The Ia Drang Valley Battle? Which One?

COLONEL NGUYEN VAN HIEU AND THE PLEIME CAMPAIGN
Introduction

- The US 1st Cavalry Division and the Ia Drang Valley Battle, 11-14 to 11-17-1965
- The ARVN 3rd Airborne Brigade and the Ia Drang Valley Battle, 11-18 to 11-26-1965
- Location of both battles: areas bordered by Chu Pong Massif ridge edges and the Ia Drang river
  - The first one in the east
  - The second one in the west, near Plei The, close to the Cambodian border.
A Trilogy of Battles: Pleime, Chu Pong & Ia Drang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Operation</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/19</td>
<td>Operation Dan Thang 21 (VN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/26</td>
<td>Operation Ingram (US)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Operation Long Reach (US)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>Operation All the Way (US)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/17</td>
<td>Operation Silver Bayonet (US)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/26</td>
<td>Operation Than Phong 7 (VN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LZ X-Ray
LZ Albany
The American Ia Drang Battle (1)

- Popularized by General Hal Moore and Joseph Galloway’s book *We Were Soldiers Once...And Young* and by Mel Gibson’s movie *We Were Soldiers*

- Unknown to the public and minimized by American military establishment:
  - The US Operation Long Reach was decided by and remained under ARVN II Corps’ control and involved US 1st Air Cavalry (main force) and ARVN 3rd Airborne Brigade (reserve force), supported by ARVN Airborne Rangers.
  - ARVN II Corps provided to US 1st Calvary Division the NVA’s position at Chu Pong
  - ARVN Ia Drang Valley Battle followed through and concluded US Ia Drang Valley Battle.
General Westmoreland noted the joint efforts between the US Armed Forces and the ARVN Armed Forces under ARVN II Corps’ Operational Control during the entire Pleime Campaign (Preface, *Why Pleime*)

The ARVN II Corps’ concept of “highly organized, closely integrated, cooperative effort: joint intelligence and support activities, commonly shared concepts of operations and results, separate TAOR, separate command, separate deployment of forces, separate conduct of activities and separate reserve.”
The American Ia Drang Battle (3)

- ARVN Special Forces Rangers teams gave support to US 1st Cavalry Division troops: reconnaissance and security of landing zones and deep into enemy's territories.
- Sources of information of these ARVN Special Forces Rangers’ team support activities: North Vietnamese military source (NVA B3 Front HQ, Chief of Section 2, 12-28-1965)
- LTC Harold More, commander of 1/7 Air Cavalry Battalion at LZ X-Ray, acknowledged the ARVN II Corps’ intercept of NVA troops’ radio message and information pertaining to their hiding positions in Chu Pong mountain.
The ARVN Ia Drang Valley Battle

- General Schwarzkopf’s account of the Ia Drang Valley Battle conducted by the ARVN 3rd Airborne Brigade (his memoir *It doesn’t Take a Hero*).
- Noteworthy: the effective support role of the ARVN Special Forces Rangers teams.
Dissipating the “Fog of Histories”

- The ARVN Ia Drang Valley Battle was a huge military exploit (General Schwarzkopf) but remained unknown.
- It was buried under the “fog of histories” by both North Vietnamese and American authors.
  - Playme-Ia Drang Campaign
  - Pleiku-Ia Drang Campaign

*Pleime Campaign: Pleime-Chu Pong-Ia Drang*
As ARVN II Corps Chief of Staff, Colonel Nguyen van Hieu orchestrated the entire Pleime Campaign.

He coordinated in person the actions of

- The Commander of the Armor-Infantry Task Force
- The Battalion Commanders of 21\textsuperscript{st}, 22\textsuperscript{nd} Ranger Battalions and 1/41 Infantry
- The Battalion Commanders in the Vietnamese Marine Alpha Task Force
- The Brigade Commanders of the 1\textsuperscript{st} US Air Cavalry Division
- The US Artillery Battalion Commanders
- The US Air Force Pilots and Observation Officers, and US Army Pilots, the US Special Forces Officers,
- The ARVN Airborne Ranger Officers
- The Airborne Battalion Commanders of ARVN 3\textsuperscript{rd} Airborne Brigade.
Colonel Hieu detected the NVA B3 Front Command’s switch from “static waylays” to “mobile ambush” tactics at Pleime.

He took a counter-ambush measure by delaying the advance of the Armor-Infantry Task Force from October 21 to October 23.

He accurately foresaw the enemy’s withdrawal route and inserted the ARVN 3rd Airborne Brigade at precise block positions in order to successfully box-in two remnants NVA battalions.
Reference

- Why Pleime (April 1966)
- www.generalhieu.com
- www.generalhieu.com/iadrang_arvn-2.htm