

Editor's Note: When SOF first received Robert Oles' two-part series on the Plei Me/Ia Drang Valley/Chu Pong Mountain campaign (see "Bloody Ia Drang" and "Winning One for Gary Owen," SOF, March, April '83), we immediately began searching for an eye-witness account to accompany it. Executive Editor Bob Poos recalled that Joe Galloway, then a UPI reporter/photographer, had been at LZ X-Ray all during the battle there. He contacted Galloway, who consented to do an on-the-spot report. Due to his busy schedule, Joe couldn't get it in until just before final deadline. We felt the piece was so good that it shouldn't suffer being cut to fit in the April issue. So here it is now.

LIKE all good war stories this one began simply enough.

In the early fall of 1965, sitting with the Marines in Da Nang, I persuaded Tiger Switch to patch me through to Puma Switch and on through several other pieces of the

when i
didn't r

From
hitched
found t
Capt. L
ing bun
heaven
mand c
game an
beads w

From
way to
jockeye
pilot fr
around

Work
runs to
the First
start —
on the in
dove fo
opened
Combat
settling

“IF YOU WANT A GOOD FIGHT...”

UPI Combat Correspondent Joins the Cavalry

Text & Photos by Joe Galloway

Editor's Note: When SOF first received Robert Oles' two-part series on the Plei Me/Ia Drang Valley/Chu Pong Mountain campaign (see "Bloody Ia Drang" and "Winning One for Gary Owen," SOF, March, April '83), we immediately began searching for an eye-witness account to accompany it. Executive Editor Bob Poos recalled that Joe Galloway, then a UPI reporter/photographer, had been at LZ X-Ray all during the battle there. He contacted Galloway, who consented to do an on-the-spot report. Due to his busy schedule, Joe couldn't get it in until just before final deadline. We felt the piece was so good that it shouldn't suffer being cut to fit in the April issue. So here it is now.

LIKE all good war stories this one began simply enough.

In the early fall of 1965, sitting with the Marines in Da Nang, I persuaded Tiger Switch to patch me through to Puma Switch and on through several other pieces of the exasperating military communications net to the UPI bureau on Ngo Duc Ke Street in Saigon.

After four or five months of sloshing around through paddies and running along ridges with the Marines in I Corps, I was no longer a green war correspondent. I knew the difference between incoming and outgoing, had seen men die on both sides and had walked an eerie hilltop in Quang Ngai Province where every man of a Vietnamese Marine battalion and four American advisers lay dead in their fighting holes.

I was also being eaten alive by paddy foot and crotch rot and my plea to the boss was for a change of scenery and altitude. A few weeks in the cool, dry central highlands, working out of MACV Headquarters in Pleiku, was just what the doctor ordered. Besides, with the recent arrival of the 1st Air Cav at Anh Khe there would be some good features to write as the newcomers started working their territory.

I caught the milk run, a clapped-out old C-123 that hauled anything and everything, including reporters, from Da Nang north to Hue-Phu Bai and then back south to Pleiku. The milk-run bird only ran in a straight line

when it was taking you somewhere you didn't really want to go.

From the airstrip at Camp Holloway I hitched a jeep ride over to MACV where I found the public information officer (PIO), Capt. Larry Brown, a cordial host dispensing bunks in his animal room, or mosquito heaven as we also called it, where the command chaplain sat in on a nightly poker game and was widely accused of rattling his beads when drawing to inside straights.

From MACV I could hop back to Holloway to visit a host of fellow Texans who jockeyed helicopters. Bob Oualline, a good pilot from Arkansas Pass, introduced me around and the groundwork was laid.

Working out of Pleiku, I made occasional runs to check on progress at Anh Khe with the First Team. From a somewhat rocky start — I can recall reflecting one evening on the inexperience of troops who suddenly dove for cover when the duty VC sniper opened up during nightly showings of old *Combat* television segments — the Cav was settling in pretty well, getting its choppers on line and flexing its muscles.

By October, everyone smelled trouble in II Corps.

By early October 1965, everyone could smell trouble in II Corps (south of I Corps). The ARVN forces were light, scattered — and scared. The American field presence was mostly scattered in isolated Special Forces camps with names like Plei Me, Dak To, Dak Sut, Dak Pek and MACV compounds in Pleiku and Kontum.

Gen. William Westmoreland was more than a little concerned. He warned Washington that the communists were poised for an all-out offensive to cut South Vietnam in two. We had all read Bernard Fall's books, and the sight of those white stone markers where French *Group Mobile* 100 was ambushed and annihilated in the

Mang Yang Pass between Anh Khe and Pleiku was enough to raise the hair on the back of our necks. It was only 12 short years since Vo Nguyen Giap's regulars ate up GM 100 and now another North Vietnamese army was building for battle in the highlands.

Unknown to us at the time, Hanoi the previous June had established the B-3 Western Highlands Front under direct North Vietnamese control. The NLF, the Viet Cong, had nothing to do with this. Maj. Gen. Chu Huy Man, a member of the Hanoi Central Committee, was in field command and he held no brief involving people's war. Man intended to use the dry season to knock out those bothersome Special Forces camps and blind American eyes to his buildup and troop movements as he moved to put pressure on the thin ARVN line.

For the past year, regular North Vietnamese regiments had been training and undergoing indoctrination under a policy laid down by Gen. Nguyen Chi Thanh that envisioned head-to-head combat with the Americans. Gen. Thanh believed he could so bloody them that political pressure at home would end their troop buildup. Giap had his doubts, but let Thanh go ahead.

The base area for Gen. Man's forces and headquarters would be near Chu Pong Mountain and the Ia Drang River valley, astride the Vietnam-Cambodian border. With supplies and men pouring down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, Gen. Man's three PAVN (People's Army of Vietnam) regiments assembled and readied themselves for battle — the first full North Vietnamese division to swing into action since Dien Bien Phu.

When everything was ready, Gen. Man set his troops on the march. His first target would be Plei Me Special Forces camp on National Route 6C — a road that was more a memory than a national highway. Plei Me camp's 400 Montagnard mercenary defenders and their families and the dozen American Green Berets who led them were resupplied entirely by air.

On the evening of 19 October, the 2,200 men of Gen. Man's 33rd PAVN Regiment slipped out of tunnels and launched wave attacks against the barbed-wire barriers sur-

EXPANDED CENTRAL-AMERICA EDITION

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

SEPT
1983

The Journal

of Adventurers

FDC 55096-9
\$3.00
UK £1.75

CRISIS IN CENTRAL AMERICA:

SOF JOINS THE BATTLE
IN NICARAGUA, HONDURAS AND
EL SALVADOR



16 EXTRA
PAGES