On 19 March, however, the LZ was changed to Gold, and at 1015 hours that morning, the 68th and 118th Air Mobile Companies began a helilift of the 3/22d Infantry into LZ Gold by UH-1D. As was true of many of the LZs throughout War Zone "C", Gold had been heavily mined with artillery and mortar shells, which had been wired for command detonation by a small team permanently assigned to guard the LZ.

Before the heliborne assault, the LZ had been heavily prepped with a 354-shell barrage by 105-mm, 155-mm and 8-inch howitzers for 30 minutes. The prep was then shifted over to two helicopter light-fire teams, which worked it over with rockets and machine gun fire. Two secondary explosions were observed in the LZ during these prep fires. Contrary to usual practice, the Army canceled the air prep, although it was doubtful that the mines would have been detonated by the bombs, since ordnance was dropped in the middle of an LZ.

When the prep fires were complete, UH-1Ds brought in the first assault wave from B Company, 3/22d Infantry. The second wave of helicopters was in hover over the LZ, preparatory to setting down, when a command-detonated 105-mm artillery shell exploded, raking the assault wave with deadly shrapnel and devastating the helicopters. Both the first and second
lifts of A Company met the same reception, while snipers fired at incoming forces with small arms fire. The snipers were subsequently driven off without casualties.

A search of the LZ revealed two 175-mm rounds and nineteen 81-mm mortar rounds rigged for command detonation. The five successfully detonated mines inflicted seven deaths among the helicopter crews, ten deaths in A and B Companies, 3/22d Infantry, and 18 more Americans wounded. Three UH-1D helicopters were totally destroyed and 13 more were damaged.

By 1300 hours, LZ Gold was declared secure, although friendly forces had sustained five more wounded by Claymore mines along the edge of the LZ. At this time, two companies from 2/12th Infantry were also helilifted into Gold. These forces moved off a thousand meters to the south, where they established security positions for the fire support base. The 2/77th Artillery moved in the next day with seventeen 105-mm howitzers to complete the manning of Fire Support Base (FSB) Gold.

By the evening of 20 March, FSB Gold contained about 450 U.S. soldiers from 3/22d (-) and 2/77th Artillery. A half mile to the southwest, 2/12th Infantry (-) was bivouacked to provide security for the FSB. A second force, consisting of two companies from 2/22d Mechanized Infantry and 2/34th Armor, had laagered for the night in dense jungle along the south bank of the Suoi Samat Creek, approximately a mile and a half to the southwest. This force had been trying to reach Gold for two days, but the armored vehicles had experienced difficulty in negotiating the steep creek banks.
The morning of 21 March was quiet until 0429 hours when a night ambush patrol, stationed some three hundred meters south of the perimeter, reported movement in front of and around their position. The handful of men from the 3d Platoon, B Company, 3/22d Infantry, observed no further activity and at 0630 hours prepared to return to the perimeter. Back at the fire support base, all units were standing by on full alert in preparation for a security sweep around their positions.

When the ambush patrol stood up to leave their night positions, they were suddenly raked by heavy fire from all directions. In less than five minutes, the entire team was annihilated; every man was dead or wounded. At the same time, the opening barrage of 60 and 82-mm mortar fire began to explode across the FSB. Immediately, the 3/22d Recon Patrol, conducting the perimeter security sweep, began exchanging heavy automatic weapons fire with a large force of Viet Cong, who had infiltrated to within 35 meters of the southeastern perimeter. Thereafter, the entire FSB came under direct assault by approximately 2,500 communist soldiers—six battalions, including the entire 272d VC Regiment. The overwhelming human wave assaults along the southeast, east, and northeast perimeters were backed up by a tremendous volume of RPG rockets, recoilless rifle shells, and automatic weapons fire. Mortar fire also continued to pound the perimeter without letup.

The 2/12th Security Force was notified of the attack at 0655 hours and ordered to proceed immediately to relieve and reinforce. Five minutes later, the entire unit was temporarily pinned down by 16 mortar rounds, which dropped into their perimeter and caused several casualties. C Company was able to
get underway after a 20 minute delay, followed 15 minutes later by A Company. These forces proceeded toward the LZ by a direct route through the heavy bamboo thickets, avoiding the trail network to avoid almost certain ambush.

Inside the FSB, the 17 artillery pieces were firing to suppress the deadly rain of mortar rounds. The initial Viet Cong assault wave had already penetrated the 1st Platoon positions of B Company, which was manning the southeast perimeter. To fill this breach, a 12-man reaction team from 2/77th Artillery was dispatched to that position as reinforcements.

Under heavy assault from three directions, the arrival of the first FAC was a welcome sight to the men on the ground. The O-1F had scrambled from Dau Tieng only minutes before with Capt. Tonie L. England and 1st Lt. Walter H. Forbes, III, aboard. The latter was instructor pilot for England, who was on his final check-out ride in the O-1. The FAC ship arrived on station at 0706 hours, but the conditions for air support were not encouraging.

The weather for the last several days had been very poor, with extensive morning ground fog and rain. On the morning of 21 March, the solid overcast had a ragged bottom ranging from 800 up to 1,500 feet. To complicate matters, within a short time after the attack began, the limited airspace beneath the cloud ceiling became dangerously overcrowded with FACs, artillery observers, fighter aircraft, and numerous helicopters all orbiting within the same restricted area.

Five minutes after the FAC arrived on station, the B Company commander reported that his 1st Platoon was surrounded. Under pressure of repeated
communist human wave assaults, the entire eastern half of the perimeter was beginning to buckle. Artillery fire from two supporting batteries was brought in to within a hundred meters of the perimeter, but the momentum of the enemy attack slowly began to cave in the main line of defense.

At this critical point, Tiger 01, a flight of Bien Hoa F-5s, flew over the LZ and circled around to line up for attack. The FAC quickly set up a target run, which placed the bombs and napalm at the edge of the jungle opposite the southeast perimeter. When the fighters had expended all ordnance, they pulled off high and dry for a BDA. Captain England circled his aircraft in a left-hand bank over the target area at 1,200 feet, flying through a tremendous fusilade of enemy machine gun bullets. Suddenly the outboard four feet of the left wing folded over and disintegrated. The 0-1 went into a spin and fell straight to the ground a mile and a half south of the FSB.

With air support temporarily neutralized, the Viet Cong pressed their advantage. Hundreds of Viet Cong swarmed forward toward the perimeter, under the protective cover of some of the heaviest enemy-supporting fires yet encountered by Free World Forces. Nevertheless, the waves of advancing enemy met with fierce resistance. Operative artillery pieces within the LZ were cranked down to zero elevation and fired directly into the charging Viet Cong. The shell bursts tore jagged holes in enemy formations but failed to check the fanatical attack. Finally, thirty beehive shells were fired directly into the Viet Cong masses advancing against B Company, each one spraying 8,000 tiny steel darts in all directions. The effect was
devastating. Enemy bodies were later found with their arms pinned to their chests by the deadly flechettes.

Despite furious defensive fires, the Viet Cong attack continued unchecked. In hand-to-hand fighting, the 1st Platoon of B Company was completely overrun by 0746 hours and within a few more minutes, the northern sector of B Company was inundated by a human wave assault breaking over the perimeter. From his surrounded command post, the Company Commander made a desperate plea over his radio for more reinforcements and ammunition. It took 15 minutes, but a 20-man force was assembled from A Company and sent on its way.

As the small force departed across the fire-swept perimeter, A Company's night ambush patrol succeeded in slipping back inside without casualties. Their help was sorely needed. At almost the same moment, the communists achieved a breakthrough in A Company's sector and both A and B Companies began falling back to secondary positions around the dug-in artillery pieces. Swarming over the perimeter, the enemy quickly destroyed the track-mounted quad-50 and began direct attacks against the secondary defense positions. The ammo dump had already been hit by mortar fire and the flames erupted repeatedly as 105-mm rounds exploded from the heat. One by one the big guns fell silent, either knocked out by satchel charges or they were out of ammunition. Every man within the constricted perimeter was now manning last ditch positions in a desperate effort to avert a final overrun.

This was the ground situation when FACs, Capt. Walter C. Sager and
Capt. Raymond F. Hanson, arrived overhead. As Captain Sager peered through smoke and haze, the scene spread out below seemed fantastic to him. As he remembered it:

"...There were mortars hitting them all over the place. They were really getting slaughtered down there. They took at least a hundred mortar rounds while I was there, if not more. It was just like a John Wayne movie...We could see bullets stitching in and out of the foxholes and Charlies running in and out...."

A flight of F-100s was orbiting nearby when the FAC arrived. After a quick briefing by the ground commander, Captain Sager launched a white phosphorous marking rocket along the edge of the jungle.

"...I talked to the ground commander and he said they were in the tree line. So we put some rockets in the tree line. We didn't realize at the time that the tree line looked different to him than to us. He called us once and said 'I'll fire the quad fifty and point out our position,' but by that time the quad fifty had been completely overrun.

"Finally after two attempts, we got it down to where he wanted it. The ground commander... said our strike with bombs and napalm was right on the button and I know we wiped out a bunch with napalm alone...."

The renewal of air support was a disaster for the already hard-hit enemy. Maj. Robert J. Meyer, the 3d Brigade ALO, later quoted a young private with whom he talked the next day about that same flight of F-100s. "There must have been five hundred of them coming at me, and this guy laid napalm right in on top of them and then I didn't see them anymore."

The strike was off target at 0900 hours. One minute later the relief force from 2/12th began to break through the jungle from the south and enter
the perimeter. By this time, Major Meyer had joined the air traffic over the embattled LZ.

"...It wasn't difficult to find because of all the aircraft in the area. My first recollection was that somebody was going to get killed up there in mid-air sure as hell. I knew where the landing zone was and I saw this FAC and two helicopters south of the LZ in a pretty tight orbit. At the time I didn't know they were over the downed FAC. Over the immediate battle area, I saw two other O-1s. One of them belonged to our FAC, Capt. Sager, and the other one I never did identify. And there were also seven helicopters all operating over this little tight area. Then right through the whole middle of it came a flight of F-4s, right under the ceiling, just swzoom. So I backed off for a minute till we figured who was who..."

While the reinforced Americans below counterattacked to reestablish the original perimeter, Captain Sager attempted to set up the three F-4s.

"...By that time the ceiling was so low that we were picking up intense fire. We only had about a thousand-foot clearance off the ground and I'd run out of smoke rockets. I had a flight of F-4Cs come in—three F-4Cs—talked them in underneath the overcast. In fact, one time I had to go up above the overcast and pick up the fighters and bring them back down on my wing, which is pretty hard to do in an aircraft like mine.

"We got the F-4s under and had them orbiting down there. Visibility was only about two miles and boy I thought it was an outstanding job just maintaining contact. As I said, I was out of smoke rockets by this time, so I pulled the grenades mounted under the wing which ejected white smoke and I circled over the target. I told the fighters to strafe beneath me and try not to pull up into me. They did and it was a fine job..."

To the ground commander, the sight of a diving O-1 emitting a long tail of white smoke caused several moments of consternation. The first reaction on the ground was that another FAC was going in, but a radio contact with the FAC quickly settled his fears.
Under the combined pressure from the renewed airstrikes and the counter-attacking infantrymen, the Viet Cong push against the southeast perimeter began to falter. At that moment, a line of tanks from 2/34th Armor crashed their way through the last few feet of jungle along the east side of the LZ and in line abreast began a wide sweep around the perimeter. For a few seconds, the enemy stood and fought the advancing armor, but within minutes the 70-vehicle tank and mechanized infantry column completely shattered organized enemy resistance. In complete panic, the Viet Cong abandoned their weapons and dead and fled back into the jungle. There they were hit by another flight of fighters which sent 750-pound cans of napalm tumbling into their positions. Major Meyer then brought the flight around for another pass, which blanketed the jungle with CBU a hundred yards ahead of the armored vehicles.

Major Meyer continued to support the armored advance with yet another flight of fighters, directing bombs, napalm, and strafe into the jungle east and northeast of the LZ. After four sorties, Captains Hanson and Sager were back again, having rearmed and refueled. They now concentrated the air effort on the enemy withdrawal route northeast of the LZ. After seven fighter sorties, they were in turn relieved by Capt. Philip Francis who continued the effort with ten more strikes.

The immediate strike support of the Battle of Suoi Tre terminated at 1327 hours. Dozens of sorties, however, continued to place strikes throughout the general area for the next few days against small groups of enemy and base camps. Between 0730 and 1327 hours on 21 March, five FAC sorties
directed in 31 scramble and divert aircraft. During the four hours of immediate strike support, the bombs, rockets, CBU, napalm, and 20-mm cannon fire were officially credited with 108 enemy KIA with another 100 listed as probable. These figures were quite arbitrarily calculated, as it was virtually impossible to determine in most cases the actual cause of death of the 654 VC bodies policed from the area during the next week.

This success had not been without cost. To achieve this spectacular victory over the Viet Cong, 31 American soldiers lost their lives and 187 more were wounded, or nearly half the strength of the original force within the LZ. In addition, one O-1 had been shot down with both crew members killed. When the crash site was finally reached, the aircraft was found literally riddled by small arms fire. An indication of the intensity of these antiaircraft fires, was the fact that 30 light machine guns and two 12.7-mm antiaircraft machine guns were recovered from the battlefield.

The Battle of Suoi Tre (named after a nearby group of huts) was unusual in that the enemy forces were so shattered that a great deal of equipment was captured, and it was possible to count most of the dead. Nevertheless, the Army estimated that an additional 200 Viet Cong were killed and carried away from the scene. A friendly patrol trapped outside the perimeter during the battle tended to confirm this. They reported observing some 75 VC dragging bodies and weapons away from the battlefield, and undoubtedly many bodies and much equipment were thus removed. Besides the huge enemy body-count, 11 Viet Cong prisoners were taken.
Among the captured or destroyed weapons were 41 RPG rocket launchers, 30 light machine guns, 50 AK-47 automatic rifles, 13 U.S. BARs, 2 12.7-mm heavy machine guns, 40 individual rifles, pistols, and carbines, and 2 U.S. M-79 grenade launchers. Captured ammunition included 31,000 rounds of small arms, 580 RPG rockets, 40 82-mm mortar rounds (it was estimated that 600 RPG rockets and 500-700 mortar rounds were expended during the attack), 34 75-mm and 28 57-mm recoilless rifle rounds, and 1,900 stick grenades.

Airpower and artillery were undoubtedly the two most outstanding factors, which, coupled with fierce resistance of the American soldier, enabled the beleaguered defenders to survive until the overwhelming reinforcements arrived. Commenting on air support, Captain Sager, who put in the most critical airstrikes, stated:

"...We definitely took the pressure off with the airstrikes. No doubt about that. They would have been overrun, because they were killing VC within their own positions--inside the artillery's positions. The Viet Cong had already overrun most of the artillery...I'm sure the artillery killed a lot of them, but they weren't turning the tide by themselves by any means...."

Both artillery and airstrikes had delivered a tremendous volume of supporting fires. In addition to the 31 immediate strike sorties, 2/77th Artillery expended 2,200 rounds of 105-mm during the engagement, including 1,000 HE and 30 Beehive rounds in direct fire. Artillery from other support bases contributed another 1,400 rounds of 105 and 155-mm fire. Despite nearly three hours of direct assaults, this massive air and artillery bombardment was largely responsible for preventing 2,500 Viet Cong from overrunning a force of less than a fifth their size, making a tremendous contribution to
one of the most decisive Free World Forces victories of the war to date.

8. Battle of Ap Gu

The communists made one final effort to gain a major victory over a large American force, before disappearing into the jungle or across the Cambodian Border for the balance of JUNCTION CITY. The final confrontation was precipitated by the 2d Brigade, 1st Division, when it began conducting search-and-destroy operations in an area quickly vacated by staff elements of COSVN and part of the Headquarters, 9th VC Division. On 30 March, the 2d Brigade, began moving troops by helicopter into LZ George, located 23 miles north of Dau Tieng (Tri Tam) and only three miles south of the Cambodian Border. Unknowingly, these forces were practically stepping into the middle of the 271st VC Regiment. 113/

The 1/26th Infantry, code name Dobol, conducted an unopposed air-mobile assault into LZ George during the early afternoon of 30 March. They were reinforced the next morning by 1/2d Infantry which immediately began moving out to the west, where they assumed security positions a mile and a half away. 114/

That same morning, Capt. Marvin R. Keller, a FAC with the 2d Brigade, was airborne by 0800 hours to provide preplanned strike support in the general vicinity of LZ George. Several nearby enemy base camps were targeted for airstrikes and Captain Keller hit them with several sorties throughout the morning. These strikes also served as cover for the movement of 1/2d Infantry to their new positions. 115/
Meanwhile, Dobol sent out two companies to conduct a sweep of the north end of the LZ. Before long, sniper fire was being encountered from the northern wood line and Captain Keller directed some ordnance into the area to suppress it. By 1215 hours, because the FAC was running low on fuel, he returned to the brigade base camp at Quan Loi. At about the same time, Dobol's recon platoon, which was just moving into the edge of the woods, suddenly encountered heavy automatic weapons and rifle grenade fire from well-entrenched enemy positions. Within minutes, the entire sweep force was hugging the ground as a reinforced battalion from the 271st Regiment worked them over with heavy machine guns, automatic rifles, and B-40 anti-tank rockets.

The enemy attack was originating from an 800-meter zigzag trench system that ran down the entire eastern edge of a jungled salient projecting into the northern edge of the LZ. The trench was just inside the woods and was later determined to have been constructed within the previous 24 hours. Because of its hasty construction and the spacing of the trees in this area, the fortification provided little overhead cover, which made it extremely vulnerable to airstrikes.

By the time another 2d Brigade FAC could be scrambled from Quan Loi, the two American companies were in serious trouble. To compound the problem, an H-13 light observation helicopter circling overhead with the battalion commander, was struck by ground fire and crashed, injuring the pilot.

Capt. Geoffrey P. Engels, call-sign Hussy 24, rendezvoused with a previously requested flight of F-100s, while below, the two American companies
were attempting to link up and pull back from the area of heavy contact. Co-
ordinating with the ground forces, Hussy 24 directed bombs and napalm into
enemy fortifications some hundred to a hundred and fifty meters in front of
the friendly positions. With this support taking enough pressure off
Dobol, they successfully began withdrawing with their casualties. The
enemy, however, refusing to disengage, advanced out of their prepared posi-
tions and attempted to envelop both friendly flanks, while at the same time
keeping maximum pressure against the center. With the enemy thus maneuvered
out into the open, airstrikes and artillery were called down with maximum
effect.

Captain Engels brought down two more flights, striking the exposed
trenches and troops with napalm, bombs, CBU, rockets, and strafing fire.
This proved to be too much for the enemy battalion, which began withdrawing
deeper into the jungle. They were prodded with bombs and napalm from yet
another flight of fighters.

Captain Engels, Captain Keller, and Maj. Robert K. Savage, the Brigade
ALO, continued to run supporting airstrikes all day. The friendly forces
were further augmented at midafternoon by the arrival of two companies from
1/16th Infantry. Most of the continuing airstrikes were directed against
enemy escape routes. Other strikes were directed in support of a ground
sweep back through the now-abandoned trench system. Contact with all enemy
elements in the area ceased about 1800 hours, but airstrikes continued until
dark. The day ended with a total of 59 tactical strike sorties having
supported the contact around LZ George.
The ground sweep of enemy fortifications just before dark produced an enemy body-count of 23. An Army airborne artillery observer reported spotting an additional 50 to 60 enemy bodies farther out in the jungle, where air and artillery strikes had been conducted. From prisoners taken the next day and documents found on the dead, these enemy units were identified as the 32d Battalion, 271st Regiment, and a few members of the 70th Guards Regiment. The prisoners also confirmed that more than 80 Viet Cong were killed during engagements of 31 March, most of them by airstrikes and artillery.

During the night of 31 March/1 April, the entire 271st VC Regiment, reinforced by the 1st Battalion, 70th Guards Regiment, moved into positions for an all-out assault against LZ George. Four or five battalions stationed themselves in the timber directly east of Dobol’s perimeter, while another battalion reoccupied the trench line along the northern woodline.

Just after 0500 hours on 1 April, a 500-round mortar barrage was fired on Dobol, and Devour, the code name from 1/16th (-). The well-bunkered Americans, however, suffered no casualties.

According to the 2d Brigade after-action report, "the final VC assault was made in great depth employing AK-47 (automatic assault) rifles and heavy grenade activity." The main brunt of the assault fell against Dobol's northeast perimeter, which was manned by C Company. The overwhelming attack against that position by hundreds of Viet Cong succeeded in breaching the perimeter where two bunkers were overrun. Heavy fighting was in progress.