



# 2/503d VIETNAM Newsletter

(Special Edition) February 2010 / Issue 12

*For the men, and their families, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 173d Airborne Brigade (Sep) ~ We Try Harder!*

To see all issues to date, call-up on the web: [www.173dabn.org/2bat/news.html](http://www.173dabn.org/2bat/news.html)

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SPECIAL ADDITIONAL FEBRUARY 2010 EDITION OF OUR NEWSLETTER  
TO FEATURE THE 43<sup>rd</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF

**~ OPERATION JUNCTION CITY ~**



# *The Drop Junction City*



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NEWSLETTER**

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By Jerry Hassler, Recon, 2/503d



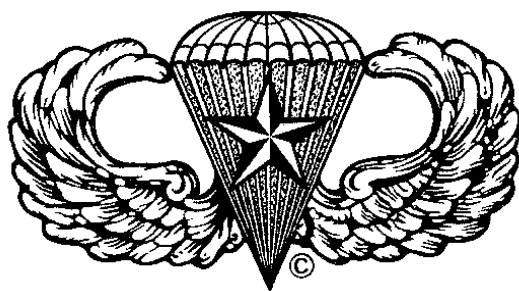
# OPERATION JUNCTION CITY

Republic of Vietnam



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By Bill Nicholls, A/2/503d



# Junction City Print 1



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Here are some pictures (see Page 2) of the jump on February 22, 1967. They might be a nice addition to the newsletter.

The two prints (below) were given to us when we got back to Bien Hoa after Junction City I. Most guys don't even remember them, let alone have them. To this day, I am amazed that I was able to not only get them back home, but to keep them all these years.

*Airborne!*  
Bill Nicholls, A/2/503d



**Caption reads: *THE REAL THING: Sky Soldiers of the 173d Airborne Brigade hit the drop zone on the first American (mass combat) parachute assault since Korea. In 10 minutes an infantry battalion with supporting elements was on the ground and ready for combat.***

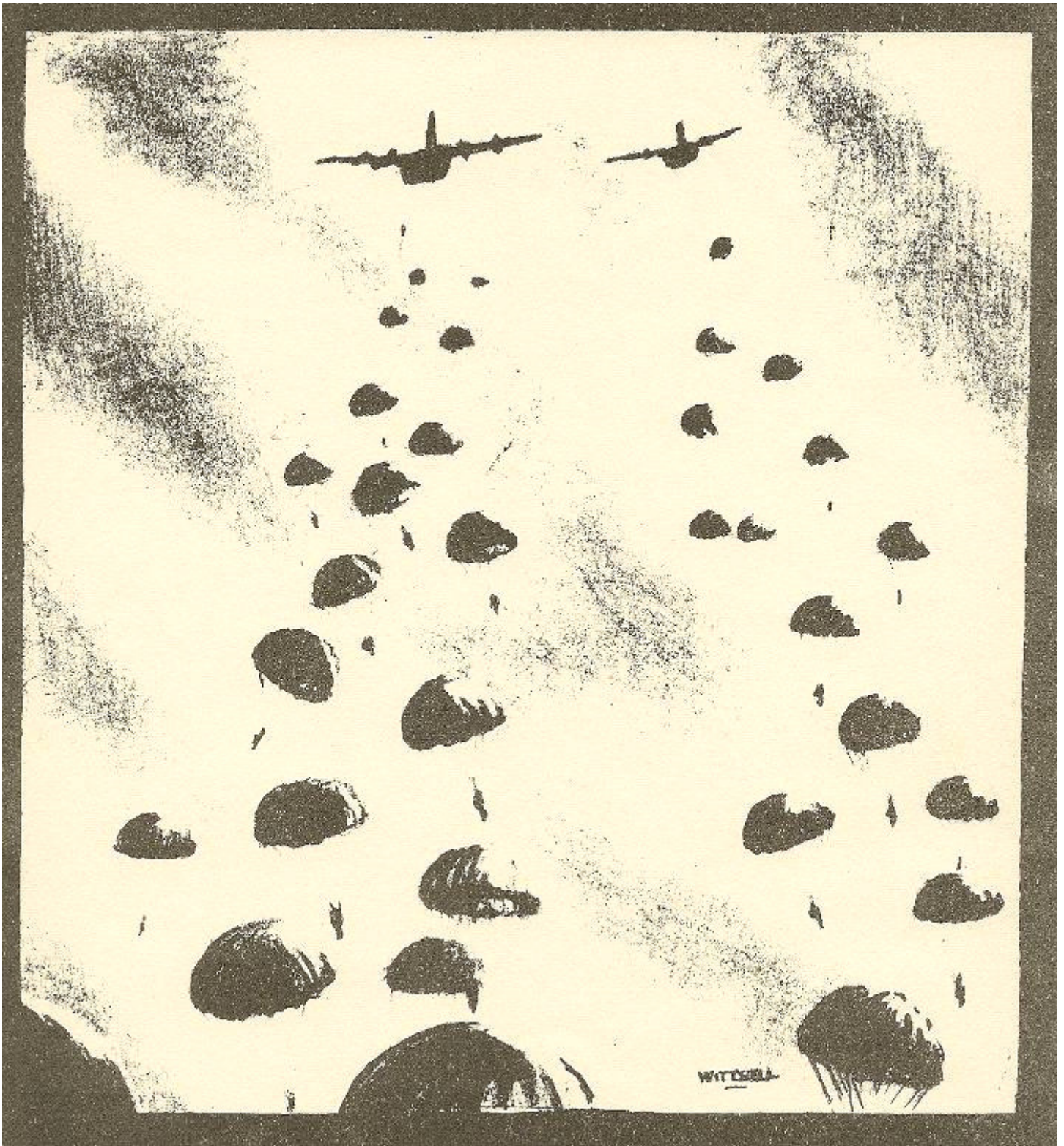


# Junction City Print 2



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**Caption reads: *FURY FROM THE SKY: 173d Airborne Brigade paratroopers jump into combat deep in War Zone C to kick-off Operation "Junction City." A 780 man task force struck with lightning speed on the first American (mass) parachute assault in Vietnam.***



# VIETNAM STUDIES CEDAR FALLS ~ JUNCTION CITY:

By

*Lieutenant General Bernard William Rogers*

Department of the Army, Washington DC 1989

(The following excerpts are from this report. All photos are 2/503d, not necessarily from this operation unless indicated. Ed.)

## Planning and Preparation

JUNCTION CITY was to be the largest operation of the Vietnam war to date and the second one under control of II Field Force, Vietnam. Its primary mission would be search and destroy to eradicate the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) and Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army installations. Also, various installations such as Special Forces camps and airfields were to be built. Two U.S. Divisions, with the commitment of as many as twenty-two U.S. Infantry Battalions, fourteen Artillery Battalions, and four South Vietnamese Battalions would be involved. JUNCTION CITY would also include the first major Combat Parachute Assault since the Korean War.



**Air drop of supplies during Junction City**

Like the Iron Triangle, War Zone C was a major Viet Cong stronghold and had been a sanctuary for insurgents for over twenty years. It was also believed to be the location of Headquarters of the Central Office of South



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Vietnam; however, owing to the remoteness of the area and the strict secrecy with which the enemy treated the Headquarters, few facts were known about COSVN installations and units in the area. Clandestine operations conducted in September of 1966 and during Operation ATTLEBORO in November had, however, developed significant intelligence on War Zone C.

In discussing the genesis of Operation JUNCTION CITY, General Seaman, commanding general of II Field Force, Vietnam, stated:

*"I've got to go back to Operation 'Birmingham' which was conducted by the 1st Division in War Zone C, in May of 1966. It was conducted along the Cambodian Border as far north as Lo Go (about 30 kilometers northwest of Tay Ninh City) and the plan was to airlift a Brigade into the then suspected location of COSVN Headquarters. The 1st Division airlifted one Battalion to the area, intending to get an entire Brigade there within the day; but, unfortunately, the weather closed in and the rainy season started a couple of weeks earlier than anticipated. So, the decision was made by the Division Commander, Major General DePuy, to withdraw that one Battalion, feeling that he could not reinforce it if they got into any difficulty. Following Operation 'Birmingham,'*

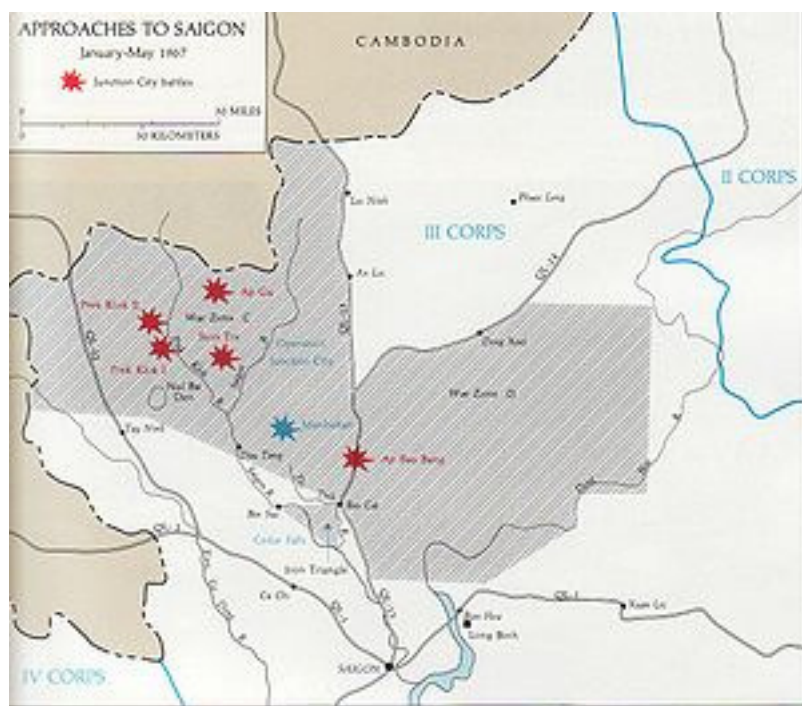
*General Westmoreland said he wanted me to plan an operation in War Zone C to start as soon as possible after the Christmas and New Year's stand-downs of 1966-1967. He said, in effect, 'To Think Big..'. This operation was to start about the 8th of January 1967, and would be a Multi-Division operation including an Airborne Drop. I (later) briefed General Westmoreland on the progress of our plans for 'Junction City' and he approved my concept."*



The operation plan, originally named GADSDEN, had three major objectives: to engage the 9th Viet Cong Division and the 101st North Vietnamese Army Regiment; to destroy COSVN headquarters; and to destroy enemy base camps and installations in the area of operation. The plans included a Parachute Assault by both the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, and the **173d Airborne Brigade**. Among other objectives, the operation was intended to convince the enemy that War Zone C was no longer a haven.

# JUNCTION CITY

The concept included deception operations prior to the main thrust into War Zone C. During this initial phase, units and supplies would be positioned to support the follow up effort. Definitive planning for the operation started in late November 1966. With all intelligence sources of II Field Force, Vietnam, oriented toward collection of information on the operational area, more and more data were received as the starting date for the operation neared. Pattern activity analysis was used extensively, as it had been for Cedar Falls; much of the data acquired in that operation was applied in planning Junction City. Information on the general location of COSVN and the movements of enemy units of interest was further refined.



## Junction City map, War Zone "C"

From the first planning conference, strict security measures were enforced to prevent compromise. The planning group was held to a minimum within II Field Force, Vietnam, Headquarters; whenever possible, preparations were made without specifically identifying them with the operation. However, in December the name of the main operation was changed to JUNCTION CITY because it was believed that the name GADSDEN had been compromised. GADSDEN was shifted to one of the two planned deception operations.

Operation GADSDEN was to be conducted by the US 25th Infantry Division in the extreme western portion of War Zone C, in the vicinity of Lo Go. The second preliminary operation, named TUCSON, would be conducted by the US 1st Infantry Division in Binh Long Province, 80 kilometers to the east, in an area generally defined by the Minh Thanh and Michelin rubber



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plantations and the village of Bau Long on Highway 13. This area also comprised the northern portion of the Long Nguyen secret zone.

Both these preliminary actions were designed as individual Division operations in the proximity of the normal Division tactical areas of interest. In addition to moving forces for GADSEN and TUCSON, providing a cover for friendly troop buildup on the edges of War Zone C, and establishing supply bases for JUNCTION CITY, it was envisioned that the deception could possibly cause the 271st and 272d Viet Cong Regiments to move into the central area of War Zone C from their then suspected locations.

The plans for JUNCTION CITY, GADSDEN, and TUCSON were published in early December 1966. D-days were set as 3 January for GADSDEN and TUCSON and as 12 January for JUNCTION CITY. However, as was discussed above, in the middle of December General McChristian, Military Assistance Command J-2, briefed General Seaman on information concerning enemy activities in the Iron Triangle which led to the decision that Operation CEDAR FALLS would be conducted in January. JUNCTION CITY would be postponed until later in February; in turn, GADSDEN was delayed until 2 February and TUCSON postponed until 14 February.

The intelligence concerning War Zone C was continuously being re-examined, and in mid January the movement and relocation of the 9th Viet Cong Division and the enemy Regiments were established. The 271st Regiment was located on the Cambodian border near Lo Go, the 272d Regiment had moved to the Michelin rubber plantation northeast of Dau Tieng, and the 273d was now located outside War Zone C near Tan Uyen, about 25 kilometers northeast of Saigon. The 271st and 272d were added as targets for Operations GADSDEN and TUCSON. Headquarters of the 9th Viet Cong Division remained in the eastern sector of War Zone C while intelligence indicated the 101st North Vietnamese Army Regiment, now listed as subordinate to the 9th Division, had moved north to the vicinity of An Loc and Loc Ninh. This new and significant information on the location of enemy units resulted in a shift in the area of primary interest from the eastern to the west central section of War Zone C. The target of major interest became the COSVN Headquarters elements.

# JUNCTION CITY

As D-day for JUNCTION CITY approached, II Field Force intelligence analysts provided these conclusions about the enemy:



## Junction City

In view of the enemy's recent setbacks in Operation Cedar Falls, and in Tay Ninh Province (ATTLEBORO), the political rejection of the VC by the populace in the national elections (September 1966), and his failure to achieve a major significant victory, the VC will increase guerrilla warfare and terrorism in an effort to wear down and tire the Free World Forces employed in Vietnam. The enemy will use his main forces, when ready, to attack targets that represent significant psychological victories at a minimum risk to his own forces. The intelligence report listed the following probable enemy courses of action:

1. Intensify guerrilla warfare, acts of terrorism, harassment, propaganda and interdiction of lines of communication.
2. Conduct less than Regimental size attacks against isolated forces and installations.
3. Withdraw from main US combat units if he considers the situation unsuitable for a decisive victory.
4. Attack selected targets with forces of regimental strength at a time and place of his own choosing.
5. Continue to secure his base areas and lines of communication.

Events over the next two months would validate these predictions.

The operational area for Junction City, War Zone C, is generally defined as the 80 x 50 kilometer area bounded on the west and north by Cambodia, on the east by Highway 13, and on the south by an east-west line drawn through Ben Cat and Tay Ninh and extending to



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the Cambodian border. The terrain in the northern and eastern portions rises to approximately 150 meters while the southern and western portions range in elevation from 5 to 50 meters. The generally flat, marshy land in the west changes to gently rolling terrain, finally becoming irregular near the eastern province boundary. The predominant land feature in the area is the 987 meter high Nui Ba Den. Two major rivers drain the area: the Vam Co Dong on the west and the Saigon on the east; neither is fordable. Numerous small streams are found in the eastern portion of War Zone C, the principal ones having steep banks and muddy bottoms.

In the south, trafficability in the area of interest varied from good in the rubber plantations to difficult in marshy areas. In the north, particularly the northeast, movement was difficult because of the heavy forests and dense undergrowth and bamboo but improved in the north and western portions of the province because of the relatively thin forests and scattered open areas.

The ground was expected to be relatively dry during most of the operation. For all practical purposes, at the time JUNCTION CITY was initiated all significant bridges in the operational area had been destroyed, although footbridges had been constructed by the enemy on many of the trails that crisscrossed the area.

At the beginning of JUNCTION CITY the skies over the operational area would be clear, with little precipitation. Later, some rain and cloudiness would occur with patchy early morning fog, limiting visibility in some instances to one mile. The fog generally would dissipate by midmorning. Temperatures would range from a high of 95° to a low of 59°.

Because of the vast area to be covered, the difficult terrain, the enemy anticipated, the number and types of units involved, and the diversity in operations, the planning for JUNCTION CITY was extensive and complex. The mission assigned the planners of II Field Force, Vietnam, read:

- a. Phase I-On order, II FFORCEV in coordination and cooperation with the m ARVN corps conducts a major offensive into War Zone C (northern Tay Ninh Province) to destroy COSVN and VC/NVA forces and installations.



# JUNCTION CITY

b. Phase II-On order, II FFFORCEV conducts coordinated airmobile and ground assaults in eastern War Zone C to destroy COSVN and VC/NVA forces and installations.

As originally planned, JUNCTION CITY was to have had only two phases; however, because of the success achieved, Phase III would later be initiated. Its mission: *"Continued search and destroy operations north of Highway 247, secure Highway 26 south from Tay Ninh to the junction of Route 239 and secure the towns of Tay Ninh and Suoi Da."*



## Junction City

Initially two South Vietnamese Regiments were to have participated; however, by January 1967 it was evident that this number was too ambitious and it was reduced to four Battalions. In addition, the 1st Brigade of the US 101st Airborne Division was not made available.

As envisioned by II Field Force, preliminary operations GADSDEN and TUCSON, jumping off on 2 and 14 February respectively, would position forces and materiel on the western and eastern extremities of the area of operations. Phase I of JUNCTION CITY would commence on 22 February with five US Brigades forming a horseshoe shaped cordon in the western half of War Zone C. The 25th Infantry Division would block on the west along the Cambodian border; on the north, along the border, and on the east along Provincial Route 4, would be the 1st Infantry Division with the **173d Airborne Brigade** attached. On D plus 1 a Brigade of the 25th Division and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (attached to the 25th), which had positioned themselves on the southern edge of the horseshoe the previous day, would attack north into the horseshoe.



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The horseshoe forces would conduct search and destroy operations in their areas. Simultaneous with the detailed and thorough search, a Special Forces and Civilian Irregular Defense Group camp near Prek Klok would be established for future interdiction of enemy supply and infiltration routes in War Zone C. An airstrip capable of handling C-130's would be constructed at the camp. A second similar airfield would be constructed in the vicinity of Katum. During the operation, particular attention was to be devoted to searching suspected locations of the political and military elements of the Central Office of South Vietnam. A thorough interrogation of all persons apprehended was to be conducted

During Phase II, II Field Force elements would focus their attention on the eastern portion of War Zone C, conducting search and destroy operations against COSVN, Viet Cong, and North Vietnamese forces and installations. The Saigon River was to be bridged at its intersection with Route 246 west of An Loc. At that site a Special Forces and Civilian Irregular Defense Group camp with an airstrip for C-130's was to be built.

In Phase III, Junction City would be reduced to a Brigade-size operation in the vicinity of Tay Ninh city in the southern portion of War Zone C. The operational control for this phase would be passed from II Field Force to the 25th Infantry Division.

Operation JUNCTION CITY would demonstrate the ability of American forces to enter areas which had been Viet Cong sanctuaries to conduct successful search and destroy missions and construct facilities in these strongholds. In addition, in the weeks forthcoming each of the four enemy regiments under the 9th Viet Cong Division would be met and defeated.

### PHASE I - THE HORSESHOE IS PITCHED

Phase I of Operation JUNCTION CITY was conducted from 22 February to 17 March and involved forces of the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions and some South Vietnamese forces deployed in the shape of a giant horseshoe. 1st Division elements constituted the east and north portion of the inverted U; the 25th was assigned the northwestern and western portions and the mission of driving a force north through the open end. With a perimeter of approximately 60 kilometers, the western leg of the horseshoe extended north of Tay Ninh along Route 22 (with major concentration north of Route 247) to the junction at Route 246 on the Cambodian border.

# JUNCTION CITY

The top of the horseshoe was generally delineated by Route 246 (which in that area was nothing more than a cart trail) parallel to the Cambodian border on the north. The east portion continued along Route 246 to the vicinity of Katum and from there south along Route 4 to south of Prek Klok. It was through the southern opening of the horseshoe that 25th Division forces initiated their drive north to conduct search and destroy operations. To the west, south, and east of the horseshoe sweep operations were to be conducted by the units forming it.

The controlling Headquarters for Junction City was II Field Force, Vietnam, under General Seaman. For the first time in the war, II Field Force Headquarters displaced to the field and opened a Tactical Command Post at Dau Tieng on D-day.

## COMBAT FORCES

During Phase I of Operation JUNCTION CITY the Big Red One, commanded by Major General John H. Hay, Jr., employed two of its three organic Brigades (the other remained active on Revolutionary Development operations) and was augmented by the **173d Airborne Brigade** and two South Vietnamese units named Task Force WALLACE the 35th Ranger Battalion and one troop from the 2d Battalion, 1st Cavalry Regiment. Later in Phase I the 1st Brigade, 9th Infantry Division, joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Division to keep Route 13 open from Lai Khe to Quan Loi. The Division's missions for Phase I were to conduct air and ground assaults to block enemy escape routes in the northern and eastern portion of the area of operations; conduct search and destroy operations; secure lines of communication from Tay Ninh to Katum (consisting of approximately 45 kilometers of Route 4); and provide security during Engineer construction at Katum and Prek Klok. On D-day the 1st Brigade (Colonel Caldwell), comprised of four Infantry



**General Deane**



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Battalions and Task Force WALLACE was to assault by air and establish blocking positions in the northern portion of the area. The **173d Airborne Brigade (Brigadier General John R. Deane, Jr.)** with three Battalions was directed to assault by air on D-day and establish blocking positions from Katum to the 1st Brigade area; this put the **173d** on the northeast portion of the horseshoe. Responsibility for the eastern leg of the horseshoe was assigned to the Division's 3d Brigade (Colonel Marks). His Brigade included one Mechanized Battalion, an Infantry Battalion, and the Cavalry Squadron with one Tank Company attached. This Brigade was to attack north on D-day along Route 4, establish fire support bases, and link up with the **173d Airborne Brigade**. Each of the Brigades had at least one Artillery Battalion in direct support.

During Phase I of Operation JUNCTION CITY the 25th Infantry Division (Tropic Lightning) under General Weyand employed its organic 2d Brigade with other units under Division control, namely, the 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division; 196th Light Infantry Brigade; 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment; and two South Vietnamese units, the 1st and 5th Marine Battalions (Task Force ALPHA). The 1st Brigade, 9th Infantry Division, part of the Division's task organization, was placed under the operational control of the 1st Infantry Division later in Phase I.

Under the 25th Division's plan, the 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division (Colonel Garth), would block and continue to conduct search and destroy operations from the area which it held at the close of Operation GARDEN on 21 February in the far western portion of the operational area. Assigned to the Brigade were one Mechanized Infantry Battalion, two Infantry Battalions, one Troop of Cavalry, and a Company of Armor. Operating closely with Garth's Brigade was the 196th Light Infantry Brigade (General Knowles), which on D-day would conduct Airmobile Assaults with its three Infantry Battalions along the northwest portion of the horseshoe to establish blocking positions and seal enemy escape routes into Cambodia. The positions of the 25th Division units would thus form the broad left leg of the horseshoe and would complete, along with the 1st Division, the seal of the operational area. The Division's 2d Brigade (Colonel Marvin D. Fuller) and Colonel William W. Cobb's 11th Armored Cavalry constituted the hammer forces that on D plus 1 would drive north into the horseshoe to locate and destroy enemy forces and facilities.



# JUNCTION CITY

Both the Tropic Lightning Division and the Big Red One started deploying forces for JUNCTION CITY on 18 February (D minus 4) and were ready to roll by D-day.

## D-DAY, 22 FEBRUARY 1967

On D-day the operation order was implemented as envisaged. Nine Infantry Battalions conducted Air Assaults (eight Airmobile, one Parachute Drop by the **173d Airborne Brigade**) to cordon the entire northern portion of the objective area. At the same time, the 25th Infantry Division adjusted its one Brigade in blocking positions on the west while positioning additional units for the attack into the horseshoe; the 3d Brigade, 1st Division, pushed north up Provincial Route 4 to complete the horseshoe.

The 1st Brigade, 1st Division, initiated the airmobile operations from Minh Thanh with one Battalion making an Airmobile Assault at 0813 into a landing zone north of Route 246 and only 1,600 meters south of the Cambodian border. Sporadic small arms fire was encountered from the southern portion of the LZ; however, the zone was quickly secured. The other two Battalions of the Brigade Air Assaulted into LZ's to the west of the first Battalion at 1130 and 1630. They were unopposed.

Earlier that day, 845 Paratroopers had boarded sixteen C-130's at Bien Hoa and at 0900 the **173d Airborne Brigade** began its Combat Jump. As the aircraft approached the drop zone (three kilometers north of Katum), the jumpmaster's voice rose above the roar of the C-130: "*Stand in the Door!*" **General Deane** moved to the right door; taking his position in the left door was **Lt Colonel Robert**

**H. Sigholtz**, Commander of the Airborne Task Force composed of the **2d Battalion, 503d Infantry; A Battery, 3d Battalion, 319th Artillery; and elements of the 173d Brigade Headquarters and Headquarters Company**. As the green light flashed "*Go!*" **General Deane** jumped, leading the first U.S. Combat Parachute Assault since the Korean War. There was no enemy contact during the jump. (**Chief Warrant Officer Howard P. Melvin** of San Francisco, California, then 53 years old, was participating in his fifth Combat Parachute Assault over a period of some twenty years. His previous four were Gela, Sicily, Salerno and St Mere Eglise).



Col. Bob Sigholtz



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When I landed at the **173d Brigade Command Post** in late morning to make final coordination for the linkup of the 3d Brigade column, I was interested to observe both the sense of euphoria and the lassitude which obviously had enveloped many of the jumpers I saw. The former feeling, I understand, resulted from the jump having been most successful; the latter, I suspect, came as the aftermath to the severe jolt of adrenalin most of the jumpers must have received as they contemplated their first jump in months being made into a potentially "*Hot*" drop zone located only four kilometers from the Cambodian border. Small wonder their glands were functioning!

By 0920 all Companies had established Command Posts. A heavy equipment drop commenced at 0925 and continued periodically throughout the day. By 1230 the Battalion Command Post was established. There had been only eleven minor injuries as a result of the jump.

Almost simultaneously with the **173d Airborne Assault**, the 196th Light Infantry Brigade began Airmobile Assaults in the vicinity of Route 246 along the northwestern portion of the horseshoe. By 1350 all three Battalions had completed their assaults unopposed.

The northeastern portion of the inverted U was completed by the two other Battalions of the **173d Airborne Brigade**, then at Quan Loi, making their Airmobile Assaults into four landing zones, three north and one south of Katum.

Ground elements for the operation had started rolling at 0630 on D-Day as the 1st Division's 3d Brigade entered the action. While an Infantry Battalion remained in Suoi Da, other forces of the Brigade attacked north along Route 4 from Artillery Base I at the "French Fort." Following the attacking force, the Mechanized Infantry Battalion moved into defensive positions at planned artillery bases near Prek Klok and three kilometers to the north.

Artillery for the bases were in the column and was dropped off as the column came to the appropriate fire base. In the column was also the Armored Company of the **173d Airborne Brigade** which would revert to the Brigade's control upon linkup. Although there were temporary delays in getting the column pushed through caused by mines, road repair, and the need to bridge some streams, the linkup with elements of the **173d** just south of Katum occurred at 1500.

# JUNCTION CITY

The Division Engineer elements in the column had had a busy day in making Route 4 passable and in launching three AVLB's over streams.



The 2d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment moved to positions near the open (south) end of the horseshoe and poised for their attack to the north in the morning. The remaining Brigade under the 25th Division continued search and destroy operations east of Route 22 and north of Trai Bi. Eighteen Battalions, organized into six Brigades, and one Cavalry Regiment were now deployed around the horseshoe. Thirteen mutually supporting fire support bases also ringed the operational area.

Throughout the day enemy contact and casualties remained light with 4 US killed and 23 wounded; enemy losses were unknown. The Air Force had also had a busy day, having flown 216 preplanned strike sorties in direct support of the ground operation.

.....On 26 February a Company of the 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, west of Route 22, engaged the 3d Battalion, 271st Viet Cong Regiment, in the latter's base camp. The Company was completely surrounded and another Company came to its relief. Eleven enemy were killed with US losses 5 killed and 19 wounded.

Two days later the **173d Airborne Brigade** northeast of Katum found what appeared to be the public information



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office for psychological propaganda of the Central Office of South Vietnam. In an underground photographic laboratory the Paratroopers found 120 reels of motion picture film, numerous still photographs, and pictures and busts of Communist leaders. This discovery proved to be one of the major intelligence coups of the war.

.....On 3 March a Company of the **173d Airborne Brigade** made contact with an estimated enemy Company east of Katum. In an intensive fire fight in which the enemy used small arms, automatic weapons, M79 grenade launchers, and which lasted only thirty minutes, the enemy lost 39 killed and the US 20 killed and 28 wounded.

On 6 March the **173d Airborne Brigade** made Airmobile Assaults with its three Battalions into three landing zones located one, three, and six kilometers south of Bo Tuc (on Route 246 southeast of Katum). The Brigade was searching for the COSVN military intelligence bureau reported to be located south of Bo Tuc. During the next seven days of search and destroy the Battalions made sporadic contact, killing about 40 Viet Cong.

The Phase I operations started to wind down beginning 12 March. On the 14th the 3d Brigade, 1st Division, turned over responsibility for the security of Prek Klok Special Forces Camp, the old French Fort, and Route 4 to the 196th Light Infantry Brigade. Colonel Marks commenced repositioning his forces and prepared to relieve the Division's 2d Brigade of its Revolutionary Development mission so the Brigade could participate in JUNCTION CITY II. On 15 March the **173d Airborne Brigade** left the operational area and reverted to control of II Field Force; on the same day the 11th Cavalry terminated its participation. At midnight on 17 March Phase I officially came to a close. The enemy had lost 835 killed, 15 captured, 264 weapons, and enormous quantities of supplies and equipment.

.....The **173d Airborne Brigade** was not initially included among the forces to participate in Phase II; however, as soon as Phase I ended the 1st Division made representations to II Field Force for another Brigade. Consequently, the **173d Airborne Brigade** was attached to the Big Red One on 20 March with the mission of securing the staging area at Minh Thanh and conducting Airmobile Assaults into eastern War Zone C beginning 23 March.





# JUNCTION CITY

On the 22d the **173d Airborne Brigade** established FSB PARRY near Route 244, seven kilometers south of the junction of Routes 244 and 246. From 23 March until 7 April, the Brigade conducted Airmobile Assaults and search and destroy operations southwest, west, and northwest of PARRY; from 9-11 April the Brigade did the same to the south and southeast of that base. On 13 April Phase II terminated for the **173d Airborne Brigade** and it returned to Bien Hoa.



*Hurry up and wait at Bien Hoa AFB.* By Jerry Hassler

.....The mission of the Big Red One for Phase II was to continue security of the bridge site and Routes 246 and 244 within the zone; to construct and secure the Special Forces and Civilian Irregular Defense Group camp and airfield; and to place two Brigades astride the two enemy routes of communication in eastern War Zone C and have them conduct search and destroy operations. For resupply purposes it was also necessary to keep Route 13 open from Lai Khe to Quan Loi most of the period.

In addition to its organic 1st and 2d Brigades (Colonels Caldwell and Grimsley), the 1st Division would have available the 1st Brigade, 9th Division (Colonel Maurice W. Kendall who was succeeded by Colonel Donald A. Seibert during the period), which would remain attached until 29 March; the **173d Airborne Brigade (General Deane)**, attached from 20 March to 13 April; and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (Colonel Cobb), attached from 1 through 15 April. One of the Squadrons of the 11th would be attached for the entire phase.



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.....As the **173d Airborne Brigade** found, it made contact of some type, each of the 22 days it participated in Phase II, but the contacts were with small groups, never larger than Platoon size. By the last week of this phase the enemy became increasingly more difficult to find. But this failure to dig out the enemy should not

detract from the success attained by friendly forces as they continued to find and destroy installations and to discover vast amounts of supplies and equipment. All of this tended to nullify the years of labor expended by the enemy in building, digging, and tunneling and in accumulating, hauling, and hoarding supplies.

.....The most lasting impression I have of these two operations, in fact of all my Vietnam tour, is of the magnificent American Soldier who made them possible. Shortly after my return from Vietnam I had occasion to express my feelings about that Soldier

in a speech given on 19 October 1967 at the Yorktown Day celebration in Yorktown, Virginia. I find those words still appropriate to describe the Soldier who fought in CEDAR FALLS and JUNCTION CITY.

*Who is this American Soldier in Vietnam? He is a boy, about 19 years of age, armed and in uniform, who did not choose to be there. He would have preferred to remain at home, comfortable, enjoying the many attractions and conveniences available to Americans; secure in the company of his family, his friends, his sweetheart. Thoughts of those persons at home creep into his mind, even at times when he is trying to force himself to concentrate on the battle at hand. And in the jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam, this smooth cheeked, bright eyed, enthusiastic boy becomes a man. He lives with fear, he lives with carnage, he lives with death. Burned forever into his memory are ugly sights and awesome sorrows which at times are almost too much for a boy, just turned man, to bear.*

*He kills the enemy but questions the waste and folly of war. He sees his buddy killed beside him and asks why? Why was it his turn to go today and not mine? He exults in the victories won by his outfit, but he weeps with grief while attending the memorial services for his buddies who fell in the fight. He understands the cause for which he is fighting; his enthusiasm, dedication and motivation are contagious. He looks with disgust at reports of those back home who question his being and fighting in the far off place. He dismisses such reports with a shrug, remarking 'Those guys back home just don't know what it's all about.'*

*You will see your Soldier in Vietnam digging his defensive fighting position in a driving monsoon rain, up to his waist in water and mud, stopping occasionally to bail out the position with his helmet. Or you will find him combating the heat and misery of the jungle floor. But whatever the conditions, he will greet you with a big smile and reassure you: 'Don't worry about this position; we'll be ready; the Viet Cong will never take it.'*

*That's your Soldier in Vietnam today, a man, who knowing he has 12 months to serve in that country, has resolved to do an outstanding job for that period. To match his spirit, his courage, his determination, enthusiasm and devotion with a comparable level of decisiveness, judgment, imagination and know-how is a challenge to every leader in Vietnam.*

To read the entire report, access this web site:  
Original Source: [US Army, Center for Military History @http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/1](http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/1)

## A SKY SOLDIER REMEMBERS JUNCTION CITY

**30 Oct 66:** Made my first jump in Nam today, Sunday, at 8 a.m. out of a C-130 at Tuc Duc, a little ways from Bien Hoa off Highway One. Was the 5th man out the left door in the first chalk of the first lift. Believe we're scheduled to jump again the 7th.



**Recon Jerry**

**21 Feb 67:** We're restricted to camp as the jump is on and secrecy is the name of the game. Spent most of the evening making sure our gear was packed tight.

**22 Feb 67:** Early morning, still dark, we loaded on the cattle cars for the short ride to Bien Hoa airfield. Arriving at the airbase, we could see the huge, black silhouettes of dozens of C-130's awaiting our arrival.



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The reality of the pending combat jump settled us and there was hardly any conversation as each man kept to his own thoughts.

### Combat Jump 22 Feb 67:

Operation Junction City would strike at the heart of War Zone C to destroy the VC Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) and its 9th Division.

Planning actually began in May 66 at MACV. **Gen.**

**Westmoreland** selected **Lt. Gen. Jonathan O. Seaman II**, Field Forces, Vietnam commander to plan a joint, multi-divisional attack, including a paratroop assault on War Zone C for early January 67. War Zone C, named by the French, had been a guerilla stronghold since WW II and extended from the Cambodian border to within 30 miles of

Saigon. The infamous "Iron Triangle" anchored its southeast corner and pointed directly at the capitol, Saigon. The Triangle lay just 15 miles from the capital and served as staging area, logistic center and headquarters for the VC Military Region IV. Seaman conceived Junction City as a two-phase operation to drop a 60-kilometer horseshoe-shaped cordon around the western half of War Zone C.

Blocking battalions would enable other battalions to sweep north to crush the enemy against the cordon.



**LTC Bob Sigholtz and his troops**

It would take 22 battalions to control the ground with air support to deliver, protect and sustain the ground action for more than two months. During the planning stage, Gen. Seaman reasoned that an attack on War Zone C without first neutralizing the Iron Triangle would diminish its effectiveness. Thus, he recommended that Westmoreland delay Junction City so a preliminary operation, Cedar Falls, could clear the Triangle and establish forward camps and airfields to support the major assault. The plan was approved and Junction City was rescheduled to begin 22 February.



**WETSU!**





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The key to the operation was air support and the C-130 Hercules. A reinforced infantry battalion was to parachute assault to secure blocking positions near the Cambodian border. Gen. Seaman selected the **173rd Airborne Brigade's 2nd Battalion, 503d Airborne Infantry**. Seventh Air Force selected the 834th Air Division for the jump. Twenty-six C-130s would carry the battalion and its equipment to the drop zone. To maintain operational security, the aircraft would not converge at the staging base until eight hours before takeoff. In addition, a false DZ was used throughout the planning to protect the actual location. Less than 10 commanders and senior staffers knew the real DZ. The flights would approach the target at a medium altitude before descending to 1,000 feet for the drop.



### **Junction City DZ.** By Jerry Hassler

In October 66, the 173rd was directed to prepare a battalion-size task force for a possible parachute operation. The **2/503rd** was selected as the key element of the task force and moved to the South Vietnamese Infantry School at Thu Duc to begin training. Joining the battalion was Battery A, 3rd Battalion, 319th Artillery with six 105mm howitzers; an engineer squad; an MP squad; a radio research team; an interrogation team; elements of the 173d HQ as a brigade tactical command post, and combat support elements from the brigade's support battalion.

**11 Feb 67:** The official word came down: The task force would make a combat jump. Stressing surprise and speed, the operation called for the task force to parachute assault into War Zone C some 5 kilometers south of the Cambodian border to secure the brigade headquarters, a heavy equipment drop zone, the fire support base and to block the enemy's escape routes into Cambodia. Once set, the other two battalions of the brigade would make a heliborne assault into an adjacent area to join the task force in blocking escape routes.

**18 Feb 67:** Ten out-of-country C-130s landed at Tan Son Nhut and were spotted as inconspicuously as possible around the airfield. **Lt. Gen. Joseph H. Moore**, Seventh AF commander, met the pilots, briefed them on the operation and concentrated on the jump. To maintain security, he told the pilots the DZ was near An Loc, 15 miles to the east of the actual DZ. Aircraft would arrive over the DZ from the southwest every 26 seconds. Because of the short interval, each aircraft would make two passes, dropping half its 60-man contingent on each pass. A second flight of C-130s would drop the equipment.

**20 Feb 67:** The final coordination was effected and that night the order was published. The next morning, men and equipment of the task force were marshalled at and restricted to Camp Zinn, the battalion's base camp. Aerial photos were distributed, but without coordinates, for secrecy. Out on the airfield, the heavy equipment and supplies needed to support the task force were being rigged for heavy drop. This included the 105mm howitzers and 2,400 rounds of 105mm ammo, four 3/4-ton trucks, 5 1/4-ton trucks, one 1/4-ton trailer, six M274 mule vehicles, four 4.2 mortars, 416 5-gal water cans, 18,000 sandbags, 746 cases of C-rations, 115,700 rounds of 7.62 ammo, 1,440 grenades for the M79 40mm grenade launchers, 1,000 fragmentation hand grenades and 500 smoke grenades.

**21 Feb 67:** The task force S4 drew all of the air items needed for the operation; these were issued from a central location and fitted that afternoon. For the remainder of the day, refresher training was given with troops wearing the equipment. The problem manifesting was simplified by using the "shoe tag" rather than the manifest sheet. The shoe tag consisted of four equal sections and each section contained the man's name, rank, serial number and chalk number. The jumpmasters received the first part of the tag, the loadmasters the second, the battalion S1 the third and the troops part four.

(continued....)



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### CATHERINE LEROY



**22 Feb 67:** Early morning, just after midnight, the planes began to assemble. First to arrive were the 10 C-130Bs from Tan Son Nhut, followed by four C-130Es from Nha Trang, three more C-130Bs from Tan Son Nhut and nine from Cam Ranh Bay. The planes were parked at the west end of the runway by their crews who gathered at the base theatre for final briefing. **Generals Moore and Deane** told the crews the real destination at this time - a 1,000x6,000 foot series of dried rice paddies called DZ Charlie location just north of Katum on Highway 246.

After loading up the paratroopers, beginning at 0825, the entire flight was airborne in three minutes and headed toward an assembly area north of Tay Ninh. Thirty minutes later Moore's C-130 slowed to 125 knots and began its descent. Still five minutes out, the cockpit crew watched forward air controllers (FACs) in single-engine Cessna O-1 bird dogs choreograph the finale of four hours of preparation strikes on DZ Charlie and five other helicopter landing zones. The strikes were conducted by TacAir and Guam-based B-52s.



#### The DZ at Junction City. By Jerry Hassler

At 0900 the ready-light in the rear turned green and the jumpmaster gave the "Go" signal. The DZ was 36 seconds long and would require two passes to put all personnel into the DZ. Each C-130 carried 60 men and was cross-loaded to put the men in each company on the DZ in the approximate area of their assigned sectors. Nine minutes later the lead plane began its second drop. As each aircraft finished its run, it regained altitude and returned to Tan Son Nhut or Cam Ranh Bay. In less than 20 minutes, the entire force of 780 paratroopers was on the ground. Colored smoke, colored helium balloons and colored tape on each man's helmet assisted the task force in rapidly assembling on the ground and identified each man with his unit and sector. It was imperative all units react rapidly in clearing and securing the DZ for the airdrop supplies and heavy equipment which was scheduled to commence 30 minutes after the first man exited the aircraft. By 1000 hours the DZ was secure and the C-130s had returned to Bien Hoa to reload for a second equipment drop at 1300.

Catherine Leroy, born 1944 in Paris during the war, died 2006 in Santa Monica, CA. She was a French photojournalist and war photographer with covers for both *Life* and *Look* magazines. She was brought up in a convent in Paris, coveted the images of famous photographers and at the age of 21, booked a one-way ticket to Saigon through Laos, arriving with no experience, a Leica camera, \$100. in cash, and no English except for three words, all unprintable. She met Horst Faas, *Associated Press* Bureau Chief, and persuaded him to offer her a job at \$15 a picture. She learned English traveling with the troops in the boonies and as a result, had a very foul mouth, believing it to be the way English was spoken. She was a diminutive five feet tall, packed a six-pack of Beaujolais wine in cans, a couple of C-rations and her poncho liner, living with the troops she was photographing.



(continued....)



A year later, she became the first photojournalist (male or female) to make a combat parachute jump, joining the 2/503 in Operation Junction City. Two weeks after the battle for Hill 881 near Khe Sanh, she was wounded by mortar and carried shrapnel the rest of her life. During the Tet Offensive in 1968, she was captured in Hue by the NVA and talked her way out of captivity becoming

the first to take pictures of the VC behind enemy lines.



Her lengthy photojournalism career took her to Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iran and Lebanon and many other crisis areas. In her latter years, Vietnam became an obsession with her in preserving the works of photographers who had covered the war. She published *Under Fire: Vietnam War Photographs*.

Story & photos submitted by  
**Jerry Hassler, Recon**  
**2/503d '66-'67**  
**Combat Parachute Jumper**

## BEGINNER'S LUCK AT OPERATION JUNCTION CITY 1

Wednesday, February 22, 1967 -  
Friday (TGIF), March 17, 1967

**By: Bill Nicholls, A/2/503d**

The morale at Camp Zinn was high with troops returning from the last operation, looking forward to getting their gear in order and some R&R. I had just arrived to the 2/503d and was assigned to A Company. This was about eight days before the combat jump, but no one there seemed to have a sense of what was about to occur.

Soldiers were confident and relaxed about future missions knowing they had **Captain Ed Carns** at the helm. I later referred to him as "*The Skipper*."



**Bill Nicholls**



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**"A" Company CO, Capt. Ed Carns, briefing his No Deros Alpha troops for Junction City II in 1967.**

Photo by Bill Nicholls

During this time, I was approached by an E-5, although I cannot remember his name. I do remember his face. He was the Company FO, about to DEROS. I have no idea why he chose me, but he convinced me I would make a good FO. Since I was an 11C with weapons training, I said yes. Besides, I'm sure no one else wanted the job!

Every day we climbed the watchtower of the berm and called in 81MM white phosphorus rounds. This round of choice is to allow visual impact to complement the audio part of the training. To hone my skills, we did this each morning and afternoon. After three days it was time to put on the blindfold to see (pun intended) how I would do. The logic is that during the majority of daytime fire missions, one could not see where the mortar rounds landed due to vegetation. At night you would not see where they landed when adjusting them into ambush position.

Before I knew it, we were at Bien Hoa Airbase loading up in C-130's for the combat jump. After hitting the silk, the rest of the day was spent with the majority of effort recovering 105 ammo crates scattered after the heavy drop.

During that day, we were harassed by sniper fire. **Col. Sigholtz** ordered a bubble chopper and borrowed a soldier's M79 to "*deal with the snipers*." About a half-hour later, the chopper returned with 2-3 bullet holes in the canopy. Seems the Col. found the snipers! As he was getting out of the chopper, he mentioned he wanted to stay out there longer but felt "*The pilot needed to come back to change his underwear*."

(continued....)

As dusk set in, I was called to a part of the perimeter to coordinate a fire mission. Seems Charley had located some of the 105 ammo outside the perimeter and was helping himself. On the way, I heard a loud crack over my head and gunfire in the distance. I looked around and I was the only target, so I assumed he was shooting at me. Seems the sniper was still out there and this was the first time of many that I would be shot at.

I approached the perimeter with the Starlight scope and saw two Vietcong about 300 meters out. I went over to the mortar and did something unconventional; I held the compass over the barrel and shot an azimuth to a reference on the tree line in the distance. Conferring with the expertise of the fire direction controller, **Bobby Gerber**, we were set. The challenging part for me was accurately estimating the distance to minimize adjusting fire until hitting the target. I got back up to the perimeter, took the Starlight and radioed to fire one round. In the light of the explosion I saw two Vietcong cartwheel in the air.



**Bob Gerber**



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After watching for 10 minutes and seeing no other enemy activity, I called the mission complete. Beginner's luck? Absolutely! I would go on 17 ambushes during Junction City 1, and was honored to be awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

A greater honor was to have contributed with my fellow Sky Soldiers to another phase of Airborne History.

**Bill Nicholls, A/2/503d  
Combat Parachute Jumper**



**Junction City DZ photo.** By Jerry Hassler



GENERAL JOHN DEANE'S  
LETTER TO THE TROOPS



2/503d VIETNAM  
NEWSLETTER

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

AVBE-SA

18 March 1967

SUBJECT: Letter of Appreciation

TO: All Troopers  
173d Airborne Brigade (Separate)  
APO San Francisco 96250

1. During Operation Junction City conducted in War Zone C, you again distinguished yourselves by an outstanding performance. The entire operation was a tremendous success as every assigned mission was accomplished in a first class manner. Credit, as in the past, belongs to you.

2. Operation Junction City marked another first for the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate), as members of the Brigade conducted the first combat jump by US Forces in Vietnam. The jump and subsequent heliborne assaults on 22 February 1967 demonstrated your professionalism at its best. During the next 22 days the 173d became the spearhead of the largest allied offensive conducted to date in the Republic of Vietnam. As listed on the reverse side of this letter, considerable damage was inflicted by you on the Viet Cong operating in War Zone C. Of significant importance, was the number of Cong killed and captured and the complete destruction of the COSVN Public Information Office for Psychological Propaganda and a COSVN Signal site. As you know, COSVN (Central Office South Vietnam) is the supreme headquarters for the VC within the Republic of Vietnam.

3. As a result of your accomplishments, the 173d has and is continuing to receive world wide publicity and the eyes of the nation are upon us. Through your personal efforts and continued "team effort" even bigger and more significant success will be achieved by the 173d in future operations.

4. Please accept my personal appreciation for a job well done in the real AIRBORNE way. I am proud of every one of you.

JOHN R. DEANE JR.  
BRIG GEN, USA  
Commanding



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# AIRBORNE!



# ALL THE WAY!!

