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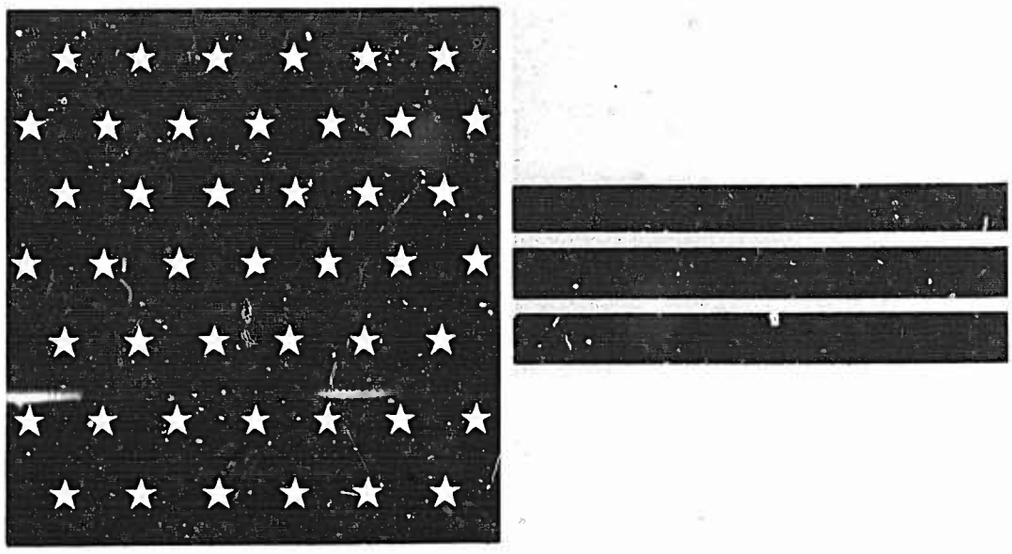

PACIFICATION OF QUANG DIEN DISTRICT

AN INTEGRATED CAMPAIGN

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UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
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SUBJECT: Pacification of Quang Dien District - An Integrated Campaign

SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. This pamphlet reviews a campaign conducted from May through October 1968 which succeeded in virtually eliminating Viet Cong influence from Quang Dien District. The combat experience written by Lieutenant Colonel Leslie D. Carter, Jr., US Army, is particularly timely because of current efforts to increase the effectiveness of territorial forces and further pacification.

2. The contents illustrate an integrated effort between a US airborne battalion and district Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Forces (PF) in creating a secure condition for resettlement and development of Quang Dien. As the author states, "Thus, a major goal was achieved; although airborne forces were available if needed, security throughout the district was provided by the RF/PF, who the people knew would remain permanently and would not be deployed to another area."

FOR THE COMMANDER:

SIDNEY GRITZ
Colonel, USA
Adjutant General

THE AUTHOR

Lieutenant Colonel Leslie D. Carter, Jr., a 1948 graduate of the United States Military Academy, commanded the 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry, 101st Airborne Division from May to November 1968 -- the period covered in the text of the article. In November 1968, he was assigned as ACofS, G5, 101st Airborne Division.

Lieutenant Colonel Carter first served in Vietnam from July 1956 to July 1957 as an advisor at the Vietnamese Military Academy at Dalat for six months and as an advisor to an Infantry Regiment near Pleiku for six months. From 1961 to 1964, he served with the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G4, United States Army, Pacific, as a logistics planner concerned primarily with mainland Southeast Asia. Prior to joining the 101st Airborne Division, he was assigned to the Office of the Chief of Research and Development, Department of the Army.

THUA THIEN
AND
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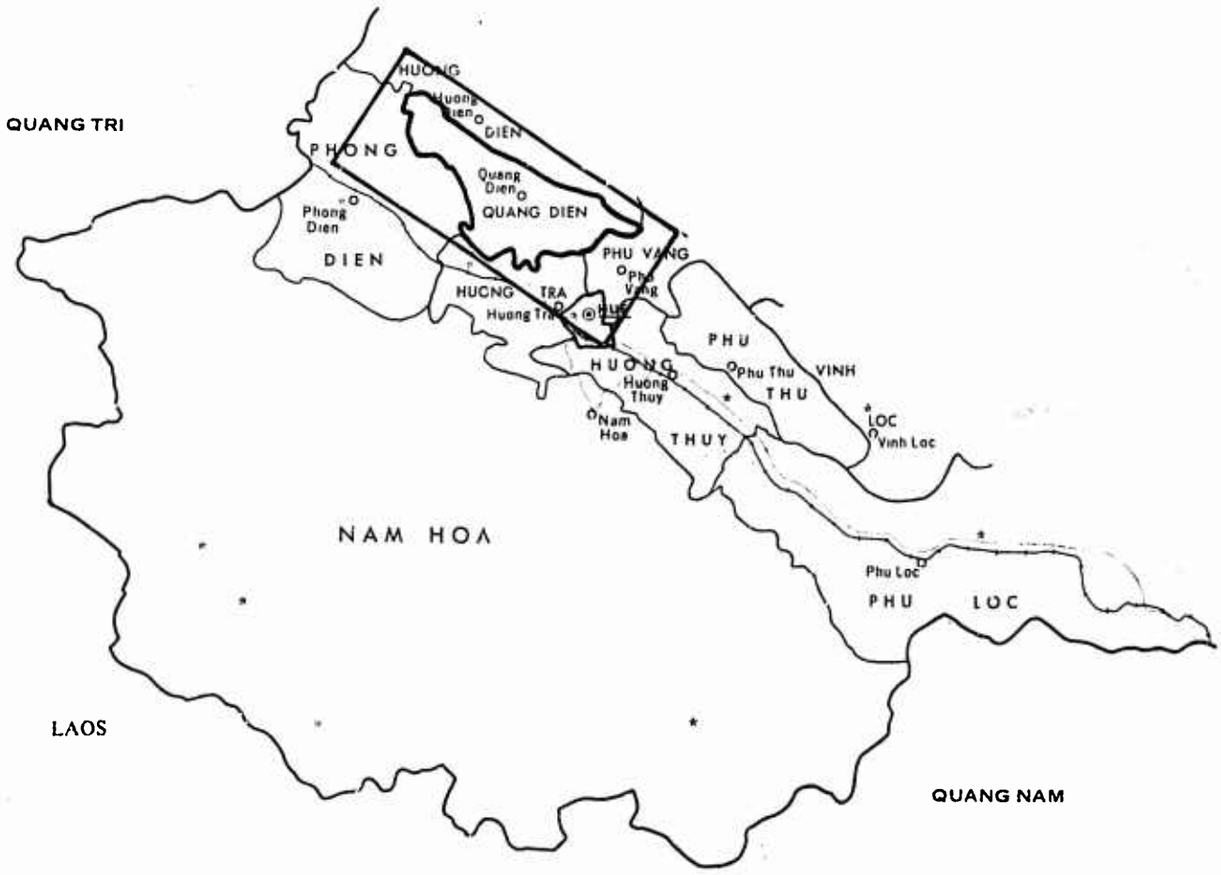

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PACIFICATION OF QUANG DIEN DISTRICT:

AN INTEGRATED CAMPAIGN

INTRODUCTION: Along the coastal plain to the northwest of Hue in Quang Dien District, US and local Vietnamese district forces, in a six month period from May through October 1968, waged a campaign which succeeded in virtually eliminating VC influence and restoring GVN control throughout the district. This success was achieved not by contacts by major forces or large-scale cordon operations, but rather by the less dramatic day-to-day execution of a harmonious and well-integrated US/Vietnamese campaign. After the defeat of major organized enemy forces in Quang Dien, the district was secured and conditions for resettlement and development created through a steady, unrelenting pressure applied by a completely cooperative and coordinated effort between the airborne infantry battalion operating in the district and district Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Forces (PF). Although it is realized that the particular set of fortuitous conditions which existed and were exploited in Quang Dien District may not all pertain in other districts, the techniques applied during the period are offered for possible application elsewhere.

DESTRUCTION OF ORGANIZED RESISTANCE: In the aftermath of the TET offensive the situation for GVN forces in Quang Dien looked grim indeed. This rich coastal riceland, only an easy stroll from Hue's Citadel, was controlled almost completely by North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong units. District forces were able to hold out in only three beleaguered posts -- constituting probably less than five percent of the district -- and these were by-passed and isolated by the NVA/VC.

In April 1968, the 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry deployed to Quang Dien to wrest the district from VC/NVA control. In a period of bitter and bloody fighting against a skillful, tenacious enemy -- culminating in the four-day Phuoc Yen cordon in which 429 NVA were killed and 107 captured -- the back of the NVA in Quang Dien was broken and the district was cleared of major organized resistance. The stage was then set to secure the area and press on with the business of pacification. This task of pacifying the district required the elimination of both the local VC fighting forces and the infrastructure which constituted the local VC government and controlled and directed VC political, economic, and psychological activities. A key component in digging out these locally based, deep-rooted, and elusive VC elements, and in establishing a permanent GVN presence to deter their return, was the effective utilization and exploitation of the potential of the RF/PF in all operations.

THE RF/PF: Since the RF/PF were principal players in the Quang Dien,

a brief examination and evaluation of these forces is useful for the discussion of their operations which follows. For in order to work effectively and harmoniously with RF/PF there are certain basic characteristics that must be understood and appreciated.

The RF/PF soldier is recruited and trained to operate in the vicinity of his native village, and his primary mission is the security of the civilian population in that area. Although RF forces are recruited throughout a province and by law may be employed anywhere within that province, an RF unit generally remains within one district; similarly, although PF are recruited throughout a district and may be employed anywhere within the district, a PF unit generally operates in the vicinity of its native village. RF are organized primarily as companies and PF as platoons; both are under the operational control of the District Chief.

The individual RF/PF is a product of the villages and hamlets of rural Vietnam. Although he has conformed to the mores and social restrictions of his village, disciplined conformation to rules, regulations, or precise group behavior is foreign to his background. To accomplish a task by 1200 hours rather than 1800 hours, or even to do it today rather than tomorrow, has never been important -- so long as necessary tasks were accomplished within the broad framework imposed by the season or custom. His three months of military training have not fundamentally altered this attitude. Consequently, individual and unit discipline is not as highly developed as in a US unit. Fire discipline is generally poor -- the RF/PF reconnoiters by fire when and where the mood strikes him, his rucksack becomes a home for stray chickens, small pigs, rice or other items that he passes. He is not by nature and training a "hard charger" who tenaciously presses to overcome all obstacles to the accomplishment of his mission. When tired he would rather rest and push toward his objective later. Especially on initial combined operations, the size, firepower, and boisterousness of the average trooper inhibit RF/PF aggressiveness and incline him to let his US partners lead the way.

But this background has also given the RF/PF certain inherent skills and acquired knowledge which the US trooper cannot duplicate. Operating in the vicinity of their native village, the RF/PF know the area like the back of their hands and, in this respect, are the equal of the VC. They know in detail all trails, streams, hedges, canals, and other features of the countryside. They are intimately acquainted with the people and their patterns of activity. They know who lives in what house and how much rice is required by the occupants, who works each paddy, which families have relatives fighting with the VC. They know which villagers to question and what type of information each could reasonably be expected to know. What would pass unnoticed by an American may immediately telegraph a message to the RF/PF; they may quickly take under fire an individual or group that would go unchallenged, or at best questioned and

released by a trooper. The RF/PF, from a life of close association with the earth and nature, are alert to any disturbance of their natural surroundings. Consequently, they are especially adept at detecting booby traps, concealed caches, or other signs of VC presence.

Thus the district forces have much to offer as fighting allies. If treated with the respect due valued partners, they are reliable and effective. When shown proper techniques and procedures they are quite capable of carrying out any reasonable assignment. Certainly a key element in the successful operation in Quang Dien was the sympathetic recognition and understanding of RF/PF characteristics and capabilities by the 1/502nd, and its desire not only to foster assumption of increasingly responsible missions within RF/PF unit capabilities but also deliberately and conscientiously to assist in training those forces and in improving their overall proficiency. During the period under consideration, the aggressiveness, proficiency and esprit of the RF/PF increased markedly; by mid-October they were capable of providing adequate security throughout the district.

OPERATIONS WITH DISTRICT FORCES: In examining the daily operations from May through October in Quang Dien, the unique degree of close, continuous cooperation between airborne and district forces is apparent. The mutual esteem and close rapport existing between the two commanders were reflected in the habitually harmonious hand-in-glove operations of their forces. It is emphasized that this applied to the day-to-day operations of those forces and not just to special operations. A perceptible shift in the type of operations conducted can also be noted as district forces steadily improved in capability and the enemy's situation concurrently deteriorated.

COLLOCATION OF COMMAND POSTS: A firm foundation for future co-operation was established from the start when the 1/502nd, upon deploying to Quang Dien, set up its command post in the same compound with the district headquarters. This collocation greatly facilitated the exchange of information and the conduct of combined planning and operations. (Also, the boundary of the area of operations (AO) of the 1/502nd coincided generally with the district boundary.) The compound contained the essential components of a typical district headquarters -- the District Chief's office and his military and administrative staffs, the District TOC, the S-2 and his staff and interrogation facility, the district police headquarters, and communication facilities; also in the compound was the MACV advisory staff. Thus, all the machinery to plan and control the operations of all forces in the district was side by side in a very small area -- the 1/502nd CP was immediately adjacent to all agencies with which it had to maintain close liaison. Planning and operations could be readily coordinated, changes to plans quickly implemented when necessary, and intelligence made immediately available to both forces.

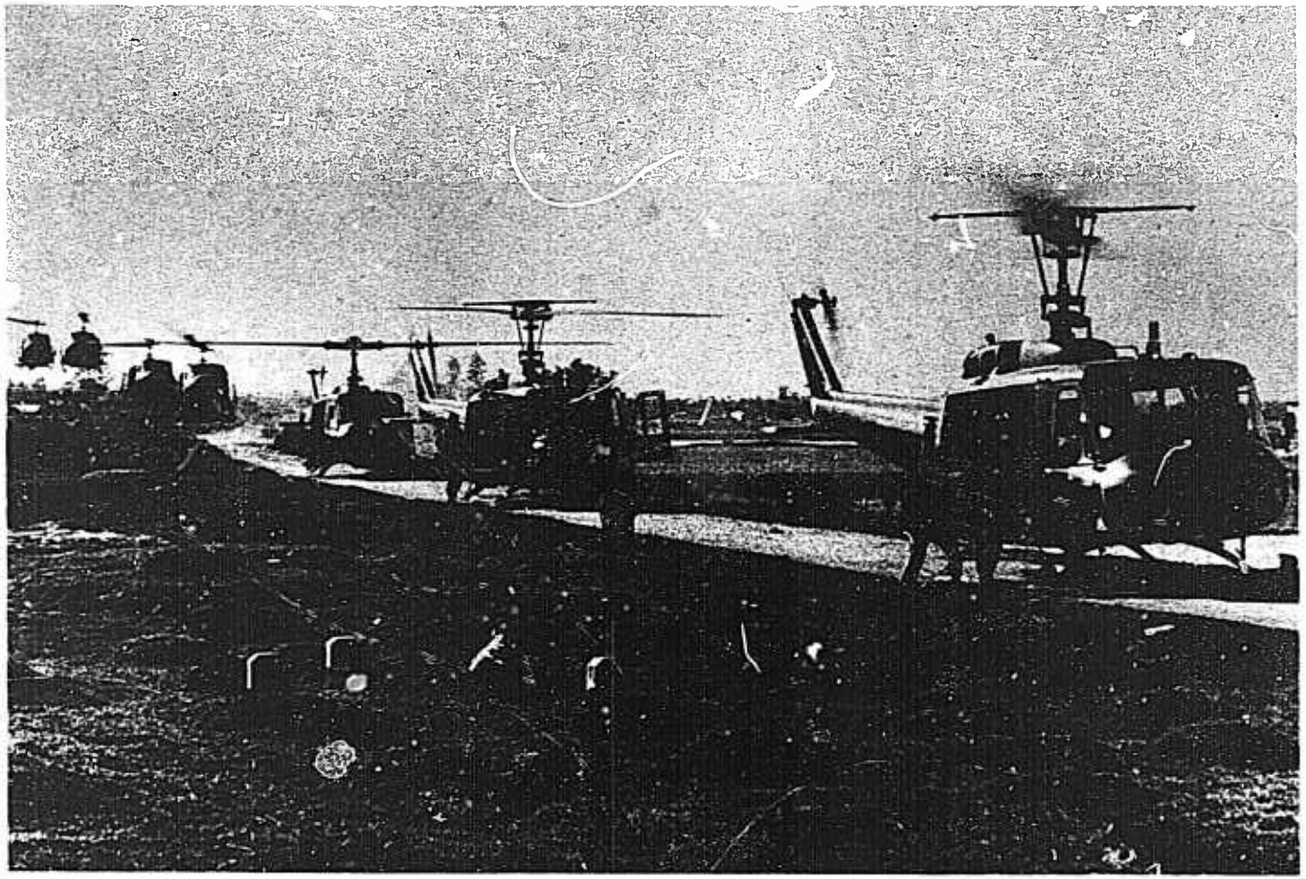
The District Chief, Major Tran Tien Dao with his S-3, and the 1/502 Commander, LTC Leslie D. Carter, Jr., with his S-3, plan the next day's operations.

Actually, this physical arrangement did more than just ease coordination procedures. It threw the two staffs into constant contact, the majority of which were casual meetings in the routine course of daily activities. This close association fostered a mental attitude that could not have developed if contact between the staffs had been primarily limited to discussions of an official nature. A frame of mind eventually evolved in which the staffs seemed to be members of the same group and US and RF/PF forces came to be regarded as a single force. Coordination was quickly and easily effected to assign a mission to whichever force was best suited to accomplish it with little conce for whether a US or an RF/PF element was tasked.

PLANNING: The initial planning for each day's operations took place at a 1900 meeting attended by the 1/502nd commander, the District Chief, their respective S-2's and S-3's and the District Advisor. At this nightly session, based on intelligence and operational objectives, the detailed operations of each US company and RF/PF unit were worked out -- the scheme of maneuver of combined forces, how and where they would link up, lift requirements, and arrangements to provide communications to include liaison teams. For elements operating independently, it was agreed exactly where they would operate.

This same close liaison continued at the battalion/district level throughout the execution of planned operations in order to keep all elements abreast of the movements of other elements in their vicinity. For example, during most of the period the number of airborne/RF/PF night ambushes throughout the district generally numbered no less than 30 and occasionally numbered in the 60's. The selection of these ambushes and the movement after dark to the sites required the closest coordination, not only for the maneuvering elements but also for the planning of artillery fires. In addition to the immediate notification of the other TOC of an impending or completed move, a routine part of TOC operation was the frequent cross-checking of 1/502nd and district operations maps to ensure all unit positions were accurately posted on both maps.

COMBINED OPERATIONS: Although several variations of routine RF/PF operations with US forces were conducted, these day-to-day operations can be grouped into three general types. Initially, when enemy resistance was still formidable, RF/PF elements usually linked up early in the morning with the airborne troopers -- normally about a RF/PF platoon with each US company. The link up generally took place in a secure area with the RF/PF either moving overland to a prearranged point and being guided from there to the company area, or the RF/PF being delivered by the 1/502nd logistical bird to the company location. Only after the link up was effected did the combined force move off on its mission. RF/PF selected by the District Chief were from the immediate operational area. They were usually deployed with the forward elements of the US force where their knowledge



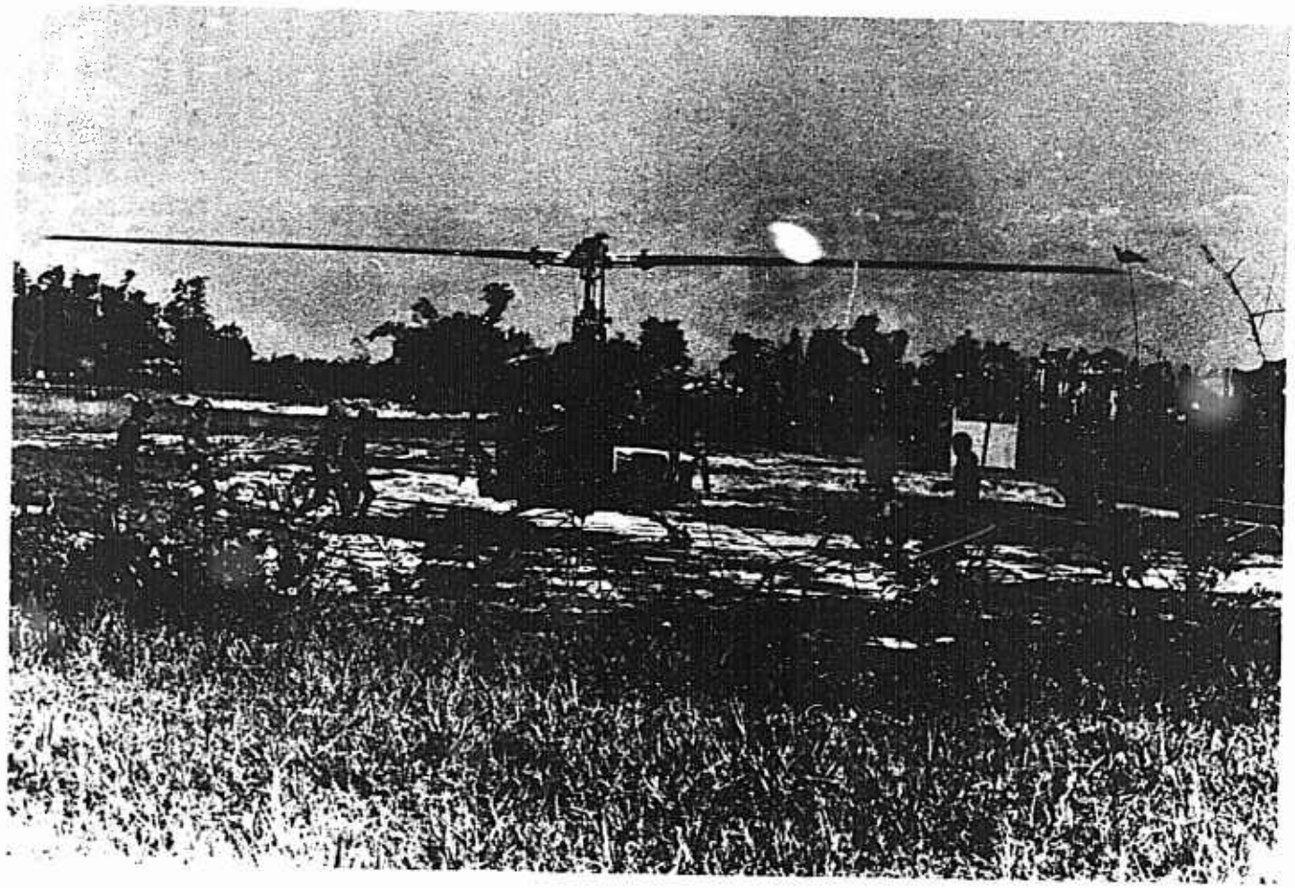
101st Airborne Division choppers landing near Quang Dien District Headquarters to lift PF on a combined operation with the 1/502.

of terrain, villages and villagers, and their skill at detecting booby traps and hidden bunkers could be best utilized. The airborne troopers provided the muscle in the event strong resistance was met. When operating with the 1/502nd, the RF/PF received the same support as the US troops -- hot meals or packaged rations, water, medical support to include medevacs, fire support, and ammunition. In the early stages, although the airborne troops remained continuously in the field, due to their commitments to defend villages or installations at night, it was generally necessary for the RF/PF to return to their bases by dusk and rejoin the US unit the following day if continuing with the combined operation.

As experience with US forces increased, operations in which RF/PF were committed as part of a tactical maneuver against the enemy became more prevalent. The combat assault with various combinations of US/district forces became routine. Generally, RF/PF elements landed in the combat assault and maneuvered toward US forces positioned as blocking forces. The RF/PF were employed extensively as the lift element because of their favorable Allowable Cargo Load (9-10 RF/PF as opposed to 6 US troops) and because they were generally utilized as the sweep element and greater surprise could normally be achieved when that force made the combat assault.

During this period, the RF/PF of Quang Dien District became highly proficient in helicopter operations. Prior to each combat assault, the units to be lifted were given training by 1/502nd instructors in helicopter boarding and unloading techniques. The RF/PF in time became as adept as our own soldiers in this phase of helicopter operations and the instruction took the form of refresher training similar to that presented the US troops. The personnel from the 1/502nd who presented the refresher training also ran all pickup zone operations during the lift.

The system developed to control these combined operations was relatively simple yet effective and reliable. When RF/PF were in the lift element, the District Chief accompanied the 1/502nd Commander and his command group in the Command and Control chopper. The District Chief had communication with the RF/PF on their designated operational frequency. An officer from the District Advisory Detachment with a radio on the lift frequency landed with the RF/PF and remained with them throughout the combined operation. US elements, either heliborne or on the ground were, of course, on the same frequency. Thus the 1/502nd Commander had communication with the RF/PF either through the battalion command net to the advisor on the operation, or through the District Chief who sat beside him in the helicopter -- and, in the case of Quang Dien, spoke fluent English. This arrangement provided necessary control of all elements and permitted adjustments in plans to be made while the lift was in progress. Following completion of the lift, communication with the RF/PF was provided through the command net to the



Quang Dien PF loading at 1/502 pad for a one-slick mini-lift.

advisor or through the District TOC immediately adjacent to the 1/502nd TOC.

A final type of combined operation that became routine as RF/PF competence and confidence increased was one in which the RF/PF conducted an independent combat assault and ground operation, and the US provided only the required lift. In these operations, coordination and control were again tied-in at the Command and Control helicopter where the 1/502nd commander had communication with the accompanying advisor and the District Chief with the RF/PF. A variation of this standard combat assault which proved quite successful in Quang Dien was a "mini-flight" or "mini-lift" in which a small RF/PF force was lifted in one or two helicopters. Generally the slick supporting the battalion was used for this type of mission, augmented by an additional helicopter when available. The general area of the landing zone was agreed upon by the 1/502nd commander and the District Chief in a planning session; the 1/502nd commander or staff officer then rode on the logistical bird with the RF/PF and in flight made the exact selection of the landing zone. The door guns of the slick provided any necessary suppressive fire on the landing zone. This technique permitted rapid searches of widely dispersed areas by relatively few forces; PF could be landed in about six different landing zones in one hour. The same squad-size element could frequently search two or more objectives during one day. In addition, this type of operation used only the helicopter already available to the infantry battalion.

Thus as the VC structure in Quang Dien District was weakened, a change in combined US/RF/PF operations took place. Initially, RF/PF forces operated as small elements within a larger US force. Gradually as RF/PF proficiency increased, they operated as company or platoon elements within a combined force, and eventually independent operations supported only by US helicopters became prevalent. This change, however, did not indicate a lessening of co-operation but rather it reflected both an increase in RF/PF capabilities and an adjustment to meet the changing enemy situation. Although each of the combined operations described was still conducted as late as October when warranted, the deteriorating VC strength permitted small independent RF/PF elements to operate throughout the district thus enabling the available forces to cover more area on a given day. In addition, the favorable situation in Quang Dien permitted the 1/502nd to be assigned a larger AO which extended well beyond the district boundaries. By mid-October, the RF/PF provided virtually all the forces in Quang Dien and the bulk of the airborne troopers was deployed in that portion of the AO outside the district. US strength in the district was generally about a platoon with the maximum being a company, and on some days in October there were no 1/502nd troopers in Quang Dien. Thus a major goal was achieved; although airborne forces were nearby and available if needed, security throughout the district was provided by the RF/PF -- who the people knew would remain permanently and would not be deployed to another

area.

RESULTS: Between May and October the VC structure in Quang Dien was shattered and the district was secured. This defeat applied not only to local force units and armed guerrillas but, perhaps more importantly, to the VC infrastructure. More and more, the political and economic leaders were identified and captured. As confidence in the government grew, the people of the district increasingly volunteered information concerning the VC. For example, the high rate of ralliers returning to government control in Quang Dien District can be attributed in part to active co-operation by the villagers with district forces. Wives, parents, or other relatives of known VC were urged to persuade them to take advantage of the Chieu Hoi program. As a result, significant numbers of Hoi Chanhs turned themselves in to district forces at a place and time prearranged by their relatives. Both Hoi Chanhs and prisoners stated that because of the constant, effective pressure in Quang Dien by both airborne and RF/PF forces, VC elements had been directed to withdraw from the district and move to safer areas in the mountains to the southwest.

The effectiveness of the RF/PF in this period of combined operations is clearly reflected in the results achieved by district forces. During the period 1 June to 1 November, these forces killed 215 NVA/VC, captured 102, and received 167 Hoi Chanhs. This total of 484 was achieved at a cost of four RF/PF soldiers killed. An even more eloquent testimony of the success of these combined operations is provided by the VC. In Appendix 1, a staff member of the Thua Thien - Hue military region operating in Quang Dien advises his superiors by letter of his bleak evaluation of the situation confronting the VC throughout the district. His assessment that "... this is the most critical, bitter, and difficult stage we ever had in Quang Dien" became truly prophetic for the author when he was killed in a night ambush on 12 October 1968.

By the end of October, US/RF/PF combat operations in Ouang Dien had clearly provided the environment in which the development of pacification could be undertaken in earnest. Attention and energies could turn from combat operations to resettlement of refugees; reconstruction of schools, markets, and homes; re-establishment of communications; rebuilding the economy; and reconstitution of effective rice-roots government and civil authority -- with the RF/PF concurrently assuming primary responsibility for maintaining requisite security and remaining alert for the return of VC influence.

The following letter is an evaluation of the situation in Quang Dien District on 5 September 1968 as seen by a VC staff officer operating in that area. The writer, in a lengthy report to his headquarters, spells out the impact of US/Vietnamese operations on VC activity in Quang Dien. The letter was obtained when the author was killed in a night ambush by Company D, 1/502d, on 12 October 1968.

Several reports have been sent to you concerning our activities for your consideration and orders but I have not received any suggestion or instruction from you at all on our mission. As we are facing many difficulties caused by the enemy actions, I send this report again today for your consideration and suggestion. Truly speaking, you do not understand the real problem and difficulty of our area, and perhaps even Mr. NAM could not give you the real situation of this area when he came to your meeting, because he does not stay in this area.

The enemy is using the "SWEEP AND OCCUPY" tactics, concentrating US and Vietnamese troops to operate from one village to another. They concentrate in a village, such as PHONG NHIEU village, and conduct operations in all the hamlets at the village. It will be the same when they move to another village, searching from one hamlet to another; and when they get through, the PF's are sent in to continue the search. They may also have the US troops operating a long time in one area, then the PF's are sent operating in another area. When they spot something strange or some guerrillas they fire artillery and use helicopters to lift US troops or even PF's, which now also have become mobile troops.

We used to say that they go sweeping; it is not sweeping now, but we must say they go looking for underground bunkers. It has never been like this that the US troops are very patient in searching underground bunkers. First of all, they fire a lot of artillery so that we have no way of escaping, we have to hide in secret bunkers. Then they will spread out, each group with shovel will keep searching in each garden, and they will move only to another garden when they get through with this one. They do not leave any area unsearched, and they continue the search day after day. This has caused many casualties for us and also many ralliers. Most of the village military action cadres have been killed.

At NINH DAI no village military action cadres are left, all of them were killed or captured long time ago. You might ask why we did not recruit to fill in, but actually we no longer have the capability; there are only the Secretary General and about 3 fellow comrades left in that area.

At BAC THUAN from village cadre level down to the hamlet, no more cadres are left. The village military action chief was killed. At NAM THUAN only the District Secretary General is left, the village chief and village

cadres were killed including the village military action cadre. At QUANG HOA the secretary was captured, the village local force was eliminated; one of two village military action cadres was killed, the other was captured. At DONG HUNG and TAY HUNG, one was killed, one captured and one rallied (Chieu Hoi). Even comrade KY, District General Secretary in charge of this area, also rallied. At PHONG NHIEU, there is only one military action cadre left; we don't have any information on the other two. At QUANG THAI, we haven't heard from that village for a long time.

Of the district military action cadres, there are only myself and two other fellows left (BAO and MINH); the rest to include Mr. XUAN already rallied. So now there are only 3 district military action cadres left living separately in 3 different areas. It is very hard to communicate with each other. I even have difficulty communicating with comrade NGO whom I used to contact daily in the past. I haven't received any information or mail from NGO or NAM for a month.

In using the "SWEEP AND OCCUPY" tactics, the enemy has attempted to:

-Intentionally round up and annihilate all our cadres and local guerrillas in order to create a secure area of their own.

-Maintain a permanent pressure on the local population living in our controlled area so that the people have to move into their area. This intention has been realized successfully. In QUANG THAI, PHONG NHIEU, all the people already have moved to the enemy area. It is the same in NINH DAI and in BAC THUAN. In NAM THUAN village there are only 10 out of 300 families left in HA LANG hamlet. Only 1 family is left in QUANG HOA; the rest have already moved to the enemy areas, or concentrated in strategic hamlets where the Peoples Self Defense force has been set up. In HAM THUAN, the HA CANG hamlet, which used to be the strongest liberation hamlet, is now their strongest strategic hamlet with 2 or 3 fences around in which there are 2 PF platoons defending; besides that, at day time they have People Self Defense force on duty which includes men and women from 15 years old to 45 years old; XUAN TUY, NGHIA LO, LAI TRUNG, LAI XA hamlets in QUANG HOA village, or THANH CAN, NAM DUONG hamlets in BAC THUAN have all become their strategic hamlets.

After organizing the hamlets, they push the communist denunciation movement, keep pressure and watch closely our infrastructure. As a result, some of them already defected or were pointed out by ralliers. This caused much trouble among the people; the people now lose confidence in the final victory of the people's revolution. Confidence in the cadres also is diminished because many cadres have rallied -- this includes some who have just returned from the North such as XUAN, District Military Action Cadre, and KY, District Secretary, as well as some who have just joined the revolution. In addition to that, many guerrillas and local main force troops have been killed causing much influence and trouble among the people. We may say that this is the most critical, bitter, and difficult stage we ever had in Quang

Dien. Recently, they used dozers to plow NINH DAI, and now QUANG THAI, PHONG NHIEU, including LA VAN hamlet located near Highway 1 from which the people have moved away. They also burned and destroyed everything left behind by the people in the liberation areas, including houses, temples and even trees and bushes, and they have forced the people to go back to the area to cut or defoliate by hand what they could not burn. They started cutting trees and bushes in QUANG HOA day before yesterday, then the typhoon came and they had to stop work. Besides that, they suffered 1 PF KIA and 2 WIA by a grenade booby trap while chopping down trees, this made them slow down a little.

This is a summary of the enemy activities and people's situation I want to bring up to you so that you can easily understand the difficulties of our mission in this area. Now I want to report on our activities.

First of all I want to report to you that I received a message on the military action meeting that would be held at Sub-Region Headquarters on the 8th of September, but I could not make it, because it was too late when I received that message on the 3rd of September. Travel is becoming more and more difficult; the road to PHONG NHIEU - QUANG THAI is very dangerous and if I could make it only halfway, there would be no place to stay overnight. The situation now is very different from before.

Since the enemy applied their tactics, the military proselyting program has come to a standstill. Our infrastructures have been detected or do not have confidence in us. Even our secret agents surrendered to the enemy. It is very difficult to build up new agents or infrastructures now. We could not go into the hamlet to get in touch with our men because the enemy has a very effective control and checking system. If we ask our men to go out of the hamlet to a certain location to meet us, they are afraid to come out; if they do come out, they are interrogated and bothered afterward and they never come out again. Most of the village military action cadres have been killed and no one is left to carry out the military action program. Even if there were some left, it would do no good now.

There are only 3 district military action cadres left; about 16 or 17 are prisoners. We don't know where the three are now. They were supposed to move to QUANG THAI at that time under the surveillance of DUNG, but when DUNG was wounded, no one took his place. PHAN and TRUYEN were supposed to take over but no word from them has been received.

This is the local situation. Next I would like to extend my regards to all of you. As to me, I have no problem with my health but I am very thin and tense because of our unsatisfactory situation. I wish I could have gone to the meeting and talked with you.

As an end to this letter, I wish you and our men good health and many victories to come.