



# **The Hump: The 1st Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry, in the First Major Battle of the Vietnam War**

*Al Conetto*

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Operation Hump, the first major battle between the U.S. Army and the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces, took place November 5–9, 1965, in South Vietnam's War Zone D. Known as "The Hump," it would change the nature of the war, escalating it from a hit-and-run guerrilla conflict to a bloody contest between Communist main force units and American commands of battalion size or larger.

This memoir of an Operation Hump survivor begins with the sequence of events leading up to the battle, from the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Drawing on official Army documents and the recollections of fellow combatants, the author not only describes the battle in detail but explains the war's basis in fabrications at the highest levels of the U.S. government. His experiences with PTSD after the war and his eventual return to Vietnam in the 1990s are included.

## **The Hump: The 1st Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry, in the First Major Battle of the Vietnam War Details**

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# **From Reader Review The Hump: The 1st Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry, in the First Major Battle of the Vietnam War for online ebook**

## **Josh says**

I'm reviewing this book for H-Net and will post a link to the full review eventually.

The Hump was written by Al Conetto, a junior officer serving with the 1/503 of the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam during 1965 and again in 1967-1968. This book is the result of Al Conetto reconciling himself with what he experienced in Vietnam and as part of his self-therapy for PTSD.

This book details Operation HUMP (5-8 November 1965), a search and destroy mission tasked to the 1st Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry, of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. When the 1/503 moved into its area of operations near Bien Hoa on 5 November it attempted to reconnoiter three hills (Hill 65, Hill 75, Hill 78) but encountered dug-in resistance from an unknown unit(s) of the North Vietnamese Army and irregulars at Hill 65. Beginning the morning of November 8 and over the course of six-and-a-half hours companies belonging to the 1/503 engaged in fierce fighting against human wave attacks, mortar barrages, and heavy .50 caliber machine gun fire from Hill 65 and nearby encampments where the NVA/Vietnamese irregulars had heavily defended positions. Several American platoons were surrounded and some fire squads annihilated during the fighting. Throughout the day battalion headquarters called in tactical air sorties, medevacs, and helicopter gunships to lend support to the besieged American units. The resulting action left 49 Americans KIA with some 83 WIA and an unknown number of Vietnamese KIA/WIA, but with estimates varying from 319 - 400 killed.

It's interesting to note that Operation Hump took place about nine days before Colonel Hal Moore's forces engaged with Vietnamese regulars in the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley on 14 November. Al Conetto says that he wrote this book partly to remind Americans of the "first major battle" that occurred in Vietnam because he believes it was overshadowed by Ia Drang and quickly forgotten by most Americans.

The book is not exclusively a narrative of the six-and-a-half hour battle between the 1/503 and Vietnamese forces on 8 November. Conetto incorporates a chapter that explains the basic historical narrative about why the United States became involved in Vietnam. Although this narrative is, due to the nature of the book, inherently simplified it nevertheless provides an accurate picture of why American forces were committed to Vietnam in 1965. The bulk of the book then details a narrative of Operation HUMP from beginning to end. Conetto relies on unit records, his personal recollections, and the perspectives of his former commanders and comrades to provide numerous perspectives on what happened. The final section, which I would probably categorize as "post-war" details Conetto's experiences returning to Vietnam as a civilian in the 1990s and 2000s and a candid discussion of his long-term battle with mild to severe depression and anger—both psychological and physiological manifestations of what he describes as post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Appendix provides readers with a snapshot of what happened to the men in the 1/503 that Conetto, descriptions of the combat after-action reports for Operation HUMP, and citations for men who received various medals.

It's also noteworthy that Lawrence Joel received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his courage under

fire administering medical aid to dozens of men. Joel was the first living African-American to receive the MoH since the Spanish-American War.

Country duo Big & Rich, who achieved some note in the early 2000s, composed a song entitled "8th of November" to memorialize the men who died during Operation Hump. The music video has real video footage and photographs from the Op.

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