1969

The division continued Operation TOAN THANG II as 1969 began, interdicting enemy activity in the northern area of the III Corps Tactical Zone.

The new year opened with major military successes for the 1st Air Cavalry Division. From January 5 to January 12, 267 enemy were killed, and one of the largest munitions caches of the war, some 18 tons of arms and ammunition, was found near Tay Ninh on January 21.

Scout helicopters from C Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, initiated the weapons find when they spotted an ammo box on top of what looked like a bunker. They requested the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry, to move in and check the area. The enemy fought for three days to protect the bunker complex, but ARA, Air Force bomb strikes and artillery finally drove them to quieter parts of the jungle.

When the battalion landed, it found more than 100,000 AK-47 rounds, 35,000 heavy machinegun rounds, more than a ton of explosives and 643 mortar rounds.

The airborne division went water-mobile in January when the 1st Brigade carried out “NavCav” operations. Skytroopers rode the Vam Co Dong River and Bo Bo Canal network on Navy boats. Contact was light, but the effects of the boats and Cav observation helicopters resulted in the location of numerous munitions and weapons caches along the river bank.

In February the Cav’s drive to deny the enemy his sanctuaries and supply caches continued in full swing. After the 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry, found 10,000 pounds of rice in a giant cache on January 31, an area roughly 25 kilometers northeast of Tay Ninh became the scene of repeated discoveries. During the action on the 31st, the division killed 47 enemy and captured 57,750 rounds of small arms ammunition.

The 2nd Bn, 12th Cav, found more than 37,000 pounds of rice on February 1 while the 1st Sqdn, 9th Cav, added another 20,000 pounds of grain. The next day 40,000 pounds were uncovered. The 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry, unearthed 157,400 pounds of rice February 9 and 11, some 23 kilometers north of Tay Ninh. Vietnamese Marines working with the Skytroopers found more than 100,000 rounds of ammo and a number of weapons on February 9 and 12. On February 12, 18 enemy soldiers were killed in a contact with the 1st Sqdn, 9th Cav, which also captured 1,000 pounds of rice that day. For some NVA units, it was going to be a lean year.

As the rice-denial and route interdiction operations continued in northern III Corps, some Cav units moved south to an area northeast of Bien Hoa. Their mission was to find and destroy enemy elements that had slipped past the division’s cordon. The 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry, and the 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry, with other 3rd Brigade elements, made the move on February 3.

Upon arrival in the new operations area, the two battalions straddled the major enemy infiltration routes. The 1st Bn, 12th Cav, assaulted into an area 13 miles northeast of Bien Hoa to establish LZ Cindy, while the 2nd Bn, 7th Cav, set up camp six miles further east at LZ

A machinegunner keeps his “gun” high, dry and ready as he fords a stream.

A hard day in the bush shows heavily on the face of this Cavalryman. A little Quan Loi red dirt is evident, too.
would launch a barrage of rockets and mortars at the base, then sappers and infantry would try to breach the perimeter. They might get no further than the wire; they might even succeed in occupying several bunkers, but inevitably they were thrown back, generally with heavy losses. No matter how many lives it took, the enemy evidently wanted to be able to claim a major victory over a 1st Air Cav unit. It was wishful thinking.

The first attempt came on February 23 at 3:30 a.m. Sixteen of the enemy were killed. They tried again with 1,000 men on March 8. Despite a direct hit on the TOC that killed the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Gorvad, the battalion did not give way. The enemy had blasted through the outer wire with bangalore torpedoes, charging in after hitting the base with rockets, mortars, and nausea gas. A withering hail of small arms fire and point blank artillery stopped the enemy, and the appearance of aerial rocket artillery and Air Force gunships put him into retreat. At least 157 NVA died in the six hour battle.

An enemy battalion came back for more on March 11. Sixty-two of them did not leave alive. Still the enemy did not give up. Perhaps they felt they had to make up for their earlier defeats. It was a vain quest. Two hundred NVA stormed Grant’s berm May 12 and to be hurled back again with the loss of 45 men.

The division paused in its daily tasks on April 23 to say farewell to its fourth commanding general as MG Forsythe left to command the Infantry School at Fort Benning. On May 5th, the division, in a ceremony on the FIRST TEAM pad at Phuoc Vinh, welcomed back a former Sky trooper. MG E. B. Roberts, who had led the 1st Brigade in 1965 and early 1966, returned to command the division. MG Roberts, a 1943 graduate of West Point, served with the 101st Airborne Division in World War II. He had been the first chief of staff of the 11th Air Assault Division at Fort Benning. Most recently, the general had served as assistant division commander of the 9th Infantry Division in the Delta, and as deputy chief of staff (plans and operations), U.S. Army Vietnam. He had just returned from flight school where he earned his wings as a helicopter pilot.

MG Roberts scarcely had settled into his quarters when the division was embroiled in a major combat action. Early on the morning of May 6 the enemy hit LZ Carolyn and LZ Joe. The 2nd Bn, 8th Cav, fought the regimental-size enemy force at Carolyn for four hours, counterattacking to push them out of a portion of the perimeter they occupied. The enemy force was smashed, with 198 killed and 30 taken prisoner. They abandoned 81 AK-47s, 285 grenades and 325 satchel charges.
The weapons of war are numerous, and each passing defense budget sees newer and more advanced machinery and equipment trickle down the supply pipe. But for the infantryman in a firefight, his main weapons remain very much what they were for soldiers of the past; it isn't the same old "pineapple," but it is still a grenade (left), and there is still no greater immediate piece of comforting steel (bottom) than the machinegun.

These are a few of the more familiar sights Cav soldiers see daily in Vietnam. Hardly any soldier who comes to Vietnam and gets beyond Saigon and Long Binh has been able to avoid filling and hefting the mainstay of defensive constructions, the sandbag (far left). It usually isn't hot water, but the field shower (left), just before turning in, can help take some of the grime off. In the war zone the workday starts as soon as there is light (below), and not infrequently it starts before dawn and runs well into the night. War knows no schedule, and "the enemy never sleeps," so the division runs 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week.

In as great demand as the horse and mule of the old Cavalry ever were are the row upon row of the industructible jeeps.
At Joe, 5th Bn, 7th Cav, troopers killed eight of the NVA force that had made a ground probe.

On May 12, the same day as the attack on Grant, the enemy also assaulted LZ Jamie, LZ Phyllis and Quan Loi, the 3rd Brigade headquarters. Eighty-three enemy were killed in the unsuccessful attacks.

The 3rd Brigade was sent south again on May 19. Its mission was to interdict the movement of the 5th Viet Cong Division out of War Zone D toward the heavily populated and strategically crucial Long Binh-Bien Hoa area. Contact was light, but caches of supplies discovered were so large that intelligence indicated the enemy units were withdrawing to the north partially because of food shortages. Nearly 200 tons of rice were captured, 43 tons of salt, six tons of sugar, and 70 tons of other foodstuffs.

The 3rd Brigade also killed 132 enemy and captured 77,070 rounds of ammo. The brigade returned to Quan Loi on June 1.

In the north, the 2nd Brigade discovered one of the largest single caches of the campaign on May 26. B Troop, 1st Sqdn, 9th Cav, first spotted parts of the cache in an area ripped open by a B-52 strike. LOH observers saw fresh trails and bunkers built less than 48 hours before. As 9th Cav “Blues” and elements of the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, searched the area they found weapons and ammunition still in factory cases and bags of rice stacked neatly on logs and covered with green plastic. In all, the Skyrangers uncovered 45 tons of rice, 11 tons of salt, 23 cases of B-40 rockets, 10 cases of .50 caliber ammunition and numerous other supplies.

In southern War Zone C, the 1st Brigade dealt a crushing blow to the tenacious 95th VC Regiment in mid-June. With intelligence indicating an enemy build-up in the base area known as the Crescent, a company was inserted after a B-52 strike. It made contact and pulled back for two more strikes. Two companies were then reinserted and were heavily engaged by the enemy. Again pulling back, four more strikes were massed, edge to edge, one after another. Immediately after the last bombs, six airborne infantry companies combat assaulted into the Crescent and sealed it off. Assisted by 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment tanks they swept the area and drove the enemy across the Saigon River and deep into War Zone C, leaving more than 400 NVA dead.

The enemy launched several ground attacks on landing zones in June. LZ Joy was hit by a mortar and rocket attack of 300 rounds on June 11, followed by an infantry assault. The men of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, killed 35 NVA as they drove off the attack. Thirty-seven NVA died in an effort to overrun LZ Ike on June 18. The 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, killed 90 NVA when the enemy attacked Ike again on June 20.

Despite the military challenge, the division still carried on a vigorous program of civic action. Tons of food were distributed to refugees. The division provided support in building schools, orphanages and dispensaries. Over a three-month period division medics and doctors treated 4,566 patients in 48 Medcaps. A scholarship assistance program was instituted to help needy Vietnamese students. A community relations council and friendship council were common features throughout the area of operations. The councils gave Vietnamese civilians and representatives of the division a chance to discuss mutual problems and their solutions. The division sponsored weekly trips to Saigon for children and teachers from the outlying rural areas, giving them their first view of the national capital.

On the combat side, July was a relatively quiet period. Contact was sporadic and generally light as all three brigades carried on the interdiction campaign in northern III Corps. The calm was broken on August 12 when the enemy lashed out at towns throughout the division’s AO.

LZ Becky, which had taken a smaller attack the night before, was blasted with 400 rounds of mortars and rockets, then attacked by two companies. Despite the heavy bombardment the infantrymen of the 2nd Battalion, 19th Artillery, rallied to defend the base, successfully keeping the enemy from penetrating the perimeter, and, with the help of ARA and Night Hawk birds, forced the NVA to retreat. Fifty-four NVA were killed.

The enemy also tried to take Quan Loi, LZ Jon, LZ Kelly and LZ Caldwell on the 12th. At each base they were repelled. As the enemy tried to melt into the jungle at daylight they were pursued by Cobra and Huey gunships. In a 24-hour period the enemy lost 452 soldiers. Another 242 would be added as the pursuit of the enemy continued over the next two days.

On August 26 elements of the 2nd Brigade began a series of engagements when Charlie Troop, 1st Sqdn, 9th Cav, spotted and fired on 50 enemy in the open. Air strikes, artillery and CS were employed in the area resulting in 12 NVA KIA. The next day 2nd Brigade scouts swooped down on enemy in the open, cutting down eight NVA. Delta Company, 5th Bn, 7th Cav, was fired upon on August 29. The enemy was answered with a devastating display of 1st Cav firepower. Organics, artillery, ARA and air strikes accounted for eight dead NVA. The following morning a sweep of the area revealed an additional 11 NVA KIA. The 5th Bn, 7th Cav, recon platoon atop Nui Ba Ra took small arms, mortar and B-40 fire on the night of August 30. The firefight flickered sporadically through the night and a first light sweep found 10 enemy bodies scattered on the mountain slopes.

LZ Ike came under enemy attack.
again shortly before midnight September 3 when 100 mortar rounds slammed into the base. An estimated company-sized unit hit the wire. The defenders used point-blank artillery fire and Cobra gunships to crush the offensive, killing 33 NVA.

A significant action came September 15 when 2nd Brigade elements fought a fierce firefight with two NVA companies. Air strikes, the 1st of the 9th, ARA and tube artillery were employed during the skirmish with devastating results. When the defeated enemy withdrew they left behind 14 bodies and much ammunition and equipment. Numerous blood trails and discarded bandages indicated that many more wounded or killed enemy had been dragged away. The next day brigade units guarding a downed aircraft called in artillery and air strikes when they heard enemy voices. Ten dead NVA were found the next day, along with 126 mortar rounds.

The division’s main task in the last three months of the year continued to be stopping enemy infiltration. The 3rd Brigade was extremely effective in this mission as its units blocked the Serges Jungle Highway, a network of trails hidden by triple canopy jungle. Sometimes the “trails” could more accurately be described as roads; at other times they were merely dirt tracks a few inches wide. They all were important as routes from Cambodia to complexes of supply and repair facilities in Vietnam.

The 3rd Brigade spread its battalions over the trail, placing them squarely in the path of enemy movement. Maneuver elements branched out through the jungle, finding numerous caches, bunkers, and often the enemy himself. By the end of 1969 the enemy had lost 800 men in the Serges area and 50 caches had been located and destroyed. Prisoners reported that the loss of the caches was forcing enemy units to concentrate their efforts on looking for food, thus drastically limiting their military potential.

In Phuoc Long Province, the 2nd Brigade was having a remarkable effect on the people. Phuoc Long had long been an enemy sanctuary, with the rural villagers forced at gunpoint to build bunkers and supply food to the NVA and VC units. The Skytroopers offered them a way out; freedom in secure areas. Twenty-seven individuals rallied at FSB Mary on September 29. More, many more, were to follow. The brigade’s psyops units used the first ralliers to make heliborne broadcasts and write leaflets to appeal to those who had stayed behind. In the end, 546 Vietnamese deserted the enemy to come under Allied protection by the end of November. The enemy vented its anger at the 2nd Brigade with a sapper attack on the unit’s FSB Buttons headquarters and other brigade firebases on November 4. Some 269 NVA died in the unsuccessful attempts.

The division continued to carry out numerous civic action projects to increase the people’s well being and ability to support themselves, showing them that the best hope for improving their lives was on the Allied side. The division put more medical teams into the villages than ever before, concentrating on “swing” districts, areas safe by day, but frequently visited by the enemy at night. The division band often accompanied the Medcap operations to entertain the villagers and help attract them to where they could be treated.

The division also supplied building materials and know how to help in construction and repair of schools. The 3rd Brigade civic action team distributed school supplies to the children at Quan Loi School. In Tay Ninh, donations from the 1st Brigade helped to build Tay Ninh Girls’ High School, one of Vietnam’s most modern. Nearly 50 percent of the monetary contributions came from the brigade. The school enabled 1,100 students to leave the old, over crowded high school.

A demonstration farm was started, supported by funds from the division’s voluntary civic action fund. The farm showed rural residents how to properly apply modern techniques of farming, concentrating on programs within the resources of the ordinary Vietnamese farmer. The 2nd Brigade imported rabbits and ducks to Phuoc Long Province to permit farmers there to experiment with them as possible new sources of income for the local economy.

In the spirit of Dong Tien, “forward together,” the division was also working with the Vietnamese in the fighting itself. Rural Forces and Civilian Irregular Defense Group soldiers coordinated search and interdiction missions with division elements. Cav helicopters and artillery provided support for Vietnamese units when they made contact. ARVN Airborne brigades and artillery battalions moved into the AOs of the division’s brigades, doubling the pressure on the enemy, who was then faced with the best of both the American and the ARVN forces.

The ARVN units made an important contribution to the division’s ability to shut off enemy supply and infiltration routes. In the early months of 1969 the division had stopped the enemy threat from the 1st and 7th NVA divisions in the area near Tay Ninh. Further east the
2nd Brigade spoiled enemy plans to move down the Adams Road, while the 3rd Brigade blocked the Serges Jungle Highway in the Quan Loi area.

As the enemy continued moving east to escape the division's vise, Cav elements followed. The 2nd Brigade displaced to Song Be, astraddle Communist routes from Cambodia through Phuoc Long Province.

That, however, was about as far as the division could stretch its manpower. More spreading out would mean decreases in division effectiveness. Then the ARVN Airborne units came. With the 1st ARVN Airborne Brigade in the eastern region of the AO the combined allied forces could and did conduct operations all the way east to the boundary between III and II Corps. Along that boundary in November Bravo Troop, 1st Sqdn, 9th Cav, discovered the Jolley Trail, named after the troop's commander, Major Charles A. Jolley.

The enemy had spent nearly a year constructing the network of jungle trails comprising the highway, paving it with bamboo matting to keep it open during the rainy season, and building bunkers every few hundred meters as way stations and bomb shelters. The high speed trails were generally about four feet wide.

With the discovery of the trail enemy hopes of bypassing the 1st Cav were quickly dashed. Air strikes ripped off the concealing canopy, blasted the bunkers and blew away the trail's bamboo bridges. Cav helicopters constantly patrolled the route, looking for any signs of enemy movement.

The division had effectively sealed enemy routes through northern III Corps, and the combination of gunships, grunts and guns was making drastic cuts in enemy manpower. In November the division killed 1,808 enemy. That was the most casualties the FIRST TEAM had accounted for in a single month since the Tet offensive in February 1968, when 1,879 Communists were cut down. In December the enemy again paid a heavy price, with 1,555 killed. In two months the division had depleted enemy ranks by 3,434 men.

For the Communists in northern III Corps it had been an unfortunate year. Moving to bunker complexes to rest and replenish their supplies of food and ammo, they found the complexes destroyed and the caches gone. Walking down trails they had used for years, they met with ambushes on the ground while division helicopters harassed them from above. Entering villages whose residents had fed and sheltered them, they found that the villagers had fled to Allied areas where they could be protected from enemy exploitation. When the NVA hurled themselves against the division firebases that were the source of their troubles, they learned that the airmobile Skytrooper could be an immovable object if his mission was holding a position. What the enemy had taken for granted, domination of northern III Corps, had been taken over by the 1st Air Cavalry Division.

**EPILOGUE**

This, then, has been a brief review of the accomplishments of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) from its activation on July 3, 1965, until December 31, 1969.

The division's history can be subdivided into five parts or phases, and, not surprisingly, these phases coincide pretty much with the tenure of each commanding general.

Each of these phases had flashy and spectacular moments, covered intensively by an omnipresent press corps; but much of the work in all the phases was done quickly, efficiently, and without fanfare. Heroism and dedication—to a cause, to a concept, to an organization—were the common threads throughout the tapestry that tells the Cav's story in Vietnam.

Any retrospective glance at the record
of the FIRST TEAM in Vietnam should immediately reveal certain high points. Certainly the Pleiku Campaign, the relief of Khe Sanh, and the great move south to III Corps stand out as dramatic events. But who can say that the pacification of Binh Dinh Province, the second most populated province in Vietnam, was not equally or more significant in the final accounting. Nor can anyone deny that the complete mastery of the Cav over the North Vietnamese army units in northern III Corps ranks as a military achievement of remarkable proportions.

In the Pleiku Campaign MG Kinnard saw the triumph of the concept he pioneered, and then presided over the dramatics of MASHER/WHITE WING. But there were also for him the unspectacular but nevertheless productive operations called MATADOR, LINCOLN, MOSBY, and CLEARHOUSE.

MG Norton inherited a proven fighting team but soon had to face what every Cav commander since has had to weather—the rotational hump. His Operations CRAZY HORSE and PAUL REVERE were tough and violent and, alas, almost entirely ignored by the press. But THAYER and IRVING played to good audiences; and then there was the start of the long grind destined to end NVA/VC domination of Binh Dinh—Operation PERSHING.

It remained for MG Tolson to terminate that operation and begin others in the same vein. All were highly successful and few were noted by those outside the military family. A log, maintained by the division information office to record the names of news media representatives, reveals that the division appeared to have been forgotten by the press during some months of 1967. This was all changed during Operations PEGASUS and DELAWARE and it was for these that the uninitiated best remember MG Tolson.

MG Forsythe, of course, engineered the move of the Air Cav south to III Corps. It had a flair and demonstrated the marvelous mobility of the airmobile division. But the defense of Saigon by the lightning ripostes of the Cav was equally impressive to those who observed and were aware of the implications of the tactics of those early days in III Corps. Under MG Roberts the division settled down to a grinding, crunching and deadly efficient war of attrition in the three northern-most provinces of the III Corps Tactical Zone, punctuated during the summer and fall of 1969 by brief and violent episodes at the Cav's far-flung firebases.

Few in the division realized at the time that these fiery episodes were but the spasmodic twitchings of a strangling enemy war machine. The slamming of an iron door on three old and well-used infiltration trails has been well-told in this volume. It was done with the determined and tireless efforts of many small units, using airmobility as it never has been used before.

Perhaps this is the one message that comes across louder and clearer than all others. From the Ia Drang to the A Shau to War Zone C, the 1st Air Cav, successfully and repeatedly, changed its tactics and techniques to meet the challenges of terrain, weather and the enemy.

It is this very adaptability—this inherent propensity for doing precisely the right thing at the right time by a finely-tuned combination of men and machines—that has made the FIRST TEAM a consistent winner.

It has been said that the Pleiku Campaign was the triumph of the airmobile concept. In truth, every battle, every campaign, every year, has been the triumph of a concept.
Vinh, the division basecamp in III Corps. Operating 11 miles north of Phou Vinh, brigade elements found 10 well-fortified bunkers that contained 942 B-40 rockets, 300 57 mm recoilless rifle rounds, 60,000 small arms rounds, 150 RPG rockets, and several hundred pounds of medical supplies, rations and clothing. Ten enemy bodies were also found at the scene.

As 1969 began the 2nd Brigade was at Quan Loi, sharing with the 3rd Brigade the dusty camp in the midst of the Terres Rouge Rubber Plantation. On January 21 and 22 elements of the two brigades found one of the biggest caches of the campaign 23 kilometers southeast of An Loc. The NVA was deprived of the use of 112,000 rounds of AK-47 ammunition, 35,000 rounds of .50 caliber machinegun ammunition, 2,800 pounds of explosives, and thousands of other pieces of equipment. From Quan Loi the 2nd Brigade moved to Lai Khe, the basecamp of the 1st Infantry Division. The spring of 1969 was occupied with searches of the dense, B-52 strike-dotted foliage along the Saigon River as the brigade interdicted enemy infiltration routes.

In Lai Khe the brigade developed its "Rat Patrol." Whenever the base received incoming enemy rounds, members of the patrol would scramble to their jeeps, mounted with M-60 machineguns, and begin a search of the perimeter wire for possible breaks, entry of enemy personnel and booby traps or tunnels.

In August the 2nd Brigade moved its headquarters to LZ Buttons near Song Be City. The brigade's mission was to protect that province capital, to locate and neutralize the 5th VC Division, and to interdict enemy movement in Phouc Long Province. Throughout August brigade elements made frequent contact and significant finds of enemy material. In September units continued to effectively combine infantry, artillery, aerial rocket artillery, and air strikes to make life miserable for the enemy in Phouc Long Province.

Throughout this period the Blackhorse Brigade carried on a vigorous program of psychological operations and civic action. In October it became evident that this program was highly effective. A record number of persons rallied to 2nd Brigade firebases and to units in the field.

On October 8, eight enemy soldiers rallied under the Chieu Hoi program and turned themselves over to B Company, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry, while 11 more Vietnamese rallied to 2nd Bn, 12th Cav, at FSB Judy. Ninety-one individuals came to the Blackhorse Brigade on October 11; that was only the beginning. By the end of November 546 Vietnamese had placed themselves under the protection of 2nd Brigade.

For five years the isolated, unmapped villages of the ralliers had served as vital supply points for the Viet Cong and NVA forces passing through. The villagers' reasons for leaving were many. They described life under the Com-

Skymtroopers of Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, move down a hill in search of enemy base areas in northern III Corps.
munists as grim, with the VC closely controlling their economy, their religion and their actions. One third of the food they produced was “purchased” with bonds which, the VC said, would be redeemed after South Vietnam was “liberated”. Another third of their produce had to be “donated” to the enemy. Brigade PSYOPS broadcasts from helicopters offered a way out.

The first refugees who came in the 2nd Brigade were used to make the PSYOPS broadcasts. Their words helped allay the fears that their fellow villagers had about rallying; fears the NVA and VC fanned with tales of beatings and bad treatment for Hoi Chanh. This was one factor in the growing stream of refugees. So were the civic action programs of the brigade, civic actions such as the airlift of rice to hungry villagers and the bringing of ducks and pigs to the people of the Song Be area to help them improve their agricultural economy. Word of these actions filtered back to the VC-held villages, and in some instances VC members themselves led the refugees to the firebases.

The success of the brigade’s programs may have accounted for the desperate sapper attack the NVA launched against FSB Buttons on November 4. The Americans repulsed the attack, and 63 NVA died. Simultaneous attacks against other brigade firebases also failed. As 1969 ended the Blackhorse Brigade continued to block the enemy’s plans for Phouc Long Province.

brigade interdicted the established jungle highways that honeycombed the area.

In January of 1969 the 3rd Brigade opened a VIP Center at Quan Loi, again the unit’s basecamp. The VIP Center would serve as the home of Garry Owen troopers during two day standdowns, enabling them to enjoy steaks, beer and recreation.

On January 21 and 22 the 3rd Brigade combined with the 2nd to find one of the biggest caches of the campaign in a staunchly defended area 23 kilometers southeast of An Loc. Some 112,000 rounds of AK-47 ammo, 35,000 rounds of .50 caliber ammo, more than a ton of explosives, and hundreds of individual weapons were among the finds. A few weeks later Garry Owen companies found an NVA hospital that included classrooms, living quarters, mess and supply bunkers and medical supplies.

The enemy twice attacked the 3rd Brigade command post at Quan Loi in May, combining mortar and rocket attacks with probes by sappers. The enemy’s efforts were futile and he sustained heavy casualties. Thirty-five NVA died on June 12 in an attack on LZ Joy.

On August 12, 1969, elements of the 1st and 7th NVA Divisions and the 5th and 9th VC Divisions struck 1st Cav Division bases throughout III Corps. In the heart of the fighting was the brigade headquarters at Quan Loi. At 1:20 a.m. NVA and VC troops from the 9th VC Division—spearheaded by a crack sapper platoon—threw themselves into the wire and succeeded in penetrating it. A handful of sappers came within 175 meters of the brigade tactical operations center, but fell to the withering fire of eight medics who demonstrated that they knew how to use rifles as well as needles and bandages. By 4:30 a.m. the enemy withdrew, leaving 42 dead men inside the wire.

The 3rd Brigade’s operations in the last four months of 1969 were concentrated on interdicting the Serges Jungle Highway, a vast network of trails spread over part of the southern and most northern halves of Binh Long and Phuoc Long Province. For years the trail had served as an NVA gateway from Cambodia to Vietnam. There were several different types of trails. Major trails were from eight to ten feet wide with hard packed surfaces often paved with bamboo matting. Numerous subsidiary trails branched off to provide easy access, exits and detours. These trails were sometimes only slightly smaller than the major trails, and sometimes merely dirt tracks a few inches wide. All of the trails were hidden from view by triple canopy jungle.

Hidden along the trail were the facilities of the enemy’s 85th Rear Service Group, providing the supplies without which the NVA and VC forces to the south cannot effectively operate. The 85th RSG operated transportation, medical and repair facilities and maintained cache sites, bunker complexes and trail networks. The group serviced

Members of the second platoon, Company D, 2nd Battalion of the 7th Cavalry, advance through a cloud of smoke during a search and destroy mission during Operation JEB STUART.

3rd Brigade
(Continued From P. 55)

away from the LZ. Firefights were frequent throughout November, as the brigade shifted to LZ Sue on the Song Be River. On December 3 the 2nd Bn, 7th Cav, air assaulted into a clearing not far from the Song Be River and was met by a battalion size enemy force equipped with heavy weapons. Outnumbered four to one, the Garry Owen troopers held against three enemy ground assaults and inflicted heavy casualties. Throughout December the
infiltrating troops and guided them to the south.

The brigade's intelligence section had used all the resources available to it to gather as accurate a picture of the “highway” and its operation as possible. In September the division decided that interdiction of the highway was of prime importance if future enemy offensives were to be thwarted. The 3rd Brigade was given the task.

On the basis of its intelligence the brigade assigned each of its battalions a section of the trail to interdict. The first major finding came on September 24 when a brief contact by the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, led to the discovery of six tons of rice that had been destined for enemy forces in the south.

That was only the beginning. As the operation progressed brigade units discovered numerous gardens that the enemy was cultivating. Destruction of crops was put off until just prior to harvest to keep the NVA planning on the yield.

Food was not the only thing the brigade was finding. On October 10 Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, found a cache that included 161 mortar rounds, 100 antitank mines, 300 Chicom grenades and other munitions. Later, in October a VC Hoi Chanh led the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, to numerous caches and bunker complexes, including a VC district military headquarters. On its own, Bravo, 1st of the 5th found a complex of 100 bunkers.

As operations continued, the brigade became familiar with enemy transportation techniques. Bicycles were the primary movers, carrying 500 to 600 pounds of material. Porters were next in priority of use, followed by elephants. Cargo trucks were the least used and restricted to areas in close proximity to Cambodia. Brigade units would encounter and destroy elements of all these transportation modes as the operation progressed.

As 1969 ended the enemy had lost some 800 men in the Serges area, about 500 of whom were in rear service positions; 10 bunker complexes and nearly 50 caches had been located and destroyed; and 97 bicycles captured.

The 3rd Brigade had severely restricted enemy use of a vital lifeline.

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**75th Rangers**

(Continued From P. 197)

1969, North Vietnamese forces shattered a lull in battle activity with coordinated, widespread attacks throughout northern III Corps. Included in the enemy plans was an attack on FSB Buttons.

A Ranger team operating in the heavy jungle nearby tipped the base off to the attack when it spotted 45 NVA troops moving quickly toward the base, toting 107 mm rockets in addition to the ubiquitous AK-47s. It wasn’t long before the enemy force was subjected to a shattering bombardment by both artillery and Cav gunships, called in by the Rangers. Forty-one of the enemy troops were killed. Other enemy units, reeling from their abortive assault on the firebase, were spotted after the attack. The Rangers brought artillery into play, further decimating the enemy ranks.

Late in 1969 the Rangers began running some of their patrols with members of the ARVN Airborne Rangers as part of the Dong Tien (Forward Together) program. After a brief period of mutual familiarization and missions, Captain Richard K. Griffith, the Ranger company commander, said, “The ARVN are fully experienced and qualified. In my opinion, they’re as qualified if not more so than our own teams.”

Throughout the year the Ranger teams continuously reported enemy activity resulting in intelligence information that has been invaluable in spoiling enemy plans and keeping track of his movements.

Said one Ranger, “We don’t just claim to be the best; we are.”
1st Brigade
(Continued From P. 47)

Following Tet, the next distinct operation began April 5 when two battalions, air assaulted into the PEGASUS AO as part of the relief of Khe Sanh, and the brigade command post went right along with them, setting up at LZ Snapper. Enemy resistance was only moderate and the brigade lifted the siege during the next 10 days. It then returned to the vicinity of Quang Tri to prepare for another move.

April 15, 1968 marked the beginning of Operation DELAWARE and the brigade displaced to LZ Stallion in the central A Shau Valley. Maneuver battalions conducted extensive reconnaissance-in-force missions throughout the valley, uncovering many enemy caches, and then redeployed back to the Quang Tri area in mid-May for Operation JEB STUART III.

November 1968 saw the division deploy from the I Corps Tactical Zone to III Corps. Establishing its command post at Tay Ninh, the 1st Brigade initiated offensive operations to interdict infiltration routes and to destroy enemy installations in Tay Ninh Province northwest of Saigon in anticipation of the 1969 Tet offensive. Deployed for the first time in a true cavalry role, screening across a broad front and conducting lightning raids deep into enemy areas, the All the Way Brigade faced a new challenge.

Further redeployments were made in response to the enemy situation during this period as Task Force Duke, composed of elements of the 1st Bn, 8th Cav, moved to LZ Elrod in the Kien Tuong Province of IV Corps. This move made the 1st Cavalry Division, and its 1st Brigade, the only combat units in Vietnam to have operated in all four of the republic’s corps tactical zones.

“Bushmaster” and “mini-cav” operations were stressed during this phase which emphasized the employment of numerous small unit ambushes designed to insure maximum interdiction and to deny the enemy his traditional sanctuary for movement, the night.

North Vietnamese elements immediately began taking immense losses in War Zone C. Besides personnel, they lost equipment of all descriptions, and—possibly more important—a vast amount of rice.

It should be pointed out that the only difference in the disposition of Allied troops in II Corps between the Tet periods of 1968 and 1969 was the presence of the FIRST TEAM. The failure of the enemy to launch an effective offensive in 1969 was in great part due to the pressure applied by 1st Brigade elements in what had previously been an NVA staging area and a major base area—War Zone C.

Indications are that the enemy’s tactical back was broken by Cav interdiction and the loss of huge amounts of rice and other foodstuffs that had been uncovered by the 1st Brigade prior to Tet of 1969.

Operation TOAN THANG III commenced February 17, in AO Montana Scout in northeastern War Zone C, and the brigade continued to uncover the enemy’s supplies. Some 190 tons of rice were captured in February as well as ammunition caches totalling some 20 tons, and another 77 tons of rice were uncovered in April.

Enemy activity during these months focused on LZ Grant which sat astride major NVA infiltration routes. The base was attacked once during February and twice again early in March. The latter two attacks on Grant alone cost the enemy 277 KIA and the total number of enemy killed by the brigade from February through April was 989, a severe and crippling blow in the enemy’s strength.

Combat elements were moved as the enemy’s posture and intentions shifted after April. When one spoke of the enemy in War Zone C at this time it was the 1st NVA Division that was mentioned with the 95C, 18B and 101D Regiments. These enemy units and the 1st Brigade came to know each other well.

Day to day operations were underlined by the tactical drama which pitted the brigade commander, Colonel Joseph P. Kingston, and his staff against the commander of the tough and tenacious 95C Regiment.

When the enemy tried to move, the brigade interdicted with a decentralized pattern of small unit operations along three critical avenues: the northwestern supply base system which was straddled by LZs Carolyn and Ike, the Mustang Trail in central War Zone C, and the Saigon River Corridor to the east.

When large enemy troop concentrations were spotted, however, the technique employed involved massed B-52 strikes followed by multi-unit exploitation.

Staggering and reduced to a flinching defensive posture, the enemy was damaged so severely that he was never able to muster a concentrated campaign.

Operations during this period included two in particular, one in the Crescent area and the other further north, which employed the “pile on” technique with great success against the 95C and 18B Regiments, inflicting such damage that
these enemy units were ineffect. In the months of May and June an incredible number of 1,500 enemy soldiers were killed in combat with the 1st Brigade while another 39 enemy were taken prisoner and six tons of rice were taken.

The opposition was the best that the North Vietnamese Army had to offer; they were not guerrillas or hastily mustered irregulars but experienced, battle-hardened and intelligently led troops. They were also particularly well-equipped, at least until the 1st Brigade brought the pinch to their supply lines.

The enemy licked his wounds during most of July, but apparently felt himself up to facing the brigade again in mid-August when FSB Becky, located close to the Cambodian border, was attacked on the nights of the 11th and 12th. North Vietnamese forces there suffered more than 70 killed.

During the autumn of 1969 increased emphasis was placed on Vietnamization of the war effort while the enemy reeled back from the grinding spring and summer campaigns. The 2nd Brigade of the ARVN Airborne Division joined the 1st Brigade in War Zone C and the two units coordinated operations in the area. New firebases were established, FSBs Vicky and Jackie, and FSB Carolyn was reopened under the flag of South Vietnam. The ARVN brigade's operations center was colocated with the 1st Brigade's in Tay Ninh, and the ARVN maneuver units, mutually supporting with the three battalions of the All the Way Brigade, quickly adapted to the airmobile concept.

The two Allied brigades—the airmobile brigade that once was airborne and the airborne brigade that is now airmobile—were still conducting large scale operations and standing shoulder-to-shoulder in War Zone C through the end of 1969.

11th Air Assault
(Continued From P. 23)

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11th Air Assault
(Continued From P. 23)

The 11th Air Assault Division or the 2nd Infantry Division would be intimately involved in any major troop deployments to Southeast Asia. But because the divisions were so intermixed a decision would have to be made by the Department of the Army... which one?

In February 1965 General Harold K. Johnson, then chief of staff of the Army, visited Fort Benning and conferred with commanders of both divisions. In the 11th Air Assault Division, GEN Johnson received a powerful and brilliant briefing from division staff officers.

During the summer months, the division, brigade and battalion staffs began war gaming situations pegged on a Vietnam mission. Because it was felt that the primary enemy threat at this
Troopers of the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, proudly ride a Soviet truck which they captured in the A Shau Valley.

1st of the 12th
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On the 3rd of July, 1969, Delta Company found a 96-room North Vietnamese underground bunker complex in the jungle 13 miles northeast of Tay Ninh City.

The Skytroopers also found the bodies of 32 enemy dead in the bunkers around the facility. They had been killed in artillery barrages and jet bomber raids which pounded the area the previous day and night after the infantrymen made contact with the enemy.

Inside, the Chargers discovered a mass of medical supplies. Also found were 25 gas masks, eight B-40 rockets, four claymore-type mines, and about 1,000 rounds of AK-47 ammunition.

After searching the area, the men of Delta Company destroyed the bunkers.

On September 19, Delta Company had just finished setting up its night defensive position 20 miles northeast of Tay Ninh City when mortar rounds crashed into the third platoon’s sector of the perimeter. Neither radio nor voice contact could be made with the observation post 50 meters in front of the platoon’s position.

Sergeant Basil Clark called for his squad to cease fire. Then, under heavy NVA small arms fire, he carefully made his way out to the observation post and brought his men back to the safety of the perimeter.

As the mortar barrage continued, both the platoon leader and platoon sergeant were wounded, leaving the platoon in the hands of SGT Clark. He moved about checking wounded and restoring order during the battle.

“My platoon leader told me that if anything ever happened to the platoon sergeant and him, I’d be the one to take over,” said the sergeant. “But I never expected it to happen.”

The heavy mortar and rocket barrage was followed by a ground attack from all sides of the perimeter. The close-in fighting continued throughout the night, making it impossible to evacuate the 12 wounded until the next morning.

When morning came, the company was finally able to evacuate its wounded and search the area. Thirty-five NVA bodies were found. An estimated 50 more enemy were killed, judging from the numerous blood trails.

On September 28 the NVA made a small but fatal mistake when one enemy soldier tried to get a good look at a night defensive position manned by Charlie Company. He was spotted, along with his unit, and four days of hard fighting followed, resulting in 65 enemy deaths.

The first day’s contact began soon after the company, operating in War Zone C about 18 miles northeast of Tay Ninh City, reached its night defensive position and began setting up perimeter defenses.

"Three of us went out to set up the claymore mines when I saw an NVA soldier pop his head out of some thick bamboo and take a good look around," said Private First Class Andy Grant. "I reported seeing him and the company reconnoitered by fire. Then all hell broke loose!"

"They threw in Chicom grenades, B-40 rockets, and used both SKS and AK-47 rifles along with at least one machinegun," added Specialist Four Donavon Haldread. "The enemy covered the whole western side of our perimeter.

The firefight continued until well after dark. Flare ships guided bright streams of lead from Cobra miniguns.

After an early-morning lull, the enemy again attacked the Skytroopers’ position with hand grenades. While the company remained behind cover, artillery pounded the enemy positions and two light observation helicopters dove in with minigun fire.

The third day in the area Charlie Company moved 700 meters to the southeast and dug in again for the night.

On the morning of the fourth day, the company’s resupply helicopter drew sniper fire. The renewed contact prevented the company from moving to another position for the night. Again, overhead cover was constructed and more air strikes were called in.

Two days later, a weary Charlie Company was happy to see the barbed wire and bunkers of LZ Grant. They had inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy and had captured a light machinegun, two AK-47 assault rifles, and two SKS rifles.

In an overnight position near Grant in the last week of October, Alpha Company troopers woke up to impacting mortar rounds and the pop of AK-47s. Air mattresses were the only casualties.

The company immediately fanned out to search the area. By day’s end 11 NVA were eliminated.

The battalion continued operations in the vicinity of Grant through early December, when they were released from the 1st Brigade. The battalion initially moved to the 3rd Brigade AO in western Phouc Long Province, conducting operations from FSB Jerri near Bu Dop. In mid-December the Chargers began working for the 2nd Brigade when the battalion opened FSB Lee near the II Corps-III Corps boundary.

On December 31 Bravo Company discovered an enemy bunker complex near FSB Lee. The complex included 15 by 10 by 15 bunkers, two large bunkers used for classrooms, and a kitchen capable of feeding more than a hundred men. On the same day Echo Company killed four NVA in automatic ambushes near the fire support base.

As the new year began the battalion continued its mission of finding and destroying enemy shelters and caches, and of stopping enemy attempts to infiltrate through the division’s AO.