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For the enemy, it was the last attempt in the long end of the rainy season and also a test case to pave the way for the eventual venture in 1966. But for us, it offered an opportunity to confirm the progress we had made despite the unfavorable weather conditions and to consolidate our conviction in a better future.

Therefore the importance of the battle of Pleime could not be assessed through statistics of results, although Pleime was the biggest and fiercest battle and has inflicted the heaviest enemy losses since 1951.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

To appreciate the importance of the battle of Pleime, let us restrain our ecstasy in such a victory and stoop for a while to speculate about the consequences if, unfortunately Pleime had been a success for the VC. In other words, if the enemy anti-aircraft fire positioned around the hill of Cha Ho had shot down lots of helicopters and aircraft, if all the troops and their dependents living in the Camp of Pleime had been slaughtered, then would the relief column still have had the motive and the order to rush hardily — as they had done along the Plei My - Pleime axis — and meet the chance to engage with so many VC major units?

The triumphal exploitation and pursuit by the 1st Air Cavalry Division during the second phase

CHAPTER II

LOSSES OF THE 22ND VIET CONG DIVISION  
as of 11 November 1965

Source: Dossier File (Revision) BUI VAN CUONG  
Political officer, Signal Co/2nd Bn

UNIT	Approximate Initial Strength	Percentage of Casualties	REMARKS
1st Battalion	500 men	33% KIA	Complete major weapons losses
2d "	500	50%	13 AA guns
3rd "	500	33%	11 M108s 3 Recoilless Rifles
Motor Co	120	4 men KIA	1 Bn Chief of Staff
Anti-Aircraft Co	120	16 men KIA	4 Co Cdrs 4 Co Political officers 1 Surgeon
Signal Co	120	4 men KIA	
Transportation Co	150	50% KIA	
Medical Co	40	80% KIA and CIA	
Engineer Co	60	15 men KIA and CIA	
Reconnaissance Co	50	9 men KIA	
TOTAL	2200	40%	

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To appreciate the full significance of the battle of Pleime, let us restrain our ecstasy in such a victory and stoop for a while to speculate about the consequences if, unfortunately Pleime had been a success for the VC. In other words, if the enemy anti-aircraft fire positioned around the hill of Chu Ho had shot down lots of helicopters and aircrafts, if all the troops and their dependents living in the Camp of Pleime had been slaughtered, then would the relief column still have had the motive and the ardor to rush hardily — as they had done along the Phu My - Pleime axis — and meet the chance to engage with so many VC major units?

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could be partly due to the impetus given by that initial success. It was also the main reason why that major unit which had just come to Vietnam accepted without hesitation the challenge from a crack enemy major unit.

If the battle of Pleime had failed since its very beginning — in the defense of the Camp — the enemy would have succeeded in spreading the panic among the population in accordance with their boasts in the attack of the District town of Lê Thanh in May 1965. The loss of Pleime would mean also the abandon of Pleiku, the isolation of Kontum and the permanent interdiction of Highway 19.

Sixteen years ago, in North Vietnam, the Communists had once succeeded in establishing their control on Highway 4 and seizing the whole string of hills north of Vinh Yên. They had threatened to celebrate the 1951 Tết Festivals for their troops in Hanoi. The same catastrophe would have happened to the Highlands last year if the VC had overrun Pleime.

That was not all. For a friendly defeat at Pleime would have also led ineluctably to a massacre of the lowland people living in the Highlands by the FULRO rebels. For a VC victory at Pleime would have prevented the troubles and demonstrations which were fomented by opportunists, because under a communist regime, there would be no religions, no freedom.

But fortunately, the gallant troops in the Highlands, closely supported by armed helicopters and fighters had not refused any sacrifices in the first phase, had

succeeded in confusing the enemy estimate and had surprised them by their ardor and tenacity.

So far the VC always succeed in rallying and re-assembling their troops after action. This time, after the lift of siege of Pleime by friendly forces, they faced a 22-day pursuit and had to disintegrate to escape. Their morale which had lowered significantly was more affected by the fact that many wounded had been left behind or abandoned during withdrawal. That explains why the number of enemy casualties and deserters had increased in Phases II and III. In the last ten days, they ran out of food and engagements could be compared to fascinating « partridge shooting » parties.

Objectively speaking, Pleime does not present any strategic value. But it has been selected as a main objective because the enemy always tries to marry up tactics and propaganda, to adjust combat activities with psychological warfare. They intended to surprise us because they were convinced that the operations in An Lao and Kim Son, North of Binh Dinh had bound 6 battalions of the ARVN General Reserve, 4 battalions of the 22nd ARVN Infantry Division and three US helicopter companies to the coast. But our prompt maneuvers had shifted them into being surprised and losing the initiative. (1)

(1) Extract from a memorandum signed by Col Daniel B. Williams, A/DSA II Corps MACV sent to C.G. II Corps on 25 Oct 1965 : « At 1500 hours on 24 October General Westmoreland called and asked for a general rundown on the situation,.. He wound up the conversation by asking that his personal congratulations be passed to General Vinh Loc on his handling of his troops to meet the various emergency situations. »

We learned from experience that nothing could be more precious than being able to gain one more minute in withstanding and delaying the enemy in a remote outpost. It was precious even for the zone commander who could then rely on the combative spirit of the troops to arrange for the relief. It is in the very moment one begins to doubt about the arrival of reinforcements that these are preparing and most anxious to accomplish their mission.

The second lesson from the battle of Pleime is that the VC are not exclusive masters of the jungle and mountains. For with modern engineer equipment and revolutionary tactics, the helicopters could land everywhere and landing zones constructed at any places, whether on tops of hills or amid dense jungles. It was for this reason that the VC had totally failed in their estimate about possible landing zones.

We also learned that in the previous battle of Duc Co, the VC always tried to take advantage of darkness to assault armored units. This time at Pleime, they had used the same tactics, offered to armored units one more opportunity to achieve exploits, and enhanced the pride of the 3rd Armored Squadron (station in Pleiku), the oldest armored unit in the ARVN which had taken part in the fierce fighting in Ninh Binh, Nam Dinh, Vinh Yen in North Viet Nam, before the cease-fire in 1954.

The terrain at Pleime is covered by dense vegetations but the soil is hard, small streams rare and armored cavalymen could feel comfortably « at home ».

In most cases, infantry protection is required to ensure the security of armored columns. The battle of Pleime on the contrary was a typical case in which the infantry elements considerably restricted the mobility and capabilities of the armored turrets. For this reason, Armor company commanders should not in the future cling to book-principles and had better expose themselves daringly instead of limiting their mobility with close infantry protection. This would provide not only liberty of action but also the arguments to defend oneself in case of being surprised.

The damage suffered by friendly forces on Hill 210 at night 23 October was not due to the enemy skill as « dead shots » but to the fact that company commanders and platoon leaders had given to their troops too much liberty in taking care of themselves. If their meals had been prepared collectively, there would have been more men and more time to dig fox-holes for troops' protection and also to set up defensive works for the whole unit.

In phase III, the operations had been conducted through a close cooperation between ARVN and US Forces : that was the latest procedure ever put into application since the second World War. It is characterized by :

- Joint intelligence and support activities.
- Commonly-shared concept of operations and results.
- Separate TAOR.

- Separate command.
- Separate deployment of forces.
- Separate conduct of activities.
- Separate reserve.

The above procedure has brought many good results, especially in a country such as ours where the psychology of the people is charged with complexities and subtleties. I also find in that procedure a real competitive spirit between the two armed forces and between units.

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We should like by this opportunity to stress the improvement which has been realized in the union between Highlanders and Lowlanders. That solidarity is based upon frank mutual understanding, sincerity and equality. It has been a hard task to correct the mistakes made by the former regime which had almost destroyed the friendship between Highlanders and Lowlanders and led to the bloody events at Buon Sarpa and Buon Eanao in 1964.

It was indeed a foolish decision to have changed the names of the places in the Highlands from their dialect into Vietnamese, a measure which only created the resentment among Highlanders. They sincerely find no advantages whatsoever in calling Blao as Bào Lộc, Ban Mê Thuột as Bàn Mai Thứ, Dran as Đon Dương, Plei Krel as Lê Thanh, Plei Kleng as Lê Chi and Liên Khàng as Liên Khương. It would be interesting to know what Ngo Dinh Diem's

answer will be if someone suggests him to change his own name into Fernando Silva or Mohamed Kasavubu !

The Diem's policy also meets failure because it has accumulated injustices, one upon another with the so-called resettlement centers established in the Highlands. Diem's error showed up at the very beginning of the execution of his plan : the centers were scattered along the border, in remote places where they could not receive any support or mutual defense. Through the years from 1964 to 1966, it was unfortunately the VC who had drawn the best advantage of these centers in food supply and also intelligence.

Even after the arrest of Y Bham, Paul Nur and other dissident leaders, Diem's influence did not increase and his policy remained unchanged. In other words Diem could not gain the Highlands into his side, could not become the leader of the Highlanders although he had tried to impose his presence in Ban me thuot, Dalat and Blao, because in the eyes of the Highland Tribes, Diem was the ugly usurper of the traditional emperor Bao Dai.

It was not because he did not have faithful and wild subordinates but it was rather his manners which were not those of a leader of Highlanders although he had tried hard to sip rice wine and to observe the rites in ceremonies celebrated in the Highlands.

Former emperor Bao Dai had done nothing of benefit for the Highlands whereas Diem had gone from one failure to another to receive finally complete

indifference of the Highlanders in regard to his fall. Diem was also stupid when he ordered Highlanders to wear clothes in order to bring the lights of civilization upto the jungle and mountains. I sincerely think it was the biggest mistake he has ever made. The decent appearance and sophisticated manners which civilization has conferred to us do not necessarily imply that we have achieved better standards in ethics than others. The outrages on decency which are frequent in cities down the delta have not taken place anywhere in the Highlands.

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Everyone knows that 9/10 of the garrison at Pleime were composed of Highlanders and the whole relief column consisted of Vietnamese. But nothing could prove better the close union between Highlanders and Lowlanders than the ardor which the Command and all the troops of the column had deployed to lift the siege at Pleime.

The Pleime battle was the first opportunity to attest the sincere devotion of the Lowlanders to the Highlanders despite all the dangers and sacrifices they could endure. The friendship between them is without discrimination and limits.

To a certain extent, the Pleime battle had also broken off the binds between Colonialists, Communists and FULRO rebels. Right after our success at Pleime, these elements had coordinated with the VC to harass our remote outposts at Nhon Co, Gia Nghia along the border.

On 21 June 1966, 14 representatives of the FULRO band have returned to cooperate with the authorities and taken their oath of allegiance in front of the Prime Minister and the Government Delegate in the Highlands in a ceremony at the Highlanders' Training Center in Pleiku. It has not been a simple event but the echo of a sound policy and of a series of success which is still to be continued.

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Nowadays, the world knows Pleime much better than the Highlands or Pleiku. Through the sacrifices by about 500 heroic soldiers of the ARVN and Allied Forces at Pleime, a new concept and policy for the Highlands have found their expression.

The enemy would never forget their disaster at Pleime. Some day, they would take their revenge, and come back again around Pleime so that they could redeem their « honor ». By its position, Pleime always reminds of Chu Pong, of the Cambodian border and of Cambodia herself with her inexhaustible supplies of rice, medicines and also of perfidy.

The recent infiltration of new units from North Viet Nam such as the 88th, 24th, 66th Regiments, the 321st and 308th Divisions continue to maintain the enemy pressure upon the Highlands. But at the same time it reveals the dilemma which Giáp and his clique are now facing. Their plan to use Cambodia as a sanctuary for their aggression could precipitate that country into disaster, because no one can tolerate

the foolish arrogance of the capricious prince who has betrayed the Free World and turned his own country into a communist satellite.

The Bu Kheo Airfield, west of Highway 19 across the border, had an important role in the battle of Pleime. High-ranking VC cadres had landed there, on their way from North Vietnam to the Field Front. By letting the Communists use Bu Kheo, Cambodia which pretends so far to be « neutralist » has demasked herself.

The infiltration routes which French General Delange worried about would never present any dangers if Cambodia did not comply to overlook the machinations the Communists are conducting on her territory. Without Cambodian rice, without the presence of Red Chinese advisors in Pnom Penh, without the communications between Hanoi and the Khmer capital, the infiltration of VC units from North Vietnam could never take place and develop.

The name « Pleime », pronounced « Play me » by foreigners has become easily familiar to alien historians and correspondents. In fact, the VC have used all their tricks and deployed all their capabilities in their game at Pleime last year. Is it for this reason that the « Spring campaign » in 1966 has not taken place in the Highlands ?

*Pleiku, the 1966 Rainy Season*