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AUTHORITY

30 Nov 1982, DoDD 5200.10; AGO ltr, 29 Apr 1983

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20310

AGDA-A (M) (11 May 71) FOR OT-UT-784245

2 June 1971

SUBJECT: ~~Operational Report~~ Lessons Learned, Headquarters, 173d Airborne Brigade, ~~173d Airborne Brigade~~

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1. The attached report is forwarded for review and evaluation in accordance with para 4b, AR 525-15.
2. The information contained in this report is provided to insure that lessons learned during current operations are used to the benefit of future operations and may be adapted for use in developing training material.
3. Information of actions initiated as a result of your evaluation should be forwarded to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, ATTN: FOR OT UT within 90 days of receipt of this letter.

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY:

Verne L. Bowers
VERNE L. BOWERS
Major General, USA
The Adjutant General

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE
APO San Francisco 96250

AVBE-SC/MHD

15 November 1970

SUBJECT: Operational Report-Lessons Learned, 173d Airborne Brigade, Period
Ending 31 October 1970, RCS CSFOR - 65 (R 2)

Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development
Department of the Army
Washington D.C. 20310

1. (C) Operations: Significant Activities

a. On 1 September 1970 the Brigade entered Phase V of Operation Washington Green, continuing to support the Vietnamization Program by upgrading Territorial Forces (RF/PF) and directly supporting the GVN Pacification Program. In addition, Washington Green V accelerates the program of destruction of the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) in coordination with anti-VCI operations being conducted throughout Binh Dinh Province by the GVN. Priority has been given to the destruction of the VCI. This is accomplished in coordination with GVN forces by quick reaction to intelligence and information provided by Hoi Chanh. Commanders employ a "hard seal" cordon of US and GVN forces around a hamlet complex and then enter and seize known VCI positions. Maximum use of Psywar media and prisoner interrogation teams is made. The Brigade has also continued to refine and implement contingency plans to deny the enemy his objectives while simultaneously inflicting maximum enemy casualties and exploiting lucrative airstrike targets.

b. Significant Operations:

(1) During August, 2-503 conducted Reconnaissance operations in the upper An Lao Valley, the periphery of the Tiger Mountains in the vicinity of Lo Dieu Beach, and continued the LZ English - Bong Son Bridge - Phu Cu Pass security mission. The 1-503 also provided security for the elections in conjunction with RF/PF units.

(2) On 12 August, one platoon of D Company 3-503 and one RF platoon, acting on information from a Hoi Chanh, conducted a search operation in the Niu Ho Du area. This operation was under the control of the RF platoon leader. As a result, a small arms and ammunition cache was captured at BR806934.

(3) Contacts had been generally limited to small units, but on 28 Aug, reconnaissance by the 3-503 disclosed 180 VC and NVA near the mouth of the Soui Ca Valley in the vicinity of grid BR839717. At the same location, re-

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Period Ending 31 October 1970, KCS CSFOR - 65 (R2)

connaissance elements of the 3-503 ambushed an estimated 50 to 60 VC/NVA. Results from this were 12 VC/NVA killed and 1 POW taken. It was later determined that the ambushed unit was the Phu My C-4 District Force.

(4) On 29 August, 3-503 captured documents which identified several units of the 2nd NVA Division.

(5) On 6 September, the 2-503 emphasized blocking force operations in the vicinity of the Monster Mountains. These operations supported the Land Clearing effort and included the 4-503 and the 40th ARVN Regiment.

(6) As part of the Brigade's continuing effort to turn over bridges to GVN forces, the 2-503 Inf terminated its security mission at the Bong Son Bridge on 30 September. Hoai Nhon District Forces assumed responsibility for the security of this new major bridge on QL 1.

(7) During September, the 3-503 Inf continued combined operations with PF and RF units to deny the VC/NVA vitally needed rice during the harvest period. Also in order to upgrade Territorial Forces, the 3-503 Inf continued its PF training program.

(8) During the first part of October, the 3-503 continued combined operations with RF and PF units to deny the enemy rice during the rice harvest. After the harvest, these were temporarily terminated although further combined operations are to be conducted during November, because of the rice harvest, the PF training program was halted, but it will be reactivated during November.

(9) On 5 October the 320 and 447 RF Companies engaged an estimated NVA company in which 20 NVA were killed and a variety of equipment was captured, including 1 pound of documents. The document readout revealed that the NVA were from the C2 Company of the 1st Battalion, 2nd NVA regiment.

c. Breakdown of casualties:

The critical figures for the period of 1 August to 31 October 1970 are as follows:

<u>US TROOPS:</u>	<u>August</u>	<u>September</u>	<u>October</u>	<u>Totals</u>
KIA	6	25	7	38
WIA	84	125	48	257
MIA	0	0	0	0
<u>ENEMY TROOPS</u>	<u>August</u>	<u>September</u>	<u>October</u>	<u>Totals</u>
KIA	90	105	75	270
CIA	6	8	9	23
DETAINEES	211	177	118	506
SM ARMS	94	68	30	192
CREW SERVED	5	2	7	14

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d. **Enemy:** During August, it was noted that the enemy was continuing to operate in small units and avoiding contact as much as possible. However, during September the enemy began to initiate contact when he believed the advantage was in his favor. In October, the 3-503 reported that with the advent of the monsoon rains enemy activity had declined sharply. In fact, from 24 October to 31 October the 3-503 had no enemy contact whatsoever. The enemy appears to have limited his movement and operations to the low ground and populated areas. He is quite possibly relocating in his mountain sanctuaries for the monsoon season. There is however, evidence which indicates that small numbers of VC/NVA continue to enter and sometimes remain in hamlets undetected or unreported by GVN forces. Known enemy units operating within the Brigade's AO during the period of 1 August to 31 October 1970, were located as follows on 31 October 1970:

<u>UNIT</u>	<u>Est location</u>	<u>Est. strength</u>
1st Bn 2nd NVA Regt	BR880850	130
2nd Bn 2nd NVA Regt	BR785635	200
3rd Bn 2nd NVA Regt	BR820810	200
5th Bn 2nd NVA Regt	BR840665	200
8th Bn 22nd NVA Regt	BS899124	200
300th Arty Bn	BR870734	40
90th Sapper Bn	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
400th Sapper Bn	BR845625	160
200th Anti-Aircraft Bn	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
D40 Sapper Co	BS9009	70
C1 Co	BS8313	40
C2 Co	BR958977	60
Phu My Local Force Bn	BR9470	120
Hoi An (D) Force	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
Hoi An Force	BR848858	60

e. **Combat Support:**

(1) The 3-319th Field Artillery Headquarters remained at LZ English for the reporting period. Battery A continued to occupy FSB Peggy (BR-9170) and is in direct support of 1-503 and 3-503. Battery B displaced from FSB Kelly (BS8004) and joined with the two gun raid at FSB Salem (BR9380) on 3 October and is in direct support of 1-503 and 3-503. Battery C continued to occupy FSB Two Bits (BR8495) with priority of fires to 3-503. Battery D continued to occupy FSB Shamrock (BS8412) with priority of fires to 2-503 and 4-503. A two gun raid from Battery D remained at FSB Tape (BS7413) with priority of fires to 2-503d Infantry.

(2) **Tactical Air Support:** (a) Brigade Forward Air Controllers flew a total of 790.1 hours in support of operations during the reporting period.

(b) **Air Support Missions:**

<u>Type of Mission</u>	<u>Sorties</u>
Preplanned FAC Airstrikes	113
Immediate FAC Airstrikes	105

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Preplanned Combat Sky Spot	3
Immediate Combat Sky Spot	11
Spooky or Shadow (AC-119) Missions	3/
Total	276

In response to guidance from COMUSMACV, this Brigade has initiated a program to emphasize austerity in the employment of combat assets. Foremost has been a reduction in the use of USAF aircraft on targets where the effectiveness of resources expended cannot be measured. Now a detailed target reconnaissance is conducted prior to each preplanned air strike. Following the strike, a ground or aerial bomb damage assessment (BDA) is conducted.

(3) The Brigade received no naval gunfire support during the reporting period. The Naval Gunfire Liaison Team was withdrawn from the Brigade in late August due to infrequent availability of US Navy warships for ground support missions. When US Naval warships are required, an ANGLICO team will be made available.

f. Combat Service Support: (1) The 173d Engineer Company continues to provide combat engineer support to Brigade maneuver battalions and attached units. Several fire support/surveillance bases were constructed as well as assorted base camp, base defense, road repair and civic action projects.

(2) Radio Research Unit Support: The 404th RRU, located at LZ English, provides spot reports and intelligence readouts to the Brigade S2. These reports and readouts are compared with the other intelligence gathering sources and then incorporated into operational planning. The physical location of the unit and close liaison have permitted timely reaction by fire support and maneuver forces in response to the intelligence information provided.

(3) The 51st Chemical Detachment continued to provide the Brigade with mission-related support. A breakdown follows:

(a) Airborne Personnel Detection: 72 missions were flown for a total of 83 hours.

(b) Herbicide spray missions: There were no such missions flown during this reporting period.

(c) Insecticide spray missions: There were no such missions flown during this reporting period.

(d) Riot control agent: A total of 107 E-158 tactical CS cannister clusters were used against known and suspected enemy positions.

(e) Incendiary fougasse drum drops: A total of 228 missions were flown to drop 3648 drums of thickened and unthickened fuel.

(4) Weather Support: Since no weather detachment is located in AO Lee, weather information is primarily obtained from Detachment 31, 5th Weather Squadron at An Khe. Such information is sometimes obtained from Detachment 23, 30th Weather Squadron at Phu Cat AB. During the monsoon season, the effects of weather are most prominent because radio relay stations and fire support bases are often "weathered in" due to poor visibility.

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Period Ending 31 October 1970, RCS CSFOR (R2)

2. (C) Lessons Learned: Commander's Observations, Evaluations, and Recommendations.

a. Personnel: Experienced Small Unit Leaders.

(1) Observation: There exists an inadequate number of experienced small unit leaders due to casualties and the short 12 month RVN tour.

(2) Evaluation: Although there is an adequate supply of NCOG trained personnel, the number of experienced small unit leaders is critically low. There still remains a period after arrival in RVN when the NCOG gains combat experience. This is a most critical period. In small unit operations (especially team and squad size) the element leader is crucial to successful completion of the unit's mission. In jungle warfare small unit operations are quite often the most practical. In this environment the squad or team leader must have a wide and thorough knowledge of his element's purpose, capabilities, and members.

(3) Recommendation: Each new member must be cross-trained in all the vital functions of his unit element in order to fill the position of leader, if necessary, and gain leadership experience.

b. Intelligence: None.

c. Operations:

(1) Utilization of Small Units.

(a) Observation: After a terrain study of an area which was in close proximity to enemy staging areas, a six man Hunter-Killer (HAWK) team from the 1-503d Infantry was inserted by APC's to interdict the area. The team was undetected and on the second day, it killed a Viet Cong communication liaison chief. In the third day, it severely wounded another VC and killed an NVA. A platoon of the 1-503d was inserted as a reaction force and the next morning, it wounded and captured a VC courier. The initial reconnaissance team was extracted by air on the same ship that inserted a new team. The platoon was extracted and the recon team continued reconnaissance of the area. The next morning, it killed another VC courier.

(b) Evaluation: There were several reasons for the above mentioned successes: 1. The area had not recently been patrolled by friendly troops; 2. Due to dense foliage, the team was well protected from observations; 3. The first insertion was undetected; 4. The platoon broke into six (6) man teams and interdicted other trails; 5. When the team and platoon were extracted, the insertion of a fresh stay-behind reconnaissance team was undetected.

(c) Recommendation: Team-size operations should become more extensively used in jungle terrain. Large platoon size operations seldom result in kills. In small and hard to detect teams, American forces can hide and disrupt VC teams and capture single man couriers.

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(2) Searching Enemy Base Camps.

(a) Observation: While sweeping a base camp bunker complex, two US soldiers were wounded when they received fire from a bunker which, supposedly, had already been cleared.

(b) Evaluation: Cursory checks of enemy base camps are unacceptable. The enemy continually uses fake walls and floors in bunkers as well as camouflaged spider holes adjacent to the bunkers.

(c) Recommendation: Bunkers must be carefully entered and probed in order to properly clear them. Extreme caution must always be used when operating in recently occupied enemy base camps.

(3) Utilization of Armored Cavalry.

(a) Observation: A reconnaissance team became heavily engaged with a numerically superior enemy force after dark. An armored cavalry platoon, located four (4) kilometers away, was dispatched to relieve them. The route was across low rolling terrain with small hedgerows and streamlines. After one hour, less than one-third (1/3) of the distance had been covered and an airmobile relief force was committed to relieve the reconnaissance team.

(b) Evaluation: Cross-country navigation by tracked vehicles, even under good conditions of visibility, is a tedious and time-consuming process. Under poor visibility it is an exercise in futility.

(c) Recommendation: When it is necessary to move tracked vehicles across the terrain rapidly, the cavalry unit commander should be provided with a helicopter to conduct route reconnaissance and to assist in directing the vehicles around major obstacles. Under conditions of poor visibility, other means of reaction must be considered or extended reaction time must be accepted.

(4) Cave Operations.

(a) Observation: Viet Cong and local force guerillas use numerous caves for base camps. Some of these caves are so complex that, once found, they can never be searched completely.

(b) Evaluation: In order for such caves to be properly cleared, a cordon of the area should be made. Then, fougasse (thickened fuel) or some other incendiary should be dropped at the mouth of the cave in order to clear away the brush. A Mighty Mite could be employed with CS, but recent operations within the Brigade have shown that the Mighty Mite is not very effective when the cave complex descends more than twenty (20) feet. If a cave is quite deep, thickened fuel can be poured into it by hand. After allowing the fuel to burn, smoke should be thrown into the cave prior to troops entering, to reduce the enemy's visibility.

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(c) Recommendation: Cave-clearing operations must not be done in haste. Proper detailed planning, organization and equipment must be utilized for successful results.

(5) Employment of Snipers.

(a) Observation: Units within the Brigade have been employing snipers in pairs in order to achieve first round hits. The snipers engage the same target simultaneously then shift to the next target. On two occasions, this method has resulted in multiple hits.

(b) Evaluation: Snipers employed in pairs greatly increase the chances of making a first round hit, even at extended ranges. Also, it allows one sniper to sleep while the other is awake during hours of darkness.

(c) Recommendation: Snipers should be employed in pairs whenever the situation permits.

(6) Use of Scout Dogs.

(a) Observation: During September, the 2-503d Infantry used nineteen Scout Dog Teams. This was generally done in areas which were suspected to contain many booby traps.

(b) Evaluation: As a result of booby trap incidents, three handlers were wounded while two dogs were killed and a third dog was wounded. No members of 2-503d Infantry were wounded. The utilization of Scout Dogs improves both the morale of the men and the probability of detecting booby traps before they are tripped. When the dogs fail to alert it is better to lose a dog than a human life, although the loss is still felt.

(c) Recommendation: The training and utilization of Scout Dog Teams for booby trap detection should be continued and, if at all possible, increased.

(7) Enemy Contact.

(a) Observation: At approximately 1900 hours on 13 September 1970, a platoon from the 3-503d Infantry came under heavy small arms, grenade and automatic rifle fire. The VC/NVA initiated the contact when the platoon's point man was only about five meters from the enemy. As a result, two US soldiers were killed and three more were wounded.

(b) Evaluation: Obviously, the point man was neither very observant nor alert. It was quite possible that he was overconfident since he had been through the same area just a short time before.

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(c) Recommendation: The point man, as well as everyone else, must be constantly on the alert for the unexpected. The VC/NVA know that the American soldier is often prone to return on his original route of departure because it is usually easier and faster. Units, particularly small ones, should never return along a previously traveled route.

(8) Contact of Elements.

(a) Observation: In a night combat operation, an element left their Fire Support Base. When it was approximately one-half of the way to its destination, the element leader made a check of his unit. His tail squad had been separated from the rest of the element.

(b) Evaluation: The element had not properly organized for night movement. There were no emergency steps planned in case individuals of the element became separated from the main body. Also, what-to-do in case of radio equipment failure was not covered.

(c) Recommendations: Alternate plans must be made prior to an actual emergency to include rally points, ambushes and dry laagers. Those plans should also include distress signals in event of radio failure. It should also be clearly understood that each person is responsible for contact with the individual to his rear in night operations. Precise and planned procedures must be understood by all whenever contact is broken.

(9) Evacuating Base Camps.

(a) Observation: Because of recent rains and subsequent flooding, many of the RF/PF were forced to leave some of their base camps. As the people were preparing to be lifted out by helicopter, scout and team leaders were directed to check the entire compound to insure that all ordnance had been recovered. When the last lift was picked up it was noticed that much equipment and ammunition (of value to the enemy) had been left by the RF. In order to remedy this situation, a patrol had to be sent by boat across very dangerous flood waters to retrieve this equipment.

(b) Evaluation: Due to the urgency of the situation, some very important equipment was left behind - equipment which could have possibly been used by the enemy had it not been discovered by friendly forces.

(c) Recommendation: Evacuation of base camps, whether under emergency or normal conditions, must include a thorough search of the area to insure that nothing is left behind for use by the enemy.

(10) Security for Land Clearing Operations.

(a) Observation: Providing security for Rome Plows during land clearing operations requires more than one technique or method, depending on the enemy situation and activities and the terrain.

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(b) Evaluation: During initial land clearing operations by the Brigade, it appeared that the major threat to tracked vehicles and Rome Plows was B-40 rockets. Therefore, security was provided for APC's and Rome Plows by a screen of dismounted infantry at a distance sufficient to prevent the vehicles from being engaged with B-40 rockets. The enemy was evidently thwarted by this tactic, or else he merely chose not to attack. However, after several days of land clearing, he began to heavily booby trap the area. These booby traps varied in size from a hand grenade to a 175mm artillery projectile. They represented a substantial threat to the dismounted infantry screen and brought about a reevaluation of the employment of the security force. To counter the booby trap menace, a Rome plow would cut a swath around the area to be cleared. Following the plow were APC's carrying infantry. The APC's would halt at varying intervals in order for the troops to observe the area. The infantry would then dismount, disperse and provide security. Neither the APC's nor infantry would move out of the cleared area. Since Rome Plows are virtually immune to explosives as large as a 155mm howitzer shell, booby traps were neutralized by the plows. This technique proved highly effective and no further casualties were suffered.

(c) Recommendation: After careful evaluation of the area to be cleared, a detailed examination of all available intelligence should be made to determine the enemy's most probable course of action to halt or delay the land clearing operation. Once a technique is adopted, it is imperative that a constant reevaluation be made to preclude the possibility of adhering to a security technique which protects the Rome Plows only at the cost of unacceptable casualties among the security force. The two principal dangers are rockets and booby traps. A third possibility is an enemy small arms attack, but this is improbable due to the tremendous fire power afforded by an infantry-armor security force. Enemy snipers are also a threat, but they can be easily eliminated unless they are firing from a village or inhabited dwelling. Flexibility oriented on enemy activity and available intelligence is the key to success in such operations.

(11) Length of Ranger Operations.

(a) Observation: During extended Ranger team operations the teams tend to become extremely fatigued and lax after seven or eight days.

(b) Evaluation: Protracted exposure to danger and the elements dulls a Ranger team's physical condition and mental alertness. As a result, the team becomes increasingly vulnerable, and its efficiency is impaired.

(c) Recommendation: Ranger team missions should not last longer than seven days.

d. Organization: None.

e. Training: None.

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Period Ending 31 October 1970, RGS CSFOR - 65 (R2)

- f. Logistics: None.
- g. Communications: None.
- h. Material: None.
- i. Other.

(1) Securing Enemy POWs.

(a) Observation: While being transported in a medivac helicopter, one of two wounded enemy prisoners, unconscious from a head wound, apparently awakened during evacuation, became frightened and jumped to his death from the aircraft.

(b) Evaluation: This action demonstrates the necessity for more stringent controls of enemy prisoners transported in aircraft. In this case it was incorrectly assumed that both wounded POWs were sufficiently rational to realize that it was in their own best interest to remain docile while being carried to a medical aid station. This assumption was invalid in this case. There is also the possibility that an able-bodied POW might escape or interfere with the crew if not bound or closely guarded.

(c) Recommendation: Whenever possible, an armed escort should accompany wounded prisoners during helicopter travel. Ambulatory wounded POWs should have their hands and feet tied.

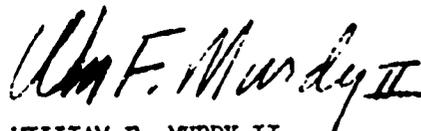
(2) Weather Casualties.

(a) Observation: Emphasis on wet weather casualty prevention is needed to help minimize such casualties during the rainy season.

(b) Evaluation: Units continuously exposed to inclement weather conditions can suffer general physical debilitation and attendant injuries and casualties.

(c) Recommendation: Tailored plans should be developed at battalion level whereby subordinate units might rotate into base camps and still be useful to other units conducting operations during the rainy season. For example, in this brigade an infantry battalion rotates companies into the battalion base camp for mandatory training and to serve as the Brigade and Battalion Ready Reaction Force. In this system a company has a five day respite from the nonseason weather every 15 or 20 days while continuing to support the parent unit's mission.

FOR THE COMMANDER:



1 Incl
Brigade Organization

10

WILLIAM F. MURDY II
Captain, CE
Acting Asst AG

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AVFA-GC-MIST (15 Nov 70) 1st Ind
SUBJECT: Operational Report-Lessons Learned, Headquarters, 173d Airborne
Brigade, Period Ending, 31 October 1970, RCD, JDFOR-65(R2)

DA, Headquarters, I Field Force Vietnam, APO S.F. 96350

TO: Commanding General, United States Army Vietnam, ATTN: AVHGC-DST,
APO 96375

This headquarters has reviewed and evaluated subject Operational Report-
Lessons Learned and concurs.

FOR THE COMMANDER:


ROBERT W. NAYLOR
1LT, AGC
Asst AG

CF:
2 - ACSFOR, DA
1 - CG, 173d ABN BDE (LESS O.R.L.)

AVHDO-DO (15 Nov 70) 2nd Ind
SUBJECT: Operational Report-Lessons Learned, 173d Airborne Brigade,
Period Ending 31 October 1970, RCS CSFOR-65 (R 2)

Headquarters, United States Army Vietnam, APO San Francisco 96375 14 MAR 1971

TO: Commander in Chief, United States Army Pacific, ATTN: GPOP-DT,
APO 96558

This Headquarters has reviewed the Operational Report-Lessons Learned for the quarterly period ending 31 October 1970 from Headquarters, 173d Airborne Brigade and concurs with comments of indorsing headquarters.

FOR THE COMMANDER:



Clark W. Stevens Jr.
Captain AGC
Assistant Adjutant General

Cy furn:
I FFORCEV
173d Abn Bde

GPOP-DT (15 Nov 70) 3d Ind (U)

SUBJECT: Operational Report Lessons Learned of HQ, 173d Airborne
Brigade, for Period Ending 31 October 1970,
RCS CSFOR-65 (R2)

HQ, US Army, Pacific, APO San Francisco 96558 95 MAR 1971

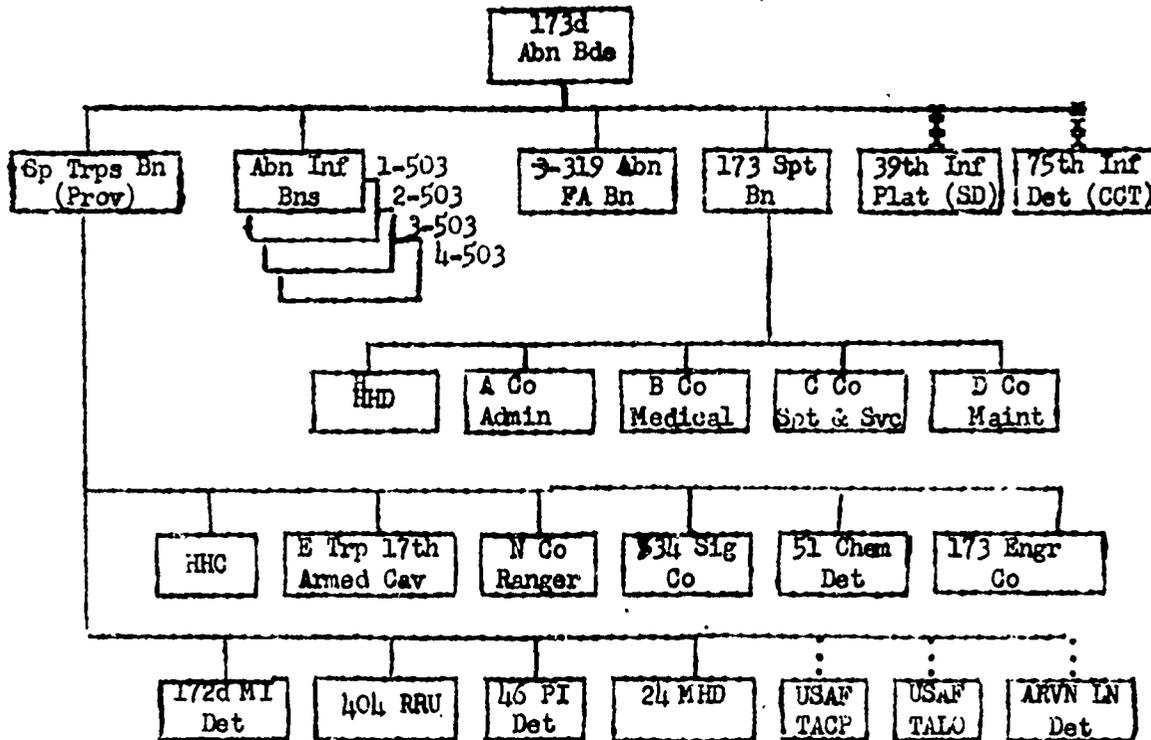
TO: Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, Department
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This headquarters concurs in subject report as indorsed.

FOR THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF:


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