

THE 3D BRIGADE, 25TH INFANTRY'S

MOVE TO VIETNAM

AS TOLD BY: COL EVERETTE STOUTNER

Subject: VIETNAM HISTORY OF THE CACTI REGIMENT

Dear Dick (Arnold):

When I returned to our Hawaiian home earlier this month after having been on the Mainland since April 14th, there were 513 E-mail messages on my computer. One was your most welcome message. It was great for me to learn of the interest you have in the history of 3rd Infantry Brigade and the work you are doing to reconstruct the events that led up to the deployment from Hawaii to Vietnam.

I took command of the 3rd Brigade in June, 1965. At that time the major units of the Brigade were: 1st Bn, 35th Infantry commanded by Lt. Col. Ed Callanan, 2nd Bn, 35th Infantry commanded by Lt. Col. George Scott (now deceased), 1st Bn, 5th Mech Inf commanded by Lt. Col. Thomas Greer, 2d Bn 9th Artillery commanded by Lt Col Saul Jackson.

On December 12, 1965 I was directed by Col Tom Mellon, 25th Inf Div C/S to meet Major General Fred Weyand , CG 25th Infantry Division, at his quarters at 1800 hours that evening. Gen Weyand, who had just returned from a meeting at CINCPAC, informed me that the 3rd BDE was to be deployed to Pleiku, Vietnam and that an Advanced Party should leave within a week. This information was, of course, TOP SECRET at that time.

The 3rd Brigade was tailored as a Separate Brigade Task Force and would be under the Operational Control of the CG First Field Force Commanded by Maj Gen Stanley Larsen whose Headquarters was some 100 miles Southeast of Pleiku on the Coast at Nha Trang .

Before leaving Schofield Barracks, the 1st Bn 5th Mech was moved to the 2nd Brigade and the 1st Bn, 14th Infantry commanded by Lt Col Gilbert Proctor was assigned to the 3rd Bde. In addition to the three infantry battalions, and the direct support artillery battalion, there was a Provisional Support Battalion, consisting of various combat and service support elements such as Medical, Signal, Ordnance, and Administrative units . Plus, there was a combat engineer company, a cavalry troop and a tank company. The overall strength of this separate brigade task force was about 4200 people.

The 3rd Bde, less the 1/14 and the large armor and engineer equipment, deployed by air. The code name of the airlift was "Operation Blue Light". The Air Force dedicated 12 C-141 and 4 C -133 aircraft to this operation. The Advance Party,

utilizing three C-141 aircraft, departed for Pleiku on or about December 16th. (I do not recall the exact date) The Main Body started deployment on December 25th and I departed Schofield Barracks at that time. Major (P) Phil Feir, was the Brigade Executive Officer. He remained at Schofield to supervise the movement and to close out the brigade responsibilities as the last elements of the brigade departed.

The 1/14th Inf, after spending 12 days at sea, arrived at Cam Ran Bay on January 17th, 1966. Our initial mission was to build a Base Camp about 4 miles East of Pleiku, establish communications, and to ensure the protection of the base as the units phased in. A plane arrived about every six hours. In addition, we had the mission of securing Hwy 19 (?) from the Coast to Pleiku as our out sized and logistical elements moved via that route to Pleiku.

As I recall, the 3rd BDE completed its move to Pleiku during the 3rd week in January 1966 which was eight days ahead of the target date that had been set by MACV.

Operation Blue Light was completed without incident and was, at that time, the largest Air Force/Army movement in point of number troops moved and the amount of ton miles flown. The 61st Military Air Lift Wing flew 225 missions, transporting more than 4700 Tons of cargo plus approximately 4000 troops. A total of 225 missions were flown during this movement.

Even before the Brigade had closed, we were ordered to perform search and destroy missions in the vicinity of some of the Special Forces Camps which were located in the Central Highlands.

Starting during the latter part of January, the 2nd Bn of the 35th Inf was given missions along Hwy 19 near the Man Yang Pass. This area had a history of frequent activity by the VC from which they launched ambushes and attacks on traffic using this highway which was a main avenue of communications. The 1/35 and 1/14 Battalions were engaged in search and destroy missions West of Pleiku. This operation was named Taylor.

During the early February, the Brigade less the 2/35 Bn, was moved to Darlac Prov and commenced Operation Garfield which started in the Ban Me Thuot area and moved North toward Buon Brieng, which was a Montanyard village. Garfield continued for about five weeks during which time over 300 VC and NVA were killed, many individual and crew served weapons and communications equipment was captured, an estimated 60 tons of rice was denied the enemy and a large field hospital with modern surgical equipment and supplies was destroyed.

Operation Garfield lasted about five weeks. After which, the 3rd Bde moved right into Operation Lincoln, where the area of operations was from the Chu Pong Mountain/la Drang River, North toward Dak To Special Forces Camp. As this

Operation got under way, two Republic of Korea Infantry Battalions were attached to the 3rd Bde. During Operation Lincoln, elements of at least five NVA Regiments made repeated attacks coming from their positions located across the border in Cambodia. During one pre dawn attack, the NVA had very heavy losses when they hit the main defenses of the 1/14th and the two Korean Battalions.

During Operation Lincoln the 3rd Bde was placed under the Op Con of the 1st Air Cav Div.

Following Operation Lincoln, the 3rd Bde participated in several search and destroy operations in the Pleiku, Kontum, and Dak To areas. And, in an operation in the vicinity of a large tea plantation (the name of which I do not remember) located South and West of Pleiku.

The next major Operation was Paul Revere. The area of operation was to the South and West of Pleiku and West toward the Cambodian Border.

Around the first of May, I turned the 3rd Bde over to Brig Gen Glenn D. Walker. Gen Walker had been one of the two Assistant Division Commanders of the 25th Infantry Division. The other Assistant Division Commander, Brig Gen Ted Desaussure later was assigned to command a Separate Brigade attached to the 25th Inf Div in the Chu Chi area. Both of these changes in command were directed by GEN Westmoreland.

I remained with the 3rd Bde as the Deputy Commander for a few weeks before being assigned to Second Field Force Headquarters at Long Bien as the G3. Long Bien is located about 20 miles North of Saigon. I remained in that position until the end of 1966 when my tour in Vietnam was completed.

Dick, the above is presented for your information and is a chronology of what transpired (as I remember) from the time we were alerted until we closed in at Pleiku and almost immediately entered into a series of combat operations.

Finally, I want to state that the Bde was well trained, and the morale was high. About two weeks before we started the deployment, the 3rd Bde won the Division Football Championship with a 10 wins and no losses This alone, was a great morale builder.

Aloha,

Ev Stoutner

Hawaii Lightning News

'Operation Blue Light' Moves Tropic Lightning

Reprinted from The AIR Division Advisor (RVN) January 7, 1966.

The Air Force's "Operation Blue Light," a massive airlift of elements of the Army's 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division from Hawaii, is now beginning its second week.

Military Airlift Command (MAC), formerly known as the Military Air Transport Service (MATS), is carrying out the airlift of some 3,000 soldiers and 3,200 tons of cargo. This troop airlift, the longest in war times, began Dec. 24, when an advanced party of more than 100 members of the 3rd Brigade and 103 tons of equipment arrived at the Pleiku air base in the central mountain region, 240 miles northeast of Saigon.

Air Force Lt. Col. Russell J. Revel of Hutchinson, Kan., MAC airlift commander here, supervised the unloading of nearly 50 tons vehicles and 75 troops from the time the planes landed.

Colonel Revel is assigned to MAC's 22nd Air Transport Squadron.

The Air Force's C-133 jet turbo-prop and the C-141 jet transport are the primary air-craft being used in "Operation Blue Light." These aircraft are backed up by C-124 Globe-masters and C-130 Hercules transports.

More than 26 aircraft are involved in the operation. Throughout the airlift, a C-133 will be landing at Pleiku nearly every four hours, while the C-141s will touch down about every 10 hours.

Flying more than 6,000 miles across the Pacific from Hickam AFB, Hawaii, all airline crews make two stops enroute to Pleiku. The first stop for both the C-133 and C-141 crews is Wake Island.

From that stopover, the C-133 crews go to Kadema AB, Okinawa, and the C-141 crews fly to Clark AFB, Philippine Islands. The flight time, including the stopovers, is about 30 hours for the C-133 crews and 18 hours for the C-141 crews.

Colonel Revel explained that the stopovers are for refueling and servicing of the aircraft to enable them to have a quick turn around time in the combat area. While at Pleiku, the air-craft engines are kept in operation during an average 25 minute ground time.

Some 270 men from MAC units are directly involved in "Operation Blue Light." Also there are about 80 men from other major commands participating in the airlift. Most of the airlift command men and aircraft come from units in MAC's Western Transport Air Force (WESTAF) with backup support provided by the Eastern Transport Air Force (EASTAF).