1st BATTALION, 508th INFANTRY

As the month of January dawned on the rice paddies of Tan Binh District, the Red Devils of the 1/508th Airborne Infantry, led by LTC Roswell Round, found themselves continuing their mission of pacification through the use of detailed searches and extensive night ambusing. Carrying the fight to the enemy at night proved successful, time and again, and destroyed any notion that Charlie may have had that the night belonged to him, to do with as he pleased. Extensive patrolling did not, however, prevent Charlie company from Attending an extra course in obstetrics. It started as relatively quiet Monday night when a Vietnamese medic shattered the calm with a call for assistance. A Vietnamese woman was in the last stages for labor, and complications prevented a normal delivery. Heeding the Hypocratic call, Sp4 Jack Rittenauer from Charlie Company's 4th Platoon, was asked to assist in any way possible. After 3 hours of trying to help the woman, Specialist Rittenauer had the woman medivaced to Saigon where she successfully gave birth to a boy. The gratitude of this Vietnamese family was a sound example of an effective pacification program in action.

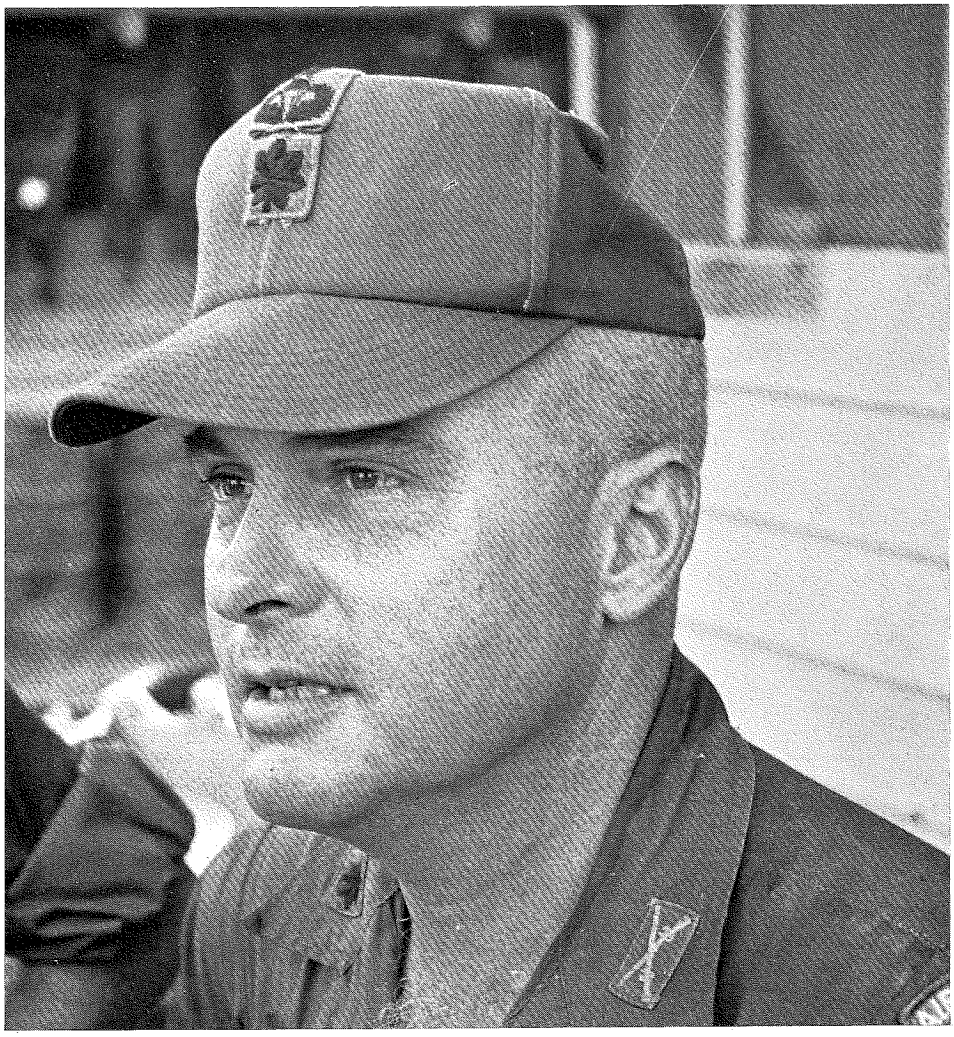
The effectiveness of the Red Devil's tactics was evidenced one February evening when Alpha Company's 4th Platoon turned one of Charlie's moonlight boat rides into a nightmare. Located on a waterway southwest of Long Binh, the fourth platoon spotted four sampans casually gliding down the river. Sp4 Frank Cunane yelled "Lai de," but they continued. Specialist Cunane then initiated a contact that was to last all night. PSG Michael Milton moved into the water and personally sank a sampan. He then informed his CO, who maneuvered another platoon into position to maintain contact. As contact increased, supporting fire and gunships were called in and when dawn came Alpha Company was credited with 19 KIA and 29 sampans.

In order for the VC to launch an offensive, they must first "prepare the battlefield" by building a cache of arms and materials needed to sustain their operations. Detailed searches conducted daily by the Red Devils succeeded in policing up Charlie's supplies before they could be used. On the 14th of March, Recon Platoon, under the command of LT Edward Munson was searching the swamps west of Vinh Tinh. As Sgt Robert W. Post was shifting some of his gear into the shade during the noon break, he caught sight of what appeared to be a partially buried illumination round in the dense foliage. "I started to brush away some of the bushes," said Post, "and realized that what was sticking out of the ground was part of a tripod." Further probing and digging unearthed five 122mm rocket launchers, complete with tripods. This find struck a serious blow at Charlie's chance of launching any large scale indirect fire attack in the area.

VC in the Tan Binh AO were almost exclusively local personnel. They operated in small groups, usually of 3 to 5 men and were concerned with setting up cache sites, acting as guides for new people coming into the area and occasionally initiating terrorist activity. The best way to destroy the small group was with the sweep, such as the one Bravo Company performed one afternoon in March. SGT Jim Sackett, while on a sweep, maneuvered his squad to a position where a LOH had spotted the enemy. SGT Sackett then came upon a lone VC, and engaged him in hand to hand combat, overpowered and disarmed him. Shortly after this happened, PFC Carl Voehl observed another VC who had stood up for a view of his surroundings. Voehl responded immediately with a well placed M-79 round. Both enemy soldiers were detained and turned over to authorities for interrogation. During the period 16 March to 18 March, the Red Devils succeeded in destroying the Vinh Loc Local Force Company's ability as an effective fighting force.

On the afternoon of 16 March, the anti-tank Platoon of Echo Company, under the command of SFC Wages, caught a VC. An interrogation of the prisoner by National Police indicated that there were







seven more VC in a nearby treeline. The whole A/T platoon assaulted the woodlines and succeeded in detaining seven NVA Regulars, one female collaborator, seven AK-47's and some personal equipment, while killing one VC.

On the evening of the 16th, at approximately 2100 hours, the first platoon of Company B, under the command of CPT Thomas Patterson, was lying in wait in their ambush positions. Scanning the area with the aid of a starlight scope, the element spotted three VC which they took under fire with M-79 grenade launchers and M-60 machine gun fire. A sweep of the area yielded a heavy blood trail. Undoubtedly, another Charlie had felt the sting of the Devil. Approximately one half hour later in the evening Company D's third platoon, under the command of LT Rod Cears, sighted five VC approaching their positions. Initiating the contact with claymores and small arms fire, Delta Company netted one wounded VC, a squad leader of the Vinh Loc Viet Cong Platoon.

Action dropped off until the evening of the 18th when an ambush of Company C under the command of SSG Alan Hildenbrand executed a classic ambush. The ambush patrol had just finished setting out their claymores and everyone settled into position. Suddenly,SGT Michael Bronson observed movement directly to his front. As he looked with astonishment, he saw a soldier standing in front of his position holding one of the claymores that had just been set out. Thinking that it may be one of the members of his petrol repositioning the claymore, he called out to the individual, who respond by diving for cover. SGT Bronson hit the detonator, resulting in three VC KIA.

At the end of March, Task Force SATAN, under the command of Major Thomas Myerchin, conducted search operations in AO Hades, north of Duc Hoa. The three day operation netted four VC KIA, two detainees and three weapons. One incident that took place indicates the strange relationship between VC personnel and U.S. troops and brings home the point that you never know who Charlie is. Several members of Company B were approached by a youth wearing a US

some soda and struck up a conversation with the GI's. A friendly rapport was established. Specialist 4 Henry Tarver gave the youth a camouflaged scarf and in return received a rosary. That same night Specialist Tarver's platoon sprang their ambush on a VC patrol. Sweeping the contact area, Specialist Tarver came upon the body of one of the VC who happened to be wearing a US Army fatigue jacket, chevrons, an 82d patch and camouflaged scarf and carrying an AK-47. The enemy soldier was not dead and was subsequently medivaced.

The beginning of May found the Red Devils once again on the move, this time OPCON to the 25th Infantry Division. Working out of FSB Patton, five miles northeast of Trang Bang, the Red Devils dealt death and destruction to VC and NVA main force units while forcing the enemy's hand in his infamous sanctuary of the Hobo Woods. The mode of operation of the Red Devils differed considerably from that in the Tan Binh area. Now, instead of facing small, isolated groups of enemy soldiers, the men were up against company sized, regular NVA forces.

The third of May was typical of the operation in the Hobo Woods. SGT Harlan Smith, a squad leader from Delta Company, saw movement in a treeline near Firebase Patton. While the element was moving to contact they came under mortar and small arms fire. At this, LT Greg Whitesell, the FO, began to call in heavy supporting fire in the form of 105 and 155mm howitzers, Cobra gunships, air strikes, and the Huey "Mad Bomber." When the smoke had cleared, the Third Platoon, under LT Rodney Gears, moved in to finish the action. This action netted 20 VC KIA and no friendly casualties.

An unusual incident occurred on the morning of 19 May when Bravo Company's second platoon leader was injured by one of the largest pieces of shrapnel in Viet Nam – a flying tree. It started when SP4 Tom Petri threw a hand frag in a tunnel and it ended when a secondary explosion rocked the country side, hurling a 500 pound tree, 25 meters through the air, landing on LT Donald Masters. SP4 William Wanscott, the RTO, said it looked

As a result of the efforts of the Red Devils, 186 VC never got a chance to participate in their annual summer offensive. Also, if the VC ever came back to their caches, they would have found that they were missing 12,250 pounds of rice, 16 AK-47's, one 75mm RR, one French LMG, one ChiCom LMG, one SKS, 7 RPG 7's, 11 B-40 rockets and boosters, 7 B-41 rockets, 8 107mm rocket fuzes plus a quantity of small arms ammunition, personal equipment and medical supplies. When the Red Devils left the area at the end of May, Charlie knew that the 82d had brought "Fury from the Sky."

Upon their return from the Hobo Woods, the 1/508 Infantry participated in actions nicknamed, "WET DEVIL" and "DRY DEVIL." "DRY DEVIL" was a task force commanded by Major Thomas Myerchin, that performed routine operations in the normal AO of Tan Binh District. "WET DEVIL" was a joint mission with units of the 1/508 Infantry and 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 505th Infantry. The mission consisted of operations in the Pineapple area, southwest of Saigon. The Pineapple area presented the Red Devils with yet another formidable type terrain. The region was almost completely under water, criss-crossed with numerous canals and minor waterways. It is a particularly difficult area in which to maneuver and one which taxes all the abilities of the individual soldier. All types of river-crossing techniques were constantly employed and dry ground was considered a luxury to be greeted with the expectation one might normally save for an R & R hotel.

The Pineapple area is home of a VC Local Force Battalion. By use of an aggressive program consisting of combat air assaults, popper missions (airmobile surveillance with a ready reaction force), amphibious insertions, extractions and patrol in conjunction with Navy PBR boats and constant searching by the rifle companies, the Red Devils succeeded in totally disrupting the activities of the VC.

On the night of June 24, at approximately 2030 hours, the first and second platoons of Company A, commanded by CPT John Morgan, lay in ambush on Navy patrol boats



one of the tributary canals which joins the Vam Co Dong. As the sampans came within fifty meters of the PBR, the chattering of the 50 caliber broke the stillness, and was quickly followed by the crack of M-16's and exploding hand grenades. The VC never knew what hit them. This perfectly executed ambush netted the Red Devils, eight VC KIA, one more probable and numerous documents. Charlie was no longer safe in his own backyard.

One new look in operations, was the large number of combined operations that were conducted with both the 3d and 1st ARVN Airborne Brigades in preparation for their takeover of the AO. The defense of Saigon was in the process of being turned over completely to the ARVNs a major step in the Vietnamization of the war. By providing security for their Capital city, the ARVNs assumed a major responsibility in the war effort. The Red Devils played an important role in this transition by working closely with the ARVN Airborne troopers. Both units benefitted from the tech-

held their fellow paratroopers from Viet Nam in high regard when it came time to move on and relinquish responsibilities to ARVN counterparts.

The Devils moved back into the Pineapple region, which they had left a month earlier, to again hunt out the VC. The first contact the Red Devils had in the Pineapple region was initiated by scout dog Princess and her handler, SP4 John E. Johnson, who were assigned to Alpha Company. While moving through the thick underbrush, Princess alerted, indicating something fresh in the area. Specialist Johnson, on point, moved forward when two VC jumped up in front of him and began running. SP4 Johnson opened up on the VC dropping one immediately. At the same time the remainder of the patrol came up with Johnson and emptied a basic load at the retreating VC. This action netted one VC KIA, one heavy blood trail, two AK-47's and a bunker.

On September 26, Company A, under the command of CPT Dale Hikes, was conducting routine airmobile operations when the accompanying gunships spotted movement in a treeline. Alpha was inserted on the spot and immediately made contact. Making close-in contact with the VC entrenched in bunkers, the Alpha Company elements used hand grenades, small arms fire, artillery and helicopter gunships in support. Contact was heavy and continued throughout most of the day. When the action trailed off, the Red Devils and gunship support had 30 VC kills and sent at least one company of the local force battalion scurrying for safety back toward Cambodia. A sweep of the area disclosed an underground hospital complex which had been occupied by at least 15 patients prior to the firefight.

As September ended, the Red Devils were again on the move, this time to Phu Hoa District, just south of the Iron Triangle. This area is perenially heavily populated with Viet Cong. It is the normal AO for the Quyet Thang Regiment. Working out of FSB Hardcore II, the Red Devils wasted no time in making it known they were there. On October 9, Company C, under the command of CPT Newman, was making a sweep just north of Trung An Vil-



into a well-concealed spiderhole. The Kit Carson Scout attempted to talk the VC into surrendering, but to no avail. A concussion grenade was then dropped into the hole and when the smoke cleared, several weapons recovered. While retrieving this material from the hole, the platoon was engaged with what appeared to be rifle grenades. Returning the fire with small arms, automatic weapons and M-79's, Charlie Company pinned down the VC. Artillery and a light fire team were called in for immediate support and the US Air Force was close behind. A Forward Air Controller flying over the contact area brought US Air Force F-100 fighter-bombers. The fighters worked the area for twenty-five minutes. Five VC were killed and many tunnels destroyed.

There are many individuals in the area who make life easier for the line trooper. One of these is the Support and Transportation Platoon. The Support Platoon, under LT Swanson, is responsible for ensuring that all the logistical supplies requisitioned from S-4, are actually delivered to the troops in the field. Another department that specializes in aiding the field trooper is the S-1. CPT Geremia, S-1, supervises all administrative aspects of the battalion. Another specialist who made life easier for the infantry is the artillery liason officer, CPT Kosturakia. When you call for help and that first round bursts on target, you know that Captain K. is on the job.

The XO's, Majors Tom Myerchin and Charlie Buttermore, kept the



ing forward to the troops. For those who prefer to work in small groups and with a certain aura of mysticism, the Rangers are the group. Usually working in teams, the Ranger job is basically one of surveillance, to find the enemy and alert higher headquarters to bring in a reaction force. However, as LT Mariner and his Rangers know, they often serve as their own reaction force.

In May, LTC Round was succeeded by LTC Paul Lunsford, a native of St. Petersburg, Florida. He had served with the Brigade since the 13th of October as Brigade operations officer before taking over the "08." In September he was replaced by LTC Peter Foss.

Suddenly in September many people knew they were "short." Those long days of patrolling, C-rations, and sleepless nights began to recede into the background and they were slowly replaced by visions of that girl back home, hamburgers and milkshakes; soon to be reality and not just a recurrent dream. However, for many of the Red Devils, it meant reassignment to other units in Viet Nam.

In the beginning of November the Red Devils departed Phu Hoa District, moved to Phu Loi base camp and began final preparations for that long journey home. Equipment was cleaned and turned-in, records checked and shots endured. Free time was spent catching up on lost sleep and writing that final letter, which basically said — "Don't send anymore letters to the APO because the kid is coming home." At long last they were waiting in line to get on that "freedom bird " which only a short time before had seemed a distant event. As the engines roared and the wheels lifted off the ground, Devils settled back knowing that they had experienced events which gave a deeper insight into the nature of man in general; the nature of war and the Vietnamese people in particular; a certain sense of satisfaction for having been there and back; and a sense of participation in the determination of the destiny of a nation. It was a job well done.