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 SOUTHEAST ASIA
REPORT

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VC OFFENSIVE

in

III Corps

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1967

15 MAY 1968

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HQ PACAF

**Directorate, Tactical Evaluation
CHECO Division**

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15 May 1968

SUBJECT:

Project CHECO Report, "VC Offensive in III Corps, October-December 1967" (U)

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FOR THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

Edward C. Burtenshaw
EDWARD C. BURTENSHAW, Colonel, USAF
Chief, CHECO Division
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VC OFFENSIVE IN NORTHERN III CORPS--OCT - DEC 1967

Introduction

In late 1967, the Viet Cong (VC) waged offensive attacks against scattered outposts in Northern III Corps. These desperate assaults on allied fortified positions were thrown back, with heavy enemy losses caused by local government troops fighting in self-defense and by rapid and accurate tactical air support. This report examines the role of airpower in support of two of these beleaguered strongholds.

Northern III Corps was located in a multi-canopied forest covering rugged hills in the eastern part of Phuoc Long Province and the rolling plains of western Binh Long Province. Because the terrain did not permit rice cultivation, very few people lived there, aside from workers employed at the isolated, but sprawling, rubber plantations the French had won from the jungles. The towns grew with the plantations, and became government strongholds in a vast tropical forest, where the enemy roamed at will. (Figs. 1, 2.) Over the years, these populated islands were repeatedly attacked and sometimes temporarily overrun by the VC, but the towns remained under nominal government control. The VC winter campaign of 1967 continued this pattern.

In view of the 1968 Tet offensive, however, the battles of Northern III Corps appear to have enhanced the enemy position, by pulling allied troops out of populated areas into isolated border regions. Gen. William C. Westmoreland, MACV Commander, in a widely publicized news conference a few days after Tet, characterized the battle of Loc Ninh as one of the preludes to

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this holiday. A briefing prepared by the Directorate of Intelligence, Seventh Air Force, for presentation to CINCPACAF on 13 March 1968, emphasized the related point that the massive Tet offensive required the expansion and extension of logistic movements into South Vietnam in late 1967. According to the Directorate:^{1/}

"Movements of such a magnitude could not remain undetected, and, once detected, would be subjected to massive air interdiction. In such a situation, classical communist doctrine called for a diversion-- Loc Ninh, Bu Dop and Dak To followed; all fiercely fought; each causing substantial diversion of US and Free World Forces."

In retrospect, this hypothesis of diversion gained confirmation from the sudden disappearance of the enemy after several attacks had been mounted in early December in Northern III Corps. The disappearance was nothing new for the VC. During 1966 and 1967, when American troops reversed the military deterioration of 1965 and went on the offensive, the VC sometimes accepted and sometimes ignored the challenge of American troops in enemy sanctuaries, such as War Zone C, the Iron Triangle, and War Zone D.

Operations BIRMINGHAM, EL PASO, ATTLEBORO, and JUNCTION CITY varied in the number of enemy killed from thousands to a mere hundred; depending, in part, on whether the VC chose to stand and fight. In Northern III Corps at the end of 1967, that pattern held true again when SHENANDOAH II in Binh Long Province received official credit for 763 enemy killed. In Operations ATALLA and SAN ANGELO, the VC could not be located, whereas a month before, they had been making repeated attacks on government outposts.

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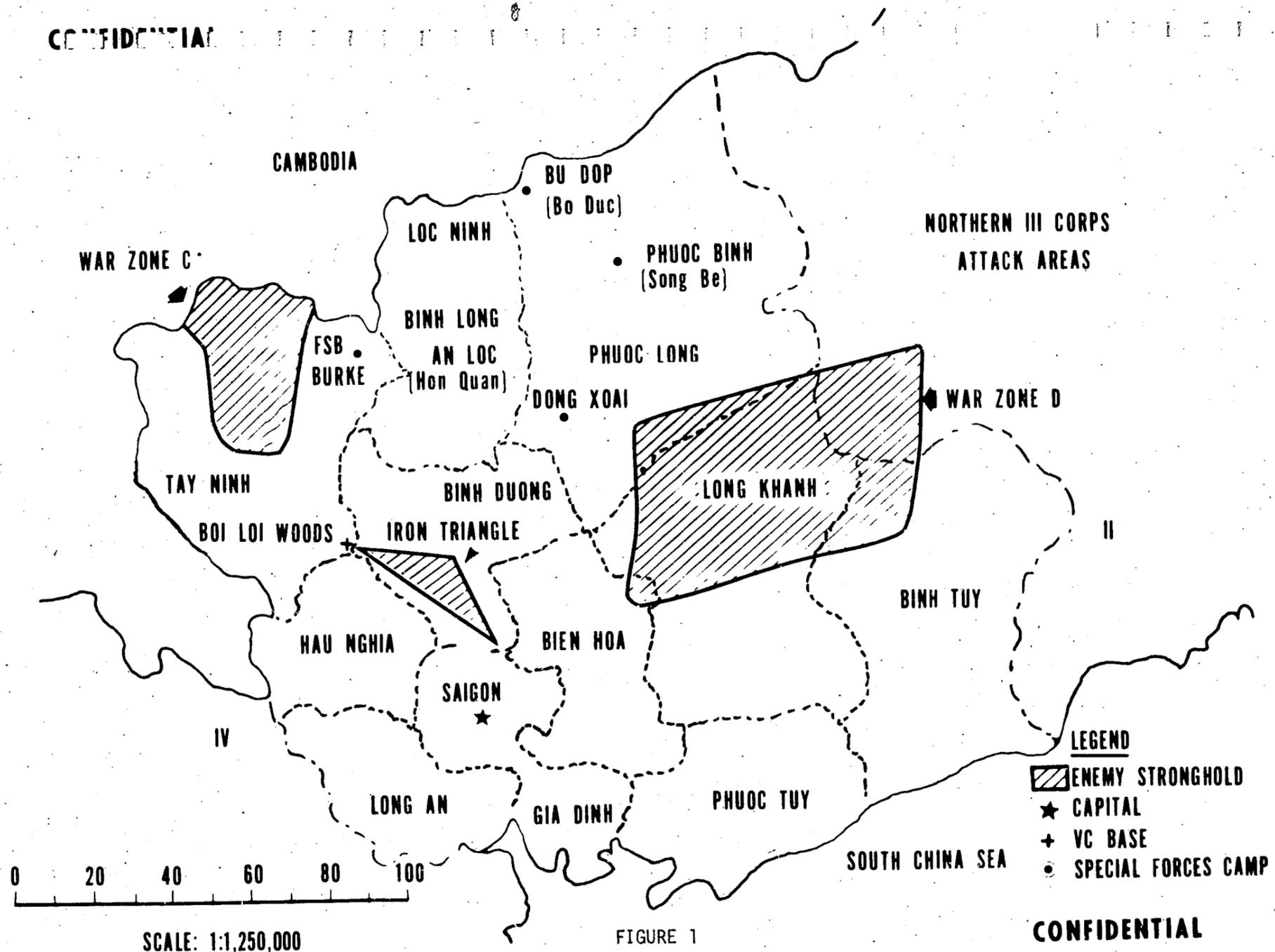


FIGURE 1

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In the battles of Loc Ninh and Bo Duc, the enemy came out of hiding to attack some isolated government strongholds, aiming for a propaganda victory to offset inauguration of the newly elected Thieu and Ky government. Even defeat had the advantage of pulling allied troops to the border, and thus hiding the VC's intention to attack Saigon and Bien Hoa during the Tet.

SHENANDOAH II

The VC offensive in Northern III Corps began prematurely for the enemy, when American troops moved into southern Binh Long Province. Operation SHENANDOAH II began on 29 September, south of Chon Thanh under the 1st Infantry Division's control. Scattered contacts occurred, but the 271st VC Regiment, which was building a staging area of base camps and food caches, would not fight and yet would not leave southern Binh Long. ^{2/} Then, like a cougar at bay, the 271st turned on its tormentors and savagely mauled two American infantry companies. (The role of air in the 17 October contact has been discussed in the 7AF CHECO study, "Ambush at XT 686576.") ^{3/}

Contacts between allied and enemy forces were minor and scattered in Northern III Corps, until the 27 October attack on an Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Battalion Headquarters, four kilometers south of Phuoc Binh. In the hours just after midnight, an estimated two or three NVA battalions attacked the ARVN outpost (YU 198045), but were repulsed by artillery, air-strikes, and helicopter light fire teams. Twelve friendlies died. In addition to a reported 134 enemy KIA, the allies captured an unusually high ratio of weapons: 54 AK-47s, six machine guns, 10 rocket launchers, and three flame throwers. ^{4/} This first major enemy assault, since early August,

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against an allied position in all III Corps, marked the beginning of an intermittent winter campaign in Northern III Corps. According to MACV Intelligence, the enemy was well fed and in good physical condition, which probably meant that the enemy would be capable of launching similar attacks on isolated friendly installations in the area, particularly against Loc Ninh, Song Be, and Bu Dop, Special Forces Camps (SFCs).^{51/} Within 24 hours, that predication became a reality, with the massive VC attack on Loc Ninh.

Loc Ninh

The actual ten-day battle for Loc Ninh combined a mixture of enemy and allied offensive maneuvers, VC assaults against government defenders, and SHENANDOAH II operations in the rubber trees surrounding the town. The ten days of fighting revealed little in the way of new lessons learned for air. However, the battles reaffirmed the success of integrated tactical airpower, light fire teams, Spooky gunships, and artillery. In the immediacy of battle, each took its place in the awesome mix of firepower supporting allied troops in contact.

Loc Ninh lay in northern Binh Long Province, at the end of the abandoned railroad that once served the large rubber plantation around the town. South of the town lay the 3,500-foot airstrip and two fortified camps representing government control of the area. (Fig. 3.) At the northwest end of the airstrip, the district headquarters compound (also called the subsector compound), had two companies of Regional Forces, a platoon of Popular Forces, and two American advisers. Less than a kilometer to the south, the

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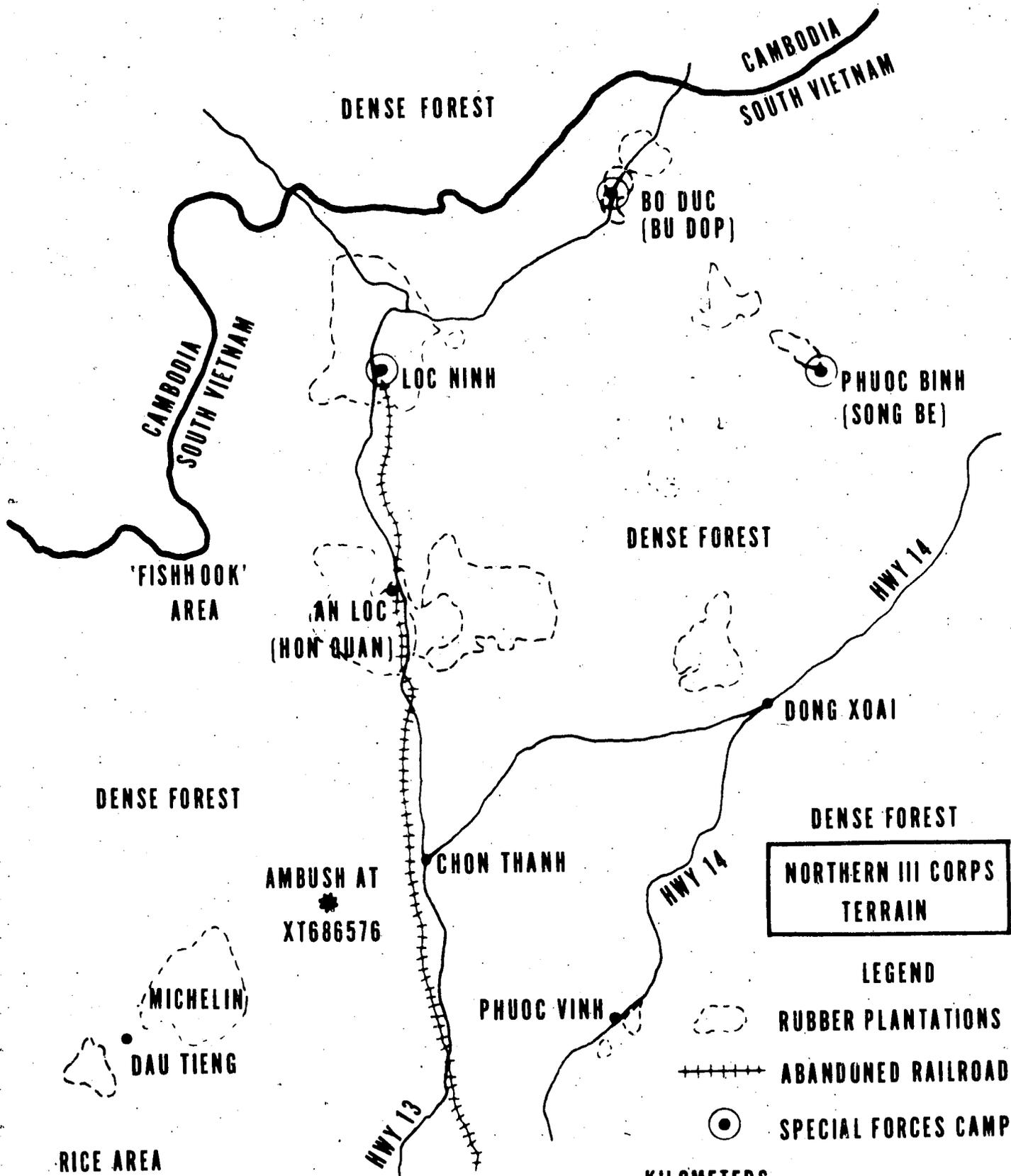


FIGURE 2
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better fortified Special Forces Camp had three Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) companies--350 men--and six American Special Forces advisers.^{6/}

These isolated local forces relayed any requests for tactical air support, including emergency airlift, through the Tactical Air Control Parties (TACPs) assigned to ARVN and U.S. Infantry divisions in the area. In all III Corps, there were essentially 26 field locations from which the Forward Air Controllers (FACs) operated, although combat needs sometimes required the movement of FACs to new airstrips. In Northern III Corps, the FACs that flew for the 5th ARVN Division at Hon Quan and Phuoc Binh used the call sign ROD. The Hussy FACs flew for the 1st Infantry Division (U.S.), whose 1st Brigade was at Phuoc Vinh in northeastern Binh Duong Province.

Enemy units making the attacks on Loc Ninh were from the 9th VC Division. The 273d Regiment made the main assaults with artillery support from the 84A NVA Artillery Regiment. Elements of the 272d and 273d and the 165th NVA Regiments deployed around the town, and battled with American forces that moved into the district. The 271st Regiment, recovering from the early SHENANDOAH II engagements, did not fight at Loc Ninh.

At 0115 hours on 29 October, the 273d Regiment put mortars, rockets, and heavy ground fire into the district headquarters and ten minutes later into the Special Forces Camp. At 0220 hours, two enemy battalions made ground assaults on both camps, penetrating the northern half of the district compound with superior forces, fighting from bunker to bunker against the Regional Forces. The district chief, the surviving American adviser, and one squad

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stayed in the command bunker, while other government troops withdrew to the southern half of the compound. ^{7/} By holding the command bunker, communications were uninterrupted between the ground and the FACs throughout the night, and made possible the close coordination necessary to put ordnance along the camp perimeters.

When the Phuoc Long Sector FAC arrived about 0230 hours, the defenders were receiving mortars from all directions, with the heaviest fire coming from rubber trees east of the runway. An AC-47 overhead and the FAC were the target of .50 caliber fire from east of the airstrip. The district chief directed antipersonnel ordnance and artillery onto his now exposed position, a deep World War II concrete bunker having L-shaped stairwells to withstand and deflect explosions. Spooky, the AC-47, and artillery poured ordnance onto the bunker and kept the enemy at bay, until the daylight arrival of CIDG and ARVN reinforcements.

With Spooky giving flare and minigun support, and the fighter aircraft delayed because the first two flights went to the aid of An Loc, also under mortar attack, the FAC moved in light fire teams to provide mortar suppression against the enemy east of the runway. When two F-100s arrived, they significantly changed the ground situation. The FAC directed strikes into the rubber trees east of the runway. ^{8/} He later described this action:

"We had the light fire teams work over the western quadrant while I worked the fighters in east of Loc Ninh. The ordnance that I expended in the course of this action was, of course, Spooky with their miniguns, the light fire teams with rockets, ...and the F-100s with 500 pounders, napes, and CBUs. From talking with Colonel Sanstelli, the 5th

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LOC NINH
Figure 3

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Division Senior Advisor, several days after the action, he informed me that the CBU was by far the most effective weapon that we put in that day. He said that was very, very effective in suppressing at least four known mortar positions plus Lord only knows how many others there might have been in there. With bombs and nape we suppressed one .50 caliber gun position and, I'd say, for an anti-personnel weapon even in those trees, from what I've been told, CBU is the best. We worked it to within about 200 meters of the airstrip there and I think it worked out real well."

The double attack on Loc Ninh and An Loc strained the ability of Spooky to cover both battles. To make the flare supply at Loc Ninh last until relief came, the flareship, instead of dropping three or four flares at a time, put out only two at a time. The FAC attributed a small strafing incident to the husbanding of flares: in the dim light, the F-100 pilots on a final pass picked up the wrong fire and strafed a burning wall, causing one allied casualty. ^{9/}

Just before 0500 hours a relief FAC arrived, followed shortly by a second Spooky. By the light of the burning town and the now plentiful flares, the FAC continued placing bombs and rockets in the rubber trees and strafing the district compound. To counter the enemy withdrawal north, out of the compound into the town, the FAC directed his second flight of A-37s (call sign RAP) around the compound and along the road just to the north, hoping to pin the enemy in the camp. The FAC believed his action helped corner the significant number of Viet Cong trapped in bunkers, when government troops retook the compound. ^{10/}

Reacting to the enemy threat, ARVN and American reinforcements were

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airborne for Loc Ninh at first light, to bolster the defenders and to engage the enemy. At 0600 hours on 29 October, the 1/18th Infantry began a helicopter shuttle from Lai Khe to stations west of Loc Ninh. By early afternoon, 12 C-130 tactical emergency sorties put the 1/26th into An Loc, preparatory to a 2 November helicopter assault northwest of Loc Ninh. The 2/28th secured the airstrip and artillery sites for the two artillery batteries that came with the battalions. On 31 October, the 1/28th made an air assault three kilometers southeast of Loc Ninh, and on 2 November the 1/12th Infantry deployed northeast of the town, completing the ring of protection. In this way, American troops accepted the challenge of the 9th VC Division. ^{11/}

On 31 October, the enemy again opened massive attacks on the camps using heavy mortar and rockets, but with the aid of tactical air and artillery, the defenders repulsed the five ground assaults. The senior Air Force adviser for Binh Long Province recounted the situation: ^{12/}

"We had five separate ground attacks and each time we were able to repel these attacks with defensive fires of both the people inside the compound and primarily by the large amount of air strikes that was flown - both the Spooky ships and the fighter aircraft. ...It was strictly an air show, especially Tuesday morning. I can't remember more than ten or fifteen minutes that we didn't have either preparation on a run or something like that. There was no more than a ten or fifteen minute lapse. This is probably pretty outstanding."

Army artillery, sited at the south end of the airstrip, received much publicity in press reports, for the relentless placement of direct line fire into the enemy coming from the rubber trees and moving west across the

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airstrip. Tactical air support was also mentioned. One detailed account quoted high praise from an Army officer, who defended the south end of the airstrip, where the artillery was located: ^{13/}

"If it hadn't been for air, we would have lost this place. The air chopped them up at the wires," (Captain) Hailey said. His men had about 30 rounds of ammunition left per man when the attackers were driven off, never having broken the perimeter....

"They came right down our perimeter with cannons, anti-personnel mines, and then when the enemy began pulling back, they hit them with high explosive stuff."

The heaviest action occurred on 2 November when 107 strike sorties, four COMBAT SKYSPOT sorties, and one B-52 mission flew in support of engagements both east and west of the town, as well as in support of the defenders in the camps, repelling several assaults. ^{14/} In the rubber trees, tactical air and ground troops were cooperating in the classic manner, described here by the Air Liaison Officer (ALO) assigned to the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division: ^{15/}

"They make the contact and back up and call for air and let the air go to work on them. While they are waiting for the air, the artillery goes in and bombards the area with artillery, then the air comes in and the artillery usually moves a little closer to the troops. Then air goes in so that the air and artillery can be operating at the same time. We can get areas covered up there with the heavy bombs being moved a little farther back and the strafe runs closer to the friendlies to get the enemy to disconnect. This is a pretty standard operation...We keep putting air in until that contact is no longer available, no longer present."

During one engagement northeast of Loc Ninh, the 2/12th Infantry contacted an enemy force and called in airstrikes. Four sorties of mixed CBUs, napalm, and strafing destroyed three antiaircraft weapons positions and

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forced the enemy to break contact. The ALO of the 1st Bde, 1st Inf Div, considered the 129 VC found in the area were killed by air (KBA). However, official statistics for all SHENANDOAH II gave only 43 KBAs with another 151 probables. ^{16/} The ALO also commented on getting accurate KBA credit: ^{17/}

"Yes, we assess the battle damage but in the case where the troops are in contact with the enemy, there is not much battle damage you can assess in bombing or strafe or whatnot. Sometimes you can see bodies around. Now up there we got a few KBA's. We have been able to see a body around but normally if a bomb hits there is not much to be seen."

The ring of American troops around the Loc Ninh plantation continued to make contact with VC until 7 November, when the last significant engagement took place 10 kilometers ENE of the town. Official results for the ten-day battle for Loc Ninh were: ^{18/}

DATE	Frd KIA	En KIA	STRIKE	SORTIES		B-52
				SPOOKY	SKYSPOT	
29 Oct	8	160	16	3	0	9
30 Oct	4	85	26	0	8	6
31 Oct	9	126	53	6	2	0
1 Nov	0	20	41	2	5	6
2 Nov	7	296	107	2	2	6
3 Nov	3	57	58	2	8	0
4 Nov	1	28	53	0	0	0
5 Nov	0	13	28	0	6	6
6 Nov	1	1	31	2	3	0
7 Nov	17	66	39	4	1	6
	<u>50</u>	<u>852</u>	<u>452</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>39</u>

Although the battle of Loc Ninh from 29 October to 7 November constituted a major defeat for the VC, the same enemy units were able to mount an attack on the government strongholds at Bo Duc less than a month later.

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The battle illustrated how successfully integrated tactical air, gunships, light fire teams, and artillery were employed in the defense of fortified perimeters, since the pilots had sharply defined boundaries for reference in placing ordnance. The defenders also had the advantage of prepared bunker positions, which permitted the close placement of friendly ordnance.

Ambush

During the last days of the battle of Loc Ninh, the VC also attacked near the Special Forces Camp at Song Be. On 5 November, an ARVN company, and then an ARVN battalion, were ambushed by an estimated enemy battalion, possibly the 275th, five kilometers (YU 1703) south of Song Be. American FACs overhead during both ambushes called for immediate tactical air, but they had difficulties coordinating with Vietnamese forces. A significant delay in receiving sector clearance to expend air and artillery caused the fighters to arrive after the enemy had begun withdrawing. One FAC used his bombs merely to clear a path through any new ambush possibly set for ARVN rangers heading for a nearby compound. ^{19/}

Failure to coordinate operations may also have led to the loss of two VNAF A-1s. A Vietnamese FAC arrived over the battle area only ten minutes before he put in some A-1 strikes. Two A-1s were shot down by .50-cal. machine guns. An American FAC later made the following comments: ^{20/}

"He (the VNAF FAC) never contacted the American ground station. He never contacted the American FAC's who had been over the station all day long to be assessed of the ground situation...As far as I know, there was no way of

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transmitting this information to the VNAF before they started their air strike. It was a very dangerous situation and could have led - well, it did in this particular case, if this is the reason they got hit - it could have led to very disastrous results. So I recommend on strikes like this, where the VNAF send people up and they don't want to use our FAC's, who have been in the area all day and aware of what is going on, at least the VNAF FAC call in and get an area check out and briefing from the American FAC before he expends his fighters."

Bo Duc

After the enemy ended his attacks on Loc Ninh and other Northern III Corps strongholds, the fighting ceased, bringing the termination of SHENANDOAH II on 19 November. Official results included 956 enemy and 107 friendlies killed and 1,329 tactical air sorties flown in support of the operation. ^{21/}

In late November, the VC again switched targets in the pattern of off-and-on offensives and attacked Bo Duc, a District Headquarters in Phuoc Long Province, and Bu Dop, the Special Forces CIDG Camp and airstrip four kilometers to the north. Both compounds had rubber trees to the east and forests to the west. On 26 November, a CIDG element east of Bu Dop, made contact with an unknown size enemy, the first confirmation of the VC's new target. ^{22/} On 25 November, VC attacked an ARVN unit near Song Be, with official results of six friendlies and 100 enemy killed and 43 individual and 21 crew-served weapons captured from the enemy.

Just after midnight on 29 November, an estimated reinforced battalion attacked the Bo Duc Headquarters compound and mortared the CIDG Camp at Bu Dop. At 0120 hours, the III Corps Direct Air Support Center (III DASC) was alerted to the Bo Duc attack. Two minutes later, Bo Duc requested immediate air at

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20-minute intervals and minutes later the enemy reached the west wall of the compound. At 0127 hours, fighters scrambled from Bien Hoa, the first of 34 tactical airstrikes aiding the camp. ^{23/}

The 2d and 3d Battalions of the 272d Regiment stormed Bo Duc in a three-pronged attack, so well coordinated that it included anti-aircraft gun positions and the imaginative use of smoke and signal flares. The 271st remained in reserve outside the town. Reportedly, the enemy had nine .50-caliber machine gun positions surrounding the Bo Duc Camp, which was composed of two square compounds joined at one corner to form a figure eight. The southern compound was overrun, as the III DASC log reveals in the following transcription: ^{24/}

0120H Bo Duc under attack.
0122H Request immediate air.
0125H Need flight immediately. West wall of Bo Duc is being overrun and is neutralized.
0127H Flight scrambled.
0129H Request immediate air every 20 minutes until we tell you different.
0131H Troops in contact (TIC) are very heavy.
0218H Compound overrun. All FACs receiving heavy .50 cal and all U.S. and Vietnamese are in one corner of compound and FACs will direct air into compound.
0225H Charlie occupies both compounds, but all the (allied) troops are in northern compound at coordinates XU 965248.

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0230H Airlift some light fire teams into this area.

0235H Light fire teams are on the way.

0243H At YU 003208 Viet outpost is overrun and request another light fire team.

0250H Another compound under fire seven clicks (kilometers) from YU 003208.

0300H ARVN compound FAC can't contact ground forces to put in strikes.

0308H Strikes now being put into southern compound.

0330H Spooky 41 receiving heavy .50 cal.

0349H Moonshine 45 (a C-130 flareship) receiving heavy .50 cal at 5,000 feet. Advise Spookies to go to 6,000 feet.

0405H ROD 07 advises that runway at Bu Dop did not have craters when he departed but reports that there is a confirmed .50 cal machine gun at end of runway and area is not secure.

0412H Charlie attacking from North where our troops are dug in--no air can be put in here--Charlie has already hit from North, South, and East.

0432H Need Spooky at AN target--no light and troops are in bad shape.

0507H FAC says VC pulling bodies off battlefield. Fighters going around perimeter.

0520H District headquarters under attack.

0621H FAC: runway covered with shrapnel. Not secure enough for airlift. Maybe two hours.

0641H Still attacking--but most are withdrawing and rounding up dead.

0702H Find fighters.

0750H Request Dust Off (medevac helicopters) for 50 friendlies.

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The careful planning of this nearly successful attack included the placement of four quad .50-caliber guns bolted together. One FAC counted ^{25/} three quad .50s positioned, as he later explained, as anti-aircraft weapons:

"The VC had these quad .50s set up so they weren't used in support of the attack on the camp as much as they were used as an anti-aircraft weapon. They were set up some three to four kilometers to the east of the camp and three to four kilometers to the north and as the aircraft rolled in they really opened up on him and the bursts were 10-15 second bursts. We could tell they were quad .50's by the volume of fire that they did put out.... The fighters drew heavy ground fire at all passes and at least one of them was hit and he had to pull off and return home... (This) is the first time that I have noticed that they have set up anti-aircraft weapons away from the attacks specifically to get the aircraft as they came in... Because of the location of the compound and the location of the town north of it, the logical direction of fighter attack in the close proximity of the Cambodian border would be from east to west and I am sure that the VC figured this out because they had a quad .50 set up about three kilometers due east of the camp... you could tell that there had been some thinking on this because everytime a fighter rolled in they just opened up with that quad .50 and they did use tracers a lot more than they have in the past. They still aren't as accurate as they should be... We switched the fighters around from north to south when we saw the heavy fire they were receiving out there and it became a lot more effective...."

The FAC also discussed use of smoke that night, something he had not ^{26/} seen before in heavy attacks of the previous month in Northern III Corps:

"...the VC used smoke for the first time and it was very effective. About one out of every three passes the fighters had to go through dry because they could not acquire the target or they were having difficulty acquiring the target... The only problems the fighters had was

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visually acquiring the target with heavy smoke on the ground. Both from the VC throwing the smoke and from the actual smoke from the bombs. The bomb smoke really wasn't that much, it was mostly the VC smoke and they did put out an awful lot of smoke. I think if it hadn't been for a ground surface wind of about 10 knots the fighters would have been severely hampered because of being unable to acquire the target to deliver their ordnance. The 10 to 15 knot ground surface wind blew the smoke off as rapidly as they threw it out. It did severely hamper them about one out of every three passes going through dry because they couldn't see the target. I believe if it hadn't been for the wind they would have really been hurting, at least to the point where we couldn't put the fighter in as close as we wanted to. I am sure that we could have delivered the ordnance out a reasonable distance from the compound but not in as close as we had to do it in the early stages of the morning when they were actually getting in very close to the compound."

Precision bomb placement was essential at Bo Duc, when the enemy stormed the west wall and overran the southern compound. Ultimately, the northern compound was able to partially withstand the enemy, because the fighters were able to put airstrikes inside the southern compound and within 20 feet of the perimeter around the northern compound. ^{27/}

Other enemy techniques reflecting systematic planning, included using red flares to signal attacks and possibly to alert gun crews of incoming fighters. The enemy also employed heavy trucks to move troops and supplies from the Cambodian Border. Smoke was used just before dawn to cover a determined policing of VC dead prior to the enemy withdrawal.

Thus the enemy staged a well-coordinated and imaginative assault on the Bo Duc Camp, one that failed because the Air Force put its ordnance within 20 feet of allied positions, keeping the enemy at bay, and because the Army

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supplied more than a dozen light fire teams to put relentless fire down on the enemy troops.

During the next 11 days, the enemy made repeated rocket and mortar attacks against Bu Dop/Bo Duc, putting in more than 600 rounds on friendly positions. The allies countered with American troops and the emergency airlift of more than 93 tons of ammunition, POL, and five armored personnel carriers into Bu Dop.^{28/} On 8 December, the enemy made two final ground attacks on night positions of American units and then withdrew, ending the offensive in the immediate area.

Parting enemy attacks were made on Dak Son, near Song Be, killing 74 Montagnards, and ^{29/} a U.S. battalion near An Loc, killing one American and 124 enemy (body count).^{30/} Then the offensive in Binh Long and Phuoc Long ended and the enemy left the region, moving southwest into War Zone C. Operation FARGO, which ran from 22 December 1967 to 20 January 1968, employed the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment in northern Binh Long and sought the 9th VC Division. The regiment lost 13 men, while killing 49 enemy (10 KBA), using 165 fighter sorties (against 235 planned), 220 O-1 sorties, and 840 Army helicopter sorties. The regiment ALO reported that 25-30 minutes elapsed between the time an immediate was requested and the fighters were on target.^{31/}

In January 1968, the enemy disappeared from Binh Long and Phuoc Long Provinces. On the first day of January, units of the 271st and 272d, however, attacked Forward Support Base (FSB), Burke (XT 490800), in northern Tay Ninh, as the VC moved west into War Zone C. At FSB Burke, the 25th Infantry Division

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troops inflicted severe losses, which totaled, according to official report, 382 enemy killed and 87 individual and 29 crew-served weapons captured, while losing 23 friendlyes. ^{32/}

Then the enemy disappeared, presumably into the Cambodian Border areas. Operation ATALLA, in southern Binh Long, was responsible for only two enemy killed in a week-long operation. ^{33/} (Three battalions of the 101st Airborne Division began ATALLA but were moved to I Corps; four battalions of the 1st Infantry Division and two squadrons of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment were conducting the operation when it ended.) The MACV Intelligence Summary, concerning enemy units as of 27 January, reported most of the enemy divisions and regiments of Northern III Corps were unlocated, but probably could be found along the border. Therefore, Binh Long and Tay Ninh ^{34/} were considered the major areas threatened.

The massive Tet offensive against Bien Hoa and Saigon a few days later revealed this assessment to be wide of the mark, and showed how effectively the offensive in Northern III Corps had held allied attention. Indeed, on 15 January 1968, Operation SAN ANGELO had been initiated as one of the larger search and destroy operations of the war in a major attempt to seal the border in northern Phuoc Long. However, it never reached the magnitude projected, because earmarked troops were drained away to counter the Tet offensive in the cities. SAN ANGELO dwindled to an end on 9 February. Eighteen enemy were killed.

In the final analysis, the VC offensive may have achieved some results.

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While Operations FARGO, ATALLA, and SAN ANGELO sought the VC in Northern III Corps, the enemy apparently shifted south to attack the military complex of Bien Hoa, Long Binh, and Tan Son Nhut. The battles of Loc Ninh and Bo Duc cost the enemy many hundreds of dead, but enemy replacements restored the ranks as they had for years. Tactically, the offensive was a standoff--the VC still moved through the jungles with near impunity, and the allies held the strongholds.

The Air Force role in the Northern III Corps offensive was the traditional one of close air support to troops in contact, especially in providing immediate heavy fire power to fortified camps under threat of being overrun. In 1966, A Shau fell when bad weather severely hampered precision bombing on the camp's perimeters. At Loc Ninh and Bo Duc favorable weather and Spooky flares allowed the fighter pilots to break the assault.

The battles in Northern III Corps demonstrated that the Air Force was effective in its primary role of close air support despite improved enemy anti-aircraft techniques.

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FOOTNOTES

1. (C) Rpt, 7AF DIS, Vietnam Intelligence Summary (VIS), 9-15 Mar 68.
2. (C/NF) Msg, J-2 MACV, Disums 293-67, 201610Z; 300-67, 270827Z; and 316-67, 120547Z Nov 67.
3. (C) Special Study, 7AF, Project CHECO, "Ambush at XT 686576" by Kenneth Sams and Maj Richard Durkee, 29 Dec 67.
4. (C) Msg, MACV, Daily Journal (Command Center Log) 271303Z and 271800Z Oct 67.
5. (S/NF) Msg, J-2 MACV, Disum 301-67, 280455Z Oct 67.
6. (C) Msg, II FFV, "Narrative Report on The Battle of Loc Ninh, 29 Oct - 7 Nov 67 (U)", 081145Z Nov 67. Doc. 1.
7. Ibid.
8. (C) Interview, Capt R. A. Keeney, FAC, 5th ARVN Div, Phuoc Long Province, 9 Nov 67. Doc. 2.
9. Ibid.
10. (C) Interview, Capt B. S. Fitzgerald, FAC, 5th ARVN Div, 9 Nov 67. Doc. 3.
11. (C) Msg, MACV Daily Journal (Command Center Log) 291740Z and 292000Z Oct 67.
12. (C) Interview, Maj J. A. Fuller, ALO, Binh Long Province, Undated. Doc. 4.
13. (U) News Release, "Loc Ninh a Bloody Disaster for Reds" by T. Cheatham and R. V. Oliver, Pacific Stars and Stripes, 5 Nov 67. Doc. 5.
14. Daily Briefing, 7AF, TACC view graphs for Gen W. W. Momyer, Comdr, 7AF, 29 Oct - 7 Nov 67.
15. (C) Interview, Maj P. J. Murphy, ALO, 1st Bde/1st Inf Div, 28 Nov 67. Doc. 6.
16. (U) Rpt, Maj P. J. Murphy, ALO, 1st Bde/1st Inf Div, to TACC, 7AF, subj: Combat Operations After Action Report - SHENANDOAH II, 17 Dec 67. Doc. 7.
17. (C) Interview, Maj P. J. Murphy, ALO, 1st Bde/1st Inf Div, 28 Nov 67. Doc. 6.

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18. Daily Briefing, 7AF, TACC, view graphs for Gen W. W. Momyer, Comdr, 7AF, 29 Oct -7 Nov 67.
19. (C) Interview, Capt R. A. Keeney, FAC, 5th ARVN Div, Phuoc Long Province, 9 Nov 67. Doc. 2.
20. Interview, Capt B. S. Fitzgerald, FAC, 5th ARVN Div, Phuoc Long, 9 Nov 67. Doc. 3.
21. (C) Msg, MACV Daily Journal (Command Center Log), 201623Z Nov 67.
22. (C) Msg, MACV Daily Journal (Command Center Log), 261343Z Nov 67.
23. Working Paper, III DASC, Daily Log, 29 Nov 67; Rpt(C), Lt Col J. E. Molchan, ALO, Hq II FFV to III DASC, subj: Historical Report, 1 Jul 67 - 31 Dec 67, 2 Jan 68. Doc. 8.
24. Working Paper, III DASC, Daily Log, 29 Nov 67.
25. (C) Interview, Capt R. H. Crooke, ALO, 5th ARVN Div, Binh Long Province, 29 Nov 67, Doc. 9.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. (C) Msg, MACV Daily Journal (Command Center Log) 042230Z and 051945Z Dec 67.
29. Ibid; 052115Z, 062245Z, and 071223 Dec 67.
30. Ibid; 101023Z, 101110, and 101230 Dec 67.
31. (C) Rpt, Maj A. J. Dougherty, ALO, 11th ACR, to ALO, II FFV, subj: Combat After Action Report - Fargo, 30 Jan 68. Doc. 10.
32. (C) Msg, MACV Daily Journal (Command Center Log), 032054Z Jan 68.
33. (C) Msg, MACV OPREP 5, SEA Ground Ops, 20-27 Jan 68, 290925Z Jan 68.
34. (C) Msg, J-2 MACV, Weekly Estimate Update 4-68, 27 Jan 68.
35. (C) Msg, MACV OPREP 5, SEA Ground Ops, 3 to 10 Feb 68, 121022Z Feb 68.

(NOTE: Document as noted provided in 1 copy to AFCHO and 1 copy in DTEC file.)

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GLOSSARY

ALO	Air Liaison Officer
ARVN	Army of Republic of Vietnam
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
ENE	East, Northeast
FAC	Forward Air Controller
KBA	Killed by Air
KIA	Killed in Action
POL	Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants
SFC	Special Forces Camp
TACP	Tactical Air Control Parties
TIC	Troops in Contact
VC	Viet Cong