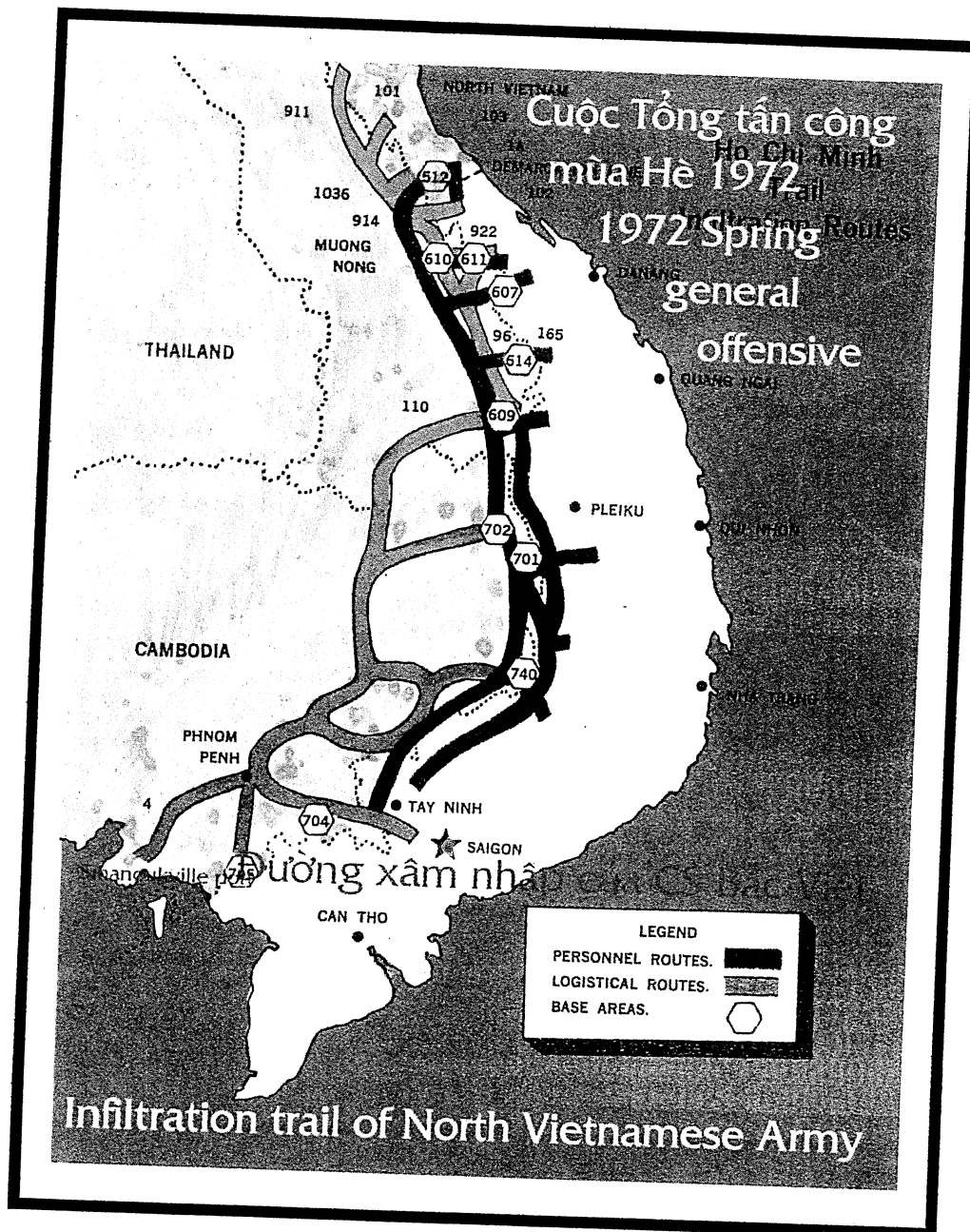


A GLIMPSE OF THE LOGISTICS SOLDIERS ON AND OFF THE AN LOC BATTLEFIELD

*Hình ảnh Ngõ Lính Tiệp V&En Trên Chiếm
Trởng An L.*



Bài thuyết trình của Cựu Trung tá Tỉu hoàn Trởng Tiệp V&En SỰ hoàn 18 B& Binh
nhân dịp K& NI&Em 50 năm Quân &Ti Úc Tham chiến VIC& Nam
C&U&c t& ch&U&c tại Swanston Town Hall Melbourne t& ngày 17 C&on 19 tháng 8 năm 2012

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I. LOGISTICS

Manpower and material are two factors vital to the organization of every army in the world. Manpower alone may prove the more important of the two if the army is imbued with sound indoctrination, high morale, spirited patriotism, and combat experience. But materials - the military vehicles, weapons, ordnance, communications equipment, and numerous other support functions - so essential to both those in the rear and at the front, may well be the decisive ingredient, prevailing over other factors of strategy and tactics.

ARVN logistics had three basic missions: (1) *supply*; the provision and distribution of all kinds of material; (2) *maintenance*; the repairing, servicing, and disposal of materials (3) *services*; the provision of transportation, medical treatment, communication, construction, housing and burial service.

To carry out the mission assigned it, the Logistics Command had been established at the national level and charged with directing the following corps: the ordnance corps, the quartermaster corps, the signal corps, the engineering corps, the medical corps, the commissary corps, and the exchange corps.

This organization partly reflects the specific responsibilities assigned to the respective branches. In the military regions, the regional logistics commands were charged with directing their respective logistics groups in support of the various branches. In the sectors (provinces) were the Logistics Administrations centers. And attached to each division was a logistics battalion like ours.

The technical ability of the various echelons matched the service requirements of the units to which they were assigned. For example, because the 1st and 2nd echelons possessed little technical knowledge and means, they were assigned to troop units; the 3rd and 4th echelons had considerable technical knowledge and means, and thus are assigned to regional support units. The 5th echelon with its large-scale production capacity is under the direction of the National Logistics Command.

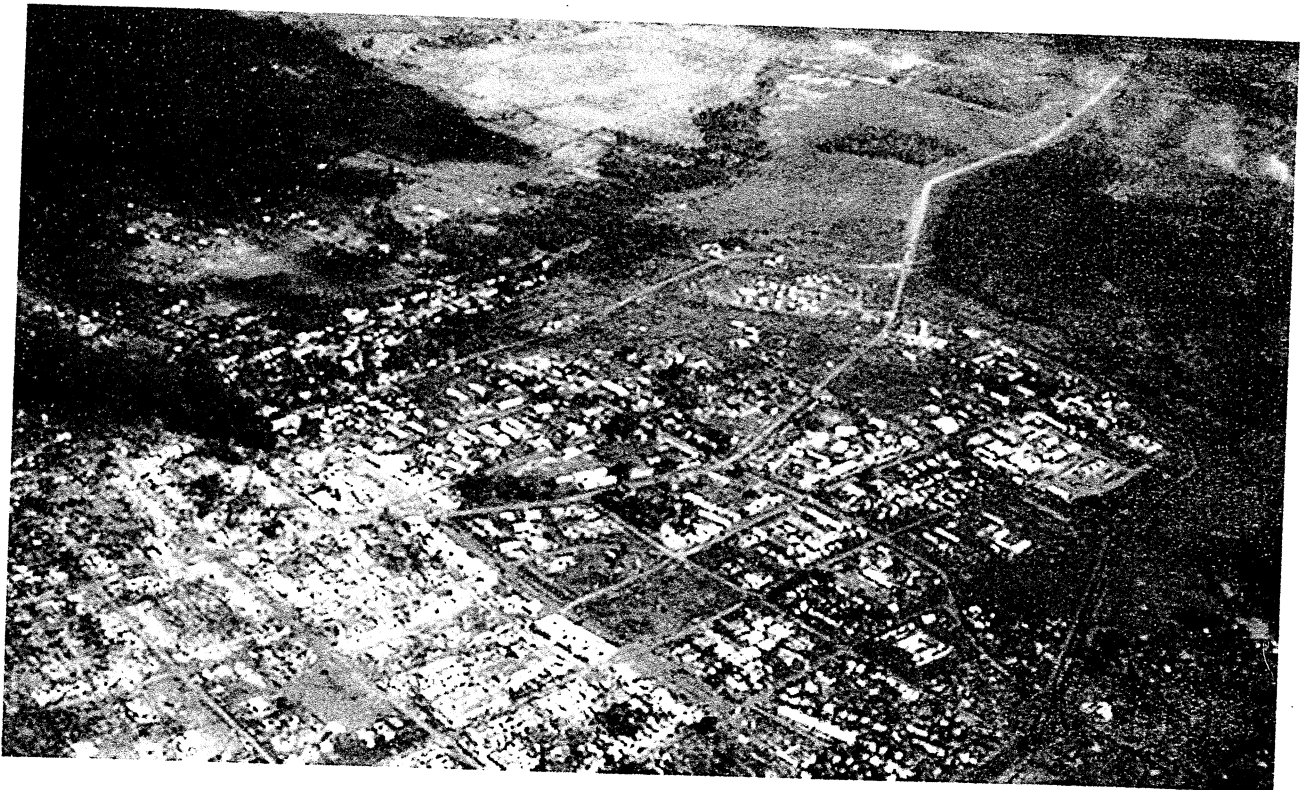
Since the formation of the ARVN, Logistics command grew to keep pace with the expansion of the army. But when compared to U.S Army logistics, ARVN logistics appears underdeveloped. In the U.S. Army, 5 logistics soldiers supported every combat soldier; in our army a single logistics soldier supported eight combat soldiers. The ratio was therefore 40:1 in favor of the U.S. Army logistics.

Nevertheless, our logistics operations proved effective in coping with the previous communist offensives. The logistics soldier gave direct support to a large battlefield, and he did his job well. On no battlefield did our combat soldiers suffer from lack of food or munitions. This has been confirmed by many commanding generals. Even the Hanoi daily Nhan Dan gave credit to the ARVN for its mobility and supply capability.

II. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE AN-LOC VICTORY

On January 25th 1972, Nixon revealed that Kissinger had been negotiating secretly with the North Vietnamese.

On March 29th 1972, North Vietnamese Army openly sent 12 divisions along with modern tanks across the 17th parallel to invade South VN. The battlefield stretched for more than 1,000 miles from Quang Tri, ThuaThien Provinces via Kontum to An-Loc City (Binh Long Province). This was a large-scale operation, somewhat like the North Korean invasion over the 38th parallel in 1952.



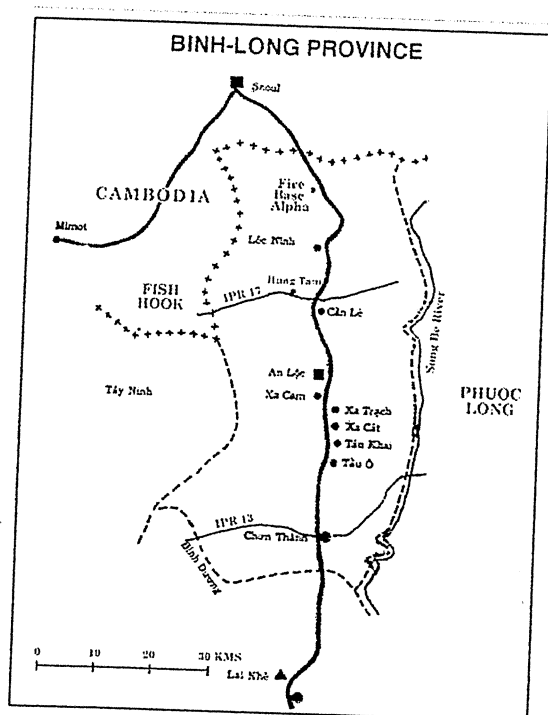
The Communists spared no effort, using heavy guns and tanks to attack Loc-Ninh District, then utilized it as a spring-board for further attempted occupation of Binh Long Province in view of obtaining a location to instate their illegal government. Without hesitation, they launched successive attacks on An Loc with 3 divisions; 5, 7 and 9, plus 2 tank regiments, one 130mm Artillery Division and local guerrilla units. The fighting was so fierce after April 9th 1972, that An-Loc, a city of Binh Long, has been called a second Dien Bien Phu. The difference is An Loc was not lost to the North Vietnamese Communists, but become the valiant battlefield of the Republic of Viet Nam Army.

Binh Long, Phuoc Long, Tay Ninh, Long Khanh and Phuoc Tuy are the northern provinces of Military Region 3 of the Republic of Viet Nam.

Province Binh Long, is a small province with a population of about 75,000 people, most of them are Montagnards; highlander people. It is worth to noting the word "Montagnard" given by the French to call the tribes who lives in Montagnes (mountains) as opposed to the

(Nguoi Kinh- Lowlanders) . The soil of this area contains a red laterite clay that is very suitable to the cultivation of rubber trees. It holds some of the most beautiful forests consisting of a wide variety of tropical trees – including teaks and many other precious species. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the French colonialists began to exploit this fertile region to plant rubber trees. One of the large administrative agencies is the Hon Quan plantation, established in 1908. Hon quan is the former name of An Loc city. Hon Quan was also the name of a large Administrative agency of French Plantation (*Hon Quan Society des plantation Des terres rouge*). “Binh Long” in Vietnamese means *Peace Dragon* and An Loc means Safe and prosperous. Ironically, by a tragic twist of fate this city was to be a victim of the most savage and murderous offensive of the Viet Nam war.

In the early year of 1972, Colonel Tran van Nhut was appointed to be the new Binh Long province chief. He lost no time reinforcing the defense of the capital city An Loc. He conducted intensive training of the provincial Regional Force (RF) Popular Force (PF) and People Self Defense Force (PSDE), and aggressively implemented the pacification program within the province, including improving relations with the ethnic Montagnards.



Instead of using all of his defence forces in static defence, Nhut used 2/3 of these forces for patrol and mobile operations. He also sent Provincial Reconnaissance teams and members of the PSDF, especially the local Montagnards disguised as civilians or farmers to gather intelligence on enemy movements or infiltration in the forest in the farm land within the province.

Alongside the province headquarters, we had the Provincial Logistic Center and Mobile Platoon of the 18th logistic Battalion together with 1 Ranger Battalion. Outside the limits of the city, was stationed the regiment belonging to the 18th Infantry Division, the 52nd Infantry Regiment.

At Loc Ninh we had one regiment, the 9th Regiment, belonging to 25th Infantry Division, one Tank Company and 2 Artillery Platoons.

The enemy side had about three Infantry divisions, Division 5, 7, 9 one Artillery Division and local force Division Binh Long, a group of Battalions of M54 Tank.

At the beginning of the fighting, being overwhelmed by the enemy's insane intention and their first use of tanks, our forces stationed at Loc Ninh District retreated to An-Loc City. Besides, being occupied with the evacuation of refugees from the battlefield, our units had to restrict greatly their fire-power for a counter-attack after that, thus resulting in the enemy's gaining ground.

Thinking that they could take over An-Loc easily in order to realize their crazy and cruel dream, the Communists used all their firepower-ground and anti-aircraft, artillery, rocket missiles, in an attempt to level An-Loc City and overrun its defenders. There were waves of

shelling and waves of human attack every hour. Innocent civilians were the most pitiful, because so many of them lost their properties and even their lives during these brutal offensives.

Correspondent PIERRE DARCOURT from L'aurore observed: *"For six weeks, the Communists have pounded An-Loc with more than 80,000 shells, i.e. 3 times the number of those slammed into Dien Bien Phu. Only the fact that the defenders have successfully endured the above shelling already means a victory on their part."*

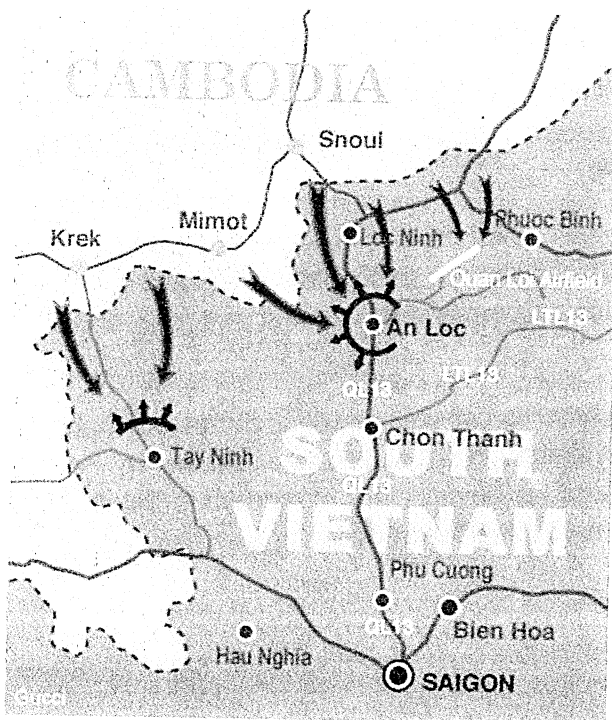
Years ago, Ngo Tu, a noted Chinese strategist, wrote,

"To win by attacking is easy, but to win by defending is difficult."

The fact that soldiers of the 18th Infantry Division, the 25th Infantry Division, the Special Airborne Group and local soldiers of Binh Long Province could do the impossible, was because they were determined not to tolerate the Communists or to cede an inch of land to them.

The battle dragged on for months, making the defenders suffer from tremendous horror and

hardship, and entitling them to the designation, "defender heroes".



Having failed to seize An-Loc by their all-out attacks, the Communists become incensed. Determined to capture Binh Long at any cost, they continued to besiege An-Loc, attacking our forces fiercely with artillery for the purpose of reducing their resistance. Meanwhile, they also set up numerous banker-nets along highway 13, so as to hamper the advance of our reinforcements.

The rest of the 25th and 18th Infantry Division outside An-Loc cooperated with friendly units in the relief of enemy pressure along highway 13 after winning the battles of Tri Tam, Ho Ba, Cha Ray and Dat Do. At Tau O village, men of the 18th

Infantry Division destroyed all VC fortified underground tunnels, these soldiers were heliborne to An-Loc to replace the defenders from other units except the 52nd Regiment of the 18th Infantry Division, then pulled out of An-Loc for rest. They were also supposed to wage a counter-attack against the enemy.

In the early days at An-Loc, the Vietnamese forces suffered much hardship from furious shelling attacks. In view of strengthening their position at the negotiating table at this critical stage, the Communists arrogantly endeavored to settle accounts at An-Loc, a thorn in their side, in their favor. Still, with admirable gallantry, we quickly recaptured several strategic points such as Windy Hill (Doi Gio) and a chain of other hills east of An-Loc, which had been considered from the beginning of the battle as worth much sweat and blood to take over and defend.

After that, our force the 5th and 18th Infantry Division relieved the enemy pressure at Tan Loi Hamlet, retaking QuanLoi Airfield and pushing the enemy back about 4 to 5 miles away from the perimeter of the city.

To cite achievements, in the early period of action, the 5th, 18th Infantry Division in cooperation with friendly forces, killed 5,000 Communists and captured thousands of weapons of various kinds. Later at Tau O, and during the counter-attacks at An-Loc, they killed 2,500 communists, captured more than 300 weapons, received 4,733 refugees, and destroyed 10 tanks and 60 assorted vehicles. But the most outstanding achievement that the 18th Division enjoyed was the pride in their presence from the beginning to the end of the battle. The division spilled much blood over An-Loc, and the victory meant not only an accomplished mission but also a satisfaction on the part of the division after their successful vengeance on the enemy for the death of innocent people and their gallant fighters.

III. THE LOGISTICS SOLDIER AT AN-LOC

The pride of the An Loc combat soldier meant also the great hardship suffered by logistics soldiers.

Earlier, I spoke of our limited logistical capacities in coping with the ever-increasing growth of requirements. These difficulties were very apparent in theory. But in reality, they should be added to by the factors of danger and obstacle.

However, there was nothing we couldn't do if we had enough enthusiasm and perseverance, and the proper support from our superiors. Fortunately, Logistics soldiers enjoyed such assistance from the 18th and 25th Infantry Division's Commanding General and other senior logistics officers.

I present our difficulties and obstacles here in order to call your attention to the fact that we did not possess the big logistics capabilities available on the battlefield of Quang Tri. I will show you pictures of our logistical operations and the obvious lack of modern facilities. But, even under these difficult circumstances, with much sweat and patience, we really kept up with our division's requirements.

On the very first day of battle at An Loc, logistics reinforcement light company had arrived at Xa Cam, An Loc, under an enemy shelling attack. To avoid being hit by shrapnel, the helicopters landed us at several positions along Highway 13: altogether 80 specialists equipped with weapons, munitions, 7 days' rations, 356kw generators, 2 battery chargers, 5 transmission radio sets, 50 cans of gasoline, 160 rounds of 81mm mortar, 12 tool kits, 2 tents, and complete sets of kitchen utensils. The landing zone was 2 miles from An Loc City. We did not take any pictures on that occasion since it was



a rainy day.

At that time, within the combat zone we had only 2 Jeeps in serviceable condition, one used by the Commanding General and the other given to us for logistics operations. Of course, we all knew how to use the Jeeps.

It took us 10 hours to move the materials in from the airfield. We did it by all possible means: by vehicles, by our bare hands, on our back and on our shoulders. On that evening, we had so little time for dinner that we had to eat dried cooked rice from plastic bags. Right after that, we began to dig fox-holes.

The support activities began on the next morning. We undertook a task that none of us had ever had to do before: picking up food packages dropped from airplanes. This task sounded rather easy and simple. We were shown the fixed areas where parachuted packages were purposed to land and then we were to gather them and turn them over to representatives of our friendly units on the spot. It turned out that the task was not as simple and easy as that.



Every day, almost 30 packages of about 1 ton each were dropped from an altitude of 10,000 feet and landing in an area of at least 500 to 1000 meters in diameter, even with the highest degree of accuracy in the parachuting techniques.

Carrying 30 tons of packages for a distance of 1000 meters by human labor only was of course not an easy and simple task. Besides, there were cases where packages landed on some mine field, the dropping area was shelled by the enemy, or some packages landed upon some men, causing fatal accidents. And then, we had to collect and carry parachutes to the camp.

Every morning, looking up at the sky, we saw several parachutes dropping slowly from high above. It would be such a beautiful sight! And, it would be so deadly as well! An open parachute with a food package landing upon a bunker was as dangerous as an 81mm mortar round fired by the enemy. In this case, the ones still in the bunker could hardly escape from death. If a parachute had not opened, the degree of danger would be greatly increased. Therefore, when it was time for airplanes to drop parachutes, a bugle was sounded, warning everyone to go outside to dodge the falling parachutes. In spite of this, some fatal

accidents did occur. About ten men were killed by being hit by parachuted packages; of these ten, one was a logistics soldier. Three other logistics soldiers narrowly escaped from death later.

At that time, all materials ranging from foods, munitions, medicine and gasoline were parachuted.

Throughout the conflict we had to deliver hundreds of tons of munitions and were ordinarily able to carry it out easily thanks to the availability of much mechanical handling equipment at our disposal. But the situation at An-Loc was different. At first, we were to supply some hundred mortar rounds a day. In order to carry out this task, we had to initiate some way of our own due to a lack of Chinook helicopters. We requested that each reinforcing soldier coming in by helicopter bring with him 2 rounds. When he arrived at the airfield, he would leave them by the side of the runway. Then, we would send out our man-team to collect these rounds. This team gathered about 300 rounds a day. Thanks to this kind of hard work, these men could sleep soundly at night.

Ordnance soldiers in charge of ammunition still had something else to worry about: the safety of their friends who were surrounded by dangerous live ammunition. With the cooperation of the explosive disposal team, we destroyed about 300 tons of unusable ammunition, and gathered about 50 additional tons of usable ammunition for future use.

We also encountered difficulties in the maintenance task due to a lack of wreckers. So, every time it was necessary, to change vehicle engines or gun tubes, we had to assemble a number of men and have them to do the job with their bare hands. Concentration of men outdoors did pose a threat because the enemy might shell anywhere at any time. To make good preparations for the later counter-offensive, we quickly had to build up a large stock of foods and munitions at all costs. We had to, therefore, repair our mechanical equipment expeditiously, speedup the requisition and reception of supplies. By the time we left An Loc, we had built a gas depot, a rice storage and an ammunition dump.

In addition to the task of repairing communications equipment, weapons and vehicles, another unusual task cropped up: patching tires and inner-tubes. This is a routine task which belonged to each user unit, not to support but amid the fighting, it became important. Despite having only 8 vehicles, we had to patch about 10 or more tires a day. Every time there was shelling, we would have flat tires to worry about. Moreover, the streets were strewn with shell shards, so you can guess what would happen if a vehicle ran over one of these sharp metal shards. If the logistics soldier did not take care of flat tires, who else would do it?!!!

The funeral service team contributed as much of their hard labor in this battle as they ever had before. At An-Loc, the funeral service team collected corpses, removed corpses, buried unclaimed dead bodies found here and there among the debris, excavated graves to remove skeletons for their relatives when requested or went to forests to look for corpses of crewmen of crashed airplanes. One of the jobs done by the funeral service team which was worth noting was to keep records on all the graves of soldiers killed at An Loc.

The logistics soldier was also charged with a combat task: fighting to maintain and expand his activities. We were proud of being assigned a line of defense at An Loc and we were also proud of the logistics activities we had performed at An Loc, marked by many warehouses, a barbed wire perimeter, and a defense bunker system left behind.

IV. CONCLUSION

I can't give any clear conclusion of this talk because this talk is about the logistics activities in the An Loc Battle and the An Loc battle was the key battle in the entire Vietnam War. To conclude this talk we must review our view of the Viet Nam war as well as the logistic idea of this war.



The Battle of An Loc, occurred after the high point of American commitment in Vietnam. The key battles of the Vietnam War have been discussed by many persons in various literature written 37 years ago.

ARVN General Lam Quang Thi said: *"Our victories at An Loc during North Vietnam's Great Offensive in 1972 completely demonstrated that we could beat back North Vietnam's regular divisions in conventional warfare, provided that we received adequate supplies and air support. The Battle of An Loc, for instance, pitted some 6,350 ARVN men against a force three times that size. During the peak of the battle, we had access to only one 105mm howitzer to provide close support while the enemy attack was backed by an entire artillery division. Whereas we had no tanks, the enemy had two armored regiments. Yet ARVN won. As General Paul Vanuxem, a French veteran of the Indochina War, wrote in 1972 after visiting the liberated city of An Loc: "An Loc was the Verdun of Vietnam, where Vietnam received as in baptism, the supreme consecration of her will." (Attached leaflet)*

NVA General Tran van Tra who commanded the attack against Sai Gon during the Tet offensive of 1968, attended a high-level meeting at which the Communist Leaders pondered the future and summoned to Hanoi in March 1973. Due to the fact that the South Vietnamese forces were retaking key sectors while the communists had not recovered from their massive spring offensive of 1972. He wrote: *Our troops were exhausted and their units in disarray. We had not been able to make up our loss. We were short of manpower as well as food and ammunition, and coping with the enemy was very difficult*" (Viet Nam a History, Stanley Karnot page 658, 659)

For they were not obtaining new supplies: Pham van Dong and Le Duan, the party secretary general, were rebuffed in Moscow and Beijing asking for additional Soviet and Chinese military aid. We do not know how much aid they received.

According to South Vietnamese spies' information discovered in 1973, the NVA quietly started to embark on a huge logistic program. To move large trucks, tanks and armored vehicles into the south. They built more highway to stretch their total road network to more than twelve thousand miles. They also started construction of an oil pipeline, three thousand miles long, to reach from Quang Tri to the town of Loc Ninh.

On the ARVN side, after the Easter Offensive of 1972, the North Vietnamese had been thrown back and most of the South Vietnamese territory that had fallen to them had been retaken. The South Vietnamese were reluctant to sign a cease fire agreement, the so-called

'Paris Agreement'. President Thieu was repeatedly given assurance by then US President, Richard Nixon, both verbally and in writing, that United States would continue support Viet Nam.

If the North Vietnamese committed serious violation of the **Cease Fire**, American military forces would immediately be used to punish the transgressor.

By March of 1973, American pilots and others soldiers held as POWs by the North Vietnamese were released, the US Congress seemed to wash its hands of Vietnamese involvement.

In 1973 The South Vietnamese received \$2.8 billion in US aid.

In 1974 this fell to \$1.1 billion

and in 1975 to \$300 million. Suddenly every bullet counted. (Vietnam War by Tom Carhart page 176)

When it comes to the outcome of this war, I can't give any simple conclusion:

Whether the South Vietnamese were incapable of handling this war? or the North Vietnamese had violated the Paris agreement to invade South Viet Nam at all costs or America had abandoned them?

But in so far as the logistics soldiers are concerned I can conclude on two counts:

First, The South Vietnamese Army were equipped with only second world war weapons while the North Vietnamese Army were well equipped with modern, sophisticated weaponry. I just want to bring out some familiar weapons to compare:

- US Tank M24 and M48 can't compare with Russia Tank M54,
- US Artillery 105 and 155 Howitzer with range of 11 and 17 Kilometers can't compare China 130 mm Gun with the range of 27 Kilometers.
- US Carbine, Garand M1 or R15 M16 can't compare with China AK 47. AK 50
- US Anti tank M72 can't compare with China B40, B41 or Russia SA7 missile

Second, the war in Vietnam was between 2 sides of Vietnamese people aided by their respective allies.

The North Vietnamese had the help of Russia and China.

The South Vietnamese had the help of the US.

If the help afforded one of those sides were to cease, they would lose the war.

Thanks for listening.

Quan Van Tran OAM JP



Gen Dao visited Vietnam Veterans Museum Gen Dao talked about An Loc Battle in Sydney

