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1st Cavalry Division, Period 2-26 February 1968

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. 14TH MILITARY HISTORY DETACHMENT
1ST CAV DIV (AM)
APO SF 96490

THE BATTLE OF HUE
2-26 February 1968

Prepared by:
14th Mil Hist Det
10 March 1968

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The decisive phase of the Battle of Hue saw its conception when the 3rd Brigade of the First Cavalry received the mission to deny the enemy access to Hue, interdict enemy routes of egress from Hue and locate and destroy enemy units west of the city. The Brigade was further directed to seal off the city on the west and north with the right flank on the Song Huong River. Contact with enemy forces was initiated by B Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry flying reconnaissance support for the Brigade when it located a large group of enemy three kilometers west of Hue and engaged them, killing sixteen NVA. B Troop continued to make sightings throughout the day, raising its total to thirty-eight NVA killed. Also, on 2 February, the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry was airlifted from Camp Evans where it had been carrying out base defense missions, to an LZ south of PK17, the headquarters of the 3d Regiment, 1st ARVN Division. The battalion was given the mission to move towards Hue, make contact with the enemy, fix his location, and destroy him.

Accordingly, at first light on 3 February, the battalion moved out from their LZ, and began movement southeast Hue. The initial advance was made without incident as the battalion followed a route south of, and parallel to, Highway One. At about 1000, the battalion came to the first settled, vegetated area between them and Hue. As they were moving through it, large numbers of NVA could be seen getting into fighting positions on the next settled area 200 meters to the south (VD 685255).

After preparing the area with artillery, ARA and helicopter gunships, the battalion attacked the fiercely resisting enemy fortifications. The battalion advanced against heavy small arms, automatic weapons and mortar fire. With the help of helicopter gunships, they were able to penetrate

the enemy positions and push the enemy clear of the northern edge of the settled area where they established a perimeter for the night. The 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry had succeeded in damaging an estimated NVA battalion and were now astride one of the enemy routes to Hue. 6

Also on Three February, the 3rd Brigade headquarters deployed to PK17 in order to better control the developing situation. The 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry was also alerted to be prepared to move to the contact area the next day.

The night of 3 February passed quietly for the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry with the exception of a few mortar rounds early in the evening. However, at first light on 4 February, the battalion came under heavy fire around its entire perimeter. The desperate enemy were making an all out effort to eliminate the critical blocking of one of their main routes in and out of Hue. Volumes of small arms and automatic weapons fire with 82mm mortar rounds limited movement in the perimeter throughout the day as the battalion placed heavy casualties on the attacking NVA. The battalion was sustaining heavy casualties of its own and it was decided to execute a night move to the highground approximately 4 kilometers to the south overlooking Highway 554 and the Song Huong River (YD 685215). This would place the battalion across one of the enemies' main routes into Hue from the west. The battalion executed a night move without incident, slipping away from the unsuspecting enemy. Leaving their FOB at 2000, they arrived at their new location at 0700 on 5 February. Also on 4 February, while the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry

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was in contact, the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry was air assaulted into an LZ near PK17 astride Highway One and made preparations to move into the contact area on the following day.

On 5 February, the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry established positions on the highground which gave them excellent observation of the main enemy routes in and out of Hue. Their command of the area was so complete that they were soon able to interdict all daylight movement of the enemy by calling artillery down on the plains before them. The 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry remained in its location decisively disrupting and restricting enemy movement until 9 February.

The 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry conducted search and destroy operations along enemy routes of egress west of the initial contact, moving gradually east towards Hue. On 7 February they again made contact with the deeply entrenched enemy who had re-occupied the area which the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry had forced them from. Progress was halted by the stubborn resistance of the enemy. Artillery and ARA were called in on the well fortified enemy and the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry again tried to breach his defenses on 8 February. But they were halted by heavy volumes of enemy automatic weapons and mortar fire.

On 9 February, 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry remained in its position as a holding force to contain the enemy in his positions. The 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry left their location on the highground and attacked northward towards the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry. Enemy resistance stiffened as the battalion entered the village of Then Bon Tri (YD 695217) and continued throughout the day as the infantry slowly moved northward,

clearing the village of stubborn enemy for about 300 meters until they halted. Their losses were two killed and fourteen wounded. Rain and poor visibility limited activities on 11 and 12 February and the two battalions remained in their locations blocking the enemy routes of egress and disrupting all visible enemy movement by calling in quantities of artillery and airstrikes.

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On 12 February, the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry again attempted to attack the well fortified enemy. The enemy was well dug in in a regimental-sized complex and the infantry was unable to uproot them. Artillery, airstrikes and Naval gunfire pummelled the enemy trenches but contact was broken by nightfall without any substantial change in the opposing forces' positions. US losses were five killed and thirty-four wounded. The battalions remained in their general locations until 19 February conducting aggressive probes of the enemy positions to ascertain his strength and blocking the enemy movement routes.

However, on 15 February, D Company, 2d Battalion, 501st Airborne, under the operational control of 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry came under heavy contact approximately 4 kilometers west of the main battle area (YD 650250). Artillery and ARA were employed and B and C Companies 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry were rushed to reinforce D Company, 2d Battalion, 501st Airborne in their fight against an estimated re-inforced enemy company. By afternoon, when contact was broken, fifty-eight NVA had been killed. The two companies then rejoined the battalion in their blocking position.

The 3rd Brigade was reinforced with the 2d Battalion, 501st Airborne

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which began actively patrolling in the vicinity of PK17 along possible enemy routes on 19 February. On 19 February the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry was released from its base defense mission at Camp Evans and completed deployment to the area of operations on 20 February.

Also on 19 February, the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry made a battalion search and destroy mission north toward Highway One. On its movement, it was engaged by a large entrenched enemy force and engaged them with artillery before returning to their original blocking position. Two patrols from the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry, while searching east of their location encountered squad-sized enemy forces which they also engaged with artillery. The 2d Battalion, 501st Airborne, while moving southeast contacted a dug in enemy force south of Highway One and southeast of PK17 (YD 650260) and did not break contact until darkness.

On 20 February, the four battalions continued to search north and south of the initial contact area and prepared to attack eastward towards Hue the next day. The two 7th Cavalry battalions were to push into the area of enemy resistance at Thng Que Chu (YD 6925). The 2d Battalion, 501st Airborne would advance on the center (YD 6824), while the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry would advance northward with 2 companies (YD 695243) holding two companies as Brigade reserve.

The four battalions moved into attack positions before daylight on 21 February and began their attack at first light. 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry made first contact with the enemy at 0520 when lead elements engaged and killed two enemy hiding in a hut. As the advance continued,

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contact became increasingly heavy as the enemy contested every foot of ground with automatic weapons and mortars. Airstrikes and Naval gunfire, in addition to artillery and helicopter gunships overwhelmed the stubborn enemy and permitted the advancing infantry to maintain a steady momentum as they pushed the NVA back. The battalions had all reached their objectives (vic YD 695245) 5 kilometers from Hue itself before darkness and had captured a considerable quantity of equipment during the day. As they established defense perimeters for the night, they were poised to continue the attack.

On 22 February, while 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry remained in the battle area to search out bypassed pockets of enemy resistance and search the battlefield, the other three battalions pushed their attack eastward to a point approximately 2½ kilometers from the walls of Hue (vic of north-south line 71). The 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry advanced against light resistance, while both the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry and 2d Battalion, 501st Airborne ran into heavy resistance in the afternoon and forced the stubbornly fighting NVA eastward before their advance. By nightfall, all objectives had been reached. One hundred and twenty-eight enemy bodies were counted in the first two days of the attack. However, many bunkers and trenches were destroyed by artillery and airstrikes and blood trails indicated many bodies and wounded had been dragged from the area.

The 3rd Brigade attack continued on 23 February with the battalions moving to locate astride the enemy avenues of escape westward from Hue.

// The 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry remained searching the battle area rooting out the remaining enemy. The 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry advanced with three companies against heavy resistance from a hastily dug in NVA force. B Company, 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry was airlifted to a point near the north Hue docks where it linked up with the 1st Platoon, A Troop, 3/5 Armored Cavalry and then searched and destroyed northwest to rejoin the battalion (YD 7224). The 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry advanced against moderate contact to a point west of the hamlet of Cho Thong (YD 718217) just north of the Song Sau River. The 2d Battalion, 501st Airborne advanced south and east against scattered resistance and secured the bridge across the Song Sau (YD 707207), moving to the south of the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry. During its advance 2d Battalion, 501st Airborne discovered evidence of the massacre of a village by the NVA. Throughout the day the enemy forces continued to resist with 82mm on 60mm mortars, B-40 rockets, 122mm rockets and heavy machine guns.

The attack was renewed on 24 February against the desperate but weakening NVA forces. The 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry with the attached armored cavalry platoon advanced against sporadic resistance. By 1447, the battalion was located against the northwest corner of the city walls. Further to the southwest, the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry rejoined the attack and advanced eastward against increasingly toughening enemy resistance. Despite mortar and rocket fire, the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry aggressively pushed the enemy into the woodline bordering the city walls (YD 733228). The 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry one kilometer southwest of

the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry met heavy resistance along the Song Sau which continued throughout the day as they slowly advanced eastward along the Cho Thong road. The 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry discovered what appeared to be the enemy's main hospital as they advanced. The 2d Battalion, 501st Airborne attacked south behind the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry against light resistance and then turned east and continued the attack on the right flank of the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry to ease the pressure on that battalion. 12

On 25 February the 3rd Brigade battalions concluded their successful advance to Hue. The 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry came to the city walls by 0730 against token resistance. The 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry began clearing the wall and joined the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry in a sweep of the southwest wall of the city. The 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry and 2d Battalion, 501st Airborne swept eastward against minor opposition, finding large amounts of abandoned enemy equipment in their progress.

The 3rd Brigade and its elements broke the back of the NVA resistance and were instrumental in returning Hue to friendly control. They succeeded in cutting off the enemy's main supply line and then destroyed his units in the field as they advanced to the walls of Hue. The total enemy killed by body count in the attack were 359 NVA and 45 VC with 15 prisoners. Total US losses to combat elements were 68 killed and 453 wounded.

The weather, which had been overcast but balmy and rather comfortable, rapidly deteriorated on 2 February and was to continue throughout the

battle. The temperature dropped into the low fifties and sixties and emanated a penetrating chill. A misty drizzle began to fall, sometimes increasing to a drenching, cold rain, turning the ground into a muddy bog. The clouds closed in and the ceiling fell to 300 feet at times, rarely exceeding 800 feet, and limiting visibility to the minimum. A heavy ground fog rolled in which persisted until the closing days of the battle. The fog was particularly dense at night and would only diminish slightly during the day. Visibility was further limited by this, seldom extending beyond 500 feet.

The weather greatly affected the employment of supporting fires. The extremely poor visibility severely limited tactical air operations. The majority of the 113 airstrikes flown were radar controlled with a few being directed visually by the forward air controllers during the final days of the battle. Despite this hampering effect of the weather the US Air Force dropped over 173 tons of bombs and 20 tons of napalm on enemy fortifications. ARA was also limited by the low ceilings and poor visibility. The burden of fire support fell on three 105mm batteries, C 1st Battalion, 77th Artillery, C 1st Battalion, 21st Artillery and B 1st Battalion, 321st Artillery and a 155mm Battery A 1st Battalion, 30th Artillery. The limited visibility did not significantly impair the highly effective and accurate fires of the guns. The heavy ground fog occasionally required the forward observers to adjust by sound. The four batteries fired over 53,000 rounds, exceeding 1,150 tons of explosives, in support of the 3d Brigade during the course of the battle. Naval gunfire from destroyers and a cruiser stationed in the

Gulf of Tonkin northeast of Hue was also extensively employed against known and suspected enemy locations, firing a total of 7,700 rounds. The enemy positions lying between the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry and the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry on 9-19 February were pounded nightly from dusk to dawn by the 8 inch guns of the cruiser. Fire from the destroyers lashed suspected enemy routes north of Highway One. The artillery gave the infantry the necessary added punch to overwhelm the enemy.

As the battle developed and intelligence data on the enemy increased, it became rapidly apparent that the 3d Brigade was engaged with an unusually large enemy force. Numerous documents captured in the area of the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry and 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry's initial operations, called La Chu by the enemy, indicated the presence of three unexpected regiments and several local units of a regimental size. The profusion of varying documents indicated that the enemy was using the area as a staging area for their actions in Hue. It is suspected that LaChu was the tactical headquarters of the Tri Thien Front. On 22 February prisoners from the Hue City Regiment and the 6th NVA Regiment were captured. On 21 and 23 February prisoners and documents were captured conclusively confirming the presence of the 24th Regiment of the 304th NVA Division. Also on 21 February other documents captured gave proof that the 29th Regiment of the 325C NVA Division were engaged in the battle. On 25 February, three prisoners were taken from the 90th Regiment of the 324B NVA Division who stated that their entire unit was

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engaged in Hue, having arrived on 20 February. Interrogation indicated that the latter three units had begun moving into the area between 11-20 February to reinforce the weakening local forces. What was unusual was that each of these regiments were from one of the enemy divisions located around Khe Sanh and the DMZ and their presence in the vicinity of Hue had been hitherto unsuspected. It is certain that the aggressive actions of the 3d Brigade in La Chu had seriously disrupted enemy plans and explains the fanatic defense of the area.

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