

Major General Melvin Zais and Hamburger Hill

**A Monograph
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ABSTRACT

Major General Melvin Zais and Hamburger Hill by MAJ Kelly O.C. Boian, USA, 50 pages.

Major General Melvin Zais, a second generation Russian American, orchestrated the battle between the 29th Regiment of the People's Army of Vietnam and the 101st Airborne Division around Dong Ap Bia (Hamburger Hill), Vietnam. General Zais, focused operations on and around Hamburger Hill to prevent build up of men, weapons, and supplies in the A Shau Valley which would have allowed for VC and NVA forces to conduct another Tet Offensive. As General Zais developed the situation in Thau Thien Province, similarities can be drawn to an offensive he assisted in coordinating within southern France in World War II. This familiarity in size of terrain, enemy presence, and friendly tactical actions assisted Zais in his understanding of the situation, and conducting continuous assaults up the 937 meters of Dong Ap Bia to destroy the 29th Regiment of the People's Army of Vietnam, and prevent the perceived threat of another Tet Offensive.

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Introduction

The C-ration sign said, “Hamburger Hill,” and underneath the simple, descriptive title of the hill another author asked, “Was it worth it?”¹ For ten and a half days, Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais (Commander, 101st Airborne Division) ordered 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division to scramble up the 937 meters of Ap Bia Mountain (also known as Hill 937 or Hamburger Hill) in the A Shau Valley, South Vietnam to eliminate the 29th Regiment of the People’s Army of Vietnam (29th PAVN). Over the course of the operation, General Zais continued to feed in reinforcements from 3-187 Infantry; 2d Battalion, 501st Infantry; and elements of the 1st and 2d battalions, 506th Infantry from the 101st, Zais also committed the 1st Army of the Republic of Vietnam Regiment to ultimately achieve victory at the top of Ap Bia Mountain. As the victorious, but weary soldiers stood on the burning, desolate, pock-marked hill and tallied the seventy Screaming Eagle soldiers killed and 372 wounded, they may very well have asked themselves, “Was it worth it?”² Little did the soldiers know at the time that they would ask themselves the same question once again when, on 5 June 1969, 1-506th Infantry, securing Hill 937, was ordered to abandon the hill. The new division commander, Maj. Gen. John Wright, had decided there was no benefit in having forces tied down to secure Ap Bia. The North Vietnamese Army responded by moving an estimated one thousand soldiers to the hill to reoccupy it, inciting rebukes from the American public and United States’ government officials that American soldiers fought and died for nothing.³ General Wright’s decision, troubling as it was, begs the question as to his predecessor’s decision to attack Hamburger Hill in the first place. As Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0 outlines, commanders use their experience, skill, knowledge, creativity, and knowledge to organize and employ

¹ Samuel Zaffiri, *Hamburger Hill: May 11-20, 1969* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), 273.

² James H. Willbanks, “Hamburger Hill,” *Vietnam* (June 2009): 29.

³ Zaffiri, *Hamburger Hill*, 277.

military forces.⁴ What events, in Zais's military career, led to his understanding of the operational context for Hamburger Hill and thus his decision to attack and seize it?

Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais's experience as an airborne regimental executive officer in southern France during World War II prepared him for the struggles he later faced as the commander of the 101st Airborne in Vietnam. As a regimental executive officer, then Lt. Col. Melvin Zais, assisted in leading the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, the "Battling Buzzards," against German fortified positions in the mountains of the Maritime Alps.⁵ Allied boundary adjustments provided a seam that the veteran German 34th Infantry Division, fresh from northern Italy, was able to exploit as it reoccupied the high ground around Col de Braus, resulting in an uphill slugfest to secure the town and surrounding area.⁶ General Zais was reminded of the fight for Col de Braus as the 101st Airborne advanced into the A Shau Valley and the high terrain around Dong Ap Bia to defeat North Vietnamese forces that had reoccupied the valley. The rigorous conditions, a determined and entrenched enemy, and the reliance upon combined arms maneuver laid the foundation for the major engagement Major General Zais orchestrated in the jungles of Vietnam. Unlike Vietnam however, the loss of life to secure Col de Braus had operational linkages to securing the eastern flank of the US VI Corps, and opening the heavily defended Sospel Valley and northern Italy, setting the stage for the strategic goal of liberating Italy, entrance to the so-called "soft underbelly of Europe," and exposing the German heartland along two fronts.⁷ In contrast, the actions at Hamburger Hill killed numerous North Vietnamese soldiers, but had no operational linkages to other objectives outside of the A Shau Valley. Finally, the objective itself, Hill 937, did not have any strategic importance tied to winning the war in Vietnam.

The 101st Airborne Division launched Operation APACHE SNOW on 10 May 1969 to neutralize enemy bases and communications in the A Shau Valley and prevent a possible enemy offensive (there

⁴ Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2012), 2-4.

⁵ Clark Archer, ed., *Paratroopers' Odyssey: A History of the 517th Parachute Combat Team* (Hudson, FL: 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team Association, 1985), http://www.517prct.org/documents/odyssey/paratroopers_odyssey.htm (accessed May 2012).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Thomas A. Popa, *Po Valley, 1945* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1996), 3.

were indicators that the North Vietnamese were massing men, supplies, and equipment for a spring offensive) by employing tactics influenced by American material superiority.⁸ Since 1966, the A Shau Valley (Figure 1) in Western Thua Thien province had been a major artery for the supply of men, weapons, and supplies from North Vietnam into South Vietnam. After the North Vietnamese had expelled a contingent of Civilian Irregular Defense Group Forces and United States and South Vietnamese Special Forces from the A Shau Special Forces Camp on 10 March 1966, they used the valley to build logistical bases and roads into Laos, connecting the valley to the network of trails and river ways that comprised the Ho Chi Minh Trail.⁹ In 1966, the Central Intelligence Agency estimated five divisions, roughly 58,000 North Vietnamese, utilized this network to infiltrate into South Vietnam.¹⁰ The Military Assistance Command Vietnam understood the strategic importance of controlling the A Shau Valley in order to stem the southward flow of enemy supplies and soldiers; Operation APACHE SNOW was one of several United States attempts to wrest control of the valley from enemy hands.

⁸ Andrew Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 158.

⁹ John M. Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign: The 1970 Offensive and America's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 19.

¹⁰ Willard Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces 1966-1968* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1975), 7.

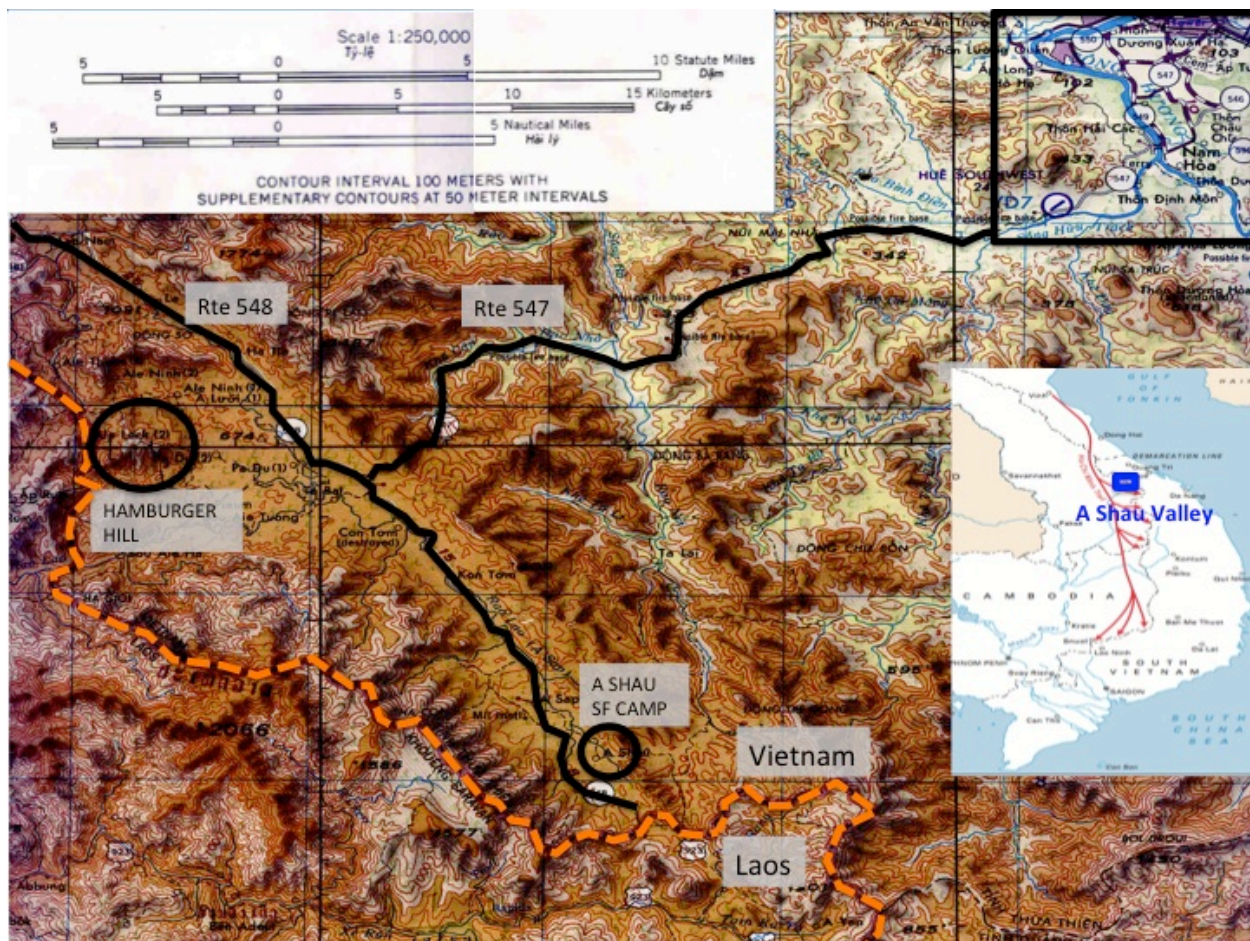


Figure 1: A Shau Valley with Hamburger Hill and the A Shau SF Camp Highlighted

Source: Defense Mapping Agency Topographic Center, *Hue, Vietnam; Laos* [map], 1972. 1:250,000. “South East Asian War – Area of Operations, 1965-1975,” 21 August 2007. http://911gfx.nexus.net/vietnam/maps/ne48-16/ne48_16g.html (accessed 17 November 2012); and Graham A. Cosmas, *United States Army in Vietnam, MACV The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967*, Center of Military History Publication 91-6-1 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2006), 4.

A chance meeting between 3-187 Infantry, “Iron Rakkasans,” and a group of NVA soldiers during a reconnaissance in force on the western edge of the A Shau Valley on 10 May 1969 escalated into the Battle of Hamburger Hill against the 29th Peoples Army of Vietnam Regiment.¹¹ The assault on Hamburger Hill by elements of the 101st Airborne were in response to a change in military strategy from containment (prior to 1965) to attrition (1965-1969), and resulted in a controversial loss of human life comparable to that in the Maritime Alps in Southern France during World War II. Hill 937 ultimately held

¹¹ The NVA had successfully habituated the 101st ABN DIV into their hit and run tactics (attack, break contact, and fall back into Laos). The battle for Dong Ap Bia, like the battle in Ia Drang with 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, parted from traditional NVA tactics, resulting in a continuous fight over several days.

no strategic or tactical advantage within the valley and was only attacked because the enemy was occupying the hill, and because General Zais's orders were to "destroy enemy forces and installations" in accordance with the new military strategy of attrition in Vietnam. He understood that the destruction of the enemy on Hamburger Hill was the operational context for the mission and employed tactics perfected in the Maritime Alps at Col de Braus to accomplish it.

To begin understanding the rationale for the decisions General Zais made, it is beneficial to first attempt to understand the man who made the decisions. Melvin Zais was a first-generation Russian-American, his father having arrived in the United States in 1892 as a Russian refugee when he was twelve years old.¹² Being from modest roots and with equally modest income, the family settled in a Fall River, Massachusetts neighborhood that was rough and wild, resulting in Zais's introduction and participation in numerous street fights. Though the Zais family's fortunes improved and then declined with the Depression, Melvin Zais's experiences with the impoverished neighborhoods and poor families gave him a toughness he carried with him throughout his time in service, and a "compassion for people who did not have much."¹³ This combination of compassion and toughness is what the soldiers of the 517th PRCT remembered of Major General Zais as they fought Italians and Germans through Italy, France, and Germany, or even when they met a couple unruly Rangers in a posh dance bar in Paris where Zais knocked the Rangers down, helped them back up, and then bought them a drink.¹⁴ Over the years, he matured from a young, tough junior officer, to a more mature, yet still tough senior officer, willing to make the hard decisions when required. His capacity for handling difficult decisions and maintaining a professional bearing were highlighted during the Battle of Hamburger Hill when he continued the engagement and piled on reinforcements, and in his diplomatic handling of a reporter who was a little too nose in second guessing Zais's decisions regarding Hamburger Hill.¹⁵ Overall, Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais

¹² Gerald Astor, *Battling Buzzards: The Odyssey of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, 1943-1945* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1993), 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁴ Lud Gibbons, 517th PRCT Recollections, *COL Zais...A Great Guy*, 517th PRCT Organization, <http://www.517prct.org/recollections.htm> (accessed 10 April 2012).

¹⁵ Zaffiri, *Hamburger Hill*, 197, 229.

was a hardened professional soldier, counted on by his subordinates, peers, and seniors to make the right decisions in difficult situations, but with the necessary compassion to ensure he took care of his men without sacrificing what was necessary to accomplish the mission. From World War II to Vietnam, Zais compiled experience and judgment to add depth and clarity to his decisions. Little did he know his experiences in southern France would revisit him through doctrine, the enemy situation, and terrain in an isolated part of the A Shau Valley in Vietnam.

Southern France

Operation DRAGOON, the invasion of Southern France, was originally termed Operation ANVIL; American planners had designed it as a complimentary invasion of southern France, to be undertaken shortly after the execution of Operation OVERLORD, the invasion of Normandy. The initial purposes of Operation ANVIL were to thin German defenses throughout France and prevent them from reinforcing Normandy with units from southern France.¹⁶ A lack of Landing Ships, Tank prevented the two operations from occurring simultaneously, resulting in the postponement of Operation ANVIL, renamed DRAGOON in the interim by Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill, until assets became available. However, the need for Operation DRAGOON soon became evident to the U.S. planners working in the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force as the Allied force's expansion of the lodgment in Normandy stalled in the hedgerows of the *bocage* countryside. In addition, the German destruction of the port of Cherbourg combined with the destruction of the artificial harbor at Omaha Beach by a storm, made necessary the capture of the French southern ports of Toulon and Marseilles.¹⁷ Ultimately, the two ports would supply one-third of the Allies' needs in northern France. The follow-on repair of the Rhone Railway made the process of shipping needed supplies northward even quicker and more efficient.¹⁸ Yet, even with these potential benefits, Prime Minister Churchill argued against pulling

¹⁶ Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Southern France* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1994), 4.

¹⁷ Ibid, 3.

¹⁸ Ibid, 29-30.

forces from the Italian campaign for the invasion of southern France, stating it was a waste of resources, would result in losing ground gained in Italy, and diminish the forces needed to attack into Germany from Italy. Nonetheless, Churchill ultimately acquiesced after having been dragooned into it.

The headquarters designated to bring Operation DRAGOON to fruition was the Seventh Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Patch. The assault force was VI Corps under Maj. Gen. Lucian Truscott's command, consisting of 3d, 36th, and 45th Divisions. Gen. Jean de Lattre de Tassigny would follow the United States divisions' beach landings with seven French divisions to assist in exploiting the beach head. Supporting the beach landings was an ad hoc airborne division, the Anglo-American First Airborne Task Force (FABTF), under the command of Maj. Gen. Robert T. Frederick. The FABTF comprised the British 2d Independent Parachute Brigade, one US regimental parachute combat team (517th PRCT), a combined U.S. – Canada regimental parachute combat team (1st Special Service Force), two US independent parachute battalions (509th and 551st), one US glider battalion (550th), three US field artillery battalions and a mortar company, and an engineer company and platoon.¹⁹

The airborne concept for Operation DRAGOON (figure 2) consisted of the FABTF securing the key intersection at Le Muy, fifteen miles inland from the coast. This town was a tactical decisive point because of the roads that converged here from north, east, and west. Seizing Le Muy would prevent German reinforcements moving from inland toward the beaches and VI Corps. The 517th PRCT (insert to figure 2) had the responsibility of securing the high ground north and west of Le Muy in order to block avenue of approaches from Toulon in the west, and Draguignan in the north.²⁰ On 15 August 1944 at 0430, following ten days of heavy bombardment of road and bridge networks by the Allied air forces, the FABTF conducted Airborne drops near Le May and Le Luc to initiate the invasion of Southern France.

¹⁹ E.M. Flanagan, Jr., *Airborne: A Combat History of American Airborne Forces*, (New York: Presidio Press, 2002), 225-226. Regimental Combat Teams were task organized with supporting units such as anti-tank companies, airborne engineers, airborne field artillery battalions, and other elements augmenting the parachute infantry regiments. The 460th Parachute Artillery Battalion and the 596th Airborne Engineer Company augmented the 517th. William Blythe, ed., "Book VII: History of the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment," in *Thirteenth Airborne Division, 1943-1946* (Atlanta: Albert Love, 1946), http://517prct.org/documents/13th_airborne/13th_airborne_history.htm (accessed 20 October 2012).

²⁰ Ibid, 228.

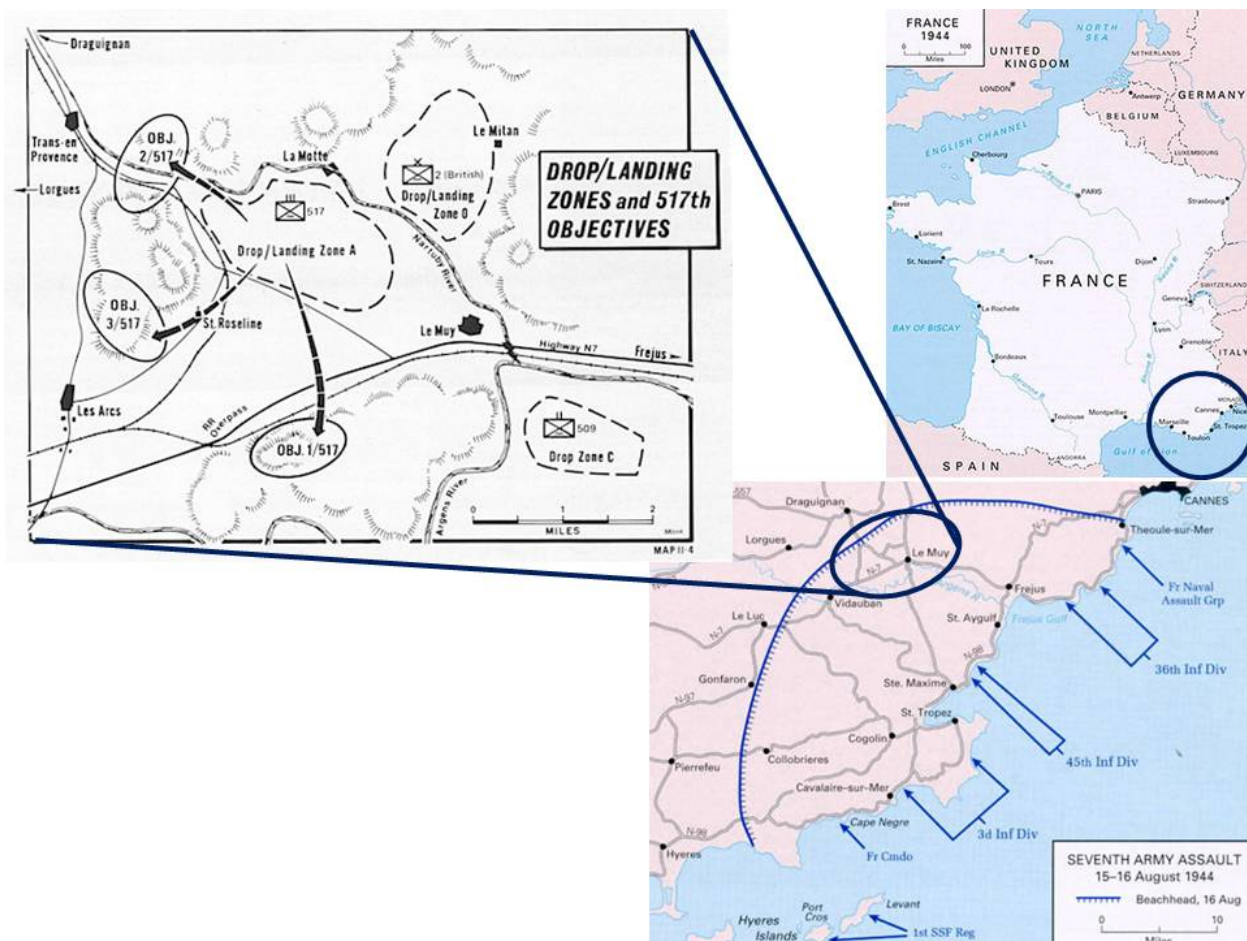


Figure 2: Operation DRAGOON

Source: Major General Melvin Zais, Papers. Historical Archive. Paratrooper's Odyssey: A History of the 517th Parachute Combat Team, Clark Archer ed, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 25; and Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Southern France* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1994), 7, 12.

Col de Braus

The successful execution of Operation DRAGOON resulted in the rapid expansion of VI Corps to the north and west, with the FABTF reverting to Seventh Army control. FABTF was next tasked to secure the Army's eastern flank, oriented toward the Franco-Italian border in the Maritime Alps.²¹ With the stagnation of the Italian campaign in the Tuscan hills, the 517th PRCT and 1st SSF adjusted their

²¹ Archer, *Paratroopers' Odyssey*.

boundary as the British 2d Independent Parachute Brigade redeployed to Italy and the 509th and 551st parachute infantry battalions were reassigned north of 517th PRCT's area of operation (Figure 3).²²

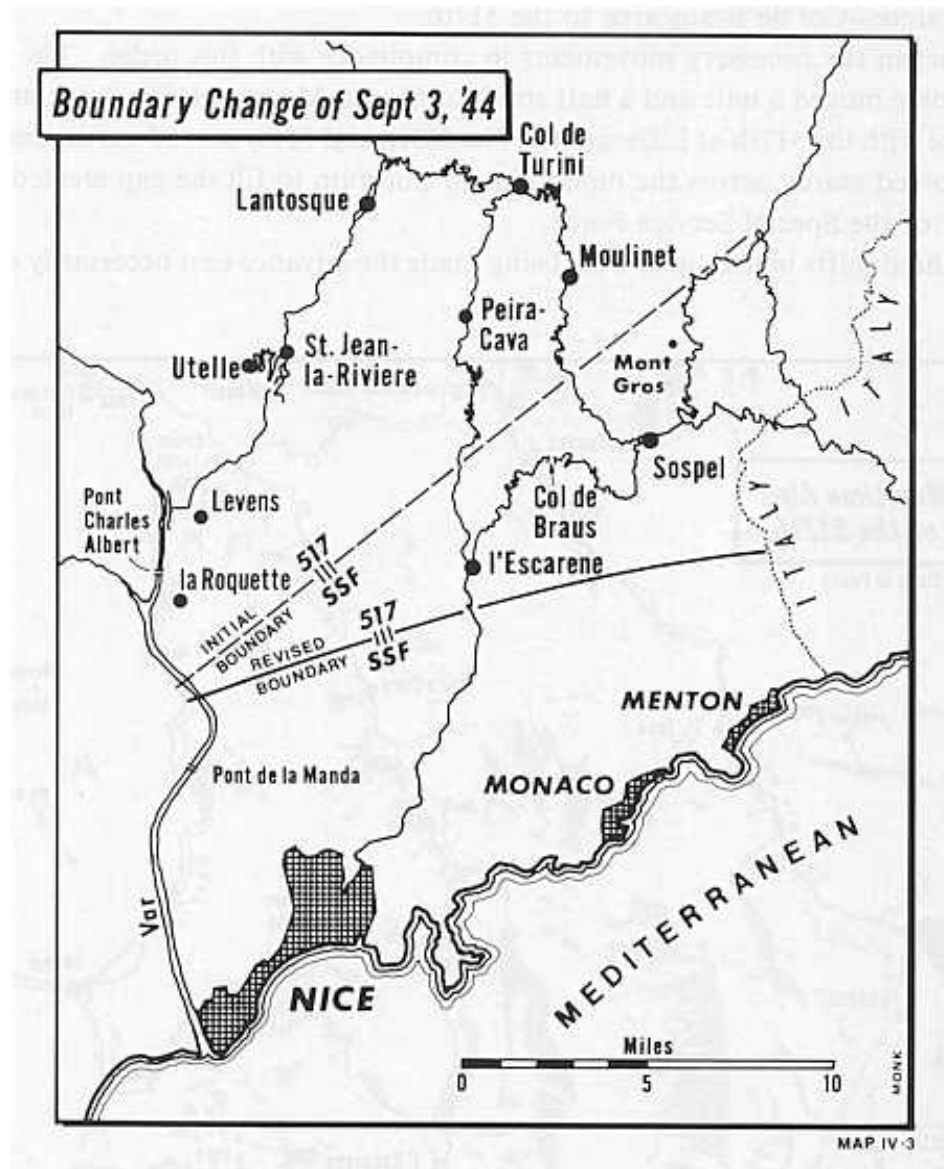


Figure 3: 517th PRCT and 1st SSF Boundary Change, 3 September 1944

Source: Major General Melvin Zais, Papers. Historical Archive. Paratrooper's Odyssey: A History of the 517th Parachute Combat Team, Clark Archer ed, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 54.

During this shift in boundaries, the German 34th Infantry Division, veterans of the Eastern Front and newly arrived from northern Italy, seized the opportunity to regain Col de Braus and Tete de la Lavina

²² Archer, *Paratroopers' Odyssey*.

which had been seized by the 1st SSF on 1 September, 1944.²³ The 517th PRCT's new area of operations (Figure 4) added l'Escarene, Col de Braus with its surrounding peaks, and the heavily defended town of Sospel, along with the German 37th Infantry Division who were reinforcing their positions with every minute the 517th provided them.

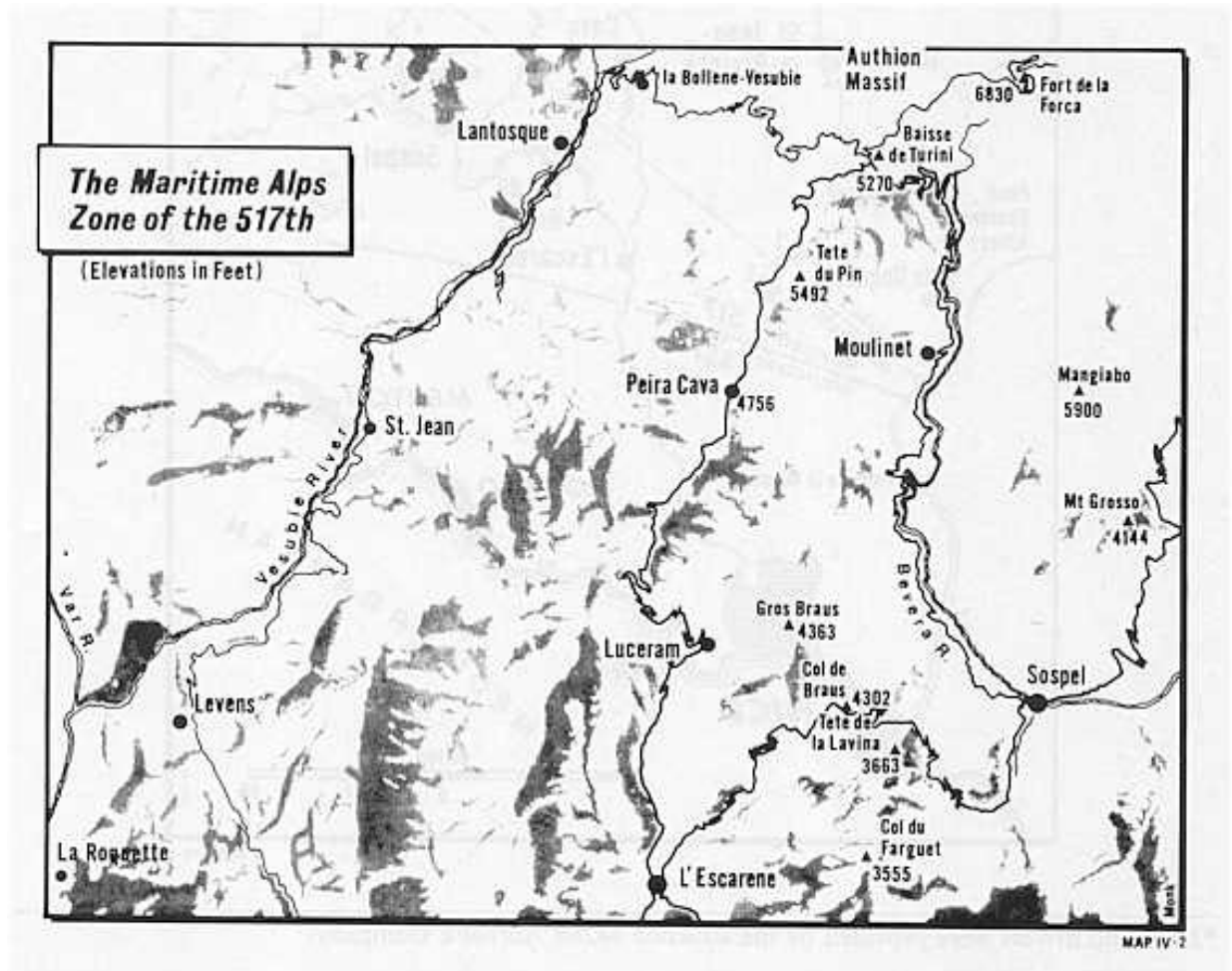


Figure 4: 517th PRCT in the Maritime Alps

Source: Major General Melvin Zais, Papers. Historical Archive. Paratrooper's Odyssey: A History of the 517th Parachute Combat Team, Clark Archer ed, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 55.

As the 517th moved east to secure 7th Army's right flank, the paratroopers made their initial contact with the German 34th Infantry Division on 31 August 1944, as a jeep on a reconnaissance patrol gathering information along the heights of Peira Cava and Col de Braus was destroyed when it turned a

²³ Archer, *Paratroopers' Odyssey*.

bend in a mountain road leading to Col de Braus. The stuttering fire of heavy machine guns and resonating thump of mortars initiated what would become the hardest fought battle for the Buzzards in southern France.²⁴

Context of Col de Braus and the Maritime Alps

The importance of Col de Braus rested in its, and the surrounding peaks', ability to control the avenues of approach into and out of the Sospel Valley. The city of Sospel consisted of a part of the southern extension of the Maginot Line that extended from Switzerland to the Mediterranean along the Italian border. The four underground forts (Mount Grosso, Mount Barbonnet, Mount Agaisen, and Fort Saint Roche) in Sospel provided German forces with a secure headquarters that could be used to regroup, rearm, and serve as a springboard for units going into the fight for southern France.²⁵ Though fortifications in Sospel were initially constructed to prevent France's enemies from invasion from the south along the Mediterranean, they instead provided the German's with the potential to send her reinforcements into the Seventh Army's rear and right flank as VI Corps drove northwest to Lyon.²⁶

Securing Col de Braus and the surrounding area provided the advantage the 517th PRCT needed to prevent the movement of German forces back into southern France. Holding the high ground west of Sospel gave the Buzzards observation into the city and valley. The regiment's occupation of Col de Braus resulted in a near-siege of Sospel. Since no men or material could enter or leave the area unobserved, attacks by indirect fire and aircraft became the norm. The subsequent advance of the VI Corps into Lyon, over 300 road miles to the northwest of Sospel, threatened Germany's forward positions along the southern Franco-Italy border. This, combined with the fast moving Third and First Armies toward the German frontier, required German forces to withdraw from the area and reinforce their critical

²⁴ Archer, *Paratroopers' Odyssey*.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Director, Historical Division, World War II: A Chronology, August 1944, Combined Arms Research Library Digital Library, 01 February 1946. In World War II Operational Documents, <http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p4013coll8/id/189/rec/25> (accessed 03 April 2012), 104.

lines of communication along the Franco-Italian and Franco-German borders. One of the key locations near France's border with Italy was the Bevera Valley; Col de Braus and Sospel were its central positions.

Actions at Col de Braus

Following the initial contact on 3 September 1944 by its reconnaissance patrol, the 517th PRCT quickly began to move assets to Peira Cava and Col de Braus to seize the area. First Battalion occupied the northern end of the line at the relatively quiet Peira Cava in order to secure the town and prevent German advances in the area. Col. Rupert D. Graves, commander of the 517th PRCT, ordered 2d Battalion to seize Col de Braus from its German defenders, with 3d Battalion conducting a follow-and-assume role for 2d Battalion's mission, with orders to push into Sospel.²⁷ In support of 2d Battalion's movement to Col de Braus was the 460th Parachute Artillery Battalion. The airborne artillery established

²⁷ Ibid.

its batteries approximately one mile north of L'Escarene (Figure 5).

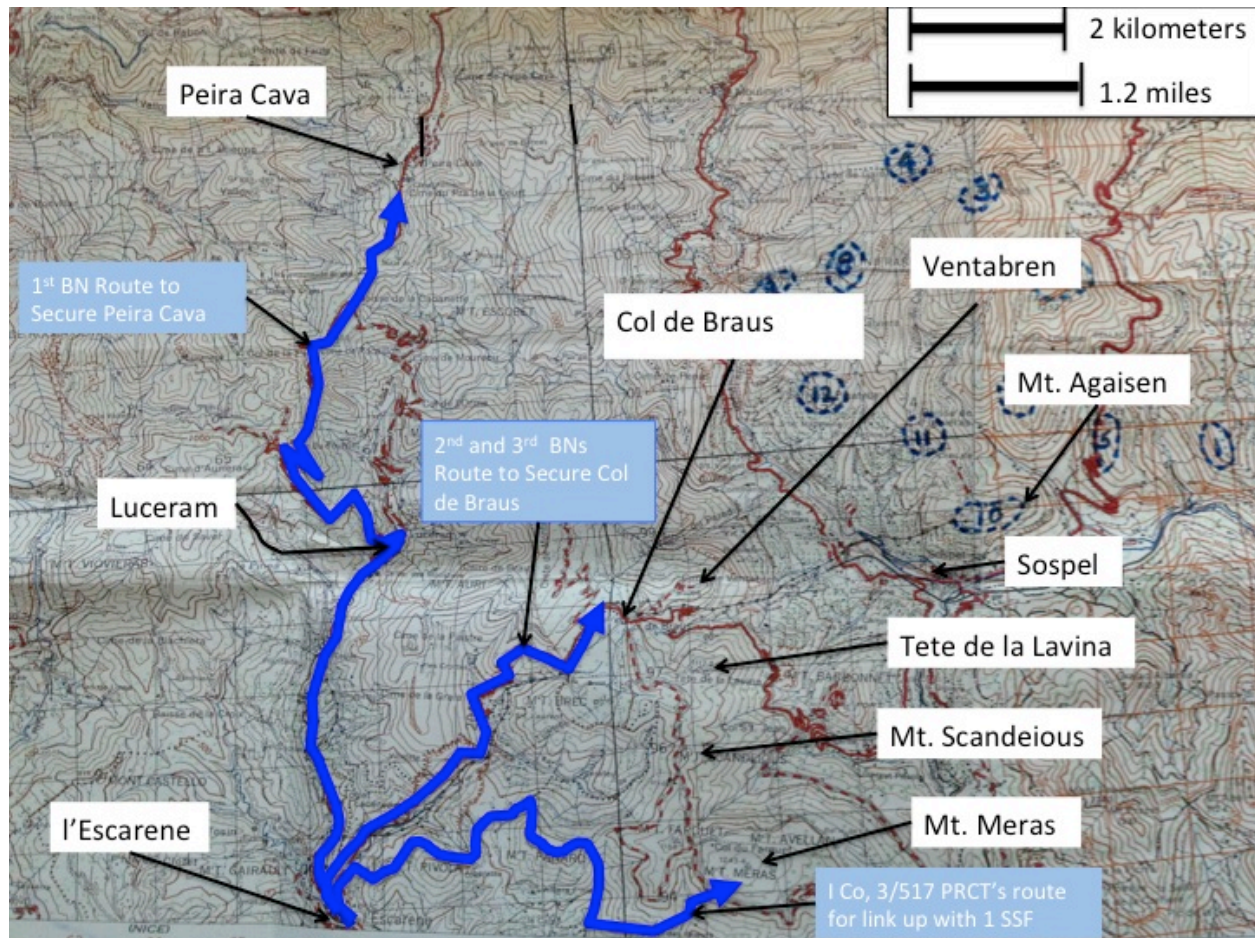


Figure 5: 517th PRCT's Initial Actions to Seize Col de Braus

Source: Forward Observer Map, 13th Airborne Division, WW II Operations Reports, 1940-48, entry 427, Box 6569, RG 407, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

Colonel Graves and Lieutenant Colonel Zais established the 517th PRCT headquarters in L'Escarene, but soon moved forward to direct the battle throughout the fourteen days it took to secure Col de Braus and the surrounding area. From 3 September until 6 September, the lead elements of 2d battalion attempted to gain a foothold at Col de Braus as the FABTF headquarters ordered the 517th PRCT to secure the high ground beyond the Bevera, toward the area around Mount l'Agaisen. For the first three days, Company D, 2d Battalion struggled to secure a foothold from which to attack Col de Braus. Faced with a thirty-foot rock wall defended by a "platoon-sized German force" that overlooked Col de Braus,

and unable to shift left or right, Company D scaled the rock face, surprised the defenders, and established a position from which to continue the attack (Figure 6).²⁸

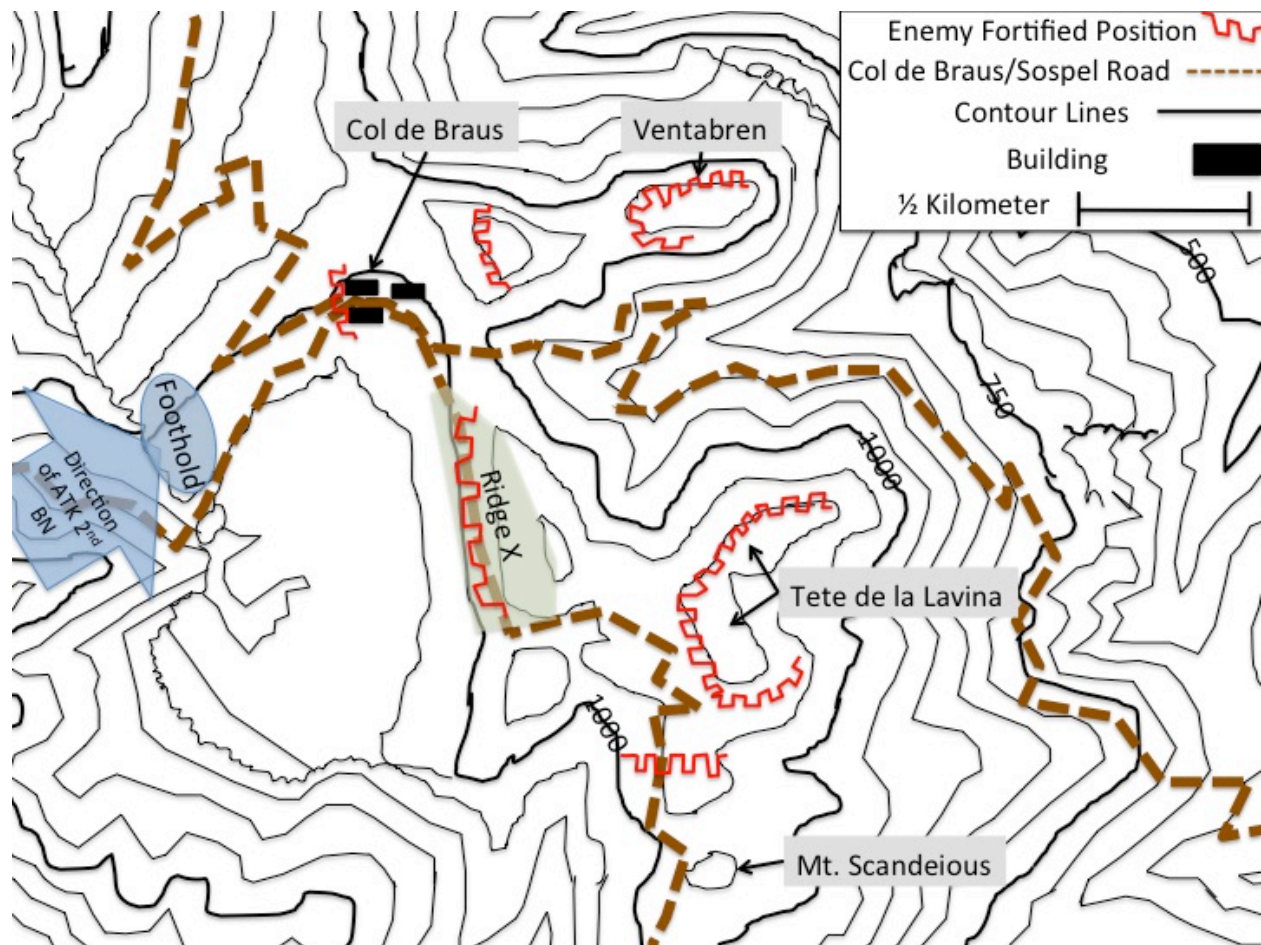


Figure 6: 517th Establishes a Foothold at Col de Braus

Source: Forward Observer Map, 13th Airborne Division, WW II Operations Reports, 1940-48, entry 427, Box 6569, RG 407, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

Having secured the high ground overlooking Col de Braus, Company D tenaciously held its position while constantly counter-attacked by enemy infantry and targeted with indirect fires. On 7 September, Colonel Graves ordered 3d Battalion to conduct a passage of lines through D Company's position preparatory to attacking east to seize Sospel. Third Battalion arrived and reinforced 2d Battalion's foothold before pushing on to first attack Col de Braus. The Germans, witnessing the arrival

²⁸ Astor, *Battling Buzzards*, 180-181.

of fresh troops, moved their positions into Col de Braus, and along Ridge X, Ventebren, and Tete de la Lavina (Figure 6). Here, the Germans had built covered and concealed fighting positions in depth. The positions at Tete de la Lavina had a commanding view of Ridge X's defensive positions, as well as the town of Col de Braus and positions constructed on Ventebren, making it impossible to secure Col de Braus without securing Tete de la Lavina (Figure 6).²⁹ Tete de la Lavina, the lynch pin for the Col de Braus area, was defended along two avenues of approach: one northwest toward Col de Braus, and the other south toward Mounts Scandeious and Meras (Figure 7).

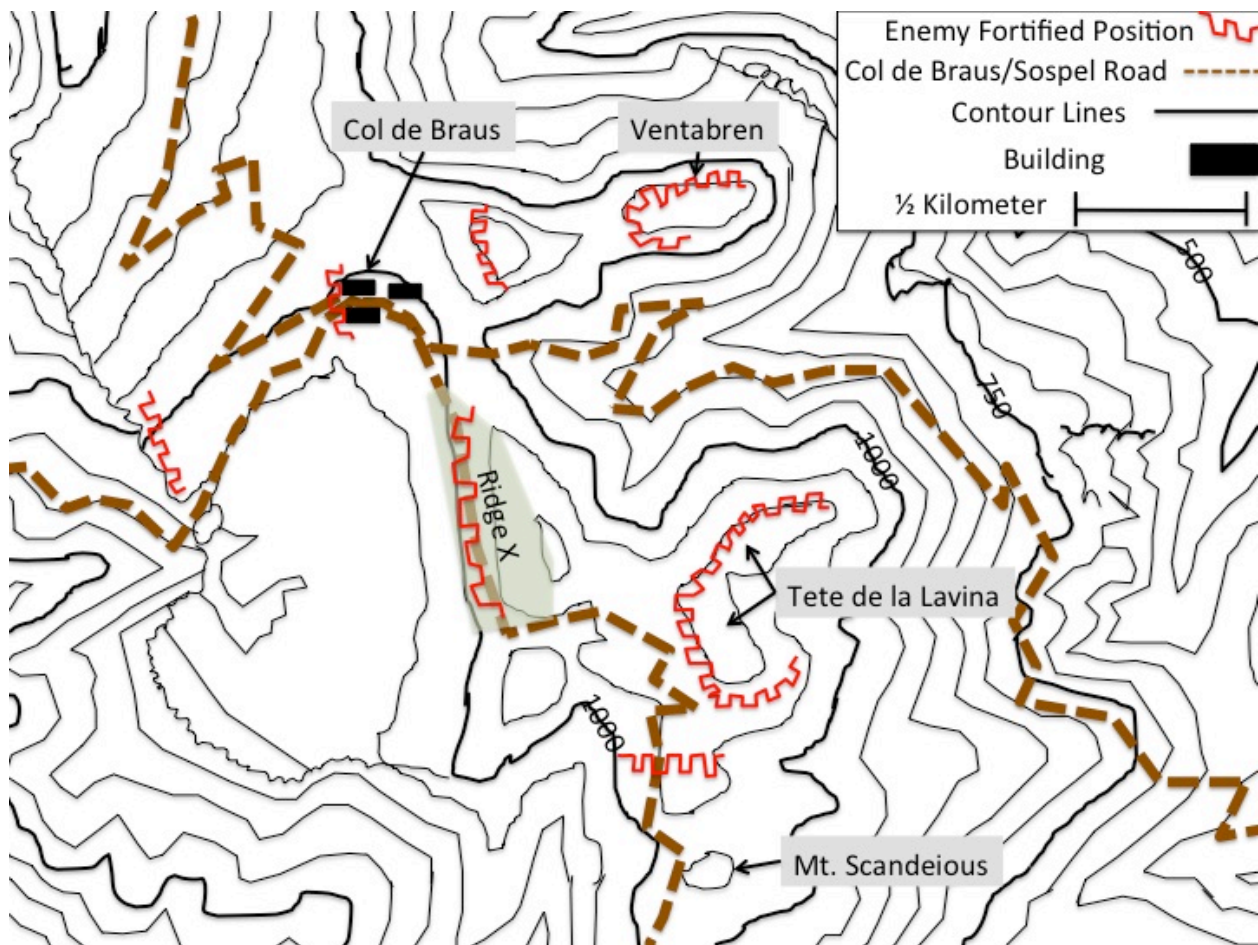


Figure 7: Enemy Positions at Col de Braus

Source: Forward Observer Map, 13th Airborne Division, WW II Operations Reports, 1940-48, entry 427, Box 6569, RG 407, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

²⁹ Ibid., 181.

Benefitting from their interior lines of communication, the Germans were able to easily reinforce threatened sectors from Tete de la Lavina to other defensive positions at Col de Braus and Ventebren.³⁰ Integrated into the defense were disappearing guns from the underground Mount l'Agaisen fort.³¹ These high-velocity, flat trajectory guns continually created havoc for the men of the 517th as they struggled to gain and maintain Col de Braus. Because the Germans had not succeeded in driving the 517th from its foothold, they were unable to reinforce their positions from Sospel, which made it more difficult to retain or retake Col de Braus and the surrounding peaks.

As 3d Battalion departed L'Escarene to relieve 2d Battalion, its I Company conducted an eastward cross country movement to Mount Meras to conduct a link up with the 1st SSF along the 517th and 1st SSF boundary (Figure 5).³² This simple action provided the 517th with an additional avenue of approach from which to attack the Col de Braus area, and would eventually be exploited with elements of 2d and 3d Battalions. Over the next few days, 7-11 September, 3d Battalion attempted seizing Col de Braus and Ridge X several times. It finally achieved victory through a coordinated pause and resumption of supporting artillery fires to catch German soldiers in the process of transitioning from cover to manning their fighting positions.³³ Having broken the German defenders' will and produced heavy German casualties, 3d battalion secured Col de Braus and Ridge X, and prepared for an assault on Tete de la Lavina and Ventebren (Figure 8).

Initially, 3d battalion conducted operations independently; I company attempted to seize Tete de la Lavina from Mount Scandeious, as F Company attempted to seize Ventebren from vicinity of Col de Braus while H and G companies secured Ridge X. These attempts failed to permanently remove the German presence from the hills, and resulted in an increasing number of casualties (147 casualties, 21 dead, 123 wounded, 3 captured after the first seven days of the assault on Col de Braus).³⁴ Colonel Graves decided that a more determined and coordinated effort from the 517th was necessary to remove the enemy

³⁰ Ibid., 180.

³¹ Archer, *Paratroopers' Odyssey*.

³² Ibid.

³³ Astor, *Battling Buzzards*, 181-182.

³⁴ Ibid., 184.

and seize the objectives. He decided to mass and synchronize two-thirds of the 517th's combat power to achieve it.

To successfully seize and secure Tete de la Lavine and Ventebren, Colonel Graves dedicated 3d battalion and two companies from 2d battalion to support. He ordered the remainder of 2d Battalion to conduct a cross country movement from Luceram to the north side of Ventebren, depositing C and D batteries from the 460th Parachute Artillery Battalion at Plan Constant, 1.7 kilometers north of Col de Braus.³⁵ Once 2d Battalion was in position, I Company and G Company would attack Tete de la Lavina (separated into two objectives) following concentrated naval gun fire and a battalion each of 155, 105, and 75mm artillery fires on the mountain peak.³⁶ Once I and G companies secured Tete de la Lavina, F Company would attack Ventebren from the Col de Braus area, with support from 2d Battalion (-) (Figure 8).

³⁵ Archer, *Paratroopers' Odyssey*.

³⁶ Ibid.

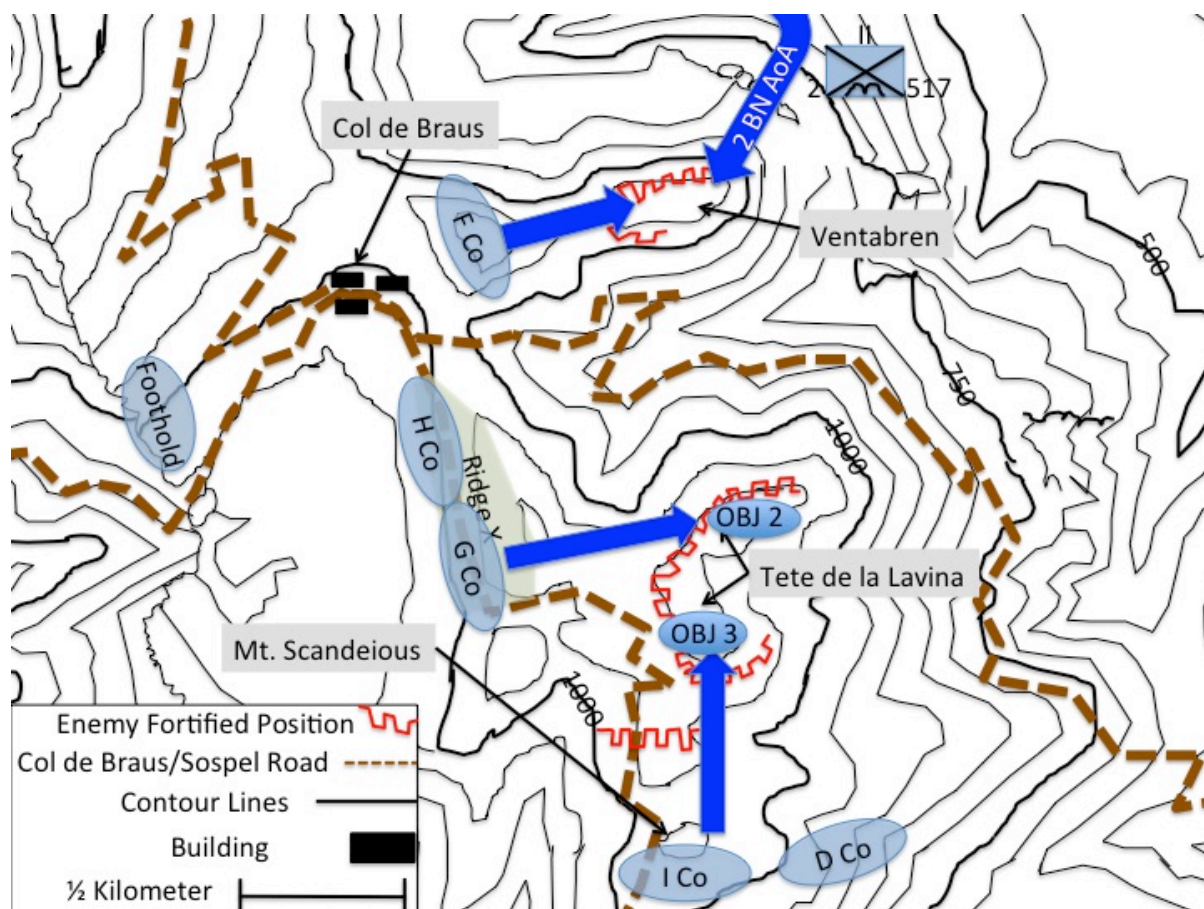


Figure 8: Securing Col de Braus and Surrounding Area

Source: Forward Observer Map, 13th Airborne Division, WW II Operations Reports, 1940-48, entry 427, Box 6569, RG 407, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

At 0800 on 18 September 1944 a blanket of indirect fire assaulted Tete de la Lavina for thirty minutes. At 0830, I and G companies initiated their attacks on Tete de la Lavina, with I company securing its objective (OBJ 2) at 0900, and G company securing its objective (OBJ 3) at 1100 hrs.³⁷ Naval and artillery fires then shifted to Ventebren, facilitating F Company in securing its objective. In total, four Americans had been slightly wounded following the assault on Tete de la Lavina and Ventebren, compared to the 147 casualties suffered prior to this coordinated attack. The defending Germans were shocked and awed by the coordinated attack, resulting in 30 surrenders and 40 killed in the final battle of Col de Braus. In response, the hidden guns on Mount l'Agasian immediately opened up with suppressive

³⁷ Archer, *Paratroopers' Odyssey*.

fire on Ridge X, Tete de la Lavina, and Ventebren as German infantry executed counter attacks. Their effort notwithstanding, the Sospel based Germans had lost too much key terrain in the Col de Braus area to retake the area. With the 517th having secured Tete de la Lavina and Ventebren on 18 September, Sospel was isolated and VI Corps's eastern flank was secured.³⁸

By establishing a defensive line from Peira Cava to Col de Braus, General Frederick, the ABTF commander, had intended to secure VI Corps's eastern flank by blocking any potential German movements to west.³⁹ Col de Braus was the essential right flank anchor to prevent the Germans from moving further west. Its importance grew when it became clear to General Frederick that the seizure of Sospel would be too costly in men and equipment. Thus, at the operational level securing Col de Braus was a significant economy of force action intended to deny the German 34th Division its freedom of movement while contributing to that of VI Corps. At first both the 517th PRCT and the German forces weathered indirect fire barrages for days on end, but only then attempted to dislodge the other from their fortified positions.⁴⁰ Once it became clear from Allied movements that their position was not tenable, the German 34th Infantry Division withdrew from Sospel. After fifty-one days of continuous fighting in the Maritime Alps, the 517th PRCT pushed into Sospel on 29 September 1944, and occupied Mount Agaisen, officially controlling the Sospel Valley and establishing defensive positions along the mountains beyond the Bevera.⁴¹

Doctrine during WWII

The success of the 517th PRCT in southern France can be contributed to the personal identification and selection of qualified soldiers, their airborne training, and the study and application of doctrine its officers used during the planning and execution of operations. Field Manual 100-5 (FM 100-5), *Operations*, and Field Manual 70-10 (FM 70-10), *Mountain Operations*, both published in 1944 are

³⁸ Mary H. Williams, comp., *United States Army in World War II; Special Studies; Chronology 1941-1945*, Washington, DC; U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1960), 19.

³⁹ Archer, *Paratroopers' Odyssey*.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

examples of doctrine that provided the leadership of the 517th PRCT the capability to develop its understanding for a firm basis of action to react to enemy activities, maneuver, and capabilities.⁴²

FM 100-5 provided the airborne infantry officer with a fundamental understanding of what army officers should know in order to quickly react to situations they might encounter in combat. As it related to the Col de Braus operation, FM 100-5 outlined the infantry's capabilities, how an enemy established in a well-organized defensive position might degrade the attacker's combat power, and the required the use of combined arms, artillery, armor, and combat aviation, to defeat the enemy.⁴³ FM 100-5 emphasized the need to fight by combining fire, movement, and shock action to complete the destruction of the enemy in close combat.⁴⁴ The manual also highlighted that the purpose of offensive action was to destroy hostile armed forces in order to facilitate the capture or destruction of a physical objective, be that a body of troops, dominating terrain, or anything else designated by the commander.⁴⁵ These guidelines, combined with the regiment's training and leadership, were the key elements in the 517th's seizure of Col de Braus. It was the combination of naval gunfire, indirect artillery fire, direct fire from small arms, bazookas, and grenades, and maneuver skillfully integrated into the assault on the physical objectives of Col de Braus, Tete de la Lavine, and Ventebren that provided the shock action to not only seize the objectives, but to seize them in a manner that maximized enemy casualties while protecting the 517th PRCT soldiers. The final aspect of FM 100-5 addressed leadership. It enjoined officers and noncommissioned officers to provide the motivation and demonstrate the determination needed by soldiers to achieve the objectives tasked to the unit. FM 100-5 also highlighted the need to recognize the exceptional services of soldiers, to provide encouragement during adverse conditions, and to lend assistance to soldiers' efforts.⁴⁶

Lieutenant Colonel Zais embodied what FM 100-5 described as leadership when he provided immediate recognition to one soldier, Woodrow McQuaid. McQuaid, a G Company soldier who took

⁴² War Department, FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations: Operations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1944), II.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ FM 100-5, 109.

⁴⁶ FM 100-5, 29.

part in the fight for Col de Braus, heroically climbed on top of a pillbox as friendly forces engaged it. He captured eight German soldiers after forcing them out by putting a white phosphorous grenade down the ventilation pipe.⁴⁷ Zais's actions not only endeared himself to McQuaid, but also earned the respect of the soldiers within McQuaid's squad and platoon. As Clausewitz wrote, "Of all the passions that inspire a man in a battle, none, we have to admit, is so powerful and so constant as the longing for honor and renown."⁴⁸

Leadership was one thing, but mountains were another. FM 70-10 provided the basis to understanding the hazards faced in the mountains of southern France. Key areas the field manual outlined were the basis for attacking fortified positions in mountainous terrain, tactical advantages provided to the defender, and the application of engineer training for use in the mountains. The main point to attacking fortified positions stressed by FM 70-10 was the need to take additional time to plan the attack due to the restrictive terrain, but also the need to conduct a combined arms attack to accomplish a breakthrough against enemy fortifications.⁴⁹ Colonel Graves, during the planning for the final attack on Tete de la Lavina and Ventebren, allocated five days for planning to ensure that coordination between all units were conducted, and that indirect fires were coordinated to support the maneuver.⁵⁰ The advantages FM 70-10 listed for the defense in the mountains is fairly elementary, but when combined with planning for employment of engineers in support of operations, the manual provided a basis for ensuring the right assets were prepared for the right mission. The engineers assigned to the Buzzards, the 596th Parachute Engineer Company, conducted typical mine and obstacle reduction operations, but also had to build bridges and maintain roads to ensure that casualties and supplies could move back and forth between Col

⁴⁷ Astor, *Battling Buzzards*, 184.

⁴⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 105.

⁴⁹ War Department, FM 70-10, *Field Service Regulations: Mountain Operations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1944), 19.

⁵⁰ Archer, *Paratroopers' Odyssey*.

de Braus and PRCT Headquarters. The 596th engineers called the maintenance of the L'Escarene-Col de Braus road, "The toughest and most important job the outfit ever had".⁵¹

Overall, the doctrine developed prior to and during Word War II provided a firm basis of action at the tactical level to react to enemy activities, maneuver, and capabilities. The leadership at Col de Braus conducted and directed operations with a firm understanding of doctrine and how to use it as a guide for planning. Lieutenant Colonel Zais was not the only officer who confirmed his actions through doctrine and established biases that would carry with him throughout his career.

Col de Braus Lessons Learned

Lt. Col. Melvin Zais was fortunate in his role as the 517th PRCT Executive Officer. He was able to observe and take part in the actions of the regiment at Col de Braus and analyze how they helped or hindered progress in seizing the objective. The lessons Zais took with him from this operation were the use of combined arms in attacking an entrenched enemy on high ground, developing a good understanding of the enemy through reconnaissance, and the validity of doctrine as a template for operational planning.

First, the concept of combined arms warfare was nothing new to the former battalion commander who had conducted calls for fire, and coordinated close air support in Italy and around Les Arcs, France.⁵² However, it was Colonel Graves' masterful coordination of assets and his allocation of time to ensure the proper dissemination of the plan that followed Lieutenant Colonel Zais through his career and became evident in his lectures and papers.⁵³ Zais also gained a good understanding of how to attack an enemy who was entrenched or within fortifications in mountainous terrain and how much slower was movement along external lines of communication and how that could influence operations on the objective. These two observations assisted Zais in estimating force ratios (the first three days were basically fought 1:1 at Col de Braus), and the speed at which reinforcements could arrive to influence actions on the objective.

⁵¹ Archer, *Paratroopers' Odyssey*.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Melvin Zais, "Developments in Ground Warfare From 1939 to 1948 and Future Potentialities" (master's thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, 1949), 10-11.

Reconnaissance then, as now is the lifeblood for a commander to understanding his environment and visualizing how to influence it. Zais understood that the lack of understanding of the enemy's positions resulted in the surprise attack of the reconnaissance patrol on 3 September, and the initial failed attempts at seizing Col de Braus during the initial days of the battle. He was fortunate to witness what happens when accurate and effective intelligence is acquired, as on the night prior to the attack on Tete de la Lavina and Ventebren on 17 September when the 3d Battalion's S2 conducted a reconnaissance mission of the defensive positions along Tete de la Lavina and was able to adjust the plan according to this intelligence.⁵⁴ Zais learned what good intelligence could provide, and that a lack of intelligence often required a loss of life before being acquired.

The final lesson Zais took forward with him was that doctrine was a valid basis to formulate plans. He had already established a good appreciation for its establishing a basis of clarity in an ambiguous situation, but his belief was reinforced as FM 100-5 and FM 70-10 proved beneficial in establishing a means to accomplish the PRCT's mission. Lieutenant Colonel Zais would continually rely on doctrine, and refine it to meet emerging requirements in future operations.⁵⁵

Thus, Zais's understanding of the requirements for attacking an entrenched enemy in dominant terrain, the use of reconnaissance to gain and develop a fuller understanding of the situation and the cost associated without it, and the importance of doctrine in establishing a basis for operations were keys to his development as a commander. As Zais and the 517th PRCT played their small part in accomplishing Allied victory in Europe Day, Zais took with him formative lessons developed learned through experience. Melvin Zais had developed biases from the operations at Col de Braus that colored his understanding of war at the tactical and operational levels. Zais's experience came into play as the commander of the 101st Airborne Division as the Screaming Eagles planned, synchronized, and accomplished missions in Vietnam and at Dong Ap Bia.

⁵⁴ Archer, *Paratroopers' Odyssey*.

⁵⁵ Major General (Ret) Melvin Zais, interview by Colonels William L. Golden and Richard C. Rice, 1977, Project 77-3, transcript volume 2, Senior Officers Oral History Program, US Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 333-341.

Vietnam

Following VE Day, Melvin Zais took command of the 517th PRCT until it was disbanded at Fort Bragg, North Carolina on 25 February 1946. His next job of importance was as the deputy commanding General, Field Force and Assistant Division Commander of the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam from 1964 to 1966. From 1968 to 1970, Major General Zais spent his second tour in Vietnam as the Commanding General of the 101st Airborne Division.⁵⁶ As Zais conducted operations in South Vietnam, the political climate in the United States changed, making the Vietnam War an extremely disputed conflict that tested his resolve as a division and later as a corps commander.

The first teetering steps the United States took toward involvement in Vietnam started in 1950 with President Harry S. Truman's slogan of communist containment.⁵⁷ President Truman formally recognized the pro-French regimes in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, promising aid and later the establishment of the military assistance advisory group to assist with the forming of a Vietnamese national army.⁵⁸ With the election of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the idea of communist containment continued and expanded with the idea that if French Indochina fell to communism, the rest of Southeast Asia would follow, the so called "domino effect."⁵⁹ In February 1965, following the deaths of eight American advisors in a raid on Pleiku in the central highlands of Thua Thien province, President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnam.⁶⁰ By July of 1965, President Johnson had approved the dispatch of 125,000 American soldiers into Vietnam. That number increased to almost half a million men by late 1967.⁶¹

Gen. William C. Westmoreland, Commander, Military Assistance Command Vietnam, was determined to deny the ability of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army from resupplying itself via

⁵⁶ University of New Hampshire Army and Air Force ROTC Hall of Fame, *General (RET) Melvin Zais, U.S. Army*, The University of New Hampshire Army and Air Force ROTC Hall of Fame, <http://www.unh.edu/army/AlumniPage/pages/Zais.html> (accessed 15 June 2012).

⁵⁷ Graham A. Cosmas, *United States Army in Vietnam: MACV; The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), 6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁹ Harry G. Summers, Jr, *Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

the Ho Chi Minh Trail that ran from North Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia into South Vietnam (Figure 9). Key to removing this logistical superhighway was controlling the A Shau Valley, where the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army had developed logistical bases following the removal of the A Shau Special Forces Camp. General Westmorland continued throughout his tenure as MACV Commander to attempt control of the A Shau Valley; his fervor passed to successor, Gen. General Creighton Abrams, who approved the 1969, XXIV Corps mission, APACHE SNOW, to prevent a potential North Vietnamese Army offensive as the enemy built up stockpiles of supplies in the A Shau Valley. The mission given to the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne and the 1st Army of Vietnam Regiment was to conduct airmobile assaults into the northern A Shau Valley in conjunction with the 9th Marines and 3d Army of Vietnam Regiment to destroy enemy forces, obstruct their routes of egress into Laos, interdict their lines of communication, and to locate and destroy enemy caches.⁶² On 10 May 1969, 3d Brigade, 101st and the 1st ARVN Regiment conducted an air assault into the daunting A Shau Valley, initiating Operation APACHE SNOW and setting the stage for one of the bloodiest battles of the Vietnam War.

⁶² Headquarters, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), Operational Report: Lessons Learned, for Period Ending 31 July 1969, Defense Tactical Information Center, 20 August 1969. In Lessons Learned Headquarters 101st, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/506515.pdf> (accessed 09 June 2012). 4.



Figure 9: Ho Chi Minh Trail

Source: Graham A. Cosmas, *United States Army in Vietnam, MACV The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967*, Center of Military History Publication 91-6-1 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2006), 4.

Hamburger Hill

Hill 937, Dong Ap Bia, “The Mountain of the Crouching Beast” (Figure 10) was a large land mass, 937 meters tall, with several large ridges that ran from its summit south and southeast. Like most of the mountainous areas of Vietnam, triple canopy jungle and dense elephant grass covered the mountain,

which made movement difficult on the best conditions. Having been under the control of the North Vietnamese Army for many years, the mountain was pock-marked with spider holes, deep tunnels, trenches, and fortified bunkers.⁶³ During Operation MASSACHUSETTS STRIKER, intelligence from XXIV Corps indicated that the 29th North Vietnamese Regiment was in the A Shau Valley, though its exact location was unknown.

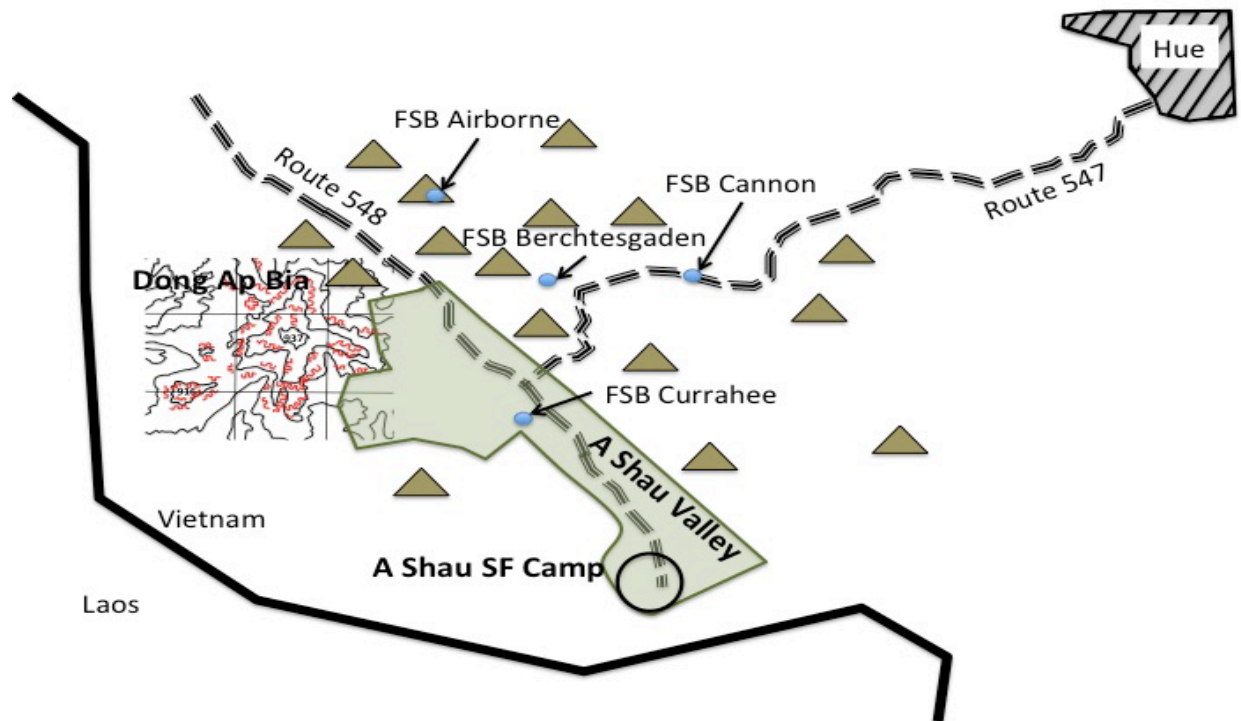


Figure 10: Dong Ap Bia and the A Shau Valley

Source: Bert Aton and William Thorndale, Project Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations Report: A Shau Valley Campaign, December 1968 – May 1969, USAF Historical Archives, Maxwell AFB. In Virtual Vietnam Achieve, <http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/starfetch.exe?TnqcmbNXESBGXU3.zojYgUQnt9ILYQ@uH2lp16qUF0dOn3p4VEtM9LJu wOp6G7SVHUpRnKr8YVA0@pSR.rtgK8cRzDJmrGwMjd.oA4SeJMJ@PQc9jRUQfg/0390126001a.pdf> (accessed 12 October 2012), 15.

On 10 May 1969 at 0730, 3-187 Infantry set out to find and destroy the 29th Regiment, known as “The Pride of Ho Chi Minh,” in order to prevent the build up of the enemy in the valley. American and South Vietnamese commanders believed that the anticipated enemy buildup and offensive could threaten Hue, Quang Tri, and other major cities and towns along the coast. With this in mind, 3d Battalion of the

⁶³ Willbanks, “Hamburger Hill,” 24.

Rakkasans departed from Fire Base Blaze.⁶⁴ As elements of the battalion moved toward the Laotian border and Dong Ap Bia, they made initial contact with snipers and a two-man element firing rocket propelled grenades. The first assessment was that contact was only trail watchers, but continued contact and encounters with spider holes made it evident that a much larger force was in the area.⁶⁵ Major General Zais determined that the size of the enemy force was too great for one battalion, and ordered 2-502 Infantry, “Five-Oh-Deuce,” 2/3 South Vietnamese Regiment, and two companies from 2-506 Infantry, “Currahees,” to Dong Ap Bia to seize the hill and assist 3-187 Infantry destroy the enemy on the mountain. Over the next ten days and with numerous attempts to secure the mountain, forty-six American soldiers were killed, and an additional 400 wounded.⁶⁶ The negative press created from the battle of Hamburger Hill ultimately helped weaken political and popular support for the war effort, and contributed to shifting the focus of the U.S. effort in Vietnam to Vietnamization.

Context of Operation APACHE SNOW, Hill 937 and the War of Attrition

When General Westmoreland developed his concept for the war of attrition in Vietnam, he based it on the belief that if U.S. forces killed enough of the enemy, then it would be easier to pacify the country.⁶⁷ The second benefit that a war of attrition provided to the American command and politicians in Washington, was that it was an easy measure of effectiveness; the more Viet Cong killed, the greater the effect on pacifying the population and creating stability in the war-torn country. However, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the northern manpower and the material support from China and the Soviet Union flowing along it blunted the any measure of effectiveness against the North Vietnamese cause. Following the Tet Offensive of 1968, General Westmoreland was replaced by Gen. Creighton Abrams. With this change in leadership came a change in the operational approach to defeating the Viet Cong and North

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Summers, *Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War*, 152.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁶⁷ Richard Stewart, ed., *The United States Army in a Global Era, 1917-2003*, vol. 2 of *American Military History* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 2005), 333-334.

Vietnamese Army in South Vietnam.⁶⁸ General Abrams changed his focus to “clear-and-hold,” which entailed units creating secure areas around major population centers to allow for institutional rebuilding in South Vietnam. For this reason, securing the A Shau Valley and denying the massive logistical bases to the enemy was the context for conducting Operation APACHE SNOW.

Operation APACHE SNOW was designed to eliminate a potential build up of communist forces, materials, and equipment in the A Shau Valley. In Operation DEWEY CANYON, the 9th Marines in January 1969, had discovered a network of paved roads connecting the valley to the Ho Chi Minh Trail, with approximately 1,000 trucks using the roads to bring supplies to base camps in the area.⁶⁹ This time, however, the mission given to the Iron Rakkasans and South Vietnam’s 1st Infantry Regiment was to conduct airmobile assaults into the valley in conjunction with the 9th Marines and 3d South Vietnamese Infantry Regiment.⁷⁰ During the previous operation, MASSACHUSETTS STRIKER, 2d Battalion, 501st Infantry had determined that the 29th NVA regiment was somewhere in the A Shau Valley. General Zais tasked the Iron Rakkasans to find and destroy the regiment to protect Hue from another attack.

If preventing an repetition of the Tet Offensive was the immediate end state, then Major General Zais viewed the destruction of the North’s 29th Regiment and the enemy logistical bases within the A Shau Valley as the means. By clearing the A Shau Valley and keeping it out of enemy control, the United States and the Republic of Vietnam was another step closer toward achieving the strategic goal in Vietnam: a stable South Vietnam free of communism. Operation APACHE SNOW was, therefore, the way in which the army link the tactical means and strategic goals in the A Shau Valley. However, even if operations in the A Shau Valley were successful, there was no longer a synchronized effort to disaggregate the NVA system of moving men and material from North Vietnam to South Vietnam.

⁶⁸ Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America’s Last Years in Vietnam* (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 1999), 7.

⁶⁹ Willbanks, “Hamburger Hill,” 24.

⁷⁰ Headquarters, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), Operational Report: Lessons Learned, for Period Ending 31 July 1969, Defense Tactical Information Center, 20 August 1969. In Lessons Learned Headquarters 101st, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/506515.pdf> (accessed 09 June 2012). 4.

Actions at Hamburger Hill

Although the actions at Hamburger Hill were tactically focused, Major General Zais approached several operational decision points during the ten days of active fighting around Dong Ap Bia. The first decision point was whether to continue operations to secure Hill 937. Zais's second was to decide if he should move additional combat power to Hill 937 to assist 3-187 Infantry. The third was to relieve the Iron Rakkasans as the main effort with another, fresher battalion.⁷¹ Zais made these three decisions, but not without some anguish and more than a little concern as to whether the decision was correct and worth the cost in lives. Compounding these decision points was Zais's having to contend with what seemed to be unfavorable press coverage and political pressure concerning the actions being taken and the purpose behind the perceived blood bath at Dong Ap Bia.⁷²

As 3-187 Infantry continually attempted to gain the summit of Dong Ap Bia, General Zais analyzed the situation and initiated movement the of non-committed forces to the vicinity of Hill 937 to support in the Iron Rakkasans and cut enemy withdrawal routes—the typical enemy tactic had been to conduct initial contact, then break contact, and retreat into the sanctuaries of Laos or Cambodia.⁷³ The first unit ordered to assist 3-187 Infantry with the attack on Dong Ap Bia was 1-506 Infantry, whose landing zone and subsequent mission placed them approximately four kilometers south of the hill mass. First Battalion of the Currahees slowly moved to conduct a link-up with 3-187 Infantry as the Iron Rakkasans continually attempted seizing the mountain (Figure 11).

⁷¹ Zaffiri. *Hamburger Hill*, 168, 229, 231-232.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 197.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 168.

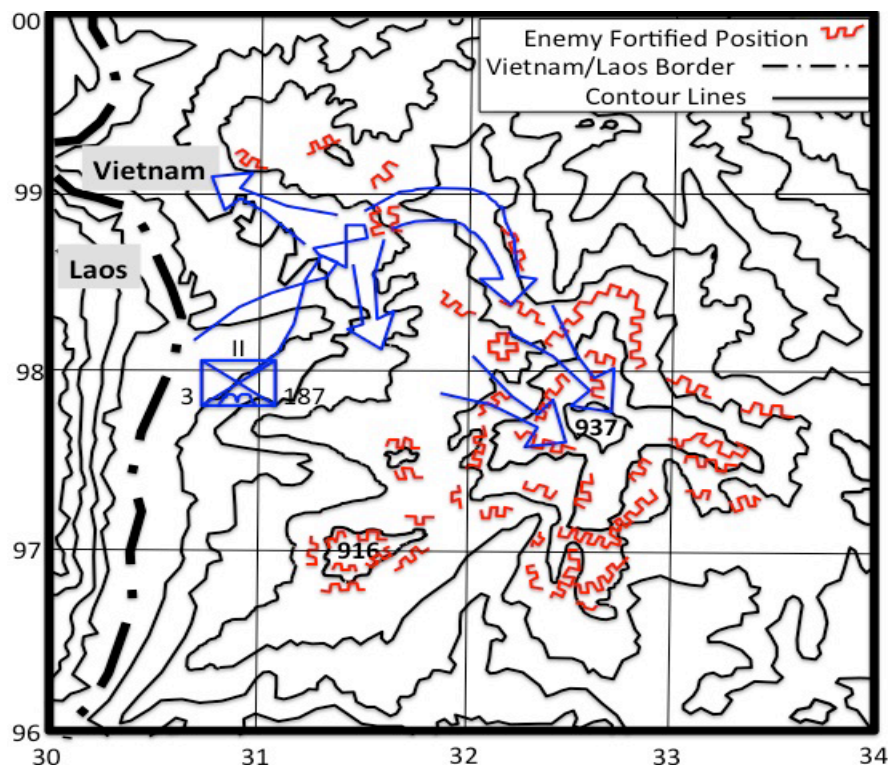


Figure 11: Initial Movements of 3-187 Infantry and 1-506 Infantry, 10-14 May 1969

Source: Major General Melvin Zais, Papers. Dong Ap Bia Archive. Headquarters, 101st Airborne Division, Battle of Dong Ap Bia: Hill 937 10-21 May 1969: Summary of Action and Results, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 10-13.

The Rakkasan attack stopped short on 11, 14, and 15 May, however, because of friendly fire incidents by attack helicopters using aerial rocket artillery.⁷⁴ On the evening of 14 May the Currahees continued movement north to take Hill 916, southwest of Hamburger Hill, and succeeded on 15 May, but stopped two kilometers from the summit of Hill 937 due to severe enemy resistance (Figure 12). On 17 May, 3-187 Infantry waited for a link-up with 1-506 Infantry to mass enough combat power for the next assault on the hill.

⁷⁴ "Battle of Hamburger Hill Timeline," <http://www.historynet.com/battle-of-hamburger-hill-timeline.htm>, (accessed 13 June 2012).

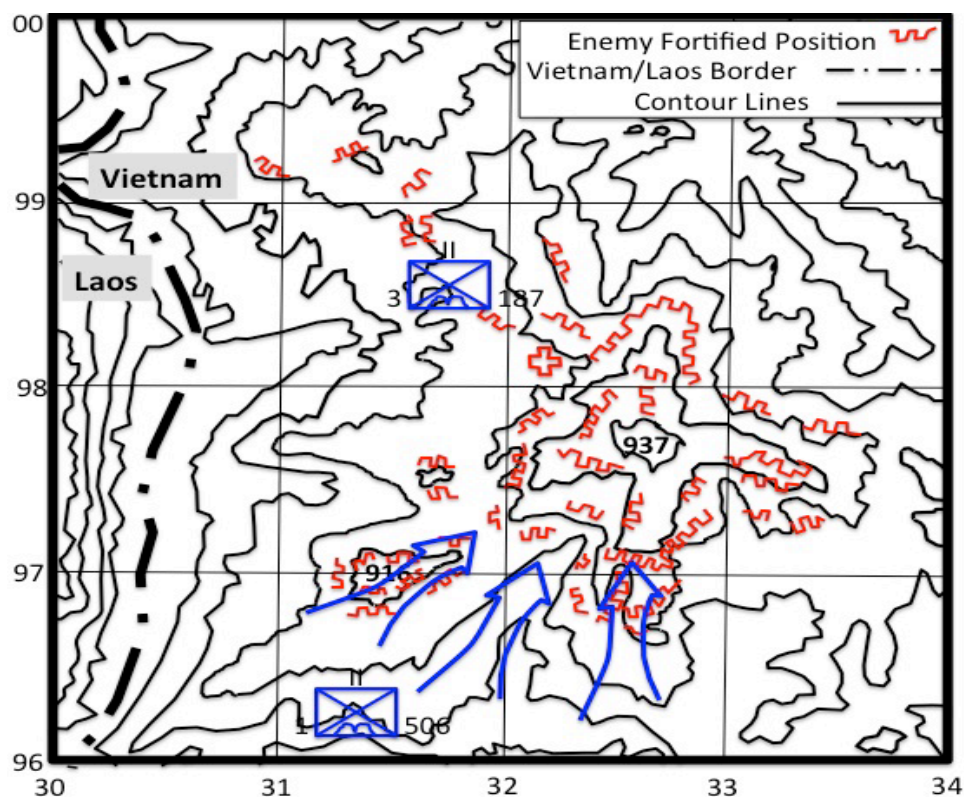


Figure 12: 1-506 Infantry and 3-187 Infantry Movement, 15-17 May 1969

Source: Major General Melvin Zais, Papers. Dong Ap Bia Archive. Headquarters, 101st Airborne Division, Battle of Dong Ap Bia: Hill 937 10-21 May 1969: Summary of Action and Results, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 14-16.

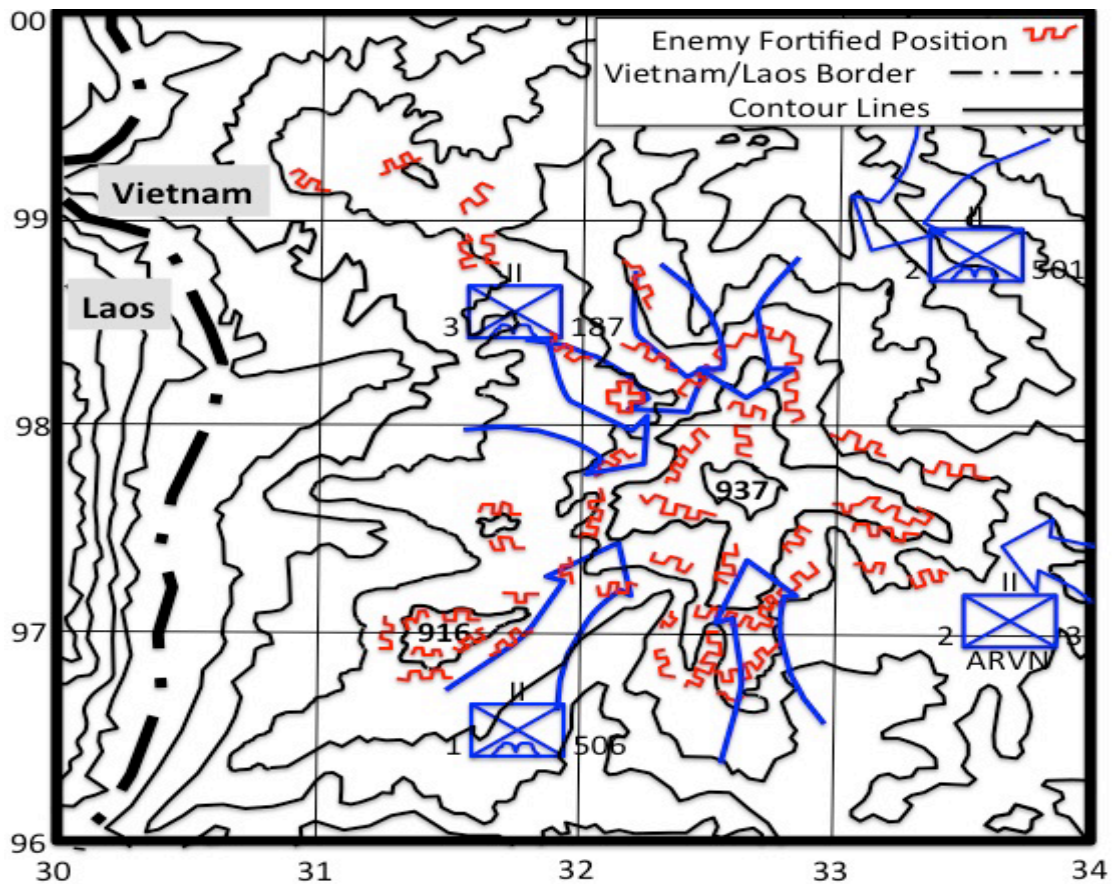
On 17 May, as General Zais looked over the casualty lists for the actions at Dong Ap Bia, he reached his second decision point: cancel operations at Hill 937 or continue with his efforts to seize the hill. Having decided that the attrition of the enemy was worth the potential loss of friendly forces, he ordered 2-501 Infantry, “Geronimo,” and South Vietnam’s 2/3 Infantry to conduct attacks against the mountain. Second Battalion of the 506th Infantry was to replace 3-187.⁷⁵ The decision to replace 3-187 was the result of seeing the battalion reduced to below 50% combat effectiveness: two companies had suffered 50% losses and another two companies some 80% losses.⁷⁶ Negative media coverage had also begun to influence Zais’s decisions. The reports added pressure on a commander facing several difficult decisions.

⁷⁵ Zaffiri, *Hamburger Hill*, 229.

⁷⁶ “Battle of Hamburger Hill Timeline.”

Following the decision to replace 3-187 Infantry with 2-506 Infantry, the Iron Rakkasan commander, Lt. Col. Weldon F. Honeycutt argued against it. Making his case with Zais, Honeycutt called upon his commander not to replace his battalion, but instead to give him control of a company from the Currahees. Zais, appreciating the determination and diligence of Honeycutt, agreed to the change in orders and cut the requested company to 3-187 Infantry.⁷⁷ The reason Zais did not swap out the battalion was because of his belief that Honeycutt could accomplish the mission. Moreover, looking to the possible consequences of replacing one battalion with another, Zais wanted to avoid fostering a narrative that Honeycutt was replaced due to failure, and the demoralizing effect it would have on his battalion. Reinforced, Honeycutt's assault continued on 18 May, but stopped just short of the hill's summit because of withering fire from the enemy. On 19 May, reinforcements from 2-501st and 2/3 Infantry arrived; the units coordinated their attacks, and secured the first level of trenches and bunkers along the hill (Figure 13).

⁷⁷ Zaffiri, *Hamburger Hill*, 232.



Source: Major General Melvin Zais, Papers. Dong Ap Bia Archive. Headquarters, 101st Airborne Division, Battle of Dong Ap Bia: Hill 937 10-21 May 1969: Summary of Action and Results, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 17-18.

Pressing forward, on 20 May, General Zais coordinated for a massive two hour bombardment by the Air Force followed by an hour and a half artillery suppression mission once the aircraft had moved off station.⁷⁸ As the beleaguered elements of the 101st and South Vietnamese assaulted to the top of Dong Ap Bia, they discovered that the majority of the enemy moved off the mountain during the night, leaving only a handful of dedicated North Vietnamese soldiers to continue to the fight as Zais's forces they maneuvered up Dong Ap Bia (Figure 14).

⁷⁸ Zaffiri, *Hamburger Hill*, 255.

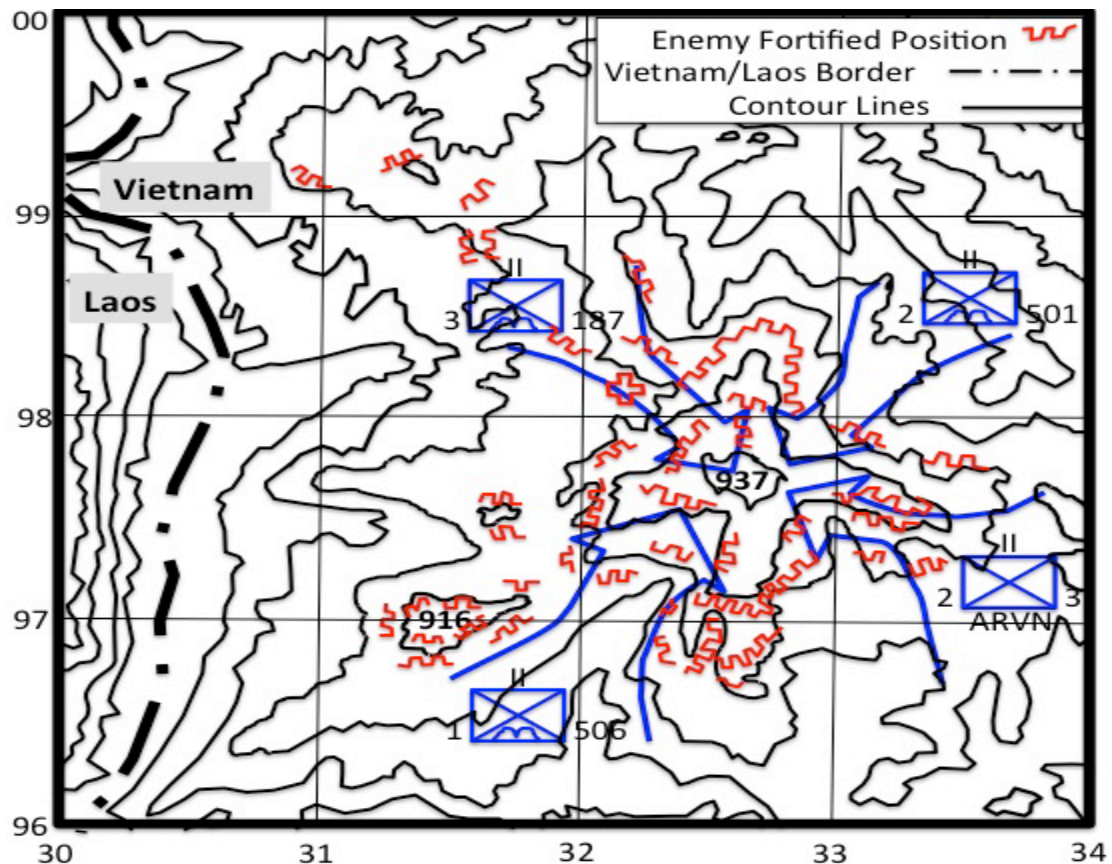


Figure 14: Securing Hill 937, 20 May 1969

Source: Major General Melvin Zais, Papers. Dong Ap Bia Archive. Headquarters, 101st Airborne Division, Battle of Dong Ap Bia: Hill 937 10-21 May 1969: Summary of Action and Results, U.S. Army History and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 19.

The assault on Dong Ap Bia resulted in the death of approximately 600 North Vietnamese soldiers, and reports of another 1,100 enemy dead and wounded removed from the hill to Laos, or buried in collapsed tunnels and bunkers.⁷⁹ For the Screaming Eagles, 56 soldiers died, with another 367 soldiers wounded.⁸⁰ General Zais had achieved his objective of wearing down the north's 29th Regiment, having virtually wiped out the 7th and 8th battalions of the enemy.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Willbanks, "Hamburger Hill," 29

⁸⁰ Major General Melvin Zais, Papers. Dong Ap Bia Archive. Headquarters, 101st Airborne Division, Battle of Dong Ap Bia: Hill 937 10-21 May 1969: Summary of Action and Results, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 27.

⁸¹ Ibid, 29.

Vietnam Doctrine

The 1962 version of FM 100-5, *Operations*, emphasized improved technology and tactical and strategic objectives. One of the failings of the doctrine was in outlining the operational level to link strategic aims with tactical actions. This failing, in and of itself is not the sole reason tactical action in Vietnam did not lead to strategic success. As military and political leaders focused efforts on defeating the guerrilla war in South Vietnam, they devised a strategy that did not focus on the source of war, North Vietnam.⁸² The pursuit of defeating a counter-insurgency in South Vietnam resulted in leaders focusing on the tactical level instead of defeating North Vietnam's strategic goal of the conquest of South Vietnam.⁸³ As in the field manuals of World War II, there was no discussion of the operational level of war or operational art as a concept, yet many American commanders and campaign planners during World War II successfully employed what is today termed operational art: linking tactical actions to strategic aims. A good example of American strategic and operational shortcomings in the Vietnam War is the well-known 1974 encounter in Hanoi, when Col. Harry G. Summers, Jr. stated to a North Vietnamese colonel Tu, "you know you (North Vietnam) never defeated us on the battlefield." Colonel Tu replied, "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant."⁸⁴ Summers recognized the truth of this in *On Strategy*, when he wrote that "Tactical success is not necessarily strategic success, and tactical failure is not necessarily strategic failure. Our (United States) tactical successes did not prevent our strategic failure and North Vietnam's tactical failures did not prevent their strategic success." The army's Vietnam-era doctrine maintained the ability to provide a basis with which to initiate operations, whether counter guerrilla or conventional warfare, and was tactically sound.⁸⁵ However, the Vietnam doctrine focused on concentrating U.S. firepower on the enemy, with maneuver primarily used for locating and fixing the enemy.⁸⁶ Its emphasis was tactical. The overall wording of FM 100-5 changed to match improvements in

⁸² Harry G. Summers, Jr, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Presidio Press, 1982), 56.

⁸³ Ibid, 60.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 1.

⁸⁵ Robert A. Doughty, *The Evolution of US Army Tactical Doctrine, 1946-76* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1979), 38.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

technology or equipment, but did not change in many of the other areas with the 1944 version. The purpose of the infantry was still outlined as closing with and destroying the enemy. It best accomplished that by combined arms employment.⁸⁷

Although the doctrine during the Vietnam era did not discuss the operational level, the biggest failing was in the military and political leadership focusing on the wrong strategy in Vietnam. This failing resulted in confusion throughout the national security establishment over tactics, grand tactics, and strategy, ultimately leading to fighting for a hill that had no strategic value in winning the war.⁸⁸ If, as a unified national security establishment, the U.S. had again focused on containment of North Vietnamese expansion, the source of the war in Vietnam, our tactical actions in defeating NVA formations might have had a greater linkage to American strategic aims.

Hamburger Hill Lessons Learned

Major General Zais, having fought during World War II and Korea, had learned much about war. It did not seem there was much more another round of combat could teach him. Three things, however, came to the forefront of his understanding from the battle of Hamburger Hill. First, the media can be a benefit and a curse that must be dealt with in good and bad times. Second, a reaffirmed lesson from his career was that no matter what the operation entails, if the leadership takes care of the soldiers, they will take care of the mission. Lastly, when doctrine or intelligence fail, an understanding of a situation can be developed based on past similar experiences to accomplish the mission.

After operations at Dong Ap Bia, Zais interacted with the media to ensure the proper story of Dong Ap Bia was told. His largest concern was that the Screaming Eagles would depart the combat zone thinking they had failed at Hill 937, or that their efforts had been worthless.⁸⁹ In his own words, General Zais stated, “I didn’t care about me, but I just thought that we had fought such a gallant and brilliant fight,

⁸⁷ War Department, FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations: Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1962), 59-61.

⁸⁸ Summers, *On Strategy*, 57

⁸⁹ Major General (Ret) Melvin Zais, interview by Colonels William L. Golden and Richard C. Rice, 1977, Project 77-3, transcript volume 3, Senior Officers Oral History Program, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 582.

and that Honeycutt had done well. For those men to think that it had all been a needless, suicidal attack just galled me, and that is why I was willing to talk to the television, radio, and newspaper people who obviously were aware of what Senator [Edward] Kennedy said and were clamoring to talk to me.”

General Zais learned that the media can be extremely critical, and later reflected in his retirement that the media could bolster the military, as occurred in World War II, or undermine it as Maj. Gen. Zais believed it did in Vietnam.⁹⁰

General Zais conducted his interaction with the media in a professional manner, even though he felt the media were ruining the war for the United States. General Zais commented later in his life that reporters covering the war in Vietnam were at a “D” grade level compared to the “A” grade level of reporters during World War II.⁹¹ Even when second-guessed about actions he directed, such as continuing the fight, or not pulling back and conducting strategic bombing on Hill 937, he swallowed his anger and calmly explained why certain actions had to be conducted. Zais emphasized the need to accomplish the mission accomplishment and to avoid losing contact with the enemy.⁹²

The media’s reporting on Hamburger Hill became one of the elements in increasing the unpopularity among Americans of the Vietnam War.⁹³ Dong Ap Bia became another rallying point for anti-war protestors and political platforms for politicians to argue against continued U.S. involvement. Media on the battlefield continue to play a critical role in explaining military actions on the battlefield, and are another means of achieving strategic objectives as was evident when Presidential Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler reinforced Zais’ message to the White House press corps 23 May 1969.⁹⁴ The media will always be in the field to gather information for stories that sell best to the public. It is the job of leaders to ensure honest, truthful, and full aspects of the situation are highlighted, and to be forthcoming with any perceived negative actions.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 343.

⁹² Zaffiri, *Hamburger Hill*, 197, 275.

⁹³ Willbanks, “Hamburger Hill,” 30.

⁹⁴ Zaffiri, *Hamburger Hill*, 27.

General Zais considered caring for people one of his top priorities, something that he first learned when he was growing up in the poor neighborhood of his hometown. A speech he delivered to the Armed Forces College describes best how caring for subordinates provides the best leadership on the battlefield.

There are all kinds of caring, and there are degrees of personal sacrifice to reflect the amount of caring that you do. There is part-time caring. There is almost-excellent caring, there is even, unfortunately, pretend caring— and then there is true, deep caring. How can you tell whether you really care deeply? Ask yourself how you would feel if you are fifteen minutes late for a meeting of your squad. Would you feel, as you should, that you have conveyed disrespect to every member of that squad? How would you react if you saw a member of your squad who was deeply troubled? Would you involve yourself just enough to satisfy yourself that you had done something and that now it's up to the person to fix it? Or would you keep digging to really understand the root cause of the issue and do your very best to help the person resolve it?⁹⁵

General Zais cared how Honeycutt would appear before his men and the morale repercussions that would occur if he relieved him of the responsibility of Hamburger Hill. Zais believed that Honeycutt was doing well in leading the fight, but wanted to replace his battalion with another unit because of the toll of the battle on his battalion. General Zais cared enough to understand the drop in morale, fighting spirit, and trust in the Rakkasan's leadership if he replaced them with the 2d Battalion, Currahees to secure Hill 937.

Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais intuitively used his previous experiences to develop understanding of a situation that was not readily clear based on a lack of intelligence received from the field. Carl Von Clausewitz called this utilizing an improved theory, but cautioned that if it outlived its usefulness, then the commanders ran the danger of demonstrating the “most extreme poverty of the imagination” which could ultimately lead to utter ruin of the commander's force.⁹⁶ Doctrine provided a starting point for operations, but then as now it is up to the commander to determine when doctrine, training, and experience no longer fit the given scenario and adapt accordingly.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ John Pepper, *What Really Matters: Service, Leadership, People, and Values* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 263.

⁹⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 154.

⁹⁷ ADRP 5-0, vi.

Synthesis – What Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais Brought with Him from Southern France

The experiences and resulting biases that Major General Zais witnessed, developed, and used during the battle of Col de Braus also came into play in the battle of Dong Ap Bia. The terrain that the battles were fought on resembled each other in height, enemy tenacity, and in their fortified defensive positions. The doctrines utilized during and between the two wars were identical with exception of changes due to technology. The context varied based on a plan synchronized with an overarching strategic objective, and one that was focused on an incorrect strategic objective. The overall military actions were similar in letting the smallest unit possible attack a well-defended enemy until it becomes obvious that additional support is needed with heavy integration of combined arms warfare. Overall, the situation that then Lieutenant Colonel Zais witnessed as a regimental executive officer was almost identical to the one he later controlled as a division commander.

In four major ways the Col de Braus battle and that for Dong Ap Bia resembled one another. While not exact in comparison, both shared more than merely superficial similarities. In General Zais's mind, the struggle for Hamburger Hill resonated with fight for control of the Sospel Valley. Indeed, that experience in France was more than a simple memory for Zais. In the A Shau Valley it served almost as a template for his division's actions at Hill 937. First, there was the matter of the battlefields' height. Each contest was similar because of the physical elevation of the objectives and difficulties that imposed on planning, executing, and on the soldiers. Secondly, Zais faced well-prepared enemies, skillful in maximizing their combat power through mutually-sustaining defensive positions. The terrain played a major role in the late massing of American combat power. In each case American forces held the disadvantage of exterior lines of operation. Finally, there was the lack of intelligence. While aware of the enemy, in neither case was the American intelligence preparation of the battlefield adequate nor were the commanders' situational awareness optimal. Thus, when General Zais faced Hill 937 he instinctively turned back to experiences at Col de Braus.

Both Col de Braus and Dong Ap Bia were extremely tall mountains, roughly reaching 1000 meters. The hardships of these elevations on the soldiers attempting to seize the summits differed only in the climates and vegetation of the Maritime Alps and Vietnam. Both objective areas had adjoining peaks that added supplementary objectives to the primary objective, which required that they be secured before moving to the next one.

Similarly, the defenses the enemy established at Col de Braus and Dong Ap Bia were well planned and integrated in order to provide the greatest possible protection to the defender. Both series of defenses had been constructed in depth to provide cover and over-watch for adjacent positions. Furthermore, the fortifications at both sites provided the defender with overhead cover, which protected them from indirect fire. Finally, the proficiency of the German soldiers at Col de Braus and the North Vietnamese troops at Dong Ap Bia were exceptionally gifted at conducting the defense, and coupled with the well planned defenses, both units, centuries apart, had initial success in repulsing the Americans from their objective.

During both battles, the American ability to mass combat power only occurred after a smaller force had sustained so much damage that it had been rendered nearly combat ineffective. In Col de Braus, 2d Battalion was relieved by 3d battalion due to the casualties suffered securing and holding the foothold. Similarly, 2-506 Infantry was ordered to replace 3-187 Infantry, but Lieutenant Colonel Honeycutt persuaded Major General Zais to allow the Iron Rakkasans to remain in the fight, though its high casualties were of a scale associated with combat ineffectiveness. Even the speed at which replacements could reach objectives was similarly hindered. At Col de Braus, the rugged mountains, steep terrain, and harassing enemy indirect fires slowed movement of reinforcements and casualty evacuations. In the A Shau Valley the triple canopy, enemy threat, and dense foliage slowed 1-506 Infantry from quickly joining with 3-187 Infantry. General Zais failed to compensate for his learned understanding of the slower speed of units with external lines of communication moving over rough terrain to conduct supporting operations.

Lack of intelligence between the objective at Col de Braus and Dong Ap Bia was deficient due to a loss of contact with the enemy, and poor intelligence passed from higher. The triple canopy at Dong Ap Bia made it extremely difficult to gather accurate intelligence on enemy locations and movement, just as the lack of adequate long range surveillance made intelligence gathering at Col de Braus extremely difficult. For both areas, the use of human intelligence gathering proved to be the best source of information in gaining understandings of the enemies' dispositions, compositions, and strengths. For both Col de Braus and Dong Ap Bia, units were forced to conduct localized reconnaissance in force to gain understanding, often countering what was provided by higher headquarters.

The four similarities of the objectives' height, defenses, slow massing of combat power, and lack of intelligence allowed General Zais to slip back into the improved theory established from Col de Braus to fight the battle of Dong Ap Bia. Although the introduction of improved technology enhanced the methods to attack the enemy, when the two hills had to be secured, Zais utilized mass, concentration, coordination, and simultaneity to achieve success.

Doctrine

The doctrine of the two wars matched almost perfectly. The biggest discrepancy between doctrine in World War II and doctrine during the Vietnam War was the introduction of improved technology. During World War II, the 1944 doctrine did not have linkages outlined between strategic aims and tactical actions, but the national strategic objectives were synchronized with what the military deemed necessary to win the war because the source of the war, Germany, was the focus for both. An operational linkage did not exist in the Vietnam doctrine either, and leaders at the military and political level failed to focus upon the right strategy of containing North Vietnam, instead focusing on defeating a counter-insurgency in South Vietnam, missing the true source of the war. Although after the war in Vietnam doctrine writers included an operational level, if the source of the war is not included in the strategy, there will continue to be breaks between tactical actions and strategic goals. In lieu of a guide to assist in his decision-making, Zais fell back on a situation that was familiar and executed successfully—Col de Braus. ADRP 5-0 states

that, “commanders use their experience and judgment to add depth and clarity to their planning guidance.”⁹⁸ Melvin Zais did exactly that, he used his experience in southern France as a guide in planning the continual assaults up the mountain to remove the enemy in a way that bombs and artillery could not, similar to “storming Kraut positions in Normandy”.⁹⁹

Context

In spite of the many similarities between the battles for Col de Braus and Dong Ap Bia, they differed significantly in their strategic and operational contexts. In the case of Col de Braus, the 517th’s tactical mission, securing the right flank of the Seventh Army, fit neatly within the larger operational picture. Seizing and holding Col de Braus and the other key locations in the Bevera Valley ensured that German reinforcements could not penetrate into southern France and attack VI Corps as it advanced to Lyon, part of the larger shaping operation, DRAGOON. In the case of Dong Ap Bia, the larger, albeit loosely connected operational linkage, was the war of attrition General Westmoreland initiated, and the later “clear-and-hold” strategy, or counter-insurgency, of General Abrams.¹⁰⁰ Operation APACHE SNOW was designed to attack the logistic bases being established in the A Shau Valley by the North Vietnamese Army, while pushing a defensive bubble outward from the populated areas and into the mountainous regions of Vietnam. By expanding the secure space, Gen. Creighton Abrams, the new MACV commander, intended to gain time for the South Vietnamese government to stabilize and rebuild its institutional structure. Tactically, there was a linkage in space and time with the isolated operations occurring in the A Shau Valley, but there was no connection to the strategic goal of defeating the VC and NVA in South Vietnam. For Operation APACHE SNOW, there was no linkage of its tactical operations in the A Shau Valley achieving the strategic goals of defeating the VC and PAVN. If Operation APACHE SNOW had been part of a strategy focused on containment of North Vietnamese expansion, defeat of the

⁹⁸ ADRP 5-0, 1-5.

⁹⁹ Colonel David H. Hackworth and Julie Sherman, *About Face* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 705-06.

¹⁰⁰ Sorley, *A Better War*, 7.

29th NVA regiment would have been complementary to a scope of operations designed to disaggregate the North Vietnamese system of flowing men, weapons, and material into South Vietnam.

Conclusion

Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais's experience in southern France had prepared him for the struggles he later faced as the commander of the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam. The biases he formed as a member of the 517th PRCT during the battle of Col de Braus became instrumental in his understanding of the battlefield at Dong Ap Bia with its similarities in height, enemy disposition, known intelligence, doctrine, and tactics utilized to secure the objectives. The 937 meter summit of Dong Ap Bia in the A Shau Valley reminded Zais of his earlier encounter during World War II of a set of peaks in southern France that was designated as an objective to secure the right flank of Seventh Army. The similarities in the defensive posture of the enemy faced during the conflicts also reminded him of how the operation was conducted in Col de Braus. From attacks by *panzerfausts* to attacks by rocket-propelled grenades, the enemy tactics remained seemingly the same in both cases; integrated defensive positions with supporting indirect fire, overhead cover, and well established internal lines of communication to rapidly reinforce locations. Even the lack of tactical intelligence mirrored what General Zais faced at Col de Braus. Between the triple canopy on Dong Ap Bia, or the lack of long range intelligence, the lack of a good enemy situational template was mirrored between the two battles. It became the job of the soldier on the ground to gain intelligence and pass the information higher to develop an understanding of what the enemy was doing or preparing to do. The doctrine used during WWII and Vietnam mirrored each other except for the incorporation of new, updated technology. This provided Maj. Gen. Zais with a familiar doctrinal template that he used during Col de Braus and could apply to Dong Ap Bia. The tactical action that was conducted at Col de Braus and Dong Ap Bia was also extremely similar. The forces involved in the initial contact were smaller than the final formation that successfully secured the objectives in both

battles. The final push to both objectives required massing indirect fires synchronized with the maneuver of dismounted forces to quickly gain altitude against a dazed and confused enemy.

Under the current U.S. doctrine, the inclusion of design and operational art is a forcing mechanism to attempt to understand the unfamiliar enemy system being employed, and linking the tactical actions to strategic goals through the Army Design Methodology.¹⁰¹ The Battle at Hill 937 lacked the linkage between tactical actions and strategic goals, mainly stemmed from a failure in the political and military leadership to orient on the source of the war in South Vietnam – North Vietnam. Zais' understanding of the operational context for Hamburger Hill was to destroy NVA caches, and troop concentrations within the A Shau Valley to prevent another TET OFFENSIVE as occurred in 1968.¹⁰² Operations at Dong Ap Bia were not linked to defeating the North Vietnamese. Instead, operations were focused on creating a zone of safety around populated areas, and allowing the South Vietnamese to build institutions, and capability to protect themselves from the insurgency in South Vietnam. If Operation APACHE SNOW had been part of a strategy focused on containment of North Vietnamese expansion, defeat of the 29th NVA regiment would have been complementary to a scope of operations designed to disaggregate the North Vietnamese system of flowing men, weapons, and material into South Vietnam. The disaggregation of the NVA system would have provided the time the ARVN needed to train, equip, and field forces capable of defeating the North Vietnamese.

In total, the similarities between the Col de Braus battle and what General Zais faced at Dong Ap Bia provided a basis to quickly gain understanding and formulate a course of action based on actions that he had experienced in southern France. However, as Clausewitz warned, a commander who continually follows the same patterns based on what he knows shows a limiting factor in ingenuity and critical and creative thinking. Leaders who do not understand what is influencing their decisions, can be blinded from developing a clear understanding of the situation, and continue to operate along the same failed mental model that did not work last time, or did work and now has become predictable. The commander's use of

¹⁰¹ ADRP 5-0, 2-6.

¹⁰² Zais interview, 3: 577-578.

experience continues to be an integral part of their understanding, visualizing, deciding, directing, and assessing operations when faced with unfamiliar situations, whether in the rapid decision-making and synchronization process or military decision-making process.¹⁰³ The importance that current doctrine has placed on operational art (the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose) is an attempt to ensure that military tactical actions are always conducted to achieve the national strategy of the United States.¹⁰⁴ As a nation, the United States must ensure that the strategy is focused on the source of war, allowing the military to properly focus its campaigns on tactical actions that will ultimately lead to strategic success.

¹⁰³ ADRP 5-0, 4-6.

¹⁰⁴ Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2012), 4-6.

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