

The Following is after action report that have been submitted.
These reports were about B Company's involvement in the A-Shaw Valley in 1968.

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A Shaw Valley is 22 miles long located in I Corps, less than six miles from Laos, and is between two mountain ranges. The A Shaw Valley was one of two strong Holds for the communists. The other strong hold was the U Minh Forest. Both of these strong holds were considered by Charlie to be his personal territory. In April 1968 there were three abandoned airfields that were spread along the valleys floor and a deserted Special Forces Camp that was overrun in March 1966. It marked the southern boundary. It was the strongest enemy base in South Vietnam. The enemy garrisoned 5000 to 6000 troops there. It was ringed by one of the most sophisticated complex of interlocked anti-aircraft Batteries. The valley had served as a launching point for the Tet Offensive on the northern provinces. It was a major base for the infiltration of personnel and supplies into Thua Thien Province and northern I Corps.

Operation Delaware was launched on April 10th 1968. The 1st Air Cavalry Division headed into the A Shaw Valley. Between the 14th and the 19th of April 1968 there were over 100 B-52 sorties and 200 Air Force and Marine fighter sorties executed along with many ARA missions. The 1st Brigade of the 101st Air Bourne Division and the ARVN Air bourne Task Force had set up to the east to interdict enemy routes of withdrawal and infiltration.

On 19 April 1968, the 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion, commanded by LTC W.F. Dixon was prepared to commit its maximum available resources in the third massive helicopter assault within a month, Operation/Delaware/Lam Son 216. The plan of operation was to simultaneously assault into the A Shau Valley and to insert a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol to secure "Signal Hill," a 4879 foot peak 5 kilometers northeast of A Loui Airfield to be used as a vital communications relay station. At 0730 hours, 19 April 1968, the weather, which was to play a harassing part throughout the 29 day operation, was a thin overcast on the plains and solid overcast above the valley. The cloud tops, however, were at about 4500 feet. The top of Signal Hill was above the clouds. With the main assault aircraft

on a temporary weather hold, Co B, 227th AHB, with 4 UH-1H helicopters, a command and control ship, and 2 escort gunships from D Co were suddenly in the position of the lead assault element. Carrying an aircraft load (ACL) of 5, the 4 lift aircraft departed Camp Evans, climbed through the thin overcast, and were vectored to the initial landing zone.

It was briefed to be a single ship LZ and intelligence reports had spotted anti-aircraft positions along the ridge to the northeast and a heavy concentration of assorted weapons in the valley floor to the west. The initial approach was attempted directly to the west, approaching the hill mass at a 45 degree angle. The first view of the LZ showed it to be a bomb crater on a 40 degree slope surrounded by 50 foot trees. Touchdown was impossible and the LRRP's would have to be repelled from about 30 feet. The lead aircraft was unable to maintain a position over the LZ and made a "go around." The second aircraft attempting the drop lost power and crashed into the LZ, sliding down the hill into the trees. The approach axis was shifted from west to east and the lead aircraft on a second approach successfully repelled his load and extracted a miraculously uninjured crew of the downed aircraft. A total of 14 sorties were lifted into Signal Hill without further incident with constant improvement being made on the LZ. From the initial assault it looked like a milk run as no significant anti-aircraft fire was encountered.

Concurrent with the Signal Hill lift at 0930 the main assault, augmented by the 229th AHB, for a total of 40 lift helicopters and 8 supporting gunships were launched from a marshaling point just southwest of Camp Evans. With 10 aircraft each, Co led by Major Darwin A. Peterson and C Co. Led by Major Edward L. Burkhalter, each escorted by a pair of gunships, lifted off with an aircraft load (ACL) of 6 in the White and Yellow flights respectively. This assault was to establish a fire base stop a 3580 foot ridge on the northwest edge of the A Shau Valley. LZ Tiger would command the approach of RSR 548 into the northern end of the valley from the west. The entire flight into the A Shau was forced to climb to 6000 feet to fly over the clouds and descend one ship at a time into the valley through holes in the overcast. The aircraft first made their approach from the west to a less than adequate LZ forced by a bomb crater in a small saddle stop Hill 122B. From the time the first aircraft came through

the clouds, it was apparent that it would be no ordinary assault. Despite the 209 tactical air sorties and 21 B-52 strikes, each aircraft approaching LZ Tiger ran the gauntlet of withering anti-aircraft fire, including .50 caliber and 37mm guns. The enemy gunners inflicted damage on a total of 25 1st Air Cav Div aircraft this first day. It was considered to be the most formidable air defense yet faced by the 1st Air Cav Div in Vietnam.

The enemy fire was not the only problem so-encountered by the relatively inexperienced aviators. For the first time the pilots were experiencing a loss of RPM due to the high density altitude. The aircraft was unable to maintain a high hover on LZ Tiger and could not sit down in the LZ without hitting the trees with the blades. The ACL was lowered to 5 on the second lift and then to safely make the lift. Blade strikes accounted for the loss of 6 aircraft before the LZ was finally curved out enough to allow the aircraft to touchdown. With 20 sorties into LZ Tiger the decision was made to split the lift into a lower LZ approximately 900ft below the original LZ creating an LZ, (Tiger Lower), and redesignating the upper location (Tiger Upper). After a number of sorties into Tiger Lower, the intense fire from the valley floor to the east and south prompted the remaining lift to revert back to Tiger Upper. During the shift, a D Co gunship was shot down southeast of the Tiger Upper, but managed to crash land on the road with no casualties; the crew was inordinately extracted.

The lift into the two Tiger LZ's was complete at 1300 hours. The air assault of the 1/7 Cav Bu to establish LZ Vicky on the northeast side of the valley began at 1330. This fire base was located directly east of LZ Tiger on a low finger tucked up against the eastern wall of the valley. LZ Vicky was a 2 ship LZ and again was formed by bomb craters. The initial flight path was from Tiger directly east across the valley landing to the southeast. The intense enemy fire from the valley floor had hit several aircraft and destroyed a 229th AHB aircraft necessitating a quick route change. A relatively secure route farther north was found with the aircraft skirting the open valley and hugging the eastern wall. The final approach was made from a dog log to the southwest.

By 1630, two-thirds of the lift was complete and the planned lift of a third battalion was canceled due to increasingly bad weather and low visibility. By this time the aviation resources had dwindled by half from both

maintenance and enemy attrition. The battalion's maintenance crews doing a job throughout the day had restored all repairable aircraft by nightfall. During the day, the 227th A.B. had lost 2 aircraft that were not recovered and over 75% of the fleet had required maintenance. Maintenance crews worked throughout the night to prepare for further lifts the next day. We had miraculously taken no serious casualties though other elements of the 11th Aviation Group did suffer: KIA and WIA. The 227th had carried a full infantry battalion into the A Shau Valley.

(20 Apr 68)

The second day of the assault into the A Shau began with an aircraft hold due to a low overcast and fog on the valley floor. At approximately 0900 Major Burkhalter led C Company's yellow flight followed by A Company's white flight to assault a ridge line 4 kilometers southwest of LZ Tiger to establish a third fire base LZ Pepper. The approach was made from the north along the ridge into a slope studded with stumps. Again the aircraft could not touchdown and experienced power loss at a hover. The lead aircraft crashed, but all crew and passengers escaped with only minor injuries. The crash, however, closed the LZ until members of 2/9 Cav repelled with chain saws to expand the LZ. Upon resumption of the lift, the new lead aircraft came too close to the trees on take off and also crashed. Again the crew got out unhurt. These two crews remained on Pepper for two nights due to bad weather restricting any further flying into the valley. Only one infantry company was air lifted into LZ Pepper before the weather halted all operations.

* See Appendix 2 for total losses of 227th and 11th Group for 19 April 1968.

Koony anti-aircraft fire was limited mostly to small arms fire with some heavier caliber fire to the north. Two infantry battalions plus one company now occupied territory in the A Shau Valley. The 227th AHB had lost two aircraft to a poor LZ on D=1 and had suffered three slightly wounded.

(21-22 Apr 68)

Bad weather prevailed throughout the entire day on 21 April 1968 with no air assaults being conducted. D Co with 6 aircraft was on standby to haul a badly needed resupply to LZ Tiger. Shortly after noon the aircraft took off at 1 minute intervals with an 800 pound sling load under each aircraft.

One by one, the aircraft were radar vectored to a point over LZ Tiger. Each aircraft had to feel its way through the holes in the overcast creating a separate approach axis for each. The gambit proved quite effective and a total of 14 sling loads were taken into both Tiger LZ's before the weather again closed. For most of the crews, it was their first actual instrument flight. No other aviation action took place on the 21st. The 22nd brought much improved weather conditions and the air lift into LZ Pepper continued with a maximum of aircraft again committed. Anti-aircraft fire was harassing but far less than previous days. At the day's end the 3rd Brigade was firmly entrenched in the A Shau Valley with 3 Infantry battalions plus supporting artillery.

(23-24 Apr 68)

On the 23rd of April, no major moves were made by air. LZ Goodman was secured by ground attack as aircraft resources were used to resupply all units in the valley. On 24 April, A Co and B Co with 6 aircraft each joined the 229th AHB to air assault elements of the 1st Bde into LZ Cecil, 2 kilometers south A Luoi Airfield. Again weather played a significant part forcing the lifts to climb as high as 11,000 feet to clear the cloud tops. Once over the valley and through the holes in the overcast the aircraft delay-chained from 13 Evens to the new 12, covered a route by the guns of both 229th AHB and 227th AHB, Cecil was a two ship 12 at the southern end of a ridge about 2200 feet high. Although all aircraft were exposed to sniping fire on the approach the main threat came from an automatic weapons position about 500 meters down the ridge to the southeast. Since the approach was made to the south, the enemy gunners get crack at each aircraft as it departed no matter which way it broke. Very few hits were sustained, however, and no aircraft were lost as the lift of the 2/8 Cav on to Cecil was completed prior to 1400 hours.

Late in the afternoon B Co. was given the mission of an emergency re-supply of 12 Cecil. The 2/8 Cav had run short of ammunition and supplies after making contact on the landing zone. A hole was found in the overcast and the six aircraft climbed on top at 6000 feet. A radar vector was obtained to get out to the valley and the calling in the A Shau Valley was forecast at about 800 feet. When the aircraft arrived a hole was found in the vicinity of 12 tiger and the ships proceeded in trail from 8500 feet to 800 feet above the valley floor. The ships low level was another story. The

flight received heavy automatic weapons fire during the entire traversing of the valley floor. One ship was hit in the engine tail pipe, but remained flyable. The aircraft found a hole to climb through near 12 Tiger and exited the A Shau.

(25 Apr 68)

On 25 April 1968 the 1st Brigade took advantage of improving weather and quickly air assaulted the 1/8 Cav into A Loui Airfield, establishing LZ Stallion. The 227th AHB played a minor role in this maneuver because very little resistance was met on the assault.

(28 Apr 68)

On 28 April the 227th AHB committed ships to lagger during the night at LZ Stallion. The weather had varied between low ceilings and ground fog in the morning to high calculus clouds in the afternoon. This had seriously restricted the operations because at the time when the valley floor was clear enough for operations, ships could get into the valley due to the high, dense, clouds surrounding the A Shau. The lagged ships could support units in the valley in case the A Shau weather deteriorated to the point that ships could not get in while the floor of the valley allowed airmobile operations. Co. B of the 227th AHB was the first unit to stay in the valley at night accompanied by 2 D Co. gunships. The program of staggering six (6) aircraft at LZ Stallion continued for three days and then the plan was shifted to one (1) flare aircraft longer for night illumination, since a flight from A Co. had been hit by a heavy mortar barrage while lagged at A Luci. During the remainder of the operation the battalion performed general support of the ground tactical units. The majority of missions being devoted to re-supply of the fire bases and movement of personnel to and from the A Shau.

(10 May 68)

On 10 May the extraction phase of Operation Delaware began. The weather, which had been poor throughout the operation began to deteriorate and the decision was made on 7 May to begin the extraction on 10 May. A Co., 227th AHB was assigned the mission to extract two battalions from the A Shau Valley. The battalions involved were the 1/7th and 5/7th Cav. The flight leader had been briefed the day

before the move by the ground commanders on the execution of the mission. Twelve lift ships and two gunships were committed the next morning to begin the extraction of the 5/7th. Plans had changed considerably from the briefing that was given the previous day and the flight was to take the entire battalion back to Camp Evans, instead of the airstrip at LZ Stallion and await further orders. About 1200 hours a company of the 2/7th Cav came into heavy contact about 2 kilometers northwest of LZ Pepper. The flight was to extract the unit back to LZ Pepper. The extraction was accomplished smoothly with the assistance of two gunships from Company D, 227th AHB 2 fighters and 8 ARA gunships. Once this was completed the flight returned to LZ Stallion to wait for the 1/7 to get into a pickup posture. During the time that the extraction to LZ Pepper, the 229th AHB was extracting the 3rd Regt, 1st ARVN Div., from 12 Upland Lucy. Several of their aircraft had maintenance problems and the S-3 of the 229th requested that the 227th flight extract the last twelve sorties of the 3rd ARVN Regt. And take them to LZ Sally. The weather was quite bad and the extraction was conducted low level. Upon completion of this move the flight returned to LZ Stallion. About 1600 hours the Battalion Commander of the 1/7th informed the Flight Commander that he was ready to be picked up. Coordination had to be made with CH-47s to pull out the artillery and the night was rapidly approaching. During this mission, two aircraft from the flight had to break off to assist in an emergency re-supply of the 2/7th Cav. The entire mission for the day was accomplished without incident, with the outstanding support that was given to the lift aircraft by the gunships of Co. D, 227th AHB. For the remainder of the extraction phase of Operation Delaware, the aircraft of the 227th AHB gave maximum air-support to the ground commanders.

The 227th Avn Bn accomplished its mission during Operation Delaware/Lam Son in an outstanding manner. Perhaps the most significant feature of the entire mission was the total reliance on the Airmobile concept. The 1st Cav operated in enemy held territory that proved to be a veritable stronghold. The A Shau Valley was extremely well defended by numerous anti-aircraft weapons, to include 37mm guns. Thought to be no match for the bug guns, and though operating for the first time (at least initially) beyond the range of friendly artillery, the slow moving helicopters proved to be quite elusive and consequently suffered

only a reasonable number of losses in light of the goals achieved. This operation was a real tribute to the flexibility of the Airmobile Concept.

The problems encountered by the 227th were only overcome by the sheer determination and true professionalism displayed by all members of the Battalion. Adverse weather conditions offered the most pressing difficulties, but by establishing navigation aids and lagging aircraft at LZ Stallion, weather problems were minimized. The terrain also played an important role in affecting our mission capabilities. Due to high altitudes coupled with high temperatures the density altitude was such that loads had to be cut and pilot techniques had to be of the finest to avoid accidents. On top of this, the First Team met stiff enemy resistance at every turn of the A Shau. Besides the anti-aircraft weaponry, the enemy had developed elaborate defenses to safeguard his highway through the Valley. He was firmly entrenched on the hillsides and ridge lines and only grudgingly gave up his ground. The aviators of the 227th never waived and eventually the enemy guns were silenced by the coordinated efforts of the First Team. All of these problems eventually fell on the shoulders of maintenance personnel at Camp Evans. These people worked night and day to repair damages sustained along with normally scheduled maintenance. The maintenance effort was outstanding in keeping the 227th availability at a high. By this maximum output and coordination the 227th was able to help insure the success of Operation Delaware/Lam Son.
