

OPERATION SILVER BAYONET: THE BATTLE OF THE IA DRANG, 1965

v.1.1 February 19, 2003

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Author's Note:

I came across LTC Kenneth Pierce's article [sources are at the end] while rewriting this article, originally written in 2001. Immediately it was obvious that one of the sources I had used the first time was based on his material. When clicking through a number of links to check on what is a good article to use, often one picks up facts that become difficult to source because one did not note a particular URL at the time and does not see it again. The difficulty is compounded by internet pages that appropriate entire articles from other pages without crediting the original author. It is only fair to acknowledge Pierce as a source, however indirect, for the original writeup.

The rewrite was necessary because I had the battles at X-Ray and Albany mixed up. The site statistics show the Ia Drang article is read by many visitors each month. I am surprised no one emailed to complain of so obvious an error.

The Battle of the Ia Drang

The Battle of the Ia Drang Valley was the first large-scale fight between the PAVN and the newly arriving Americans in South Vietnam. Some reckon it also to be the fiercest battle between the two sides, though this is a subjective issue. For instance, was Ia Drang more fierce than the 1968 battle for Hue? Nonetheless, it was a battle that fundamentally changed the way both sides fought; ironically, both sides came away convinced their methods were correct, though in reality both sides were proved wrong.

Technically, the Ia Drang was a campaign spread over several weeks and involving many battles. We focus on the Battles at LZ X-Ray and Albany, which commonly are said to be the Battle of the Ia Drang.

For the Americans, the battle was the validation of the new airmobile warfare concept, and this they proved. Having enjoyed tactical success, the Americans proceeded to completely ignore the strategic implications of the Ia Drang. Green American troops defeated highly experienced Communist troops under highly unfavorable circumstances. But what then? The Americans thought that if they simply killed enough communists, the later would tire of the war; they reduced a highly complex strategic situation to a one-dimensional tactical problem and failed to come up with anything smarter for the next ten years. Worse, according to one writer [Wild Bill], when General William Westmoreland learned of the 12-1 kill ratio at the Ia Drang, he decided he could fight and win a battle of attrition. If this is correct, the Ia Drang battle has even more significance than generally believed.

For the PAVN, the Ia Drang was an opportunity to take the measure of their new adversary and to learn to fight helicopters. They wanted to kill Americans, and this they did: US losses were serious, over 250 KIA, mainly from two battalions of the 7th Cavalry Regiment. But they also lost heavily. PAVN losses are harder to assess, but were estimated at 1800- 3000 including actual bodies counted. The PAVN paid great attention to recovering bodies, complicating attempts to make estimates.

Having proved their strategic concept at the Ia Drang - originally tested against the French - that they could withdraw to fight another day, the PAVN failed to understand they could never beat the Americans in battle. They proceeded to keep trying to kill Americans instead of looking for a political solution that would have got the US out of Vietnam and left the North free to conquer the south - as happened in 1975 after the 1972 accords. They kept trying for a military victory at the most incredible cost to themselves. To say, as the Northern generals were to say in retrospect, that this was all part of their strategy is simple rationalization for their complete ignorance and colossal stupidity. Losing 15 to 20 men for every enemy killed cannot be dignified as a strategy. They could have achieved the same results by incessant guerilla attacks at a tenth of the cost to themselves. Even if America had lost a thousand men each year instead of ten thousand, its people would have eventually tired of the war. The PAVN strategy was a throwback to the

failed strategies of World War I, and General Giap should be grouped with Haig, not with the great generals of history.

The Genesis

The best summary of the genesis of the Battles at X-Ray and Albany comes from Wild Bill. Most of the account below is a direct quote.

There were five distinct phases to the Ia Drang campaign, all hinging on battles fought in general area. They are as follows.

The First Round: The Battle for Plei Me - Oct.19, 1965. Realizing that time is working against him, General Giap, commander of the North Vietnamese Army, sends three full regiments south to the Central Highlands of South Vietnam. Their mission is to split the country in two and start its total downfall before the Americans build up their strength.

The Special Forces Camp (Green Berets, Detachment A-217), under Captain Moore, will face heavy attacks by the 33rd NVA Regiment all through the night and into the next day. His CIDG forces fight desperately, but the enemy takes part of the camp. A Nung Force and ARVN Rangers are sent to strengthen the position. If Plei Me falls, Pleiku, key to the Central Highlands, is next.

The Second Round: Ambush on Highway 5 , south of Pleiku, October 23, 1965. In response to the NVA intrusion in the Central Highlands, a reaction force of armor, cavalry, and infantry from the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam is ordered to relieve the beleaguered Plei Me Special Forces camp. As would be seen often in the war, the ARVN soldiers, even with good equipment are not really that enthused about the war, or rescuing Americans and their own countrymen.

Hit by a light delaying ambush, the South Vietnamese major leading the group begins to drag his heels. It takes his force another two days to travel less than 20 miles. Within four miles of the camp on the fourth day of the fighting at Plei Me, the armored column is hit with another savage ambush by elements of the 33rd NVA Regiment. They are to hold up the rescue column until Plei Me can be taken by their fellow Communist soldiers.

The Third Round: Contact, Ia Drang Valley, South Vietnam, November 6, 1965. Once the NVA troops have abandoned the siege of Plei Me, they begin a march to the west. Their hidden sanctuary in the Chu Pong Mountain is their goal. The 1st AirCav Division is determined not to let that happen.

After a number of engagements in the Ia Drang, the 1st Brigade enters into the largest engagement of Silver Bayonet up until that time. Company B of the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry was on a sweep when it stumbled across a series of trenchlines manned by the NVA of the 6th Battalion, 33rd Regiment. Not knowing how big a force he faced, two US platoons go to the attack. Soon the entire company is pinned down by the enemy.

Now the NVA begins an encircling movement to finish off Company B. In response, Sister Company C is choppered into a nearby landing zone. Hacking their way through the heavy foliage, the troopers run right into the rear of the NVA battalion. Both American companies are in big trouble, but able to link up and hold on till air and artillery support can drive off the North Vietnamese.

The Fourth Round: LZ X-Ray Near the Chu Pong Masif, Ia Drang Valley, November 14-15, 1965. After nearly two weeks of searching and incidental contact, battalions of the 3rd Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), with less than two months "in country," are deposited at key areas throughout the Ia Drang Valley. Their mission: Find the elusive NVA forces that have retreated from Plei Me and eliminate them.

Lt. Col. Harold Moore's 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, begins landing at a small zone near the base of the Chu Pong Mountain. [This is the Battle of LZ X-Ray that we will discuss.]

The Fifth Round: LZ Albany, Ia Drang Valley, Nov. 17-18, 1965. For some reason still unknown today, the troops sent in to LZ X-Ray to relieve the battered 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, are told to leave the area and head north on foot to other landing zones. An incoming B-52 strike from Guam has to have a two-mile radius cleared for the bombing raid from 35,000 feet. No helicopter transport is to be provided for them. [This is the Battle of LZ Albany, where the Americans took their worst losses.]

The Ia Drang Valley lay near the Cambodian border, dominated by the giant Chu Pong massif, southeast of Pleiku in the Central Highlands. The combination of jungle and mountains was ideal for the PAVN, and they had built a big complex in the area without the ARVN challenging them or the Americans knowing about it. A peculiarity of the terrain was that even the so called "clear" terrain consisted of grasses and shrubs six feet in height, and this was a factor in the battle. In the forest trees were 100-foot high.

The PAVN B-3 Front was in the area with two regiments and a third arriving. The infantry was supported by mortar and AA units, and by Viet Cong units. B-3 Front had a clear strategic objective to help win the war. It's job was to (1) lure the ARVN into a major battle by attacking important targets; (2) cut South Vietnam into half. In furtherance of this objective, on October 19, 1965, B-3 Front attacked the US Special Forces/ARVN base at Plei Me, one of a chain of fronts built in the western highlands precisely to thwart the kind of attack the Front planned. This attack was a major escalation of the war and it caused several US casualties. An incensed US command decided to abandon its previous strategy of helping the South Vietnamese fight a counter-insurgency campaign, and to directly engage the communists by going on the offensive. In retrospect, provoking the Americans was one of the most brainless actions undertaken by the PAVN, and it paid an increasingly bloody price for its foolishness.

The PAVN attack on Plei Me was beaten back by the usual skillful American use of firepower. The PAVN withdrew and the US Command then counterattacked, ordering its forces to find and destroy B-3 Front. Consequently, on October 27 the 1st Cavalry Division was tasked to this mission.

The Opposing Sides

In August and September 1965 the 1st Cavalry Division arrived at its home base of An Khe in the Central Highlands, completing its move by October 3. The American genius at logistics is evident in that the division was given 8 weeks to move from its home base to An Khe, cut out of the jungle for the division by a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division. An amusing incident occurred at sea en route when one unit was told to be prepared to fight its way ashore. There was simply no way this could happen because the division was packed administratively. Moreover, the ship on which this unit was traveling believed its destination was Korea - no one had bothered to tell the merchantmen they were in fact headed for Vietnam.

The 1st Cavalry Division had been formed in 1921, and dismounted in 1943 to fight as an infantry division in the Pacific and later in Korea. It stayed behind in Korea as part of the permanent garrison till its flags were transferred in 1965 to the experimental 11th Air Assault Division at Ft. Benning, Georgia. At full strength the division had 16,000 men, 1,600 vehicles, and 435 aircraft. It devoured - for its time - enormous quantities of supplies: 500 tons a day plus 50,000 gallons of aviation fuel, equaling about another 180 tons. This was an entirely new kind of division, built to fight a new kind of war in three dimensions, and spoiling for a battle to prove itself.

Despite its eagerness, the 1st Cavalry Division arrived with a whole set of problems. It was under strength when orders to move to Vietnam were given; a number of experienced helicopter crews and other technicians did not go with the division because their time in the Army was coming to an end; and on arriving, a thousand of its men were made sick by a particularly virulent strain of malaria for which there was no treatment. Most important, its troops were green, and about to come up against some of what the journalist Bernard Fall, with justification, had called the best light infantry in the world [Pierce].

The PAVN and VC had been fighting for years: the 32nd and 33rd Regiment were veteran; in the case of the senior officers, for decades. They were not just very experienced, they were on their home ground. As an example of how unprepared the Cavalry was, its troopers had been issued their M-16 rifles just ten days before sailing for Indochina.

See Map Ia Drang 1

On taking up station, the division was given a 150 by 150 mile area of responsibility, in which it was free to operate as it wanted, with only a warning to friendly units in the zone. Its brigades were distributed in a line through the middle of South Vietnam.

The problem was that Front B-3 was not to be found: a division's worth of enemy troops had just disappeared.

A measure of the PAVN/Viet Cong's field skills is that when B-3 was discovered, it was just 8 kilometers from the Special Forces fort! The field craft of these soldiers was formidable.

First contact came on November 1 as the division's 1st Brigade moved to engage Front B-3. The Cavalry got their initial experience of combat with a first-class PAVN force when they found that most of the fighting took place at ranges of just 20 meters: the adversary had trained to immediately close in with the Americans so that the latter could not use their firepower. B-3 decided to disengage and withdraw, and the Cavalry worked out that B-3 would use the line of the Ia Drang River to get back to their mountain bases.

On November 9 the division's 3rd Brigade relieved the 1st in the continuing skirmishes as the Cavalry sought to locate and engage B-3, and B-3 just as assiduously sought to avoid battle.

LZ X-Ray

On November 14, an under strength cavalry battalion, 1/7th Cavalry with 450 men, was airlifted into Landing Zone X-Ray in an effort to trap B-3 by blocking its withdrawal routes to the Massif. The 7th Cavalry is, of course, as famous outside the United States, because this was the regiment that General George Custer led to its destruction at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. To the amateur - and this author counts himself as one in the matter of history, there seem to be some correspondences between the two battles of the 7th Cavalry, fought 80 years apart. Nonetheless, we will have to leave it to more knowledgeable persons to discuss this point.

Besides X-Ray, three other LZs were created as part of this operation, LZ Albany, about 2 1/2 miles away, LZ Columbus, and LZ Victor, a similar distance away. The landing was covered by two artillery batteries of the 1/21st Artillery and by aerial rocket artillery. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Hal Moore, led the assault, being the first to jump from the helicopters, and 1/7th Cavalry found itself smack in the middle of three PAVN battalions, 9/66th and 7/66th Regiments, and elements of the 33rd Regiment. This is what happened over the next five days.

With the visibility effectively at zero meters, the badly outnumbered 1/7th Cavalry and the three PAVN battalions went at each other, neither willing to give way, even though this was the first real battle for the American unit. Viet Cong Main Force Battalion H-15 joined in; the VC battalions, though usually smaller in size than the PAVN ones, tended to consist of some of the most battle hardened soldiers in the world. The US 2/5th Cavalry arrived to assist the beleaguered 1/7th, covering the latter's evacuation for reorganization. The battalion got out on November 16th, losing 79 KIA and 121 WIA, almost half its strength. C Company alone lost 42 killed and 20 wounded.

During the course of the battle, the 2/7th Cavalry arrived at X-Ray to reinforce the 1/7th. Its B Company was instrumental in saving 1/7th from the encircling B-3 Front: the Front, not knowing of B Company's arrival, put in four attacks before daybreak against what it thought was the remnants of 1/7th Cavalry waiting to be finished off. B/2/7th defeated all attacks, extracting 200 killed for a cost of six wounded. Ironically, the tables were very shortly to be turned.

LZ Albany

On the morning of November 17th, with the Americans believing the battle was over, the 2/5th and 2/7th were ordered out of the battle area ahead of a 200-ton B-52 strike to be delivered against the B-3 Front's bases at the Massif, which looked down on X-Ray. Nothing in Vietnam was more frightening than a B-52 strike. The effect was akin to that of a tactical nuclear weapon, with everything in the target area obliterated. Depending on a number of factors, the bombs might be dropped outside the box, so no one wanted to be anywhere near. Since X-Ray had been shut down due to the earlier fighting, 2/5th Cavalry was to evacuate from LZ Columbus, and 2/7th from LZ Albany. Albany lay 10 kilometers from X-Ray.

See Map Ia Drang 2

2/5th Cavalry reached its extraction area without incident. 2/7th had a longer distance to go. Its men had been in action for 50 hours without sleep or rest. Exhausted as they were, their ordeal was just beginning. En route to LZ Albany, with the head of the column already at the LZ, a 550-yard long column of 2/7th was ambushed by a fresh PAVN battalion, the 8/66th, which had not yet till then entered fighting. The OC 2/7th had called his company commanders to the LZ for a conference, and except for one company commander [A 1/5th Cavalry] who had not quite reached the LZ and was able to get away to rejoin his men, the rest of the troops were now isolated from their immediate commanders. This undoubtedly helps explain the disaster that followed.

The PAVN had got about 100 snipers into the trees where they could not be seen. Remnants of the 33rd PAVN Regiment, who must have been every bit as exhausted as the 2/7th and considerably more beat up due to American firepower, nonetheless reorganized and joined in the ambush. Most of the troops in the ambush zone seem to have been from C 2/7th with some from A 1/5th Cavalry.

Because of the the elephant grass, visibility was near nil. A first hand account has the author saying the fighting was so intense he did not see or hear an enemy machine gun firing from three feet away, just one foot over his head. Obviously neither did the PAVN see the Americans. This man was fighting within 30 meters of the LZ, but in 36 hours nether he nor his comrades could make it to the LZ. Because of the bad visibility, everyone shot at everyone, so that foe killed foe, and friend killed friend. Many of the Americans were killed by their own fire; later, with the entire area under heavy air and artillery attack for the better part of 24 hours as the Americans sought to save their men, many more were killed by friendly fire. Yet it was the ceaseless fire support that enabled what remained of 2/7th Cavalry to survive. PAVN attacks against the column continued through the night. What happened now is best told in a first person account of a survivor of the battle. His company suffered 93 percent casualties, half dead and half wounded; he notes that the wounded were crippled for life.

We suggest the reader look up the account for himself, and if he is unfamiliar with the real nature of infantry combat, and with the Vietnam War in particular, he will be utterly appalled at the ferocious cruelty with which both sides fought. Perhaps the war against the Japanese was like the Battle at LZ Albany, but perhaps in those days combatants were more restrained in their writing. This account, by an enlisted man named Jack Smith, will one day be reckoned as a classic of war literature. It is all the more stunning in its impact for his direct, simple narration, bereft of any intent to dramatize.

The highly experienced PAVN, masters of night-fighting, had the advantage, and they took it, inflicting horrific casualties on the Americans - 2/7th was to lose 151 KIA, 121 WIA, 4 MIA. The reason for the low MIA is the PAVN systematically executed every wounded trooper they came upon. But before we get morally outraged, let us be clear that the Americans reacted in exactly the same manner, shooting every single wounded PAVN soldier. This preshadowed a disturbing aspect of the Vietnam War: Perhaps the PAVN/VC and the South Vietnamese treated each other's wounded better, but if the Americans and the PAVN/VC took prisoners, it was simply for interrogation, and if the prisoners were still alive after interrogation, it was simply an oversight. Even at their worst, the Japanese fighting the British in Malaya, Burma and India were never as brutal as the Americans and Vietnamese were toward each other.

Jack Smith's account has many remarkable aspects, but the one this author found the most astonishing was that a number of American wounded shot themselves rather than be taken prisoner. Smith tells of three men he knows for a fact killed themselves, and says that many others did too, but it was hard to tell later because so many of the bodies had multiple wounds. In the Japanese culture suicide rather than capture was considered highly honorable; but Smith, being an American, is faintly derisive about the two he knew about, possibly because he feels they gave up without fighting to the last. Be that as it may, this samurai behavior is not something one associates with the Americans.

This cannot be emphasized enough - for the great majority of the American troops this was their first battle. One can expect soldiers who have seen many atrocities to be as harsh and ruthless as the Americans were, but how did green soldiers become this way after just a few days in combat?

Though the battle was over by the morning of the 18th - the PAVN were forced to withdraw under the weight of American firepower, losing over 450 dead, 403 by confirmed count - the suffering of the wounded cavalymen was to continue. The survivors were not completely evacuated till the 20th. One reason was that the Cavalry's helicopter crews would not come in given that effective visibility was a few yards and they too could be ambushed.

The Aftermath

This author finds many aspects of the Battle of the Ia Drang disturbing, and hopes better educated people will clear up some of the apparent mysteries. One is how was 2/7th Cavalry so easily ambushed? It has been said that in contrast to the 1/7th, which was commanded with the highest professionalism, the 2/7th was sloppy in its march to its LZ, making little effort to move quietly and with due concern for its safety - lacking any real knowledge of the battle, the author cannot say what was the truth of the matter. Also baffling is why the Cavalry's helicopters stood off: this was an elite formation; it is hard to see the Marines, for example, not doing everything to aid their wounded regardless of what it cost them.

At any rate, B-3 Front, unable to crush the Americans, now withdrew, leaving behind a highly pleased 1st Cavalry Division and higher US command.

Both sides believed themselves victorious at the Ia Drang, though if the author may be permitted a value judgment, the PAVN's claims of victory smack of propagandistic bravado. B-3 wanted to fight the Americans, they did so and were severely beaten by a much smaller force in action for the first time. That green troops could perform so well could not have been a good augury - and those who might maintain the American victory was solely because of firepower will be sadly misguiding themselves.

Though American losses from so few units engaged were never again as heavy, the Ia Drang was a preview of the way the Americans were to fight the war. They were extremely aggressive on the battlefield, always seeking to draw the enemy out. So small American units, platoons and companies, could be found all over the battlefield, in close proximity to the enemy. Each and every time, without fail, the Americans beat the PAVN and VC. And yet, given that the battlefield is only dimension of the equations of war, an impartial observer with the benefit of hindsight must also be left much disturbed. The Communists never lost the strategic initiative. The American habit of seeking, finding, and destroying the enemy and then pushing off to look for another fight somewhere else as if nothing but the main battle existed can give no comfort because in the long run, the Americans, despite winning every battle, lost the war. The failure lay in the American inability to understand this was a political war: without military victories, the political aspects could not come into play, but the Americans seemed never to proceed further than their military victories, deeming them sufficient to win. They were mistaken.

This author was, and still is, too staunch an anti-communist to feel any real sympathy for the PAVN and especially the VC troops. Nonetheless, personal feelings aside, we have to admire their battle skill. The PAVN/VC, had unparalleled skill at moving undetected around the jungle battlefield, and had the advantage of choosing to decline combat unless forced into it. Time and again, if the PAVN could mass around an isolated American unit, it would attack; time and again it would be beaten back. This tactic resulted in very heavy PAVN casualties. If 58,000 Americans did not come home from Vietnam, neither

did 800,000 PAVN, though of course many of those casualties were caused by the ARVN, generally its elite parachute and marine units. Nonetheless, given that the PAVN lacked the technology and the firepower, it had no choice but to substitute human bodies for machinery, and suffered accordingly. And, needless to say, had the PAVN had the technology, the trucks, aircraft, guns, and helicopters, it would have been that much easier for the Americans to defeat them, because if the masters of jungle warfare were the Vietnamese, the masters of conventional war are the Americans. Given that they always lost in these infantry actions, we have to marvel at the determination of the PAVN in continuing to press forward.

At the Ia Drang, B-3 Front had the initiative at all times and the Americans were left merely to react. The way in which B-3, already once beaten back with heavy losses from the Highlands, managed to reorganize itself and counterattack the Americans looking for the Front, is astonishing. After staggering losses at X-Ray, where any army could be excused for packing it in, B-3 again went on the offensive and caught the Americans at Albany. That the Americans reacted with pile-hammer blows that eventually pulverized B-3 is no credit to their tactics. Even in defeat, B-3 retained its cohesiveness; the American higher command lacked the foresight to continue pursuing it till annihilation. In any case, B-3 would have escaped into Cambodia; the Americans, being forced to function within arbitrary lines devised by the politicals, would not have followed the retreating enemy into Cambodia. Though B-3 paid an appalling price for its careless assumption that it could fight the Americans in a straight conventional battle, enough men got away that the units were rebuilt, and that the experience gained was imparted at all levels

We know the Americans left Vietnam because they could not accept the continuing losses for no clear purpose. What most people fail to appreciate is that had North Vietnam been anything except a rigid communist dictatorship, its people could not have accepted their losses either. The North Vietnamese showed an astonishing stupidity and crude determination through the war. But so did the Americans. No other western country could have fought so long and so hard for so futile a purpose.

Some statistics regarding aviation during the 35-day period of the operation. Five thousand and forty eight tons were lifted into the battlefield; an additional 8216 tons were moved by division resources from depots to the An Khe base; 2,700 refugees were moved out. Fifty nine helicopters were hit; four were downed, or which three were recovered. The Battle of the Ia Drang helped convinced doubters that the helicopter was no where near as vulnerable as feared.

B-3 Front PAVN [General Chu Huy Man]

32 Regiment

334th Battalion

635th Battalion

966th Battalion

The battalions were also known as H-4, H-5, H-6

33 Regiment

1st Battalion

2nd Battalion

3rd Battalion

The battalions were also known as K-1, K-2, K3; and as D-1, D-2, D-3

66 Regiment

7th Battalion

8th Battalion

9th Battalion

Also known as K-7, K-8, K-9 battalions

120mm mortar battalion

14.7mm AAA battalion

H-15 Battalion, Main Force, Viet Cong

Other Viet Cong units

AA and mortar units

US Army Field Forces, Vietnam [MG Stanley R. Larsen]
II Corps Tactical Zone, the same area as covered by ARVN II Corps

US 1st Cavalry Division (incomplete orbat) [Major General W.O. Kinnard]
3rd Brigade [Colonel Thomas Brown]
 A 1/5 Cavalry (attached to 2/7 Cavalry)
 2/5 Cavalry
 1/7 Cavalry [LTC Hal Moore, later LTG]
 2/7 Cavalry [LTC Robert McDade]
1/9 Cavalry [divisional reconnaissance squadron (regiment), fought in campaign]
1/19 Artillery [Not mentioned at Battles at X-Ray and Albany]
2/20 Aerial Rocket Artillery
1/21 Artillery [Two batteries support X-Ray]
227 Assault Aviation Battalion [UH-1, Fought in the campaign]
228 Assault Support Helicopter Battalion [CH-47]
B/229 Assault Aviation Battalion (20 UH-1D)
11 Aviation Support Company [OV-1 Mohawk]
17 Aviation Company [De Havilland Buffalo]
478 Aviation Company [CH-54 heavy lift]
545 MP Company
8 Engineer Battalion [Elements]
15 Medical Battalion [Elements]
27 Maintenance Battalion [Elements]
13 Signal Battalion [Elements]
15 Supply and Service Battalion [Elements]
34 Quartermaster Battalion [Elements]

Air Support

740 CAS sorties were flown, mainly in support of LZ X Ray and Albany. Five B-52 missions with 96 sorties were flown.

Other cavalry battalions of the division:

1/5 Cavalry
1/8 Cavalry [Fought in the campaign]
2/8 Cavalry [Fought in the campaign]
1/12 Cavalry [Fought in the campaign]
2/12 Cavalry [Fought in the campaign]

Some accounts mention a 3/5 Cavalry at the Ia Drang. This unit had nothing to do with the 1st Cavalry Division and was elsewhere in Vietnam. The 8/4th Artillery was among the units that participated in the campaign. The US 7th Air Force's 1st Air Commando may have participated in the battle.

Code names for other parts of the Ia Drang campaign were Long Beach and Green Horse.

Hal Moore later became a three-star general. He wrote a book together with journalist Joe Galloway about Vietnam titled *We Were Soldiers Once..and Young*, surely one of the most poignant titles ever for a book about war. The title simultaneously evokes the careless strength and vitality of the youthful warrior fading to an impotent old age, and serves as a metaphor for the American experience in Indochina, where the Americans arrived optimistic and fresh and full of energy, determined to win, and left exhausted and disillusioned and cynical.

The cavalryman on the cover of Moore and Galloway's book was the legendary Lt. Rick Rescorla of the 2/7th Cavalry. As security manager for the Wall Street firm Dean Witter Morgan Stanley, he got everyone from his company out of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 but did not come out alive. When last heard from, he was still looking for people left behind. The US Post Office issued a 7 cent stamp using the same picture.

SOURCES:

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- http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR775/MR775_chap7.pdf
- <http://www.weweresoldiers.net/campaign3.htm> [Hal Moore and Joe Galloway]
- <http://pub82.ezboard.com/fworldatwargamingfrm5.showMessage?topicID=50.topic> [Wild Bill]
- <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/Vietnam/tactical/chapter2.htm> [for some of the cavalry actions preceding the battles at X-Ray and Albany and for helicopter tactics]
- http://cdl.panam.edu/dayoung/vn_pdf/After_Action_Report_1st_Cav_Pleiku_Campaign_Cover_Forward_TOC.pdf [After action report of the 1st Cavalry Division; I have still to digest this lengthy - 133 page - document.]

The maps are from [US Military Academy Map Library](#)