

Major General VINH-LOC
ARVN

WHY PLEIME



Prepared by NGUYEN HOANG DAT



From the U.S. Generals and Military Commanders

15 DECEMBER 1966

"... As you know, I am vitally concerned in the war currently raging in your country and the events that led us to the present situation. For that reason I am interested in the campaign described so effectively in your book Why Pleime...."

General MARK W. CLARK

USA ,Ret.

Former Commander-in-Chief of the U.N. Forces in Korea

12 DECEMBER 1966

"... I am confident that those gallant officers and men who gave their lives in the course of the campaign would indeed be proud of your fine account of their role in combating the enemies of a Free World..."

General HAROLD K. JOHNSON

Chief of Staff

The United States Army
(The Pentagon)

16 DECEMBER 1966

".... I want to express my sincere appreciation for your book Why Pleime. I have read it and found it to be compelling, informative and very inspiring.

I know that the officers and men who courageously gave their lives in that campaign for the cause of freedom would join their voices with mine in acclaiming Why Pleime as a most fitting tribute to their sacrifice. I have recommended your excellent book to my constituents
.... I extend to you and the gallant officers and

men of II corps continued success as we march onward together, ever approaching the day of final victory over communist aggression...."

Lieutenant General L. W. WALT

Commanding General

III Marine Amphibious Force

20 DECEMBER 1966

"... I have finished reading your fine book Why Pleime and found it most readable and enjoyable and found myself reliving those hectic, important days of last fall.

The mention which you made of me in the book was most kind and, believe me, is reciprocated in my own esteem of your splendid leadership characteristics. This book will become a treasured one in my personal library...."

Major General HARRY W. O. KINNARD

Acting Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development

The U S Department of the Army

Former Commander 1st Air Cavalry Division

(An Khê)

3 DECEMBER 1966

"... It was indeed a pleasure to read your very fine book "Why Pleime". I would like to add my congratulations to you for writing this important document and also for the very important part that you and your Vietnamese troops played in this important military victory.

Your book portrays very clearly the importance of the highlands to Viet Nam and also the significance and importance that the North Vietnamese Command places on the control of this strategic area. As I mentioned to you the other day, your book made me realize for the first time how important this area was in the 1954 Campaign...."

Major General JOHN C.F. TILLSON, III

Operations, MACV and USFFV

26 NOVEMBER 1966

"... As you know, it was my good fortune to have been stationed at Headquarters I FFV during the battle of Pleime and subsequent battles in the vicinity of Chu Pong. I remember the incidents well and therefore I can say with certainty that your account of the battle and the events leading up to it are accurate and to the point. The book Why Pleime is very well done and serves admirably as a reference book on the operations during the period covered, as well as being a great tribute to the gallant soldiers who participated in the campaign.

Please accept my gratitude for your thoughtfulness and kindness in sending me a copy of your latest work. You are building an enviable reputation as an author..."

Major General PAUL F. SMITH
Commanding General
173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate)
Former Chief of Staff, I FFV

28 DECEMBER 1966

".... I found your book Why Pleime so interesting that I couldn't put it down after I started it until I finished. It was a very good account of the battle and tied the strategic importance of that operation in with Viet Minh operations prior to 1954. I assure you that we will make a maximum use of it here at the United States Army Infantry School where it will be studied and analyzed in detail.

I congratulate you and your forces in the II Corps for the progress they have made in recent months...."

Major General ROBERT H. YORK
Commanding General
The United States Army Infantry Center
Fort Benning

22 DECEMBER 1966

".... I have read your book Why Pleime with interest and am now directing that it be placed in the Armor School Library. I know it will be of great value to our officer students in their studies of combat in VietNam...."

Major General A. D. SURLES, Jr
Commanding General
The US Army Armor Center
Fort Knox

19 DECEMBER 1966

"... This account of the military campaign which took place during October-November 1965 will be of great interest, not only to myself, but also to those members of my staff and faculty here at the College who served in Vietnam..."

Major General EUGENE A. A'LET
Commandant of The US Army War College
Carlisle Barracks

28 DECEMBER 1966

"... I read your book Why Pleime with interest. I also expect that it will prove to be useful to the members of the Faculty at the Command and General Staff College...."

Major General MICHAEL S. DAVISON
Commandant of the US Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth

19 DECEMBER 1966

".... I have read your excellent book « Why Pleime » with intense interest. It is extremely well written, well documented and provides a lucid

comprehensive account of this vital campaign. It should prove of deep interest to all members of our armies—especially to those of us who were privileged to be in II Corps during the enactment of this great Allied victory.

Upon reading your book, I have sent it for circulation to the various officers of 1st Cavalry Division here at Fort Benning who are veterans of the Pleime campaign. Also, I am taking the liberty of using some of the information you provided as a basis for instruction of your officers here at the Infantry School.

Brigadier General JAMES SIMMONS TIMOTHY
Assistant Commandant

The United States Army Infantry School, Fort Benning
Former Commander of the 1st Brigade, 101st Abn Div
Deputy Senior Advisor ARVN Second Army Corps

From the U.S. Officials

14 DECEMBER 1966

".... I was particularly interested in the work of your Montagnard Agricultural Training Center, and I would deeply appreciate your conveying to them my best wishes for continued progress in their important task. In this regard, I thought it very significant that your book Why Pleime on page 110 indicates food and health problems high in the list of major causes for Viet-Cong disenchantment.

I deeply appreciate your thoughtfulness and kindness in sending me a personal copy of your book. I shall keep it both as a memento of my visit with the personnel of the Republic of Viet Nam II Corps and as a symbol of the just cause that unites our people in this struggle for freedom...."

ORVILLE L. FREEMAN

Secretary of Agriculture

The United States Government.

18 NOVEMBER 1966

".... Since I last saw you I have had the opportunity to read your book "Why Pleime" in its entirety, including the documentary sections. I congratulate you on your presentation of a highly complicated matter, namely the leadership of tactical operations. The clear and understandable way in which you handled this subject shows how truly successfully you met command responsibilities during the Communist campaign in October 1965...."

THOMAS E. NAUGHTEN

Associate Director

U. S. Aid Mission to VIETNAM
Former Director, USAID Region II

From the Ambassadors

18 OCTOBER 1966

"... Your book Why Pleime will continue to remind me of the most enjoyable day I have spent during my short stay in Viet-nam...."

His Excellency Peter Wilkinson
Ambassador of the United Kingdom,

25 NOVEMBER 1966

".... I wish to thank you very much for your book entitled «Why Pleime» which I read with the greatest interest."

His Excellency G. D'Orlandi
Ambassador of Italy

28 NOVEMBRE 1966

".... Je viens de recevoir votre livre «Why Pleime» qui m'a fait un grand plaisir...."

Son Excellence BANCHA MINETRAKINETRA
Ambassadeur de Thaïlande

Major-General VINH-LOC
ARVN

WHY PLEIME ?

*to General Peers
with my admiration
for "Behind the Burma Road"
best regards
Pleiku
Vinh Loc*

PLEIKU
August 1966

From the Ambassador

DOJ-HNV Letter 10/24/66

NVA

13 OCTOBER 1966

Your book Why Phine will certainly be reading
me at the most enjoyable day I have spent during
the short stay in Viet Nam.

His Excellency Peter Wilton
Ambassador of the United Kingdom

WHY PHINE

I wish to thank you very much for your book
which I read with the greatest interest.

Handwritten notes:
The book is very interesting and I have read it with great interest. I wish to thank you very much for your book which I read with the greatest interest. I wish to thank you very much for your book which I read with the greatest interest.

011114
10/24/66

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

- L'Energie atomique
et le Bouddhisme January 1964
- The So-Called Movement
for Autonomy FULRO September 1965
- The 1966 Program of Action
for II Corps Tactical Zone January 1966
- Counter - Ambushes and
Road - Opening Operation April 1966

*It is all important
to maintain the initiative
to make the enemy conform to your action,
to dance to your tune.
When you are advancing
this is normally possible.*

Field Marshal T. G. S. S.
(The Royal Armed Forces
of the United Kingdom)

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- I. Energetic Atomique
et le Bouddhisme
January 1964
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September 1965
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for II Corps Tactical Zone
January 1966
- Counter - Ambushes and
Road - Opening Operation
April 1966

dedicated to

MEN AND OFFICERS
WHO VALIANTLY FOUGHT IN
DAN THANG 2
LONG MEACH
AND
THAN PHONG 7
OPERATIONS

*« In war
it is all important
to gain and retain the initiative,
to make the enemy conform to your action,
to dance to your tune.
When you are advancing
this is normally possible ».*

Field Marshal SIM
(The Royal Armed Forces
of the United Kingdom)

Field Marshal Sir
(The Royal Armed Forces
of the United Kingdom)

When you are advancing
to dance to your tune.
to make the enemy conform to your action,
it is all important
to gain and retain the initiative.

The initial preparatory ground,
proving the way for the introduction of the 1st
Air Cavalry Division, was accomplished by
Vietnamese forces. Similarly the very successful
initial dash was accomplished largely
by the Vietnamese Airborne Brigade. The effec-
tiveness of the operation was a result of the
dedicated to

MEN AND OFFICERS
WHO VALIANTLY FOUGHT IN
DAN THANG 21
LONG REACH
AND
THAN PHONG 7
OPERATIONS

C.G.
Second Army Corps

From the standpoint of employment of joint
forces, the battle was a classic. The
significance of the latter phases could, perhaps,
never have been realized had it not been for the
judgment and foresight of Vietnamese leadership.

PREFACE

10 OCTOBER 1966

This most interesting manuscript vividly recalled to mind the threats and challenges our forces faced against a common enemy just one year ago. General Vinh Loc's assessment of the significance of the battle of Plei Me is in accord with mine; history may well confirm that this represented the turning point in the war. It is all the more significant that in this crucial test of arms, Vietnamese and United States forces fought side by side as comrades, and decisively crushed the best combat units that the VC have yet been able to deploy against us.

From the standpoint of U.S. forces, Plei Me was the "test by fire" of our most recently developed instrument of war, the 1st Air Cavalry Division. The mobility, flexibility, and great impact of this division under most adverse conditions of weather and terrain portend the direction of further developments of the future.

From the standpoint of employment of joint forces, the Plei Me battle was a classic. The signal successes of the latter phases could, perhaps, never have been realized had it not been for the judgement and foresight of Vietnamese leadership.

The initial preparatory effort on the ground, paving the way for the introduction of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, was accomplished by Vietnamese forces. Similarly the very successful final phase exploitation was accomplished largely by the Vietnamese Airborne Brigade. The effectiveness of this highly organized, closely integrated, cooperative effort has not often been emulated in modern warfare.

General Vinh Loc has not attempted in this work to provide a completely detailed account of this battle, nor is it yet possible, scarcely twelve months thereafter, to place the numerous individual action of the many Vietnamese and U.S. units into accurate perspective. This cannot be accomplished with conviction until, perhaps much later, the VC accounts of this battle as seen from their side become available. Nevertheless, it is particularly interesting at this time to gain the perspective of General Vinh Loc, who served with distinction as Commander of the ARVN II Corps during the battle.



W.C. WESTMORELAND
General, USA
COMUSMACV

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But early this year, a delegation of ROK Generals headed by General LEE HYUN CHIN and afterwards, the ROK Deputy Secretary of Defense - General

CHANG CHANG KUK — together with some Commanding Generals in the ROK Armed Forces, came to VIETNAM in April, 1966 in order to study the battles at Pleime and eagerly asked for documents. Then a delegation of 11 Generals of the Republic of China headed by General LO YU LUN, Operations, also came for the same purpose.

Besides, there were the US Congressmen as well as Military Commanders calling on II Corps Hqs in order to know more about the details of the battle at Pleime and to visit Pleime. Such concern proved that the collection of these war documents was not only desirable for any military commanders and personnel but also a chance to satisfy and glorify the memory of the heroes who valiantly died at Pleime and Chu-Pong.

All the Army units committed in this historic battle have done their best to serve their Fatherland.

We are proud of them and sincerely think that nothing could be worth as rewards and decorations to those who accepted the Pleime battle in the deplorable situation of the Highlands during the 1965 rainy season.

These pages are written with the purpose of honoring the exploits of the heroes from the Armor, Ranger, Infantry, Airborne, Air Force, Special Forces and SF Ranger units and especially of those who survive but still suffer of their wounds.

Through the book I only want to stress that during the Pleime battle, 6,000 VC were wiped off, 3,000 individual and crew-served weapons were captured or destroyed, among which there were 169 heavy machine guns and 179 NVA

regulars made prisoners. This battle has lasted in a longest period : 38 days and 38 nights or in other words over 800 hours : 800 hours of anxiety, of terror, of worries, of thrill and suspense.

The Dien Bien Phu Battle which ended the Indo-China war (1947-1954) lasted for two months but was merely an encirclement of a stronghold in the Dien Bien Phu Bowl.

The Pleime Battle, quite different with many tactical aspects :

- Envelopment
- Counter-ambushes
- Relief.
- Pursuit
- Ambushes
- Exploitation
- Attack and destroy.

is no doubt the biggest battle from the last years.

In the second phase of the battle, there was the participation of the modernest and unique type unit of the US Army : the 1st Air Cavalry Division.

It's delightful for me to have the chance to fight side by side throughout the battle with one of the smartest generals in the US Army : Major-General HARRY KINNARD, Commanding the 1st US Air Cavalry Division.

I sincerely call on :

- The Commander of the 'Armor-Infantry Task Force.

- The 21st, 22nd Ranger Battalions and 1/42 Infantry Battalion Commanders.
- The Airborne Battalion Commanders in the General Reserve.
- The Battalion Commanders in the Vietnamese Marine Alpha Task Force.
- The Brigade Commanders of the 1st US Air Cavalry Division.
- The Artillery Battalion Commanders.
- The Air Force and Army pilots.
- The Air Force Observation Officers.
- The Special Forces and SF Ranger Officers.

If they have details or documents related to the commitment of their units, they should send them to II Corps TOC so that they could be added to this book to make it become a complete historic document, because it is the result of the hardships and sacrifices endured by the valiant and zealous soldiers serving in the remote Highlands.

The 1966 Rainy Season
in the Highlands

A STRATEGIC POSITION

For most people, the sudden increase of Viet Minh activities in the Central Highlands in 1954 was due to the following reasons:

- (1) A significant amount of French units was withdrawn to reinforce Dien Bien Phu, thus leaving the area insufficiently defended with mobile forces which by that time only consisted of French Task Force N° 700 (Groupeement Mobile N° 700), some Montagnard Battalions and VN Task Force N° 11.

The "Atlantic" operations launched by the French in the coastal region were intended to draw the Viet Minh who had moved into the Highlands in order to be able to disperse

CHAPTER I

THE V. M. 1954 CAMPAIGN IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

Thus far relatively quiet fronts, the Viet Minh hoped to continue to keep the upper hand and to retain the initiative over Lieutenant-General Navarre's plan aiming at the creation of strong mobile forces.

But all the above reasons could not explain why the Viet Minh had tenaciously pursued their efforts until the 1954 Geneva Agreement and toward territorial control. According to Dr Bernard B. Fall (1),

- (1) STREET WITHOUT JOY — The Stackpole Company, Lancaster 9, page 169.

A STRATEGIC POSITION

For most people, the sudden increase of Viet Minh activities in the Central Highlands in 1954 was due to the following reasons :

- 1) A significant amount of French units was withdrawn to reinforce Điện Biên Phủ, thus leaving the area insufficiently defended with mobile forces which by that time only consisted of French Task Force N° 100 (Groupement Mobile N° 100), some Montagnard Battalions and VN Task Force N° 11.
- 2) The «Atlante» operations schemed by the French to occupy the central coastal region were known beforehand by the Viet Minh who thus thrust into the Highlands in order to be first in the field, to compel the French to disperse their forces.
- 3) By stepping up their activities in the thus far relatively quiet fronts, the Viet Minh hoped to continue to keep the upper hand and to retain the initiative over Lieutenant - General Navarre's plan aiming at the creation of strong mobile forces.

But all the above reasons could not explain why the Viet Minh had tenaciously pursued their efforts until the 1954 Geneva Agreement and toward territorial control. According to Dr Bernard B. Fall (1),

- (1) STREET WITHOUT JOY — The Stackpole Company, Chapter 9, page 169.

which could be used as a spring-board for expansion in almost all directions :

- Southward to the southern Plateaus and to Southern Viet Nam,
- Eastward to the coast,
- Westward to Lower Laos and Cambodia.

« Furthermore, with Middle Laos (to be liberated by Interzone IV), that area will constitute a large base in the very middle of the Indochinese peninsula. The control of that territory by the enemy will enable them to better coordinate their activities and regulate their forces between North and South and thus prepare for a « general counter-offensive ». The positions and the terrain in this area formed by « the Northern Plateaus and the Bolovens » are considered well-fitting with the Viet Minh intentions and must be liberated in accordance with their plans ».

Further on, General Delange also wrote :

« The Viet Minh attacks in the Western Highlands in 1954 differed very much from those in previous years. This time, the « liberated zone » shall be defended and extended southward in order to secure their base more effectively and be able to exert later on their pressure more directly over Cambodia and Southern Vietnam ».

KONTUM AND HIGHWAY 19

To carry out their plan, in December 1953 and January 1954, the Viet Minh thrust into Middle

and Lower Laos, seized Thakhet, destroyed the whole string of French posts along Highways 12 and 9, threatened the base of Seno and surrounded Voeune Sai (Eastern Cambodia).

Toward the end of January 1954, on the 27th, they simultaneously attacked Mang Buk, Plateau Gi (present district town of Chuong Nghia) and Konbrai. Then they shifted all their efforts to North Kontum and cut it off from Pleiku. On 2 February, all the posts in North West Kontum, Dakto included, were overrun and on 5 February, all bridges North Kontum destroyed. The French Expeditionary Forces were compelled to leave Kontum on 7 February and to withdraw to Pleiku. Task Force N° 100 which just set their feet upon the Highlands less than two months ago — on 17 December 1953 — and from then in continuous movements was so thrown again into a second withdrawal ! (the first one on 28 January 1954, from Tuy Hoa to Kontum).

Ten days after, on 17 February, the Viet Minh resumed pushing east and southward : they seized Dakdo, harassed Pleibon and attacked La PIT (10 km North Pleiku, on Highway 14) as if to compel the French to leave also Pleiku.

But on 15 January, the Atlante Task Forces landed at Sông Cầu and Tuy Hòa. The Viet Minh then quickly adjusted their objectives after 15 March into :

- 1) Destroying the strong point of An Khe or at least interdicting Highway 19 in order to isolate Pleiku and to deny all contacts between An Khe and Qui Nhon for the French troops.

2) Opening other fronts in the Highlands and along the coast in order to dissipate the French forces.

On 29 March, they began their activities on Highway 19 with an ambush and an attack against the post at Đèo Mang. During the following month, they again ambushed and attacked four times in the area extending from An Khê to Pleiku, inflicting heavy losses to elements of Task Force N° 100.

At the same time enemy efforts were increased on Highway 14 and Inter-provincial route 7, in the direction of Cheo Reo. Attacks were launched without interruption against Plei Ptao, Plei Ring, B. Hioan Cham, Le Bac.

Besides the above main fronts — An Khê and Front Sông Ba — conducted by regular units belonging to Interzone V, two other secondary fronts were organized by regional units to harass the rear of the French forces, one in Phu Yen and Darlac, the other in Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan and Djiring provinces.

In May 1954, to support their bargain at the Geneva Conference, the Viet Minh deployed all-out efforts all over the area. From then until the armistice, they incessantly attacked French positions and convoys on all Highways 19, 21, 14 and 1. French posts in Tuy Hoa were continuously under siege and harassment. It was in this period that the French Expeditionary Forces were reduced to abandon An Khe (29 June 1954) and in their withdrawal to Pleiku, Task Force N° 100 was decimated by enemy ambushes. After another entrapment by the Viet Minh at Chu Drek Pass on Highway 14, the 2nd Korea Battalion (French) ceased to exist!

The tenacity of the Viet Minh in carrying out their plan and their uninterrupted activities have shown the degree of importance they have conferred to the Highlands. Faced with failure, General Delange meditatively put down the following conclusion, before leaving Viet Nam :

« Whatever the future may be, due to their strategic position, their rough terrain and the scarcity of their population, the Highlands still provide the best natural infiltration routes for the enemy, as long as they do not give up their dream of aggression of South Viet Nam. Through these « corridors », all liaison between the two regions would be carried out harmoniously and with the utmost secrecy ».

CHAPTER II

1964 - 1965

THE SAME WAR
WITH A BIG DIFFERENCE