

Termites, Bully Boys, and the Architect of Search & Destroy: An Assessment of General William E. DePuy as MACV J-3 and Commander of the 1st Infantry Division, Republic of Vietnam, 1964-67

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Abbreviations and Acronyms Used in the Text

| | |
|-----------|---|
| AO | Area of Operations |
| ADC | Assistant Division Commander |
| ARVN | Army of the Republic of Vietnam |
| CIA | Central Intelligence Agency |
| CIDG | Civilian Irregular Defense Group |
| CINCPAC | Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command |
| CJCS | Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff |
| COIN | Counterinsurgency |
| COMUSMACV | Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam |
| CORDS | Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support |
| COSVN | Central Office of South Vietnam |
| CTZ | Corps Tactical Zone |
| DMZ | Demilitarized Zone |
| DoD | Department of Defense |
| DRV | Democratic Republic of Vietnam |
| FDC | Fire Direction Center |
| FF | Field Force |
| FM | Field Manual |
| GVN | Government of South Vietnam |
| H&I | Harassment and Interdiction |
| JCS | Joint Chiefs of Staff |
| JUSPAO | Joint United States Public Affairs Office |
| KIA | Killed in Action |
| LCM | Landing Craft, Mechanized |
| LZ | Landing Zone |
| MAAG | Military Assistance Advisory Group |
| MACV | Military Assistance Command, Vietnam |
| MEDCAP | Medical Civic Action Program |
| NCO | Noncommissioned Officer |
| NLF | National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam |
| NVA | North Vietnamese Army |
| PAT | Provincial Advisory Team |
| PAVN | People's Army of Vietnam; see also NVA |
| PLAF | People's Liberation Armed Forces; see also VC |
| PsyOps | Psychological Operations |
| PsyWar | Psychological Warfare |
| RAND | The RAND Corporation |
| RD | Revolutionary Development |
| RDTF | Revolutionary Development Task Force |
| RF/PF | Regional Forces/Popular Forces |
| ROE | Rules of Engagement |
| RVN | Republic of Vietnam |
| RVNAF | Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces |
| TAOR | Tactical Area of Responsibility |

| | |
|-------|--|
| TO&E | Table of Organization and Equipment |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| VC | Vietnamese Communist, Vietcong |
| VCI | Vietcong Infrastructure |
| WIA | Wounded in Action |

Abbreviations Used in the Notes

| | |
|---------|--|
| CARL | Combined Arms Research Library: Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. |
| USAHEC | U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center: Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. |
| MRCDA | McCormick Research Center and Digital Archive: Cantigny Park, Wheaton, Illinois. |
| NARA II | National Archives & Records Administration II: College Park, Maryland. |
| TTUVA | The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University: Lubbock, Texas. |
| HKJP | Harold K. Johnson Papers |
| SBBP | Sidney B. Berry Papers |
| WCWP | William C. Westmoreland Papers |
| WEDP | William E. DePuy Papers |

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Abstract

As Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations (J-3) at MACV from 1964-1966, General William DePuy served as the main architect of the campaign strategy implemented by General William Westmoreland in fighting both VC and NVA units during the earliest and most critical years of the Vietnam War. Following his role at MACV, DePuy assumed command of the 1st Infantry Division in March 1966 where he exhibited a distinct command philosophy and transformed the organizational culture of the “Big Red One” through a series of directives and tactical innovations. Most historians are critical of Westmoreland’s chosen strategy as well as DePuy’s operational framework. This thesis examines DePuy’s contributions as MACV J-3 and the operational level of war of the Big Red One under his command where strategy is translated into military action. It argues that despite the war’s final outcome, DePuy understood the Communist threat and, also, simultaneously implemented an appropriate counterinsurgency campaign to address that threat.

Keywords: Vietnam War; William E. DePuy; United States Army; Tactical Innovation; Military Culture; Counterinsurgency

Introduction

“Everything is very simple in war, but the simplest thing is difficult. These difficulties accumulate and produce a friction which no man can imagine exactly who has not seen war.”¹

-Carl von Clausewitz, 1832

Throughout the early years of the entry of American ground units into combat missions in the Vietnam War, General William E. DePuy served in an influential capacity directly devising the chosen strategy of the United States military and the allied Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in attempting to prevent the fall of the South Vietnamese government to the North Vietnamese Communist enemy in Hanoi. From May 1964 to February 1966, DePuy served as the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations (J-3), Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), under the overall command of General William C. Westmoreland. In this role, DePuy worked as the primary staff officer in MACV responsible for developing theater strategy and driving operational objectives for forces in the field with the aim to defeat both the Viet Cong (VC) insurgency and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) formations.

Although most historians and analysts focus mainly on Westmoreland and his command decisions in ultimately selecting the strategy to prosecute the war, behind the scenes DePuy is recognized as the architect of that preferred strategy. As a result, DePuy became synonymous with the much criticized big-unit “search and destroy” missions undertaken to reach desired strategic objectives.² Thus, the extent of DePuy’s contributions in this role requires further

¹ Carl Von Clausewitz. *On War*, Translated by J.J. Graham (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997), 66.

² John M. Carland, *Combat Operations Stemming the Tide: May 1965 to October 1966* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 2000), 51.

analysis in identifying and understanding certain decision points and recommendations he made as Westmoreland's most trusted strategic adviser.³

In March 1966, following a successful assignment at MACV, Westmoreland selected DePuy to command the 1st Infantry Division. Known as the "Big Red One," the 1st Infantry Division's long and storied combat record dated back to World War I, where its performance on the Western Front and then, subsequently, in World War II on the battlefields of North Africa, Sicily, and mainland Europe after taking part in the D-Day invasion on the Omaha beachhead distinguished the unit as one of the most famous and decorated outfits in the United States Army.

As one of the first United States Army divisions sent to Vietnam in 1965, the unit's tactical area of responsibility (TAOR) was within the III Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ).⁴ Located just north of the South Vietnamese capital city of Saigon, the zone extended all the way west to the Cambodian border and contained the enemy strongholds known as War Zone C, War Zone D, and the Iron Triangle.⁵ III CTZ also included numerous highly-trafficked infiltration routes from the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the suspected location of the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), the ever-elusive North Vietnamese headquarters in overall command of Communist forces operating in South Vietnam. Hence, this exceedingly complex area of operations was characterized by both the highly populated areas around Saigon and, also, the dense jungle enclaves and base camps used by Communist forces of the B2 Front to build and sustain combat power throughout South Vietnam. As such, control of the III CTZ was deemed as vitally decisive

³ David Halberstam, *The Best and The Brightest* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2001), 542. According to Halberstam, DePuy was Westmoreland's "most trusted adviser on strategy."

⁴ James S. Wheeler, *The Big Red One: America's Legendary 1st Infantry Division from World War I to Desert Storm* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2007), 419.

⁵ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 74.

terrain to the strategic objectives of both MACV and COSVN resulting in a hotly contested and crucially important battleground throughout the entire conflict.

As a division commander, DePuy undertook a unique responsibility in that he went from directly devising the theater campaign strategy in his previous staff assignment, to then, implementing that strategy into military action at both the operational and tactical levels of war. DePuy's transition from theater level strategist to division commander in the field provides a unique vantage point with which to assess American military strategy in a highly complex counterinsurgency conflict.

DePuy's combat record fighting in the European theater in World War II undoubtedly influenced his distinct command philosophy for the rest of his military career. During the war, he served as a highly decorated 24-year-old battalion commander in the 90th Infantry Division, against battle hardened Wehrmacht forces in the final sweeping ground offensives against Nazi Germany. His forceful personality coupled with a penchant for clearly articulating tactical solutions and innovations as a result of his formative combat experiences in western Europe also served him well in rising to the highest positions of responsibility in the U.S. Army throughout a thirty-six-year military career.⁶

Most historians and critics of DePuy assert that he incorrectly applied the overly conventional offensive mindset used to achieve Allied victory on the battlefields of Europe in World War II to the complex counterinsurgency campaign the United States military found itself thrust into in Vietnam. These critics assert that he fundamentally misunderstood the enemy threat

⁶ Historian Graham Cosmas described DePuy's personality as "highly intelligent, articulate, and forceful" and that he "was perhaps Westmoreland's most influential counselor on a wide range of matters until he left the MACV Operations Directorate." Cosmas quoted LTG William K. Jones, USMC, who stated "there was much truth to the assertion that the chain of command was Westmoreland to DePuy to the field." In Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 2006), 276.

and misapplied military force, greatly contributing to the eventual American defeat.⁷ Following the war, the U.S. military establishment attempted to understand how after nearly every engagement with the enemy resulted in tactical success according to the standard metrics of casualty ratios and seizing contested terrain, the United States still managed to lose the war. Many critics pointed squarely at DePuy asserting that he focused too heavily on American firepower, technology, big-unit operations, and “body-count” metrics as part of the attrition strategy waged against the Viet Cong and NVA formations at the expense of the pacification measures deemed essential to secure and support the South Vietnamese rural population.⁸

My research into the specific contributions of DePuy in his role as MACV J-3 shows that he actually understood the unique enemy threat and operational environment to develop a cogent strategic concept for the commanders in the field. To do so, it will identify, describe, and analyze the operations and tactics implemented by the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam under the command of DePuy to demonstrate how those chosen methods fit into the United States Army’s overall strategy for fighting both the Viet Cong insurgency and more conventional NVA units. In analyzing these operations, this study will also tackle the question of how the 1st Infantry Division changed its tactics and doctrine to deal with flexible and resilient enemy forces to determine whether or not these tactics remained effective in fighting the Communist enemy. I

⁷ For narratives on DePuy’s role in crafting the attrition strategy and utilizing conventional force in Vietnam see Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 197. See also David Maraniss, *They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace Vietnam and America October 1967* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 154. See also Thomas E. Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2012), 242. See also Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), 11.

⁸ For the purpose of this study, *pacification* is defined as “the military, political, economic, and social process of establishing or re-establishing local government responsive to and involving the participation of the people.” In Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2006), 387. *Revolutionary Development* is defined as “those civilian, military, and police actions taken to eliminate [enemy] political and military activity and to enhance the economic, political, and social development of a community.” In Gregory A. Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 35. *Pacification* and *Revolutionary Development* are used interchangeably throughout this work just as they were during the Vietnam War era.

believe that a distinct tactical-level subculture emerged in the Big Red One under the command of DePuy as a direct result of his leadership and the challenges posed by the operational environment. This tactical-level subculture undergirded significant change at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels in the post-Vietnam Army.

Furthermore, this thesis will challenge the widely popular belief that DePuy and the 1st Division solely focused on pursuing and bringing to battle main force Viet Cong and NVA battalions utilizing excessive firepower at the expense of conducting the pacification measures deemed necessary in waging a successful counterinsurgency. In doing so, it will consider the ever-changing enemy situation on the ground at the time and the unique threat posed to the 1st Infantry Division, partnered ARVN units, and the Government of South Vietnam (GVN) within the III CTZ to determine if pursuing enemy main-force units was, in fact, the appropriate course of action to follow during the crucial years of 1966 to 1967.

Most scholarly attention on the Vietnam War focuses on broad sweeping national political and strategic military shortcomings to explain the American defeat. Other works, focus on a specific unit operating in a specific CTZ or province during a specific time frame of the conflict.⁹ These areas studies acknowledge the particular problem sets that distinctly define that area and the individual units operating therein. These studies also account for the “mosaic” nature of revolutionary warfare in which vastly multifaceted complications defined by distinct enemy objectives, unique cultural dynamics, and the challenges posed by varying terrain alter the

⁹ See Eric M. Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991). In this work, Bergerud focuses on the operations of the U.S. Army’s 25th Infantry Division in Hau Nghia Province operating in the III CTZ from 1965-1970. See also Kevin M. Boylan, *Losing Binh Dinh: The Failure of Pacification and Vietnamization, 1969-1971* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2016). Boylan focuses on the U.S. Army’s 173rd Airborne Brigade and its pacification campaign in Binh Dinh Province (II CTZ) during the latter years of the war.

scope of the operations conducted in those particular areas.¹⁰ As such, studies such as these provide a depth of insight to gauge the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of specific actions by American, Free World, and South Vietnamese military units and the various civilian agencies and programs undertaken in these areas. This study will do the same for the 1st Infantry Division operating in the III CTZ under the command of General William DePuy from March 1966 to February 1967.

¹⁰ Phillip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History 1946-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 25. See also Phillip B. Davidson, *Secrets of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1990), 20-21. In these works, Davidson defines and discusses the “mosaic” nature of revolutionary warfare in Vietnam. LTG Davidson (USA Ret.) served as the MACV J-2 (Intelligence Officer) from May 1967 to May 1969 where he worked under both Westmoreland and Abrams.

Figure 1



Source: George L. MacGarrigle, *Combat Operations Taking the Offensive: October 1966 to October 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1998).

Chapter One: Questions of Strategy

“Operation plans should, in the best of all possible worlds, pursue military objectives which coincide with strategic goals. In this usage and for working purposes, political and strategic goals are basically synonymous. In the case of Vietnam, the strategic goal was to prevent the spread of Communist power in Asia - the political goal was to preserve the territorial and political integrity of South Vietnam. This matching of political goals and military objectives is a difficult and sometimes delicate business.”¹¹

-General DePuy, *Army Magazine*, 1986

A school of thought which permeates throughout the current literature on the Vietnam War is that the United States could have in fact won the war against the Communists yet suffered from flawed strategic aims. Although the United States Army fared well tactically against the enemy, the reliance on search and destroy operations, which DePuy devised and endorsed as the MACV J-3, and which the 1st Division under his command played a significant role during the early years of the war, produced results which were misleading for both the American government and the American people.¹² Without the support of both the government and the people, the war quickly lost appeal amongst the American populace. Thus, through uncovering and focusing on the specific contributions of DePuy at MACV and the tactics, techniques, and procedures of the 1st Infantry Division he commanded thereafter, may help to explain exactly how, if at all, strategic aims were flawed within the United States Army during this time period.¹³

¹¹ William E. DePuy, “Vietnam: What We Might Have Done and Why We Didn’t Do It,” *Army* 36, no. 2 (February 1986): 22-40, in *Selected Papers of General William E. DePuy: First Commander, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1 July 1973*, Comp. Colonel Richard M. Swain, Ed. Donald L. Gilmore and Carolyn D. Conway (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1994), 349.

¹² Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), 21.

¹³ Of note, the United States Marine Corps also fell under the MACV command structure; however, their influence on MACV’s selected strategy, though minimal, falls outside the purview of this study.

The strategy of the United States military prosecuted by MACV in the earliest years of the American entry into the conflict from 1965-1968, and particularly the decisions made by MACV's commander, General William C. Westmoreland, are often criticized for the eventual defeat to the Communist North Vietnamese. Most historians are critical of Westmoreland's decision to follow a strategy of attrition in which large big-unit "search and destroy" operations were used to kill enemy forces to satisfy "body count" metrics.¹⁴

Consequently, three main schools of thought emerged to explain the American defeat. The first was that MACV failed to implement a proper counterinsurgency strategy as a result of an inability to adapt and learn in an unconventional conflict. The second was that both the United States Government and MACV failed in applying enough political and military pressure on the Communist North Vietnamese government in Hanoi to secure victory. More recently, a third school of thought argued that Westmoreland's strategy of bringing to battle enemy main-force units was necessary in the earliest years of the war to provide the security needed to fully enact pacification measures however, by the time MACV established a semblance of security, political support for the war on the American home front was long gone.

Written in 1982, one of the first seminal works that attempted to explain the American failure in Vietnam was the book *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* by U.S. Army colonel Harry G. Summers. Summers, a veteran of the conflict and U.S. Army War College instructor at the time, offered a strategic analysis of the conduct of the Vietnam War in this work with a central thesis that asserted that "a lack of appreciation between military theory

¹⁴ For further narratives focused on the attrition strategy see Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 46. See also George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979, 2002), 179. See also Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 182. For a counter narrative on the attrition strategy see Daddis, *Westmoreland's War*, 65-91. Daddis goes so far as labeling the attrition strategy as a "myth," arguing that Westmoreland used the term to suggest that the war would be a "prolonged" conflict within the context of the military lexicon of the day.

and military strategy (especially the relationship between military strategy and national policy) led to a faulty definition of the nature of the war.”¹⁵

Summers proposed that the Viet Cong guerillas acted as a sideshow for the NVA who had hoped to decisively win the war in terms of conventional battles with American forces.¹⁶ Overall, his main argument was that the United States lost the war in Vietnam on the strategic level because the military could not widen the war for a long enough period of time with the proper force levels in country and also, widen the geographic scope of the conflict to subdue the Communist enemy. Therefore, although the U.S. military was able to win almost all engagements at the tactical level of war, they suffered a strategic defeat at the hands of the North Vietnamese.¹⁷

Summers contended that the over reliance on pure “body count” statistics (the main component of search and destroy operations) produced results that were misleading for both the American government and the American people.¹⁸ In essence, although most engagements between American forces and the Communists resulted in a larger amount of enemy dead, the losses incurred were not acceptable to American military leaders and their elected civilian political leaders back in Washington, D.C.

Another of the earliest and most critical additions to the historiography of the Vietnam War was Andrew F. Krepinevich’s work entitled *The Army and Vietnam* written in 1986. In this work, Krepinevich assessed the strategy of attrition that the United States executed in the beginning years of the war in Vietnam under the command of General Westmoreland. Krepinevich, a former U.S. Army lieutenant colonel and defense policy analyst, asserted in his

¹⁵ Summers, *On Strategy*, xiii.

¹⁶ Summers, *On Strategy*, 76.

¹⁷ Summers, *On Strategy*, 1.

¹⁸ Summers, *On Strategy*, 21.

central argument that the United States could have fared much more successfully in the earlier years of the war had the Army concentrated more on the pacification strategy in the villages of South Vietnam rather than on large-scale search and destroy operations to destroy the main force NVA units which he saw as a secondary threat.¹⁹

In stark contrast to Summers, Krepinevich asserted that this pacification strategy would have denied the enemy access to the population, eventually leading to a loss of Communist support. This belief runs parallel to the school of thought that asserts that had the United States relied much more on counterinsurgency type operations, rather than a strategy of attrition, success against the Communist North Vietnamese forces would have been achieved much more quickly for the United States. Krepinevich asserted that as a result of the United States Army not being effectively trained or organized to fight a counterinsurgency campaign at the beginning of the war, and its failure to adapt both its doctrine and force structure to these circumstances quickly enough, led to the eventual defeat.²⁰ Krepinevich outlined the overreliance on firepower and body count statistics that the U.S. military focused on to measure progress in the earliest years of the attrition strategy and how an overreliance on technological innovations such as the helicopter led to this faulty strategy.²¹

In Eric Bergerud's book entitled *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province*, the author, a historian and former researcher at the U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH) in Washington, D.C. conducted a case study on the operational level of war in the South Vietnamese province of Hau Nghia from 1963-1973. Writing in 1991, Bergerud focused on this important province in the III CTZ and most of his analysis at both the strategic

¹⁹ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 259.

²⁰ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 37.

²¹ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 198.

and operational levels of war as a case study for larger implementation of U.S. strategic initiatives across South Vietnam as a whole.

Bergerud argued that although MACV focused on a strategy of attrition through large sweeping operations, they also focused heavily on pacification measures but ultimately, no matter the strategy implemented, the war in Vietnam was in fact unwinnable for the United States given both the political and military realities on the ground.²² Therefore, Bergerud fell more in line with the school of thought formulated by Krepinevich and disagreed with Summers that a more aggressive main force strategy enacted more quickly by MACV could have prevailed in Vietnam.

Bergerud traced the various strategic initiatives implemented by MACV and the U.S. Army's 25th Infantry Division in particular in their attempt to defeat the Viet Cong insurgency and NVA units in Hau Nghia. He concluded that MACV's strategy failed as a result of the following realities on the ground which were "virtually beyond solution."²³ First, the South Vietnamese Government (GVN) lacked legitimacy among the rural peasant population and American attempts to help the Saigon government to reach legitimacy repeatedly failed. Second, the strength of the Viet Cong in the rural areas to maintain popular support despite often following a ruthless destructive strategy was never weakened substantially enough by American efforts. Third, MACV did in fact focus on pacification measures despite an overuse of big-unit and highly technological firepower-based doctrine but saw marginal successes. Finally, the only strong successes for MACV in the province were a result of inflicting military damage to the Viet Cong and not through influencing the peasantry to their side.²⁴ In combination, Bergerud

²² Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat*, 335.

²³ Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat*, 3.

²⁴ Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat*, 3-5.

argued that these factors inhibited tangible success for the United States military on the battlefield.

In yet another addition to the historiography, Lewis Sorley, a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel and military strategy expert, discussed his opinions on where the United States Army fell short of success in Vietnam in his book *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam*. Written in 1999, his central argument was that General Westmoreland's implementation of the search and destroy strategy concentrated too heavily on the main force war in the jungles and therefore, was not as successful as his successor General Creighton Abrams and his strategy of "clear and hold" which fought the enemy on all levels, the most important of which was in the villages where pacification measures were deemed most important.²⁵ Sorley's argument rested on the belief that the threat which the Viet Cong posed in the highly populated areas was the most dangerous and needed to be dealt with first in order for U.S. forces to meet strategic objectives. This assessment on the threat posed by the Viet Cong fell in line with the arguments made by Krepinevich.

Sorley contended that when Abrams replaced Westmoreland as commander of MACV after the North Vietnamese launched the Tet Offensive in January 1968, Abrams' strategy known as the "One War Concept" fundamentally changed the way in which the war was fought leading to immediate successes.²⁶ In describing the concept, and its fundamental success, Sorley wrote that Abrams recognized that the war was not "...a guerilla war on one hand, or a conventional war on the other. The fact is that it was both, in varying degrees and at different times and places. The "one war" approach recognized and accommodated this pervasive thought shifting reality."²⁷

²⁵ Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (Orlando, FL: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1999), 8.

²⁶ Sorley, *A Better War*, 18.

²⁷ Sorley, *A Better War*, 18.

As a result of shifting the strategy from attrition to more of a focus on pacification of the rural population in the countryside, coupled with a more active approach in arming the ARVN to play a larger role in the fight against the Communists, Sorley argued that Abrams succeeded in turning the war around by 1970 and boldly claimed that “the fighting wasn’t over, but the war was won.”²⁸ This contention of a sudden shift in the strategy focusing more on pacification lies in stark contrast to the assertions made by Bergerud that even under Westmoreland’s big-unit attrition strategy, the U.S. Army still in fact implemented a simultaneous pacification program in the years up to 1968 albeit with less focus and emphasis.

U.S. Army lieutenant colonel John Nagl’s work entitled *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* further added to the historiography on the Vietnam War as a case study in counterinsurgency warfare. Written in 2002, Nagl compared and contrasted the strategy and tactics of the British Army in Malaya (1948-1960) and the American military in Vietnam (1961-1975) through the lens of organizational culture. In his central argument, Nagl maintained that the British military was more of a “learning organization” than the United States military and thus fared much more successfully in their counterinsurgency campaign.²⁹ Nagl, quite critically, wrote that the U.S. Army’s failure in Vietnam “demonstrates the triumph of the institutional culture of an organization over attempts at doctrinal innovation and the diminution of the effectiveness of the organization at accomplishing national objectives.”³⁰ Thus, MACV’s failure to adapt to the construct of the unconventional battlefield in Vietnam was the crux of Nagl’s argument.

²⁸ Sorley, *A Better War*, 217.

²⁹ John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), ix.

³⁰ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 115.

Falling in line with the school of thought advocated by Krepinevich, Nagl asserted that the MACV strategy implemented throughout the war did not adapt quickly enough or place enough emphasis on the threat posed by the Viet Cong in the rural countryside in the earlier years of American involvement. As a result, the Viet Cong were never effectively separated from the popular support of the people – a tenet deeply critical in fighting and succeeding in a counterinsurgency.³¹

As a result of entering the conflict with an organization and doctrine that was well suited to fight a more conventional war in Europe against the Soviets, Nagl argued that the U.S. Army floundered when faced with the complexity of the situation in Vietnam. He asserted that the Army's organizational culture was "ineffective in recognizing poor performance, suggesting doctrinal innovation, gaining organizational consensus behind new doctrine, and disseminating the changes throughout the army."³² Although changes were implemented at the tactical level, the U.S. Army as a whole was unable to implement changes to break through the "overly conventional attrition-based doctrine" that defined their strategy. An important distinction that Nagl made was in the differing tactics used in fighting a counterinsurgency and he outlined the characteristics that make this type of warfare unique and so difficult to prosecute as compared to conventional war.

A retired U.S. Army colonel and former instructor at the United States Military Academy at West Point, Gregory Daddis added a new outlook to the historiography on the Vietnam war in his work entitled *Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam*. Writing in 2014, in blunt contrast to Lewis Sorley, Daddis' central argument was that General Westmoreland did not simply focus on a strategy of attrition that involved large conventional

³¹ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 115.

³² Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 116.

“big-unit” operations but rather, did in fact also focus on pacification measures, equipping and training ARVN units, and strengthening the political infrastructure of the South Vietnamese government during his time as MACV commander.³³ Daddis argued that the success of General Abrams was more a result of diminished combat power on the side of the North Vietnamese as a result of losses incurred during the Tet Offensive rather than a result of the “One War Concept” advocated by Sorley.³⁴

Daddis argued that Westmoreland’s strategic blunders were more in his failure to clearly articulate his policies to both his commanders in the field as well as the American public writ large thus leading to a failed strategic and operational outcome.³⁵ Without the support required from Washington, D.C., and the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, Daddis argued that Westmoreland was forced to rely on massive firepower and search and destroy operations to beat back the threat posed by the NVA before pacification programs could be implemented to full effect.³⁶ As the political and military situations of the South Vietnamese continued to deteriorate as the war continued, Daddis argued that Westmoreland attempted to control what he knew best – using the military forces at his disposal to execute the war. Finally, Daddis concluded “Perhaps the time has come to envisage Westmoreland not as a bad general, but rather as a good general fighting a bad war.”³⁷ Thus, his conclusion, in similar fashion to Bergerud, attested to the messy and extremely complex nature of the war that the United States military found itself committed to in Vietnam.

³³ Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, 75.

³⁴ Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, 171.

³⁵ Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, 77.

³⁶ Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, 77.

³⁷ Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, 183.

Overall, the historiography on the American strategy implemented by MACV in the Vietnam War is fraught with many schools of thought. Wars limited in nature and fought against a combination of both conventional and guerrilla forces are extremely difficult to prosecute in the absence of an effective all-encompassing strategy or one that does not consider a variety of variables based on the ever-changing nature of the battlefield and enemy inputs. Ultimately, the enemy also has a strategy and a vote in the battlefield equation. Uncovering and analyzing the extent of DePuy's understanding of the complexity of the conflict while serving as the MACV J-3 will provide crucial insight into the strategic situation as it unfolded in the earliest years of the American commitment in South East Asia. Furthermore, analyzing the operations of the 1st Infantry Division under his command will reveal how his specific ideas on the application of military force in waging this limited war fit into the United States Army's strategic goals in the critical years of 1964 to 1967 at the escalation of the American military commitment.

Chapter Two: World War II and Formative Experiences

*“We went to war with a batch of incompetents in charge. That incompetence trickled down and caused the tactical failures...and the incredible casualties. All this was indelibly stamped on my mind and attitude ever after for both good and bad.”*³⁸

-General DePuy on the 90th Infantry Division in WWII

Born on 1 October 1919, in Jamestown, North Dakota, DePuy’s military career began when he enlisted in the South Dakota National Guard at the age of eighteen where he served as a corporal and squad leader in Company B, 109th Engineers, 34th Infantry Division. By 1941, after participating in the Reserve Officer’s Training Corps, he graduated from South Dakota State University where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in economics and a commission in the Army reserve as a second lieutenant of infantry.³⁹

During World War II, DePuy served as an officer in the 90th Infantry Division. Known as the “hard luck” division, the 90th had one of the worst combat records of all the American infantry divisions that fought in the European theater of operations. Poorly trained and oftentimes badly led, the unit suffered one of the highest casualty rates in the Normandy breakout. Towards the end of his career DePuy wrote, “In Normandy, the 90th Division was a killing machine – of our own troops!”⁴⁰

At just twenty-four years old, he commanded the 1st Battalion, 357th Infantry Regiment. DePuy’s experiences in the 90th taught him many lessons which remained with him for the rest of his military career. Most important among these were notions on leadership and tactics. He witnessed how ineffective leadership had resulted in needless casualties. Rather than launching

³⁸ William E. DePuy, *Changing an Army: An Oral History of General William E. DePuy, USA Retired* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988), 90.

³⁹ Henry G. Gole, *General William E. DePuy: Preparing the Army for Modern War* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 1-9.

⁴⁰ DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 202.

direct assaults on fortified enemy positions, DePuy learned to conduct flanking attacks, envelopments, and turning movements to the rear. He witnessed the devastating effects artillery and airpower had inflicted on enemy forces in the push towards Germany.

DePuy also took many lessons from the Wehrmacht that he would later incorporate into his own tactical repertoire. He admired the way in which the Germans camouflaged and tied in their defenses with the terrain while also developing engagement areas where they would emplace their direct fire weapon systems. DePuy also appreciated their use of direct fire weapons systems to suppress the enemy and the constant flow of information and directives from German leaders to their soldiers in the midst of battle.⁴¹

Following World War II, DePuy found himself back in Germany serving in the 4th Infantry Division where he commanded 2-8 IN. Still a lieutenant colonel, DePuy formed a relationship with the 2nd Armored Division's assistant division commander, Brigadier General Hamilton H. Howze. Howze had pioneered the "overwatch" technique in which tanks would assault an objective or maneuver only when suppressive direct fires covered their approach. Naturally, DePuy felt that infantry units could implement this same method and he began to develop these techniques.⁴²

In 1954, DePuy outlined his developments on the implementation of the overwatch concept for infantry units in a series of writings entitled "Mission Complete!" and "The Guide to Competence." These training pamphlets codified a series of battle drills at the squad and platoon level and outlined his development of movement formations and techniques.⁴³ Four years later he

⁴¹ Paul H. Herbert, *Deciding What Has to be Done: General William E. DePuy and the 1976 Edition of FM 100-5, Operations (Leavenworth Paper, Number 16)* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Defense Technical Information Center, 1988), 15.

⁴² Herbert, *Deciding What Has to be Done*, 17-18.

⁴³ See William E. DePuy, "Mission Complete! [Platoon Battle Drill, 1954]," in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 1-7. See also William E. DePuy, "The Guide to Competence [Rifle Squad Battle Drill, 1954]," in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 9-16.

wrote an article for *Army Magazine* entitled “11 Men 1 Mind” where he stressed the importance of the rifle squad as a critical component to success on the battlefield. Labeling the squad as “an idea shared by a group of men,” he maintained that a common doctrinal language was required to meld each individual member of the squad into a team.⁴⁴

DePuy did not see service in the Korean War but served in a variety of other assignments in the period after World War II. After learning to speak and write Russian, he served as a military attaché to Hungary. DePuy also conducted clandestine work for the Central Intelligence Agency on operations in China and other Asian countries. By the Spring of 1962, he served as the Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff for Counterinsurgency where he developed concepts for guerrilla warfare, psychological operations, and civic action. All of these previous assignments and combat experiences shaped DePuy in one way or another for the role he would assume in Vietnam.

⁴⁴ William E. DePuy, “11 Men 1 Mind,” *Army* 8, no. 8 (March 1958): 22-24, 54-60, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 17-24.

Chapter Three: The MACV Years

“Everybody recognized that there were several levels of war going on simultaneously, ranging all the way from the very quiet, subversive political war and use of terror down in the hamlets and villages, up to the use of main forces, with everything in between.”⁴⁵

-General DePuy

In May 1964, DePuy arrived in Vietnam where he was assigned as the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations (J-3). At the time, the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) under the command of General Paul D. Harkins was still in command. Shortly thereafter, the MAAG was absorbed under MACV and, on 1 August 1965, General Westmoreland, who had previously served as Harkins’ deputy assumed command of MACV.⁴⁶ DePuy noted that during this transition, MACV began to slowly shift their focus from advising and training ARVN forces “to a staff that was increasingly concerned with operations.”⁴⁷

For the next twenty-two months, DePuy served in an influential capacity assisting Westmoreland in devising a theater strategy. As his operations officer, DePuy was responsible for a myriad of important tasks. Among these were to develop a strategic concept and a corresponding concept of operations to respond to the Communist’s intent to overthrow the government of South Vietnam. Once the decision was made in Washington to introduce American ground units, DePuy’s contributions within the MACV Operations Directorate intensified as Westmoreland relied on DePuy to convey his commander’s intent to his subordinate elements in the field. DePuy also played a vital role in implementing policy decisions made in Washington into MACV’s deployment of forces throughout South Vietnam.

⁴⁵ DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 124-125.

⁴⁶ Cosmas, *MACV*, 123.

⁴⁷ DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 121.

A Battleground of Political Struggle

“It is our conviction in J-3 that unless we devise a system whereby we can go into the minds of every member of the RVNAF and eventually through them and other public officials into the minds of all the effective leadership in this country, and lead them into a conviction that the government can and must win for good and logical reasons, we will have no chance in the long run of seeing any return on our very extensive investment.”⁴⁸

-DePuy to Westmoreland, 1 February 1965

Although common historical narratives portray both Westmoreland and DePuy as military strategists wedded to the conventionally minded blueprint for victory on the World War II battlefield, the historical evidence suggests that both studied and well understood the unique and monumental challenges posed by the Communist threat in South East Asia. As career soldiers dedicated to their craft, both men attempted to confront the complex mission assigned to them through analyzing the particular characteristics distinct to the operational environment while conceiving a viable strategic plan. A preliminary step in the military planning process dictated an attempt to understand the unique threats posed by the enemy force MACV confronted and to place it within the construct of the operational environment. Only then could strategic plans move forward with any hope of successful implementation.

Of course, their analysis, conducted within the parameters of the political restraints imposed by the United States government coupled with the complicated and messy political environment of South Vietnam, proved daunting. The ultimate mission to create a stable and independent non-Communist government in South Vietnam was no simple undertaking.⁴⁹

Working within these parameters to craft a strategic concept, both men understood that in order

⁴⁸ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from BG DePuy to General Westmoreland, “Motivation,” dated 1 February 1965, p. 3, Box 4A, Folder 8, Correspondence, William E. DePuy Papers (hereafter cited as WEDP), U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania (hereafter cited as USAHEC).

⁴⁹ U.S. Grant Sharp and William C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 6.

for the United States to achieve a successful outcome in the conflict, the GVN had to offer a more credible alternative to the people of South Vietnam over that of the Communist regime. Not only would MACV and the GVN have to build a broad base of support amongst the people, they would also have to find a way to propagate and maintain morale amongst the RVNAF to support the GVN. By early 1965, with both the GVN and the ARVN in complete disarray, accomplishing either of these objectives presented a highly formidable task.

In the first week of February 1965, DePuy's J-3 shop crafted two memoranda for Westmoreland which reveal an attempt to grapple with the challenge of winning the "hearts and minds" of the people to the side of the GVN. Both documents disclose an effort within the MACV Directorate to come to grips with the tough road that lie ahead in making headway to convince the South Vietnamese people that they could identify with the shaky political platform pushed by Saigon. These documents also reveal that Westmoreland and DePuy, even in the earliest days of American intervention, understood and acknowledged that the crux of success or failure rested on the political allegiance of the people.

Simultaneously, MACV had to contend with the ever-strengthening propaganda machine of the Politburo in Hanoi which promulgated to the South Vietnamese population the narrative of the Americans as "foreign invaders," the ARVN as a "puppet army," and the GVN as a "puppet regime." Although American ground units were not committed to combat missions until two months later with the amphibious landing of the U.S. Marines at Da Nang, American advisors had been on ground since the 1950's with a front row seat to the struggle. DePuy's writings at the time exemplify an attempt to improve the performance of the ARVN and strengthen the legitimacy of the GVN.

At the same time, his focus also articulates a firm understanding of the political nature of revolutionary warfare at the grassroots level. Though his formative experiences were grounded on the conventional battlefields of Western Europe in World War II, DePuy's previous assignments and schooling had prepared him well for the realization that the application of overwhelming military force in and of itself would not garner success in the new wave of revolutionary wars of national liberation. DePuy realized that this was a type of warfare in which other factors played a significant role.

On 1 February 1965, DePuy produced a memorandum for Westmoreland entitled "Motivation" that substantiated this point. Identifying motivation amongst the South Vietnamese as the "key to success or the cause of failure" to the ultimate outcome of the war in Vietnam, DePuy wrestled with the conundrum that the Communists had seemingly mastered the "technique" while the South Vietnamese struggled. DePuy highlighted a number of his own observations amongst the South Vietnamese that displayed this lack of motivation. First, an overall inability amongst trained ARVN troops to effectively implement their training in battle due to, in his opinion, an unwillingness to commit "extra effort and extra sacrifice." He also criticized rising desertions amongst conscripted soldiers and "commanders holding back – taking a wait and see attitude – because they [had] apparently no conviction and less faith in the outcome of the war." Finally, he noted that many public officials charged with the critical tasks of Civic Action and Psychological Warfare were "simply going through the motions in a superficial way."⁵⁰

⁵⁰ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from BG DePuy to General Westmoreland, "Motivation," dated 1 February 1965, p. 1, Box 4A, Folder 8, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC. Of particular note, this document contains a hand-written note of acknowledgement written in red pencil from General Westmoreland at the top right corner of page one: "J-3 Noted. Excellent paper. Let us keep pushing Political Warfare Effort. – [Initialed] WCW." Another hand-written note from MG Milton B. Adams, USAF, the MACV Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans (J-5) appears at the bottom of page three under DePuy's signature block written in black ink: "Note: J-5 heartily concurs!"

DePuy opined that Americans were oftentimes naïve towards the importance of motivating the convictions of the people due to an assumption that both western society and the political systems espoused in the non-communist world were “a superior formulation.” Hence, the benefits of the system created a mentality where there was no need to focus on motivating individuals to realize the benefits of the system in place. As a result, DePuy concluded that Americans “are not disposed to place much emphasis on such training [motivating the convictions of the people] in respect to the countries we are trying to assist.”⁵¹

Commenting on the paradox that democratic societies focus less on “working on the ego and intellect of individuals” as compared to the Communists, DePuy pushed for a renewed emphasis on motivating the South Vietnamese utilizing methods from the Communist playbook. Thus, he called for implementation of an indoctrination and education program to be spearheaded by the creation of a “Political Warfare Department.” DePuy maintained that this program should focus its efforts on the leadership of the RVNAF as well as District and Province officials.⁵²

Five days later, DePuy penned another memorandum to Westmoreland entitled “The Revolutionary Spirit.” DePuy lamented on the ability of the VC to harness the emotions that “appeal to the revolutionary masses.” He acknowledged that the United States and the South Vietnamese government faced a difficult situation as they represented “stability” which in and of itself was “anti-revolutionary.” As a result, the Americans and their allies were “peculiarly vulnerable to VC propaganda.” The only way forward, as DePuy saw it, was for the South

Need a central rallying point, personifying the values for which we seek to convince the ARVN that they fight, however. The commies have a cause and an understandable way of achieving it in their doctrine.”

⁵¹ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from BG DePuy to General Westmoreland, “Motivation,” dated 1 February 1965, p. 1, Box 4A, Folder 8, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

⁵² William E. DePuy, Memorandum from BG DePuy to General Westmoreland, “Motivation,” dated 1 February 1965, pp. 2-3, Box 4A, Folder 8, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

Vietnamese leadership to enter the “intellectual and emotional arena of the revolution” and open communication with the people to attempt to win them back to their side.⁵³

In these writings, DePuy certainly exhibited an attempt to understand the enormous challenges MACV confronted in a political-military conflict. Both also articulate a core tenet of counterinsurgency doctrine – how to win the support of the people. Yet, understanding a problem and crafting a viable solution are altogether different. DePuy’s optimistic belief that somehow the American military could solve internal political problems for the South Vietnamese reveals a somewhat naïve approach to Vietnamese culture; a culture with a long history of resisting foreign influence. Clearly, in his efforts to attempt to understand the internal problems of South Vietnam, he had still missed the mark. Nevertheless, his understanding that this was a political battleground certainly provides critical insight to the chosen American strategy to prosecute the war. These writings also discount arguments that DePuy was attached solely to the use of conventional military force.

Hanoi’s Big Unit War

“The enemy had committed big units and I ignored them at my peril.”⁵⁴

- General Westmoreland

Westmoreland was correct in his assessment that the North Vietnamese had deployed large main force units into South Vietnam beginning in 1964. No longer would the North Vietnamese mainly rely on guerrilla forces as they had done during the advisory years of the American effort. In September 1964, the Communist Party Central Committee of the Politburo in Hanoi had decided, in the words of the official Communist history, to commit “the entire armed

⁵³ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from BG DePuy to General Westmoreland, “The Revolutionary Spirit,” dated 6 February 1965, pp. 1-4, Box 4A, Folder 8, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

⁵⁴ William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1976), 149.

forces to concentrate all our capabilities to bring about a massive change in the direction and pace of expansion of our main force army on the battlefield, to launch strong massed combat operations at the campaign level, and to seek to win a decisive victory within the next few years.”⁵⁵

Later that same month, General Nguyen Chi Thanh, a career soldier and vocal advocate of the application of conventional military force, deployed to South Vietnam to head the Communist war effort. Thanh’s orders from Hanoi were to “launch a campaign during the 1964-1965 winter-spring period aimed at destroying a significant number of puppet regular army units and [to expand] our liberated zones.” To assist him in his task of building conventional combat strength, Thanh was joined by a compliment of “many high-level cadre with experience in building up main force units and in leading and directing massed combat operations.”⁵⁶

In the first week of December 1964, the Communists immediately launched their “Binh Gia Campaign” and through a combination of VC and NVA main force attacks, wreaked havoc across the South Vietnamese countryside targeting strategic hamlets, convoys, and ARVN formations.⁵⁷ By 3 January 1965, the Communist history notes that in just over one month, their units had “fought five regiment-level and two-battalion level battles, wiping out two entire battalions of enemy regulars (including one battalion of the enemy’s strategic reserve forces) and one armored troop) and inflicting severe casualties on three other battalions.” Claiming victory in the “first full-fledged campaign to be conducted by COSVN main force units,” the Communists

⁵⁵ *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975* (Translated by Merle L. Pribbenow. Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2002), 137.

⁵⁶ *Victory in Vietnam*, 137-138.

⁵⁷ *Victory in Vietnam*, 139-141.

acknowledged that the campaign was also “strategically important” as they would now combine “guerrilla warfare with conventional warfare” in operations moving forward.⁵⁸

The North Vietnamese also realized that the ARVN was on the ropes and in danger of collapse by February 1965 and it was time to transition to the third phase of revolutionary war. With the entrance of American ground units a month later, the Communists intensified their own efforts to send main force units into South Vietnam. Beginning in the spring of 1965, the Politburo sent the 325th Division along with seven infantry regiments and “scores of sapper, artillery, and other specialty branch battalions [which] poured down the Annamite Mountain Chain, marching to the battlefield.”⁵⁹ Throughout late 1964 and into 1965 the Communists intended to predominantly wage conventional war utilizing their main forces to reach their strategic objectives. The stage was now set for clashes with the newly arrived American ground units.

Devising a Concept of Operations

On 14 June 1965, Westmoreland cabled a framework of his concept of operations in which he articulated a clear understanding of the dual nature of the threat that both MACV and ARVN forces confronted in clashes with both the NVA and VC writing, “the insurgency in South Vietnam must eventually be defeated among the people in the hamlets and towns...they [the people] must be provided security of two kinds...from large, well organized and equipped forces...and from the guerilla, the assassin, the terrorist and the informer.”⁶⁰ Thus,

⁵⁸ *Victory in Vietnam*, 141.

⁵⁹ *Victory in Vietnam*, 145.

⁶⁰ William C. Westmoreland, “Concept of Operations - Force Requirements and Deployments, South Vietnam,” dated 14 June 1965, pp. 1-2, Box 2, Folder 4, Larry Berman Collection (Presidential Archives Research), Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas (hereafter cited as TTUVA).

Westmoreland outlined the unique challenge U.S., Free World, and ARVN forces confronted in providing security to the population.

To better understand the employment of U.S. forces within the strategic framework, this dual threat capability posed by the enemy must be considered. By 1965, the threat came from both conventional main force units as well as from the guerillas and their political cadres. Westmoreland clearly recognized this and, by way of analogy, he likened the South Vietnamese government to the “structural members of a building.” He equated the guerillas and political cadre to “termites,” whose efforts were “persistently eating away” at the foundation of the building. Simultaneously, the main force units, which he dubbed “bully boys” waited off in the distance “armed with crowbars” postured for the appropriate moment to attack at the debilitated building. In the short term, Westmoreland conceived the “bully boys” as posing the greatest threat to the building.⁶¹ For the time being, pacification would have to take a backseat to eliminating the main force units. Simultaneously, MACV had to train, equip, and reinforce the RVNAF while also attempting to protect the South Vietnamese people.

On 1 September 1965, Westmoreland codified his strategic concept in a document entitled “Concept of Operations in the Republic of Vietnam.”⁶² Consisting of three phases, the ultimate objective of his campaign plan “was to end the war in RVN by convincing the enemy that military victory was impossible and to force the enemy to negotiate a solution favorable to the GVN and the U.S.” Phase I called for the deployment of U.S., Free World, and ARVN forces “to halt the losing trend by 1965 – to stem the tide.” Key tasks for this phase consisted of securing major military bases, protecting key political and population centers, and strengthening the RVNAF. In Phase II, aimed to begin in 1966, U.S. and allied forces would go back on the

⁶¹ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 175.

⁶² Cosmas, *MACV*, 249.

offensive with the intent to “destroy enemy forces” and reinstitute “rural construction activities.” In this phase, allied forces would “participate in clearing, securing, reserve reaction, and offensive operations as required to support and sustain the resumption of pacification.” In Phase III, U.S. and allied forces would supervise the “defeat and destruction of the remaining enemy forces and base areas.”⁶³

Westmoreland utilized his concept of operations not only as a directive for the actions that his subordinate commanders should implement, but also, as an outline for the troop requests he required moving forward.⁶⁴ As J-3, DePuy played a major role in preparing and delivering the briefings before the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in requests for troop increases. Known for his skills as a confident and articulate briefer, DePuy delivered presentations outlining the associated military tasks in the campaign plan with the requisite troop numbers in front of audiences in Honolulu, Washington, and Saigon throughout late 1965. DePuy also served as the chief spokesperson for the MACV delegation at the Honolulu Conference in January 1966.⁶⁵ Another aspect of his duties included determining where to deploy military units within South Vietnam to best fit within this strategic campaign framework.⁶⁶

⁶³ Command History, United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam, 1965, pp. 141-143, Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas (hereafter cited as CARL). For a more detailed explanation see Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, 100. In this document, Westmoreland refers to the concept as a “three-phase sustained campaign.”

⁶⁴ Cosmas, *MACV*, 249.

⁶⁵ Cosmas, *MACV*, 252-257. Of particular note, DePuy was tasked by Westmoreland as the principal spokesperson for the planning for Phase II. Cosmas notes that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was “impressed with the briefing” and even “characterized it as the ‘best professional performance’ that he had seen in five years at the Pentagon.” In Cosmas, *MACV*, 252-253. See also Willis W. Hawkins, Memorandum for Record: “Presentation by General DePuy to the JCS and Service Secretaries,” dated 18 October 1965, Box 53, Folder 15, Series II Official Papers, William C. Westmoreland Papers (hereafter cited as WCWP), USAHEC.

⁶⁶ Message Traffic: “DePuy to Westmoreland Regarding Honolulu Conference,” dated 15 December 1965, Box 2, Folder 9, WCWP, USAHEC. In this message, DePuy outlined for Westmoreland the various courses of action he and his staff in J-3 prepared for deploying units based on logistical requirements and the approval/disapproval of various force packages.

On 17 September 1965, MACV issued Directive 525-4: Tactics and Techniques for Employment of U.S. Forces in the Republic of Vietnam. Drafted by DePuy, and signed into directive by MACV Chief of Staff Major General William Rosson, the document further defined the objectives for U.S. commanders and units to undertake within the context of the concept of operations to achieve tactical, operational, and strategic success in the field.⁶⁷ An understanding of the key operational and strategic objectives as outlined in this document also helps to place the actual combat operations, which subsequently unfolded, into a tangible strategic framework.

Just as important, MACV Directive 525-4 also codified the significance of the pacification effort: “the ultimate aim is to pacify the Republic of Vietnam by destroying the VC...while at the same time reestablishing the government apparatus, strengthening the GVN military forces, rebuilding the administrative machinery, and re-instituting the services of the Government. During this process security must be provided.”⁶⁸ Thus, the contents of MACV Directive 525-4 intimates that both DePuy and Westmoreland well understood the critical importance of pacification even in the earliest days of the entry of American ground units into South Vietnam.

As J-3, DePuy devoted significant thought to the logical sequence pacification measures should follow. Rather than just paying lip service to pacification, he and his staff dedicated substantial effort towards analyzing effective implementation. On 22 September 1965, in a

⁶⁷ John M. Carland, “Winning the Vietnam War: Westmoreland’s Approach in Two Documents,” *The Journal of Military History* 68, no. 2 (April 2004): 554. According to Carland, in a letter sent to him from General Rosson (USA-Ret), dated 29 February 1993, DePuy “wrote much of it [MACV Directive 525-4] himself, assisted by an able assistant or two.” Carland also notes: “Although DePuy sought the views of major subordinate commanders, he was ‘the prime mover and respected authority’...It made sense that the Chief of Staff publish the memorandum; it made equal sense that it be drafted in the Operations Shop.” Historian Andrew Birtle referred to MACV Directive 525-4 as MACV’s “Operational bible.” In Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine*, 379.

⁶⁸ MACV Directive 525-4: Tactics and Techniques for Employment of U.S. Forces in The Republic of Vietnam, dated 17 September 1965, p. 2, Box 03, Folder 03, Larry Berman Collection (Presidential Archives Research), TTUVA.

memorandum to Westmoreland, DePuy sequentially outlined the procedures for both U.S. and ARVN forces to follow. DePuy focused not only on the responsibilities of military forces to establish security but, also, the equally important administrative functions of the various GVN agencies and their cadres tasked with the numerous follow-on functions of strengthening ties to the GVN once effective security was established.

The first step entailed U.S. or ARVN forces to move into an area or province to conduct offensive search and destroy operations with the intent to “dominate the area and create a favorable balance of power.” Once accomplished, the next step necessitated the clearing of company size or higher echelon VC main force elements from the area while also leaving an adequate contingent of friendly forces behind to inhibit the main force elements from returning. Once these conditions were established, a district level regional force tasked with providing long term security and recruitment of hamlet and village level popular forces would remain in the area and continue to defend. The final step required handover of the area to the responsibility of the National Police but only if security was “firmly established” and the “VC organization exposed and destroyed.”⁶⁹

With effective security established, the administrative functions could begin to “reactivate the machinery of government” as the various GVN teams and cadres tasked to provide the requisite services and supplies to the population could descend on the area. Acknowledging snags and pitfalls he had witnessed in the implementation of pacification up to that point, DePuy noted, “The hitch seems to come between the clearing and securing stages, or perhaps more precisely during securing.” Furthermore, the specific needs of each hamlet varied with respect to the required services for the cadres to target. In some cases, the services provided

⁶⁹ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from BG DePuy to General Westmoreland, “The Techniques of Pacification,” dated 22 September 1965, p. 1, Box 4A, Folder 9, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

were way off mark. Some hamlets required assistance specifically with countering VC terror attacks while others required support with constructing school houses or tilling farm land. Moreover, other hamlets simply did not have the conditions set to commence pacification measures altogether.⁷⁰

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, DePuy identified what he referred to as a “major missing ingredient” in the pacification program – a lack of “political content” resulting in “little motivation.” As a result, the various GVN cadres and popular forces operated in what he referred to as a “psychological vacuum” which fostered an environment inconducive to garnering the requisite support for pacification from the people. To rectify this, DePuy recommended that PAT teams be assigned the mission to support both the district and village level chiefs to create a “political and psychological climate” where pacification would have a higher chance of taking hold.⁷¹

DePuy recognized the importance of the pacification effort within the strategic framework. Not only did he attempt to define the sequential steps, he also identified the weaknesses in implementation that he had witnessed up through late 1965. Utilizing this structure, forces in the field were equipped with a template to conduct pacification moving forward in an attempt to garner the support of the people to the side of the GVN. As combat operations unfolded, other weaknesses would arise in MACV’s attempt to conduct pacification. Predominantly, the constant threat from main force units coupled with a lack of manpower to retain control over areas deemed secured or pacified hindered this approach.

⁷⁰ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from BG DePuy to General Westmoreland, “The Techniques of Pacification,” dated 22 September 1965, p. 1-2, Box 4A, Folder 9, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

⁷¹ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from BG DePuy to General Westmoreland, “The Techniques of Pacification,” dated 22 September 1965, p. 2, Box 4A, Folder 9, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

Nonetheless, the MACV Operations Directorate certainly gave significant attention and emphasis to pacification. Strategic planning was one thing; however, battlefield realities were something altogether different in regard to achieving the necessary conditions required to attain pacification objectives. Over the coming years, MACV would learn this lesson the hard way in countering the Communist threat. Successful pacification would, for the most part, have to take a back seat to the offensive combat operations necessary to achieve requisite security.

Search and Destroy

*"I coined that term. It turned out to be infelicitous, because later when some marine was televised setting the roof of a native house on fire with his cigarette lighter, the commentator said, 'Here's a marine company on search and destroy,' and from then on a burning house was the 'destroy' part of it. But that had nothing to do with search and destroy."*⁷²

-General DePuy, 1989

Of all the operational concepts implemented by American combat units throughout the Vietnam War, perhaps none are derided more by the critics of Westmoreland's strategy than "search and destroy." Conjuring images of large multi-battalion and brigade size forces arriving to the battlefield by helicopter and trampling aimlessly through the jungle searching for an ever-elusive enemy, the term evokes images of a flawed operational concept. Yet, considering the operational objectives of the enemy at the time, search and destroy should be placed in the context of parrying the most dangerous threat; that posed by main force VC and NVA formations.

To better understand the importance of search and destroy operations within MACV's strategy, one must consider the opposing order of battle and strategy of the Communists. U.S.

⁷² DePuy quoted in Harry Maurer, *Strange Ground: An Oral History of Americans in Vietnam, 1945-1975* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), 447-455, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 439. See also Ted Gittinger, "William DePuy Interview 1 - Oral History Transcript," dated 28 October 1985, p. 22-24, LBJ Oral History Series, LBJ Presidential Library.

and ARVN forces confronted an enemy hierarchy composed of a variety of enemy echelons. From top to bottom they consisted of the following: Regular NVA units, main force VC Units, regional and local force VC units, and local VC guerillas. All of these echelons relied upon one another to reach strategic objectives. The enemy strategy rested on pre-stocked base areas located in the jungle sanctuaries near the border where they could position men and materiel. NVA units along with the main force VC units operated in the base areas and acted as “mobile forces” supporting each lower echelon by staging attacks against allied forces and reinforcing the lower echelons in areas operating closer to the populated areas.

Search and destroy operations were intended to disrupt this matrix of intelligence and logistical support. Without the reinforcement of men and materiel from the higher echelons, the lower echelons could not operate effectively. At the same time, the higher echelons relied on the lower echelons and their familiarity with the populated locales. Through attacking the enemy’s base areas and pushing the main force units farther from the populated areas; in theory, each echelon could be defeated in detail weakening the entire hierarchy.⁷³

Originally coined by DePuy in 1964, the term search and destroy intended to serve as a “doctrinal teaching point” for ARVN forces participating in Operation Hop Tac.⁷⁴ Initiated in September 1964, Hop Tac (“cooperation” in Vietnamese) aimed to pacify the area in the provinces immediately outside Saigon. With MACV oversight, the operation called for ARVN troops, National Police and other government agencies to move out from Saigon in “concentric rings of steel” and pacify the outer six provinces.⁷⁵ Within the inner ring, the National Police

⁷³ Harold K. Johnson, “Memorandum for the President Regarding Validity of Present Strategy of Operations in South Vietnam,” dated 1 February 1968, pp. 2-3, Box 76, Folder 9, Official Correspondence – Army Chief of Staff Close Hold, Harold K. Johnson Papers (hereafter cited as HKJP), USAHEC.

⁷⁴ Report: “Definition of Search and Destroy,” p. 1, Box 188A, Folder 2, MACV Command Historian’s Collection, USAHEC.

⁷⁵ Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, 89-90. See also Cosmas, *MACV*, 142-143. On Hop Tac’s results, Westmoreland wrote: “Frankly, it did not accomplish all that we had hoped it would. Even

were to “secure” the population. In the next ring, ARVN troops along with RF/PF forces were tasked with “clearing” the VC district companies and village platoons. Finally, in the outer ring, ARVN units were tasked with conducting search and destroy operations.⁷⁶

Endorsed by Westmoreland, the term intended to convey to ARVN troops the traditional infantry mission to “find, fix in place, fight, and destroy (or neutralize), the enemy.” Later adopted by American forces, search and destroy operations were designed to locate and destroy the enemy base areas, bring to battle the main force NVA and VC units, and destroy their logistical and command infrastructure. By design, allied forces would not remain in the area at the conclusion of the operation.⁷⁷

A second type of operation termed “clear and hold” intended to be implemented in areas where security was required to take hold in preparation for pacification objectives. Utilizing saturation patrols, allied units intended to destroy enemy forces or drive them away from the area. Working closely with various GVN agencies, they would attempt to strengthen their presence in the area. Finally, “securing” operations would commence. Intended to be undertaken by the South Vietnamese, ARVN units along with RF/PF forces and the National Police would continue to conduct saturation patrols and maintain a presence in the area while a combination of civil, economic, and psychological efforts were undertaken to influence the population and eliminate any remaining vestiges of VCI in the area.⁷⁸

though the concept was sound, the relative strengths were too disparate, governmental coordination too demanding under the circumstances, and execution of the plan too weak. However, I believe that Hop Tac – in spite of its many shortcomings – probably saved Saigon from enemy control.” In Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, 86.

⁷⁶ Harry Maurer, *Strange Ground: An Oral History of Americans in Vietnam, 1945-1975* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), 447-455, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 439.

⁷⁷ Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, 91. See also Report: “Definition of Search and Destroy,” p. 1, Box 188A, Folder 2, MACV Command Historian’s Collection, USAHEC. See also Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine*, 368.

⁷⁸ Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine*, 368-369.

As the architect of search and destroy, DePuy understood that the elimination of the main force elements would not remove the entire spectrum of the enemy threat. Yet throughout 1965, search and destroy operations were essential to free the South Vietnamese countryside from the domination imposed by organized main force units. Soon enough, DePuy would have the opportunity to implement into action the operational concepts he devised. In his next assignment as a division commander, DePuy brought the enemy to battle with a vigor and determination that distinguished his unit. In the process, he ushered in a tactical-level subculture which would soon be emulated across the Army.

Chapter Four: DePuy Gets Cracking

“His [Westmoreland’s] philosophy, with which I entirely agreed, was that the US units were there to fight the enemy “big boys,” the big regiments that were tearing up the ARVN and destroying the pacification effort. I knew the difference between what the division was doing and what was expected of it. Now, if you ask me if General Westmoreland told me precisely to do these things, he didn’t. But, we had worked together closely for two years. It was clear to me that he wanted me to get cracking.”⁷⁹

-General DePuy

On 15 March 1966, Major General Jonathan O. Seaman relinquished command of the Big Red One to Brigadier General William DePuy. Seaman then assumed command of II Field Force, a newly created Corps level command responsible for all of the III CTZ. With the creation of II Field Force, Seaman now became DePuy’s immediate supervisor.⁸⁰ After spending nearly two years as a staff officer, DePuy was eager to confront the enemy he had observed and crafted the strategy to defeat. Years later, he described his intent upon assumption of command:

It was my idea to go after the Main Forces wherever they could be found and to go after them with as many battalions as I could get into the fight – what was later called “pile-on.” To do that required a very agile and fast moving division, a division which was, in fact, airmobile. My initial efforts were to create just such a division. I took it as my main mission to defeat or disrupt the activities of all the VC Main Forces north of Saigon in the III Corps zone. As a minimum it was essential to keep the 9th VC division entirely out of the populated areas.⁸¹

DePuy’s approach to command of the Big Red One mirrored Westmoreland’s commander’s intent. In a memorandum Westmoreland issued to all of his subordinate field commanders in December 1965, he had expressed his dissatisfaction with the frequency in which

⁷⁹ DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 138-140.

⁸⁰ Gole, *General William E. DePuy*, 167-168. DePuy was promoted to Major General in April 1966 and Seaman to Lieutenant General in August 1966. Historian Henry Gole, DePuy’s biographer, notes a rather contentious relationship between DePuy and Seaman as a result of different command styles and Seaman then becoming DePuy’s immediate supervisor. Comments made by Hollingsworth and DePuy’s relief of officers which Seaman had selected for command in the Big Red One prior to his selection to command II FF also complicated their relationship. DePuy’s close relationship with Westmoreland also compounded this situation. For more insight See Gole, *General William E. DePuy*, 170-173.

⁸¹ DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 138.

responsibility (TAOR). His “pile-on” concept equated to committing a reserve force once a friendly force was in contact with the enemy to mass combat power.⁸³

For this concept to be effective, DePuy required a division that was, in his own words, “mentally mobile as well as physically mobile.” He envisioned commanding the division from a helicopter in the air where he and his subordinate commanders could direct the action.⁸⁴

Immediately upon assumption of command, DePuy attempted to shift the mentality of the unit to one that could respond quickly and efficiently to the demands of the AO. He moved the division out to the field and to different areas within the AO simply “to get it moving.”⁸⁵ Rather than relying on complex schemes of maneuver and traditional written operations orders, DePuy issued oral fragmentary orders so his units could quickly respond to developing situations.⁸⁶

⁸³ Herbert, *Deciding What Has to be Done*, 20.

⁸⁴ LTC William LeGro noted that within the first hour upon his assumption of command of the Big Red One, DePuy issued his first order to his G-3, LTC George Freeman: “Have my chopper on the pad in five minutes. I’m going to the field.” DePuy was apparently shocked that he had no command helicopter and that his predecessor (Seaman) did not even have a radio call sign. LeGro wrote, “Thus began General DePuy's first hour in command of the 1st Infantry Division and his first encounter with his operational staff.” In William E. LeGro, “Draft of The Big Red One (Chapters 1-5),” pp. 36-38, Box 01, Folder 64, Colonel William E. LeGro Collection, TTUVA. DePuy’s use of the airmobile assets at his disposal is accentuated in his oral history: “The 1st Division, without being organized as an air mobile division, and without having a large air cavalry squadron, tried to practice what I now understand to be the tactical concepts of an air mobile unit. Sometimes people laughed about the 1st Division being the first air mobile division (heavy), and so on. The fact of the matter is, that in the early days in Vietnam, we had more helicopters available operationally from the 1st Aviation Brigade than the 1st Cavalry Division. And, since the 1st Cavalry Division had to maintain its own helicopters, they found it very difficult to lift an entire battalion in one lift. But... in the 1st Infantry we did that repeatedly. In fact, there were days when we had 90 lift ships available to the division, plus lots of gunships. That was more air mobility than anybody had before or after, including the 1st Cavalry or the 101st. And, that was true for much of 1966.” In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 148.

⁸⁵ DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 140. DePuy also noted: “The first time I ordered the division to go into the field, I didn't say anything to them except, ‘We're going. 1st Brigade, go into that area. 2nd Brigade, go into that area. Division, go there.’ Now, when we went out, the division headquarters commandant and all of the principal staff officers stayed back at base camp, while all of the second team went out with me. That was quite interesting... Well, we turned that all around. The first team went out and the second team stayed back. But, it was part of the division's mentality at that particular time.” In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 141.

⁸⁶ Paul F. Gorman, *Cardinal Point: An Oral History – Training Soldiers and Becoming a Strategist in Peace and War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2011), 47. While serving as DePuy’s G-3, Gorman noted: “There wasn’t much about the way we ran the division that Leavenworth would admire. No five-paragraph field orders... Everything was oral, fragmentary orders... I learned from listening to the division command net that adaptation was central to the way that DePuy operated. He would change his mind about where and when he wanted units in accordance with his reading on the enemy and the developing situation. We had to be ready to respond.” On DePuy’s leadership: “He truly gave me both complete freedom and assured support. He was an ideal commander. Above all, I learned to respect his instincts for finding the enemy and anticipating his next moves. He

The III Corps Tactical Zone

Throughout the entire deployment of the 1st Infantry Division to Vietnam, the Big Red One operated exclusively within the III CTZ. In total, four CTZ's were created in 1961 to correspond to the four different ARVN Corps level commands within South Vietnam. Stretching from I CTZ in the north near the DMZ to IV CTZ in the Mekong Delta to the south, each CTZ offered its own unique challenge in terms of terrain, enemy composition, and population demographics.⁸⁷ Situated between the Annamite Mountains of the Central Highlands to the north and the swampy lowlands of the Mekong Delta to the south, the terrain of the III CTZ generally consisted of rolling hills and thick jungle. By all accounts, the topography was conducive to conducting combat operations.⁸⁸

The III CTZ served as an important logistical hub for the Communists. Located in close proximity to the Cambodian border, the North Vietnamese were able to move men and materiel down the Ho Chi Minh trail and then stage their combat power in War Zones C and D. From there, they were within close striking distance to the South Vietnamese capital city of Saigon. The Communists utilized three separate mobility corridors to infiltrate into Saigon. The first went east from across the Cambodian border through Hau Nghia; the second emanated from War Zone C and traversed south to Saigon along the Saigon River; a third began in War Zone D and wound south along the Song Be River.⁸⁹

knew the larger aspects of the war and its finest details, right down to the rifleman's level. I consider him an authentic military genius." In Gorman, *Cardinal Point*, 34.

⁸⁷ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 6-7.

⁸⁸ George L. MacGarrigle, *Combat Operations Taking the Offensive: October 1966 to October 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1998) 31.

⁸⁹ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 34.

Figure 3



Source: George L. MacGarrigle, *Combat Operations Taking the Offensive: October 1966 to October 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1998), 32.

Of the eleven different provinces in the III CTZ, those situated directly around Saigon to include Hau Nghia, Binh Duong, and Bien Hoa were more densely populated than the others. The other seven provinces, where DePuy conducted the majority of search and destroy missions while in command of the 1st Division were in the less populated provinces.⁹⁰ Sharing the

⁹⁰ In describing the Big Red One's TAOR, DePuy wrote: "Within the 1st Division area we were in an area that was less populated than were the areas where the divisions in the Delta, or around Saigon, or the [U.S. Army's]

operational area of the III CTZ, was the 25th Infantry Division under the command of Major General Frederick C. Weyand.⁹¹ Throughout their entire time as division commanders and well after, DePuy and Weyand were often compared for the stark differences in their operational approaches.

Tactical Directives and Innovations

“If at every echelon, from squad to brigade, each commander applies the standard techniques of ground combat and utilizes the full fire power available to him, the operations of the 1st Division will be successful. If on the other hand, commanders maneuver their troops and handle their fire power so that the full weight of the combined arms team is not or cannot be brought to bear, then setbacks will be experienced and unnecessary casualties will be taken. Every commander is expected to do his job in a cool, professional manner at all times.”⁹²

-General DePuy, Commanders Notes #1, 27 March 1966

DePuy’s tactical acumen went public in a series of “Commanders Notes” which he issued throughout his time in command of the Big Red One. His first note, issued on 27 March 1966, just twelve days after he assumed command of the Division, was perhaps the greatest indication of the offensive and aggressive mindset which he demanded from the subordinate leaders under his command and from his formation as a whole. This memorandum laid the tactical framework of his command philosophy.

25th [Infantry] Division, or the divisions up in the northern coastal area such as the [U.S. Army’s] Americal [Division] were located...our AO included a lot of jungle and little population.” In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 164.

⁹¹ In describing the inherent differences between the 25th Division’s TAOR and that of the 1st Infantry Division, DePuy wrote: “The 25th Division was deployed between the Saigon River, which was our southern boundary, and the Oriental River, which came into Saigon from the Parrot’s Beak. This area was heavily populated. Weyand was correct in his emphasis on pacification and security. On the other hand, the 1st Division was a jungle division. Except for an area around Di An, south of the line, Lai Khe - Phuoc Vinh, we had very little civilian population. Instead, what we had was an enormous operating area which included all of War Zones C and D, and went all the way to the Cambodian border on the west and north, as far east as Song Be. Our AO was ten times the size of the 25th Division’s AO.” In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 163.

⁹² William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #1,” dated 27 March 1966, p. 4, Box 23B, Folder 10, Sidney B. Berry Papers (hereafter cited as SBBP), USAHEC.

In it, DePuy first acknowledged the high turn-over rate of personnel at both the squad and platoon level through battlefield casualties. In an effort not to lose the combat experience and learned tactical knowledge of the veteran nucleus that comprised the cohort of his squad and platoon-level leaders through the natural attrition of sustained heavy combat and rotation policies, he mandated that all commanders “devote their personal attention to training at every available opportunity.”⁹³ He went on to require that, “Emphasis will be at the squad, section, platoon level. Experience and lessons learned must be pushed down by brigade, battalion, company, troop, and battery commanders through an imaginative, continuous, aggressive training program. Nothing will be taken for granted.”⁹⁴

Like any capable military commander, DePuy assessed the proficiency of the unit of which he had just taken command. Where he saw deficiencies, he demanded immediate changes. Not only in training, but also in the conduct of operations. What is striking about this directive is that it was issued less than two weeks after he assumed command; the crucible of combat most certainly sped up these observations. This was a testament to not only the intensity of the operational tempo of the 1st Division at the time but, also, the tactical acumen of DePuy who

⁹³ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #1,” dated 27 March 1966, p.1, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

⁹⁴ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #1,” dated 27 March 1966, p.1, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC. DePuy continually stressed the issues posed by the rotation policy and the need for further training. In a letter to Army Chief of Staff Harold K. Johnson, DePuy wrote: “The most important problem we have is that of training because of the constant rotation. By this, I mean training on the fundamentals. We have already instituted some training during operations and in the forthcoming months, will spend substantial time with each unit at squad and platoon level... We are all working constantly to improve the esprit, the aggressiveness and the over-all effectiveness of the 1st Division.” In William E. DePuy, Correspondence from Major General William E. DePuy to General Harold K. Johnson to [With Attachments], dated 13 May 1966, p. 4, Box 75, Folder 1, Official Correspondence - Army Chief of Staff, Close Hold 10 December 1965- 9 November 1966, HKJP, USAHEC. In another private correspondence to Colonel Sidney Berry prior to Berry’s arrival to Vietnam to assume command of the 1st Brigade, DePuy wrote, “You will find that the terrain in which we operate presents a number of problems dissimilar to those in the Delta. I believe we are beginning to master the techniques required for jungle fighting, we still have a long way to go. Our basic problem is the training of squads and platoons because of the rapid turn-over from rotation and casualties. This will be your greatest challenge.” In William E. DePuy, Correspondence from Major General William E. DePuy to Colonel Sidney B. Berry, Jr. Regarding Lieutenant Colonel Paul Fischer Remaining as an Executive in the 1st Brigade [With Attachment], dated 27 May 1966, p. 2, Box 20C, Folder 13, Memoranda/Reports/Correspondence From the 1st Brigade, 1966-1967, SBBP, USAHEC.

immediately upon witnessing tactical maneuvers and established SOPs in the field, identified serious deficiencies in the tactics, techniques, procedures, and overall mentality of the unit ultimately leading, from his perspective, to unnecessary casualties and a lack of combat effectiveness.⁹⁵

These observations led to the more exacting mandates contained in the operational directives of DePuy's first memorandum to the men of the Big Red One: "Henceforth, no rifle company in the 1st Division will advance either in the open or closed terrain with three platoons on line. Each commander at company and battalion level will always have a reserve element in hand, under control, and prepared for immediate commitment."⁹⁶ According to LTC William LeGro, Division G-2, DePuy felt the need to direct this requirement immediately after he assumed command while observing an infantry battalion near the Courtenay Plantation in Phouc Tuoy Province in the early days of Operation Abilene.⁹⁷

There, DePuy witnessed three companies on line advancing forward in the dense jungle separated by a thousand meters or so. One platoon suffered more than thirty KIA and many more WIA when ambushed by a Viet Cong battalion. Because the rifle companies were separated by such a large distance in the thick vegetation, they could not mutually support each other. To make matters worse, artillery could not be called in as the location of friendly units could not be

⁹⁵ It is important to note that DePuy differentiated between "tactics" and "techniques." In simple terms, he defined tactics as the "what" and techniques as the "how." In a speech given in 1969, he stated "If I have one slight uneasy feeling about the way we [the U.S. Army] go about our business, it's that we spend a lot more time on the 'what' than we do on the 'how'... Tactics are simple, dictated by the terrain and the enemy; and you can't do much about either one. The solutions are usually obvious. It's easy to order a company around the right flank. It's hard for that company to move around the right flank properly. That's technique." In William E. DePuy, Speech: "Graduation Address, LTG William E. DePuy, Advanced Class 3-69," dated 31 July 1969, p. 2, Box 8C, Folder 5B, SBBP, USAHEC.

⁹⁶ William E. DePuy, "Commanders Notes - #1," dated 27 March 1966, p.1, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

⁹⁷ Oral History Interview with William LeGro, OH0431, p. 303, 23 June 2005, Colonel William E. LeGro Collection, TTUVA.

ascertained. The standard method of employing smoke grenades, often used to identify the location of friendly units by aircraft and commanders hovering overhead to locate their whereabouts, proved futile as the smoke was unable to rise through the thick triple canopy jungle. From then on out, DePuy ensured that units moved in column rather than on line.⁹⁸

The soldiers and leaders of the Big Red One most certainly understood that DePuy meant business in his next directive: “The term, or phrase, ‘pinned down’ is no longer a part of the vocabulary of the 1st Division. Troops must anticipate that meeting engagements with the VC will involve a heavy volume of initial VC fire.” DePuy went on to direct, “Forward elements closely engaged will automatically become a base of fire. Commanders at squad and platoon level will advance their men into base of fire positions, by crawling if necessary.” Contemporary infantry soldiers will recognize these directives as the basis for a react to contact battle drill. DePuy went on, “Under NO circumstances, repeat, NO circumstances will forward elements in contact, withdraw in order to bring artillery fire on the VC. The base of fire will stand fast and reinforce if necessary. Contact will be maintained if necessary throughout the night.”⁹⁹

In the “Commanders Note,” DePuy also called for company commanders to immediately commit their reserve platoons to either flank and then “immediately begin mortar and artillery fire to their front. In the jungle, this fire may be started some distance in front of the position and walked back toward the position until safety requires that it be brought back no further.” DePuy maintained that this would “prevent the VC from reinforcing, withdrawing, or maneuvering. At no time, will company commanders lose control of their forward elements or battalion commanders of their companies, so that maximum fire power cannot be brought into the VC

⁹⁸ Oral History Interview with William LeGro, OH0431, p. 303, 23 June 2005, Colonel William E. LeGro Collection, TTUVA.

⁹⁹ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #1,” dated 27 March 1966, pp. 1-2, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

position to the immediate front.”¹⁰⁰ This emphasis on overwhelming firepower once in contact with an enemy force became a hallmark of DePuy’s philosophy.

This predilection to favor firepower over maneuver was a direct result of the complications posed by the restrictive terrain of the jungle. As Captain George Kirschenbauer noted, “You can’t bring your company power, combat power to bear in the jungle...it’s like a night attack...if you try to conduct grandiose flanking attacks and everything like that, kind of quickly, everything gets out of control and you find that what happens is that some of your guys are firing at your other guys because they can’t see...it gets very confused very fast.”¹⁰¹

Kirschenbauer’s comments attest to the inability to determine enemy locations while also simultaneously maintaining command and control of infantry elements when conducting maneuvers.

Infantry leaders on the ground found the application of indirect fires equally difficult as Kirschenbauer explained: “In that atmosphere...it’s very hard to get your resources applied exactly where you want them, even artillery.”¹⁰² In the dense canopy of the jungle, spotting the impact of rounds to then adjust fire was extremely difficult. The same problem arose for helicopter gunships and close air support. If the pilots overhead could not pin point the exact locations of friendly troops, they would hesitate to drop their ordnance. A common technique was to employ colored smoke grenades to signal friendly locations and talk on the air support over the radio but, oftentimes, the thick triple canopy of the jungle did not allow the smoke to

¹⁰⁰ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #1,” dated 27 March 1966, p. 2, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

¹⁰¹ LTC Thomas P. Barrett, “Interview with LTC George W. Kirschenbauer,” p. 23, Box 20, Folder 3, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

¹⁰² LTC Thomas P. Barrett, “Interview with LTC George W. Kirschenbauer,” pp. 23-24, Box 20, Folder 3, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

rise above the canopy hindering the allocation of ordnance. Compounding matters, the enemy utilized “bear hug” tactics where they would intentionally get so close to U.S. troops they would often hesitate to call in fires for fear of dropping ordnance on their own position. Kirschenbauer added, “I never got air support where I wanted it, I don’t think, ever. It was always too far away. By the time you’re engaged with small arms with a little enemy force, they are so very close that air refuses to come in that close for fear of making a mistake.”¹⁰³

Of particular note, in a 1969 survey of over two hundred Army officers, 56 percent of the respondents felt that the historic mission of the infantry to close with the enemy was still the preferred tactic to utilizing artillery to finish the job.¹⁰⁴ Reflecting this sentiment, one company commander stated, “Whenever we’d get into a good firefight, you know what the first order of the day was, I sensed? Break contact to reduce the casualties...in comes the artillery...it was an artillery battle...I just never sensed it was a good mop-up operation in there...the last punch should be a bayonet going into some foxhole.”¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, although maneuvering against the enemy still occurred when absolutely necessary in firefights as a last resort, the use of overwhelming firepower upon contact became the preferred method under DePuy.

DePuy also issued directives in his first “Commanders Note” describing the importance and necessity of saturation patrolling. Assigning battalions areas as large as ten kilometers on a side, he prescribed that units begin to “progressively operate independently down to platoon level.” While learning the fundamentals, platoons were expected to operate only in the daytime and then pull back into company perimeters at night. Once platoons became more acquainted to

¹⁰³ LTC Thomas P. Barrett, “Interview with LTC George W. Kirschenbauer,” pp. 23-24, Box 20, Folder 3, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

¹⁰⁴ Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine*, 381.

¹⁰⁵ LTC Arturo Rodriguez, “Interview with LTC Dennis D. McSweeney,” pp. 88-89, Box 23, Folder 2, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

this type of patrolling, they would operate independently in both day and night. DePuy stressed continuous repeated movement to prevent the VC from staging planned attacks and, also, required that both platoon leaders and platoon sergeants fully acquaint themselves with how to direct and adjust indirect fire assets. Furthermore, DePuy stressed that combat reconnaissance patrols by platoon and company size elements were essential. By his own estimations, he demanded that, “Rifle platoons are expected to be able to handle VC companies; companies to handle battalions; and battalions to handle regiments during initial engagements of 4-6-10 hours until reinforcements can be brought in.”¹⁰⁶

In a counterinsurgency environment, such as that in which the 1st Division operated in Vietnam, the continued presence of American forces in the highly populated areas was essential to maintain a semblance of security for the local population. Despite the overly emphasized “big-unit” operations consisting of large battalion and brigade size movements that dominate the historical narrative, there were, in fact, smaller platoon size presence patrols concurrently conducted and mandated by division commanders like DePuy.

Intelligence reports in early 1966 indicated that VC forces within the III CTZ had in their possession significant anti-aircraft weapons and were more than likely to establish a helicopter ambush against Big Red One units. As a result, in concluding his first directive to the division, DePuy emphasized the importance of prepping LZs for airmobile assaults, utilizing both artillery and aerial ordnance systems. Rather than sequential bombardments of close air support, followed by artillery, and then armed helicopters, DePuy insisted on the continued expenditure of artillery and strafing runs by armed helicopters alongside approach corridors throughout the entire

¹⁰⁶ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #1,” dated 27 March 1966, p. 3, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

infiltration. He required that both brigade and battalion commanders incorporate these procedures into the planning of all air mobile assault missions moving forward.¹⁰⁷

Subsequent “Commanders Notes” issued by DePuy reflected his continued observations from the field and addressed pressing matters he deemed vital to combat effectiveness. His mandates ran the gamut from tactical instructions to leadership philosophies. Following operations conducted in Phuoc Tuy province in early May 1966, DePuy witnessed significant disparities in the utilization of non-commissioned officers across the battalions in the division. Some units empowered their NCOs while others did not. As a result, DePuy felt it necessary to mandate that all battalion sergeants major and company first sergeants “always accompany their units to the field.” Furthermore, he required that “Commanders at all echelons will delegate to the non-commissioned officers the necessary authority to perform their duties and will hold the non-commissioned officers responsible for discharging those duties satisfactorily.”¹⁰⁸

DePuy also observed a lack of security emplacement by company size formations during operations. Acknowledging that the “nature of the war in Vietnam is conducive to the relaxation of appropriate security measures,” he insisted that “all Commanders, from squad up, must require patrolling, local security and digging in even though they know that 99 times out of 100, the VC may not attack or be in the vicinity.” He continued with “the individual soldier will not take these measures voluntarily and this is the great challenge to leadership inherent in the war in Vietnam.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #1,” dated 27 March 1966, pp. 3-4, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

¹⁰⁸ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #2,” dated 18 April 1966, p. 1, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

¹⁰⁹ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #2,” dated 18 April 1966, p. 1, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

Continuously stressing the theme of utilizing the significant firepower assets available, DePuy directed his brigades and battalions to improve their methods of calling in massive supporting fires both quickly and accurately. He even required his commanders to utilize “imagination and ingenuity” in implementing “techniques for continuing these fires during medical evacuation.” Additionally, rather than treating air mobile operations simply as “airlifting exercises,” as he had witnessed thus far while in command, he expected his commanders to treat this type of operation as a “carefully planned, well executed heliborne assault.” To accomplish this, he required that infantry commanders at all echelons coordinate for at least one-hour prior with air lift commanders the details of their tactical plans.¹¹⁰

Harkening back to his earlier writing of “11 Men 1 Mind,” DePuy also issued a memorandum on the importance of the rifle squad. DePuy wrote, “of all the problems in an infantry division, the first and most important problem is to maintain the organizational integrity of the rifle squads while in combat.” Stressing the constant flow of orders and instructions from squad leader to team leader and then down to individual soldiers, he professed that while under sustained enemy contact “the individual soldier knows that he is not alone on the battlefield, but rather continues to be a member of a functioning military unit.” Compared to their combat arms brethren such as tankers and artillerymen, the infantry squad, not being organized around a single piece of equipment, had to share a common understanding for how to accomplish its assigned mission. Thus, he concluded that the squad leader had “the greatest command challenge of any infantry leader.”¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #2,” dated 18 April 1966, p. 2, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

¹¹¹ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #3 - The Rifle Squad,” dated 27 May 1966, pp. 1-2, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

By mid 1966, the turnover rates of squad and team leaders was very high in the 1st Division due to the sustained heavy combat undertaken by infantry formations along with Army rotational policies. As a result, DePuy stressed that standardizing the common operating language of infantry patrolling techniques would allow for not only a higher rate of combat effectiveness but, also, a more successful understanding of doctrinal teachings to fill the gaps caused by the repeated turnover of lower echelon leaders.¹¹²

The concept of providing mutual support and security through “overwatch” at all echelons from fire team up to company was therefore stressed by DePuy as paramount to successful tactical competence. Describing in great detail the movement techniques of “travelling,” “travelling overwatch,” and “bounding overwatch,” his note outlined the particulars of these techniques and how they were to be employed to increase survivability. Mandating that fire teams avoid moving in single file and, instead, operate in “V” formations with the requisite spacing outlined by the respective movement technique employed, he hoped to reinforce this doctrinal knowledge across the entire division.¹¹³

DePuy concluded that infantry elements would become more effective “by several hundred percent” if squads and platoons mastered and employed these principles. Additionally, he opined that “because each squad and platoon leader understand exactly the tactics being followed by all others, the control of the infantry elements will be simplified and units will be able to work together with greater effectiveness.” Moreover, he expected commanders to ensure

¹¹² William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #3 - The Rifle Squad,” dated 27 May 1966, p. 2, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

¹¹³ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #3 - The Rifle Squad,” dated 27 May 1966, pp. 2-3, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

“continuous” training of these techniques at the fire team, squad and platoon level “until they [had] achieved a high level of effectiveness.”¹¹⁴

On his various trips around the 1st Division’s TAOR, DePuy visited units and personally led demonstrations of his doctrinal teaching points. One company commander from B/1-28 IN who served from August 1966 to September 1967 recollected years later how DePuy visited his battalion to demonstrate the doctrinal techniques he expected:

I remember one time when General DePuy came down and took all the officers down to lieutenant platoon leaders, formed a platoon out of them, and he was the platoon leader, and he went out of our base camp there and he demonstrated as a platoon leader how he wanted platoons to move through the woods and how you did your final security, flank security, and rear security.¹¹⁵

For a division commander to visit a unit in the middle of a combat zone to demonstrate these techniques reveals the great extent to which DePuy involved himself in the minutiae of tactical expectations. His attention always remained down in the squads, platoons, and companies. More importantly however, it showed the level of seriousness with which he operated. His desire to create a common operating picture for units on the ground involved in the actual fighting was unparalleled amongst the general officers of his time.

Although DePuy expected exacting standards from his subordinate leaders in his tactical directives, he also demonstrated a degree of flexibility as the situations faced by the Big Red One on the battlefield unfolded. Throughout many of the search and destroy missions executed throughout the spring and summer of 1966 within the TAOR, many units had encountered heavily fortified VC base camps and suffered heavy casualties. In fact, throughout the entire year

¹¹⁴ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #3 - The Rifle Squad,” dated 27 May 1966, pp. 3-4, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

¹¹⁵ LTC Thomas P. Barrett, “Interview with LTC George W. Kirschenbauer,” pp. 13-14, Box 20, Folder 3, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

of 1966, U.S. forces encountered the enemy in entrenched fortifications in 63 percent of all engagements.¹¹⁶ In his first “Commanders Note,” DePuy had mandated that elements in contact with VC forces were to maintain contact and not withdraw under any circumstances. Five months later, he amended this order if contact was received from heavily fortified enemy positions.¹¹⁷

In the case of well entrenched VC defenses, DePuy authorized brigade and battalion commanders to pull back their forces upon clear identification of such works, but only if they were “not able by infantry fire and maneuver to destroy or force the enemy out.” Stressing that the smallest friendly force possible initiate first contact and identify these defenses, ideally a squad sized element, he expected heavy ordnance to then be inflicted on the position. Prescribing the technique of marking the defensive position through a distance and azimuth from colored smoke, he expected air and artillery strikes to immediately commence. DePuy even went so far as to outline the most effective ordnance to destroy these defenses. Preferably, he expected large bombs and napalm to be requested or, in the case of artillery, delayed fuse 155 and 8” rounds. Finally, after the barrage of ordnance, he expected the infantry to then comb through the area.¹¹⁸

Yet another example of DePuy adjusting tactics, techniques, and procedures in response to VC tactics was his directed method for fighting enemy forces in rice paddies and along streams. Throughout operations conducted in the early summer months of 1966, Big Red One units were unable to block VC avenues of escape along wood lines, stream lines, and canals. Thus, he directed emplacement of platoons astride these terrain features to clear the foliage and

¹¹⁶ Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine*, 378.

¹¹⁷ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #4 - Attack on VC Fortified Positions,” dated 30 August 1966, p. 1, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

¹¹⁸ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #4 - Attack on VC Fortified Positions,” dated 30 August 1966, pp. 1-2, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

seal the area. From there, platoon leaders were to call in artillery and 81mm mortar strikes into the water to destroy retreating enemy forces.¹¹⁹

Of all the tactical directives and innovations DePuy issued in his time as the commander of the Big Red One, perhaps the one which he is remembered for the most in the institutional memory of the Army is the “DePuy Foxhole.” DePuy insisted on infantry elements digging in to hasty defenses each evening spent out in the field. The standard operating procedure for each individual soldier was to construct a defensive position that consisted of “a rectangular hole, a berm piled up in front, with corner firing ports so that the individual rifleman or machine gunner can continue to fire to the flanks even if under direct fire to the front.”¹²⁰

DePuy emphasized continuous improvement of foxhole defenses and camouflaging, utilizing “local foliage.” He also instructed clearing fields of fire through either cutting down or trampling brush and the emplacement of overhead cover at each position. Because firing ports emanated from each side of the foxhole, rather than from the front, interlocking and mutually supporting fields of fire required constant communication between soldiers manning each position. Moreover, he directed that leaders from squad leader up to battalion commander walk defensive perimeters prior to nightfall to ensure that positions had been constructed properly, were mutually supportive of one another, and that all “necessary coordination” had been undertaken. Additionally, he mandated that all leaders from squad leader and above know the exact location on the ground and associated target number for the pre-planned artillery and mortar targets in their respective sector of the defense.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #5 - Fighting in Rice Paddies and Along Wooded Streams,” dated 30 August 1966, p. 1, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

¹²⁰ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #7 - Defensive Positions,” dated 30 August 1966, p. 1, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

¹²¹ William E. DePuy, “Commanders Notes - #7 - Defensive Positions,” dated 30 August 1966, p. 1, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

Theodore Fichtl, who served as the commander of C/2-18 IN from May to October 1966, emphasized the impact of DePuy's mandate to dig in:

I had an offshoot of the DePuy philosophy...It was absolutely a mortal sin in my battalion and my company to not dig when you stopped. And not only to dig, but then to enhance your dug-in position through the use of sandbags...digging was tremendously important...and more effective if you enhanced that position with six sandbags...everybody carried six sandbags.¹²²

DePuy's emphasis on his units digging in for the night prioritized the survivability of his soldiers over conducting nighttime operations. Most often, units dug in when on large search and destroy missions in the jungles where the enemy threat loomed largest. Through the creation of well entrenched defenses, DePuy sought to have the enemy attempt to attack.¹²³ If they chose to do so, they would often face a deluge of well-coordinated direct and indirect firepower in response.

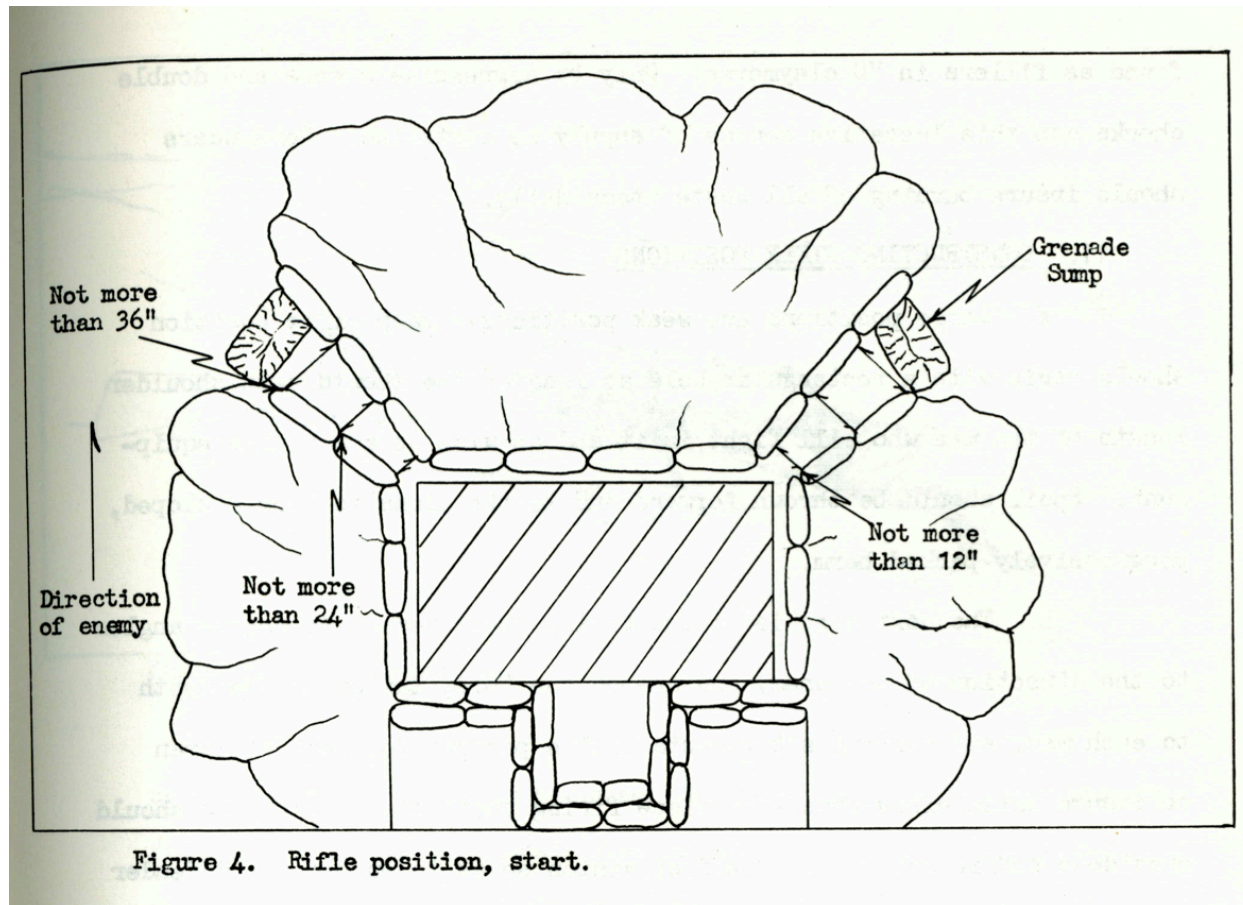
DePuy also stressed nighttime fire discipline for infantry elements set in overnight patrol bases. Enemy probing attacks were to be met with hand grenades and mortar fire rather than small arms and machine guns in an effort to not reveal the size and disposition of the defense to the attackers. In a nod to the Australian Forces operating closely with the 1st Division in Phuoc Tuy Province, DePuy recommended utilizing their tested technique of attaching a rope or wire from listening posts back to the squad or platoon leader. A certain number of tugs on the rope would communicate the presence and size of an identified enemy force.¹²⁴

¹²² LTC John P. Otjen, "Interview with LTC Theodore C. Fichtl," pp. 34-35, Box 12, Folder 4, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

¹²³ In discussing night operations, DePuy recollected, "That's what I wanted to do, to have them [the VC] attack. Additionally, we found that units deployed across major VC supply and courier routes had great success at night. For example, Al Haig's battalion, the 1st of the 26th Infantry, loved to sit on a sandy hill south of Chon Thanh, because all night, every night, small groups of VC would stumble into his outposts." In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 151.

¹²⁴ William E. DePuy, "Commanders Notes - #6 - Nighttime Fire Discipline," dated 30 August 1966, p. 1, Box 23B, Folder 10, SBBP, USAHEC.

Illustration 1



Source: 1st Infantry Division PAM 350-1: Fundamentals of Infantry Tactics, dated 1 February 1968, p. 40, Box 1, Folder 4, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

Night operations in Vietnam were undoubtedly a dangerous and difficult mission for American forces to conduct.¹²⁵ This is not to say that 1st Infantry Division units did not conduct operations at night, as they certainly did. For example, operations in the Rung Sat Special Zone

¹²⁵ Bruce Palmer, Jr. *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1984), 58-59. Palmer is critical of DePuy's mandate to dig in each evening writing: "A major weakness was that it surrendered the night to the enemy...to preclude them [night operations] by design was a self-imposed handicap that gave the enemy an uncontested advantage." In reality, DePuy still conducted night operations under conditions favorable to his forces when accurate intelligence was available. When asked in his oral history if he should have conducted more operations at night, DePuy wrote: "Well, I probably should have done more, but, really, there are only two things that you can do at night, one of which is just move without fighting...So, I think that perhaps we should have moved some battalions and companies into blocking positions or ambushes at night. But, as far as moving and fighting at night, when you don't know exactly where the enemy is, I'm against it because I don't think you can develop any combat power. If he's there and organized, and you're moving and disorganized, you are not going to like the results." In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 150.

were almost exclusively conducted under the cover of darkness to ambush enemy forces moving supplies down river by boat. Additionally, missions conducted in the heavily populated areas of Binh Duong province as part of the various Revolutionary Development missions such as Lam Son II consisted of saturation patrolling at night when the VC were most active.

Cloverleafing

“The trick of jungle fighting is to find the enemy with the fewest possible men and to destroy him with the maximum amount of firepower.”¹²⁶

-General DePuy, *Newsweek*, 5 December 1966

In a tactical maneuver he dubbed “cloverleafing,” DePuy sought to initiate contact with the enemy using the smallest friendly force possible. Operating in an environment where the terrain favored the enemy and visibility was oftentimes poor in the jungle, units would often stumble upon enemy defenses or kill zones while conducting search and destroy sweeps. Implementing a variation of overwatch which he had mulled over and developed for years, the clover leaf technique became an effective means by which friendly units at all echelons from platoon up to battalion could locate enemy forces without becoming decisively engaged under conditions favorable to the enemy.¹²⁷

While on patrol, the cloverleaf technique was implemented in bounding overwatch when enemy contact appeared likely or imminent. As an example, the lead platoon moving to establish contact with an enemy force in a search and destroy operation as part of a large battalion column would halt in a security posture. The squad in the lead platoon would advance forward fanning

¹²⁶ “The Men Who Run the War” in “General Westmoreland, A Recipe for Victory?” *Newsweek*, December 5, 1966, p. 53, Box 28, Folder 18, Sedgwick Tourison Collection, TTUVA.

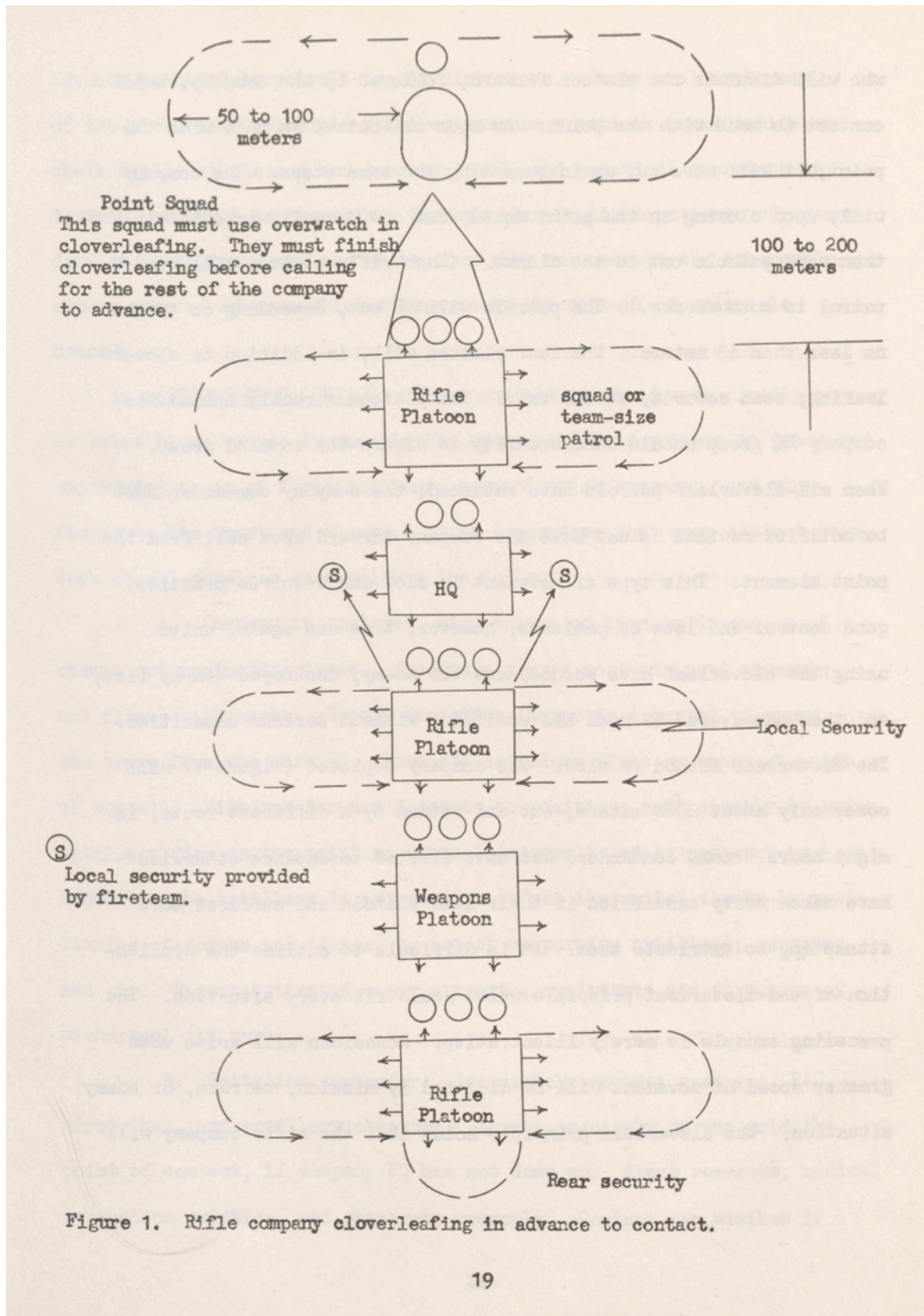
¹²⁷ “Meeting Transcript on Operation Attleboro” – Support Document from Project Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations (CHECO) Reports of Southeast Asia Report # 38, p. 5, Box 0002, Folder 0579, TTUVA. See also MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 45-46. See also Gole, *General William E. DePuy*, 178-179.

out a specified distance, usually fifty to one hundred meters, depending on the density of the jungle. That squad would then return to its departure point. Simultaneously, squads to the flanks would also fan out. If no contact was made with the enemy, the main body could move forward along its intended route of travel and repeat the process once again.¹²⁸

The cloverleaf technique proved pivotal in providing early warning to infantry formations. Although it slowed movement through the jungle, it increased survivability amongst infantry units and allowed commanders to capitalize on advantages in firepower if an enemy force was discovered. When utilizing this technique properly, the chances of stumbling into an enemy ambush or fortified defensive position diminished significantly. Big Red One units utilized cloverleafing with significant success during Operation Attleboro in November 1966 and other units across the Army soon adopted the technique implementing it into use on their own patrols.

¹²⁸ 1st Infantry Division PAM 350-1: Fundamentals of Infantry Tactics, dated 1 February 1968, pp. 18-21, Box 1, Folder 4, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC. See also William S. Hathaway, "Operations Report – Lessons Learned 4-67 – Observations of a Battalion Commander," dated 7 June 1967, pp. 15-18, Box 21D, Folder 37, SBBP, USAHEC.

Illustration 2



Source: 1st Infantry Division PAM 350-1: Fundamentals of Infantry Tactics, dated 1 February 1968, p. 19, Box 1, Folder 4, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

Artillery

“In his operations, the brigade commander seeks to inflict maximum damage to the enemy at least cost to his own soldier’s lives. He employs to the fullest the firepower, mobility, and mechanical advantages American forces have over the enemy. He uses his soldiers to find and fix the enemy and supporting firepower to destroy the enemy. He spends firepower as if he is a millionaire and husbands his men’s lives as if he is a pauper. His constant and governing operational aim is to find the enemy and destroy him.”¹²⁹

-COL Sidney B. Berry, 1st BDE CDR, 1st ID, 1967

Under DePuy’s command, the 1st Infantry Division relied heavily on artillery as a central component of its firepower melee throughout 1966 and into 1967. During DePuy’s formative experiences on the World War II battlefield, artillery had played an important role in the U.S. Army’s drive across Western Europe and into Germany. In the European operational environment, emplacing forward observers on key terrain where they could then inflict preparatory fires on German troop concentrations prior to Allied infantry and armored formations attacking an objective was standard practice. In essence, implementing indirect fires with maneuver became the accepted method in the U.S. Army and was reflected in the post-World War II American doctrine.

Recollecting on his own experiences in the 90th Infantry Division, DePuy felt that the most important accomplishment his infantry battalion had contributed on the battlefield was to move combat power forward in the form of artillery:

My battalion was the means by which Field Artillery forward observers were moved to the next piece of high ground. Once you had a forward observer on a piece of high ground, he could call up five to ten battalions of artillery and that meant you had moved combat power to the next observation point – more combat power than the light infantry could dispose of...what you’re really trying to do... [is] move combat power forward to

¹²⁹ Sidney B. Berry, Jr., “Observations of a Brigade Commander,” dated 1967, p.12, Box 22A, Folder 5, SBBP, USAHEC.

destroy the enemy, and the combat power that you are moving forward has been, in the past, mostly artillery.¹³⁰

In describing this process, DePuy also noted the important role which the infantry played: “The infantry has a lot of ears and a lot of eyeballs...The infantry is a sensor. It’s a sensory organization that works into the fabric of the terrain and the enemy, and can call in all of this firepower – including artillery and TAC air that can really do the killing.”¹³¹

In the operational environment DePuy encountered in Vietnam, where the terrain tended to favor the elusive tactics of the VC and NVA and where key terrain rarely ever presented itself, DePuy adjusted his employment of artillery. Now, DePuy would use artillery to destroy the enemy altogether once ground units became decisively engaged in lieu of maneuver. Amongst other factors, fighting in the thick jungle inhibited visibility, maneuver, and command and control. With survivability always at the forefront of DePuy’s mind, and no clear forward edge of the battle area, artillery now took center stage in all operations to maximize combat power. Yet, DePuy’s mantra of using the infantry as a “sensor” remained a central tenet to his methodology.

In the Big Red One, units began to utilize artillery in a number of different ways. One infantry company commander noted how his unit utilized artillery fire to aid in land navigation

¹³⁰ DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 86-87. It is important to note that DePuy acknowledged that his comments on this topic “infuriated the Infantry School.” In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 86. Further evidence of this appears in a memorandum from the U.S. Army’s Combat Developments Command attached to a copy of 1st Infantry Division Pamphlet 350-1: “Fundamentals of Infantry Tactics.” The memorandum noted that LTC Albert J. Brown, Senior Liaison Officer, U.S. Army, Vietnam wrote: “Most of the techniques addressed in the pamphlet are excellent with one exception. Paragraph 4, Chapter 2, “Action Upon Contact” is highly controversial. The basic combat mission of the infantry to close with the enemy by means of fire and maneuver, in order to destroy or capture him, or to repel his assault by fire and close combat seems to have been preempted by a policy of back off and call in artillery, gunships and/or direct support air to do the fighting. It would appear that if this is the proper method to fight the Vietnam - type of war, we in CDC [Combat Developments Command] had better take a long hard look at our present doctrine.” In Major R.S. Christian, Memorandum: “1st Infantry Division Pamphlet 350-1, dated 1 February 1968, ‘Fundamentals of Infantry Tactics’,” dated 27 June 1968, Box 1, Folder 4, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

¹³¹ DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 87.

and quickly bring firepower into the fight: “Our SOP [Standard Operating Procedure]...the FDC [Fire Direction Center] would fire a single round of artillery; you’d walk that 500 meters ahead of you all the time so that that was available to you at very short notice...the guns were ready to shoot so that aided in land navigation.”¹³² Another battery commander echoed the practice of this technique, stating:

The cloverleaves would expand out, and we’d pop out a round so the infantry always knew where their artillery was at as they were moving to contact...the lead element, the forward observer, as they were cloverleafing – searching, destroying, sweeping the area, we would fire one round every one minute...they were called marching rounds...when they [the infantry] got hit [enemy contact], it was easy to adjust from that last round.¹³³

This method, although helpful in quickly bringing indirect fire on enemy positions, had many shortcomings. For one, it gave up the element of surprise for units as they moved to contact on suspected enemy locations during large search and destroy sweeps. It also served as an extremely wasteful procedure.¹³⁴

In an attempt to provide more organic firepower to his maneuver units, DePuy preferred outfitting each rifle company with an 81mm mortar system. When conditions permitted, the company could then quickly bring overwhelming indirect fires on an enemy force utilizing the techniques of “direct lay” and “direct alignment” to employ indirect fires without the need for an FDC.¹³⁵ Although this technique equipped infantry companies with their own indirect fire assets,

¹³² LTC Thomas P. Barrett, “Interview with LTC George W. Kirschenbauer,” p. 15, Box 20, Folder 3, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

¹³³ LTC Arturo Rodriguez, “Interview with LTC Dennis D. McSweeney,” pp. 44-45, Box 23, Folder 2, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

¹³⁴ For further analysis of H&I fires see John M. Hawkins, “The Costs of Artillery: Eliminating Harassment and Interdiction Fires during the Vietnam War,” *Journal of Military History* 70, no. 1 (January 2006): 91-122. See also John M. Hawkins, “The Limits of Fire Support: American Finances and Firepower Restraint During the Vietnam War,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2013.

¹³⁵ William E. DePuy, Letter: “MG DePuy to MG Robert H. York, Commandant, U.S. Army Infantry School,” dated 1 February 1967, Box 4A, Folder 13, WEDP, USAHEC. DePuy noted: “Only one of my battalions masses its mortars and, frankly, I do not approve of that except in unusual circumstances. I prefer one mortar per

the thick canopy of the jungle often inhibited the employment of high-angle fires in most cases. To rectify this, mortar squads would often emplace their tubes in areas with less restrictive overhead cover.

In the seemingly endless pursuit of firepower in the Big Red One, the quest to introduce artillery support into all operations even influenced units operating in the swampy terrain of the Rung Sat Special Zone. With the ground highly saturated, finding suitable terrain to emplace artillery pieces in stable firing positions proved limited. As a result, in December 1966, 1-7 FA undertook a mission codenamed Operation Hornblower to test the feasibility of fitting 105mm howitzers on board LCM6 landing craft.¹³⁶

The operation concluded that it was in fact possible to mount howitzers on board the LCM6. The report recommended that the “LCM6 mounted howitzers be employed as a two gun platoon...utilized in a general support or a reinforcing role for artillery units.” The report also outlined limitations on the employment of artillery in this configuration. For one, when firing from the LCM6, the report recommended that “the landing craft must be beached during the firing of all missions except shore line preparations employing direct fire.” Second, the report acknowledged that “unobserved fire close to friendly positions is not consistently accurate due to variances in tide. Only observed fire should be employed.”¹³⁷ Nonetheless, through this display of ingenuity, units operating in the mangrove swamps around Saigon had access to artillery fires whenever required in operations moving forward.

rifle company because that is all the ammunition they can carry and they do, indeed, fire without an FDC – and they are pretty good at it.”

¹³⁶ 1st Battalion, 7th Artillery, 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Hornblower, dated 17 February 1967, pp. 1-2, Box 19, Folder 2, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited as NARA II).

¹³⁷ 1st Battalion, 7th Artillery, 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Hornblower, dated 17 February 1967, p. 2, Box 19, Folder 2, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

DePuy vehemently defended his use of artillery throughout his entire time in command and well after. Following Operation Attleboro, he asserted that in the 1st Division, “We don’t fire H&I fires; always at a specific target. We fire at targets reported by intelligence.” He also insisted that the psychological effects of artillery fire on the VC produced the largest number of defections to the Chieu Hoi program.¹³⁸ Years later, he echoed these same sentiments insisting that “we [the 1st Division] fired a lot of ammunition during fights but fired much less ammunition between fights.”¹³⁹ DePuy described his method of implementing artillery fires in a fight using the analogy of a “doughnut”:

Let's say that there was a company or a battalion in a clearing and the VC or the NVA were attacking it. The problem...was that one of three things was happening in a "doughnut," ...that might be two or three hundred yards in depth. The enemy were either reinforcing, or they were maneuvering, or they were withdrawing. But, you never knew which, because you could not see them. The least reliable reports come from people in contact because they are under fire. So, we would take artillery batteries and simply put boxes of fire around the fight and tell them to continue to shoot until we told them to stop. Maybe on one side we'd put in air strikes and put in artillery boxes around the rest. So, they fired a tremendous amount of ammunition during those fights...It was the only way I knew of employing firepower in a jungle fight. I still think that that is precisely the right thing to do, but it has been interpreted as just throwing a lot of artillery out that's not under adjustment.¹⁴⁰

DePuy’s battle principles stressed that maneuver units always position themselves within range of artillery to ensure that this process could take place.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the use of fire

¹³⁸ “Meeting Transcript on Operation Attleboro” – Support Document from Project Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations (CHECO) Reports of Southeast Asia Report # 38, p. 4, Box 0002, Folder 0579, TTUVA. The Chieu Hoi or “Open Arms” program was a joint initiative by the United States and South Vietnamese governments to encourage the defection of VC and NVA personnel to the side of the GVN. Initiated in 1963, it saw limited and controversial success as the sincerity of many defections was brought into question. For further information see Lucian W. Pye, *Observations on the Chieu Hoi Program* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1969).

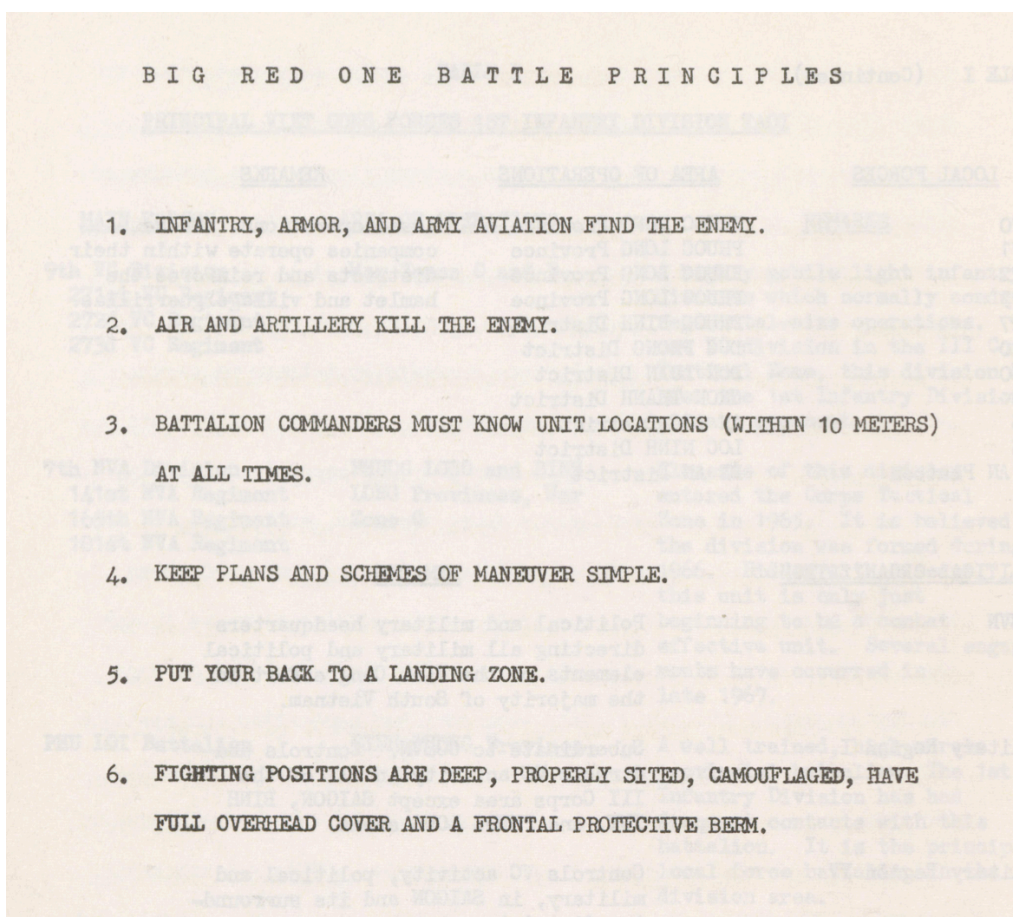
¹³⁹ Acknowledging his own defensive tone, DePuy wrote: “I happened to look up the records and had some charts made before I left over there. The 25th Division fired more artillery than the 1st Division fired by a wide margin. But, we got our reputation from the concept that we used when fighting.” In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 144.

¹⁴⁰ DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 144-145.

¹⁴¹ According to Alexander Haig, DePuy’s “Big Red One Battle Principles” was the “best military directive of the war.” In Alexander M. Haig Jr., *Inner Circles: How America Changed the World: A Memoir* (New York: Warner Books, 1992), 159. Haig identified two of DePuy’s battle principles as follows: “1.) The commander who

coordination lines in major search and destroy operations ensured lethal indirect fires were effectively brought down on the enemy. Nevertheless, throughout 1966, 85 percent of all artillery fired by U.S. Army units throughout Vietnam consisted of H&I fires.¹⁴² Surely, the 1st Infantry Division contributed to the use of unobserved H&I fires despite DePuy's arguments to the contrary.

Illustration 3



Source: 1st Infantry Division PAM 350-1: Fundamentals of Infantry Tactics, dated 1 February 1968, p. 14, Box 1, Folder 4, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

attacks or defends with infantry weapons alone commits an unpardonable tactical error. 3.) Complicated schemes of maneuver have no place in jungle warfare.” In Haig, *Inner Circles*, 158-161. According to Henry Gole, DePuy's Battle Principles were retained through the command of General Hay although they appear to have been slightly modified in the 1 February 1968 Publication of 1st Infantry Division PAM 350-1. See Gole, *General William E. DePuy*, 195.

¹⁴² Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 385.

Relief of Officers and NCOs

“If every division commander relieved people like DePuy, I’d soon be out of lieutenant colonels and majors. He just eats them up like peanuts.”¹⁴³

-General Harold K. Johnson, 24th Army Chief of Staff

Despite the reputation DePuy garnered for the tactical methods he mandated and implemented across the 1st Infantry Division, perhaps the legacy which followed him the most throughout the rest of his military career was the swift relief of officers and NCOs within his formation who did not meet his exacting standards. During DePuy’s eleven months commanding the Big Red One, he relieved a total of fifty-six officers and NCOs to include seven battalion commanders.¹⁴⁴

If there was one lesson that DePuy took away from his time serving in the 90th Infantry Division in World War II, it was that incompetent leadership ultimately led to unnecessary casualties. Much like many other military leaders who witnessed intense combat at such a young age, and were lucky enough to survive the ordeal, their experiences shaped their approach to combat leadership throughout the rest of their time in uniform. In describing what he ultimately looked for in a leader, DePuy exclaimed, “I wanted people who were flexibly minded, didn’t need a lot of instructions, would get cracking, and would get out and do something useful on their own once they were given a general direction.”¹⁴⁵

Perhaps DePuy relieved so many leaders as a result of those very methods he so demanded. His emphasis on “pile-on” tactics and bringing to bear overwhelming firepower required ground force commanders to master the techniques of calling in artillery, close air

¹⁴³ Gole, *General William E. DePuy*, 189.

¹⁴⁴ Ricks, *The Generals*, 242. Sources vary on the number of personnel DePuy relieved while in command. In his own oral history, DePuy admits to relieving at least seven Battalion Commanders for a variety of different reasons.

¹⁴⁵ DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 140.

support, helicopter gunships, and naval gunfire. Prior to calling in ordnance, leaders had to know the precise locations of both friendly and enemy forces while still maneuvering and directing their elements and simultaneously managing direct fire contact with enemy. This was no simple task and required necessary training, skillful coordination, and a mastery of combined arms warfare.

Likewise, the relatively new airmobile concept required leaders who could adapt quickly to the everchanging nature of the battlefield. Airmobile operations required commanders to conduct detailed planning in order to synchronize their maneuver plan with the helicopter transport assets at their disposal. Additionally, quick communications and precise timing were required from leaders to minimize casualties in their own formations and simultaneously inflict damage to enemy forces before they could withdraw.

Furthermore, the Army's personnel rotation policy during the Vietnam War required officers to spend only six months on the line and then transfer to rear echelon staff duties. By the time these officers had learned how to operate effectively in the unique combat environment of Vietnam, and were lucky enough to survive, they were transferred to other positions. Compared to enlisted soldiers, who were required to spend twelve months on the line if they were not killed or suffering from wounds or sickness, this policy created a rift between the officer and enlisted ranks which grew ever larger as the war waged on.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the learning curve in combat was steep and needed to be mastered quickly.

¹⁴⁶ Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 140. Commenting on the officer rotation policy and his relief of leaders DePuy stated years after the war, "With regard to having six months in command and trying to rotate everybody through, I've always said that that was running the war for the benefit of the officer corps...I'm sure I made mistakes on some of the people I relieved. But, I don't think I made very many. I think most of them were cut and dried cases of pure ineptitude or malfeasance. I acted in every case on behalf of the lives of our 1st Division soldiers who always paid the price for the actions of the weak or incompetent leaders." In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 154.

Nonetheless, DePuy's leadership style reached the lower levels of the command and had a profound impact. George Kirschenbauer who served as a company commander in 1-28 IN, commented years after the war on DePuy's leadership and approach to officer management:

I've been with other units at other times, even the unit after I left company command changed character a little bit as new guys came in, and I don't think it was as flexible, as dynamic as it was at the particular time that I had company command; that gave me great confidence in the leadership, just absolute confidence and respect for the leadership. I can tell you that I certainly had more respect for the division commander, for example, doing the right thing, when I thought he might be in a position to observe; I had more respect for that than I ever had for the enemy...respect, or fear...fear is not exactly the right word, but, of course, he was noted for relieving people. If you were, number one, either not capable of doing the job, or you didn't care enough to do your job right, you were out. But, if you did your job reasonably well, he was actually supportive. Great confidence in the leadership at the time.¹⁴⁷

On the contrary, other leaders at various echelons deemed DePuy's style as micro managerial. Recollecting on his time serving as a battery commander in the Big Red One's Division Artillery, Dennis McSweeney noted, "There was over-supervision by higher...there was not faith, trust, and confidence in the junior NCOs and in the junior officers...There were a lot of generals and a lot of colonels flying over our heads telling us what to do from a day-to-day basis."¹⁴⁸ Despite the varying opinions expressed by subordinates under DePuy's command, it was the negative attention DePuy garnered from Chief of Staff of the Army, General Harold K. Johnson, that ultimately mattered most.

Johnson and DePuy held starkly different views on leadership. DePuy allowed little room for error among leaders in combat as a result of his personal experience in World War II.

Johnson on the other hand, held the belief that the mark of a true leader amounted to producing

¹⁴⁷ LTC Thomas P. Barrett, "Interview with LTC George W. Kirschenbauer," p. 38, Box 20, Folder 3, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

¹⁴⁸ LTC Arturo Rodriguez, "Interview with LTC Dennis D. McSweeney," p. 87, Box 23, Folder 2, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

results with those personnel assigned under them. Johnson felt that DePuy needed to give leaders a chance and to communicate his expectations more clearly.¹⁴⁹ The differing views held between Johnson and DePuy on this issue were never resolved.

Organizational Culture in the Big Red One: The Emergence of a Tactical-Level Subculture

“No Mission Too Difficult, No Sacrifice Too Great. Duty First!”

-1st Infantry Division Motto

In 1988, historians Allan R. Millet, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth H. Watman established a framework to measure the effectiveness of military organizations. Ultimately, they defined military effectiveness as “the process by which armed forces convert resources into fighting power.”¹⁵⁰ In 2019, historians Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray expanded upon the concept of military effectiveness in military organizations through the addition of organizational culture as a key factor. The authors defined organizational culture as “the assumptions, ideas, norms, and beliefs, expressed or reflected in symbols, rituals, myths, and practices, that shape how an organization functions and adapts to external stimuli and that give meaning to its members.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Harold K. Johnson, Correspondence from Harold K. Johnson to Major General William E. DePuy [With Attachments], dated 6 May 1966, p. 1, Box 75, Folder 1, Official Correspondence - Army Chief of Staff, Close Hold 10 December 1965- 9 November 1966, HKJP, USAHEC.

¹⁵⁰ Allan R. Millet, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth H. Watman, “The Effectiveness of Military Organizations,” in *Military Effectiveness, Volume I: The First World War*, ed. Allan R. Millet and Williamson Murray (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 2. Within the study, the authors established a set of factors by which to assess military effectiveness: “The ability of the armed force to operate within the political milieu to obtain manpower and resources, the fashioning of strategies to achieve political goals, the matching of ways and means to the ends of strategy, the ability to operate within the context of an alliance, the development of doctrine to maximize the capabilities of various arms and services, the willingness of the officer corps to realistically examine the problems confronting an armed force, the reasonable integration of available technology, a coequal emphasis on support elements such as intelligence and logistics, and tactical flexibility and adaptability.” Mansoor and Murray noted that in the 1988 publication the authors wrote “one must include in the analysis non-quantifiable organizational attitudes, behaviors, and relationships that span a military organization’s full activities at the political, strategic, operational, and tactical levels.” In Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray, *The Culture of Military Organizations*, ed. Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3. It should also be noted that these factors were meant to be applied to conventional military operations.

¹⁵¹ Mansoor and Murray, *The Culture of Military Organizations*, 1. Mansoor and Murray importantly note: “Of all the factors in military effectiveness, culture is perhaps the most important. Yet it also remains the most

Mansoor and Murray posited that organizational culture impacts military organizations in two ways. First, it establishes an “organizational identity” defined as “the distinctive attributes that make the organization different from others.” Second, organizational culture “establishes expectations of how group members will act in a given situation.”¹⁵² Furthermore, the authors identified history, geography, and the nature of the operational environment as key “external factors” that influence military culture.¹⁵³ Just as important, they acknowledged that subcultures exist within military organizations that have the ability to exert “significant influence on the larger organization.”¹⁵⁴ Consequently, a “tactical-level subculture” may emerge under a confluence of these characteristics within a military organization.¹⁵⁵

Defined by this combination of factors, a tactical-level subculture emerged in the Big Red One under DePuy’s command. As the longest serving infantry division on continuous active duty service in the United States Army, the 1st Infantry Division had a storied and proud history. Established in 1917, it was the first division to deploy overseas in World War I and see combat on the western front. In World War II, it was the first division to arrive in the United Kingdom and land in North Africa and Sicily. The division took part in the D-Day landings on the Omaha beachhead and participated in the drive across western Europe where it was the first unit to cross the Siegfried Line.¹⁵⁶ Known as the “Fighting First,” each trooper in the division wore an olive

difficult to describe and understand, because it involves so many external factors that impinge, warp, and distort its formation and continuities, even in different military organizations within the same nation.”

¹⁵² Mansoor and Murray, *The Culture of Military Organizations*, 2.

¹⁵³ Mansoor and Murray, *The Culture of Military Organizations*, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Mansoor and Murray, *The Culture of Military Organizations*, 457.

¹⁵⁵ For an excellent discussion of tactical level subcultures, see Tony Ingesson, “The Politics of Combat: The Political and Strategic Impact of Tactical-Level Subcultures, 1939-1995.” Ph.D. Dissertation, Lund University, 2016. Ingesson defines a tactical level subculture as “a set of cultural norms, ideas and priorities, which are shared by the members of a military unit. These norms, ideas and priorities not only distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior, they also influence perception, decision-making in general, and the ability to take action. In addition, they [tactical level subcultures] are shaped by the constraining and enabling aspects of the equipment used by the unit.” In Ingesson, “The Politics of Combat,” 26.

¹⁵⁶ “Welcome Brochure for all 1st Infantry Division Soldiers,” dated 1966, pp. 1-4, Box 22A, Folder 11, SBBP, USAHEC. See also “Into a New Kind of War,” *Danger Forward*, June 1, 1967, p. 58, 1st Infantry Division

drab colored patch with a red numeral one on their shoulder sleeve insignia distinguishing them as members of the unit.

Upon his assumption of command of the Big Red One on 15 March 1996, DePuy acknowledged the legacy of the division. In his speech to the troops in the formation, he stated “It is a privilege for me to join your ranks; I am well aware of the illustrious history of the Division...During the next days, weeks and months, we will have many opportunities to demonstrate that we can live up to this, the first of all Divisions.”¹⁵⁷

The tactical directives and innovations which DePuy ushered into the 1st Infantry Division separated the unit from other Army units of the time. The lavish use of firepower, implementation of airmobile assets, and the tactical methods and directives DePuy espoused in his “Commanders Notes” were all a result of the challenges posed by the operational environment and the enemy threat. Many of these techniques were adopted into practice by other U.S. Army divisions as the war continued.¹⁵⁸ The SOPs and “Battle Principles” DePuy devised, implemented, and mandated served as guiding principles in how units should perform in the different situations which they confronted on the battlefield.

The leadership of a military unit often has the greatest influence on establishing the culture of the organization.¹⁵⁹ A common mantra amongst military units exists where the formation as a whole begins to exude the personality, traits, beliefs, and behaviors of its

Publications – Vietnam, Colonel Robert R. McCormick Research Center Digital Archives, First Division Museum at Cantigny Park, Wheaton, Illinois (hereafter cited as MRCDA).

¹⁵⁷ “Into a New Kind of War,” *Danger Forward*, June 1, 1967, p. 44, 1st Infantry Division Publications – Vietnam, MRCD.

¹⁵⁸ According to historian Andrew Birtle: “DePuy’s experience was replicated throughout the Army in Vietnam in 1965 and 1966 and became the basis for U.S. tactics for the rest of the war.” In Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine*, 380.

¹⁵⁹ See Mansoor and Murray, *The Culture of Military Organizations*, 449-450. On leadership establishing organizational culture, Mansoor and Murray wrote: “As with most human endeavors, leadership is essential to creating and maintaining organizational culture...War magnifies the importance of leadership in establishing organizational culture.”

leadership. Under DePuy's command, the leadership at the top of the Big Red One consistently displayed an aggressive spirit for bringing the enemy to battle. This mentality was immediately ushered in by DePuy as soon as he assumed command and instituted the drastic changes which separated him from his predecessor.

DePuy codified his views on leadership and the art of command in a memorandum he issued to all Big Red One leaders in the summer of 1966. Within this directive, he outlined his three steps to competent leadership:

- a. Decide carefully, exactly what it is you intend to do.
- b. Explain carefully to your commanders exactly what you want them to do. If you can't phrase it in simple clear language it is a bad plan.
- c. Make them do it – all the way.

Demand top performance every day. There is no day in Vietnam which may not be the BIG day. As leaders, you and your NCO's owe it to your men to insist on deep holes, adequate patrolling and security, and proper combat formations because their lives depend upon it. The junior leader who sluffs off because his men are tired or who would rather be a good guy than a combat leader inevitably winds up with good American blood on his hands. This amounts to criminal negligence and will be neither condoned nor forgiven in the 1st Division.¹⁶⁰

DePuy held steadfast in his belief that leaders should be alongside those they were charged to lead and was not alone in his approach to combat leadership. Throughout his time in command, his assistant division commander Brigadier General James F. Hollingsworth shared his command philosophy. As one officer noted, "The 1st Division had not seen a more two-fisted approach to command of the division since the days of Terry de La Mesa Allen and his colorful assistant, Brigadier General Teddy Roosevelt Jr., in World War II."¹⁶¹ DePuy and Hollingsworth were both known for their aggressive command style and would often land their command

¹⁶⁰ William E. DePuy, Memorandum to All Platoon Leaders, Company, Troop and Battery Commanders 1st Infantry Division, Subject: "Leadership," dated 23 June 1966, Box 22A, Folder 11, SBBP, USAHEC.

¹⁶¹ James E. Shelton, *The Beast Was Out There: The 28th Infantry Black Lions and the Battle of Ong Thanh, Vietnam, October 1967* (Chicago: Cantigny First Division Foundation, 2002), 16.

helicopters and join units in contact with enemy forces on the ground.¹⁶² Hollingsworth, who had served in Patton's Third Army during World War II, was revered as a "fighting general."¹⁶³

Lieutenant Colonel Richard Prillaman, who had served as the battalion commander of 1-2 IN under DePuy, noted the stark differences in the Big Red One's approach to command compared to his peers who had served with other units across the Army in Vietnam. Leading from the front amongst the troops came to define the culture established in the 1st Infantry Division. Following his attendance at the Army War College and a follow-on assignment to the Infantry School at Fort Benning, in a letter to DePuy Prillaman wrote:

I've discovered since I went to Carlisle and came here that we in the Big Red were a unique breed of cat. The idea that a battalion commander would walk through the jungle with his outfit is completely foreign to most commanders from other units...I feel very strongly that our approach was the right one...command, with all that the word implies, requires personal presence.¹⁶⁴

One company commander from B/1-28 IN who served from August 1966 to September 1967 held the DePuy-Hollingsworth team in high regard stating:

The team we had there from the division commander down...I think there was as much talent there at that particular time as you'd ever find in the Army. I think it was a particularly good unit to serve in and I felt very confident that the senior leadership would, number one, pass down all their experience to the guys running the lower level units so that we had the benefit of all their knowledge; they were very, very serious about what they were doing, and that they had good talent and capability.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² In a letter to DePuy, Johnson wrote: "I note in a cable and news release that reached here yesterday (5th) that you and Holly are out chasing VC in your choppers. If I had wanted a lead scout in command of the 1st Division, you would not have gotten the job. Your value and Holly's is proportional to the responsibility that you have for over 15,000 men. Your job is not to shoot VC. Your job is to see that other people shoot VC. At least, that is the way that I look at it." In Harold K. Johnson, Correspondence from Harold K. Johnson to Major General William E. DePuy [With Attachments], dated 13 May 1966, p. 1, Box 75, Folder 1, Official Correspondence - Army Chief of Staff, Close Hold 10 December 1965- 9 November 1966, HKJP, USAHEC.

¹⁶³ James H. Willbanks, *Danger 79er: The Life and Times of Lieutenant General James F. Hollingsworth* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2018), 85.

¹⁶⁴ Richard L. Prillaman, Letter from LTC Richard L. Prillaman to MG DePuy, dated 1 November 1968, p. 2, Box 4B, Folder 19, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

¹⁶⁵ LTC Thomas P. Barrett, "Interview with LTC George W. Kirschenbauer," p. 37, Box 20, Folder 3, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

In a testament to the impact DePuy's leadership had on the men of the Big Red One, even after he had relinquished command of the unit his influence on the soldiers in the formation remained. Retired Brigadier General James E. Shelton, who joined the division as a then major in July 1967, where he served as an Operations Officer (S-3) in 2-28 IN, admitted to the long-lasting effect of DePuy's influence. Years after the war, he wrote "I could clearly sense an attitude of resentment toward General [John H.] Hay on the part of those who had served under General DePuy. This resentment was not necessarily a result of anything Hay had done poorly. Most old timers simply felt that DePuy could not be replaced."¹⁶⁶

The tactical-level subculture that emerged in the Big Red One undergirded significant change in the post-Vietnam Army. These changes manifested at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Over thirty officers who served under DePuy in the eleven months he commanded the division eventually reached the rank of general officer.¹⁶⁷ DePuy's command sergeant major, William O. Wooldridge went on to become the first Sergeant Major of the Army.¹⁶⁸ This group of leaders spearheaded institutional change throughout the Army and all were influenced by DePuy while he commanded the Big Red One.

¹⁶⁶ Shelton, *The Beast Was Out There*, 18-19.

¹⁶⁷ Gole, *General William E. DePuy*, 195.

¹⁶⁸ "Into a New Kind of War," *Danger Forward*, June 1, 1967, p. 32, 1st Infantry Division Publications – Vietnam, MRCDA. See also DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 167.

Chapter Five: Significant Operations of the Big Red One - Case Studies in Search and Destroy Under DePuy's Command

By the spring of 1966, just as General DePuy assumed command of the 1st Infantry Division, the enemy situation in the III CTZ had strengthened exponentially and rapidly in preparation for a new Communist offensive. Under General Nguyen Chi Thanh, the commander of COSVN and the B2 Front, the Communists sought to intensify their combat operations in the areas north and east of Saigon through a combination of “medium-size and large-scale campaigns” spearheaded by both VC and NVA divisions.¹⁶⁹ Thanh had pressed his desire to wage another “big-unit war” to the Politburo in Hanoi and been granted the requisite support to launch a large scale offensive against American forces despite the increased casualties incurred since the arrival of U.S. divisions a year earlier. MACV intelligence was unable to pinpoint the exact location of Thanh’s COSVN headquarters, but, believed it to be located along the Cambodian border either in War Zone C, or somewhere in the vicinity.¹⁷⁰

As a result of Thanh’s request to go on the offensive, his 9th PLAF Division, located north of Saigon, and the 5th PLAF Division located in the eastern fringes of the III CTZ, were joined by the 7th PAVN Division. The NVA unit had recently travelled down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and detached its 70th Guard Regiment to protect Thanh’s COSVN headquarters. Thanh’s force was further augmented by the U80 PLAF Artillery Regiment which emplaced three artillery battalions in Tay Ninh Province, one battalion in Long Binh, and another in Phuoc Tuy.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ *Victory in Vietnam*, 173-174.

¹⁷⁰ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 305.

¹⁷¹ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 305-306.

Figure 4



Source: George L. MacGarrigle, *Combat Operations Taking the Offensive: October 1966 to October 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1998), 20.

DePuy Cuts his Teeth: Operation Abilene

Over the winter months, Thanh's forces had prepositioned supplies in what both Generals Westmoreland and Seaman believed was preparation for a massive offensive in the areas around Saigon to occur in the late spring or early summer months during the monsoon season. In response, General Seaman ordered DePuy and the 1st Infantry Division to launch a preemptive series of operations against Thanh's three divisions. The first of these, Operation Abilene, commenced on 30 March with the objective of eliminating elements of the 274th and 275th PLAF Regiments of the 5th Division thought to be operating in Phuoc Tuy and Long Khanh Provinces.¹⁷²

Operating between Highways 1 and 15, DePuy tasked both his 2nd and 3rd Brigades along with the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, to conduct a search and destroy operation against the 5th and 94th PLAF Regiments suspected to be located in Phuoc Tuy Province. Following the sweep, they were to move north along Highway 1 and sweep through Long Khanh Province. On 30 March, the battalions of both the 2nd and 3rd Brigades began their sweeps of the jungle after insertion into their landing zones.¹⁷³

In an effort to keep the enemy off balance, DePuy shifted the search areas for each battalion throughout the operation. Supported by naval gunfire offshore, three battalions of artillery, fixed wing close air support, and helicopter gunships, the infantry battalions operated relatively unopposed for the first ten days of Abilene as they swept through their assigned areas and only came into contact with squad size enemy elements. As a result, none of the allocated firepower assets were brought to bear. In the process of conducting their sweeps, the infantry units did, however, uncover fifty-four enemy base camps, a weapons factory, a propaganda

¹⁷² Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 306.

¹⁷³ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 433.

factory, and large caches of rice, salt and kerosene. Civil affairs and MEDCAP teams also converged on the area and treated over 1,500 medical patients, rebuilt homes, and distributed over 25 tons of food.¹⁷⁴

On the afternoon of 11 April, C/2-16 IN stumbled upon the base camp of the D800 Battalion in what became the largest engagement of the operation. Initially establishing direct fire contact with a VC platoon, the men of C Company suffered two KIA and 12 WIA while inflicting five enemy casualties. The platoon of VC attempted to break contact to the northwest but were pursued by C Company. During the pursuit, C Company halted to establish a MEDEVAC landing zone. The thick vegetation prevented Company C from realizing that the LZ was only a few hundred meters from the Communist base camp. At 1735 hours, C Company was attacked from all directions and repulsed three separate enemy attacks on its position. Throughout the night, helicopters dropped flares to illuminate the position and artillery barrages from 1-7 FA attempted to protect their hastily dug-in perimeter. The next morning, the VC retreated and A/2-16 IN and B/2-18 IN linked in with C Company after cutting their way through the dense jungle. A confirmed total of forty-one VC KIA were found in the area. American losses were high with 35 KIA due to the intense close-quarter attacks sustained throughout the night.¹⁷⁵

On 15 April, DePuy ordered all Big Red One units back to their base camps, effectively ending the operation. Abilene resulted in a confirmed enemy body count of 92 KIA with an estimated 96 more unconfirmed while Big Red One units had suffered 48 KIA and another 135 wounded.¹⁷⁶ In DePuy's final analysis of the operation he identified a number of key

¹⁷⁴ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 433.

¹⁷⁵ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Abilene, p. 17-18, Box 18, Folder 2, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

¹⁷⁶ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 434.

observations. First and foremost was the ability of the 1st Division to utilize airmobility assets to rapidly move across two large provinces. This freedom of maneuver allowed the entire province of Phuoc Tuy to be searched in just over two weeks. Although the enemy units originally thought to be in the TAOR were not brought into decisive battle as he had hoped, DePuy concluded that “the Vietcong have suffered a tremendous loss of prestige in Phouc Tuy Province by failing to oppose U.S. Forces.”¹⁷⁷

As the first large search and destroy operation conducted by the Big Red One under DePuy’s command, Operation Abilene demonstrated a number of key revelations. For one, the enemy further demonstrated their ability to commit to engagements with Big Red One forces only when it was to their advantage such as in the fierce firefight with C/2-16 IN. Likewise, the intelligence used to drive these operations was oftentimes inaccurate. DePuy’s observations on the intricate planning necessary for successful airmobile operations and the requirement for ground force commanders to properly liaise with airlift commanders steadily improved as the operation unfolded, but, still needed improvement. Furthermore, the proper preparation of landing zones utilizing artillery and air weapons systems and the necessity for infantry leaders to quickly master call for fire procedures when in contact required further training and refinement. As such, DePuy addressed all of these areas where he witnessed shortcomings in his first “Commanders Note.”

Although pacification measures were undertaken in the villages of both provinces immediately following operations, and refugees relocated, when Big Red One units returned to their base camps at the culmination of the operation, the enemy was free to move back into the area. There simply were not enough ARVN forces available to maintain proper security in such a

¹⁷⁷ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Abilene, p. 34-35, Box 18, Folder 2, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

large operational area. Nonetheless, DePuy felt that the tactical lessons learned in Abilene, if sufficiently corrected, could pay dividends in operations moving forward.

The Big Red One's First Foray into War Zone C: Operation Birmingham

General Seaman next set his sights on War Zone C where intelligence estimated that the Communists used the area as a sanctuary to conduct logistical resupply and training activities. Located northwest of Saigon in Tay Ninh Province and in close proximity to the Cambodian border, War Zone C provided Communist forces the ability to evade Big Red One units by crossing back and forth over the border into neutral Cambodia and, also, resupply via the nearby Ho Chi Minh Trail. II Field Force intelligence reported that elements of the C230 and C320 PLAF Battalions of the 70th Guard Regiment operated within War Zone C and had established numerous medical facilities, training camps, and supply depots throughout the area.¹⁷⁸

Seaman tasked DePuy and the 1st Division with the mission to eradicate the enemy from War Zone C and, on 23 April, DePuy established his tactical command post "Danger Forward" near Tay Ninh Airport. Simultaneously, both the 1st and 3rd Brigades deployed to Tay Ninh while 1-4 CAV and the supporting artillery battalions road marched to Dau Tieng.¹⁷⁹ On the morning of 24 April, four infantry battalions executed heliborne assaults onto LZs west of Route 22 in War Zone C. Over the next week, the infantry battalions conducted search and destroy sweeps

¹⁷⁸ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Birmingham, pp. 2-4, Box 18, Folder 3, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

¹⁷⁹ Both the 1st and 3rd Brigades began Operation Birmingham until 7 May when DePuy replaced the 1st Brigade with the 2nd Brigade. DePuy recalled: "I exchanged one brigade for another because one brigade didn't do very well. One brigade was slow on the uptake so I replaced it with the 2nd Brigade commanded by Ernie Milloy." In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 140; An ARVN infantry battalion, three airborne battalions, and three ranger battalions also participated in Birmingham and operated further to the east in Tay Ninh Province. See 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, p. 4, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also 3rd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Birmingham, pp. 2-3, Box 18, Folder 3, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

through the area searching for the enemy. Although little contact was made, DePuy's forces uncovered a battalion-sized enemy base camp, tons of supplies, and a VC training center.¹⁸⁰

On 30 April, 1-2 IN under the command of LTC Richard Prillaman, along with 2-16 IN under the command of LTC William Hathaway, moved north along the east bank of the Rach Cai Bac River. While conducting their sweep along the river, which separated Cambodia from South Vietnam, both battalions simultaneously received small arms fire from the Cambodian side of the river and from the northern side of the village of Lo Go. Prillaman's force, acting within MACV's Rules of Engagement (ROE), returned fire on the enemy located on the Cambodian side of the river with small arms, automatic weapons, and artillery strikes.¹⁸¹

While 1-2 IN suppressed the threat from across the river, A/2-16 IN maneuvered to the eastern flank of the VC force to the north of Lo Go, destroying a company sized base camp and killing eight VC commandos. With the threat eliminated from across the river, Prillaman's 1-2 IN then moved north on Lo Go and swept through the village where an estimated battalion size force of the C230 Battalion was located. Finally, by midafternoon, the remaining VC withdrew from Lo Go after a fierce firefight. A total of fifty-four enemy KIA were confirmed by body count with an estimated 100 more estimated on the Cambodian side of the river.¹⁸² Big Red One losses amounted to 6 KIA and another 9 wounded.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Birmingham, pp. 12-14, Box 18, Folder 3, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. In DePuy's oral history, he notes how the operational search area was discovered by accident: "We hopped all around War Zone C, but we didn't find very much. Then one day a fighter bomber happened to drop a bomb on some 55-gallon fuel drums hidden along the river. So, we went over and searched along the riverbank. Now, it turned out that the riverbank was a depot which stretched for about ten miles...we scarfed up all the supplies that had been stacked along the river, of which there was a substantial amount. One place had four or five thousand uniforms. I remember finding lots of sewing machines. We made a haul in sewing machines. It must have been a quartermaster depot." In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 140-141.

¹⁸¹ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Birmingham, p. 16, Box 18, Folder 3, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

¹⁸² 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Birmingham, p. 16, Box 18, Folder 3, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

¹⁸³ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 308.

Birmingham continued for another two weeks as DePuy pushed forces farther north into War Zone C in an attempt to locate COSVN headquarters but little contact was made with enemy forces. Finally, on 16 May, DePuy terminated the operation as the onset of inclement weather inhibited continued operations in northern Tay Ninh Province. Net results for Birmingham totaled the destruction of 66 enemy base camps, six fuel depots, four munitions factories, and three hospitals as well as the capture of 16,000 pages of intelligence documents and over 130 small arms weapons. The VC suffered a confirmed 118 KIA with an estimated 307 more. Furthermore, over 35 tons of wheat, 2,103 tons of rice, and 323 tons of salt were captured over the course of the operation. Big Red One losses during Birmingham amounted to 62 KIA and another 324 wounded. Likewise, 21 of the division's helicopters and eight armored vehicles were damaged throughout the course of the operation ¹⁸⁴

In DePuy's final assessment of Birmingham, he lauded the division's ability to once again exhibit a flexible mindset while rapidly deploying forces in "the first deep penetration of War Zone C since 1961." Highlighting the vast losses in materiel the enemy sustained throughout the operation, he believed that the results of Birmingham would "have a long term adverse impact on VC ability to shelter, feed and equip large numbers of personnel." He went on to assert, "Possibly, no other operation in Vietnam has accomplished such extensive damage to VC logistics and base systems." In much the same vein as Operation Abilene, DePuy believed that the results of Birmingham crippled VC credibility, prestige, and influence in Tay Ninh Province. He also felt that the results of the operation could severely hinder the Communist's ability to amass combat power for an upcoming "monsoon campaign."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Birmingham, pp. 30-31, Box 18, Folder 3, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

¹⁸⁵ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Birmingham, p. 37, Box 18, Folder 3, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

Highlighting the successful actions of the infantry battalions at Lo Go, DePuy lauded their ability to orchestrate the power of the combined arms team utilizing the available artillery and close air support assets to destroy the enemy while, also, adeptly maneuvering in close terrain. Despite this display, DePuy identified deficiencies at both the squad and platoon level with marksmanship, synchronizing fire and maneuver, and implementing “quick reaction battle drills.” As a result, he mandated that each brigade institute “squad and platoon battle courses” to refine these techniques in operations moving forward. Further improvements in LZ preparation and ensuring unit integrity at the platoon and company level when loading helicopters in airmobile operations at the expense of filling all seats on the aircraft were identified as key lessons learned moving forward.¹⁸⁶

Entering the Rung Sat Special Zone: Operation Lexington III

At the conclusion of Operation Birmingham, with orders from MACV, DePuy tasked 1-18 IN on a search and destroy operation codenamed Operation Lexington III. Operating in the Rung Sat Special Zone southeast of Saigon, the mangrove swamps along the Saigon River served as an important transportation corridor for the VC who brought materiel up the river from North Vietnamese trawlers located off the coast in the South China Sea. Simultaneously, the VC had interdicted allied shipping traveling along the river to Saigon through a series of ambushes that disrupted the allied war effort.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Birmingham, p. 38, Box 18, Folder 3, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also William E. DePuy, Correspondence from Harold K. Johnson to Major General William E. DePuy [With Attachments], dated 13 May 1966, pp. 3-4, Box 75, Folder 1, Official Correspondence - Army Chief of Staff, Close Hold 10 December 1965- 9 November 1966, HKJP, USAHEC. Recollecting on Operation Birmingham in his oral history, DePuy reinforced the importance of the lessons gleaned: “That whole operation taught us how to operate. The brigade and the battalion commanders then knew that we wanted to conduct a lot of air mobile search operations, how we wanted them to be conducted, and that we were going to be very flexible.” In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 141.

¹⁸⁷ 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Lexington III, pp. 1-2, Box 18, Folder 4, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

From 21 May to 9 June, 1-18 IN adapted to the demands of the terrain and utilized the mobility provided by helicopters and U.S. Navy LCMs to combat the VC operating in the area. Throughout the course of the operation, 1-18 IN staged seven ambushes against VC forces moving supplies down the river on sampans. Conducted at night, the ambushes were highly successful and resulted in the destruction of seven sampans, 26 VC KIA, and the capture of 30 weapons.¹⁸⁸

Overall, the operation resulted in the destruction of fourteen enemy base camps, two ammunition facilities, and a hospital severely hindering VC capabilities in the area. Just as important, the operation pioneered tactics, techniques, and procedures to successfully operate in the unique operational environment posed by the swampy terrain. The After Action Report concluded that troops should not operate for more than 48 hours in the wet conditions to prevent the onset of sickness and infection. Furthermore, the report emphasized the necessity to further train replacements who demonstrated “a tendency to fire prior to identifying the enemy or insuring that moving objects are not friendly troops.” Finally, the report highlighted the effective emplacement of ambushes as “the most successful maneuver” leading to success in the operation. In total, 37 VC were KIA throughout Lexington III; 1-18 IN suffered one KIA and another four WIA.¹⁸⁹ The high kill ratio attained throughout the operation impressed on both

¹⁸⁸ 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Lexington III, pp. 1-2, Box 18, Folder 4, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. DePuy gave high praise to 1-18 IN’s performance during Lexington III in his oral history: “In the Rung Sat we moved through the swamps on foot waist deep in water and muck to establish ambushes. The VC moved only by boat. They did not know - could not know - where we were. At night, as they moved about by boat, they would run into our ambushes and be destroyed. We rotated a number of battalions through Rung Sat and had spectacular results... [1-18 IN] pioneered that technique. There were no big battles, just dozens of successful ambushes. Normally, the battalion in the Rung Sat achieved the best combat results of all the battalions in the division. We also found whole villages on stilts and naval mine factories there. All the fighting in Rung Sat - every bit of it - was at night.” In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 151.

¹⁸⁹ 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Lexington III, pp. 8-12, Box 18, Folder 4, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

DePuy and MACV that units should continue to conduct operations in the Rung Sat Special Zone.

Roadrunner Bait & Switch: Operations El Paso I/II/III

In the midst of Operation Birmingham, significant intelligence discoveries revealed that COSVN still planned to launch a monsoon offensive. A number of captured VC prisoners and deserters disclosed that the 273rd Regiment of the 9th Division planned to move west from War Zone D into War Zone C. Interrogations also divulged that the 271st Regiment along with two regiments of NVA regulars could also join the operation and attack near Loc Ninh crossing the border in vicinity of the Binh Long/Phuoc Long area.¹⁹⁰

In May, the intelligence picture solidified when a captured VC commando from the 272nd Regiment had in his possession a notebook which disclosed that the unit was to mount an offensive near Loc Ninh. Further compounding this intelligence, a CIDG patrol operating southeast of Loc Ninh killed a reconnaissance officer belonging to the 271st Regiment. When searching the body, they discovered plans and maps to conduct a series of attacks on Loc Ninh. The captured intelligence further revealed that the attacks would involve three regiments of the 9th Division as well as the 101st PAVN Regiment. Compounding matters, in mid-May two ARVN units patrolling west of An Loc came into contact with battalions of both the 271st and 273rd PLAF Regiments.¹⁹¹

DePuy sensed a major enemy offensive in the works and, in response, launched Operation El Paso I. On 19 May, DePuy ordered the 3rd “Iron” Brigade under the command of

¹⁹⁰ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, p. 2, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

¹⁹¹ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 309. See also, 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, p. 2, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

Colonel William Brodbeck to deploy three of his infantry battalions and supporting artillery units to Loc Ninh to conduct search and destroy sweeps of the area. For four days Brodbeck's units scoured the area but made no contact with enemy forces and, as a result, DePuy terminated the operation on the morning of 24 May.¹⁹²

Despite the inability to locate enemy forces in the area around Loc Ninh, intelligence reports still indicated that the Communists had delayed rather than cancelled their offensive. The objective of the new plan that Thanh envisioned involved attacking the towns of Loch Ninh, An Loch, and Chon Thanh in Binh Long Province using a combination of all three regiments of the 9th Division possibly augmented with other regular NVA units. Operating as far west as Phuoc Long province, the Communist offensive would concentrate on Highway 13 to sever the area of operations and access the three towns in Binh Long.¹⁹³

In response to the intelligence estimate, Seaman ordered DePuy to conduct a defensive mission to protect key installations in both provinces. Named Operation El Paso II, DePuy was to posture his forces to defend and then, on order, go on the offensive to conduct search and destroy sweeps of the surrounding area. DePuy chose the Iron Brigade for the mission as they were already deployed to the TAOR and, by 8 June, DePuy sent three additional infantry battalions and a troop of armored cavalry to augment Brodbeck's force.¹⁹⁴

On the morning of 8 June, Brodbeck ordered A/1-4 CAV with a contingent of ARVN troops to leave their base in Phu Loi and move north along Highway 13 to An Loc to defend the town. The convoy, which consisted of nine tanks and thirty-two other armored vehicles came under attack near the hamlet of Ap Tau O that afternoon. There, the column was ambushed when

¹⁹² Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 309.

¹⁹³ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 312.

¹⁹⁴ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, p. 9, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

the lead Patton tank struck a mine followed by enemy recoilless rifle fire. The troop commander immediately called in artillery and air strikes as the column continued to be attacked by barrages of uncoordinated VC infantry attacks and mortar rounds.¹⁹⁵

Over the course of a four-hour firefight, A/1-4 CAV established a defensive perimeter by coiling their vehicles and pounding the attacking enemy force with a combination of artillery and airstrikes. 2-18 IN and a contingent of 5th ARVN Division troops, based out of nearby An Loc, were called in by DePuy to reinforce the Quarterhorse element and air assaulted onto LZs a few kilometers north of the ambush site. By the time they linked in with A Troop, the enemy had withdrawn leaving 105 confirmed enemy KIA and possibly another 200-250 more unconfirmed KIA. The action resulted in fourteen Quarterhorse soldiers KIA and another nineteen 5th ARVN Division troops KIA.¹⁹⁶

The thwarted enemy force, estimated at approximately 1,200 strong, belonged to the both the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 9th PLAF Division's 272nd Regiment. DePuy felt that the encounter dealt a serious blow to the 9th Division yet, the inability of the A Troop commander to realize that he was up against a regimental size enemy force and call in the requisite firepower to inhibit avenues of escape, allowed the enemy to stave off further losses. A/1-4CAV's encounter coupled with further intelligence reports, convinced DePuy that all three regiments of the 9th Division were operating within the Highway 13 corridor or somewhere near Minh Thanh and

¹⁹⁵ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, pp. 11, 48, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

¹⁹⁶ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, p. 49, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 313.

Loc Ninh. Therefore, on 9 June, DePuy widened the operation and called in the Devil Brigade under the command of COL Sidney Berry and established Danger Forward at An Loc.¹⁹⁷

On 11 June, A/2-28 IN of the 3rd Brigade came into heavy contact with the 1st Battalion, 273rd PLAF Regiment while clearing a hamlet in the rubber plantation northwest of Loc Ninh. Entrenched on two hills located less than two kilometers from one another, the enemy force held their positions forcing LTC Kyle Bowie to commit C/2-28 IN along with his reconnaissance platoon and commence artillery and airstrikes on the enemy positions. A ten-hour firefight ensued in which Bowie pounded the enemy positions with artillery and launched two infantry attacks up the hills. The VC force finally collapsed, sustaining over 98 KIA with an estimated 150 more. 2-28 IN losses were quite costly as Bowie's reconnaissance platoon was decimated in an enemy counterattack. Total losses in the battle for the Americans amounted to 33 KIA and another 33 WIA. Over the next three weeks, the division continued searching for enemy forces throughout Binh Long Province however, much like the operations before, the enemy remained elusive.¹⁹⁸

In an effort to lure the enemy out in the open, DePuy decided to undertake a series of what he dubbed "Roadrunner" operations. These missions consisted of a small armored column sent down a high-speed avenue of approach tasked with clearing mines and other obstacles from the road while simultaneously presenting targets of opportunity to the VC in hopes of spurring an attack. Once the enemy force was exposed, Big Red One units could then "pile-on" with

¹⁹⁷ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, pp. 48-49, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 142. See also Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 313.

¹⁹⁸ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, p. 50, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 314.

overwhelming troop reinforcements and firepower. Beginning on 18 June, 1-4 CAV began sending these columns south down Highway 13 from An Loc to Phu Loi.¹⁹⁹

On the morning of 30 June, DePuy tasked elements of both 1-4 CAV under the command of LTC Leonard Lewane and 2-18 IN under the command of LTC Herbert McChrystal on a Roadrunner mission down Highway 13. Departing An Loc for Loc Ninh, their mission was to conduct a reconnaissance in force while also escorting an engineer unit to repair a bridge just north of An Loc. Both B and C Troops 1-4 CAV and C/2-18 IN were assigned the mission.²⁰⁰

Shortly after 0900 hours, the engineers emplaced a temporary span across the damaged bridge near Cam Le and the vehicular element continued down the road north towards Loc Ninh. C/1-4 CAV and a platoon from C/2-18 IN moved north along the west side of the highway while B/1-4 CAV and two platoons from C/2-18 IN traveled along the east side. At 0940 hours, upon reaching the intersection of Highway 13 and Route 17, the elements were attacked by the 271st Regiment, which had emplaced an L-shaped ambush that stretched nearly two kilometers down the western side of the road.²⁰¹

Located just south of the Srok Dong Hamlet, B/1-4 CAV received the brunt of the ambush receiving small arms, recoilless rifle, and machine gun fire from both the north and northwest. Within just thirty minutes, B Troop lost four M-48 Tanks after coiling to establish a hasty defense. LTC Lewane, flying overhead in a helicopter, maintained radio communication with the B Troop commander on the ground and diverted airstrikes and Huey gunship runs on the attacking enemy force. Lewane also directed C Troop to move towards B Troop to reinforce their

¹⁹⁹ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, pp. 13-22, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 315.

²⁰⁰ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 316.

²⁰¹ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, Annex A: "Narrative of the Battle of Srok Dong 30 June 1966," dated 8 August 1966, pp. 1-2, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 316.

position. Utilizing Highway 13 as a fire support coordination line, Lewane directed airstrikes to the western side of the highway while artillery simultaneously pounded the eastern side. Under the protection provided by the air and artillery strikes, Lewane ordered B Troop to withdraw 800 meters to the south to Checkpoint One to reconsolidate and reorganize.²⁰²

As B Troop arrived at Checkpoint One, they were joined by A/2-18 IN which arrived via helicopter to reinforce the position. After mounting up on C Troop's vehicles, they moved back north to reinforce C Troop. With the link up complete, A/2-18 IN and C/1-4 CAV pushed to the west to pursue the enemy force. Shortly thereafter, LTC McChrystal and B/2-18 IN arrived and the pursuit continued until the remaining enemy force retreated around 1615 hours that afternoon.²⁰³

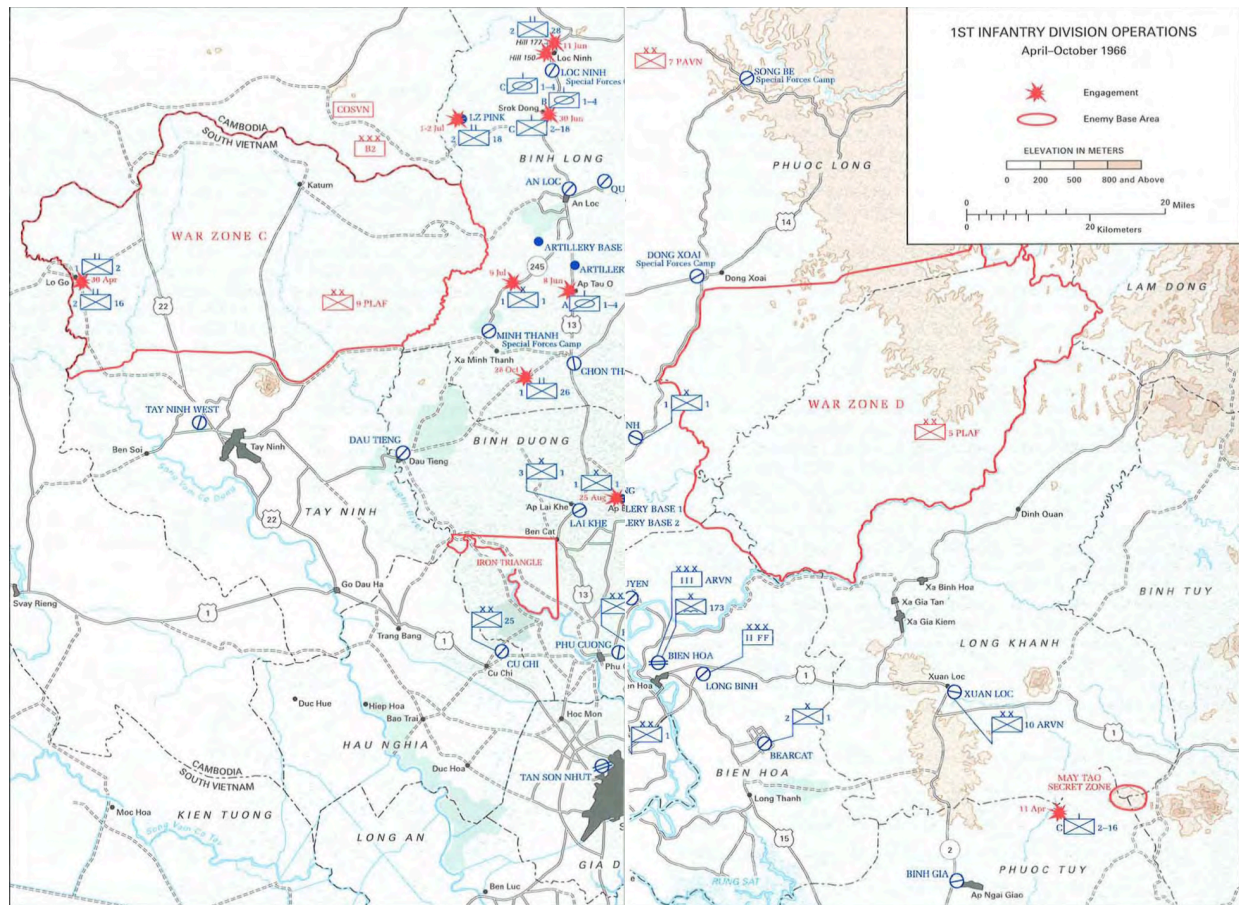
Following the withdrawal of the 271st Regiment, DePuy tasked Colonel Berry to pursue the enemy force as they retreated west towards their sanctuaries across the Cambodian border. Given operational control of all Big Red One units involved at Srok Dong, along with elements of the 5th ARVN Division, Berry pursued the 271st Regiment for the next three days. 1-2 IN, 1-28 IN, and 2-18 IN attempted to block escape routes as they pushed further towards the border. In an effort to cover the retreating elements of the 271st Regiment, the 273rd Regiment staged a counterattack on A/2-18 IN's patrol base in the early morning hours of 1 July near a hamlet a few kilometers from the Cambodian border. To reinforce A Company, LTC McChrystal dispatched C/2-18 IN along with his reconnaissance platoon in support.²⁰⁴

²⁰² 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, Annex A: "Narrative of the Battle of Srok Dong 30 June 1966," dated 8 August 1966, pp. 3-4, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁰³ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, Annex A: "Narrative of the Battle of Srok Dong 30 June 1966," dated 8 August 1966, pp. 4-5, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁰⁴ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, Annex A: "Narrative of the Battle of Srok Dong 30 June 1966," dated 8 August 1966, pp. 5-9, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st

Figure 6



Source: John M. Carland, *Combat Operations Stemming the Tide: May 1965 to October 1966* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 2000), 310.

As the reinforcements arrived at A/2-18 IN's patrol base, the VC force retreated around 2000 hours that evening. The next morning, 2-18 IN's position was attacked by mortars, automatic weapons fire, and numerous coordinated ground assaults. To repulse the attack, McChrystal called in artillery strikes and over 61 sorties from air force bombers dispatched from the nearby Bien Hoa Air Base. By 0900 hours, the enemy force withdrew sustaining 78 KIA.

Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 317-319.

Total enemy losses in the Battle of Srok Dong were 270 KIA confirmed by body count with an estimated 300 more. Although the Americans captured 23 crew-served weapons and another 40 small arms, the counterattack by the 273rd Regiment had allowed the 271st to escape and fight another day. Big Red Units suffered 19 KIA and another 94 WIA.²⁰⁵

The 9th PLAF Division Takes the Bait: The Battle of Minh Thanh Road

In an effort to continue to capitalize on presenting targets of opportunity, DePuy tasked COL Berry to plan another “Roadrunner” operation with the mission “to position forces and conduct reconnaissance in force to lure VC forces to ambush/attack the column, enabling the 1st Brigade to destroy VC forces by offensive action.” Utilizing signal intelligence which indicated that a regimental-size command post of the 272nd Regiment was located in the vicinity of Minh Thanh Road, Berry decided to spring his trap along the route. Located just south of An Loc, the road splintered southwest off of Highway 13.²⁰⁶

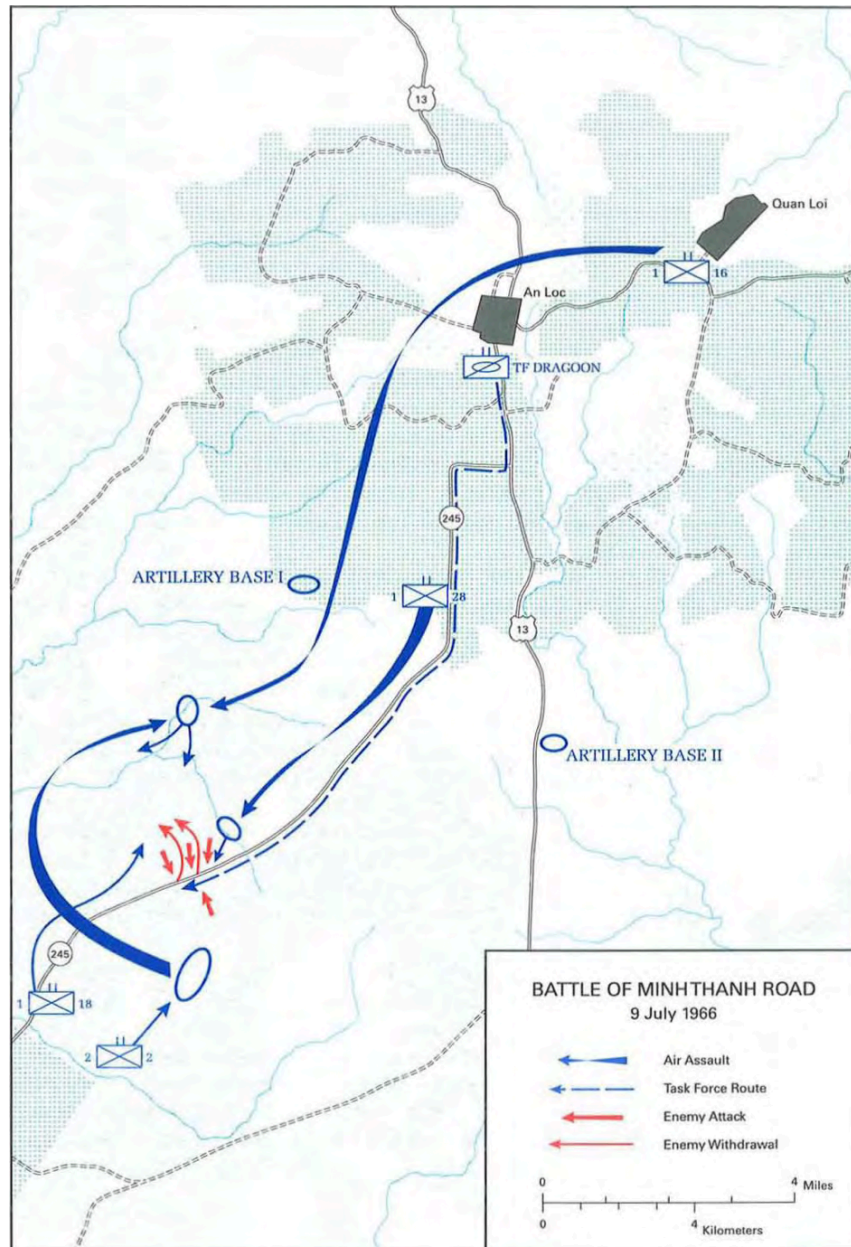
DePuy and Berry’s plan called for a deception operation which would tempt the VC to stage an attack. Operating under the guise that a lightly guarded convoy of supply trucks and bulldozers was traveling down the road from An Loc to repair an airfield, and certain that there was a VC spy or sympathizer on the staff of the An Loc Province Chief, Berry and DePuy ensured that the operational plan was divulged to the Chief and his staff. Dubbed “Task Force Dragoon,” the actual convoy consisted of a highly formidable cavalry and infantry force poised to strike if the enemy were to take the bait. DePuy and Berry also had four infantry battalions staged on call to act as a quick reaction force along with two well established firebases to

²⁰⁵ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, Annex A: “Narrative of the Battle of Srok Dong 30 June 1966,” dated 8 August 1966, pp. 5-9, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 317-319.

²⁰⁶ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, Annex C: “Battle of Minh Thanh Road,” p. 1, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 319.

provide artillery support. Furthermore, prior coordination for Air Force assets enabled fighter bombers to strike on quick notice.²⁰⁷

Figure 7



Source: John M. Carland, *Combat Operations Stemming the Tide: May 1965 to October 1966* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 2000), 321.

²⁰⁷ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, Annex C: “Battle of Minh Thanh Road,” p. 1, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 319-320. See also DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 142.

At 0700 hours on the morning of 9 July, Task Force Dragoon, which consisted of both B and C Troops 1-4 CAV and B/1-2 IN departed An Loc airfield. Commanded by LTC Lewane, who was once again overhead in a helicopter, the convoy traveled southwest down the road with the infantrymen riding on 1-4 CAV's tracked vehicles. As the column moved down the road, tanks fired machine gun bursts at suspected VC ambush sites. Finally, at approximately 1110 hours, 1/C/1-4 CAV spotted five VC crossing the road ahead of the column. As the tanks opened fire, the column was bombarded by VC recoilless rifle and mortar fire from foxhole positions to the north of the road. Lewane, who had already pre-planned artillery targets on the position, then began to call in artillery strikes on the ambush site.²⁰⁸

When the ambush kicked off, Task Force Dragoon immediately coiled in their positions postured for VC ground assaults and stayed on the road in a herringbone formation. Mission planning prior to the operation mandated this directive for the first phase so that upon contact, maximum firepower could be brought down on enemy positions via a lethal combination of artillery, air force fighter bombers, and helicopter gunships. In much similar fashion to the attack at Srok Dong, in which Lewane had used Highway 13 as a fire support coordination line, Berry now used Minh Thanh Road for the same purpose. With the enemy then exposed, Berry called in reinforcements to inhibit the VC from escaping the battlefield. While 1-18 IN moved overland towards the fight, 1-28 IN mounted in their helicopters and inserted on an LZ to the northeast of

²⁰⁸ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, Annex C: "Battle of Minh Thanh Road," pp. 1-4, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

the ambush site. Simultaneously, both 1-16 IN and 2-2 IN air-assaulted into the battlespace to prevent the 272nd Regiment from withdrawing.²⁰⁹

Over the next eight hours until dusk, the infantry battalions called in to search for the withdrawing VC had sporadic encounters with the enemy as they attempted to envelop their positions and exfiltration routes. Occasionally encountering small groups of retreating VC, the thick jungle inhibited efforts of the Big Red One's infantry battalions to inflict a knockout blow. By nightfall the infantry battalions established positions in the vicinity of the initial ambush site while artillery continued to bombard escape routes throughout the night. Nonetheless, despite attempts to track down the 272nd Regiment over the next few days, the enemy had once again slipped away to the safety of their sanctuaries across the border.²¹⁰

Despite the inability to fully destroy the 272nd Regiment, the Battle of Minh Thanh Road resulted in serious damage to the enemy unit, inhibiting its ability to launch further offensive operations as part of the monsoon offensive campaign. The mission resulted in a confirmed 239 KIA with an estimated 304 more during the retreat. Furthermore, eight VC POWs were captured along with an additional 54 weapons. American losses in the battle were 25 KIA and another 113 WIA.²¹¹ Through a combination of counterintelligence, tactical audacity, airmobile flexibility, and the synchronization of the firepower assets of the combined arms team, the Big Red One had dealt a serious blow to the 9th Division.

²⁰⁹ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, Annex C: "Battle of Minh Thanh Road," p. 4, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 324.

²¹⁰ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, Annex C: "Battle of Minh Thanh Road," pp. 4-6, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. DePuy terminated El Paso II on 13 July but left a brigade in the TAOR to inhibit the enemy from returning. The subsequent phase of the operation, named El Paso III, resulted in no significant activity and, as a result, DePuy terminated El Paso III on 3 September. In Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 324.

²¹¹ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, Annex C: "Battle of Minh Thanh Road," pp. 6-7, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

In total, Operation El Paso resulted in a confirmed total of 825 enemy KIA with an estimated 1,249 more. Big Red One losses amounted to 125 American KIA and another 424 WIA. More importantly, El Paso forced two enemy regiments of the 9th Division to abandon their base areas in Binh Long Province.²¹² The destruction of materiel and sanctuaries temporarily staved off further incursions within the monsoon campaign. In DePuy's final analysis of the operation, he concluded that El Paso had "inflicted a severe defeat on the 9th Vietcong Division, completely frustrating the monsoon offensive in the northern III Corps area, and represented an important learning process throughout the 1st Infantry Division."²¹³

The learning process DePuy referenced took form in continual refinement of operational practices throughout each engagement with the enemy during El Paso. As missions progressed throughout the operation, the implementation of pre-planned air and artillery targets into mission planning procedures as well as the use of clearly delineated fire support coordination lines enabled the full power of these assets to be inflicted on the enemy both "continually and simultaneously." Furthermore, DePuy reorganized his quick reaction forces to respond to the speed of enemy withdrawal techniques. As evidenced in the Battle of Minh Thanh Road, the first reaction force would insert in the area of the main enemy attack while the other would serve as a "battlefield exploitation force" inserted on likely enemy avenues of withdrawal to attempt to destroy the enemy in piecemeal as he fled the point of attack.²¹⁴

²¹² According to Carland, the large body count for Operation El Paso was comparable to the Pleiku and first Binh Dinh Campaigns launched by the 1st Cavalry Division. Additionally, interrogations conducted on captured VC commandos during El Paso revealed that the "9th Division had sustained a 50-percent loss in combat effectiveness" as a result of the operation. In Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 324-325.

²¹³ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, pp. 30-43, 48, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²¹⁴ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation El Paso II/III, p. 49, Box 18, Folder 5, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

Overall, El Paso had inflicted a serious blow to the 9th Division. Much of the success however, was a result of the enemy deciding to take the bait. Nonetheless, the Roadrunner operations followed by the pile-on tactics DePuy spearheaded throughout the operation led to the ever-increasing enemy casualties. Continuous refinements in operational and tactical techniques and the aggressive spirit exhibited by DePuy and the 1st Infantry Division gained traction in bringing enemy main force units out into the open. In fact, Operation El Paso accounted for nearly fifty percent of MACV's "large unit operations" during the height of the monsoon season.²¹⁵ The question remained though if the 9th Division would continue to stand and fight or, once again, adjust their own tactics in response to the Big Red One.

The Big Red One "Piles-On": Operation Amarillo and the Phu Loi Fight

Following Operation El Paso, DePuy tasked COL Berry's 1st Brigade on a follow-on mission codenamed Operation Amarillo to provide security for the 1st Engineer Battalion along Routes 1A and 16. The two routes, which ran between the Devil Brigade's headquarters at Phuoc Vinh and their supply depots at Di An, required repair and Berry's units were to provide support to the engineers while also securing American convoys traversing the route. On 24-25 August, a fifteen-man force from C/1-2 IN conducting a nighttime patrol just north of Tan Binh, discovered a bunker complex occupied by the Phu Loi Battalion of the 9th Division. The trapped American force radioed for help and 1-2 IN's battalion commander immediately called for the remainder of C/1-2 IN along with 2/C/1-4 CAV to move towards the besieged element. Simultaneously, COL Berry, who felt there was an opportunity to trap and destroy the enemy battalion, ordered the remainder of 1-2 IN to reinforce the element. Moreover, at 0800 hours on

²¹⁵ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 325.

the morning of 25 August, he radioed Danger Main and requested the insertion of 1-16 IN to LZs west of the bunker complex to inhibit the Phu Loi Battalion's withdrawal.²¹⁶

By 1100 hours the next morning, 1-16 IN had air assaulted into their LZ to the west of bunker complex. Concurrently, 1-26 IN under the command of LTC Paul Gorman moved towards the engagement from the south. Gorman split his force sending C/1-26 IN north to link in with and assist C/1-2 IN while B/1-26 IN moved west mounted on A/1-4 CAV's tracked vehicles to the village of Bong Trang in an effort to prevent enemy escape towards the southwest. By 1600 hours that afternoon, C/1-26 IN had reached C/1-2 IN's position. However, in their attempt to reach the besieged unit, both B/1-2 IN and C/1-4 CAV had sustained severe casualties after launching three separate assaults in an attempt to reach the trapped fifteen-man element.²¹⁷

DePuy, realizing the severity of the situation, notified Berry that he was going to air assault 2-28 IN into the battlespace to reinforce his elements in contact. By 1430 hours, the action had become so confused with so many Big Red One units intermingled in the AO that Berry decided to land his helicopter and direct the action from the ground where he felt he could best command and control the situation. Around 1625 hours, 1-16 IN also came into heavy direct fire contact from the enemy as they pushed east towards the bunker complex. In the melee that followed, C/1-2 IN, C/1-26 IN, and C/1-4 CAV sustained the brunt of the enemy counterattacks and had sustained two KIA with as many as fifty more WIA. To relieve the situation, Berry ordered Gorman's A and B Companies along with A/1-4 CAV, still co-located in Bong Trang, to push north and link in with the other elements. Upon linking in with the besieged units, Berry

²¹⁶ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 442.

²¹⁷ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 443-444.

placed Gorman in command of the entire element where they immediately prepared overnight defenses.²¹⁸

As darkness fell, the Phu Loi Battalion began its withdrawal harassing the Big Red units with sniper fire.²¹⁹ Berry felt that a small pocket of the enemy force still remained on the battlefield between 1-2 IN and 1-26 IN and attempted to encircle the position to prevent further withdrawal. In the early morning hours of 26 August, Gorman called in napalm strikes on the suspected enemy position however, the air strikes dropped canisters within the American lines wounding several men and killing many others. As a result, Berry called off the air strikes and Gorman's unit assaulted the suspected enemy position but found that the enemy had retreated during the night. Only nine soldiers from the fifteen-man element of C/1-2 IN that originally came under attack in the bunker complex survived the battle.²²⁰

During Operation Amarillo, Big Red One units had suffered 41 KIA (34 of which occurred in the battle with the Phu Loi Battalion on 25-26 August). VC losses amounted to a total of 54 KIA by body count, 6 POWs captured, and an estimated 92 more KIA.²²¹ The operation revealed a number of key lessons learned moving forward. The "pile-on" tactics DePuy had emphasized, although successful in retrieving the besieged element, had created a loss of command and control on the ground. With so many battalions quickly inserted into a heavily entrenched and well-fortified enemy base camp, chaos ensued as Big Red One and enemy units interspersed directly on top of each other often intermingling. Compounding

²¹⁸ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 444.

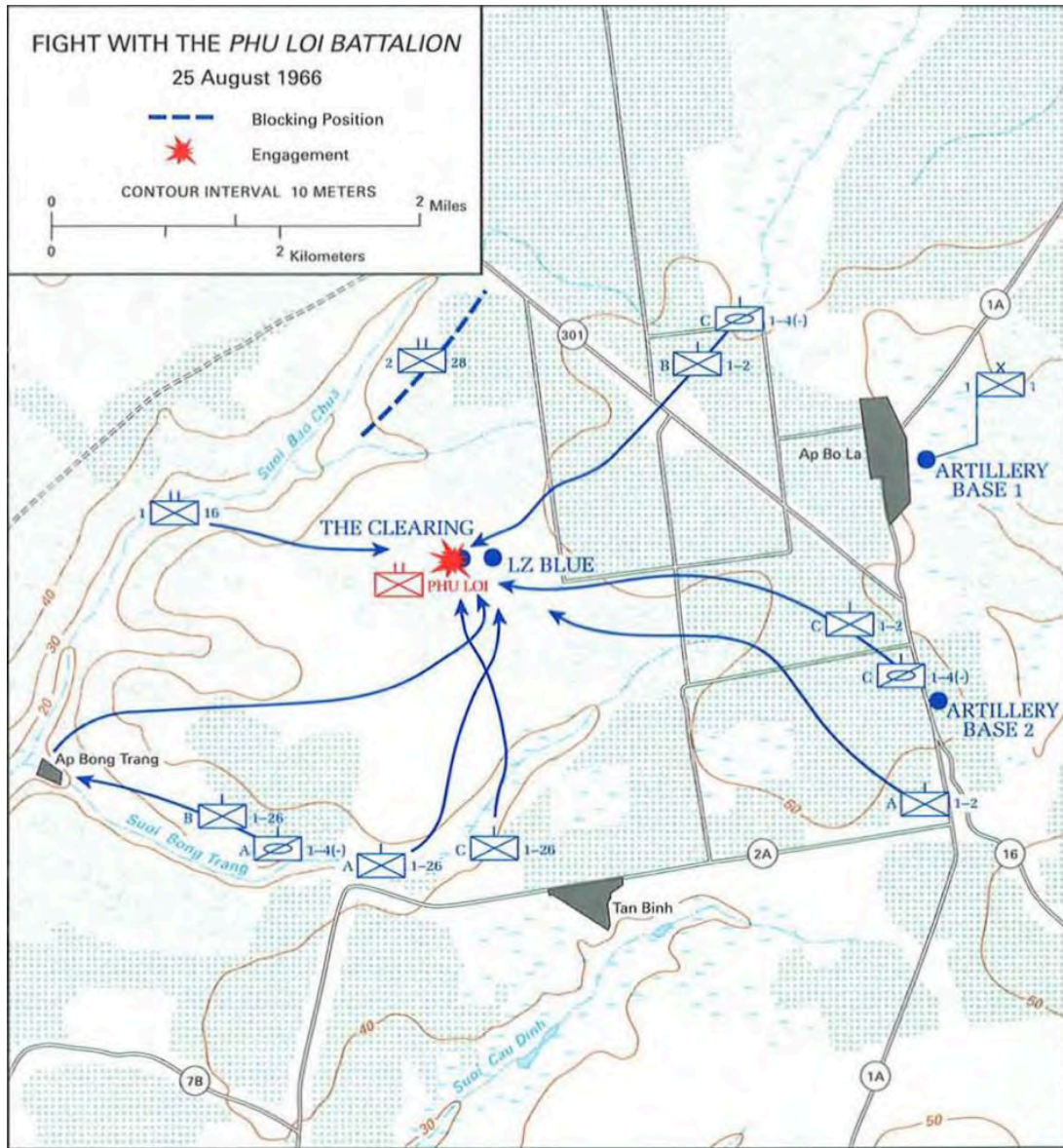
²¹⁹ Both Berry and Gorman were almost killed by sniper fire while linking up on top of Gorman's tank enroute to the bunker complex. In Gorman, *Cardinal Point*, 43-44.

²²⁰ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 445.

²²¹ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 445.

matters, the thick jungle vegetation inhibited 1st Infantry Division units from maneuvering effectively.

Figure 8



Source: John M. Carland, *Combat Operations Stemming the Tide: May 1965 to October 1966* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 2000), 327.

Recalling the battle, Berry wrote, “This battle presented on a grand scale the tactical difficulty often previously encountered at company level in the jungle: The tendency to bring up

units on line for frontal attack instead of enveloping the enemy position by wide maneuver.”²²²

Like so many other preceding engagements, the battle had been fought on the terrain of the enemy’s choosing. The base camp, situated in an area which the VC were intimately familiar, afforded them the ability to utilize pre-planned routes of withdrawal allowing them to once again escape despite the best efforts of the Big Red One to close the trap.

By the fall of 1966, the Big Red One under DePuy’s command had, for the most part, only brought the Communists to battle under conditions of the enemy’s choosing. The continued ability of the VC to avoid severe losses, reconsolidate and reorganize in the safety afforded by their border sanctuaries, and resume their operations in the areas north of Saigon continued to pose a serious problem. Roadrunner type operations in which the enemy was lured into battle by targets of opportunity against seemingly weak convoys or isolated 1st Infantry Division units, such as the situation that unfolded on Minh Thanh Road, had enabled DePuy’s forces to inflict their largest decisive punches. Once the enemy was exposed, DePuy would do what he had always done: “pile-on.” As a result, DePuy attempted to replicate these successes in operations moving forward.

This understanding of a slight change in tactics and techniques reached the lower echelons of the Big Red One. Captain Theodore Fichtl, who commanded C/2-18 IN from May 1966 to October 1966 later recalled on this tactical flexibility in response to the difficulty in bringing the enemy to battle:

At about the mid-point of my tour as opposed to aimless kind of search and destroy, we went into a sort of a bait and bite mode of operations, in that the division commander

²²² Berry quoted in Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 445. Wheeler also adeptly notes how leadership changeover within the 1st Infantry Division during the summer of 1966 inhibited the combat effectiveness of the infantry battalions just prior to this operation. Because the Big Red One had been in country for close to a year, the Army’s personnel rotation system mandated that almost all NCOs and soldiers rotate back to the United States. In the process, tactical lessons had to be relearned across the entire formation as the ranks were filled with less experienced new replacements at almost all lower echelons. In Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 445.

thought it would be lucrative for us to rather expose ourselves generally and then upon being attacked or encountering an enemy force, react vigorously and with extensive reinforcement...he would use a company team or task force and then reinforce it rapidly after contact had been established to expand the operation.²²³

For company level leaders like Fichtl, who had served in the Big Red One since the early days of DePuy's command, a certain familiarity and belief in the tactics and techniques began to form.

Fichtl noted:

A feeling of confidence was reinforced by a willingness to not only fire and maneuver, but to bring to bear supporting arms, artillery and air, in a way in which supported the maneuver of my particular company...Rather than simply...fixing bayonets and charging off willy-nilly, we were within range of a formidable amount of artillery, fire support that was available and air support which was also available, and we brought that to bear effectively and incorporated that in sort of an orchestrated way with our fire and maneuver and that proved to be successful.²²⁴

The 9th PLAF Division Refuses the Bait: Operations Tulsa & Shenandoah

On 9 October, DePuy initiated Operation Tulsa. Establishing Danger Forward at Lai Khe, where he could best command and control the operation, DePuy tasked both the 1st and 3rd Brigades with the mission to conduct a Roadrunner operation along the Highway 13 corridor stretching from Phu Cong in the south to An Loc in the north. From 9-11 October, the Brigades swept through the area clearing roads of mines and booby traps and provided security while engineers repaired and improved the route. During this first phase of the operation, no contact was made with enemy forces.²²⁵

Beginning on 12 October, with the road now open to civilian traffic for the first time since the culmination of Operation El Paso II in late August, two large American resupply

²²³ LTC John P. Otjen, "Interview with LTC Theodore C. Fichtl," p. 3-4, Box 12, Folder 4, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

²²⁴ LTC John P. Otjen, "Interview with LTC Theodore C. Fichtl," p. 13, Box 12, Folder 4, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

²²⁵ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operations Tulsa & Shenandoah, pp. 1-8, Box 19, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

convoys made their way north towards An Loc. For the next five days, the enemy refused to take the bait as only small engagements consisting of sporadic sniper fire and overnight mine emplacements along the road defined the action. With such a large infantry and armored force in the area, the enemy avoided the firepower poised to strike if they were to make their move. In response, DePuy terminated Tulsa on 16 October.²²⁶

The very next day, DePuy initiated Operation Shenandoah. Utilizing the same two brigades already postured in the TAOR, Shenandoah was a large search and destroy and reconnaissance in force operation designed to bring the enemy into decisive battle. The infantry battalions focused their sweeps in the area of interest to the west of Highway 13 between An Loc and Minh Thanh. On 24 October, COL Berry attempted to move a force from Quan Loi down Minh Thanh Road to replicate what he had done months earlier; yet, the enemy still refused to attack.²²⁷

Colonel Berry believed the enemy were still in the area but their refusal to commit to an attack coupled with updated intelligence reports led him to believe the enemy was postured somewhere near the Minh Thanh Plantation. For the next two days, four infantry battalions scoured the area north and northwest of the plantation. When their sweeps came up empty, Berry shifted their search areas to the south of the plantation. Finally, on 28 October, a platoon from B/1-26 IN stumbled upon an enemy element of approximately fifty VC moving down a trail and

²²⁶ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operations Tulsa & Shenandoah, pp. 6-7, Box 19, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. In his final analysis of Operation Tulsa, DePuy concluded that the operation was successful “in that it allowed the resupply of vitally needed rice and equipment to Binh Long Province...reopened Route 13 to both military and civilian traffic, accomplished extensive road repairs, and proved to the Vietnamese people that unmolested travel on the highways can be achieved through cooperation of US and ARVN forces.” In 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operations Tulsa & Shenandoah, p. 17, Box 19, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²²⁷ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operations Tulsa & Shenandoah, pp. 9-10, Box 19, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

immediately sprung a hasty ambush. As the enemy attempted to retreat, they ran into another platoon from B Company. With the enemy force caught between two elements, the B Company Commander began pummeling the VC with mortars, artillery, and air support.²²⁸

With the enemy force, later identified as the 3rd Battalion, 272nd Regiment brought into contact, LTC Gorman, still in command of 1-26 IN, maneuvered C/1-26 IN into a blocking position to the north in an effort to inhibit the enemy from escaping. While air and artillery strikes pounded the area, Gorman radioed COL Berry who air assaulted 2-28 IN to the west and 2-18 IN to the south. Later that afternoon, in an attempt to totally surround the enemy force, Berry established a “box-type ambush,” emplacing 1-28 IN to the east. Covering all possible enemy escape routes with artillery targets, and with the enemy now seemingly surrounded on all sides, Berry’s units dug in to patrol bases for the night while 155 mm howitzer fire from B/1-5 FA fired over 2,000 rounds on the gaps between the infantry battalions. Despite the Air Force launching over seventy sorties throughout the night, the enemy force somehow had managed to escape to the southwest somewhere in the gap between 2-28 IN and 2-18 IN.²²⁹

The following morning, DePuy personally took command of the operation and re-task organized both 2-28 IN and 2-18 IN under the operational control of the 3rd Brigade Commander, Colonel Sidney Marks. Both battalions were then air assaulted twenty-five kilometers south of Minh Thanh tasked with the follow-on mission to pursuit the retreating enemy force along suspected avenues of escape. But, COL Marks’ task force came up empty handed. Concurrently, DePuy tasked COL Berry and his units to sweep through the box. As 1-26 IN swept from the

²²⁸ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operations Tulsa & Shenandoah, pp. 9-10, Box 19, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 334-335.

²²⁹ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operations Tulsa & Shenandoah, pp. 9-10, Box 19, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 335-336; and Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 447.

north, 1-28 IN maneuvered from their easterly positions to the west. While conducting the sweep, the battalions uncovered two enemy base camps and 74 KIA confirmed by body count as a result of the air and artillery strikes inflicted the night before. For the next four days, the Devil Brigade searched the area but no additional contact with the enemy occurred. On 2 November, DePuy terminated the operation as both of his brigades returned to their base camps. In the final two division-size operations planned and executed by DePuy in 1966, Big Red One losses throughout both Tulsa and Shenandoah had amounted to 5 KIA and 27 WIA.²³⁰

In his final analysis of Operation Shenandoah, DePuy classified the operation in the After Action Report as a “limited success” writing, “It became increasingly evident that the Viet Cong Main Forces will attack only at a time and place of their choosing, and only when the odds are stacked heavily in their favor.”²³¹ Clearly, by the end of 1966, the 9th Division, under the command of Senior Colonel Hoang Cam, had adjusted their own tactics, techniques, and procedures in response to DePuy’s aggressive methods. Unbeknownst to DePuy, the enemy had reconsolidated and reorganized within War Zone C postured for a new offensive in Tay Ninh Province.²³² There, General Thanh had set his sights on his own target of opportunity; a much softer target than DePuy’s battle tested 1st Infantry Division and its unparalleled mobility and overwhelming firepower.

In Through the Back Door: Operation Battle Creek/Attleboro

By Autumn 1966, General Thanh, in keeping with his plan to continue to wage his own “large-scale” campaign against American and ARVN units operating within the III CTZ, had

²³⁰ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operations Tulsa & Shenandoah, pp. 10-11, Box 19, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II. See also 1st Infantry Division, 1st Brigade, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Shenandoah, p. 9, Box 19, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²³¹ 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operations Tulsa & Shenandoah, p. 7, Box 19, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²³² Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 336.

decided that the time was ripe to launch another offensive during the upcoming dry season. With the objective to further expand Communist control in the countryside north of Saigon, and inflict as much damage as possible on U.S. and ARVN forces, Thanh tasked Colonel Cam and the 9th Division with their marching orders: “Destroy a ‘vital’ element of the enemy, support the local movement, oppose enemy pacification and expansion efforts, break the oppressive government control, widen friendly liberated areas, and provide security and protection for storage facilities and base areas of Dung Minh Chau [War Zone C].” Thanh’s orders specified that Cam concentrate his “main effort” on the relatively untested 196th Light Infantry Brigade, which had just recently arrived in Tay Ninh Province in mid-September.²³³

Throughout the last two weeks of October, the 196th Brigade under the command of Brigadier General Edward de Saussure, had conducted large battalion-sized search and destroy sweeps in the jungles west of Dau Tieng and the Michelin Plantation designed to probe the area in hopes of locating enemy base camps and supply depots within their newly assigned TAOR. In the process, the Brigade had uncovered several large rice caches and captured enemy documents indicating that large COSVN supply depots were strewn to the north of their search area. The captured intelligence also revealed that the 9th Division had begun to hastily prepare an area defense within the province to prevent further American incursions.²³⁴

In response, on 3 November, de Saussure launched a preemptive search and destroy operation in an attempt to search for larger supply caches into the area in vicinity of the Ba Hao River, approximately seven kilometers northwest of Dau Tieng. In an overly complex maneuver plan, de Saussure sent two infantry battalions north through the thick jungle from the previously discovered cache sites along four separate routes. Simultaneously, he air-assaulted two rifle

²³³ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 34-35.

²³⁴ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 36-37.

companies into two blocking positions located just south of the Ba Hao River. One company established a position to the east and another to the west of the four attacking columns.²³⁵

In the dense jungle terrain, the American forces soon became separated and disoriented. Compounding matters, just before noon, the rifle company in the western blocking position came under heavy direct fire contact. Situated in a field of elephant grass, the unit could not determine the size and disposition of the attacking enemy due to the severely restricted visibility.

Unbeknownst to the Americans, they had come into contact with elements of the 101st PAVN Regiment. The company quickly incurred heavy casualties to include the company commander. In response, de Saussure, monitoring the action overhead in his helicopter, sent in two additional reserve rifle companies and diverted two companies from the attack columns to assist the company under attack. Throughout the rest of the afternoon, de Saussure and his battalion commanders on the ground attempted to regroup and reorganize their units and assist the besieged company. Despite incurring heavy losses from mines, booby traps, and constant sniper fire, the Americans consolidated within two large night defensive positions just prior to nightfall.²³⁶

The actions of the 196th Brigade on 3 November resulted in Colonel Cam adjusting his attack plans for the upcoming offensive. Viewing the foray of the 196th near the Ba Hao River as a lucrative target of opportunity, he quickly sent in reinforcements to the area and established his command post on the morning of 4 November to exploit the tactical advantage.²³⁷ Concurrently,

²³⁵ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 37-38. In describing de Saussure's maneuver plan in the U.S. Army's official history, MacGarrigle wrote, "The operation went badly from the start. With no linkup plan, little appreciation of the enemy and terrain, and command and control difficult, the two blocking and four attacking forces quickly became separated from one another, lost in the dense jungle." In MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 38.

²³⁶ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 38.

²³⁷ Colonel Cam's original plan called for three regimental size attacks to launch on 3 November. The 271st Regiment was tasked to attack the 196th Brigade's base camp at Tay Ninh West. Simultaneously, two battalions of the 272nd Regiment were to strike the South Vietnamese territorial outposts in vicinity of Suoi Cao. His main effort,

both the 271st and 272nd Regiments staged diversionary attacks on both the 196th Brigade's base camp at Tay Ninh West and the combined American and South Vietnamese outposts at Suoi Cao inflicting significant damage and forcing de Saussure's attention away from the action along the Ba Hao River.²³⁸

That same morning, the American units near the Ba Hao River departed their patrol bases and began sweeping the area searching for the enemy. They quickly came into heavy contact with the NVA regulars of the 101st PAVN Regiment entrenched in well-fortified concrete bunkers. After sustaining heavy casualties, the NVA began committing human wave assaults against the overwhelmed American force. In response, de Saussure attempted to send in reinforcements via helicopter but once they arrived, they quickly became pinned down. As the fighting continued throughout the day, General Weyand, concerned with the predicament de Saussure and his 196th Brigade was embroiled in, relieved de Saussure and tasked DePuy to assume command of the 196th and commit the Big Red One to the battle.²³⁹

On the night of 4 November, DePuy established Danger Main at Dau Tieng and flew in one infantry battalion along with him in support. At the same time, he ordered the 3rd "Iron" Brigade to establish their command post at Suoi Da and throughout the evening, the Big Red

consisting of the 101st PAVN Regiment and a battalion of the 272nd Regiment, was to link in with and attack the Special Forces camp at Suoi Da. In MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 35.

²³⁸ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 38.

²³⁹ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 39-42; and Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 449. Recollecting on the situation years later, DePuy wrote: "The sequence was rather interesting. I happened to have flown over to visit the 196th Brigade one day just out of plain curiosity, or perhaps, I smelled a fight. At that time they were beginning to get all these contacts. I looked at the brigade's operations map; they had five battalions, so they had 15 companies scattered around. They had the two "Wolfhound" battalions, the 27th Infantry, as well as the three of their own. I looked at that map and listened to what they were telling me, and I knew that there was a disaster under way. Every hair went up on the back of my neck; every instinct told me that they were in terrible trouble. I didn't know exactly what was going on out there, but I sensed that they were in terrible trouble." In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 146. General Weyand, the commander of the 25th Infantry Division, assumed temporary command of II Field Force while General Seaman was out of country on 30 days leave in the beginning days of Operation Attleboro. See "Meeting Transcript on Operation Attleboro" – Support Document from Project Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations (CHECO) Reports of Southeast Asia Report # 38, p. 1, Box 0002, Folder 0579, TTUVA.

One's supporting artillery and cavalry units road marched to join the 3rd Brigade. He also ordered the 2nd "Dagger" Brigade to join him at Dau Tieng. Simultaneously, DePuy ordered de Saussure to "break contact" the next day and reconsolidate and reorganize his forces.²⁴⁰

On 5 November, de Saussure's two battalions managed to repel repeated attacks from the 101st PAVN Regiment. Air and artillery strikes along with an additional infantry battalion air assaulted onto the battlefield forced the attacking NVA to disengage. Under the cover provided by withering artillery fire, the American battalions were extracted via helicopter. Enemy losses amounted to over 200 KIA.²⁴¹

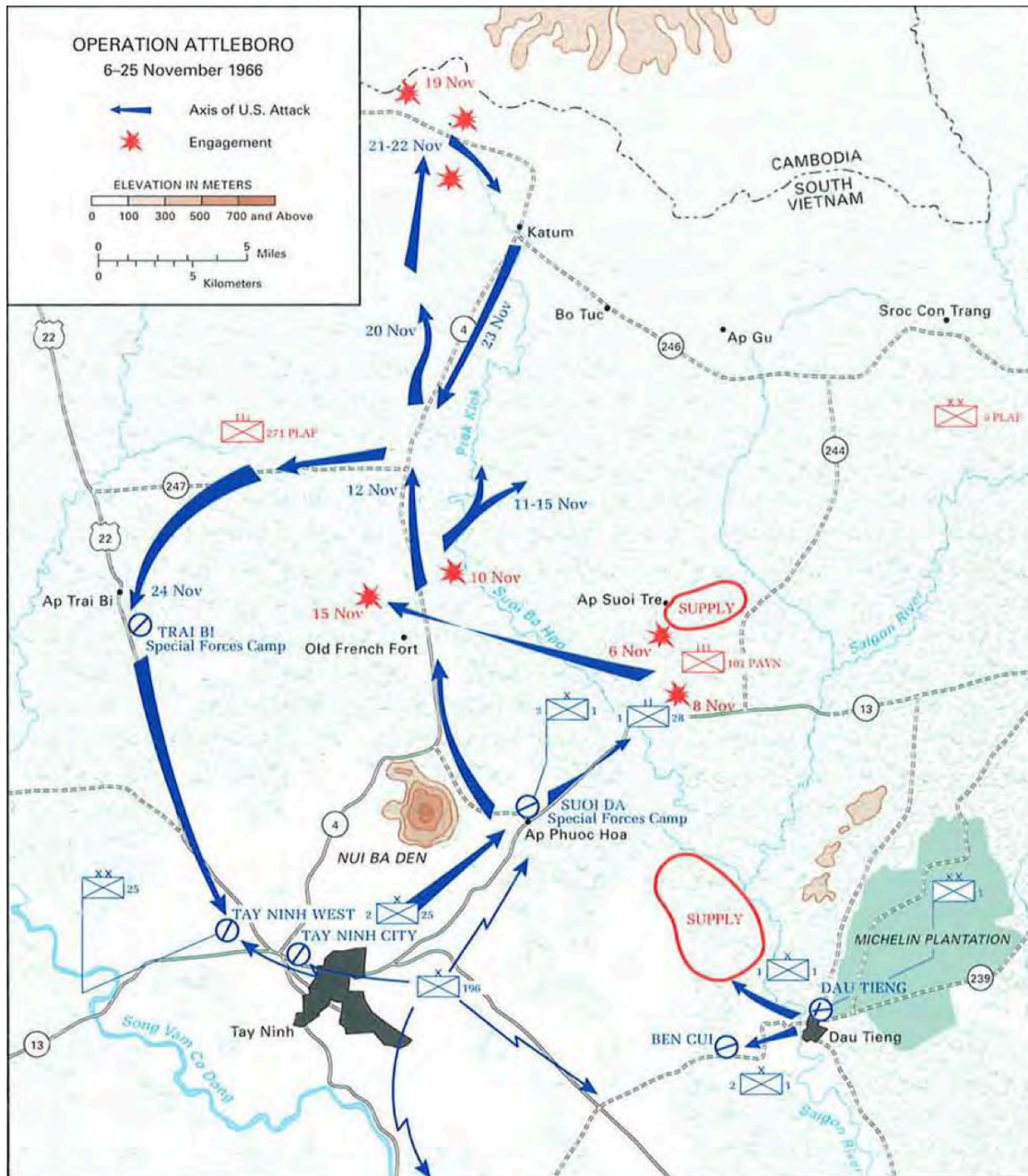
By 6 November, with his 3rd Brigade at Suoi Da and 2nd Brigade at Dau Tieng, DePuy was now postured to pursue the 9th Division. DePuy's plan called for his units to air assault into the vicinity of suspected enemy locations rather than moving long distances through the jungle. Utilizing preparatory artillery fires on LZs and cloverleafing techniques he sought to find and fix the enemy in the area. Throughout the day, he inserted one battalion into the area northwest of Dau Tieng where the 196th Brigade had been attacked and two other battalions ten kilometers north of that position. That evening, with all three battalions dug-in, artillery and air strikes provided a blanket of security around the Big Red One positions throughout the night.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 42.

²⁴¹ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 44.

²⁴² MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 47. That evening, a squad sized ambush patrol from the 3rd Brigade ambushed a VC patrol utilizing a combination of claymores, artillery, and mortar fire resulting in 70 KIA.

Figure 9



Source: George L. MacGarrigle, *Combat Operations Taking the Offensive: October 1966 to October 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1998), 49.

The tactics and techniques DePuy had stressed paid dividends in the opening engagements of Operation Attleboro. Through agile maneuver and overwhelming firepower, he had quickly inserted two brigades into the fight in a matter of days. Enemy losses on the first day DePuy committed the Big Red One amounted to 170 KIA with only one friendly KIA and 23 WIA. Confident that DePuy had located the 9th Division, Weyand committed the 25th Infantry Division to the operation.²⁴³ For the next three weeks, II Field Force sparred with the 9th Division in the jungles northwest of Saigon.

Just two days later on 8 November, 1-28 IN operating northeast of Suoi Da came under attack from a company size element of the 101st PAVN Regiment in the early morning hours while in their patrol base. DePuy's emphasis on properly constructing defensive positions enabled 1-28 IN to repel the attacking force and prevent them from being overrun. Utilizing a combination of claymores, artillery, and air strikes, 1-28 IN thwarted three enemy attacks throughout the morning up until noon. With the enemy in retreat, DePuy sent his 3rd Brigade in pursuit but they were unable to track down the fleeing NVA regulars.²⁴⁴

Convinced that the enemy force was postured northeast of Suoi Da, DePuy requested that his 1st Brigade also join the operation. On 9 November, with Weyand's approval, the 1st Brigade moved to Dau Tieng while DePuy allowed the situation to develop with a clearer understanding of the enemy disposition.²⁴⁵ Over the next two weeks, Big Red One units continued to implement clover leaf patrols and overwhelming well-coordinated firepower in engagements with the

²⁴³ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 47.

²⁴⁴ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 50. 1-28 IN sustained 21 KIA and 42 WIA; Enemy losses amounted to 305 KIA and 58 captured weapons. In Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 450.

²⁴⁵ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 50-51.

enemy. Their efforts uncovered ammunition dumps, supply depots, and tons of rice while also inflicting heavy enemy casualties.²⁴⁶

On 25 November, II Field Force ended the operation and Big Red One units returned to their base camps the following day. The 1st Infantry Division had inflicted upwards of 845 enemy KIA while sustaining 45 KIA and another 195 WIA over the course of the three-week operation.²⁴⁷ During the final week of Attleboro, in a testament to his aggressive spirit, DePuy requested that II Field Force continue to pursue the 9th Division to inflict a knockout blow yet his request was denied by Weyand.²⁴⁸

Overall, Operation Attleboro had thwarted the Communist's dry season offensive. Although Colonel Cam had inflicted serious damage to the 196th Brigade, the Big Red One's quick entry into the battle had swung the momentum back to the side of the Americans. Furthermore, DePuy's strong emphasis on mobility enabled his units to react quickly and set the tempo once decisively engaged. Overwhelming firepower, well-constructed defenses, and clover leaf patrolling techniques were all put on full display and viewed as crucial components to the successful outcome of the operation. Although the enemy had still managed to slip away, they had suffered tremendous losses.

DePuy Drops the Hammer on the Anvil: Operation Cedar Falls

Towards the end of 1966, General Westmoreland and his staff at MACV had been preparing plans to launch an offensive in the III CTZ to once and for all eradicate the Communist's jungle base camps and sanctuaries. Westmoreland's original plan called for a

²⁴⁶ Of particular significance, following a "Search and Seal" operation in the village of Ben Cui II on 12 November, the 2nd Brigade uncovered a "requisition processing point for COSVN's 82d Rear Service Group." In MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 51. Also, on 15 November the 3rd Brigade discovered and destroyed the VC hospital for War Zone C located northwest of an old French fort. In MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 54-55.

²⁴⁷ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 450.

²⁴⁸ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 59.

major foray into War Zone C where he hoped to destroy the 9th PLAF Division and eliminate their logistical infrastructure. However, this plan changed at the behest of his intelligence officer, General Joseph McChristian, who recommended that the Iron Triangle be targeted first. Utilizing “pattern activity analysis” McChristian believed that the VC Military Region 4 was located in the area just 20 kilometers northwest of Saigon. By December 1966, attacks on the Tan Son Nhut airbase and around Saigon corroborated these estimates. After McChristian conferred with General Seaman, who’s II Field Force had been tasked to launch the offensive, Seaman decided that it made sense to clear the Iron Triangle prior to entering War Zone C. Westmoreland agreed with the decision and plans began for what became known as Operation Cedar Falls.²⁴⁹

Conceived as a “hammer and anvil” operation, the mission entailed quickly surrounding and sealing the triangle to destroy the enemy and their infrastructure located within. All civilians were to be evacuated and then the area deemed a “specified strike zone” where anyone found afterwards would be treated as a hostile enemy combatant. The 2nd Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division along with the 196th Light Infantry Brigade were to form the anvil position located on the western side of the Saigon River. The hammer force, consisting of DePuy’s 2nd and 3rd Brigades, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and the 173rd Airborne Brigade were tasked to move southwest towards the anvil position from the Thanh Dien Forest and the Thi Tanh River.²⁵⁰

The operation commenced at 0800 hours on 8 January when 1-26 IN, then under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Haig, air assaulted onboard 60 helicopters into the village of Ben Suc. Located in the northwest quadrant of the triangle, the large village of

²⁴⁹ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 95-96. See also Bernard W. Rogers, *Cedar Falls-Junction City: A Turning Point* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974, 2004), 15-19.

²⁵⁰ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 96-97. See also Rogers, *Cedar Falls-Junction City*, 19-27.

approximately 3,500 inhabitants contained the suspected site of a VC medical facility. 1-26 IN quickly established the seal on the village within minutes sustaining no casualties. Interpreters and PsyOps teams directed the villagers to move to the village school where they were to then be screened and moved to a relocation camp. ARVN forces moved into the village over the ensuing days and evacuated 5,987 refugees. Following the evacuation, the village was razed and tunnel systems destroyed.²⁵¹

As 1-26 IN conducted their search and seal of Ben Suc on the morning of 8 January, five of DePuy's other infantry battalions simultaneously sealed the area to the north of the triangle by air assaulting into LZs in the Thanh Dien Forest. At the same time, elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade and 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment maneuvered into position on the eastern side of the triangle and began pushing westward. Within 24 hours, the seal of the Iron Triangle had been established.²⁵²

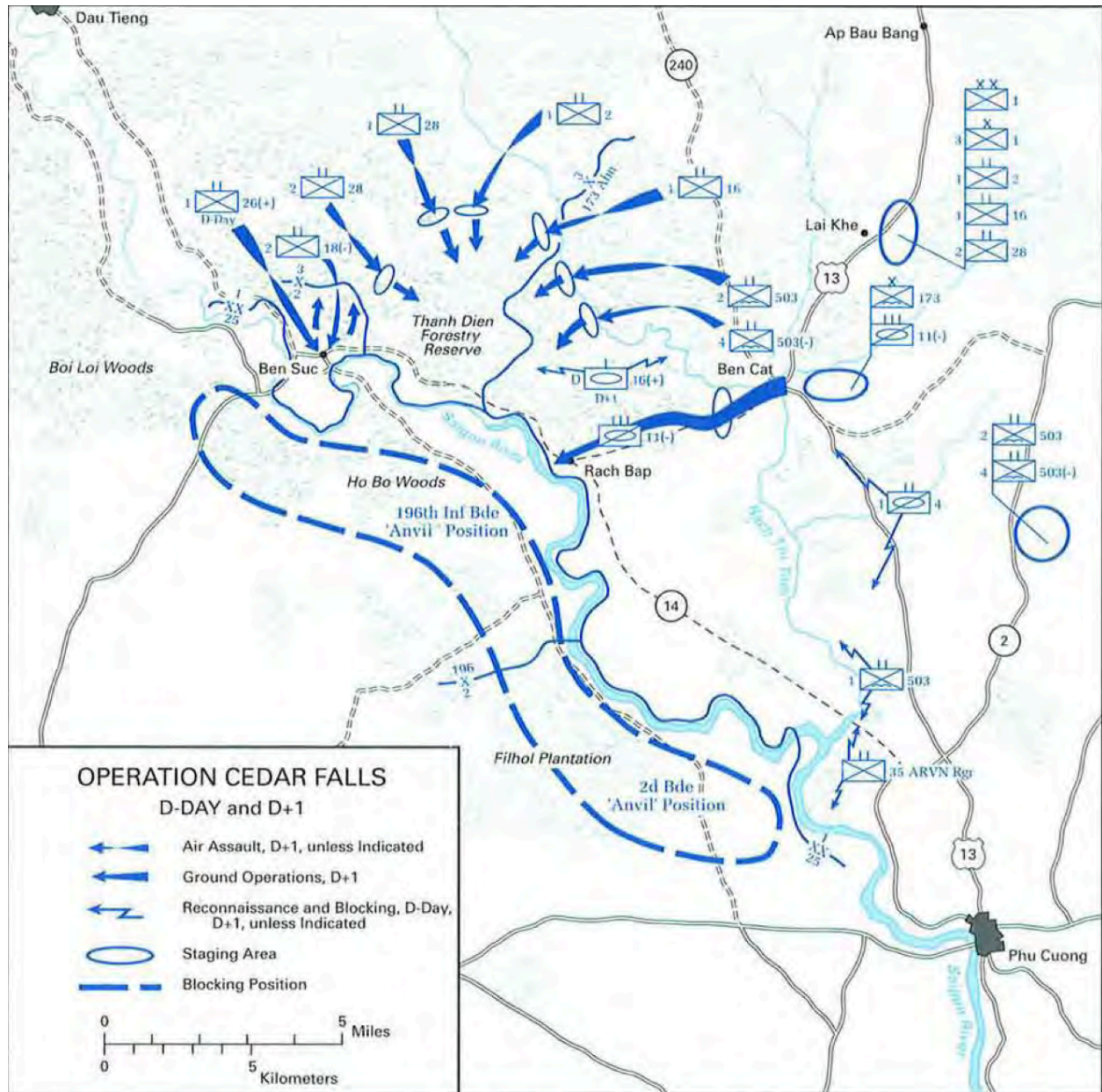
For the next nine days, the American units swept through the triangle pushing south towards the anvil position. In the process, they encountered sporadic enemy contact. Enemy losses amounted to 750 KIA, 280 POWs, and 512 Chieu Hoi defectors. Additionally, the American units captured over 600 weapons. Just as important, in the process of conducting their sweeps they destroyed over 500 tunnels and 1,100 bunker complexes capturing over 500,000 intelligence documents and 3,700 tons of rice. Throughout the entire operation, American forces sustained 72 KIA and another 337 WIA.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Rogers, *Cedar Falls-Junction City*, 30-39.

²⁵² Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 454.

²⁵³ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 454-455. See also Rogers, *Cedar Falls-Junction City*, 74.

Figure 10



Source: George L. MacGarrigle, *Combat Operations Taking the Offensive: October 1966 to October 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1998), 98.

DePuy was extremely satisfied with the results of Cedar Falls writing, “Although I do not expect the war to end quickly, I believe this has been a decisive turning point in the III Corps Area; a tremendous boost to the morale of the Vietnamese government and Army; and a blow

from which the VC in this area may never recover.”²⁵⁴ Now that the Iron Triangle was purged of the Communist infrastructure, the Americans could turn their attention farther north towards their original objective of War Zone C.

At the conclusion of Cedar Falls on 26 January, DePuy had led the 1st Division in his last operation as commander of the Big Red One. On 10 February, he relinquished command to Major General John H. Hay who would command the Big Red One through the remainder of 1967. Following the success of Cedar Falls, Westmoreland hoped to maintain the momentum of the offensive and initiated Operation Junction City on 22 February. The large search and destroy operation lasted until late April and aimed to achieve comparable results in War Zone C; with the ultimate objective to locate COSVN headquarters and destroy the 9th Division and its base camps. At the conclusion of Junction City, the Big Red One had inflicted close to 1,800 casualties on the 9th Division yet, once again, the Communists were able to slip back over the Cambodian border to their sanctuaries and fight another day just as they had done so many times before.²⁵⁵

Although both operations initially appeared successful in terms of the standard metrics of enemy killed, equipment captured, and infrastructure destroyed, the results did not last long. There simply were not enough allied forces to maintain control over the area once operations

²⁵⁴ DePuy quoted in Rogers, *Cedar Falls-Junction City*, 78. In a letter to journalist Joseph Alsop, DePuy stressed privately his delight with the results of the operation: “We have just concluded an operation which I believe represents THE turning point in the war. This operation has destroyed Military Region IV Headquarters...the headquarters charged with winning the war in the Saigon area...we have had 388 Chieu Hois in the last 15 days...nothing like this has happened before in the war in Vietnam. The implications are limitless... P.S. In addition to the 388 Chieu Hois, the killed and captured pushes the total in the 1st Division area alone to almost an even 1,000 which is the biggest victory we have ever had, including Attleboro, El Paso, and the rest.” In William E. DePuy, Letter from MG DePuy to Joe Alsop, dated 24 January 1967, Box 4A, Folder 11, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

²⁵⁵ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 465.

concluded. One of DePuy's assistant division commanders, Brigadier General Bernard W. Rogers, attested to this predicament:

One of the discouraging features of both Cedar Falls and Junction City was the fact that we had insufficient forces, either U.S. or South Vietnamese, to permit us to continue to operate in the Iron Triangle and War Zone C and thereby prevent the Viet Cong from returning. In neither instance were we able to stay around, and it was not long before there was evidence of the enemy's return.²⁵⁶

Conducting large scale multi-division search and destroy operations such as Cedar Falls and Junction City demonstrated another drawback. The units mobilized to participate eventually had to return to their TAORs and reassume their primary assigned missions in those areas. Units simply could not remain in the operational area or else their previous efforts in establishing security in the areas which they were responsible would diminish.²⁵⁷

Nevertheless, during the eleven months DePuy commanded the 1st Infantry Division it had brought the enemy main force units to battle and successfully inhibited their ability to enter the populated areas of the III CTZ. Despite this accomplishment, time and time again the enemy prohibited the Big Red One from dealing a knockout blow. Years after the war, DePuy summed up his thoughts on the enemy:

I guess I was surprised a little bit...after I took over the division, about the difficulty we had in finding the VC. We hit more dry holes than I thought we were going to hit. They were more elusive than I had expected. They controlled the battle better. They were the ones who decided whether or not there would be a fight... the VC and NVA were simply able to avoid enough direct confrontations that they were able to survive. They metered out their casualties, and when the casualties were getting too high...they simply backed off and waited. They came back later, under circumstances in which they could afford to sustain more casualties.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Rogers, *Cedar Falls-Junction City*, 158.

²⁵⁷ See Command History, United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam, 1967, Volume 1, p. 144, Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas (hereafter cited as CARL). The Command History admits: "Major operations, such as Cedar Falls and Junction City, required that several units be massed to obtain the requisite 25 to 30 battalions, but competing requirements for the available forces did not permit sustained operations of such magnitude."

²⁵⁸ DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 160-161.

Despite the frustrations DePuy felt with his inability to destroy the enemy, his skill in adjusting tactics, techniques, and procedures to conform to the operational environment had certainly thwarted the initiative the Communist's had hoped to maintain. Furthermore, search and destroy operations had prevented the Saigon government from collapsing and had dealt a severe blow to the enemy's logistical infrastructure. By pushing the Communists further from the population centers, the North Vietnamese were severely handicapped in their ability to continue to recruit and influence the people in the highly populated areas around Saigon.

Chapter Six: The Big Red One's "Other War" - Revolutionary Development Under DePuy's Command

*"To provide a clutch and gear mechanism to match the speed and power of the 1st Infantry Division to the slow, arduous pace of Revolutionary Development, the Commanding General created the Revolutionary Development Task Force (RDTF), with the primary mission of planning and executing Lam Son."*²⁵⁹

-LTC Paul F. Gorman, G-3, 1st ID, 21 March 1967

A common misconception exists that DePuy solely focused on bringing to battle main force units and paid little to no attention on pacification measures while in command of the Big Red One. During the conflict, most of the public focus on DePuy came from the many journalists who were granted mostly unfettered access to front-line units where they witnessed first-hand combat operations throughout the war. DePuy's outspoken personality coupled with his forceful convictions on how to achieve tactical successes soon garnered the eye of those reporters embedded within the 1st Division.²⁶⁰

These journalists, primarily focused on DePuy's seemingly unorthodox and overly aggressive tactical methods for bringing the enemy to battle, coupled with his emphasis on the heavy use of firepower and mobility, crafted a persona of a combat leader in search of inflicting nothing more than high body counts as a metric for success.²⁶¹ At the time, these themes are what made the headlines, sold papers, and gave the impression that the United States was making

²⁵⁹ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, "1st Infantry Division's Revolutionary Development," dated 21 March 1967, p. 1, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

²⁶⁰ DePuy maintained close relationships with many journalists throughout his eleven months in command of the Big Red One. His correspondence file at USAHEC contains letters to and from Joseph Alsop, Peter Arnett, Ike Pappas, and other famous journalists of the day seemingly intrigued by his methods and aggressive spirit for bringing the Communists to battle. For further insights on DePuy's relationship with reporters and the media and his views on their influence on the war's final outcome see DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 165.

²⁶¹ In discussing the "body count" as a metric for success, DePuy wrote: "It is a gruesome way of accounting, but there didn't seem to be any other way to keep track of the progress being made...I believe that problems arose with the body count in certain units...Now, if units compete for body count, and they inflate them, then that's corruption of the system. So, I think it's inevitable that there will be some kind of counting of enemy casualties, and that automatically brings you into an area of potential abuse." In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 162.

headway in the war. Much less focus, if any, was directed to the less glamorous pacification efforts he spearheaded while in command of the 1st Division.

Of course, the commentary DePuy sometimes provided did little to help his case. Journalist Neil Sheehan wrote that in a conversation between Daniel Ellsberg and DePuy while on a visit one day to Danger Main, DePuy told him, “The solution in Vietnam is more bombs, more shells, more napalm...till the other side cracks and gives up.”²⁶² Yet, this was only one part of DePuy’s two-pronged approach. For pacification measures to take center stage, he had to first eliminate the greater threat posed by the main force elements.

Some of DePuy’s contemporaries in uniform were equally condemning of his operational approach. DePuy’s replacement as J-3 at MACV, Major General John C.F. Tillson, exclaimed years later, “We never did pay any attention to the COIN area. My predecessor, Major General Bill DePuy, never hesitated about heavy artillery preparation. He never thought about COIN – he was fighting nothing but a conventional war.”²⁶³ As a result, in both the Army’s institutional memory as well as in the public memory of the war, these themes held surrounding DePuy’s time in command. In reality, however, the historical record exemplifies a much more balanced operational approach; an approach that much more closely mirrors his writings while serving on the MACV staff.

Even in their earliest days of formulating the strategic concept to prosecute the war at MACV, both Westmoreland and DePuy understood and emphasized the importance that the pacification line of effort required if U.S., Free World, and allied ARVN units were to garner the support of the South Vietnamese population and strengthen the ties between the people in the countryside and the GVN. Purely defeating NVA and Viet Cong main force elements would not,

²⁶² Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 619.

²⁶³ Tillson quoted in Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 161.

in the end, satisfy strategic objectives. Accordingly, the 1st Infantry Division mission statement for 1966 called for, in tandem, “combat [search and destroy] and Revolutionary Development operations designed to further extend and consolidate RVN control throughout the III Corps Tactical Zone.”²⁶⁴

MACV Directive 525-3, issued on 7 September 1965, outlined the critical importance for commanders in the field to adhere to the associated nonmilitary tasks deemed essential to overall mission success within the strategic framework outlined by Westmoreland’s concept of operations. Highlighting the significance of minimizing and avoiding non-combatant battle casualties in the conduct of search and destroy operations, the directive also mandated that “commanders will consider both the military and psychological objective of each operation.” Furthermore, the directive maintained, “a civic action plan should be developed to support each operation even if the area has been controlled by VC...operations should be planned in coordination with province and district chiefs.”²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 August 1966 - 31 October 1966, p. 3, Box 67, Folder 3, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁶⁵ MACV Directive 525-3: Combat Operations Minimizing Non-Combatant Battle Casualties, dated 7 September 1965, p. 2, Box 15A, Folder 8, MACV Directives, MACV Command Historian Collection, USAHEC. It should be noted that under DePuy’s command, the leadership of the Division attempted to mitigate civilian casualties in accordance with MACV Directive 525-3 throughout all operations. Evidence of this appears in a memorandum from Colonel Sidney Berry while in command of the 1st Brigade in September 1966. On 18 September, two American soldiers stationed at Phuoc Vinh injured two Vietnamese civilians while firing an M-79 grenade launcher. Berry immediately placed the area off limits to American soldiers and mandated that his subordinate commanders discuss the incident with their formations. Berry wrote: “Neither I nor any other commander here at Phuoc Vinh can nor will tolerate such ill—disciplined, irresponsible, criminal actions on the part of some of our soldiers. Such hoodlum-like conduct will undo quickly the progress that has been made in making friends with the Vietnamese people.” In Sidney B. Berry, Jr. “Memorandum To All Commanders of Units Stationed at Phouc Vinh Regarding the Conduct of American Soldiers,” dated 19 September 1966, Box 20C, Folder 13, Memoranda/Reports/Correspondence from the 1st Brigade, 1966-67, SBBP, USAHEC. In some cases, when civilian casualties were incurred on operations, all efforts available were undertaken to rectify the situation. During Operation Lexington III in May 1966, an accidental mortar strike on the village of Dong Hoa killed seven civilians and wounded thirty others. 1-18 IN immediately dispatched their battalion surgeon and medical staff to administer first aid. The Division G-5 compensated the families of those killed and injured and troops rebuilt destroyed homes and distributed food and supplies. In 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, Combat Operations After Action Report (AAR) Operation Lexington III, p. 3, Box 18, Folder 4, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

Under the leadership of DePuy, the 1st Division incorporated Civil Affairs teams and Psychological Operations into their missions wherever and whenever they were applicable despite the severe threat posed by NVA and VC main force units in the TAOR at the time. DePuy well understood that if he had any hope of influencing the local population to support the GVN, he would have to rely heavily on the CA teams and PsyOps assets available to him through the creation of a robust Revolutionary Development program.

In the June 1967 publication of *Danger Forward*, the monthly magazine of the Big Red One, an article entitled “Into a New Kind of War,” highlighted the major operations undertaken by the 1st Infantry Division since their entry into the combat theater of operations in 1965. Under the heading “The Other War Revolutionary Development,” the article described Operation “Lam Son” that began in 1966 as a “joint Vietnamese-American Revolutionary development program...to win the confidence and good will of the Vietnamese people”²⁶⁶ In further describing the operation, “Under the concept developed villages are sealed, searched and made safe from VC influence...doctors and supplies are brought to the people...The results of such an extensive program cannot be easily measured as those in all out fighting on the battlefield, but the outcome is just as important and may well be the deciding factor in the Vietnam conflict.”²⁶⁷ As early as 1966, even with the serious threats posed by main-force NVA and VC units, pacification was in fact conducted in conjunction with combat operations and viewed as critical to strategic success within the Big Red One.

Moreover, initiated before DePuy assumed command of the Division in mid-March 1966, Operation Lam Son, and the subsequently named iterations Lam Son II and Lam Son 67, grew

²⁶⁶ “Into a New Kind of War,” *Danger Forward*, June 1, 1967, p. 47, 1st Infantry Division Publications – Vietnam, MRCDA.

²⁶⁷ “Into a New Kind of War,” *Danger Forward*, June 1, 1967, pp. 47-48, 1st Infantry Division Publications – Vietnam, MRCDA.

exponentially over the next year. DePuy further emphasized, strengthened, and regarded these operations as a main line of effort throughout his entire time in command. Incorporating various lessons learned and leveraging the available Revolutionary Development, Civic Action, and Psychological Operations assets available throughout the entire year of 1966, Lam Son morphed into a much stronger program with greater command emphasis placed on its importance by DePuy and his subordinate commanders.

Accordingly, the 1st Infantry Division's Revolutionary Development support program defined DePuy's interpretation of his overall mission for the Big Red One "as necessitating two differing coincident campaigns: one campaign against the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army Main Force units and a second campaign aimed at wresting control over the people of Binh Duong province from the VC local guerrillas and cadre. He [DePuy] conceived these campaigns as interrelated, interacting military operations."²⁶⁸

The first campaign translated to fighting a "systematic offensive" against main force elements such as the 9th VC Division and the VC Binh Duong Province Battalion to inhibit their support of the local guerrillas in the populated areas. If successful, this campaign would allow smaller and less heavily armed patrols to maintain security in the more densely populated areas once the main force units were defeated.²⁶⁹

The second campaign translated to Lam Son operations and consisted of both hamlet/village search and seal operations as well as the destruction of nearby jungle sanctuaries. Designed to occur simultaneously with the destruction of main force units, Lam Son operations were intended to attrite the local VC guerrillas and their cadre in order to "deprive main force

²⁶⁸ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, "1st Infantry Division's Revolutionary Development," dated 21 March 1967, p. 5, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

²⁶⁹ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, "1st Infantry Division's Revolutionary Development," dated 21 March 1967, p. 5, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

units of guides, communication and liaison and sources of money, food, women and other comforts of civilization.”²⁷⁰ Thus, equipped with this two-pronged mission set, DePuy and the 1st Infantry Division focused their operations throughout their TAOR in the III CTZ. As demonstrated in this study, this second campaign has often been overlooked by historians and critics of DePuy’s methods while in command of the Big Red One.

Operation Rolling Stone

Just two weeks before DePuy assumed command of the Big Red One, the 1st “Devil” Brigade under the command of Colonel Edgar Glotzbach, concluded Operation Rolling Stone. From 11 February to 2 March 1966, the Devil Brigade, along with the attached 1st Engineer Battalion, conducted “a search & destroy and road repair operation” with the aim of constructing a new road north of Saigon in Binh Duong Province linking Highway 13 with Highway 16.²⁷¹ Straddling the area between War Zones C and D, the proposed road lay directly astride a major VC infiltration and supply route. If successfully completed, the road and subsequent influx of U.S. troop activity in the area would isolate War Zone D from the established Communist strongholds located farther to the west.²⁷²

The primary purpose of the operation was to rid the area of VC influence and, also, to introduce military and economic programs to strengthen the ties between the Vietnamese living in the area to the GVN. A secondary objective of the operation was to open a main supply route between the two forward deployed brigades of the division located at both Phuoc Vinh and Lai Khe. If successful, the construction of the proposed road would increase both ARVN and U.S.

²⁷⁰ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, “1st Infantry Division’s Revolutionary Development,” dated 21 March 1967, p. 5, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

²⁷¹ Combat Operations After Action Report, 1st Infantry Division, 1st Brigade, Operation Rolling Stone – Department of the Army Headquarters, dated 28 March 1966, pp. 1-16, Box 1, Folder 58, Colonel William E. LeGro Collection, TTUVA.

²⁷² Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 179.

trafficability in the area and, also, strengthen lines of communication between the two American bases.²⁷³

As the 1st Engineer Battalion constructed the road, MEDCAP teams converged on villages and hamlets in the area providing medical treatment to the civilian inhabitants of the area. As a result, over 754 civilians received medical treatment along with the inoculation of over 400 children. Simultaneously, Civil Affairs and PsyOps teams distributed food, broadcasted anti-communist messages, and worked to repair damaged houses.²⁷⁴ The presence of American troops in the area had the effect of diminishing the “VC prestige and control in the local villages.” Furthermore, U.S. forces disrupted the ability of VC units and couriers to conduct resupply activities. As a result, two weeks into the operation, on the morning of 24 February, approximately 1,500 -1,800 VC commandos of the 761st and 763rd Regiments, D800 Battalion, 9th Division attacked the forward elements of the 1st Brigade in the vicinity of the village of Cau Dinh near Tan Binh. Over the course of a five-hour attack, VC forces were beaten back and suffered tremendous losses. The U.S. infantry force providing security for the operation repulsed the attacks inflicting 135 confirmed enemy KIA and an estimated 250 more. The 1st Brigade suffered 11 killed and another 74 wounded in the battle.²⁷⁵

Following the defeat of the VC force, construction and pacification measures continued. In an effort to incorporate the South Vietnamese in the operation, the duly appointed chiefs from the Phu Giao and Ben Cat districts were introduced to the villagers in the area. More importantly, ARVN troops remained in the region following the operation to maintain permanent security

²⁷³ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 January 1966 - 30 April 1966, p. 5, Box 67, Folder 1, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁷⁴ Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 181.

²⁷⁵ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 January 1966 - 30 April 1966, p. 5, Box 67, Folder 1, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

from VC influence.²⁷⁶ According to Colonel Glotzbach's final analysis in the After Action Report: "Operation Rolling Stone was without reservation a classic counterinsurgency operation in the Vietnam environment. It incorporated the interrelated fields of Civic Action, Psychological Warfare, and Ground Combat Operations."²⁷⁷

In his final assessment of the operation, Glotzbach posited that the area could sway permanently to the side of the GVN as long as the security force remained permanently in the area. Unfortunately, similar to many other operations undertaken, ARVN forces were unable to maintain a firm grip on the area in the ensuing months allowing the VC to eventually slowly reestablish control.²⁷⁸ As a result, in the last week of December 1966, in an attempt to regain control of the village, a targeted search and seal mission in Tan Binh as part of Operation Lam Son II attempted to wrestle back control of the area. A further examination of this mission as an in-depth case study appears later in this chapter.

Revolutionary Development Early 1966

By early 1966, the Big Red One occupied six major base camps at Di An, Phu Loi, Lai Khe, Phuoc Vinh, Bien Hoa, and Bear Cat. Each of these base camps established a Community Relations Council during this period. Described as "the backbone of Civic Action," the purpose of these councils was to enhance the relationships between local GVN officials and Big Red One commanders.²⁷⁹ Maintaining a pulse on the local concerns of the Vietnamese in close proximity

²⁷⁶ Combat Operations After Action Report, 1st Infantry Division, 1st Brigade, Operation Rolling Stone – Department of the Army Headquarters, dated 28 March 1966, pp. 1-16, Box 1, Folder 58, Colonel William E. LeGro Collection, TTUVA. See also, 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 January 1966 - 30 April 1966, p. 5, Box 67, Folder 1, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁷⁷ Combat Operations After Action Report, 1st Infantry Division, 1st Brigade, Operation Rolling Stone – Department of the Army Headquarters, dated 28 March 1966, pp. 1-16, Box 1, Folder 58, Colonel William E. LeGro Collection, TTUVA.

²⁷⁸ Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 428.

²⁷⁹ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 January 1966 - 30 April 1966, p. 9, Box 67, Folder 1, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

to American base camps served a twofold purpose. One, local concerns could be addressed by 1st Infantry Division leaders at various echelons who were able to provide both military aid and civil assistance wherever it was required. Second, establishing close relationships with local government officials was critical to portray and reinforce the image that the local government had the requisite support to establish credibility.

As demonstrated by the recently successful completion of Operation Rolling Stone, the MEDCAP program gained recognition as the most effective and critical line of effort within the Civic Action campaign during this time. A perception existed that successful medical treatment of villagers in such large numbers established a feeling amongst the people that the GVN held a true concern to assist the population. In the first quarter of 1966 alone, over 25,000 patients were treated by the 1st Division's MEDCAP program.²⁸⁰ PsyOps and Civic Action activities went hand in hand on most operations. Techniques such as wrapping medicine in PsyOps leaflets to reinforce themes of government support became a common practice. Moreover, all South Vietnamese nationals who received medical treatment would subsequently be questioned by G-2 personnel to gather any intelligence deemed important for conducting future operations.²⁸¹

Other projects undertaken by the division during the early months of 1966 helped to strengthen the infrastructure for the civilian population in the III CTZ. Five school construction projects commenced with one completed in April 1966 in the Di An and Phu Hoa areas. At the An Loc Orphanage, a new dining hall was constructed by 1st Division soldiers. Construction of latrine facilities, playgrounds, and fences in heavily populated areas also greatly assisted the local population. On 22 March 1966, following a VC terrorist attack in the village of Phuoc

²⁸⁰ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 January 1966 - 30 April 1966, p. 9, Box 67, Folder 1, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁸¹ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 January 1966 - 30 April 1966, p. 9, Box 67, Folder 1, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

Vinh, which destroyed the village market house, Civic Action teams planned the layout of the new facility and donated construction materials. Moreover, working closely with the Phu Giao District Chief, a total of fifty-five families were relocated with assistance provided by 1st Division soldiers in surveying and staking out new structures planned for construction as part of the resettlement.²⁸²

Operation Lam Son II

“He [DePuy] said that he wanted me to know that we had an important mission: maybe, he said, the most important mission of any battalion in the whole division. He said the division had to learn how to secure its rear area and that I was to work with the Revolutionary Development Task Force that he had set up, call sign HELPER, to discover the right mix of force and persuasion to eliminate the VC local forces and to persuade the people to cooperate with the government.”²⁸³

-LTC Paul F. Gorman, Commander, 1-26 IN, 1st ID

On 23 May 1966, 1-26 IN, a battery from 2-13 FA, elements of the 1st Engineer Battalion, and the 5th ARVN Division initiated Operation Lam Son II. Conducted in the Phu Loi area of Binh Duong Province, the mission called for “clearing and securing of the operational area to be followed by progressive pacification activities in selected areas.” Working in close cooperation with both ARVN and Sector forces, the “Phu Loi Pacification Task Force,” as it came to be known, was comprised of a combined Big Red One and 5th ARVN Division staff working in conjunction with one another to plan and execute various pacification missions. Lam Son II relied extensively on the techniques of saturation patrolling, village cordon and search, the coordinated efforts of Civil Affairs and PsyOps teams, interrogators, interpreters, engineers, and MEDCAP personnel. Classified as a “highly specialized pacification operation...with emphasis

²⁸² 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 January 1966 - 30 April 1966, p. 10, Box 67, Folder 1, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁸³ Gorman, *Cardinal Point*, 34.

on developing local self defense capabilities and developmental projects,” it intended to make headway in the pacification of Binh Duong Province.²⁸⁴

Upon identifying a particular village or hamlet to be pacified, a typical operation was conducted in a series of phases. The destruction of main force and guerilla units in vicinity of these areas became a precursor to site selection. Beginning with intense saturation patrolling in the area, a hamlet was then cordoned and searched. Local police forces and interrogators then descended amongst the inhabitants to screen personnel for intelligence while simultaneously conducting MEDCAP treatments and other services. Villagers were then exposed to the Chieu Hoi program and various other GVN programs. Following this phase, task force personnel emphasized construction of defenses to protect against further Viet Cong incursions. In some cases, depending on the reception in the village or hamlet, a “hamlet festival” would also take place. Simultaneously, civic developmental projects commenced such as the construction of roads, schools, and other infrastructure deemed essential to improve living conditions and attempt to sway the inhabitants to the side of the GVN.²⁸⁵

On 26 May, the Phu Loi Pacification Task Force, in cooperation with Binh Duong Province and District officials, National Police, and ARVN PsyOps elements of the 5th Division initiated the first operation of Lam Son II on the Binh Phu/Binh Phuoc complex.²⁸⁶ Once the Task Force converged on the hamlet, and the cordon was established, three VC were identified, two of which were political cadre members. One of the prisoners divulged the location of mines and other emplaced booby traps. Additionally, the search uncovered 11 ARVN deserters, 7

²⁸⁴ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, p. 6, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁸⁵ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, p. 6, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁸⁶ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, p. 6, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

personnel with fake identification cards, and 34 military aged males who were subsequently interrogated by GVN authorities. In this particular operation, a “County Fair” hamlet festival was conducted with over 3,000 lunches served and entertainment provided by the 1st Infantry Division Band and two Vietnamese cultural teams. In total, over 750 patients were treated by MEDCAP teams and 521 adults screened by intelligence personnel.²⁸⁷

Throughout June 1966, in an effort to set the conditions for future Lam Son II missions and maintain the required presence in the area of the villages and hamlets already deemed pacified, platoons conducted 391 search and clear operations of which 16.5 percent ended in contact with enemy forces. Furthermore, the emplacement of 496 ambushes resulted in just 3 percent establishing contact with the VC. Despite these low contact rates, by the end of the month, the effectiveness of these platoon size operations showed improvement as techniques were further refined by Big Red One and ARVN units as they adapted to enemy tactics and further increased their familiarity with the local terrain.²⁸⁸

Phu Loi Pacification Task Force missions further expanded in the month of June 1966 resulting in a total of eight hamlet search and seal operations. The first of these operations was conducted on the Tan Phuoc Khanh hamlet complex from 1-4 June where the Task Force uncovered 118 draft dodgers, 13 former VC parole violators, 21 deserters, and 89 VC suspects. Additionally, a VC hamlet chief and another VC security chief were returned to GVN control. Following the operation, captured VC intelligence revealed “a 50% loss of their capability and a

²⁸⁷ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, p. 6, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁸⁸ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, p. 8, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

two month period required for recuperation.” Cooperation from the villagers was classified as high with one young girl even divulging the hiding place of ten VC in the hamlet.²⁸⁹

By the end of June, Lam Son II operations resulted in a total of 8 VC KIA, 33 VC prisoners captured, 23 former VC screened, 31 Blacklist VC supporters captured, and the apprehension of 8 civilians with false ID Cards, 38 ARVN deserters, and 175 ARVN draft dodgers. Despite initial reluctance by 5th ARVN Division soldiers as to the efficacy of the program, the successful results for the month encouraged their belief in the program resulting in a more active role on their part in participating in both rural construction projects and hamlet festivals.²⁹⁰ Many lessons learned throughout the various Lam Son II operations were incorporated into subsequent search and seal operations. Amongst these was utilizing Rural Construction Cadre to provide crowd control during festivals. This increased the rapport with the people enabling easier initiation of projects in the hamlet. ARVN PsyOps teams also proved critical in communicating with the villagers and establishing commonalities due to the inherent cultural similarities.²⁹¹

On 16 July, 1-26 IN relinquished responsibility as the main 1st Infantry Division battalion of the Phu Loi Pacification Task Force to 2-2 IN. Years later, LTC Paul Gorman, the commander of 1-26 IN recollected on the time his unit spent in support of Lam Son II:

We were as vital to the success of the division’s campaign against the main force as any of the battalions operating up north. It was grubby work: lots of patrolling, much of it at night. Small unit fights against handfuls of VC. Mines and punji pits, claymores and mortar attacks – the grungiest sort of combat...ours was a new form of war...we had to invent new ways of fighting. I praised innovation and lauded initiative, especially if it worked. I preached that every leader had to think on his feet as he acted. In fact, that

²⁸⁹ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, p. 8, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁹⁰ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, p. 8, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁹¹ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, p. 9, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

became our motto in the 'Blue Spaders': *Inventamus Si Progressimus*. 'We Made It Up As We Went Along.'²⁹²

Gorman's comments reinforce the steep learning curve Big Red One units contended with to ensure the successful execution of the less glamorous Revolutionary Development mission sets required to meet strategic objectives. Effective population security required continuous patrolling in operational areas and the implementation of various enablers often foreign to infantry leaders and the soldiers within their formations. To further compound the difficulty of pacification missions, political stability was hard for military commanders to measure throughout the entirety of their respective TAOR.

With 2-2 IN then at the helm of Lam Son II, operations continued in the Binh Duong Province throughout July and consisted of more hamlet seal operations, squad size ambush patrols, and platoon size search and clear missions. Throughout the course of the month, 10% of the 127 total platoon search and clear missions and six percent of the 257 emplaced ambushes resulted in contact with VC forces. Of particular note, a search and seal operation in the hamlet of Phu Chanh on 13 July resulted in the discovery of a large VC arms cache. Eleven Mauser rifles, a Thompson Submachinegun, two American shotguns, and thousands of rounds of ammunition were uncovered in the search. The residents of the village cooperated with the Task Force and disclosed the identity of 14 VC guerrillas. By the end of July, Lam Son II operations accounted for a total of 4 VC KIA, 17 VC prisoners, 21 false identification cards, 25 ARVN deserters, and 147 draft evaders.²⁹³

Civic Action activities also increased in the month of July as a result of funds made available by MACV Directive 37-13 which provided the Task Force with 200,000 piasters per

²⁹² Gorman, *Cardinal Point*, 37.

²⁹³ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, pp. 10-11, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

month to aid in Revolutionary Development activities. These funds were utilized in the AO by the 1st Engineer Battalion to renovate the Thu Duc grade school. Funds were also used to purchase personal hygiene supplies and educational materials for local schools. Other funds were applied towards refurbishing the buildings of the An Loc Orphanage, paying local Vietnamese laborers to construct wells throughout the Lam Son area, and to supplement local “Milk Programs” where children would receive one glass of milk per day.²⁹⁴

As with any military operation, the techniques used throughout Operation Lam Son II in the first half of 1966 were continuously refined as the efficacy of certain procedures resulted in more tangible results. The saturation patrolling technique that DePuy emphasized in his first “Commanders Note” proved extremely effective in the more densely populated areas of Binh Duong province. The constant U.S. presence provided by these patrols inhibited VC main force units from infiltrating pacified areas and, also, hindered their ability to locate 1st Infantry Division battalion positions. Integrating ARVN 5th Division soldiers into patrols instilled “in the people a loyalty to the GVN and activated increased participation of the people in the Revolutionary Development Program.” Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the populated areas achieved a sense of security from witnessing continuous patrolling in their areas.²⁹⁵

Integration of the 5th ARVN Division staff with the Phu Loi Pacification Task force to conduct planning was continuously refined and the joint execution of missions seen as critical. One operational report concluded that “combined ARVN-US pacification operations should be employed against the VC operating in the populated outlying areas. Understanding of the goals and mutual willingness for cooperation and patience must be present.” Other refinements in Lam

²⁹⁴ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, p. 13, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁹⁵ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, p. 23, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

Son II operations included house-to-house dissemination of propaganda literature as a preferred method over the previous technique of mass airborne drops of leaflets. Furthermore, introducing Revolutionary Development Cadre at hamlet festivals proved to be an effective method to maintain crowd control while, at the same time, provided a prime opportunity to introduce newer cadre to the intricacies of the Lam Son II program.²⁹⁶

Throughout August and September 1966, Lam Son II continued to evolve and expand with a number of key innovations. Due to the inaccessibility of the Hoi Lai hamlet complex, the first completely heliborne search and seal operation complete with a hamlet festival was executed on 17 August. Additionally, on 26 August a hamlet festival in Tan An Xa was entirely planned and executed by the 5th ARVN Division and demonstrated an ability for ARVN forces to assume a larger responsibility in future Lam Son II operations. Likewise, from 20-22 September the first hamlet seal outside of Binh Duong Province was executed with combined elements of the 10th ARVN Division and Bien Hoa Sector Forces.²⁹⁷ An indication that Lam Son II programs were successful in strengthening the linkages between the GVN and the population of Binh Duong Province, the national election held on 11 September resulted in 79.9 percent of the eligible voters casting ballots without major incident.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 May 1966 - 31 July 1966, pp. 23-24, Box 67, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁹⁷ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 August 1966 - 31 October 1966, pp. 5-7, Box 67, Folder 3, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

²⁹⁸ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 August 1966 - 31 October 1966, p. 7, Box 67, Folder 3, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

Formation of the Revolutionary Development Task Force

“The real work in pacification is what goes on after you move into a village...that’s where our effort will pay off – or not pay off. The day-in-and-day-out unglamorous work of the civic action teams and the Revolutionary Development cadre. That means getting rid of the Vietcong by bringing back the government...without military security, nothing much more can be done. The Americans can kill a lot of Vietcong. But only the Vietnamese themselves can pacify their own villages.”²⁹⁹

-LTC Robert L. Schweitzer, Commander, 1st ID RDTF

On 15 October 1966, Lam Son II was placed under operational control of the 2nd “Dagger” Brigade and the Phu Loi Pacification Task Force officially renamed as “The Revolutionary Development Task Force.” A proper in brief between the RDTF and the leadership of the 2nd Brigade to include a thorough report on best practices moving forward and a detailed planning exercise for future Lam Son II operations was conducted. Along with a name change, a significant restructure to the RDTF directed by DePuy enabled a stronger program moving forward.³⁰⁰

From then on, the RDTF was to be placed under operational control of a maneuver brigade or battalion to maintain the organizational knowledge of best practices and techniques within the RDTF. Furthermore, the restructure enabled maneuver units to contend with a less steep learning curve upon assumption of pacification missions. The restructure called for a unique task organization to the RDTF. Similar to a line infantry battalion, a lieutenant colonel commanded the RDTF with an equivalent staff component appointed similar in size, grade, and

²⁹⁹ William Tuohy, “Colonel Sees Village Effort Vital to Victory in South Vietnam,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 1967, Box 8, Folder 6, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 Assessment and Strategy, TTUVA.

³⁰⁰ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 August 1966 - 31 October 1966, p. 10, Box 67, Folder 3, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

responsibility. In addition, assigned to the task force was “a modest compliment of communicators, intelligence specialists, drivers, and other mission essential personnel”.³⁰¹

Rather than drawing soldiers from the line battalions to create the RDTF, personnel were instead drawn from the division over-strength, Division Headquarters, and Division Artillery units. In total, fifteen officers and thirty-two enlisted soldiers equipped with small arms, fourteen trucks, and eleven radios were assigned to the unit. Some of the 1st Infantry Division soldiers assigned were Vietnamese language trained and those with backgrounds in PsyOps or intelligence gathering contributed key skill sets to the specialized mission of the RDTF.³⁰²

Functioning as a staff, the RDTF provided the division “with a corporate memory of the minutiae of Binh Dinh Province which our brigade and battalion staffs, moving from mission to mission, are unable to develop.” Moreover, the RDTF headquarters acted as a liaison between ARVN provincial units to further increase cooperation in conducting Lam Son II operations. During these operations, attaching the RDTF to one of the maneuver brigades or battalions served the purpose of “augmenting the tactical commander’s capacity to know and understand the Binh Duong situation, and to dovetail his efforts to those of GVN units.”³⁰³

As with all units in the Big Red One at the time, the leaders DePuy chose to command at various echelons were carefully selected. Understanding the importance of the pacification campaign, the RDTF was no exception. With the radio call sign “HELPER 6,” LTC Robert Schweitzer was uniquely qualified and hand selected by DePuy to command the RDTF. Years later, DePuy emphasized the unique qualities Schweitzer contributed in this role:

³⁰¹ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, “1st Infantry Division’s Revolutionary Development,” dated 21 March 1967, p. 1, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

³⁰² LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, “1st Infantry Division’s Revolutionary Development,” dated 21 March 1967, p. 1, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

³⁰³ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, “1st Infantry Division’s Revolutionary Development,” dated 21 March 1967, p. 1, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

In the case of Colonel Schweitzer, we had the perfect man. He spoke Vietnamese, was the bravest man I ever met, was a man of enormous initiative and energy, was wounded a number of times, and had the confidence of the Vietnamese at every level to the extent that they would assign forces to him at his request without his even telling them what he was going to use them for. And, there would be no intelligence leaks of any kind. So, whatever success we had, and I think the HELPER Organization had many, in strengthening the Vietnamese and in attacking the enemy's so-called infrastructure, can be credited primarily to Colonel Schweitzer and his men...my guess is that there was never another Schweitzer.³⁰⁴

Schweitzer continued to lead the RDTF throughout late 1966 and into 1967. Under his command, the RDTF played a pivotal role in the search and seal of the village of Ben Cui II during Operation Attleboro and the village of Ben Suc in Operation Cedar Falls. On 12 April 1967, two months after DePuy relinquished command, Schweitzer was wounded on a combined search and seal operation in the village of Tandonghiep, Bien Hoa Province, where he received severe shrapnel wounds from a VC grenade attack.³⁰⁵ The unique skillset Schweitzer brought to DePuy's RD campaign undoubtedly strengthened the program and provided the leadership required to influence DePuy's commander's intent in strengthening pacification objectives.

Revolutionary Development Late 1966

By October 1966, intelligence reports indicated that the VC 3rd Battalion, 165A Regiment had infiltrated the Di An area resulting in increased enemy activity. As a result of the influx of increased enemy in the AO, Lam Son II operations netted a total of 93 VC KIA, 70 Chieu Hoi

³⁰⁴ DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 164-165.

³⁰⁵ William Tuohy, "Colonel Sees Village Effort Vital to Victory in South Vietnam," *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 1967, Box 8, Folder 6, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 Assessment and Strategy, TTUVA. Schweitzer worked closely with French war correspondent Bernard Fall on pacification measures during his tenure as the commander of the RDTF. After the war, Schweitzer served a long career and eventually retired as a Lieutenant General. His assignments included command of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (1973-1974), the Director of the Office of Defense Policy for the National Security Council (1981), and as the Chairman of the Inter-American Defense Board (1983-1986). In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 164.

ralliers, and large amounts of captured rice, weapons, ammunition, and equipment throughout the month of October.³⁰⁶

The Big Red One designated November 1966 as “Chieu Hoi Month.” To set the groundwork for future PsyOps missions and encourage more defections, the Division G-5 held a “Chieu Hoi Seminar” during the second week of October. Attendees included the S-5’s from each brigade as well as representatives from JUSPAO, USAID, RAND and other advisors operating within the III CTZ. The seminar further developed the Chieu Hoi program to focus more on exposing the families of VC cadre to information on the benefits of the program in hopes of encouraging more defections in the ensuing months ahead. From the start of Lam Son II on 23 May 1966 up until October 1966, a total of 273 VC surrendered to the Chieu Hoi program as a result of PsyOp leaflet and loudspeaker operations conducted during the various Revolutionary Development associated operations.³⁰⁷

Countless Civic Action projects undertaken by the 1st Division in close proximity to base camps continued to enhance local infrastructure throughout the Autumn of 1966. In the Thu Duc District, the 1st Brigade and 1st Engineer Battalion repaved an intersection at Tam Binh to open traffic flow and, also, constructed a bridge on the Song Be River linking Phuoc Vinh with Le Trang. At Ben Cat, the 3rd Brigade constructed a refugee hamlet for 610 refugees along with a brick factory to employ the refugees living there. A public school in Lai Khe was also completed in late September. From August to September, MEDCAP services expanded to cover dependents

³⁰⁶ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 August 1966 - 31 October 1966, p. 10, Box 67, Folder 3, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

³⁰⁷ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 August 1966 - 31 October 1966, p. 14, Box 67, Folder 3, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

of RF/PF forces. In total, 19,750 patients were treated on both combat and RD operations between August and October.³⁰⁸

One battery commander who served in the Big Red One's Division Artillery from September 1966 to July 1967 noted the extent to which his unit participated in Civic Action amongst the local population. The battery he commanded sponsored a schoolhouse in the village of Zi An near Lai Khe. Using leftover ammunition boxes and cannisters, they constructed a schoolhouse and then used donation money from Saigon to install blackboards and desks. Furthermore, they conducted maintenance and repair on an orphanage located in a neighboring outer village. While there, the commander noted that medical teams would enter the village and conduct dental exams, first aid, and other necessities. Soldiers would give their Sunday packs of candy to the children. Many times, the battery commander was invited to the district chief's home for dinner.³⁰⁹

During November 1966, Lam Son II operations shifted to the 1st Brigade as the 2nd Brigade was called to support Operation Battle Creek. While operating in the vicinity of the Tan Phuc Khanh village, 2-2 IN came under heavy attack from a VC force resulting in 90 enemy KIA, 21 detainees, and 51 Chieu Hoi ralliers as well as the capture of thousands of rounds of ammunition, weapons, and explosives. More importantly, five VC base camps and a complex tunnel system were destroyed.³¹⁰

In December, Lam Son II responsibilities fell once again under the 2nd Brigade with 1-18 IN spearheading the majority of operations. Operating near the villages of Binh Chuan, Vinh

³⁰⁸ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 August 1966 - 31 October 1966, p. 15, Box 67, Folder 3, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

³⁰⁹ LTC Arturo Rodriguez, "Interview with LTC Dennis D. McSweeney," p. 46-48, Box 23, Folder 2, Company Command in Vietnam Oral History Interviews, Senior Officers Oral History Program, 1981-1985, USAHEC.

³¹⁰ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 November 1966 - 31 January 1966, p. 5, Box 29, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

Truong, Tan Phu Khan, and Hoa Nhut, 1-18 IN conducted a series of saturation and security patrols. Joint U.S./RF patrols were also conducted in the villages east of Phu Loi and consisted of three reconnaissance patrols and eleven squad size night ambushes. Contact with VC forces was light but resulted in the destruction of three tunnel systems and an old VC base camp. In all, Lam Son II operations for the month resulted in forty-seven VC KIA, ten WIA, and sixty-nine prisoners along with the capture of loads of weapons, ammunition, and supplies in the TAOR.³¹¹

Operation Fairfax

During the month of December 1966, and throughout the first two weeks of January 1967, the Big Red One conducted a combined search and destroy and Lam Son II operation codenamed Operation Fairfax. Beginning on 1 December, 2-16 IN road marched from Di An to Thu Duc and established an "Area Security Coordination Center." Operating in the Capital Military Region near the Song River just outside northeast Saigon, in an area known to be a VC sanctuary, 2-16 IN sent out over twenty ambush patrols each night in coordination with the 30th ARVN Ranger Battalion and Thu Duc District forces. The area was thoroughly combed with C/2-16 IN operating riverine patrols on the Dong Nai River while the other elements of 2-16 IN and 1-16 IN, along with their ARVN counterparts, continued to establish ambushes and road check points. Search and seal operations were conducted on hamlets to include Phuoc Liep, Go Cong, and two others.³¹²

Prior to the operation, the AO was deemed 50 percent secure, with intelligence reports that elements of the 4-165A Battalion augmented by twelve VC guerrilla squads and a security

³¹¹ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 November 1966 - 31 January 1966, pp. 7-8, Box 29, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

³¹² 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 November 1966 - 31 January 1966, pp. 11-14, Box 29, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

platoon held control over the area and openly conducted nightly propaganda meetings. The close cooperation between the joint U.S.-ARVN staffed Area Security Coordination Center provided timely and accurate intelligence to drive missions throughout the operation. This, coupled with Big Red One commanders and district level forces working together to conduct nightly ambush patrols, riverine ambushes, and search and seal operations proved paramount.³¹³

Furthermore, 2-16 IN and the ARVN 30th Ranger Battalion established company sized patrol bases throughout the AO from which they jointly launched missions. The establishment of these base camps allowed 2-16 IN company commanders to exert greater control over their ARVN brethren on joint missions. Overall, sixty-eight VC KIA were reported with an equal number of Chieu Hoi defectors. Over 394 detainees were also apprehended during the operation as well as a large number of weapons, ammunition, and equipment. Big Red One units suffered nine KIA and another forty-four WIA throughout the operation.³¹⁴

In January 1967, the Big Red One ended their participation in the operation as General Westmoreland handed the responsibility over to the 199th Light Infantry Brigade. Operation Fairfax continued throughout 1967 until it's culmination in December.³¹⁵ Although Fairfax had produced results which improved the security situation in a critical area outside of Saigon, and had done so through a number of joint U.S.-ARVN cooperative efforts, the operation revealed a serious shortcoming.

Fairfax rested on the ARVN's ability to assume full control of the security situation once the Americans left the AO. Instead, due to disparities in resources and capabilities,

³¹³ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 November 1966 - 31 January 1966, p. 14, Box 29, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

³¹⁴ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 November 1966 - 31 January 1966, p. 14, Box 29, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

³¹⁵ MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, 158.

Westmoreland noted that the South Vietnamese had slowly taken a back seat in the operation. As a result, the MACV commander concluded that it was “better for South Vietnamese and American units to operate side by side in cooperation than to integrate.”³¹⁶ Nevertheless, a serious attempt at integration had occurred and the Big Red One played a large effort in the earliest and most successful phase of Operation Fairfax.

Revolutionary Development into 1967

Lam Son II operations continued throughout January 1967, and towards the end of the month, increasingly intensified throughout the TAOR in conjunction with Operation Cedar Falls. In combination with Cedar Falls, Lam Son II operations netted much larger successes. From 15 to 31 January, metrics jumped considerably to 306 VC KIA up from 250, from 1209 detainees up to 1743, and from two tons of rice captured up to 16.5 tons. Operational control of Lam Son shifted back and forth between both the 1st and 2nd Brigades throughout the month and many of the operations were spearheaded by both 1-18 IN and 1-26 IN. Of particular note, on 20 January, a search and seal operation conducted jointly by the two infantry battalions and augmented by 2-2 IN on the village of Cau Dat netted three VC KIA and seventy-six prisoners. Four days later, the RDTF, 1-26 IN, and the 8th ARVN Regiment conducted a seal and search on the village of Chan Luu resulting in the capture of significant intelligence.³¹⁷

Of particular significance, on 20 January, 1-18 IN, 2-18 IN, 1-26 IN, and 2-2 IN conducted a seal of the Tan Hiep Woods, a known VC sanctuary. After the seal was established, a PsyWar aircraft passed over the area and notified any personnel in the woods to proceed to the nearby village of Hoa Nhut. The next day, the infantry battalions directed a three-hour artillery

³¹⁶ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 207.

³¹⁷ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 November 1966 - 31 January 1966, p. 15, Box 29, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

bombardment coupled with air strikes on the area within the seal. Following the barrage, a search and destroy operation followed in the areas surrounding the woods. On 23 January, the seal was lifted and the search uncovered numerous tunnel complexes, bunkers, small arms, and food stores. Following the operation, 2-2 IN provided security for engineer units to conduct four square kilometers of jungle clearing in the woods.³¹⁸

Operational reports acknowledging shortcomings and lessons gleaned from Lam Son II operations in late 1966 and early 1967 aimed to improve Revolutionary Development operations moving forward. Viewed as a significant shortcoming, there existed a demand for more psychological warfare assets in a counterinsurgency environment. With standard Army TO&E's and doctrine established for a more conventional operating environment in which there was less of a demand for allocation of so called "PsyWar" assets, this made imminent sense. Reports recommended that PsyWar staff officers be assigned down to the battalion level to increase the "responsiveness, breadth, and depth for psychological operations." Understanding that the "real battleground is the minds of the people and the insurgents," the report concluded, "PsyWar becomes a primary factor rather than just a supporting weapons system in counter-insurgency operations." Hence, the report stressed that PsyWar assets should be used on all operations wherever possible and aimed at both the VC and the civilian population.³¹⁹

The successes achieved through Lam Son II operations undertaken in January 1967 coordinated in conjunction with Operation Cedar Falls demonstrated a number of shortcomings on the RD front. For one, when 1st Infantry Division units left an area undergoing RD to partake

³¹⁸ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 November 1966 - 31 January 1966, p. 15, Box 29, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

³¹⁹ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 November 1966 - 31 January 1966, pp. 47-50, Box 29, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

in a large search and destroy operation such as Cedar Falls, VC activity in that area increased. ARVN units remaining in those areas tasked to hold and control villages and hamlets became spread too thin resulting in a significant diminishment in progress. All in all, these observations demonstrated that RD operations conducted by ARVN units required significant and continuous oversight as well as supplementation from Big Red One soldiers to be effective.³²⁰

During February, thirteen villages in total were sealed and searched as part of Lam Son II. Civic Action projects continued throughout the month with MEDCAP servicing over 1,350 civilians. Additionally, the RDTF established close contact with the Binh Duong Chieu Hoi center and, through this relationship, gained significant intelligence to drive future operations. On 8 February 1967, Operation Lam Son II was renamed Operation Lam Son 67. Two days later, General DePuy relinquished command of the Big Red One to General John H. Hay who continued Lam Son 67 operations throughout his entire time in command.³²¹

Lam Son II Case Study: The Search and Seal of Tan Binh

On 23 February 1966, the large counterattack by elements of the 272nd Regiment on 1st Brigade forces during Operation Rolling Stone had occurred near the village of Tan Binh. Located in north central Binh Duong province, Tan Binh rested in an area considered to be on the outer fringe of U.S. and GVN influence in the III CTZ. Following the defeat of the VC in the battle, ARVN forces slowly loosened their control over the area resulting in a series of mine emplacements by the VC along the nearby Route 16. Further intelligence reporting indicated that VC forces had slowly reestablished control over the peasants in the village. By late 1966, the RDTF identified the remote village and its population as a key area of interest in which to

³²⁰ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 November 1966 - 31 January 1966, p. 50, Box 29, Folder 1, USARV 1st Infantry Division, Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 Files, RG 472, NARA II.

³²¹ 1st Infantry Division Operational Report - Lesson Learned (ORLL), 1 February 1967 – 30 April 1967, pp. 1-11, Box 68, Folder 2, USARV Command Historian Files, RG 472, NARA II.

wrestle back control of the population as part of targeted planning for future Lam Son II missions. Due to the remote location of the village, and the steady progression of Revolutionary Development techniques in other Lam Son II operations conducted throughout the year, the RDTF executed a search and seal mission on Tan Binh from 26-27 December 1966 with the objective of purging the village from VC control.³²²

In the search and seal of Tan Binh, the RDTF incorporated a number of techniques and procedures that demonstrated a steady progression of the Revolutionary Development concept. Utilizing a variety of enablers, the mission in Tan Binh produced results that further validated the importance of implementing RD operations in conjunction with search and destroy operations against main force VC and NVA units. At the time, this operation became a benchmark for how search and seal operations could further propagate pacification efforts.

To gather intelligence on the village, the RDTF conducted specialized interviews in the Binh Duong Chieu Hoi Camp. One of the Hoi Chann (ralliers), a former VC Recondo from Tan Binh, provided specific intelligence during his interview with the RDTF that substantially revealed the precise locations and daily activities of the VC currently operating in Tan Binh. Specifically, the informant revealed that the VC entered the town at 1700 hours each day along with the local farmers as they returned from the fields. After eating dinner with the villagers and conducting propaganda meetings, the VC normally left the village around 2400 hours each night. When given aerial photographs of the village, the informant pinpointed the exact locations of the huts where the meetings occurred. According to the former VC Recondo, no tactical defenses were erected in the village other than a few foxholes located in a nearby rubber plantation.

³²² LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, "1st Infantry Division's Revolutionary Development," dated 21 March 1967, p. 1, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

Moreover, the informant revealed the escape routes the VC planned to use in the case of a U.S. or ARVN attack on the village.³²³

Utilizing this intelligence, the 1st “Devil” Brigade, then under the command of Colonel Sidney Berry, along with the attached RDTF, two additional infantry battalions, a cavalry troop, and an artillery battalion task organized to conduct a search and seal operation on Tan Binh following the 1966 Christmas truce. Augmented with 40 UH-ID Huey helicopters and three CH-47 Chinooks, the task force was adequately outfitted to conduct a heliborne seal of the village. Additionally, the RDTF liaised with and equipped the 5th Reconnaissance Company of the 5th ARVN Division and a local district intelligence platoon of the 10th National Police unit to participate in the mission. In total, this added an aggregate of 115 South Vietnamese personnel to supplement the operation.³²⁴

To execute the mission, the combined Big Red One and ARVN force task organized into both a “seal force” and a “search force.” Both 1-26 IN and 1-28 IN along with the cavalry troop constituted the “seal force.” According to the operational report, placing the Big Red One force on the outer cordon of the seal “put US firepower and mobility where it would do the most good against VC and the least harm to the peasant’s property or lives.”³²⁵

The “search force” consisted of the RDTF, ARVN, and GVN forces. This decision provided a number of key advantages when combing through the village. Spearheaded by the South Vietnamese, the search teams better understood the local customs and courtesies and could better sense anything that seemed out of the ordinary. Additionally, their presence when

³²³ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, “1st Infantry Division’s Revolutionary Development,” dated 21 March 1967, pp. 1-2, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

³²⁴ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, “1st Infantry Division’s Revolutionary Development,” dated 21 March 1967, p. 2, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

³²⁵ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, “1st Infantry Division’s Revolutionary Development,” dated 21 March 1967, p. 2, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

interacting with the local population and searching homes portrayed “an image of GVN efficiency” as compared to the “the stigma of ‘foreigners’ imposing their power and might on the people” had a predominantly American force been tasked with conducting the search.³²⁶

The date and time selected for the operation, chosen to maximize the element of surprise and ensure that the maximum number of VC were located in the village, was 1800 hours on 26 December. The Christmas truce ended at 0700 hours that morning and RDTF planners believed that the VC would least expect a major operation undertaken between then and the New Years holiday truce. The infantry units in the search force, stationed at the 1st Brigade’s headquarters at Phuoc Vinh, were to conduct heliborne assaults on four pre-selected landing zones. Upon landing, they were to link up at these landing zones with the cavalry troop to arrive at that location via vehicular movement from their headquarters at Phu Loi.³²⁷

Search plans utilized aerial photography of the village and broke down each area of the complex into specific search zones assigned to each element of the search force. The plan called for simultaneous convergence on the village by both the seal force and the search force. Once the seal was in place, and search forces began their work, all military age males between the ages of fifteen to forty-five years old were to be assembled in a centralized collection point and evacuated for questioning. To continue the search during the hours of darkness, and inhibit VC freedom of movement throughout the night, flares dropped by aircraft provided necessary illumination.³²⁸

³²⁶ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, “1st Infantry Division’s Revolutionary Development,” dated 21 March 1967, p. 2, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

³²⁷ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, “1st Infantry Division’s Revolutionary Development,” dated 21 March 1967, p. 2, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

³²⁸ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, “1st Infantry Division’s Revolutionary Development,” dated 21 March 1967, pp. 2-3, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

As a result of most joint missions with ARVN forces becoming compromised, the operations order called for the nearby village of Nuoc Vang (approximately 20 km away) as the objective rather than Tan Binh. Additionally, all operational graphics issued during the planning phase consisted of diagrams rather than overlays on maps. The true location of Tan Binh was not revealed to both Big Red One and GVN forces until hours before the mission kicked off to ensure the utmost operational security.³²⁹

During the actual execution of the operation, the seal was established within just under thirty minutes. Following the establishment of the seal, the RDTF and the various South Vietnamese agencies to include the National Police, interrogators, and intelligence specialists entered the village and searched for VC over the course of two days. All males aged fifteen to forty-five years old were ordered to report to the village school house to be screened. They were then relocated via helicopter to an interrogation camp for further screening while the women and children remained in the village. Chieu Hoi's actively participated in the searches and gave anti-Communist speeches within the village. Anyone found fleeing was considered VC and either killed or captured by the seal force.³³⁰

Seal and search operations such as the one conducted in Tan Binh produced results that amounted to less enemy dead and equipment captured as compared to search and destroy missions. Yet, there were many benefits to conducting these operations. In Gorman's final analysis he concluded that Revolutionary Development missions produced many benefits:

Seal and search operations offer a rare opportunity for US-GVN cooperation with the US cast in an auxiliary role to GVN searchers. They provide a village level demonstration to the vacuity of the VC's 'puppet' characterization of ARVN forces. Moreover, in our experiences these operations have done much to build respect among American soldiers

³²⁹ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, "1st Infantry Division's Revolutionary Development," dated 21 March 1967, p. 3, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

³³⁰ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, "1st Infantry Division's Revolutionary Development," dated 21 March 1967, pp. 3-4, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

for their Vietnamese comrades in arms – more than any other operation we conduct. Finally, they contribute directly to the training of GVN forces in the sort of operations essential for long-term policing of the countryside.³³¹

Future Control of Revolutionary Development

“The concept we have been following from the beginning in Vietnam is sound; its execution has been faulty...I recommend you go for a major overhaul, for clear and expanded authority, for the integration of U.S. agencies at each command level, including division; and, that you make it clear at the outset that the current statistical measures are probably inflated insofar as the elimination of the VC local organization is concerned.”³³²

-DePuy to Westmoreland, 18 October 1966

On 14 October 1966, two days before the conclusion of Operation Tulsa, DePuy traveled to Saigon to attend a planning meeting at MACV Headquarters to discuss the way forward for unification of the Revolutionary Development effort. With greater pressure on MACV from Washington, D.C. to increase support and emphasis on RD programs, the conference aimed to streamline and exploit pacification measures moving forward.³³³ Armed with a firm understanding of the Lam Son II operations concurrently conducted by the Big Red One, DePuy was uniquely qualified to speak on the best practices, shortcomings, and overall challenges facing Revolutionary Development initiatives up to that point in the war.

Days later, DePuy drafted a memorandum to General Westmoreland summarizing his own recommendations for how RD should proceed. His analysis included his personal views on the following: the concept for how the program should move forward, the tasks to be performed by the agencies involved, a synopsis of the lessons learned to date, a proposed organizational

³³¹ LTC Paul F. Gorman, Report, U.S. Army 1st Division, “1st Infantry Division’s Revolutionary Development,” dated 21 March 1967, p. 7, Box 1, Folder 3, 1st Infantry Division Collection, USAHEC.

³³² William E. DePuy, Memorandum from MG DePuy for General Westmoreland, “Control of Revolutionary Development,” dated 18 October 1966, pp. 1, 6, Box 4A, Folder 7, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

³³³ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from MG DePuy for General Westmoreland, “Control of Revolutionary Development,” dated 18 October 1966, p. 1, Box 4A, Folder 7, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

structure, and a recommendation on the authority Westmoreland required to achieve a more successful overall RD program throughout South Vietnam in the near future.³³⁴

DePuy wrote that future Revolutionary Development support, “clearly requires the provision of total security for the people and must include ways and means for assisting them economically, inspiring them and enlisting their support psychologically, and finally, organizing the administrative machinery of government to control and support them.” Indicating his frustration with the ARVN, DePuy opined that the only places where RD proved successful in operations conducted up to October had been in locales where U.S. and Free World forces were heavily involved. Hence, he stressed that rather than opening new areas to further RD programs, run by purely ARVN units, the focus should remain on “exploitation and expansion” in areas where RD had already taken a firm hold to be followed by a “gradual introduction of ARVN RF/PF forces” in those areas.³³⁵

Highlighting security as the first and most critical aspect for successful RD, DePuy outlined the logical chronological sequence in which the levels of security required for RD programs to take hold and flourish should proceed: “First, security against main force units; second, security against guerrillas; third, security against the Communist infrastructure with its terror, taxation and control within the villages and hamlets.” By October 1966, in DePuy’s estimation, security against main force units in heavily populated areas had, for the most part, been achieved by U.S. and ARVN units. Security against guerrilla units had only been achieved where saturation patrols were extensively implemented. Finally, security against the communist infrastructure had not taken hold “even in areas ostensibly under government control” and

³³⁴ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from MG DePuy for General Westmoreland, “Control of Revolutionary Development,” dated 18 October 1966, p. 1, Box 4A, Folder 7, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

³³⁵ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from MG DePuy for General Westmoreland, “Control of Revolutionary Development,” dated 18 October 1966, p. 1, Box 4A, Folder 7, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

needed to be provided by National Police, RF/PF units, and Province/District intelligence agencies “to penetrate and destroy or interrogate and apprehend the VC organization at the local level.”³³⁶

To better control military operations against enemy main force units, DePuy proposed to Westmoreland a combined command structure between U.S., ARVN, and Free World forces at least at the Corps level to ensure unity of command in providing the necessary security. Furthermore, to rid VC guerrillas in the areas already undergoing RD, he urged Westmoreland to request authority over Police Field Forces, RF/PF units, and the Chieu Hoi program to ensure their active participation in saturation patrolling. Finally, to eliminate the VCI, DePuy recommended control over intelligence agencies and the National Police.³³⁷

DePuy also called for control over the provincial AID program to assist in economic aid at the local level to “reduce the human burden inherent in the war and take care of the people more effectively than the VC.” To increase communication between the GVN and the people in the countryside, and to increase more VC defections to the Chieu Hoi program, he recommended firmer control over all agencies conducting PsyOps programs. Furthermore, in areas undergoing RD, control over the various agencies involved needed to be streamlined into a single functionable organization. These agencies included a number of U.S., Free World, ARVN, and Vietnamese civilian and military agencies to include the CIA, USAID, and JUSPAO. He concluded, “It will not be possible for MACV to conduct successfully any RD program unless

³³⁶ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from MG DePuy for General Westmoreland, “Control of Revolutionary Development,” dated 18 October 1966, p. 2, Box 4A, Folder 7, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

³³⁷ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from MG DePuy for General Westmoreland, “Control of Revolutionary Development,” dated 18 October 1966, p. 2, Box 4A, Folder 7, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

COMUSMACV has effective operational control over the U.S. agencies involved and has established a tight working relationship with a Vietnamese counterpart organization.”³³⁸

DePuy urged Westmoreland to push for a “streamlined single manager arrangement” at the national level to prevent parent agencies in Washington from exerting operational control over RD without a firm understanding of the actual situation on the ground in Saigon. He suggested that the newly proposed organization should have the same type of relationship with Washington agencies as that which existed between the Department of the Army and MACV; that is, the agencies should train, equip, organize, and provide administrative support but not hold operational control.³³⁹

Furthermore, he cautioned Westmoreland from undertaking the full responsibility of RD as he would be unable to supervise and control the participating non-military agencies if they were placed under his operational control, yet, still were required to report to their parent agencies back in Washington. Instead, DePuy recommended that “the proper chain of command should be a dual reporting and accounting system” that would be able to take into account both the requirements coming from Washington and the realities in Saigon. DePuy suggested that within the proposed restructure, COMUSMACV should report through CINCPAC to the JCS and, also, directly to the Secretary of Defense who, acting as an executive agent, would report directly to the President.³⁴⁰

Yet another reason DePuy insisted in his recommendation that RD should not fall under MACV is that on the South Vietnamese side, most RD programs were slowly transitioning to

³³⁸ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from MG DePuy for General Westmoreland, “Control of Revolutionary Development,” dated 18 October 1966, p. 3, Box 4A, Folder 7, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

³³⁹ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from MG DePuy for General Westmoreland, “Control of Revolutionary Development,” dated 18 October 1966, p. 3, Box 4A, Folder 7, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

³⁴⁰ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from MG DePuy for General Westmoreland, “Control of Revolutionary Development,” dated 18 October 1966, pp. 3-4, Box 4A, Folder 7, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

civilian control. With RD directives flowing down through the military chain of command on the American side, but through the civilian chain of command on the Vietnamese side, this would more than likely result in a contradictory and organizationally unsound structure. Likewise, he asserted that if MACV were to assume total control of RD, it would appear to the Vietnamese as a reversal in the policy objectives pursued up to that point and, therefore, “require a corresponding reorganization in the Vietnamese Government.”³⁴¹

Expressing dissatisfaction on the contributions from the ARVN in RD programs, DePuy acknowledged that unless there was a significant turnaround in their efforts, progress would continue to stall. DePuy forcefully wrote, “there is a considerable disinterest remaining in the ARVN chain of command toward such activities and responsibilities. This is an obstacle of considerable magnitude which must be overcome, as it encompasses the psychology as well as the leadership, discipline and training deficiencies of ARVN units.”³⁴²

DePuy proposed that the newly created national level organization needed to “be reflected at the Corps, Division, Province/Sector and, perhaps, the District/Subsector level.” The individual placed in charge needed to have the equivalent level of power as that of COMUSMACV and be able to provide both operational and administrative control. DePuy also felt that the creation of a “counterpart Vietnamese organization” was necessary.³⁴³

DePuy’s sobering appraisal, given towards the latter half of his time in command, offers a number of critical insights. For one, it demonstrates a considerable amount of frustration with the handling of the Revolutionary Development line of effort. Perhaps, most importantly, it reveals

³⁴¹ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from MG DePuy for General Westmoreland, “Control of Revolutionary Development,” dated 18 October 1966, p. 4, Box 4A, Folder 7, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

³⁴² William E. DePuy, Memorandum from MG DePuy for General Westmoreland, “Control of Revolutionary Development,” dated 18 October 1966, p. 4, Box 4A, Folder 7, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

³⁴³ William E. DePuy, Memorandum from MG DePuy for General Westmoreland, “Control of Revolutionary Development,” dated 18 October 1966, pp. 4-6, Box 4A, Folder 7, Correspondence, WEDP, USAHEC.

the tight stranglehold the Communists still maintained over the local population inhibiting progress in strengthening the linkages between the people and the GVN. DePuy's assessment of ARVN deficiencies also reveals a serious shortcoming in the overall MACV concept of operations in which the division of labor assigned ARVN forces and GVN agencies the task to spearhead most pacification missions. Simultaneously, U.S. and other Free World forces along with the elite ARVN units were to take the fight to the enemy predominantly utilizing large scale search and destroy.³⁴⁴

Despite the serious losses DePuy and the 1st Infantry Division inflicted on VC and NVA units in the III CTZ up through late 1966 and into early 1967, the Communists still showed no signs of capitulation. Revolutionary Development would continue to see lackluster results unless the necessary security required could take hold. This situation raises an important point in that the lack of success up through late 1966 in gaining traction with pacification objectives was a direct result of the continued presence of main force VC and NVA units still operating within South Vietnam.

The lack of tangible results further validates that simply focusing on a counterinsurgency strategy, as some analysts and historians argue MACV should have done, without bringing to battle the enemy main force elements, the same pitfalls in advancing pacification measures would have occurred. In fact, without the much-criticized large scale offensive operations, pacification would have not have been able to take hold at all. In a sense, despite the efforts of the Big Red One's RD program, their efforts also demonstrate a premature implementation of the concept. DePuy had his own analogy for this conundrum. In a lecture he gave just one month

³⁴⁴ Dale Andradé, "Westmoreland Was Right: Learning the Wrong Lessons from the Vietnam War," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no. 2 (June 2008), 156.

later upon his return to the United States, he referred to this predicament as “trying to redecorate the kitchen while the living room is on fire.”³⁴⁵

Task organizing the limited maneuver battalions and assets DePuy had at his disposal to RD without an overall semblance of security meant that not only was he removing valuable combat power from fighting the main force units, but because he was unable to leave these units in areas deemed pacified to maintain security for the long haul, results were oftentimes ephemeral. The amount of organizational energy harnessed to attend to RD efforts could have been used elsewhere until the enemy was pushed farther from the population centers to enable the conditions required for effective implementation. Simply put, even if an area was deemed secure, political stability still remained elusive.

The restructure that DePuy urged Westmoreland to press for eventually resulted in the creation of the Office of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS). Although the ultimate organizational structure of CORDS did not follow to a tee what DePuy recommended to Westmoreland in October 1966, Westmoreland was not the sole arbiter on the creation and subsequent arrangement of the organization.

It is difficult to ascertain just how much Westmoreland utilized DePuy’s input moving forward in his deliberations with Washington in the final structure decided upon for CORDS. However, there exist many striking similarities between CORDS and the content of DePuy’s memorandum. Nonetheless, the content of this message reveals that DePuy still had Westmoreland’s ear as a strategic advisor though he was no longer working directly under him as a key staff primary at MACV. It also demonstrates just how much of a strong understanding DePuy had for the pacification line of effort.

³⁴⁵ William E. DePuy, “Lecture of Opportunity – Vietnam,” dated 20 March 1967, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 50.

Chapter Seven: Post-Vietnam Contributions and Musings

Positions of Increased Responsibility

In February 1967, after relinquishing command of the 1st Infantry Division, and having spent nearly three years in Vietnam, DePuy returned to the United States. He had always hoped to take command of the Infantry Center at Fort Benning, Georgia where he felt that he could best apply his tactical acumen. However, his spat with General Johnson over the methods and command culture he exhibited in the Big Red One became irreconcilable and Johnson ultimately denied DePuy the position. With help from Westmoreland, DePuy's next assignment instead brought him to the Pentagon where he served under the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Earle Wheeler, as the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA).³⁴⁶

With his ear now close to the ground in Washington, DePuy continued to monitor and influence the situation in Vietnam – this time from afar and in an altogether different capacity. In his new assignment, his principal duty was to guide the efforts of the armed forces on counterinsurgency, special operations, guerilla warfare, psychological operations, escape and evasion, unconventional warfare, and civic action. Well prepared for the position due to his previous assignments at MACV and his command of the Big Red One, he was intimately familiar with application of these concepts and the nature of the war. As the SACSA, DePuy also served as the primary assistant to General Wheeler on Vietnam. While serving in this capacity, he travelled back to Vietnam in late February 1968 to assist Wheeler in composing his report for President Johnson analyzing the ultimate outcome of the 1968 Tet Offensive.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Gole, *General William E. DePuy*, 197-198.

³⁴⁷ Gole, *General William E. DePuy*, 205-206. In his oral history, DePuy notes that Wheeler changed the scope of DePuy's responsibilities as SACSA to predominantly assist him with all aspects of Vietnam "minus the air

DePuy's close relationship with Westmoreland continued throughout this time and issues related to strategy and operations remained at the forefront of their dialogue. On 19 October 1967, DePuy wrote a letter to Westmoreland where he provided insight and advice on discussions floating around the Pentagon in regard to the rising criticism levied against search and destroy operations. With systems analysis a major component of the Department of Defense during this time, statistics indicated that "small unit patrolling" should replace "major unit operations in the VC base areas." The operations analysts, who DePuy described as "uninformed thinkers," interpreted statistics indicating higher kill ratios per man on smaller patrols conducted in the I CTZ to conclude that a change in strategy would result in greater enemy casualties while simultaneously lowering American losses in men and materiel. Moreover, citing reports that the VC almost always initiated fire in engagements with U.S. forces, they concluded that the enemy still held the initiative in the war.³⁴⁸

DePuy was deeply bothered by these conclusions. So much so, that he felt the need to recommend to Westmoreland that he should attempt to better communicate in his conceptual campaign planning messages how MACV's actual implementation of operational concepts were misinterpreted and oversimplified by these conclusions. He pointed out that even as early as 1964, Westmoreland had stressed "large-scale reconnaissance efforts to find the enemy to be followed by larger exploitation forces as an economy of force measure and as a sensible military approach to the problem of finding and fighting an elusive enemy." Furthermore, DePuy highlighted that small patrols were utilized extensively by American units operating in the

war." While in this position, Westmoreland also tasked DePuy to supervise the writing of Sharp and Westmoreland's *Report on the War in Vietnam*. In DePuy, *Changing an Army*, 168-169.

³⁴⁸ William E. DePuy, "Correspondence from MG DePuy to GEN Westmoreland Regarding Update," dated 19 October 1967, pp. 1-2, Box 4A, Folder 13, WEDP, USAHEC.

Mekong Delta along with the 4th Infantry Division deployed in a reconnaissance screen along the Cambodian border.³⁴⁹

DePuy's comments shed light on the course the war had taken by late 1967. The conflict had reached a stalemate and frustrations with the strategy implemented by MACV to produce results that would favorably end the war mounted both in the Pentagon and amongst the American public. DePuy warned that the issue could "grow into a serious civilian intrusion into the business of the professional soldier."³⁵⁰ Calls for a change in strategy would continue to persist for the next few years as the war raged on and debates between historians and analysts over the chosen strategy implemented continue even up to the present day. Nevertheless, the contents of this letter highlight the disconnect between the realities on the ground and the overgeneralization associated with the search and destroy concept.

Following his role as the SACSA, DePuy was promoted to Lieutenant General in March 1969 and assumed responsibilities as the Assistant Vice Chief of Staff of the Army.³⁵¹ DePuy once again found himself working under General Westmoreland who was now the Army Chief of Staff. DePuy remained in the position for the next four years where he worked to fix and rebuild the Army that emerged from Vietnam.

In 1973, DePuy became the first commander of the newly created United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). As the commander of TRADOC, DePuy standardized and codified many of the tactics and techniques he implemented during his command of the Big Red One into Army doctrine. He also revolutionized the conduct of training

³⁴⁹ William E. DePuy, "Correspondence from MG DePuy to GEN Westmoreland Regarding Update," dated 19 October 1967, pp. 1-2, Box 4A, Folder 13, WEDP, USAHEC. DePuy also noted that the analysts "added statistical dimensions to pictures evoked by press accounts of battalions formed in a great phalanx of soldiers plowing through the jungle in a noisy, hopeless sort of way."

³⁵⁰ William E. DePuy, "Correspondence from MG DePuy to GEN Westmoreland Regarding Update," dated 19 October 1967, pp. 2-3, Box 4A, Folder 13, WEDP, USAHEC.

³⁵¹ Gole, *General William E. DePuy*, 212.

for Army units. In 1977, DePuy retired from the Army after having served a thirty-six-year career.

DePuy's Retirement Musings on Vietnam

“The U.S. effort also foundered on the political track. The ultimate measure of effectiveness of the whole U.S effort simply has to be an assessment of the comparative national political strength of the South Vietnamese government and the North Vietnamese regime...against the bottom line, we never quite induced the growth of a strong independent government of South Vietnam. It was a shaky structure girded and propped by a pervasive American presence. An external American ignition harness extended to every level. The power generator lay outside the machine itself. When it was withdrawn, the spark plugs no longer fired.”³⁵²

-General DePuy, *Army Magazine*, 1986

Always a prolific writer throughout his entire career, in his retirement DePuy finally turned his attention to publicly discussing Vietnam. Like most soldiers of the Vietnam War generation, he tried to grapple with how the United States had lost the war. Considering the massive role he played in the decision to commit U.S. forces, devising the theater strategy, and commanding a division in combat, his insights provide a wealth of content from which conclusions can be drawn. In the wake of the Vietnam War, men like DePuy who personified the military establishment received a fair share of the blame both from within the military and amongst the American people as to why the United States ultimately failed.

In the February 1986 edition of *Army* magazine DePuy wrote an article entitled “Vietnam: What We Might Have Done and Why We Didn’t Do It.” Within this article, he discussed the complex political and strategic problems the United States faced in the conflict which ultimately led to the disastrous defeat. His central argument rested on the assertion that failures at the highest levels of both American military and political leadership inhibited the

³⁵² William E. DePuy, “Vietnam: What We Might Have Done and Why We Didn’t Do It,” *Army* 36, no. 2 (February 1986): 22-40, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 356.

development of a cogent “concept of operations” to counter the “escalation of the struggle” waged by the North Vietnamese.³⁵³ DePuy identified several key factors which he attributed to the inability to devise a coherent strategic concept. Amongst these were: “The strong focus on counterinsurgency; the ambiguity of intelligence; the symmetry of our [the United States] response – reaction; gradualism and retaliation; and weaknesses in the high command.”³⁵⁴

DePuy lamented that the MACV campaign plan for 1967 which called for sending American forces into the Laotian panhandle to block the Ho Chi Minh Trail was never approved. Codenamed Operation El Paso, the plan called for a corps-size force to interdict the trail and sever the flow of manpower and supplies.³⁵⁵ DePuy felt that following through with this operation would have greatly influenced the outcome of the war.

DePuy also believed that an overemphasis on counterinsurgency neglected the reality of the enemy order of battle and the situation on the ground. Citing Robert McNamara’s objectives outlined in the Honolulu Conference of July 1966, he noted that the “objectives were patently beyond reach without defeating the rapidly growing Vietcong/North Vietnamese main forces.”³⁵⁶

³⁵³ William E. DePuy, “Vietnam: What We Might Have Done and Why We Didn’t Do It,” *Army* 36, no. 2 (February 1986): 22-40, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 349. It should be noted that DePuy almost always chose to publish his writings in *Army* magazine. According to Paul Gorman, DePuy chose to publish in the periodical because he felt “young officers would be more likely to read what he wrote, picking up that widely distributed periodical when they had the time, perhaps as a staff duty officer or relaxing at night after duty.” Gorman quoted in Paul F. Gorman, Orwin C. Talbott, and Maxwell R. Thurman, *In Tribute to General William E. DePuy* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1993), 14.

³⁵⁴ William E. DePuy, “Vietnam: What We Might Have Done and Why We Didn’t Do It,” *Army* 36, no. 2 (February 1986): 22-40, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 352. DePuy’s frustrations with Vietnam in his retirement can be gleaned from his correspondence with Colonel Rod Paschall, the Director of the Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, PA, in the 1980s. In a series of letters back and forth between the two, DePuy sought information from the archive to gather source material for writing this article. In one letter he wrote, “Of course, the more I get into the Vietnam project, the more complicated it gets – Vietnam was always thus!” In William E. DePuy, Letter: “GEN (Ret.) Bill DePuy to Rod Paschall Regarding Vietnam Project,” dated 17 August 1985, p.1, Box 27, Folder 7, WEDP, USAHEC.

³⁵⁵ For an overview of OPLAN El Paso see Charles F. Brower IV, “Strategic Reassessment in Vietnam: The Westmoreland ‘Alternate Strategy’ of 1967-1968,” *Naval War College Review* XLIV, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 20-51. Krepinevich offers a counternarrative to the validity of OPLAN El Paso and whether or not it would have succeeded. See Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 262-263.

³⁵⁶ William E. DePuy, “Vietnam: What We Might Have Done and Why We Didn’t Do It,” *Army* 36, no. 2 (February 1986): 22-40, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 353-354. McNamara’s six operational goals were as follows:

Interestingly, DePuy analyzed the breakdown of the efforts of American combat formations up through the final withdrawal and concluded the following: “40 percent [were conducted] in area support of pacification, 30 percent against the reinforced main force war (North Vietnam army reinforced) and 30 percent against North Vietnamese army border incursions.” Ultimately, he determined that 60 percent of the combat formations were engaged with the NVA throughout the entirety of the war.³⁵⁷

In the end, DePuy conceded to certain shortcomings in the strategy he helped devise. In 1989, he admitted that he and his peers in uniform at the highest levels should have been more vocal with their civilian leaders:

Why didn't we object at the time? We were good soldier Schweiks. In a military organization, you have two personalities. One is your opinion as to what's best. The other is the team player, doing what you're told. That's a precondition to playing the game. We should have fought a lot harder for cutting the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We should have seen more clearly that a North Vietnam undefeated and a trail uncut would make it impossible to end the war. We should have been utterly frank about that. However, we continued to hope that we could inflict such losses on the VC or the NVA that it would be more than they would be able to take. That's the alternative to cutting the trail. That's an attrition war. It's a dirty word now in military circles. I think the concept of attrition was an outgrowth of counterinsurgency - which, after all, is a form of attrition. So we fell into that trap.³⁵⁸

Seven months later, in a book review of Andrew Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam*, DePuy critiqued Krepinevich's assessments and conclusions against his own experiences and views. DePuy took issue with Krepinevich's central argument that the U.S. Army was enthralled

“1.) Eliminate 40 to 50 percent of all Vietcong/North Vietnamese army base areas in South Vietnam. 2.) Open 50 percent of all the main roads and railways in South Vietnam. 3.) Pacify the four priority areas specified in the joint U.S./South Vietnam directive AB 141 (Saigon, central Mekong Delta, Danang area, Qui Nhon area). 4.) Secure 60 percent of the South Vietnamese population. 5.) Defend the military bases, the political and population centers, and the main food-producing areas under government of Vietnam control. 6.) By the end of 1966, Vietcong/North Vietnamese army forces were to be attrited at a rate at least equal to their replacement capacity.

³⁵⁷ William E. DePuy, “Vietnam: What We Might Have Done and Why We Didn't Do It,” *Army* 36, no. 2 (February 1986): 22-40, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 359.

³⁵⁸ DePuy quoted in Harry Maurer, *Strange Ground: An Oral History of Americans in Vietnam, 1945-1975* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), 447-455, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 440-441.

with the “concept” that Krepinevich pushed throughout the work. In his own words, DePuy defined the “concept” as “an eradicable fixation of the Army on European-type war – a prodigious consumption of resources to avoid the spillage of American blood – and...a strong preference for firepower and attrition.”³⁵⁹ DePuy felt that the ultimate failure experienced by the U.S. Army in the conflict could not simply be explained “through the single gate of the Army concept on a go/no-go basis.”³⁶⁰

DePuy asserted that Krepinevich failed to consider a number of factors in his assessment. First, he felt that Krepinevich had mischaracterized the enemy by not adequately outlining the heavy involvement of the North Vietnamese in influencing the strategy of the VC insurgency and simultaneously committing large conventionally equipped NVA forces. Second, the “daunting weakness” of the GVN and ARVN exacerbated by what he described as “political constraints inherent to our own system of government which limits the extent and effectiveness of any effort by us [the United States] to control the actions of another country.” Third, and most “disturbing” to DePuy was Krepinevich’s belief that U.S. troops should have spearheaded counterinsurgency missions instead of the South Vietnamese.³⁶¹

Finally, DePuy felt that his experience in Vietnam pointed to an altogether different conclusion than that reached by Krepinevich. DePuy wrote, “the proper, indeed the only, role for U.S. combat forces is to isolate the insurgent battleground from outside intervention. This we failed to do in Vietnam, but we should have done it and we will be faced with the problem again and again...it was not that some abstract doctrine was in error.” Thus, he remained steadfast in

³⁵⁹ William E. DePuy, “The Army War and the Proper Way in Vietnam,” *Army* 36, no. 9 (September 1986): 77-78, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 371.

³⁶⁰ William E. DePuy, “The Army War and the Proper Way in Vietnam,” *Army* 36, no. 9 (September 1986): 77-78, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 372.

³⁶¹ William E. DePuy, “The Army War and the Proper Way in Vietnam,” *Army* 36, no. 9 (September 1986): 77-78, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 372.

his belief that pursuing the main forces through search and destroy was the correct course of action. In future American conflicts where the United States involved itself in counterinsurgency, he believed that “for the most obvious political reasons” a small cohort of professional experts should advise the local government and its forces and that U.S troops should not takeover counterinsurgency operations. Ultimately, in future conflicts he cautioned that unless the foreign government the United States committed to assisting could stand on its own, the chances of a repeated failed outcome would remain high.³⁶²

Both of these articles provide further clarity into the ultimate failure of the United States in Vietnam. Although DePuy’s views and opinions could be considered an attempt to protect his own reputation as a critical participant in ultimately devising the theater strategy, they nonetheless reveal many salient points which may have been dismissed by readers when the turmoil brought about by the conflict still remained fresh in the American psyche of the 1980’s. The thoughts portrayed in these writings further add to the complex nature of the monumental task the United States faced in Vietnam.

³⁶² William E. DePuy, “The Army War and the Proper Way in Vietnam,” *Army* 36, no. 9 (September 1986): 77-78, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 372-373.

Chapter Eight: Significant Conclusions

DePuy's contributions to the theater strategy implemented by MACV to prosecute the war in Vietnam during the earliest and most critical years of the American military commitment were both vast and influential. As the J-3 at MACV, he demonstrated a clear understanding of the challenges facing both MACV and the GVN. Exhibited in his writings and his contribution to the tactical employment of U.S. forces, DePuy assisted in crafting a concept of operations in response to the enemy threat and in accordance with the Army doctrine of the time.

This is not to say that DePuy underestimated the complexity of the task at hand. Even in his earliest writings, he exuded the belief that the war would be a long and protracted conflict that would require adaptation. Despite these assessments, he played a major role in the ultimate decision to commit U.S. forces to South Vietnam. Like many of his contemporaries in MACV, in his attempt to define the political struggle that the United States military would confront he seemingly allowed a level of hubris or naivete to cloud his judgement in thinking that American intervention could solve the complex internal political issues of the South Vietnamese. However, he may have also felt a sense of duty as a soldier to defend his South Vietnamese allies from the threat posed by the Communist incursion.

The much-maligned search and destroy concept which DePuy devised served as a critical component to preventing the fall of South Vietnam in 1965-1966. Into his retirement, DePuy maintained his belief in search and destroy stating, "I have no apologies for that concept. It was right then, and it's right even in retrospect. Only the Vietnamese can handle the counterinsurgency job, and the American troops should defeat the main forces – keep them deep

in the jungle so that pacification could proceed. The problem was that we didn't stick to fighting the enemy's main force.”³⁶³

Search and destroy operations were only a singular component of the operational approach. Yet, by late 1967, the term became politically and emotionally charged. So much so that Westmoreland directed that the term no longer be used as it had become associated “in the public mind with aimless searches in the jungle and the destruction of property.” Instead, MACV reverted back to the more traditional terms such as “combat or offensive sweep, reconnaissance in force, and spoiling attack.”³⁶⁴

While in command of the Big Red One, DePuy’s heavy focus on large brigade and battalion size search and destroy operations was in direct response to countering the Communist main forces. Simply put, in 1966 DePuy prioritized his limited allocation of both manpower and resources to counter the most dangerous threat throughout one of the largest TAOR’s in South Vietnam. As evidenced by the operations of the 1st Infantry Division within this study, the threat posed by both General Thanh and Colonel Cam’s main forces and their intent to wage a large-scale conventional style campaign required an equal amount of aggressive force if any semblance of security was ever to exist. By all accounts, South Vietnam was on the precipice of outright defeat in 1965-1966 and aggressive offensive action was necessary to “stem the tide.”

As further demonstrated in this study, the heavy reliance on artillery, helicopter gunships, and close air support to inflict damage on the enemy was more a result of the constraints posed by the operational environment rather than on a fixation with firepower born from the playbook of the World War II battlefield. When faced with thick vegetation, restrictive terrain, and an

³⁶³ DePuy quoted in Harry Maurer, *Strange Ground: An Oral History of Americans in Vietnam, 1945-1975* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), 447-455, in DePuy, *Selected Papers*, 439.

³⁶⁴ Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, 91. See also Report: “Definition of Search and Destroy,” p. 3, Box 188A, Folder 2, MACV Command Historian’s Collection, USAHEC.

elusive enemy, grandiose maneuvers amounted to high casualties and a loss of command and control.

For units such as the Big Red One which conducted the majority of its search and destroy operations in the jungles of the III CTZ where there was little to no civilian population, arguments that stress that this was an improper use of force simply do not account for the mosaic nature of the conflict. Clearly, in the early years of the war this heavy emphasis on firepower was restrained in the highly populated areas to minimize civilian casualties. It would be incorrect to assert *carte blanche* that this was the correct method for other units in other TAORs where the civilian population inhibited the use of heavy firepower. Ultimately, those decisions would be left to the military commanders on the ground to use their own discretion in the use of firepower.

The tactical directives and innovations DePuy implemented during his command accounted for the unique operational environment and the changes in enemy tactics. The tactics, techniques, and procedures ushered into the 1st Infantry Division by DePuy evolved during his entire time in command. Roadrunner missions in which he sought to present soft targets of opportunity brought the enemy to battle where he could capitalize on his advantages in both firepower and mobility. The construction of well tied in defenses, cloverleaf techniques, and saturation patrolling all contributed to a distinct tactical-level subculture.

Rather than enacting a myopic operational approach that only focused on advantages in both firepower and mobility to conduct search and destroy, the Big Red One under DePuy's command demonstrated a serious effort to conduct pacification. Operations such as Lam Son II aimed to strengthen the ties between the GVN and the people. DePuy's mandate to create the Revolutionary Development Task Force succeeded in attempts to assist ARVN units such as the 5th ARVN Division and the various GVN agencies in pacification. Other operations such as

Rolling Stone and Fairfax incorporated PsyOps and Civic Action throughout the III CTZ. The search and seal of Tan Binh became a model across the Army for the proper way to conduct a cordon and search of a village to meet Revolutionary Development objectives. This tactical-level subculture influenced U.S. Army doctrine even up to the present day.

In many regards, Westmoreland's decision to place DePuy in command of the 1st Infantry Division also proved, certainly in hindsight, both a well calculated and wise decision. A decision which played into DePuy's strengths as both an aggressive commander and a brilliant tactician. Given the vast expanse and critical importance of the operational area assigned to DePuy and the Big Red One within the III CTZ, and the equally aggressive strategy pursued by COSVN and the B2 Front throughout 1966 and into early 1967, the 1st Infantry Division clearly demonstrated an ability to adapt to counter the threat.

In a twist of irony however, perhaps DePuy's aggressive operational tempo while in command played directly into the North Vietnamese playbook. The eradication of most of the base areas in the III CTZ simply forced the VC and NVA to further consolidate across the border – out of reach to American ground units. MACV's inability to isolate the battlefield as a result of political restrictions played directly into the Communist's hands. Continually crossing over the Cambodian border to reconsolidate and reorganize, they were able to stave off further losses and maintain their combat power. In fact, the official PAVN history attests to this advantage: "A solid rear area was a factor of decisive strategic importance to the victory of the resistance and was of decisive importance for our army to mature and win victory."³⁶⁵

Ultimately, the defeat of the United States in the Vietnam war cannot be singularly explained through a faulty military strategy. Nor can the record of the 1st Infantry Division in the

³⁶⁵ *Victory in Vietnam*, 444.

III CTZ from 1966-1967 explain the ultimate outcome of the war. In the end, it was the enemy - the “termites” and “bully boys” – who were willing to undertake severe losses to reach their ultimate goals. Their strategy demonstrated flexibility and resilience time and time again. As DePuy departed the theater in February 1967, the Communists adapted their strategy away from the main force war instead opting to standoff and buy time. Eleven months later, they launched the Tet Offensive and despite suffering severe losses, managed to secure a political victory.

Implications for Future Conflict

The failure of the United States to achieve victory in the Vietnam War held lasting repercussions to both the United States military and American foreign policy writ large. DePuy, along with many of his contemporaries at the highest levels of the military viewed the war as an aberration; that the United States would not commit itself to a similar conflict in their lifetime. Following the war, the United States military purged from its institutional memory many of the lessons learned in conducting counterinsurgency operations. Convinced that the next war would be a conventional one, the military focused on preparing for a large land war in Europe against the greater threat posed by the Red Army within the larger context of the Cold War.

Throughout the 1980’s, the Powell-Weinberger Doctrine specifically outlined the prerequisites the United States should adhere in the deliberations to commit military force across the globe in an effort to specifically prevent another Vietnam from unfolding. Nearly thirty years after the last American combat troops departed South East Asia, the United States once again found itself thrust into a counterinsurgency conflict. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the United States military entered a counterinsurgency conflict in the countries of Iraq and Afghanistan.

When the regime of Saddam Hussein fell in the spring of 2003, the Iraq war transformed seemingly overnight from a battlefield where U.S. forces fought a conventional foe to one in which they faced a hybrid insurgency. As foreign fighters and weapons poured in across Iraq's borders to bolster the ranks of the insurgency, questions of isolating the battlefield arose once again in strategic deliberations. Many of the same lessons learned in the counterinsurgency environment of Vietnam had to be relearned again. The learning curve was steep and a renewed interest in the lessons learned through the counterinsurgency operations of Vietnam surfaced within military circles. Once more, leaders on the ground had to adapt to the operational environment in real time and on the fly.

Upon the conclusion of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States military again finds itself at odds over preparing for the next threat it may face. With institutional knowledge at all levels temporarily grounded in the counterinsurgency lessons gleaned in the Global War on Terror, the military is once more focused on the conventional threats most likely posed by global actors such as China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran. Once again, the pendulum has swung between preparing for a conventional versus counterinsurgency conflict. Perhaps more importantly now more than ever, the experiences, thoughts, teachings, and lessons of General William E. DePuy at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels are significant. As a leader who experienced the full gamut of warfare throughout his career and, in the process, fundamentally changed the United States Army, perhaps there are more lessons to be learned from DePuy in the future.

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Vita

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