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## **ARMY JOURNAL**

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**COVER:** 'Ack Ack' — An anti-aircraft nest in the coastal area near Mersa Matruh, Egypt, May 1941. From a painting by Ivor Hele at the Australian War Memorial.

# ARMY JOURNAL

*A periodical review of military literature*

No. 237, February 1969

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*(Australian War Memorial)*

Brigadier C. E. Cameron, Commander 8th Australian Infantry Brigade, shakes hands with Private C. Moe of the US Army — the first American to link with the Australians of the 30th Battalion at the Yaut River, Yagomai, New Guinea on 10 February 1944. This meeting, near Sidor, marked the end of the Huon Peninsula campaign.

# Victory at Hué

AATTV

## Introduction

THE Battle for Hué (30 January—25 February 1968) has been acclaimed as the greatest achievement by the fighting men of South Vietnam since the war began. This article, submitted by the Australian Army Training Team (AATTV) in Vietnam, describes the battle and reflects the opinions of individual members of AATTV. They praise the South Vietnamese units, who fought with great tenacity and won the major part of the victory.

Hué lies astride Route 1, which was the main supply route from the United States Marine Corps (USMC) bases at Da Nang and Phu Bai to the encircled outpost at Khe Sanh. Hué is some 60 miles south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), has a population of 140,000 and is generally regarded as the cultural and intellectual centre of the Republic of South Vietnam.

Within Hué, on the north bank of the Perfume River, are the thick-walled battlements of the Citadel or Imperial City of the ancient Emperors of Vietnam, some of whom are buried there. The ramparts of the Citadel form a 2,500 metre square and consist of an outer stone wall three metres thick and five metres high; separated from an inner wall by distances varying between 15 metres to 75 metres. The area between the walls is filled with earth and rubble. The 1 ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) Division was located in Hué.

A ceasefire between the opposing forces had gone into effect at 1800 hours on 29 January 1968 for the Tet-Vietnamese lunar new year celebration and several thousand visitors had arrived in Hué for the festival. That night, the Communists staged their boldest military stroke of the war, with well co-ordinated attacks against many of the cities in South Vietnam—but Hué was not one of them. Because of the widespread violations the South Vietnamese Government terminated the Tet ceasefire at 0945 hours the following morning and the army of the Republic of Vietnam was alerted.

Allied estimates of the enemy situation prior to 31 January did not indicate their capability to launch a divisional size attack against

Huế. Reports had been received of a 'pre-Tet' offensive but the enemy had remained relatively inactive. It was considered that any enemy operations would be directed against Allied forces along the DMZ south to Highway 9, especially in western Quang-Tri Province at the USMC complex at Khe Sanh, where the enemy continued to exert pressure and reinforced his positions with artillery and some tanks. Khe Sanh was considered to be the principal objective and the lines of communication through Phu Loc as a secondary target. Intelligence in the Huế area pointed to the possibility of battalion sized attacks on outposts or sub-sectors. There were no reliable indicators of a large scale redeployment of enemy forces towards Huế.

At the time eleven AATTV members were stationed in the Huế area, or were to become involved in the battle. Major N. J. Wilson and WO E. B. Ostara were with the subsector advisory team at Nam Hoa, about eight miles south-west of the city. Three WOs were advisers with ARVN battalions — WO1 M. Evans with 2 Battalion 3 ARVN Regiment, WO2 A. L. Egan with 1 Battalion 3 ARVN Regiment and WO2 D. R. McDonald with 4 Battalion 2 ARVN Regiment. Captain D. Campbell was an operations staff officer in the Tactical Operations Centre (TOC) of 1 ARVN Division, located in the northern corner of the Citadel. WO2 G. B. Snook was an adviser with 3 Troop 7 ARVN Cavalry Regiment, which was equipped with M113 armoured personnel carriers. WO2 T. J. Egan was an adviser with 1 ARVN Division Reconnaissance Company. WO2 R. D. Ford, normally employed as an adviser at the Long Tho Training Centre, was at the MACV Compound in Huế to enjoy the Tet recess. WO2 B. J. Silk was advising the 21 Vietnamese Ranger Battalion, which moved from Da Nang to Huế during the operations, and WO2 A. N. Powell was a member of the Phong Dien subsector advisory team, isolated for almost a month at its headquarters on Highway 1 mid-way between Huế and Quang-Tri.

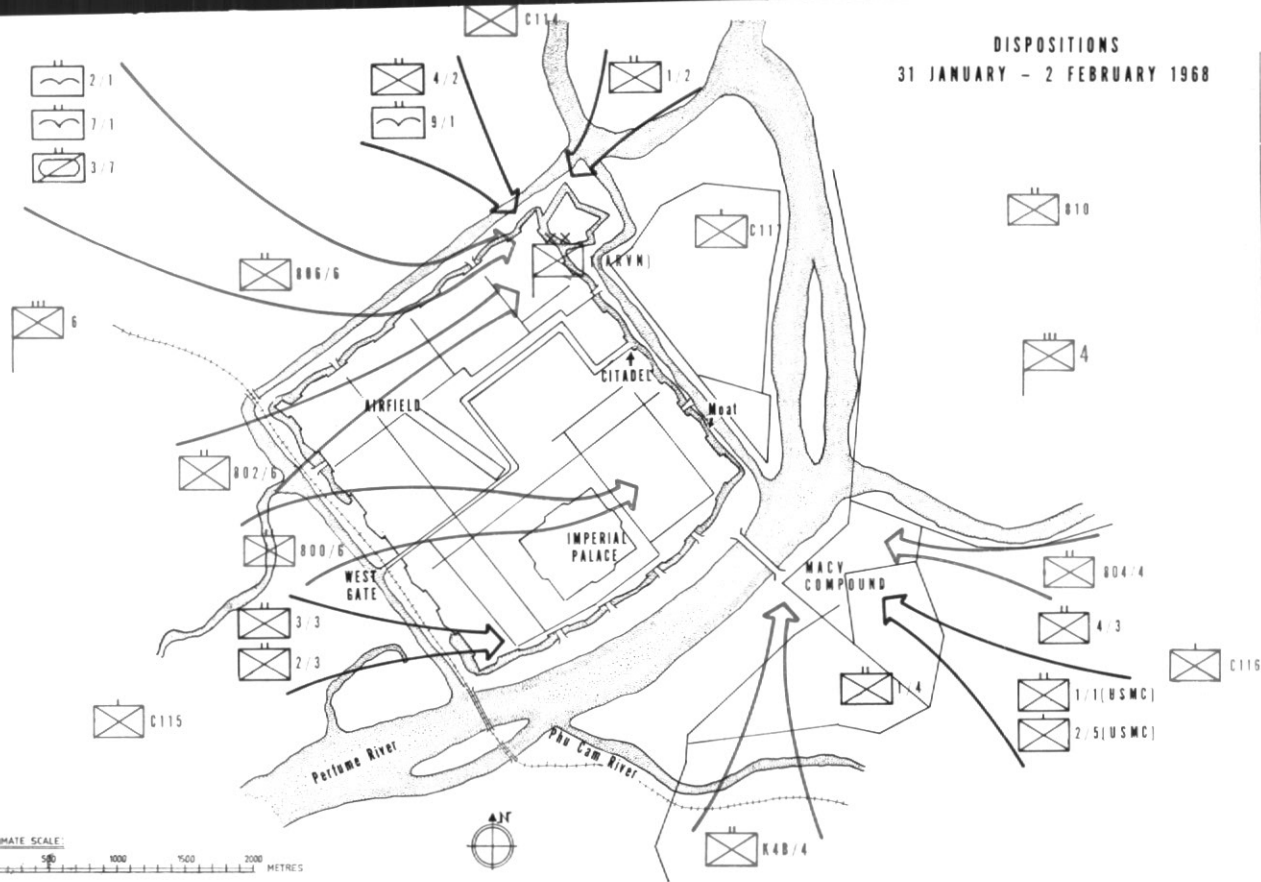
### **The First Phase**

WO2 T. J. Egan and 36 men of the Division Reconnaissance Company were on a river and area surveillance mission three miles south-west of Huế during the night of 30/31 January. At 2200 hours a Regional Force (RF) Company to their east was attacked by a large enemy force. WO2 Egan radioed enemy positions, strengths and movements to HQ 1 ARVN Division as elements of at least two enemy battalions moved past his position towards Huế. (See Map 1) This report furnished the first definite warning of the impending battle.

At 0340 hours on the 31st the enemy launched a rocket, mortar and ground attack against Huế. A strong attack against the north-east

DISPOSITIONS  
31 JANUARY - 2 FEBRUARY 1968

MAP 1



VICTORY AT HUE

corner of the MACV Compound was repelled by small arms fire. Approximately one hour later a second attack was mounted against the south-east corner but this was also repelled. At the same time the enemy moved two battalions into the Citadel towards HQ 1 ARVN Division. These battalions were the 800 Battalion and 804 Battalion of the 6 Regiment of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). As the 800 NVA Battalion approached Hué city airfield at 0400 hours it struck the 1 ARVN Division reaction force, the Hac Bao or 'Black Panther' Company and was forced to move south. At this time the 802 NVA Battalion penetrated the 1 ARVN Division compound and occupied the medical company cantonment area. The Hac Bao Company was ordered to the compound and, assisted by the headquarters clerks, drove out the enemy force.

By first light the enemy held the Citadel, except for the 1 ARVN Division Compound, and had established the 806 Battalion 6 NVA Regiment in a blocking position outside the north-west corner on Highway 1. The Viet Cong flag was flying from the Citadel masthead.

To the south, across the Perfume River, the MACV Compound had been attacked by elements of the 4 NVA Regiment, supported by rockets and mortar fire. An attack by 804 Battalion was repulsed with small arms fire and grenades. The enemy had planned to destroy the compound with plastic explosives.

Except for the two main enemy objectives the North Vietnamese now controlled Hué, and the Allied localities required reinforcement.

Brigadier General Ngo-Quang-Truong, the Commanding General of 1 ARVN Division, ordered 3 ARVN Regiment, the Vietnamese 1 Airborne TF and 3 Troop 7 ARVN Cavalry Regiment to be moved to the Citadel. Two companies and four tanks from 1 Battalion 1 USMC Regiment at Phu Bai were despatched as a reaction force.

It is estimated that during 31 January two reinforced enemy regiments occupied Hué. Inside the Citadel were 800 Infantry Battalion and 802 Infantry Battalion, reinforced by 12 Sapper Battalion and an unknown number of support companies commanded by 6 NVA Regiment. Across the Perfume River to the south were elements of 4 NVA Regiment. To the east of the MACV and Thua Thien Compounds was the 804 Infantry Battalion, reinforced by elements of the 'Co Be' Sapper Battalion, with a headquarters and mortars in the Stadium. To the west of Highway 1 were elements of the K4B Infantry Battalion reinforced by newly infiltrated units whose size and strength were unknown. Enemy command posts were believed to be located in the Province Hospital, the Catholic Redemptionist Church and Mission School. The K4C Infantry Battalion was located south of the Phu Cam Canal, with the task of blocking Allied



reinforcements from the south. At least two local force companies were east of the city in delaying positions in the vicinity of Xuan-Hoa and Nhi-Dong. The 801 Infantry Battalion was astride the lines of communication both north and south of the Perfume River to the south-west of the city.

Order of battle estimates totalled some ten to twelve thousand enemy troops and at least 25 per cent of the estimated strength could be used to reinforce the main forces. Reports were now received of pre-positioned weapons, ammunition caches and guides and collaborators assisting the enemy within the city. Students and left wing political and religious organizations were thought to be assisting the enemy as a fifth column.

The enemy was heavily committed in Quang-Tri Province and along the DMZ and it was not believed that VC/NVA reinforcements could be provided from the north without major redeployment of forces and a readjustment of priorities.

### **The Reaction**

Two companies of 1 Battalion 1 USMC Regiment, with four tanks, moved north from Phu Bai during the morning of 31 January. The Marines encountered 1 Battalion 4 NVA Regiment at the An Cuc Bridge on Highway 1, and again, only 700 metres south of the MACV Compound. Both marine companies reached the MACV Compound at 1420 hours on the 31st, then crossed to the north side of the Perfume River and attempted to force an entry into the Citadel. The marines could not dislodge the firmly dug in enemy force between the Citadel walls and returned to the MACV Compound for the night.

3 Troop 7 ARVN Cavalry Regiment, with WO2 Snook, was ordered to move to the Citadel on the morning of 31 January. At 0920 hours the troop supporting the 7 Vietnamese Airborne Battalion left their base camp, 10 miles north of Hué, and moved south along Highway 1. The paratroopers moved on foot and were harassed by mortar fire and snipers. By midday they were within 1,000 metres of the western corner of the Citadel when the column was attacked while clearing a small village. The 7 Vietnamese Airborne Battalion and the troop were forced to fall back and suffered moderate casualties. The force regrouped and again attacked astride the highway and railroad but were repulsed by two NVA battalions dug in at An-Thai. At 1500 hours a further attack was launched but was again halted when three M113s were disabled by rockets.

2 Vietnamese Airborne Battalion moved forward from the Quang Dien subsector to assist in a concerted attack at 1825 hours. This was partially successful. The two airborne battalions remained where they were and during the night the enemy troops withdrew to the Citadel. Throughout the night and the following morning efforts were concentrated on evacuating the large number of wounded paratroopers. The limited number of helicopters available could not cope so the cavalry troop was used to move casualties across a temporary bridge into Hué Hospital. This relief force sustained 40 killed and 91 wounded during the 24-hour action but claimed 270 enemy killed and captured 96 weapons. Four of the 12 M113s with the cavalry troop were destroyed. On the morning of 1 February the column reached HQ 1 ARVN Division.

On 31 January, 2 and 3 Battalions of 3 ARVN Regiment moved east along the north bank of the Perfume River to the Citadel but could not gain entry. 2 Battalion, with WO1 Evans, made heavy contact with the enemy and one company became separated from the battalion, which it did not rejoin for three weeks. After several brushes with the enemy the battalion reached the railway bridge near the south-west corner of the Citadel at 1700 hours on 1 February.

1 and 4 Battalions of 3 ARVN Regiment were on operations south-east of Hué when the Tet offensive began. Both battalions were surrounded and had to fight their way back to Hué. 4 Battalion 3 ARVN Regiment was engaged by an estimated NVA battalion and after continuous fighting 170 men from the battalion reached the MACV Compound on 4 February. On 1 February, 2 Airborne Battalion and 7 Airborne Battalion, with elements of 3 ARVN Cavalry Regiment and the Hac Bao Company recaptured the airfield. On the same day one half of 4 Battalion 2 ARVN Regiment was air-lifted from Dong Ha to the Citadel and deployed south of HQ 1 ARVN Division. On the 2nd the remainder of 4 Battalion, 2 Company 1 Battalion 1 ARVN Regiment and 9 Vietnamese Airborne Battalion were air-lifted to HQ 1 ARVN Division. The paratroopers joined their sister units near the airfield. 1 Battalion 3 ARVN Regiment was deployed along the north-west wall and 4 Battalion 2 ARVN Regiment was deployed along the eastern wall of the city.

The three airborne battalions were successful in the vicinity of the airfield and reported killing over 200 enemy in the first few days. On 4 February, 1 Battalion 3 ARVN Regiment captured the An Hoa gate on the north-east wall and 2 Battalion 3 ARVN Regiment attempted to capture the gate in the south-west wall. The first attack was made after a preliminary air bombardment. Of the 10 men who

succeeded in crossing the moat six became casualties. Fifteen men then managed to cross and place a ladder against the wall but were driven back. The ladder against the wall encouraged them to try again and a company attack was launched. Thirty men succeeded in scaling the wall but within a short while 24 had become casualties and the remainder were driven off. The gate was not captured until some days later.

Casualty reports on 4 February advised that 693 enemy had been killed in the Citadel and to the north-west on Highway 1.

Dispositions of the opposing forces on 4 February are shown on Map 2:

By this day the intelligence staff had a fairly clear picture of the enemy force. There appeared to be one regiment in the Citadel, with its command post in the Imperial Palace; another regiment was deployed along Highway 1. A third regiment with four battalions and supporting arms was west of Highway 1. Within the Citadel it was believed that two reinforced battalions were entrenched along the south wall and around the Imperial Palace. The third battalion was in position along the west wall linking with the units to the north-west of the Citadel. It appeared the enemy were determined to retain Hué for as long as possible.

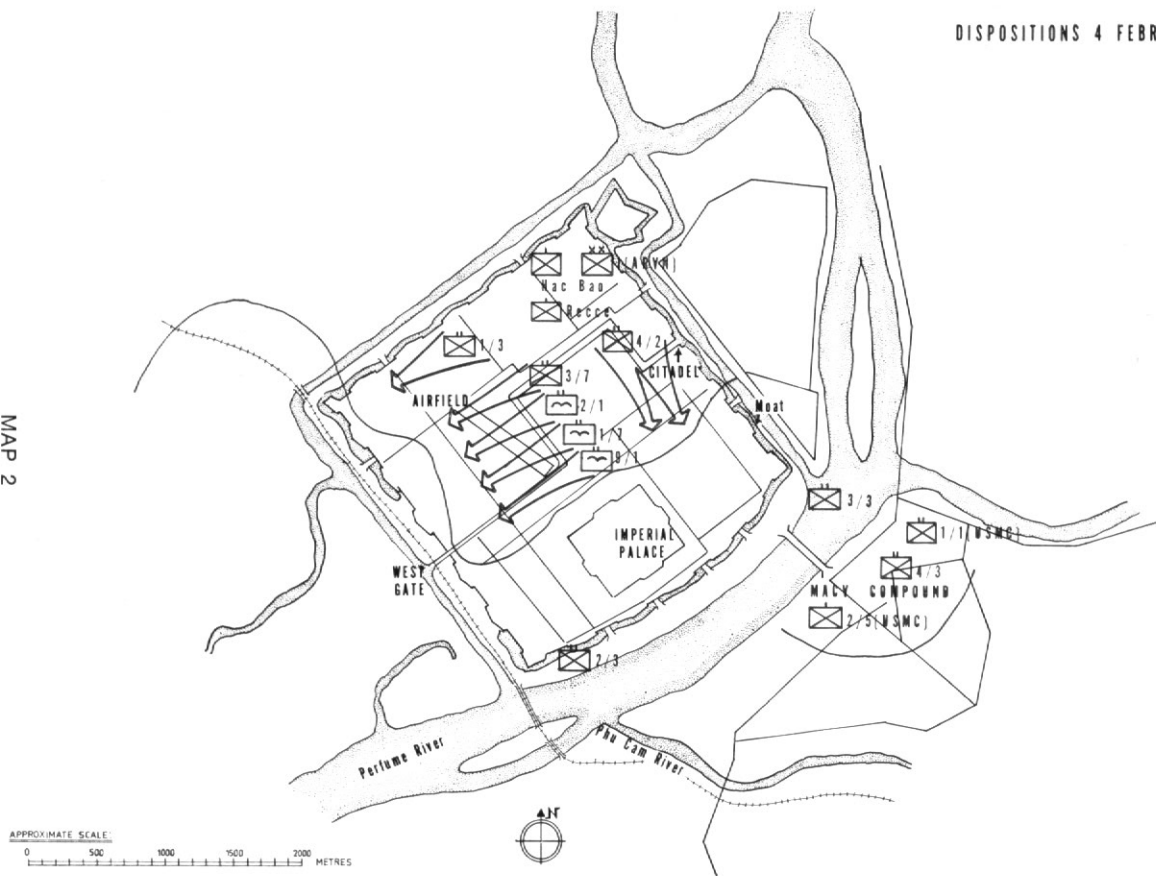
### **The Recapture of the Citadel**

On 5 February the Airborne TF was redeployed along the north-east wall and 4 Battalion 2 ARVN Regiment occupied positions near the airfield. On the following day 4 Battalion 2 ARVN Regiment fought its way to the south-west wall. On the night of 6/7 February the enemy launched six attacks against this position and forced the defenders off the walls. The 4 Battalion 2 ARVN Regiment fell back and was reorganized near the southern end of the airfield.

Also on 5 February 4 Battalion 3 ARVN Regiment crossed the Perfume River and assaulted the south gate of the Citadel seven times but could not breach the enemy defences. The battalion then took up a defensive position alongside two of its sister units from the 3 ARVN Regiment (2 and 3 Battalions) just outside the south-east wall along the Perfume River. During the early morning of the 7th enemy frogmen managed to demolish the central span of the Nguyen Hoang Bridge, the last link from the Citadel to the southern portion of the city.

On 7 February, being unable to penetrate the Citadel from the south, 2, 3 and 4 Battalions of 3 ARVN Regiment were moved by motorized junks to HQ 1 ARVN Division, from where they deployed to the airfield on the 8th, thus relieving 4 Battalion 2 ARVN Regiment.

MAP 2



Although 2 Troop 7 ARVN Cavalry Regiment had been ordered to move from Quang Tri to Hué Citadel on 3 February, the cavalry was not able to break contact and redeploy to Hué until the 6th. Escorted by a company from 1 Battalion 1 ARVN Regiment the column arrived at Hué on the 7th where the troop was deployed on the airfield relieving 3 Troop 7 ARVN Cavalry Regiment, now down to three operational M113s. 3 Troop withdrew to HQ 1 ARVN Division to regroup and provide security for the headquarters.

Poor weather conditions during the first week of the battle had precluded the employment of Allied close air support and had allowed the enemy to move men and supplies in and out of the Citadel at will. During the period 7-12 February the enemy remained firmly entrenched within the city and effectively blocked the ARVN attempts to remove them.

A company of marines from 1 Battalion 5 USMC Regiment, reinforced with five tanks, arrived by water at HQ 1 ARVN Division on the night of 11 February. On the following day the remainder of the battalion arrived and relieved the ARVN Airborne TF in the south-east portion of the Citadel. The enemy were firmly entrenched in well-defended positions for 1,000 metres south to the south-east wall. These positions had to be cleared house by house and block by block. M48A3 tanks and ONTOS were used to demolish strong points. The ONTOS is a USMC light tracked vehicle which mounts six 106 RCLs. Air strikes and artillery had failed to dislodge the enemy positions deep in the Citadel walls, and the tanks and ONTOS proved invaluable in silencing the fire positions.

On the 12th elements of Task Force Alfa arrived from Saigon (1 Vietnamese Marine Battalion and 5 Vietnamese Marine Battalion). Both battalions, supported by six 105-mm howitzers, were deployed to the south-west portion of the city. The battalions were ordered to sweep to the south-east wall, some 1,000 metres distant. The Vietnamese Marines lacked heavy direct fire weapons, particularly 106 RCLs, so that small, well-positioned enemy detachments were able to repeatedly hold up company attacks.

The 3 ARVN Regiment and 2 Troop 7 ARVN Cavalry Regiment kept pressure on the enemy west of the airfield; however, on 14 February the enemy broke out and encircled 1 Battalion 3 ARVN Regiment in the western corner. The Hac Bao Company, supported by the cavalry troop, joined up with 1 Battalion 3 ARVN Regiment on 16 February.

On 15 February the Commanding General 1 ARVN Division, to co-ordinate the movement and support of units deployed in the

attack on the Citadel, divided the city into six Areas of Operations (AOs). On the same day the Vietnamese marines continued to move along the south-west wall, killing 39 enemy and capturing a school-house containing a large cache of weapons and ammunition one block from the Imperial Palace.

On 16 February the 4 Vietnamese Marine Battalion arrived and was deployed the following day with the task of clearing the south-west wall of the Citadel from the west corner. This battalion met strong resistance and after two days fighting gained only 400 metres.

On 18 February 1 ARVN Division Reconnaissance Company and the Hac Bao Company moved to the right of the USMC units along the north-east wall of the Palace and 4 Vietnamese Marine Battalion moved to join the Vietnamese marine units in the south-west corner for another attack on the south-west wall.

On the same day the US marines moved to within one block of the south-east wall and on the 22nd, using their tanks and ONTOS vehicles, reached the wall with 2 Battalion 3 ARVN Regiment on their right flank.

During 21 February 1 US Air Cavalry Division launched four battalions on a sweep through the La Chu area three miles to the north-west of the Citadel, killing 41 enemy and capturing 23 weapons.

At 0630 hours on the 22nd the enemy mounted an attack through the south-west wall against 3 ARVN Regiment and the 4 and 5 Battalions of the Vietnamese marines. After two hours of defensive artillery fire the attack ceased and a counter-attack by the Vietnamese resulted in 200 enemy killed and many weapons captured.

The 21 and 39 ARVN Ranger Battalions landed by water outside the north-east wall on the 22nd and cleared the large island east of the city. They met only light to moderate resistance during the subsequent three-day operation.

On the night of the 23rd the enemy launched an attack, supported by mortars and rockets, in the western area of the city. ARVN artillery replied and by daylight the attack had ceased. During the same night 2 Battalion 3 ARVN Regiment mounted a raid along the south-east wall and captured the area of the main flag pole. At 0500 hours on 24 February the Viet Cong flag, which had flown for 24 days, was replaced by the flag of the Republic of Vietnam.

At 0730 hours 3 ARVN Regiment, supported by 2 Troop 7 ARVN Cavalry Regiment, reached the south-west wall and reorganized on the

wall by 1025 hours. 161 enemy bodies were counted, many having been killed by the intense artillery fire during the night.

The 2 Battalion 3 ARVN Regiment and the Hac Bao Company were immediately ordered to capture the Palace. Entering it at 1515 hours they secured the objective by 1700 hours after light resistance. By nightfall Vietnamese marines reached the south-west wall and the last stronghold in the city fell at 0500 hours on 25 February after artillery concentrations were adjusted on to the south-east corner. The Citadel had been cleared and was secure.

Four battalions from 1 US Air Cavalry Division were well-positioned to block the withdrawing enemy and these troops killed 152 enemy at La Chu and to the west of the Citadel.

Nguyen Van Thieu, the President of South Vietnam, flew into HQ 1 ARVN Division on 25 February 1968 to congratulate General Truong on his victory. President Thieu, who had at one time been a Commanding General of 1 ARVN Division, praised the units involved in the operation. Intelligence estimated that sixteen battalions, or two divisions of the North Vietnamese Army, were committed against Hué.

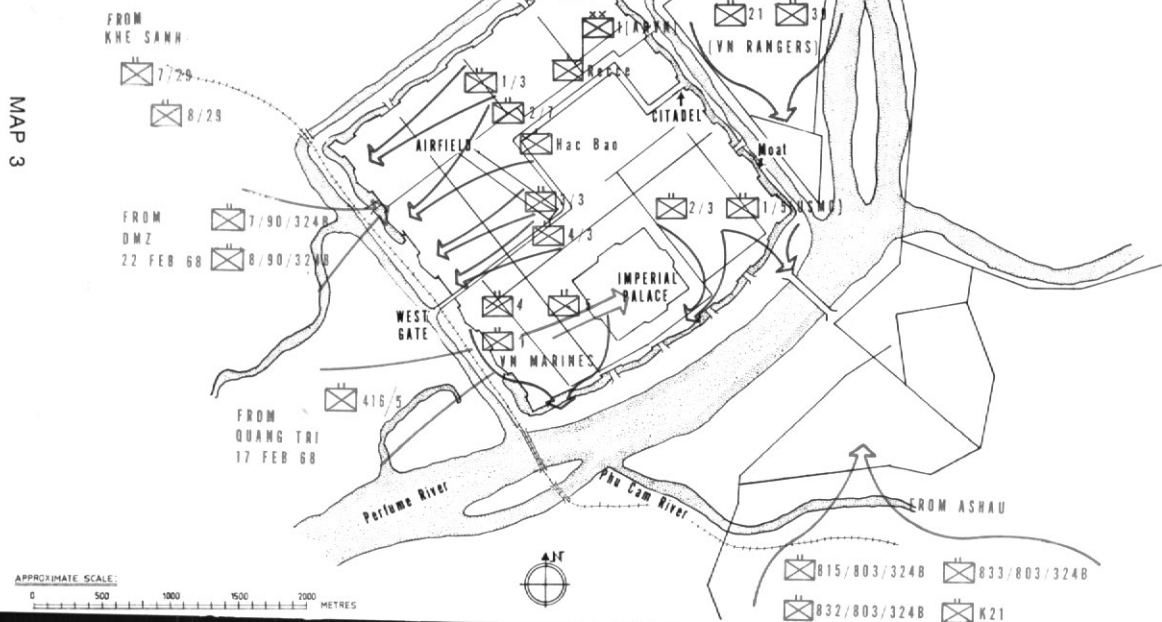
Dispositions of forces in the final phase are shown in Map 3.

### **Behind the Scenes**

Until 8 February 1968 when the first Landing Craft Utility (LCU) landed from Da Nang the supply situation was precarious, particularly as additional ARVN troops moved into the Citadel. When the water route was established sufficient stockpiles of supplies were collected to support the eight ARVN battalions. 3,530 tons, or 85 per cent of all supplies, were transported by water. Isolated ARVN units outside the Citadel, however, remained short of supplies throughout the battle because of transportation problems. Units adjacent to US Forces received sufficient supplies, including 105-mm ammunition, from US sources.

Motor transport throughout was completely disrupted as the only two bridges over the Perfume River were destroyed by 7 February. Supplies were moved by water on LCUs to the Bao Vinh landing but not until 8 February. The boats also provided a vital link between the forces south of the river and the Citadel. The enemy attempted to interdict the river but because of helicopter gunship and patrol boat escorts they succeeded only in occasionally slowing traffic. The movement of supplies and troops continued at the LCU ramp on the south side of the river despite heavy enemy fire from the Citadel walls. During the battle two boats were sunk and many others damaged.

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Of the nine H-34 Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) helicopters available seven were destroyed. The remaining two provided a limited capability for the resupply of ARVN artillery positions and isolated outposts. Until 8 February most resupply was accomplished by USMC aircraft, which provided support throughout the battle. Adverse weather and heavy enemy ground fire made aerial resupply undependable and the Nam Hoa subsector and 1 ARVN Engineers, for instance, were not resupplied until 17 February. Transportation was a limiting factor in the deployment of troops and resupplying units and, in consequence, the ARVN capability was considerably reduced.

Neither the 1 ARVN Division in Hué nor the many scattered units could have survived without US assistance. The extremely limited resources available in the advisory organization could not cope with problems of this magnitude.

ARVN infantry and airborne units and Vietnamese marine corps units did not have the heavy direct fire weapons needed for successful operations in built-up areas. 105-mm howitzers, mortars, and light infantry weapons were not powerful enough to destroy enemy positions in masonry structures and earthworks and this lack of suitable firepower resulted in heavy casualties during the operations.

On 31 January the 1 US Air Cavalry Division and Task Force Xray arrived in the Hué Thua Thien area. The close liaison and support that had existed between the 3 USMC Division at Phu Bai and the 1 ARVN Division had not been achieved with the newly-arrived units and, in the early stages, this hindered rapid co-ordination of operations.

The initial mission and the Tactical Area of Operations (TAOR) of the 1 US Air Cavalry Division proved unsatisfactory because it precluded the cavalry division from closing on the enemy supply route to the Citadel through the west wall. The enemy used the area between the cavalry division's TAOR and the Perfume River to resupply his troops and evacuate his casualties from the Citadel. When the cavalry's area of operations was extended to the Perfume River and the western wall of the Citadel on 21 February the enemy's main supply route was cut, causing a rapid deterioration in his ability to continue offensive operations. Allied forces were then able to take the initiative from the enemy in the Citadel.

Prior to the Tet offensive the 1 ARVN Division had telephone and radio communications with its subordinate units and with 1 ARVN Corps. The division never lost radio contact with its units or with corps. However, early on 31 January the cable from Division to the Thua

Thien Sector Communications Centre on the south side of the Perfume River was cut. This meant all telephone communications were lost until 9 February when a VHF radio link was installed to connect the division to the Sector Communication Centre.

As a result, advisers at Division did not have access to telephone or teletype facilities and all communications were conducted via tactical radio. Radio contact was maintained with advisers in subordinate units but not with I Corps Advisory Group because of radio range limitations. Contact with I Corps Advisory Group was possible only by tactical radio to the MACV Compound, then relay by telephone or teletype. This arrangement effectively prohibited the transmission of long or classified messages. A VHF link was installed at Division on 15 February and a teletype facility was added on the 22nd.

As the Hué battle developed it became impossible for the advisory organization to co-ordinate the many competing demands for air and artillery support in the restricted area of operations where ARVN, Vietnamese marine, US army and USMC units were engaged. A central co-ordinating agency with power to enforce co-ordination was eventually established at HQ 1 ARVN Division by MACV (Forward).

Seasonal weather, characterized by rain and low ceiling, prevented employment of fixed-wing tactical aircraft, except for short periods of time on a few days. Coupled with the enemy's strong anti-aircraft resources it also severely limited the use of helicopters for resupply, medical evacuation, troop movement and escort of river traffic.

Civil affairs and psychological warfare played little part in the battle since most of the agencies had been overrun or neutralized during the first twenty-four hours of the attack. A system of makeshift refugee centres was organized on 3 February and psychological warfare began with leaflet drops and air broadcasts on the 15th. In general, few civilians offered information, but some refugees brought in timely and accurate information of the enemy's composition, dispositions and strength.

The enemy employed two confirmed new weapons during the battle, a 60-mm mortar round with CS gas of medium strength and persistency and a 20-mm Vulcan gun used in both the ground and AA role. This multi-barrelled weapon was apparently taken off a downed US aircraft. During the battle 122-mm rockets were used for the first time in the Thua Thien Sector.

During the pre-Tet period there were no indications of the enemy's intentions to launch a major attack on Hué. Reports did indicate the possibility of harassment of cities; however, most intelligence indicated

that outposts and district headquarters would be the principal targets of enemy action. As a result of the general situation the 1 ARVN Division and MACV elements increased security measures and the division was put on alert on 30 January. These steps prevented disaster but could not defeat the major attack that took place.

ARVN units continued to be an effective fighting force throughout the battle, despite losses which reduced some battalions to less than 150 men available for operations.

The location of the 1 ARVN Division Advisory Team in the MACV Compound, south of the Perfume River, prevented really effective advisory support because the initial enemy attack confined the advisers in the compound, except for a skeleton staff on duty at the headquarters of the division. Major adviser communications were located in the compound and were not available at HQ 1 ARVN Division even when the adviser staff was increased there, and approximately half of the advisers had to be retained in the compound to provide for its defence.

### **In Retrospect**

Many of the lessons learnt during the Battle of Hué are applicable to other battles which took place in Vietnam during the Tet offensive. However, the Battle of Hué was unique in that it was here that the NVA and Viet Cong achieved their greatest success and also suffered their greatest defeat of the offensive. It was a victory for the enemy in that they were able to sustain a foothold for 25 days. The psychological effects of this feat on the South Vietnamese and on the world was significant and the enemy undoubtedly demonstrated a capacity with which they had not previously been credited. On the other hand few people outside Vietnam realized that the recapture of Hué was very much a Vietnamese feat of arms, for relatively few US units were intimately involved. The battle was fought under General Truong's command and the Vietnamese soldiers and marines fought well.

The attack was a tactical surprise, despite the knowledge of an impending offensive, and the warning given by the attacks on other cities which had begun twenty-four hours before. Many people in the city knew of the impending attack but no warning reached the Government (GVN) forces. This is understandable to a degree when one considers the vengeance which was meted out to the GVN supporters by the Viet Cong. Their atrocities were undoubtedly aimed at terrorizing the populace and ensuring their tacit, if not active, support.

Most estimates of the enemy's capabilities were sadly astray; apart from indicating the enemy's lack of intent to attack Hué few

believed he had the capacity. On 30 January five regiments were known to be within a night's march of Hué. It is interesting to note that Major Peter Badcoe VC wrote in April 1967, a few days before he was killed . . . 'I consider that we are losing ground in Thua Thien at present. The enemy has one division in the Ashau—A Loui valley and has the capability to take Phu Bai or Hué for a limited period. The declared Viet Cong intention is the systematic destruction of the District Headquarters, Revolutionary Development (RD) hamlets and government outposts.' How little the situation had changed in the intervening ten months.

Apart from the US Air Cavalry Division which arrived at Camp Evans (25 miles north of Hué) a few days before Tet our own forces were in circumstances similar to when Major Badcoe wrote his report—widely dispersed, defending numerous outposts and protecting RD centres; with only two companies available as an immediate reaction force. What better time to attack than at Tet when the whole country was on holiday. And what better place to attack and hold than the ancient capital of Vietnam—Hué.

Stemming from the underestimation of the enemy's capabilities little had been done to defend the city of Hué or key points within it, though in fairness the same could be said for many other cities in the country. The MACV Compound and the adjacent Thua Thien Sector HQ were fortunate to survive and the divisional headquarters was only saved by the Hac Bao company, the divisional reaction force. The lesson was quickly learnt and never again will key points such as these be found so poorly defended.

A difficult problem and one which has still not been completely solved is the command structure. Firstly, the HQ 1 ARVN Division and the MACV Compound where the advisers live and where the main advisory communications are located, are separated by the Perfume River. Consequently the divisional advisers in the MACV Compound at the start of the battle were isolated and were unable to carry out their normal duties for some days. Fortunately the Thua Thien Sector headquarters is adjacent to the MACV Compound and the sector advisers were able to work at the sector headquarters. Sector exercised little control over the battle although they retained command of all the Regional Force (RF) and Popular Force (PF) outposts. The battle in the city was General Truong's responsibility but he was considerably hampered in obtaining fire support and in co-ordinating operations by the lack of advisers with suitable communications—the normal means of obtaining US support. The few advisers, including Captain D.

Campbell, who were in the headquarters at the beginning of the attack were on almost continuous duty for days. To avoid a repetition of this situation it is essential that advisory teams live with the headquarters to which they are attached and that their communications are at the same location.

The Australian advisers were almost unanimous in stating that the greatest problem they encountered in the initial stage of the battle was the breakdown in command and communications. Command nets were clogged with administrative traffic, such as requests for medevacs, and, as WO Evans points out, a separate frequency should have been provided. The advisers found that most of their reliable information was gained from their Vietnamese counterparts, through the ARVN communications.

It was not until 15 February that General Truong established six clear AOs within the Citadel. Although HQ 1 ARVN Division reacted as quickly as possible and rapidly concentrated all available forces in the city 1 Corps reaction was much slower. Air cavalry was virtually uncommitted until 21 February when a brigade was deployed on the enemy lines of communication west of Hué. Reasons for this were due probably to the fact that they had only arrived in the area at the end of January 1968; the need to retain a mobile reserve; and the plan for GVN troops to conduct the city fighting, with US troops fighting in the open country.

The ARVN logistic organization was unable to cope with the requirements of the battle and resupply ceased completely in some cases. For example, WO Evans' battalion had no resupply of food from 28 January to 14 February. The advisers with the battalion were fed by the battalion from a supply of food it was able to forage. The ammunition shortage in some cases became critical. WO Power, who was at Phong Dien District headquarters, reported that a PF platoon defending the Kem Bridge on Highway 1 was forced to withdraw after running out of ammunition. The enemy destroyed the bridge.

One of the outstanding features of the battle was the fighting spirit, courage and determination of the Vietnamese soldiers. WO Terry Egan praises the 36 men of the Reconnaissance Company who fought their way back to Hué as being 'skilful and steady'. They accounted for 37 enemy dead for a loss of 11 of their own men. WO Ford quotes the story of a Vietnamese forward observer who, when asked by a battalion commander to destroy a particular house in which the enemy were entrenched replied, 'Yes, I know it well'. He destroyed the house —

his own home. WO Snook praised the ARVN cavalry, which had only four of its 12 M113s left after six days of fighting.

The morale of the Vietnamese soldiers was high. Most of the advisers quoted examples of soldiers rejoining their units from Tet leave as quickly as they could and to do so some had to travel through enemy controlled territory. The battalions of the 1 ARVN Division suffered heavily and their strengths at the end of the battle averaged about 130 men.

During the battle 938 civilians were killed, 770 wounded and 261 were listed as missing. Mass graves uncovered around Hué have yielded many bodies of soldiers and civilians, some of whom had been bound with wire and either shot or buried alive. In the village of Nam Hoa Majors N. Wilson and I. Porteous and WO Ostara were in charge of the exhumation of the bodies of 43 civilians and found that a further 68 people were missing from the village complex. In Hué, 10,000 homes were damaged in the battle and 40,000 people were made homeless. The GVN reacted quickly and with US financial and material assistance relief soon came. Flying over Hué now the gleaming new roofs clearly show the areas which had been the scene of the battle.

Before Tet in 1968 many of the people did not feel involved in the war. It is apparent now that they feel open hostility to the Viet Cong who despoiled the sacred festivities of Tet and invaded their historic city. □

Let us be clear about three facts. First, all battles and all wars are won in the end by the infantryman. Secondly, the infantryman always bears the brunt. His casualties are heavier, he suffers greater extremes of discomfort and fatigue than the other arms. Thirdly, the art of the infantryman is less stereotyped and far harder to acquire in modern war than that of any other arm.

— Field Marshal Lord Wavell.

# Armour Leaps to Lose its Chains

*Lieutenant-Colonel A. Argent,  
Royal Australian Infantry*

**Thou shalt not pass by me, lest  
I come out against thee with a sword.**

Numbers 20:18

THEY kept looking for the enemy and now they had turned away and were flying down the side of the hill to the valley below; next almost hovering over a spot where a track just showed through the canopy, the branches and leaves dancing in the rotor downwash; then a pedal turn to the right and a flight over the river only two hundred yards to the south. Always watching and looking through the foliage or heat haze for some movement, something that was not there before. There were eight spider holes under that bank yesterday, how many today? Are these fresh foot prints on the path? Wonder why those boats are on the other side of the river this morning? Like a shadow almost, the second helicopter, two hundred or so feet higher and slightly behind followed, protecting and assisting the reconnaissance with more eyes, more radios and another machine-gun.

There was nothing dramatic about the first clue because a piece of black signal wire is not, in itself, unusual. But it was unusual to see it in an empty, half-burnt out village. This required a closer reconnaissance and after a brief exchange between pilots the low aircraft descended below palm tree level. Weaving in and out and around obstacles the pilot and his observer kept looking.

The wire was about five yards long and one end was attached to a bamboo pole, the other ran slant-wise into the ground. The village

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*Lieutenant-Colonel Argent enlisted in the A.I.F. in 1945. In 1948 he graduated from the Royal Military College and was allotted to Infantry. After service in Japan and Korea with 3 RAR he completed a Flying Instructors Course in the U.K. This was followed by service with BAOR Germany. From 1958 to 1962 he held flying appointments in Australia and qualified at the Australian Staff College. Service with 2 RAR and 3 RAR in Australia, Malaya and Borneo followed, then a staff appointment in AHQ Canberra. At present he is attached to AAS Washington as Exchange Officer (Flying).*

seemed deserted and the only thing that moved was some blue smoke from a burning hut.

Then it happened. The enemy opened fire on the buzzing gadfly. The rounds hit the armour plating under the pilot's seat at almost 90



(US Army Photograph)

US Army OH-6A. Manufactured by Hughes Tool Company — Aircraft Division. Allison T63-A-5A turbine engine, 317 SHP derated to 252 SHP. Length 30 feet 3¾ inches, height 8 feet 6 inches. Main rotor disc 26 feet 4 inches, maximum all up weight (for operations) 2700 lb. This aircraft is equipped with an XM 27 armament subsystem — 7.62-mm minigun — in the pod above the skids.

degrees<sup>1</sup> but other than the normal fright to pilot and observer there was no damage. But those few rounds meant doom to the enemy there and disruption (as it was later learned) to a long planned attack on the .....th Brigade base.

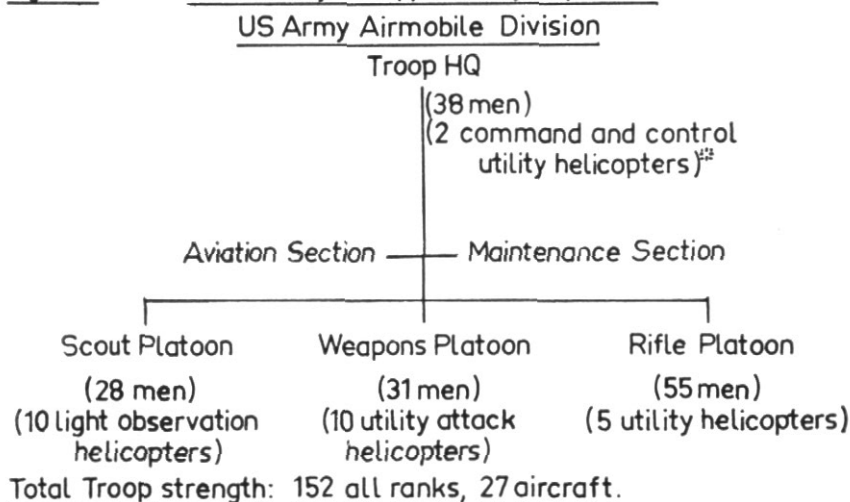
It took only minutes for the gunships ('Charlie' model Hueys) to arrive. One of the scout helicopters (an OH-13 Sioux) dropped yellow smoke almost through the entrance of the hole from where the fire had come. The light fire team (two Hueys) fired rockets and machine-

<sup>1</sup> In this particular case the armour plate was not quite secured and could move in the vertical plane. The resultant thump in the seat of the pants, split seconds before the reports of the shots, would arouse even the most torpid of aviators.



guns into the area and under this cover five 'Delta' model Hueys, each carrying six or seven men, landed on the next rice padi on the sheltered side. The troopers moved towards the smouldering huts and began searching. They were in constant contact with the scouts and the gunships and so began a week's battle which would eventually involve the whole of the US Brigade. The success of the operation was due, in the main, to the men who saw the first clue and whose gunships and troops were there so quickly that the enemy never really had time to react or alter his plans. The men and machines were from an air cavalry troop.

**Figure 1.** Air Cavalry Troop, Cavalry Squadron



<sup>22</sup>Command and control (C and C) helicopters are fitted out with additional radios, to be used by commanders, staff officers, artillery officers etc. For example, the AN/ASC 6 fitted to some C and C aircraft consists of two ARC 44 or 54 (VHF FM), ARC 51 (UHF) or ARC 73 (VHF) and the control head for the aircraft's ARC 102 (HF SSB). Later models have voice security equipment.

### **US Army Air Cavalry**

The air cavalry are the eyes of the US Army division and brigade commanders in Vietnam, but in fact they are merely doing what armour (or cavalry) has always done or tried to do in war—to reconnoitre. To find the enemy, by fighting if necessary; manoeuvre and then destroy him, with or without the aid of others. The air cavalry units in Vietnam are organized to do this and use aircraft merely as a vehicle or weapons

platform to achieve their aim. For example, the air cavalry troop shown in Figure 1, which is equivalent in numbers and command to our ground armoured or reconnaissance squadron, consists of:

- Troop Headquarters with two command and control Hueys.
- Scout Platoon of ten Sioux helicopters. These aircraft are being replaced by the OH-6A. For ease of reference over the radio the platoon is called 'White'.
- Weapon Platoon of ten Hueys (UH-1B or UH-1C) which are now being replaced by the Huey Cobra—the AH-1G. The platoon is called 'Red'.
- A Rifle Platoon, including helicopter crews, of 55 men and five troop carrying Hueys. This platoon is called 'Blue'.

Some of the more important features of the US Army's air cavalry units are best summarized as follows:

- The most striking features are those which are almost taken for granted—flexibility, mobility and firepower. These things are there because the aircraft, weapons and men are there all the time and are utterly responsive to the air cavalry commander and formation commander.
- Good communications. Without good UHF or VHF radio the aircraft may as well stay on the ground.
- Airmobile divisions have organic air cavalry squadrons (three air cavalry troops) and other divisions one air cavalry troop, a sub-unit of the armoured cavalry squadron. The organizations of both troops are almost identical but in infantry divisions the platoons are called 'aerorifle' 'aeroscout' and 'aeroweapons'.
- Air Cavalry Squadrons may also be found as Corps or Army troops.
- Aircraft, weapons, avionics and vehicle maintenance begins at organizational level i.e., within the air cavalry troop. The next echelon or level of maintenance involves the workshops of the Transportation Corps e.g., Maintenance Battalion.
- The crew chief system is used—that is, a man is allocated an aircraft to maintain and what he can and can't do to keep that machine flying is clearly laid down by Department of Army. In aircraft such as the UH-1 he is also one of the two door-gunners.

- By establishment an air cavalry squadron (760 men, 88 aircraft), is commanded by a lieutenant colonel; an air cavalry troop by a major; a platoon by a captain.
- Logistics must be good because, if nothing else, helicopters are thirsty machines (one UH-1 consumes about 450-500 pounds per hour—about 60 imperial gallons). In addition to the ever present problem of spare parts for aircraft, the different types of ammunition (grenades, rockets, smoke, small arms, anti-tank missiles) can pose supply problems.

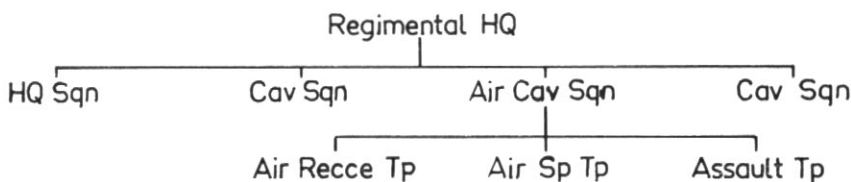
**What's in it for the Australian Army?**

That we are weak in up-to-date reconnaissance (and surveillance) techniques and equipments is unfortunately true and needs no further amplification. An equally critical lack or 'gap' (to use the present fashionable word) is our inability to develop or exploit a situation to our advantage by moving troops and firepower quickly. Reconnaissance and surveillance, firepower, mobility and flexibility are some of the characteristics and roles of armour but over the recent years they have been able to do little about them mainly because of the places where we have chosen to fight and because our equipments have not been related to the task. But there is no time like now to break these man-made hobbles and for the Royal Australian Armoured Corps to regain its rightful place in the order of battle.

**Proposal**

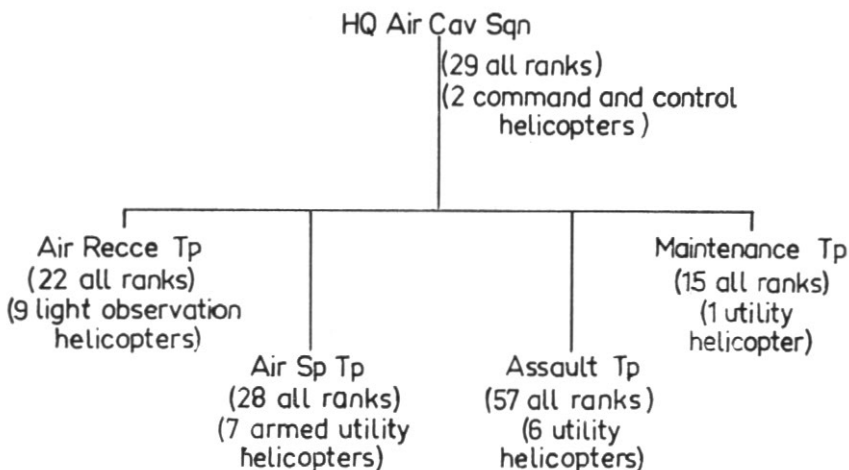
My proposal is that one of the squadrons of the Divisional Cavalry Regiment should be an Air Cavalry Squadron and in outline the unit would look like this:

**Figure 2. A Proposed Cavalry Regiment, RAAC**



More detail of the Air Cavalry Squadron is shown in Figure 3 overleaf.

**Figure 3** Proposed Organization of an Air Cavalry Sqn,  
Cavalry Regiment, RAAC



Total Sqn strength: 151 all ranks.

#### **Explanatory Notes**

- *Command and control.* The squadron commander, naturally, works to his regimental headquarters where his colonel is responsible to the divisional commander for close and medium reconnaissance and for surveillance.
- *Role of Air Cavalry Sqn.* Its job is to get information, if necessary by fighting to get it, and to take any immediate advantage that this information may offer. Obviously its small number of helicopters limits its actions to initial exploitation. Development of the situation and follow up will, of course, be done by the infantry.
- *Squadron Headquarters.* Consists of the normal command (including an operations section), medical and administrative elements. The only new faces are those who make up the aircraft crews. It almost goes without saying that all the officers are aviators.
- *Light observation helicopters.* These can either be the familiar Bell 47 model—the Sioux—or one of the small turbine aircraft such as the Hughes OH-6A or the Bell OH-58A. For the

reconnaissance role, at the time of writing, there is very little difference in any of the types. However, for fuel considerations it would be better if all aircraft were turbine powered.



(US Army Photograph)

Gunship of the Weapons Platoon, Air Cavalry Troop. This 'Huey' is equipped with the M-5 system — 150 40-mm grenades. The launcher can elevate 15 degrees, depress 35 degrees and traverse 60 degrees left and right. Other armed helicopters may be equipped with rockets and machine-guns.

- *Air Support Troop.* At the moment there are two main contenders—the UH-1C (the Huey Gunship) and the Huey Cobra. Personally I prefer the UH-1C because it costs less, but more important than this it carries four pairs of eyes, two of which look out to either flank. In the Huey Cobra both pairs look ahead.
- *Assault Troop.* At first sight it seems excessively large. However, 24 of its 57 men are aircrew and for administrative convenience held against Troop HQ strength. The best aircraft for this troop is the UH-1D or UH-1H, the latter Huey having a more powerful engine.

- *Maintenance Troop.* This troop holds the helicopter mechanics, armourers, radio mechanics, electricians, vehicle mechanics and the supervising NCOs. In the diagrams I have included the crew chiefs—25 of them—in the various sub-units.
- *The aircraft.* They must be on the unit's equipment table.
- *The aircrews.* Ideally they should come from the RAAC or have had previous experience in armoured units. The majority of utility helicopter aviators should be NCOs.



(US Army Photograph)

'Blue' about to land. These UH-1D aircraft are from the Rifle Platoon of an Air Cavalry Troop. There are three Air Cavalry Troops in a US Army Airmobile Division; one in an infantry division. In areas of high temperatures the UH-1D aircraft load is seven Australian troops.

- *Timings.* Experience has shown that it takes a little over 14 months, from the beginning, to field an air cavalry squadron ready for war. One must assume that sub-unit leaders have already had armoured training and that there is a cadre of helicopter mechanics.
- *The cost.* In the proposed squadron there are 9 light observation helicopters and 16 utility helicopters. For training and spares these numbers should be increased to 12 and 20 respectively. On present costs, with spare parts, the bill would come to

\$8.2 million. Other expenses, such as overseas training would increase this amount to, say, \$8.5 million. Obviously if we used our present Bell 'Sioux' the initial cost would be that much the less. However, no matter how the figures come out the complete air cavalry squadron costs the Australian taxpayer less than one F-111.

## Conclusion

The 1914-18 War saw the cavalry (including the Anzac Mounted Regiment) in France waiting for that break-through that never came; much nearer home and in more recent times we have seen highly-trained and dedicated crews waiting and waiting while the wars passed them by. But now the vehicles and weapons are here and no longer should the men of this Corps be chained to the tyranny of terrain. □

### TOWARDS SATTELBERG — 26 SEPTEMBER 1943

On top of the hill was a company of what were regarded as Japan's *corps d'élite*—the *marines*. Faced with the Australians' unflinching advance upwards, the marines began to shower them with grenades which fortunately were largely ineffective. Had they been good grenades, the attacking companies would have suffered heavy losses. Corporal Norris, leading the first section of Snell's company, was blown down the hill by a grenade landing a foot away. He picked himself up and climbed back to lead the assault. Apparently the Japanese explosive was not quick enough and the metal was too light. The marines now opened up with all their weapons, but most of the fire passed over the Queenslanders as their relentless advance continued. In order to keep down the defenders' heads the attackers replied with fire as they advanced, although they could not yet use grenades which would have rolled back on them.

The marines, who should have been able to hold the position against a battalion, at first wavered and then panicked. Cold steel flashed as the Australians came to the summit and charged with their bayonets. Most of the Japanese, who were much taller than the average, turned and fled.

— David Dexter, *The New Guinea Offensives* (1961)

# As a Senior NCO sees It

## FOREWORD

*Recently Sergeant Major John G. Stepanek, a 25-year veteran serving with Maintenance Training Department, Army Transportation School, Fort Eustis, Virginia, was invited to address a class of Basic Officer Course graduates at the school. His words of friendly advice are so appropriate that I am making this rostrum available, to bring Sergeant Stepanek's remarks to an Army-wide audience.*

William O. Wooldridge  
Sergeant Major of the Army

Gentlemen:

I feel a tinge of regret that I am not young enough to be sitting out there as one of you. You have so many years of challenge and adventure to look forward to. So many of these years are now behind me.

Soon you will meet your platoon sergeants, your first sergeants, your sergeants major, your other noncommissioned officers and your troops. What do we expect from you as officers, commanders, leaders?

We expect of you unassailable personal integrity and the highest of morals. We expect you to maintain the highest state of personal appearance. We expect you to be fair—to be consistent—to have dignity, but not aloofness—to have compassion and understanding—to treat each soldier as an individual, with individual problems.

And we expect you to have courage—the courage of your convictions—the courage to stand up and be counted—to defend your men when they have followed your orders, even when your orders were in error—to assume the blame when you are wrong.

We expect you to stick out your chin and say, 'This man is worthy of promotion, and I want him promoted.' And we expect you to have even greater courage and say, 'This man is not qualified and he will be promoted over my dead body!' Gentlemen, I implore you do not promote a man because he is a nice guy, because he has a wife and five kids, because he has money problems, because he has a bar bill.

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Reprinted from the August 1967 issue of *Army Digest*, the Official Magazine of the U.S. Department of the Army.



If he is not capable of performing the duties of his grade, do not do him and us the injustice of advancing him in grade. When he leaves you, or you leave him, he becomes someone else's problem!

Gentlemen, we expect you to have courage in the face of danger. Many of you will soon be in Vietnam where there are no safe rear echelons. During your tour, opportunities will arise for you to display personal courage and leadership. Opportunities could arise from which you may emerge as heroes. A hero is an individual who is faced with an undesirable situation and employs whatever means at his disposal to make the situation tenable or to nullify or negate it.

Do not display recklessness and expose yourself and your men to unnecessary risks that will reduce their normal chances of survival. This will only shake their confidence in your judgment.

Now gentlemen, you know what we expect from you. What can you expect from us?

From a few of us, you can expect antagonism, a 'prove yourself' attitude.

From a few of us who had the opportunity to be officers, and didn't have the guts and motivation to accept the challenge, you can expect resentment.

From a few of us old timers, you can expect tolerance.

But from most of us you can expect loyalty to your position, devotion to our cause, admiration for your honest efforts—courage to match *your* courage, guts to match *your* guts—endurance to match *your* endurance—motivation to match *your* motivation—esprit to match *your* esprit—a desire for achievement to match *your* desire for achievement.

You can expect a love of God, a love of country, and a love of duty to match *your* love of God, *your* love of country, and *your* love of duty.

We won't mind the heat if you sweat with us. We won't mind the cold if you shiver with us. And when our cigarettes are gone, we won't mind quitting smoking after *your* cigarettes are gone.

And if the mission requires, we will storm the very gates of hell, right behind you!

Gentlemen, you don't accept us: we were here first. We accept you, and when we do, you'll know. We won't beat drums, wave flags, or carry you off the drill field on our shoulders. But, maybe at a

company party, we'll raise a canteen cup of beer and say, 'Lieutenant, you're O.K.' Just like that.

Remember one thing. Very few noncommissioned officers were awarded stripes without showing somebody something, sometime, somewhere. If your platoon sergeant is mediocre, if he is slow to assume responsibility, if he shies away from you, maybe sometime not too long ago someone refused to trust him, someone failed to support his decisions, someone shot him down when he was right. Internal wounds heal slowly; internal scars fade more slowly.

Your orders appointing you as officers in the United States Army appointed you to command. No orders, no letters, no insignia or rank can appoint you as leaders. Leadership is an intangible thing; leaders are made, they are not born. Leadership is developed within yourselves.

You do not wear leadership on your sleeves, on your shoulders, on your caps or on your calling cards. Be you lieutenants or generals, we're the guys you've got to convince and we'll meet you more than halfway.

You are leaders in an Army in which we have served for so many years, and you will help us defend the country we have loved for so many years.

I wish you happiness, luck and success in the exciting and challenging years that lie ahead.

May God bless you all! □

#### GRADUATES OF PORTSEA

Four members of the Pacific Island Regiment have returned to the Territory after completing their courses at the Officer Cadet Training School, Portsea, Australia. The four are 2/Lt Lima Dataona, 2/Lt Gago Mamae, 2/Lt Tom Poang and 2/Lt John Sanawe.

— Dept. of External Territories Papua and  
New Guinea Newsletter. 23 January 1969.

# A Good Day to Die

—25 June 1876

*Major M. J. Ryan  
Royal Australian Infantry*

THE detour from Yellowstone National Park north and east to the Black Hills country is not a long one as distances go in America's West and many tourists, drawn by the folk-legends of the area, take it. It is only when you arrive at the Little Big Horn Valley that you realize you have been on a pilgrimage of sorts and a journey in time, for the years have not touched this country and it remains much the same now as it was on the day it leapt into what passes for history.

The Battle of the Little Big Horn has been the subject of a dozen jokes, a hundred legends and ten times as many lies in the ninety-odd years since it was fought; and both sides deserved better—the Indians fighting for their land, their homes and their racial existence and the 7th Cavalry, spearhead of an unjust, ill-formed and guilt-ridden national policy. This highwater mark in the American-Indians fight for survival had to come eventually; in coming when and where it did, it provides the student of military history with a near-classic example of how the personality of a commander can determine the course and result of a battle.

George Armstrong Custer (or rather, his Hollywood image) has become a folk-figure down the years since his death, and 'Custer's Stand' is forever dominated in the public mind by the tall figure in fringed buckskins, golden locks streaming in the wind, fighting to the last with sabre and guidon in hand, going down alone before Indians treacherously armed with repeating rifles by venal squawmen. An examination of the available facts reveals a notable example of 'gilding the lily'—the hair and buckskins the hallmarks of a 'flamboyantly egotistical egocentric', his personal history a sorry record of broken trusts,

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*Major Ryan underwent National Service Training in 1955/56 and was then posted to Melbourne University Regiment where he was commissioned in 1958. He held various postings within MUR until 1962 when he spent a year in the United States of America. During this period he was attached to 1st Armoured Rifle Battalion, 160th Infantry Regiment, 40 Armoured Division, California National Guard. Travel within the US enabled him to work also with Arizona National Guard and US Marine Corps units. Since returning to Australia he has had various company commands in MUR, on 3 Div HQ and now in 5 RVR. In civil employment Major Ryan manages an electronic equipment and armaments division of a nation-wide corporation.*

murder charges, courts martial and an almost frantic searching after past glories.

Custer graduated from West Point in 1861 at the bottom of his class, his record endorsed, 'Regardless of discipline or regulations'. His graduation was conferred only because the Civil War then raging had so depleted officer ranks that 'fillers' were in high demand, and whatever misgivings his instructors may have had were doubtless dispelled by the possibly apocryphal comment that 'this gamecock won't last long'.

Almost immediately, the legend of 'Custer's Luck' was born. A fortunate series of staff postings and field commands was accompanied by an equally fortunate series of notable successes. Custer's reckless personal bravery and the savage discipline he imposed on his troops rapidly won him the notice of his superiors; brevetted brigadier-general in June of 1863, he rose from ADC on a remote headquarters to command of a crack Michigan cavalry regiment. His personal leadership at Gettysburg was such that he had eleven horses shot from under him in three days, and in October 1864 he became the youngest brevetted major-general in the Union armies—the 'Boy General', aged 25. Before the final surrender at Appomattox, Custer bravely infringed the truce line by riding into the Confederate lines demanding the surrender of General James Longstreet, the Rebel cavalry commander. Dismissed with a contemptuous 'Bubby, get home or get shot', he soothed his ruffled feathers by making off with the marble-topped table on which Lee signed the formal surrender.

With few friends among his former commanders, Custer suffered a galling reversion to his substantive rank of Lieutenant-Colonel during the Army retrenchment of 1866, following cessation of hostilities. He was posted to an obscure cavalry command in the South West, there to languish through a wearying period of minor skirmishing with the Cheyennes, apparently doomed to fade quietly into obscurity. The only people who took real note of the man during these middle years of his career were the Indians—the savagery of his little actions on the Washita River line caused them to design a special trophy for the brave who killed him—a buckskin-and-hoop device featuring a central motif of a red hand and a black heart.

During Custer's skirmishes on the Washita he made his first excursion towards infamy. Caught in a sudden rally by embattled Cheyennes his regiment's flanks were threatened and he withdrew, leaving a Major Elliot and his understrength company to cover the withdrawal. Since Custer's plan made no provision for support of this rearguard and, once clear, he made no effort to extricate them, they were surrounded



GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER

and wiped out to the last man. The bitterness arising from this episode revealed other deficiencies in his unit and a hastily-convened court martial in July 1867 found Custer guilty on seven charges, including 'open disobedience of orders, deserting his command in hostile country, shooting enlisted men for minor infractions of regulations, and refusing medical aid to soldier casualties who were then abandoned and left to die.' The sentence was surprisingly light—a mere reprimand. The subsequent Board of Review expressed its dissatisfaction with this leniency in a scathing judgement and recommended a retrial on a charge of murder. However, a local magistrate, anticipating this result, issued a civil warrant for a murder trial and in the protracted legal battle over jurisdictions and authorities which ensued Custer went unapprehended and uncharged. 'Custer's Luck' seemed alive again.

America's luck was not. Weakened by war in the East, her depleted frontier forces had fought a series of losing campaigns against ever-strengthening Indian resistance of the drift westward. Fought to a standstill, and not yet profiting from the end of the Civil War, the US Army was forced on 6 November 1868 to sign at Fort Laramie the first and only peace treaty dictated on the terms of an enemy who had beaten them in their own country. The Sioux Nation forced the destruction of Army forts, a total withdrawal of troops, and the ceding of perpetual rights to a Sioux reservation totalling half the state of South Dakota, 'for as long as the grass shall grow'. But although the humiliating peace was signed and in effect, violation of the agreed borders was an almost daily occurrence; violations by both sides gave rise to reprisal and counter-reprisal, and there were few places in the Dakotas where a man could be sure of his scalp.

The winter of 1874 was a long and hard one, more than usually boring for the snow-bound garrison troops of Fort Lincoln, where Custer reigned as commander of the 7th Cavalry Regiment. His organization of a protracted hunting and exploring trip in early spring was welcomed by all with a glee which took no heed of the fact that its planned route placed it in direct violation of the spirit and the letter of the 1868 Treaty. During July and August of 1874 Custer led a motley collection of jaded officers, bored troopers and unwashed prospectors in a wide sweep through Indian territory. Early in August, after a prospecting side trip accompanied by his civilian hangers-on (including the inevitable newspaperman), Custer blew the lid off the frontier kettle with the well-publicized statement that 'The Black Hills country is gold from the grass-roots down'—that same grass whose growth was to have determined the duration of Indian tenure.

By the time Custer's party had cleaned the dust from their saddles the rush was on. Frontier violations escalated almost overnight, Sioux war-parties killed, or were killed by prospectors and their protecting soldiers, and within weeks the smouldering peace was gone. Custer was almost directly responsible for the twenty-five-year long Indian war which followed.

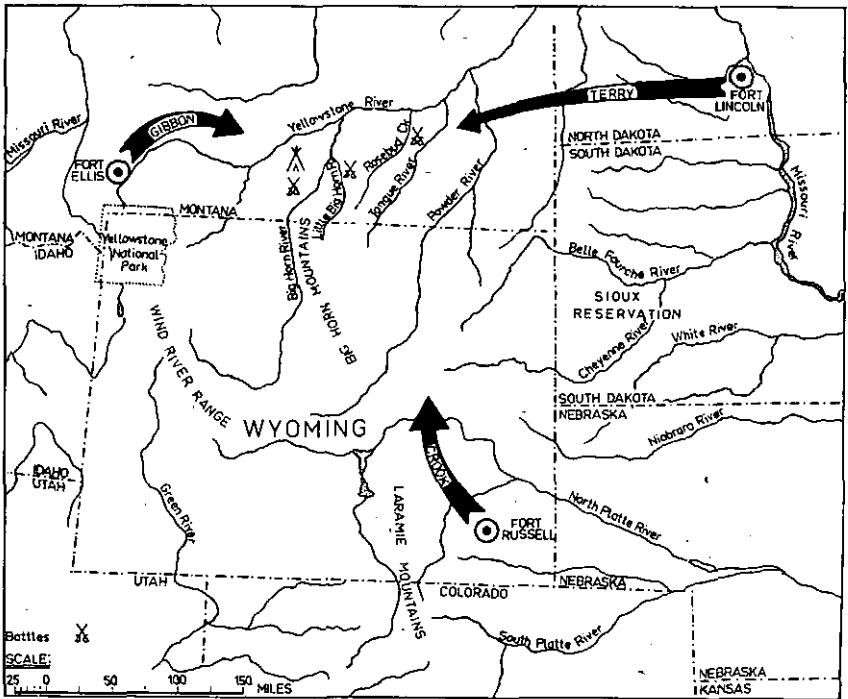
Washington, either unable or unwilling to commit itself to support or discouragement of the inevitable empire-acquiring Westward Side, faced this fresh war with the Sioux nation and its Cheyenne allies with an army tempered by war, equipped with the best the factories of the North had to offer, and commanded by a leavening of combat veterans who, if not widely experienced in frontier warfare, at least had nothing to fear from 'a parcel of blanket-wrapped savages'.

These same savages (who had been earlier described by General Philip Sheridan as 'the finest light cavalry in the world') were not averse to war either. Although armed only with primitive weapons (for the repeaters of legend were acquired only *after* the Little Big Horn Battle) they were experts in their use; a merely average Sioux bowman could flight six arrows before the first-fired hit ground. Even above the kill they valued the coup—the bold courageous gesture in the face of death. So highly rated was such an act as striking an enemy with bow or hand in a skirmish, and living to boast of it, that even to count second or third coup by hitting some other warrior's victim was not scorned. The Indian was an intensely individual fighter, who could decline battle without shame simply because the mood was not on him, or his 'medicine' not strong, or ride alone to gallant death in the happy belief that this was his day. Since the 1868 treaty he had seen the white man's word broken time without number; the tributary food allotments promised under the treaty were seldom received and rarely edible; the resultant hunting parties were harried by soldiers enforcing a border they themselves would not observe; the gold-grubbers daily incursions were fouling their rivers and driving off the buffalo. Their response was both savage and general, based on the belief that they were absolutely in the right to defend land sworn before God to be theirs—which, of course, they were.

Against this army of individuals, the American government threw a force geared to a crushing campaign of extermination, committed to massive manoeuvre and encirclement aimed at bringing the Indian to battle only when the full technological might of the white man could be employed against him. But against an enemy adept at ambush, who knew his battleground intimately, Gatlings and artillery were of little use, and the primary problem became to find, isolate, contain and

destroy a mobile and elusive enemy. The parallel with today's operations is obvious; the solution proposed ninety years ago was the column system, of converging independent columns on co-ordinated timetables, gradually crushing the Indians in a central vice. Far-ranging scouts and patrols flanking each column would, in theory, provide early intelligence, restrict Indian mobility within the area contained, and channel the hostiles into the killing ground at the point of convergence. Such a campaign was planned for the summer of 1876.

Brigadier-General Terry's column from Fort Abraham Lincoln, including Custer's 7th, was to strike south and west into Montana.



Colonel Gibbon's column from Fort Ellis, moving in from the west, should join him almost concurrently with the arrival of Crook's from the south, in the area between the Big Horn and Tongue Rivers, traditionally a Sioux hunting and camping area. Their co-ordinated movements were to begin in March 1876 but were delayed by bad weather.

Custer, embroiled once more in serious trouble, was in danger of being left-out-of-battle. Even before his provocative 1874 moves he had



again aroused the anger of his superiors by involvement in a long series of political intrigues, culminating in an ill-judged and abortive attempt to bring about the impeachment of President Grant's Secretary of War. Grant, an old enemy, relieved him of his command and ordered him to Washington to defend himself. Here he languished until 2 May 1876 when Grant nominated another officer to command the 7th in Terry's impending campaign. Without further ceremony Custer bolted west, to be arrested in Chicago on the joint orders of Sheridan and Grant. By a direct appeal to General Sherman (his only friend in high places) Custer secured a grudging postponement of his hearing, and even more grudging permission to return to Fort Lincoln, but 'on no account, and under no circumstances, to accompany . . . the expedition against the Sioux under Terry'. Once back at Lincoln, Custer besieged the harassed Terry with requests for an endorsement to his appeal against this restriction and the wretched man finally yielded—'a decision I regretted at once, and a thousand times since'. Grant, too, yielded—perhaps swayed by the inevitable. He left the decision to Terry, as commander in the field, but with a firm injunction to ' . . . prevent him again attempting to throw discredit on his profession and his brother officers . . . advise him to be prudent, to take with him no newspapermen, and to abstain from personalities in the future.' Terry's column marched out of Fort Lincoln on 7 May 1876. At the head of the 7th Cavalry rode Lieutenant-Colonel G. A. Custer—and two reporters.

This then was the man who was to lead the 7th to its death—the 'Boy General' who was no longer boy or general; balding, affected by a squint, smarting under the tongue lashings he had received in Washington, determined to restore his lost prestige and regain past glory. His image was tarnishing; the man was a walking paradox—courage beyond measure, a sparkling sense of humour, impetuous and imperious, wantonly brutal in a time when such things were scarcely noticed, by his own estimate 'superior to normal mankind', he was the strictest of disciplinarians, with none himself. He was hated by those below him as heartily as by those above, and his few friends formed an isolated family-and-ally clique within the regiment. The officers were divided, the troopers mostly half-trained recruits, the regiment lacking in mutual trust. Custer needed a triumph badly; 'Custer's Luck' had got him this far, now it must be ever-present. So the band played 'Garry Owen', the wind snapped in the guidons, and the 7th Cavalry marched forth to battle.

The march north and west was uneventful and on 9 June Terry's column linked with Gibbons' as planned, west of the Big Horn River. The timetable of the co-ordinated move had been adhered to but of Crook's column there was no sign. Down river Crook was in trouble.

His push north had taken him along the line of march of the tribes moving up to the Yellowstone for the annual summer hunting season. What was not realized then, or in fact until after the campaign, was that this particular tribal re-union was unique in its size. Under the imminent threat of war, and following on two successive bitter winters, the Sioux and their Cheyenne allies were on the move, not as scattered tribes, but as a nation. Between twelve and fifteen thousand Indians, the biggest concentration in history, were moving into the Big Horn country. Their twenty thousand horses, foraging far and wide, created a daily feeding problem for the seven tribes in the area, which contributed to their defence. The closely guarded horse herds, grazing ever further out from the camp sites, actually constituted a simple early warning system or screen, to supplement the conventional scouts and patrols despatched by each encampment.

Crook's force had several minor brushes with such scouting and foraging parties and it was obvious long before he neared the Yellowstone rendezvous that tactical surprise was lost. Slowed by his administrative elements he decided to regain lost days by leaving his pack train under escort and force march a picked force of cavalry north to the Tongue-Yellowstone River junction. His aim was to clear the route of the pack train, locate and put pressure on Indians south of the river line, and effect a junction with Gibbon. On 16 June—already five days late—his cavalry force commenced its dash for the river.

From the outset they were under observation by, and in contact with, vedettes from a grouping of several villages near the junction of the Rosebud and Yellowstone rivers. A series of minor clashes, leisurely withdrawals by the Indians and eager pursuits by the troopers gradually drew Crook off course to the west. His scouts, timorously remaining within sight of the column at all times, failed to discover the size of the Indian force and ahead of Crook the 2,000 fighting men of the Hunkpapa and Brulee Sioux debated what to do with him.

Eventually, 1,000 volunteer sportsmen rode out, reconnoitred his column exhaustively, and ambushed him soundly in the Rosebud Canyon. Crook sustained only medium losses, and the Indians light—eleven casualties in all—but despite the disorganized and indecisive nature of the clash, Crook was badly shaken. The Indians had hit him with a series of sustained attacks, heedless of possible casualties, and aggressive in the extreme. This year was different—sight of a blue uniform-shirt was no longer an engagement winning factor; this year the savages were going to fight.

By the 19th Crook was back in his base camp, licking his wounds and firmly convinced that the strength of Indian resistance indicated an unusual congregation of villages in the area. In this country, where dispatch riders vanished forever within minutes of departure, the benefits of his experience could not be passed to Gibbon or Terry.

The Indians, with mounts and ammunition exhausted, moved camp west to the main Sioux rendezvous on the Big Horn, where tales of their victory over Crook added to an already high morale.

Terry's wait on the Yellowstone was a long one, and finally despairing of Crook he briefed Gibbons and Custer on 21 June 1876. His plan was for a series of reconnaissances in strength, east to the line of the Rosebud, to locate the Sioux main strength and find Crook. Terry's technique was basically to be a tactical employment of the overall campaign strategy—he planned for movement on three parallel routes, with himself, Gibbon and Custer moving close enough together to provide mutual support, far enough apart to ensure full ground coverage, and kept in communications by scouts criss-crossing between the three columns across the axis of advance. Any element of the force locating the main Sioux camp was to avoid action and report contact to enable concentration of the force's full strength. By now Terry's scouts had given him an estimate of two thousand as the Sioux strength (based on tracks, rather than head counts) and although the Indians were not expected to fight, Terry ordered Custer to exercise caution—on no account was he to enter the Little Big Horn area, which lay across his route, until Gibbon was physically there to support him. Custer was to include in his column a battery of Gatlings; rate of advance was to be a flat thirty miles per day; the columns were to maintain a spacing apart of 'three hours hard riding by courier'. The conference continued far into the night and the plan was discussed in great detail. Terry's intentions were never in doubt, or the mechanics of the plan questioned—if it were carried out control and mutual support would be guaranteed, Crook's force located for a full concentration, and the security of the expedition maintained. The pivotal point of the plan was co-ordinated movement, and as of the time the conference broke up, Terry's strategy was doomed.

At noon on 22 June, Custer and the 600 men of the 7th led out of Terry's camp on the Yellowstone. Left behind, without any advice to Terry, were the Gatlings; Custer considered that they might slow him, and soon showed why—as soon as the camp dropped out of sight the pace was forced and the 'thirty miles per day' limit abandoned. Custer was forcing the speed to the limit to outdistance Terry and Gibbon and so find the Sioux first. Even before the departure from Fort Lincoln

Custer had told a reporter 'I shall cut loose from Terry this summer', and, he now lived up to his threat, sprinting for the Little Big Horn, trusting to 'Custer's Luck', burning for a triumph.

Custer's 7th was eleven companies strong, each company of forty-five men, thirty-five of them fighting soldiers. Of these, up to ten would be detailed as horse-holders in action, and generally would not fight. Armed with carbines, pistols and one hundred rounds of ammunition they moved rapidly east, trailed by their pack train and preceded by vedettes of friendly Crow Indian scouts.

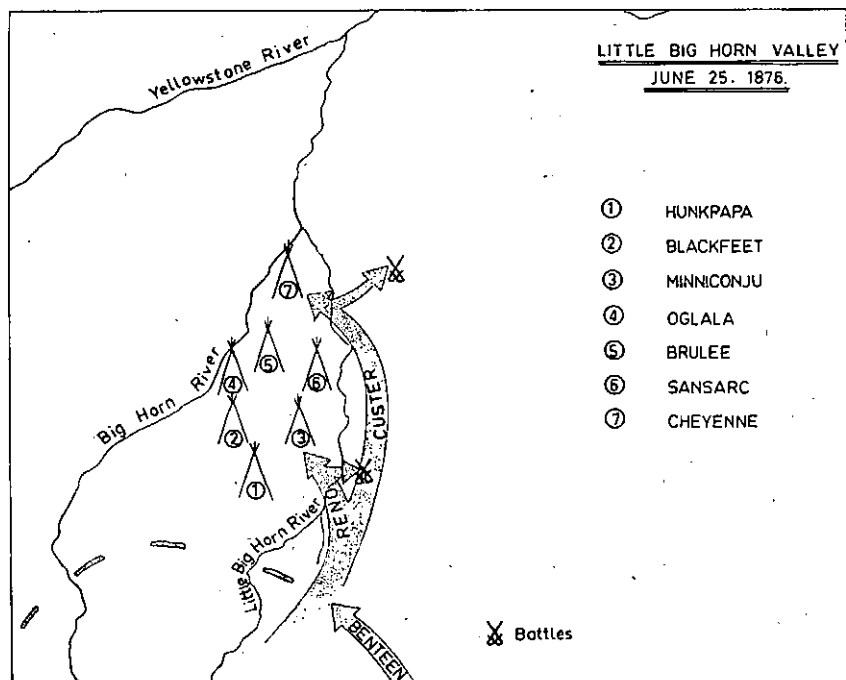
Strangely, the force was not seen as it approached the Big Horn, and ultimately achieved full tactical surprise. The Sioux attention was focussed further east, where contact with Crook had been lost; among all the comings and goings of new tribal arrivals the approach of the soldiers was either not noticed or not recognized for what it was. Physical contact was somehow missed in an area swarming with separate groups and Custer, disregarding the warnings of his scouts as their estimates of Sioux strength rose, pushed on hard. A long patrol under his second-in-command, Major Marcus Reno, forged ahead to the creek which now bears Reno's name, and sighted a village, withdrawing unseen and without a full assessment of strength in the area.

Without further reconnaissance Custer took Reno's report as evidence that there was only one village on the Little Big Horn and again acted in direct contravention of his orders. Having made contact he not only failed to send word back to Terry but again increased his rate of advance, forcing the pace in a night march which even further outdistanced the main force. By dawn of the 25th, his horses blown, Custer had visual contact with a small corner of the Sioux' sprawling four-mile-by-one village. He decided to bivouac on the twenty-fifth to rest his exhausted force, and attack on the twenty-sixth. But his famous luck was running out.

During the morning there were, at last, three contacts with hunting parties of Sioux, one of which flushed and fired on a small cavalry detachment seeking a lost pack-mule. Surprise was endangered; Custer changed his plans and decided to attack immediately. As cursing troopers climbed stiffly into the saddle Custer's trumpeter sounded 'Officer's Call' loud and clear over the ridges and valley of the Little Big Horn. In the lodges of the Sioux, ears were cocked and startled glances exchanged—had Crook recoiled on them? Whatever the source, the gauntlet had been thrown down and those camps within earshot sprang to arms. Custer was on the move, down over the valley rim.

Before he reached the valley floor he gave the orders which doomed his regiment—the fatal splitting of his forces. Captain Benteen was to

take his 'battalion' of H, D and K companies around in a hook to the southwest and act as a cutoff to deny escape to the south. McDougal's B company would guard the pack-train, while Reno with A, M and G was to drive again up the line of Reno Creek and storm the village. Custer and the two hundred and twenty five men of I, L, F, C and E Companies would move parallel to Reno on the east bank of the creek during the advance and swing in to support Reno for the assault. The



orders were given and in retrospect their intention makes sense but at the time they were not clear. Reno was to say 'There was no plan communicated to us at all . . . if one existed the subordinate commanders did not know it!' Benteen, overtaken by Custer's orderly, received amended orders to engage any hostiles found in the next valley over; if there were none he was to try the next and the next. 'I had no instructions to re-unite with Reno or anyone else—there was no plan at all.' As he moved off, Benteen lost contact with Custer for ever, due to the broken nature of the ground. Without scouts he would spend the next few vital hours chasing contours from valley to valley, for there were no Sioux to be found. Aroused, but not alarmed, for their medicine was good and their

confidence high they were rallying in those villages which were aware of Custer's approach up the valley. So poor were their internal communications however that many of the Indians in the western villages did not know of the battle until it was over.

As the Custer/Reno force approached the village Custer had a further change of heart and waved Reno back across the creek. By 2 p.m. Reno had recrossed the stream and rejoined his force with Custer's just in time for the column's scouts to flush a small party of Sioux completing the burial of a warrior who had died of wounds sustained on the Rosebud. As these broke and rode back towards the village Custer ordered Reno back across the creek yet again—'take as fast a gait as you deem prudent and charge after—you will be supported by the whole outfit.' This was the turning point of poor Reno's life—his credence in those words started him down a dark road to disgrace, ignominy and ruin. Strung out and at a fast gallop he led A, M and G in hot pursuit.

As his subordinate charged the village Custer moved as if to follow, and then abruptly veered off to the east. Perhaps he intended to swing around and hit the village from another quarter; perhaps he hoped to draw some of the hostiles off Reno; his reasons will never be known but what matters is that he told Reno he would support him, and then did not. Custer rode off, north-east, up the valley.

Captain Myles Keogh and a Lieutenant Croke rode with Reno until the force opposing him became apparent, then spurred back to their places in Custer's column to warn him of the strength of the Sioux but what transpired on their return will never be known for they too continued north with him. All contact between the three dispersed elements of the 7th was now lost for ever.

Brushing aside scattered opposition Reno charged headlong at the village of the Minniconju Sioux, to be met head-on by the counter-charge of the village's warriors. The Battle of the Little Big Horn was opened by a crashing volley which alerted other villages and ended Reno's charge in a welter of downed horses, swirling dust and arrow-shot troopers. His movement restricted by the creek and a high bank, his formation broken, and fire from the hitherto unsuspected Hunkpapa village ripping into his exposed flank, Reno reeled in confusion. Within minutes his situation had deteriorated so far that he must either move or be supported in strength and he must have realized by now, with mounting horror, that his support was not coming. The open ground before the village was untenable; pressed hotly at close range, outnumbered fifteen to one, and steadily losing men Reno dismounted his command and conducted a controlled withdrawal to the timber-line

skirting the creek. But there was to be no respite — flanked and rapidly surrounded by his more mobile enemies, low on ammunition and with his reserve committed Reno decided to mount and fight clear, through to the creek and across to the far bank. The decision was sound but the conduct of the withdrawal was poor; the Minniconju were already into the treeline and a wild scrambling fight was in progress. Badly shaken, Reno ordered 'Mount', then 'Dismount', remaining in the saddle himself. As a further wave of Sioux pressed in, the 'Recall' was sounded and Reno led a rush to the creek which left many wounded or unhorsed troopers to be butchered in the scrub. Since no clean break was made the surviving cavalrymen entered the creek mixed with large numbers of exultant Indians, to be dragged down in panic and confusion. Of the two hundred men who rode so bravely forward scant minutes before ninety survived the creek crossing.

Saved only by the Indians delay to loot and mutilate the fallen, Reno's survivors staggered to a small hilltop on the east bank, scraped up a bulwark of brush and saddles, and repulsed the first Sioux assault. They were broken men, their fire control gone, but the Sioux could not face them in such a set-piece fight, especially when Custer was providing easier pickings further north. They contented themselves with a holding action, pinning Reno's men down and keeping them out of the fight.

From the time Reno ordered the charge nine minutes had elapsed. Benteen, meanwhile, had tired of his fruitless ramblings in search of absent foes so finally halted and threw out a series of fast moving fan patrols which scoured the countryside and returned a final conclusive 'No Contact' report. In disgust he retraced his steps to the Little Big Horn, returning in a great circle which brought him up to Reno Creek where, hearing the distant firing of Reno's defence, he rode north up the earlier route taken by the Custer/Reno party. His first sight of the battlefield was of Reno's depleted command isolated in a melee of Sioux who showed no inclination to run, as forecast. Of Custer there was no sign. Appreciating that with his 150 men he could do little to influence the overall course of whatever battle was in progress he rode to, where he could offer fastest assistance. Breaking through the encircling Sioux he joined Reno's depleted command on the hilltop, and assumed command of the shattered force when Reno proved incapable of effective leadership. For forty-two hours they were to hold that hilltop, constantly expecting the return of Custer to their relief.

But Custer was dead. After he abandoned Reno and moved north along the ridge his force passed into mystery, rather than history, for no white man who rode up that valley ever emerged from it. It is possible,

from the testimony of the Sioux and the location of the bodies, to present a fair estimate of what transpired.

By the time Reno had become heavily engaged Custer would have been in sight of the Sansarc village, the Cheyenne camp further north being screened from sight by a strip of cottonwoods. By now he knew his estimate of Sioux strength was faulty but with only this Sansarc village ahead, quiet and deserted, and Reno's Minniconju village behind already under attack the stage was set for a quick victory. He sent back a last courier with a message for the pack-train and B company to move forward with his ammunition reserves and deployed for the assault across the ford and into the village.

Having seen Custer's column on the ridge across the river the few occupants of the village were thrown into confusion, but five young warriors who had returned late from a foraging trip and were still arming for Reno's fight were not dismayed by this new threat. Five against three hundred, they rode quietly through their village towards the ford. An old warrior called to them urging them to wait until he had run to alert villages but one of them—for ever nameless, for ever honoured—answered, 'Old father, only the sky and the earth last for ever; it is a good day to die.' Five gallant gentlemen, each in good company, they sang their death songs and rode down to glory.

Custer, advancing two companies up and his headquarters in the van was, for the second time that day, lured by the cheap victory. A half-dozen startled Sioux emerged from the timber to his front and bolted for the river at first sight of his column. Abandoning his formation Custer waved E company to join him in pursuit. Riding hard he entered the water close on the heels of the Sioux only to halt in consternation as a quick spattering of fire from the far bank emptied saddles in his vanguard. From covered positions in the treeline the five young Sansarcs were in action.

The momentary check enabled the fleeing Sioux to reach the bank and dismount, joining the warriors in the scrub. Anxious to cross before resistance stiffened further Custer called for a covering fire which successfully quieted the handful of Sioux and started across the Big Horn. In midstream, 'Custer's Luck' at last ran out.

Summoned by messages from the threatened village hundreds of mounted Sioux broke through the timberline downstream from the ford and charged up river at Custer's flank. As the cavalry fire switched to this new threat the ten Sioux heroes holding the ford again rose and fired. Hit in the left breast Custer pitched from his horse into the



stream. His guidon bearer and two orderlies went down with him. As the massed firepower of the column repulsed the first rush Custer's scout dragged him from the water and held him in the saddle. Already heavily outnumbered and with Indians streaming uphill on both flanks to surround them Custer's men instinctively began to pull back up the bank onto the ridge from which they had come. In the rear of the column I and L companies under Keogh deployed along the ridgeline, trying to cover the rearward move of F, C and E companies up the west slope. Dismounted for greater accuracy in their shooting, these companies were moving slowly back towards the crest, doubtless hoping to link up with Keogh for a defence such as Reno was even then establishing further south. But by now Hunkpapa, Brulee, Sansarc, Blackfeet and Minniconju were congregating from upstream and down and the uphill move ground to a halt as the encirclement was completed, only one hundred yards short of the goal. Surrounded by three thousand howling Sioux, blinded by dust, beaten down by a hail of arrows, at ranges never exceeding thirty feet, the 7th made its last fight, edging painfully like some blinded snake ever uphill. With them they carried their commander, unconscious and perhaps already dead.

In response either to an order of incredible stupidity, or in brave desperation, E company as a man charged on foot into the whirling mass before them to be butchered, scalped and stripped within seconds. Pouring into the gap in the 7th's line left by E, the Sioux cut I off from L and fired a single crashing volley into L's flank which was heard by Reno's men, far down the valley, and which reduced L to a few isolated groups of shocked fighters, to be overrun before they could reload between shots. Spurred on by this dual success the rampaging Sioux swarmed like a tidal wave over I company, obliterating it in two minutes flat as part of their exploitation on the overrunning of L.

F and C companies were still fighting a painful dismounted action up the hill. Before their eyes three companies of their friends had been overrun in twice as many minutes; within a few feet the scalpers and mutilators were at work and the merciless squaws picking over the wounded. Their own end was only minutes away and Sioux tales of soldiers who fired their rifles in the air, too excited to aim, are readily credible. F and C were almost at the crest when a further thousand Sioux, fresh from Reno's fight, joined the battle and halted them for the last time. What horses remained were shot for bulwarks and the last hundred-odd men of the 7th, Custer still carried with them, were whittled down one by one, fighting to the end. Scattered men tried to break through the ever-tightening circle of Indians, but none succeeded. Behind them a mile-long trail of haggled bodies marked their path, with

little mounds of dead where E, L and I had died. They lie there still, little clusters of plain stone markers hidden in the long grass, Custer's 'gold from the roots down' grass, the grass whose growing was to mark the years of Sioux ownership.

The whole action had taken between twenty and thirty minutes.

Of all those who died there only one, Keogh the devout Catholic, whose Sacred Heart medallion was 'bad medicine' to prospective scalpers, escaped mutilation. Custer was not scalped—his thinning locks being too mousy a trophy—but the eagle tattooed on his narrow chest was lanced several times by eager coup counters. Despite his reputation from the Washita days he received no special attentions from the carvers. Among so many dead he passed almost unnoticed, except by the squaw Monaseetah, who on the Washita had borne him a son.

The Sioux were rapidly on the move—the summer sun was already working on the dead and 'dead man' camps were bad luck. Taking their dead with them (29 Sioux, 6 Cheyenne) they began to break camp at dawn. Their victory had brought them a haul of new weapons and nearly 10,000 cartridges—an unequalled opportunity for a record buffalo kill to round off a great summer—and one could not eat dead soldiers (although, maddened by the loss of her husband, one squaw did.) A few hotbloods made some glancing passes at Reno's little fortress but they were merely trying out their new rifles and soon joined the mass migration straggling off to the west.

Terry had camped on the night of the 25th at the mouth of the Little Big Horn (twelve miles north of the battle), still unaware of Crook's defeat on the Rosebud or Custer's presence in the Little Big Horn Valley—one and a half days ahead of schedule. He had sent his H and F companies across the Yellowstone on a hundred-mile ride looking for Custer. Thirty-six hours in the saddle, they found nothing and lost men crossing flooded rivers—more sacrifices to Custer's wilfulness. By now Terry's scouts were reporting brushes with little bands of Sioux, ominously armed with Army carbines. His advance guard bivouaced on the 26th at the head of the valley; at dawn on the 27th the combined force moved down the valley, where they found Benteen and Reno still waiting for Custer. Shortly after they found the 7th.

Terry stood over Custer's body and delivered his funeral oration—'That's what you get for disobeying orders, God damn you!' The troopers were buried where they fell, but the earth was hard, the bodies had lain three days in the sun, and the Sioux were still unlocated. Hasty ten-inch scrapes were dug, and brushwood piled high, but it was a

poor job. The only living thing found on that battlefield had been Keogh's horse 'Commanche': a year later to the day, when the reconstituted 7th returned to the valley to bury its dead, 'Comanche' was to avert another battle, but that is another story.

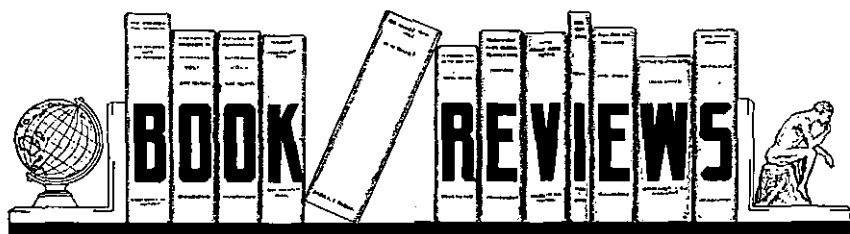
The Sioux were not found again that summer and it was well into the 1880s, and a dozen fights later, before the frontier quieted down and the last participants were rounded up. Benteen rose to brevet-Colonel; Custer lies at West Point; Reno, despite the support and testimonials of his troops, was the subject of a court of enquiry which dragged him through the mud of the Little Big Horn a second time. Ahead lay the whisky bottle, ignominious dismissal, and unmarked death. It was only in February 1968 that a Board of Review cleared his name and reinstated his commission. Maybe he sleeps quieter as a result.

Grant said 'I regard Custer's massacre as an unnecessary sacrifice of troops brought on by Custer himself,' but it wasn't a massacre, for the word has overtones of murder about it, and Custer's men died hard, defeated by superior numbers, equal courage and inferior generalship.

Doubtless the centenary of the battle will be marked by some ceremony—there will be bands and speeches, and maybe some tame Indians, but when the echoes of 'Garry Owen' have died away and the programmes blown off across the valley, there will be only the crying silence of men who died for nothing. □

The Indians had secured a resounding victory over the U.S. Army almost without parallel in Army history. Custer's violation of the principles of maneuver and security had cost dearly.

—Department of the Army *ROTC Manual 145-20* (1959)



ARMS AND INFLUENCE, By THOMAS C. SCHELLING. (New Haven and London Yale University Press, 1966, \$7.50).

*Reviewed by Major E. D. M. Cape, Royal Australian Artillery, a candidate at the Australian Staff College, Queenscliff in 1968. Other reviews included are by fellow officers attending the Staff College during the year.*

SINCE the Second World War a generation has grown up with the Cold War and mankind has endured the tension and dread inherent in such words as 'deterrent effect', 'escalation', 'nuclear proliferation', and 'brinkmanship'. In this book we are presented with the 'gamesmanship' of the Cold War.

The author has set out what he believes to be the major principles for the diplomacy of violence which, because of today's weaponry, is of such importance to all of us. The major theme is that military strategy is no longer just the science of military victory but rather the art of coercion, intimidation and deterrence. The instruments of war are more punitive than acquisitive and any country's capacity for violence is bargaining power at the diplomatic level.

Historical examples are used to illustrate the principles spelt out by the author and these date from the Peloponnesion War through to the first use of coercive bombing of North Vietnam in 1965. In many ways this is a text book and it is possible, through sub-headings, to search out a particular area of interest such as 'negotiation in warfare'. The language of diplomacy is handled in a most readable form and gives the reader a better insight into the shaping of policy and the devious ways of the diplomat.

The principles laid out by Schelling are his own ideas but with the concrete evidence of his illustrations it is hard to fault their validity as he continually proves each point he makes. However, an annoying feature to this reviewer, was the use of a game of chess, lasting several pages, to illustrate the theory of brinkmanship—if you don't play chess you are handicapped. Perhaps it is only natural that there is a definite American flavour to the theory of the principles in this book; but even so the point is made that they represent Schelling's own views and interpretations of international relationships.

For any student of strategy this is a book which opens up new areas of interest. Although some of the concepts are not new in the sense that examples can be seen in history, they have been updated. Even the casual Army reader will find this book interesting and should at least get some understanding of what goes on behind the headlines. □

COMMUNISM IN ASIA: A THREAT TO AUSTRALIA?, By AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE. (Angus and Robertson, 1967, \$1.95).

*Reviewed by Major R. L. Sinclair, Royal Australian Infantry.*

SO much has been written of Communism that one could be forgiven for assuming that the subject has been exhausted, that there can be nothing new in it. Whether Asian Communism poses a threat to Australia and in what way are, however, vexed and topical questions.

*Communism in Asia: A Threat to Australia?* is an edited record of proceedings of the 33rd Summer School of the Australian Institute of Political Science held in January 1967. The book contains a series of papers prepared and read by intellectuals from Australia and overseas countries. Each paper is followed by a commentary and debate in which leading Australian Communists take part. There is unfortunately no prologue indicating the nature of presentation and debate nor is there a short biography of all participants.

The papers are arranged in a progressive order of subjects. From the nature of Communism in Asia we are led to China's foreign policy, the Communist threat and, finally, Australia's policy towards Asia. Progression however ends with the choice of subjects for, while each contributor presents his argument and reaches conclusions, the succeeding author does not necessarily agree with those preceding him. There is thus no common ground for the development of argument towards a general conclusion.

The first two papers are mainly descriptive of Communism but such terms as 'simplistic capitulationism' and 'bourgeoisification' make heavy going for the reader. The third paper, by Dr J. D. B. Miller, concerns China's foreign policy. In it he speculates on a Sino-Soviet rapprochement changing the whole pattern of world power and, with it, American policy. Just what that change might be and its effect on Australia's security is not pursued. At this stage the papers and discussion have simply placed Australia on the periphery of a bi-power struggle, with China emerging to upset the balance.

It is Professor Owen Harries who lifts this book out of the morass of debate on what *has* happened, and who takes a sharp look at

what *could* happen. In a precise and enlightening paper he dismisses the bogey of overt invasion as a sop to Australian traditionalism. He argues that, in the foreseeable event of an American withdrawal, Australia could face a systematic campaign of diplomatic and economic pressure which would bring about profound changes in our way of life. Professor Harries sees Australia, alone and vulnerable in such a situation, gradually succumbing to external (Communist) pressures which could produce irreparable schisms in political ideology leading at the worst to civil war. Here indeed is food for thought.

As a complete work this book will disappoint the reader seeking purely military guidelines for the counter action of Communist expansion. For the reader who is concerned with trends in political thought the book is worth reading. Those who do so will find that opinions are keenly divided on this subject. □

THE POLITICS OF BRITISH DEFENCE POLICY 1945-1962, By WILLIAM P. SNYDER. (Ernest Benn Limited, 1964, \$7.00).

*Reviewed by Major T. E. M. Stoneham, Royal Artillery.*

THERE is a fashion for authors, writing on the theory and practice of defence, to pursue highly theoretical and abstruse arguments, particularly when writing about another nation. Major Snyder has avoided this frustrating practice and has written a short, clear, simple and logical analysis concerned with British defence policies since the end of World War II.

Major Snyder, a United States army officer and a member of the Social Science Department of the Military Academy, has written one of the few military studies of post-war defence problems to be produced by a professional office.

His book has two main purposes: first, to analyse the formulation of policies; secondly, to indicate the main pressures which have helped shape the substance of the policy since World War II.

The writer commences with a review of the evolution of defence policies since 1945. He presents in detail the series of adjustments Great Britain has made since World War II to bring about a balance of domestic capacities and international commitments. That the war adversely affected national power and loosened the bonds of empire is well known; not so well known is the process by which British policy-makers have shaped and reshaped military capacities amidst recurrent crises at home and abroad. Major Snyder examines in detail this process and the influence on resulting policy made by parliament, pressure groups, policy elites and service departments.

A British reader might fairly comment that Major Snyder has fallen prey to the common American fallacy that a unity of background provided by public schools and Oxbridge leads to common concepts and aims in British defence policy. One has only to look at such diverse products as Mr Wilson and George Brown to disprove this. Certain to provoke discussion is the author's conclusion that, despite severe limitations, Great Britain has fashioned a successful military policy in keeping with the role she has been forced to assume in the world.

This excellent book is not a ponderous historical chronicle; it is a study of a complex subject presented in a clear and very readable style. In its approach and specific conclusions it is a valuable contribution to the understanding of present British defence policies and civil-military relations and is recommended for anyone who wishes to obtain a simple understanding of this complex subject. □

CHINA AFTER MAO, BY A. DOAK BARNETT. (Princeton University Press, 1967, \$6.75).

*Reviewed by Major N. R. Bergin, Royal Australian Signals.*

MANY of the critical problems in the world hinge on what is happening in China today and what this vast country may do beyond its borders tomorrow. In this short book Professor A. Doak Barnett provides a searching analysis of the enormous problems facing this country as it enters an historic transitional period—the passing of the founders of the revolution and their succession by the new men Mao Tse-tung has called 'the heirs of the revolution'.

Professor Barnett presents a clear, concise and convincing assessment of the forces motivating the course of political and economic development in Communist China. He is well qualified for this task. As Professor of Government and Chairman of the Contemporary China Studies Committee of the East Asian Institute, Columbia University, he is a recognized leader in China studies in the United States of America.

The book grew from a series of lectures delivered at Princeton University in October 1966 and demonstrates the author's ability to present a complex and, at times, abstruse subject in a simple, clear and thoroughly readable style without losing impact or detail. It is arranged in two parts. Part 1 identifies the factors threatening destruction of the regime and the methods adopted by Peking's present leaders to ensure continuing revolution after the passing of Mao. It concludes with Barnett's interpretation of the struggle for succession and the process of change, through successive generations, in the leadership of the

regime. Part 2 contains four selected documents that have emanated from Communist China recently. Each assists the reader to understand the forces underlying the developing crisis and support the author's succinct conclusions and recommendations.

Wisely, Professor Barnett does not attempt to provide a formula for the solution of China's future. The die is already cast and the Western World can have little influence on the course of events during this critical period. He recommends the adoption of policies that show China 'we will respond positively to any signs of reasonableness and moderation on their part' thus giving that country a greater chance of achieving some of her most basic and legitimate goals. Significantly his judgements closely reflect the policies that the United States of America has adopted towards China and those being vigorously applied in an attempt to solve the Vietnam crisis.

The Chinese Revolution is exerting a continuing influence upon the policies of our age and will eventually affect all people, from the political strategist to the conscription age youth. For the Army reader interested in gaining an understanding of the forces at work in Communist China, now and in the years immediately ahead, this book provides valuable comment and food for thought. □

SCIENTISTS AND WAR, BY SIR SOLLY ZUCKERMAN. (Hamish Hamilton Limited, 1966, \$2.65).

*Reviewed by Major P. J. Day, Royal Australian Engineers.*

SIR Solly Zuckerman has had unique experience in the application of scientific methods to the planning and conduct of war. During World War II he worked in the field of operational research and since 1954 has served Labour and Conservative governments in the United Kingdom. He is now Chief Scientific Adviser to the British Government.

*Scientists and War* is a collection of addresses given by the author during the period 1959 to 1965, all of which contribute to his main theme that '... decisions which we make today in the field of science and technology determine the tactics, then the strategy, and finally the politics of tomorrow.' In the first five chapters the author discusses the ambivalent relationships between scientists and soldiers and traces the influence of science on tactics and strategy. The final two chapters of the book deal with the place of science in the progress of society and are intended to complement his theme on the influence of science in military affairs.

In a book of 177 pages his theme cannot be developed in depth but the propositions he makes are logically and convincingly argued.



There is emphasis on nuclear warfare and, while accepting its deterrent value, the author exposes the absurdity of the phrase 'tactical nuclear weapons' when the decision to use them must be made at the highest political level. He argues prophetically that the increased complexity of weapons systems will reduce the scope (but not the need) for military judgement and will encourage political direction of armed forces to a much greater degree than in the past. Of particular interest is his caveat against the use of computers in certain military fields. He predicts an undesirable gap between high command and units if middle management is replaced by computer, and is completely sceptical of the value of strategic 'war-gaming' because of the impossibility of representing human and social factors in mathematical terms. These and many other propositions made by the author are controversial but quite relevant to military affairs today.

*Scientists and War* is not an easy book to read. Sir Solly Zuckerman writes in a diffuse style and uses with irritating frequency popularized technicalities such as 'polarity of relationships' and the word 'function' in its mathematical sense. Perhaps in consequence of the book's origin as lecture notes comprehension is aided by reading aloud to oneself. An inexcusable fault is the author's lack of precision in use of the word 'science'. In Chapter One he clearly explains the differences between pure science, applied science, and technology but then confuses the issue by making 'science' do the work of all three.

That Sir Solly Zuckerman's opinions on the effects of science on war and national policy are important can be seen by considering his obvious influence on British Defence Policy today. *Scientists and War* is recommended to the student of strategy and the future development of warfare. It is not a textbook, but will stimulate clear thinking. □

THE AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE, BY MAJOR R. J. HALL.  
(Dominion Press, Victoria, 1966, \$3.00).

Reviewed by Major D. R. Walton, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment.

IN this short and concise book Major Hall tells the story of Australia's mounted soldiers. It is not a military history but rather a brief outline of the origins and development of Light Horse units. The author stresses that his aim has been to produce something which will unfold the traditions inherited by the Royal Australian Armoured Corps to the new recruit.

The opening chapters of this book briefly examine the development of military defence in Australia and list the various traditional recruiting grounds for Light Horse units. Following this introduction, and against the background of events and policies of the time, the author traces the

development of the various Light Horse units and formations from their origins in the mid-nineteenth century, until their supplanting by the Royal Australian Armoured Corps after the Second World War. No attempt has been made to narrate the history of particular units although some highlights of a colourful history, for example a description of the capture of Beersheba in 1917, have been included to illustrate the foundations of the Light Horse traditions.

Major Hall is a Regular Officer in the Royal Australian Armoured Corps. The depth of his research is evident in the appendices, tables and anecdotes used to clarify and interest the reader in what is a rather complicated history. Of necessity the subject must involve a somewhat lengthy description of units and dates. The author has interwoven interesting facets and comments of a more descriptive nature to retain the interest of the reader. Tables showing the War Establishment of a Light Horse Regiment and a trooper's marching order dated 1902 exemplify this.

This book has been written in a clear and simple style. Various appendices, listing Orders of Battle, Battle Honours and Regimental Crests, and a large collection of photographs as an addendum, illustrate much of the text and provide interest. To the uninitiated, however, it is sometimes difficult to comprehend the various amalgamations of units. This is possibly because of a desire on the part of the author to highlight only major developments. Nevertheless this is sometimes distracting.

For those who now carry on the traditions of the Light Horse this book is recommended as interesting reading, as well as serving as an introduction for all who would wish to read deeper into the subject. □