U.S. MARINES IN VIETNAM

FIGHTING THE NORTH VIETNAMESE

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by

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and

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Foreword

This is the fourth volume in a planned 10-volume operational and chronological series covering the U.S. Marine Corps' participation in the Vietnam War. A separate topical series will complement the operational histories. This volume details the change in focus of the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF), which fought in South Vietnam's northernmost corps area, I Corps. III MAF, faced with a continued threat in 1967 of North Vietnamese large unit entry across the Demilitarized Zone separating the two Vietnams, turned over the Chu Lai enclave to the U.S. Army's Task Force Oregon and shifted the bulk of its forces—and its attention—northward. Throughout the year, the 3d Marine Division fought a conventional, large-unit war against the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) near the demilitarized zone. The 1st Marine Division, concentrated in Thua Thien and Quang Nam provinces, continued both offensive and pacification operations. Its enemy ranged from small groups of Viet Cong guerrillas in hamlets and villages up to formations as large as the *2d NVA Division*. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing provided air support to both divisions, as well as Army and allied units in I Corps. The Force Logistic Command, amalgamated from all Marine logistics organizations in Vietnam, served all major Marine commands.

This volume, like its predecessors, concentrates on the ground war in I Corps and III MAF's perspective of the Vietnam War as an entity. It also covers the Marine Corps participation in the advisory effort, the operations of the two Special Landing Forces of the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet, and the services of Marines with the staff of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. There are additional chapters on supporting arms and logistics, and a discussion of the Marine role in Vietnam in relation to the overall American effort.

The nature of the war facing III MAF during 1967 forced the authors to concentrate on major operations, particularly those characterized by heavy combat. The uneven quality of the official reports submitted by combat units also played a role in selecting the materials presented in this volume. This is not meant to slight those whose combat service involved long, hot days on patrol, wearying hours of perimeter defense, and innumerable operations, named and un-named. These Marines also endured fights just as deadly as the ones against large enemy regular units. III MAF's combat successes in 1967 came from the efforts of all Americans in I Corps.

All three authors have been historians in the History and Museums Division. Major Gary L. Telfer, now a retired lieutenant colonel, has a bachelor of arts degree from Muskingum College, Ohio. He had two tours in Vietnam, first as an advisor with a Vietnamese Army artillery battalion and, three years later, with the 12th Marines. Major Telfer began this history project and produced the initial manuscript. His replacement, Lieutenant Colonel Lane Rogers, now also retired, expanded the materials into a second draft. He is a member of the class of 1953 of the U.S. Naval Academy and was an advisor with the Vietnamese Marine Corps. The third author, Dr. V. Keith Fleming, Jr., is a

former Marine officer who served as a rifle company commander in Vietnam. He prepared the comment edition and then incorporated the suggestions of the reviewers. He has bachelor of arts and master of arts degrees from the University of Alabama and a doctoral degree in American military history from Ohio State University.

E. H. SIMMONS
Brigadier General, U. S. Marine Corps, Retired
Director of Marine Corps History and Museums

Preface

U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967, like its predecessors, is largely based on the holdings of the Marine Corps Historical Center. These official files include the monthly unit command chronologies, after action reports, messages, units' daily journal files, the oral history collection, comment files, and previously classified studies prepared by members of the division. Especially useful in the latter category were Lieutenant Colonel Ralph F. Moody and Major Thomas E. Donnelly, "Introduction of North Vietnamese Regulars," and Lieutenant Colonel Ralph F. Moody, "A Higher Order of Warfare," parts IV and V of a then-projected single-volume history of the war.

The authors supplemented the above sources with research in the records of the other Services and pertinent published primary and secondary sources. Although none of the information in this history is classified, some of the documentation on which it is based still has a classified designation. More than 250 reviewers, most of whom were participants in the events described in this volume, read a comment edition of the manuscript. Their comments, where applicable, have been incorporated into the text. A list of all those who commented is included in the appendices. All ranks used in the body of the text are those held by the individuals in 1967.

The production of this volume, like its predecessors, has been a cooperative effort. All of the Vietnam historians, past and present, in the Histories Section, History and Museums Division, have reviewed the draft manuscript. Mrs. Joyce Bonnett, head archivist, and her former assistant, Mrs. Linda T. Benedict, aided our access into the records in the Archives Section. Miss Evelyn A. Englander, head librarian, and her assistant, Mrs. Patricia E. Morgan, were very helpful in obtaining needed references. The Reference Section, headed by Mr. Danny J. Crawford, and earlier by Mrs. Gabrielle M. Santelli, made its voluminous files available and answered the authors' numerous questions cheerfully and professionally. Mrs. Regina Strother, formerly with the Defense Audio-Visual Agency, but now with the History and Museums Division, graciously assisted in the photographic research. Mr. Benis M. Frank, the head of the Oral History Section, was equally helpful in making his tapes and transcripts available.

Mr. Robert E. Struder, head of the Publications Production Section, skillfully guided the manuscript through the various production phases. Mr. Struder also served as the project officer supervising the contract with the University of Maryland's Cartographic Services Laboratory, which made the maps in this volume. Mrs Bonnie Kane and Ms. Lee Ritzman Ebinger were the cartographers, under the supervision of Mrs. Sue Gibbons and her successor, Ms. Vickie Taylor. The typesetting of the manuscript was done by Corporals Paul W. Gibson, Joseph J. Hynes, Mark J. Zigante, and Stanley W. Crowl. Mrs. Catherine A. Kerns contributed significantly to the typesetting effort, and provided considerable technical expertise on typesetting procedures. Mr. William S. Hill, the Division's graphics specialist, completed the design and layout of the book, incorporating some work completed earlier by his predecessor, Mr. Dennis W. Kirschner.

The authors give special thanks to Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, the Director of Marine Corps History and Museums, whose policies guide the Vietnam series. Four successive Deputies for Marine Corps History—Colonel Herbert M. Hart, Colonel John E. Greenwood (now editor of the *Marine Corps Gazette*), Colonel Oliver M. Whipple, Jr., and Colonel John G. Miller—have shepherded this project to its completion. Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., the Chief Historian, aided all three authors by giving us the benefit of his considerable experience in writing Marine Corps History, encouragement and advice when needed, and general editorial guidance. Mr. Jack Shulimson, now the senior Vietnam historian, provided advice to all three authors and aided research through his knowledge of Vietnam-era Marine Corps records. The historians in the historical offices of the Army, Navy, and Air Force have freely exchanged information with the authors and assisted in locating documents needed to complete our research. We express our gratitude to all those who reviewed the comment edition and pointed out needed corrections. They also were generous in providing personal photographs, documents, and the insights available to participants in events. Finally, the authors are responsible for the contents of the text, including the opinions expressed and any errors in fact.

GARY L. TELFER LANE ROGERS V. KEITH FLEMING, JR.

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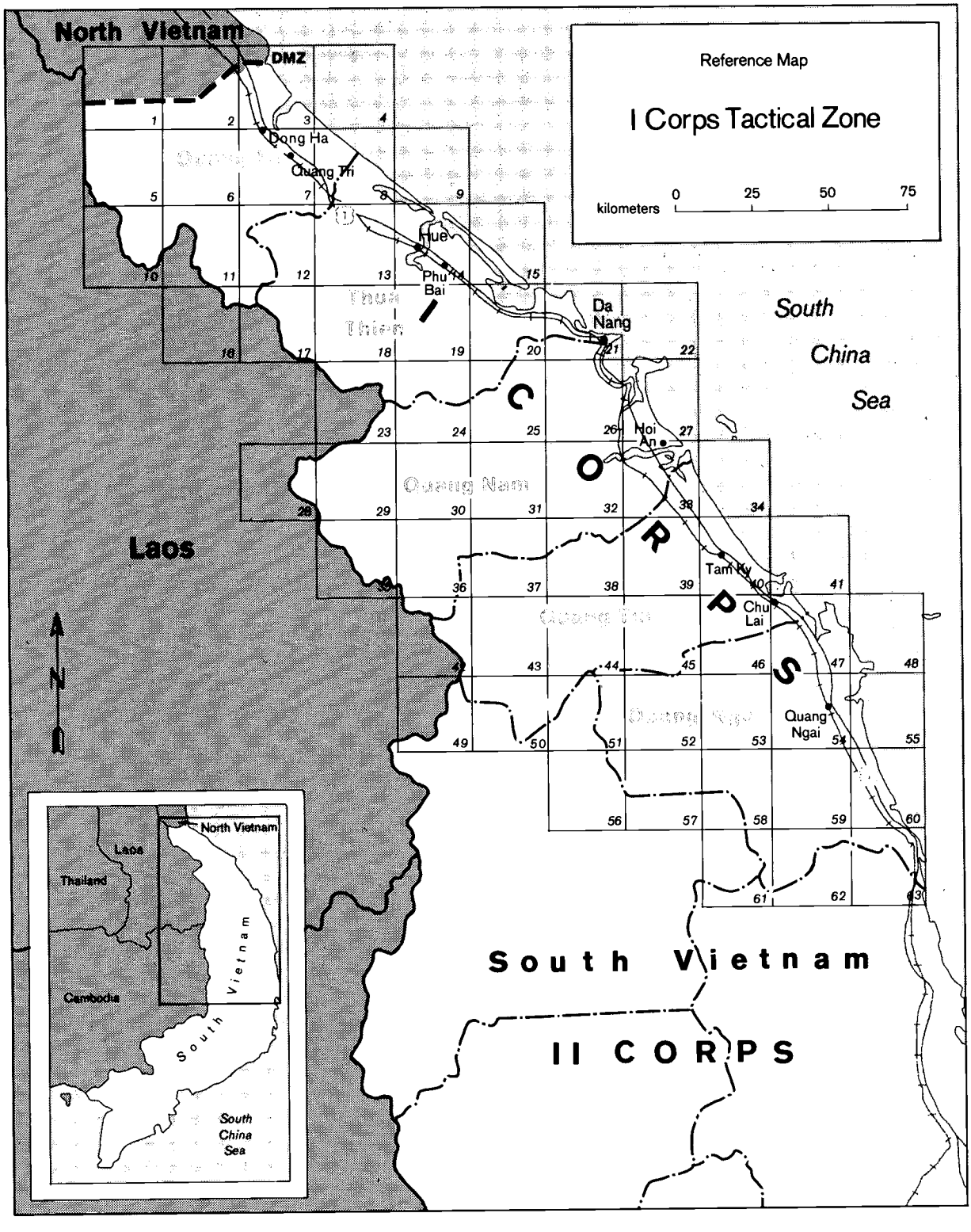

Reference Map
I Corps Tactical Zone
kilometers 0 25 50 75
North Vietnam
DMZ
Dong Ha
Quang Tri
Hue
Phu Bai
Da Nang
Hoi An
Tam Ky
Chu Lai
Quang Ngai
Thua Thien
Quang Nam
Quang Tin
Quang Ngai
Laos
South China Sea
I CORPS
South Vietnam
II CORPS
North Vietnam
Laos
Thailand
Cambodia
South Vietnam
South China Sea

PART I
THE DMZ IN EARLY 1967

CHAPTER 1

The Situation at the Start of the Year

The Early Days – Command Relations – The Plan for the Year – A Change in Strategy
The Enemy Organization – Tactical Considerations

The Early Days

The landing of the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) at Da Nang on 8 March 1965 reaffirmed the United States' determination to assist the South Vietnamese government in defending itself against increasing Communist military pressure from Viet Cong (VC) forces and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). Two Marine infantry battalions reinforced the Marine helicopter task unit which had supported the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) since the spring of 1962. Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 3/9 landed across the beach just north of the Da Nang Air Base from U.S. Seventh Fleet amphibious ships and the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines arrived by air from Okinawa. Additional Marine units, both ground and air, arrived during April and May, and Marine units established two more bases in the I Corps Tactical Zone (I CTZ) of South Vietnam at Chu Lai and Phu Bai.

On 7 May 1965 the 9th MEB disbanded when the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) absorbed its mission. First under the command of Major General William R. Collins and then Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt, III MAF initially consisted of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, and the 3d Marine Division. In August, the Commanding General, III MAF, became senior advisor to the Vietnamese I Corps commanding general and, as such, assumed responsibility for the Corps advisory effort. He directed all U.S. ground operations in I CTZ, as well as the security of all U.S. bases in the Corps area. By the end of March 1966, III MAF's combat power increased following the arrival of the 1st Marine Division.

The first large-scale encounter between III MAF Marines and an enemy main force unit took place in August 1965, when the 7th Marines successfully defeated the *1st VC Regiment* south of Chu Lai during Operation Starlite. This battle was followed by battalion- and regimental-size combat operations against VC and NVA units throughout I CTZ. In addition, the Special Landing Force (SLF) of the Seventh Fleet conducted amphibious operations against enemy forces in I CTZ and other areas of South Vietnam.

Behind the shield provided by these operations, smaller Marine units conducted patrols, ambushes, and sweeps to destroy local Communist forces and to secure the Vietnamese countryside. Once the Marines established security, they initiated civic action programs to aid the Vietnamese government's Revolutionary Development Program. By mid-1966, these tactics were forcing the guerrillas out of traditional strongholds, denying them sources of supply and manpower, and most importantly, seriously eroding the enemy's hold over the people.

In July the Communists reacted to III MAF's expanding control over the heavily populated, rice-rich coastal areas by thrusting the North Vietnamese *324B Division* across the demilitarized zone (DMZ) into the comparatively unpopulated province of Quang Tri in northern I CTZ. Although the Marines' Operation Hastings soundly defeated this invasion attempt, the enemy tried again in September, this time with elements of two divisions. Again the Marines repulsed the invaders by conducting Operation Prairie, an effort that continued through the end of the year.

While both of the major NVA efforts suffered defeat as did all others throughout I CTZ, the Communists did succeed in relieving some of the pressure on the hard-pressed guerrilla forces in the coastal areas to the south. All signs indicated that most of the Communist forces had withdrawn across the DMZ, but Marine troop dispositions remained oriented northward in the face of the enemy's apparent willingness to invade this northern area.

As 1966 ended, III MAF's Marines found themselves fighting essentially two separate but in-

terrelated "wars." The 3d Marine Division conducted basically a conventional war along the DMZ against regular NVA formations. At the same time, the 1st Marine Division continued its combination of large unit and counterguerrilla operations south of the Hai Van Pass.

Command Relations

As the commander of III MAF, General Walt operated under a complicated web of command relations that put him virtually under two masters. Operational control of all United States forces in South Vietnam rested with General William C. Westmoreland, whose Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), was a unified command under Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, the Commander in Chief, Pacific Command (CinCPac). On the other hand, Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, who headed Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (FMFPac), retained command of III MAF in the areas of administration and logistics. Further, the air war in most of North Vietnam, in which some III MAF aircraft participated, remained under the personal control of Admiral Sharp. Finally, General Walt, as the senior American officer in I Corps, served as the senior advisor to the South Vietnamese forces in the corps area. His burden would have been heavier had he not relinquished in 1966 his responsibilities as Naval Component Commander for all American naval forces in Vietnam.

At the beginning of 1967, the 18 infantry battalions of III MAF occupied bases throughout the I CTZ. I Corps, the name commonly given to I CTZ, which consisted of the five northernmost provinces of South Vietnam, stretched 225 miles from the DMZ in the north to the northern border of II CTZ in the south. Twenty-one fixed-wing and helicopter squadrons of the 1st MAW supported the allied ground forces. These units and the numerous supporting organizations gave General Walt a total of more than 70,000 troops in I CTZ.

The enemy's two major thrusts across the DMZ during the summer and fall of 1966 resulted in the shifting of some 10,000 Marines north to meet these threats. The prolonged commitment of substantial Marine forces in the north forced a realignment of operational commands within III MAF. On 10 October 1966 Major General Wood B. Kyle of the 3d Marine Division assumed control of all U.S. forces committed to Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces. Brigadier General Lowell E. English established a forward command post at Dong Ha, in Quang Tri Province. At the same time, the main 3d Division command post moved from Da Nang to Phu Bai,

Senior Marine commanders pose at Da Nang with MajGen Bruno A. Hochmuth upon his arrival to assume command of 3d Marine Division. They are, from left, MajGen Louis B. Robertshaw (1st MAW), MajGen Herman Nickerson, Jr. (1st MarDiv), LtGen Louis W. Walt (III MAF), Gen Hochmuth, and MajGen Wood B. Kyle (3d MarDiv).

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A19456

north of the Hai Van Mountains which separate the two northern provinces from the rest of I CTZ. At the turn of the year, III MAF had committed 7 of its 18 battalions in this northern area.

With the 3d Division's move, the 1st Marine Division, commanded by Major General Herman Nickerson, Jr., shifted its headquarters north from Chu Lai to Da Nang, but General Nickerson left Brigadier General William A. Stiles' Task Force X-Ray, a brigade-size force of four battalions, at Chu Lai. The X-Ray force stretched between two provinces; two battalions operated in Quang Tin Province and two in Quang Ngai Province. Additionally, three battalions of Korean Marines, commanded by Brigadier General Yun Sang Kim, were in Quang Ngai Province. The command relationship with the Korean Marines was one of cooperation and coordination.

Because of the fluid, nonlinear type of warfare peculiar to the Vietnam conflict, the individual infantry battalion became the key maneuver element. Under the system of operational control, or "opcon," a battalion might operate under a task force headquarters, or even as part of a regiment other than its parent unit. For example a battalion of the 7th Marines might be attached to the 4th Marines while a battalion of the 4th Marines was a part of another command. This command situation became further confused in August of 1966 when Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (FMFPac) reestablished the intratheater unit rotation program between Marine battalions in Vietnam and Regimental Landing Team 26 (RLT-26) located on Okinawa.*

The Special Landing Force (SLF) of the Seventh Fleet complemented the strength of III MAF and all allied forces in Vietnam. Consisting of a SLF headquarters, a Marine battalion landing team, and a Marine helicopter squadron, the SLF operated from ships of the Seventh Fleet Amphibious Ready Group (ARG). The SLF could land either as an independent force or in conjunction with other units withdrawn from combat and temporarily embarked on other amphibious ships.

*RLT-26 was an element of the 5th Marine Division which activated at Camp Pendleton, California, on 1 June 1966. The rotation system permitted units to withdraw from South Vietnam and go to Okinawa for a 1- or 2-month refitting and retraining cycle.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A369912

BGen William A. Stiles (right) of Task Force X-Ray greets LtGen Victor H. Krulak at Chu Lai on 9 March during one of the latter's frequent visits to South Vietnam. Krulak, as commander of FMFPac, had administrative control over Marine units in III MAF.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189027

BGen Yun Sang Kim commanded the 2d Republic of Korea Marine Brigade in Quang Ngai Province. The Korean Marines were independent of III MAF but both Marine commands cooperated and coordinated their efforts against the common enemy.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189011

LtGen Hoang Xuam Lam, as the South Vietnamese commander of I Corps, had administrative and tactical control of the country's five northern provinces.

To support the ground elements, Major General Louis B. Robertshaw's 1st MAW deployed to five principal airfields. Wing headquarters was at Da Nang, fixed-wing squadrons were at Da Nang and Chu Lai, and helicopter squadrons were at Phu Bai, Marble Mountain east of Da Nang, and Ky Ha near Chu Lai. Additional helicopter detachments were at Dong Ha and Khe Sanh.

The ARVN I Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General Hoang Xuan Lam, shared its tactical zone of action with III MAF. At the beginning of 1967, this ARVN force consisted of the 1st and 2d Army Divisions, a Ranger group, and three temporarily assigned battalions of Vietnamese Marines, a total of 34 infantry battalions. Regional and Popular Forces, added to the ARVN regulars, brought the South Vietnamese troop total to 77,000 in the five provinces of I CTZ.*

*Regional Forces (RF) companies recruited their personnel within their respective provinces, to be used within the boundaries of the province, while Popular Forces (PF) platoons obtained their men locally for employment only as security forces at their home villages or hamlets.

The posture of the regular ARVN forces at the start of the year was as follows:

> I Corps headquarters was at Da Nang.
>
> The 1st Division headquarters was in the city of Hue. Its area of operation was the two northern provinces, Quang Tri and Thua Thien.
>
> The 2d Division's headquarters was in Quang Ngai City. Its tactical area included the two southern provinces of Quang Tin and Quang Ngai.
>
> The 51st Regiment, an independent unit located in the central province of Quang Nam, had the mission of pacification security.
>
> A Ranger Group of three battalions was the corps reserve and moved throughout the I Corps area.

Although III MAF and ARVN I Corps were coequal commands, their respective commanders recognized the need for close operational coordination in an agreement which stipulated that, while neither force would serve under the control of the other, elements of either force could be temporarily placed under the tactical direction of the other for specific operations.

The Plan for the Year

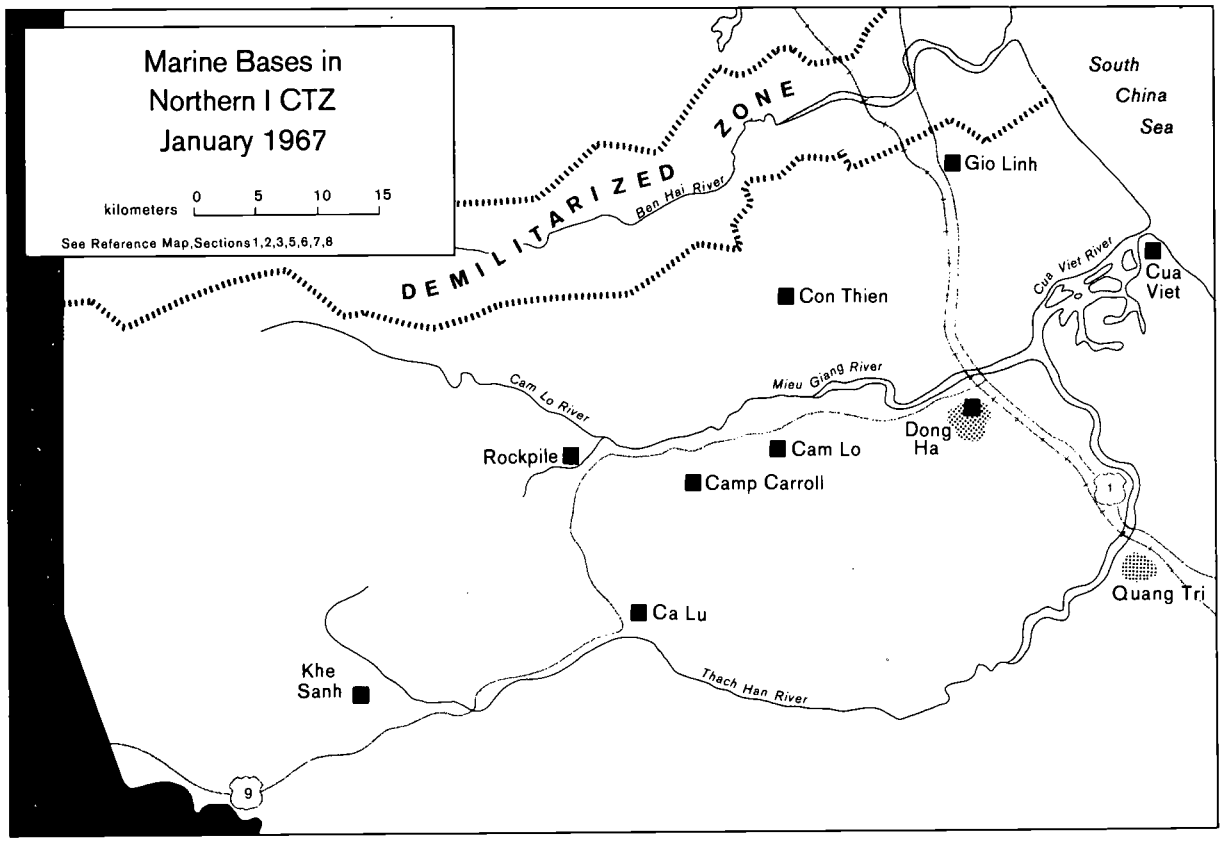
The objectives assigned these two commands by the Vietnamese Joint General Staff and MACV in the Combined Campaign Plan for 1967 were threefold:

> To counter rapidly any threat of invasion across the I Corps borders;
>
> To destroy Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army units attempting to disrupt the government's expanding control over the populated areas; and,
>
> To ensure the security of the base areas and lines of communication that were enabling the government to expand its control.

A Change in Strategy

The major change in strategy from 1966, as outlined in the 1967 Combined Campaign Plan, was the assignment of the Vietnamese armed forces to the primary role of pacification. To free the South Vietnamese Army units for pacification, American forces assumed the tactical tasks hitherto pursued by the South Vietnamese, at the same time carrying the bulk of the offensive effort against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese.

The American focus on the enemy's forces, however, was not to be at the expense of U.S.



pacification efforts. General Westmoreland, addressing a joint session of Congress in April 1967 said, "The only strategy which can defeat such an organization is one of unrelenting but discriminating military, political, and psychological pressure on his whole structure—at all levels."[1]

Ironically, just when allied strategy placed increased emphasis on pacification, the Marines found themselves hard-pressed to pursue their own pacification program, initiated as early as 1965. Spread throughout the five provinces, III MAF forces simultaneously faced large-scale attacks by NVA and VC units throughout I Corps. There was a substantial increase in the tempo of guerrilla warfare, as well as the threat of a major invasion in the DMZ area by an enemy force of possibly three divisions. At the same time, III MAF's mission still included the defense of the three large base areas which contained the five principal I CTZ airfields.

The 3d Marine Division's area, along the DMZ, caused the greatest Marine concern. III MAF headquarters expected the enemy to exploit his shorter supply lines. U.S. policy, well known in North Vietnam, prohibited the pursuit of Communists into the DMZ. Strong enemy pressure south of the DMZ possibly could gain a prestige victory, perhaps even the conquest of the two northern provinces, Quang Tri and Thua Thien. Such pressure would also divert the Marines from the pacification program which was beginning to fragment the guerrilla infrastructure further south.

The Enemy Organization

The Marines of III MAF faced a hierarchy of enemy units ranging from local, part-time guerrillas to conventional North Vietnamese Army divisions. At each level, an appropriate political headquarters controlled various subordinate units' operations. The village Communist Party chapters supervised their own squads of guerrillas. Viet Cong local force companies and battalions came under the Party committees of the province or district. Main force Viet Cong or North Vietnamese units received their orders from the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) or other major headquarters which, theoretically, were subordinate to COSVN. In practice, however, these headquarters usually took their orders directly from Hanoi.

Military Region 5 (MR-5), commanded by a North Vietnamese general officer, controlled enemy units in the northern part of South Vietnam. Two subregional headquarters shared the command responsibilities for this large area. The *B-3 Front* commanded Communist units in Darlac, Kontum, and Pleiku provinces. South of the DMZ, the important Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces operated under the *Tri-Thien-Hue Military Region*, which, for all practical purposes, was subordinate to North Vietnam's *Military Region 4*.

MR-5 commanded two infantry divisions that threatened the Marines in southern I Corps. The *2d NVA Division*, also known as the *620th*, and composed of two NVA regiments and the *1st Viet Cong Regiment*, operated in Quang Ngai and Quang Tin provinces. The *3d NVA Division*, also made up of two NVA and one VC regiments, worked further to the south in Binh Dinh, Quang Ngai, and Kontum provinces.

North of the DMZ were four NVA divisions, the *304th*, the *320th*, the *324B*, and the *325C*, all under the command of North Vietnam's *Military Region 4*. The *324B* suffered heavy casualties in combat with the 3d Marine Division in July and August 1966 and withdrew back across the DMZ to refit. The *325C* served as the strategic reserve for *MR-4*.

Tactical Considerations

As 1967 began, III MAF could not attack the NVA divisions in and north of the DMZ; American policy prohibited such action. Many Marines disagreed with the policy, including the commander of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade on Okinawa, Brigadier General Louis Metzger, who later became the assistant commander of the 3d Division, General Metzger recently commented:

> It has long been my belief that the most significant aspect of operations along the DMZ was the publicly stated United States policy that U.S. forces would not enter North Vietnam. This allowed the enemy to deploy his forces across the DMZ at the time and place of his choosing, and to withdraw to a sanctuary when it suited his convenience; to utilize his artillery against U.S. positions and bases while at the same time denying the Marines the most effective means of destroying the enemy weapons, i.e., to overrun them; [and] to free his infantry elements from guarding his artillery so that they could be employed against U.S. forces and positions south of the DMZ.[3]

In response to the enemy challenge in the DMZ area, MACV began working on two sets of contingency plans in the latter part of 1966. First, if necessary, General Westmoreland would shift U.S. Army units north to reinforce III MAF. In addition, he planned, at the urging of the Secretary of Defense, to build an elaborate anti-infiltration barrier system south of the DMZ to seal off the area from North Vietnamese incursions. Both actions would have a profound effect upon III MAF's operations in 1967 as it struggled to fight both a counterinsurgency war against the VC infrastructure and a conventional war against regular NVA infantry divisions.

Some principal figures in the war in I Corps discuss the situation on 3 May 1967. Those present include, from left, an unidentified Marine colonel; BGen John R. Chaisson, the senior Marine on the MACV staff; Col Archelaus L. Hamblen, USA, who commanded the Army Advisory I Corps Headquarters; Gen William C. Westmoreland, USA, the MACV commander; BGen Ngo Quang Truong, commander of the 1st ARVN Division; MajGen Hoang Xuan Lam, the I Corps commander; LtGen Lewis W. Walt, the III MAF commander; MajGen Bruno A. Hochmuth of the 3d Marine Division; and an unidentified Vietnamese colonel wearing the shoulder patch of the 1st ARVN Division.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC)801029

CHAPTER 2

Spring Action South of the DMZ—February-April 1967

Operation Prairie I Continues—Operation Prairie II—Operation Prairie III

Operation Prairie I Continues

As 1967 began, the 3d Marine Division was fighting two wars: a conventional one along the DMZ, where division confronted division, and a counterguerrilla war in the rest of Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces. Although committed to both campaigns, the situation forced the division to give priority to the DMZ.

During January, the enemy avoided major ground contact with ARVN and Marine units in the DMZ area, but the NVA did maintain energetic screening and reconnaissance efforts south of the DMZ. Mortar and rocket attacks on friendly positions increased sharply, particularly during the period 8-28 January, and there was a noticeable increase in local and main force guerrilla activity throughout the month.

In January Marine units were still conducting Operation Prairie along the DMZ. Three battalions of Colonel John P. Lanigan's 3d Marines and the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines were operating from combat bases along Highway 9.* The largest of the combat bases, the nerve center for the entire area, was at Dong Ha, the command post (CP) of the 3d Marine Division (Forward), the controlling headquarters for the operation.

The intermediate position at Cam Lo was seven miles west. Four miles further west, Camp J. J. Carroll was occupied by artillery units of the 12th Marines, reinforced by U.S. Army 175mm self-propelled guns. An additional artillery position, the Rockpile, was near the base of a jagged mountain six miles west of Camp Carroll. The last and most westerly of the combat bases was Khe Sanh, only a few miles from the Laotian border. In addition to these major positions along Highway 9, Marines were establishing two strongpoints just south of the DMZ at Con Thien and Gio Linh.

One feature of Operation Prairie was the provision of a specific "package" of aircraft for support of the 3d Marine Division. In this manner the wing increased its efficiency and decreased response time for missions within the DMZ region. The "package" contained a variety of helicopters, such as UH-1Es, CH-46s, CH-37s, and fixed-wing observation aircraft. A total of 40 helicopters and 8 O-1 observation aircraft supported the division daily. Marine air support radars (TPQ-10) provided the capability of conducting radar-controlled bombing missions during bad weather and at night.

Operation Prairie I ended on 31 January. At its height the operation involved six Marine infantry battalions. It accounted for the largest number of enemy casualties in a single Marine operation to that date: 1,397 killed and 27 captured. Marine casualties for the same period were 239 killed and 1,214 wounded.

Operation Prairie II

The mission assigned to the Marines for Operation Prairie II was essentially the same as that for Prairie I: to conduct operations in conjunction with ARVN forces, to seek out and destroy enemy forces, and to defend the area against attack. To accomplish this, Brigadier General Michael P. Ryan, assigned as Commanding General, 3d Marine Division (Forward) and Assistant Division Commander, 3d Marine Division, since February 1967, controlled a force of three infantry battalions, two reconnaissance companies, and supporting units.

The concept of operations during Operation Prairie II called for patrols and sweeps by units of various sizes, including infantry battalions. Normally, 3d Marine Division (Forward) kept one infantry

*Route 9 was a two-lane, east-west road which ran from the Laotian border to the city of Dong Ha. Only the eastern portion of the highway was paved in 1967.

battalion at a time involved in mobile operations while the remainder of its units defended the combat bases. Meeting the latter responsibility required the frequent shifting of rifle companies and their operational control. Rifle companies, as a result, often found themselves under the operational control of other battalions or even directly under the commander of the 3d Marines.

To expand artillery coverage, the 12th Marines shifted some units. The February artillery distribution was:

Khe Sanh: two 4.2-inch mortars, two 155mm, and six 105mm howitzers
Rockpile: two 175mm guns, two 155mm guns, six 105mm howitzers
Ba Long: six 105mm howitzers
Ca Lu: six 105mm howitzers
Camp Carroll: six 175mm guns, four 155mm, and six 105mm howitzers
Cam Lo: two 155mm howitzers
Cua Viet: six 105mm howitzers (LVTH-6)
Gio Linh: four 175mm guns and six 105mm howitzers

The 12th Marines' firing fans covered almost all of Quang Tri Province, and stretched well north of the DMZ and several miles into Laos.

Except for mortar attacks, enemy activity during the first week of Operation Prairie II was confined to reconnaissance and screening actions, similar to activity during the last two months of Prairie I. With the bombing halt during the *Tet Nguyen Dan* truce period, 0700 8 February - 0700 12 February, enemy movement dramatically increased, both north and south of the Ben Hai River.* Of special significance was the activity immediately north of the DMZ. Aerial observation and photographic readouts revealed heavy truck and boat traffic throughout the area. There was little doubt that the NVA had taken advantage of the truce to accomplish resupply and personnel replacement.

As a result of the detection of a large concentration of enemy troops and material north of the Ben Hai River, the Marines on 25 February asked for and received permission to fire into and north of the DMZ against purely military targets.** The North Vietnamese could no longer consider the DMZ area as a safe haven; staging and support areas and artillery positions now could be interdicted on a 24-hour basis.

The Communists reacted quickly to the sudden vulnerability of their previously safe positions. On the 27th of February, heavy enemy mortar, rocket, and artillery fire struck Con Thien and Gio Linh. The composite artillery battalion at Gio Linh bore the brunt of these attacks; on the 28th more than 400 rounds landed on the battalion's position in a 17-minute period.

The morning of the 27th, the same day the NVA began the artillery attacks, a Marine reconnaissance team 5,000 meters northwest of Cam Lo attempted to ambush what appeared to be only two enemy soldiers. The team actually engaged an enemy company which proved to be the lead element of the *812th Regiment, 324B Division*. By 1045, the reconnaissance team reported that it was surrounded by at least 100 North Vietnamese. The closest friendly force was Captain Alan H. Hartney's Company L, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines which, minus one rifle platoon but reinforced with a platoon of tanks, was patrolling north of Cam Lo. Colonel Lanigan immediately ordered Captain Hartney's force to go to the reconnaissance team's relief. Captain Hartney reported slow progress; brush 4-12 feet high blocked his route.

With the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines already involved in an operation near the Rockpile, Colonel Lanigan had few reserve forces. He turned to Lieutenant Colonel Victor Ohanesian's 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, located at Camp Carroll. Most of this battalion was already on board ships prior to sailing for Okinawa after being relieved by the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines. Now, however, Company G, the only intact company still ashore, would have to go to the aid of the endangered reconnaissance team.

Ironically, only a few hours previously the commanding officer of Company G, Captain Carl E. Bockewitz, had been assured by Major Robert F. Sheridan, the battalion S-3 officer, that there were no plans to send the company on an operation. The latter officer recalled:

> The morning before his unit was committed . . . Captain Bockewitz, who was on an extension of his tour, came to see me in the S-3 bunker and asked if there was any chance we would be going north of the Cam Lo River. As over half of our battalion was already on ships ready to go

**Tet Nguyen Dan,* or festival of the lunar new year, usually called "Tet," is the most important holiday of the Vietnamese year.

**The code name for these artillery attacks against targets in and north of the DMZ was Operation Highrise.

to Okinawa and our in-place relief was almost completed, I told him there was no way we were going north. Only Company G, Company F (-), and a token command group were left in country. Captain Bockewitz was visibly relieved as he stated, "That's good. Last night I had a dream that if I went north of the Cam Lo I would die."[1]

Despite his forebodings, Captain Bockewitz led his company from Camp Carroll and began to move overland to link up with the reconnaissance team. Bockewitz, as had Captain Hartney, also found tough going and did not reach the reconnaissance team until 2342 that night. Captain Bockewitz established a defensive position and stayed there for the night.

About the same time that Company G was leaving Camp Carroll, Captain Hartney's company, while trying to cross a stream, came under fire from a large enemy force. After a heavy firefight in which the tanks played a decisive role, the company was able to break contact and began to move toward the reconnaissance team. The tanks now proved to be a handicap; one of them threw a track. Company G could not leave it. Captain Hartney reported his dilemma and was ordered to establish a night position and evacuate his wounded.

A Marine of Company L, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines helps a casualty to a medevac helicopter during Operation Prairie's heavy fighting on 28 February.
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188455

To exploit the two enemy contacts, Colonel Lanigan decided to commit the remaining available elements of Lieutenant Colonel Ohanesian's 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, which consisted of a small command group and part of Company F. On the morning of the 28th, Lieutenant Colonel Ohanesian, who had operational control of all units in this action, planned to move his group overland to link up with Company G. Then the united force was to sweep east to Cam Lo. Company L was to act as a blocking force and then move back to its original position at Cam Lo after linkup. That was the plan; the North Vietnamese had other ideas.

At 0630 a vicious mortar and infantry attack stunned Company L. More than 150 82mm mortar rounds hit the company's position and NVA forces struck from three sides with heavy automatic weapons, small arms, and antitank (RPG) fire.* RPG rounds hit two tanks; one caught fire, but both tanks continued to support the company with their turret-mounted .50-caliber machine guns. By 0900 the Marines had repulsed three enemy attacks. During the attack, Captain Hartney and his artillery observer had called in artillery fire to within 30 meters of the company position.

Because of this heavy attack, Colonel Lanigan ordered Ohanesian to link up with Company L instead of Company G as originally planned. Lieutenant Colonel Ohanesian's small force left Camp Carroll by truck, disembarked at Cam Lo, and forded the river. By 1030, it had reached Company L, guided at the end by the sound of enemy mortar explosions. Captain Hartney's Company L had four dead and 34 wounded.

Major Sheridan remembered that, upon arrival, the force ". . . attacked and secured the high ground in the area, encountering large numbers of well-equipped NVA troops. In my year in Vietnam, I had never seen this number of NVA troops in the open.

*The Soviet RPG is a 40mm recoilless, antitank grenade launcher, in many respects similar to the German World War II *Panzerfaust*. The later model RPG-7 can penetrate 9.4 inches of armor.

After securing the high ground, a [helicopter landing zone] was established to evacuate the dead and wounded. . . ."[2]

At the same time that the regiment ordered Lieutenant Colonel Ohanesian's force to Company L's relief, Company G and the reconnaissance team received orders to move north to Hill 124 to establish blocking positions.* At approximately 1035 on the 28th, as Company G began moving up the hill, it came under fire from well-concealed positions on both flanks. The fighting was heavy, casualties mounted on both sides. Among the Marine dead was Company G's commander, Captain Bockewitz.

Second Lieutenant Richard C. Mellon, Jr., the company executive officer, assumed command while the heavy fighting continued. Company G was not able to recover its dead until late that afternoon. When the fight ended the Marines had suffered 7 more killed and 18 wounded.

To relieve the pressure on Company G, Colonel Lanigan decided to place another company under the operational control of Lieutenant Colonel Ohanesian and to commit it north of Hill 124. He designated Company M, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines as the unit to move by helicopter to Hill 162 immediately north of Company G's position. Company M completed the lift by 1430 and began to move south toward Company G. Company M encountered only light contact during the move.

By early afternoon, the remaining platoon of Company L and a section of tanks reinforced Lieutenant Colonel Ohanesian's position. At 1430, Ohanesian's command group and Company F began to move toward Company G, leaving Company L and the serviceable tanks to guard the disabled tanks. First Lieutenant Richard D. Koehler, Jr.'s Company F led, followed by the command group. Major Sheridan later wrote:

> We were ordered to proceed . . . knowing full well we were walking into a hornet's nest. Based on the number of enemy forces we had already encountered and the vast amounts of equipment, new weapons, and ammunition, we knew we were outmanned and outgunned. . . . We left the perimeter . . . and within 200 yards we came upon a very large radio complex. The trail was narrow and we could not disperse our troops. One could almost smell the enemy forces.[3]

*Hill 124 was about 2,000 meters due west of Company L's position which was approximately the same distance northwest of Cam Lo. The hill was the commanding terrain feature along the enemy's probable route of withdrawal.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

A Marine of the 3d Platoon, Company M, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines throws a hand grenade toward North Vietnamese positions in close fighting on 1 March during Operation Prairie II north of Cam Lo.

As the last man left Company L's original position, the lead elements of the column came under automatic weapons and mortar fire. The Marines had stepped into an ambush. Company F's lead elements took cover from the growing volume of fire from the front and both flanks; enemy mortar fire walked down the length of the column. Heavy brush hid the enemy and the Marines could not establish fire superiority. At 1510, Lieutenant Colonel Ohanesian ordered a withdrawal.* Sheridan described the move:

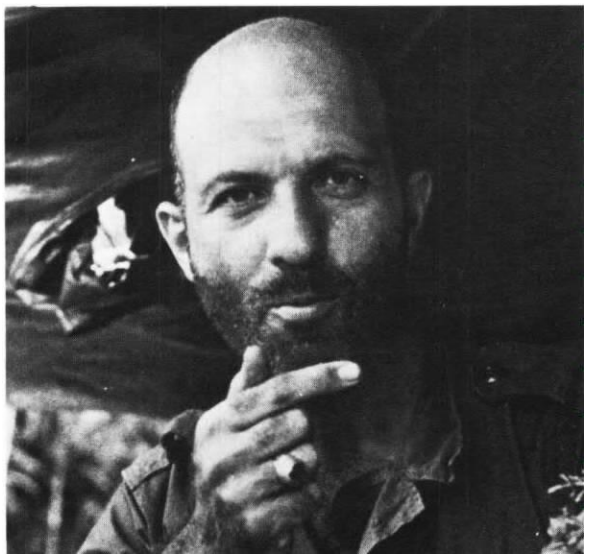
> . . . all radios had been hit and casualties continued to mount. Moving the dead and wounded out of the killing zone required feats of bravery beyond comprehension. The NVA were everywhere. Lieutenant Colonel Ohanesian was carrying the last of the wounded Marines towards the perimeter when an explosion mortally wounded him,

*For his actions during the closely fought engagement Private First Class James Anderson, Jr., received the Medal of Honor, posthumously. When the fight began, the thick brush beside the trail prevented the Marines from deploying. When a grenade landed in the midst of the Marines, Anderson reached out, pulled the grenade to his chest, and curled around it as it went off. See Appendix D for complete citation.

> [plus] three other Marines, and myself. None of us could walk and Marines had to leave the relative safety of their holes to come get us.[4]

Although painfully wounded, Sheridan assumed command and directed the rest of the withdrawal to Company L's position and the consolidation of the perimeter. He requested emergency evacuation for the more than 100 casualties. While the Marines organized their defensive perimeter, the enemy closed to within 20 meters and attacked with small arms and grenades. The Marine tank crewmen and infantrymen returned the fire and forced the enemy to withdraw. At this time the helicopters arrived to pick up the wounded, but they were unable to land because of heavy fire in the landing zone. At 1830, the position was still being hit by intermittent mortar shelling, which by now had lasted more than three hours. Sheridan recalled:

> The enemy continued to alternately shell and [attempt to] overrun our small position the remainder of the night. Lieutenant Colonel Ohanesian died around midnight as it was impossible to secure a landing zone. Sergeant Major Wayne N. Hayes died about the same time of wounds suffered in hand-to-hand combat and grenade and mortar blasts. Constant artillery, night air strikes within 50 meters of our position and the courage of the Marines on the ground finally took their toll and the NVA withdrew.[5]



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189092

LtCol Victor Ohanesian, the commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, shown here in Operation Allegheny in August 1966, died early on 1 March 1967 from shrapnel wounds suffered the previous afternoon as he carried a casualty to safety.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A193922

Members of Company A, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines who had finished Operation Chinook II, rest while waiting for the helicopters that will transport them to Cam Lo Province to participate in Operation Prairie II just south of the Demilitarized Zone.

Earlier, upon learning that Lieutenant Colonel Ohanesian had been wounded, Colonel Lanigan ordered his executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Earl R. "Pappy" Delong to take command of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines. In addition, Lieutenant Colonel Delong received operational control of Company F, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines which, fortuitously, was at Dong Ha after serving as escort for a "Roughrider" vehicle convoy from the south. Company F went by truck to Cam Lo where it would begin moving overland to reinforce the hard-pressed 2d Battalion, 3d Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Delong attempted to reach his new command by helicopter but enemy fire prevented a landing. He ordered the helicopter to Cam Lo where he joined Company F for the overland march. At 0340 on 1 March, Delong arrived at the battalion's position and began reorganization and preparation for the evacuation of casualties.

The 2d Battalion remained in position the entire day. About noon it was joined by Companies G and M. The Marines searched the surrounding area and recovered a large amount of enemy equipment. Company M made several contacts with small enemy groups, but the NVA force was withdrawing. The 2d Battalion, 3d Marines could continue its interrupted embarkation for Okinawa.

Two additional battalions were brought into the area on 1 March, Major James L. Day's 1st Battalion, 9th Marines and Lieutenant Colonel Gary Wilder's 3d Battalion, 3d Marines. Major Day's battalion moved by helicopters to Hill 162, Company M's former location, and began to sweep north.

Meanwhile, Wilder's battalion attacked northwest from a position north of Cam Lo to try to squeeze the withdrawing enemy against the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines. This maneuver restricted the Communists' escape route, thereby concentrating targets for Marine supporting arms. On 3 March, an air observer sighted three large enemy groups moving northwest toward the DMZ, carrying bodies. Massive artillery and air strikes were ordered. A followup sweep of the area by the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines revealed that the North Vietnamese had used the bomb and shell craters as mass graves for their dead; more than 200 NVA bodies were found.

All enemy forces had not withdrawn. On the morning of 7 March, the enemy made three separate mortar and rocket attacks on Camp Carroll. Between 420 and 485 rounds hit the camp, including 209 spin-stabilized 122mm rockets.

The remainder of the Prairie II operation consisted of a series of battalion sweeps between Cam Lo and Con Thien. The Marines located several mass graves; the discovery of many abandoned bodies emphasized the disorganized state of the enemy. Numerous artillery and air strikes hit the scattered enemy forces trying to avoid contact. During the last week of the operation ARVN airborne units caught up with the NVA east and southeast of Con Thien. The enemy force, estimated to have been three battalions, broke contact after losing more than 250 killed.

At 2400 on 18 March Operation Prairie II ended. Prairie II cost the NVA 694 killed and 20 captured; Marine casualties were 93 killed, 483 wounded, and, of these, approximately one-third of the Marines killed and two-thirds of the wounded were victims of mortar fire.

*This was the first use of this weapon in the DMZ area. The Chinese Communist 122mm rocket is similar to the obsolete U.S. 4.5-inch rocket used during World War II. It has a range of 5,000 meters.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189085

Maj James L. Day (right), commanding the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, briefs BGen Michael P. Ryan on 3 March on the progress of Prairie II, as Company A's commander, Capt Donald Festa (left), checks a map.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188463

Marines of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines pause on 3 March in their sweep of an area used by the North Vietnamese to bury more than 200 soldiers killed by supporting arms during Operation Prairie II.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

2dLt Jerry D. Garner of Company A, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines orders his platoon forward during the pursuit of NVA units north of Cam Lo on 3 March.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188464

The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines encountered a wide variety of terrain conditions and enemy activity during Operation Prairie II. Excellent observation in an area of elephant grass permitted 2dLt Jerry D. Garner of Company A (above photo, left) to observe the effectiveness of an airstrike on a distant NVA unit. The following day, 3 March, an NVA soldier surrendered to the company. The final day of the operation, 18 March, found Company C moving through a bombed-out forest in hills near Cam Lo.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188525

Operation Prairie III

Increased enemy use of supporting arms became a constant concern for the Marines during Prairie III, which started immediately after Prairie II. At the start of the operation, enemy activity centered on the Cam Lo and Gio Linh districts. Contact was moderate, generally limited to small enemy groups. Prairie II had blunted earlier NVA intentions in the area, but all indications were that the enemy's determination to challenge the Marines' presence had not diminished in spite of heavy casualties.

Anticipating renewed NVA efforts, III MAF held five infantry battalions and four artillery battalions in the area. Battalions at Dong Ha served under the operational control of the 3d Division's forward headquarters, while those at Camp Carroll and the Rockpile came under the control of the 3d Marines. Additional company-strength outposts were at the Cua Viet port facility, Gio Linh, Mai Loc, Ba Long, and Ca Lu; a two-company outpost was at Khe Sanh. The Marines conducted energetic reconnaissance throughout the area.

The increased operational tempo in the DMZ area placed a heavy strain on Dong Ha logistic facilities. Supplies for the Prairie area of operation arrived at either the Dong Ha airfield, which had been extended to handle C-130 transports, or they came north

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188524

The start of Operation Prairie III found Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines moving through heavy elephant grass as the battalion searched the mountains north of Cam Lo for North Vietnamese units.

Trucks of the 9th Motor Transport Battalion move over Highway 9 from Dong Ha to Khe Sanh on 28 March. The 11th Engineer Battalion had opened the road on the 19th after months of effort that involved coping with adverse weather and enemy attacks.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

from Da Nang by LCUs (landing craft, utility) up the Cua Viet River to Dong Ha. On 18 March, a major step in easing the logistic burden occurred when an LST (landing ship, tank) ramp opened at Cua Viet. These LSTs could discharge their cargo for transhipment up the river by LCUs and LCMs (landing craft, medium). The Cua Viet facility more than tripled the daily tonnage that could be brought in by ships.

A second significant logistic event occurred on the 19th. Route 9 opened from Dong Ha to Khe Sanh, thanks to Lieutenant Colonel Ross L. Mulford's 11th Engineer Battalion. Mulford's engineers had worked on the road for months, hindered by terrible weather conditions, mines, and the NVA. The military significance of their effort was considerable, since it reduced the requirement to commit aircraft for logistic support of the Khe Sanh outpost until late summer, when enemy activity closed the road.

When Operation Prairie III started, it appeared that Marine forces continued to face elements of the *324B* and the *341st NVA Divisions* north of the Ben Hai River. Battalion-size elements of both enemy divisions were in Quang Tri Province, conducting extensive screening and reconnaissance missions, as well as attempting to disrupt the Revolutionary Development Program. Additionally, ARVN units reported that the *808th VC* and *814th NVA Battalions* were east and south of Quang Tri City.

On 20 March Lieutenant Colonel William H. Rice's Composite Artillery Battalion at Gio Linh came under attack by mortars, rockets, and artillery. The attack demonstrated the enemy's ability to employ artillery from positions north of the Ben Hai River. Although the bombardment on the 20th was the heaviest, both Gio Linh and Con Thien received almost daily attacks during the next two weeks.

Further evidence of increased enemy activity in the area occurred on 21 March. At 0200 an enemy force ambushed an ammunition resupply convoy only 300 meters south of Gio Linh. As the convoy approached the artillery position, the enemy struck with heavy small arms and mortar fire, destroying eight trucks and damaging six others. Fortunately, friendly casualties totaled only eight wounded because of the rapid reaction of both the convoy guard and the Gio Linh security company, Company I, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines.

When Prairie III began, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines and the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines were conducting a mission in the mountains west of Cam Lo approximately 6,000 meters north of Camp Carroll. The seven-day operation ended on the 21st having made little contact with the enemy, but discovered numerous mortar positions and rocket launching sites, which probably were the positions used in the attack against Camp Carroll on 7 March. A search of the area uncovered 125 large rockets and 3 rocket launchers. Both battalions received orders to sweep north from Cam Lo in support of Operation Beacon Hill being conducted to the east by Seventh Fleet's SLF.

For some time General Walt had been troubled by growing enemy activity in the region northeast of Dong Ha. His greatest concern was the possibility of an NVA attempt to overrun the Gio Linh artillery base. Its 175mm guns were capable of firing at positions deep in North Vietnam. To counter this threat, General Walt asked the commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (ComUSMACV) to have the SLF committed to this area.* CinCPac approved the request on 15 March. Operation Beacon Hill moved into the planning phase, with 19 March set as D-Day.

Bad weather postponed the scheduled landing from ships of the Seventh Fleet's Amphibious Ready Group until the early afternoon of the 20th. Initial operations were unopposed, but BLT 1/4 elements near Gio Linh received fire from enemy supporting arms that night. Company B made contact on the 21st, and the BLT engaged well-entrenched enemy units through the 26th. On 28 March, BLT 1/4 passed to the operational control of the 3d Marines. On 1 April Beacon Hill ended, and III MAF released the BLT to SLF control.

The contribution of Beacon Hill to the Prairie III operation, going on 10 miles to the west, can be measured, in part, by casualty figures. During 12 operational days, BLT 1/4 killed 334 NVA soldiers who otherwise would have been available for use against the battalions involved in Prairie III. Beacon Hill tied up a substantial enemy force. Marine casualties totaled 29 SLF Marines killed and 230 wounded.**

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*General Westmoreland, as ComUSMACV, could not authorize the landing of the SLF; CinCPac was the authorizing command.

**Chapter 11 contains the detailed account of SLF participation in Beacon Hill/Prairie III.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188583

Members of Company K, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines cross a stream on 19 March as the battalion conducted a seven-day search west of Cam Lo early in Operation Prairie III.

To the west of Beacon Hill, other Marines involved in Operation Prairie III experienced similar light contact during the opening phases. The two battalions under command of the 3d Marines—the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines and 1st Battalion, 9th Marines—had moved from the Dong Ha/Dong Ma Mountain complex to Cam Lo on 21 March in preparation for a sweep north to Con Thien. The next morning both battalions jumped off at first light; Lieutenant Colonel Wilder's 3d Battalion, 3d Marines was on the left and Major Day's 1st Battalion, 9th Marines was on the right. They encountered light contact during the first two days, but on 24 March Day's battalion found an NVA battalion southeast of Con Thien. The enemy was in well-prepared defensive positions consisting of mutually supporting bunkers. After two hours of heavy fighting, which included concentrated air and artillery strikes, the enemy withdrew, leaving 33 bodies.*

While Major Day's 1st Battalion attacked the Communist bunker complex, Lieutenant Colonel Wilder's battalion, on the left, engaged an NVA company. This unit was also well entrenched in camouflaged, reinforced bunkers. The enemy's light mortars were dug in below ground level, making them even more difficult to locate. Artillery, followed up by an assault by Company I, cracked the position. The NVA broke contact and withdrew, leaving behind 28 bodies, including two uniformed women.

The enemy attempted to delay the Marine advance with harassing mortar and sniper fire for the next two days. By the evening of 26 March the Communist force had broken contact and withdrawn into the DMZ.

On the 28th, the 3d Marines pulled both battalions out of the area and replaced them with Lieutenant Colonel James S. Wilson's 3d Battalion, 9th Marines. Wilson's mission was to conduct night ambushes in the area immediately north of Cam Lo. There was very little contact for the first two days, but on the 30th, as Company I completed establishing platoon ambush positions, the NVA attacked the company command post and the 2d platoon's position. Company I's positions were approximately six miles northwest of Cam Lo. The Communists walked mortar fire over the position twice, then followed with a ground assault in company

*During this action Sergeant Walter K. Singleton of Company A, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, assaulted the key enemy strong point with a machine gun. Though mortally wounded, he drove the enemy from the position. Sergeant Singleton was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously. See Appendix D for complete citation.

strength. The first assault failed when the company commander, Captain Michael P. Getlin, called in supporting arms. As the first attack started, both the 1st and 3d Platoons tried to help the command group and the 2d Platoon, but the enemy stopped the Marines with a cross-fire of automatic weapons. The NVA assaulted a second time. This time they overran the position.

With the help of UH-1E gunships, the company managed to drive off the enemy. The NVA lost 67 killed and 2 captured in both attacks, and a search of the area the following morning turned up a heavy machine gun and 12 automatic weapons. Company I's losses were heavy. Sixteen Marines died, including the company commander, executive officer, and the weapons platoon commander; 47 more were wounded, including the company first sergeant.*

Enemy activity around Quang Tri City increased during the first week of April. The NVA launched a series of mortar and ground attacks against ARVN positions in the area. On 6 April a Viet Cong unit broke into the Quang Tri provincial jail, freeing more than 200 prisoners.

In spite of this surge of enemy activity to the south, the Marines' main concerns in the Prairie area continued to be blocking major invasion attempts by the NVA and clearing an anti-infiltration trace between Gio Linh and Con Thien. The second task, included in the development of a strongpoint system, was intended to stop large-scale infiltration in the critical area along the eastern DMZ.*

On 12 April, Major General Bruno A. Hochmuth, a lanky Texan who had assumed command of the 3d Marine Division from Major General Kyle the previous month, established a task force around Lieutenant Colonel Theodore J. Willis' 1st Battalion, 4th Marines.** Its mission was to provide security for Company C, 11th Engineer Battalion. The engineer company was to clear a 200-meter-wide strip from Gio Linh to Con Thien, a distance of 10,600 meters. Willis' task force was reinforced with a platoon of tanks, an armored amphibian tractor (LVTH-6) platoon, a platoon of M-42 track-mounted dual 40mm guns of the 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery, USA, and some ARVN forces. From the onset the clearing operation proceeded under constant harassment by enemy artillery, mortars, mines, recoilless rifles, and small arms. Despite enemy activity, the Marines had completed approximately half of the strip by 19 April when Operation Prairie III ended.

Prairie III cost the enemy 252 killed, 4 captured, and 128 weapons seized. Marine losses were 56 killed and 530 wounded. The Prairie series was far from over; Prairie IV began the next day in the same place and with the same forces.

*Second Lieutenant John P. Bobo, the weapons platoon commander, later received a posthumous Medal of Honor for his actions during the encounter. See Appendix D for the complete citation.

*The trace or strong point system will be covered more fully in Chapter 8.

**At the conclusion of Operation Beacon Hill, 1 April 1967, BLT 1/4 transferred from the SLF to the 3d Marine Division.

CHAPTER 3

Combined US/ARVN Operations in the DMZ

Operation Prairie IV Begins—Attack on Con Thien—Into the DMZ—Operation Lam Son 54
Operation Beau Charger—Operation Hickory—Operation Priarie IV Ends

Operation Prairie IV Begins

Enemy concentrations of troops and artillery in the DMZ area dictated the reinforcement of the 3d Marine Division. Responding to the demands of the situation, MACV deployed Army Task Force Oregon to the southern two provinces of I Corps in April to allow Marine units to reinforce the northern three provinces.* As a result of the northward shift of Marine forces, Colonel Robert M. Jenkins' 9th Marines headquarters moved from Da Nang to Dong Ha during 12-16 April. At the same time, III MAF shifted the 2d Battalions of the 4th and 26th Marines from the 1st Marine Division area to the vicinity of Phu Bai.

The introduction of a second regimental headquarters into Quang Tri Province permitted the closing of the 3d Division's forward command post at Dong Ha after the conclusion of Operation Prairie III. Units operating from Dong Ha reverted to the operational control of the 9th Marines, while the 3d Marines controlled those operating from Camp Carroll.

Operation Prairie IV started on 20 April as a two-regiment search and destroy operation, covering the same area as Prairie III. The concept of employment placed the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines and the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines in the northwest portion of the area of operations. The 9th Marines, using the 1st Battalions of the 4th and 9th Marines, was to cover the vital piedmont area in and around Quang Tri City. The boundary between the two units was just west of the Cam Lo-Con Thien axis.

Initially, the operation confined all units to relatively fixed positions. Lieutenant Colonel Wilson's 3d Battalion, 9th Marines was charged with the security of Camp Carroll and the outpost at Mai Loc. Wilder's 3d Battalion, 3d Marines held the Rockpile and placed companies at Ca Lu and Ba Long. The latter battalion was also responsible for providing security for the 11th Engineers, who kept

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188645

A UH-34D from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 uses a newly constructed helicopter pad on top of the Rockpile to resupply members of the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines. Helicopters previously performed this mission by hovering with one wheel on a tiny wooden ramp. (See photograph on page 183 of the volume U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966.*)*

*The deployment of Task Force Oregon into the Chu Lai area is covered in detail in Chapter 6.

Route 9 open into Khe Sanh. In the 9th Marines' area of operation, the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines defended the Dong Ha combat base and provided one company for security of the Cua Viet petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL) facility. The 1st Battalion, 4th Marines protected the engineers clearing the trace between Gio Linh and Con Thien, referred to as "Ryan's Road" because of Brigadier General Michael P. Ryan's frequent visits and interest in the project. The battalion also continued to provide a company for security for the Gio Linh Composite Artillery Battalion.

Although contact with enemy infantry was light at the beginning of the operation, reconnaissance reports indicated an NVA buildup northwest of the Rockpile. Mortar, rocket, and artillery attacks continued against the Marines clearing "Ryan's Road," as well as against the Con Thien and Gio Linh outposts. Attacks on these two positions and against Lieutenant Colonel Willis' 1st Battalion, 4th Marines and the engineers became almost daily affairs, and included not only mortar and rocket fire from the southern half of the DMZ, but also medium and heavy artillery fire from a growing number of fortifications north of the Ben Hai River.

On 24 April a major battle broke out in the western DMZ near Khe Sanh, the beginning of heavy fighting which continued throughout the summer all along the demarcation line.* In conjunction with the battle being fought in the west, the enemy stepped up activity in the east. Enemy forces cut Route 9 between Cam Lo and Khe Sanh repeatedly in an effort to isolate the Marines in that area. In consort with this effort, the NVA attacked the Marine installations at Gio Linh, Camp Carroll, and Dong Ha with mortars, rockets, and artillery. The period 27-28 April was particularly savage. Approximately 850 rounds of artillery, plus 200 mortar rounds blasted Gio Linh, while more than 50 140mm rockets hit Dong Ha.

Attack on Con Thien

On 8 May, the 13th anniversary of the fall of Dien Bien Phu, the NVA tried to overrun the Marine position at Con Thien. The outpost, less than two miles from the southern boundary of the DMZ, was on a hill only 158 meters high in the middle of a red mud plain. It afforded the best observation in the area, overlooking the DMZ to the north and west, as well as the Marine base at Dong Ha to the southeast. As a strategic terrain feature, Con Thien was important to the Communists; before the summer was over, it achieved an additional symbolic importance.

At the time of the attack, the outpost contained a small command group of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, reinforced companies A and D of the battalion, and a civilian irregular defense group (CIDG) unit. The Marines were there to provide security for the engineers, who, having completed the trace on 1 May, were busy clearing a 500-meter-wide strip around the perimeter of the outpost. At 0255, the morning of 8 May, a green flare lit the sky south of the hill, followed immediately by a savage 300-round mortar and artillery attack. Concurrently, Camp Carroll, Gio Linh, and Dong Ha also came under fire.

At Con Thien, enemy units maneuvering under cover of the barrage breached the defensive wire with bangalore torpedoes, and small elements moved inside. At approximately 0400, two NVA battalions, armed with flamethrowers, RPGs, and automatic weapons, attacked through the breach in the wire. The brunt of this assault fell on the right flank of Company D. The Marines engaged the enemy force in bitter hand-to-hand fighting. An engineer platoon moved to reinforce Company D. The situation became serious when the Marines ran out of 81mm mortar illumination rounds; artillery illumination from the nearest artillery at Gio Linh could not reach Con Thien.* A flare plane finally arrived and provided much-needed illumination until daylight.

Meanwhile, Company A sent a platoon to help Company D, as well as to protect an ammunition resupply convoy composed of an attached Army M42 "Duster," two LVTHs, and two 1/4-ton trucks. As these elements moved up to support the hard-pressed Marines of Company D, the relief vehicles came under enemy fire. The Army M42, which was the lead vehicle, stopped and burst into flames after being hit by an enemy RPG antitank projectile. A satchel charge exploded under the following LVTH. It began to burn but its crew managed to get out. The trailing LVTH, trying to get around the burning vehicles, which now included the 1/4-ton trucks,

*For a detailed account of the action at Khe Sanh see Chapter

*There is no illumination round for the 175mm gun.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A193904

An amphibian tractor (LVTP-5) hit by North Vietnamese mortars on the night of 8 May at Gio Linh still burns the next morning. The other vehicle is an Army M-42 "Duster" equipped with twin 40mm automatic cannon and often used in a ground support role.

became entangled by barbed wire around its left rear sprocket. The tractor was stuck. Despite their losses, the reinforcing Marines continued to Company D's position. With these reinforcements, Company D halted the enemy penetration and sealed off the break in the wire just before daylight. By 0900, the enemy soldiers still within the perimeter were either dead or captured.[1]

The recently completed brush clearance around the perimeter paid early dividends. It permitted the Marines to catch the retreating North Vietnamese in the open as they crossed the cleared strip. Tanks and LVTHs firing both conventional and "beehive" antipersonnel ammunition were particularly effective.* Supporting fires of the Composite Artillery Battalion at Gio Linh ripped into the enemy as it withdrew north to the DMZ.

The defending Marines lost 44 killed and 110 wounded, as well as two LVTHs and one 1/4-ton truck destroyed, but the hard and bloody battle cost the enemy 197 killed and 8 captured. The Communists left behind 72 weapons, including 19 antitank weapons, 3 light machine guns, and 3 flamethrowers.*

The 8 May attack on Con Thien had been carefully rehearsed, but the enemy displayed an inherent inability to alter plans. The NVA attacked the strongest point of the defensive perimeter and continued to press the attack at this point, even when it was clear that it had encountered heavier resistance than anticipated. The enemy planners were not aware of the arrival of the two Marine companies. Company D had replaced an ARVN unit only a few days before the attack.

Following this battle, enemy activity intensified throughout the "Leatherneck Square" area.** The number and volume of artillery attacks increased greatly. More than 4,200 mortar, rocket, and artillery rounds were fired at Marine positions during the month. The enemy revealed the degree and

*See Chapter 13 for discussion of "beehive ammunition."

*This was the first instance of NVA use of flamethrowers against the Marines.

**"Leatherneck Square" was the quadrilateral between Con Thien, Gio Linh, Dong Ha, and Cam Lo.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Maj Edward H. Boyd, the executive officer of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, shows one of the three captured flame throwers used by NVA units that attacked the base at Con Thien in the early hours of 8 May.

sophistication of its buildup in the area on 10 May by the destruction of a Douglas A-4E Skyhawk flying a radar-controlled mission near the southern boundary of the DMZ. As the plane approached its target, Marines on the ground witnessed the firing of three surface-to-air missiles (SAM) from positions north of the Ben Hai River. One of the missiles hit the A-4E; the aircraft disappeared from the controlling radar screen at Dong Ha. This was the first reported use of Communist SAMs over South Vietnam.

Into the DMZ

Enemy ground action increased. During the period 13-16 May, while clearing Route 561 from Cam Lo to Con Thien, the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines made heavy contact with a large NVA force in well prepared positions just south of Con Thien. The enemy fought well and retired north of the DMZ boundary only after extreme pressure.

Once again the enemy used the unusual advantage conferred by the de facto access to the DMZ, and thus to all of South Vietnam. Marine forces still were forbidden by U.S. policy to move beyond the southern edge of the DMZ. For some time much of the shelling, particularly that by shorter-ranged weapons, mortars, and rockets, came from the region south of the Ben Hai River. It was equally clear that the enemy was using the southern DMZ as a sanctuary from which to launch ground attacks, such as the one against Con Thien.

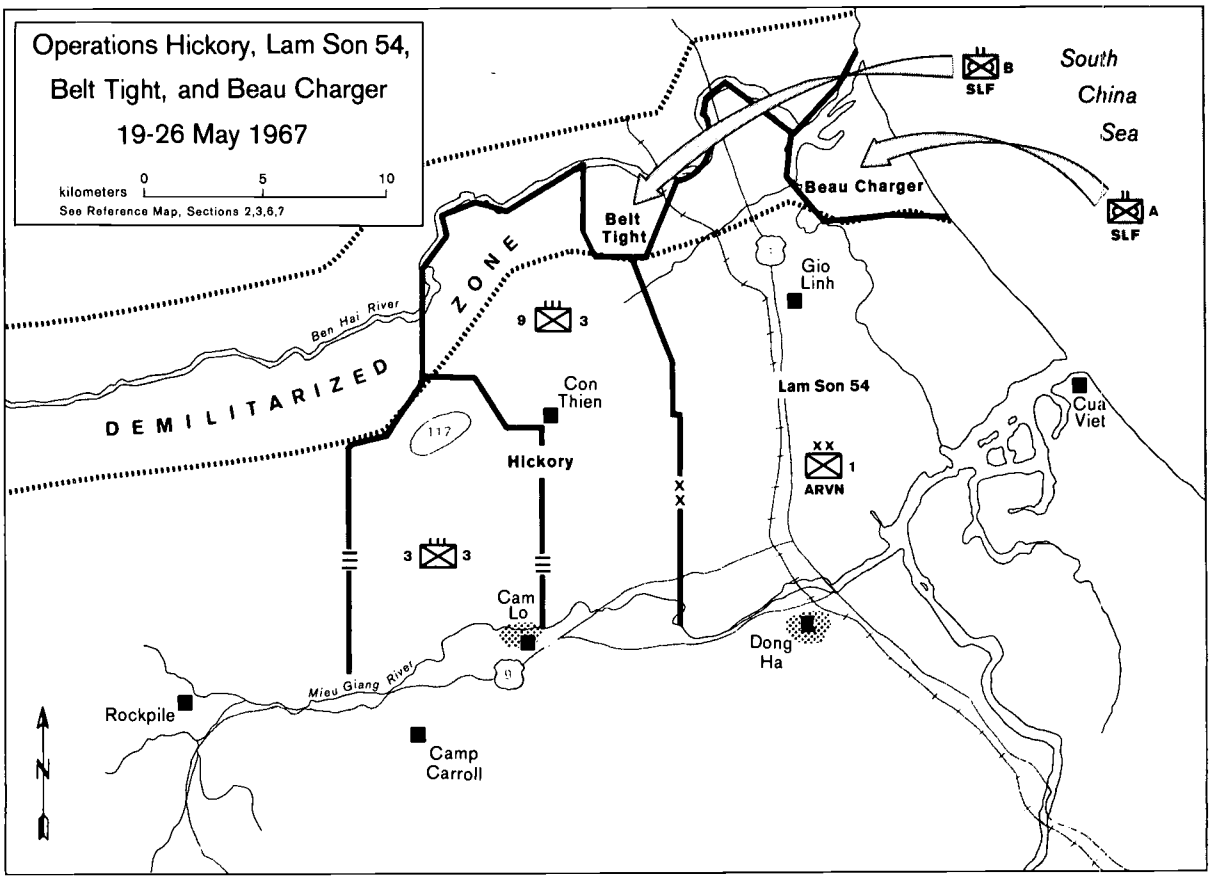
On 8 May, after the Con Thien attack, Washington changed the DMZ policy. MACV then authorized III MAF to conduct ground operations in the southern half of the DMZ, and III MAF, in conjunction with the South Vietnamese, quickly drew up plans for combined USMC/ARVN ground, amphibious, and heliborne operations in the eastern portion of the area. The basic concept called for ground attacks by the 3d Marine Division and 1st ARVN Division along parallel routes, as far north as the Ben Hai River.

Combined with the ground attack, the newly formed Special Landing Force Alpha was to conduct an amphibious landing in the southern portion of the DMZ along the coast to secure the area as far north as the south bank of the Ben Hai River*. On reaching the Ben Hai, all units were to turn around and attack south on a broad front, sweeping as far as Route 9, destroying all enemy units, installations, and supplies encountered. In addition, the plan included the development of a freefire zone which involved the evacuation by South Vietnamese National Police of some 12,000 noncombatants living within the buffer zone. Operational code names were Hickory for the 3d Marine Division units, Beau Charger and Belt Tight for the SLFs, and Lam Son 54** for the ARVN forces. The ARVN force for this operation was composed of three battalions of airborne troops and two battalions of the 1st ARVN Division. The combined operation was to start on 18 May. More fire support was allocated for this operation than for any previous operation in the 3d Division's operating area.

The available fire support included artillery, augmented by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, two cruisers, and seven destroyers (six U.S. and one Australian), as well as by aircraft from the Seventh

*At ComUSMACV's request, CinCPac committed a second SLF to the area on 15 April. The two SLFs were identified as Alpha and Bravo. (See Chapter 11).

**Lam Son was an ancient Vietnamese cultural hero for whom all the 1st ARVN Division operations were named. LtGen Louis Metzger, comments on draft MS, [1981].



Air Force and the Seventh Fleet. The majority of the support focused on enemy concentrations and gun positions in the northern portion of the DMZ and the adjacent area to the immediate north, and, if required, as counterbattery fire against North Vietnamese shore batteries.

A buildup of Marine forces in the Prairie area preceded the operation. Lieutenant Colonel Charles R. Figard's 2d Battalion, 26th Marines arrived from Phong Dien on 15 May; the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Wendell N. Vest, came in from Okinawa on the 15th; and the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Peeler, arrived from Phu Bai on the 16th.* At the beginning of the operation three battalions, the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines and the 1st and 3d Battalions, 9th Marines provided augmentation from Operation Prairie IV forces. In addition, SLF Bravo was to act as 3d Division Reserve. The same day Colonel Edward E. Hammerbeck, the new regimental commander, deployed the 9th Marines command post to a position just north of Cam Lo.

During the night of 17-18 May the NVA directed heavy mortar, rocket, and artillery attacks against all Marine positions along the DMZ. Gio Linh and Dong Ha suffered the most. From 2350 on the 17th until 0401 on the 18th, over 300 rounds hit Gio Linh, killing 1 Marine and wounding 12 others. During the attack on Dong Ha, at 0315, 150 140mm rockets killed 11 and wounded 91. One rocket scored a direct hit on the roof of the 3d Marine Division Combat Operations Center (COC), but there were no casualties. The rocket detonated prematurely upon hitting a tin roof the division recently had built a few feet above the original sandbagged but leaky roof.[2] Next door, the ARVN COC had no sandbag protection and suffered numerous casualties. The rockets also damaged considerable amounts of equipment, including minor fragment damage to several helicopters of Major Marvin E.

*At the request of ComUSMACV, CinCPac directed the deployment of BLT 3/4, the last element of the Pacific Command reserve, to I Corps. In a massive 42-plane Air Force and Marine airlift the BLT moved directly from Okinawa to Dong Ha. The entire lift of the 1,233-man force took exactly 31 hours.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

North Vietnamese soldiers captured in Operations Hickory and Lam Son 54 stand blindfolded outside the 9th Marines' headquarters at the Dong Ha combat base on 25 May.

Day's Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 363.* The Communist artillery attacks, nevertheless, were fortuitous for they allowed the allied forces to bombard the NVA positions in and north of the DMZ, under the guise of counterbattery fire, thereby maintaining tactical surprise for the forthcoming operation.

Operation Lam Son 54

Hickory/Lam Son 54 started on schedule. The 1st ARVN Division elements jumped off at 0500, moving in column up Route 1, into the DMZ. Surprise was complete; the ARVN units encountered no resistance as they moved to the Ben Hai and wheeled south. The two 1st ARVN Division battalions started their sweep south on the east side of Route 1, while the three airborne battalions, supported by tanks, turned to the west and then southward abreast the advance of the 1st Division units east of the highway.

On the 19th, the airborne battalions engaged elements of the *31st* and *812th NVA Regiments*. From then until the 27th, when Lam Son 54 ended, ARVN units were in constant contact with the enemy. Their casualties were 22 killed and 122 wounded. The enemy suffered more substantial losses: 342 killed, 30 captured, and 51 weapons seized. Most of the casualties occurred in the area known as the "rocket belt" north of Dong Ha.

Operation Beau Charger

East of the Lam Son 54 operational area, Operation Beau Charger began at the scheduled L-hour and H-hour of 0800, 18 May. Just before and during the launching of the assault, a duel started between Navy fire support ships and NVA shore batteries. Although the NVA batteries hit no ships, 10 salvos bracketed the USS *Point Defiance* (LSD 31). After return fire silenced the shore batteries, the surface landing proceeded without further incident; there was no opposition.

*While the damage to the helicopters was minor, this and subsequent attacks disrupted helicopter operations by preventing normal maintenance. This caused the rotation of squadrons in July and the subsequent abandonment in the fall of Dong Ha as a permanent helicopter base in favor of Quang Tri. LtCol Horace A. Bruce, Comments on draft ms, 14Jul81, (Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

The Beau Charger heliborne force experienced a different reception. Landing Zone Goose was a "hot" zone, and only one platoon of Company A, the assault company, managed to land. The Communists closed in and the situation was very much in doubt. At 1100 elements of Company D and the rest of Company A, reinforced with tanks, succeeded in joining up with the isolated assault platoon. The Communists withdrew only after air strikes began to hammer their positions.

On the 18th, NVA gunners ranged in on supporting Marine SLF artillery positions, knocking out two guns. Ships of the Seventh Fleet returned fire, silencing the North Vietnamese batteries. The Marines relocated their remaining guns at positions 5,800 meters further south.

Action during the rest of Beau Charger consisted of light contact and continuing artillery harassment until the operation ended on 26 May.* West of the Beau Charger operational area the 3d Marine Division was faced with a much different situation. There, the enemy had come to fight.

Operation Hickory

Adjacent to the Lam Son 54/Beau Charger operational area, 3d Marine Division units launched Operation Hickory on the morning of 18 May. Lieutenant Colonel Figard's 2d Battalion, 26th Marines and Lieutenant Colonel Peeler's 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, supported by tanks and Ontos, advanced northward from positions near Con Thien.** Concurrently, Lieutenant Colonel Vest's 3d Battalion, 4th Marines moved by helicopters into a landing zone (LZ) within the DMZ near the Ben Hai River, northwest of Con Thien. The heliborne battalion was to act as a blocking force to prevent the enemy from escaping to the north, or to stop the movement of reinforcements into the area from the north.

Shortly after 1100 the lead element of Figard's 2d Battalion, 26th Marines made contact with a force which intelligence officers later determined to have been two battalions. All elements of the Marine battalion quickly became engaged in the battle; the enemy defended from well prepared bunkers and trenches. As the battalion moved against the NVA positions, the right flank came under vicious automatic weapons and mortar fire. Casualties were heavy. Among them were Lieutenant Colonel Figard and his S-3, both of whom required evacuation. Despite the heavy enemy fire, the Navy hospital corpsmen continued their treatment of the wounded.[3] By 1600, Peeler's 2d Battalion, 9th Marines had moved up on the right of the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines and was also in close contact. Fighting continued until nightfall when the Marines broke contact and pulled back to evacuate casualties. During the day, enemy fire killed 5 Marines and wounded 142; 31 enemy soldiers were known to have been killed.

The 3d Marine Division already had replaced the wounded Lieutenant Colonel Figard with a new battalion commander. As soon as it learned of Figard's condition, the division immediately ordered Lieutenant Colonel William J. Masterpool, who had just joined the division staff after command of 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, to assume command of the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines.

That night, 75 radar-controlled air strikes hit the NVA positions in front of the two Marine battalions. At 0500 on 19 May, heavy artillery fire fell on the enemy defenses and both battalions jumped off in the attack at 0700. During the "prep" fires several short rounds landed on Company F, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, killing 3 and wounding 2 Marines. Within minutes, the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines again checked its advance because of savage fire from its front and right, while Peeler's battalion encountered only light small arms fire and pushed rapidly ahead to relieve the pressure on Masterpool's flank. By 1030 the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines had overrun the enemy bunker complex, accounting for 34 North Vietnamese killed and 9 wounded.

As the 3d Marine Division begins Operation Hickory on 18 May, CH-46A Sea Knight helicopters commence lifting the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines to a blocking position within the DMZ near the Ben Hai River, northwest of the important Con Thien base.
Marine Corps Historical Collection

*See Chapter 11 for the detailed operation of SLF involvement during Operation Beau Charger.

**The Ontos, or M50A1, was a lightly armored, tracked vehicle which mounted six 106mm recoilless rifles. Originally intended as an antitank vehicle, the Ontos, because of its mobility, became an all-purpose infantry support weapons system in Vietnam.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A801287

This log and dirt bunker, part of an unoccupied enemy fortified complex found by the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines on 18 May during Operation Hickory, illustrates the type of well constructed and camouflaged North Vietnamese Army fortifications often encountered by the 3d Marine Division in the battles in and below the Demilitarized Zone.

During the rest of the morning both battalions continued to advance against negligible resistance. At 1330, Captain Robert J. Thompson's Company H, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, on the easternmost flank of the advance, met heavy automatic weapon and mortar fire from the east. The company returned fire, but then received additional enemy fire from a tree line 60 meters to the front. Again the Marines returned fire and a tank moved up in support. It silenced the enemy with cannister fire. A squad sent forward to check out the area also came under heavy automatic weapons fire. The tank, moving to support the squad, halted after being hit by RPG rounds and began to burn. A second tank maneuvered forward to help; RPGs disabled it also. Captain Thompson, unable to use other supporting arms because of wounded Marines to his front, moved the entire company forward to retrieve the dead and wounded. After moving the wounded to the rear, the company pulled back and called in supporting arms fire on the evacuated area. The action cost the Marines 7 killed and 12 wounded; enemy casualties were unknown.

In the meantime, Lieutenant Colonel Vest's 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, after the heavy action involving the 2d Battalions, 26th and 9th Marines, swept to the southeast to block the NVA withdrawal. On 18 May the battalion made little contact, but discovered a large, abandoned, fortified position, well stocked with food and equipment. For the next two days Vest's battalion maneuvered toward the other Marine battalions which were moving north. Contact was light, but the battalion encountered intermittent mortar and artillery fire. The battalion continued to uncover large caches of rice and ammunition—over 30 tons of rice and 10 tons of ammunition—but due to the heat and distance to the landing zones much of the rice could not be moved and had to be destroyed.*

*High temperatures reduce helicopter lift capability, hence the inability to evacuate the large quantities of rice without diversion of additional helicopters from other missions.

To the southwest, Lieutenant Colonel Wilson's 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, screening the western or left flank of the operation, saw little action during the first two days. Then, on 20 May, Company K, point for the battalion, made contact with what it initially estimated to be an enemy platoon deployed in mutually supporting bunkers in a draw. The enemy, at least a company, took Company K under fire. To relieve pressure on Company K, Company L maneuvered to the flank of the enemy position, but was unable to link up with Company K because of heavy enemy fire. Both companies spent the night on opposite sides of the draw with the enemy force between them, while supporting arms pounded the enemy position all night.

On the 21st, Company M moved forward and joined with K and L and the three companies were able to clear the area. The clearing operation was costly: 26 Marines were killed and 59 wounded. The Marines counted only 36 enemy bodies, but the lingering smell in the draw indicated that many others were in the destroyed fortifications.

Meanwhile, the division reserve, SLF Bravo's BLT 2/3, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel DeLong, and HMM-164, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Rodney D. McKitrick, joined Operation Hickory on the 20th. The employment of SLF Bravo involved a unique departure from the norm for amphibious operations in that the heliborne force passed to the control of the 3d Marine Division as it crossed the high water mark. This procedure ensured positive control of all supporting arms covering the battalion's approach to its inland tactical area of reponsibility (TAOR).*

The squadron helilifted the battalion into the DMZ northwest of Gio Linh to block possible withdrawal routes of NVA units then engaged with ARVN airborne formations to the east. By noon all elements of the battalion were ashore and sweeping north toward the DMZ. The Marines of BLT 2/3 encountered only light resistance from small NVA units, apparently security elements for several large ordnance caches and bunker complexes. One of the bunkers was exceptionally sophisticated, constructed of steel overhead and walls. The Marines captured more than 1,000 60mm mortar rounds, as well as large quantities of small arms ammunition and medical supplies in the same complex.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188700

Capt Troy T. Shirley, commanding Company L, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, talks to some of his men after the company sustained heavy casualties during Operation Hickory close to the Demilitarized Zone.

After sweeping the southern bank of the Ben Hai River, De Long's battalion wheeled south and began a deliberate search in that direction. Although the battalion met no resistance, it did uncover and destroy two extensive subterranean bunker complexes filled with supplies and ordnance. On the 23d the advance halted temporarily because of the declaration of a cease-fire to be observed throughout Vietnam in honor of Buddha's birthday.

After the brief "stand down," two battalions, the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines and the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines, began sweeping the DMZ to the southwest toward the mountains west of Con Thien. The 3d Battalion, 9th Marines continued to move northwest as the other two battalions moved south. To the east, the remaining Hickory battalions resumed search and destroy operations in the southern half of the DMZ and "Leatherneck Square."

*The battalion's movement from the SLF shipping to its inland TAOR was called Operation Belt Tight. See Chapter 8 for a more detailed account of SLF participation in Belt Tight.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188699

PFC R. L. Crumrine, serving with the 9th Marines in Operation Hickory, bows his head in anguish after learning one of his closest friends had died fighting the North Vietnamese near the Demilitarized Zone.

Early on the morning of 25 May, Captain John J. Rozman's Company H, 26th Marines made contact with a large NVA company in a mutually supporting bunker complex near Hill 117, three miles west of Con Thien. The action was extremely close and lasted for more than an hour before Rozman's Marines managed to gain fire superiority and disengaged to evacuate their casualties. Air and artillery then hit the enemy positions. When relieved of its casualties, Company H maneuvered north of the hill mass where it met Captain John H. Flathman's Company K, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines at 1345. Both companies moved against the hill. At 1500 savage fighting developed; the Marines estimated the enemy force holding the position to be at least several companies.

When the Marines could not break through the strongly fortified position, Lieutenant Colonel Masterpool ordered them to disengage so that supporting arms could again attack the enemy positions.* The two Marine companies again attacked but broke off the action at 1730 and established night positions north and west of the hill. Results of the day's fighting were 14 Marines killed and 92 wounded; the Marines counted 41 NVA bodies.

Marine air and artillery pounded the hill all night in preparation for the next attack, scheduled for the next day. At 0915 on the 26th, enemy automatic weapons fire forced down a UH-1E helicopter on a reconnaissance flight over the area. Among the wounded in the helicopter were Lieutenant Colonel Masterpool, his executive officer, and the commanders of Companies H and K; Lieutenant Colonel Masterpool and Captain Flathman had to be evacuated. Consequently, the battalion delayed the attack for another day to allow time for further bombardment of the hill and command adjustments. On the 27th, Companies E and F, 2d Battalion, 26th Marines, under the control of Lieutenant Colonel Vest's 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, moved against the objective behind covering artillery fire. They met no resistance and secured the hill by 1600. The 3d Battalion, 4th Marines then passed through Companies E and F and consolidated on the ridges leading up to the higher ground west of Hill 117. In the meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Duncan D. Chaplin III arrived by helicopter to assume command of the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines, temporarily under its executive officer, Major James H. Landers.[4]

During the night, Colonel James R. Stockman, the commander of the 3d Marines, initiated heavy artillery fires from Con Thien and Gio Linh and using the 175mm guns of the Army's 2d Battalion, 94th Artillery to "literally change the face of the earth" on the enemy-held high ground. The following morning, the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines continued its westward movement onto the high ground without opposition. Lieutenant Colonel Vest's men encountered only the extensive destruction of numerous fortified positions, apparently abandoned by the NVA early in the artillery attack. Colonel Stockman then ordered the battalion to move toward Con Thien.[5]

With the exception of the Hill 117 battle, contact diminished during the last days of Operation

*Operational control of Company K had passed to Colonel Masterpool's 2d Battalion, 26th Marines at 1645 on the 25th.

Hickory and the artillery operations to the east. Nevertheless, the Marines found and destroyed numerous well-fortified areas before the operation terminated on 28 May. In addition, they captured or destroyed more than 50 tons of rice and 10 tons of ordnance. Total enemy casualties for the combined Marine/ARVN operation were 789 killed (the equivalent of two NVA battalions), 37 captured, and 187 weapons taken. Of this total 447 were killed by Marines (85 in Beau Charger, 58 in Belt Tight/Hickory, and 304 in Hickory). Allied losses for the operation were by no means small; the Marines lost 142 killed and 896 wounded, while ARVN losses were 22 killed and 122 wounded.

The first large-scale allied entry into the southern half of the DMZ signified that the rules had changed. The area was no longer a guaranteed Communist sanctuary from which they could launch attacks. More immediately, the operation had upset, at least temporarily, the NVA organizational structure in the DMZ. The Marines realized that this initial search and destroy operation would not permanently deny the enemy's use of the area. Nevertheless, while total friendly control had not been established over the region, the removal of the civilian population from the area, some 11,000 people, now permitted the Marines complete freedom of use of supporting arms.

Operation Prairie IV Ends

At the end of Operation Hickory, all participating forces joined Operation Prairie IV and continued sweeps of "Leatherneck Square" and the area southwest of Con Thien. On 28 May, the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines made heavy contact on Hill 174, approximately four miles southwest of Con Thien. The NVA were in bunkers, similar to the complex encountered on Hill 117. Two Companes, M and L, attacked late in the afternoon, only to be "blown off 174"[6] by a heavy volume of fire from enemy small arms, automatic weapons, 57mm recoilless rifles, and 82mm mortars. Accounting for all personnel took much of the night. Results of this initial engagement were 2 Marines killed and 21 wounded. Known enemy casualties were 4 dead; with another 4 probably killed.

The 3d Battalion, 4th Marines called in artillery throughout the night; the North Vietnamese responded with 82mm mortars. The following day, the 29th, Companies M and I, the latter led by Lieutenant Walter E. Deese's 1st Platoon, attacked up the hill. Despite being hit by friendly 60mm mortars, the Marines made contact with the NVA defenders around 1600. Enemy resistance remained firm; 5 more Marines died, 33 suffered wounds. This time, however, the Marines managed to hold positions on the western and northern slopes of Hill 174. The crest remained in enemy hands.

On 30 May, I and M Companies attacked again. Despite heavy supporting arms fire and the Marines' use of flame throwers and 3.5-inch rocket launchers, the enemy retained control of the hill. Another Marine died; 45 were wounded. There were seven confirmed enemy dead. The North Vietnamese, however, decided to give up the contest. Company M reached the crest of Hill 174 on 31 May, meeting no resistance.[7]

Operation Prairie IV, the last of the Prairie series of operations was over. It, like its predecessors, hurt the enemy: 505 died, 8 captured, and 150 weapons seized. Friendly losses were 164 killed and 1,240 wounded.

On 1 June, Operation Cimarron began in the same area and with the same formations. The operation lasted through 2 July, producing only light contact. The Marines discovered and destroyed several large, abandoned, fortified positions in the area southwest of Con Thien and unit sweeps located numerous enemy graves and several supply caches.

While Cimarron progressed, the land clearing project from Con Thien through Gio Linh to the high water mark on the coast reached completion by 1 July. The Marine engineers widened the previously cleared area to 600 meters for the entire 13.5 kilometers of its length. The 11th Engineer Battalion contributed more than 10,000 man hours and 4,500 tractor hours to this hazardous effort.

During the last days of Cimarron a sharp increase in enemy artillery activity, coupled with several small but intense engagements between patrols and dug-in NVA units around Con Thien, indicated that the enemy was preparing for renewed offensive operations in the area. There was to be much hole digging and sandbag filling before the summer ended.

CHAPTER 4

The First Battle of Khe Sanh

The Early Days – Opening Moves of the Battle – Hill 861 – Reinforcing the Hill 861 Attack Attacking Hill 881S – The Final Objective: Hill 881N – End of the Battle – Operation Crockett

The Early Days

The war in the northwestern portion of the 3d Marine Division's area of operations intensified early in 1967. During the spring the NVA gradually increased its forces around the Marine base at Khe Sanh. As the Marines maneuvered to determine the enemy's intentions, they became engaged in one of the bloodiest battles of the war.

The Khe Sanh area in western Quang Tri Province had been a major infiltration route into South Vietnam for as long as the Vietnamese had been at war. That slight but definite plateau, rising abruptly from the foothills bordering Laos and Vietnam, is dotted with hills and low mountains, providing a natural route into the two northern provinces of I Corps. The majority of the trails in the more mountainous area are concealed by tree canopies up to 60 feet in height, while those on the lower heights are hidden by dense elephant grass and bamboo thickets. Concealment from aerial observation was good and the dense undergrowth limited ground observation in most places to no more than five meters. Dong Tri Mountain is 1,015 meters high, the highest peak in the region. With Hills 861, 881 North and 881 South, it dominates the three main avenues of approach. Two trails enter from the northwest. One crosses the Laos-Vietnam border and winds southeast along the streams and valleys that join the Rao Quan River. The second approach from the northwest is a ridgeline that crosses the border to merge with Hills 881N, 881S, and 861. The third approach is Route 9 from the Laotian border through the village of Lang Vei to Khe Sanh.

American troops first arrived in the area in August 1962, when a U.S. Army Special Forces detachment established a CIDG camp at the small airfield just northeast of the village of Khe Sanh. These troops engaged in border surveillance and clandestine operations to detect and thwart infiltration.

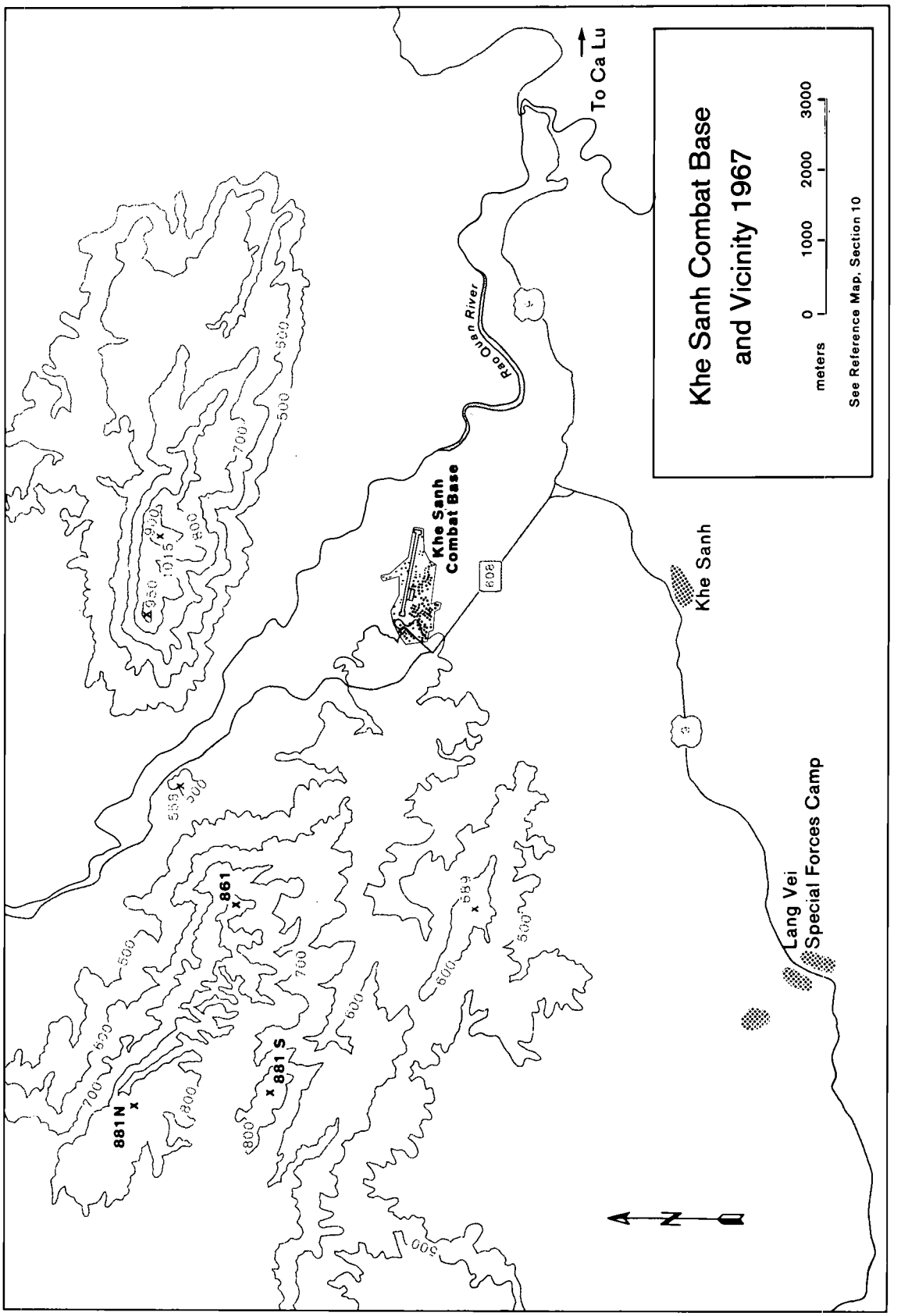
During the fall of 1966 intelligence reports noted increased enemy movement on an east-west trail network which ran into the region from Laos. As a result, III MAF ordered a battalion to be deployed to Khe Sanh as part of Operation Prairie I. Its mission was to prevent Communist occupation, as well as to provide security for a detachment from U.S. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (Seabee) 10 which was improving the Khe Sanh airfield.

On the 29th of September, Lieutenant Colonel Peter A. Wickwire's 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, reinforced by Battery B, 1st Battalion, 13th Marines, assumed the Khe Sanh mission and flew by helicopters into the position. The Marines occupied the key terrain around the airfield and began construction of defensive positions. Reconnaissance and combat patrols searched out to 6,000 meters to detect enemy buildup in the area. The battalion used the 6,000-meter range because it suspected the Communists would bring in 120mm mortars to attack the complex.*

As the logistic support for the battalion began to arrive at the airfield, the battalion command post, the reserve company, and the artillery battery set up in the immediate vicinity of the camp complex and established a perimeter defense. The Special Forces garrison and service support elements received responsibility for portions of the perimeter while the rifle companies continued to operate from company strong points. The battalion then extended the patrolling effort out to 10,000 meters and beyond, depending upon the size of the patrol.**

*The 120mm mortar's maximum range was 5,700 meters.

**During December 1966-January 1967 the Special Forces Camp was 9,000 meters west near the village of Lang Vei.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Initially, Battery B, reinforced with two 155mm howitzers and two 4.2-inch mortars, provided the battalion's only immediate artillery support. Late in October, additional artillery became available when U.S. Army 175mm guns moved into positions at Camp Carroll 13 miles to the east. While the fires of the 175s augmented the base's defensive plans, they normally fired interdiction missions and support of Marine reconnaissance units operating from the base.

Air support for the battalion came from three UH-34 helicopters assigned to Khe Sanh on a daily basis. These aircraft provided routine and emergency resupply, evacuation, troop lifts, and reconnaissance missions. Additional helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft were available on request.*

As 1967 began, the battalion experienced no significant contacts. On 31 January, Operation Prairie I ended. Wickwire's battalion could claim only 15 enemy killed during the four months it had participated in Prairie. While the casualty figures for the operation were not impressive, the battalion had established control of the Khe Sanh Plateau, and the extended airstrip provided a terminus from which III MAF could challenge the movement of enemy forces through the area.

After Operation Prairie I, III MAF reduced operations from Khe Sanh to reconnaissance efforts. As a result, when the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines moved to Okinawa on 6 February, only a single company, Company B, 9th Marines, augmented by a 45-man security platoon and Battery I, 12th Marines, remained to defend Khe Sanh Base.** The mission of Captain Michael W. Sayers' company was essentially the same as the 1st Battalion's had been: To defend the airstrip and patrol the surrounding area out to a distance of 15,000 meters. The company also maintained a 30-man force as emergency support for Marine reconnaissance patrols operating in the area.

Poor weather, primarily fog, through February hampered the activities of both Captain Sayers' company and the platoon of the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion working from the base, but reconnaissance contacts did indicate an increase in enemy activity. Five reconnaissance patrols came under attack from NVA units during this period and helicopters extracted them under fire. Then, on 25 February, a sharp contact occurred only 3,000 meters from the airstrip; the days of watchful waiting were over.

A squad patrol from the 2d Platoon, Company B, led by Sergeant Donald E. Harper, Jr., was moving up a small hill west of the airstrip when an NVA unit opened up with small arms fire, killing one Marine and wounding another. The patrol pulled back immediately and called in artillery fire. When the artillery stopped, Harper's squad again moved against the enemy position and this time made contact with about 50 North Vietnamese. Once more the Marines backed off the hill and called in artillery fire. Captain Sayers sent a second squad to reinforce Harper's patrol. The Marines assaulted the position for the third time and after heavy fighting were able to take the hill. They found only nine enemy bodies on the position, but a search of the area uncovered fire direction center equipment, an 82mm mortar, 380 82mm mortar rounds, 3 mortar base plates, 2 individual weapons, some clothing, and 10 enemy packs. Friendly losses in the action were one killed and 11 wounded.[1]

Although the area remained quiet after this sharp encounter, an unfortunate incident occurred at Lang Vei on the evening of 2 March. Two USAF aircraft mistakenly bombed the village, killing 112 civilians, wounding 213, and destroying 140 buildings. The Marines immediately sent helicopters and trucks to the village to help with the evacuation of casualties. A KC-130, carrying a group of 1st Marine Aircraft Wing personnel especially organized for such events and under the command of Major William F. Morley, arrived at the airfield and flew out 53 of the wounded before weather closed the field.[2]

The NVA took this opportunity to hit the base with more than 90 82mm mortar rounds, killing two Marines and wounding 17, while damaging two CH-46s and two UH-1Es. Three days later, on the 5th, 14 enemy soldiers probed the airfield perimeter from the north and west. The defending Marines detected and drove them off with command-detonated claymore mines before they could do any damage.

*The number of helicopters assigned to the Khe Sanh Base increased during January to six: two CH-46s, two UH-1Es, and two UH-34s.

**Battery I replaced Battery B/13 on 26 January. Two 155mm howitzers and the two 4.2-inch mortars reinforced Battery I.

The 3d Marine Division responded to the increased enemy activity by reinforcing Khe Sanh with Captain William B. Terrill's Company E, 9th Marines on 7 March. With the addition of the second company, the Marines increased their patrols of the surrounding area, with particular emphasis given to the 861-881 hill complex northwest of the base. Reconnaissance teams there had made numerous sightings during the past few weeks. Patrols and ambushes in the area saw signs of enemy activity, but made no contact; on 16 March, however, the NVA provided the Marines with all the contact they could handle.

At 1000 on the 16th, the 1st Platoon of Company E was returning from a night ambush position on Hill 861. As the point squad, under Sergeant Donald Lord, moved past some dense bamboo bordering the trail, it came under heavy crossfire from both sides. The two remaining squads advanced to help the point element. After 15 minutes they drove the enemy away. The Marines then moved back up the hill about 100 meters to a suitable landing zone to evacuate their casualties, one killed and five wounded. Nearing the zone they came under heavy fire again; six more Marines died, four suffered wounds, and one was missing. Another firefight started and the Marines directed artillery fire against the enemy, but this time the NVA did not withdraw.

In the meantime, two squads of Second Lieutenant Gatlin J. Howell's 2d Platoon, Company B, which had been operating about 1,500 meters east of Hill 861, received orders to move to help the 1st Platoon, Company E. As they moved up they came under fire from the top of the hill. Air strikes drove the enemy from the crest; they left 11 bodies behind. Both Marine units moved to the summit and began clearing a landing zone (LZ).

By 1600 the Marines had cleared the LZ and three CH-46s were on station to evacuate the casualties. The first helicopter landed, and took off, but as the second one touched down the NVA hit the zone with mortar fire. The CH-46 made its pickup and managed to get out of the zone, but the Marines on the ground were not as lucky. Both units' corpsmen were killed; several other men were wounded. The Marines called in artillery fire on suspected enemy mortar positions, then requested the helicopter to come in to evacuate the new casualties. As the aircraft approached the zone, the NVA struck again with mortar fire. The helicopter broke away, but the exploding rounds caught the Marines who had carried the wounded out to the LZ and they became casualties themselves. Captain Terrill recalled, "The platoon commander tried to move the LZ down to the reverse slope of the hill, but by this time there were not enough able-bodied men in the platoon to move all the dead and wounded."[3]

At 1705, a helicopter carrying the 3d squad, 2d Platoon, Company B attempted to set down in the landing zone on the reverse slope, but the CH-46 overshot the zone and crashed at the base of the hill. A second helicopter picked up the squad, but it had to return to Khe Sanh because of casualties caused by the crash. Then Captain Terrill and the 2d Platoon, Company E moved by helicopter into the LZ. The new platoon moved to the top of the hill and began to bring down the wounded. By 2100, when fog stopped helicopter operations, all but three of the wounded had been evacuated and by 1300 on the 17th all the dead and the rest of the wounded had been lifted out. The Marines attempted but failed to extract the CH-46 that had crashed, forcing Captain Terrill's unit to remain at the LZ as security for the aircraft. Another helicopter finally lifted the damaged one out by 1100 on the 18th and Terrill and his Marines, now reinforced by 1st Platoon, Company B, began a two-day sweep of the area north and west of the hill. The search was to no avail; the enemy force had departed. The action on the 16th had been costly for the Marines: they suffered 19 killed and 59 wounded, almost all of whom were from Company E. The Marines found the body of the missing man the next day. Enemy losses in the engagement were only the 11 known killed.

Immediately after this contact, reconnaissance teams operating northwest of the hill complex reported several sightings of large enemy forces moving southeast. There were several exchanges of small arms fire between Marine patrols and small enemy units, but in all cases the enemy quickly broke contact and withdrew.

Captain Sayers, responsible for the defense of the Khe Sanh perimeter, recognized the growing threat to the combat base. He expressed his concerns during one of the frequent visits to the base by Brigadier General Michael P. Ryan, the commander of 3d Marine Division (Forward). General Ryan agreed and asked what Sayers needed to defend the base. Sayers provided his "shopping list" and, as soon as the Marine engineers opened the road from Dong Ha to Khe Sanh, General Ryan sent additional firepower. Sayers gained a light section of Marine

tanks and a heavy section of Ontos. Each of the latter mounted six 106mm recoilless rifles, which, with the proper ammunition, could be devastating antipersonnel weapons. Equally deadly were two light sections of Army truck-mounted heavy weapons. One section had dual 40mm automatic cannon; the other had quad-.50 machine guns. Offsetting these gains, however, was the loss of Company E, 9th Marines, which, depleted by the fighting on 16 March, returned to Dong Ha on 27 March to rebuild.[4].

The reinforcements to the base's firepower seemed even more important in the early weeks of April when agent reports indicated two NVA regiments moving into the region northwest of Khe Sanh. These reports and earlier sightings prompted the Marines to intensify reconnaissance and patrolling in the area. In spite of these efforts, the Marines did not determine the full extent of the enemy's buildup.

Allied personnel in the Khe Sanh area numbered less than 1,000 men. Among these were the CIDG force at Lang Vei and the Marines' Combined Action Company Oscar, located between Khe Sanh Village and the combat base and within mortar range of the latter.* The Khe Sanh combat base housed Company B, 9th Marines, reinforced by an aggregation of support detachments, and a Marine reconnaissance platoon. Organic artillery support for these units came from Captain Glen Golden's Battery F, 12th Marines, which replaced Battery I on 5 April. While the allied forces were too small to be a deterrent to major enemy incursions, they did serve as an advance warning unit.

On 20 April, operational control of forces at Khe Sanh passed to the 3d Marines which had just begun Operation Prairie IV, though Khe Sanh was not included as part of the Prairie IV operational area. Rather it was a territorial appendage, attached for control purposes to the 3d Marines because that regiment was in the best position to oversee the base and reinforce it if the need arose. The time of need was imminent.

*III MAF created the Combined Action Program to increase the ability of the local Vietnamese militia units to defend their own villages. These units included Marines who lived, worked, and conducted operations with their Vietnamese counterparts. The company at Khe Sanh formed in February 1967 and was unique in that its indigenous forces were Montagnards rather than Vietnamese. A more complete coverage of the Combined Action Program is contained in Chapter 11.

Opening Moves of the Battle

On 23 April, two of Company B's platoons, the 1st and 3d, were operating from patrol bases north and east of Hill 861. Late that afternoon Captain Sayers ordered them to link up and establish a night position north of the hill in preparation for a sweep the following morning of a cave complex located to the northwest.

The morning of the 24th, Second Lieutenant Thomas G. King and 30 men from his 2d Platoon, with an 81mm mortar section, moved from the airfield to Hill 700, south of Hill 861. Their mission was to provide additional fire support for a company sweep then starting to the northwest. Once the mortars were in position, First Lieutenant Phillip H. Sauer took four men, including a forward observer (FO) to the top of Hill 861 to establish an observation post.* As the FO team entered a bamboo thicket 300 meters from the crest of the hill, it stepped into an enemy ambush. When the NVA opened fire the point man yelled, "I'm hit," and went down. Lieutenant Sauer ordered the rest of the team to pull back and then stood firing at the enemy with his pistol to cover their withdrawal. Only the forward observer managed to escape. Although the action lasted but a few minutes and appeared to be just another small unit encounter, it marked the beginning of the "First Battle of Khe Sanh," one of the bloodiest and hardest fought battles of the Vietnam War.[5]

Lieutenant King, having lost radio contact with the forward observation team but aware of the firefight on the hill, sent a squad to investigate. As the squad moved forward it came upon the FO, the lone survivor of the ambushed team. The squad, accompanied by the FO, moved back into the area of contact to recover the other four members of the team. They saw two of the bodies but were unable to get to them because of heavy enemy fire. The unit withdrew to Lieutenant King's mortar position. King directed mortar and artillery fire at the hill and then took another squad and went back to the ambush site. The enemy had gone. The Marines recovered

*First Lieutenant Sauer was the commander of the Ontos heavy section that had recently been attached to Captain Sayer's Company B. He accompanied Lieutenant King's unit to assist the forward observer.

the two bodies seen by the other squad, but after searching the area they still could not find the other two Marines.* King pulled back and threw a smoke grenade to bring in a helicopter to evacuate the two bodies. Just as the UH-34's wheels touched the ground the whole crest of Hill 861, approximately 300 meters wide, erupted with automatic weapons fire. The infantrymen took cover without casualties, but the enemy fire hit the helicopter 35 times in a matter of seconds. Two UH-1E gunships escorting the UH-34 immediately strafed the hilltop. As the enemy fire let up, King's Marines loaded the bodies aboard the helicopter, and after it took off King and his men returned to the mortar position.

While the mortars on Hill 700 and the artillery at Khe Sanh base shelled the enemy positions, Captain Sayers, who had joined King after a forced march with a security platoon, ordered his 1st and 3d Platoons to sweep southeast across Hill 861 and strike the enemy from the rear. Sayers' Marines were roughly 2,000 meters northwest of their new objective. When the two platoons turned toward their new direction of advance, five 82mm mortar rounds hit, killing one Marine and wounding several others. The Marines continued on and the point squad moved down the reverse slope of a small knoll until halted by heavy fire from its right flank.

The Marines returned fire in an attempt to gain fire superiority. Lance Corporal Dana C. Darnell disregarded the enemy fire and brought his 60mm mortar into action. Unable to set up the weapon properly, he placed the base of the tube in a helmet between his legs and steadied the mortar with his hands. The firing quickly heated the tube; another Marine kept Darnell's hands from being burned by urinating on the mortar tube to cool it. Darnell kept firing until he exhausted his immediate supply of ammunition. Ignoring the enemy fire, he several times gathered additional rounds from nearby Marines to keep up his firing.[6]

The enemy answered with its own mortars and the Marines moved back over the crest of the hill to find cover and call in helicopters to evacuate casualties. During the move, Lance Corporal Darnell dragged two wounded Marines toward cover until temporarily blinded by dirt and rock fragments blown into his eyes by enemy fire. Within an hour, however, he was assisting in the care of the wounded.*

Helicopter pilots made two attempts to get the wounded out, but each time they came in the enemy hit the Marine position with mortars and automatic weapons, causing more casualties. After the second rescue attempt, the Marines received orders to move to a more secure position and dig in for the night.[7] After expending all of their mortar ammunition on Hill 861 and in support of the 1st and 3d Platoons, the mortar section, Captain Sayers, and the security platoon on Hill 700 moved back to the base just before dark on the 24th. There, Captain Sayers, his company command group, and the 22-man 2d Platoon prepared to join the 1st and 3d Platoons by helicopter at first light on the 25th. Casualties for the first day included 12 Marines killed, 17 wounded, and 2 missing. There were five known NVA dead.

Captain Sayers' Marines had forced the North Vietnamese into the premature revelation of their plans to overrun Khe Sanh Combat Base. Their plan resembled the one they used so successfully against the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. In both cases the enemy buildup occurred over a period of about a month and included the occupation of key terrain. Before the main attack, they engaged in a prolonged supply staging activity and, just prior to the main attack, made coordinated attacks against support facilities, particularly airfields and lines of communication.

After-the-fact reconstruction by General Walt of the NVA plans for Khe Sanh indicated that the first step was the buildup of troops and supplies in the region north of the base. Step two was to be the isolation of the base by knocking out the transport helicopters based near the coast and by cutting key stretches of Route 9. Next, Camp Carroll, Con Thien, Dong Ha, Gio Linh, and Phu Bai were to be hit with supporting arms, both as a diversion and to reduce their ability to provide fire and logistic support. A diversionary attack was to be carried out against the Lang Vei Special Forces Camp to present a threat from that direction. All of these efforts were in support of the main attack from the north through the Hill 881/861 complex by regimental-

*These two bodies later were found. They had been decapitated and burned. Maj Michael W. Sayers, Comments on draft ms, 18May81. (Vietnam Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

*LCpl Darnell, killed in action two days later on the 26th, received a posthumous Navy Cross for his actions on the 24th.

size units of the *325C NVA Division**. Fortunately, the contact made by Lieutenant Sauer's FO party on the morning of the 24th and subsequent action by Company B alerted III MAF to enemy intentions.

Hill 861

The job of stopping the NVA fell to Colonel John P. Lanigan's 3d Marines. Although Lanigan was unaware of it at the time, this assignment was to be similar to one 22 years before on Okinawa which earned him the Silver Star Medal. Both involved driving a determined enemy force off a hill.

Originally, Colonel Lanigan planned that Company K, 3d Marines, would relieve Captain Sayers' Company B on 29 April, so liaison personnel were already at Khe Sanh when the action began. On the morning of the 25th, heavy fog at Khe Sanh delayed the arrival by helicopter of the remainder of Company K as well as Lieutenant Colonel Gary Wilder and his 3d Battalion, 3d Marines command group. By the time they arrived, Captain Sayers and his 2d Platoon had already departed by helicopter to join the rest of Company B.

There had been no chance for coordination between the battalion command group and Company B. Inevitably, communications proved difficult since Company B did not have the battalion's codes and radio frequencies. Captain Sayers, convinced that the enemy monitored his transmissions, relayed his coded position reports through his company's rear command post at Khe Sanh. This problem plagued the two units throughout the coming fighting.[8]

Shortly after landing at Khe Sanh, Lieutenant Colonel Wilder started his force moving north to assist Company B. By 1500, the lead elements were moving up Hill 861.

When Company K of the 3d Marines reached the slopes of Hill 861, its commander, Captain Bayliss L. Spivey, Jr., ordered his platoons to move on two axes. The 1st Platoon moved up a ridgeline, followed by the company command group. The 3d Platoon started up another ridgeline to the right. The 2d Platoon, understrength because one squad was still attached to another company, remained behind to provide security for the battalion command group and the 60mm mortar section.

Captain Spivey had his forces in position for his attack by 1525. Artillery check fire was in effect, however. Captain Spivey requested and received permission to continue up the hill without further artillery preparatory fires.

The 1st Platoon moved upward through the heavy growth on the ridgeline. When the platoon was 300 meters from the crest, it made contact with an enemy company. The platoon found itself under heavy, grazing fire from well-fortified, expertly concealed bunkers, as well as from mortars sited on the reverse slope of the hill. The vegetation made locating the bunkers difficult. Countermortar and artillery fire were relatively ineffective in silencing the enemy mortars; the grazing fire from the enemy automatic weapons and small arms continued from the mutally supporting bunkers.

The 1st Platoon fought its way uphill for about 200 meters, but by 1730 only about 10 men remained effective. With darkness fast approaching, it was imperative for the company to get more Marines on the line. The 3d Platoon could provide no immediate assistance; its advance up the adjacent ridgeline encountered no enemy opposition but the rugged terrain slowed its movement. Captain Spivey had no option but to ask for the 2d Platoon. Aware of the gravity of the situation, the battalion assented.

The 2d Platoon moved forward and quickly became engaged in heavy fighting that continued until nightfall. Since it could not evacuate its casualties, the company spent the night in place; Captain Spivey ordered all elements to dig in. The battalion command group and 60mm mortar section, located on a small knoll only 300 meters from the hill, forced to provide its own security, also dug in for the night.[9]

Progress of Company B during the day had been equally difficult; it too had no luck evacuating its wounded. Each time a helicopter attempted to land, it met a screen of enemy small arms and mortar fire. One helicopter did get into a nearby zone around 1000 when the fog lifted, bringing in Captain Sayers and the 22 men of the 2d Platoon, but it could pick up only three wounded before being driven off by incoming mortar rounds. Slowed by numerous litter cases and sporadic enemy contact which required the seizure of each succeeding ridgeline, Company B succeeded in moving only to a point 800 meters northwest of Hill 861.

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*Apparently the enemy launched all of the diversionary attacks on schedule. On 27 and 28 April, the previously mentioned Marine positions were hit by 1,200 rockets, mortar, and artillery rounds. They cut Route 9 in several places. Other enemy units attacked and severely battered the Lang Vei Special Forces Camp on 4 May. The Marines detected and subsequently thwarted only the main effort. FMFPac Ops USMC Vn, Apr67, pp. 27-28.

As a result of the heavy resistance encountered by both companies, Captain Jerrald E. Giles' Company K, 9th Marines flew in from Camp Carroll. By 1800 on the 25th, the company had arrived at Khe Sanh base; it remained there for the night.

At about 0500 on the 26th, the 3d Battalion command post (CP) shook under more than 200 82mm mortar rounds. At the same time, Khe Sanh base was the target of 100 mortar and recoilless rifle rounds, most of which, thanks to fog which obscured the enemy's aim, landed outside the perimeter. While the shelling did not cause any damage, it did confirm that the NVA were on Hill 881S. The Marines replied by hitting suspected enemy positions with artillery and air strikes; the NVA fire quickly ceased.

Captain Sayers later recalled:

> . . . B-1/9 was close enough to the NVA recoilless rifles to see and hear their backblast in the fog. They were on the eastern slope of 881S. We directed artillery on the recoilless rifles and silenced them. We could hear the 82mm mortars but couldn't see the muzzle flashes. We directed artillery by sound. By [105mm artillery illumination rounds] and holes in the fog, we confirmed destruction of the recoilless rifles. (The fog was in layers—the hill masses were covered and the valleys were clear.)[10].

At 0800 on the 26th, Captain Giles' company moved out from the airfield toward Lieutenant Colonel Wilder's position, using the rear elements of Company B as guides. The company arrived at the battalion command post shortly after noon. Spivey's Company K had been heavily engaged on Hill 861 all morning. The enemy unit, fighting from a strongly fortified position, repulsed a second Marine attempt to take the hill, this time by the 3d Platoon. All efforts to break off contact and withdraw failed because of numerous casualties. Lieutenant Colonel Wilder ordered Captain Giles to send two platoons up the hill to help Spivey disengage and evacuate the dead and wounded. By 1400, the two companies linked up, but, despite the effective use of helicopter gunships in a close support role to suppress enemy fire, it was not until 1900 that the last Marine elements got off the hill.

In the meantime, Company B's advance also stopped. The company had been moving southwesterly to skirt Hill 861 and link up with the battalion. As the Marines turned south, they met fierce enemy resistance. The NVA troops, well-concealed in the thick underbrush, allowed the Marines to move to within five meters before opening fire, almost cutting the point man in half. Four or five others, including Captain Sayers and members of the command group, received wounds. At the same time, the enemy hit the entire column with mortar fire. Casualties were heavy. With the aid of gunships and artillery, the company finally gained fire superiority and at 1200 it broke contact, pulling back to the top of a small knoll. There the company attempted to evacuate some of its wounded, but as the helicopters came into the area the infantrymen waved them off; they were helping the NVA mortars to pinpoint the Marines' position. At 1445, Captain Sayers reported to Lieutenant Colonel Wilder that he had so many casualties that he could not move.[11]

The battalion ordered Captain Sayers to leave his dead behind and bring out his wounded. Sayers replied that he could not move, even with only the wounded. Resupply was impossible, the company had only five operational radios, powered by weak batteries. Sayers reported he would move into the fog, assume a defensive posture, and ". . . fight until it was over."[12] This option proved unnecessary, however.

As Sayers later recalled:

> Captain Glen Golden [the commander of Battery F, 12th Marines at Khe Sanh] found me in the fog by walking artillery rounds to me. (Once in the fog I could only make an educated guess as to my exact position.) Artillery put a "ring of steel" around my defensive position that was so tight we were taking dirt from the impact. It was the most professional and accurate piece of artillery work that I have ever seen. No doubt it saved our lives.[13]

Lieutenant Colonel Wilder sent Captain Giles and his one remaining platoon to assist Sayers. It took Giles' party almost four hours to hack their way to the battered company. Under the cover of a heavy ground fog, darkness, and periodic downpours, and preceded by artillery fire from Battery I, the united force began its move toward the battalion CP, skirting the south edge of Hill 861. Progress was slow. Every man, except the point and rearguard, was burdened with stretchers and the equipment of the casualties. Sayers remembered:

> We were carrying KIAs and WIAs in ponchos [borne by] four men to a litter. The heat deteriorated the bodies rapidly and they bloated fast. Almost impossible to carry in the dark, the mud, and the rain. Many times we stopped our march to retrieve a body that had fallen out of a poncho and rolled down a hill. Identification was difficult [as] KIA tags were lost. . . . not until we arrived back at Khe Sanh and matched our company roster with the evacuation list was I convinced that we had not left a fellow Marine in the hills.[14]

The weary column arrived at a safe area south of the 3d Battalion CP at 0500 on the 27th. Helicopters soon arrived and by 0730 had evacuated all of the casualties and salvaged equipment. The remnants of Company B refused the offer of trucks to transport them back to Khe Sanh; they marched back.[15]

Reinforcing the Hill 861 Attack

After the fierce action of the morning of the 26th, the 3d Marine Division realized the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines did not have the strength to carry Hill 861 alone. Major General Hochmuth shifted the SLF Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Delong's 2d Battalion, 3d Marines back to its parent regiment for the Khe Sanh operation. At the time, the battalion had been conducting Operation Beacon Star, 16 miles north of Hue. Picked up in the middle of the operation at noon on 26 April, Delong's battalion flew to Phu Bai in helicopters from HMM-164[16] and then to Khe Sanh by transport aircraft. By 1600, companies E, G, and H and the battalion command group had arrived at the Khe Sanh Combat Base and started moving toward Hill 861. The battalion established night positions approximately 500 meters east of Wilder's battalion.

The 27th was a day of preparation. By 1130, the 3d Battalion had completed all its medical evacuations and moved overland from Hill 861 to Khe Sanh base for replacements for its battle-depleted companies. Colonel Lanigan transferred both Companies M of the 3d Marines and 9th Marines to Wilder's battalion in relief of Companies K, 3d Marines, and B, 9th Marines, which had sustained the heaviest casualties. Company F, the remaining company of the SLF battalion, arrived and assumed the mission of regimental reserve. Battery B, 12th Marines, the SLF artillery battery, arrived at 1900 and was ready to fire by 2050. By the end of the day, Battery B and Battery F, the resident artillery unit at Khe Sanh, had established an organization that permitted them to function as an artillery group, with one battery in direct support of each battalion. The two 155mm howitzers and two 4.2-inch mortars attached to Battery F assumed the general support mission for the operation.

Artillery and air took on the job of softening up the objective area. For the better part of the 27th and 28th of April, the Khe Sanh artillery group and the Army's 175mm guns, further east, poured tons of high explosives onto Hill 861. During the two-day period, artillerymen fired more than 1,800 rounds of observed fire and 270 of harassment and interdiction, but the preponderance of support came from the air. During this period, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing dropped 518,700 pounds of ordnance on the target area. As each flight arrived on station, the Marine and Air Force airborne forward air controllers, (FAC[A]) directed them to orbit on the top of a large holding pattern. The flights gradually worked their way downward as preceding flights dropped their ordnance and headed for home.

To destroy the solidly built and well-camouflaged bunkers, the FACs devised a new technique. Many of the bunkers were so thick that even a direct hit with a 500-pound bomb would not completely destroy them. Napalm was ineffective until the jungle growth was cleared because the jellied gasoline burned out in the treetops. Consequently, aircraft armed with 250- and 500-pound "snakeye" bombs were called in on low runs to ripple their loads, stripping the trees and heavy foilage from the hill.* With the bunkers exposed, other aircraft armed with 750-, 1,000-, and 2,000-pound bombs came in on high-angle passes to destroy the bunkers.

Late in the afternoon of the 28th, the Marine infantrymen were ready to resume the attack. The concept of operations involved a two-battalion assault; Hill 861 became Objective 1, Hill 881S was Objective 2, and Hill 881N was Objective 3. From its position south of Hill 861, Lieutenant Colonel Delong's 2d Battalion was to seize Objective 1 on 28 April. Lieutenant Colonel Wilder's 3d Battalion was to follow the 2d Battalion. After taking the first objective, Wilder's Marines were to turn west, secure the ground between Hill 861 and 881S, then assault Objective 2 from the northeast. As the 3d Battalion attacked, the 2d Battalion was to consolidate Objective 1, then move out toward Hill 881N, screening Wilder's right flank, reinforcing it if necessary. After securing Objectives 1 and 2 Delong's battalion was to seize Objective 3, Hill 881N.

After the preparatory fire lifted, the 2d Battalion assaulted Hill 861 with two companies abreast. The Marines moved up the hill against sporadic mortar fire, but met no other resistance; the NVA had withdrawn. Both assault companies dug in on the

*The "snakeye" is a 250- or 500-pound bomb with large tail fins that unfold after release to retard the descent of the bomb. For greater accuracy, it was dropped at a low altitude. The slow parabolic trajectory of the "Snakeye" gives the aircraft time to clear the blast and fragmentation pattern.

objective while the command group and the reserve company took up positions on the southern slope of the hill. A search of the objective revealed that the enemy's withdrawal had been professional; the area was well policed, with no equipment or anything of intelligence value left behind. Though the NVA withdrawal had been orderly, it had not been without cost; the strong odor of dead bodies saturated the area. Supporting arms had done a thorough job. The hill was heavily fortified with 25 bunkers and more than 400 fighting holes, all mutually supporting, but the Marines took the hill without losing a man. Bombs and artillery had stripped most of the vegetation, leaving only charred and splintered trees.

Attacking Hill 881S

After Hill 861 was secured, the 3d Battalion, composed of Companies M, 3d Marines and K and M, 9th Marines moved from Khe Sanh to take positions on the west flank of the 2d Battalion. A small hill mass, 750 meters northeast of Hill 881S, was the battalion's intermediate objective. Lieutenant Colonel Wilder planned to secure the intermediate objective the next day, as a jumping off point for the assault on Objective 2, Hill 881S.

Early in the morning of 29 April the battalion started its advance, with Company M, 9th Marines as the lead element. At 1120, the point engaged an enemy platoon in a small draw. The company deployed, took the platoon under fire, and called for artillery and air support. At the same time, the second element of the battalion column, Company M, 3d Marines, passed south of the firefight, continuing the attack toward the battalion objective.

At 1915, Company M, 3d Marines secured the intermediate objective with no contact, and dug in for the night. Shortly after occupying the position, the company spotted North Vietnamese soldiers emplacing mortars on Hill 881S. The company called in artillery, and the enemy fired only four rounds before being dispersed. An hour later, the Marines spotted more North Vietnamese moving toward their perimeter. Although it was dark by then, the FO with Company M adjusted variable time (VT) fuzed artillery fire on the enemy's position.* As the rounds exploded over their heads showering the enemy with fragments, screams of the wounded could be heard. The NVA force quickly withdrew and the Marines passed the rest of the night without incident.

At first light on 30 April, while Wilder's battalion prepared to assault Hill 881S, Delong's battalion moved off Hill 861, along a ridgeline toward Hill 881N. Its mission was to clear the area on Wilder's right flank, and to secure positions for a final assault on Objective 3, Hill 881N. Company H, 3d Marines moved into the area where Company M, 9th Marines had made contact the previous day. As soon as it entered the area, the company ran into two NVA platoons in a bunker complex. After a brief, vicious firefight, the Marines backed off to evacuate casualties, 9 dead and 43 wounded, of whom helicopters evacuated 29 while artillery and air worked over the enemy positions. Later that afternoon, Company G assaulted the bunker complex and after heavy preparation fires, the Marines overran the position.

The men of Company G, like those of Company H, knew that they had been up against a tough and well-disciplined foe. Staff Sergeant Ruben Santos, platoon sergeant of the 1st Platoon, witnessed the tenacity of the defending North Vietnamese. One of

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Sgt R. E. Ferdeit, armed with a shotgun, keeps a wary eye out for North Vietnamese soldiers as the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines completes its preparations on 30 April for an assault on Hill 881S near Khe Sanh.

*VT fuze detonates an artillery round several meters above the ground, thus increasing the fragmentation pattern and effective kill radius. Air bursts are especially effective against troops in the open or in unprotected positions such as foxholes and open trenches.

his squads found two enemy soldiers in a bunker. The Marines threw in several hand grenades killing one man, but the other grabbed a grenade and sat on it to smother the blast. Although the explosion "blew his ass off," it did not kill him. When one of the Marines went into the bunker to clear it, the enemy soldier shot and wounded him. Sergeant Santos grabbed the Marine and tried to drag him to safety but the NVA soldier fired another burst into the Marine, killing him. Santos tried to flush the enemy soldier from the bunker by throwing in tear gas but he still would not come out. The Marines then threw fragmentation grenades in until they were sure that he was dead. Sergeant Santos later said, ". . . there was no way of getting them out . . . unless you dragged them out after they were dead."[17]

The Marines of the 3d Battalion learned the same lesson before the day was over. The strength and dispositions of the NVA forces on Hill 881S were unclear on the morning of the 30th. Thirty-three aircraft sorties had slammed 250 2,000-pound bombs into the positions on the evening of the 29th and over 1,300 rounds of artillery rained down on the hill during the night. At 0800, as the last rounds of the preparation fires hit, the Marines of Wilder's battalion began their assault.

The rough and broken terrain restricted the approach to the ridge; the Marines could not maneuver. The 3d Battalion jumped off in the attack against the hill from the northeast with Company M, 3d Marines in the lead, followed by Company K, 9th Marines. By 1025, the lead platoon reached the western end of the top of the hill after encountering only occasional small arms fire. A second platoon moved up and the two companies closed on the enemy. Suddenly the NVA struck back with automatic weapons in camouflaged bunkers and with accurate sniper fire from the trees. Thirty mortar rounds fell on the attacking platoons. They were stuck, unable to move forward or backwards. NVA infantrymen from bypassed bunkers and holes blocked the way back down the hill. Company K and the remaining platoon of Company M advanced into the savage firefight. "Huey" (UH-1E) gunships and attack aircraft streaked in, covering the enemy positions with ordnance as close as 50 meters from the Marines. At 1230, Lieutenant Colonel Wilder ordered both companies to disengage and pull back off the hill, but it took several hours to break contact. When they did move back down the hill, the Marines were able to carry their wounded with them, but not their dead. The cost had been high: 43 Marines died and 109 suffered wounds. Heavy casualties rendered Company M temporarily ineffective as a fighting unit.

The cost was even greater to the enemy. Marine infantry, artillery, and air strikes killed 163. Marine aircrews flew 118 sorties and the Khe Sanh artillery group fired 1,685 rounds that day, but it had not been enough. More supporting arms preparation fire was needed before the hill could be assaulted again.

The next day the air space over Khe Sanh was stacked high with Marine aircraft; 166 sorties attacked hills 881N and 881S. Over 650,000 pounds of ordnance, including 130 2,000-pound bombs and 1,445 artillery rounds, plastered both hills. On one occasion, the constant bombardment of Hill 881S became too much for the enemy to endure. After three very heavy airstrikes, one enemy platoon ran from its bunkers. Once the NVA soldiers were in the open, they came under fire by aircraft, as well as mortar and small arms fire from Wilder's battalion. Most died before they could escape. By the end of the day close air support pilots reported 140 more enemy killed, including 81 killed by a single strike west of the battle area.

While Hill 881S was being pounded, the 3d Battalion remained on its intermediate objective northeast of 881S, reorganizing its companies. At 1200, Company M, 3d Marines relinquished position to the regimental reserve, Company F, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines.* The depleted Company M returned to Khe Sanh and flew to Dong Ha that evening.

With the reserve committed, Major General Hochmuth transferred Company E, 9th Marines to the control of the 3d Marines and by 1910, 1 May, the company was in position at Khe Sanh. During the day both battalions brought up their "Mule"-mounted 106mm recoilless rifles to assist in the reduction of enemy bunkers and fortifications by direct fire.**

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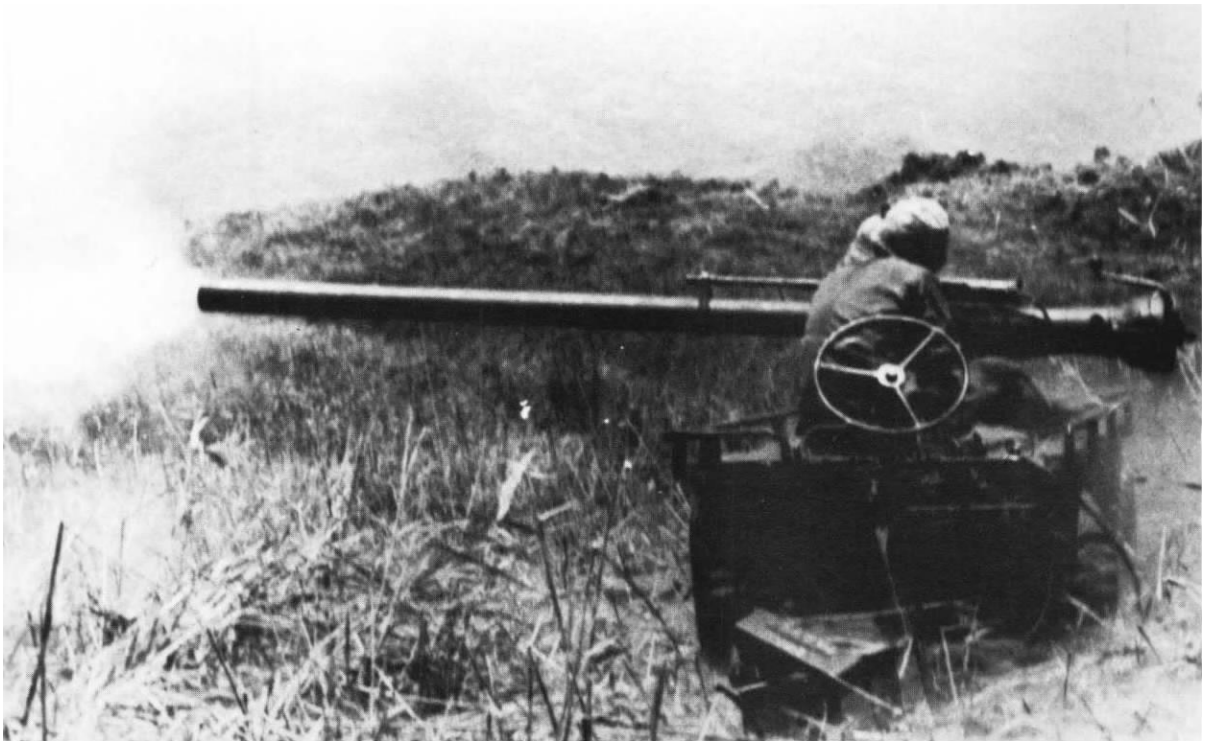
*Captain Raymond H. Bennett, who was ashore from one of the carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin on a 30-day indoctrination assignment, temporarily commanded Company M.

**The "Mule" is a small, rough terrain vehicle, primarily used for resupply. It is the standard platform and transportation for the 106mm recoilless rifle, an antitank weapon.



Marine Corps Historical Collection

The 2d Battalion, 3d Marines used its 106mm recoilless rifles to destroy North Vietnamese bunkers on Hill 881S prior to the 3d Battalion's final assault on the hill, 2 May.

The 3d Battalion was ready to go again on the morning of the 2nd, and after a final artillery preparation, the 9th Marines' Companies M and K moved out against Hill 881S. By 1420, the Marines had secured the hill, having encountered only sniper fire in the process. That evening Lieutenant Colonel Wilder established his CP on 881S and dug in for the night with two assault companies. Company F, the most recent arrival, remained behind on the intermediate objective. The Marines, at last, had the opportunity to see what they had run up against on the 30th.

The enemy had dug about 250 bunkers on the hill; after four days of heavy air strikes and artillery preparation fire, 50 remained. Wire communications connected the bunkers and they mutually supported each other with interlocking fields of fire. Two layers of logs and as much as five feet of dirt covered small bunkers, leaving only a small two-foot opening. Larger fortifications, capable of holding four men, were equipped with small storage shelves, bamboo mat floors, and a simple but effective drainage system. The largest dugouts, command posts, had two entrances and roofs covered by four to eight layers of logs, in addition to 4 feet of dirt on top of the logs. The extent of the fortifications on 881S caught the Marines by surprise, but their discovery alerted Delong's battalion as to what to expect on Hill 881N.

The Final Objective: Hill 881N

With Hill 881S secured, the Marines turned their attention to Objective 3, Hill 881N. Since 28 April, when the battalion took Hill 861, Lieutenant Colonel Delong's Marines had been sweeping the area northwest of the hill, checking out each successive ravine and ridgeline. By the morning of 2 May the battalion was ready to move against 881N. At 1015, the action began with Company E attacking the hill from the south and Company G assaulting from the east. Company H was in a supporting position between the two units. Company G made contact almost immediately and after a brief firefight pulled back to employ artillery fire. After the artillery attack, the company moved in, but again came under automatic weapons and mortar fire. Additional Marine supporting arms silenced the enemy. Com-

pany H, moving to a position to support Company G, also came under enemy mortar attack which ceased when Company G called in fire support requests. At the same time, Company E battered its way almost to the top of the hill. Suddenly, a heavy rain squall driven by gusts up to 40 miles per hour lashed the hills. Lieutenant Colonel Delong, realizing that control was impossible and that the coordinated assault by his units could not be made, pulled the battalion back to more defensible terrain for the night.

A strong enemy counterattack, early in the morning of 3 May disrupted Marine plans to continue the assault. At 0415, Company E, in night positions on a small hill 500 meters south of Hill 881N, endured small arms and mortar fire followed by an aggressive ground attack. Two reinforced NVA companies struck the Marines' perimeter from the northeast and, after bitter hand-to-hand fighting, penetrated that portion of the defenses. The attackers either killed or wounded all Marines in this area. After penetrating the lines, the NVA units moved into a tree line in the middle of the position and reoccupied some of the bunkers which the engineers had not yet destroyed.

About 10 minutes after the first attack, First Lieutenant Frank M. Izenour, Jr., whose platoon held the western half of the perimeter, received orders to take a squad to attempt to seal off the penetration. With his second squad, the lieutenant moved forward, but immediately came under fire from two machine guns which hit several of his men. Lieutenant Izenour reported that he needed reinforcements. Company commander Captain Alfred E. Lyon did not want to weaken the 1st Platoon further so he organized 11 attached engineers as a squad and sent them into the fight. Both squads took positions on the left edge of the penetration and fired into the enemy's flank. With the help of artillery, gunships, and jets, the Marines stalled the attack, but the platoon commander still did not have enough force to drive the enemy out of the penetration.[18]

A flareship arrived and its two-million-candlepower parachute flares practically turned night into day. From Hill 881S, the Marines of the

This well constructed, log-reinforced North Vietnamese Army bunker on Hill 881 South, its embrasure hidden among the deep shadows around the base, remained fully intact despite a bomb explosion in April that left a large crater just over 10 feet away.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800216

3d Battalion could see approximately 200 NVA soldiers moving toward Company E from the west. They quickly moved the battalion's 106mm recoilless rifles into positions and fired more than 100 rounds into the enemy's flank, breaking up the attack. Then artillery pounded the North Vietnamese force as it withdrew.

By first light, the Marines had shattered the NVA attack, but some enemy soldiers still remained inside Company E's position. At 0700, Company F reverted to the operational control of its parent unit, the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines. From its position on the 3d Battalion's intermediate objective, one platoon of the company flew in helicopters from HMM-164 to a landing zone next to the Company E perimeter. The reinforcing unit immediately attacked the southern edge of the penetration. In the meantime, Lieutenant Colonel Delong ordered Company H to close in on the enemy's rear from the northeast. Moving toward each other the two units finally managed to seal the breach.

Company H then began the difficult task of eliminating the NVA soldiers in the bunkers and tree line. The effort required bitter close-quarters fighting which continued until 1500 when the company reported the final bunker cleared. The NVA soldiers fought virtually to the last man. The NVA attack killed 27 Marines in the action and wounded 84, but enemy bodies covered the area. The NVA attackers left behind 137 dead, and the Marines captured three prisoners, plus a large quantity of weapons and equipment.

Interrogation of the prisoners revealed the enemy planned another attack for that night. As a result, Lieutenant Colonel Delong consolidated his companies on the southern slope of Hill 881N and established a tight perimeter defense. After dark, helicopters from HMM-164 flew in extra defensive equipment, including concertina wire, trip flares, and Claymore mines. The Marines were ready for the assault, but the attack failed to materialize. Instead an NVA unit hit the Special Forces Camp at Lang Vei 10 kilometers to the southeast.[19]

At 0435, 4 May, a reinforced NVA company assaulted the Lang Vei camp. The attack was to have served as a diversion for the major NVA thrust from the northwest which the Marines had preempted on 24 April. The action had a little effect on the battle taking place in the hills, but was a tactical victory for the Communists. The NVA attackers quickly overran the camp's defenses and penetrated to the heart of the compound. There, they destroyed vital installations and killed many key personnel, including the U.S. Army Special Forces detachment commander and his executive officer. Despite artillery fire from the Marines at Khe Sanh, the attackers withdrew with only light casualties. The South Vietnamese irregulars defending Lang Vei were not as lucky; 20 died and another 39 disappeared. To counter any further threats from the southwest, the 3d Marine Division ordered Company C, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, airlifted from Phu Bai later in the afternoon of 4 May and added to the Khe Sanh reserve.

The next morning Lieutenant Colonel Delong's Marines advanced toward the final objective, Hill 881N. His three companies had spent most of 4 May reorganizing, while additional preparatory fires blasted the hill. At 1530, the battalion moved into assault positions on the southern slopes of the objective. At 0850 5 May, Companies E and F jumped off, meeting gradually increasing resistance as they advanced. Both units temporarily disengaged so that air and artillery could again work over the hill. At 1300, Company F resumed the attack while Company E established a base of fire and Company G enveloped the north. The two attack Companies, F and G, met only sniper fire and secured the objective at 1445. The Khe Sanh hill complex belonged to the Marines.

End of the Battle

For the next three days, there was little contact with NVA units. Both battalions thoroughly searched Hills 881N and 881S, while engineers destroyed the remaining enemy fortifications. Marine aircraft struck suspected enemy positions to the north and west, while platoon patrols covered the area immediately west of the two hills. Airborne observers remained on station to call in artillery and air strikes on likely avenues of escape. Air support achieved a unique first during the period. An AO sighted a lone NVA soldier waving a flag, indicating his desire to surrender. A helicopter flew in and picked up the rallier.

Observers spotted enemy troops to the northwest. The sightings indicated that the *325C NVA Division* was withdrawing toward North Vietnam and Laos. On 9 May, a patrol of two platoons of Company F finally caught up with one of the evading enemy units. The patrol had just swept down the northern

finger of Hill 778, 3,200 meters northwest of Hill 881N, when it ran into sniper fire from a ridgeline to its front. The lead element deployed on line and started up the slope, only to be met pointblank by a heavy fusillade. The action remained furious for 20 minutes as the Marines tried to gain fire superiority and call in artillery fire.

Getting artillery support was not an easy matter. Company F's forward observer, Second Lieutenant Terrence M. Weber, tried feverishly to contact Khe Sanh Fire Support Control Center; apparently it was out of radio range. Finally, Weber raised another Marine unit which relayed his fire requests. About 30 minutes after the firefight started, the North Vietnamese began to disengage and withdraw. As they pulled back, artillery and gunships tore into the enemy ranks. The battalion ordered Company E, south of the engagement, to go to Company F's aid. Company E's 60mm mortar hit the right flank of the NVA unit. The battalion also sent two 81mm mortars, two 106mm recoilless rifles, and a security platoon by helicopters to Company E's position. As a result of the rapid reaction by reinforcing units and supporting arms fire, the enemy's orderly withdrawal turned into flight.[20]

When the fighting ended, the Marines counted 31 NVA bodies in the area. A search of the position uncovered large amounts of equipment and rice as well as 203 freshly dug graves. The bitter fighting cost the Marines 24 dead and 19 wounded, most of whom became casualties in the opening minutes of the battle. Bad weather prevented a withdrawal, so Companies E and F set up a defensive perimeter and passed the night without further contact.

To the west, another encounter between a seven-man reconnaissance team from the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion and an enemy company marked the last significant action of the operation. Helicopters inserted Reconnaissance Team Breaker at 1650 on 9 May. Shortly after midnight it became heavily engaged. The enemy easily could have overrun the outnumbered Marines, but they chose not to do so. Apparently they were more interested in shooting down helicopters attempting to extract the team. The heroic performance of 18-year-old Private First Class Steve D. Lopez highlighted the action. Wounded four times, twice in the head, the young Marine remained on his radio for 12 hours, calling in artillery and air strikes practically on top of his own position. In addition, he killed several enemy soldiers at close quarters with his M-16.[21]

Helicopters made two attempts during the night to extract the team and another in the early morning; all three failed because of heavy ground fire. At 1145, they made a fourth try. After sealing off the area with fixed-wing and gunship coverage, a UH-1E landed and picked up the three survivors. Four members of the reconnaissance team and one helicopter pilot died in the action, as did a known total of seven enemy soldiers.

This action ended the First Battle for Khe Sanh, one of the finest examples of an air-ground team effort during the war. The men of the 3d Marines fought a conventional infantry battle against a well-entrenched NVA force. Although aggressive infantry assaults finally took the various objectives, much of the credit for overwhelming the enemy force belongs to the supporting arms. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing flew more than 1,100 sorties, expending over 1,900 tons of ordnance during the operation. Air attacks proved particularly effective in uncovering and destroying enemy bunkers and fortifications. While Marine air provided all the close and direct air support for the operation, 23 U.S. Air Force B-52 strikes hit enemy troop concentrations, stores, and lines of communications. Artillery also provided a large share of combat support, especially during the many periods of reduced visibility. Artillery units fired more than 25,000 rounds in support of their comrades on and around the Khe Sanh hills.

The battle was also the first major test of the M-16 rifle by the Marine Corps. Opinions of the results were mixed. The light weight of the rifle and the ability of the troops to carry more ammunition than with previous rifles were important positive factors. One Marine officer attributed the success of the final assault on Hill 881 to the M-16s used by the attacking Marines. Others, however, strongly criticized the weapon for a tendency to jam.[22]*

The First Battle for Khe Sanh did not turn into the spectacular victory that the North Vietnamese desired. Reported enemy casualties in the action from 24 April through 11 May stood at 940 confirmed killed. The cost of stopping the Communist effort was not light; 155 Marines died and another 425 suffered wounds.

*See Chapter 14 for a discussion of the problems with the M-16 and the efforts to correct them.

Operation Crockett

With the enemy threat in the area relieved for the time being, Lieutenant General Walt began reducing forces at Khe Sanh. From 11-13 May, the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines replaced the two battalions from the 3d Marines and, at 1500 on the 13th, Colonel John J. Padley, commanding officer of the 26th Marines, assumed responsibility for Khe Sanh from Colonel Lanigan.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188672

The 26th Marines constantly patrolled the area around Khe Sanh after the beginning of Operation Crockett in mid-May. This patrol from Company A climbs through rugged terrain near Hill 881 North that had been blasted by several earlier air strikes.

The mission assigned to Colonel Padley's Marines was to occupy key terrain, deny enemy access into the vital areas, conduct aggressive patrolling in order to detect and destroy enemy elements within the TAOR, and provide security for the base and adjacent outposts. Colonel Padley was to support the Special Forces Camp at Lang Vei with his organic artillery, as well as to coordinate all activities of allied units operating in the area. The code name for Marine operations in the Khe Sanh TAOR was Operation Crockett.

To accomplish the mission, the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Donald E. Newton, stationed one company each on Hill 881S and 861; a security detachment on Hill 950 at a radio relay site; and the remainder of the battalion at the base, acting both as base security and battalion reserve. The units at the company outposts patrolled continuously within a 4,000-meter radius of their positions. Company A, 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, operating from Khe Sanh, inserted reconnaissance teams at greater ranges to provide long-range surveillance. Although numerous sightings and reports indicated that all three regiments of the *325C NVA Division* were still in the tri-border region, there was only occasional contact during May.

As June began, there was a sharp increase in the number of sightings throughout the Crockett TAOR. At 0101 6 June, twenty-five 120mm mortar rounds and 102mm rockets hit the base. One hour later the radio relay site on Hill 950 came under attack from the west and northeast by an unknown number of enemy soldiers. The enemy penetrated the position, but the defending Marines quickly forced them to withdraw, leaving 10 dead, one wounded, and seven weapons. Marine losses in the action were six killed and two wounded. The next afternoon, mortar and small-arms fire hit a patrol from Company B, approximately 2,000 meters west of Hill 881S. The mortar attack immediately preceded an assault by about 40 NVA troops. The Marines

*The official designation of the unit at Khe Sanh was the 26th Marines (Forward). It consisted of one battalion and a small regimental headquarters. The other two 26th Marines battalions were in Vietnam, but under the control of other units. The regimental rear headquarters remained on Okinawa.

repulsed the enemy charge and called artillery in on the attackers. A platoon from Company A arrived by helicopter to help. By 1630, when the enemy withdrew, the two Marine units had killed 66 North Vietnamese and lost 18 of their own men. Twenty-eight Marines suffered wounds.

Two days later the enemy shot down an armed UH-1E in the same area, killing the pilot and wounding the copilot. Friendly forces rescued the copilot and two crew members, but the aircraft had to be destroyed. Due to the increasing number of enemy contacts, Lieutenant Colonel Kurt L. Hoch's 3d Battalion, 26th Marines returned to the operational control of the 26th Marines (Forward) at Khe Sanh; the battalion arrived at Khe Sanh on the 13th.

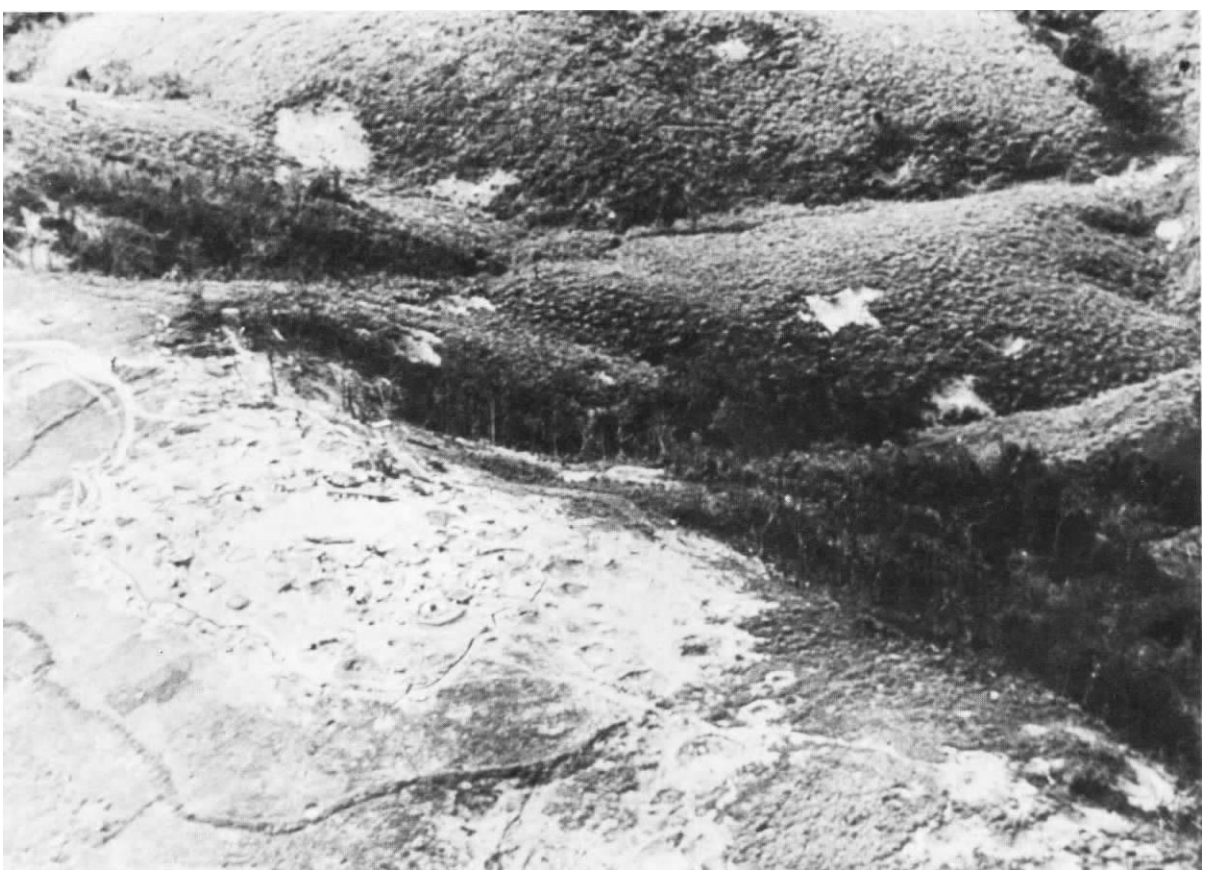
During the two weeks after the 3d Battalion's arrival, both Marine battalions had many contacts with isolated enemy forces throughout the TAOR. In the early morning of the 27th, 50 82mm mortar rounds hit the Khe Sanh base. The attack was extremely costly to the Marines; it killed nine and wounded 125. Another attack occurred at 0525 by 50 102mm rockets. Casualties resulting from the second attack totaled one killed and 14 wounded. The Marines' artillery answered both attacks with unknown results.

At 1230 on 27 June, Company I, 26th Marines, while searching for a suspected mortar position to the west of the base, ran into two NVA companies. Company L landed by helicopter to reinforce the engaged Marines. By 1900 the NVA broke contact and withdrew to the northwest leaving 35 bodies on the battlefield. This was the last significant action during June.

Operation Crockett continued as a two-battalion effort until it ended the 16th of July. During the July period of the operation there was a gradual increase in the number of sightings, but only occasional contact. Nevertheless, the Marines knew the NVA was not ready to abandon the Khe Sanh area.

Following the battles of April and May for the Khe Sanh area, shell-scarred Hill 881 South, shown here in an aerial view, became a combat base for a 26th Marines company.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189356



PART II
SPRING FIGHTING IN SOUTHERN I CORPS

CHAPTER 5
The War in Southern I Corps

The Situation – Operation Desoto – Deckhouse/Desoto – Desoto Continued
Operation Union – Union II

The Situation

The buildup of regular NVA forces along the DMZ attracted command attention, but the fighting there was only one segment of the I Corps-III MAF campaign. The 1st Marine Division, in the southern portion of the III MAF zone of operations, was fighting a three-pronged war. Marine operations of battalion size or larger extended to the outer periphery of the division's TAOR to destroy North Vietnamese units and Viet Cong main forces and base areas, while company-size and smaller counterguerrilla operations sought to protect both allied installations and the civil population. At the same time, the division provided support for the Vietnamese Government Revolutionary Development Program which was trying to neutralize the guerilla infrastructure.

The area of responsibility of Major General Herman Nickerson, Jr.'s 1st Marine Division consisted of the three southernmost provinces of I Corps: Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai. This area was important for diverse reasons. It contained a large population, was a rich rice-producing basin, and was a major source of salt.* Furthermore, the tree-covered foothills of the Annamite Mountains jutting into the coastal plain and the numerous rivers provided the enemy with natural access to the area.

Forty-three large unit operations, involving a force of at least a battalion, were conducted in southern I Corps during the first six months of 1967. In addition, thousands of small unit operations abetted the larger "sweeps." During the first three months of the year, for example, the 1st Marine Division carried out no less than 36,553 company-size operations, patrols, and ambushes in the Da Nang Tactical Area alone.

*Salt had traditionally been a medium of barter and a taxable commodity in Vietnam. Moreover, the hot climate of Vietnam makes its use a dietary necessity.

These small unit actions occasionally were hard-fought battles with the Viet Cong. One such occurred on 31 January during a patrol approximately 15 kilometers southwest of Da Nang by Company H, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, commanded by Captain Edward J. Banks. Just before noon, as the company approached the hamlet of Thuy Bo, located immediately west of the north-south railroad, it came under heavy fire from a Viet Cong main-force battalion. The latter's armament included .50-caliber and other automatic weapons which hit several Marines in the lead platoon. The casualties mounted as the enemy gunners' fire found the Marines taking shelter behind low rice paddy dikes. Evacuation of the dead and wounded proved difficult and only one helicopter managed to land and pick up some of the casualties.

Captain Banks requested air and artillery strikes on the enemy force. By 1330, he decided to ask for a quick reaction mission to bring in reinforcements. Supporting arms continued to hit the Viet Cong but did not eliminate the main-force battalion's fire. The Marines had to remain in their exposed positions the rest of the day and all night.

The following morning, the Marine company assaulted the hamlet. There was some gunfire during the assault; however, the enemy battalion had withdrawn during the night. Marine casualties numbered 5 dead and 26 wounded, most of whom were from the lead units on 31 January. One Marine later died from his wounds. The Marines estimated they had killed 101 Viet Cong soldiers.

During the next two days, local Vietnamese peasants brought 22 dead and 18 wounded villagers to the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines command post. These casualties had resulted from air, artillery, and small arms fire. After an investigation, the battalion determined that these civilian casualties were a regrettable corollary to the fighting on 31 January and 1 February.

The 1st Marines followed up the 31 January action with Operation Stone, which lasted from 10-12

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A369882

Operation Desoto occurred as the 1st Marine Division prepared to issue the M-16 rifle to its infantrymen. MajGen Herman Nickerson, Jr., used a 21 February visit to Operation Desoto to discuss the weapon with one of the few 1st Division Marines to have one.

February. Three Marine battalions participated in the operation's first phase on Go Noi Island, a 12-kilometer-long island formed by the river south of Company H's action. Phase II took place north of the river and included the Thuy Bo area. However, only a single reinforced battalion, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, conducted the remainder of the operation.

The 1st Battalion managed to establish a cordon on 19 February around elements of the Viet Cong *R-20 Battalion*. Beginning the following morning, the Marine battalion's companies took turns sweeping back and forth across the cordoned area. By the end of the operation on 12 February, the 1st Battalion had killed a confirmed total of 68 Viet Cong soldiers and captured 25 prisoners and 17 weapons.

Marine casualties for all of Operation Stone totaled 9 dead and 76 wounded. One Kit Carson Scout also died. The 1st Marines claimed 291 Viet Cong killed in the entire operation and listed another 112 as probably killed, plus 74 enemy captured.

While such actions established a tedious balance in the "cat-and-mouse" game of subduing local guerrillas, operations of a larger scale, responding to confirmed intelligence reports, attempted to smash larger, established Communist concentrations. Four major operations, Desoto, Deckhouse VI, Union, and Union II, produced the most significant results during January-June 1967, and are discussed in this chapter as being representative of the major unit fighting in southern I Corps during this period. Although these operations produced tangible and significant results, it is, and was, impossible to measure the full impact of the "unsuccessful" operations, much less the small unit patrols and ambushes that encountered no enemy. "No contact" had to be considered as a potential victory in the war for area and people control.

The Vietnamese-U.S. 1967 Joint Combined Campaign Plan specified several areas of southern I Corps for allied operations in early 1967. The Thu Bon area between Da Nang and An Hoa and the rich, densely populated Que Son Valley were main areas of concern. The results of Marine and ARVN efforts in these regions for the past two years were tangible, but continued pressure was required to extend and consolidate government authority there. Pacified areas, and those undergoing pacification, required protection, as did military bases and population centers. The gradual increase of Communist capabilities made it necessary to pay higher costs for the security of these locations.* At the same time, the enemy sanctuary in the Duc Pho-Mo Duc sections of Quang Ngai, demanded immediate attention. Intelligence reports indicated that NVA units had moved north into these two districts from II Corps.

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*On 27 February 1967, the enemy attacked the Da Nang air base complex with 140mm rockets, which had a range of 8,000 meters. This was the first use of the weapon in the war. To counter the increased firepower capability the Marines extended their search areas by approximately 2,500 meters. (See Chapter 6 for a more detailed account of this attack.)

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370227

A peasant family's bomb shelter provides a place for a machine gun team from the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines to set up to provide covering fire for infantymen searching a village during Operation Arizona in June. Arizona was one of the many conducted by the 1st Marine Division to maintain control over the populated areas south of Da Nang.

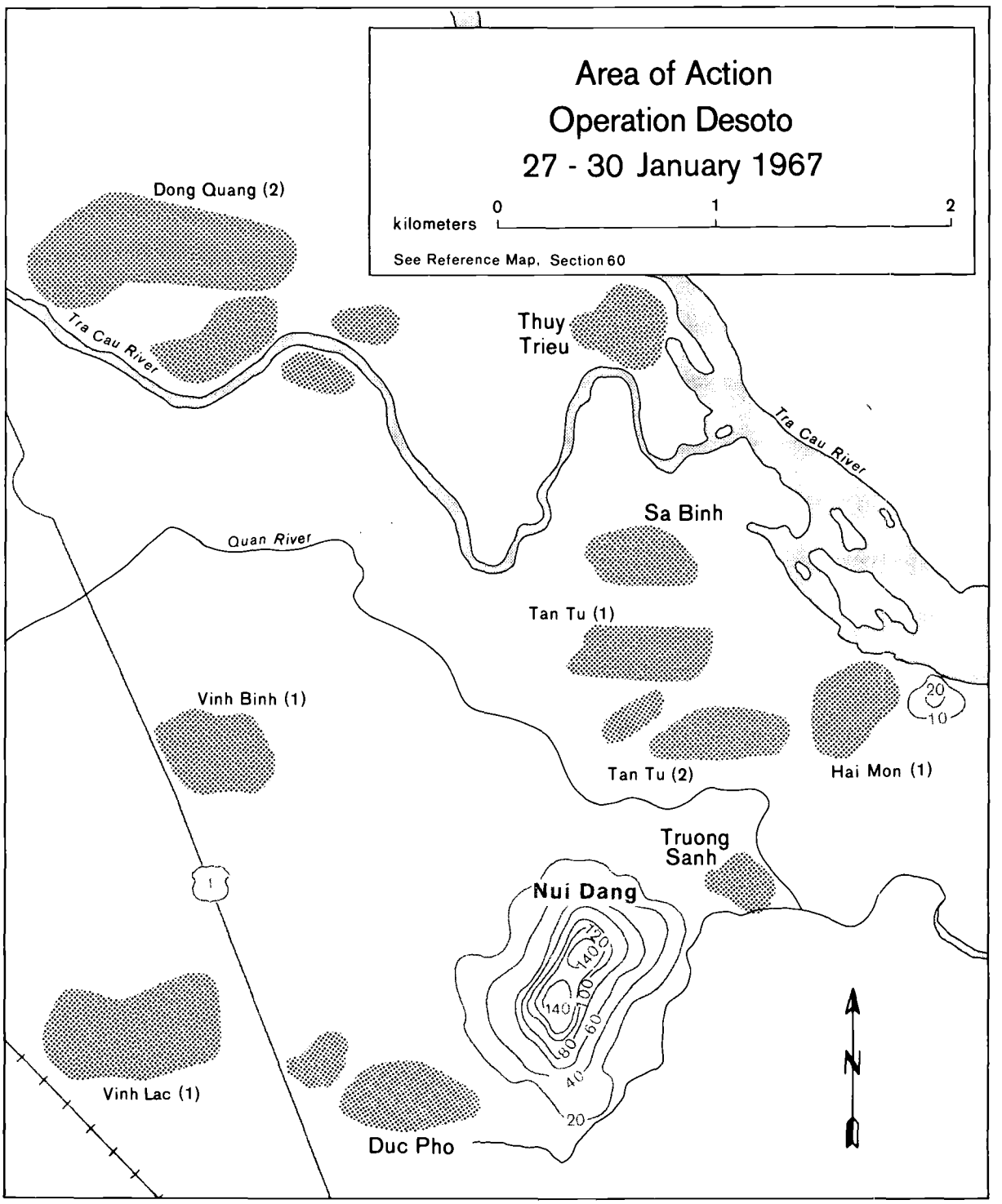
Duc Pho, the southernmost district of Quang Ngai Province, had been under Communist influence for many years. The salt flats at Sa Huynh, as well as the rich and populated, fertile coastal plain, were a vital source of supply for the Viet Cong war effort. Furthermore, the Tra Cau inlet and the coast immediately to the north had long been suspected as infiltration points. Intelligence reports also indicated that the district harbored the Viet Cong political subdivision of the region. South Vietnamese Army activity in Duc Pho had been restricted to the outposting of two predominant hills, Nui Dang and Nui Dau. An ARVN battalion occupied these hilltops and controlled the area around the district capital of Duc Pho, but nothing more. As a result, the guerrillas developed extensive fortifications and supply installations throughout the countryside. Astonishing as it may seem, the Communist control over the area was so complete that many of the inhabitants had never come in contact with military forces other than the Viet Cong.

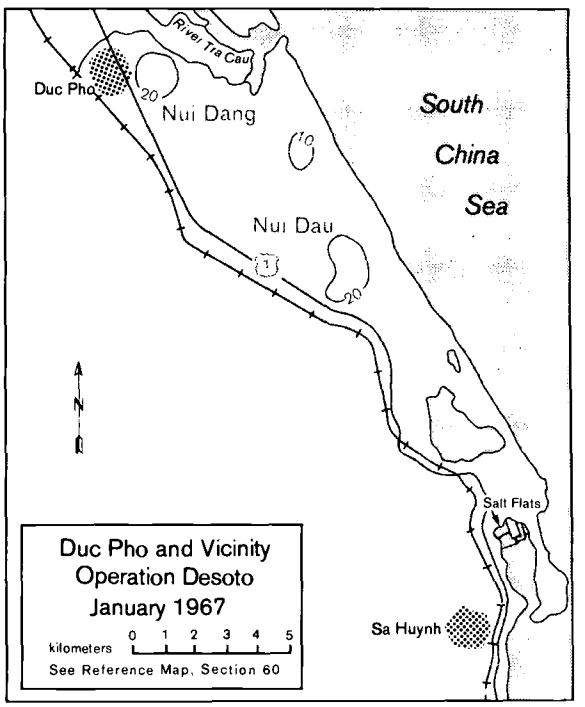
Geographically, the Duc Pho region is a predominantly flat rice paddy interspersed with numerous small streams having steep banks four to five feet high. The majority of the streams are fordable. Hedgerows border vitually all the rice paddies and cane fields and bamboo groves are scattered throughout the area.

Operation Desoto

Operation Desoto originated from the joint Vietnamese-U.S. 1967 Combined Campaign Plan in which III MAF forces were to relieve ARVN units from outpost duty so that they could be employed more effectively elsewhere in the Revolutionary Development Program. The 4th Battalion, 4th Regiment, 2d ARVN Division, stationed in Duc Pho District, was one of the units selected to concentrate on the pacification program. In turn, General Stiles' Task Force X-Ray assigned one of its battalions to relieve the ARVN battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Raymond J. O'Leary's 3d Battalion, 7th Marines received this mission.*

*LtCol O'Leary's 3d Battalion came to the operation with considerable experience in fighting both NVA and VC units. During the latter part of 1966, the battalion participated in Operation Prairie I in the DMZ and in the Dai Loc/Hill 39 TAOR west of Da Nang. Col Francis V. White, Comments on draft ms, 22Nov82 (Vietnam comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)


Area of Action
Operation Desoto
27 - 30 January 1967
kilometers
0
1
2
See Reference Map, Section 60
Dong Quang (2)
Tra Cau River
Thuy Trieu
Tra Cau River
Sa Binh
Quan River
Tan Tu (1)
Vinh Binh (1)
Tan Tu (2)
Hai Mon (1)
Truong Sanh
Nui Dang
Vinh Lac (1)
Duc Pho
N



The relief operation termed Desoto began on 27 January. Marine helicopters lifted Company L and four 105mm howitzers and crews of Battery I, 12th Marines to Nui Dang to relieve the Vietnamese units there. The howitzers were to provide fire support for a battalion assault the next morning. At 0800 on the 28th, Company M, followed by the rest of the battalion, made a helicopter assault into landing zones just north of the Nui Dang position. The only opposition was sniper fire, but intermittent firing continued throughout the day.

Shortly after the battalion's landing, Companies I and M moved out to secure the villages of Vinh Binh and Truong Sanh.* Sniper fire harried Company I during its advance to Vinh Binh, but by the end of the day the company had secured the village and established night positions east of it. Company M also encountered light harassing fire as it moved toward Truong Sanh, but it occupied the village without opposition. Villagers at Truong Sanh told the Marines that strong VC forces were east of the Song Quan (Quan River) in the hamlet of Tan Tu (2).

*Truong Sanh appears on maps in use in 1967 but not on the 1970 edition of the Mo Duc mapsheet. It occupied the area north east of Nui Dang and south of the Song Quan.

To exploit this information, the battalion command group, Company M, and one platoon moved east of the stream south of the hamlet. As the lead elements began to move into Tan Tu (2) they came under sniper fire, and when they tried to close with the snipers a strong VC bunker complex stopped their advance. The company called in artillery and air strikes against the positions. After the bombardment, the Marines attacked again, but stopped once more because of heavy fire from machine guns and automatic weapons to the north and northeast. The Marines directed more supporting arms fire against the Communist positions. Under its cover, Company M recovered its dead and wounded and, following orders from the battalion, withdrew across the stream and established company night positions.

Because of the sharp engagement east of the Song Quan, Lieutenant Colonel O'Leary decided to use both Companies I and M to assault the Tan Tu village complex on the 29th. During the night supporting arms blanketed the village to prepare for the attack, and at first light both companies began moving toward the objective. As they forded the Song Quan, sniper fire broke out. The enemy snipers were unusually accurate; they wounded three men from Company I almost immediately. Both companies returned the enemy fire and pushed on into the village against little resistance.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A369746

A rifleman races for the cover of a paddy dike as his 7th Marines unit draws sniper fire on 28 January, the first day of Task Force X-Ray's Operation Desoto.

By 1330, the Marines had secured Tan Tu and moved into the adjacent village of Sa Binh, still harassed by long-range sniper fire. Periodic bursts of heavy fire were the only sign of the enemy; the majority had withdrawn. The two companies searched the village and dug in for the night on a small knoll north of Sa Binh.

The next day, Company M again searched the two communities. One patrol found an enemy landmine foundry with 500 pounds of uncut metal, mine molds, and tools. After photographing the entire works for intelligence purposes, the Marines demolished the foundry.

Meanwhile, Company I had started to sweep southeast toward the village of Hai Mon. Since this area had sheltered enemy snipers on the 29th, the Marines first called in artillery and naval preparatory fires on suspected positions near the community. As the lead element advanced, they met heavy small arms fire from Hai Mon. The FAC assigned to Company I called in jets armed with napalm and 500-pound bombs, followed by attacks by two UH-1Es which hit the area with rockets and machine gun fire. One UH-1E, badly damaged by ground fire, force-landed at the battalion CP.

One of the battalion's 106mm recoilless rifles revealed the degree of fortification of the village when one of its rounds hit one of the thatched huts and revealed an oval concrete bunker. A direct hit from another 106mm round penetrated the bunker.[1]

Hai Mon proved to be more difficult by the minute. The defending enemy had fortified many rice paddy dikes to create positions providing a deadly cross-fire. By 1330, Company I had taken cover in deep rice paddies west of the village. As the afternoon wore on, the situation became even worse. Enemy gunfire, including fire from heavy machine guns, raked the company from four sides. The company could not evacuate its casualties and ammunition ran low. At 1655, the battalion ordered Company I to break contact and withdraw to the west.

Withdrawal and reconsolidation were not easy. Company M fought its way up to the eastern flank of Company I and replenished the latter's ammunition, then both companies tried to disengage under the cover of air strikes, artillery, and naval gunfire.* By 2000, Company M had established a casualty collection point and both companies gathered their casualties there. The Marines could not complete the medical evacuation until 2200 because some casualties had been point men caught in the open by the initial enemy fire. Marines could recover these bodies only by crawling out under cover of darkness. By then, the battalion estimated that Hai Mon was 60 percent destroyed. Supporting arms amounting to 325 5-inch naval rockets, 125 5-inch shells, 590 105mm rounds, and 50 tons of aviation ordnance had smashed the enemy fortifications.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A369818

Enemy fire on 1 February during Operation DeSoto forced this Marine from Company I, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines to crawl to cover while another Marine elected to avoid the mud and dash forward on foot.

Lieutenant Colonel O'Leary, realizing the village was highly fortified, was not content with the damage to Hai Mon and ordered more shelling to neutralize the area. Again on the 31st, the battalion directed air, naval gunfire, and artillery at all known and suspected Communist positions in and around the village.

While supporting arms pounded Hai Mon, Company M resumed the deliberate search of the Tan Tu hamlets, as Company I swept the area west of Hai Mon. To the south, Company K, operating from Nui Dau, made several small contacts, but enemy activity was light. The heaviest action of the day occurred at 2200 when the battalion command post and logistic support area came under small arms and 60mm mortar fire. Shortly thereafter, 20 VC probed the perimeter. Company L and Headquarters and

*Col Francis V. White, then the 3d Battalion's S-3 officer, recalled in 1982 that, at the height of this firefight, Capt Alan L. Orr, the battalion S-4 officer, led an ammunition party to Company M's position, then to Company I, to deliver badly needed ammunition and to assist in casualty evacuation. Col Francis V. White, Comments on draft ms, 22Nov82 (Vietnam comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Service Company security troops stopped the attack in the outer wire of their defenses, killing two of the enemy. Marine losses were 14 wounded, eight of whom required evacuation. The battalion's 81mm mortars and supporting artillery fired on possible escape routes to catch the withdrawing enemy, but a followup search of the area turned up only two Russian-made rifles, several grenades, and some satchel charges.

During early February, the battalion remained in the new TAOR and conducted repeated search and destroy operations. On 2 February, Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. Bronars relieved Lieutenant Colonel O'Leary as commanding officer of the battalion. The next day, 3 February, Companies L and M, 5th Marines, which joined the operation on 31 January, conducted a two-day sweep in the village complex southeast of Nui Dang. Although contact in the area was light, the Marines found the hamlets to be well fortified, and discovered more than 100 tons of rice which they bagged and turned over to ARVN authorities. After searching this community, the Marines again turned their attention to Hai Mon and Hill 26 east of it.

Aerial observation reports and Company I's bloody experience of the 30th indicated that most of the enemy fortifications in the village pointed west. Lieutenant Colonel Bronars decided to attack the position from the east by vertical envelopment, using Companies L and M. The morning of 5 February, artillery, naval gunfire, and air bombardment blanketed the objective area. The assault helicopters from Lieutenant Colonel Ural W. Shadrick's HMM-262 followed approach and retirement lanes which allowed the artillery at Nui Dang and the naval guns offshore to maintain suppressive fire throughout the landing.

Light machine gun fire and several rounds of 57mm recoilless rifle fire greeted the companies as they moved into the hamlets. They responded by calling in artillery and naval gunfire. At this time, Marines spotted a number of sampans carrying about 30 Viet Cong fleeing northward across the Song Tra Cau. Bronar's Company M sprayed the withdrawing force with small arms fire and fixed-wing aircraft made several strikes, destroying several of the sampans.

After seizing Hill 26 and Hai Mon, the Marines searched the area and uncovered a vast, intricate bunker and cave system. They promptly destroyed the bunkers, but the caves, particularly those on Hill 26, were so extensive that the battalion called in engineers to determine the amount of explosives needed to seal them. By the time the last cave on the hill had collapsed, the engineers had used 3,600 pounds of explosives. The well-prepared defensive positions and the skillfully laid fields of fire confirmed that the Communists had expected an attack from the west; the assault from the east caught them by surprise. Possession of the village enabled the Marines to control the southern bank of the Song Tra Cau inlet.

Desoto continued during February, consisting of frequent platoon and company sweeps and extensive patrolling and ambushing throughout the area. The battalion's area of operations expanded with each passing day. The villages of Thuy Trieu, An Trung, Dong Quang, Vinh Lac, and Thanh Lam appeared on daily situation reports, but for the Marines on the ground each one was just another "ville" that had to be seized and cleared, a dirty and often painful task.[2] Attrition among company grade officers was quite high, and the high tempo of daily operations had a noticeable deleterious effect on the rifle companies.[3]

Snipers were a constant threat and the major source of Marine casualties. The Marines countered with scout-sniper teams positioned at carefully selected vantage points; however, the teams had difficulty in locating an enemy who fired from cleverly constructed spider traps

Throughout the month the battalion exploited reports of Viet Cong positions with artillery and naval gunfire and extensively used radar-controlled aerial bombing of suspected enemy concentrations. Surveillance reports indicated that the supporting arms attacks were very effective against the Communist sanctuaries.

Deckhouse/Desoto

While Lieutenant Colonel Bronars' battalion gradually expanded control of the Nui Dang-Nui Dau area, the Marines of Colonel Harry D. Wortman's SLF landed near Sa Huynh at the southern tip of the district. The SLF's amphibious operation area included the only area in I Corps where the Annamite Mountains extend to the coastline. It was a predominantly Communist-controlled area. The heavily forested hills concealed the supply routes leading to major enemy base areas further inland. A sheltered harbor and anchorage, and several landing beaches on the coast enhanced Sa Huynh's infiltration potential.

SLF Operation Deckhouse VI had several goals: to prevent free movement of Communist forces in the area; to conduct harbor, beach, and airfield surveys to locate a site from which to provide more economical logistic support for allied forces in southern Quang Ngai; and to provide security for the construction of a CIDG camp which would establish permanent government control in the region. Upon completion of these tasks, the SLF was to join with Bronar's battalion to continue search and destroy operations throughout the Duc Pho region.

The first phase of the operation began at 0800 16 February when the naval gunfire support ships, including the rocket ships USS *Clarion River* (LSMR 409) and USS *White River* (LSMR 536), began preparation fires. When the naval fires ended, two UH-1Es of VMO-2 directed air strikes on the primary and alternate landing zones. At 0855, the first wave of helicopters from Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth E. Huntington's HMM-363 lifted off the deck of the USS *Iwo Jima* (LPH-2) with Company A of Lieutenant Colonel Jack Westerman's 1st Battalion, 4th Marines. The helicopters landed on high ground five miles inland. Two UH-1E gunships accompanying the flight suppressed a platoon-size ambush, killing 12 of an estimated 30-man VC force near the LZ.

On 20 February, operational control of the SLF passed to General Stiles' Task Force X-Ray. Lack of opposition around Sa Huynh allowed General Stiles to reorient the BLT's efforts. He ordered Westerman to begin deliberate search and destroy operations to the northeast, while elements involved in Operation Desoto moved into blocking positions south and west of Nui Dau. By the afternoon of the 25th, the BLT had passed through Lieutenant Colonel Bronars' battalion and moved into positions near Nui Dau, thus ending the first phase of Operation Deckhouse VI.

During their sweep north, Lieutenant Colonel Westerman's Marines found numerous bunkers, tunnels, caves, and supply caches; they demolished 167 fortifications, captured 20 tons of supplies, and destroyed 10 caves and 84 booby traps. In the process of defending these positions, the enemy force killed six Marines and wounded another 61. Most of the enemy casualties came from supporting arms fire called in by reconnaissance teams operating to the west; these fires killed 201 enemy soldiers.

The operation plan scheduled the second phase of Deckhouse VI to take place along the northern portion of the Desoto TAOR. Intelligence reports indicated that the *38th VC Battalion* was infiltrating into the Duc Pho area from the northwest. General Stiles arranged to exploit this information by an operation involving his Task Force X-Ray, the SLF, and 2d ARVN Division units in Quang Ngai Province.

One Marine and two ARVN battalions were to be helilifted into the area northwest of Duc Pho and sweep eastward. At the same time, other 2d ARVN Division units would screen the northern flank of the operational area while elements of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines secured the southern flank from blocking positions within its TAOR. The plan ordered the SLF Marines to make an amphibious assault between the Mo Duc-Duc Pho district boundary and the Song Tra Cau, then sweep southwest to entrap any VC withdrawing from the other allied forces advancing eastward.

On the morning of 26 February, Lieutenant Colonel Peter L. Hilgartner's 1st Battalion, 5th Marines and two ARVN battalions landed northwest of Duc Pho and began sweeping northeast. They encountered only long-range sniper fire, but discovered numerous caves and bunkers, all oriented toward the east.

With the insertion of three battalions in the western portion of the area of operation, General Stiles ordered the SLF withdrawn, and by 1825 that evening the BLT completed its withdrawal. Less than 15 hours after the last elements of the BLT left the beach near Nui Dau, the SLF made another amphibious assault, 10 kilometers further north in Duc Pho District.

Following preparation of the beach area and landing zones by naval gunfire and aircraft, the helicopterborne assault elements launched from the USS *Iwo Jima* at 0830 on 27 February. Two armed UH-1Es escorted the 12 UH-34s and two CH-46s carrying the first wave of Company A into LZ Bat, 1,500 meters from the beach.

As the troop-laden helicopters from HMM-363 made their approach into LZ Bat, enemy soldiers, located in and around the landing zone, opened up with a heavy volume of small arms fire. Marine helicopter crewmen immediately returned fire with their door-mounted machine guns; the UH-1Es closed in to provide suppressive fire with rockets and machine guns.

The first wave of Company A got into LZ Bat at the cost of battle damage to eight medium

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800971

A unit of BLT 1/4 establishes a night defensive position in the middle of a broad expanse of muddy rice paddies during Operation Deckhouse VI. One of the Marines in the foreground has obtained a non-issue M1 rifle which rests against a pack on the dike.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A191134

Capt Richard F. Corcoran uses his radio to coordinate the defense of Landing Zone Bat on 27 February at the beginning of Phase II of Operation Deckhouse VI. Only one platoon and the company headquarters managed to get into the LZ; heavy enemy fire forced other units to land on the beach.

helicopters. All eight flew back to the *Iwo Jima* but three made forced landings onto the flight deck. Another three of the damaged aircraft also had to be grounded.

Company C landed by LVTs at 0837. With the beach area safe for helicopters, Company B and the remainder of Company A used the area as their LZ. As soon as they reorganized, they moved toward LZ Bat and linked up with the isolated elements of Company A. Enemy sniper fire continued, wounding seven Marines by 1200.

LZ Bat remained hazardous for aircraft all morning. At 1030, a UH-34 encountered heavy small arms fire while making an emergency medevac from the zone. Fortunately, it suffered no hits. Around noon, two other helicopters from HMM-363 were not so lucky. The squadron's after action report said:

> At 1206H, two aircraft were launched for an emergency med-evac [from] Landing Zone Bat. YZ-81 received five rounds upon approach and had to wave-off. His wingman, YZ-83, then proceeded into the zone, but also encountered heavy fire on approach and, after taking three rounds, waved off. One of the rounds lodged in the co-pilot's right thigh causing moderate injury. Shrapnel from the same round hit the co-pilot's left foot and the pilot's chin, causing minor injuries. Both aircraft returned to the USS *Iwo Jima* with battle damage.[4]

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188495

An armed Navy LCU lands Marines at Blue Beach during the first day of Operation Deckhouse VI. Ships of the Seventh Fleet's Amphibious Ready Group dot the horizon.

The rest of the BLT continued to land and by midday the command group was controlling the operation from ashore and the two artillery batteries were set up, ready to support the battalion. Company D landed by helicopter at 1430 and the battalion began to sweep to the southwest.

The SLF remained in almost constant contact with fleeing groups of VC for two days after the landing, but by the afternoon of 1 March the contact diminished. The morning of 3 March the operation terminated. Phase II of Operation Deckhouse VI cost the enemy 76 dead; but they killed a Marine and wounded 50 others.*

For Hilgartner's 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, operating inland with the ARVN battalions, the entire operation had been frustrating. Although the Marines found and destroyed numerous fortifications, they had very little enemy contact. The following excerpt from a report of 2 March typifies the battalion's encounter with the enemy during the period 26 February-3 March:

> Company D while sweeping through a hamlet observed 3 VC carrying packs. One VC was dressed in black, one in white, and one in green trousers. The VC spotted the Marines and began to run in a westerly direction. Company D fired 10 rounds of small arms fire and physically pursued the VC. VC wearing green trousers was captured. The VC carried a well-stocked firstaid kit. Marines continued to pursue and captured the VC wearing white trousers. This VC was carrying a pack with assorted clothing. Marines continued to pursue third VC with negative results.[4]A

When Deckhouse VI ended on 3 March, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, had accounted for 17 Communists killed and 11 captured. The 1st Battalion suffered two killed and 12 wounded.

Both the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines and the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines departed the Duc Pho area after Deckhouse VI. The 1st Battalion, 4th Marines reverted to SLF control while the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines returned to Chu Lai. With the departure of these units, responsibility for the Duc Pho TAOR again rested with the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines.

Desoto Continued

Operation Desoto continued through the months of March and April. The 3d Battalion conducted daily company- and platoon-size search and destroy operations while maintaining and improving the Nui Dang base camp and LSA area and positions on Nui Dau. Throughout this period, brushes with local VC were frequent. Constant pressure by the Marines forced the VC to give up attempts to defend the hamlets and resort to delaying actions, harassment, and only an occasional attack.

The most damaging enemy action during the period took place early in the morning of 24 March when an enemy force hit the battalion base camp and logistic support area with 250 mortar and recoilless rifle rounds. The first rounds landed in the

*See Chapter 8 for detailed descriptions of SLF participation in Operation Deckhouse VI.

CP/LSA part of the camp. Battery I began counterbattery fire before its gun positions came under fire. The VC quickly responded and fired 70 rounds into the artillery revetments, scoring direct hits on two of the Marine guns, killing three Marines and wounding 14 others. The artillerymen fired more than 100 rounds, silencing the enemy weapons. The effects of the Communist attack remained visible long after the action stopped. The enemy fire had hit the tactical fuel dispensing system and dumps in the LSA; 70,000 gallons of fuel burned far into the night.

A search of the area the next morning located 36 75mm recoilless rifle cannisters and several freshly dug mortar positions. All the positions showed damage from the thorough artillery counterbattery fires. Followup intelligence reports revealed that the attacking force came from the *95th VC Battalion* and that they had forced local villagers to carry ammunition for the 12 recoilless rifles used in the attack.

A sequel to this incident occurred on the 27th, when the enemy attacked the destroyer USS *Ozbourne* (DD 843), lying 1,000 meters off the mouth of the Song Tra Cau, with 18 rounds of recoilless rifle fire. There was no damage to the ship and her answering fire drove off the attackers.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A369802

The strain of the constant patrolling and combat of Operation Desoto shows on the face of this Marine from Company F, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines. Company F served under the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines during some of the heaviest fighting in Desoto.

Operations in the Que Son Basin brought an increase in the base and logistics structure in the area. Here, a Marine CH-46 lands on a newly constructed helicopter platform surrounded by the sand-bagged bunkers at the fortified hilltop position of Nui Dang.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A421627

The same day, Company K conducted a search and destroy operation northwest of Nui Dau, accompanied by the village chief and National Police representatives. Company G, 7th Marines, which had joined the operation on 23 March, assumed blocking positions outside the village while a plane flew over the village, broadcasting advice to the villagers to remain in their homes.* As the Marines of Company K began moving into the hamlets, they saw several VC slipping into the waters of the Dam Lam Binh and into sampans moored nearby. The Marines captured these, and found 13 more hiding in a bunker. The pilots of UH-1E helicopters supporting the operation saw more Communists camouflaged with moss in shallow swamp water. The gunships made several strafing runs to force the VC toward shore. After each pass, some of the enemy waded to shore to be captured by Company K. The aviators flushed 3 VC from the swamp in this manner and killed another 23. The number of prisoners reached 49 during the operation.

By 31 March, the battalion had swept approximately 75 percent of the assigned area of responsibility. Reconnaissance teams operating in the hills to the west and aerial observers continued to report moving enemy, which supporting arms took under fire with good results. Targets outside the TAOR, acquired through intelligence sources, suffered attacks by Marine radar-controlled air strikes and USAF B-52s. The steady pressure exerted by the Marine infantrymen in the rice paddies and hamlets began to pay dividends. The harassed local Communist forces reverted to guerrilla tactics as evidenced by an increase in their use of mines and booby traps.

The most costly mining incident during this period occurred at dusk on 5 April. As full darkness approached, Captain Robert B. Wilson began to move his Company G, 7th Marines into a night defensive position on a small hill southeast of Nui Dang. Someone in a security element tripped an antipersonnel mine devised from a 105mm round. The explosion wounded two Marines, one of whom required immediate evacuation. Unfortunately, the medevac helicopter, which had been in the area all day, had departed for Ky Ha. Instead, the pilot of a UH-1E gun ship volunteered to make the evacuation.

*Company G, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines replaced Company F, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines which had relieved Company M, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines on 23 February.

Captain Wilson suspected there might be additional mines hidden in the chest-high elephant grass on the hill. He advised the UH-1E pilot by radio to hover, rather than land, when picking up the casualty. The pilot hovered just above the ground and several infantrymen loaded the wounded Marine on board. As the loading occurred, a second, larger explosion disintegrated the UH-1E, causing numerous additional casualties. Other nearby Marines rushed to the scene to provide assistance only to be caught by a third explosion as large as the second.

Darkness made it difficult for Captain Wilson to get an accurate casualty count; the reported figure was 10 dead and 13 wounded. (Not until a week later did Marines recover the body of an 11th victim, a crew member of the UH-1E. The crewman's body, still strapped in its seat, lay more than 200 meters from the site of the explosion.)[5]

Company G searched the area around the three craters and found two wires leading from the hill to a cane field 500 meters away; the VC had command detonated the last two mines. Analysis of the craters from the last two explosions revealed they had been made by bombs of 250 pounds or larger.

While all the enemy's harassing actions were not as successful as the one on 5 April, Marine casualties were high. Lieutenant Commander Robert M. O'Brien's Company B, 1st Medical Battalion, operating with the Marines at Duc Pho, treated an average of 12 casualties and performed two major surgical operations a day. On one day alone, they handled 49 wounded. One of these casualties, a young Marine who was seriously wounded and under the influence of sedation, asked O'Brien if he would live. A few minutes later the chaplain arrived and, as he approached, heard the wounded man say "Chaplain, I don't need you. The doctor says I'm going to live."[6]

The return of local Viet Cong units to guerrilla tactics was not the only indication of the Marines' growing influence in the region. District officials reported that the populace, enjoying more security, became increasingly pro-Government. Indicative of growing anti-Viet Cong feeling among the people was the fact that they often volunteered information pinpointing VC locations.

Unfortunately, military success outpaced civic action progress, particularly in the resolution of the refugee problem. About 11,000 Vietnamese became refugees from the heavy combat in the Duc Pho area. Of these, local government officials considered

about 7,500 as "permanent" refugees who were to be resettled on an island 10 miles off the coast. However, since there were few vessels available to move such numbers, food and housing became critical in the Desoto area of operations.[7]

Local factors complicated the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines' civic action problems. The area was the home of the vice premier of North Vietnam, a fact in which many local Vietnamese took great pride. In addition, intelligence sources gave indications the province chief was a Viet Cong sympathizer, as were many of the refugees. Despite positive efforts by the commander of the Marine battalion, including obtaining new leadership for the attached Army civil affairs platoon, the civic action aspects of Operation Desoto remained unsolved long after the operation ended.[8]

By 7 April, when Operation Desoto ended, the Marines had expanded positive military control over 43 square kilometers of the Duc Pho District and had ensured relatively safe movement in another 50 square kilometers. Revolutionary Development teams were able to work effectively, a virtual im possibility three months earlier. Desoto was a landmark in that it was an initial step toward restoration of Government control in southernmost I Corps.

Logistically, Operation Desoto had been unique. The terrain and tactical situation required that all logistical support be provided by helicopter. At the beginning of the operation, the Marines established a logistical support area at the Quang Ngai airfield, and for the first six days flew all supplies from there directly to units in the field. Thereafter, six CH-46 helicopters arrived daily from Chu Lai, to supply an LSA at Duc Pho. On 8 February, to preserve the wing's helicopters and conserve critical flight time, III MAF obtained a Navy logistical support ship which established a forward supply point providing all operational support. The ship, an LST, loaded at Chu Lai with all classes of supply and then stationed itself off the coast, only five miles from the Duc Pho LSA. Helicopters, hovering over the ship, picked up supplies as external lifts and moved them to the LSA. This technique reduced the daily helicopter requirement from six to four. The Navy further improved the system later in February by providing a helicopter refueling capability by mooring an LCU (landing craft, utility) alongside, loaded with two 10,000-gallon reinforced rubber tanks full of aviation gas. Helicopters landing on the cargo deck of the LST could have their fuel tanks filled from the alongside LCU at the same time they reloaded for another mission to Duc Pho. A forward supply point at Quang Ngai backed up the logistic support ship. Bulk items, fuel, and ammunition arrived there by trucks from Chu Lai. A detachment of the Marines' new heavy-lift helicopters, Sikorsky CH-53D Sea Stallions from HMM-265, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William R. Beeler, lifted the bulk items to the operational area when required. The new helicopters made possible air transportation of heavy equipment such as Ontos, 155mm howitzers, and D-4 Caterpillar tractors for which there had been no previous means of aerial delivery.

Logistical problems during the operation almost equaled the operational difficulties of eliminating the Communists from the area. From 27 January when Desoto began, until 7 April when it ended and control of the area passed to elements of the U.S. Army's 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), the Marines killed a reported 383 enemy soldiers. But in terms of American casualties the cost was high—76 Marines died and another 573 received wounds.

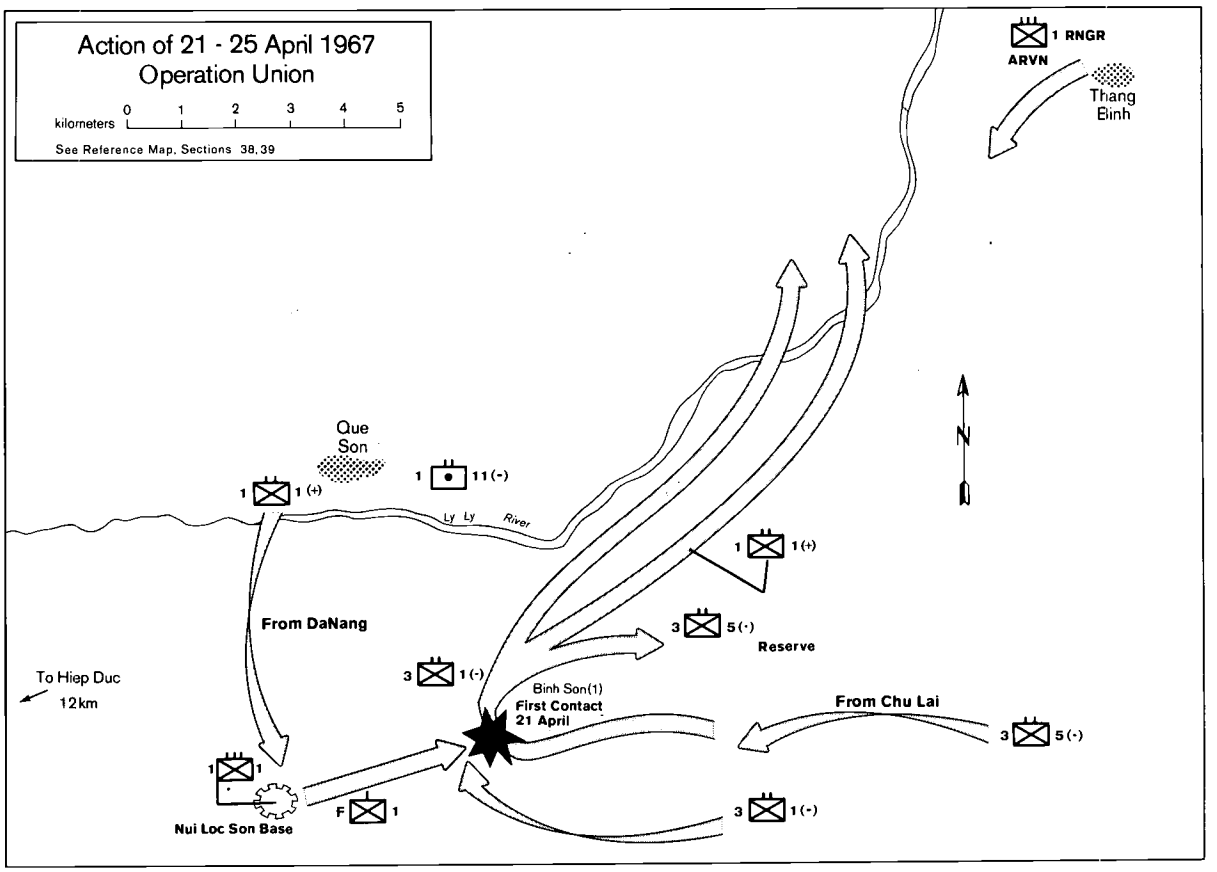
Operation Union

Operation Union, like Desoto, was an outgrowth of the 1967 Joint Combined Campaign Plan and the requirement for III MAF to replace ARVN units at isolated outposts. The hill complex of Nui Loc Son, overlooking the Que Son Valley, is 25 kilometers northwest of Tam Ky.* In 1967 it was the site of one of the ARVN manned outposts.

The Marines realized that dominance of the fertile, densely populated Que Son Basin region astride the Quang Nam-Quang Tin boundary was one of the keys to control of the five northern provinces of Vietnam. The enemy needed this agriculturally rich and populous area to support operations in the coastal lowlands. Despite a number of operations in the basin by both Marine and ARVN forces, Government control continued to be negligible.

The principal enemy force in the basin was the *2d NVA Division*. Although headquarters elements of the division appeared there in July 1966, units of its *3d* and *21st NVA Regiments* did not arrive in force until late February 1967. As the year progressed, the

*Some sources refer to this area as the Nui Loc Son Basin. The term Que Son Basin is used for consistency within this volume.



3d VC Regiment, also part of the *2d NVA Division*, joined them after moving north into the region from Quang Ngai Province.

The demand for Marine units elsewhere long denied the permanent assignment of a battalion or larger formation to the valley, and ARVN troops lacked the strength to carry the burden alone. However, the deployment of U.S. Army units to southern I Corps during April freed the 1st Marine Division for operations in this critical area.* Operation Union marked the beginning of the bitter campaign for control of the Que Son Basin.

In mid-January 1967, Captain Gene A. Deegan's Company F, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines had relieved the ARVN unit on Nui Loc Son and began operations under the direct control of Colonel Emil J. Radics' 1st Marines. By positioning Marines on this small hill mass, III MAF hoped to achieve three goals: establish a modicum of control over VC/NVA access to this rice producing area; initiate a much needed civic action effort in a region frequented regularly by U.S. Forces; and force the *2d NVA Division* into open battle.

Company F, reinforced with an 81mm mortar section and a 106mm recoilless rifle section from the battalion and a 4.2-inch mortar battery from the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, engaged small enemy units attempting to cross the valley floor. The company undertook civic action projects which generated a good relationship with the Vietnamese and produced accurate intelligence of NVA/VC activities in the area. The successful combination of small unit operations and civic action disturbed the NVA who had previously operated with impunity in the Que Son Basin. Colonel Radics described these actions as ". . . the planned and premeditated utilization of a Marine rifle company to create a situation."[9] The *2d NVA Division* took the bait; in April it came out in force to fight.

The enemy's desire for a fight did not go unnoticed. As Colonel Radics recalled:

*Two battalions of the 2d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) temporarily moved into Duc Pho pending the arrival of Task Force Oregon units which were to be assigned to I Corps to reinforce III MAF later in April. See Chapter 4 for a detailed account of the U.S. Army's arrival in I CTZ.

> During early April, while making one of my twice weekly visits to Nui Loc Son, Captain Deegan advised me of increasing enemy movement in the hills to the west and south of the Que Son Basin. We deduced that, perhaps, he was at last making his move. On April 15, [the enemy] started infiltrating small units into the valley floor east of F Company's position. This buildup continued through the 16th and 17th, and on the night of April 18, Captain Deegan reported . . . that he believed the enemy [force] to be of at least two regiments in size.
>
> My options were two. Let the enemy initiate action against F Company on Nui Loc Son and then react—or—assume the initiative and strike him first. I chose the latter option . . . The concept of a heliborne assault had been on the books and we only needed to know where the enemy would locate his major elements. . . . His option to locate east of Nui Loc Son was just what the 1st Marines wanted. This would enable the regiment to inhibit the enemy from [either] assaulting F Company's position or rapidly seeking sanctuary in the mountains to the south and east.[10]

The 1st Marines staff worked throughout the night of 18-19 April developing its final plan of attack. The plan provided for the following: Company F was to make contact from its outpost position, covered by supporting arms fire; elements of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines would make a helicopter-borne assault into the operational area, followed by the 1st Battalion (-), 1st Marines; and another, as yet undesignated, battalion from Chu Lai would act as regimental reserve. Artillery from the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines would move by helicopters to Que Son village for direct support. The 1st Marines command group would control the operation from the Nui Loc Son outpost.

The 1st Marines presented its plans to General Nickerson on the morning of the 19th, with the recommendation for execution that same day. General Nickerson approved the plan but delayed its execution because of another operation in progress within the division TAOR. On the afternoon of the 20th, he gave permission to begin Operation Union the following day.

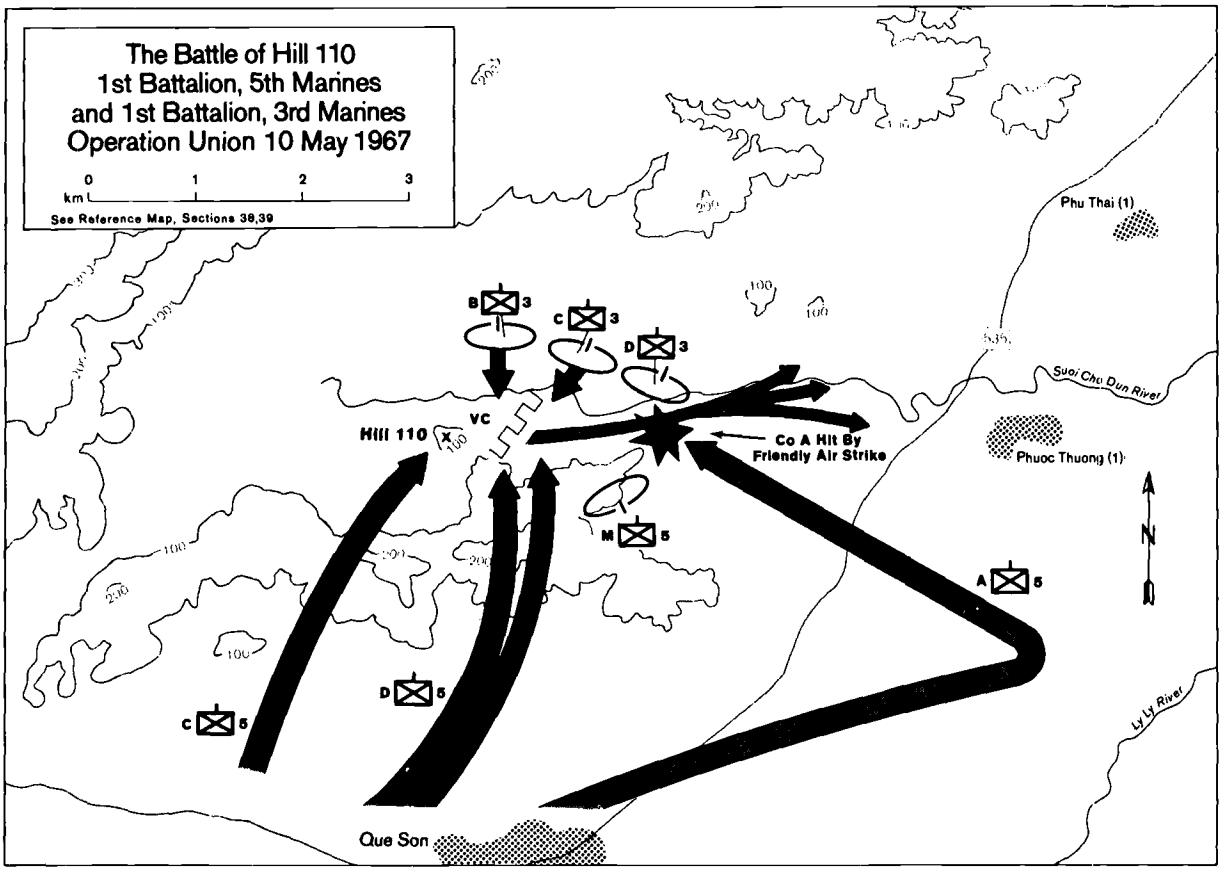
Early on the morning of the 21st, Company F moved out from Nui Loc Son. By 0700, the company had several brief encounters with small NVA elements and had seen a large enemy force moving into the village of Binh Son (1) four kilometers to the northeast. At 0930 the Marine company came under heavy small arms fire and pulled back to a tree line where it called in artillery and air strikes on the enemy positions. At 1100, Captain Deegan moved his 2d and 3d Platoons against the village, while the 1st Platoon provided covering fire. The assault elements encountered almost no resistance as they jumped off in the attack, but as they started to enter the village they were stopped cold by heavy fire. The 1st Platoon tried to flank the enemy position, but as it moved it came under equally heavy fire. Despite repeated artillery and air strikes on the NVA positions the company was stuck, unable to maneuver because of the volume of enemy fire.

Lieutenant Colonel Hillmer F. DeAtley, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, his command group, and Companies I and M, joined the fight, entering a hotly contested landing zone 1,500 meters from the Company F action. The force fought its way to help Deegan, who, despite serious wounds, continued to direct his company until evacuated after DeAtley's battalion arrived. At 1610, the lead elements of Lieutenant Colonel Dean E. Esslinger's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines from Chu Lai began landing east of the battlefield. Esslinger's Marines moved west through scattered resistance to link up with DeAtley's Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Van D. Bell, Jr.'s 1st Battalion, 1st Marines arrived from Da Nang, landing in darkness near the 1st Marines command post at the Nui Loc Son outpost. Bell's battalion moved out immediately to join the battle.

To support the rapidly committed battalions, helicopters lifted Battery B, 1st Battalion, 11th Marines to Que Son village and a platoon of U.S. Army 175mm guns from the 3rd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery moved from Chu Lai to Tam Ky. The heaviest supporting arms fire power for the opening phase of the operation came from planes of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

During the first day's action, the men of Company F and the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines bore the brunt of the fighting, but by dawn of the 22nd, all elements were locked in battle. The Marines drove the enemy soldiers out of their positions and maneuvered to force them northward. While withdrawing, the Communists suffered severe casualties from air strikes and artillery. Bell's and Esslinger's battalions attacked northeast, while the three-battalion ARVN 1st Ranger Group moved southwest from Thanh Binh to catch the fleeing enemy.

The pursuit continued as the infantrymen searched north and east of Nui Loc Son, but there were only scattered contacts. On the 25th, Colonel Kenneth J. Houghton's 5th Marines arrived from Chu Lai and moved into the valley, allowing the 1st Marines to be



returned to their Da Nang TAOR.* By 26 April, all elements of the 1st Marines had returned to Da Nang, with the exception of Company F which remained at the Nui Loc Son outpost.

Lieutenant Colonel Esslinger's battalion began a thorough search of the mountains south and west of the basin to find the NVA. Action was generally light, but an incident on the night of the 27th proved that the enemy remained active in the area. A Marine stepped on a mine which triggered a series of explosions throughout a landing zone. Marine casualties were one killed and 43 wounded, 35 of whom required evacuation.

On 28 April, Colonel James A. Gallo, Jr.'s new SLF Alpha, which landed by helicopters southeast of the Nui Loc Son outpost, joined Esslinger's battalion.** Both battalions met only light resistance as they swept their respective zones. Despite the lack of contact, intelligence reports indicated that major enemy forces were still in the area.

Colonel Houghton, an experienced combat commander in two wars, responded to this information by helilifting Lieutenant Colonel Hilgartner's 1st Battalion, 5th Marines into the mountains 13 kilometers east of Hiep Duc on 1 May. Initially, the battalion encountered only light opposition, but as it swept west along the Song Chang, there was a sharp increase in the number of engagements.

On 5 May, Hilgartner's Company D came upon an enemy regimental storage site three kilometers north of Hiep Duc. The cache contained recoilless rifle rounds, shoes, 8,000 uniforms, 3 complete surgical kits, maps, and other assorted equipment.[11]

As the two battalions of the 5th Marines continued to sweep north, Lieutenant Colonel Peter A. Wickwire's 1st Battalion, 3d Marines helilifted into the Que Son area of the basin and began a sweep northwest of Que Son village. As the operation progressed, all three battalions had brief contacts with small enemy units, but in each case the NVA withdrew.

*The 5th Marines consisted of only the regimental CP and the 1st and 3d Battalions. The 2d Battalion guarded the industrial complex at An Hoa in the Da Nang TAOR under the operational control of the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division.

**The code name for SLF Alpha's participation in the operation was Beaver Cage. See Chapter 10 for a detailed account of SLF action during Beaver Cage.

On 10 May the Marines engaged a larger and more determined Communist force. Hilgartner's Company C was moving up the southwestern slope of Hill 110, 4,000 meters north of Que Son, when it came under heavy fire from a battalion entrenched along the face of Nui Nong Ham to the southeast. The Marines took Hill 110, but when they reached the summit they found themselves still under deadly fire from a cane field below and from caves in the lower slopes of Nui Nong Ham. Captain Russell J. Caswell, the company commander, called for help.

Companies B and C of Wickwire's battalion were the nearest units to Caswell's Marines; they were northeast of Hill 110. The two companies shifted to Hilgartner's operational control. They moved to join the action but a determined enemy and heavy NVA fire halted their advance. The Marines adjusted supporting arms fire on the Communists' positions, but it was not effective; friendly and enemy forces were too close. The two companies requested reinforcements. Marine helicopters flew a platoon of Wickwire's Company A to the area. The platoon met such fierce resistance while landing that further helicopters could not land. The enemy shot down one UH-34 in the landing zone which further complicated the situation.

Hilgartner's Company A, 2,000 meters to the east, moved to help Wickwire's companies. As the company approached the battle area it also came under fire. The company commander, Captain Gerald L. McKay, quickly deployed his troops to push through the enemy positions. Just as the company began its assault, an airborne forward air controller mistakenly marked the company's position with rockets and four Marine F-4s strafed the company, killing five Marines and wounding another 24. The combination of the attack and the enemy fire halted Company A's advance.

Hilgartner's command group and Company D were on the slope of Nui Nong Ham, southeast of Hill 110. They climbed over the crest of Hill 185 to assist Company D and BLT 1/3 below them. By 1500, they had arrived at a position from which they could support by fire. The battalion's mortarmen could see the enemy in the valley below and could immediately adjust their weapons. They fired at a rapid rate; the tubes were "just about red hot."[12]

At 1530, Esslinger's Company M landed at Hilgartner's position from helicopters and Company D moved into Nui Nong Ham to join up with Captain Caswell's Company C. The two companies quickly consolidated their position and began to provide covering fire for the Marines below. Under the cover of supporting fire from above, the BLT companies maneuvered against the NVA in the sugar cane field and on the northern slope of Nui Nong Ham. By evening the Marines drove the enemy force from its position and forced it to withdraw to the northeast. Artillery and air strikes followed the retreating North Vietnamese. Not all of the NVA escaped. The Marines found the bodies of 116 enemy soldiers the following day. Marine losses were also high: 33 died and another 135 received wounds, including the casualties from the misguided air strikes on Company A.

On 12 May, BLT 1/3 turned over its responsibilities to the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and the SLF flew by helicopters to its ships off the coast. Although the operation was over for the SLF, it was far from over for Lieutenant Colonel Bell's battalion and the two battalions of the 5th Marines. On the 12th and 13th of May, all three elements stayed in almost continual contact with enemy platoons and companies in the valley. Esslinger's battalion engaged an enemy battalion five kilometers east of Que Son the evening of the 13th. After an exchange of mortar and small arms fire, the battalion called in artillery and air strikes. As the Marines began their assault, aerial observers shifted supporting fires to block possible withdrawal. The attacking Marines met only token resistance as the assault moved through the area, but 122 Communist bodies scattered over the position attested to the ferocity of the battle.

For the next two days firefights continued and artillery missions and air strikes harried enemy units as they tried to avoid the Marines in the valley. The devastation caused by supporting arms became most apparent on the afternoon of 14 May when Bell's Company D found 68 dead enemy soldiers in one location, all killed by fragments or concussion.

The last major battle of the operation took place on 15 May, when the 5th Marines' Companies A and M found another bunker complex. Artillery and air strikes pounded the fortifications as the Marines maneuvered into assault positions. After the heavy preparation fires, the Marines attacked. They met only light resistance and secured the position quickly. They counted 22 enemy bodies in what remained of the fortifications.

The next day, Lieutenant Colonel Bell's battalion, following its orders, departed the valley and return-

ed to the Da Nang TAOR. The following morning Colonel Houghton closed down Operation Union. It had lasted for 27 days, during which time the Marines killed 865 enemy troops; including a reported 486 who were NVA regulars of the *2d NVA Division*. The Marines suffered 110 killed, 2 missing in action, and 473 wounded.

Although the number of enemy casualties was large, Colonel Houghton believed that the psychological impact of Operation Union on the population of the basin was even more important. As he stated:

> The prolonged operations by the 5th Marines in the agriculturally rich Hiep Duc-Que Son-Thang Binh corridor broke the VC control of the area that had spanned almost twenty years. With the establishment of two permanent bases deep in this corridor, the fixing and subsequent destruction of hundreds of the enemy, the capture of significant quantities of supplies, equipment and weapons, the enemy loss in prestige in the eyes of the people is readily apparent. The psychological impact of Operation Union equalled or even exceeded the material damage to the Communist effort in this area of operations.[13]

Despite this optimistic opinion, enemy influence in the Que Son Basin was far from erased. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, which assumed the responsibility for the Nui Loc Son outpost and established its battalion command post on Hill 51 west of the village of Que Son, had daily skirmishes with enemy forces remaining in the area. Continuing activity substantiated reports that the *3d* and *21st NVA Regiments* were moving back into the basin. Operation Union II was the response.

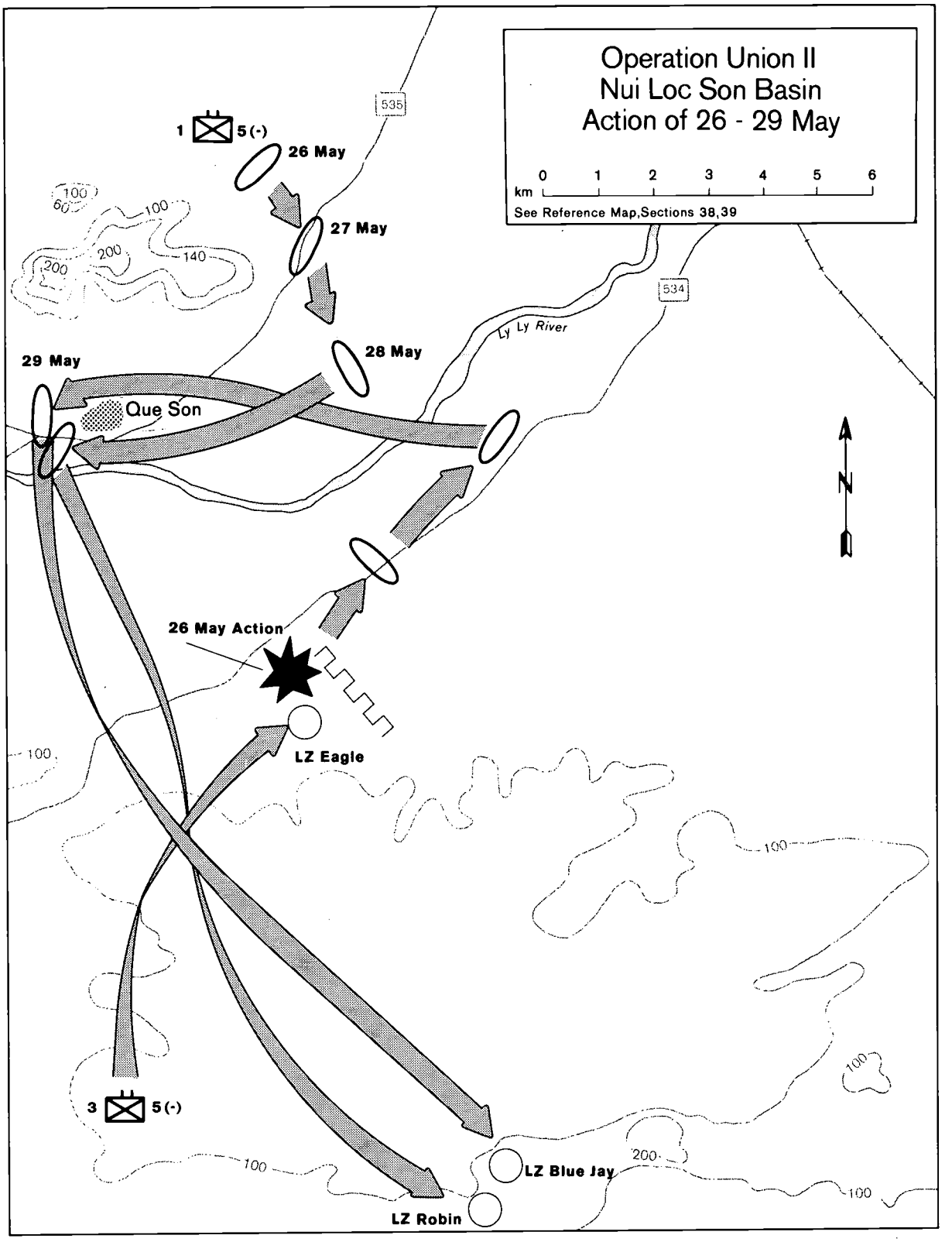
Union II

Union II, like Union I, involved coordination with the 6th ARVN Regiment and the 1st ARVN Ranger Group. The 1st and 3d Battalions, 5th Marines once again became the maneuver elements for III MAF's portion of the operation. The operation plan directed Hilgartner's 1st Battalion to establish blocking positions in the western portion of the valley. The three RVN Ranger Group battalions were to attack southwest from Thang Binh, while two units of the 6th ARVN Regiment were to attack northwest from a position near Tam Ky. Essingler's 3d Battalion would move by helicopters into the southern portion of the basin and sweep northeast. The ARVN named their part of the operation Lien Kit 106.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370448

Shortly after landing from helicopters at the beginning of Operation Union II, this rifleman and the rest of Company L, as well as Company M, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines attack a fortified North Vietnamese position firing upon helicopters in the landing zone.

On the morning of 26 May, Esslinger's Marines, three companies and a command group, made a heliborne assault into an area five kilometers east of Nui Loc Son outpost. Company L's first two waves experienced only sniper fire as they landed at LZ Eagle, but as Company M and the command group landed, heavy small arms and mortar fire struck the LZ. At 1134 the enemy defenders shot down a CH-46 over the LZ. As Company I landed, Companies L and M attacked north to relieve the pressure on the LZ. The attacking companies found a well-entrenched enemy force northeast of the landing zone. While artillery and air strikes pounded the NVA positions, Company I moved to the northeast to envelop the enemy's flank, and in the face of strong resistance drove through the position. Fighting continued throughout the afternoon. When the Marines finally overran the last enemy


Operation Union II
Nui Loc Son Basin
Action of 26 - 29 May
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Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A421853

Low rice paddy dikes provided the only available cover for these men from the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines after debarking on 26 May from helicopters of HMM-361. This photograph, taken from a helicopter, shows the barrel of the crew's M-60 machine gun.

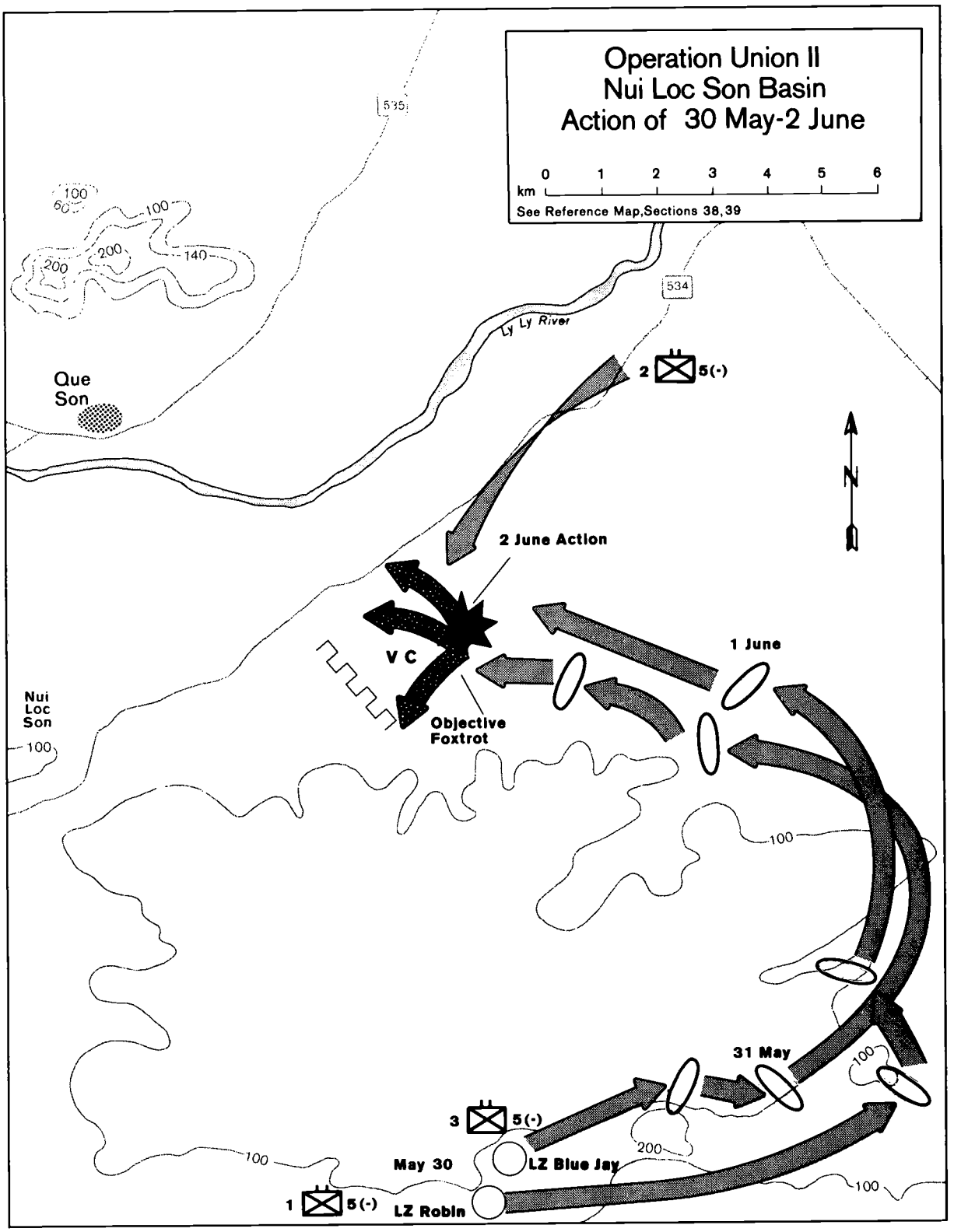
positions at 1630, they counted 118 dead NVA soldiers scattered over the battlefield. The 3d Battalion lost 38 killed and 82 wounded, including Lieutenant Colonel Esslinger, who was wounded in the eye.

While the Marines of Esslinger's battalion engaged the enemy force, Hilgartner's Marines established blocking positions to the northwest as planned. The ARVN ranger and infantry elements closed from the northeast and southeast to box in the enemy. For the next three days, all four forces swept the area. There were only isolated exchanges of fire; once more the *3d NVA Regiment* had withdrawn from the basin. Convinced that the enemy had escaped, the South Vietnamese ended their operation, but Colonel Houghton did not believe that all the NVA forces had left the Que Son region.

After analyzing available intelligence, Houghton decided to change the direction of attack toward the hills along the southern rim of the basin, southeast of the 3d Battalion's battle area of the 26th. On 30 May, he had his two battalions flown into the area by helicopter and began a sweep to the northeast. Their advance encountered only long-range sniper fire. By the afternoon of 1 June, both battalions had reentered the basin and moved northwest generally toward the site of the original 26 May contact.

On 2 June, the Marines moved out, two battalions abreast, with the 1st Battalion on the right. Objective Foxtrot in the Vinh Huy Village complex was their destination. By 0930, the two lead companies of the 3d Battalion were under heavy fire from 200 dug-in North Vietnamese troops 1,000 meters east of the objective, and roughly 3,000 meters east of the scene of the 3d Battalion's heavy action on 26 May. By 1300, after savage fighting and extensive use of supporting arms, the Marines overran the position. As the companies consolidated and began to evacuate their casualties, a helicopter took a direct hit from a 57mm recoilless rifle, killing one Marine and wounding seven others.

While the units of the 3d Battalion, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Webster, engaged the enemy, Hilgartner's 1st Battalion pushed forward to relieve the pressure. The battalion moved with Company D on the right and an attached company, Company F, 5th Marines, on the left. About 1130, Company D began crossing a 1,000-meter-wide rice paddy that contained a horseshoe-shaped hedgerow. The location of the


Operation Union II
Nui Loc Son Basin
Action of 30 May-2 June
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See Reference Map,Sections 38,39
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Ly Ly River
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Objective Foxtrot
1 June
31 May
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hedgerow was such that the Marines could not approach it except by crossing the open paddy. When the company was halfway across the field, well-camouflaged NVA troops in fortified positions in the horseshoe opened fire. The enemy fire swept the Marines' front and left flank, catching the left flank platoons in a crossfire. The reserve platoon tried to envelop the enemy, but heavy automatic weapons fire forced it back. The Marines consolidated their positions while artillery and air strikes softened up the enemy fortifications.

Company F, commanded by Captain James A. Graham, was in serious trouble on Company D's left. Initially, Graham's unit moved under the cover of air and artillery strikes and encountered only sniper fire. As it began crossing a large open paddy area, a Kit Carson Scout with the company started shooting at several mats of hay lying in the paddy.* The NVA had concealed themselves under the mats and the Marines killed 31 of them as the company advanced.

As the company continued across the open area, mortar and automatic weapons fire inflicted many casualties. Hardest hit was the 2d Platoon; two concealed enemy machine guns stopped it in the middle of the open field. Captain Graham quickly organized his small headquarters group into an assault unit and attacked through the 2d Platoon's position, forcing the North Vietnamese to abandon one of their guns. With some of the pressure relieved, the platoon moved some of the wounded to a more secure area. Captain Graham then tried to silence the second gun, but was unsuccessful. Wounded twice by this time and with his men's ammunition exhausted, the captain ordered his Marines to move back to friendly positions while he stayed behind to protect a wounded man who could not be moved. The last word over the radio from Captain Graham was that 25 enemy soldiers were attacking his position.**

At 1420, Lieutenant Colonel Hilgartner's CP came under heavy mortar, recoilless rifle, and RPG fire. Despite the extensive use of air and artillery by the Marines, the Communist force was too well dug-in and too big for the battalion to dislodge. Colonel Houghton, advised of the situation, asked for help. Since his 3d Battalion was already involved in heavy

*Kit Carson Scouts were former enemy soldiers used by the Marines. The program is discussed in detail in Chapter 11.

**Captain Graham received the Medal Of Honor posthumously for his action. See Appendix D for complete citation.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370265

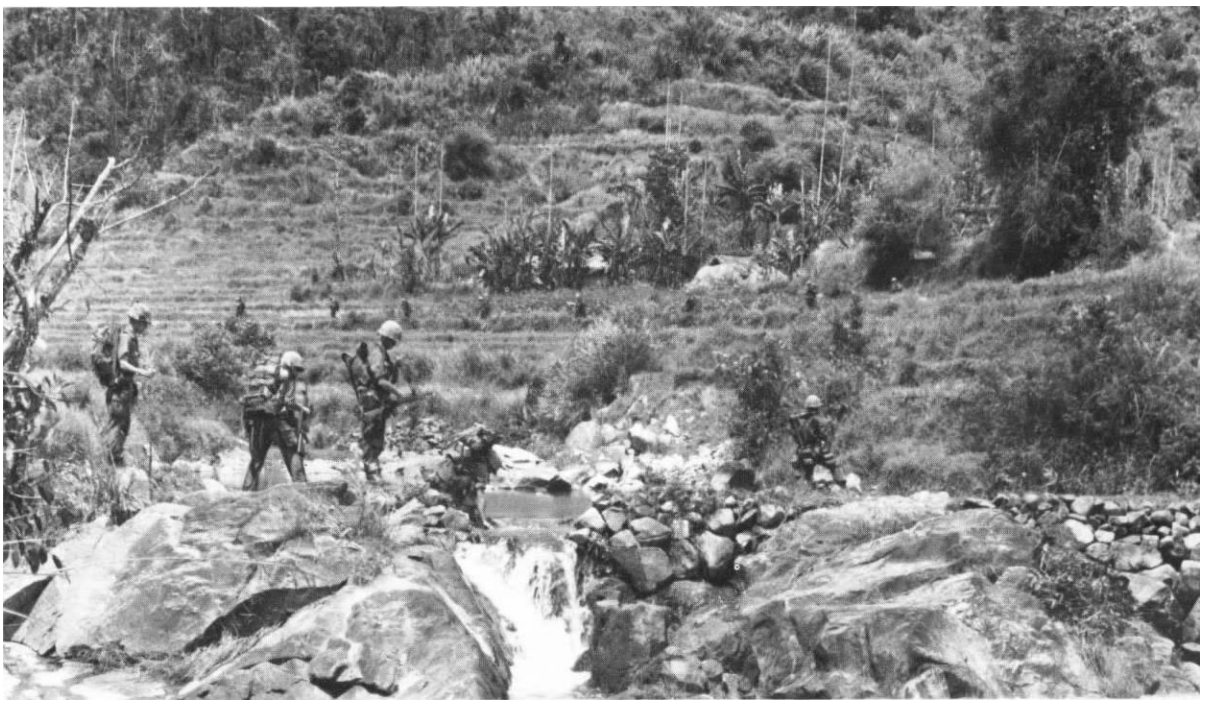
PFC George Hase of Company M, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines reflects on the initial combat of Operation Union II when casualties sustained from North Vietnamese fire forced him to shift from ammunition carrier to assistant gunner on his machine gun team.

fighting, he asked for the commitment of the division reserve, Lieutenant Colonel Mallett C. Jackson, Jr.'s 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. Major General Donn J. Robertson, a Navy Cross holder who had just assumed command of the division on 1 June, concurred and the 2d Battalion prepared to move out by helicopter to join in the battle.* The three companies that made up Lieutenant Colonel Jackson's force for this operation were his own Company E; Company D from the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines; and Company E, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.**

The 5th Marines' commander paved the way for the 2d Battalion's entry into the operation by ordering 90 minutes of air and artillery preparation of the planned landing zone. He intended to insert the battalion northeast of the enemy position so it could drive south into the left flank of the NVA force. By 1900, the battalion command group and two com-

*General Nickerson, who had commanded the 1st Marine Division since September 1966, became Deputy Commanding General, III MAF, upon his relief.

**Colonel Hilgartner later described the insertion of Lieutenant Colonel Jackson's battalion as crucial. "Mal Jackson's entry into the battle saved the day for us," he remembered. Colonel Peter L. Hilgartner, Comments on draft ms, 2Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370268

During the last few days of May, two Marine battalions, engaged in Operation Union II, searched the rugged mountains found along the southern rim of the Que Son Basin.

panies had landed. They were unopposed and quickly organized the position.

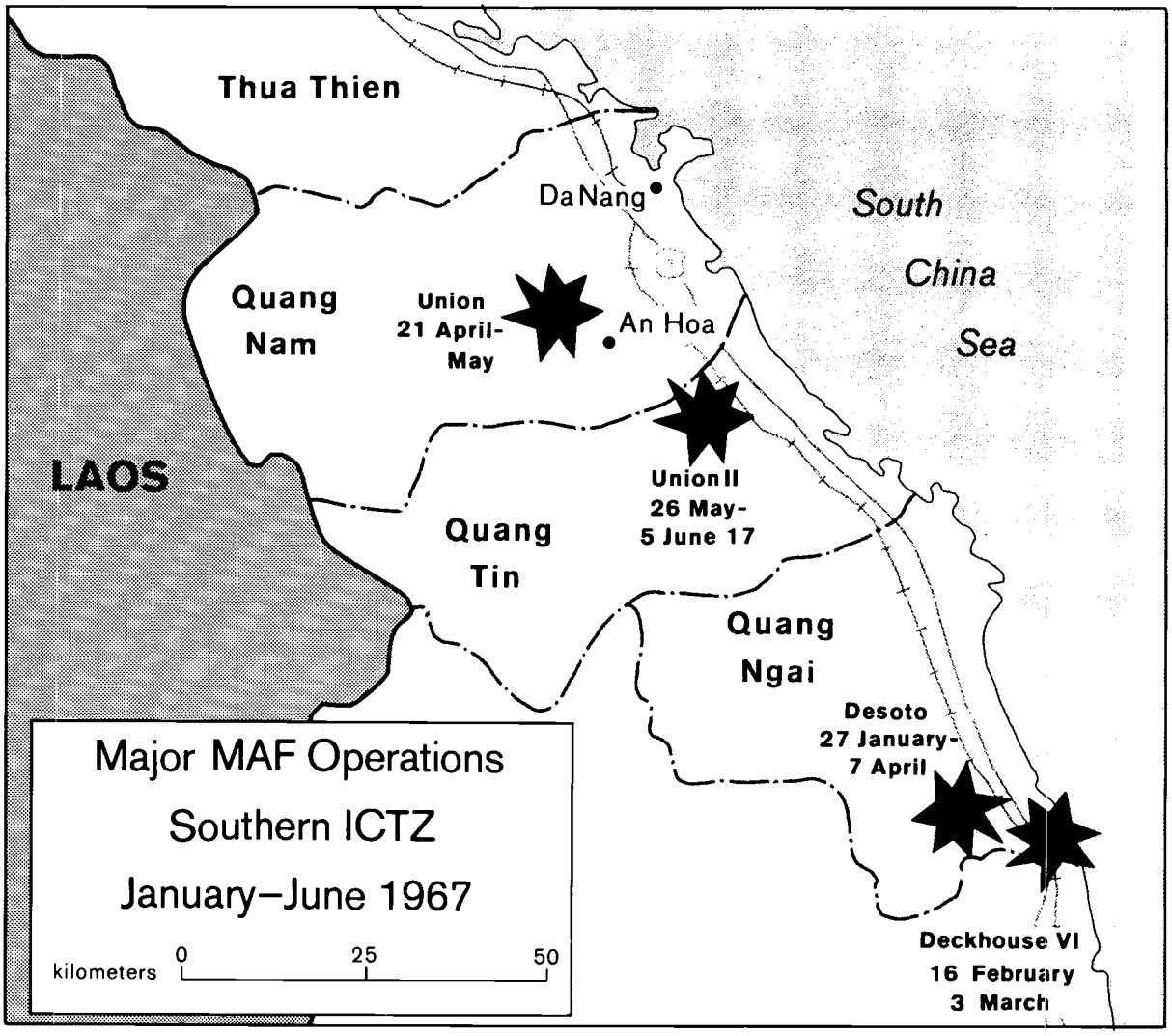
As night fell, one of Jackson's companies still had not arrived. Aware of the urgency of the tactical situation facing Hilgartner's battalion, and concerned about the fate of Captain Graham's company from his own battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Jackson requested permission to begin his attack without the missing company.[14] Colonel Houghton concurred. Leaving a security platoon in the landing zone, Jackson maneuvered his force south against the enemy. The battalion had not gone far in the darkness before it collided with an NVA force trying to withdraw to the north. The Marines quickly drove through the Communists and continued south.

The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines suffered almost 20 casualties in this initial contact. To evacuate the wounded, the battalion's forward air controller called in a passing CH-53. The pilot landed his helicopter in the middle of the command post, not far from where Company E still engaged the enemy. As Marines completed loading the wounded, an enemy mortar round landed just to the rear of the aircraft and enemy automatic weapons took it under direct fire. The pilot quickly took off. The 2d Battalion later heard that, on its arrival at Da Nang, ground crews counted approximately 58 holes in the helicopter.[15]

The sudden presence of a strong force on its northern flank caused the NVA units to disengage and make a hasty withdrawal to the southwest, but the move proved costly. Once NVA soldiers left the protection of their fortifications, they were easy targets for Marine supporting arms fire. Air strikes were devastating. On one occasion two F-4 aircraft used an unusual technique of target acquisition which proved especially effective. The first aircraft approached the area at low speed and switched on its landing and running lights. When the enemy fired at the plane, the second aircraft, following closely behind without lights, spotted the enemy and dropped napalm on the firing positions.

While supporting arms fire hastened the Communist departure from the battlefield, the 5th Marines spent the night regrouping and evacuating casualties. The following morning, all three battalions swept the battle area. The Marines counted 476 dead North Vietnamese in and around the contested rice paddy and its formidable hedgerow complex. The Marines themselves suffered 71 killed and 139 wounded in the fight.

During the sweep of the battle area, Lieutenant



Colonel Hilgartner received a radio message from one of his companies that enemy working parties were out collecting the NVA dead. The company commander asked if he should open fire. Hilgartner declined for he saw this as a chance to recover his own dead, including Captain Graham's body. For the remainder of the day there was an undeclared truce; the two sides intermingled but ignored each other as they went about collecting their dead.[16]

When the enemy main body withdrew, they transported their wounded on two poles lashed together, similar to the "travois" used by the American Plains Indians. The day after the undeclared truce, Hilgartner's battalion tried to follow the travois skid marks but could not catch up with the main body of the NVA force. Halts to call in helicopters to evacuate casualties caused by the enemy's rear guard hindered the Marines' progress. The NVA force escaped.[17]

The action on 2 June marked the last significant battle of Union II. Total enemy casualties were 701 killed and 23 captured, a favorable ratio to 110 Marines killed (the same number as during Union I) and 241 wounded.*

Despite the heavy losses suffered during the two Union operations, throughout the summer the enemy continued to pump replacements into the region in a determined effort to regain control of the Que Son Valley. Elements of III MAF met and thwarted each Communist thrust into the area. Government control was returning to the region, and forcing the Communists to pay a big price in men and material.

*For action in both Union I and II the 5th Marines and units under its operational control received the Presidential Unit Citation.

CHAPTER 6
Task Force Oregon

The heavy fighting of early 1967 had been anticipated by the American command. Throughout the fall of the previous year, both III MAF and MACV expressed concern over the NVA buildup north of the Demilitarized Zone and along the Laotian border to the west. In a 13 September 1966 message to Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp, Commander in Chief Pacific (CinCPac), General Westmoreland outlined his appreciation of the threat to I Corps:

> The current enemy buildup . . . constitutes a direct threat to US/FW GVN forces in I CTZ and to the security of Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces. The seriousness of this threat underscores the importance and urgency of utilizing all practicable means to prevent the enemy from generating a major offensive designed to 'liberate' the provinces in question and to inflict maximum casualties on US/FW GVN forces. . . .
>
> He continues to use the DMZ as a troop haven and as a supply head for his forces moving into northern I CTZ. . . . The size of his buildup, disposition of forces, forward stockage of supplies, AA weapons systems being deployed southward, and depth of patrols are developing an offensive as opposed to a defensive posture. By October, the weather in Laos will be clearing and the enemy may be expected once again to move personnel and supporting material in quantity through the area. . . . Utilizing traditional [infiltration] routes through the Laos panhandle, he will be able to reinforce large scale diversionary attacks further south in coordination with a main assault through the DMZ and the western flank. . . .[1]

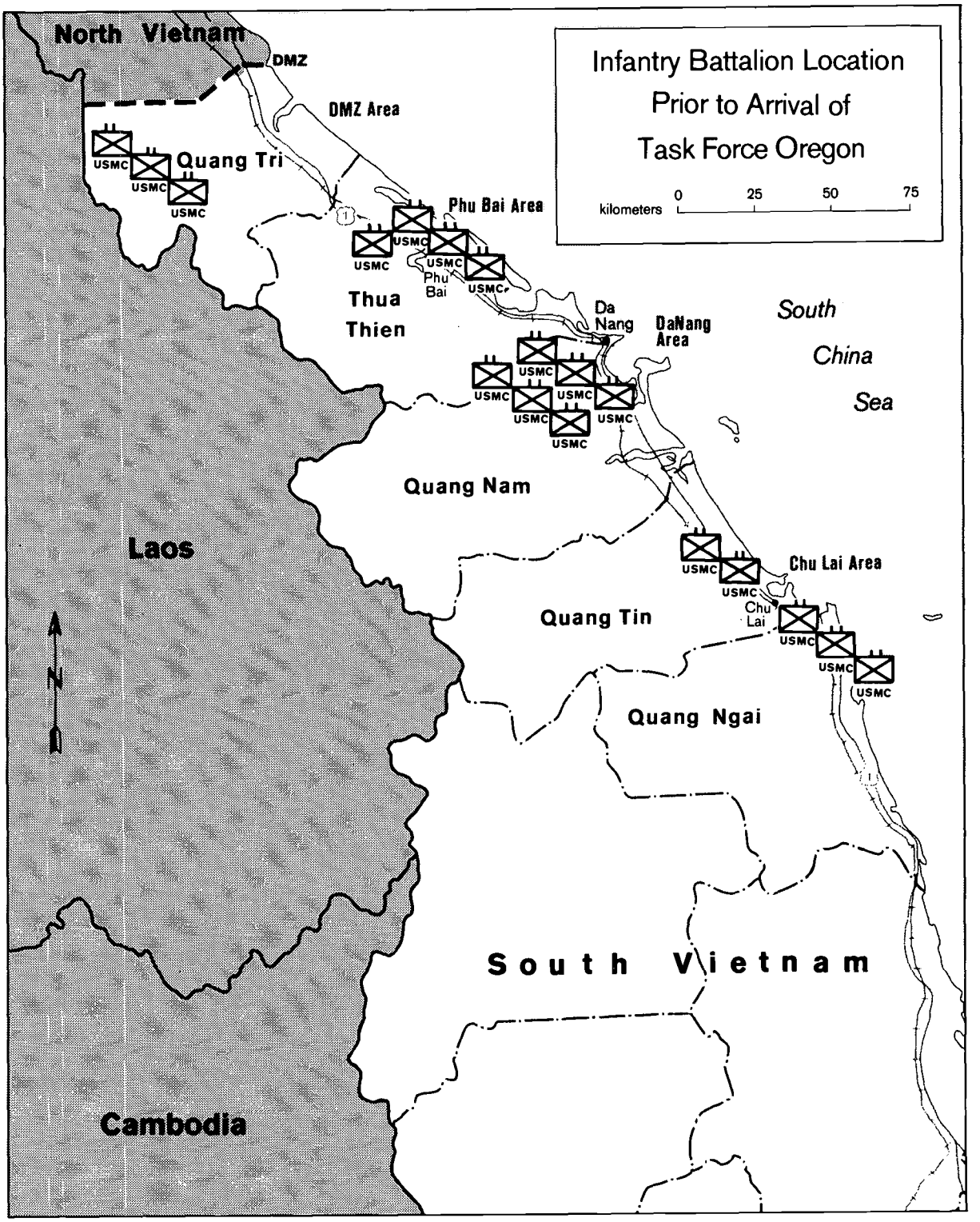
To counter the threat, the Marines established positions covering the eastern and central infiltration routes across the DMZ. They had already occupied Khe Sanh, to the west, in late 1966, and they took over the ARVN camps at Ca Lu and Ba Long, both astride natural routes leading east through the Cam Lo Valley. While the occupation of these locations did not entirely halt infiltration, they did make it more difficult, but manning the positions seriously depleted III MAF's strength as the year began.

In early 1967 several developments, other than Vietnamese domestic problems, contributed to reduced III MAF troop availability. The necessity of protecting large bases and the resulting extension of the protective TAORs around them tied down a large number of men. The requirement to relieve ARVN units for redeployment to the revolutionary development program also drained available forces. The most threatening situation was the enemy troop buildup in Quang Ngai Province. Infiltration from Laos and the influx of NVA troops and supplies into the A Shau Valley and the mountains west of Hue caused some very touchy and precise repositioning of units. As January began, most of General Walt's reserve consisted of already committed forces earmarked for oncall helicopter redeployment.

MACV Headquarters appreciated the problem facing III MAF but viewed things from a different perspective. As Brigadier General Louis Metzger, the assistant division commander of the 3d Marine Division, recalled:

> On one occasion General Westmoreland told me that he knew that the 3d Marine Division was overextended, but that he was achieving a victory (words not exact but that was the meaning) in the II Corps Area, and we would just have to hold on. One really cannot fault his position as he was following the principle of war "Economy of Force;" holding with the Marines while expecting his Army elements to the south to achieve a victory. It did make it lonesome along the DMZ.[2]

For all practical purposes, these troop shortages reduced the allied situation in I Corps to a holding action. III MAF did not have enough troops to expand TAORs and at the same time block NVA thrusts across South Vietnam's borders. III MAF needed additional forces to regain the initiative. On 11 January, after a visit to I Corps, General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., the Commandant of the Marine Corps, commented that ". . . one Marine division/wing team reinforced or its equivalent [was needed] in I Corps in addition to those forces already there." He contended that these forces would permit


Infantry Battalion Location
Prior to Arrival of
Task Force Oregon
kilometers 0 25 50 75
North Vietnam
DMZ
DMZ Area
Quang Tri
USMC
Phu Bai Area
Phu Bai
Thua Thien
Da Nang
DaNang Area
South China Sea
Quang Nam
Laos
Chu Lai Area
Chu Lai
Quang Tin
Quang Ngai
South Vietnam
Cambodia
N

III MAF to counter enemy infiltration across the borders and regain momentum in pacifying the populated coastal areas.[2] At the beginning of the year these forces did not exist.

After the Tet cease-fire of 8-12 February, enemy activity intensified. The NVA initiated aggressive efforts to offset the embryonic Revolutionary Development Program, while continuing the buildup of forces in I and II Corps. The *2d NVA Division* and supporting battalions moved south from Quang Tin Province to Quang Ngai Province. This move appeared related to movement of other subordinate units at the turn of the year in preparation for a proposed dry season offensive in Quang Ngai.

As enemy activity continued to intensify, both in southern I Corps and immediately south of the DMZ, on 19 February General Westmoreland directed his Chief of Staff, Major General William B. Rosson, to develop a contingency plan for the organization and deployment of a divisional task force to the troubled northern provinces. The purpose of the proposed shift was twofold: to release Marine units for action along the DMZ and to use the new force to expand the scope of operations in southern I Corps. Westmoreland's headquarters code-named the proposed task force, "Oregon."

The Oregon plan was not the first contingency plan prepared for the reinforcement of III MAF. At the time of the first NVA thrust across the DMZ in mid-1966, MACV Headquarters developed several schemes. The Tennessee plan proposed the movement of a U.S. Army brigade to Chu Lai. Another, dubbed the South Carolina plan, was to deploy an Army brigade to the 3d Marine Division's area of operation in northern I Corps, while North Carolina would have introduced an Army brigade into southern I Corps. The latter two contingency plans included the movement of a Republic of Korea Army regiment to Chu Lai. During November 1966, General Westmoreland gave consideration to the deployment of the 9th Infantry Division to I Corps when it arrived in South Vietnam, but shelved the idea in December 1966 and the division moved into the region east of Saigon.

While General Rosson and his staff were developing the Oregon plan, events in I Corps forced the planners' hand. On 27 February, NVA forces attacked Da Nang Airbase with 140mm rockets, the first known use of large tactical rockets by the enemy in South Vietnam. The Da Nang attack preceded rocket attacks on Camp Carroll in Quang Tri Province on 6 and 12 March and another attack on Da Nang on 15 March.* The rockets were the enemy's most economical weapon of the war. They were easily transported, usually backpacked, and required only a few personnel for installation and employment. The February Da Nang attack demonstrated the speed with which the rockets could be launched. More than 50 rockets hit the base in less than a minute.

With the introduction of rockets, the Marines expanded their protective patrolling out to a range of 9,000 meters, rather than 5,000 meters, the maximum effective range of heavy mortars which had been the primary concern before the rocket threat. The speed with which the rockets could be employed also required the Marines to deliver counterbattery fire on the rocket launching positions in a matter of two to three minutes, a factor which complicated the already complex problem of coordinating the use of air and artillery in populated areas.

Rocket attacks were not the only indication that the enemy's main target was I Corps. During the first six weeks after Tet, enemy attacks increased by approximately twice the 1966 rate. Enemy expenditures of artillery, mortar, recoilless rifle, and rocket ammunition for the month of March were 5,057 rounds, compared to 2,183 in January and 2,656 in February.

At the same time, the NVA buildup continued along the DMZ. Intelligence agencies reported that elements of another division, including fire support units, had reinforced the *324B* and *341st NVA Divisions*. Captured prisoners and documents verified the presence of the new units. Increased mortar fire and the employment of artillery and rockets confirmed the arrival of the fire support units. The seriousness of these developments was even more apparent when Marine intelligence officers learned that the NVA forces in the northern provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien were under the control of North Vietnamese Army *Military Region 4*, with headquarters in Vinh above the DMZ. The North Vietnamese considered the targeted provinces as a subregion of this command.

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*The rockets employed in the attack against Camp Carroll were 102mm Communist copies of the U.S. 4.5-inch barrage rocket, with a range of 5,000 meters. The 140mm Soviet rocket used at Da Nang had a range of almost 9,000 meters.

In an 18 March message to Admiral Sharp, General Westmoreland reflected his concern over the growing threat to I Corps. He stated:

> In I Corps, the situation is the most critical with respect to existing and potential force ratios. As a minimum, a division plus a regiment is required for Quang Tri Province as a containment force. The latter had been justified previously in another plan. Employment of this force in the containment role would release the units now engaged there for expansion of the Da Nang, Hue-Phu Bai, and Chu Lai TAORs as well as increase security and control along the corps' northern coastal areas. One of the most critical areas in RVN today is Quang Ngai Province. Even if a major operation were conducted in this area during 1967, the relief would be no more than temporary. A force is needed in the province to maintain continuous pressure on the enemy, to eliminate his forces and numerous base areas, and to remove his control over the large population and food reserves. The sustained employment of a division of 10 battalions is mandatory in Quang Ngai Province if desired results are to be realized. Employment of this force would provide security for the vital coastal areas facilities, opening and securing Route 1 and the railroad and, perhaps equally important, to relieve pressure on northern Binh Dinh Province.[4]

One week later, on 25 March, reconnaissance photographs verified increased infiltration of the Tri Thien subregion. They revealed five new bivouac areas and two possible way stations on infiltration routes from Base Area 606 in central Laos to western Quang Tri Province. The photographs also pinpointed new bivouac areas along infiltration routes in the northern A Shau Valley, indicating reinforcement in that region. Equally alarming, the NVA continued to hold three divisions in or near the DMZ, despite heavy casualties suffered during the Marines' recently conducted Operations Prairie II and Beacon Hill.

At the same time, enemy activity in southern Quang Nam and Quang Tin increased; the enemy made multicompany attacks near Tam Ky. A high-ranking Communist officer, Colonel Haynh Cu, who surrendered to III MAF forces in early March, stated that the Que Son Basin would be a major objective for the forthcoming NVA summer campaign, scheduled to begin during April. He also revealed that Operation Desoto had uncovered a primary supply route which the VC believed required their control for effective operations in that region. This revelation added to the indications that Duc Pho would remain a primary enemy objective.

In a 28 March followup message to CinCPac, General Westmoreland reiterated his earlier sentiments regarding additional forces required in I Corps, but this message reflected his increased concern over the growing enemy threat. General Westmoreland stated:

> Failure to provide two and one-third divisions for I Corps would result in the diversion of existing forces from other tasks to deny and defeat infiltration or invasion. Security in support of Revolutionary Development could not be increased to the desired degree in the coastal area, the major LOC's could be able to continue operating virtually unmolested throughout the key Quang Ngai Province.[5]

If this force were available, Westmoreland estimated that III MAF could make gains in 1967, especially in the restoration of the populated areas of I Corps to secure GVN control. Unfortunately, the additional forces were not available.

The first week of April confirmed the need for reinforcements as the enemy increased pressure throughout the five northern provinces. Intensified terrorism and regimental-size attacks marked the opening days of the month. On 6 April, a large enemy force broke into Quang Tri City, inflicting severe losses and permitting more than 200 VC prisoners to escape from the local jail. This was the first large-unit incursion into a provincial capital since early in 1965. The Quang Tri attack preceded an attack on an ARVN regimental headquarters 10 miles north of the city of Hue. Generals Walt and Westmoreland agreed that these incidents heralded a large-scale, coordinated enemy offensive in the two northern provinces. On 6 April, therefore, General Westmoreland decided to execute the Task Force Oregon plan.

As conceived and refined by General Rosson's staff, Operation Oregon was to be executed in three separate phases. First, an army brigade from II Corps was to move into the Duc Pho district. Two days later a second brigade from III Corps was to begin movement to Chu Lai, and at a later date a third brigade, and possibly a fourth, was to be shifted into the area. The Task Force Oregon headquarters was to be activated on the 12th, to arrive at Chu Lai no later than 20 April.

By the afternoon of the 7th, the headquarters of the 2d Brigade, 5th Cavalry, 1st Air Cavalry Division, and two battalions, arrived at Duc Pho and relieved the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines. The size and mobility of the Army force impressed the Marines.

The Marine battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel John D. Counselman, recalled, "They had so many 'choppers' that the company defensive areas of 3/7 were occupied in less than an hour. . . ."[6]

The use of the 1st Air Cavalry unit was only temporary; according to the Oregon plan it was to be replaced by the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division before the end of April. To accomplish the logistical support for this unit, MACV temporarily included the two southernmost districts of Quang Ngai Province, Duc Pho and Ba To, in the 1st Air Cavalry Division's TAOR, pending the arrival of the Task Force Oregon headquarters.

On 9 April, Brigadier General Richard T. Knowles' 196th Light Infantry Brigade of four battalions began arriving at Chu Lai. The brigade completed the move on the 14th, and the infantrymen assumed operational tasks in the Chu Lai area under the control of the 1st Marine Division. On 17 April, the brigade initiated Operation Lawrence, west of the airfield. This was the first U.S. Army operation in I Corps. Although the soldiers made no contact with the enemy during the three days of Lawrence, they gained a familiarity with their area of operation.

The task force command group activated as scheduled on 12 April. The headquarters and selected combat support and combat service support units began deploying to Chu Lai. Task Force Oregon headquarters became operational on 20 April and assumed control of all Army forces operating from Chu Lai. The task force commander was Major General William B. Rosson, the former MACV chief of staff and author of the original Oregon plan. When Colonel James G. Shanahan's 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division arrived at Duc Pho two days later, it also came under control of Task Force Oregon. Combat support for the task force consisted of four artillery battalions, an engineer battalion, and one medium and three light helicopter companies.

The arrival of the Army units allowed the Marines to concentrate in the northern three provinces of I Corps. The 7th Marines moved from Chu Lai to the Da Nang TAOR, completing the move on 13 April. The consolidation of the 1st Marine Division at Da Nang permitted the 3d Marine Division, in turn, to concentrate its regiments in the northern part of I Corps.

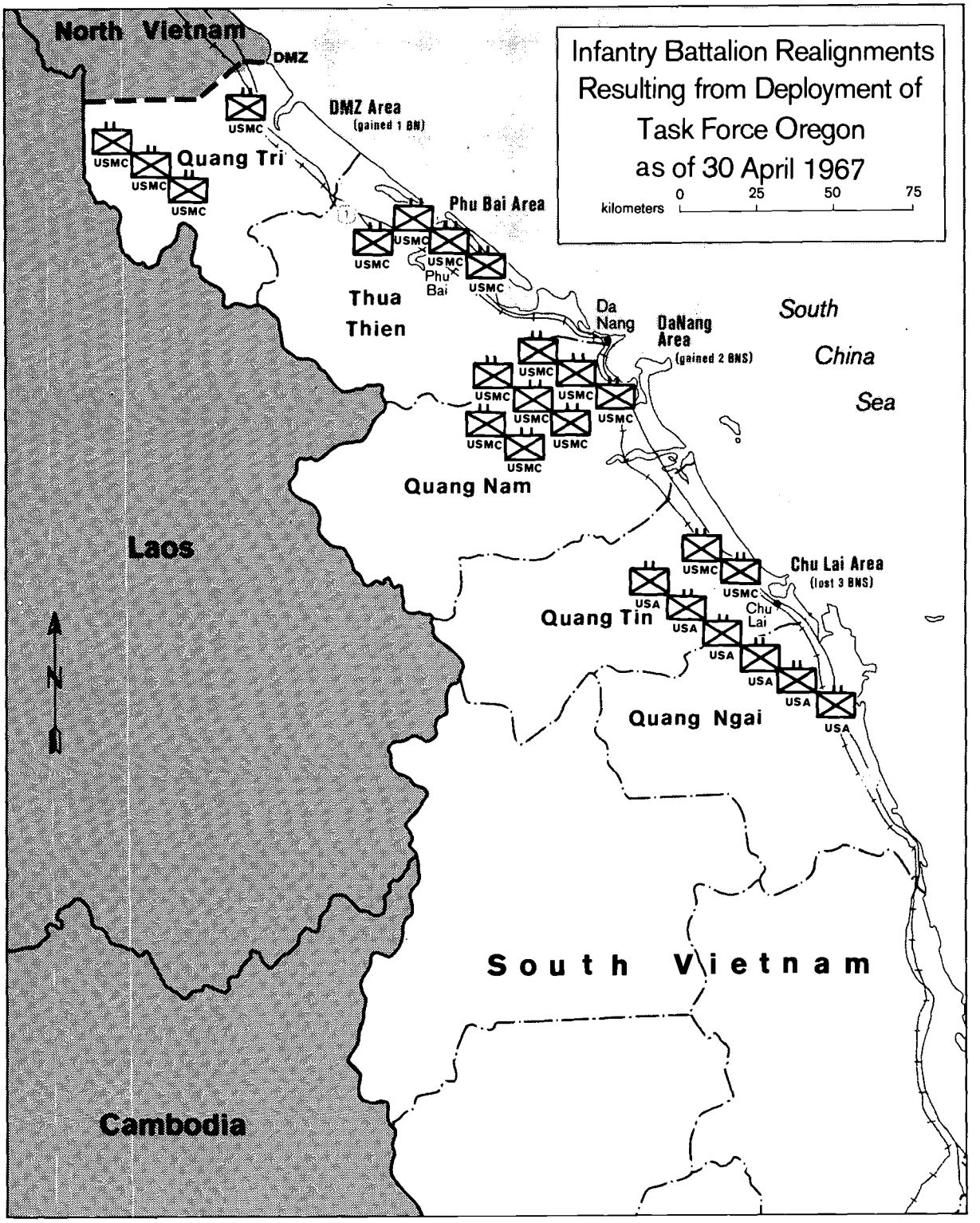
The shift that produced the most immediate results occurred on 25 April when the 5th Marines, with two battalions, moved into the Thang Binh area and assumed responsibility for operations in the Que Son Valley. The second of the two battalions did not arrive in the valley until 1 May because of a delay in the turn-over of its portion of the Chu Lai TAOR. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines served as a separate battalion under the direct control of the 1st Marine Division with responsibility for the security of the An Hoa industrial complex 22 miles southwest of Da Nang.

Department of Defense Photo (USA) SC 639323

A Marine amphibian tractor carries members of the Army's 196th Light Infantry Brigade on a village search on 27 April, after Task Force Oregon took control of the former Marine enclave at Chu Lai.

With the shifting of these forces, the Marines deactivated Task Force X-Ray at 1200 on 26 April and Task Force Oregon, under III MAF operational control, assumed responsibility for all of the Chu Lai TAOR, including the Chu Lai Base Defense Command. The turnover went smoothly. The Army units were not equipped or manned to handle postal services, an exchange system, or a clubs system. Since the Marines previously had organized those services at Chu Lai, Marine personnel remained in place until the Army units took over these functions or substituted their own systems.

Chu Lai continued to be the home of a large component of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Force Logistic Support Group Bravo, and the 7th Communications Battalion. In addition, approximately 200 Marines assigned to combined action units also


Infantry Battalion Realignments Resulting from Deployment of Task Force Oregon as of 30 April 1967
kilometers 0 25 50 75
North Vietnam
DMZ
DMZ Area
(gained 1 BN)
Quang Tri
Phu Bai Area
Phu Bai
Thua Thien
Da Nang
DaNang Area
(gained 2 BNS)
South China Sea
Quang Nam
Laos
Chu Lai Area
(lost 3 BNS)
Chu Lai
Quang Tin
Quang Ngai
South Vietnam
Cambodia
USMC
USA
N

Department of Defense Photo (USA) SC 639318

remained in the area. Brigadier General Foster C. LaHue, the former commanding general of Task Force X-Ray, stayed at Chu Lai as the installation coordinator. The command relationship between General Rosson and General LaHue was one of mutual coordination and cooperation, under the authority of General Walt.

During the first week of May, Brigadier General Salve H. Matheson's 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division joined Task Force Oregon. These additional battalions of the 1st Brigade permitted General Rosson to open a new offensive campaign in the important coastal region south of Quang Ngai City. On 11 May, five U.S. Army battalions began Operation Malheur in the area immediately north of what had been the Desoto TAOR. By the end of May, this extensive heliborne search and destroy operation had succeeded in killing 369 Communists and capturing 64.

Malheur II followed Malheur I and produced even better results. Experiencing almost daily contact with the Communists, the soldiers killed 488 of the enemy before the operation ended on 2 August. Both operations concentrated upon eliminating regular enemy formations in the area to reduce the pressure upon the rural populace. Once they accomplished this, the soldiers shifted their emphasis

Soldiers of the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry, 196th Light Infantry Brigade search a deserted village in April as Army units gain familiarity with the Chu Lai tactical area after Task Force Oregon took responsibility for the region from the 1st Marine Division.

Department of Defense Photo (USA) SC 639319

Department of Defense Photo (USA) SC 640815

American soldiers (top) of the 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry advance toward a tree line under enemy fire near Duc Pho in May in Operation Malheur, conducted by Task Force Oregon after it assumed control of the Chu Lai area. As enemy fire increases (below), an armored personnel carrier of the 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment fires in support.

Department of Defense Photo (USA) SC 640811

to eliminating the guerrilla infrastructure. During the ensuing months, the Viet Cong found it increasingly difficult to obtain support from the people in the surrounding countryside.

The introduction of Task Force Oregon was only the first step in the buildup and realignment of forces in I Corps. The second step was the temporary commitment of the CinCPac reserve, the Seventh Fleet's Amphibious Ready Group with Special Landing Forces Alpha and Bravo. In mid-May, BLT 3/4, the last major element of the Marines' Western Pacific reserve, arrived in a 42-plane shuttle at Dong Ha to participate in Operation Hickory. The 26th Marines' regimental headquarters followed from Okinawa to provide the operational control of units in the Khe Sanh area in northwestern Quang Tri Province.*

*The movement of BLT 3/4 and the 26th Marines headquarters to Vietnam ended unit rotation to Okinawa for refitting and retraining. This was a real loss to the Marine units fighting in Vietnam. LtGen Louis Metzger, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981), (Vietnam Comment files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Department of Defense Photo (USA) SC 640809

A platoon leader of Company C, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment radios for a medevac helicopter after an encounter with an enemy unit in May's Operation Malheur.

The large number of enemy casualties in I Corps during the month of May reflected some of the impact of the sudden III MAF reinforcement. In I Corps 6,119 enemy died fighting the Americans, compared with a total of 3,723 in the other three corps areas. The surprise arrival of 12 new U.S. battalions and the reshuffle of forces already in I Corps upset the Communists' plans. They did not find the coastal plains undefended as expected, and Hanoi demanded adherence to the plan. The ability of the allies to reinforce I Corps against the anticipated summer campaign cost the Communists a high price in troops lost and doomed North Vietnam's hopes for a resounding 1967 summer victory.

PART III
CONTINUING ACTION ALONG THE DMZ

CHAPTER 7

The Barrier—Another Approach

Evolution of the Concept

Evolution of the Concept

The arrival of Task Force Oregon with its nine maneuver battalions vastly changed the friendly to enemy troop ratio in I Corps. The increase was intended to give III MAF much more flexibility, but this is not the way it worked out. At the time of Oregon's addition, General Westmoreland directed General Walt to begin a task which ultimately tied down as many III MAF units as TF Oregon added. The task was the construction of a barrier or strongpoint obstacle system below the DMZ.

The idea of a DMZ barrier had been under discussion in Washington for months. In March of 1966, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara raised the question of a barrier with the JCS[1] which, in turn, requested the views of Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp, CinCPac, on the construction of a conventional mine and wire barrier to be backed up by monitoring troops. The proposed barrier was to extend from the South China Sea across northern South Vietnam through the panhandle of Laos to Thailand.

The CinCPac staff studied the idea and in April Admiral Sharp pointed out a number of problem areas with the concept. The problems included the tremendous strain that the project would place on logistic facilities in both South Vietnam and Thailand, the enormous construction effort, and the large number of troops it would require before, during, and after completion. Admiral Sharp also expressed his opinion that the barrier would deny the advantages of maneuverability to friendly forces.

September 1966 brought another proposal, this one the result of a study conducted by a panel of scientists under the auspices of the Institute for Defense Anaylses. Known as the Jason Plan, the study proposed the employment of an aviation supported barrier system across infiltration routes into South Vietnam and Laos. This barrier was to consist of two parts: one to block foot traffic and one to stop vehicles. The foot traffic barrier was to be placed along the southern edge of the DMZ, while the antivehicle system was to be built in Laos where the Communists were developing an extensive road network. The barriers were to consist of large numbers of gravel mines, button bomblets, and acoustic detectors, supported by patrol and strike aircraft.* Ground personnel, tasked to emplace detectors and plant mines would man the portion of the barrier in South Vietnam.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189042

Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, shown here during his visit to MAG-11 in July, believed a barrier system south of the DMZ would retard the move of NVA combat units into South Vietnam.

Admiral Sharp forwarded his response to the Jason Plan to JCS on 13 September 1966. The reply pointed out that while the establishment of an aviation supported barrier might be technically feasible, CinCPac doubted that such a barrier would impede infiltration, even initially. He maintained that "a

*Gravel mines are small mines designed to damage feet and legs. Button bomblets are small mines which make a loud report, but are not designed to injure when stepped on by a shod foot; they make a noise to be picked up by acoustic sensors.

barrier system must be tended; if not, it could be breached with ease, while the flow of men and material to the VC/NVA continued." An aerial delivered obstacle would not be expected to supplant the need for soldiers on the ground, and the time, effort and resources of men and material required to establish a ground barrier would be tremendous."[2]

While military leaders showed little enthusiasm for the barrier schemes, Secretary of Defense McNamara believed that the ideas had merit. On 15 September, he appointed Lieutenant General Alfred D. Starbird, USA, director of the Defense Communications Agency, to head a joint task force within the Department of Defense with the mission of devising an anti-infiltration system that would stop, or at least inhibit, the flow of men and material from North to South Vietnam. The mission envisioned wide usage of air dropped munitions and electronic sensors to establish the barrier. This directive formally established the program that was to become known as Project Practice Nine.

In October 1966, General Westmoreland suggested to Secretary McNamara, as an alternative to previous recommendations, that a conventional barrier utilizing strong points could be constructed across all of northern South Vietnam. This barrier would be augmented by selective use of air delivered munitions and sensors in Laos. Key terrain was to be organized behind the barrier, with observation posts and patrols integrated into the scheme. Reaction forces were to be emplaced to respond if the barrier was breached. General Westmoreland believed that a division, supported by an armored cavalry regiment, would be needed as the containment force. Secretary McNamara told General Westmoreland that he was receptive to the concept and requested that the idea be refined into a requirement plan. At the same time, the Secretary charged the Starbird task force with functioning as an expediting agency to obtain and deliver munitions, sensors, and equipment to support the MACV concept.

General Westmoreland ordered his staff and all involved subordinate commands to develop the plan. The burden of preparing the aviation portion fell on the Seventh Air Force; III MAF and the MACV Combat Operations Center were to provide the concept for the conduct of mobile defense and conventional barrier aspects.

General Walt ordered the 3d Marine Division to prepare the Marine portion of the concept, since any implementation of the idea would directly affect that command. His only guidance to General Kyle, the division commander, was that he wanted the report to begin with a statement that III MAF disagreed with the barrier idea and preferred the mobile defense currently being employed.[3] General Kyle, briefing Walt on the division plan, also indicated his preference for a mobile concept, stating:

> A mobile defense by the size of the force envisioned for manning the barrier system (one and one-third divisions) would in itself provide an effective block to infiltration south of the DMZ, and in the process negate the necessity for construction of the barrier.[4]

After the III MAF staff reviewed General Kyle's plan, General Walt forwarded it to General Westmoreland. His covering letter made III MAF's view quite clear, stating, " . . . this plan was being submitted in response to a directive, and that it was the opinion of the Commanding General III MAF that such a barrier, in effect, was not going to be worth the time and the effort that would be put into it."[5]

On 26 November, General Westmoreland forwarded the plan to the Secretary of Defense after additional refining at MACV Headquarters. As submitted, it called for a linear barrier immediately south of the DMZ, extending from the South China Sea to a point near Dong Ha Mountain, a distance of approximately 30 kilometers. This portion of the barrier was to be 600-1,000 meters wide, consisting of wire obstacles, minefields, sensors, watch towers, and a series of strong points. The line was to be backed up by an armored unit. From the west end of this linear barrier to the Laotian border there were to be a series of about 20 defile barriers, each to consist of a minefield and wire obstacles extending roughly 1,000 meters across the avenue of approach to be blocked by the barrier. Manned strong points were to occupy commanding hills and ridgelines overlooking these obstacles. The plan called for a division to man this portion of the system.

The plan also required the construction of artillery positions along Route 9 to provide fire support for the system. These positions also were to house the reaction forces needed to support the strong points. Other construction projects included in the plan were the improvement of Routes 1 and 9, expansion of the Cua Viet port facility, and the establishment of a major airfield near Hue.

After reviewing the proposal, Secretary McNamara

directed General Starbird on 19 December to prepare a procurement program to provide the materials for the linear section of the barrier. The materials were to be in South Vietnam by July 1967. Although the Secretary's memorandum did not specify an exact date for commitment of the materials, it stated that at least a part of the system should be operational by 1 November 1967. On 22 December 1966, General Starbird submitted his proposal which specified the time schedule to be followed and funding and personnel needed by 1 November.[6]

As 1967 began, MACV was preparing a new Practice Nine Requirement Plan to conform with the timetable in the Starbird proposal. On 26 January MACV completed this plan and forwarded it for review. The study provided the concepts and estimated troop and logistic requirements to support the anti-infiltration system for the eastern portion of the area as outlined in the earlier plan. The system was to consist of a series of strong points and fortified base areas. Barbed wire and minefield obstacles were to be emplaced forward of the strong points to deny the enemy likely avenues of approach and restrict movement, while sensors, detector devices, night observation devices, searchlights, and radar were to be used to locate the enemy. The strong points and base areas occupying key terrain features were to be constructed by tactical units under the supervision of engineers. The positions were to serve as both patrol and fire support bases. On-call, preplanned artillery fires were to cover the entire area, and tactical aircraft were to be available on short notice for support. Reaction forces were to be stationed behind the system in positions from which they could deploy rapidly. All civilians were to be relocated behind the system. The plan envisioned that future strong points and obstacles possibly would be extended westward to the Laotian border, but the westward expansion would be contingent upon time, forces, material, and security conditions.

The study group also cautioned that the term "barrier" should not be used, because the connotation of an impregnable defense exceeded the scope of this system, and that an effective obstacle system across northern South Vietnam would require, at a minimum, an additional force of one division and one armored cavalry regiment. The study group considered the minimum essential additional force necessary to man the eastern portion of the system to be one infantry brigade, or Marine regiment, augmented with supply, maintenance, construction, transportation, and other support units.[7]

Despite the apparent growing interest in the strong point obstacle system (SPOS) at MACV, the Marines' opinions of the concept remained unchanged. In January, at a briefing held for Under Secretary of the Navy Robert H. B. Baldwin at the 3d Marine Division Headquarters, the briefing officer reiterated the III MAF view of the barrier concept:

> To sum it all up, we're not enthusiastic over any barrier defense approach to the infiltration problem. . . . We believe that a mobile defense by an adequate force, say one division, give or take a battalion, would be a much more flexible and economical approach to the problem.[8]

III MAF was not the only command that had reservations about the idea. On 6 February, a CinCPac message to JCS admitted that the SPOS was feasible, but questioned the necessity for one. The message stated:

> The level of infiltration in the area in which the obstacle system is to be installed does not justify diversion of the effort required to construct and man such a system. Moreover, there is no indication that present operations are inadequate to cope with what has been an insignificant infiltration problem in this particular area of SVN.[9]

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A369973

The 3d Marine Division staff briefed Under Secretary of the Navy Robert H. B. Baldwin, shown here visiting a refugee center in January 1967, on the III MAF view that a mobile defense of the DMZ region was better than building an extensive barrier system.

Despite opposition from concerned Marine and Navy commanders, on 8 March Secretary McNamara ordered General Starbird to procure the materials for strong points and base camps, and enough sensors and surveillance devices to service a 10-kilometer section of the obstacle system. At the same time, he directed the improvement of Route 1 and the ports at Hue and Cua Viet. He also arranged with the State Department to secure South Vietnam Government support for required land acquisition and civilian relocation.

On 17 March at III MAF headquarters, General Westmoreland met with General Walt, General Lam of the ARVN I Corps, and other GVN representatives to explain the basic concept of a strong point system in northeastern Quang Tri Province. The ARVN representatives warmly endorsed the idea and suggested that an early start should be made on the project to take advantage of the weather. They did not believe that land procurement or civilian relocation would pose any problem.

As a result, General Westmoreland ordered General Walt, in coordination with General Lam, to prepare a plan to locate, construct, organize, and occupy a SPOS. He also informed General Walt that discussion of Practice Nine with the South Vietnamese at this time should be limited to the SPOS.[10]

General Walt, in turn, ordered his chief, G-3 Plans Division and III MAF Practice Nine officer, Lieutenant Colonel Marvin D. Volkert, to meet with his ARVN counterpart and begin the preparation of a combined barrier plan. Walt instructed Volkert to lead the planning and to complete the total effort without divulging details of the Practice Nine plan such as equipment and forces required. By early April, although no written document was in existence nor even expected for at least 30 days, combined planning had progressed sufficiently to permit initial ground clearing between Con Thien and Gio Linh. At that time Marine spokesmen described the project as a modest effort to clear fields of fire and to install a limited obstacle system, but Lieutenant Colonel Volkert had ensured that the work would fit into the Practice Nine concept.

Although the number of Marine units involved in the initial clearing effort was small, it precipitated the basic problem that III MAF had feared would result from the barrier project: the loss of flexibility. On 19 April, a message from Westmoreland to CinCPac intensified the problem. General Westmoreland indicated that, "The mission of establishing a strong point/obstacle system south of the DMZ initially will be given to the U.S. Marines."[11] General Walt expressed his concern in a 26 April message to General Westmoreland, stating that the assignment committed his entire 3d Marine Division to the Practice Nine Plan. He pointed out that ARVN participation in the anti-infiltration belt construction accelerated the anticipated reduction in his forces.

The clearing of the area between Con Thien and Gio Linh was nearing completion, opening the way for the installation of towers, wire, strong points, mines, sensors, and communications. General Walt emphasized that the manpower required to construct and man even that portion of the system would not only use up all of the division's personnel, but also would fix all available division units in place. General Walt observed that this was contrary to all previous MACV positions.

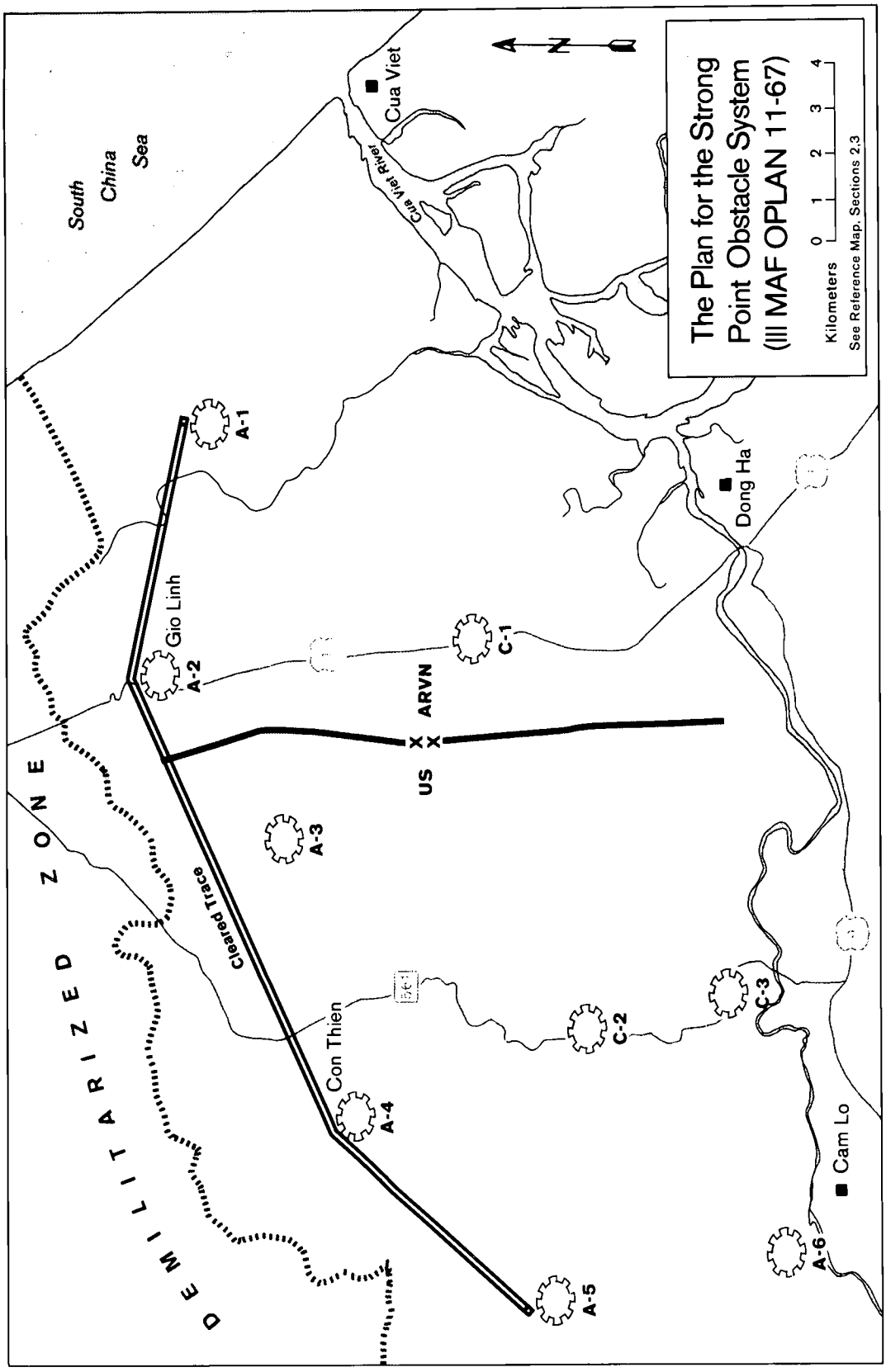
From the outset the plan had:

> Consistently protected [the] integrity of Marine Corps forces in [the] northern portion of ICTZ (i.e., have inferred that forces now in northern Quang Tri have not unduly been tied to any of the projected barrier systems).
>
> Recognized the requirement for significant forces over and above those now in place to construct and man whatever system is finally adopted.

General Walt contended that both of these positions remained valid, and maintained that unless he received the additional forces required to install and man the Practice Nine system, his capability to conduct offensive actions in northern I Corps would cease almost immediately.[12]

There were no additional forces available in South Vietnam at the time. The posting of the U.S. Army's Task Force Oregon to southern I Corps had reduced troop strength in the other three corps areas to a minimum. These facts, and the 1 November target date for the completion of the first portion of the SPOS, forced General Westmoreland to place the responsibility for the system's construction on III MAF, but the MACV commander did indicate that as additional forces became available he would use them to reinforce the Marines.

By 2 May the 11th Engineer Battalion had cleared a 200-meter trace between Con Thien and Gio Linh and was starting to clear a 500-meter perimeter around each position. Once the battalion completed this task it planned to widen the 200-meter trace to 600 meters and then extend it eastward beyond Gio Linh to the flood plain. While the engineers were clearing the land, at least one infantry battalion, but


The Plan for the Strong Point Obstacle System (III MAF OPLAN 11-67)
Kilometers 0 1 2 3 4
See Reference Map, Sections 2,3
South China Sea
Cua Viet
Cua Viet River
Dong Ha
Gio Linh
Con Thien
Cam Lo
DEMILITARIZED ZONE
Cleared Trace
US
ARVN
A-1
A-2
A-3
A-4
A-5
A-6
C-1
C-2
C-3

normally two, provided security and screening for the engineering effort.

One of the major problems encountered by the engineers during the initial clearing of the trace was the large number of civilians living in the area. Although the government had begun the removal of the population in this region, it appeared that this would be an extremely difficult and extended task, but the inception of Operation Hickory on 18 May changed the picture completely. One of the objectives of Hickory was to clear the entire SPOS area of civilians. By 23 May, GVN authorities reported that there were 6,000 people already at the Cam Lo temporary resettlement site. By the end of Hickory, on 29 May, the population at Cam Lo had grown to over 11,000; the construction zone was virtually free of civilians.

On 18 June, III MAF published Operation Plan 11-67, outlining the SPOS concept. This plan envisioned that, in its completed form, the system would require one U.S. regiment and one ARVN regiment, disposed at six strong points and three battalion base areas. The U.S. portion of the defense was to include four company strong points and two battalion base areas. An additional U.S. battalion was to be based at Dong Ha to be employed in tactical operations in support of the defense.

The plan divided the construction and manning of the system into two phases. The first phase consisted of expansion of the trace to a 600-meter width, installation of a linear obstacle system, and clearing and construction of four strong points and three base areas. Concurrently, III MAF units would improve Routes 1, 9, and 561 and prepare a fortification materials storage site at Dong Ha. The plan set the completion date for Phase 1 as 1 November 1967.*

The Marines planned to begin Phase 2 of the plan at the end of the monsoon season. It required the construction of the final two strong points west of Con Thien and continued obstacle construction on both flanks of the Phase 1 line. III MAF anticipated that the entire system would be completed by July 1968.

Although the III MAF plan had not used the MACV code name Practice Nine, the plans were identical. A partial compromise of the classified code name Practice Nine occurred in June, and III MAF received instructions to discontinue use of the Practice Nine code name. MACV assigned the interim name Illinois City for use until 14 July when the code name Dye Marker became effective. At the same time, 14 July, the air-supported portion of the program, which was still in a conceptual stage, acquired the code name Muscle Shoals.*

Renaming of the project was not the only change to occur in June. On 1 June, Lieutenant General Walt, the burly Marine veteran from Colorado, who had led III MAF since June of 1965, relinquished his command to Lieutenant General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., recipient of the Navy Cross as a battalion commander on Guam during World War II. General Cushman had been deputy commander at III MAF since early in the year. The new commanding general was well aware of the problems involved in the construction of the anti-infiltration system, but, unlike his predecessor, he believed that, once completed, the system would free his forces for missions elsewhere.**

During Secretary McNamara's visit to the 3d Marine Division in July, the division briefed him on the status of Dye Marker and flew him over the construction sites. The Marines had cleared the strong points at Con Thien and Gio Linh to a 500-meter radius and had begun building bunkers in both positions. They had cleared the 600-meter-wide trace between the two strong points and extended it to the flood plain east of Gio Linh. The staff opinion was that with release of the Dye Marker materials, the division could finish Phase 1 of the system by the 1 November target date. Since the monsoon would greatly reduce trafficability in the area, the engineers made a major effort to improve Routes 1, 9, and 561 which linked the strong points to the base areas.

These accomplishments had been costly for III MAF. All of the forces used for clearing the strong point obstacle system had come from III MAF and they had not begun installation of wire and other obstacles. The amount of Marine efforts devoted to the Dye Marker project to that stage had been:

(1) Direct labor: 5,795 mandays; III MAF estimated the

*The ARVN were to construct strong points A-1 and A-2 and base area C-1.

*The air-supported portion of the system was the responsibility of the Seventh Air Force and this monograph does not cover it.

**General Cushman apparently was making the best of a bad situation. In his comments in 1981 on the draft of this volume, he wrote, "Your handling of the *stupid* barrier concept and operation was even handed." Gen Robert E. Cushman, Comments on draft ms, 17May81 (Vietnam Comment files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

11th Engineer Battalion was applying 50 percent of its resources to Dye Marker.

(2) Equipment hours: 18,440.

(3) Equipment losses: destroyed tractors, 15; dump trucks, 2.

(4) Personnel losses: KIA 4; WIA, 77.[13]

At the same time, the construction effort was meeting increased enemy resistance, requiring more security forces. Further, Marine units still had responsibility for their respective TAORs. The 9th Marines' TAOR, for example, stretched from the sea above Cua Viet to Con Thien in the west and as far south as the newly constructed airfield at Quang Tri. "Although the 9th Marines was reinforced with at least one additional infantry battalion and often two," recalled Colonel George E. Jerue, "the additional mission of assisting in the construction of the trace precluded any rest for the combat troops involved."[14]

One example of the effort required was that of Lieutenant Colonel Lee R. Bendell's 3d Battalion, 4th Marines at Con Thien in late August and early September. As one company worked on construction projects within the perimeter, company-sized patrols conducted sweeps north, east, and west of Con Thien while platoon-sized patrols covered the south. Those working within the perimeter endured over 100 rounds of incoming enemy artillery and rockets, which dictated strict flak jacket discipline. "The Marines much preferred to take their chances on patrol," recalled Lieutenant Colonel Bendell, "than be sand bag fillers and bunker construction 'experts' interrupted by incoming barrages."[15]

By mid-August, the enemy situation in the DMZ area was becoming critical. In a 16 August message to General Westmoreland, General Cushman stated that although he had increased his own troop strength in the area, he had received none of the forces considered as the minimum essential augmentation by the 26 January 1967 plan. The enemy threat in the DMZ had increased progressively to the degree that Marine units were fully occupied with holding back the Communists in the Con Thien-Gio Linh region. Allied forces along the trace (four battalions plus combat support and combat service support, with the effective assistance of extensive and continuous artillery, air, and naval gunfire support) were unable to defend their front and at the same time construct, man, and operate the SPOS in their rear. General Cushman concluded by stating that he required more forces in northern Quang Tri if he were to meet the 1 November target date for the

The construction of the barrier system, also called the strong point obstacle system, created severe logistics problems for III MAF. For example, the heavy timbers used in this partially completed bunker at Strong Point C-2 had to be acquired and then hauled to the site over dirt roads made almost impassable by the monsoon rains late in the year.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189849

SPOS. His only alternative, barring the arrival of reinforcements if he was to continue the project, was to shift one Task Force Oregon brigade north to free elements of the 5th Marines for deployment in Quang Tri.[16]

General Westmoreland responded to CG III MAF's request by ordering another Army brigade to I Corps to permit the 5th Marines to deploy further north. He also informed General Cushman that he planned to send a second brigade into the area in October. As a result, the III MAF commander informed General Westmoreland that he would use nine Marine battalions; seven committed to searching, clearing, and screening in support of the construction effort, while the other two infantry battalions and an engineer battalion would construct the obstacles and man them as the work was completed. All of these forces would be in the range of enemy artillery. Moreover, increased NVA use of proximity fuzes posed a greater threat to those troops who would have to do the work, expected to take six weeks. Because of this, General Cushman emphasized that the flow of equipment and materials would have to be timely. The general pointed out that the 3 September artillery attack on Dong Ha also had reduced his ability to proceed with the project.[17]

On 7 September, General Westmoreland directed III MAF to assess the cost of installing the SPOS in terms of casualties resulting from enemy fire. At the same time, he requested that the Marines submit an alternate plan to be executed between then and November should a decision be made not to proceed with the Dye Marker plan. On 10 September, III MAF presented its analysis of the casualties that could be expected if it pursued the existing plan. The Marines based this analysis on actual casualties from previous operations in support of the SPOS, with an adjustment made for the increased enemy artillery capability. They estimated the system installation time as 29 days. Total projected casualties were: 672 U.S. killed and 3,788 wounded; projected South Vietnamese casualties for the same period were 112 killed and 642 wounded.[18]

Three days after the submission of the casualty analysis, General Westmoreland approved III MAF's alternate plan, Operation Plan 12-67. The major change in the new plan was the cessation of obstacle construction until after completion of the strong points and base areas and stabilization of the tactical situation. Other changes outlined in the plan included relocation of Base Area C-3 nearer to Cam Lo and the addition of a fourth base area north of the Cua Viet POL facility. One other change, not involving construction, was the provision for manning all four strong points with ARVN forces, freeing a Marine battalion for security of the new Quang Tri airfield. Operations in the western, or defile, area were to be conducted from battalion combat operating bases (COBs). This plan envisioned that the COBs would support the area between Camp Carroll and Khe Sanh. Subsequently, the Marines would establish bases in the vicinity of Lang Ru'ou and Lang Vei.[19]

The onset of the seasonal monsoon further complicated construction efforts. The heavy rains in September, for example, turned Route 561 between Cam Lo and Con Thien into a quagmire impassable to any type of vehicle. While CH-53 helicopters, often guided by TPQ-10 radar, attempted to ferry sufficient supplies to Con Thien, the 11th Engineer Battalion received orders to make Route 561 useable; this became the battalion's top priority. The major problem facing the engineers was the location and movement of sufficient crushed rock to build a subbase for the road. The nearest supply was near Camp Carroll, which required hauling the rock in dump trucks more than 15 miles. "When the project was completed and the first vehicles made it to Con Thien," commented Lieutenant Colonel Willard N. Christopher of the 11th Engineer Battalion, "General Hochmuth told me that he was elated to 'get them off my back,' and congratulated the men in the battalion who had done the bulk of the work."[20]

By mid-October General Westmoreland was expressing dissatisfaction with the rate of progress on the Dye Marker project. He realized that the heavy rains in late September and early October had required a large effort to keep the roads open, and he also appreciated that there had been some delay because construction materials had not arrived on schedule, but, despite these recognizable problems, he believed that more progress should have been made. On 22 October, he told General Cushman that, as a result of his own observations and inspections by his staff, he had concluded that quality control of the project was inadequate, that the Dye Marker system had not received the priority consistent with its operational importance, and that the project required more command emphasis and bet-

ter management.* He ordered General Cushman to take immediate steps to correct deficiencies and to institute a positive system of quality control over the entire Dye Marker project.[21]

General Cushman appointed the assistant III MAF commander, Major General Raymond L. Murray, a distinguished and highly decorated veteran of two wars, to head a permanent Dye Marker special staff. At the same time, III MAF informed all commanders concerned that the Dye Marker project had high national interest and a priority second only to emergency combat requirements. In addition, General Cushman planned to move another regiment north to provide more troops for tactical requirements. General Cushman pointed out that although all construction was incomplete, all the A and C sites, except A-3, included in his 12-67 plan were manned and engaged in anti-infiltration operations. He assured the MACV commander that the task of completing construction and improving the cases and strong points would be pursued as a matter of utmost urgency.[22]

On 10 December, General Cushman reported that III MAF had made significant progress. All bunkers at sites A-4, C-2, and C-4 were complete. Engineers had completed the wire and mine emplacement at C-2, and had finished most of the other two sites. Construction had started on the combat operating base at Ca Lu and Marines were conducting tactical operations to clear the A-3 site. Vietnamese Army construction at sites A-1 and C-1 did not meet the new 1 December target date, but completion was near. Engineers had prepared Route 561 to handle a 60-ton capacity and opened it from Cam Lo to Con Thien, but delayed asphalting the road because of weather. The new Quang Tri airfield was completely operational, substantially easing the logistic burden in the area.

By the end of the year, III MAF units finished all strong points and base areas, except A-3 and C-3. Both A-3 and C-3 were approximately 70 percent finished, as was the Ca Lu COB. The total Dye Marker effort and its associated security tasks had required 757,520 mandays and 114,519 equipment hours by 31 December. Equipment lost to enemy action during the construction effort amounted to a monetary loss of $1,622,348.[23]

By the end of the year the Marine command's opinion of the barrier concept had not changed. One Marine officer stated, "With these bastards, you'd have to build the zone all the way to India and it would take the whole Marine Corps and half the Army to guard it; even then they'd probably burrow under it." General Wallace M. Greene, Jr. the Commandant, testifying before the Senate Subcommittee on Preparedness in August 1967, declared, "From the very beginning I have been opposed to this project."[24]

Each of the strong points in the barrier system contained bunkers designed to withstand enemy artillery and rocket fire. These South Vietnamese soldiers are adding a thick layer of dirt to the top of this bunker at Strong Point C-2 in mid-October.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189856

*Lieutenant Colonel Willard N. Christopher of the 11th Engineer Battalion remembered a Saigon staff officer suggesting the bunkers be painted white, as the ones at Long Binh supposedly were. This convinced Christopher that the quality control issue basically was a matter of "cosmetics." General Metzger, however, suspected that such "nit-picking" criticisms from the MACV staff stemmed, in part, from interservice rivalry. LtCol Willard N. Christopher, Comments on draft ms, 31Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.); MajGen Louis Metzger, ltr to CG, FMFPac, Subj: Debrief, dtd 22Jan68 (Archives, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

CHAPTER 8

Con Thien and the Summer Battles Along the DMZ

Why Con Thien?—Operation Buffalo

Why Con Thien?

The Marines along the DMZ began construction of the strong point obstacle system south of the border in the spring and fall of 1967 in compliance with orders from MACV and Washington. The system, called the "McNamara Line" by the Marines, proved to be a major burden to the 3d Marine Division. Security of the troops building the line, coupled with the demands on Marine units to fill sandbags, creosote bunker timbers, install wire, and other associated tasks, severely restricted the division's combat activities.

While the construction of the obstacle system limited III MAF's flexibility, higher headquarters expected its speedy completion to force southbound NVA regiments to move westward into the mountains, thereby complicating the enemy's logistical problems. The Marines' combined-arms fire power from strong points would then confront the anticipated enemy attacks. Smaller patrols and infiltration groups would face the challenge of the extensive obstacle system. The Communists, however, chose to attack before the system became too strong.

The enemy decided to concentrate on the Marine strong point at Con Thien, located 14 miles inland and two miles south of the DMZ. This outpost was crucial to Marine efforts in the area. It occupied what would be the northwest corner of the strong point obstacle system, which enclosed an area which became known as "Leatherneck Square." Con Thien also overlooked one of the principal enemy routes into South Vietnam. Capture of the outpost would open the way for a major enemy invasion of Quang Tri Province by 35,000 NVA troops massed north of the DMZ, a victory of immense propaganda value. Colonel Richard B. Smith, who commanded the 9th Marines, later described the outpost's importance:

> Con Thien was clearly visible from the 9th Marines Headquarters on the high ground at Dong Ha 10 miles away, so good line-of-sight communications were enjoyed. Although Con Thien was only 160 meters high, its tenants had dominant observation over the entire area. Visitors to Con Thien could look back at the vast logistics complex of Dong Ha and know instantly why the Marines had to hold the hill. If the enemy occupied it he would be looking down our throats.[1]

The Communists made two offensive thrusts into the Con Thien region during the second half of 1967. Although reinforced by heavy artillery, rockets, and mortars north of the Ben Hai River in the DMZ, each thrust collapsed under a combination of Marine ground and helicopter-borne maneuvers coupled with supporting artillery, naval gunfire, and attack aircraft.

The first offensive aimed at Con Thien, the largest in terms of troops committed, occurred in July. For the first time the NVA employed extensive artillery to support its infantry, but the Marine counterattack, Operation Buffalo, beat back the enemy, netting more than 1,200 NVA dead.

The outpost at Con Thien, which this Marine patrol is approaching, occupied a low hill, but one which provided excellent observation of the surrounding area as well as the key installations at Dong Ha.
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370551

The second attempt came in September. A heavy weapons attack of greater volume and duration supported a multipronged infantry assault on Con Thien, but this endeavor, too, ended in failure for the Communists.

In reviewing the enemy invasion attempts across the DMZ during 1967, analysts found the Communists used fewer troops as the year progressed, but greatly increased their attacks by fire. The enemy sanctuary in the northern half of the DMZ, protected by U.S. policy, was always available for regrouping and employment of heavy artillery. This unique situation caused considerable frustration for the allied commanders. Even so, Communist plans for a significant victory in the DMZ area remained unfulfilled at the year's end, and construction of the allied strong point obstacle system continued as planned.

Operation Buffalo

Operation Buffalo began on 2 July utilizing Lieutenant Colonel Richard J. Schening's 1st Battalion, 9th Marines in and around Con Thien. Companies A and B operated north-northeast of the strong point near a former market place on Route 561, while Company D, Headquarters and Service Company, and the battalion command group remained within the outpost perimeter. Company C was at Dong Ha at Colonel George E. Jerue's 9th Marines command post. Colonel Jerue described the origins of the operation:

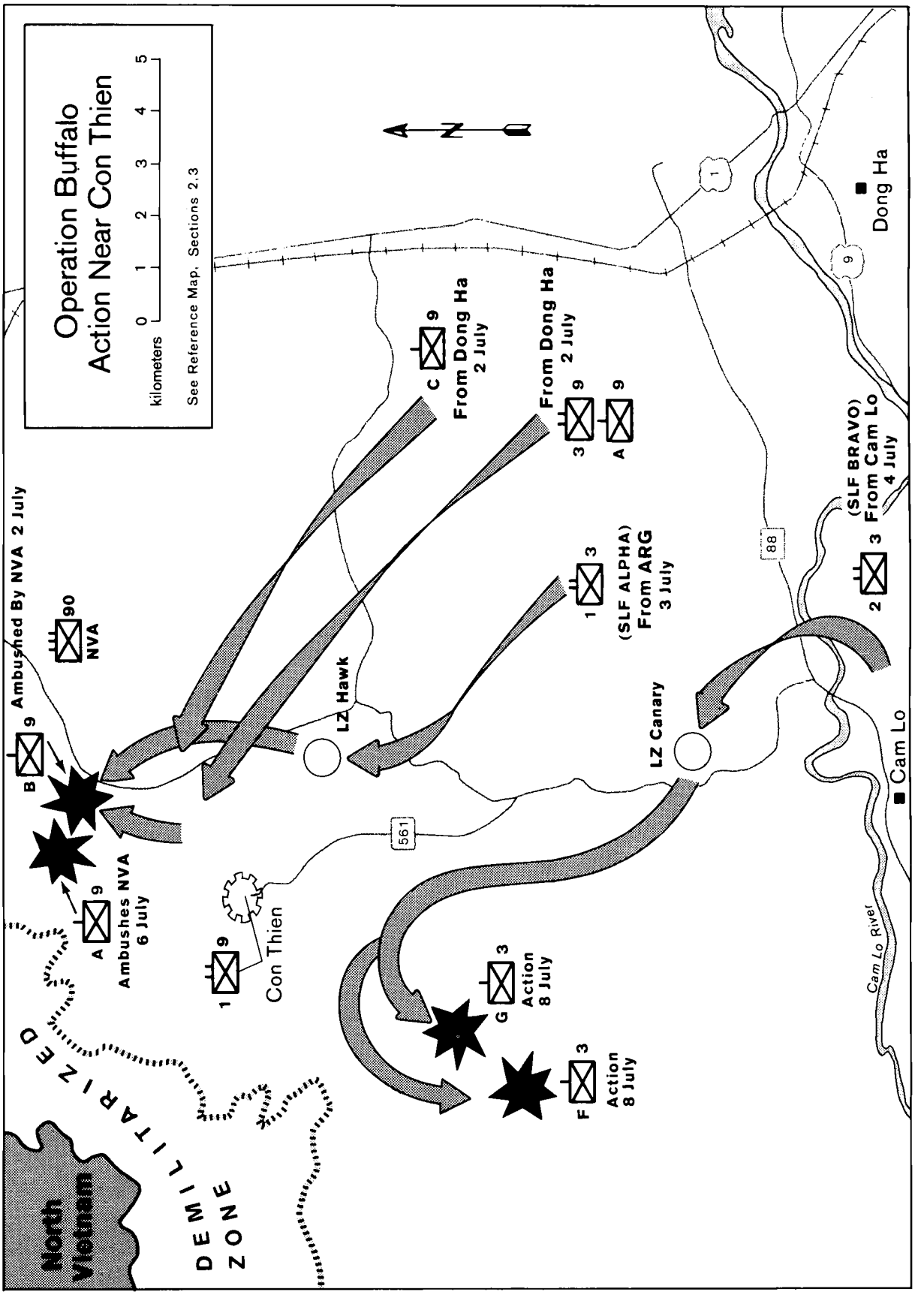
> The TAOR assigned to the 9th Marine Regiment was so large that the regiment could not enjoy the advantage of patrolling any particular sector on a continuing basis. As a result, an area would be swept for a few days and then it would be another week or so before the area would be swept again. Consequently, it became evident that the NVA, realizing this limitation, would move back into an area as soon as a sweep was concluded.
>
> In an attempt to counter this NVA maneuver, it was decided to send two companies of 1/9 ("A" and "B" Cos.) into the area (1,200 yards east of Con Thien and north of the Trace) which had just been swept during the last few days in June. This is the reason the two companies were [there on 2 July].[2]

That morning, Captain Sterling K. Coates' Company B, a company which gained a reputation for finding the enemy during earlier actions at Khe Sanh, walked into the heaviest combat of its Vietnam assignment. It had moved a mile east of Con Thien the day before in company with Captain Albert C. Slater, Jr.'s Company A to conduct a sweep north of the cleared trace. At 0800 on the 2nd, both units began moving north. Company A was on the left. Company B moved along Route 561, an old 8- to 10-foot-wide cart road bordered by waist-high hedgerows. The road led to trouble; two NVA battalions waited in prepared positions.

Company B's movement started smoothly and by 0900 the 2d Platoon had secured its first objective, a small crossroads 1,200 meters north of the trace. There was no contact. As the 3d Platoon and the command group moved up the trail, enemy sniper fire started. The 3d Platoon and Captain Coates' command group moved to the left to suppress the enemy's fire, but as they pushed north the NVA fire intensified, halting the platoon. Captain Coates directed his 2d Platoon to shift to the right in a second attempt to outflank the Communist position; at the same time he ordered the 1st Platoon forward to provide rear security for the company. The 2d Platoon tried to move, but enemy fire forced it back onto the road. The number of wounded and dead mounted as NVA fire hit the unit from the front and both flanks. To worsen matters, the enemy began pounding the Marines with artillery and mortars.

Shortly after the sweep began, Company A tripped two Claymore mines and the need for casualty evacuation delayed its movement. Afterward, Captain Slater moved his company eastward to help Company B, but could not link up because of heavy small arms fire. Soon the company had so many casualties that it was unable to fight and move simultaneously.

Company B's position deteriorated. Enemy artillery and mortar fire cut off the 3d Platoon and the command group from the 2d Platoon. The NVA troops then used flamethrowers to ignite the hedgerows on both sides of Captain Coates' unit, as well as massed artillery in close coordination with a ground attack.[3] Many of the Marines, forced into the open by the flamethrowers, died under the enemy fire. The Communist artillery and mortar fire shifted to the 2d Platoon as it attacked to help the 3d Platoon and the command group. This fire killed Captain Coates, his radio operator, two platoon commanders, and the artillery forward observer. The attached forward air controller, Captain Warren O. Keneipp, Jr., took command of the company, but he soon lost radio contact with the platoons. Only the company executive officer, at the rear of the 2d


Operation Buffalo
Action Near Con Thien
kilometers 0 1 2 3 4 5
See Reference Map, Sections 2,3
N
Dong Ha
9
1
C 9 From Dong Ha 2 July
From Dong Ha 2 July
3 9 A 9
(SLF BRAVO) From Cam Lo 4 July
88
2 3
1 3 (SLF ALPHA) From ARG 3 July
90 NVA
Ambushed By NVA 2 July
B 9
LZ Hawk
LZ Canary
Cam Lo
561
A 9 Ambushes NVA 6 July
1 9
Con Thien
G 3 Action 8 July
F 3 Action 8 July
Cam Lo River
North Vietnam
DEMILITARIZED ZONE

3d MarDiv ComdC, July 1967

Much of the terrain around Con Thien and the area south of the DMZ was well suited for armored vehicles. These infantrymen from Company K, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines have teamed up with M-48 tanks from the 3d Tank Battalion during Operation Buffalo.

Platoon, managed to maintain radio contact with the battalion CP, but the heavy enemy fire kept him from influencing the situation.[4]

Down the road, the 1st Platoon also took heavy punishment as it tried to push its way up to the lead elements of the company. North Vietnamese troops swarmed against the platoon's flanks, but air support arrived and the platoon commander, Staff Sergeant Leon R. Burns, directed strikes against the enemy. Burns said later, "I asked for napalm as close as 50 yards from us, some of it came in only 20 yards away. But I'm not complaining." The air strikes disrupted the enemy assault and the 1st Platoon reached what was left of the 2d Platoon. Burns quickly established a hasty defense and began treating the wounded.[5]

The 1st Battalion command post at Con Thien heard the crackle of small-arms fire from the 0930 action, followed by a radio report that Company B had encountered a dug-in NVA unit. The first assessment of enemy strength was a platoon, then a battalion, and ultimately a multibattalion force. When the firing began to increase, Lieutenant Colonel "Spike" Schening alerted his Company C, at Dong Ha, to stand by to be helilifted into Company B's area. Since these reinforcements would not arrive for some time, Schening dispatched a rescue force composed of four tanks and a platoon from Company D. The assistant S-3, Captain Henry J. M. Radcliffe, went with the small force to take com-

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A192417

Moving through seven-foot-high "elephant grass" in the DMZ region could be nerve-wracking. Grass offered the superb concealment desired by an enemy lying in ambush. Close-range encounters were always a threat that required constant alertness for the slightest sign of the presence of NVA soldiers.

mand of Company B if link-up could be made. First Lieutenant Gatlin J. Howell, the battalion intelligence officer, went also because he was familiar with the area where the enemy engaged Company B.[6] The remainder of the battalion command group remained at Con Thien.

The small rescue force moved down the cleared trace from Con Thien to the junction of Route 561 without incident, but as it turned north up the road it came under fire. A North Vietnamese unit, trying to encircle Company B, had moved south and was opposite Radcliffe's small force. Helicopter gunships and the fire from the four tanks dispersed the enemy. Company C began arriving by helicopter and Captain Radcliffe ordered the Company D platoon to secure the landing zone and evacuate casualties. As the lead elements of Company C came into the zone they met a heavy artillery barrage, which wounded 11 Marines.

Despite enemy fire, the platoon of tanks and the lead unit of Company C continued to push north toward Company B. Half a mile up the road, the advancing Marines found the 1st Platoon. Captain Radcliffe told Burns that he was the acting commanding officer and asked where was the rest of the company. Sergeant Burns replied, "Sir, this is the company, or what's left of it."[7]

After organizing the withdrawal of the 1st Platoon's wounded, Radcliffe and the relief force, accompanied by Burns, continued to push forward to Company B's furthest point of advance to recover the company's casualties. The Marines set up a hasty defense, making maximum use of the tanks' firepower, and brought the dead and wounded into the perimeter.

For Lieutenant Howell the scene had a particular impact. He had commanded Company B's 3d Platoon for more than eight months. Howell was seemingly everywhere as he searched for the wounded. Captain Radcliffe estimated that Howell and Corporal Charles A. Thompson of Company D were instrumental in the evacuation of at least 25 Marines.[8] The Marines then loaded their casualties on the tanks. Lacking space on the vehicles for the arms and equipment of the wounded, Radcliffe ordered them destroyed to prevent capture. The rescue force found it impossible to recover all the bodies immediately; some bodies remained along the road.

The company came under heavy enemy artillery fire as it began to pull back. Two of the tanks hit mines which further slowed the withdrawal. When the company reached the landing zone it came under devastating artillery and mortar fire again, hitting many of the wounded who awaited evacuation. Litter bearers and corpsmen became casualties as well.

Casualties increased in the landing zone, among them were the platoon commander and platoon sergeant from Company D who had been directing the defense of the zone. In the resulting confusion, someone passed the word to move the casualties back to Con Thien. A group of almost 50 started making their way back until Marines at Con Thien spotted them in the cleared trace. Lieutenant Colonel Schening sent out a rescue party, headed by his executive officer, Major Darrell C. Danielson, in a truck, jeep and ambulance. Upon reaching the wounded Marines, Major Danielson saw that many were in a state of shock; some seemed in danger of bleeding to death. Fortunately, two helicopters landed in the area and the Marines loaded the more serious casualties on board. Enemy artillery fire delayed the evacuation of the remainder but, despite the fire, Major Danielson and his party managed to get everyone into the vehicles and back to Con Thien for treatment and further evacuation.[9]

During the battle, friendly and enemy supporting arms engaged in a furious duel. In the first few hours of the engagement Marine aircraft dropped 90 tons of ordnance during 28 sorties. Artillery fired 453 missions, while Navy destroyers fired 142 5-inch rounds into enemy positions. The NVA force fired 1,065 artillery and mortar rounds during the day at Gio Linh and Con Thien; more than 700 rounds fell on Lieutenant Colonel Schening's 1st Battalion, 9th Marines alone.

Captain Slater's Company A remained heavily engaged. When the necessity of carrying the increasing numbers of wounded brought the company to a halt, Slater had his 3d Platoon establish a hasty landing zone in the rear of the company. After the first flight of medevac helicopters departed the zone, the enemy hit the 3d Platoon with mortars and assaulted the position. Slater moved his 2d Platoon and company command group to reinforce the 3d Platoon.* The enemy advanced to within 50 meters of Company A's lines before small arms and artillery

*In the confused fighting, the 1st Platoon of Company A broke through the surrounding enemy and joined Captain Radcliffe's relief force. LtCol Albert C. Slater, Comments on draft ms, 12May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

fire broke up their attack. Enemy pressure and the remaining casualties kept Company A in the defensive position until the NVA force withdrew later in the evening.[10]

At 1500 Schening, at Con Thien, notified the regimental commander that all of his companies were hard pressed, that he had no more units to commit, and that the situation was critical. Colonel Jerue, commanding the 9th Marines, ordered Major Willard J. Woodring's 3d Battalion, 9th Marines to move by helicopter to Schening's assistance. Three companies and the command group of the 3d Battalion were in position north of the trace by 1800.* After landing, Major Woodring assumed operational control of Companies A and C of the 1st Battalion. The combined force made a twilight attack on the enemy's left flank, while elements of Company B and the platoon from Company D holding the landing zone pulled back to the Con Thien perimeter in expectation of an attack on the outpost. The increased pressure provided by the 3d Battalion caused the enemy to break contact.

When the worn and exhausted survivors of the morning's encounter mustered for a head count, the Marines found the total casualty figure shocking. Staff Sergeant Burns, subsequently awarded the Navy Cross, stated that only 27 Company B Marines walked out of the action. Lieutenant Colonel Schening's battalion lost 53 killed, 190 wounded, and 34 missing. Not until 5 July did the battalion complete the recovery efforts that reduced the number of missing to nine, but the number of dead increased to 84.** The battalion established no accurate count of enemy killed.[11]

During the next three days, 3-5 July, enemy contact continued. At 0930 on the 3rd, an Air Force air observer reported more than 100 NVA soldiers advancing from positions north of Con Thien. Battery E, 3d Battalion, 12th Marines fired on them and killed 75. To the east, Major Woodring called in continuous air strikes for 12 hours to prepare for an attack the following day. The same day, 3 July, Lieutenant Colonel Peter A. Wickwire's BLT 1/3 from SLF Alpha joined the 9th Marines and tied in with Woodring's right flank. The regiment planned a drive north to recover missing bodies and push the NVA out of the Lang Son area, only 4,000 meters northeast of the Con Thien perimeter.

The attack started early the morning of the 4th. The 3d Battalion encountered heavy resistance from concealed enemy positions southwest of the site of Company B's engagement on 2 July. A prolonged fight followed, involving tanks, artillery, and close air support. By 1830 when the final Marine assault ended, Woodring's 3d Battalion, 9th Marines had lost 15 dead and 33 wounded. BLT 1/3 had 11 wounded during the same action. The same day Major Wendell O. Beard's BLT 2/3 from SLF Bravo joined the operation; the battalion landed by helicopter north of Cam Lo at LZ Canary and moved west and then northward on the western edge of the battle area toward Con Thien.

During daylight on 5 July all units northeast of Con Thien came under enemy mortar and artillery fire, but there was relatively little ground contact while completing the grim task of recovering Company B's dead. That afternoon an air observer spotted a large concentration of enemy troops 3,000 meters northeast of Con Thien. He called in artillery and tactical air strikes and reported seeing 200 dead NVA soldiers.

Following preparatory fires on the morning of 6 July, all battalions continued moving north. Major Beard's BLT 2/3 ran into an enemy force supported by mortars less than 3 kilometers south of Con Thien. In the brief engagement that followed the battalion killed 35 Communist soldiers, while suffering five killed and 25 wounded.

Northeast of the outpost, Wickwire's and Woodring's battalions advanced under intermittent NVA artillery and mortar fire. Major Woodring decided to move a reinforced company 1,500 meters to the north-northwest to cover his left flank. He chose Captain Slater's attached Company A, 9th Marines, which now included the survivors of Company C, and a detachment from 3d Reconnaissance Battalion. Slater's company moved into position without opposition and established a strong combat

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*Enemy artillery quickly zeroed in on 3/9's LZs. Helicopters could not land in the LZs during later resupply missions, which caused 3/9 to go entirely without water for a day and a half. Col John C. Studt, Comments on draft ms, 9Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

**The XO of 3/9, Maj John C. Studt, supervised the recovery of Company B's dead, ". . . a grisly task after 3 days in the hot sun . . . .[Most] appeared to have been left right where they fell. They were in flank security positions too close to the road to have prevented an ambush or in the [sunken] road itself which . . . [offered] some cover . . . [Company B] clearly had walked into a [very well executed] ambush." Col John C. Studt, Comments on draft ms, 9Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Marine Corps Historical Collection

Members of H&S Company, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines board a CH-46 helicopter as their battalion moved to assist hard-pressed elements of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, then fighting a North Vietnamese force north of the Con Thien combat base on 2 July.

Members of Company K, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines move behind one of their attached tanks from the 3d Tank Battalion as it skirts a large bomb crater during Operation Buffalo. This tank-infantry combination, aided by artillery and air strikes, destroyed a North Vietnamese defensive position in heavy fighting near Con Thien on 4 July 1967.

3d MarDiv ComdC, July 1967

outpost. Slater's composite force dug concealed fighting positions and sent reconnaissance patrols north in an attempt to discover where the enemy crossed the Ben Hai River.[12]

While Slater's move was unnoticed, the same was not true for the advance of the main elements of the two battalions. As they advanced, they encountered increasingly heavy artillery fire and by 1600 they could go no further. Wickwire's battalion had lost a tank and, because of the enemy fire, pulled back without recovering it. Captain Burrell H. Landes, Jr., commanding Company B, BLT 1/3, climbed a tree to spot for air strikes and artillery fire in front of his position. An aerial observer radioed that a large enemy force was approaching his position. When Landes asked how big the force was, the reply was, "I'd hate to tell you, I'd hate to tell you." The AO had spotted a 400-man force crossing the Ben Hai River in approach march formation; it was heading directly for the two battalions. After the sightings, both battalions, less Slater's company, came under heavy, accurate artillery fire. Between 500-600 rounds hit the 3d Battalion's position and about 1,000 landed on BLT 1/3.

During the Communist bombardment, one of Slater's reconnaissance patrols also spotted the 400-man NVA force and reported it moving toward the 3d Battalion. The enemy, still in column formation, was unaware that it was heading directly into Captain Slater's concealed unit. The Marines opened fire at less than 150 meters distance. Captain Slater recalled:

> When the point of the enemy column was brought under fire, the NVA alerted their unit with a bugle call . . . . Their initial reaction was [one] of confusion and they scattered, some of them toward Marine lines. They quickly organized and probed at every flank of the 360 degree perimeter. Concealed prepared positions and fire discipline never allowed the NVA to determine what size of unit they were dealing with. When the enemy formed and attacked, heavy accurate artillery was walked to within 75 meters of the perimeter. The few NVA that penetrated the perimeter were killed and all lines held.[13]

Heavy enemy probes, mortar fire, and small arms fire continued through the early evening. Some NVA soldiers crept close enough to hurl hand grenades into the Marine lines. One of the attached Company C fireteam leaders, Lance Corporal James L. Stuckey, responded by picking up the grenades and throwing them back toward their source. He was wounded when the third grenade exploded as it left his hand. He continued, however, to lead his fireteam for the rest of the night without medical assistance.[14]

Despite heavy Marine artillery fire that effectively boxed in Slater's position, the NVA maintained pressure on the Marines until 2200. For the rest of the night, enemy small arms and mortar fire harassed Company A, but the NVA units were withdrawing. First light revealed 154 enemy bodies strewn around Company A's perimeter; the defenders had 12 casualties. Among the wounded Marines was Lance Corporal Stuckey; only tattered flesh remained where his hand had been.*

While the attack on Company A took place, the rest of what intelligence officers later determined to have been the *90th NVA Regiment* assaulted the two Marine battalions. To add to the effect of their preparatory fires, the attacking North Vietnamese threw fuzed blocks of TNT into the Marine positions to keep the Marines down as the assaulting troops moved in. The Marines countered with supporting arms; flare ships, attack aircraft, helicopter gunships, naval gunfire, and all available artillery concentrated their fire on the attacking enemy. By 2130, the Marines had repelled the assault and the Communist forces began withdrawing to the north.

At 0520 the next morning, Major Woodring ordered Captain Slater to pull back into the battalion perimeter. The decision was most opportune; immediately after Company A cleared the night position, a 30-minute NVA artillery concentration landed within its old lines.** Company A returned to the battalion's perimeter without incident. Both battalions spent the rest of the 7th trying to determine the extent of the damage inflicted on the *90th NVA Regiment.* By 8 July the Marines raised the NVA casualty count to more than 800. Counting enemy bodies proved to be a most difficult task; the grisly carnage was beyond description. Hundreds of bodies covered the scarred battleground, some half buried, others in pieces, all surrounded by a carpet of battered equipment and ammunition. Counting enemy canteens was one method used to try to

*Corporal Stuckey received the Navy Cross for his actions on 6 July 1967.

**Colonel John C. Studt, the XO of 3/9 in July 1967, said this incident was typical of the battalion commander. "Major Woodring, a former drill instructor, a woodsman and a deerhunter, possessed that rare instinct which enabled him to frequently anticipate enemy actions." Col John C. Studt, Comments on draft ms, 9Jul81, (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

establish realistic figures. The vast area which the bodies covered further complicated the morbid undertaking. As late as the afternoon of the 8th, Captain Gerald F. Reczek's Company C, BLT 1/3 found about 200 enemy bodies more than 600 meters east of Route 561.

The scattering of bodies to the north occurred when air and artillery hit groups of North Vietnamese moving toward or away from the main battle area. The lateral scattering from the 3d Battalion's position eastward across the front of BLT 1/3 was the result of the NVA attempt to outflank Major Woodring's unit without realizing that the BLT was on line. Trying to move further east, they lost even more men to the guns of Wickwire's Marines.[15] The Marines found it impossible to compute an accurate total of Communist losses to supporting arms because of the inability of allied forces to continue the count on the north side of the Ben Hai River.

The last significant engagements of Operation Buffalo took place on 8 July, southwest of Con Thien. After BLT 2/3 closed on Con Thien during its northward sweep, it had turned west, and then headed south toward the Cam Lo River. Moving south, at 1030 Captain James P. Sheehan's Company G discovered a bunker complex. When small arms fire and grenades interrupted further investigation, Sheehan wisely backed off and called in air and artillery. At 1300, Company G moved in, but some NVA soldiers continued to fight. Later that afternoon, after clearing the complex, Company G reported 39 dead Communists, 2 Marines killed, and 29 wounded, including the company commander.

At 1430 while Company G cleared the bunkers, a Company F squad patrol, located some 1,200 meters southwest of Company G, engaged another enemy force. When the Communists counterattacked, the company commander, First Lieutenant Richard D. Koehler, Jr., sent in the rest of his Marines. When 82mm mortar rounds began falling, Koehler knew he was in trouble and called in artillery and air strikes. The concentration of supporting arms cracked the enemy position, and when Company F moved in, it counted 118 enemy bodies. The Marines estimated the Communist unit to have numbered between 200 and 250. Marine losses totaled 14 killed and 43 wounded. Apparently the NVA had had enough; for the next five days BLT 2/3 encountered only mines and harassing fires.

One ominous development which accompanied the Buffalo fighting was the accurate employment of large-caliber, long-range NVA artillery. On 7 July, enemy artillery scored a direct hit on the command bunker of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines at Con Thien, killing 11, including First Lieutenant Gatlin J. Howell, the intelligence officer who had gone to the aid of Company B, 9th Marines on 2 July. Eighteen others sustained wounds; one was the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Schening.* The cause of the damage was a 152mm howitzer round, which penetrated five feet of sand bags, loose dirt, and 12x12-inch timbers.

The same day, at Dong Ha, a delay-fuzed 130mm round landed at the base of the north wall of the 9th Marines' command post, exploding six feet below the bunker floor. Luckily, there were no injuries. The NVA also scored a direct hit on the Dong Ha chapel during Catholic services, killing the chaplain's assistant. Storage areas, helicopter maintenance areas, and medical facilities were among the targets of the long-range weapons. The frequency and accuracy of the enemy fire caused Col-

Marine Corps Historical Collection

The heat during the summer battles south of the DMZ made water a precious commodity. Following a helicopter resupply mission, these two Marines use a Vietnamese technique to carry a five-gallon can of water to their squad during Operation Buffalo.

*Lieutenant Colonel Schening also suffered wounds at Cape Gloucester and Peleliu in World War II, as well as in Korea. He thus survived wounds in three wars.

onel Jerue to move his command post to a location northeast of Cam Lo. There, relative quiet prevailed for the remainder of the operation.*

Another indication of the Communist buildup along the DMZ and around Con Thien during this period was the increased employment of surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). While an A-4 aircraft was attacking the NVA in front of BLT 1/3 on 6 July, the enemy launched eight SAMs from sites north of the Ben Hai River. One hit Major Ralph E. Brubaker's VMA-311 jet, causing the aircraft to crash in enemy territory. Brubaker, only slightly wounded, remained in enemy territory until picked up the next morning by an Air Force rescue helicopter.

Operation Buffalo closed on 14 July 1967. The Marines reported enemy losses as 1,290 dead and two captured. Marine losses, in contrast, totaled 159 killed and 345 wounded. The Marines found the enemy's large-scale July offensive against Con Thien a short one, but considerably more vicious than most of the Communist operations conducted in I Corps. The most savage aspect was the heavy employment of supporting arms by both sides. Of the known enemy killed, more than 500 came from air, artillery, and naval gunfire. In addition, supporting arms destroyed 164 enemy bunkers and 15 artillery and rocket positions, and caused 46 secondary explosions. To accomplish this, Marine aviation used 1,066 tons of ordnance, Marine and Army artillery consumed more than 40,000 rounds, and ships of the U.S. Seventh Fleet fired 1,500 rounds from their 5- and 8-inch naval guns. On the other hand, enemy artillery accounted for half of the Marine casualties during the operation and posed a constant threat to the Marine logistical support installations.

The July fighting around Con Thien reaffirmed the Marines' faith in supporting arms. In spite of the appearance of SAMs and the presence of excellent, long-range Communist artillery, the Marines could prove that the latest enemy offensive had failed. Con Thien had held and at least one firstline enemy regiment was in shambles. The Buffalo victory did not breed overconfidence, but the body-strewn wasteland along the DMZ provided mute evidence of the effectiveness of III MAF's defenses. The summer was far from over; they would be challenged again.

*Colonel Joseph J. Kelly recalled in 1981 that the requirement to find room for a forward division headquarters to be reopened at Dong Ha also influenced this move. In addition, regimental staff officers knew the old French barracks housing the regimental headquarters were prominent features on maps used by the North Vietnamese. Col Joseph J. Kelly, Comments on draft ms, 29May81 (Vietnam comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Con Thien proved that Marines, although offense-minded, also had to know how to build sturdy bunkers to fortify their defensive positions. This Marine inspects a bunker constructed of dirt-filled ammunition boxes which collapsed after being hit by artillery.

Marine Corps Historical Collection

PART IV
FALL COMBAT, NORTH AND SOUTH

CHAPTER 9

Continuing Operations Against the *2d NVA Division*

Raids and Rockets in Quang Nam—Operation Cochise
Operation Swift—A Busy Calm Before the Storm

Raids and Rockets in Quang Nam

During June allied units intensified operations against elements of the *2d NVA Division* and Viet Cong units in the southern three provinces of I Corps. The enemy continued to pump replacements into the region in a determined effort to regain control of the area, particularly the Que Son Basin. The allied forces, in greater numbers and with increased firepower, thwarted each Communist move as it developed. As a result of continuing enemy defeats, the pacification program began to show positive results as demonstrated by its expansion into virgin territory.

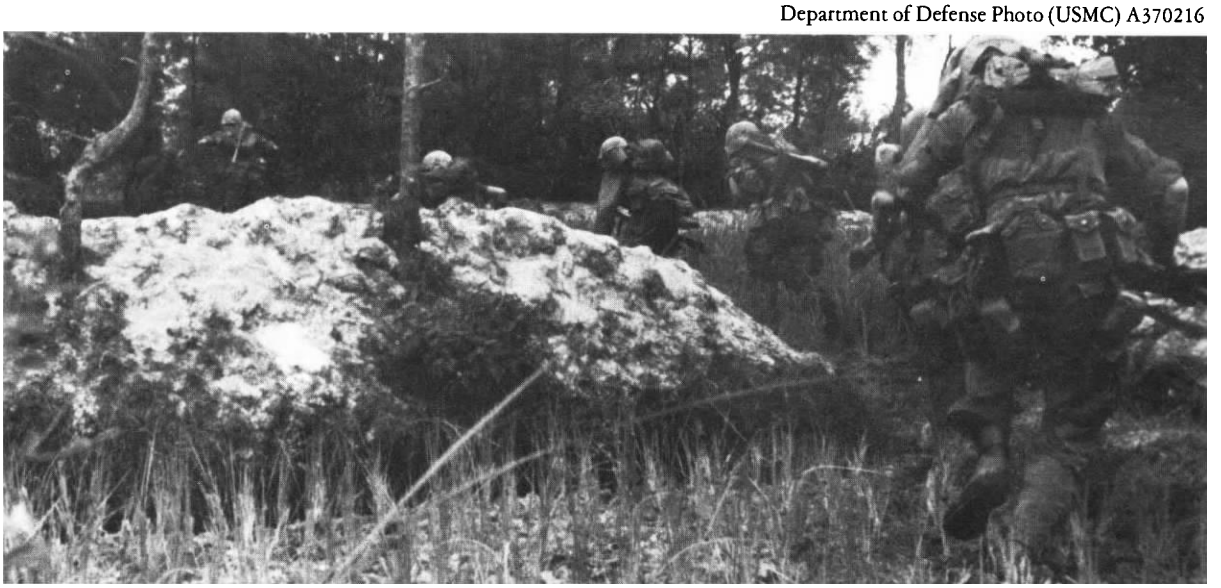
As July began, the 1st and 7th Marines, both from the 1st Marine Division, which Major General Donn J. Robertson still commanded, were operating in the densely populated area around Da Nang. Two battalions of the 5th Marines continued operations against elements of the *2d NVA Division* in the Que Son Basin, while the other battalion of the 5th Marines, the 2d, provided security for the An Hoa industrial complex and Nong Son coal mine, southwest of Da Nang.

Further south, the nine U.S. Army battalions of Task Force Oregon, now commanded by Major General Richard T. Knowles, USA, continued their operations in southern I CTZ. Four of the Army battalions operated in and around Chu Lai, while the remainder of the force expanded allied control over the populated coastal plain of Quang Ngai Province. The Korean Marine Brigade of three battalions remained in its TAOR south of Chu Lai.

The combined efforts of these units forced NVA and VC main force units to pull out of the populated regions and move back into the mountains. Despite this setback, the enemy tenaciously maintained a

Two battalions of the 5th Marines, the 1st and 3d, remained in the Que Son Basin after the arrival at Chu Lai of Army units of Task Force Oregon. Marines of the 3d Battalion maneuver under fire on 21 July while in contact with units of the 2d NVA Division.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370216



presence in the three provinces by cutting lines of communication and attacking allied installations by fire. The Communists targeted Revolutionary Development teams and isolated units for their main efforts. These tactics enabled the enemy to limit force commitments and still gain moral and propaganda victories while, at the same time, reconstituting regular units. Communist actions in Quang Nam Province during July 1967 provide an excellent example of this *modus operandi*.

The Communists chose the relatively isolated Marine outpost at Nong Son, the site of the only producing coal mine in South Vietnam, as their first target. First Lieutenant James B. Scuras' Company F, 5th Marines provided security for the mine. The company manned two positions near the mine itself and a third, with an attached 81mm mortar section and two 4.2-inch mortars, on top of the hill overlooking the mine. The enemy chose the mortar position as his objective.

At 2327 on 3 July, a Marine listening post outside the upper position reported, "I have movement to my front," and within seconds, "They're all around me," and then, "We've been overrun."[1] Next, the main position came under mortar attack. One of the first rounds blew up the 4.2-inch mortar ammunition dump. Immediately following their mortar barrage, enemy sappers moved into the position, throwing grenades and satchel charges into the Marine bunkers. Simultaneously, other enemy units made a mortar attack on the Marine artillery positions at An Hoa to neutralize their support of the Nong Son outpost. The Marines of Captain John Pipta's Battery E, 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, however, immediately began firing in support of the Company F Marines.

By the time Pipta's first artillery barrage landed around the edge of the position, the enemy assault had already faltered. The attackers had not caught all of the Marines in their bunkers. Private First Class Melvin E. Newlin, an 18-year-old machine gunner from Wellsville, Ohio, and four other Marines had been manning a perimeter position when the attack started. Although the initial attack killed his four campanions and wounded him, Newlin kept his machine gun in action. He fought off two additional attempts to overrun his position before a grenade wounded him again and knocked him unconscious.

With Newlin temporarily silenced, the Viet Cong moved into the center of the outpost and destroyed both 4.2-inch mortars. As the enemy prepared to attack the Marines on the other side of the perimeter, Newlin regained conciousness, remanned his machine gun, and opened fire. His fire caused the VC to break off their assault of the remaining Marine bunkers and once again they attacked him. Newlin withstood two additional enemy attempts to silence his gun before he died.*

When the attack started, Lieutenant Scuras took two squads and moved to relieve the 1st Platoon in the upper outpost. Arriving at the top of the hill at about midnight, the reinforcements, with the assistance of the surviving defenders, drove the enemy out of the position. As the VC withdrew from the hill, the Marines remanned their 81mm mortars and brought them to bear on the retreating force. In addition, they called in artillery on suspected escape routes.

At approximately 0100, the battalion's Company E arrived at Nong Son and assumed responsibility for the two lower positions. The remaining elements of Company F then moved to the top of the hill to reconsolidate their position and evacuate the casualties. The attack had killed 13 Marines and wounded 43.

For the Viet Cong, the attack on the position was expensive. They did not overrun the entire outpost as they hoped, and the loss of 44 of their members made the effort very costly, but they succeeded in destroying the two heavy mortars in the position.[2]

The Communists executed two other attacks to influence the people in Quang Nam Province. Both mutually supporting actions took place on the night of 14 July. The first attack occurred in the town of Hoi An at 2300 when an enemy force hit the U.S. advisors' compound with mortar fire. At the same time, two platoons of VC, dressed in ARVN uniforms, attacked the nearby provincial jail. The enemy force broke into the jail and released 1,196 military and political prisoners. During the confused fighting that followed, the ARVN recaptured 206 prisoners and killed 30, but 960 escaped. Only 5 of the Viet Cong died in the attack; ARVN units wounded another 29. The return of almost 1,000 cadre to the VC ranks increased their capacity to oppose the September elections, but the psychological blow caused by the untimely "liberation" had an equally severe impact.

The Communists chose their other target equally well: the Da Nang Airbase, center of American

*For his actions Private First Class Newlin received a posthumous Medal of Honor. (See Appendix D for his citation.)

presence in the northern provinces. The home of Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF), Marine, and U.S. Air Force tactical squadrons, the Da Nang Airbase stood as an undisputed symbol of U.S. and GVN strength. The Communists were aware that an attack on Da Nang would be more difficult than their earlier attempts to strike the base. Since the first rocket attack on the base in February, the Marines had intensified their defensive efforts, instituting as many as 800 daily patrols and ambushes. Allied aircraft conducted overflights of the rocket belt itself to detect any movement in the area, and artillery fired more than 2,000 rounds every 24 hours to interdict likely avenues of approach to the rocket belt.

Despite these impressive Marine countermeasures, the Communists were confident they could attack the base successfully. The reason was their new 122mm rocket, a weapon which they had not used south of the DMZ. This rocket was a high trajectory weapon, capable of being emplaced virtually anywhere. A trained crew could prepare a 122mm rocket for firing in less than 30 minutes. Its range of 12,000 meters, 2,000 meters greater than that of the 140mm rocket, allowed emplacement beyond what the Marines had established as the rocket belt.

During the night of 14 July, enemy rocket units moved out of "Happy Valley," southwest of Da Nang, and established six firing positions, divided into two clusters of three positions each. Each firing position contained six individual launcher sites. Shortly after midnight the enemy fired their rockets at the airfield; within five minutes 50 projectiles hit the base.

Marines responded swiftly to the first volley. Almost instantly, a number of friendly units reported the firing and three minutes after the enemy launched the rockets an Air Force plane attacked one of the sites. At the same time, artillery units plotted the launch site locations and commenced firing at both the sites and the probable escape routes. This rapid reply by supporting arms was exemplary, but it was only a countermeasure and not a solution to the problem of defending the Da Nang complex against the new, long-range threat. In the attack, the rockets destroyed 10 aircraft, 13 barracks, and a bomb dump, and damaged 40 more aircraft. Eight Americans died and another 176 suffered wounds.

The Communists had not only succeeded in destroying a large quantity of material, but the resulting fires provided visible evidence of a successful attack to the 300,000 people living around Da Nang. That the VC carried out the attack successfully, while the Marines and ARVN forces had been actively trying to prevent it, vastly increased its propaganda value.

The 14 July attack forced immediate adjustments of III MAF's defense of the airfield. III MAF extended the rocket belt to include the space between two radii of 12,000 and 8,000 meters, the maximum ranges from which the VC could launch both 140mm and 122mm rockets. The new belt also included the most likely areas of penetration by enemy launching units. The Marines established a centralized control system for all aspects of the counterrocket effort and increased their patrols and overflights. They also instituted a waterway control plan which included an 1800-0600 movement curfew on all streams within the belt. Deep reconnaissance patrols along the enemy's approach routes outside the belt increased by 40 percent. In addition, the 1st Marine Division developed an elaborate psychological operations (PsyOps) campaign to counter the threat, including the offer of 10,000-piastre rewards for information on rockets, location of caches, and routes used to bring rockets into the Da Nang area. On a day-to-day basis, the division allocated more than 90 percent of its PsyOps assets to this program.[3]

For the Marines operating in the rocket belt the war was particularly frustrating. Each patrol contended with the probability of encountering mines and booby traps. So called secure areas were never entirely free from these threats. Over 50 percent of the division's casualties during the first half of 1967 resulted from explosive devices encountered while patrolling in these dangerous though densely populated areas. There was no easy solution, and in spite of the Marines' efforts rocket attacks continued.

Operation Cochise

While the Communist rocket gunners were annoying the Da Nang TAOR, intelligence agencies reported that the *3d NVA Regiment* had moved into northern Quang Tin Province during late July. Intelligence also indicated the headquarters of the *1st VC Regiment* also had moved from Quang Ngai Province to a new location east of Hiep Duc in the Que Son Basin. Reacting to these reports, on 9 August General Robertson reactivated Task Force X-Ray, again under the command of his assistant division

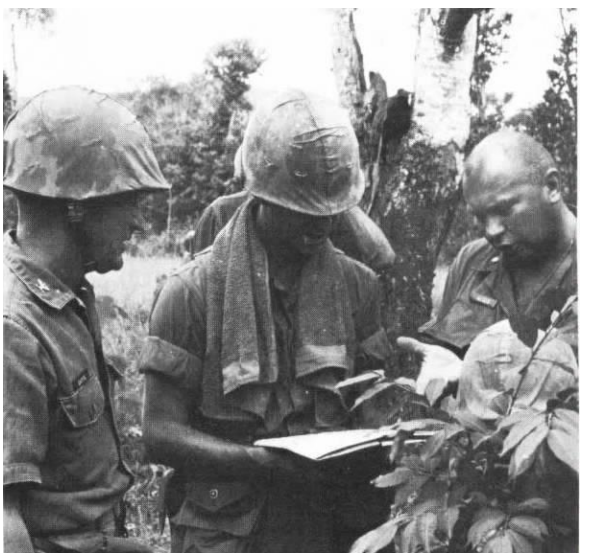
commander, Brigadier General Foster C. LaHue. General LaHue received orders to strike the enemy wherever possible within the Que Son Basin and surrounding hills, with emphasis on the Hiep Duc area which intelligence officers believed contained the *2d NVA Division's* headquarters and logistic base. For this operation, code named Cochise, General LaHue's Task Force X-Ray controlled the 1st and 3d Battalions of Colonel Stanley Davis' 5th Marines and Lieutenant Colonel Alfred I. Thomas' BLT 1/3 from SLF Alpha.

General LaHue's concept of operations for Cochise consisted of three phases. The first phase involved the insertion of the two 5th Marines battalions south of Nui Loc Son outpost between the tactical elements of the *2d NVA Division* and its suspected logistic base. The two battalions were to drive east toward friendly blocking positions and eliminate Communist tactical forces in the vicinity of the logistic installations. Phase II called for a helilift of two battalions into the suspected enemy base area, and the third phase a two-battalion sweep from the Hiep Duc region northeast to Que Son.

South of the Cochise area of operation the 2d ARVN Division was about to conduct companion operation Lien Ket 112; its concept resembled Cochise. Two ranger battalions were to be helilifted into landing zones southeast of Hiep Duc and sweep eastward, while three battalions of the 6th ARVN Regiment occupied blocking positions west of Tam Ky. Both operations began early on the morning of 11 August.

The ARVN rangers made the first significant contact. On the morning of the 12th, three battalions of the *21st NVA Regiment* attacked the rangers. Heavy fighting continued throughout the day and by 1700 the rangers reported heavy casualties. Dangerously low on ammunition, with darkness approaching, and with no sign of a letup on the part of the enemy, the rangers requested an emergency resupply. At 1730, a CH-46 from HMM-165, accompanied by two UH-1E gunships from VMO-6 arrived overhead with the badly needed ammunition. The gunships scouted the intended landing zone and reported that the CH-46 could not land in the contested zone. The pilot, Captain Jack H. McCracken, well aware of what would happen to the rangers without ammunition decided to try to deliver his cargo anyway. He ordered his crew chief, Corporal James E. Bauer, to stack the ammunition on the rear ramp. Captain McCracken nosed over his helicopter and raced for the landing zone. McCracken then hovered 30 feet over the zone, and Corporal Bauer lowered the ramp and most of the ammunition dropped into the zone. While repeated enemy small arms hits shook the helicopter, Corporal Bauer kicked out the rest of the ammunition. As the last box dropped, enemy bullets severely damaged the helicopter, but McCracken's resupply permitted the rangers to continue the battle[4]. At 2300, the NVA units finally pulled back, leaving 197 bodies behind. The ranger losses also had been heavy, 81 killed and 153 wounded.

During the next three days, there were numerous encounters with small VC elements. On the night of 16 August, enemy units twice attempted to infiltrate BLT 1/3's night positions, but turned back in the face of small arms and artillery fire, leaving 36 bodies behind. The next morning, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph A. Nelson, commanding officer of VMO-6, in a UH-1E gunship, was escorting resupply helicopters when he sighted more than 50 VC in the open. The VMO-6 commander expended all of his ordnance in the process of fixing the enemy group in place. He then directed a fixed-wing mission against the target. Meanwhile, a company of Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Webster's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines moved into assault positions under cover of the air strike. After Webster's attack,



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370348

Col Stanley Davis, commanding the 5th Marines, and the regimental operations officer, Maj Richard J. Alger (right), confer in the field on 16 August with LtCol Charles B. Webster of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines during Cochise in the key Que Son Basin.

a sweep of the area located 40 VC bodies. Total Marine casualties totaled only three wounded.

On the afternoon of the 18th, the first phase of Operation Cochise ended and Task Force X-Ray withdrew Webster's battalion. The next morning helicopters lifted the remaining two battalions into the Hiep Duc area for Phase II. Though the Marines anticipated a sizable enemy force in this region, there was little contact and the operation turned into a bush-beating effort. The final phase of Cochise began on the 25th and continued until 28 August. Enemy contact during the last three days consisted of sniper fire and booby traps.

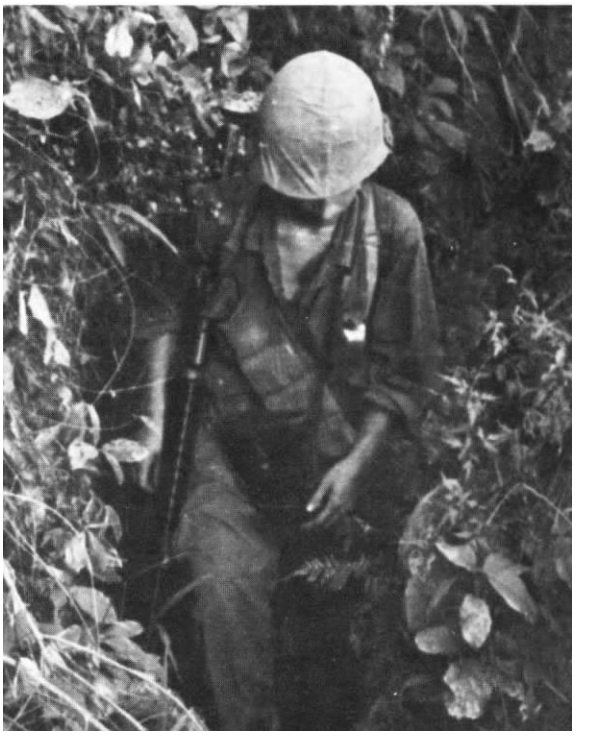
Final casualty results for Cochise included 156 enemy killed and 13 captured. Marine casualties were light in comparison, 10 killed and 93 wounded. Vietnamese Operation Lien Kit 112 accounted for 206 NVA killed, 12 prisoners, and 42 weapons seized. ARVN losses were more severe than Marine casualties during Cochise, 83 killed, 174 wounded, and 3 missing.

Although these operations forced a major portion of the *2d NVA Division* to withdraw, III MAF had no illusions of the enemy abandoning the densely populated, rice-bearing lands of the Que Son Basin. Cochise and Lien Ket 112 had been tactical victories, but the *2d NVA Division* had suffered only a reverse, not a defeat.

Operation Swift

As September neared, the Communists faced an increasing loss of control of the population in the coastal region south of Da Nang. The *2d NVA Division* again moved into the Que Son Basin.

The Marines anticipated that the Communists would try to increase their strength in this area during this period, since it corresponded with the time of the South Vietnamese national elections, as well as preparations for the fall rice harvest. At the beginning of September, intelligence sources reported that elements of all three regiments of the NVA division had moved into the area. There were increasing indications that these enemy units planned offensive actions to disrupt the elections in Que Son District. The Marines responded with numerous small unit operations to screen the district polling places. Operation Swift was the outgrowth of one of the election day screening sweeps near Dong Son (1) village, eight miles to the southwest of Thang Binh along Route 534.

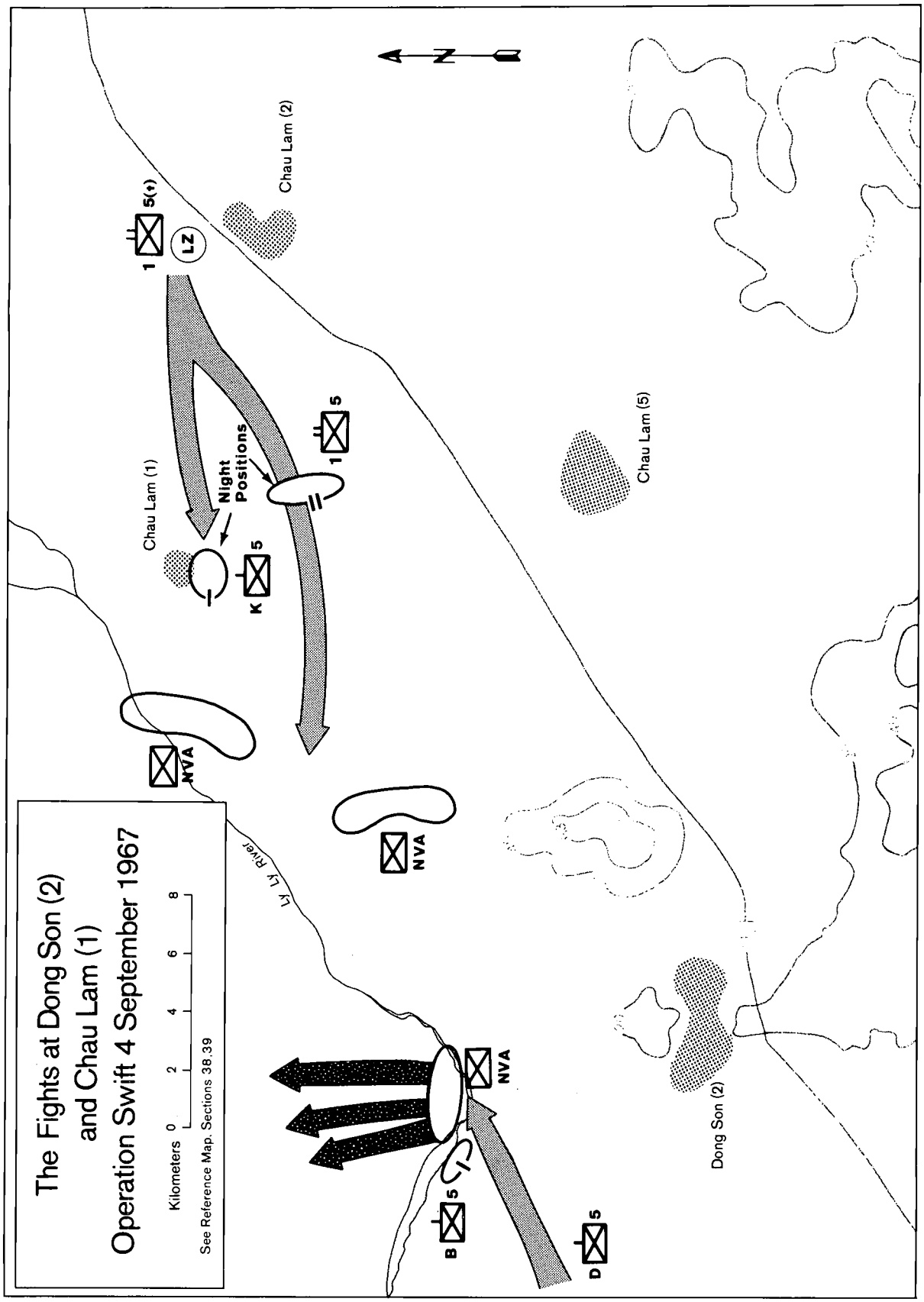


Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370355

The second phase of Operation Cochise brought little enemy contact since the elements of the 2d NVA Division *had withdrawn from the Que Son Basin. This Marine moves down a narrow trail through thick vegetation as Company D, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines searches for the elusive North Vietnamese.*

The operation began when the enemy attacked Captain Robert F. Morgan's Company D, 5th Marines just before dawn on 4 September. The action unfolded slowly. At 0430, the enemy force struck the Marine company with small arms fire and mortar rounds from positions 100 meters northwest and west of the company perimeter. The Marines returned fire and recalled the company outposts. Help arrived in the form of an armed UH-1E, but when the Marines marked their position with a strobe light, the NVA soldiers saw it too. As soon as the light began flashing, the enemy hit the position with even more accurate small arms and mortar fire.

A short time later, Marines discovered enemy infiltrators inside the western segment of the company perimeter. Captain Morgan organized a force to drive the NVA out and by 0620 reestablished the perimeter. As it reorganized, more NVA automatic weapons hit Company D, killing Captain Morgan. The executive officer, First Lieutenant William P. Vacca, called for air strikes, some within 50 meters of


The Fights at Dong Son (2)
and Chau Lam (1)
Operation Swift 4 September 1967
Kilometers 0 2 4 6 8
See Reference Map, Sections 38,39
Chau Lam (1)
Chau Lam (2)
Chau Lam (5)
Dong Son (2)
Ly Ly River
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Night Positions
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the company lines. The enemy pulled back. As the fire let up, Vacca completed the perimeter reorganization and requested helicopter evacuation for his casualties. At the same time, he reported that he faced at least an enemy company and needed help. His battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Peter L. Hilgartner, responded by ordering Captain Thomas D. Reese, Jr.'s Company B, then 4,000 meters to the west and near the battalion CP on Hill 51, to move overland to Vacca's position.

Company B arrived in the vicinity of the battle by 0820, and within the hour it came under fire from another enemy force, apparently a company, entrenched in the town of Dong Son (1). Captain Reese asked for a tear gas drop on the dug-in NVA, and "Hueys" from VMO-2 obliged by dropping 400 pounds of the agent on the enemy lines. The Communists broke and ran north toward the Ly Ly River. Company B attacked, killing 26 of the enemy, and secured the eastern end of Dong Son (1). While Company B fought in the east end of town, HMM-363 helicopters arrived over the battle area to pick up Company D's casualties. The NVA force greeted the aircraft with heavy fire and decoy smoke signals. They hit two UH-34s and shot one down over Company D. They also shot down one of VMO-2's UH-1Es, piloted by Major David L. Ross, who managed to land in the Company D perimeter. Ross changed his "Deadlock" radio call sign to "Deadlock on the deck" and continued to help direct air strikes on the enemy. He also provided ammunition and machine guns from his aircraft to help in the defense of the perimeter.[5]

At 0925, Lieutenant Colonel Webster's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, based at the regimental command post seven miles east of Que Son, received orders to prepare two companies for a helilift to the Dong Son area for attachment to Hilgartner's battalion. By 1245 both of the 3d Battalion companies, K and M, and Hilgartner's 1st Battalion command group had landed four kilometers east-northeast of Dong Son (1) and were preparing to move toward Companies B and D. Meanwhile, Company B found another enemy pocket in the west end of Dong Son (1). After an air strike, the company moved in and cleared the west end; they killed nine more Communists in this action. Fighting in the town diminished as Companies B and D consolidated their positions in the western edge of the village; Hilgartner's force was less fortunate.

At 1430, Hilgartner's Companies K and M were advancing in column. Company K, accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel Hilgartner's command group, led the movement. "We were alerted to the impending conflict," said Hilgartner, "when one of our scouts brought in a Chinese-made, magazine-fed, light machine gun which was found teetering back and forth on a large rock." Hilgartner radioed this information to Major Richard J. Alger, the regimental operations officer. Alger replied that he had just received an intelligence report that a large enemy force was in the area.[6]

These two events gave Hilgartner time to begin to change his tactical formation from a column to two companies on line. He ordered Company M to move up on Company K's right. As Company M advanced, both companies came under intense fire from a large NVA force in what the Marines later found to be an L-shaped, entrenched position.[7]

Company M's 1st Platoon was crossing a rice paddy about 1430 when it first came under heavy fire from an estimated enemy company. First Lieutenant John D. Murray, commanding Company M, sent his 2d Platoon to assist the 1st Platoon. While crossing a small knoll near the village of Chau Lam (1), the 2d Platoon ran head-on into still another entrenched NVA company. The 1st Platoon's commander, Second Lieutenant Edward L. Blecksmith, ordered his Marines to pull back to the top of the knoll. While the 2d Platoon fought the by now attacking North Vietnamese, Lieutenant Murray ordered the remainder of the company to move onto the knoll with the 1st Platoon and set up a perimeter. The enemy quickly encircled Company M and pounded it with more than 200 mortar rounds, as well as extremely heavy automatic weapons fire. Murray requested a tear gas drop on the enemy positions to help the 2d Platoon disengage. While the gas did slow up the Communist assaults, it did not help the many Marines who had lost or discarded their gas masks during the action.

As the gas lifted, the NVA renewed their attack and, on at least one occasion, succeeded in penetrating the 2d Platoon's lines. Sergeant Lawrence D. Peters, a squad leader, stood up to point out NVA positions until hit in the leg. Despite his wound, he led his men until they drove the enemy from the position. Sergeant Peters died later that evening from a fragment wound.*

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*Sergeant Peters received a posthumous Medal of Honor for his actions. See Appendix D for the citation.

The enemy attacks separated Hilgartner's two companies; each had to fight independently. Captain Joseph R. Tenny, commanding Company K, fought and maneuvered his company against the enemy in a firefight that lasted until nightfall. Finally, he had to back off and set up night positions with Hilgartner's command group.

As darkness fell over the Que Son Valley, the Marines called for air strikes. Captain Robert J. Fitzsimmons and his aerial observer, First Lieutenant Robert H. Whitlow, arrived over the battlefield in a Cessna O-1 Bird Dog to control the strike.* Napalm and 500-pound bombs exploded as close as 50 meters to Company M's lines. To the west, Marine artillery from Que Son fired in support of Companies B and D. Early in the evening the fighting reached a crescendo when the North Vietnamese opened up against the attacking planes with heavy machine guns. Marine A-6A Intruders, directed by Whitlow, attacked the main cluster of enemy antiaircraft positions on Hill 63. After silencing these guns, the A-6As struck at Communist mortars within 60 meters of Company K. By 2000 the one-sided air-ground duel was over. Although scattered action continued on the ground, the destruction of the NVA antiaircraft positions signaled the end of major fighting. Corporal Joseph E. Fuller, a Company M squad leader, was one of many infantrymen who recognized the value of Marine close air support during the night of 4 September. Referring to the strikes, Fuller later commented, "I'd like to thank the FAC that called it in . . . I think that is what really saved us."[8]

Marine artillery fire from Que Son and Thang Binh continued to pound the North Vietnamese after the heaviest fighting subsided. Under the cover of artillery fire, UH-34 helicopters from Lieutenant Colonel Robert Lewis, Jr.'s HMM-363 delivered supplies and evacuated casualties. At 0100, Captain Francis M. Burke's Company I, 5th Marines fought its way to Hilgartner's positions. After its arrival, the enemy backed off and the rest of the night passed quietly.

While these events took place, Lieutenant Colonel Webster's 3d Battalion Command Group and Company D, 1st Marines received orders to join Companies B and D to the west. Early on 5 September, Webster's force reached the two companies, at which time he assumed operational control.

The same morning, 5 September, Hilgartner's troops searched the battle area and reported 130 dead NVA soldiers and 37 captured weapons. Marine casualties were 54 killed and 104 wounded; among those killed was the 3d Battalion's chaplain, Lieutenant Vincent R. Capadonno, USNR. During Company M's heavy fighting, Chaplain Capadonno made repeated trips out of the perimeter to help 2d Platoon casualties. Wounded twice, he refused medical aid, continuing to help wounded until killed by the enemy. Lieutenant Capadonno received a posthumous Medal of Honor for his gallantry; he was the first Navy chaplain killed in action in Vietnam.*

Although the NVA broke contact with the Marines, they did not leave the basin area. The 5th Marines commander, Colonel Davis, ordered his 1st and 3d Battalions to sweep toward the foothills bordering the southern edge of the basin. The morning of the 6th, the two battalion command groups exhanged operational control of their respective companies and the 5th Marines continued the attack to the southeast. At 1515 that afternoon Hilgartner's companies ran into two battalions of the *1st VC Regiment* near Vinh Huy (3). Lead elements of the Marine battalion came under fire from snipers and as the Marines continued to advance, heavy automatic weapons fire stopped the lead platoon, the 3d Platoon of Company B, in an open rice paddy. Captain Reese sent his 2d Platoon around to the right of the stalemated platoon to provide covering fire so that it could withdraw, but the 2d Platoon also came under extremely heavy and accurate fire which stopped its advance. The Marines took cover behind some graves and a hedgerow and once more tried to establish a base of fire to cover the 3d Platoon's withdrawal. Again, enemy fire superiority prevailed. Reese then sent the 1st Platoon further to the right in still another attempt to outflank the NVA. As the 1st Platoon moved, it found itself outflanked and almost surrounded. Forced to pull back almost immediately, the platoon had to leave some of its dead behind, but managed to bring out all of the wounded. While the North Vietnamese concentrated on the 1st Platoon, there was a lull in the firing in front

*The O-1 observation aircraft were not part of VMO-2 at this time. Instead they had their own officer-in-charge who functioned directly under MAG-16. Colonel Philip M. Crosswait, comments on draft ms, 14Jul81 (Vietnam comment files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

*See Appendix D for Chaplain Capadonno's citation.

of the 3d Platoon, so at last, it managed to pull back from the exposed paddy.

Next, the NVA hit the 2d Platoon position with a frontal assault, as well as an envelopment of the right flank. Lance Corporal Lonnie R. Henshaw recalled:

> We looked up and saw many NVA in full uniforms, packs, and cartridge belts running across the rice paddy at us. We started shooting and we could see them falling, but they didn't stop and more and more of them kept coming. Nothing could stop them, it was like they were doped up.[9]

The platoon commander, First Lieutenant John E. Brackeen, seeing the enemy's flanking attempt, ordered the platoon to fall back 50 meters to a trench line and set up a new perimeter. The NVA closed quickly and the enemy attack turned into a grenade duel. One landed in the trench near Lieutenant Brackeen and some of his men. The platoon guide, Sergeant Rodney M. Davis, seeing the danger to his lieutenant and the others, jumped on the grenade, taking the full impact of the explosion with his body. For thus giving his life, Sergeant Davis received the Medal of Honor.*

By now the enemy, in strength, was so close that Lieutenant Brackeen realized he could not hold the position much longer. He requested tear gas to cover the withdrawal of what was left of the platoon to the battalion perimeter. The tear gas worked and the Marines moved back to the battalion position with their wounded, but not their dead.

After the gas attack to support Brackeen's withdrawal, enemy fire slackened, but as the gas dissipated the NVA renewed their assault. Artillery fire from Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Hunter, Jr.'s 2d Battalion, 11th Marines landed within 50 meters of the Marine lines, while air strikes hit as close as 100 meters from the position. The NVA assaults stopped; however, as night fell the battalion came under heavy mortar and rocket fire. NVA soldiers, crawling as close as 15 meters to the perimeter, began lobbing grenades into the lines, while others attempted to slip through the defenses. The battalion's S-3, Major Charles H. Black, checking a sector of Company D's lines, discovered some of the infiltrators. Major Black killed several of them as he rallied nearby Marines to drive out the others. The enemy attacked until about 0200, at which time they withdrew, leaving behind 61 bodies. The Marines had lost 35 killed and 92 wounded in the action.

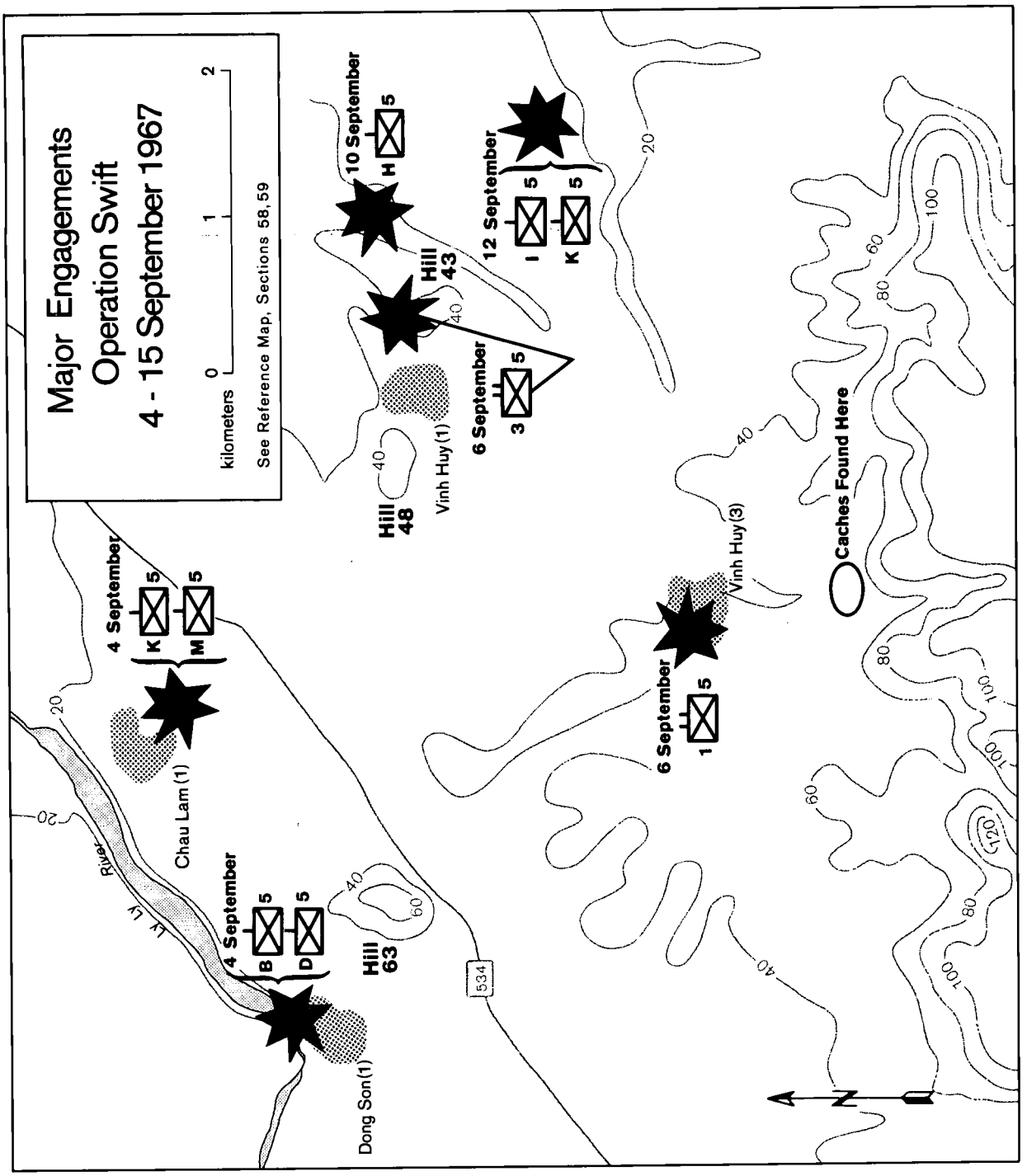
*See Appendix D for Sergeant Davis' citation.

Northeast of the 1st Battalion action, the 3d Battalion also became heavily engaged on the afternoon of 6 September. By 1400, Lieutenant Colonel Webster's Marines had seized Hill 48, without meeting significant resistance. Webster then ordered Captain Francis M. Burke's Company I to seize Hill 43, 1,100 meters southeast of Hill 48. When Burke's company was about 200 meters from the base of the hill, the lead elements saw two camouflaged NVA soldiers and opened fire on them. Automatic weapons fire erupted from the left front, but initial Communist resistance was light and the lead platoon continued to push through. Resistance began to stiffen and Captain Burke ordered his other two platoons up on either flank of the lead platoon. All three platoons continued to push on. At 1630, heavy machine gun fire hit Burke's left platoon. The advance stopped. Burke ordered the other two platoons to shift over to help the stalled platoon, but they also became heavily engaged. Finally the company managed to consolidate its position. Lieutenant Colonel Webster ordered Company K to go to Burke's assistance. By the time that Company K had fought its way to Burke's position, Company I had many casualties, some of whom were still forward of the company front. With the arrival of the second company, the Marines recovered most of their casualties and established a better perimeter.

While the Marines consolidated their position, a UH-1E gunship from Lieutenant Colonel Philip M. Crosswait's VMO-2 reported a large number of NVA immediately south of the perimeter. The pilot cut short his report, saying that the enemy was, " . . . swarming all over the top of this hill and I've got to get to work."[10] The gunship killed 23 NVA before it had to break off the attack to rearm and refuel.

Between 1900 and 2300, Companies I and K repulsed two determined NVA assaults. Heavy machine guns supported both attacks and the second broke into the Marine positions before the Marines threw it back after furious hand-to-hand fighting. At 2300, Lieutenant Murray's Company M, the battalion reserve, joined Companies I and K. The enemy pressed the position until just after midnight when the Marines used tear gas to drive them off. Only a few mortar rounds interrupted the rest of the night. Dawn revealed 88 enemy bodies around the position. Webster's losses were 34 killed and 109 wounded.

At first light on 7 September, both battalions began searching the enemy dead for items of in-


Major Engagements
Operation Swift
4 - 15 September 1967
kilometers
0
1
2
See Reference Map, Sections 58, 59
4 September
K 5
M 5
Chau Lam (1)
4 September
B 5
D 5
Dong Son(1)
Hill 63
Ly Ly River
534
Hill 48
Vinh Huy(1)
Hill 43
10 September
H 5
6 September
3 5
12 September
I 5
K 5
6 September
1 5
Vinh Huy(3)
Caches Found Here
N

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370399

Operation Swift's objective was to destroy elements of the 2d NVA Division *and deny the enemy access to the food derived from the basin's extensive rice paddies, such as these being crossed by Marines with the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines on 7 September.*

telligence value. They found a map which revealed the defensive positions of a battalion of the *1st VC Regiment*. It pinpointed company and command post locations, as well as mortar positions and ammunition storage sites. This information triggered an attack to the east by Hilgartner's battalion. Supporting arms blasted the plotted enemy positions and then the infantry swept through them. As the operation progressed, on the 9th, the 1st Battalion Marines found 91 cases of small arms ammunition, 27 cases of mortar rounds, hundreds of hand grenades, and 6 cases of 75mm recoilless rifle rounds as well as a vast assortment of loose ordnance. The Marines saved samples for intelligence purposes, and blew the rest in place.*

At this time, General Robertson again activated Task Force X-Ray under the command of Brigadier General LaHue. X-Ray now included the U.S. Army's 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Peter P. Petro, USA. Simultaneously, the Vietnamese started their companion Operation Lien Ket 116.

*Lieutenant Colonel William K. Rockey arrived by helicopter around noon that day, 7 September 1967, and assumed command of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines from Lieutenant Colonel Webster. Colonel William K. Rockey, Comments on draft ms, 28Jul81 (Vietnam Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

There were two more significant encounters during the last days of Operation Swift. The first occurred on 10 September during a patrol northeast of Hill 43 by Captain Gene W. Bowers' Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines.*

Early in the afternoon, Company H searched a small village and found it empty except for a few women and children. The Marines noted, however, that the enemy had fortified the village with bunkers, interlocking trenches, and barbed wire.

Upon completion of its search of the village, Company H continued its patrol. After moving another 1,500 meters, the company established a defensive position on a small hill at about 1400 and requested resupply by helicopter. To provide additional security, Captain Bowers ordered Second Lieutenant Allan J. Herman's 3d Platoon to patrol around the hill in a circle with about a one-mile radius. The 3d Platoon departed the perimeter and a heavy rain began falling.

The patrol route took the 3d Platoon back to the small village which Company H had recently searched. In the interim, however, a reinforced North Vietnamese company had slipped back and reoc-

*Captain Bowers' company served under the operational control of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines at this time.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370397

LCpl Patrick J. Ferguson, who had received a superficial gunshot wound in the left side in June, takes a breather on 7 September during Operation Swift. LCpl Ferguson, who is carrying an AN/PRC-47 radio, was part of a forward air control team attached to the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines for the operation.

cupied the well-constructed defensive positions. Herman's platoon reached the vicinity of the village around 1430 and began crossing the rice paddies around it. The North Vietnamese company remained quiet until the lead squad of Marines was about to enter the village, then opened up with sudden, intense, automatic weapons fire, including .50-caliber machine guns, and virtually eliminated lead Marine squad. The heavy fire, supplemented by 60mm mortars, gave the North Vietnamese fire superiority over the rest of the Marine platoon and it could not move. The platoon was soon leaderless; Lieutenant Herman died trying to rescue a wounded Marine in the rice paddy.

Company H had just received its supplies by helicopter when Captain Bowers heard the sound of automatic weapons and mortars from the direction of the village. Since he could not contact the 3d Platoon by radio, Captain Bowers left a small contingent to guard the supplies and quickly moved the rest of his company toward the sound of the firing. Enroute, Bowers made radio contact with a wounded corporal from the 3d Platoon who described the situation, including the death of Lieutenant Herman.

Captain Bowers sent the 2d Platoon around to the left where it could provide a base of fire as well as cover by fire the enemy escape route from the rear of the village. The company headquarters and the 1st Platoon continued toward the 3d Platoon and attempted to gain fire superiority over the NVA unit. "Mortar and artillery fire," wrote Bowers, "was brought to bear on the enemy . . . with fire landing within 50 meters of friendly positions. Helicopter gunships arrived to rocket and strafe the NVA [positions] while artillery sealed the rear of the village."[11]

Company M, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, which the battalion commander sent to assist Company H, arrived on the scene and joined the fight. After several air strikes by fixed-wing aircraft armed with 250-pound bombs, two A-4 aircraft dropped tear gas on the enemy. The two rifle companies then made a successful, coordinated assault on the village. Only a few NVA soldiers escaped out the other side of the village.

After the assault, the Marines searched the village and counted 40 dead NVA soldiers above ground. Others, Bowers reported, probably lay buried in the bunkers and trenches collapsed by the artillery and air strikes.

Nine Marines died in the action, six of them in the rice paddies just in front of the enemy fortifications. "[They] were found," noted Bowers in 1981, "with their M-16 rifles broken down in an attempt to remove cartridges jammed in the chambers. They had powder-burned bullet holes in their heads."[12]

The second engagement at the end of Operation Swift started at 0330 the morning of 12 September. Two NVA companies attacked Captain Burke's Company I patrol base. Burke's Marines repulsed the attack, but as the enemy withdrew they bumped into one of Captain Tenney's Company K platoon outposts and received a further battering. NVA losses were 35 killed and four captured.

During the same period, an ARVN ranger group operating north of the Swift AO during Operation Lien Ket 116 had two sizable contacts. The morning of 10 September, the 37th Ranger Battalion came under heavy mortar attack, followed by a ground assault by a NVA battalion. When the enemy finally withdrew, the rangers had lost 13 killed, 33 wounded, and 9 missing, but the NVA left 70 bodies behind.

Elements of two enemy battalions hit the rangers again at 1700 on the 13th. The enemy closed to grenade range and heavy action continued until about 1900. That night, more ARVN units arrived in the area in helicopters to help the rangers. Both the 1st and 3d Battalions, 5th Marines debarked from helicopters in a secure LZ northeast of the engaged ranger group. The Marine battalions attacked south-southeast to relieve the pressure on the rangers, and by dawn, the NVA broke contact leaving 49 bodies on the battlefield. The rangers suffered 69 wounded and 15 killed in the engagement. This action was the last sizable encounter of both Swift and Lien Ket 116.

Operation Swift ended on 15 September. Once more allied forces had driven the *2d NVA Division* from the basin. The enemy's 1967 dry season offensive in the southern part of I Corps had failed. By the end of September allied commands regarded the *1st VC* and *3d NVA Regiments* unfit for combat. More than 4,000 enemy troops reportedly died between 21 April, when Union I began, and the last day of September. A prime reason for this turn of events was the sudden arrival of a large U.S. Army force in Southern I Corps, which allowed III MAF units to operate in the Que Son Basin on a permanent basis, thereby breaking the Communist stranglehold on the area.

Operation Swift's heavy, sustained combat created personnel accounting problems which were unusual in the kind of war most of the 1st Marine Division fought in 1967. The 5th Marines and the division encountered many difficulties during Swift with casualty reporting, recovery, evacuation, and disposition of the dead, as well as with what Colonel William R. Earney termed "the big No-No," missing in action. "They [5th Marines] could tell you," commented Colonel Earney, "where the enemy was and their body count [of enemy dead] but not a comprehensive report as to what their own condition was."[13] The task of answering many of the personnel questions fell to the division staff, including, according to Colonel Earney, determining which morgue held the corpse of Medal of Honor recipient Capadonno before his brother arrived in South Vietnam to view the body.[14]

Other allied activity, both north and south of the Que Son Basin, also hurt Communist formations in I Corps. The enemy, buffeted between the allied forces in the basin and those in contiguous areas, lost the initiative. To the north, Colonel Herbert E. Ing's 1st Marines continued to prod the VC around Hoi An. Operation Pike, conducted in early August, was one of the more significant operations in this area. Two Marine battalions, Lieutenant Colonel George E. Petro's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and Lieutenant Colonel Webster's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines executed a box and sweep maneuver that accounted for 100 enemy dead and four captured. South of the basin, General Knowles' Task Force Oregon conducted Operation Benton in the hills west of Chu Lai during the latter part of August. Army troops made a helicopter assault of a suspected enemy base camp and then drove south and east, encountering enemy platoons and companies. When Benton ended, on 1 September, Task Force Oregon reported 397 NVA soldiers killed and nine captured.

Much further south, between Quang Ngai and Duc Pho, Task Force Oregon's Operation Malheur series, lasting from 11 May through 2 August, produced a total of 857 enemy troops killed. A more important result was the opening of Route 1 from the border of II Corps to Dong Ha, the last section of this vital artery to be cleared in I Corps.

Hood River followed Malheur II in a locale 25 miles south of Quang Ngai City. Hood River occurred in conjunction with the Korean Marine Brigade's Dragon Head V and the 2d ARVN Division's Lien Ket 110. The soldiers on Hood River claimed credit for 78 enemy dead and 45 prisoners. Army casualties were only three killed.

All of these operations maintained constant pressure on the *2d NVA Division.* Continual use of the search and destroy process in the basin and adjacent areas from April through August by the 5th Marines, the Special Landing Force, and ARVN units forced the enemy to move south. As the Communists tried to regroup in the hills west of Chu Lai, Task Force Oregon pushed them back to the Que Son Basin to face the Marine and ARVN Swift-Lien Ket 116 operations. Once more the enemy withdrew, this time trying to escape to the hills near Tam Ky. There four U.S. Army battalions were on hand to meet the remnants of the *2d NVA Division* during Operation Wheeler. Task Force Oregon became the Americal Division on 22 September and by the end of that month the soldiers of the Army division had killed an additional 442 Communists. Once more they drove the NVA units back into the basin. A new opponent was waiting for the North Vietnamese division.

A Busy Calm Before the Storm

Increased September activity in I Corps once more caused General Westmoreland to send reinforcements north. On 4 October, Colonel James D. McKenna's 3d Brigade, 1st U.S. Cavalry Division, having been transferred to III MAF and, in turn, to the Americal Division, began Operation Wallowa in the Que Son Basin. With the arrival of this brigade, the Americal Division took over responsibility for the entire basin and the 5th Marines moved to Hoi An, relieving Colonel Ing's 1st Marines there. Operational control of the 1st Marines shifted from the 1st to 3d Marine Division and Colonel Ing then moved his headquarters and two battalions to the northern provinces of I Corps.[15]

Most operations in southern I Corps during the last three months of 1967 reflected the enemy's desire to avoid casualties, but even in this the enemy was unsuccessful. The Americal Division, now commanded by Major General Samuel W. Koster, USA, continued to harry the *2d NVA Division* in the Que Son Valley as the Communists frantically tried to collect rice and supplies there. During October, the Army units, engaged in Operation Wheeler and Wallowa, were in almost constant contact with small NVA units. By the end of the month Operation Wheeler had reported 498 enemy killed, while Wallowa recorded another 675 NVA dead.

During November, the Americal Division combined Operations Wheeler and Wallowa as Operation Wheeler/Wallowa and a force of seven U.S. Army battalions, more than twice the number previously available, deployed in the area. The army battalions systematically pursued NVA elements as they tried to escape to the mountains in the west. Ancillary operations such as the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines' Essex in "Antenna Valley," six miles south of An Hoa, drove the enemy back against the Army units in the basin.

There were two main engagements with NVA forces in Antenna Valley during Operation Essex.* Both involved company-sized attacks on fortified villages which the North Vietnamese chose to defend. Lieutenant Colonel George C. McNaughton, commander of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, described these fortified villages in his after-action report:

> In each instance, the village had a wire fence around the perimeter . . . concisting of three to six strands of cattle fence with woven wire running up and down through the horizontal strands. The wire fence line was either concealed in bamboo tree lines or camouflaged with bamboo and shrubs. Behind these perimeter fences, the enemy had dug a communication trench . . . that was four to six feet deep with firing positions and deep caves for protection against artillery and air attack. Some of these caves were fifteen feet deep. Spider holes, caves, and bunkers were found in depth through the village. Fortifications were carefully located to achieve an interlocking and mutually supporting series of defensive positions. Both [villages] were located such that attacking infantry had to cross stream barriers [to reach] the defensive positions. As attacking troops emerged from the stream beds, they found themselves to be within close range (50-150 meters) of the enemy perimeter defenses with open rice paddy in between. [Both villages were] situated on the sides of the valley adjacent to high ground such that the enemy had ready routes of egress into the mountains.[16]

Both Marine attacks took place during afternoon hours and the enemy force successfully defended its positions into the night. In each case, however, the NVA defenders withdrew from the fortified positions under cover of darkness in spite of continuous artillery fire in and behind the village. "In summary," wrote McNaughton, "when Marine units attacked the villages in the afternoon, the enemy defended with vigor. When Marine units delayed an attack until dawn and conducted heavy preparation by air and artillery, the NVA units made their escape."[17]

Company H, commanded by Captain Gene W. Bowers, conducted one of the fortified village assaults. Bowers used tactics similar to those that had succeeded so well in a similar situation during Operation Swift.

Company H had landed by helicopter in Antenna Valley earlier in the day, as had the rest of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines.* The company then proceeded toward its assigned objective, the village of Ap Bon (2) in the northeast portion of the valley. As it approached the objective, Company H made heavy contact with a large enemy force within the village.

Captain Bowers ordered Second Lieutenant Duane V. Sherin to maneuver his 2d Platoon to the left of the village and then envelop the enemy. The platoon, however, ran into more NVA soldiers in the

*In Operation Mississippi in Antenna Valley during the fall of 1966, the Marines evacuated more than 2,000 refugees. Less than 600 civilians remained in the entire valley in 1967.

*Company F, according to the original plan, was not scheduled to participate in Operation Essex. It was to remain in the battalion's primary TAOR as a rapid reaction force.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189790

The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines boards helicopters in November for Operation Essex in Antenna Valley, six miles south of An Hoa. Essex drove the 2d NVA Division *back into the Que Son Basin where the Americal Division was conducting Wheeler/Wallowa.*

heavy brush west of the village, sustained two Marines killed and several wounded, and then, on Bowers' orders, withdrew with its casualties back to the company. Upon its arrival at the company position, Bowers directed the 2d Platoon to move to the company's right flank and establish a base of fire for an assault on the village by the 1st and 3d Platoons. The assault began after air and artillery strikes on Ap Bon(2). Bowers recalled the subsequent action:

> The assault was well-coordinated and executed, maintaining continuous fire superiority over the enemy until the assault line reached the bamboo hedgerow on the periphery of the village. Eight taut strands of U.S. [-type] barbed wire were unexpectedly encountered woven among the bamboo stalks. As the Marines fought to break through the barrier, .50 caliber machine guns from 800 meters on the right flank and 800 meters on the left flank commenced enfilading, grazing fire down the line of barbed wire, as 60mm, 82mm, and 4.2-inch mortar rounds began impacting in the paddy before the village. One platoon commander, Second Lieutenant Robert W. Miller, Jr., was killed and both platoon sergeants were severely wounded. The assault faltered and the Marines took cover, protected by small inter-paddy dikes.[18]

The fighting developed into an exchange of rifle fire and grenades as reported air strikes hit the village. Some bombs and napalm fell within 50 meters of the exposed Marines in the paddies. Captain Bowers requested reinforcements and Captain Edward J. "Buck" Byer, Jr.'s Company F arrived about 1600. With Company H acting as a base of fire on the village, Company F made an assault which the North Vietnamese repulsed.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189791

Marine UH-34Ds land the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines in abandoned rice paddies in Antenna Valley at the beginning of Operation Essex. Few civilians remained in the area after the evacuation of the valley in the fall of 1966 by Marines in Operation Mississippi.

At dusk, both companies moved back about 70 meters, carrying all wounded Marines and equipment, and established night defensive positions. The North Vietnamese maintained pressure on the two companies until almost dawn despite flares and machine gun fire from AC-130s, which fired on targets within 10 meters of the Marines. Around 0430, the North Vietnamese slipped away.

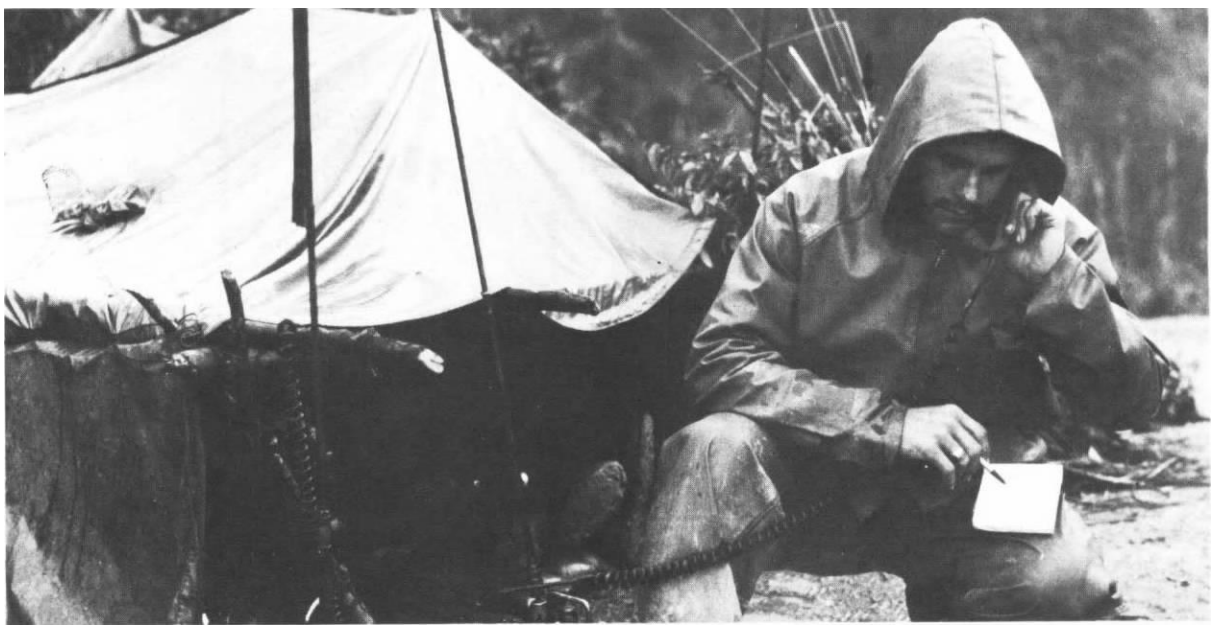
At dawn, the two Marine companies advanced and searched the village without resistance. There were no enemy bodies. All bunkers and trenches had collapsed under the intensive artillery and air strikes. The Marine companies had suffered 53 serious casualties, including 16 dead, in the fighting of Ap Bon (2).

The following days involved pursuit of small groups of fleeing NVA soldiers. On 10 November, the 2d Battalion captured an NVA aspirant (officer cadet) who claimed to have been in Ap Bon (2) on 6 November. He said the village had contained a division headquarters battalion. A direct bomb hit on the command post bunker killed the battalion commander; 60 enlisted men died in the fighting and many were severely wounded. Operation Essex ended a few days later, on the 17th.

By the end of December, cumulative reports for

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370661

A member of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines' 81mm Mortar Platoon, chilled and wet from the monsoon rains, takes a rest during Operation Pitt in December. Pitt was one of several operations late in the year which the 1st Marine Division conducted to protect the Da Nang air base from enemy rocket attacks.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A371053

LCpl C. M. Wolfe, clad in a rain suit as protection from the cold monsoon rains in December, takes a message over an AN/PRC-25 radio. He and other members of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines on Operation Pitt have fashioned a "hooch" from ponchos as protection from the weather. Air mattresses in the shelter keep the Marines out of the mud.

Wheeler/Wallowa cited 3,188 enemy killed, 87 captured, and 743 weapons seized, while U.S. Army units listed their own losses as 258 killed and 1,190 wounded. As 1967 ended there could be little question that control of the Que Son Basin was returning to the South Vietnamese Government.

North of the Que Son Valley, in the 1st Marine Division's Quang Nam Province zone of action, the level of enemy contacts dropped during this period. Fifth Marines units executed Operations Onslow and Essex, while elements of the 7th Marines conducted Knox, Foster, Pitt, Citrus, and Auburn. All of these operations were designed to keep the enemy out of the Da Nang rocket belt. The most significant of these was Foster and a companion SLF operation, Badger Hunt.*

Foster/Badger Hunt followed two savage Viet Cong attacks against the district headquarters and refugee settlement at Duc Duc and Dai Loc, 15 miles southwest of Da Nang. The attacks killed 34 civilians, wounded 42, and another 51 were reported missing. In addition, the enemy destroyed 559 houses and left 625 families homeless.

*See Chapter 10 for the SLF participation in Badger Hunt.

The Marines retaliated with Operation Foster, conducted by Lieutenant Colonel Roger H. Barnard's 3d Battalion, 7th Marines and Operation Badger Hunt utilizing SLF Bravo's BLT 2/3, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Henry Englisch. Both were coordinated search and destroy endeavors in the river complex of the Dai Loc District and in the flatlands and foothills west of the An Hoa industrial complex. Intelligence reports placed the Viet Cong *R-20* and *V-25 Battalions* and the *Q-13 Company* in these areas.

The operation began at 0900 on 13 November. BLT 2/3 landed by helicopter west of An Hoa, and two hours later Barnard's Marines landed northwest of the complex near Dai Loc. Initially there were numerous contacts with small groups of VC trying to escape. The Marines uncovered many VC bunkers and logistic areas. With the exception of one company-size fight on 29 November, the enemy concentrated on escaping. Marine reconnaissance and air observers sighted numerous fleeing enemy groups; artillery and air strikes directed against these groups caused the majority of enemy casualties inflicted during Foster. For the Marine infantry units, the operation was more successful in terms of

The rotor wash from a medevac helicopter, not to mention the proximity of the aircraft itself, forces men of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines to duck during Operation Foster, one of the operations protecting the Da Nang air base complex from enemy rocket attacks.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A371016

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370659

Patrols in the rugged interior of South Vietnam could encounter dangers other than enemy soldiers. Three men of the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, wearing unorthodox uniforms, proudly display the hide of a tiger they killed during a five-day patrol. They are, from left, LCpl James Ortega, LCpl Thomas L. Little, and Sgt James L. Griffith.

destruction of enemy supplies and installations than enemy killed. The Marines destroyed 6,000 enemy buildings, bunkers, tunnels, and shelters and uncovered rice caches totaling 87 tons. By the end of the operation, 30 November, reported enemy casualties totaled 125 killed and eight captured. More important than the personnel losses inflicted on the enemy, the Marines evacuated more than 11,500 refugees from the Communist-dominated area.

The loss of a large, readily available labor and manpower pool annoyed the local Communist leaders. Previously, the enemy, following the Communist guerrilla dictum that the good will of the people must be preserved, had been very selective in targeting acts of terror. During December, as the Marines challenged their hold on the populace, Communist terror attacks increased, demonstrating that the "liberating" Communists were not really concerned about popular good will. Distrust of the Communists spread in the refugee communities. Intended to force the refugees to abandon their Government-sponsored settlements, the terror raids caused grave doubts about the promises made by the Viet Cong.

The refugees from western Quang Nam Province, like those from the Que Son Basin and the coastal plains of Quang Ngai Province, demonstrated a desire not to be incorporated in the Communist system. Would they rally to the South Vietnamese Government and be loyal citizens? The next step was the implementation of the pacification program to win the support of the mass of displaced, confused, and often apathetic residents of Vietnam's food-producing regions. In I Corps it was III MAF's job to provide the physical security for the Vietnamese Government's pacification efforts. It would prove to be a tough, unrewarding, tedious assignment.

CHAPTER 10

Fall Fighting in the North

Operation Kingfisher—Medina/Bastion Hill/Lam Son 138
Adjustments Within the 3d Marine Division

Operation Kingfisher

After the conclusion of Operation Buffalo, III MAF ordered a sweep of the southern half of the DMZ. The Marines intended for the operation, Hickory II, to destroy enemy fortifications, mortar, and artillery positions in the southern portion of the buffer zone. The concept resembled that employed during Operation Hickory, the Marines' initial entry into the area on 18 May.

During Hickory II, two Marine battalions, one from SLF Alpha, attacked north to the Ben Hai River, wheeled about, and swept southward to the Cam Lo River. BLT 2/3 of SLF Bravo screened the inland left flank, while to the east three ARVN battalions and an armored personnel carrier troop advanced up Route 1 to the Ben Hai, then turned and attacked southward. On the coast east of the ARVN thrust, Lieutenant Colonel Albert R. Bowman II's 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion drove northward through the coastal sand dunes from Cua Viet. There was little resistance. The sharpest action occurred on 15 July, when Bowman's battalion engaged an enemy unit four miles east of Gio Linh, killing 25. Marine casualties, when the operation ended on 16 July, were four killed and 90 wounded. Total NVA losses totaled 39 killed and 19 weapons captured.

At the close of Hickory II, the two SLF battalions, upon release by III MAF, returned to a ready status off the coast of I Corps, but the remaining five battalions which comprised the 3d and 9th Marines began a new operation in the same general area. Called Operation Kingfisher, its mission, as in previous operations along the DMZ, was to block NVA entry into Quang Tri Province. From the 16th through the 27th there were only minor contacts.

On 28 July the 3d Marine Division sent Lieutenant Colonel William D. Kent's 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, reinforced with a platoon of tanks, three Ontos, three LVTEs, and engineers, on a spoiling attack into the DMZ. The main body, including the tracked vehicles, moved north on Provincial Route 606 with Companies E and G providing security on the flanks. Company F remained in a landing zone south of Con Thien, ready to board helicopters and exploit any heavy contact with the enemy.

There was no contact; the armored column moved north without incident. The terrain, however, restricted the tracked vehicles to the road and thick vegetation made movement difficult for the flanking companies. Further, the terrain canalized the column into a relatively narrow "V" of land bounded by the Ben Hai River on the west and north and a tributary stream to the east. The reinforced battalion would have to return by the same route by which it entered the DMZ.* The North Vietnamese were already moving units into previously prepared positions covering Route 606.

The North Vietnamese did not molest the Marines in their night defensive positions near the Ben Hai River. The following morning, the 2d Battalion scouted the objective area and destroyed several small abandoned fortification complexes.

Late in the morning the battalion began its movement south out of the DMZ. It would move in a column led by Company E and followed by Command Group A, H&S Company, Command Group B, and Companies F, H, and G. An airborne forward air controller circled overhead; he would soon be busy.

Company E began moving south at 1000; at 1115 the enemy detonated a 250-lb bomb buried in the road, wounding five Marines. Nearby, engineers found a similar bomb, rigged as a command-detonated mine, and destroyed it.

Upon the second explosion, North Vietnamese soldiers near the road opened fire on the column with machine guns, rifles, and 60mm and 82mm

*Major Willard H. Woodring, commanding the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, raised these objections at a division briefing prior to the operation. Colonel John C. Studt, Comments on draft ms, 9Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

3d MarDiv ComdC, July 1967

The 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, supported by tanks from the 3d Tank Battalion, moves through the open terrain south of the Ben Hai River in Operation Hickory II in July.

An armored column, composed of tanks, Ontos, amphibian tractors, and infantrymen from the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines moves unopposed toward the Ben Hai River inside the Demilitarized Zone on 28 July. NVA units, however, already were moving in behind the column and it would have to fight its way south to safety the following day.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A191240

mortars, initiating a running battle that did not end until dark. The NVA units, using heavy fire from prepared positions combined with the maneuver of other units, quickly fragmented the armored column into roughly company-sized segments. Each isolated segment fought its own way through the gauntlet of fire.

The tracked vehicles became more of a liability than a tactical asset. They were restricted to the road because the thick brush provided excellent cover for NVA soldiers armed with antitank weapons. Instead of providing support to the infantry Marines, the tracked vehicles required infantry protection. Using them as ambulances to transport the wounded further reduced the vehicles' ability to fight.

Tracked vehicles suffered all along the column. An RPG round penetrated both sides of an LVTE moving with Company E. Another RPG explosion disabled the turret of a tank with Company F, wounding three crewmen. When Company H brought up an Ontos to suppress NVA fire that was holding up its movement, an RPG gunner hit the vehicle and wounded three crewmen. A second Ontos came forward, beat down the enemy fire with its machine gun, and permitted the company to move again.

The infantry's primary fire support came from the airborne controllers, one of whom was on station throughout the day. The controller maintained contact with air representatives with each company and with the battalion air liaison officer. The airborne forward air controller directed fixed-wing air strikes whenever needed. The Marine infantrymen needed them often.

The North Vietnamese units knew the danger from American supporting arms and attempted to stay close to the Marine column. Company F had hardly cleared its night defensive position when it realized an NVA unit had immediately occupied the position. At another point, Marine engineers with Company E spotted a 12.7mm antiaircraft machine gun just off the road. They attacked, killed seven NVA soldiers, and destroyed the weapon and its ammunition. At the rear of the column, Company G had problems with enemy units following in its trace and maneuvering back and forth across the road. Company G killed 12 and wounded 10 of these soldiers; an attached scout-sniper team killed another 15. Shortly afterward, an enemy assault from the flank almost cut the company in two, but the attack failed.

Shortly after Company F took its place in the column, it received instructions to establish a helicopter landing zone for evacuating casualties from Company E and H&S Company. When the tanks carrying the dead and wounded reached the zone, the enemy opened up with RPGs, machine guns, and 60mm and 82mm mortars. The mortar fire walked across the entire landing zone. In addition to the earlier casualties, the Marines now had anothr seven men killed and 31 more Marines and Navy corpsmen wounded.

A gap then developed between the rear of H&S Company and Company F. The latter company loaded the casualties in the zone on the tanks and attacked to close the gap. It did so at the cost of a further two dead and 12 wounded by NVA mortar fire. The company resumed its fight south.

Late in the afternoon, Company E and Command Group A managed to break through the enemy to safety. They left behind, however, two Company E squads which could not move because of intense enemy automatic weapons and rifle fire that killed two and wounded nine Marines. Company E and the command group continued on until they linked up at 1830 with Company M, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines which had moved up from Con Thien.

By this time the other companies of the 2d Battalion were no longer able to continue south; there were too many casualties to move. At 1930, Company H drew back and established a defensive position on high ground at the edge of the clearing through which Route 606 passed at that point. Joining Company H were Company F, two other squads from Company E, two squads from Company G, plus H&S Company. It was an all-infantry force; the tracked vehicles, carrying some of the wounded, had broken through to join the lead elements at the position of Company M, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines.

Company G's movement came to an end about the same time. It could no longer both fight and transport its wounded. By 2100, the company was in a defensive position for the night.

The two isolated squads from Company E found themselves rescued early in the evening. Lieutenant Colonel Kent had taken operational control of Company M, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines and accompanied that unit back to the two squads. They accomplished the mission by 1930 and Company M moved into a good defensive position for the night. To the south, the bulk of Company E organized its defenses and called in medevac helicopters for the casualties.

The remainder of the night was relatively quiet;

the NVA units were pulling back. Company G and Company F both heard much shouting west of their respective positions and called in artillery missions. The final event of the fight occurred at 0330 when an NVA soldier crept up to Company F's perimeter and killed one Marine and wounded three with a burst of automatic weapons fire. Other Marines opened fire and the NVA soldier withdrew.

The following morning, the 30th, helicopters evacuated all casualties located at Company G's position. Company M, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines and Lieutenant Colonel Kent moved north to link up with the rest of the 2d Battalion. The Marines evacuated the remainder of the casualties by 0900 and all units were out of the DMZ by 1150 behind a screen provided by the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines.

The gauntlet had been costly for Lieutenant Colonel Kent's 2d Battalion. Twenty-three Marines died and the wounded totaled 251, of whom 191 required evacuation. There were 32 confirmed NVA dead but the battalion estimated another 175 probably died.

While the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines' battle quickly entered the division's folklore as "2/9's armored thrust into the DMZ,"[1] an earlier and relatively minor action on Route 9 had a more lasting impact on the tactical situation in northern I Corps. It led to an end to vehicle convoys to Khe Sanh; thereafter, the base relied upon aerial resupply.

III MAF supplied Khe Sanh at the time by aircraft and "Rough Rider" vehicle convoys from Dong Ha. One of the largest of the convoys, composed of over 85 vehicles and several U.S. Army 175mm guns,[2] departed Dong Ha on 21 July. Part of its route passed through the TAOR of Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Needham's 3d Battalion, 3d Marines. This gave the battalion the responsibility for securing that portion of Route 9.

Lieutenant Colonel Needham ordered his Company M to send a platoon out that morning to sweep Route 9 from Ca Lu west to the boundary between the regimental TAORs of the 3d and 26th Marines. The convoy departed Dong Ha at about the same time as the 2d Platoon, Company M began its check of the road.

The 2d Platoon searched Route 9 without incident for about five kilometers. Then the point surprised an NVA soldier urinating beside the road.[3] The point opened fire; other NVA soldiers answered with rifle fire from high ground north of the road and from a tree line south of it. The whole platoon quickly became engaged with what the platoon commander first believed was an NVA platoon. He soon changed his estimate to an NVA battalion.

Infantrymen of the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines move into the safety of the perimeter of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines on 30 July after a running battle the previous day with NVA units that fought to fragment the column and destroy the reinforced Marine battalion piecemeal as it came back south from the Ben Hai River and out of the DMZ.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189064

The 3d Battalion, 3d Marines ordered the platoon to disengage but the unit could not do so. The battalion staff at Ca Lu worked quicky to coordinate air and artillery support and alerted the rest of Company M to prepare to move to the 2d Platoon's rescue. In the midst of this activity, the Rough Rider convoy's arrival at Ca Lu created some confusion.[4] The battalion requested and received permission to halt the convoy immediately since there was only one place between Ca Lu and the 2d Platoon's position where the convoy could be turned around.[5]

Company M moved toward the firefight with two U.S. Army vehicles in support. One of these mounted dual 40mm cannon, the other carried a quad-.50 machine gun. As the force neared the 2d Platoon, the enemy fired approximately 200 rounds from 82mm mortars at the road. Enemy riflemen opened fire from the high ground north of the road.

Under the cover of fixed-wing aircraft strikes on the high ground and heavy fire from the two Army vehicles, Company M reached its 2d Platoon and the Marines disengaged. Two tanks came up from Ca Lu and provided additional fire against the tree line to the south. The combined force then returned to Ca Lu.

The Rough Rider convoy could not continue to Khe Sanh until the road was secure. The division ordered it to turn around and return to Camp Carroll.

At noon the following day, the 22d, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, using its own Company L and Companies A and C of the 9th Marines, moved against the enemy positions north of Route 9. There was only scattered contact with the enemy; however, the Marines found ample evidence the previous day's action had prevented a major ambush of the Rough Rider convoy to Khe Sanh. They found 150 well-camouflaged fighting holes in the area where the 2d Platoon had engaged the enemy. The North Vietnamese obviously had constructed the fighting holes for a horseshoe-shaped ambush whose killing zone was the open road. Nearby was a large, abandoned NVA base camp containing another 200 fighting holes and 25 two- and four-man log bunkers camouflaged with dirt and elephant grass. The camp also contained several huts, some for sleeping and others for cooking.

The following day Company K, 3d Marines, supported by tanks and Army M42 "Dusters" (the latter mounting dual 40mm cannon), joined the operation and attacked Hill 216 north of, and overlooking the NVA ambush site on Route 9. Company K ran into heavy machine gun fire from a bunker complex on the hill's east slope which killed one Marine and wounded two. The company called in an artillery mission and the supporting tracked vehicles opened fire on the enemy. Company K then pulled back to allow fixed-wing aircraft plenty of room to bomb the bunkers. At the completion of the strike, Company K attacked, but the NVA unit had gone. The Marines continued to the crest of Hill 216.

Later that afternoon, fixed-wing aircraft bombed Hill 247, located west of Hill 216 and which also overlooked Route 9. Following the air strike, Company L, 3d Marines moved west on Route 9 and linked up with Company B, 26th Marines which had cleared the road from the western edge of the 26th Marines' TAOR.

During its move, Company L uncovered 30 Chinese-made anti-personnel mines buried along approximately 2,000 meters of the southern margin of Route 9. The enemy had rigged the mines with trip wires to catch the Marines and soldiers from the Rough Rider convoy as they sought cover from the planned ambush.

With Route 9 cleared, the Rough Rider convoy, minus any 175mm guns, completed the trip to Khe Sanh on the 25th. The whole episode, however, changed the thinking about resupply for Khe Sanh. There was one more large convoy to Khe Sanh and a few to the Lang Vei Special Forces camp, but these ended in early August. There were no other convoys to Khe Sanh until Operation Pegasus opened Route 9 at the end of the "siege" of Khe Sanh in 1968.*

For the next few weeks only scattered, small-scale fighting took place. Intelligence analysts reported the probability of a major enemy offensive in the region. They reported a large buildup of supplies north of the DMZ, and estimated at least five Communist battalions were preparing for offensive operations. Sighting reports of vehicles north of the Ben Hai increased substantially, including, for the first time, reports of armored vehicles there.

The first outburst of renewed NVA ground activity in the Kingfisher area happened in the southwestern portion of the TAOR on the morning of 21 August. A North Vietnamese battalion am-

*Robert Pisor's *The End of the Line: The Siege of Khe Sanh* (New York: 1982), p. 94 says the convoy with the 175mm guns had ". . . run into 'one horrendous ambush' and turned back. . . ." The NVA's planned ambush literally might have been "horrendous" except for one NVA soldier's bladder discomfort.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A193261

CH-53 helicopters bring 105mm howitzers of Battery I, 12th Marines to Hill 881 South near Khe Sanh on 3 August following intelligence reports of an NVA buildup nearby.

bushed a small Marine convoy traveling south on Route 9 from the Rockpile to Ca Lu. In the first moments of the attack, enemy antitank rockets hit and put out of action two Marine trucks and two Army track-mounted, dual 40mm guns of the 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery. The security force with the convoy returned fire and radioed for air and artillery support. Company L of Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Needham's 3d Battalion, 3d Marines came down from the Rockpile, and a reinforced platoon from Company M moved up from Ca Lu. These maneuvers trapped the ambushers. The action lasted for more than six hours as the Marine units, supported by air and artillery, converged on the NVA battalion. As night fell the enemy broke contact and fled to the west. Confirmed Communist losses were light, but 3 Marines and 3 Army artillerymen died, with another 35 wounded.

The North Vietnamese tried again on 7 September at almost the same location, but again the enemy commander miscalculated the location of Marine forces, their ability to maneuver, and the speed with which the Marines could bring supporting arms to bear. The NVA ambushed a convoy at 1010, and again Marine units converged on the site from the north and south. This time the battle continued for more than eight hours. The Marines killed 92 of the enemy before the fight ended at dusk. American casualties in this encounter totaled five killed and 56 wounded.

Additional indications that the Communists remained determined to achieve a victory at Con Thien became evident during late August. To gain maximum propaganda effect, the North Vietnamese timed their new offensive to coincide with the South Vietnamese elections scheduled for 3 September. As the date for the elections approached, the NVA fired an increasing volume of artillery and rockets across the DMZ at Cua Viet, Gio Linh, and Con Thien. On 26 August these hit Dong Ha in three separate attacks; 150 rocket and artillery rounds destroyed two helicopters and damaged 24 others.

The most effective and spectacular of these attacks took place on election day. Forty-one artillery rounds slammed into Dong Ha base that morning, destroying the ammunition storage area and bulk fuel farm and damaged 17 helicopters of Major Horace A. Bruce's HMM-361. Damage control teams fought the fire and explosions for four hours before they controlled the situation. Miraculously, no one died, but 77 suffered wounds, one seriously. Spectators as far away as Phu Bai could see the billowing smoke cloud that rose over the base. Because of this and similar attacks, III MAF moved the logistics base in 1968 from Dong Ha to Quang Tri, beyond the range of the enemy's 130mm guns.[7]

The attack on 3 September ended the use of Dong Ha as a permanent helicopter squadron base facility. HMM-361 personnel flew back to the Marble Mountain facility that day in the CH-53s of HMM-463. All

3d MarDiv ComdC, August 1967

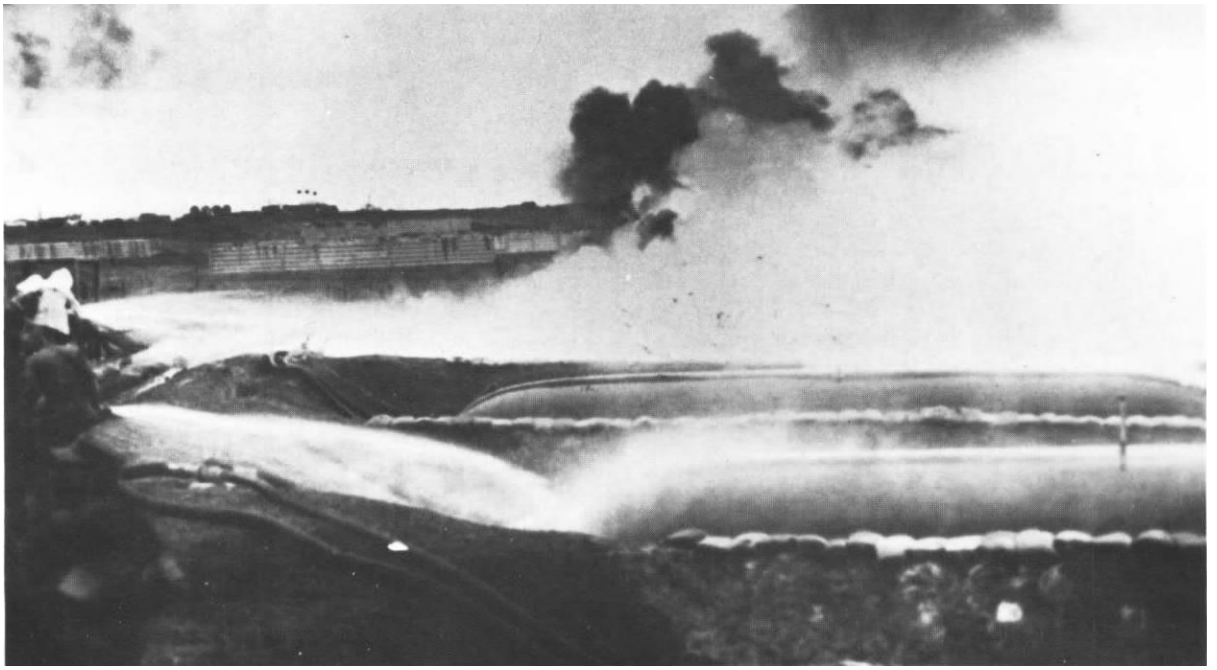
Firemen contain the fire at the Dong Ha combat base following a rocket attack on 26 August, just a week before NVA artillery destroyed the fuel facility.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A355576

A burned-out Marine cargo truck sits in the middle of the rubble of the ammunition storage area at Dong Ha after the 3 September artillery attack.

Marines fight to save the fuel storage area at Dong Ha after a rocket attack on 26 August. Some are trying to put out the fire while others cool down the remaining fuel bladders.

3d MarDiv ComdC, August 1967



of HMM-361's aircraft caught on the ground suffered damage from blast, shrapnel, or both and the CH-53s had to lift them to Marble Mountain. Until III MAF readied a new field at Quang Tri, helicopter support for the DMZ area came from squadrons at Marble Mountain and Phu Bai.[8]

Brigadier General Metzger had good reasons for vividly remembering these attacks. He recalled:

> When one of the attacks hit Dong Ha I was in a UH-1E on the pad getting ready to take off. The pilot lifted off the ground and turned to the south, thereby flying right through the barrage of "incoming." We felt the "bird" shudder and knew we were hit. After a futile attempt to spot the enemy firing batteries, we finally landed at Camp Evans and examined the plane. There was a hole about 15 inches in diameter in the tail. We were fortunate![9]

Con Thien was the primary NVA artillery target. During September, the North Vietnamese subjected the Marines there to one of the heaviest shellings of the war. The hill itself, known to local missionaries as "The Hill of Angels," was only big enough to accommodate a reinforced battalion. Almost daily Con Thien's defenders could expect at least 200 rounds of enemy artillery fire, and on 25 September more than 1,200 shells rained down upon the position. The completed "Dye Marker" bunkers at Con Thien provided some cover as the NVA artillery and rocket attacks escalated.[10]

Under cover of the artillery and rocket attacks, enemy ground activity increased. The NVA's main thrust was to the south and southeast of Con Thien. Since the beginning of Operation Kingfisher, the 9th Marines had been operating in that area with a force varying between three and six battalions. The level of combat was light, but enemy resistance began to stiffen at the end of August.

On 4 September, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell's 3d Battalion, 4th Marines met strong opposition. At 1100 that morning, the battalion's Company I, commanded by Captain Richard K. Young, engaged an enemy force 1,500 meters south of Con Thien. The company pressed the enemy unit, but by 1400 its advance halted because of the volume of enemy fire. Company M and the battalion command group moved to the left of Company I and, after extensive artillery preparatory fires, struck the NVA flank. Moving slowly, with two tanks in support, Company M pushed through the Communist position, relieving the pressure on Company I. The maneuver trapped a group of enemy soldiers between the two Marine units, and Company I assaulted and overran

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A421910

Artillerymen from the 2d Battalion, 12th Marines load their 105mm howitzer at Con Thien for counterbattery fire against North Vietnamese Army units. In the background are some of the bunkers in which Marines took refuge during the frequent enemy artillery fire against the Marine combat base.

the entrapped NVA force. The count of the enemy casualties at the end of the fight was 38 killed and one captured. As Bendell's units returned to their perimeters near Con Thien,[11] they endured harassing fires from NVA mortar and artillery. Six Marines died and 47 suffered wounds in the day's action.

Three days later, Company I of Lieutenant Colonel Harry L. Alderman's 3d Battalion, 26th Marines* found the enemy again three miles south of Con Thien. The fight lasted for five hours and resembled the battle of the 4th, except this time Marine tanks reinforced the infantrymen. Fifty-one NVA died in this encounter; so did 14 Marines.

On 10 September, Alderman's Marines engaged what seemed to be the entire *812th NVA Regiment.* The fight began in the early evening four miles southwest of Con Thien. In this instance the patrolling Marines spoiled a major enemy attack in the making. The battalion's command chronology reflects the intensity of this four-hour battle:

*3/26 participated in Operation Kingfisher from 7-11 September.

1615H—Co M and Co K received estimated 60 rounds of 140mm rockets followed by a coordinated attack by NVA (reportedly) wearing USMC flak jackets and helmets.

1630H—Co I and Co L came under attack by NVA wearing USMC equipment and supported by mortars.

1637H—Co K and Co M were hit by 12 140mm rockets followed by 12 more at 1645H.

1655H—Co I and Co L came under an extremely heavy assault from the north and west sides of their perimeter by an estimated NVA battalion. Fixed-wing air, which was on station, began making strikes immediately, and napalm consistently fell 50 to 75 meters from the friendly lines. The flame tank and gun took direct hits from RPGs fired from approximately 75 meters. The flame tank was destroyed and burned the remainder of the night, and the gun tank was rendered useless and rolled into a draw. . . . The crews of both tanks withdrew into the perimeter.

1700H—The tank supporting Co K fired on 100 NVA in front of their lines with unknown results.

From 1705H to 1754H—Each company reported numerous sightings of NVA in various sized units maneuvering around both defensive perimeters.

1825H—The [battalion] CP received heavy incoming mortar fire and the NVA appeared to be massing for an attack.

1825H—M-1 [1st Platoon, Company M] was pinned down in a bomb crater 70 meters west of the CP.

1900H—Co M pulled back towards the CP to consolidate the lines and was forced to abandon a disabled tank.

1905H—An emergency resupply was attempted to Co I and Co L and although suppressive fires were delivered, the enemy fire was too intense and the helicopter could not land.

1905H—A flareship arrived on station. Co K and Co M had formed perimeter around the CP and were boxed in with well aimed artillery.

2030H—The enemy ground attack ceased although 60mm mortar [rounds] were still being received by Co I and Co L.

The next morning the companies searched the battlefield for casualties and abandoned equipment, and evacauted all casualties by 1000. The Marines recovered a large quantity of enemy material, including cartridge belts, packs, ammunition, and weapons; 140 enemy bodies lay scattered throughout the area. The 3d Battalion's losses totaled 34 killed and 192 wounded. Alderman called it ". . . the hardest fighting [the battalion] encountered since arriving in Vietnam."[12]

Following this fight, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines moved to near Phu Bai to refit. As its replacement in the DMZ area, the division pulled Lieutenant Colonel James W. Hammond, Jr.'s 2d Battalion, 4th Marines off an operation near Camp Evans and sent it north. Hammond later wrote:

> We stopped overnight at Cam Lo and then went north to take the place of [the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines] which had been mortared [severely] in their position northwest of Con Thien. We then became the roving battalion outside Con Thien . . . the battalion moved every day but still was shelled as much, if not more than Con Thien. The difference was that we had to dig new holes in every position . . . we were hit pretty hard during our month-plus along the DMZ.[13]

Both sides shed more blood around Con Thien before the month ended. At 0325 on the 13th, a North Vietnamese company attacked the north-northeast sector of the perimeter of the outpost. Even though artillery, mortars, and heavy machine guns supported the attacking force, the Communists failed to penetrate the wire. They gave up and withdrew after a heavy pounding from the Marines' supporting arms.

Following the attack of the 13th, Colonel Richard B. Smith,* the new commanding officer of the 9th Marines, moved two battalions to a position behind Con Thien from which they could react if the enemy attacked in force. Lieutenant Colonel John J. Peeler's** 2d Battalion, 9th Marines occupied the area southeast of Con Thien while Lieutenant Colonel James W. Hammond, Jr.'s 2d Battalion, 4th Marines moved to the southwest of the hill.[14] At the same time, Colonel Smith ordered the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, now commanded by Major Gorton C. Cook, to move inside the main perimeter. The anticipated assault did not materialize; instead the NVA bombarded all three battalions with savage artillery and mortar attacks for the next seven days.

With the passing of the immediate threat to Con Thien, the Marines there went on the offensive. On 21 September, Hammond's battalion started a search and destroy operation 1,800 meters east of Con Thien. The battalion front, Companies E and F, moved out on line. Movement was cautious but steady, but maintaining alinement proved difficult in terraced terrain broken up by hedgerows. The command group and Companies G and H had to stop, waiting for the rear elements to clear their previous position.

*Colonel Smith, an experienced combat commander and veteran of two wars, assumed command of the 9th Marines from Colonel Jerue on 13 September, the day of the attack on the outpost.

**Lieutenant Colonel Peeler had the distinction of serving twice as the commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines during 1967, from 1 January to 4 July and 13 September - 28 October. He assumed command in September after enemy mortar fragments severely wounded Lieutenant Colonel William D. Kent near Con Thien.

3d MarDiv ComdC, October 1967

Company K, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines moves off a thickly-wooded hill during a patrol near Camp Evans. The battalion moved to the base to refit after heavy fighting with the 812th NVA Regiment *four miles southwest of Con Thien on 10 September.*

As the lead elements advanced, maintaining visual contact became impossible in the thick underbrush. At 0750, Company E encountered fire from snipers. Then, when the company pushed forward, it came under heavy automatic weapons fire from the front and left, which killed one Marine and wounded four. The tempo of the battle increased; the Communists opened up with mortars. The Marines, now close to the NVA force, heard shouted orders and directions for a mortar crew, and the two sides soon became involved in a deadly grenade duel.* The battalion could not call in artillery because of the close contact, and Company F was in no position to help. Company E slowly withdrew to a position which offered better cover and established a landing zone to evacuate casualties.

Shortly after the beginning of the engagement, Lieutenant Colonel Hammond ordered Company G to envelop the left flank of the NVA position, but 150 meters of open ground faced the assaulting troops. The company advanced to within 30 meters of the objective, but withdrew in the face of nearby NVA small arms, automatic weapons, and mortar fire. Meanwhile, Companies E and F linked up and covered Company G by fire as it disengaged.

The battle turned into a stalemate. The battalion needed tanks, but after 96 hours of rain the approaches to the area were impassable. At dusk the fighting died down and the Marines pulled back to the main battalion perimeter. The NVA force had killed 16 Marines and wounded 118; 15 of the bodies remained on the battlefield until 10 October when the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines went back and picked up its dead in a later operation in the same area.[15] The battalion could not determine the total Communist casualties but reported at least 39 NVA soldiers killed.* Intelligence officers later identified the enemy force as part of the *90th NVA Regiment.* After the action of the 21st, the enemy withdrew across the Ben Hai River.

The persistent enemy attacks during September appeared to be a desperate bid for a military victory, with its attendant propaganda value, before the fall

3d MarDiv ComdC, September 1967

A CH-53 delivers supplies destined for the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines to the muddy landing zone of the Con Thien combat base in September 1967.

*Lance Corporal Jedh C. Barker received a posthumous Medal of Honor for his actions in this battle. See Appendix D for his citation.

*Colonel Hammond remembered in 1981 that Major General Hochmuth said that G-2 put the number of enemy casualties at 350. Colonel James W. Hammond, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 18May81 (Vietnam comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

monsoon hit. Failing in attacks from three different directions, the NVA resorted to a massive attack by fire against Con Thien. During the period 19-27 September, more than 3,000 mortar, artillery, and rocket rounds blasted the position.

The Americans retaliated by massing one of the greatest concentrations of firepower in support of a single division in the history of the Vietnam war. III MAF artillery units fired 12,577 rounds at known and suspected enemy positions in the region, while ships of the Seventh Fleet fired 6,148 rounds at the same area. Marine and Air Force fighter pilots flew more than 5,200 close air support sorties and B-52 bombers of the Strategic Air Command dropped tons of ordnance on the enemy in and north of the DMZ. The Con Thien garrison applauded the results; North Vietnamese pressure on the outpost subsided as September drew to a close.

Although enemy activity gradually diminished at Con Thien; defense of the base remained a continuing ordeal. Marine searching and patrolling activity discovered a multitude of bunker and trench complexes around the hill mass, most of which were about 1,500 meters from the main perimeter. The Marines destroyed the bunkers, but often during subsequent patrols they found them rebuilt again. During early October the Marines continued to find bunkers, but by then these were usually unoccupied.

Experiences of the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines during October typify the trend of activity around Con Thien during the fall. On 4 October the battalion, still under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Hammond, conducted a sweep southwest of Con Thien in conjunction with Lieutenant Colonel Henry Englisch's BLT 2/3 from SLF Bravo. Leaving the line of departure at 0645, the battalion had found three NVA shelters by 0830. An hour later and 1,000 meters further, the Marines found several more ambush sites and 16 bunkers. Shortly after that, Company H came upon 13 more bunkers while skirting the southwest side of the Con Thien slope. Similarly, Company G found abandoned mortar positions, loose 82mm mortar rounds, and powder-charge increments. Just before 1500, the unmistakable odor of decaying human flesh led the Marines to the partially covered graves of 20 North Vietnamese. Backtracking, Company G discovered fresh enemy footprints around the previously destroyed bunkers. Tension heightened. The three companies moved back to the perimeter west of Con Thien, but while pulling back Company G heard movement and called in artillery to cover their return march. The Marines observed no NVA casualties, but had no doubt the Communists were still active.

Several days later the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines relieved BLT 2/3 as the defense force for the recently built bridge north of Strongpoint C-2.* The construction of the bridge had permitted the reopening of the vital road to Con Thien which the heavy September rains washed out. The battalion defended the bridge** because the 3d Marine Division was concerned that if the enemy destroyed it, they would cut the only supply line to Con Thien.[16]

The defense of the bridge was no easy task for Lieutenant Colonel Hammond's battalion. Since its move north from Camp Evans on 11 September, the constant combat around Con Thien had worn the battalion down from a "foxhole strength" of 952 to about 462. The 2d Battalion, 4th Marines had great difficulty in manning all the defensive positions prepared by the departed full-strength BLT-2/3.[17]

The defensive position around the bridge was divided into quadrants by virtue of the road, which ran roughly north and south, and the stream, which ran east and west. Company G had the northwest quadrant; Company H was on the same side of the road but across the stream in the southwest quadrant. Company F was in the northeast; Company E in the southeast. The battalion command group set up beside the stream in Company G's area and near the center of the position.

At 0125 on 14 October, 25 artillery rounds, rockets, and 135-150 mortar rounds hit Company H. An ambush squad posted in front of the company reported an enemy force moving toward it, and immediately took the advancing enemy under fire. The Marine squad leader notified his company that he had three casualties and that the enemy seriously outnumbered his squad. The company commander, Captain Arthur P. Brill, Jr., ordered the squad to pull back and, at the same time, called for night defensive fires to block the avenues of approach to his position. The battalion requested flare ships to illuminate the area. Using starlight scopes, sniper teams watched the enemy as they massed only 50

*BLT 2/3 phased out of Operation Kingfisher to resume its duties with the Special Landing Force.

**In 1981, Lieutenant General Metzger described the defense of this bridge as an ". . . illustration of how our forces were tied to defending terrain and not free to operate." Lieutenant General Louis Metzger, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981) (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

meters in front of the company. The snipers and two tanks attached to the company opened fire, forcing the North Vietnamese to start their assault prematurely. The rest of the company held fire until the NVA troops reached a clearing 20 meters from the wire. Of the entire attacking unit, only two NVA soldiers reached the wire and Marines killed both as they tried to breach that obstacle.

The enemy withdrew, leaving bodies behind, but they were far from finished. At 0230, enemy mortars shelled Company G. Direct hits by RPGs destroyed a machine gun emplacement and several backup positions on the primary avenue of approach into the company position.* The NVA force attacked through this break, overran the company command post, and killed the company commander, Captain Jack W. Phillips, and his forward observer. Three platoon leaders, two of whom had just arrived in Vietnam that morning, also died. The battalion sent its S-3A, Captain James W. McCarter, Jr., to replace Phillips, but enemy fire killed him before he reached Company G.[19] During the confused, hand-to-hand combat some of the North Vietnamese fought their way within grenade range of the battalion command post in the center of the position.

In the command post, although wounded by a grenade, Sergeant Paul H. Foster, a member of the fire support coordination center, continued to direct mortar and artillery fire upon the enemy. Another grenade landed among a group of six Marines. Sergeant Foster threw his flak jacket over the grenade and jumped on top of the jacket. The grenade blast mortally wounded him, but this action saved his fellow Marines.** Before the melee ended, the North Vietnamese killed or wounded the entire forward air control team.[20] The enemy also killed the battalion medical chief, and wounded the fire support coordinator, headquarters commandant, and battalion sergeant major.[21]

Lieutenant Colonel Hammond moved what was left of his command group to a better location within Company H's position. He ordered Company F to move to Company G's right flank and counterattack to push the NVA forces out of the perimeter. Illumination and automatic weapons fire from "Puff," the AC-47 requested at the beginning of the fight and which arrived about 0330, aided the counterattack. By 0430, the enemy began retreating out of the position, pursued by Company E.

The next morning the battalion reconsolidated and evacuated casualties. Twenty-one dead, including five officers, and 23 wounded were the night's toll. The NVA lost at least 24 killed. That afternoon, Lieutenant General Cushman and Major General Hochmuth visited the bridge site. They granted a request from Lieutenant Colonel Hammond that the new bridge be named Bastard's Bridge* to honor the 21 Marines of the 2d Battalion who gave their lives in its defense. At 1400, Hammond's battalion turned over the bridge to Lieutenant Colonel Needham's 3d Battalion, 3d Marines and then moved to Dong Ha where it assumed the mission of regimental reserve after 42 days of close combat.[21].

The last major action of Kingfisher took place during a 9th Marines operation on 25-28 October. By this time Hammond's battalion (minus Company G which was attached to the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines), had moved to Cam Lo to take part in the operation. The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines was at Con Thien and Needham's 3d Battalion, 3d Marines was at C-2 Bridge.[23] The regimental frag order directed Hammond's Marines to sweep north on the west side of Route 561 while the other two battalions provided blocking forces.

The 2d Battalion, 4th Marines began its sweep at 0600 on the 25th. Lieutenant Colonel Hammond planned to move his understrength battalion all day to reach the objective before dark. There was no enemy contact but heavy brush slowed the move. As darkness approached, the battalion was still about 1,000 meters from the objective. Hammond decided to halt the battalion and request additional ammunition before darkness.

Hammond's decision was prudent, given the nature of the enemy in the DMZ region and the re-

*Lieutenant Colonel James E. Murphy commented in 1981 that the NVA force used tear gas in their attack. "Company G got the brunt of it and it lasted only for a few minutes but [the gas] greatly added to the confusion." Lieutenant Colonel James E. Murphy, Comments on draft ms, 6Aug81 (Vietnam comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

**Sergeant Foster subsequently received a posthumous Medal of Honor. See Appendix D for Sergeant Foster's citation.

*The nickname "Magnificent Bastards" has been claimed by the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines for many years. Tradition traces the nickname to World War II; however, the Marine Corps Historical Center has no evidence to substantiate the claim. It appears likely that the battalion borrowed the phrase from the book, *The Magnificent Bastards* by Lucy Herndon Crockett (New York: 1953) which is a fictionalized account of Marines in the South Pacific in World War II.

cent combat losses that reduced his entire battalion to just over 400 men. Additional ammunition could partially compensate for the loss of firepower resulting from personnel shortages and the absence of Company G. He controlled, at the time, a "battalion" only a little larger than a standard reinforced rifle company. The resupply helicopters would give away the battalion's location, of course, but he took the risk that his command could receive its additional ammunition and move on to the objective before the enemy responded.

Helicopters were in short supply at this time, following the grounding of all CH-46s after a series of accidents. III MAF by necessity reserved the available helicopters for meeting emergency requests from units in the field. Hammond ordered an "emergency resupply" of ammunition.

Lieutenant Colonel Hammond took a calculated risk and lost. The resupply helicopters did not bring everything he ordered but, worse, also delivered significant quantities and types of ammunition that the battalion had not ordered, including three pallets of tactical wire. There was more material than the battalion could use or move. Hammond's Marines would have to spend the night in place and try to get the excess ammunition flown out the next morning. Unfortunately, the helicopters had revealed the Marines' position to the enemy.

The North Vietnamese hit the battalion's perimeter about 2330 with 10 rocket rounds.* The battalion executive officer, Major John J. Lawendowski, died and Lieutenant Colonel Hammond and two others required evacuation for wounds. Lieutenant Colonel Frankie E. Allgood, the newly promoted executive officer of HMM-363, landed his UH-34D at the battalion command post and flew the casualties to Dong Ha. Captain Arthur P. Brill, Jr., who had moved up the previous day from commanding Company H to be the battalion operations officer, took command of the battalion.

Upon learning that Hammond and Lawendowski were casualties, Colonel Richard B. Smith, commanding the 9th Marines, decided to send an officer to take temporary command of the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines. The obvious choice was right at hand. Lieutenant Colonel John C. Studt, the regimental operations officer, knew the details of the current operation; he had drafted the regimental frag order implementing the division's directive for the operation.[24] Colonel Smith sent Studt to the Dong Ha airfield to catch a helicopter to the 2d Battalion.

Lieutenant Colonel Studt reached the airfield shortly after medical personnel removed the 2d Battalion's casualties from Lieutenant Colonel Allgood's helicopter. Studt explained his mission and the two officers discussed the chances of succeeding in reaching the 2d Battalion safely. Having had great difficulty in evacuating the four casualties, Allgood advised Studt that he wasn't sure he could make it into the battalion's position. He also pointed out that fog was increasing throughout the whole area. Both officers decided, however, that the situation required that the flight be attempted. Studt climbed into the passenger compartment of the helicopter, which, he noted, still had fresh blood on the floor.[25] Allgood lifted off from the airfield and managed to land the UH-34D inside the battalion perimeter around 0300 on the 26th.

Studt immediately climbed into Captain Brill's foxhole to get an appraisal of the 2d Battalion's situation. The first thing that struck Studt were the gaps in the battalion staff. Each time Studt asked about a key staff position, Brill reported that the respective officer was either a casualty in some hospital or a new officer was filling the position.[26] The battalion had been ground down during a month and a half of heavy fighting.

Company G, released back to the 2d Battalion's control, arrived at the defensive perimeter the following morning. The additional strength was welcome since Lieutenant Colonel Studt had learned he would have to leave one company behind to guard the pile of excess ammunition. Due to other commitments, the regiment reported, there were no helicopters available to move it. "I could not help but note," wrote Studt, "that this short-sighted policy resulted in [III MAF] providing a number of helicopters for emergency medevacs, which might not have been necessary had they been a little more flexible and appreciative of the tactical situation on this operation."[27]

Leaving Company F to guard the ammunition, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines moved toward its objective and occupied it by 1300. Shortly afterward, enemy 60mm mortars hit the battalion as it organized its defenses. One hour later, the NVA struck with a heavy mortar barrage, followed by small arms fire from the west and northwest. The Marines began

*The official reports describe these as rockets, however, Colonel Hammond believes they were actually artillery rounds. Colonel James W. Hammond, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 18May81 (Vietnam comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

taking casualties and requested a helicopter medevac.

In an effort to pick up some of the casualties, Captain Ronald D. Bennett of HMM-363 attempted to land his UH-34D within the 2d Battalion's perimeter. Those on the ground waved him off because of intense enemy fire. As Captain Bennett pulled away, enemy fire hit the rear of the helicopter, separating the tail pylon. The aircraft crashed, rolled and began burning about 150 meters outside the Marine lines. Bennett and a gunner, Corporal Edward Clem, died in the crash. Second Lieutenant Vernon J. Sharpless and Lance Corporal Howard J. Cones, both seriously injured, managed to crawl from the burning wreckage.

A second helicopter from HMM-363, piloted by Captain Frank T. Grassi, tried to land to pick up the survivors but could not. Enemy fire hit Grassi in the leg and arm, damaged the helicopter, and slightly wounded one of the gunners and a Navy hospital corpsman. The aircraft limped away as far as Strong Point C-2 where it made a forced landing.

Captain James E. Murphy, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines' air liaison officer, who had been calling in air strikes in front of Company E, saw Bennett's helicopter go down. With his radio still on his back, Murphy crawled out to the downed helicopter, moving past NVA soldiers in his path. He found the two survivors near the burning helicopter. The three Marines were surrounded and there was no way Murphy could get them back to Marine lines. Fortunately, the enemy soldiers in the area either did not know the three men were there or simply did not care. Captain Murphy could hear NVA soldiers nearby and see some movement, however, and called in air strikes within 50 meters of the crashed helicopter with the aid of an airborne observer in an O-1C aircraft overhead. The latter eventually managed to direct a Marine A-4 attack aircraft to deliver a line of smoke so that a UH-1 helicopter could land and rescue the three Marines.[28]

The rescue helicopter was a UH-1C from the U.S. Army's 190th Helicopter Assault Company whose pilot volunteered to make the pickup. Enemy fire hit the aircraft twice during the rescue and the pilot suffered a minor wound in the arm. The UH-1C also managed to reach Strong Point C-2 where it, too, made a forced landing.

Lieutenant Colonel Studt's observation during his short period of command convinced him of the need for reinforcements. At his request, the 9th Marines ordered the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines at C-2 Bridge to send two companies and a small command group to the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines' position.[29]

Company F still occupied its exposed position and Studt decided to move it within the battalion perimeter. He directed the company to have its attached engineers blow up the excess ammunition, but they were unable to do so.* After several hours of fruitless attempts by the engineers, Studt told the company to leave the ammunition and join the rest of the battalion. The battalion had direct observation of the ammunition pile and would cover it by fire.[30]

Company F reached the perimeter near dusk. The two companies from the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines arrived at about the same time.[31] With these reinforcements, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines was ready for any NVA attacks that evening. Studt recounted the night's subsequent events:

> From before dusk . . . until almost 0200 in the morning, we were under almost continuous attacks by both direct and indirect fire, and our perimeter was hit again and again by ground attacks. . . . The wounded were being accumulated in the vicinity of my CP, which consisted of foxholes, and their suffering was a cause of anguish. After several attempts to medevac them by helicopter were aborted due to intense enemy fire, we came up with the plan that on signal every man on the perimeter would open fire on known or suspected enemy positions . . . for a few minutes with an intense volume of fire. During this brief period, a volunteer pilot . . . succeeded in zipping into the zone and removing our emergency medevacs. The [trick] . . . probably would not have worked again.[32]

The ground attacks ceased around 0200 in the morning of the 27th, but the Marines heard enemy movement for the rest of the night as the North Vietnamese removed their dead and wounded. Dawn revealed 19 enemy bodies within or in sight of the Marine positions. Lieutenant Colonel Studt decided not to send anyone to sweep the area since any movement still drew enemy artillery and mortar fire.[33]

The enemy completed its departure by dawn. The Marines soon did likewise; on orders from the 9th Marines, the battalion made a tactical withdrawal. Still harrassed by enemy rocket and mortar fire and carrying the remainder of its dead and wounded, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines moved by echelon to

*The reason for the failure to detonate the ammunition is not clear from the records. Studt himself wrote in 1981 that he never knew the reason. Col John C. Studt, Comments on draft ms, 9Jul81 (Vietnam comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Strong Point C-2 and then to Cam Lo.[34] During the period 25-27 October, eight 2d Battalion Marines died and 45 suffered wounds giving the battalion an effective strength of around 300 Marines. Known NVA casualties were the 19 bodies counted by the battalion on 27 October.

The battalion moved back to Dong Ha on the 28th and resumed its role as the regimental reserve. Lieutenant Colonel William Wiese took command of the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines and Lieutenant Colonel Studt returned to his duties at the 9th Marines' command post.* That day a message from Lieutenant General Cushman arrived, the last line of which read "2/4 has met and beaten the best the enemy had to offer. Well done."[35]

Kingfisher listed 1,117 enemy killed and five captured; Marine casualties totaled 340 killed and 1,461 wounded. General Westmoreland described the operation as a "crushing defeat" of the enemy.

The Con Thien area remained a grim place. The constant danger of artillery, rocket, and mortar fire, and massed infantry assaults, and the depressing drizzle and mud from which there was no escape, combined to make it miserable for the Marines there. Neuropsychiatric or "shell shock" casualties, relatively unheard of elsewhere in South Vietnam, were not unusual. Duty on and around the drab hill mass was referred to by all Marines as their "Turn in the Barrel," or "the Meatgrinder."[36]

Medina/Bastion Hill/Lam Son 138

On 5 October, in conjunction with the arrival of a fourth U.S. Army brigade in southern I Corps, Colonel Herbert E. Ing, Jr.'s 1st Marines, consisting of two battalions, came under the operational control of the 3d Marine Division and moved north from the Da Nang TAOR to the southern part of Quang Tri Province. On the 11th, the regiment, reinforced by SLF Alpha, started Operation Medina in the rugged hills of the Hai Lang National Forest.** The operation was part of III MAF's comprehensive program to destroy enemy base areas previously left alone because of lack of forces. The Hai Lang forest area south of Quang Tri was the enemy's Base Area 101, the support area for the *5th* and *6th NVA Regiments*. Northeast of the Medina AO, two ARVN airborne battalions conducted Operation Lam Son 138.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189393

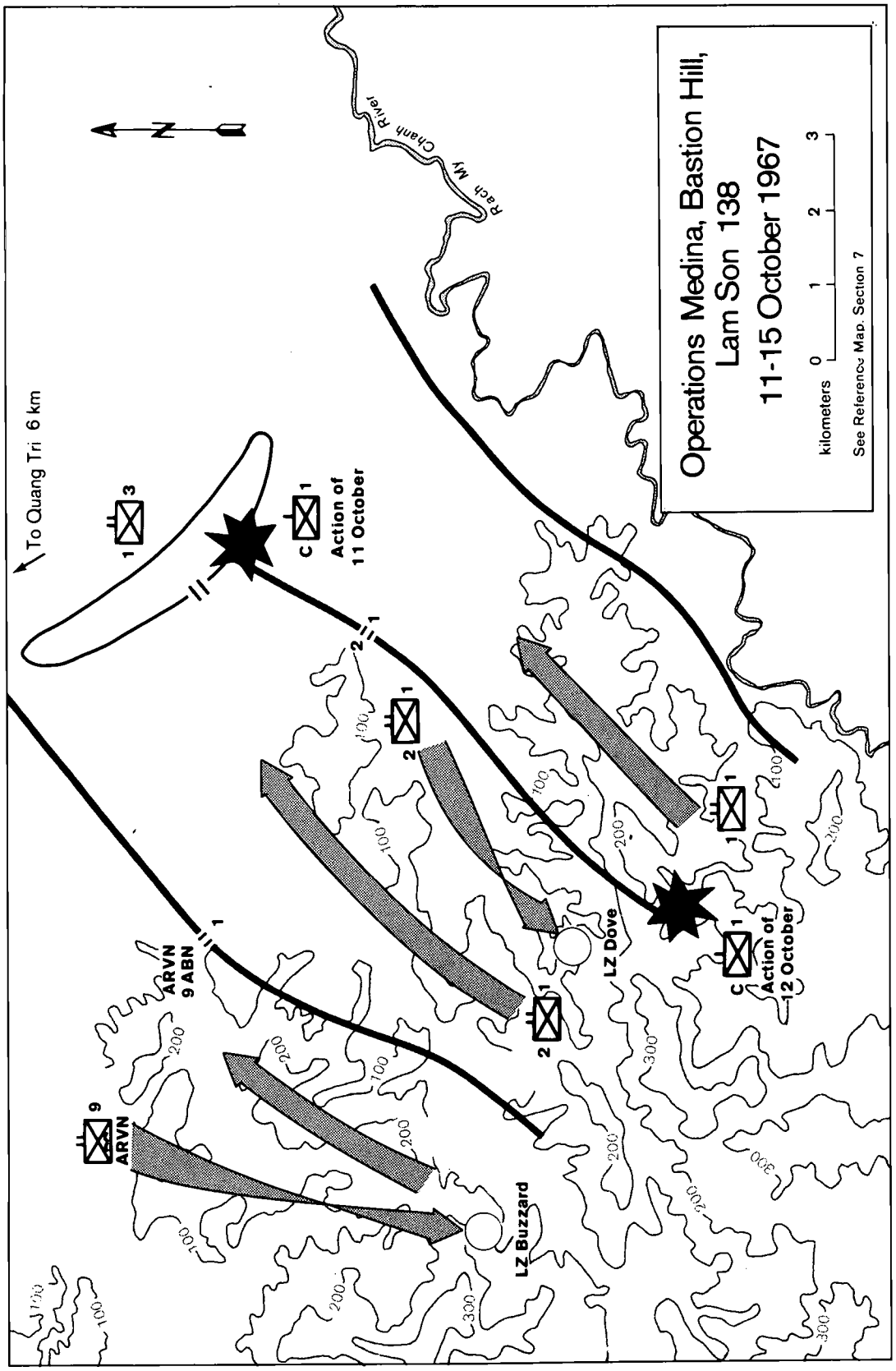
Marines and journalists wait on 2 October in the safety of a trench beside Con Thien's landing zone until the arrival and touchdown of the helicopter that will take them from the base back to Dong Ha.

Medina started as Lieutenant Colonel Albert F. Belbusti's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and Lieutenant Colonel Archie Van Winkle's 2d Battalion, 1st Marines made a helicopter assault landing in the forest. After landing they cleared the area around LZ Dove and then swept in a northeasterly direction while BLT 1/3 blocked to the east. At 0330 on the 11th, Company C of BLT 1/3 came under mortar and small arms fire, followed by a ground assault. The company drove off the attackers and the fighting subsided.

The next day both of the 1st Marines' battalions continued searching to the southwest, while BLT 1/3 remained in its blocking positions. At 1515, Company C, 1st Marines was moving through thick jungle when the point element engaged 10 NVA soldiers. The exchange of fire wounded several Marines. Company C pulled back to a small clearing

*Studt had hoped to retain command but Colonel Smith was more interested in keeping him as the regimental operations officer. "Unfortunately," wrote Smith, "I extolled [Studt's] virtues so much to General Tompkins that he was grabbed later to take over a battalion at Khe Sanh where he distinguished himself." Colonel Richard B. Smith, Comments on draft ms, 21May81 (Vietnam comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

**SLF Alpha's (BLT 1/3) move to its Medina blocking positions had the code-name Operation Bastion Hill.


Operations Medina, Bastion Hill, Lam Son 138
11-15 October 1967
kilometers 0 1 2 3
See Reference Map, Section 7
N
Rach My Chanh River
To Quang Tri 6 km
Action of 11 October
Action of 12 October
LZ Dove
LZ Buzzard
ARVN 9 ABN
9 ARVN
100
200
300

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A421900

Operation Medina begins early on 11 October as two battalions of the 1st Marines make a helicopter assault into Landing Zone Dove in a III MAF drive to clear enemy base areas in the thick Hai Lang forest, located approximately 12 miles south of Quang Tri City.

3d MarDiv ComdC, October 1967

An air observer with the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines directs an air strike early in Operation Medina on enemy positions located on an adjacent ridgeline.

and established a perimeter before calling in helicopters to pick up wounded. Just after the evacuation was completed, three NVA companies attacked Company C from two sides. The firefight continued as darkness fell; hand grenades figured heavily in the exchange. The battle surged back and forth across the small clearing. At the height of the struggle a grenade landed in the company command post. Corporal William T. Perkins, Jr., a combat photographer attached to the company, yelled, "Grenade!" and threw himself on the deadly missile. The explosion killed him.*

Lieutenant Colonel Belbusti reinforced Company C with Company D and the two companies drove off the attacking NVA force. Dawn on the 13th revealed 40 enemy dead around the Marines' position. The enemy attack had killed eight Marines and wounded 39.

After these two fights, the enemy avoided further contact; Medina turned into a search for small groups of North Vietnamese in the nearly impenetrable forests. The 1st Marines did find a number of base camps, but the enemy had evacuated the sites. The Marines captured more than

*Corporal Perkins received a posthumous Medal of Honor, becoming the first Marine combat photographer to receive the nation's highest award. See Appendix D for Corporal Perkins' citation.

four tons of rice, 16 weapons, and a quantity of small arms ammunition.

The enemy's efforts to elude the sweeping Marine units resulted in the largest action of the companion Operation Lam Son 138. On the morning of 20 October, the *416th NVA Battalion,* a subordinate unit of the *5th NVA Regiment* collided with one of the ARVN airborne companies involved in Operation Lam Son 138. The airborne company held and, after reinforcement, killed 197 North Vietnamese in the day-long battle.

Operation Medina ended on the 20th. The SLF battalion transferred to Colonel William L. Dick's 4th Marines, which was conducting Operation Fremont to the south. The 1st Marines stayed in the former Medina area and started Operation Osceola the same day. Osceola was an unspectacular, but systematic, search for enemy forces in the Hai Lang forest.

Adjustments Within the 3d Marine Division

A new series of operations began in November. Only Osceola continued from October. The 3d

3d MarDiv ComdC, October 1967

A Marine with the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines places explosives before blowing a helicopter landing zone in the Hai Lang forest during Operation Medina.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A193856

An LVTP-5 carries members of the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, operating as infantrymen, on a sweep of the shoreline north of the Cua Viet River in September. The battalion continued these patrols in November and December in Operation Napoleon.

Marine Division split the Kingfisher TAOR in two: Kentucky, embracing the region including Gio Linh, Con Thien, Cam Lo, and Dong Ha came under the control of Colonel Richard B. Smith's 9th Marines; and Lancaster, to the west, covered Camp Carroll, the Rockpile, and Ca Lu under Colonel Joseph E. LoPrete's 3d Marines. The division renamed Operation Ardmore at Khe Sanh to Scotland and continued it as a one-battalion operation under the control of Colonel David E. Lownds' 26th Marines. On the coast, the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion conducted Operation Napoleon north of the Cua Viet River. In Thua Thien Province, Colonel William L. Dick's 4th Marines continued to cover approaches to Hue City west of Route 1 as Operation Neosho replaced Fremont. The 3d Marine Division had tactical responsibility for all territory west of Highway 1 in the northern two provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien, while the 1st ARVN Division was responsible for all terrain east of the road except for the Napoleon operational area north of the Cua Viet River.

Artillery support for all of these operations came from Colonel Edwin S. Schick, Jr.'s 12th Marines. Composed of five Marine artillery battalions, three Army artillery battalions, and two Marine separate

batteries, it was the largest artillery regiment in the history of the Marine Corps. The reinforced regiment's 220 weapons[37] were located throughout the division TAOR. Each infantry regiment could call upon a direct support battalion of 105mm howitzers. In addition, the artillery regiment's medium 155mm howitzers and guns, and heavy 8-inch howitzers and 175mm guns, provided reinforcing or general support fires.

While the new operations were beginning, the division headquarters at Phu Bai prepared for a visit from Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey on 1 November. After the stop at the division command post, the Vice President flew over the division's area of operations. Upon his return to Da Nang, he presented the Presidential Unit Citation to the 3d Marine Division for "extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance of duty in action against North Vietnamese and insurgent Communist forces in the Republic of Vietnam from 8 March 1965 to 15 September 1967."

After pinning the streamer on the division colors, the Vice President warmly congratulated the division commander, Major General Hochmuth. This was the last official ceremony that the general attended. Major General Hochmuth died on 14 November when his UH-1E exploded and crashed five miles northwest of Hue.

Colonel William L. Dick, commanding the 4th Marines at Phu Bai, learned of the crash around 1400 on 14 November. Since he had a helicopter sitting on a pad at his headquarters, Dick, accompanied by his operations officer, Major James D. Beans, and the regimental sergeant major, quickly reached the crash scene. Colonel Dick described the rescue attempt:

> After several passes, I spotted the Huey upside down in a rice paddy filled to the brim by the heavy rains which had been falling for several weeks. . . . I directed the helicopter pilot to land on the paddy dike nearest the crash site from where the three of us walked through about 200 yards of paddy water until we reached the wreckage. There were flames on the water's surface around the aircraft. While the sergeant major attempted to extinguish these, Major Beans and I commenced diving beneath the surface, groping through the water for possible survivors. We had no idea just how long it had been since the crash had occurred. This was a difficult task, as you can imagine, since the water was full of silt, not to mention leeches, and impossible to see through. The three of us were joined by a Vietnamese farmer who refused to identify himself and could be distinguished only by a small gold crucifix around

A machine gun team from Company F, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines pauses during its movement in November in Operation Lancaster in the 9th Marines' portion of the former Operation Kingfisher area. The team wears its ammunition bandolier-style.

3d MarDiv ComdC, November 1967

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A190235

MajGen Bruno A. Hochmuth, the commanding general of the 3d Marine Division, wearing a rainsuit as protection from the monsoon, sits in a UH-1E helicopter prior to a routine inspection of the divisional area on 7 November, one week prior to his death.

his neck. The four of us, after getting rid of the aviation fuel flames, repeatedly went below the surface into the helicopter cabin and by touch, finally found the bodies, one by one, of the six who had died in the crash. The helicopter had turned upside down just before impact which made the situation even more difficult. The last body recovered was General Hochmuth. I found him in the rear seat of the helicopter, the spot where he usually traveled when visiting the various command posts.[38]

Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins, a veteran of more than 32 years' Marine service and holder of the Navy Cross as a battalion commander at Saipan, received immediate orders as General Hochmuth's replacement. Brigadier General Louis Metzger, the assistant division commander, assumed command until General Tompkins arrived from the United States on 28 November.

One of General Tompkins' first steps after his arrival was to discuss the overall situation with his division operations officer, Colonel James R. Stockman, who had commanded an 81mm mortar platoon under Tompkins on Saipan. "Tell me," said Tompkins, "about the operational folklore in the division's area of operations." Stockman replied with, among other things, descriptions of the enemy and the terrain and the frustrations of fighting under the

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189947

MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins inspects an honor guard on 28 November during the ceremony at Da Nang in which he assumed command of the 3d Marine Division after MajGen Hochmuth's death.

restrictions imposed by MACV and Washington. Stockman recalled that Tompkins disliked the system which considered infantry battalions as interchangeable parts to be shifted from one regimental headquarters to another, depending upon the tactical situation. Tompkins accepted it, however, as "temporary operational folklore," which he would have to live with. "He faced," wrote Stockman, "a worsening operational situation in the late part of 1967 with as much fortitude and optimism as humanly possible."[39]

During November and December, the most significant activity in the 3d Marine Division's zone of action was small unit fighting near the strongpoint obstacle system around Con Thien and Gio Linh. In November, platoon and company-size NVA units operated from well camouflaged bunkers in the area, trying to ambush Marine patrols and to hinder the system's construction. The Marines countered with attacks that drove the NVA units out of their positions on four different occasions during November, killing 65 Communists. In addition, Marine patrols found and destroyed three extensive bunker systems. On 29 November, three Marine battalions and two ARVN battalions began clearing operations within the Kentucky TAOR between Con Thien and Gio Linh, the planned site of Strong Point A-3 of the proposed barrier plan, or "McNamara wall." The Marine units swept south of Con Thien eastward to Site A-3, while the ARVN units moved from near Gio Linh westward to clear a road to the strong point location. The following day, Lieutenant Colonel William M. Cryan's 2d Battalion, 9th Marines found a North Vietnamese company in bunkers two and one-half miles northeast of Con Thien. The battalion maneuvered to envelop the enemy and overran the position by 1800, killing 41 defenders. Marine casualties totaled 15 killed and 53 wounded requiring evacuation.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189997

A patrol from Company F, 9th Marines, part of the screening effort during the construction of Strongpoint A-3, moves out carefully after finding fresh enemy footprints and bunkers on 22 December.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189948

Company G, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines engages an NVA unit on 3 December during the portion of Operation Kentucky conducted to prevent enemy interference with the construction of Strongpoint A-3 of the barrier system south of the DMZ. The 3d Marine Division originally planned to call this protective effort Operation Newton but decided on 28 November to consider it as simply part of Kentucky.

Although the Marine and ARVN units continued screening operations north of A-3 during December, the largest engagement during the month took place southeast of Gio Linh in the Napoleon area of operation. Lieutenant Colonel Edward R. Toner's 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion and Company F, 2d Battalion, 4th Marines were protecting the movement of building materials to Strongpoint C-4 on the coast, two kilometers north of the Cua Viet River. Company F, under the operational control of the tractor battalion, occupied Strongpoint C-4. Platoon and

squad patrols routinely operated 2,000 meters north of C-4 as forward security for both the strongpoint and the battalion's position at Cua Viet port facility.

Early in the afternoon of the 10th, two squads patrolled near the fishing village of Ha Loi Tay. Their operational area was a sea of sand dunes, interrupted by a strip of scrub pine growth and hedgerows dotting the coastline. As they approached a break in the coastal tree line south of the village, sniper fire surprised them. The Marines fired back, killing eight North Vietnamese. The enemy fire killed one Marine and wounded three in this brief encounter.

As the Marines checked the area, they discovered 20-25 NVA soldiers, some wearing American helmets and flak jackets. The Marines opened fire and called for reinforcements. The company commander, First Lieutenant Michael H. Gavlick, radioed the situation to the battalion CP, and then took a platoon and the third squad of the engaged platoon forward to join the battle.

Contact continued throughout the afternoon. Before dark, Lieutenant Colonel Toner ordered two provisional rifle platoons from his Company B and two LVTH-6s to go to the scene of contact to assist. As darkness settled, Lieutenant Gavlick drew his composite force into a tight perimeter. At 0630 on the 11th, the composite unit moved out under a light drizzle toward the area of the previous day's action. At 0800, lead elements spotted 40 of the enemy trying to move south across the break in the tree line. The Marines observed 11 NVA soldiers digging a mortar position and another 15 moving behind a sand dune to the north. While the Marines took these enemy under fire with artillery and the LVTH-6s, Lieutenant Colonel Toner moved his Company A, organized as an infantry unit, and his command group to Strong Point C-4. At the same time, the U.S. advisor with the ARVN battalion occupying Strong Point A-1, 2,500 meters across the sand dunes west of the contact, asked if his battalion could help. Toner asked the ARVN battalion to move a unit into a blocking position southwest of the action. The NVA force had moved around to the west of the Marines and were now attacking from the south. The advisor informed Toner that an ARVN company would move to the desired blocking position. Fifteen of the enemy had already attacked the Marines and, although driven off, had fired 10 RPG antitank rounds. One of these rounds hit a LVTH-6 on the bow, but the round glanced off without damaging the tractor. The LVTH-6 destroyed the antitank gunners' position with direct 105mm howitzer fire.

The number of enemy troops involved in the battle increased. A 30-minute firefight began; Gavlick's composite company took heavy small arms fire from three sides, then the Communists began hitting the Marines with mortars. Throughout the action, the two LVTH-6s maneuvered back and forth to engage the enemy, often firing at ranges between 50 to 150 meters. The remaining four LVTH-6s at Cua Viet and a detachment of 4.2-inch mortars at C-4 added their fire to the battle.

As the Marines tightened their perimeter, the NVA made a second assault. Fifty-five of the enemy attacked from the north, 12 more came in from the northeast, and 20 others from the south. Again, mortar fire supported their assault. The Marines responded with artillery, and used naval gunfire to hold back enemy reinforcements. The Communist assault failed, but individual soldiers continued to pop up around the perimeter. One audacious NVA mortar crew, protected by infantry, went into action on an exposed sand dune only 90 meters from the Marine perimeter. They fired six rounds before machine guns and direct fire from one of the LVTH-6s killed them.

3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967

PFC F. N. Bunton carries a small Christmas tree on his pack while on Operation Kentucky with Company C, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines in December.

By this time, the ARVN company had crossed the sand dunes and was moving into its blocking position. As it entered the position, the company spotted a mortar crew that had been giving the Marines trouble from the southwest. After a brief fire fight the enemy mortar crew ran away to the north, leaving two bodies behind. After this, the fighting dwindled to sniper fire.

Lieutenant Colonel Toner ordered Company A to sweep the area north of C-4 and clear it of any remaining NVA soldiers. At the same time, he ordered Lieutenant Gavlick to withdraw his composite company to C-4. Artillery and naval gunfire continued to shell the tree line north of the battle position. As Lieutenant Gavlick's force moved south, they found a supply dump bordered by communications wire strung waist high from trees as a guide. The site contained many full storage bins, dug into the sand dunes next to the trail. Live vegetation camouflaged their trap-door entrances. The Marines destroyed the bins as they discovered them, after which they returned to Stongpoint C-4. The day-long battle resulted in 54 enemy known killed, while the composite Marine unit suffered 20 wounded.

As the year came to a close, all of the operations which had started in November remained in progress. Although contact was light, there were signs of renewed enemy activity in the Scotland TAOR. Intelligence officers reported at least two NVA divisions, the *325C* and *304th,* moving into the Khe Sanh region. Because of these reports, General Tompkins strengthened Khe Sanh with an additional battalion during December and prepared to deploy more reinforcements on short notice. The year 1967 ended as it had begun; a major invasion of northern Quang Tri Province appeared to be the enemy's next move.

PART V
SPECIAL EFFORTS

CHAPTER 11

The Special Landing Force

Doctrine Versus Expedient—Forming a Second SLF—Continuing Operations Throughout the Year

Doctrine Versus Expedient

In 1967 the Seventh Fleet's Special Landing Force (SLF) was the Pacific Command's strategic reserve for all of Southeast Asia, as well as Vietnam. The SLF contained a Marine command element of approximately the same organization as an infantry regimental staff; a Marine battalion landing team, consisting of a Marine infantry battalion reinforced by artillery, a small logistics support unit, and other elements to support independent operation; and a Marine helicopter squadron. The Marine SLF commander reported directly to the Navy amphibious commander. Although under the overall operational control of the Seventh Fleet, the SLF was readily available for MACV use in Vietnam.

SLF operations in 1967 concentrated in I Corps. The reasons for this change in practice were not entirely the result of a national level strategy for the conduct of the war. Without considering the Communists' strategy, there were sufficient conflicting interests within the many command levels of the U.S. Armed Forces to cause diverse opinions of the most appropriate use of this unique striking force.

Opinions were divided even within the Marine Corps. In III MAF, Marine division and wing commanders wanted to control their own battalions and squadrons which were siphoned off to man the SLF. Continuing reappraisals of required troop strength to "do the job" in I Corps amplified this desire. MACV and III MAF did not want troops floating off the coast when they could be "in country" and, most probably, in contact. However, the personnel in the SLF did not count against the "in-country" authorized troop strength ceilings and, as one operations officer noted, the SLF at least served as a source of emergency reinforcements following commitment of a division's reserve.[1] Other Marine commanders, primarily those outside Vietnam, such as Brigaider General Louis Metzger of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade on Okinawa, advocated a close adherence to approved amphibious doctrine. General Metzger later wrote, "As Commanding General, 9th MAB, and at the direction of CG, FMFPac, Lieutenant General Krulak, I was precise in following the established amphibious operational command relationships and logistic support. It was a constant struggle, particularly with the Wing and Division commanders."[2]

Compounding the problem was the Seventh Fleet's position, reinforced by approved doctrine, that the Navy-Marine amphibious capability provided by the Amphibious Ready Group/Special Landing Force organization added great flexibility to the allied strategic options, as well as the Vietnamese tactical situation. U.S. Air Force considerations entered into the controversy because of air space control requirements. A final, but certainly not overriding, consideration in the III MAF stance was the Marine Corps' situation in I Corps. If additional MACV, in this case U.S. Army, troops could be released to go into lower I Corps, the 1st Marine Division would be able to move north to cover Da Nang, thereby allowing the 3d Marine Division to concentrate in northern I Corps. This would permit the 1st and 2d ARVN Divisions to devote their energies to pacification. These moves, however, could occur only if the Marine divisions could accomplish their mission without the SLF battalion. In January of 1967, all of the ramifications of this complex situation were not in evidence, but two basic questions were starting to form. What Marine formations would provide the SLF with its landing forces and where should it be used?

The Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) gained an additional landing ship, tank (LST) in January 1967, bringing the ARG ship total to five. The other ships in the group were: an amphibious assault ship (LPH), a dock landing ship (LSD), an attack transport (APA), and an amphibious transport dock (LPD).

Early in 1967, the Joint Chiefs of Staff made two significant decisions. They authorized the formation

of a second SLF and directed CinCPac to commit both SLFs to extended operations in Vietnam. Neither of these decisions were restrictive as far as the location of SLF landings, but the provision of the required logistic support provided a major reason why SLF operations became a purely I Corps function.

Under the heading of "Logistic Support for the Special Landing Force" in April, FMFPac's report of Marine operations in Vietnam revealed a major reason for concentrating SLF operations in I Corps; the support structure dictated operational location. The report stated:

> With the decision by the Joint Chiefs of Staff . . . to commit the SLFs to extended operations in Vietnam, the normal logistic support procedure required some changes. The CG, III MAF now provides logistic support when the SLF operates in areas contiguous to III MAF logistic installations. When operating in areas isolated from established logistic support areas, ground units of the SLF utilize their own resources, with stocks reconstituted as practicable from the Force Logistic Command. While operating from the LPH, aviation units of the SLF will be supported by the LPH but, when operating ashore in the III MAF area of operations, support by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing will augment that positioned by 9th MAB aboard ship. If the operations ashore extend beyond 15 days, support of helicopters will become the responsibility of CG, III MAF. When the SLF operates ashore in locations other than I CTZ (after 15 days), CG, III MAF will provide only aeronautical spares and special support equipment. All other logistic support responsibilities will remain with CG, 9th MAB [on Okinawa].*

A final determinant for SLF commitments which received due consideration was the Communist plan for 1967. As the year opened with the sour memory of an uneasy and far from inviolate 48-hour New Year's truce, there were continuing indications of enemy buildups and unit movements in and north of the DMZ. As events proved, the Marine occupation of the bases at Con Thien and remote, but vital, Khe Sanh alarmed the Communists, but at this early stage of the year there were no clear indications of Communist intentions in northern I Corps. Elsewhere in the corps area, the enemy obviously would continue to exert as much pressure as possible on allied units in order to immobilize or at least distract them. The year 1967 tested the validity of the SLF concept as the Communists forced the expedient of long and often unrewarding SLF commitments on the Marine commanders in I Corps.

Operation Deckhouse V
6 - 15 January 1967

The first SLF operation of 1967, Deckhouse V, was significant for two reasons. It was a sizable, combined U.S. Marine and Vietnamese Marine amphibious operation. More ominously, for the proponents of the SLF concept, it was the last SLF landing to take place beyond the boundaries of I Corps.

The ARG, under Captain John D. Westervelt, USN, with Colonel Harry D. Wortman's SLF embarked, steamed south to the coast of Kien Hoa Province in IV Corps for the landing. Deckhouse V was the only SLF operation for Major James L. Day's BLT 1/9 and it marked the end of SLF duty for Lieutenant Colonel Marshall B. Armstrong's HMM-362.

D-day for Deckhouse V was 6 January. Both BLT 1/9 and elements of Vietnamese Marine Brigade Force Bravo, primarily consisting of the 3d and 4th Vietnamese Marine Battalions, enjoyed support throughout the operation from HMM-362's mixed force of UH-34 and CH-46 helicopters operating from the USS *Iwo Jima* (LPH 2). The combined seaborne and heliborne force assaulted an area of suspected Viet Cong concentrations on the coast between the Co Chien and Ham Luong reaches of the Mekong River. Lasting until 15 January, the operation produced unspectacular results. The combined force killed only 21 Viet Cong, destroyed two small arms workshops, and captured 44 weapons and 42 tons of rice. Seven U.S. Marines died and one Vietnamese Marine died accidentally.

Some participants attributed Deckhouse V's failure to information leaks. The Marines encountered only local force VC in the operational area, but prisoners stated that larger VC units had been there before the landings. Someone told Captain Westervelt—he did not hear it himself—that a Philippine radio station broadcast the news when the ARG departed Subic Bay that the Marines were headed for the Mekong Delta.[3]

Many other difficulties marred the execution of the combined operation. Communications were bad, rough seas interfered, planning was hurried, and on D plus 1 the 4th Battalion VNMC endured a

*"When the 9th MAB assumed responsibility for Marine aviation and ground units in the Western Pacific which were not in Vietnam, it became an important part of SLF operations. . . . The Brigade's aviation component, MAG-15, became a composite MAG consisting of helicopters, KC-130s, and fixed-wing attack and fighter aircraft, and, as such, was one of the largest air groups we have ever had." Col David O. Takala, Comments on draft ms, 2Jun81 (Vietnam comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A191246

Two men of BLT 1/9 look out over some of the flooded rice paddies that hampered mobility in Vietnam's Delta region during Operation Deckhouse V in January 1967.

near record-breaking ship-to-shore landing-craft move of 23 miles, rivaled only by some of the U.S. shore-to-shore operations in the Pacific during World War II. Captain Westervelt recalled these difficulties:

> The Navy aspects of the Deckhouse V landings were formidable. Normal operating depths of water for the LPH, LPD and other deep draft ships in the Amphibious Ready Group were about 8 to 10 miles to seaward off the coastal areas of Kien Hoa between the Co Chien and Ham Loung Rivers. The 8-inch gun cruiser *Canberra* had a fire support station some eight miles, as I recall, from the impact areas for her pre-assault bombardment. Water depths adequate for LST and rocket ship passage over the shallow bar into positions for the assault landings obtained only at high tide. Because an early morning landing time was required for the Marine assault forces in the LVT5 vehicles, this meant that, to protect the surprise features of the landings, the LST's and rocket ships had to proceed over the bar late in the preceding evening at high tide to be in position by dawn. . . .
>
> The long distance off-shore required by the principal ARG ships plus the fact that some landing beaches were well upstream from the seaward beaches accounted for the long boat rides (up to 23 miles) required for some of the troops.
>
> The seas were very rough on the original D-Day (4 Jan) and again on 5 Jan, so the actual D-Day on 6 Jan was 2 days late. However, even on the 6th it was not possible to load the [Vietnamese Marines] from the *Henrico* into LCM6's alongside, so *Henrico, Thomaston* and *Vancouver* returned to Vung Tau, transferred *Henrico's* troops to the LPD and LSD so loading could take place in the well decks. The [Vietanamese Marines] actually landed on the 7th.[4]*

The operation encountered problems at an even higher level. Amphibious doctrine called for the amphibious task force commander to control all aircraft in the amphibious operations area. Normally, these aircraft would come from the Navy and Marine Corps. The location of Deckhouse V created special circumstances, however, that dictated that all air support come from the Seventh Air Force. As Brigadier General John R. Chaisson later recalled, the commander of Seventh Air Force, Major General William W. Momyer, agreed with Navy control of aircraft in a traditional amphibious assault against a hostile shore. In the Mekong Delta, however, with the Air Force air control system already in place, General Momyer saw no valid reason to change the existing system just because an amphibious force

*See Chapter 12 for the U.S. Marine advisors' accounts of the VNMC participation in Deckhouse V.

temporarily was operating in the area. General Westmoreland backed the Navy in this argument in this case but all future SLF operations were to be in the I Corps area where such complicated command relationships could be avoided.[5]

Deckhouse VI/Desoto
16 February - 3 March 1967

During late January the two main components of the SLF changed. Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth E. Huntington's HMM-363 relieved HMM-362 and Lieutenant Colonel Jack Westerman's BLT 1/4 replaced BLT 1/9. Sailing from the Philippines, the newly constituted SLF arrived off the coast of Vietnam on the 14th of February.

While the SLF underwent its transition, significant changes occurred in I Corps. To release more ARVN troops for pacification work, U.S. Marine Task Force X-Ray, commanded by Brigadier General William A. Stiles, relieved Vietnamese troops of combat duties in southern Quang Ngai Province in January. General Stiles promptly initiated Operation Desoto, a search and destroy operation directed against known Communist strongholds in the region. To augment Desoto, the SLF received orders to operate in an area south of Task Force X-Ray's AO. The SLF operation was Deckhouse VI. As in Deckhouse V, Colonel Wortman commanded the SLF and Captain Westervelt, the ARG.[6]

The mission assigned to the SLF ground element, BLT 1/4, called for it to disrupt enemy movement in the Sa Huynh salt flats, search northward in the Nui Dau area, and, finally, link up with the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, then operating around Nui Dau in Operation Desoto.

At 0800 on 16 February, two rocket-firing landing ships started the naval gunfire preparation for the Deckhouse VI landings. Fifty-five minutes later, the first wave of HMM-363's helicopters lifted off the deck of the *Iwo Jima* and headed inland with the assault company, Company A. Company C landed in LVTs near Tach By and helicopters ferried the rest of the battalion inland. The landings were unopposed.

Brigadier General Louis Metzger, the commanding general of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade based on Okinawa, was there to observe this landing and commented later on the assault phase. He wrote:

> Because of the insistence of MACV a NOTAM [Notice to Airmen] was published several days before each amphibious operation, I suppose to protect any commercial air in the area. It didn't take a very effective intelligence system for the Viet Cong and/or NVA to know just where and when a landing was going to take place. Secondly, I was concerned that even though this landing was taking place in a populated area, the amphibious force carried out routine naval gunfire and air strikes. . . . Civilian casualties did result. Following the operation, I discussed the matter with Commander 7th Fleet [Admiral John H. Hyland] and he supported my position. At least as long as I was CG 9th MAB the NGF and Air Strikes in future landings in populated areas were on call.[7]

Captain Westervelt later commented on a number of problems encountered during the assault landing in Deckhouse VI. He wrote:

> Deckhouse VI was treated as a regular assault landing complete with heavy pre-assault fires for the boat landings. In retrospect, because of the U.S. Army forces operating just to the south and west and U.S. Marines operating to the north and west of the assault area, the pre-assault fires should have been "on call." There were weather problems at Deckhouse VI when heavy fog and rain obscured the landing zones on D-Day and caused a one-day postponement. Surface landings could have been carried out. The cruiser firing pre-assault fires commenced fire in spite of D-Day cancellation and probably gave some indication to any VC in the area that something unusual might be scheduled. However, this was improbable because the area was normally frequented by gunfire support destroyers.
>
> The population of the villages just south of Sa Huynh congregated on the eastern face of a ridge, which sloped up from the boat landing area, to watch the Marine landing show. Originally, the pre-assault fires had included this area, but this had been changed on the advice of a representative from the Province Chief's staff on board the flagship. He pointed with a dirty finger to the ridge and forced out his interpretation of "Friend" in English. We took him at his word and put those particular fires "on call."[8]

The opening phase of Deckhouse VI was uneventful. The SLF planners had suspected this would be the case. True to form, local Communist units concentrated on delaying and harassing tactics. The BLT confirmed the Communist presence in the area by destroying 167 fortifications and capturing 20 tons of assorted supplies during the 32 days of Phase I. Though there never were any major contacts, the BLT claimed 201 VC killed during this period; only six Marines died. Unfortunately, on 25 February, the HMM-363 commander, Lieutenant Colonel Huntington, and his copilot received wounds during a troop lift; the squadron executive officer, Major Marvin E. Day, assumed command on the 28th and continued in command for the duration of

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A191174

Heavy monsoon rains flooded the wide expanse of rice paddies through which these Marines are wading during Operation Deckhouse VI near the coast in February 1967.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A191131

A member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines hits the deck as his unit comes under fire in Landing Zone Bat during Deckhouse VI, the SLF's companion piece to Operation Desoto in February.

Deckhouse VI. Phase I ended on 26 February when the SLF Commander, Colonel Wortman, ordered a tactical withdrawal of the SLF from the Sa Huynh area to its ships to prepare for Phase II.

Only 14 and one-half hours after the last element of the battalion left the Sa Huynh salt flats, the SLF landed again, this time 10 kilometers north of Sa Huynh. Phase II of Deckhouse VI, by now integrated as part of the combined 7th Marines and ARVN Operation Desoto, started at 0830 on 27 February.

As the SLF helicopters approached LZ Bat, five miles inland from the beach, they met heavy fire which hit eight of the 14 helicopters in the assault lift, and put six out of action. All other loaded helicopters diverted to the beach area while supporting Marine aircraft strafed and rocketed the VC defenders. Fortunately for the isolated Marines of the assault element, the Communists pulled out and that afternoon the rest of the battalion linked up with its first wave. By dark the BLT had consolidated near LZ Bat and began preparations for the next day's search and destroy operation.

Other than the opposed landing at LZ Bat, Phase

Infantrymen from BLT 1/4 rush a wounded Marine to a waiting CH-34D helicopter from HMM-363 for a flight to the amphibious ship USS Iwo Jima *on 23 February 1967 during Operation Deckhouse VI.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188499

II action almost repeated Phase I. Occasional contact and intermittent sniper fire marked the only enemy reactions. In the six days required to accomplish the second phase, the battalion killed 78 more VC, destroyed 145 fortifications, and captured an additional five tons of supplies. Similarly, as in Phase I, the price totaled six more Marines dead. Deckhouse VI concluded on 3 March and the SLF promptly sailed for the Philippines; it returned to Vietnam, however, long before the month ended.

Beacon Hill I

20 March - 1 April 1967

In the spring of 1967, III MAF faced a growing Communist capability to overrun the Marine base at Gio Linh and its appealing prize of four 175mm guns. Units of the 3d Marine Division committed to Operation Prairie remained thinly spread over an extremely large area. Still more unsettling, intelligence sources reported five NVA infantry battalions in or near the eastern portion of the DMZ.

In response to this threat, the SLF, offshore since 14 March, went into action once more on the 20th.* Lieutenant Colonel Westerman's BLT 1/4, and HMM-363 commanded by newly-promoted Lieutenant Colonel Day, the former squadron executive officer, landed on the coast north of the Cua Viet. Operation Beacon Hill had begun.

*The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing reinforced HMM-363 with a detachment of UH-1Es and CH-53s.

A Navy hospital corpsman with Company D, 4th Marines treats a wounded Marine under fire in Operation Beacon Hill north of Cua Viet in March.

3d MarDiv ComdC, March 1967

3d MarDiv ComdC, March 1967

An unshaven Marine rifleman carefully removes enemy equipment from a bunker in the North Vietnamese defense line destroyed in Operation Beacon Hill by BLT 1/4 on 26 March after an intense two-day preliminary bombardment by air and artillery.

Contact was light until 21 March when the BLT engaged about 80 NVA troops, killing 14. The next day the battalion made contact again between Gio Linh and Con Thien. After a stiff fight the enemy, apparently a company, withdrew leaving 43 bodies behind. Progress during both days was slow because the NVA laced their positions with connecting tunnels which required detailed search.

On the 26th, after a two-day air and artillery preparation, the BLT broke through two well-prepared defensive trench lines. Again, the Marines encountered interconnecting tunnels. Finding the tunnels required care because the enemy had concealed them skillfully among the hedgerows. As the battalion cracked the position, the Communists again withdrew. Only sniper fire and minor rear guard actions slowed the advancing Marines. On 28 March, BLT 1/4 shifted to the operational control of the 3d Marines and occupied a blocking position 1,300 meters south of the Con Thien perimeter in support of a 3d Marines attack. This was the last phase of Beacon Hill and the operation ended on 1 April.

Beacon Hill results appeared promising. Although BLT 1/4 had suffered 29 Marines killed and 230 wounded, it reported 334 NVA dead even though the Communists had fought from positions which were difficult to identify, much less exploit.

With the end of Beacon Hill, the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines transferred from the SLF to the 3d Marine Division. The 3d Battalion, 4th Marines,

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188496

LCpl Claude Tucker stands guard while the commanders of the two Special Landing Forces, Col Henry D. Wortman (center) of SLF Bravo and Col James A. Gallo of SLF Alpha look over a suspected Viet Cong on the first day of Operation Deckhouse VI.

commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Wendell N. Vest, a regular line battalion scheduled for rehabilitation on Okinawa, started loading on board the empty ships of the ARG shipping on 2 April. The transports sailed on the 5th.

While this exchange of units, ships, and roles took place, Marines on Okinawa were implementing the twin SLF concept. HMM-363 and the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines joined SLF Alpha (Task Group 79.4) and the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines and HMM-164 became part of SLF Bravo (Task Group 79.5) battalion. Task Group 79.5 had operated as the single SLF since 1965, but during the transitional period of March-April 1967, TG 79.5, now designated SLF Bravo, went through a standdown phase. Neither of the SLFs were in an offshore ready position during early April 1967. SLF Alpha, on board the ARG ships which sailed on 10 April, arrived on station near the DMZ on the 18th. The ships carrying SLF Bravo followed shortly thereafter, sailing on 17 April.[9]

Beacon Star
22 April - 12 May 1967

Beacon Star was the first operation for newly designated SLF Bravo. As Navy Captain Richard L. Cochrane's ARG steamed toward northern I CTZ, Colonel Wortman, the SLF commander since September 1966, experienced normal prelanding doubts and anxieties. One reassuring factor was that both of his major subordinate units were I Corps veterans. The helicopter squadron, HMM-164, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Rodney D. McKitrick, had been in Vietnam since February 1966, and Lieutenant Colonel Earl R. Delong's BLT 2/3 originally arrived "in country" in May of 1965. Additional confidence stemmed from the fact that the BLT had just come from a one-month rehabilitation period on Okinawa. It was at full strength and all equipment was ready for combat.

The target area for Beacon Star was a major VC stronghold and supply area along the border of Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces. The small O Lau River is the natural terrain feature which delineates the provincial borders in the coastal region. The center of the Beacon Star amphibious objective area (AOA) was 27 kilometers northwest of Hue, on the edge of what French soldiers called "*La Rue Sans Joie,*" or "The Street Without Joy." The

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A193880

Col James A. Gallo briefs senior Marines on 7 May on SLF Alpha's progress in Operation Beacon Star near the border of Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces. Prominent among the officers present are (seated, left) LtGen Victor H. Krulak and MajGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr. MajGen Herman Nickerson, Jr. and BGen Foster C. Lahue stand at left.

AOA was known for its heavy concentration of Communists; intelligence officers reported two battalions of the *6th Regiment* and two main force battalions, the *810th* and the *814th*, were operating in the region.

The Beacon Star scheme of maneuver consisted of a waterborne and heliborne BLT landing on the coast. The battalion was to move inland, generally following the O Lau River, while, at the same time, gradually expanding its TAOR in a southwesterly direction.

Bad weather and poor visibility delayed operations on D-day, 22 April, but the first heliborne company landed at 0809. It met no opposition.* Beacon Star progressed according to plan; enemy resistance was minimal. On D plus four the battalion launched a combined helicopter and overland assault in the southwestern portion of the expanded TAOR to attack an estimated 250 VC spotted in the target area. Unfortunately, the BLT was not able to capitalize on this intelligence.

Urgent orders from the Commander Task Group 79.5 interrupted Beacon Star. The Phase I casualties, one killed and 10 wounded, would seem insignificant in the face of what happened in the next 24 hours. The new SLF Bravo was about to undergo its first real combat test. On 26 April, the name Khe Sanh was just another place name to many of Lieutenant Colonel Delong's Marines; by mid-March those who survived would never forget it.

While Phase I of Beacon Star proceeded, the Marines of the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines discovered strong Communist formations in the hills west of Khe Sanh, 43 miles from the Beacon Star area. Realizing that one battalion could not carry the hill mass, the 3d Marine Division commander, Major General Hochmuth, ordered BLT 2/3 to break off operations in the original Beacon Star AOA and proceed to Khe Sanh.

The tactical move to Khe Sanh was a transportation triumph. At 1200 on the 26th, the division placed BLT 2/3, in the field and in contact with the enemy, under the operational control of the 3d Marines. By 1400, three of the BLT's companies and the command group were at Khe Sanh, and by 1600 the BLT effected a link-up with elements of the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines northwest of the Khe Sanh perimeter. The BLT moved by helicopter from the Beacon Star AOA to Phu Bai, and from Phu Bai to Khe Sanh by Marine and U.S. Air Force KC-130 and C-130 Hercules transports. The total elapsed time from receipt of the warning order until the link-up near Khe Sanh totaled less than seven hours.

The second phase of Beacon Star is more commonly known as "The Khe Sanh Hill Fights" or the "First

*BLT 2/3 suffered approximately 60 heat casualties within about a three-hour period after landing. Colonel Rodney D. McKitrick later cited such incidents as part of the justification for the placing of an acclimatization room in the new *Tawara* class LHAs. Colonel Rodney D. McKitrick, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981) (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Battle of Khe Sanh."* The BLT's casualties during the period 27April-12 May gave evidence of the violence of the fighting for the Khe Sanh hills. During these weeks the BLT lost 71 killed and 349 wounded, more than a fourth of its strength. Of the 78 Navy corpsmen assigned to the BLT, five died and 15 suffered wounds.

The fighting at Khe Sanh tapered off in May and SLF Bravo's BLT 2/3 transferred from the 3d Marines' operational control back to the SLF. The return to ARG ships started on 10 May and finished on the 12th, signaling the official end of Beacon Star.

Beaver Cage/Union I
28 April - 12 May 1967

The other special landing force, SLF Alpha, formed on Okinawa on 1 March 1967 under the command of Colonel James A. Gallo, Jr. The new SLF contained BLT 1/3, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Peter A. "Pete" Wickwire, and HMM-263, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Edward K. Kirby. Both the helicopter squadron and the battalion had just finished rehabilitation periods on Okinawa and were at full strength. Departing from Okinawa on 10 April, the ARG, with SLF Alpha embarked, headed for Vietnam and made its first landing on the 28th.

*For a detailed account of the bitter contest for Hills 558, 861, 881 North, and 881 South, see Chapter 4.

A 60mm mortar crew with Company A, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines fires against a North Vietnamese Army unit on 20 May during Operation Beau Charger, the SLF's portion of Operation Hickory which cleared the southern portion of the DMZ.

3d MarDiv ComdC, May 1967

3d MarDiv ComdC, May 1967

2dLt John V. Francis, wearing no shirt under his armored vest because of the intense heat encountered in Operation Beaver Cage, takes a short break on 12 May as BLT 1/3 concludes its initial SLF operation.

The target for the first SLF Alpha landing, Operation Beaver Cage, was the rich and populous Que Son Valley, 25 miles south of Da Nang, important to the Communists as a source of both food and manpower. Beaver Cage started at 0700 28 April as the first heliborne elements of BLT 1/3 touched down. For the next four days heat caused more casualties than the enemy as operations continued against negligible opposition.

Moving to a more promising operational area five miles to the north, the BLT made its first significant contact on 2 May. An enemy force, at least a platoon, attacked Company C as it dug in for the night. After dark, USAF AC-47 "Puff the Dragon" gunships and "Spooky" flare planes, Marine artillery, and the BLT's own supporting arms pounded the suspected Communist positions. The enemy fled.

The next morning the battalion resumed its sweeping operations. The enemy did not react until 5 May. That night the VC struck back, hitting the BLT headquarters and support elements with mortar and small arms fire as they evacuated a landing zone. The Headquarters and Service Company troops and

the attached Marines of 4.2-inch Mortar Battery, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, repulsed the Communists. Despite the intensity of the attack and reduced visibility caused by oncoming darkness, Lieutenant Colonel Kirby's helicopters successfully extracted 200 men and more than 1 and one-half tons of ammunition without loss.

To the north, while BLT 1/3 conducted Beaver Cage, the 5th Marines engaged in Operation Union I. On 9 May the Beaver Cage scheme of maneuver reoriented to include an eastward sweep toward the coast coordinated with the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines on the BLT's right. In this manner the final stage of Beaver Cage became a part of the Union I plan, although the BLT designed its maneuver to place it in position for an amphibious withdrawal.* During the last week of the operation, 6-12 May, the BLT endured continuous mortar attacks and sniper fire.

On 10 May, as the eastward sweep continued, Companies B and C engaged in a day-long action with a sizable VC force. After much maneuvering, air strikes, mortar missions, and the insertion of a 40-man Sparrow Hawk unit, the VC broke off the action, but only after the BLT killed 86 enemy soldiers. Beaver Cage/Union I ended for the SLF Alpha units on 12 May as they returned to their respective ships.

The first operation for SLF Alpha had been a costly venture, but all units had demonstrated their fighting qualities. Battalion casualties totaled 55 Marines killed and 151 wounded, but in 16 days of continuous operations the BLT claimed 181 enemy dead and a bag of 66 prisoners. The next test of SLF Alpha was only five days away.

Beau Charger/Belt Tight/Hickory
PrairieIV/Cimarron
18 May - 10 June 1967

Because of the Communist rocket and artillery buildup in the DMZ during the spring of 1967, General Westmoreland issued a directive authorizing the entry of forces into the DMZ buffer zone south of the Ben Hai River, actually South Vietnamese territory. The authorization triggered planning for a series of simultaneous operations to be conducted in the new manuever area, one by ARVN forces and three by the U.S. Marines. The code names for these operations were Hickory for 3d Marine Divison units, Beau Charger for SLF Alpha, Belt Tight for SLF Bravo, and Lam Son 54 for the South Vietnamese task force.* The overall concept envisioned the movement of SLF Bravo into the Hickory Operation by means of Operation Belt Tight, while SLF Alpha was to operate east of the Hickory/Lam Son 54 operational areas under the aegis of Beau Charger. The Beau Charger/Belt Tight/Hickory plan was unique in that it called for the employment of both SLFs in the same operational area at the same time.

The opening scheme of maneuver called for the movement of three separate assault forces to the Ben Hai River where they were to face about and drive south on roughly parallel axes, destroying all enemy units and installations in their paths. The plan included the establishment of a free-fire zone which would require the evacuation of more than 10,000 noncombatants from the buffer zone, a monumental task assigned to the Vietnamese National Police.

D-day for Beau Charger, SLF Alpha's show, was 18 May. Fifteen UH-34s of Lieutenant Colonel Kirby's HMM-263 lifted from the flight deck of the USS *Okinawa* (LPH-3) and headed inland, each loaded with five Marines from the assault element, Company A, BLT 1/3. L-hour was 0800. The landing zone, Goose, was less than six kilometers from the North Vietnamese boundary of the DMZ, and almost within small arms range of the north bank of the Ben Hai River.

The SLF planners studied aerial photographs of the terrain before the operation, but conducted no prelanding overflights to preserve secrecy. For the same reason, they requested no air and naval gunfire preparations of the LZ. Intelligence sources had reported the presence of many enemy antiaircraft machine guns in the area.

Flying lead, Kirby led his 34s toward the potentially dangerous zone, flying at altitudes of less than 50 feet to reduce the enemy gunners' effectiveness. A maximum speed approach, about 80 knots, lack of prominent landmarks, and the tenseness of the situation made navigation difficult at best. Kirby landed at the north end of the zone, but as he did machine gun fire ripped into his helicopter. The enemy bullets wrecked the helicopter's radio and wounded the copilot, crew chief, gunner, and three infantrymen. Another infantryman, killed, fell out of the helicopter. The wounded gunner returned fire

*See Chapter 3 for the 5th Marines' account of Union I.

*The non-SLF operations appeared in Chapter 1.

and, as Kirby later related, ". . . saved [our] bacon."[10]

Kirby managed to get the helicopter back in the air, but without a radio he had no contact with the rest of his flight or with the *Okinawa*. Four other UH-34s in the assault wave and two escorting UH-1Es suffered damage from enemy fire, but the entire wave unloaded its troops. As soon as Kirby got his crippled helicopter back to the *Okinawa*, he briefed the SLF commander, Colonel Gallo, on the bad situation at LZ Goose. Colonel Gallo ordered the cancellation of all further lifts to Goose and the substitution of the alternate LZ, Owl, 800 meters south of Goose. The assault element of Company A at Goose was very much alone and in trouble.

Second Lieutenant Dwight G. Faylor's 2d Platoon, Company A spread over 800 yards at LZ Goose. A well-organized enemy force pressed his thinly held position from the northwest. The BLT naval gunfire liaison officer, Ensign John W. McCormick, vainly tried to call in naval gunfire. The ships denied his requests; no one was certain of the exact location of friendly positions and in many cases the enemy was too close to use naval guns without endangering the Marines. Rescue was on the way, but the Marines at Goose were in desperate straits.

While the abortive assault at LZ Goose was taking place, Company D landed in LVTs at Green Beach, 900 meters southeast of LZ Owl. This landing was unopposed. By 0855, the remainder of Company A had landed at Owl. Overland reinforcements arrived at Owl in the form of one platoon from Company D and a section of tanks. At 0930 the lead elements of Company B began landing. The force at Owl then moved out to rescue the beleaguered platoon at LZ Goose.

By 1100 the rescue force had regained contact with Faylor's platoon, but the enemy showed no signs of breaking off the engagement. Company B joined the fighting at Goose and the tempo of battle increased. Stymied by a tenaciously held trenchline, the Company A Marines tried another avenue of attack. Moving against the Communist position under the cover of a tree line, the Marines engaged enemy soldiers in furious hand-to-hand fighting. Company A's advance bogged down again and the infantrymen called in close air support to crack the tough position. Eleven jets blasted the entrenched Communists and finally both Companies A and B, supported by tanks, moved forward. As the fighting died down, the Marines counted 67 Communist bodies.

Belt Tight started on 20 May. The initial mission of SLF Bravo was to land in the northeastern corner of the 3d Division's Hickory operational area and conduct search and destroy operations within a designated TAOR.* At 0714 on the 20th, Companies F and H with a BLT 2/3 command group started landing at LZ Parrot. Companies E and G followed with another command group landing at LZ Mockingbird at 0850. The initial enemy reaction was deceptive; the Marines encountered only light resistance.

The general trace of SLF Bravo's sweep in its TAOR was in a southerly direction. The Hickory planners wanted the SLF to dislodge enemy units in the area, thereby driving them into 3d Division units moving up from the south. Neither the 3d Marine Division nor SLF Bravo ever determined how many enemy troops Belt Tight displaced, but the SLF experienced four days of close combat during the operation, certainly an indication that its presence had a spoiling effect on enemy intentions. Throughout the Belt Tight period, BLT 2/3 encountered well-trained enemy troops who fought with skill and determination. The enemy's soundly constructed positions and excellent weapons employ-

*A description of 3d Marine Division participation in Operation Hickory appears in Chapter 1.

Two riflemen from BLT 1/3 pass carefully through a Vietnamese village while on Operation Beaver Cage.
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A371988

ment caused severe problems for the battalion as it fought its way south. During one of the many mortar attacks, Lieutenant Colonel Delong, the BLT commander, aggravated an old back injury which necessitated his evacuation. His experienced executive officer, Major Wendell O. Beard, a former Amphibious Warfare School instructor who joined the battalion in February, took command.

Belt Tight ended at 1559, 23 May 1967. At this time BLT 2/3 shifted to the operational control of the 9th Marines which assigned the BLT a new area of operations as part of Operation Hickory, representing a continuation of the Belt Tight sweep. Until Hickory ended at midnight on the 28th, the battalion continued its deliberate sweep operations. The highlight of this period was a sharp engagement between Company E, commanded by Captain Stuart R. Vaughan, and a determined NVA force defending the village of Xuan Hai. The battle started on the afternoon of the 24th and did not end until the Marines completed a detailed sweep of the village ruins at 2155 on the following day. The enemy force had built 40 defensive bunkers in and around the town. Company E destroyed them and counted 27 dead NVA soldiers on the site. SLF casualties were light during the nine days of Belt Tight/Hickory, considering the fact that the battalion was either in contact or under artillery attack during most of the period. SLF Bravo had 17 Marines killed and 152 wounded. North Vietnamese losses totaled a confirmed 58 killed and one prisoner taken by the Marines.

When Hickory finished on 28 May, BLT 2/3 remained in the field, still under the operational control of the 9th Marines. During the next three days the battalion participated in Operation Prairie IV which ended on the 31st. The BLT's assignment involved primarily a security operation in relief of both the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines and the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines. BLT 2/3 protected artillery positions immediately north of the Cam Lo Bridge, the bridge itself, and provided route security for both truck convoys and engineer units on Route 561 from north of the Cam Lo Bridge to Con Thien, an air distance of slightly over 10 kilometers.

Although the Prairie IV assignment was of short duation, the end of the operation did not eliminate the security requirements for Route 561 and nearby positions. As a consequence, SLF Bravo, still under operational control of the 9th Marines, retained its Prairie IV mission as part of a new 3d Division plan, Operation Cimarron. Cimarron lasted from 1 June until 2 July, though SLF Bravo's involvement lasted only through 10 June.

The SLF participation in Cimarron succeeded, in the sense that there was no local enemy activity. The enemy stayed away, the road remained open, and Con Thien maintained its defensive integrity. The BLT spent 9-10 June reorganizing and moving back to Dong Ha combat base. Reembarkation on the 11th marked the end of the longest SLF combat deployment ashore since its formation, 23 days of continous operations. The shipboard respite would be short; SLF Bravo would land again in only a week's time.

Day On, Stay On—SLF Operational Tempo Increases

The spring and early summer of 1967 challenged the flexibility of the SLF concept in I Corps. Variations ranged from SLF Bravo's April "fire brigade" action at Khe Sanh during Operation Beacon Star to dull, but necessary, "housekeeping" duties assigned to BLT 2/3 during its 10 days with Operation Cimarron. As the year progressed, SLF operational commitments increased, not only in frequency, but also in days ashore. During the first four months of 1967, the average number of days of monthly combat commitment for a SLF was only 12.* SLF Alpha's Operation Beaver Cage landing in April signaled a drastic increase in operational tempo. The May combat-day average jumped to 16 and one-half days per BLT, while June operations resulted in a new high of 22 days for SLF Alpha and 24 for SLF Bravo.

The remainder of the year reflected a much heavier reliance on the SLFs. Average commitments remained above the 20-days-per-month figure. Not only did the number of combat days increase, but the number of individual operations involving the SLFs more than doubled.

The reasons for the increase in tempo were not related to a single cause. The forthcoming Vietnamese National elections, continuing Communist unit moves in northern I Corps, and offensive sweeps to protect Marine fire support bases were only some of the factors which demanded SLF participation.

*SLF Bravo provided the basis for this computation because of SLF Alpha's late entry into RVN, in April 1967. SLF Bravo's combat days by month in early 1967 were: January, 10; February, 13; March, 15; and April, 10.

Even though many of the SLF operations were inconclusive, their harried staffs deserve tribute. In spite of the stepped-up operational tempo of 1967, the SLF planners kept abreast of the often confusing, and always demanding, I Corps tactical situation.

Bear Bite/Colgate/Choctaw/Maryland
2 - 5 June, 7 - 11 June,
12 - 23 June, 23 - 27 June 1967

Bear Bite, a conventional LVT and helicopter assault, was the first of SLF Alpha's June operations. It targeted the Viet Cong operating along the coast 40 kilometers southeast of the DMZ in the "The Street Without Joy" region. Starting at 0730 on 2 June, BLT 1/3 spent the next 72 hours probing and destroying unoccupied enemy positions. Enemy snipers and a troublesome Marine tank stuck in a paddy were the only hindrances to the operation. There were no SLF casualties, but the Marines killed only two of the enemy and picked up nine suspects. On 5 June the BLT returned to the 4th Marines' perimeter by helicopter.

Two days later, the battalion moved out again on the uneventful Operation Colgate. During the intervening day the new SLF Alpha commander, Colonel John A. Conway, assumed command. The subsequent Operation Choctaw, southwest of the Bear Bite AOA, involved 11 days of tedious sweeps west of Route 1 along the Thac Ma River. About as productive as Bear Bite, Choctaw netted only 15 more detainees and nine enemy killed. Nineteen Marines suffered wounds. At 1300 on 23 June the last elements of the battalion returned from the field to the 4th Marines' Camp Evans, 23 kilometers northwest of Hue.

When it started Operation Maryland on 25 June, BLT 1/3 moved by helicopters into the same general area where it had been for Colgate. The battalion's zone of action included the southwestern edge of the grave-covered Maryland area. Elements of a VC battalion operated in the region. The Marine battalion did not find them, but ARVN units advancing from the north encountered what probably were two VC companies. The ARVN units killed 114 Communists. In its own zone, the BLT killed seven Communists, took 35 prisoners, and salvaged almost nine tons of rice at the cost of three Marines wounded. By mid-morning on the 27th, the BLT departed the area in helicopters as Maryland ended after four weeks of probing graves and tunnels. On 28 June, HMM-362, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Nick J. Kapetan, relieved HMM-263 as the SLF Alpha helicopter squadron, and the next day the BLT reembarked.[11]

June was a trying time for SLF Alpha. Four separate operations, none of which achieved significant results, could only be called "good experience." For the Marines of the SLF, the loss of three men and the wounding of 51 others served as a terse reminder of the price of experience. The SLF Alpha BLT now had six operations to its credit, and, since its first landing on 28 April, it had killed 307 Communists.

Beacon Torch/Calhoun
18 June - 2 July, 25 June - 2 July 1967

Operation Beacon Torch placed SLF Bravo south of Da Nang in the coastal region near the Quang Nam and Quang Tin provinical border. A conventional search and destroy operation, Beacon Torch covered an enemy-controlled area east of the Troung Giang River and southeast of the city of Hoi An.

A companion operation, Calhoun, targeted against the "Pagoda Valley" west of the Beacon Torch AOA, started on 25 June. The area received this name because of the many small pagodas on the valley floor. III MAF suspected "Pagoda Valley" of being a Communist forward logistic base. In essence, BLT 2/3 phased into Calhoun and, when Calhoun ended, it withdrew as originally planned in Beacon Torch.

Beacon Torch started at 0630 on 18 June as assault elements of Company F, followed by Command Group Alpha landed in what the helicopter pilots thought was LZ Cardinal. Actually, the heliborne troops landed 2,000 meters south of Cardinal. Company H landed at what the pilots believed was LZ Wren. It, too, landed in the wrong place and 2,000 meters south of its planned starting position.

While the first heliborne companies untangled their LZ problems, Company G landed on Red Beach, followed by the 2d Platoon (Reinforced), Company A, 3d Tank Battalion. Once the squadron resolved the LZ location problems, it lifted Company E into the correct LZ Cardinal.

Company H made the first contact at 0930. Light encounters continued throughout the day until 1540 when Company H engaged about 100 enemy troops. In the ensuing firefight, 43 of Company H's Marines succumbed to nonbattle causes; most were heat casualties. The enemy killed five Marines and wounded 14 while the Communists left 23 bodies

behind. The enemy disengaged at sunset.

The BLT moved out again on the 19th. Small actions flared up throughout the day and the advancing Marines began discovering hidden enemy food stocks.

After another quiet night, the BLT renewed sweep operations at 0845 on the 20th when Company E crossed the Troung Giang River. That afternoon, Company H had great difficulty fording the Troung Giang, but by late afternoon the battalion began moving westward again. Scattered contact continued west of the river for the next three days. The highlight of this period was Company E's discovery of three tons of rice and two tons of potatoes early on the morning of the 24th. At 0600, 25 June, Operation Beacon Torch phased into Operation Calhoun.

By 1300, 25 June Company E had discovered another 1,000 pounds rice and at 1600 Company G uncovered a two-ton cache. The rice hunt continued and on the 26th the Marines bagged and helilifted another 7,600 pounds to the ARVN-controlled town of Dien Ban, nine kilometers west of Hoi An. The largest single find of the operation was a five-ton cache discovered by Company F on the morning of the 27th. Complementing this discovery, Company G, assisted by ARVN troops, rounded up and evacuated 84 stray cattle.

Minor skirmishes and the detention of scattered suspects continued until Calhoun ended at 1200, 1 July. Reverting to the Beacon Torch plan, the BLT began its retraction. As the last units returned to their respective ships, Beacon Torch ended at 1300, 2 July.

Beacon Torch/Calhoun hurt the Communists in central I Corps. The BLT captured more than 40 tons of rice and other food stocks, over 31 of which they evacuated for ARVN use. The rest they destroyed in place. The BLT's casualty ratio was favorable. Eighty-six enemy died in contrast to only 13 SLF Marines. The BLT suffered 123 nonbattle casualties.

Beacon Torch/Calhoun, however, had no lasting impact, as emphasized by the fact that the departing Marines sighted enemy troops near the beach area during the retraction. The Communists could not afford to lose control of the population and immediately reoccupied the area to repair the damage caused by the operation.

SLF Alpha in Bear Claw/Buffalo/Hickory II
3 - 16 July 1967

The first two days of July, SLF Alpha on board the ships of TG 76.4, prepared for Operation Bear Claw, a proposed landing in eastern Quang Tri Province. The SLF cancelled Bear Claw at 0100 on the 3rd when it received orders alerting BLT 1/3 for immediate employment in the 9th Marines TAOR at Con Thien. The 9th Marines was in trouble.

Lieutenant Colonel Richard J. "Spike" Schening's 1st Battalion, 9th Marines provided the security of the Con Thien perimeter. Two of the battalion's companies, A and B, on patrol a mile and a half northeast of Con Thien, had discovered a large NVA force, at least two battalions of the *90th NVA Regiment.* The initial contact took place as the Marine companies were trying to link up. In this awkward situation, the North Vietnamese managed to punish each company separately. Additionally, the Communists hit the Marines with massed artillery fire from north of the DMZ. Casualties mounted on both sides as the battle intensified. Company B lost most of its officers; the company commander, his FO, the FAC, and two platoon commanders were casualties.*

Responding to this serious situation, Lieutenant Colonel Schening committed Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, reinforced by tanks. The action intensified as the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines arrived from Dong Ha to help regain control of the situation. At this stage, III MAF requested SLF Alpha. Similarly, SLF Bravo, also at sea, went on alert. The mission assigned to SLF Alpha during Operation Buffalo, the name given the continuing engagement with the *90th NVA Regiment,* was to tie in to the right flank of the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines and sweep the battle area to recover 1st Battalion, 9th Marines' casualties.

The original 0100 warning order for SLF Alpha preceded a regimental briefing at 0700 which set L-hour at 1030. After much frenzied action on the part of the SLF, the launch took place on schedule. Throughout the late morning of 3 July, Lieutenant Colonel Kapetan's HMM-362 flew BLT 1/3 into the zone of action, supplemented by CH-46s from SLF Bravo's HMM-164.[12] Unfortunately, the lead assault elements of the BLT landed 2,500 meters south of the designated landing zone, a mile southeast of Con Thien. Readjusting the battalion cost valuable time. The first physical contact with the right flank of the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines occurred at 1315. By the time all of BLT 1/3 had moved into the cor-

*See Chapter 5 for additional description of this action.

rect positions, however, the level of fighting had waned, and only Communist gunners remained active. The night of 3-4 July was relatively quiet, as was the next day. The 5th opened with an early morning enemy mortar attack against Companies A and C. Exchanges of artillery and mortar fire punctuated most of the day. The battalion continued its sweep operation. On the 6th, enemy rockets knocked out a Marine tank. The fighting around the disabled tank became so savage that the BLT did not reach the burnt-out hulk until 1000 on the 7th of July. The Marines recovered the bodies of the crew early the next morning.

At 1330, 8 July, the BLT received orders to make an immediate withdrawal. This was a challenging operation even under ideal circumstances. Wickwire's battalion faced a dangerous situation. There were five complications: it was daylight; the battalion was in contact; the withdrawal would occur over 600 meters of open ground; two of the attached tanks were crippled; and the battalion had just received resupplies and had no organic transport to move the vital, though cumbersome, material. A sixth factor added to the BLT's problems. Just as the withdrawal began, the Communists opened up with small arms, mortars, and artillery. In spite of these difficuties, the battalion carried out this complex maneuver with only light casualties.

The next four days of Buffalo involved patrolling the Con Thien perimeter. Buffalo ended on the morning of 14 July. The Marines of BLT 1/3 had recovered the bodies of 11 fellow Marines from the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, but their efforts were costly; the BLT's price was eight killed and 179 wounded. Operation Buffalo produced a total of 424 verified North Vietnamese dead for the BLT.

While Buffalo neared its terminal phase, ComUSMACV directed that a followup sweep be conducted of the area south of the DMZ and east of Con Thien. In response, III MAF initiated Operation Hickory II. The plan called for SLF Alpha's BLT 1/3 to move out from its final Buffalo positions with the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines on the BLT's right. The combined force would sweep southward in a search and destroy operation. Three other battalions were to block north and south of the operational area. All Hickory II battalions came under the operational control of the 9th Marines, with the exception of SLF Bravo which served the 3d Marines as a blocking force on the western edge of the sweep zone.

The evening of the first day of Hickory II, BLT 1/3 received orders to move to a phase line approximately 15,000 meters south of its position by 1700 the next day. As a consequence, though the deployed battalion formations remained prepared to engage the enemy, the required speed of advance prevented the battalion from making a detailed search of its zone of action. During Hickory II, BLT 1/3 experienced no enemy contact, and the net result was the capture of 17 suspects. There were no friendly casualties. The operation ended at 1600 on 16 July and the next day SLF Alpha returned to the TG 79.4 ships.

SLF Bravo in Beaver Track/Buffalo/Hickory II
4 - 16 July 1967

When SLF Alpha joined Buffalo on 3 July, SLF Bravo went on standby, and it entered the Buffalo area on 4 July on Operation Beaver Track. At 0640, Major Wendell O. Beard,* the BLT 2/3 commander, and Company H loaded in Lieutenant Colonel Rodney D. McKitrick's Ch-46s and flew off the USS *Tripoli* (LPH 10); destination: Cam Lo. McKitrick's HMM-164 ferried the rest of the battalion to an assembly area north of Cam Lo where the BLT prepared for employment as directed by the 3d Marine Division. At 1300, BLT 2/3, under operational control of its parent regiment, gained the 1st Platoon of Company A, 3d Tank Battalion. The battalion spent the afternoon moving into position in preparation for impending search and destroy operations.

The Beaver Track operation order directed the battalion to move out at 0700 on 5 July and attack northward on a four-kilometer front to a point just south of the southern limit of the DMZ. There, the battalion was to turn and move roughly three kilometers west. During Phase II, a return sweep, the battalion was to maneuver south to the Cam Lo River from its DMZ position, following an axis parallel to but west of the Phase I axis of advance. Friendly units had occupied the area as recently as two days before the start of Beaver Track, but intelligence sources reported that elements of the *29th NVA Regiment* were making a reconnaissance of the region.

At 0700, 5 July, Major Beard's troops moved out. As in many similar operations, nothing happened at

*Major Beard's nickname was "Moose," a reference to his size. LtGen Louis Metzger, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981) (Comment files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Courtesy of Mrs. Wendell O. Beard

Company H, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines boards CH-46A helicopters from HMM-164 for a flight from the USS Tripoli *to Cam Lo on 4 July as SLF Bravo begins Operation Beaver Track, a subsidiary of the 3d Marine Division's Operation Buffalo south of the DMZ.*

first. The Marines discovered and demolished abandoned bunkers as the day progressed. By midafternoon, Company E was enduring desultory sniper fire, but no contact developed. That night remained quiet.

The enemy made the first move at 0535 on 6 July with a probe of Company E's perimeter. The Marines met the attack with skillful, coordinated machine gun and artillery fire. The Communists broke off the engagement, leaving 14 bodies behind plus abandoned weapons and equipment. Shortly after the beginning of the fight along the Company E perimeter, 40 NVA mortar rounds hit the BLT command group and Company G, located about four kilometers south of the DMZ. Return fires temporarily silenced the Communist gunners, but at 0800 a Company H patrol less than three kilometers to the northeast also came under mortar fire. Supporting tanks and artillery again silenced the enemy, but not before RPG rounds hit two of the supporting Marine tanks.

At 0930, the enemy struck a Company F patrol with a command-detonated claymore-type mine, and half an hour later, Company G, operating east of Company F, also encountered enemy claymores. A brief flurry of action occurred when the tank platoon commander, 2d Lieutenant Edward P. B. O'Neil, spotted NVA troops in the vicinity of the destroyed town of Nha An Hoa. The tankers' 90mm guns and heavy machine guns accounted for 16 of them. The remainder of the 6th of July reverted to duels between Communist mortars and U. S. artillery.

As the sweep continued on the 7th, the SLF Bravo Marines confronted increasing numbers of enemy bunkers, all deserted, but many showing signs of recent use. The search for the elusive *29th NVA Regiment* continued.

July 8th was a day filled with the curious whims of combat. At 0800 a patrol from Company H found a completely stripped UH-34D surrounded with assorted NVA equipment. While these Marines examined their disquieting prize, another Company H patrol was busily engaged destroying captured enemy equipment. Someone or something triggered an unknown explosive device which killed eight Marines. A Company G patrol tripped a "Bouncing Betty"* at 1030; two more Marines died and another received wounds. The tempo of action picked up an

*A "Bouncing Betty" mine, projected upward by a small charge, explodes its main charge at waist level.

Courtesy of Mrs. Wendell O. Beard

A division of CH-46A helicopters from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 164 carries elements of BLT 2/3 to shore from the USS Tripoli *during Operation Beaver Track.*

hour and a half later when Company G engaged in a sharp action in one of the many Communist bunker complexes. Air and artillery smashed the enemy position. The Company G Marines found 35 NVA bodies in the wreckage after the bombardment.

The fortunes of war smiled on the BLT that afternoon. As the battalion patrol actions continued, Company F executed a classic example of fire and maneuver. One squad, immobilized by enemy automatic weapons fire coming from a well-developed position, became a pivot for the rest of the company. The Marines fixed the Communists in their dug-in positions and called in supporting arms. The Marines counted 73 NVA bodies in the followup sweep and captured three 82mm mortars.

During the following days, the BLT Marines discovered and destroyed more bunkers, fighting positions, and shelters, but the Communists chose not to fight. Meanwhile, at sea on board the USS *Tripoli,* Lieutenant Colonel McKitrick's HMM-164 turned over its SLF assignment on 12 July to HMM-265, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William R. Beeler.

To capitalize on the results of Operation Buffalo, which had paralleled Beaver Track, ComUSMACV ordered that another sweep be made south of the Ben Hai River to destroy enemy weapons positions in the southern half of the DMZ. Known as Operation Hickory II, the plan was similar in concept to the 13-battalion Hickory I sweep conducted in the same area during May. Hickory II was smaller in scale; it employed seven maneuver battalions and four blocking battalions.** Since BLT 2/3 was already located northwest of Cam Lo, it became a blocking battalion on the western edge of the zone of action.

SLF Bravo received the Hickory II operation order on the morning of 13 July. At 0700 the next morning the battalion moved out, securing designated objectives en route to its final blocking position. At 1000, the battalion commander, Major Beard, became a casualty and his executive officer, Major John H. Broujos, took over the battalion. By 1230 the battalion reached the blocking positions and searched the surrounding terrain. During BLT 2/3's brief two-day involvement in Hickory II, Communist antipersonnel devices were the most serious threat. Grenades rigged as booby traps killed two Marines and wounded 13. Other than mortar fire, the 2d Battalion had no contact with the enemy during Hickory II.

The BLT reconstituted at 0600 on 16 July as Hickory II ended. Reembarkation began immediately. SLF Bravo's participation in the Beaver Track/Buffalo/Hickory II operations produced an impressive, verified kill ratio. Sixteen SLF Bravo Marines gave their lives, while the battalion killed 148 NVA soldiers.

Bear Chain/Fremont
20 - 26 July 1967

At sea on 17 July 1967, Lieutenant Colonel Emil W. Herich assumed command of BLT 2/3, relieving

**See Chapter 6 for the account of other III MAF units' participation in Hickory II.

Major Broujos, who reverted to battalion executive officer. Lieutenant Colonel Herich had only a brief "shakedown;" SLF Bravo landed again on the 20th. The operation, Bear Chain, targeted the coastal region between Quang Tri City and the city of Hue. The mission was to attack the exposed seaward flank of the *806th VC Battalion* and to destroy it, or at least drive it westward toward ARVN forces engaged in Operation Lam Son 87.

Southwest of the Bear Chain operational area, the 4th Marines was conducting a search and destroy operation named Fremont. As Bear Chain progressed, it phased into Fremont. At 1400 on 21 July, BLT 2/3 switched to the operational control of the 4th Marines for the rest of the operation.

Bear Chain/Fremont produced the desired results. The enemy reacted as the Bear Chain planners had hoped. Communist units moved west toward Route 1, directly into the Lam Son 87 ARVN forces. In the following battle the South Vietnamese troops distinguished themselves. They held their positions with determination and 252 Viet Cong died. A secondary gain of Bear Chain/Fremont was the capture of an extremely large rice stock.

Late the afternoon of 24 July, BLT 2/3 Marines, searching the village of Don Que, less than a kilometer east of Route 555, captured a VC suspect, the only male found in Don Que. Company F received sniper fire from the village just before they captured the suspect. A search of the town turned up enormous quantities of rice. Villagers stated that the Viet Cong had told them to harvest their rice and be ready for the VC rice collectors who would arrive "within a few days." The final tally of rice was over 37 tons. The Marines bagged it and flew it out in HMM-265's helicopters.

The BLT Marines had helped maul the *806th VC Battalion* and confiscated its rice supply. Its purposes achieved, the Bear Chain portion of the operation ended on 26 July and SLF Bravo went back to sea. Nine Marines and two corpsmen died on the operation.

Beacon Guide
21 - 30 July 1967

SLF Alpha's BLT 1/3 held a change of command at sea on 16 July, the day after it returned from Hickory II. Lieutenant Colonel Alfred I. Thomas took over from Lieutenant Colonel Wickwire. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas' first operation was Beacon Guide. Starting with a helicopter and surface assault, Beacon Guide was a search and destroy operation in the coastal region 18 miles southeast of Hue. The BLT's sweep was part of III MAF's continuing plan to maintain pressure on Viet Cong units in coastal I Corps. Beacon Guide was uneventful from its start on 21 July. Tangible results were negligible, and SLF Alpha reembarked on the afternoon of 30 July.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189132

LtCol Alfred I. Thomas, the new commander of BLT 1/3, checks a fire plan diagram drawn on the back of a cardboard C-rations case by one of his staff officers during Operation Beacon Guide below the DMZ.

Kangaroo Kick/Fremont
1 - 3 August, 3 - 21 August 1967

August was a month of aggravating frustration for SLF Bravo and its new commander Colonel James G. Dionisopoulos.* Twenty-one operational days resulted in the death of only three enemy, while the SLF lost three killed and 44 wounded.

Operation Kangaroo Kick, 1-3 August, was another search and destroy sweep over the now familiar sand dunes, graves, and rice paddies of the Viet Cong sanctuary region along the O Lau River,

*Colonel Dionisopoulos replaced Colonel Wortman as the SLF Bravo commander as of 1 August. Colonel Wortman had served as the SLF commander since 1 September 1966.

midway between Hue and Quang Tri. They had operated there on Operation Beacon Star in April-May and again in July on Bear Chain. Kangaroo Kick, almost a carbon copy of the two previous operations along the O Lau, precipitated the standard VC reaction; they fled, only to return after the BLT departed.

At 0800, 3 August, BLT 2/3 shifted to the 4th Marines' operational control and rejoined Operation Fremont. Operation Fremont assumed almost marathon proportions; it did not end until 31 October. The BLT's mission during its second tour under the 4th Marines required relieving the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines of its many and complicated duties, including providing security for Camp Evans, Hill 51, and Hill 674; interdicting enemy lines of communications in the nearby Co Bi-Thanh Tan Valley; detaching one rifle company to the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines for operational use by that battalion; providing security for road sweeps between the 4th Marines' perimeter and Route 1; providing one company for "Sparrow Hawk" rapid reaction missions; and being prepared to provide one company for "rough rider" truck convoys between Phu Bai and Dong Ha.

Respite from the Camp Evans routine came on 16 August. The BLT, actually only Company F and Command Group Alpha reinforced by Company E, 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, conducted a daylong sweep. The operation took place in the My Chanh area north of the O Lau River, the scene of recently completed Operation Kangaroo Kick. The sweep was in conjunction with ARVN units operation in the same area.

BLT 2/3 lost one Marine killed and six wounded during the day's sweep. Unfortunately, a supporting tank returning to the 4th Marines command post ran over a mine, believed to have been made from a dud 500-pound bomb. The blast killed four Marines and wounded five. Later that afternoon a tank retriever hit another mine six kilometers west of the disabled tank. The explosion wounded another six Marines. Tank problems continued; while trying to destroy the tank lost on the 16th, an engineer tripped still another exploding device; one more Marine died. The engineers finally destroyed the tank by 1530.*

*The term exploding device refers to all enemy jury-rigged mines. The devices ranged from trip-wired grenades to pressure-detonated, re-fused dud bombs.

Another variation of the multiple duties shared by the BLT occurred on 18 August. Company F moved to Quang Tri to occupy the airfield there and to provide a show of force. At 0930 19 August, Lieutenant Colonel Herich received authorization to start reembarkation. The 2d Battalion, 4th Marines relieved BLT 2/3 of its Camp Evans duties and the SLF gladly went back to sea. III MAF released BLT 2/3 to CTG 79.5 at 1600 22 August.

The BLT commander, Lieutenant Colonel Herich, commenting on Kangaroo Kick and the 16 August Fremont sweep, expressed the growing frustration with operations along the O Lau:

> Operation Kangaroo Kick was . . . in an area generally controlled by the enemy. Although this operation proved successful in completing the assigned mission, as in the past, the entire area . . . was reoccupied by the enemy as evidenced by his presence during the S&D [search and destroy] operation conducted by this BLT on 16 August 1967 on Operation Fremont.[13]

Beacon Gate/Cochise
7-11 August 1967, 11-27 August 1967

At 0700 on 7 August, SLF Alpha started Operation Beacon Gate by landing southeast of Hoi An along the coastal boundary of Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces. Intelligence reports fixed elements of the *V25 Local Force Battalion* and other

A radioman from BLT 1/3 pauses in Operation Beacon Gate to look over a cow and a calf in a shed during a routine search of a Vietnamese village.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A650000

smaller VC units in the battalion's operational area. During the five-day southerly sweep, the Marines endured continuous sniper fire. The infantrymen made extensive use of armed UH-1E helicopters to suppress the snipers. Operation Beacon Gate ended on 11 August at 0800; the Marines killed only 12 enemy soldiers.

The same day, SLF Alpha shifted to the operational control of Task Force X-Ray of the 1st Marine Division for the start of Operation Cochise. BLT 1/3 made a heliborne assault from the Beacon Gate AOA into a landing zone approximately seven miles east of Que Son. There the battalion occupied blocking positions to support elements of the 5th Marines which were attacking to the east.

On 16 August, BLT 1/3 started search and destroy operations, also in an easterly direction, in conjunction with the 5th Marines. The BLT made heavy contact with an enemy force late on the 16th, but the enemy broke off the engagement during the night. The rest of the first phase of Cochise consisted of sweep operations, still to the east, with contact limited to sniper fire.

Phase II of Cochise began on 19 August. BLT 1/3 transferred to the operational control of the 5th Marines. Enemy contact, as in Phase I, was negligible, but the Marines uncovered several rice caches and an ammunition dump. Phase III opened on 25 August. The BLT continued search and destroy operations northeast from Hiep Duc to Que Son. It encountered only snipers. When the battalon arrived at Que Son on 27 August Cochise ended. The next day the BLT moved by helicopters to Chu Lai where it began reembarkation. Beacon Gate/Cochise produced good results for SLF Alpha; the BLT claimed 59 VC/NVA killed and 65 detained at a cost of nine Marines dead and 51 wounded.

Belt Drive/Liberty

27 August - 5 September, 1 - 4 September 1967

Major Beard returned from hospitalization and reassumed command of BLT 2/3 on 23 August, replacing Lieutenant Colonel Herich. The same day, Major Gregory A. Corliss and his CH-46A squadron, HMM-262, landed on board the USS *Tripoli* to relieve the departing SLF helicopter squadron, HMM-265. Four days later, SLF Bravo was in action again. At 0545, 27 August, HMM-262 lifted the first elements of Company H from the *Tripoli* back to the familiar terrain of eastern Quang Tri Province.

The Belt Drive operation's objective area was the densely vegetated high ground on both sides of the small Nhung River, less than nine kilometers south of Quang Tri City. The operation involved a spoiling attack against Communist units that could have interfered with the voting in Quang Tri City during the impending national elections. Small unit actions flared up during the next five days as the battalion encountered minor enemy formations, but no contact involved any determined enemy resistance.

The battalion commander, Major Beard, reported two interesting enemy reactions:

> The use of demolitions by the enemy when attacking a defensive position . . . is a tactic with which the battalion had not yet been confronted. It is believed that it was definitely designed to simulate mortar fire in order to keep the defenders down deep in their positions. The exploding charges were almost immediately followed by three or four probers armed with automatic weapons who sought to penetrate the perimeter.
>
> During this operation . . . the enemy failed to . . . leave a clean battlefield after an engagement. This situation is by all means contrary to their principle of battle and the first time in which the BLT was able to capture weapons and equipment without an immediate physical pursuit. Enemy KIAs, one WIA, and weapons . . . lay undisturbed overnight in killing zones and were easily recovered at first light on the morning following the encounter. On one occasion, two enemy KIAs and one weapon were recovered almost two days later by a patrol which swept an area in which an air strike had been run. These instances are reflections of the combat discipline and training of the enemy which the BLT engaged in its operating area.[14]

At 0800 1 September, the BLT once more shifted to the 4th Marines' operational control, this time to participate in Operation Liberty while holding Belt Drive in abeyance. The Liberty operation order assigned BLT 2/3 to sweep operations in the Hai Lang District of Quang Tri Province. The battalion was to assist the 4th Marines in blocking enemy approaches to Route 1, as well as Quang Tri City. Liberty simply was a minor reorientation of Belt Drive, with the provision of a command structure change.

At midnight 4 September, SLF participation in Liberty ended and Belt Drive resumed immediately. The last operational day, 5 September, involved moving the battalion and its supporting units out of the TAOR. By 2000, SLF Bravo had completed reembarkation.

Four dead Marines and 59 wounded represented the price of Belt Drive and Liberty, but 19 Communists died. The BLT Marines captured one dazed, wounded NVA soldier on the morning of 1 September. Unfortunately the BLT did not fully ex-

ploit his knowledge and mistakenly evacuated him to Camp Evans rather than to the *Tripoli*. What he knew of enemy locations might have changed the outcome of Belt Drive.

Trouble of a different nature developed during Belt Drive, trouble which caused serious problems not only for the SLFs, but for all Marine activities in I Corps. On 31 August, during a medical evacuation, the lead helicopter, a CH-46A, disintegrated in flight while en route to the *Tripoli*. The crew and their passenger died. The next day, another CH-46A experienced a similar failure at Marble Mountain Air Facility. These two similar accidents forced III MAF to restrict CH-46A missions to emergency categories. For all practical purposes, they were "down." In a matter of hours, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing lost 50 percent of its helicopter capability, and the LPHs became little more than troop transports.

A Change In Scenario – The 46s are Grounded

The grounding of the CH-46As was a severe blow to the SLFs. SLF Bravo's CH-46A Squadron, HMM-262, was "down." SLF Alpha fared better, since HMM-362 was a UH-34D squadron. However, MAG-16 recalled HMM-362, though another UH-34D squadron, HMM-163, replaced it only 4 days later. The USS *Tripoli*, the amphibious assault ship carrying SLF Bravo's helicopters, temporarily withdrew from ARG duties to ferry faulty helicopters to Okinawa for modification. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing rescheduled all planned squadron rotations. Emergency requests prompted shipment of 10 CH-53s and 23 more UH-34Ds from west coast U. S. ports, but they would not arrive until October. On 31 August 1967, III MAF had 150 available transport helicopters, and the SLF could muster 39 more. The next day, as the result of the grounding order, III MAF counted only 23 CH-53s and 73 UH-34Ds, while SLF Alpha could provide another 17 UH-34s. Five squadrons of CH-46As could operate under extreme emergency conditions.

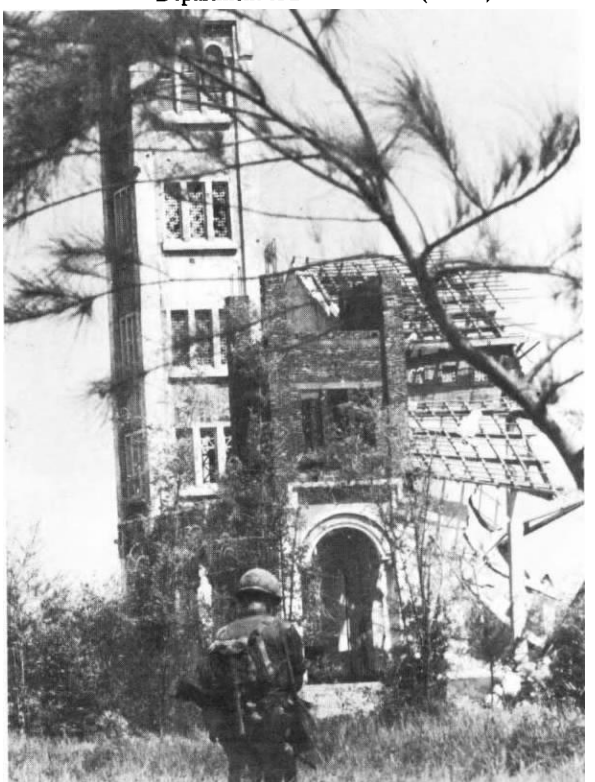
Initially, SLF operations suffered from the helicopter strength reduction. Both landing forces, by necessity, operated as conventional ground units until resolution of helicopter allocations. SLF Bravo spent the rest of the year relying upon interim support from HMM-463's CH-53s operating from Marble Mountain. A detachment from HMM-262 remained on board the *Tripoli* to provide emergency CH-46A support for SLF Bravo. This detachment, known as the "Poor Devils," remained with SLF Bravo until the end of the year, though the rest of the squadron left in mid-October.

Necessarily, SLF operations reflected the reduced flexibility and lift capability. To provide better support for a landing force ashore, a new trend developed. The SLF BLTs would land, conduct a preliminary operation, and then shift to the operational control of a Marine regiment operating in the same area. Though this represented a reasonable solution under the circumstances, during the fall of 1967 SLF BLTs found themselves assigned to missions ranging from fortification construction to road security, a far cry from the stoutly defended SLF tenets of early 1967.

Beacon Point/Fremont/Ballistic Charge/Shelbyville
1 - 9 September 1967, 16 - 28 September 1967

On 1 September SLF Alpha landed in Thua Thien Province on Operation Beacon Point for a southerly sweep of the by-now all too familiar "Street Without Joy." Snipers and surprise firing devices were the only resistance encountered. At 1800 on 4 September, Lieutenant Colonel Kapetan's HMM-362 detached from the SLF and reverted to MAG-16 control. For-

A ruined church dominates the skyline as infantrymen of Company D, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines move through a area of the coastal plain known to both the French and the Americans as the "Street Without Joy" in the quiet Operation Beacon Point.
Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189242



tunately, the lack of enemy activity did not subject the BLT to the full impact of the loss of its assigned helicopters. The most tangible result of Beacon Point was the evacuation or destruction of more than 35 tons of Viet Cong rice. After the BLT marched to an assembly area near Camp Evans on 5 September, Operation Beacon Point concluded at 0600 on the 6th.

Later that morning BLT 1/3 phased into Operation Fremont, again under the operational control of the 4th Marines. Elements of the battalion trucked to their blocking and screening positions south of Quang Tri. As during Beacon Point, snipers were the only active enemy troops.

A solution to SLF Alpha's helicopter needs occurred on 8 September. Lieutenant Colonel Walter C. Kelly's HMM-163, UH-34D equipped, reported on board the USS *Okinawa* just in time to prepare for the following day's extraction. SLF Alpha dropped out of Fremont on 9 September.

One week later, on the 16th, BLT 1/3 landed again. Operation Ballistic Charge involved a simultaneous heliborne and surface assault of an objective area four miles southeast of Dai Loc. The operation consisted of a rapid sweep to the north followed by a detailed search and destroy sweep to the south along the track of the first northward move. Again, opposition consisted of Communist snipers, but during Ballistic Charge the battalion did detain 55 suspects and three confirmed prisoners.

When Ballistic Charge ended on the 22nd, BLT 1/3 shifted to the operational control of the 1st Marines for Operation Shelbyville. BLT 1/3's involvement started with a heliborne assault from the Ballistic Charge AOA to a landing zone four miles southeast of Dai Loc, close to the original Ballistic Charge objective area. While the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines occupied blocking positions to the east, and the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines blocked to the south, Lieutenant Colonel Alfred I. Thomas' BLT 1/3 swept the operational area in an easterly direction. Sniper fire was the only enemy response.

On 25 September, the BLT reversed its axis of advance and, after a night movement, crossed the railroad tracks paralleling Route 1 on the morning of the 26th. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines was on the BLT's left during the advance. Late that afternoon, Company B had a brief firefight with an enemy company, but friendly artillery fire put a quick end to the engagement for SLF Bravo. Subsequent action remained limited to sniper fire. On the 28th the BLT marched out of the operating area to the Liberty Bridge, and then moved by trucks to Da Nang where it reembarked. CTG 79.4 assumed operational control of SLF Alpha at 1715, 28 September.

September was not a spectacular month for SLF Alpha. Twenty-two operational days resulted in 26 Communists killed, 3 prisoners, and 108 detainees. To achieve this, eight Marines gave their lives and another 97 sustained wounds.

Fortress Sentry/Kingfisher
17 - 25 September 1967,
27 September - 15 October 1967

On 16 July 1967, the 9th Marines initiated Operation Kingfisher near Con Thien. This lengthy operation employed a force varying from three to six battalions. As Kingfisher progressed, a new enemy threat developed to the east in the I Corps coastal region. Identified NVA and VC units were operating between the coast and Dong Ha on the northern side of the Cua Viet River. To neutralize these Communist formations, III MAF planned to land SLF Bravo in this by-now familiar operational area for Operation Fortress Sentry. Previously, Operations Beacon Hill and Beau Charger swept the same locale.

A significant operational change occurred following the untimely grounding of the CH-46s; SLF Bravo had to land by surface means. III MAF directed the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion to supplement the ARG landing craft.

Poor visibility, rough seas, and generally bad weather hampered BLT 2/3's 17 September landing on the dunes bordering the "Street Without Joy." As usual, there was no resistance on the beach and only light contact as the battalion took its initial objectives. As the battalion moved north-northeast toward the DMZ, the 1st ARVN Division screened its left flank. Land mines damaged some amphibian tractors as the BLT moved inland, but contact remained light.

On 23 September about 100 NVA soldiers attacked the battalion, but it broke up the probe with the assistance of helicopter gunships. On the morning of the 24th, the Marines engaged another enemy force near the village of An My, three miles east of Gio Linh. Prisoners revealed that the Communists had expected an attack from the south or southwest and the appearance of the BLT east of their position had been a complete surprise.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189273

A Navy landing craft, utility (LCU) brings elements of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines from the USS Tripoli *to the beach on 17 September for Operation Fortress Sentry, the day before the battalion phased into the 3d Marine Division's Operation Kingfisher.*

The next morning at 0800 Fortress Sentry terminated and BLT 2/3 phased into Operation Kingfisher to the west.* SLF participation involved extensive sweep operations which resulted in only minor contact. On 10 October Lieutenant Colonel Henry Englisch relieved Major Beard as the BLT Commander. SLF Bravo phased out of Kingfisher on 15 October.

Bastion Hill/Medina/Liberty II/Fremont

10 - 19 October 1967, 19 - 23 October 1967

SLF Alpha, on board the ships of TG 79.4, engaged in an extensive rehabilitation effort, while SLF Bravo participated in Operation Kingfisher during the first nine days of October.

On 10 October, the 1st Marines, having displaced from Da Nang to Quang Tri Province, initiated Operation Medina in the rugged hills of the Hai Lang Forest south of Quang Tri City. Medina was part of a comprehensive plan to eliminate enemy base areas. The Hai Lang Forest contained the Communist's Base Area 101, and elements of the *5th* and *6th* NVA *Regiments* operated in and around the region.

SLF Alpha's mission in Medina was to serve as a blocking force for the 1st Marines on the eastern edge of the operational area. BLT 1/3 made its helicopter move to assigned blocking positions on the 10th under the operational code name Bastion Hill. The landing met no opposition. Except for one sharp action between Company C and a company of North Vietnamese regulars early on the morning 11 October, the battalion's contact with the enemy during Medina involved scattered firefights, incoming mortar rounds, and many grenade mines and booby traps.

A major action related to Medina took place north of the SLF sector the day after the operation officially ened. There, the *6th NVA Regiment*, moving eastward away from the SLF's former location, ran into the ARVN units participating in Operation Lam Son 138, an adjunct to Operation Medina. By the end of the day-long battle which followed, the ARVN reported 197 NVA troops killed.

Immediately after Medina, BLT 1/3 moved south to new blocking positions west of Route 1 and the railroad between Hai Lang and Phong Dien to participate in Operation Liberty II/Fremont. Upon joining Liberty II/Fremont, operational control of BLT 1/3 passed from the 1st Marines to the 4th Marines. This operation sought to prevent the Communists from disrupting the South Vietnamese National Assembly elections. BLT 1/3 activity during the next five days involved squad and fire team patrols and encounters with the enemy. Liberty/Fremont ended on 23 October, and 1/3 moved by trucks to Camp Evans to prepare for its next operation, Granite, which was only three days away. One of the most appreciated preparations was the issue of an extra poncho and poncho liner to the SLF Marines. The cold winter rains had come to I Corps.

Neither Medina nor Liberty II/Fremont produced

*Chapter 8 covers Kingfisher in detail.

any telling results, at least in the opinion of SLF Alpha. Two weeks in the field that accounted for only 9 confirmed enemy dead, 7 prisoners, and 11 suspects, while attrition gnawed at the battalion's rolls during both operations. The casualties totaled 10 Marines dead and 50 others wounded, 38 of whom required evacuation.

Formation Leader/Liberty II/Knox

17 - 18 October, 18 - 24 October,

24 October - 4 November 1967

Only two days after leaving Operation Kingfisher, Lieutenant Colonel Englisch's BLT 2/3 began Operation Formation Leader in support of the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines. Envisioned as an area control operation, Formation Leader focused on the stabilization of coastal Thua Thien Province east of Route 1, specifically Vin Loc and Phu Loc Districts. Because of the impending Vietnamese National Assembly elections, intelligence officers presumed that the Communists would concentrate disruptive efforts against these populated districts.

The Communists did not respond. BLT 2/3's greatest problems during Formation Leader were nontactical. Because of the grounding of the CH-46s, all troop lifts from the USS *Tripoli* relied upon CH-53s from Lieutenant Colonel Joseph L. Sadowski's HMH-463, operating from Marble Mountain. The lifts were entirely satisfactory, but realining the BLT's serial assignment tables for the larger helicopters gave Major Douglas W. Lemon's battalion S-3 office a good prelanding workout. Additionally, high seas and bad weather slowed the landing of attached heavy vehicles at Hue. In fact, some remained on board for the duration of the operation.

There were no enemy contacts on the 17th and at 1000 on the 18th, BLT 2/3 shifted to the 3d Marine Division's operational control. Formation Leader terminated and a new operation, Liberty II, started, but SLF Bravo's mission and operational area remained the same. The enemy still did not respond. The most significant incident was the sighting and subsequent artillery attack on an enemy squad late on the 21st. Sadly, the next day five Marines on a trash-burning detail suffered wounds from the explosion of a grenade apparently dumped in the trash. Liberty II ended at 0800 on the 24th and Operation Knox started.

Shifted to the operational control of the 7th Marines, the BLT moved by truck to a new assembly area 11 kilometers east of Phu Loc. There, it began sweep operations under the direction of the 7th Marines, and during the next 13 days the battalion experienced 12 enemy contacts, mostly mortar fire. The Marines killed two enemy soldiers, but Knox had a debilitating effect on BLT 2/3. Two Marines died in accidents and, of the 78 nonfatal casualties, only 15 were the result of enemy action. Fungus infections claimed 33 victims. Knox ended at 1000 on 4 November; however, bad weather prevented reembarkation. Instead all elements of the BLT moved to the Da Nang Force Logistic Command facility.

Granite/Kentucky II and III

26 October - 4 November, 6 - 16 November 1967

On 26 October, Operation Granite began for SLF Alpha with an early morning helicopterborne assault into the Hai Lang Forest. Granite was a two-battalion search and destroy operation in the region of Communist Base Area 114. The two assault battalions, the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, and SLF Alpha's BLT 1/3, conducted Granite under the operational control of the 4th Marines.

The first day of Granite was uneventful for the Marines of BLT 1/3, but during the next nine days the enemy "continuously harassed the BLT . . . staying within a few hundred meters . . .," and "night probes were made with a consistency not normally experienced. . . ."[15]

By the afternoon of the 30th some of the BLT Marines began to believe that Granite was a jinxed operation; supporting arms mistakes were becoming costly. A friendly air strike, short of target, wounded two Marines on the morning of the 29th. At dusk a short 60mm mortar round wounded another Marine, and just after midnight a short artillery round wounded still another BLT Marine. Fortunately, this was the last Granite casualty inflicted by friendly forces.

BLT 1/3 never did find the enemy base area in the Hai Lang Forest, but it had no doubt of the presence of enemy troops there. When the battalion finished its sweep of the rugged terrain on 4 November, its journals revealed that it had called in 59 fixed-wing sorties and 652 artillery fire missions during the last 10 days. The battalion captured five AK-47s and killed 17 Communists. The tangled vegetation of the Hai Lang hid the rest of the story. All of the BLT returned to Camp Evans before dark on 4 November. Granite ended with three Marines dead and 24 wounded.

The SLF Alpha battalion did not stay at Camp Evans after Operation Granite. Just before noon on 6 November, the division shifted BLT 1/3 to the 9th Marines' operational control. The BLT spent the rest of the day moving west to Cam Lo where it joined Operation Kentucky as the 3d Division reserve. Kentucky began on 1 November, the day after Operation Kingfisher ended. The Kentucky area of responsibility, including Con Thien and Cam Lo, was nothing more than the eastern portion of the old Kingfisher TAOR. Kentucky was the assigned TAOR of the 9th Marines while Lancaster, to the west, was the 3d Marines' responsibilty.

BLT 1/3 celebrated the 192nd birthday of the Marine Corps with an early morning move from Cam Lo north to attack positions less than two kilometers east of Con Thien. With the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines—comprised of only two companies and a command group—on its right, BLT 1/3 jumped off on Phase II of Kentucky the next morning. The BLT's mission involved making a sweep from east to west around the northern face of the Con Thien base. The 9th Marines conceived the operation as a spoiling attack to disrupt suspected Communist concentrations around Con Thien.

The Kentucky planners were right. At 0830 on the 11th, Company D hit an enemy platoon from the east, the blind side of the well-dug-in and concealed Communist position. The Marines forced the surprised NVA to fight; seven died. That afternoon Company D hit another dug-in enemy unit. This one suffered a similar fate; six more NVA soldiers died. One survivor, a squad leader, told his captors that his battalion had been in the Con Thien area for about a month. Apparently, Kentucky, with excellent timing, upset Communist plans for Con Thien.

The SLF battalion's combat commitment to the opening phases of Kentucky ended the morning of 12 November. The battalion marched back to Position C-3, a base area in the strong point/obstacle system, and then moved on to Dong Ha by truck. BLT 1/3 remained at Dong Ha, again as 3d Marine Division reserve, from 12 November until released by the 9th Marines at 0900 on the 16th, at which time the BLT started reembarkation. SLF Alpha, however, would see Kentucky again.

While the BLT phased out of Kentucky, III MAF provided some relief for the loss of mobility caused by the grounding of CH-46s. On 15 November, Lieutenant Colonel Daniel M. Wilson's HMM-361 flew its UH-34Ds out to the USS *Iwo Jima* to become the new SLF Alpha helicopter squadron. The reliable 34's were a welcome addition, especially since circumstances forced the BLT to rely on other sources for helicopter support during all of Kentucky II and III.

Badger Hunt/Foster
13 - 29 November 1967

In Quang Nam Province, north of the concluded Beaver Cage area of operation, enemy contact during the fall of 1967 had been relatively light. The 1st Marine Division committed units of the 5th and 7th Marines to spoiling operations to prevent infiltration of the Da Nang rocket belt. In November SLF Bravo participated in Operation Badger Hunt as a continuation of the spoiling tactics. The division conceived Badger Hunt as an amphibious operation to support the 7th Marines' Operation Foster which two spectacular VC raids triggered. On 2 November and again on the 8th, the Viet Cong raided the district headquarters and refugee settlements at Hieu Duc and Dai Loc, approximately 15 miles south of Da Nang. The VC killed 22 civilians, wounded another 42, and destroyed or damaged 559 houses.

To rid the area of the Communist raiders, both operations focused on the river complex of Dai Loc District and the flat lands and foothills west of the Thu Bon River. SLF Bravo, under its new commander, Colonel Maynard W. Schmidt, and consisting of BLT 2/3, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Englisch, and a detachment of HMM-262, started Badger Hunt by landing at An Hoa. The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Roger H. Barnard, began Operation Foster west of Dai Loc and north of the Thu Bon River.

There was little contact during either operation, with the exception of one company-sized engagement on the 29th. The Communists evaded both sweeps, heading for the hills to the west. The enemy suffered some casualties as reconnaissance teams and air observers called in air strikes and artillery fire on fleeing enemy groups. The final tally for Badger Hunt and Foster totaled 125 Communists killed and eight captured. Marines losses added up to 25 killed and 136 wounded. The most significant accomplishment of both operations, other than driving the enemy out of the area, was the destruction of most of the enemy's supporting installations in the region. The Marines destroyed over 6,000 bunkers, tunnels,

and shelters and captured 87 tons of rice. Badger Hunt ended on 29 November.

Fortress Ridge
21 - 24 December 1967

On 1 November 1967, the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Max McQuown, learned it would be the new SLF Bravo BLT, in relief of the BLT 1/3. McQuown's battalion passed to the command of SLF Bravo on 1 December and the same day embarked for the Special Landing Force Camp at Subic Bay in the Philippine Islands for intensive training and equipment rehabilitation. On the 17th, the SLF sailed again, destination: I Corps.

Fortress Ridge involved seaborne and heliborne landings on the beach area of Gio Linh District, seven kilometers south of the DMZ. After seizing four separate objectives, each company was to conduct search and destroy operations in adjacent areas. Intelligence sources reported one battalion of the *803d NVA Regiment*, an unidentified main force battalion, and the *K400 Local Force Company* near the beach. The operation started on the morning of 21 December as BLT 3/1's Company M, commanded by Captain Raymond A. Thomas, landed in LVTs on Red Beach. Half an hour later, Company L landed on the north bank of the Cua Viet River, almost five kilometers to the southwest. HMM-262 took Companies I and K into two zones in the sand dunes four kilometers inland from Company M.

Nothing happened during the morning, but at 1324 hours Captain Lawrence R. Moran's Company I received small arms and mortar fire on the south side of the village of Ha Loi Tay. A heavy firefight ensued between Company I and Communist forces. Information from Company I indicated that they had met a sizable, well-entrenched enemy force. Accordingly, the battalion mounted Company M on LVTs and moved it north on the beach side of the Gulf of Tonkin, where it could support Company I. When Company M arrived in the dune area north of Giem Ha Trung village, the Communists started shelling it with mortars. Rocket and artillery fire from Communists guns north of the Demilitarized Zone hit both companies. Darkness came early and Company I and the Communists broke contact. Company I established a defensive position to the west of Ha Loi Tay. Company M set up a perimeter defense in the area where it stopped that afternoon.[16]

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A190226

Rain-soaked Marines of the Special Landing Force board a Navy medium landing craft (LCM-6) for the return trip to their assigned ships after an operation.

Events of the 21st indicated that the Communists were in force behind the beach, north of the day's area of operation. Lieutenant Colonel McQuown requested permission from the SLF to conduct search and destroy operations 1,000 meters north of Objective 1 and 1,000 meters inland from the beach. The SLF approved the plan, and shortly after 0800 on the 22nd, Company M moved through the Communist positions that had opposed Company I. The latter company remained in position to support the advance of Company M.[17] By 0900 Company M discovered the first positive result of Fortress Ridge: three NVA bodies. Both Companies I and M continued moving northward for the rest of the day, finding quantities of enemy arms and equipment in abandoned positions. Company K, north of Objective 3, had no contact. At dusk, Company L, four kilometers southwest of Companies I and M, came under small arms fire from across the Cua Viet, the last enemy action of the day. After a quiet night, the battalion resumed search and destroy sweeps on the 23rd. The day remained uneventful. Company I found the major portion of the day's harvest of duds and enemy ordnance.

Fortress Ridge concluded on the morning of the 24th. By 1100 all units were back on board ship for a contemplative Christmas Eve. In its first operation in its new role, SLF Bravo lost 10 shipmates and had another 27 wounded, but the Marines, however, had

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A371075

Company I, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines continues to move northward with the rest of the battalion on 23 December as Operation Fortress Ridge along the coast draws to a close.

counted 10 dead VC soldiers and observed enough enemy equipment on the battlefield to know they had hurt the Communists. In his after action report, Lieutenant Colonel McQuown summarized the results of 21-24 December, writing, "Operation Fortress Ridge provided the confidence and experience needed for a newly formed BLT to perform as a professional combat unit."

Badger Tooth
26 December 1967 - 2 January 1968

Special Landing Force Bravo's last commitment in 1967 was Operation Badger Tooth. The original plan called for the BLT to land one company by LVT to seize Landing Zone Finch, slightly more than three kilometers inland from the beach on the southern Quang Tri Province border. The rest of the battalion would follow by helicopter. The proposed objective area was on the extreme western side of the "Street Without Joy," and this time intelligence estimates placed as many as 1,700 enemy troops in the area of operation.[18]

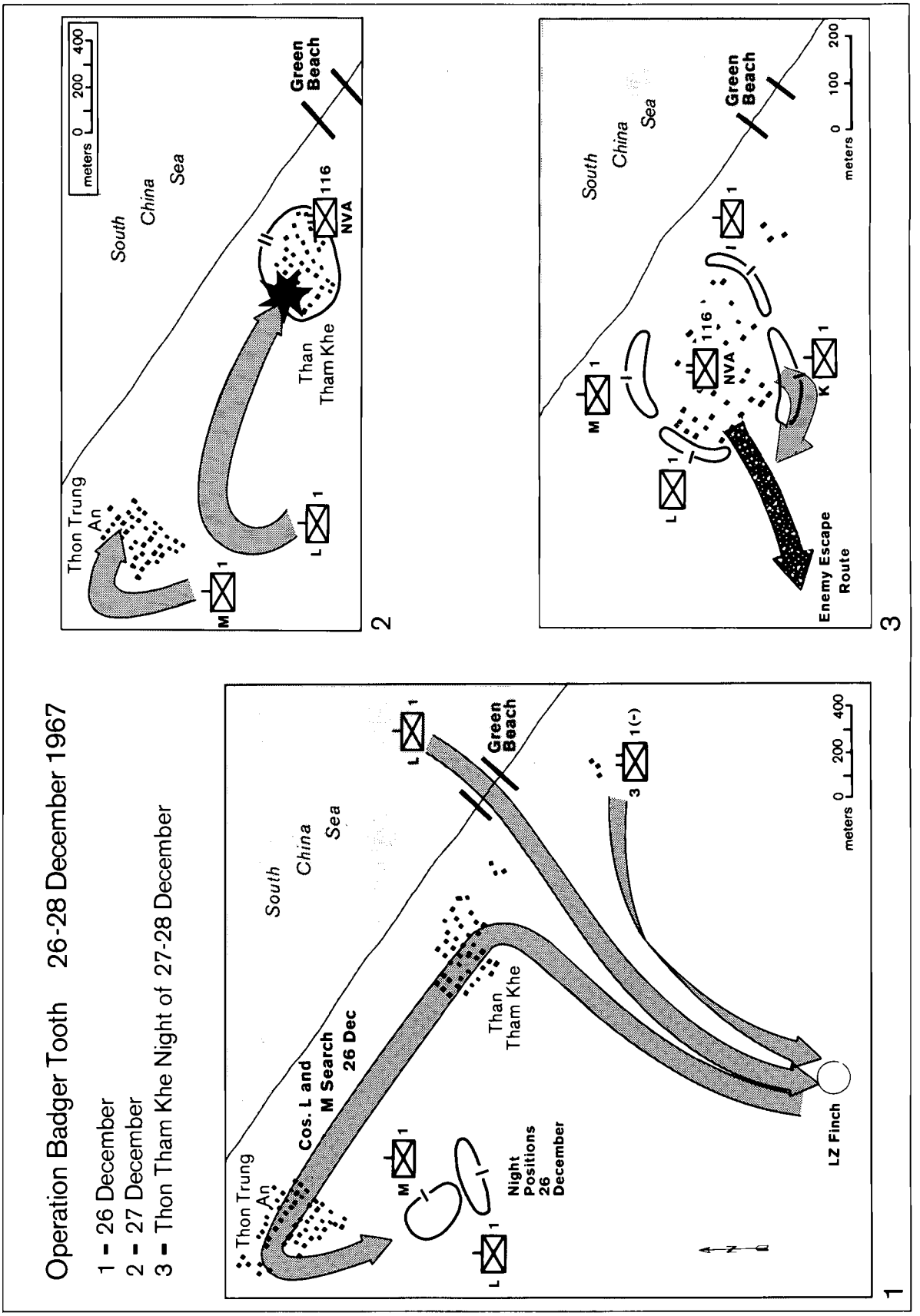
The BLT commander, Lieutenant Colonel Max McQuown, described the plans for the operation:

> The scheme of maneuver called for a river crossing over the Song O Lau River once all the BLT Task Organization had landed from ARG shipping. After the river crossing the BLT was to conduct search and destroy operations through 14 towns and villages on a route running southwest from LZ Finch terminating at the town of Ap Phouc Phu, 11 kilometers from LZ Finch. Initial fire support for the operation would be organic 81mm mortars, available on-call air support, and naval gunfire support. Once the BLT had closed on the first intermediate objective, Thon Phu Kinh, 105mm howitzers from a platoon of the 3rd Battalion, 12th Marines and a battery from the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines would provide artillery support.[19]

Information relayed to the SLF by a U.S. Army liaison officer with nearby ARVN units changed the Badger Tooth plan. After the seizure of LZ Finch, the SLF directed the BLT to search new objectives consisting of the coastal villages of Thom Tham Khe and Tho Trung An. Intelligence officers suspected enemy forces hid there after evading ARVN operations to the north and west. Once the BLT cleared the two villages, the SLF would continue with the originally planned sweep to the southwest.

Badger Tooth started as Company L in LVTs landed over Green Beach at 1100 on 26 December and proceeded to LZ Finch. The operation continued as scheduled against very light opposition. Major David L. Althoff's "Poor Devils" from HMM-262 landed the last elements of the battalion at Finch by 1415. Two hours later Company K suffered the first casualty of Badger Tooth when automatic weapons fire west of the LZ wounded a Marine.

The SLF commander, Colonel Schmidt, accompanied by the U.S. Army liaison officer to ARVN forces in the area, arrived at the battalion command post with orders for the BLT to change direction and


Operation Badger Tooth 26-28 December 1967
1 - 26 December
2 - 27 December
3 - Thon Tham Khe Night of 27-28 December
Thon Trung An
Cos. L and M Search 26 Dec
South China Sea
Than Tham Khe
Night Positions 26 December
Green Beach
LZ Finch
meters 0 200 400
116 NVA
Enemy Escape Route
meters 0 100 200
1
2
3

sweep the coastal villages of Tham Khe and Trung An. Company L received the mission of sweeping Tham Khe, with Company M in support. After moving to the edge of the village in LVTs, Company L advanced northwest into the built-up area. By 1822 Company L had cleared the first village and was well into Trung An. Both towns were clean; the Marines killed only three Viet Cong and detained four. The infantrymen found no evidence of the presence of Communist formations. By 1940, both Companies L and M had tied in for the night north and west of Tham Khe. The night was quiet.

At 0700 on the 27th, both companies moved out on another sweep of the two villages. Company M moved north on a line parallel to Trung An so it could begin it's sweep of the village from north to south. Company L, with the mission to sweep Tham Ke, initially moved out to the northeast. Leading elements of Company L were almost into the south of Trung An when Company L's commander realized that his leading platoon had not turned south toward Tham Ke. Company L reversed direction immediately and started toward Tham Ke.

Just as the leading platoon of Company L approached the edge of the village, a concealed enemy force opened up with a devastating volume of fire from machine guns, rifles, RPGs, and mortars. The company immediately suffered many casualties and Captain Thomas S. Hubbel decided to pull his company back and regroup for another attack. He requested supporting arms fires on Tham Ke while his company prepared for its new assault. After two air strikes, followed by naval gunfire, Company L assaulted the village. The enemy again met the Marines with withering defensive fires, killing Captain Hubbel and his battalion "tac-net" radio operator. Lieutenant Colonel McQuown lost communications with the company for a short period until the acting company executive officer assumed command of Company L.

During the period without radio contact with Company L, Lieutenant Colonel McQuown ordered Company M to move east and south and join the fight on the left flank of Company L. Company M reached its attack position and immediately came under heavy enemy fire. Lieutenant Colonel McQuown realized at this time that the two companies were up against a major enemy force in well-prepared defensive positions. The search of Tham Ke the previous day had been inadequate.

Lieutenant Colonel McQuown ordered Company I to move to the south of Tham Ke. He then re-

Marines of BLT 3/1 take cover as they fight to enter the village of Tham Khe on 27 December after their first search of the village the previous day failed to detect the presence of the elaborate but well-camouflaged positions of the 116th NVA Battalion.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A190208

quested that the SLF land the tank platoon from the ARG ships. Next, he instructed Company K to take the pressure off Companies L and M by attacking the south end of Tham Ke. After prepping the area with 81mm mortar fire, Company K attacked against fierce resistance.

Company K made no progress until the arrival of two Marine tanks at the company's position. Unfortunately, the two tanks had sustained water damage to their communications equipment during the landing and could not communicate with the infantrymen except by voice.* This reduced their effectiveness; however, the tankers did knock out some enemy bunkers by direct fire from their 90mm guns. The inability to coordinate the tanks' fire with its own assault kept the company from making more than a limited penetration into the village complex. It did, however, gain a foothold in the village amid the enemy defenses.

Companies K, L, and M continued their battle as night fell, Lieutenant Colonel McQuown expected the enemy would use the darkness to cover their escape. To counteract this, he moved Company I to the right flank of Company K where it could maintain control over the eastern, or beach side, of Tham Ke. Company M, to the north, could cover part of the beach side of the village by fire. Lieutenant Colonel McQuown also moved elements of both Companies L and K to the west of Tham Ke. Even though the extent of the area involved precluded a link-up of these elements, McQuown anticipated that his unit dispositions would block the enemy within the confines of the village. Such was not the case.

The following morning, the 28th, Company K, already in the southern edges of Tham Ke, and Company I renewed their assault on the village. They quickly subdued the initial heavy enemy small arms fire and secured the village by noon. McQuown's Marines spent the afternoon in a detailed search of Tham Ke. He recalled:

> This search revealed a village that was literally a defensive bastion. It was prepared for all-around defense in depth with a network of underground tunnels you could stand up in, running the full length of the village. Connecting tunnels ran east and west. This tunnel system supported ground level bunkers for machine guns, RPG's, and small arms around the entire perimeter of the village. Thus the NVA were able to defend, reinforce, or withdraw in any direction. All defensive preparation had been artfully camouflaged with growing vegetation. Residents of Tham Ke, questioned after the fight, disclosed that the NVA had been preparing the defense of this village for one year.[20]

The search turned up numerous machine guns, RPGs, AK-47 rifles, and thousands of rounds of ammunition which clearly indicated that a major NVA force had defended the village, not local Viet Cong. A dying NVA soldier confirmed it; the enemy force had been the *116th NVA Battalion*. The Marines also learned that ARVN forces operating northwest of Tham Ke had found over 100 bodies from the *116th NVA Battalion* abandoned in the sand dunes. The enemy force apparently had evacuated its casualties through the gap between L and K Companies during the night.

At 1800 on the 31st, a New Year's truce went into effect and SLF Bravo prepared to return to its ships; the New Year's stand-down cancelled any further thoughts of attacking inland. Bad weather and rough seas slowed back-loading, but by 1130, 2 January the BLT had left the "Street Without Joy." In the sharp fighting at Tham Khe, the Marines suffered 48 killed and 86 wounded; 31 enemy soldiers were known dead. Tham Khe was a bitter experience for the Marines of BLT 3/1, but Badger Tooth was a poignant tactical lesson which would be remembered in the clouded future of 1968.

Ballistic Arch/Kentucky V/Osceola
24 - 27 November, 27 November - 29 December, 30 December—continuing 1968

Eight days after leaving Cam Lo, SLF Alpha landed again. While at sea, BLT 1/3's commanders changed, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas turned over his command to recently promoted Lieutenant Colonel Richard W. Goodale. The 24 November landing, Ballistic Arch, was a helicopter and surface assault of Viet Cong-dominated villages on the northern coast of Quang Tri Province, only seven kilometers south of the southern DMZ boundary.

Ballistic Arch aimed at Communist sympathizers reported in and around the hamlet of Mai Xa Thi. The operation was a "walk through" for most of the battalion, but the opening minutes were tense for the crews of the LVTP-5s of the 4th Platoon, Com-

*Of the five tanks assigned to the BLT, only these two participated in this action. One tank was under repair at Da Nang; a second would not start and had to be left aboard ship. None appear to have been properly waterproofed for landing. The third tank reportedly "submerged" during the landing and the other two, though operable, "received water damage on landing." BLT 3/1 AAR, Operation Badger Tooth, dtd. 16Jan68, p. 15 (Archives, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A190211

Company I, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines rests on the beach on 28 December 1927 after it and Company K completed their assault through the village of Tham Khe and eliminated the rear guard of the 116th NVA Battalion, *which had covered the withdrawal of the bulk of the enemy battalion during the night.*

pany A, 5th Amphibian Tractor Battalion and the embarked Marines of the BLT's Company A.

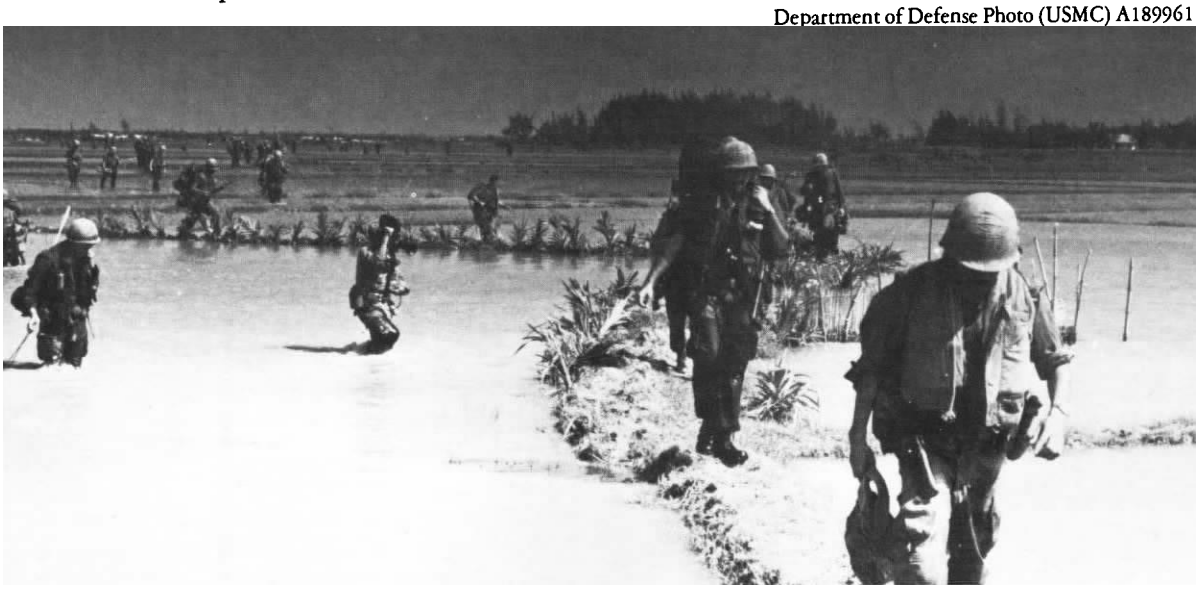
Poor information on surf conditions presented the amphibian tractors with a serious problem. As they approached the beach, they started to take on more sea water than their pumps could handle; at times it was knee deep in the tractors. Two Marines, riding on top of a tractor washed overboard, but fortunately others rescued them. At last the vehicles grounded and climbed the dunes of the Quang Tri coast. There were no losses.

The expected contact did not materialize. The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Goodale summarized the apparently poor intelligence which triggered Ballistic Arch, saying, "no fighting holes, bunkers, or fortifications of any kind were uncovered during the operation . . . The area appeared to be quite pacified and the indigenous personnel were very friendly."[21] Ballistic Arch ended at noon on 27 November, and BLT 1/3 immediately came under the 9th Marines' operational control.

The BLT again phased back into the continuing Kentucky Operation. Its only active participation, however, was a sweep during the period 28-30 November. On 2 December the battalion moved back to the A-3 Strongpoint to provide security and engineer support for its construction. The Marines made a concerted effort to complete construction. By

Rice paddy mud provides the only resistance to BLT 1/3 Marines after poor intelligence caused Operation Ballistic Arch to take place in a thoroughly pacified area of Vietnam.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189961



the time of the departure of BLT 1/3 on 29 December, the Marines had completed the defensive wire and minefield and almost finished the bunker complex.

Enemy contact during the stay at A-3 was very light. The battalion experienced small enemy probes until 11 December when supporting arms broke up a platoon-size Communist attack. Enemy ground action dropped off appreciably afterward. Enemy artillery, mortar, and rocket fire were the main deterrent to the Marines' engineering effort at A-3. From 2 December until the 29th, 578 rounds landed on the position. Phase V of Kentucky concluded on 29 December. BLT 1/3 made a combined tactical foot and motor march back to Quang Tri Airfield complex. The last two days of December passed as the BLT prepared to relieve the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, then involved in Operation Osceola. The end of the year brought no slowing of the planned tempo of SLF operations.

CHAPTER 12

Pacification

The Problem Defined—County Fair
Marine Grass-Roots-Level Participation—Reporting and Evaluation

The Problem Defined

Military commanders in Vietnam realized that operations against Communist main force units, alone, could not win the war. These operations could only provide a shield of security behind which the South Vietnamese Government and its allies could implement a Revolutionary Development or pacification program, a program aimed solely at winning the support of the people.

Pacification is a relatively simple concept; the process and means of accomplishment are extremely complex. Because of differing interpretations and frequent interchanges of the terms "pacification," "revolutionary development," and "nation building," ComUSMACV issued a memorandum, "Clarification of Terms," which listed the following definitions:

> Pacification is the military, political, economic, and social process of establishing or reestablishing local government responsive to and involving the participation of the people. It includes the provision of sustained, credible territorial security, the destruction of the enemy's underground government, and the initiation of economic and social activity capable of self-sustenance and expansion. The economic element of pacification includes the opening of roads and waterways and maintenance of lines of communication important to economic and military activity.
>
> Revolutionary development, the leading edge of

An infantryman from Company D, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines demonstrates the need for a viable pacification program by holding up an empty bulgur wheat sack found in a North Vietnamese Army unit's bunker destroyed by the battalion on 26 March 1967.

3d MarDiv ComdC, March 1967

pacification, is the formalized Government of Vietnam program, under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Revolutionary Development, in specified hamlets generally within RD campaign areas. It includes the local security for these hamlets and the political, economic, and social activities at that level.

Nation building is the economic, political, and social activity having an impact nationwide and/or in urban centers. It is related to pacification in that it builds on the results of pacification and contributes to the establishment of a viable economic and social community.[1]

Since the beginning of United States involvement in Vietnam, security for the rural population remained the basic requirement for pacification, and how best to provide this security was the subject of continuing debate between American and Vietnamese officials. The military side contended that the problem was a fundamental military issue, that physical security of the contested area must be established before starting any developmental programs; civil officials, on the other hand, viewed the problem as a political issue, stating that political, economic, and social developmental projects would make greater inroads on Communist influence and therefore should have greater priority. The contrasting views led to the initiation of programs which often resulted in duplication, as well as confusion on the part of the Vietnamese offices charged with implementing and administering them. To help already overloaded local administrators, MACV dispatched more American advisors to the provinces, but, unfortunately, in many cases their presence actually retarded pacification progress. Zealous advisors often stifled local initiative.

At the same time, MACV experienced equally perplexing problems. While MACV perceived that security was the first prerequisite for a successful program, it had difficulty implementing a sound, balanced management system. As in the civilian programs, military civic action concepts evolved by trial and error.

The Vietnamese had experimented with pacification programs since 1954. Based on past experience, a new program emerged late in 1965. The Vietnamese adopted the concept of the armed propaganda cadre as the basis for the national program. The civil side of the program began slowly in 1966, primarily because of the shortage of trained cadre, but the Vietnamese Government provided enthusiastic direction and the prospects for success were optimistic.

In February 1966, the Honolulu Conference aligned many of the diverse American and Vietnamese opinions and actions. Top-level U.S. and Vietnamese policy makers agreed to consider the civilian aspects of the war as important as the military effort. This summit changed the system of priorities and caused the initiation of additional programs and provision of more of the requisites needed to wage what many called the "other war." Perhaps the most significant outcome of the conference was President Johnson's decision that only one person would direct United States pacification efforts in Vietnam. This led to the establishment of the Office of Civil Operations (OCO) in late autumn 1966. This new organization brought the various U.S. civilian pacification programs under the control of a senior official who, in turn, reported directly to the deputy ambassador.

The South Vietnamese Government assigned the overall responsibility for the Vietnamese side of the national pacification plan, the Revolutionary Development Program, to Major General Nguyen Duc Thang, who headed the newly created Ministry of Revolutionary Development. A reorganization of the Vietnamese war cabinet on 12 July 1966 gave Thang direct supervision over the Ministries of Revolutionary Development, Agriculture, Public Works, and Interior. At this juncture, Thang gained authority to direct coordination and integration of civil/military Revolutionary Development activities at all echelons of the government.

The main operational element for the civil aspects of Revolutionary Development was the 59-man Revolutionary Development cadre team. The government recruited these teams from within each district, trained them at the National Cadre Training School at Vung Tau, and returned them to their provinces for assignment to a district chief for work in one of his hamlets. Their first task involved the security and defense of their assigned hamlets. Once they established security they started working with the people to create a better way of life within the hamlet.

In September, to ensure military assistance for the program, the South Vietnamese appointed General Thang to the position of assistant for territorial affairs and pacification to the Chief, Joint General Staff. Major functions of his position included development of policies and concepts for military activities in support of revolutionary development and supervision of the employment, maneuver, and training of regional and popular forces. The primary

Revolutionary Development role of the military forces required achieving a level of security which would permit the accomplishment of civil activities and subsequent nation building. The 1967 Combined Campaign Plan assigned the primary mission of supporting the Revolutionary Development program to ARVN forces, thus, by the end of 1966, the South Vietnamese Government had taken major steps to consolidate its pacification programs.*

As the Vietnamese reorganized, the Americans also continued to reform their own programs. The Office of Civil Operations (OCO) confidently reported that it had integrated the pacification effort with military operations and was making significant progress in implementing the various programs. One of the most important OCO contributions was the appointment of four regional directors, one for each corps area. These four men had full authority over all American civilians in their respective regions and reported directly to the director of OCO; previously there had been no central management of the various pacification programs. During the spring of 1967, the United States realized that it needed a stronger organization and placed all of the various components of the American pacification effort, both civilian and military, under a single manager, ComUSMACV. The name of the new organization was Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS).

On 23 May, MACV Directive 10-12 implemented CORDS. Ambassador Robert Komer became General Westmoreland's deputy for CORDS with full responsibility for the entire program. The directive specifically charged the ambassador with "supervising the formulation and execution of all plans, policies and programs, military and civilian, which support the GVN's revolutionary development program and related programs." In addition, the directive provided for the integration and consolidation of all OCO and revolutionary development support activities at all levels: nation, corps, province, and district. The OCO regional director became the deputy for CORDS to each corps commander, while the senior provincial and district advisors became CORDS representatives at those levels. Accommodation of this extensive program proved to be a simple matter in I Corps, chiefly because the I Corps Coordinating Council had performed a very similar function for 20 months.

By early August 1965, Marine civic action had expanded to the point that coordination with other United States agencies in I Corps became imperative for the effective support of the Vietnamese pacification program. General Walt ordered the creation of the I Corps Joint Coordinating Council. The council drew its members from all major U.S. and Vietnamese agencies in I CTZ, including representatives from both Marine and ARVN military staffs. When the council met on 30 August 1965, it was the first working regional council of its kind in South Vietnam. This organizational step preceded the formation of subcommittees for public health, education, roads, refugees, distribution, and police. Although the Joint Coordinating Council had no directive-making authority or material resources of its own, the influence of its members made it the most effective group for carrying out the total pacification program in I Corps.* By the fall of 1966, the success of the council encouraged and assisted the formation of other joint coordinating councils (JCC). These JCCs were independent of the corps-level council, but had similar staffs and missions. As 1967 began, growing Vietnamese participation in council activities and sponsored programs indicated the value of the JCC approach.

During 1965 III MAF created a fifth general staff section, G-5, to coordinate all civic action programs. The Marines established G-5/S-5 sections in every Marine division, regiment, and battalion serving in Vietnam. At the same time, to prevent overlap of projects, III MAF assigned responsibility for the coordination of civic action in particular geographical areas to specific units. This enabled them to coordinate all programs within their areas with local government officials. By the end of 1966, these two steps formed a sound base for both the III MAF and Vietnamese pacification programs.

Following the formation of CORDS, many of the functions of the III MAF G-5 section shifted to the CORDS representatives at III MAF Headquarters. Such a shift inevitably caused some friction between the two offices. Among them was the tendency of

*For a detailed description of the Revolutionary Development Program during 1966 and the development of the Combined Campaign for 1967, see Shulimson, *U. S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966.*

*Vice Admiral Thomas R. Weschler wrote that General Walt's leadership was the key element that molded the various agencies into a team dedicated to a successful pacification campaign. Vice Admiral Thomas R. Weschler, Comments on draft ms, 18Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

the CORDS staff to report through their own channels directly to Saigon, bypassing III MAF. Despite daily meetings, the G-5 section believed that much information from the CORDS system was not reaching the G-5. "As CORDS took on more of the responsibility for pacification from the G-5," wrote Colonel James L. Black, who served as III MAF G-5, "coordination among the [III MAF] G-3, G-2, and G-5 became almost non-existent." III MAF sharply reduced the size of the G-5 section and it almost integrated into the CORDS staff. However, in spite of being the smallest staff section in III MAF, G-5 remained charged with major requirements to support the pacification effort.[2]

The G-5 officer found a number of obstacles in his path. Even though the Army's 29th Civil Affairs Company supported III MAF, the growth of CORDS blurred the command relationship between III MAF and the company. Further, Colonel Black did not believe the company's task organization properly reflected its mission. Another limiting factor was the lack of understanding of civil affairs among Marines assigned to G-5/S-5 staffs at all command levels. Few had been school trained in their duties and had to learn on-the-job. Those with formal school training had to learn to shift their thinking from theoretical, classroom concepts to the practical situation at hand. The learning process slowed progress in the III MAF civil affairs effort.

The importance placed upon civic action required the III MAF G-5 to submit a daily civic action report to FMFPac headquarters. The report included such topics as the amount of lumber, clothing, garbage, and other material distributed to the Vietnamese people during the last 24 hours. This classified report could not be delayed, not even by heavy message traffic during peak operational periods. "If this report did not reach FMFPac within 24 hours," wrote Colonel Black, "you would receive a 'nasty' phone call [from Hawaii]." The reports problem ended, according to Colonel Black, in the spring of 1968.[3]

County Fair

Throughout 1967, the Marines concentrated on the basics of pacification development. In accordance with the Honolulu Declaration of 1966, the Marines directed much of their effort at the expansion and refinement of the pacification program they had initiated earlier. For their programs to succeed, the Marines needed to provide secure conditions in which the Vietnamese people could live and in which all levels of legal government could function without enemy interference. To this end, the Marines' main objective was the isolation of the VC from the people, both physically and economically. Golden Fleece operations, in which Marines provided security during rice harvests, had proven successful in protecting the villagers' rice crops since September 1965; however, they occurred only during the two or three yearly harvest seasons. On the other hand, the war on the VC infrastructure was a daily affair.

The source of the enemy's strength was the local guerilla organization which operated in 5- to 10-man cells within each hamlet. Each cell acted as a clandestine *de facto* government which worked to foster Communist influence, while simultaneously undermining the influence of local officials and the central government. If the local population was not sympathetic to the Communist cause, the guerillas resorted to intimidation and terror to control inhabitants. Each guerrilla acted as an agent between the people and the VC main force units which needed food, recruits, and intelligence. Simply stated, pacification involved eliminating the agents and thus reducing the large Communist units to the status of conventional forces groping around in hostile territory. Furthermore, with the destruction of the guerrilla infrastructure, the seeds of RVN influence could fall on neutral, if not completely fertile, ground.

The Marines recognized these realities during the early stages of the campaign and devised several techniques to combat the guerrillas. One of the most successful, initiated in 1966, was the County Fair concept. Basically, County Fairs involved elaborate cordon and search operations conducted by combined ARVN and Marine forces. Since the South Vietnamese government needed to know who belonged where, the ARVN handled the population control aspects, as well as the actual searching of the targeted village, while the Marines usually remained in the background, providing tactical "muscle."

Once the combined commanders selected an operational area, Marine units moved in at night and established a cordon around the designated village to prevent the VC, if any, from escaping or gaining reinforcements. At dawn, ARVN troops entered the village, rounded up the inhabitants, apologized for the inconvenience, and announced that they intended to search the hamlet. While district and village leaders mingled with the people explaining what was

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370115

Vietnamese peasant women hold out their straw hats for the mixture of ham and rice prepared by the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines during a "County Fair" operation in May.

happening, other officials checked identification cards and took a census.

The allies tried to make the experience as pleasant as possible. They set up a temporary dispensary to provide the villagers with free medical and dental care. They fed the people, including providing candy and other delights for the children. Entertainment featured movies, live presentations, and band concerts which helped to cover the serious business of uprooting the Communists. These organized amusements provided the name "County Fair."

While the distractions continued in the assembly area, South Vietnamese troops systematically combed the village. Often the guerrillas slipped into tunnels or spider holes at the first sign of approaching troops, but if the troops discovered the underground hiding place they literally smoked out the VC. On some operations, the searchers used portable blowers, called "Mighty Mites," to saturate the shafts with tear gas and smoke.* If the guerrillas chose to run away, they encountered the Marine cordon around the village.

While these operations proved successful, County Fairs were not an end in themselves. When Marine and ARVN units left the area, they took with them the security essential to the survival of pro-government villages. Even if the allies eradicated the existing VC infrastructure, their departure created a vacuum into which other guerrilla cadre could filter. During a survey conducted by Marine civil affairs personnel in the Chu Lai area, most civilians interviewed stated that they appreciated the medical care, the clothing, the new schools, and all of the other benefits, but what they really wanted was protection from the Viet Cong. Revolutionary Development teams and Popular Forces could only partially remedy the situation because of their limited training and armament. The Marines realized these facts, but they also recognized the unexploited potential which the popular forces offered: total familiarity with local conditions, loyalties, needs, and every physical characteristic of their home villages. Marine recognition of this potential, and efforts to develop it, produced one of the most productive innovations in I Corps, the Combined Action Program.

Marine Grass-Roots-Level Participation

The birth of the Combined Action Program occurred in the summer of 1965 in Lieutenant Colonel William W. Taylor's 3d Battalion, 4th Marines as a means of controlling the population around the Phu

*The term Mighty Mite should not be confused with the similar nickname for a light vehicle used as a jeep by Marine units in the 1960s.

Bai combat base. The battalion civil affairs officer, Captain John J. Mullen, Jr., provided the original inspiration. Understanding the Vietnamese culture, Mullen realized that the militia troops living in the villages were the key to local security. Rural Vietnamese had an orientation toward families, ancestors, and hamlets; they were not strong nationalists. Most farmers spent their entire lives within a 10-mile radius of their hamlets. PFs usually performed poorly if moved to another district, but in defense of their own homes they could be tough. In the war with the VC, motivation alone could not overcome superior firepower and experience. Mullen believed the Marines could add the necessary ingredients and, given proper leadership and firepower, the PFs not only could, but would stand up to the VC.

Lieutenant Colonel Taylor agreed with Mullen's idea and, on 3 August 1965, he sent four squads of Marines to work with six platoons of PFs in the three villages northwest of his perimeter. First Lieutenant Paul R. Ek, who spoke Vietnamese, became the company commander and a PF lieutenant worked as his executive officer. Under this leadership, the program got underway.

Lieutenant Ek's success with combined action prompted III MAF to expand the program. General Walt, a strong advocate of the pacification program, approved of the results at Phu Bai and, in January 1966, decided to initiate similar programs at Da Nang and Chu Lai.* General Walt's initiating order stated:

> 1. . . . the Commanding General, I Corps has concurred in III MAF proposal to expand the Marine-Popular Force program throughout all Marine enclaves and has published instructions to subordinates throughout I Corps.
>
> 2. Action will be taken immediately to establish liaison through Province, District, and down to village/hamlet as required to take operational control of Popular Force units within a zone of action in accordance with reference (b). In each case ensure that local officials thoroughly understand the program and have been apprised of General Thi's letter. Specifically, presentations will include that Marine forces intend to establish communications to Popular Force units, provide supporting arms, reserve forces, and plan to place Marines with selected Popular Force Platoons. Where possible Popular Force units in proximity to each other will be organized into Combined Action Companies.* In discussions, stress the mutual benefits of the program in that Marines can profit from Popular Forces knowledge of area, language, and people while the Popular Force will receive valuable training and will be provided additional security. Of primary importance is the fact that this relationship will provide a basis for better understanding and building of mutual respect between our forces. In presenting the program to RVN officials, avoid the use of the terms "operational control" by substituting "cooperation or coordination."
>
> 3. Insure a thorough indoctrination on the overall aims of programs to all concerned. These are to improve the effectiveness and prestige of the Popular Forces with a view to increasing recruitment to build up this critically understrength force. The importance of the Popular Forces to provide security for rear areas, which will allow Marine/ARVN combat forces to move forward, cannot be overstressed. At every opportunity when dealing with GVN officials, highlight the Popular Force problem and assess the adequacy of the program at local levels to improve this force.
>
> 4. Upon receipt of this letter, report:
> a. Location of Popular Force units in area of operation.
> b. Assigned mission of each unit.
> c. Commander.
> d. Personnel present for duty.
> e. Amount and condition of equipment.
> f. Uniform requirements.
> g. Plans for implementing program.
>
> 5. After the initial report submit summary of operations conducted and evaluation of the program on a weekly basis.[5]

By January 1966, there were seven combined action platoons in existence; by July, 38; and by the beginning of 1967 the number had risen to 57. III MAF planned still more.

While it was important to have the support of III MAF command levels for combined action, the success or failure of the venture ultimately rested on the shoulders of 19- and 20-year-old Marines. Combined Action units needed a special Marine; a man without the necessary motivation, understanding, and compassion could do more harm than good. All Marines in the original program were volunteers with at least four months' combat experience, a favorable recommendation from their commanding officer, no record of disciplinary action, and, all important, no discernible racial prejudices. These men were the

*Captain Mullen, who replaced Lieutenant Ek upon the latter's rotation in September 1965, and several members of the original company assisted and advised in the establishment of the second unit. Lieutenant Colonel John J. Mullen, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 21May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

*The name of these units soon changed to Combined Action Platoons (CAPs). The Marines found that the acronym "CAC" was, under certain pronunciations, a vulgarity in the Vietnamese language.

foundation upon which the Marine side of the program was built.

By mid-1967, III MAF had compiled statistics which illustrated the dedication of Marines in the Combined Action Program. The average Marine participant had a 75-percent chance of being wounded once during his tour and a 30-percent chance of being hit a second time. The ultimate statistic, those who would die, was just under 12 percent. Despite these grim mathematical reminders, over 60 percent of the Marines volunteered for at least one six-month extension to their normal 12-month tours in Vietnam. The high extension rate was a strong indication to their leaders that the Combined Action Program had a better than average chance of success.

The basic operating unit of the program, the combined action platoon (CAP), consisted of a 14-man Marine squad and a Navy corpsman, integrated into a nominal 35-man Popular Forces platoon. The ideal scenario following establishment of a combined action unit was as follows:

Initially, there was only one objective, around-the-clock security of their assigned hamlet. The first days were the most dangerous, the period when unit cohesiveness and proficiency were most questionable. The Marines first had to teach the PFs to defend themselves. The Marines provided the knowledge of tactics and weaponry while the PFs contributed their knowledge of the terrain and local conditions. In the field the Marine squad leader, normally a sergeant, usually controlled the unit; but during the daily routine, cooperation replaced command. As the PFs' confidence and skill grew, CAP patrolling became more aggressive. Continuous sharing of experience gained through daily, side-by-side participation in training and patrolling created truly effective, integrated platoons and a new degree of reliable hamlet security. As the strength of the CAP grew, the peoples' willingness to accept the unit also increased. Then, and only then, could lasting social action within the hamlets become a reality.

Time worked paradoxically for the CAP Marines. To ensure their own survival, they had to quickly transform the CAP into a cohesive defense force, but the opposite was the case in their dealings with the people. The Vietnamese, possessing a wariness of outsiders typical of peasant societies, would not let the Marines force their way into the existing social structure of the hamlet. Acceptance took time. Usually the breakthrough in acquiring community

3d MarDiv ComdC, June 1967

This Marine, though wearing starched, pressed trousers and shined boots for the visiting photographer, wields a hoe alongside a Popular Forces militiaman to demonstrate the importance of cooperative effort in the Combined Action Program.

acceptance came from the hamlet children. Since the CAP compound was a natural gathering place for the naturally curious and uninhibited children, they accepted the Marines and, in turn, gained the friendship of the Americans. In most cases, hamlet children became the most significant factor in bridging the cultural gap. As parents began to know and understand the Marines through their own children, empathy could develop which aided the establishment of common purposes.

This approach was not without its pitfalls, as Navy Chaplain Vincent T. Capadonno, a former missionary on Taiwan, pointed out in a series of lectures to Marine units at Chu Lai in the summer of 1966. Young American males, he said, love to play with children—for about 15 minutes. Then they tire of the children and start pushing them away, sometimes having to get rough before the children realize the game is over. Further, in Vietnamese peasant society, where infant and child mortality were high, children, though loved by their parents, had little social standing. Among the Vietnamese, social standing was a matter of age, with the elderly having the highest, most respected status. The American cultural emphasis on youth could lead young Marines to concentrate on young Vietnamese and ig-

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189582

Popular Forces militiamen and Marines work together to improve village defenses by building a traffic control gate over a bridge near the combined action platoon's position.

nore the village elders, a situation that could create resentment within the village power structure.[6]

In areas of strong Communist influence, the development of a close relationship was even more difficult. The Marines had to counter VC propaganda which pictured them as blood-thirsty mercenaries who burned, raped, and pillaged, but participants managed to overcome these obstacles when their actions disproved the Communists' claims. They had to live, work, and eat with the people, respect their customs, and treat them as equals. The CAP corpsmen also helped to narrow the gap by providing rudimentary but vital medical assistance. Most importantly, the Marines' approach had to demonstrate that they genuinely cared about the well-being of the villagers.

Once the people accepted the Marines, true civic action could start, but again the Americans could not take charge. For civic action to be effective, it had to reflect what the people sincerely wanted, as well as what they were willing to support. Once everyone determined these needs, only the imagination and initiative of the Marines and the villagers limited the extent of the program. The range of projects accomplished by Marines, PFs, and citizens working together ranged from school construction to animal husbandry. Many desired civic action projects exceeded the material resources available to the CAPs, but they could turn to the vast inventories of agencies as USAID and CARE. Local Marine commands also helped by providing the hamlets available construction material, machinery, tools, and clothing.

When they demonstrated military proficiency and gained popular support, the CAPs could apply greater pressure on the VC. By denying the guerrillas access to the hamlets, the defense force curtailed the Communists' logistic and manpower sources. The CAPs also established antiguerrilla intelligence nets in their immediate areas. When the people realized that to help the CAPs was to help themselves, they provided the Marines information on VC movements, storage areas, and the locations of mines and booby traps.* Armed with this intelligence, the CAPs managed to inflict heavier casualties on the Viet Cong, driving them further from the mainstream of hamlet life.

The CAPs also attempted to erode Communist strength through persuasion. They aimed this effort primarily at the relatives of the local guerrillas. The Marines entreated the resident families of known VC to ask their kin to give up the VC cause, pointing out that sooner or later the CAPs would find and possibly kill them. This approach not only ac-

*The Marines rarely, if ever, patrolled without the PFs, because the Vietnamese, being more familiar with the area, could spot mines and booby traps more readily than the Americans.

celerated enemy defections, but it also reinforced the permanency of the CAP program in the minds of the peasants.

All of these activities contributed to the growth of the villagers' belief in their own government and their allies. Perhaps the most important factor in promoting confidence in the program was the fact that the Viet Cong had not regained control of any area in which a CAP had established security. The presence of a successful CAP in a village complex prohibited further use of that village by the VC.

Not all CAP units succeeded, especially during the period of rapid expansion of the program. Lieutenant Colonel Max McQuown, the commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, was not favorably impressed with either of the two units in his battalion TAOR. He described the problems of these units:

> Few of the Marines assigned to these two CAP units had prior ground combat experience. . . . [They] were an admixture out of combat service support units. The leaders and the Marines under them . . . lacked skills in scouting and patrolling, mines and booby traps, map reading, observed fire procedures, basic infantry tactics, and VC tactics and techniques. Further, they had scant knowledge of the Vietnamese language and were unfamiliar with the social and religious customs of the people they were living with.
>
> With respect to their PF counterparts, *not one* PF was a resident of either village . . . all the eligible resident males, who should have been members of the PF platoons, were gone! They had been drafted into the ARVN, joined the VC, or deserted the village to keep from [serving in either the ARVN or VC]. The strength of each PF platoon in these villages never exceeded 20 men. . . .
>
> Marine [and PF] members of the CAP platoon . . . kept themselves aloof from the villagers they were supposed to be helping. . . .
>
> There was *no* record of either CAP unit capturing a VC, let alone destroying the VC infrastructure in these villages. In fact, the VC operated with impunity around these villages unless elements of 3/1 were in the area. . . .
>
> [The chiefs of the two villages], both many times wounded [and] ardent anti-communist leaders, chose to deal directly with [the battalion S-2 and S-5 sections] with respect to VC activity and civic action programs. Both chiefs were instrumental in initiating 3/1 action against VC operating in and around their villages. Neither chief had faith that the CAP units would accomplish anything.[7]

The existence of similar problems among a number of CAP units, which were traceable to rapid expansion of the program, was apparent to III MAF headquarters. To enhance the program's effectiveness, General Cushman, the new III MAF commander, established a provisional combined action group (CAG) headquarters at Da Nang. The primary purpose of this provisional CAG was to oversee training and support of the combined action units. A month later, III MAF formed two more

A large South Vietnamese flag flies over the bunkers and barbed wire protecting the gate leading into the headquarters of Combined Action Platoon 3-1 in August 1967.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189537

CAGs to direct activities in the Phu Bai and Chu Lai areas.

During July, III MAF revised control and support of the CAP Marines by removing them from the command of the Marine division responsible for their area. The new chain of command linked the CAPs through their companies and groups directly to III MAF. Under the revised system, supervisory authority rested with the deputy commanding general of III MAF, Major General Herman Nickerson, Jr., via his Combined Action Program Staff. This command revision occurred following the relocation of Marine tactical units after the arrival of the Army's Task Force Oregon at Chu Lai.

The CAP program continued to grow during 1967. By July there were 75 CAPs and by the end of the year, 79 operated under 14 company headquarters.

The increasing success of the Combined Action Program demonstrated the results achievable. Pacification involved not changing, but rather, reinforcing the villagers' own aspirations. The successful CAP Marines understood this and, because of it, achieved one of the basic goals of the entire pacification effort, the unification of interest between the South Vietnamese villager and the individual Marine. For the process to work in the Marine TAORs, III MAF needed the same identity of interest between the Marines in the regular units and the local populace. Marines in companies and battalions had to realize that their mission was the protection of the people, while the Vietnamese peasants had to learn to overcome their fear of Americans.

The Marine Corps attempted to solve this problem with its Personal Response Project, a program designed to help the individual Marine to understand the South Vietnamese. III MAF initiated the project in July 1966, but it remained in a data collecting stage until early in 1967. The first steps of the program consisted of making several surveys of Marines throughout I Corps to establish a representative sample of Marine attitudes toward the Vietnamese people. At the same time, III MAF chaplains conducted lectures and discussions to acquaint the Marines with the basic features of Vietnamese culture and civilization. III MAF distributed a *Platoon Leader's Personal Response Notebook* to all small unit commanders as an instruction guide for Marines under their command.

In February 1967, the 3d Marine Division established a Personal Response Council and a Personal Response Contact Team. The council and team started a variety of programs directed toward improving Marine-Vietnamese relationships, essentially through eliminating any negative attitudes held by the Marines.[8] By the end of May, both the 1st Marine Division and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing had similar programs.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189650

Cpl Gary W. Armstrong fires his M-60 machine gun toward a Viet Cong sniper's position while on a combat patrol with a combined action unit on 9 May.

The Headquarters, Marine Corps statement of the purpose and objectives of the Marine Corps Personal Response Project was:

> The Personal Response Project is a systematic effort toward attitudinal improvement in intercultural relations. By discovering the ways in which people of another culture relate their religious and ethical value systems to daily life the project develops effective anticipation of acculturative problems. Such anticipation and understanding is one of the keys to the elimination of offensive behavorial patterns toward indigenous citizens. It is expected that appropriate mutual assistance between Marines and the citizenry will be a by-product of increased understanding and contributory to the elimination of local guerrilla forces in an insurgency environment.
>
> The objectives of the Personal Response Project are to: assist military personnel to respond to the predisposition of indigenous citizens to act in concert with their social, religious, and cultural value systems; identify the expression of these value systems and the motivation implicit in them; and recognize that the lives, relationships, and ac-

tions of indigenous citizens are of the same importance as those of all other human beings.[9]

Despite the heavy language, the approach seemed helpful. By the end of 1967, the Personal Response Project had become one of the anchors of III MAF's civic action program. Lieutenant Colonel Donald L. Evans, the III MAF assistant G-5 at the time the project started, stated that he considered the Personal Response Project as important as psychological operations and the Combined Action Program.[10]

The Marines realized that any effective pacification plan must have both a political and a psychological impact. They found that civic action and psychological operations had to be mutually supporting and to obtain a maximum benefit, required close coordination with Vietnamese officials. To this end, the County Fair and Combined Action Programs proved most effective. Other joint psychological operations involved relocation of refugees from VC controlled areas and the support of tactical operations with armed propaganda teams' presentations, leaflet drops, audio-visual productions, combat loudspeaker performances, and movie festivals. Vietnamese Cultural Drama Teams served in Marine operational areas to entertain local peasants; these teams presented short dramas and songs weaving in appropriate political points.

The most significant psychological effort was the *Chieu Hoi* (Open Arms) Program. This was the government's campaign to win over the Viet Cong. The government provided them with assistance for a new start by teaching them a trade to use when returning to their homes. Ralliers (*hoi chanhs*) often provided valuable information, especially regarding the location of troops and equipment caches, but more importantly, III MAF believed this program provided still another avenue for achieving pacification. Consequently, III MAF accelerated planning to support the *Chieu Hoi* Program. Planned support included the building of new *Chieu Hoi* centers to increase the handling capability of the returnees. During 1967, the *Chieu Hoi* Program accommodated 2,539 ralliers in I Corps.

In July 1966, the Marines used *hoi chanhs* for the first time during a County Fair operation. The *hoi chanhs* addressed small groups of villagers to describe the Viet Cong methods and intentions, as well as the benefits of the Government's Revolutionary Development Program. The success of *hoi chanh* employment rapidly became apparent; for example, in two months' time one rallier identified more than 30 VC.

Achieving the full potential of the ralliers demanded rigid screening and orientation. Six participated in combat operations on a trial basis in October 1966. The *hoi chanhs'* intimate knowledge of the terrain, their familiarity with local people, and their knowledge of the VC *modus operandi* proved invaluable to the tactical units. When General Nickerson, then commanding the 1st Marine Division, learned of the success of the trial, he ordered that all qualified returnees join field units as soon as possible. General Nickerson also originated the new collective name for the *hoi chanhs;* he called them Kit Carson Scouts, after the famous guide of the western frontier. At the end of 1966, 19 scouts served in the 1st Marine Division program.

In February 1967, General Walt ordered the program adopted throughout III MAF. A newly established Kit Carson Training Center standardized scout training, and by the end of December 132 scouts served with Marine units in I Corps. During the year 1967, scouts killed 58 Viet Cong, captured 37, and seized 82 weapons. Equally important to the Marines operating with them was the scouts' discovery of 145 mines and explosive devices.

Among other civic action programs employed by the Marines during 1967, public health and educa-

Pham Duoc, a veteran of five months as a Kit Carson Scout, points on a map to likely Viet Cong hiding places to LCpl R. D. Kilmer and Cpl P. F. Collins, while fellow Scout Ho Quyet (center) watches.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189519

3d MarDiv ComdC, May 1967

2dLt Edward F. McCourt, Jr. (left), SSgt Roy C. Sharp, and He-Xung, an interpreter/translator, train Kit Carson Scouts on the M-16 at the training center at Phu Bai.

tion continued to be keystones of the effort. Of the two, medical assistance produced the most immediate results. Almost every unit conducted medical and dental civic action projects (MedCAPs and DentCAPs) for their humanitarian value. As an adjunct to MedCAPs, Navy medical personnel distributed medical supplies to the Vietnamese and Vietnamese medical workers.

The Public Health Program bridged the gap between pure medical assistance and self-help projects. These efforts operated under the aegis of CORDS and the supervision of the Public Health Committee of I Corps' JCC. A general sanitation campaign included trash removal, innoculations, preventive medicine, pest control, and water purification.

Just as good health was a prerequisite to the villagers' general well being, education was mandatory for economic and social growth. Medical assistance, particularly the MedCAP efforts, produced immediate, tangible results; conversely the III MAF civil education program offered few short-term advantages, but the Marines could not ignore the requirement for education and its long-range impact. During 1967, the Marines expanded the school building project they started during the spring of 1966. They coordinated this program through the Education Committee of I Corps JCC to determine the hamlets that wanted to participate. Each participating hamlet provided an adequate school site, agreed to provide labor for its construction, arranged for a teacher, and paid the teacher's salary. In return, the Marines agreed to provide construction materials, technical advice, and heavy equipment. Each application required coordination with the local government and CORDS officials to ensure compatibility with overall national school construction plans.

Even more widespread than the school building programs were those of providing school supplies. Most of the refugee village schools needed every type of school supply. Elementary school kits from the Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE) were the most popular item distributed to individual students. Classroom supply kits, also from CARE, went to those students who needed only replacements. By the end of 1967, almost every school-age child in I Corps had received, at one time or another, one of the CARE kits.

These humanitarian programs were very difficult to accomplish in actual practice. Committing a battalion to an operation outside its TAOR or transferring it to another area could often disrupt the continuity of the pacification effort within a village. Vietnamese teachers were understandably reluctant to risk their lives by working in newly-built schools in contested villages. In addition, as Lieutenant Colonel McQuown of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines pointed out, some projects required a 48-hour day to complete. "The Vietnamese people," he wrote, "labored from dawn to darkness just to farm and raise enough food to subsist. At the end of the working day they were too tired to be interested in a lecture on the necessity of screening or covering a toilet that had been open for 3,000 years. . . ."[11] In spite of

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370042

Lt Thomas E. Bunnell, a Navy physician assigned to the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, gives a shot to a Vietnamese child during a medical civic action patrol (Medcap) to a village five miles northeast of Chu Lai.

these and other obstacles, the Marines persisted in their pacification efforts.

Reporting and Evaluation

As 1967 began, the Marines in I Corps used two measurement systems to evaluate progress in the various pacification programs. III MAF independently developed one system. On the other hand, MACV used the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) on a country-wide basis to evaluate all areas where Government authority existed.

In February 1966, the Marines introduced an index system to measure and record a broad range of essential indicators of pacification status. The index related civic action and Revolutionary Development programs in the TAORs and, at the same time, tied in Marine Corps combat operations to both programs. Essentially, the system equated progress in pacification with the progress of the war, and included indicators of improvement which required action by military organizations. The system included five basic general indicators of progress:

1. Destruction of enemy military units
2. Destruction of enemy infrastructure
3. Establishment of local security by the Vietnamese
4. Establishment of local government by the Vietnamese
5. Status of New Life Development Programs

The village served as the basic measurement unit in this assessment since it consisted of a clearly defined area for applying uniform standards for comparative purposes. The evaluator determined the level of pacification progress in each village based on five general indicators which, in turn, subdivided into subordinate elements. The subordinate elements carried various weights, so that a village that fully satisfied all elements of each indicator received 100 points. For the subdivision and specific weights of the system, see table this page.

Pacification Progress Indices

1. Destruction of Organized VC Military Forces	
a. VC local/main force units destroyed or driven out	15
b. GVN/FW/MAF capable of defending the area	5
	20
2. Destruction of VC Infrastructure	
a. Census completed	2
b. VC infrastructure discovered and destroyed or neutralized	8
c. GVN intelligence network established	5
d. Census grievance teams completed interviewing each family	2
e. Principal grievances proceed	3
	20
3. Establishment of Local Security	
a. Defense plans completed	2
b. Defense construction completed	3
c. Local defense forces trained and in place	12
d. Communications established with supporting unit	3
	20
4. Establishment of Local Government	
a. Village chief and council elected and functioning	4
b. Village chief lives and sleeps in the village	3
c. Hamlet chiefs and councils elected and functioning	4
d. Hamlet chief lives and sleeps in the hamlet	4
e. Psyops and public information services established	3
f. Village statutes enacted	1
g. Village social and administrative organization completed	1
	20
5. Completion of Initial New Life Hamlet Programs	
a. Necessary public health works, required to meet initial needs of populace, completed	4
b. Necessary educational requirements, to satisfy initial needs, have been met	4
c. Necessary agricultural works completed	4
d. Adequate ground transportation into and out of the area has been established	4
e. Necessary markets established	4
	20
Maximum points	**100**

Each component of the system depended on the others, thus the evaluation could not reflect a great achievement in the category "Establishment of Local Government" until the village made large advances in the category "Destruction of Enemy Units." A high score in "Completion of Initial New Life Hamlet Programs" was possible only if it represented gains in security and the establishment of local apparatus in the village. A score of 60 points for a village indicated that government had established firm influence. A "pacified" village was one which attained the grade of 80 points. The system proved to be highly successful and, with minor refinements, became the basic technique used by the Marines to assess pacification progress. At the end of 1967, it remained the standard system.

The Hamlet Evaluation System, devised by the Department of Defense in conjunction with the U.S. Mission Council, Vietnam, appeared in December 1966. Patterned after the Marine evaluation system, it differed in several important areas:

> The HES system focused on the hamlet level, while the Marine system graded villages.
>
> HES presented the results of its hamlet evaluation in letter form, while the Marine project rated the village by numerical percentage.
>
> Several HES elements required subjective evaluation, while the Marine system was basically objective.
>
> HES evaluated all areas in which Government authority was present, while the Marines' system rated only those villages in which III MAF influence was present.
>
> HES utilized the advisory structure for its information while the Marine system used the military structure.[12]

HES, like the Marine system, operated on a monthly reporting cycle. The heart of the system was the Hamlet Evaluation Worksheet (HEW), which each district advisor prepared for each of his district's hamlets possessing some degree of Government control. The advisor analyzed each hamlet's pacification status in terms of six general categories:

1. VC military activities
2. VC political and subversive activities
3. Security (friendly capabilities)
4. Administrative and political activities
5. Health, education, and welfare
6. Economic development

Each of the six categories received a rating indicator, from A (best) through E. The advisor also completed a multiple-choice list of 14 questions about the hamlet's problems during the month. Despite the basic differences between the Marines' System and the HES, the systems proved compatible as well as complementary.

Neither system was flawless, however. Both required a great deal of work to compile statistics that were not always meaningful. As Colonel Black, the III MAF G-5 noted, the fact a village chief slept in his village was misleading. "If the chief did," wrote Black, "the usual assumption was made that pacification was really in progress. [However, the] chief could be VC and sleep in the village and the village or hamlet could be under VC control." Nevertheless, III MAF considered the village report the better indicator of pacified areas.[13]

PART VI
SUPPORT AND CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 13

Supporting Arms

Marine Air Operations—Fixed-Wing Operations—Helicopter Operations—Artillery

Marine Air Operations

At the start of 1967, Major General Louis B. Robertshaw's 1st Marine Aircraft Wing consisted of three fixed-wing groups, MAGs-11, -12, and -13, and two helicopter groups, MAGs-16 and -36. One fixed-wing group, MAG-11, operated from Da Nang, while the other two were at Chu Lai. The two helicopter groups operated from different bases also; MAG-36 was at Ky Ha, and MAG-16 split between Marble Mountain and Phu Bai. Wing headquarters, services, command, and control functions came from units of Marine Wing Headquarters Group 1 (MWHG-1) at Da Nang.

General Robertshaw, as III MAF's air component commander, exercised operational control of these units through his staff and by means of the Marine air command and control system. The key unit in this system, the tactical air direction center (TADC), was at wing headquarters in Da Nang.* This agency monitored the employment of all wing aircraft and allocated resources to specific missions. TADC exercised control through two subordinate organizations, the tactical air operations center (TAOC) and the direct air support centers (DASCs).

*The senior agency in the Marine air command and control system normally is the Tactical Air Command Center (TACC). Since the Seventh Air Force had a TACC in Saigon, the 1st MAW center used "TADC" as provided for in doctrine. Lieutenant General Keith B. McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962-1970," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, May 1971, p. 138.

Sunlight reflects from a .50 caliber machine gun sticking from the side of a CH-46A helicopter as it heads out on a late afternoon mission to a unit southwest of An Hoa.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A421675

The TADC, manned by Marine Air Control Squadron 7 (MACS-7), was the main control center for both antiair warfare and air traffic control. Plotters wrote information from the unit's various radars on vertical display boards from which controllers maintained positive air traffic control, as well as target area air space control. In June, wing control capabilities significantly increased when MACS-4 arrived to replace MACS-7. The new unit brought with it a new semi-automated, computer-oriented TAOC which comprised part of the Marine Tactical Data System (MTDS). This TAOC permitted the wing to handle more than 200 aircraft tracks at the same time. When the complete MTDS became operational on Monkey Mountain on the Tiensha Peninsula northeast of Da Nang in July, it provided a link with the Navy Tactical Data System of the Seventh Fleet for instant exchange of air defense data with ships operating in the Gulf of Tonkin. Future plans for the MTDS included a connection with the Air Force Tactical Data System for passing air defense and air control data instantly from Thailand to Da Nang and naval units in the Tonkin Gulf.

While the TAOC, collocated with the MTDS and a Hawk missile battery on Monkey Mountain, served as the hub of wing control and air defense, the DASCs were the main centers of support for ground units. At the beginning of 1967, three DASCs were in operation; one at each of the division headquarters and one at the 3d Marine Division (Forward) Command Post at Dong Ha. Marine Air Support Squadrons (MASS) 2 and 3 provided the DASCs. Requests for air support, both attack and helicopter, passed through battalion and regimental air liaison officers to the DASC at division headquarters; requests from AOs and FACs went directly to DASC.

The support squadrons also contained the air support radar teams (ASRTs). During 1967, there were five ASRTs in operation. Located at Chu Lai, Da Nang, Phu Bai, and Dong Ha (two), each team used TPQ-10 radar to control aircraft in direct support missions during low visibility conditions. TPQ-10s had a 50-mile range, thus the Marine radar coverage included almost all of I Corps.

Although their mission was not tactical in nature, the Marine air traffic control units (MATCUs) were vital to the conduct of effective air operations. At all Marine airfields, the MATCUs provided terminal traffic control, including landing instructions and ground-controlled approach data during periods of low visibility.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189984

Men from Marine Air Traffic Control Unit 62, a subordinate unit of MAG-12, operate at the Khe Sanh airstrip from expeditionary equipment they have sandbagged against NVA artillery and rockets.

Until the activation of Marine Air Control Group 18 on 1 September 1967, the units operating the Marine air command and control system were part of Marine Wing Headquarters Group 1. With one headquarters squadron, two air support squadrons, two air control squadrons, and two antiaircraft missile battalions on 1 July 1967, the group was one of the largest known to Marine aviation. Its personnel served throughout I Corps, including Chu Lai, Phu Bai, Dong Ha, Marble Mountain, Monkey Mountain, and the Hai Van Pass.[1]

Throughout 1967 the 1st MAW operated under the provisions of MACV Aviation Directive 95-4 of 25 June 1966. This directive gave the commander of the Seventh Air Force, in his capacity as Deputy Commander USMACV (Air), the "coordinating authority" for tactical air support in South Vietnam, but not actual operational control of Marine air. The system allowed 1st MAW to meet all of III MAF's air support requirements while making its excess sortie capability available to Seventh Air Force for supporting other U.S. and allied forces.

A Memorandum of Agreement between III MAF and Seventh Air Force guided 1st MAW's air defense operations during 1967. Both services recognized the

necessity of a unified air defense system in the event of a North Vietnamese air attack on South Vietnam. The agreement gave the Air Force overall air defense responsibility, including naming an air defense commander. The 1st MAW designated which of its forces would participate in air defense and granted the Air Force certain authority over those forces, including the scrambling of alert aircraft, designation of targets, declaration of Hawk missile control status, and firing orders.

Marine commanders were essentally satisfied with the adequacy of these documents. In actual practice, 1st MAW controlled all air operations in support of ground units in I Corps while making available 25 to 30 sorties per day to the Seventh Air Force.[2] This system remained in effect until the advent of "single management" in early 1968.

Fixed-Wing Operations

In the absence of enemy aircraft over South Vietnam, the day-to-day mission of the 1st MAW fighter and fighter attack squadrons became close air support (CAS).[3] By long-established doctrinal definition, these air strikes were against targets so close to friendly forces that each mission required integration with the fire and maneuver plans of the ground combat element. For better coordination and to reduce the possibility of friendly casualties, a forward air controller (FAC) with the supported unit or an airborne forward air controller (FAC[A]) controlled these strikes.

There were two basic categories of CAS mission, preplanned and immediate. A preplanned strike was the culmination of a complex process. For example, a Marine battalion commander with the mission of taking a specified objective normally would submit a request for strike aircraft through his air liaison officer the day before the operation began. From the battalion this request passed through the DASC at division and eventually to the wing TADC at Da Nang. There, the TADC assimilated all requests and assigned missions to one of the three fixed-wing groups, depending on the nature of the target and aircraft type desired for the mission.

As soon as the TADC passed the mission to a MAG, the group operations officers compared the orders with aircraft availability within the group and assigned a schedule to each squadron for the following day. Each mission passed by TADC through group received a mission number, a time on target (TOT), and a prescribed ordnance load;* the squadron scheduling officer merely assigned pilots and aircraft.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A421815

A Marine forward air controller in a small O-1 observation aircraft checks a target after directing an airstrike on the position by fixed-wing attack aircraft.

At the appropriate time, the aircraft took off and headed for the target. Once airborne, the flight leader contacted TADC to confirm that his flight was airborne and proceeding on schedule. Usually the TADC simply cleared the leader for his original mission, but if a target of higher priority developed, the TADC could divert the flight. In this case, before entering the new operating area, the leader contacted the responsible DASC, which cleared the flight to a local controller. Normally this was a division air liaison officer (ALO) or a Marine or Air Force FAC(A) flying over the area of the infantry unit to be supported.

FAC(A)s in either light observation planes or UH-1E helicopters controlled most CAS missions in I

*Colonel John M. Verdi pointed out that this system did not relieve the squadron commander of his responsibilities. The squadron commander had to carefully supervise the weight and balance of the prescribed load on the aircraft to avoid unnecessary danger to the crew and aircraft during takeoff and combat maneuvering. Col John M. Verdi, Comments on draft ms, 4Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Verdi Comments.

Corps. During these missions, the airborne controller monitored the ground unit's VHF radio net and directed the attacking aircraft over his UHF radio. When a flight arrived on station, the FAC informed the pilots* of the target description, elevation, attack heading, direction of pull-out, number of passes desired, and the number and type of bombs to be dropped on each pass. He also relayed the direction and distance to the nearest friendly units. The FAC then marked the target with a white phosphorous rocket or a smoke grenade. Once certain that the pilots had identified the correct target, the controller cleared the jet for an approach with the phrase "cleared hot." Thus instructed, the flight leader would make the first pass on the marked target, followed closely by his wingman. Throughout the strike, the ALO or FAC would relay corrections to the attack planes, often directing them to new targets as the Communist troops maneuvered or fled.

While preplanned missions required approximately 20 hours from time of request to time of delivery, the wing could respond much more quickly if necessary. This response was an "immediate mission." If an emergency developed, the TADC or DASCs diverted airborne flights to another target, and briefed them en route to the new target. The TADC also could launch aircraft from one of three "hot pads." Each of the three fixed-wing groups maintained four planes on an around-the-clock alert for this type of emergency. Two of the planes at each group were on primary alert, and the other two served as a backup in case of another emergency. The time lapse between notification to launch and until the on-call aircraft became airborne normally was just under 10 minutes. As soon as a flight of alert aircraft became airborne, another flight replaced it on the pad.

Another important aspect of Marine fixed-wing operations was deep air support. These strikes did not take place in the immediate vicinity of friendly forces and, therefore, did not require integration with the ground maneuver plan. Deep air support missions helped isolate the battlefield by destroying enemy reinforcements, support troops, and logistic resources. If a FAC(A) was available in the objective area, he controlled the strikes, but his services were not mandatory because the distance from the target to friendly forces eliminated the chance of accidental bombing. However, pilots of strike aircraft often preferred to work with a FAC(A) on such missions because of the latter's greater familiarity with targets and enemy defenses in the area.[4]

The aircraft most frequently selected for close support missions was the Douglas A-4E Skyhawk. Colonel Jay W. Hubbard's MAG-12 included four A-4 squadrons. The A-4E was a small, highly maneuverable, attack jet capable of extremely accurate bombing. The Skyhawk could deliver a variety of ordnance including bombs, rockets, napalm, smoke, and 20mm cannon fire. The most significant performance limitation of the A-4 was the size of its payload, roughly 3,000 pounds.*

The McDonnell F-4B Phantom II was a more versatile aircraft. Four F-4 squadrons operated in Vietnam during 1967, one assigned to Colonel Franklin C. Thomas, Jr.'s MAG-11, at Da Nang and three with Colonel Douglas D. Petty, Jr.'s MAG-13. Designed to perform the primary air-to-air mission and modified to perform a secondary air-to-ground mission, the F-4 was one of the fastest interceptors in the world, yet it could carry as many as twenty-four 500-pound bombs for ground support.[5]

Lieutenant Colonel John M. Verdi commented, however, that this was a theoretical figure that did not reflect the realities of combat. He wrote recently:

> . . . the F-4 *could* be loaded with as many as 24 Mk-82 bombs . . . But (1) *not* an F-4B (unless one elected to go with 2,000 pounds less than full internal fuel so as to comply with max gross weight), and (2) *not* if the target was anywhere further away than the end of the runway. I daresay somebody might have hauled such a load in combat (to get his picture taken), but in the real tactical world the choices came down to TANK-3-6-3-TANK ([as did VMFA-] 122 and most USAF units) and 3-3-TANK-3-3 (most Navy units). Of course, Brand X [squadrons] did it 6-3-TANK-3-6, which (1) overloaded the airplane, (2) cracked the wing spars, and (3) gave the crew an unmanageable rolling moment in event of failure of one of those outboard MERs (multiple ejection racks] to release or jettison (something [the Air Force] found out when *they* tried it, which is why they went back to TANK-3-6-3-TANK.)[6]

*Colonel John M. Verdi noted that such in-the-clear radio transmissions also informed enemy monitors of the particulars of the mission. This was true of all radio transmissions, ground or air, without voice encryption devices, especially during this period when radio frequencies and call signs did not change on a daily basis . Verdi Comments.

*As is common with aircraft, the A-4's practical payload varied from as much as 5,000 pounds in the winter monsoon to as little as 2,000 pounds in the heat of summer, assuming a center-line external tank. Verdi comments.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A26453

A large ordnance load and multiple bomb racks made the A-4 Skyhawk, shown here in the A-4F version entering production in 1967, a mainstay for close air support missions.

Two other types of Marine aircraft available for ground support operations during 1967 were the Ling-Temco-Vought F-8E Crusader and the Grumman A6-A Intruder. One squadron of each type served under MAG-11 at Da Nang.

The Crusader carried internally mounted 20mm cannon and was the only Marine aircraft in Vietnam configured to carry more than one 2,000-pound bomb until the arrival of the A-6A. Because the F-8Es were originally designed as a high performance fighter, the Marines phased out these planes and replaced them with F-4s.[7]

The morning of 1 April, VMA(AW)-533, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Williams P. Brown, arrived at Chu Lai to become MAG-12's first A-6 squadron.* The A-6A was the only operational U.S. aircraft that had a self-contained all-weather bombing capability using a moving target indicator.[8] It flew extensive interdiction missions during the monsoon season, not only in South Vietnam, but also in Laos and North Vietnam. The Intruder could carry a heavy bomb load to a target 400 miles away, drop its ordnance, and return to base, even during severe monsoon conditions.

The increase in heavy ground action in northern I Corps during the early months of 1967 brought demands for many more close and direct air support missions in that region. The heavy fighting at Khe Sanh in late April and early May provided a classic example of integrated employment of modern, fixed-wing aviation in support of ground maneuver elements. In the two weeks of bitter fighting for Hills 881 North and South, the 1st MAW flew more than 1,000 sorties for Marine infantry units. The defeat of the enemy on this critical terrain was the product of skillful and closely coordinated air-ground action.

As the enemy continued to focus on northern Quang Tri Province, Marine aviation, from 2 June under the command of Major General Norman J. Anderson, increased the tempo of attack operations there. Primary targets were enemy artillery and rocket sites, a major threat to allied units and installations along the DMZ. By July, intelligence officers had identified approximately 130 sites, including weapons as large as 152mm gun-howitzers. The heaviest raids against these positions occurred during and after the battle for Con Thien, when Marine aircraft participated in joint operations called Headshed, Neutralize, and Eradicate. These operations received the acronym SLAM, for searching, locating, annihilating, and monitoring. This concept used the entire spectrum of supporting fire: B-52s, tactical air, artillery, and naval gunfire. Elements of the Seventh Air Force, Strategic Air Command, Seventh Fleet, Vietnamese Air Force, Marine and Army artillery, and 1st MAW concentrated on destroying the enemy fire support positions. By the end of the year, the effort destroyed less than 40 of the NVA weapons.

While the majority of the 1st MAW's out-of-

*Lieutenant Colonel Howard Wolf's VMA(AW)-242, also flying the A-6A and part of MAG-11, had arrived in Vietnam on 1 November 1966.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A422400-B

General purpose bombs hang from the wings of an A-6A Intruder from VMA(AW)-242 and an F-4B Phantom II from VMFA-542 enroute on a scheduled mission in Vietnam.

country missions were in the DMZ area, Marine pilots also participated in strikes against North Vietnam. These strikes involved the six areas of North Vietnam which planners called "route packages." Route Package I was immediately north of the DMZ; Route Package VI lay in the extreme north of the country. Bombing of the southern portion of Route Package I, codenamed "Tally Ho"and under the control of Seventh Air Force, began in July 1966. By the winter of 1967, Tally Ho missions ceased as a separate entity; strikes in the area thereafter fell within the overall interdiction campaign.[9]

The Seventh Air Force's retaliatory Rolling Thunder raids, initiated in March 1965, expanded to include high intensity interdiction missions during 1967. On 18 May 1967, VMA(AW)-242 participated in the first Rolling Thunder strike in Route Package VI (Hanoi/Haiphong).[10] The other A-6A squadron, VMA(AW)-533, kept just as active. The sophisticated electronic equipment and superb all-weather capability of the Intruder made it an ideal aircraft for attacks against attractive, but heavily defended, North Vietnamese targets.

Because of the A-6's all-weather capability, 1st MAW reduced the enemy's antiaircraft effectiveness by flying most Marine Rolling Thunder missions at night and as single-aircraft missions.[11] During the strikes, the attack pilots relied upon assistance from their fellow Marines from VMCJ-1. EF-10Bs and EA-6As of VMCJ-1, the same basic aircraft as the A-6As, carried equipment for electronic countermeasure missions; they carried no ordnance.[12] During the raids, the EF-10Bs or EA-6s orbited beyond North Vietnamese surface-to-air missile range and jammed the enemy's fire control radar while the attacking Intruders made their target runs. Because of their lighter equipment load, the EA-6As could remain on station longer than the attack aircraft, an ideal situation for superior electronic countermeasure raid protection. Prime targets for Rolling Thunder missions were bridges, fuel facilities, rolling stock, airfields, missile sites, and supply lines.*

In addition to close and deep air support missions, Marine fixed-wing squadrons conducted a variety of less dramatic, but equally important, tasks such as landing zone (LZ) preparation. These operations illustrated the then prevalent Marine Corps concept that the helicopter was a mode of transportation, not an attack aircraft. The 1st Wing provided fixed-wing support for helicopter assaults of contested landing zones. Prior to and during these landings, Marine attack aircraft would strike the objective area to clear obstacles and neutralize possible antiaircraft threats. As the troop-carrying helicopters entered the zone, the covering jet pilots would shift their attacks to terrain around the LZ from which the enemy could op-

*After the NVA's deployment of missiles in the DMZ area in April, electronic countermeasure EA-6As and older EF-10B Sky Knights remained airborne over the area to counter this threat. Their effectiveness limited Marine aircraft losses to only two missile kills during 1967.

3d MarDiv ComdC, September 1967

Cargo parachutes stream from the rear of one of VMGR-152's KC-130s bringing supplies to the Khe Sanh combat base in September 1967 after enemy activity closed the only road leading to the base.

pose the landing. These strikes not only protected the helicopters, but also shielded the first infantry waves during the critical, early phase of the landing.

Other Marine fixed-wing pilots contributed immeasurably to the overall air effort, even though they never fired a shot or dropped a bomb. Some flew the C-117Ds assigned to the headquarters of the aircraft groups. These C-117D missions varied from routine logistics support to dropping flares over friendly forces at night. Another group of transport pilots came from VMGR-152. The squadron's Lockheed KC-130 Hercules provided extensive and varied support for both III MAF and 1st MAW. Though VMGR-152's home base remained at MCAS Futema, Okinawa, the squadron maintained a detachment of at least four planes on a rotational basis at Da Nang. The Marine transport's 30,000- to 35,000-pound cargo load, depending on mission range, served many varied logistic requirements. The 130s flew diversified missions such as in-flight refueling of jets, paradropping of bulk lots of ammunition and supplies, flare drops, and even service as airborne DASCs; as well as for daily, routine shipments of hundreds of passengers and tons of cargo. Such varied missions required great flying skill, especially those into Khe Sanh and Dong Ha. Flying into Khe Sanh under visual flight rules and into Dong Ha with its dust and short runway were routine but far from dull missions for VMGR-152 pilots.[13]

VMCJ-1's version of the Phantom II, the RF-4B, equipped with cameras in the nose, performed a variety of photo-reconnaissance missions for 1st MAW. These aircraft also contributed directly to the defense of Da Nang, as described by one of the squadron's commanders, Major Edgar J. Love:

> . . . after the second rocket attack on Da Nang, 14 July 1967, the RF-4B played a major role in helping to keep the VC from launching rockets within the 12,000 meter ring [around the base]. Through use of its sensors, the RF-4B was able to [monitor] a fairly large area on a daily basis from about 5 miles north of Da Nang to about 20 miles south and from the sea on the east to some 30 miles inland. When it was determined that the various [enemy] teams transporting rockets were converging into a central area, harassing fires or air strikes (including B-52s) were directed into these areas. It was a coordinated effort of reconnaissance patrols, artillery, air strikes, and airborne reconnaissance. As a side light, Major Richard W. Hawthorne and Captain Richard R. Kane, while flying one

The sun rises beneath the nose of a venerable C-117 at the Ky Ha airfield at the Chu Lai combat base in February. This particular aircraft had logged over 15,000 hours in the air and still performed reliably.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A421604

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A421998

Cpl William H. Mielke (top) and LCpl Phillip J. Orlando of Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 36 repair the AD20-8 engine of their squadron's C-117D at Phu Bai on 30 December.

of these many reconnaissance flights, crashed in September 1967 and were declared missing.*[14]

Helicopter Operations

The Vietnam War was the first conflict in history to involve large-scale employment of helicopter forces. This "Cavalry of the Sky" provided the allies with the advantages of mobility and staying power which negated much of the advantage held by an already elusive enemy. To the infantryman the helicopter was more than a tactical expedient; it was a part of his life. Helicopters carried him into battle, provided him with life and fire support, and rushed him to the hospital if he were sick or wounded.

At the beginning of 1967, MAGs-16 and -36 and the SLF had a total of 11 helicopter squadrons operating in South Vietnamese air space. Of these, eight were transport squadrons flying either the Sikorsky UH-34D, a Vietnam veteran since early 1962, or the relatively new and larger Boeing-Vertol CH-46A. The other three squadrons were observation squadrons equipped with the highly maneuverable, single-engined Bell UH-1E.*

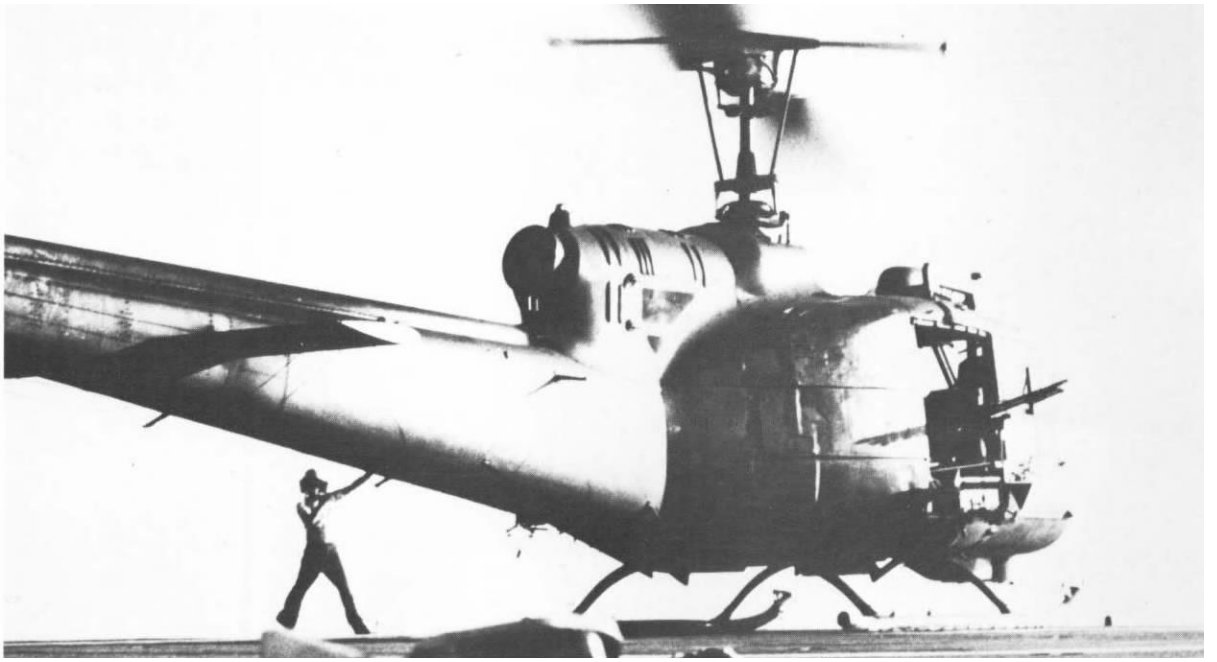
The Marines used helicopters for five basic missions: tactical airlift of troops, insertion and extraction of reconnaissance teams, supply, downed aircraft recovery, and search and rescue. The helicopter groups frequently supported more than a dozen major ground operations during a given month. The 1st MAW maintained direct control of the helicopter groups, issuing orders to them on the basis of the ground units' daily needs. The air request and allotment chain of command was basically the same as for fixed-wing squadrons. While the daily schedule covered routine missions, many unforeseeable situations occurred, such as medical evacuations, emergency extractions, and downed aircraft. To deal with these contingencies, the squadrons kept a section of helicopters on strip alert, normally either one UH-34 or CH-46 transport and one armed UH-1E to fly "chase."

"Medevac" and emergency extractions were especially critical because lives depended on the quick and effective response of the helicopter crews. Most of these missions occurred when friendly forces were in close contact with the enemy; in such cases, ground fire in the landing zone was almost a certainty. Even with the jet and armed helicopter escort, rescue helicopters rarely departed the landing zone without sustaining hits from enemy fire. These flights usually took place over extremely rugged terrain, which gave the pilots problems in even finding the landing zone. MAG-16 and -36 squadrons flew these missions daily. The skill and courage of the helicopter crews were the major factors enabling nearly 99 percent of the wounded evacuees to survive.[15]

A major factor in the success of these missions was the presence of UH-1E "gunships." Assigned to the observation squadrons (VMOs), the UH-1Es functioned in a number of roles. The armed version, or gunship, carried four fuselage-mounted, electrically fired M-60 machine guns and two 19-round rocket packs. Gunships flew escort and close air support missions and also served as command and control

*The Marine Corps later administratively declared both officers legally dead. The determination occurred on 28 November 1978 for Hawthorne and 26 February 1980 for Kane.

*VMO squadrons each rated 12 light helicopters in 1965 and the Marine Corps had obtained UH-1Es based on this figure. The scarcity of suitable fixed-wing observation planes resulted in further procurement, so that by 1967 UH-1Es were the only aircraft assigned to the three VMOs in Vietnam. By December of that year, each squadron had between 21 and 27 UH-1Es available. This interim measure continued until the arrival of the long-awaited OV-10 in 1968.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A421708

A Navy flight deck crewman on the USS Okinawa *(LPH 3) signals the pilot of a Marine UH-1E that he is cleared for take off in support of Operation Beau Charger, Special Landing Force Alpha's assist to Operation Hickory against NVA forces below the DMZ.*

"birds" for airborne forward air controllers as well as senior ground commanders. Each division commander had a permanently assigned helicopter; regimental and battalion commanders used others on an "as available" basis.

In the FAC(A) mode, one rocket pack carried white phosphorous marking rockets, the other contained high explosive missiles. In a clean, unarmed configuration, appropriately referred to as a "slick," the aircraft could carry seven to nine fully equipped troops. "Slicks" also performed administrative and transport missions such as VIP flights.

An incident occurred in southern Quang Ngai Province in late 1967 which demonstrated both the firepower of the armed UH-1E and the tenacity, skill, and courage of Marine gunship crews. On 19 August, Captain Stephen W. Pless, a VMO-6 gunship pilot, was flying chase for an emergency medevac mission when he heard over the radio net of another emergency situation. Pless learned that four U.S. Army soldiers were stranded on a beach north of Duc Pho and were about to be overwhelmed by a large Viet Cong force. Breaking off from his original mission, the Huey pilot flew to the scene. On arrival, Pless saw about 50 VC in the open; some were bayoneting and beating the Americans. He swept in

1stLt Jack H. McCracken, a helicopter pilot with HMM-165, escaped serious injury during a resupply mission in Quang Ngai province when the .30-caliber round he holds smashed into his cockpit and lodged in the hard rubber heel of his left boot.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A423001

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A422068

The terror of a helicopter medevac flight under fire shows on the faces of a wounded Marine, Cpl Larry R. Miklos (center) and an unidentified Navy hospital corpsman as they watch an enemy machine gun shooting toward their helicopter on 1 September.

on the VC, killing and wounding many and driving the survivors back into a treeline. He made his rocket and machine gun attacks at such low levels that fragments from his own ordnance pelted the gunship. Though still under heavy small arms fire, Pless landed his gunship between the Communists in the treeline and the wounded soldiers. His two enlisted crewmen, Gunnery Sergeant Leroy N. Poulson and Lance Corporal John G. Phelps, leaped out of the helicopter and raced through enemy fire to help the wounded men.

Captain Rupert E. Fairfield, Jr., the co-pilot, killed three of the nearest VC with a burst from a M-60 machine gun, then ran to help Poulson and Phelps drag the soldiers to the aircraft. Captain Pless hovered his UH-1E and sent streams of machine gun fire into the Viet Cong positions in the treeline. Under cover of his fire, the three crewmen pulled the wounded soldiers into the helicopter. Pless headed the dangerously overloaded aircraft out to sea. Four times the helicopter settled into the water. Each time Captain Pless skipped it back into the air. While the crew threw out all unnecessary gear to lighten the craft, Pless jettisoned the rocket pods. Gradually, the UH-1E gained altitude and limped back to the 1st Hospital Company's landing pad at Chu Lai. In addition to rescuing the Americans, the crew received credit for killing a confirmed total of 20 VC and probably killed another 38. Fairfield, Poulson, and Phelps each received the Navy Cross; Captain Pless

The Da Nang press center provides the location for this photograph taken during a news conference on 26 August following the dramatic flight that earned VMO-6's Capt Stephen W. Pless (second from left) his Medal of Honor. Others of the UH-1E crew, LCpl John G. Phelps, Capt Rupert E. Fairfield, Jr., and GySgt Leroy N. Poulson, received the Navy Cross.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189212

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370412

A smoke grenade marks the landing zone as a member of a helicopter support team-brings in a CH-34D with supplies for the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines in Operation Shelby.

received the Medal of Honor, the first awarded to a member of the 1st MAW for action in Vietnam.*

While the armed helicopters participated in many dramatic exploits, the yeoman's share of the workload fell to the transport helicopters, the UH-34s and the CH-46s. In March of 1966, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing's tactical/logistical airlift capability significantly increased with the arrival of the CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter. It could carry a four-man crew and 17-20 combat-loaded troops, or 4,000 pounds of cargo, in contrast to the five to seven troops, or 1,500-pound lift capacity of the aging UH-34. The twin-engined, tandem-rotor transport had a retractable tail ramp, a 115-mile combat radius, and a top speed of about 145 knots. The Sea Knight was the only Marine helicopter in Vietnam armed with two .50-caliber machine guns.*

The arrival of another aircraft in 1967 further improved Marine helicopter capabilities. On 8 January, a four-plane detachment of CH-53A Sea Stallions from HMH-463 joined MAG-16 at Marble Mountain. They were the first increment of a phased replacement of the obsolescent CH-37s. By the end of the year, 36 of the big CH-53s operated in I Corps. These twin-turbine, single-rotor assault transports could carry an impressive internal cargo of 8,000 pounds, but more significantly the "53A" had a six-ton external lift capability which permitted battlefield salvage of disabled UH-34Ds and CH-46s. By the end of 1967, Marine Sea Stallions had retrieved more than 120 damaged aircraft which avoided

*In addition to the Medal of Honor, Captain Pless, who flew over 700 combat missions in two tours in Vietnam, earned the Silver Star Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star Medal, 32 Air Medals, the Navy Commendation Medal, the Korean Order of Military Merit, and the Purple Heart. After returning to the U.S., this colorful Marine aviator died in a tragic motorcycle crash at Pensacola, Florida, in 1969. See Appendix D for Captain Pless' Medal of Honor citation.

*Major General Norman J. Anderson has cautioned that there was a greater complexity behind this simple statement about two .50-caliber machine guns on helicopters. "This became standard, replacing the .30-caliber," he wrote, "only after extensive experience proved the need for the range and impact of the heavier weapon. Issues such as this, and there were many in the ordnance and engineering areas, were important and should not be [overlooked] or you create the impression that aviation sailed through the war without problems." MajGen Norman J. Anderson, Comments on draft ms, 10Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370575

Infantrymen lean forward against the rotor wash and rush forward to unload supplies from a CH-46A Sea Knight helicopter in the 1st Marine Division's Operation Citrus.

destroying them in place. Troop lift and ambulance capabilities also increased with the Sea Stallions' arrival; normal loads were 37 combat troops or 24 litters. Fully loaded, the aircraft could accomplish missions at ranges up to 200 miles at a comfortable cruise speed of 120 knots.

The arrival of the "Super Bird," as the Marines quickly nicknamed the CH-53, was providential. In September III MAF grounded all CH-46s following several unexplained crashes. An on-site investigation, conducted by a joint Naval Air Systems Command/Boeing Vertol accident investigation team, revealed that structural failures were occurring in the area of the after pylon.* The team recommended structural and systems modifications to reinforce the rear rotor mount, as well as the installation of an indicator to detect excessive strain on critical parts of the aircraft.

The entire modification program, requiring approximately 1,000 man-hours per aircraft, occurred in three phases: (1) disassembly of the aircraft, (2) incorporation of the modifications, and (3)

Aviation personnel at Dong Ha on 16 January look over one of the huge CH-53s from HMH-463 only eight days after the first detachment of four of the new helicopters arrived in South Vietnam for service with MAG-16 at the air facility at Marble Mountain.

3d MarDiv ComdC, January 1967

*Lieutenant General Louis Metzger, a former assistant division commander of the 3d Marine Division, recently wrote his recollections of the grounding of the CH-46s: "Several CH-46s had gone down in flight before this. One was observed by an assistant air officer of the 3d Marine Division, a major [who was an] aviator. He had described seeing the tail fly off a CH-46 in flight. However, it is believed that [because of] a desire to accord the lost crew members the honor of dying in combat rather than in an accident, this observation was ignored. It wasn't until the accidents occured as stated in the text, that the CH-46s were grounded. LtGen Louis Metzger, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981) (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967

A CH-53, the Marine Corps' largest and most powerful helicopter, retrieves a UH-34 downed in a mission to the Con Thien combat base in December.

reassembly and flight tests. Marines performed phases one and three; Boeing Vertol personnel completed phase two. Okinawa served as the principal modification site because it was the nearest secure Marine base which could provide both adequate facilities and skilled civilian workers. The program modified 80 aircraft at MCAF Futema, Okinawa, while the remaining 25 aircraft, already undergoing normal overhaul in Japan, received their modifications there.

The Marines of HMM-262, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Gregory A. Corliss, detached from the SLF to perform the Marine portion of the work. On 11 October, the Marines unloaded 40 CH-46s at Futema, and disassembly began immediately. Five days later, 114 Boeing Vertol specialists began phase two. By the end of December, the program had modified 89 aircraft and began phasing them back to the squadrons. The remaining 16 aircraft completed the modification program in February 1968.

Until the 46s returned, III MAF lost approximately half its tactical/logistic airlift capability and had to find replacement helicopters. As soon as the Marine Corps learned the seriousness of the CH-46s' defect, it rushed 23 UH-34s from the United States by cargo planes. They arrived on 15 October and immediately entered battle, often flown by pilots from the downed CH-46 squadrons. Ten additional CH-53s entered the wing's inventory to further augment the lift capability in Vietnam. Finally, 31 U.S. Army UH-1Ds of the 190th Aviation Company joined General Anderson's forces at Phu Bai until the Sea Knights returned to flight status.[16]

The shifting of additional ground forces into the northern two provinces of I Corps during the fall of 1967 increased the tempo of helicopter operations. During this period, the two main areas of enemy activity were the DMZ and the Que Son Basin south of Da Nang, but as combat to the north intensified, MAG-36 at Chu Lai found itself further and further from the scene of Marine ground operations. As a result, General Anderson ordered MAG-36 to Phu Bai where it could better support 3d Marine Division operations. The first squadron, VMO-6, relocated on 4 October and 11 days later Colonel Frank E. Wilson displaced his group headquarters from Ky Ha to Phu Bai. The next day, Colonel Wilson took over VMO-3, HMM-164, HMM-362, and MATCUs-62 and -68 from Colonel Edwin O. Reed's MAG-16. At the same time, HMM-265, a MAG-36 CH-46 squadron at Marble Mountain, passed to Colonel Reed's command. On 30 October, another UH-34

A CH-46A from HMM-164 lands on 2 March 1967 to pick up infantrymen from the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines engaged in Operation Prairie II north of Cam Lo, while an escort helicopter circles overhead.

3d MarDiv ComdC, March 1967

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189791

CH-34Ds, the mainstay of transport helicopter operations following grounding of the CH-46s for structural problems, land infantrymen in a dry paddy for Operation Essex.

squadron, HMM-163, joined MAG-36 from the USS *Okinawa* (LPH 3) and moved to the new airfield at Quang Tri.* By the end of the month, MAG-36 occupied its new home; only HMM-165 remained at Ky Ha, until space became available at Phu Bai in November. The relocation of MAG-36 proved to be a wise decision, as events of early 1968 demonstrated.

*Before joining the SLF, HMM-163 had been at Phu Bai as part of MAG-16. LtCol Horace A. Bruce, Comments on draft ms, 14Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

A CH-46A takes off after bringing supplies to an infantry unit on a hill top somewhere in Vietnam.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370584

Operational statistics indicate the sharply increased scale of Marine helicopter squadrons' efforts in Vietnam during 1967. The sorties rate increased by more than 20 percent over that of 1966. In 1967, 1st MAW helicopters flew 510,595 sorties, carrying 628,486 personnel and 70,651 tons of cargo.

Artillery

In January of 1967, the Marines had the entire family of Marine Corps artillery—light, medium, and heavy—in I Corps. The method of employment of these weapons differed little from World War II and Korea: direct support of a specific unit or general support of divisional units.

Division-level light artillery, the 4.2-inch mortar or the 107mm M30 mortar and the 105mm M101A1 howitzer, provided direct support of infantry units. Division Medium artillery, the 155mm M114A1 howitzer (towed) and the 155mm M109 self-propelled (SP) howitzer, were the general support weapons.* Force artillery elements attached to the

*The Marine Corps replaced 155mm M114A1s in the Marine divisional artillery regiments with the 155mm M109/SP just before the the Vietnam conflict. As the need for more artillery developed, the Marine Corps shipped the old towed weapons to Vietnam and formed provisional batteries. Personnel and required equipment came from artillery battalions already there. Ironically, the older M114A1 enhanced the overall mobility of the divisional 155mm capability. The heavy tracked M109/SP was essentially roadbound and served in a "fortress artillery" role, while the lighter M114A1 could move both by helicopter and truck.

Marine Artillery Capabilities

WEAPONS	RANGE (meters)	WEIGHT (pounds)	SUSTAINED RATE OF FIRE PER MINUTE	PRIME MOVER	EFFECTIVE AREA OF BURST: METERS, ONE ROUND		AMMUNITION			FINAL PROTECTIVE FIRE
					DEPTH	WIDTH	TYPES AVAILABLE	FUZES AVAILABLE	WEIGHT OF FUZED HE PROJO (pounds)	
105mm How Towed M101A1	11,000	4,980	3	Helo 2½-ton truck	20	30		Q,D Ti VT CP	33	200
155mm How Towed M114A1	14,600	12,950	1	Helo 5-ton truck	30	50	HE L HE Illum WP Smoke RAP Gas Nuclear	Q,D Ti VT CP	95	300
155mm How (SP) M109A1	14,600	53,060	1	SP						
8" How (SP) M110	16,800	58,500	0.5	SP	30	80	HE Spot Gas Nuclear	Q,D Ti VT CP	200	N/A
155mm Gun (SP) M53	23,500	96,000	0.5	SP	30	50		Q,D VT	95	N/A
107mm Mort M30	5,656	671	15-20	Helo ¾-ton truck	30	30	Illum WP Gas	Q,D Ti VT	26	200

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A421672

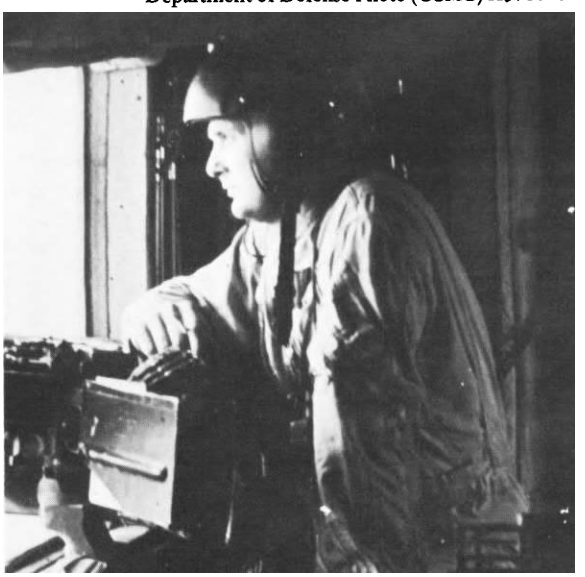
A maintenance team from HMM-165 rigs a hoist sling to a CH-46A sitting in a mountain stream northwest of Chu Lai on 12 May. Enemy ground fire had set the aircraft on fire and the pilot, Capt James F. Pleva, force-landed in the stream, dousing the flames.

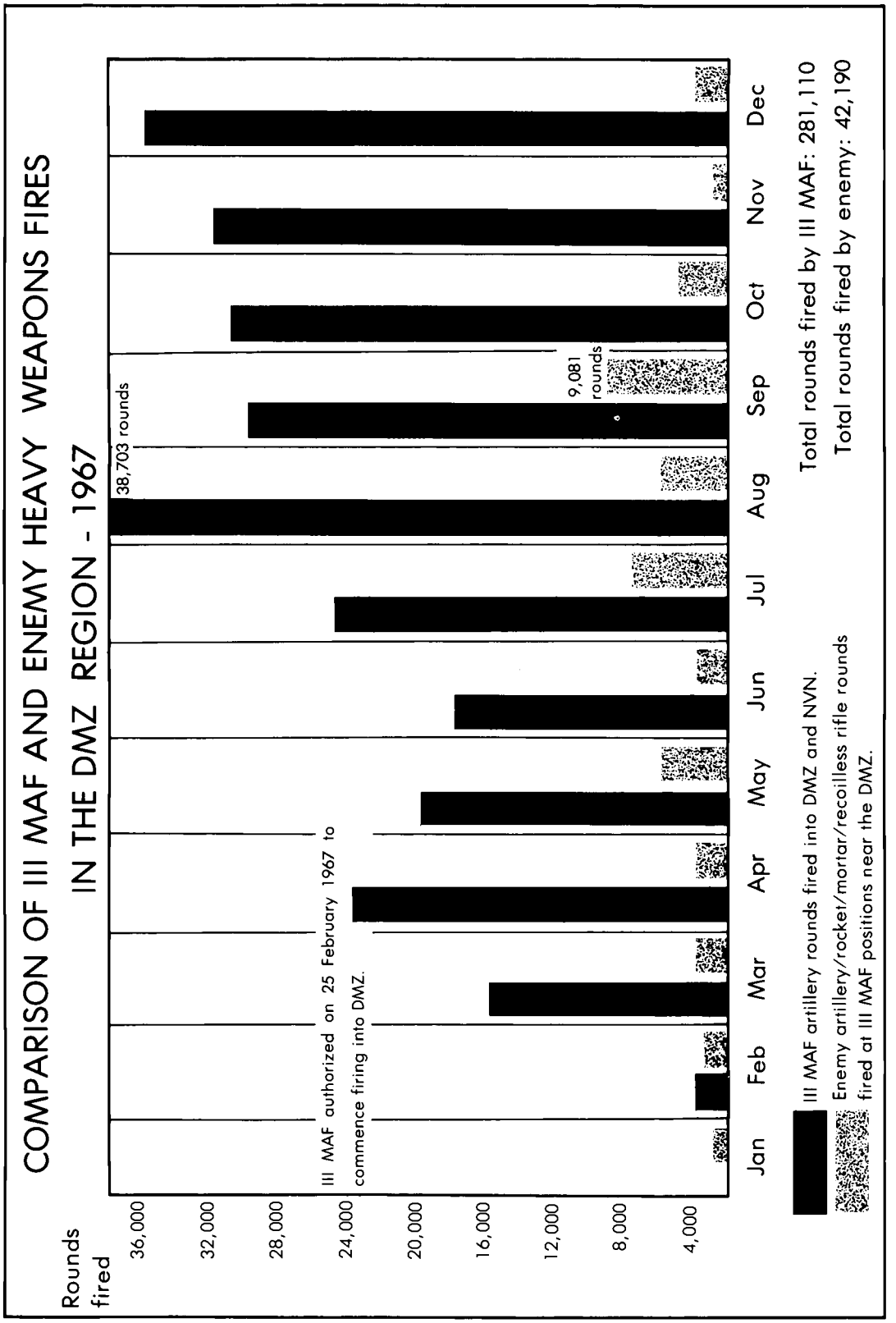
artillery regiments provided increased range and delivery capabilities.[17] Force artillery included the 155mm M53 self-propelled gun and the 8-inch M55 self-propelled howitzer. The Marine Corps replaced the M55 during the year with the new M110 self-propelled model.

Although the basic techniques of artillery employment in Vietnam differed little from those used elsewhere, local circumstances required certain refinements. Probably the most difficult problem facing Marine artillerymen and the infantry they supported was the need to minimize civilian casualties and property destruction, while still furnishing adequate fire support. Strongly worded MACV directives, further amplified by instructions from III MAF and the divisions, enjoined restraint and careful fire planning. These required careful selection of helicopter landing zones and scheduling artillery and air strikes with the goal of keeping both Marine and civilian casualties at the lowest possible level, especially in heavily populated areas such as those around Da Nang. Firing into populated areas, using reconnaissance by fire, and planning harassment and interdiction fires presented significant problems. The Marine artillerymen continually balanced the possible tactical advantages against the danger to long-term pacification goals. When Marine units planned operations in coordination with Vietnamese province and district chiefs, a liaison officer from the Marines or a Marine or Army advisor stayed at the district headquarters to coor-

An unidentified Marine helicopter crewman smokes a cigarette beside his M-60 machine gun mount during a quiet flight in a CH-53A in December 1967.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370848




COMPARISON OF III MAF AND ENEMY HEAVY WEAPONS FIRES
IN THE DMZ REGION - 1967
Rounds fired
36,000
32,000
28,000
24,000
20,000
16,000
12,000
8,000
4,000
III MAF authorized on 25 February 1967 to commence firing into DMZ.
38,703 rounds
9,081 rounds
Jan
Feb
Mar
Apr
May
Jun
Jul
Aug
Sep
Oct
Nov
Dec
III MAF artillery rounds fired into DMZ and NVN.
Enemy artillery/rocket/mortar/recoilless rifle rounds fired at III MAF positions near the DMZ.
Total rounds fired by III MAF: 281,110
Total rounds fired by enemy: 42,190

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370303

Bystanders cover their ears on 25 June as MajGen Donn J. Robertson, the commanding general of the 1st Marine Division, fires from a self-propelled 155mm howitzer the 30,000th artillery round shot by the 4th Battalion, 11th Marines in the Vietnam War.

dinate fire support, as well as other aspects of the operations. ARVN liaison officers performed a similar function at American headquarters.*

These operational considerations, formalized as rules of engagement, were necessary restrictions but did not deprive any American unit of the right to defend itself against hostile action. Though planning helped to avoid the problem of noncombatant casualties, sound judgment during operations by both field commanders and fire support centers remained the final determinant.

Another technique of fire coordination, the "sav-a-plane," appeared because of the crowded air space over Vietnam, particularly over Route 1 along the coast of I Corps. Any artillery unit operating near the road contended with innumerable aircraft flying through its zone of action. The competition for space to shoot and space to fly was a constant headache for both participants. The 1st MAW considered the established practice of restrictive fire planning too burdensome because of the episodic nature of artillery firing. As a result, III MAF introduced the sav-a-plane system as a technique for keeping friendly aircraft safe from allied artillery while, at the same time, permitting liberal use of both arms.

*Forty Marines augmented the U.S. Army advisory staff with the ARVN in I Corps during 1967.

Sav-a-plane was simply a radio procedure which told a pilot where and when artillery or naval gunfire was shooting. From that point on, it was the individual pilot's responsibility to stay clear of the firing area. When a battalion or regimental fire support coordination center (FSCC) initiated a sav-a-plane, the message went to the division FSCC/DASC for broadcast to all pilots in the area. The elements of a sav-a-plane transmission included target area, location of the firing unit, time of firing, and maximum trajectory ordinate. Though the system was not foolproof, artillery and naval gunfire hit very few, if any, aircraft.*

Supplemental safeguards to the sav-a-plane system included air sentries at battery positions and, whenever possible, collocation of the artillery liaison officers with infantry battalion forward air controllers. The latter technique ensured that all

*"I don't know that any aircraft has ever been hit by artillery fire," commented Colonel Edwin S. Schick, a former commander of the 12th Marines. "There was some talk that an Army outfit did hit a plane. . . . So long as the proper fusing is maintained . . . [and the] coordination principle of the restrictive fire plan is adhered to, no harm will come to our air brethren." Col Edwin S. Schick, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 11Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) Current doctrine does not include the sav-a-plane concept. Statistical studies support the "big sky-small bullet" principle by indicating very little probability of artillery hitting an aircraft in flight.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189158

Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr., the Commandant of the Marine Corps, listens as Col William L. Dick, commander of the 4th Marines, points to explosions on a nearby hill demonstrating artillery support available to his regiment from the 12th Marines. The latter was one of the largest artillery regiments ever fielded under Marine command.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A370317

The fire direction center of Battery G, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines receives and computes a fire mission.

elements kept abreast of artillery firing and also permitted immediate response for lifting or shifting of fires.

The employment of individual batteries in Vietnam differed from all previous American war experiences. A single battery often provided the support normally expected from an artillery battalion. The individual 105mm and the provisional 155mm towed batteries possessed the capability to deploy to widely separated positions, each with its own fire direction and communication capability. Each battery maintained its own 360-degree (6,400 mills to artillerymen) firing capability. Often the battery fire direction center coordinated its own reinforcing fires and those of nearby ARVN artillery as well. Marine artillery batteries also made increased use of helicopter displacement. This practice required battery personnel to break down the guns, section gear, and ammunition into helicopter-transportable loads on short notice. These procedures required greater versatify of artillerymen in Vietnam than in the Korean War and World War II.

Traditional unit descriptions provided misleading indicators of artillery capabilities in Vietnam. When

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A800970

A Marine M-98 107mm "Howtar," a 4.2-inch heavy mortar mounted on a 75mm pack-howitzer chassis, awaits a fire mission in support of the Special Landing Force in Operation Deckhouse VI, a subsidiary of Task Force X-Ray's Operation Desoto near Duc Pho.

the tactical situation dictated, the 3d Marine Division, for example, formed provisional batteries using a mix of artillery calibers. At times these were closer to being "mini-battalions" than conventional batteries. Such practices in task organization also affected the artillery battalions; at times they assumed the size of "mini-regiments."[18]

Fast and accurate response traditionally provided the measure of good artillery support. If contact appeared imminent, the infantry battalion's forward observer notified the FDC, where chart operators prepared to plot the mission while the computer stood ready to provide gun data. The artillery liaison officer in the battalion FSCC then could arrange for a sav-a-plane to avoid losing time in getting clearance to fire. As the same time, word passed to the gun crews of the impending mission. To ensure accuracy of firing data, both the battery and battalion FDCs computed the fire missions, providing a double check on the information sent to the guns.

In July 1967, a new piece of equipment, the M18 Field Artillery Digtal Computer (FADC), arrived at artillery battalion FDCs. Prior to its arrival, the Marines manually computed all firing data computations. FADC was supposed to accelerate the process of providing the batteries with accurate firing data and decrease the time between the initial request and the impact of the first round on the target.

FADC did not favorably impress either Colonel Edwin S. Schick, Jr., or Lieutenant Colonel Clayton V. Hendricks, who respectively commanded the 12th and 11th Marines. Colonel Schick noted that "a well-disciplined and trained fire direction team [would] out perform [FADC] with speed, reliability, and all-weather capability . . . and no material failures." Lieutenant Colonel Hendricks remembered that the 11th Marines continued to compute manually and used FADC only as a check on the results. However, those doing the manual calculations often had to wait on FADC. In addition, FADC depended upon electricity from undependable power generators.[19]

On-call fires provided another means used to reduce reaction time. When an infantry unit operated in enemy-controlled areas, preplotted on-call fires along the route of advance were common practice. To execute the mission, the artillerymen used previously prepared firing data. Last minute clearance was the only requirement before firing the mission. Marines often resolved such delays by employing a long-term umbrella or area type sav-a-plane which permitted the battalion FSCC to retain local firing control. In such cases, they did not need higher-level firing clearance. On-call preparations,

"almost instant artillery," were particularly effective as a counter to meeting engagements and ambushes.

Other uses of artillery involved flushing the enemy from concealed positions, denying his use of escape routes, and deceiving him as to the direction of attack. Night employment included illumination of avenues of approach, harassing and interdiction fires, and navigational orientation for friendly elements. The Marines also used jungle applications dating back to the island campaigns of World War II. A lost patrol could reorient itself by requesting a marking round on a nearby grid line intersection. Another common jungle technique was the use of artillery fire to guide units toward their objectives. Following the advancing fire by only a few hundred meters, the infantry worked their way forward while the artillery forward observer adjusted the firing to suit the situation.

The Sting Ray concept represented a novel innovation which blended maximum use of supporting arms and the talents of III MAF's reconnaissance personnel. As III MAF initiated large-unit operations beyond assigned TAORs, and as TAORs increased in size to accommodate the operational tempo, reconnaissance teams operated at ever increasing ranges from their battalion command posts. The lightly armed and equipped teams usually landed by helicopter at points near their operational areas and then moved stealthily to a designated observation post. Their primary mission was to gather intelligence in areas of suspected heavy enemy movement, but the Marines was soon learned the teams could call in artillery fire and air strikes and remain undetected by the enemy. This led to the evolution of Sting Ray which caused substantial enemy casualties at the risk of a very few Marines. Enemy troops, away from the main battle areas, relaxed, and feeling relatively safe, moved with less caution and often concentrated in large numbers. Alert Sting Ray teams exacted a heavy toll on unwary Communist units by hitting them with accurate artillery fire and precision air strikes.

The crew of a 105mm howitzer from Battery C, 4th Battalion, 12th Marines, prepares to respond to a fire mission in support of infantrymen engaged in Operation Chinook about 12 miles north of Hue.

3d MarDiv ComdC, January 1967

For the Sting Ray teams, artillery served both as a defensive and an offensive weapon. If the enemy detected the team, artillery provided a ring of fire around its position while helicopters moved in for the rescue. Though enemy units hotly contested many extractions a surprisingly large number of Sting Ray teams escaped with only minor casualties, while Communist losses multiplied greatly from the heavy concentration of fire. To overrun a Sting Ray position, the Communists had to concentrate their forces; as soon as helicopters extracted the team, the abandoned site became a killing zone.

When the North Vietnamese sent large units across the DMZ during the fall of 1966, more American artillery units moved into the region, including the U.S. Army's 2d Battalion, 94th Artillery with its 175mm self-propelled guns. These heavy weapons, with a range of 32,700 meters, added a new dimension to III MAF artillery support. By March of 1967 the 11th and 12th Marines provided artillery coverage from the Gulf of Tonkin to Laos and substantially reduced enemy freedom of movement.

The U.S. Army's 1st Battalion, 40th Artillery also arrived to reinforce Marine artillery during 1967. Its M108 self-propelled 105mm howitzers had a 360-degree traverse capability and could respond rapidly to calls for fire from any direction. In recognition of its quick response and rapid rate of fire, the 3d Division Marines called the 40th's Battery A "Automatic Alpha."

Artillery strength further increased in I Corps during 1967 following the arrival of the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines; the 1st Armored Amphibian Tractor Company (105mm howitzers); the 5th 155mm Gun

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189143

Battery A, 2d Battalion, 94th Artillery, one of several Army units sent north to provide needed artillery reinforcements to III MAF, fires a 175mm gun into the A Shau valley in Operation Cumberland in August. The operation closed at the start of the monsoon.

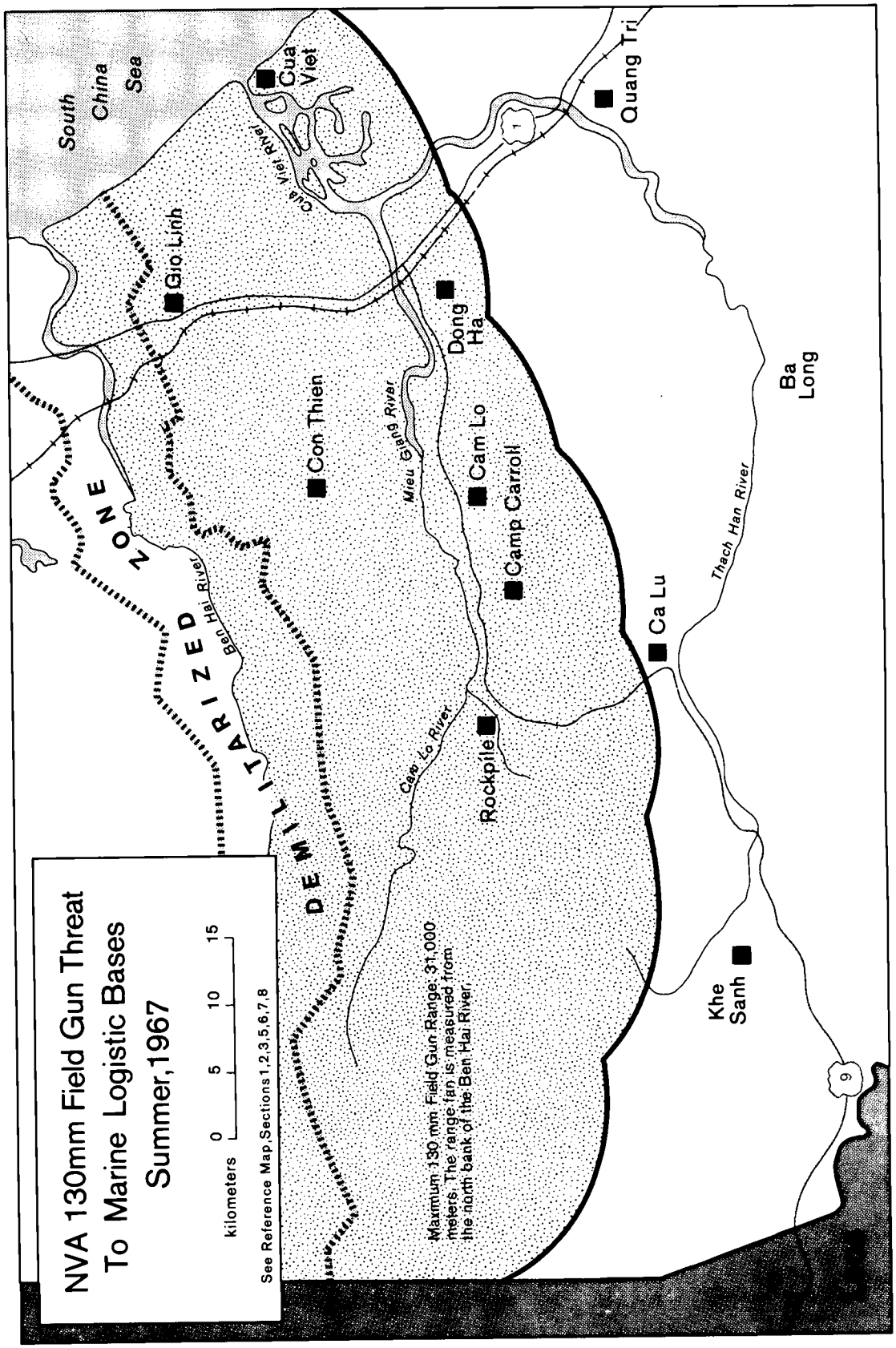
Battery; a platoon from the 5th 8-inch Howitzer Battery; and another battalion of Army 175mm guns, the 8th Battalion, 4th Artillery. By the end of the year, 35 Marine artillery batteries from the 11th, 12th, and 13th Marines, as well as four separate Force Troops and 10 Army batteries supported Marine operations in I Corps.*

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of the war, from an artilleryman's point of view, was the massive supporting arms effort employed to counter enemy artillery and rockets in the DMZ region. In the spring of 1967, the NVA introduced rockets as well as medium and heavy artillery to support actions there. As the year progressed, the North Vietnamese employed more and larger-caliber weapons. According to intelligence on the enemy order of battle, the North Vietnamese had approximately 130 artillery pieces in the area north of the Ben Hai River, including 152mm gun howitzers with a range in excess of 10 miles. Marine positions at Cua Viet, Gio Linh, Dong Ha, Con Thien, Cam Lo, and Camp Carroll suffered frequent attacks. These bombardments threatened not only the Marine forward positions, but also lines of communication, command posts, airfields, and logistic installations.

There were many difficulties in countering the increased enemy artillery acitivity, but the biggest problem involved determining the precise location of the enemy weapons. The Marines had limited ground observation because of the political/military probibition of operations in the DMZ, and NVA missile and antiaircraft fire challenged aerial observation. Intelligence and damage assessments remained, at best, skimpy. The available assessments came from diversified sources. The prolonged collecting and collating time, however, produced targeting results which often were too old to be worthwhile. Conversely, the Communists knew the exact locations of Marine forces and installations. The fact that the Marines occupied prominent terrain further simplified the enemy's observation task.

The Marines response to the expanded NVA artillery and rocket threat involved a pronounced increase in counterbattery fire, augmented by naval gunfire and aviation. III MAF increased Marine artillery along the DMZ to 84 of the 180 pieces available to the 3d Division. In August, USAF B-52s

*K Battery, 4th Battalion, 12th Marines remained on Okinawa awaiting gun repairs and equipment.


NVA 130mm Field Gun Threat
To Marine Logistic Bases
Summer, 1967
kilometers 0 5 10 15
See Reference Map, Sections 1,2,3,5,6,7,8
Maximum 130 mm Field Gun Range: 31,000 meters. The range fan is measured from the north bank of the Ben Hai River.
DEMILITARIZED ZONE
South China Sea
Gio Linh
Cua Viet
Cua Viet River
Con Thien
Dong Ha
Mieu Giang River
Cam Lo
Camp Carroll
Ben Hai River
Cam Lo River
Rockpile
Ca Lu
Thach Han River
Quang Tri
Ba Long
Khe Sanh
1
9

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189466

Soldiers of Battery G, 65th Artillery, equipped with truck-mounted, quad-.50 machine guns, stand by to escort a Marine "Rough Rider" truck convoy in I Corps in October.

added their immense bomb loads to the battle against the Communist artillery. The 3d Marine Division staff initiated an intensive effort to improve the counterbattery program and installed new radar and sound-flash ranging equipment at key locations. An Army unit, the Target Acquisition Battery from the 2d Battalion, 26th Artillery worked to improve target information. The Dong Ha FSCC received more personnel and communications equipment. Because the Seventh Air Force controlled fire clearances north of the DMZ, it sent an Air Force liaison officer to the Marine FSCC to speed up fire mission clearances. On 28 September 1967, the Marines established a fire support information center (FSIC) that employed data processing equipment, to speed collection and collation of target information from all 3d Marine Division, III MAF, and Seventh Air Force sources. Additional observation aircraft were made available, nearly doubling the number of hours of aerial observation over the DMZ area.

The Marines initiated large-scale, joint counterbattery and interdiction operations such as Ropeyarn, Headshed, Neutralize, and Eradicate. Artillery, naval gunfire, and air strikes blanketed all known and suspected firing and support positions north of the DMZ. For example, during Operation Headshed, both artillery and naval gunfire hit enemy positions, and air strikes followed to catch the survivors of the earlier bombardment.

As a result of these measures, enemy fire declined steadily from a September peak, but the Communists retained their capability to disrupt military activity and cause significant allied casualties.

The DMZ experience highlighted the necessity of relying on supporting arms to offset the disadvantage of operating next to an enemy sanctuary. The problem of neutralizing enemy artillery remained one of the most frustrating dilemmas of the war. Though supporting arms eased the situation, political considerations ruled out the only satisfactory solution, seizure of the enemy guns.

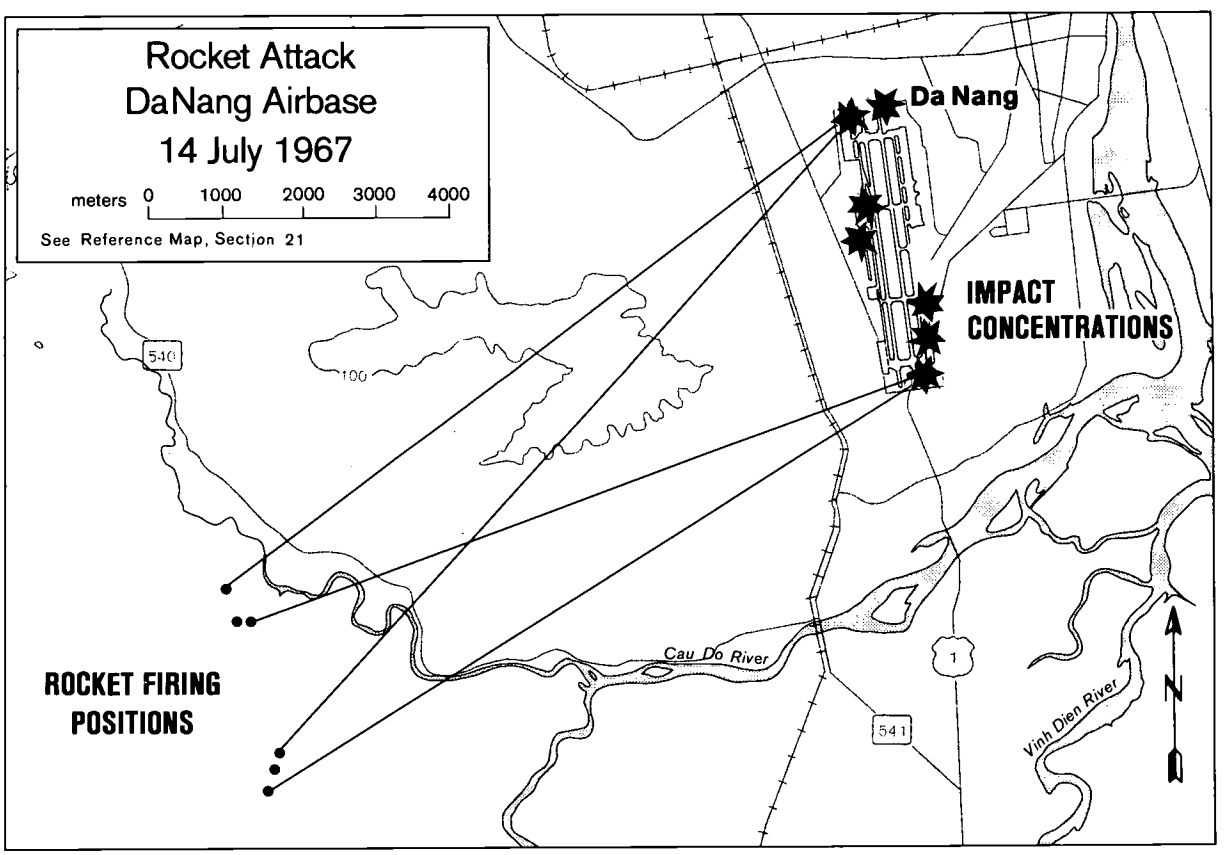
For the Marines not involved in the war along the DMZ, base defense remained one of the most worrisome responsibilities. Beginning in February, the threat of rocket attack menaced all I Corps bases. At Da Nang the enemy could launch rockets from any point in a 200-square-mile belt surrounding the city. Five thousand Marines participated in the defence of this TAOR, but the high mobility of the enemy rocket enabled the Communists to maintain the threat. To combat the rockets, the 11th Marines

3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967

An artilleryman covers his ears and turns his back after dropping a round down the tube of a 4.2-inch mortar in a position at Dong Ha in December 1967.

repositioned firing batteries so that by July, at least two batteries covered each part of the Da Nang TAOR. Observation aircraft flew constant patrols over the rocket belt.[20] Additionally, artillerymen manned strategically located observation posts throughout the belt, but the threat persisted.

III MAF artillery, totaling 49 Marine and Army batteries at the end of the year, faced a vast array of tactical and technical problems. Counterbattery fire across the DMZ, neutralization of the Da Nang rocket threat; coverage of numerous, simultaneous ground operations; and countless harassment and interdiction missions provide samples of the complex gunnery problems confronting III MAF artillery during 1967. As an example of the quantity of artillery support needed, the Communists fired 42,190 rounds during the 1967 artillery duel, while the III MAF Marine and attached Army gunners replied with 281,110 rounds.



CHAPTER 14

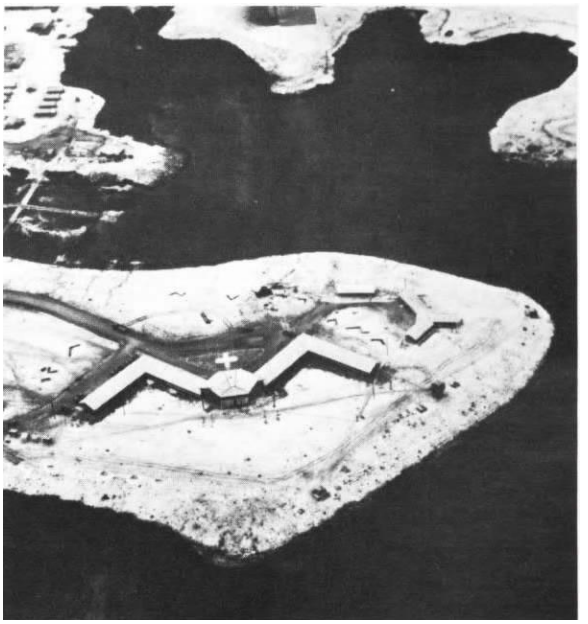
Logistics

Upgrading the Logistics System—Problems with the M-16 Rifle
Navy Support—Marine Corps Engineers

Upgrading the Logistics System

When 1967 began, the Marine logistics system in support of the Vietnam War was still undergoing growing pains. The means to fight were available; however, as Brigadier General Louis Metzger noted, there were many weaknesses, not excluding the provision of such necessities as socks and uniforms. "While CG, 9th MAB," he wrote, "I was appalled at the condition of the Marines and their equipment when they arrived on Okinawa [from Vietnam]. My observations in-country [as assistant commander of the 3d Marine Division] did nothing to dispel my opinion."[1]

The Marines landed in March 1965 with logistic support tailored for their initial requirements; only 592 personnel provided motor transport, supply, and maintenance services. As III MAF's role in I Corps expanded, the logistic organization increased



FLC ComdC, December 1967

The headquarters of the Force Logistic Command (above) sits almost surrounded by water while (below) parts of the maintenance and storage area stretch toward Da Nang.

FLC ComdC, December 1967

FLC ComdC, July 1967

GySgt D. B. Durrell, assigned to the inventory section of Supply Battalion, checks some of the material stored by FLC at Camp Brooks in Da Nang in July.

both in scope and size and led to the creation of the Force Logistic Command. FLC realignment started with the transfer of the 1st Force Service Regiment from Camp Pendleton to Da Nang on 15 February 1967. Although only the 1st FSR headquarters colors arrived, involving no personnel or equipment movement from Camp Pendleton, this transfer permitted the FLC to restructure its elements to conform with a service regiment's table of organization and equipment provisions. The required personnel were already in Vietnam, but FLC needed a new structure to administer an inventory which had grown to more than 60,000 supply items. By 28 February the Marine logistic organization in I CTZ, which was to remain essentially unchanged until the end of the year, was:

Dong Ha: Force Logistic Support Unit 1

Phu Bai: Force Logistic Support Group Alpha, 3d Service Regiment

Da Nang: Force Logistic Command Headquarters, 1st Force Service Regiment

Chu Lai: Force Logistic Support Group Bravo, 1st Service Battalion

FLC strength totaled 5,500 men; its mission was:

> To provide sustained logistical support to III MAF organizations; to provide staff augmentation and self-sustaining, balanced, mobile logistic support elements in support of III MAF units up to and including brigade size when deployed on independent missions; and to provide logistic support to other organizations as may be directed.[2]

By 31 December, FLC's authorized strength had grown to 9,551 men. Elsewhere, the Marine Corps adjusted existing tables of organization and force levels to accommodate the compelling needs in I Corps. The realignment provided a III MAF "tooth-to-tail" ratio of 6.5 to 1. This ratio measured the relative numbers between Marine combat and combat support troops to combat service support troops in Vietnam.

Providing supplies and services to the Vietnam Marine was a worldwide Marine Corps logistic network which spanned the United States from Albany, Georgia, and Barstow, California, across the Pacific to Hawaii, then Okinawa, and finally to I Corps. Most of the supplies flowed directly into the combat zone; the rest stopped at the Marines' supply base on Okinawa, thus providing a "surge tank" that could respond rapidly to demands from the units in RVN. The 3d Force Service Regiment (FSR) on Okinawa remained the nerve center of the Marine logistic system in the western Pacific. Continuously exchang-

The operator of one of the most important pieces of equipment in the Marine logistics system, a rough-terrain forklift, carefully removes cargo from the rear of a KC-130F at the air freight facility at Dong Ha.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A190069

FLC ComdC, October 1967

A Marine operates the keyboard in air-conditioned comfort surrounded by other components of the IBM-360 computer used by the Force Logistic Command to fill over 63,000 requisitions each month.

ing computerized information with III MAF, this activity processed 1,333,140 III MAF requisitions between January 1966 and September 1967, filling 82 percent of them from stores on hand. The remainder passed to the Marine Corps Supply Center at Barstow, or in some cases to the Naval Supply Centers at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, or Oakland, California. During this period, the Okinawa Marines shipped 19,521 short tons of material to Vietnam by air and 78,949 measurement tons by ship.

The focal point for all logistic support flowing into III MAF was the Force Logistic Command (FLC), commanded by Brigadier General James E. Herbold, Jr. FLC handled all supplies and equipment going to, or coming from, III MAF, as well as performing maintenance of equipment and facilities.

This logistic pipeline was a two-way system; as it moved new equipment into combat, damaged and worn items headed in the other direction for repair, salvage, or disposal. The 3d FSR acted as both a coordinating agency and a rebuilding center. Work repairs occurred either in Marine shops on Okinawa, at the Public Works Center, Yokosuka, Japan, or in the continental United States. Between January 1966 and September 1967, 3d Force Service Regiment repair facilities completed work orders on 77,286 items of combat equipment.

Frequent shifting of units to new locations, the rapid pace of the fighting, and bad weather all combined to aggravate supply problems. FLC introduced new supply management techniques to accelerate delivery of critical materials. The first of these was the Red Ball system introduced in September 1965. It sped the delivery of problem items through the normal distribution system by means of individual personal attention and continuing followup actions. When III MAF designated an item as Red Ball, FLC notified all supply agencies in Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Thereafter, designated action officers at each command level monitored the status of each Red Ball item and took every possible measure to speed delivery. By the end of September 1967, over 5,700 items had received the Red Ball treatment since the program's inception.

FLC introduced another special system in 1965 which it called the Critipac program. Under this program, each month the Marine Corps Supply Center at Barstow provided every major III MAF unit with one box of rapidly expended supplies which it required on a routine basis. Critipac eliminated the process of requisitioning and the inherent wait for the supply system to respond.

These two 5-ton trucks, one heavily damaged by an enemy mine and the other rebuilt to fully-usable condition, illustrate the heavy maintenance capabilities of FLC's motor transport repair shops.

FLC ComdC, August 1967

3d MarDiv ComdC, January 1967

A Rough Rider convoy of 150 vehicles enroute to Phu Bai moves through the Hai Van Pass, the only land route across the mountains that reached the sea north of Da Nang.

Repair parts and similar expendable items, usually in the Class II supply category, continued to be a headache during 1967. No matter how many of these items flowed into Vietnam through the supply system, the demand seemed insatiable. The explanation rests with the wide variety of items required, 86,000 during 1967, as well as the high usage rate. The increased tempo of combat operations and harsh weather conditions played a significant role in the rapid expenditure of supplies and equipment. This increased the number of requisitions submitted each month within III MAF. The number rose from only 2,500 in April 1965 to 70,959 in October 1967.

Enemy action also influenced supply levels and created sudden shortages. One of the most dramatic incidents of this nature occurred on 3 September when enemy artillery hit Dong Ha combat base, touching off one of the most spectacular series of explosions in the war. The initial blasts damaged seventeen helicopters. Force Logistic Support Unit 1's bulk fuel storage farm went up in flames. The enemy fire destroyed the main ammunition storage area; 15,000 short tons of vitally needed ammunition vanished. The explosions continued for more than four hours and people as far south as Phu Bai, more than 40 miles away, could see the enormous column of smoke.

Replacing the destroyed ammunition and the bulk fuel system while continuing normal supply operations plus providing building materials for construction of the "McNamara Line" represented monumental tasks.[3] As an interim measure, the men of Force Logistic Support Unit 1 established a drum refueling point immediately after the attack. This functioned until engineers completed another bulk fuel farm at Dong Ha a week later. The ammunition situation was better. Fortunately, two small, alternate supply points in the immediate Dong Ha area survived the attack. Quantities of artillery and other ammunition remained limited, however, until emergency sea and airlifts replenished the dangerously low stocks. Bad weather, heavy seas, and flooding of the Dong Ha LCU ramp during the period of 17-23 September complicated the resupply effort. The Marines circumvented this untimely development by offloading munitions at Hue and then moving them by truck to Dong Ha. Concur-

A forklift, mired to the axles in mud created by monsoon rains in January, sits in the Force Logistic Support Group Alpha open storage lot at Da Nang.

FLC ComdC, January 1967

rently, they started construction of new dumps at Quang Tri City, well beyond enemy weapons' range. Luckily, the Communists did not capitalize on the disaster.

Enemy artillery fire in October almost caused another serious setback to these resupply efforts. Fortunately, the immediate efforts of three Seabees and four Marines, one of whom was a general officer, prevented another disaster. "On 29 October our second and smaller ammunition dump in Dong Ha was hit by enemy fire," recalled General Metzger. "Knowing we simply could not lose it, three Marines, three Seabees, and I put out the fire."[4]*

Another of FLC's inherited missions involved personnel management. By 1967, the task of processing personnel to and from the western Pacific had grown to prodigious proportions. Over 191,000 Marines required processing during 1967. Approximately 97,000 went by aircraft to Vietnam and 7,872 arrived in surface shipping; 82,000 flew back to the United States and another 4,276 traveled home by ship. This complex evolution required the writing of orders, rosters, and schedules; and administering physical examinations, baggage inspections, troop handling, and billeting at transient facilities and processing centers reaching from South Vietnam back through Okinawa to El Toro and Camp Pendleton in California. In addition, all Marine posts and stations faced the tasks of filling outbound quotas and absorbing returnees.

At first, the main control center for the stream of Marines flowing through the western Pacific remained at Camp McTureous, Okinawa. In mid-1966 this activity moved to Camp Hansen, Okinawa to accommodate the increasing two-way personnel flow. By early 1967, the Transient Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Donald K. Cliff, processed as many as 25,000 troops in a single month. This complicated operation included accounting for all hospitalized casualties and expediting emergency leave personnel movement by arranging for these Marines' transportation, clothing, and pay, as well as many other services. Computerization sped such involved operations as the modification of orders of personnel still in transit. By 1967, the Transient Battalion reduced the average holding time for transients at Camp Hansen to about 40 hours. The transient program also involved the classification and storage of excess baggage and clothing in 3d FSR's climate-controlled warehouse. The hard-working troop handlers and administrators of the Transient Battalion received little praise, but their long hours of demanding work were as vital to the support of the Marines in I Corps as food and ammunition.

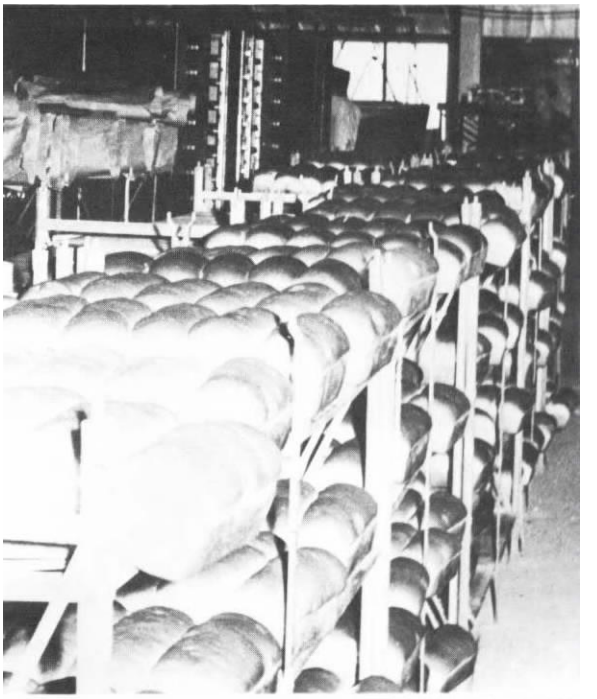
The Air Delivery Platoon of FLC was one of the

*Each of the seven received the Bronze Star Medal for their efforts in saving the ammunition dump.

Newly arrived Marine replacements await processing in front of a long line of tropical huts at the Force Logistic Command's transient facility in July at the Da Nang airfield.

FLC ComdC, July 1967

FLC ComdC, April 1967



FLC ComdC, July 1967

Feeding the thousands of Marines assigned to III MAF required facilities as large and efficient as many stateside commerical establishments. Some of the average of 2,592 loaves of bread provided each day by the bakery sit on cooling racks at Phu Bai. A Vietnamese civilian (right), one of 53 employed in FLC's milk plant, analyzes a sample of the more than 40,000 pints of reconsituted milk produced each day in April 1967.

more unusual Marine logistic units. The members of this specially trained 33-man platoon were graduates of the parachute school at Fort Benning, Georgia, as well as the parachute rigger school at Fort Lee, Virginia. The platoon supported requests for aerial delivery of supplies throughout I Corps. During September and October, the platoon rendered especially valuable service during the aerial resupply of the 26th Marines at Khe Sanh. Because of subsurface water damage, landing on Khe Sanh airstrip had become extremely hazardous for transport planes. Beginning in late August, the Air Delivery Platoon helped airdrop large quantities of supplies to the Marines at Khe Sanh during repairs to the runway. During the more than two months the strip remained closed, the Air Delivery Platoon made airdrops on 40 days, handling an average of 51 short tons per day, more than double its normal, rated capacity.

At the end of 1967, to improve logistic support and keep pace with the northward movement of III MAF combat elements, FLC emphasis shifted to northern I Corps. Force Logistic Support Group Bravo moved from Chu Lai to Dong Ha, leaving Supply Company (-)(Reinforced) as the agency responsible for logistic support of Marine elements in the Chu Lai area.

Problems with the M-16 Rifle

Problems with the M-16 rifle posed a logistics burden of staggering proportions for III MAF. After the heavy fighting at Khe Sanh in April and May a furor developed over reported deficiencies in the newly issued M-16. Many Marines lost confidence in the weapon, creating a situation which had a definite impact on combat operations and morale.[5]

The issue generated considerable reaction in the American press and Congress. Some Marines contributed to the furor by spreading exaggerated accounts of problems with the M-16, as described by General Metzger:

> . . . a congressional investigating team of two congressmen . . . arrived on the scene. It was my unhappy duty to escort them to units along the DMZ. If it weren't so serious it would have been laughable. They insisted on questioning individual Marines with no officers and NCOs present, I suppose to ensure they got the truth, without command influence. The result was that they were fed the

FLC ComdC, July 1967

Off-duty Marines watch a 20-lap race organized by the Force Logistic Command on 4 July as part of efforts to provide diversified recreation to III MAF.

FLC ComdC, July 1967

Marines enroute to the United States in July 1967 on government transportation line up at the airline ticket office at the FLC transit facility in Da Nang to buy tickets from the west coast to their homes.

Security forces' aerial flares, photographed by a time exposure as they drift over Camp Brooks, serve as a blunt reminder of the nearness of FLC's Marines to the dangers of war.

FLC ComdC, August 1967

most awful line of "hog wash" imaginable. Tall tales of heroic actions, patrols wiped out, etc., all due to the M-16 rifle, but which according to the sergeant major of one unit involved, had never taken place. The young Marines had a field day.[6]

The main criticism was that the rifle jammed; it would not extract spent cartridges. III MAF conducted numerous field tests and studies to determine if the weapon was faulty and, if so, what could be done about it. Much of the evidence pointed to the absolute necessity of keeping the weapon immaculately clean, mainly because of the extremely fine tolerances of its moving parts and the tendency of rounds to bend in the chamber. The studies cited dirty ammunition and poor cleaning methods as the major reasons for malfunctions. Commanders at every level hammered away at the traditional Marine theme of frequent weapon cleaning, which had been less important when armed with the M-14 rifle with its chrome-plated chamber and bore.

Even this was not always adequate. "The earlier [M-16] weapons—even when cleaned to usual standards (not always possible in any sustained combat) still developed microscopic 'pits' in the chamber," recalled Colonel James C. Short. "The [rifles] would then fail to extract, usually at an awkward time."[7]

RAdm Thomas R. Weschler, commander of the Naval Support Activity, Da Nang discusses his command and its capabilities with Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr., the Commandant of the Marine Corps, on board a small craft in Da Nang harbor in January.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188112

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189370

Two large cargo ships unload at the Naval Support Activity's deepwater piers at the Da Nang harbor.

When further investigation revealed that the problem could be alleviated by changing the chambers, the FLC faced the urgent task of modifying all Marine M-16s. It set up an assembly line and replaced all of the original chamber assemblies with new ones having a chrome coating. This modification reduced chamber friction, making extraction more reliable. At the same time, FLC installed a modified buffer group to reduce the cyclic rate of fire. The M-16's teething problems plagued FLC for the rest of the year, and a final solution waited until 1968.

The controversy over the new rifle had other long-term side effects that affected III MAF's combat effectiveness and logistic posture. These effects originated from the policy that each Marine would test fire his rifle before departing on a patrol. "So, obeying orders, each Marine dutifully fired his weapon regularly before each patrol," recalled General Metzger, "which depleted our ammunition supply and conditioned the Marines to shooting without aiming, so that the standard of marksmanship in combat dropped sharply."[8]

Navy Support

Throughout 1967, the Naval Support Activity

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A193811

A Navy medium landing craft (LCM-8), with folding cots on top of its improvised pilot house cover, moves a tank from the 3d Tank Battalion up the Dong Ha River on 6 July.

(NSA), Da Nang, served as the focal point for Navy activities supporting the Marines in I Corps. The Navy established NSA in July 1965 to relieve the Marines of the administrative and logistic tasks associated with an advanced naval base. During 1966 the command's responsibilities grew to the point that a flag officer, Rear Admiral Thomas R. Weschler, became the unit's commander. By the end of 1967, NSA developed into the largest U.S. Navy overseas shore command with more than 10,000 officers and men.* It provided III MAF with an average of 39,661 measurement tons of supplies per month in 1967.

Besides operating the Da Nang port facilities, sailors of NSA served throughout I Corps in several separate detachments to accomplish some rather diverse missions. Personnel of the command operated small craft on the dangerous waters of the Cua Viet to supply the fighting forces along the DMZ. Detachments at Hue/Tan My performed similar duties. At Chu Lai another detachment shared the burden of supplying all allied forces in lower I Corps, aided by the southernmost NSA detachment at Sa Huynh. NSA built the Sa Huynh

A sailor on the Navy's Swift Boat 80, operating in the South China Sea in September, prepares to fire an 81mm mortar at enemy coastal positions two miles south of the Demilitarized Zone. The dual mount also includes a .50-caliber machine gun installed above the mortar and recoil mechanism.

3d MarDiv ComdC, September 1967

*For a fuller treatment of Navy logistics in Vietnam, see Vice Admiral Edwin B. Hooper, USN (Ret), *Mobility, Support and Endurance: A Story of Naval Operational Logistics in the Vietnam War, 1965-1968* (Washington: Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1972).

3d MarDiv ComdC, June 1967

Navy hospital corpsmen remove a wounded man from a medevac helicopter at Dong Ha for the short ride to the 3d Medical Battalion's field hospital.

facilities shortly after the arrival of Task Force Oregon in the summer of 1967.

In addition to transhipping material from Da Nang to the smaller ports, NSA performed a variety of other tasks. It provided loading and unloading services, and transient and terminal storage at these ports; operated base supply depots for supply of material common to all U.S. forces in I Corps; supplied port and harbor security; coordinated activities with RVN agencies and the U.S. Agency for International Development in support of military operations; supervised industrial relations; provided all petroleum requirements; provided public works support in secure areas; maintained airfields in coordination with III MAF; and operated in-country R&R facilities.

Another vital NSA service involved providing hospital facilities for combat troops in I Corps. The NSA station hospital opened at Da Nang in January 1966. It expanded from a 60-bed capacity to 460 by year's end. The staff included more than 500 doctors, nurses, corpsmen, and technicians. This modern hospital boasted the only frozen blood bank in Vietnam, and had competent departments such as X-ray; eye, ear, nose, and throat; neurosurgery; urology; orthopedic; research; and preventive medicine facilities. Served by a convenient helicopter pad, the NSA hospital, working with the facilities of the 1st and 3d Medical Battalions and the 1st Hospital Company, provided III MAF with the most modern medical technology available.

In addition to the fixed medical facilities, hospital ships cruised the waters off Vietnam to receive casualties evacuated directly from the battlefield by helicopter. The USS *Sanctuary* arrived on 10 April 1967 to join her sister ship, the USS *Repose,* a veteran of almost a year's Vietnam service. In her first 50 days of action, *Sanctuary* admitted 1,200 patients. Operating from Da Nang, the *Sanctuary,* with 560 hospital beds and 27 doctors embarked, could move to Chu Lai in less than two hours and to the seaward approaches to the DMZ in less than five hours. The presence of a fully-equipped hospital ship only minutes away provided solace for many Marines as they contemplated their chances of survival.

No account of naval support would be complete without mention of the Marines' long-term friends, the Seabees. By midsummer of 1967, nine Navy mobile construction battalions (NMCBs) were in Vietnam: two at Dong Ha, one at Phu Bai, five at Da Nang, and one at Chu Lai. These formed the 3d Naval Construction Brigade, commanded by Rear

HMC Marvin L. Cunningham, Navy medical corpsman, removes mosquitoes from a trap with a portable vacuum cleaner before sending them to the Navy Support Activity at Da Nang for examination.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189498

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A369856

General purpose tents of the type commonly called "GP Medium" house a small field hospital run by the 1st Medical Battalion in support of Operation Desoto near Duc Pho.

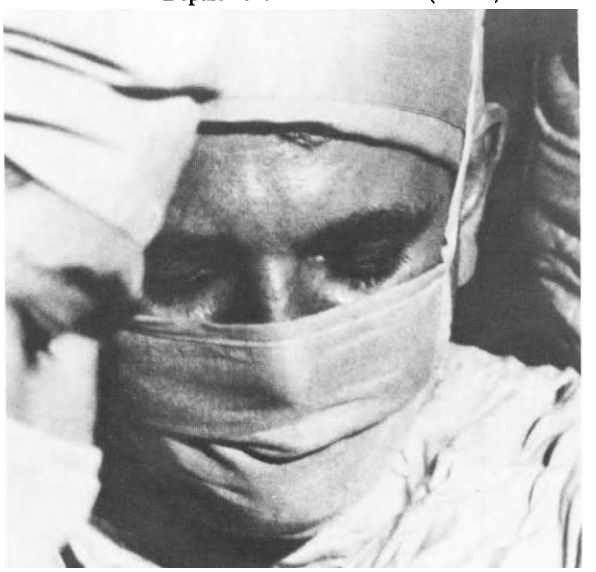
Admiral Robert R. Wooding, CEC. His force included 7,000 officers and men.

The Seabees in Vietnam demonstrated their amazing capability and traditional versatility. One of the best examples of their ability to respond with speed and determination took place during the fall of 1967 when they built an airfield and quarters for 500 men at Quang Tri. The field served as a backup installation for the strip at Dong Ha, by then vulnerable to NVA rocket and artillery fire. Seabees and equipment converged on the site within a day of General Westmoreland's order to complete the field before the monsoon season. NMCB-10, the Pacific Fleet's Alert Construction Battalion on Okinawa, deployed immediately to take charge of the urgent project and relieve the composite force already at work. The specifications called for a 4,100-foot strip of sand cement covered with metal matting, plus 15,000 square yards of parking aprons and taxiways.

Heavy rains hit the region in late September, adding to the problem of stabilizing shifting sand in the construction area. The Seabees also faced the delicate task of negotiating and supervising the removal of approximately 11,000 Vietnamese graves located in the middle of the proposed site. The latter problem occurred frequently in Vietnam and its solution required subtle and skillful diplomacy. In spite of these obstacles, the first KC-130 landed at Quang Tri on 23 October, nine days ahead of the scheduled completion date and only 38 days after the project started.

Concentration shows on the faces of Cdr Ronald L. Bouterie and his assistants during surgery on the hip of a wounded Marine on board the USS Tripoli.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A704398



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A189992

Seabees of Mobile Construction Battalion 301 battle the mud on 29 November as they set and seal runway mats into place during the rebuilding of the runway at Khe Sanh.

Navy Seabees use special mobile equipment in September to crush rock for repairing the damage caused by heavy monsoon rains to the runway at the Khe Sanh combat base.

3d MarDiv ComdC, September 1967

Photo courtesy of Maj Henry Wayne Gardner

A Navy chaplain assigned to the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines conducts a non-denominational service in February using three C-ration boxes for an altar.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A369963

HM Andre A. Bougie, a 19-year old Navy medical corpsman in the 1st Marine Division, tries to keep a wounded Viet Cong alive in Operation New Castle.

Seabees also made a major contribution by their continual struggle to maintain "Liberty Road," the route connecting Da Nang with the An Hoa industrial complex, 23 air miles to the southwest. Elements of the 3d, 7th, and 9th Marine Engineer Battalions worked with the Seabees to keep the road open as heavy two-way traffic strained its many culverts and bridges. The constant threat of enemy mines and sapper attacks added to the Seabees' and Marines' worries on "Liberty Road." Lieutenant Colonel Frank W. Harris III's 7th Engineer Battalion replaced one bridge blown up by enemy demolitions on 4 February 1967, with a 96-foot, 60-ton-limit, timber bridge in the remarkable time of only 16 days.

The Seabees, however, claimed credit for the largest single bridge building feat on "Liberty Road." NMCB-4, commanded by Commander Richard M. Fluss, CEC, built the 2,040-foot-long "Liberty Bridge" across the Thu Bon River. The bridge rested on more than 800 80-foot-long piles, each one driven approximately 40 feet into the river bed. The battalion used more than five tons of 10-inch nails and 5,000 24-inch bolts in its construction. It completed the job in less than five

The visiting Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr., pins a Navy Unit Commendation streamer on the colors of the 3d Medical Battalion in a ceremony at Phu Bai on 7 January 1967.

3d MarDiv ComdC, January 1967

3d MarDiv ComdC, April 1967

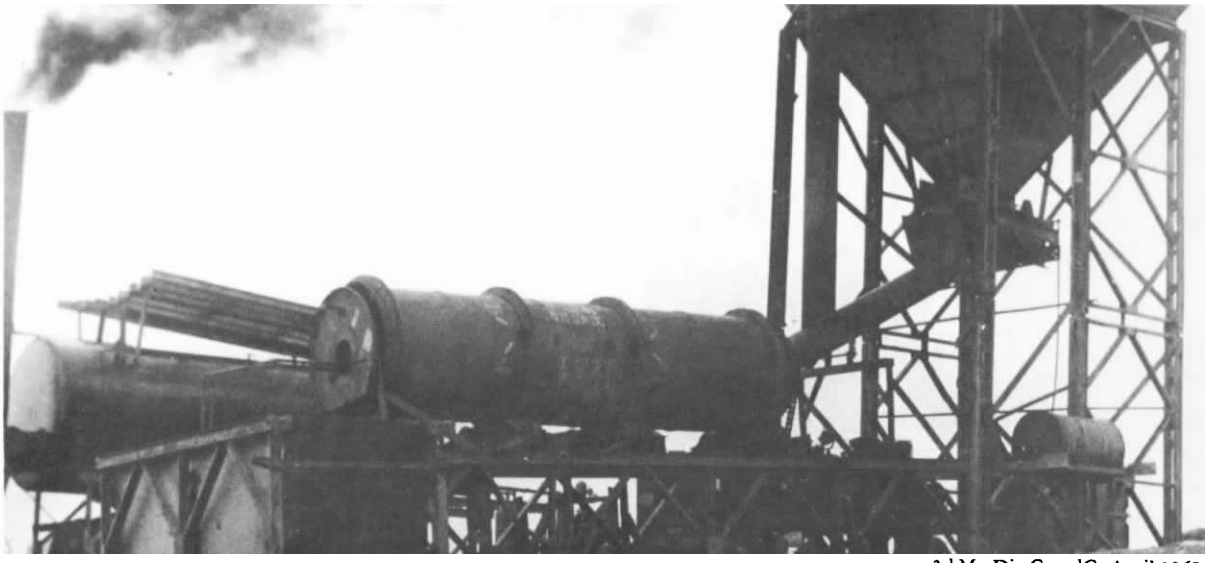
Two Marines from Company D, 11th Engineer Battalion perform a ritual common in the Vietnam War. PFC T. Outlaw, having located a suspected enemy mine with a mine detector during a road sweep on 12 April, watches as Pvt R. P. Dotson cautiously probes the ground with his bayonet tip.

3d MarDiv ComdC, July 1967

A bulldozer pushes trees aside as the 11th Engineer Battalion completes construction on Route 561 near the strategic combat base at Con Thien in July 1967.

A pontoon ferry constructed by Company C, 11th Engineer Battalion carries several Marine vehicles across the Perfume River 15 miles west of the city of Hue on 16 May.

3d MarDiv ComdC, May 1967



3d MarDiv ComdC, April 1967

Smoke pours from the 11th Engineer Battalion's new asphalt plant constructed at Dong Ha for improving the highway network necessary to the defense of the DMZ region.

months, from 3 April to 2 September. Enemy sappers attacked the bridge during the early morning hours of 6 September and knocked out two spans. A scant 32 hours later, the Seabees had completed repairs and traffic moved once more on "Liberty Road."

For the majority of Marines in Vietnam, the most frequently encountered evidence of Navy support were the naval personnel assigned to his unit. Each battalion, aircraft group, and higher headquarters had its own Navy chaplain. Each battalion and squadron, as well as higher headquarters, had its own complement of Navy medical personnel, headed by a physician. The enlisted Navy medical corpsmen provided immediate medical care at all levels, down to the individual rifle platoon. In addition, each Marine division included a medical battalion and a dental company commanded by a Medical Corps or Dental Corps officer.

Captain John T. Vincent, MC, USN, who commanded the 3d Medical Battalion, described his unit's disposition in support of the 3d Marine Division:

> During 1967 there were two essentially complete hospitals, one at Phu Bai and the other at Dong Ha which we staffed and equipped for definitive surgical treatment. In addition, two clearing platoons (essentially the equivalent of an Army MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] unit) were in the field: one at Khe Sanh and the other at a fire support base between Phu Bai and Quang Tri. The deployment of a clearing platoon of "C" Company, 3d Medical Battalion to Khe Sanh during the fight for Hills 861 and 881 was an extremely expeditious and efficient operation and provided excellent combat support.[9]

Dental Corps personnel could be found operating with Marines under similar conditions. For example, to provide primary dental care to Marines at Duc Pho, the 1st Dental Company rigged a dental chair and other equipment in a 3/4-ton trailer. A helicopter flew the trailer from Quang Ngai to Duc Pho. When dug in and sandbagged, it allowed the provision of excellent dental care throughout the Marine stay at the base, despite such occurrences as a near miss from a mortar during the enemy attack on 24 March.[10]

Marine Corps Engineers

No Marines in Vietnam faced more frustrations in the accomplishment of their mission than the engineers. Organized and equipped to accomplish engineer support for short duration amphibious operation, five Marine engineer battalions, the 1st, 3d, 7th, 9th, and 11th, found themselves committed to a protracted land war in an underdeveloped country. The wide spectrum of urgent tasks, hard equipment use, torrential rains, mud, heat, abrasive dust, replacement shortages, lack of spares, and a long supply pipeline were some of the more com-

mon hindrances. Only forceful leadership, grueling work schedules, and considerable ingenuity kept the battalions abreast of mounting demands for engineering support. They met their military commitments while still managing to build dams, schools, dispensaries, bridges, and other facilities for the people of South Vietnam.[11]

One of the most challenging tasks facing the engineers in 1967 involved maintaining and upgrading more than 2,000 miles of I Corps roads. The opening of Route 9 connecting Dong Ha with Khe Sanh in March provided a prime example of Marine engineering accomplishment. Flooding and enemy damage closed the road to vehicular traffic west of Cam Lo in 1964. This 42-mile road included 49 bridges, 27 of which occupied the 15-mile stretch between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh. Once open, the road required continuous maintenance to repair the constant ravages of flooding and enemy action. Additionally, the engineers reinforced all bridges to support 60-ton loads. The Route 9 project tied up almost a full engineer battalion for all of 1967.

Another project which tested the resolve of the battalions was the construction of the DMZ barrier system in northern Quang Tri Province. The 11th Engineer Battalion, under the sucessive command of Lieutenant Colonels Ross L. Mulford and Willard N. Christopher, comprised the initial project force, but by the end of the summer, the mammoth effort involved 30 percent of all III MAF engineer forces.[12] U.S. Army motor transport and helicopter units were deployed from other Corps areas to help; Seabees provided additional support, especially in the construction of observation towers and bunkers; and ARVN engineers contributed their share. By the end of the year, the barrier construction effort and associated security tasks had absorbed 757,520 man days. Casualties among the engineers mounted as the enemy employed snipers, mines, mortars, and artillery to discourage them.

The generator shortage caused headaches for Marines throughout 1967. The engineers owned and operated the major share of III MAF's power-generating equipment, but they were purely expeditionary-type generators. The Marine Corps possessed only a limited quantity of garrison equipment, including power generators. The rapid construction of many new installations in I Corps, all of which required electricity, quickly depleted existing generator stocks. The engineers had the task of servicing and exchanging generators to keep up with seemingly insatiable power demands. Clubs, messes, air conditioners all demanded electricity, and the requirements often exceeded the means.

The generator situation in 1967 would have been even more acute save for actions taken in 1966 by Colonel George C. Axtell, then the commander of

Marines from the 3d Engineer Battalion use ropes and muscle power as they manhandle a dud 250-pound bomb in the mud of a farmer's paddy near Camp Evans in October.

3d MarDiv ComdC, October 1967

Photo courtesy of Col Frank W. Harris III

The 7th Engineer Battalion, in an assignment common to all engineer units in Vietnam, goes beyond its combat duties and aids the pacification program by building an irrigation dam to allow local Vietnamese farmers to grow a second rice crop each year.

the Force Logistic Command. Colonel Richard D. Taber, Sr., recently recalled:

> When the shortage of generators began to be realized, Colonel Axtell personally called higher headquarters in the Pacific and United States to get all available expeditionary generators made available to III MAF. Then, following a discussion with Captain [Albert R.] Marschall (CEC) USN [of the Third Naval Construction Brigade], joint action was taken to obtain some larger (60 kilowatts and up) Navy generators for all complexes where power grids could be built and to release the smaller expeditionary generators to more remote locations. Care and maintenance of the expeditionary generators was primarily by their "owners" (i.e., the engineers) with backup from FLC. Care and maintenance of the larger Navy generators was first by selected engineer personnel from FLC and backed up/augmented by Navy Seabees.[13]

While the Marine engineers spent much time engaged in construction and maintenance, they also devoted many hours to road clearing sweeps. Each day, prior to the departure of the first truck convoy, engineers teams, with infantry support, ensured the roads were clear of mines, booby traps, and ambushes.[14] When the engineers found enemy explosives they either disarmed or blew them in place, depending upon their size and type. The slow, tedious, and dangerous sweeps were a necessary part of keeping supplies moving throughout I Corps.

The Marine engineers in Vietnam demonstrated true versatility. Not only challenged by new and demanding tasks, but they also faced vastly different physical properties of soil and rock, as well as a clever and determined opponent. Every engineering project involved constant exposure to sabotage, mining, ambush, or some other nagging threat. The dramatic aspect of combat eclipses most supporting efforts, but this was not the case of the Marine engineers in Vietnam. If nothing else, the mere physical size of their accomplishments bears witness to their contribution.

Father Nguyen Thanh Hoan, LtCol Ross L. Mulford of the 11th Engineer Battalion, and others stand in front of the school in Dong Ha partially supported by the battalion.

3d MarDiv ComdC, March 1967

CHAPTER 15

Other Marine Activities

Marines with MACV—The Embassy Guard—The Advisors—I Corps Advisors—The Rung Sat Special Zone The Marine Advisory Unit—Action In Binh Dinh Province—Action in the South

Marines with MACV

The Marine Corps provided the MACV staff 72 officers and 67 enlisted men at the beginning of 1967. The assigned Marines comprised slightly less than five percent of the total MACV staff personnel. Another 25 officers and 24 enlisted Marines served with the MACV field components. The senior Marine officer on the staff was the director of the combat operations center (COC), Brigadier General John R. Chaisson. General Chaisson remained in this vital position through 1967 and up until mid-1968. Other Marine billets covered a broad spectrum of assignments which ranged from membership in the Studies and Observation Group to duty with the radio and television staff.

Marine participation in MACV functions had a dual importance. Not only did they make Marine views readily available to the staff in Saigon, but MACV Marines clarified Saigon's decisions with their fellow Marines in I Corps. General Chaisson was himself a former member of the III MAF staff and the only Marine general out of 20 flag officers at MACV Headquarters. He had direct, personal contact with General Westmoreland and his senior staff members, as well as other senior American and

Marine BGen John R. Chaisson, the director of the MACV combat operations center in Saigon, listens as Gen Creighton W. Abrams, the deputy MACV commander, confers with III MAF's LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr., and the 3d Marine Division's MajGen Bruno A. Hochmuth during Gen Abrams' visit to the division at Phu Bai on 13 July.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A188880

foreign representatives. From these associations, he gained considerable insight into the way the other services viewed Marines. None ever criticized Marines' fighting characteristics, except for the belief that Marines did not know how to dig in when occupying a defensive position, such as Con Thien in 1967. Not all the remarks were so charitable, as he recounted some years later at the Basic School:

> Sometimes they made disparaging remarks about our rather casual approach to logistics and communications and these rather ancillary supporting activities. They weren't quite sure that we were up to speed in these regards. . . . I don't think they gave us credit for having too many smarts. They had a feeling that we liked to put our head down and go up the middle rather than get the least bit fancy. I can remember one day a senior officer of the Army came back [after] he'd visited a Marine battalion. He said to me, "John, you know, I met a real intelligent battalion commander up there. Real unusual guy." Now, I wasn't sure that . . . [of the Marine's] two characteristics—intelligent and unusual—whether the one followed the other.[1]

Some of the other 1967 Marine MACV Staff members were: Colonel James C. Stanfield, chief of the Plans and Requirements Division (J-4); Colonel William L. Traynor, the COC air operations officer; and Colonel Joseph C. Fegan, Jr., who served as General Chaisson's deputy director of the COC. Colonel Kirby B. Vick was the deputy director of the Doctrine and Analysis Branch (J-34) until March, when his relief, Colonel David D. Rickabaugh, arrived.

Many controversial issues confronted the Marines assigned to MACV. These involved doctrinal and policy matters of direct interest to other commands, such as FMFPac, Seventh Fleet, and III MAF and its subordinate units. Marine participation in MACV functions helped in arriving at palatable solutions for many of the problems which developed during the year.

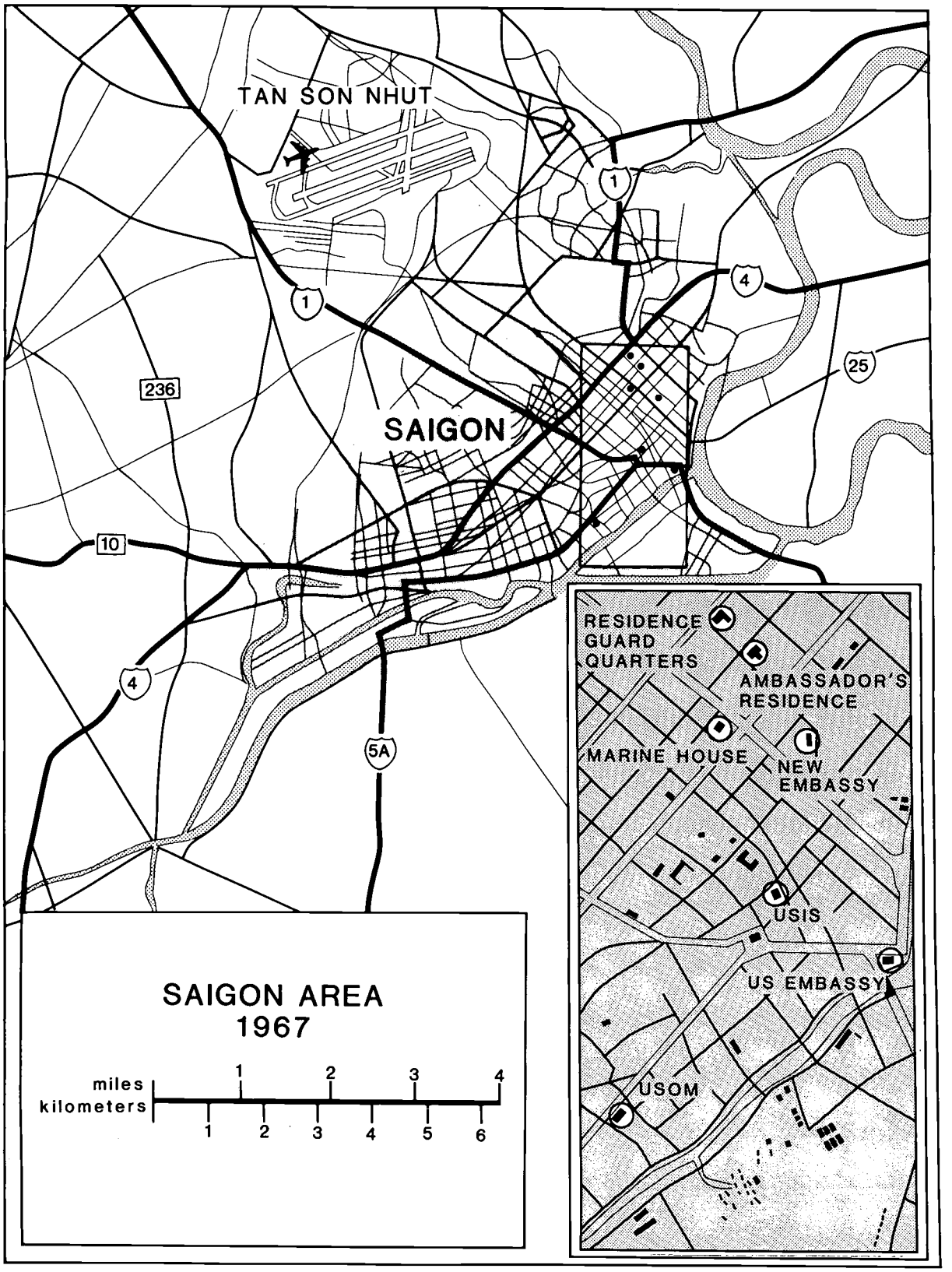
The MACV viewpoint, of necessity, covered a broader range than that of the respective corps commands. MACV maintained a fine balance between the attitudes of the U.S. participants, as well as those of Vietnamese and allied staffs. Typical of the issues which confronted MACV in 1967 was the structuring of U.S. Army participation in I Corps. The provision of Task Force Oregon represented only the beginning of the northward move of Army troops. The fact that the displacement of each unit to I Corps meant that another corps area faced a force reduction, or a postponement of force buildup, remained a constant staff annoyance throughout the year. General Westmoreland's continuing concern about Communist use of the A Shau valley and the protection of the remote cities of Kontum and Pleiku was another worrisome matter. The enemy rocket attacks against Da Nang posed still another dilemma. If enemy rockets could hit Da Nang, they also could hit Bien Hoa and, for that matter, Saigon. Another issue was the "barrier," or the "McNamara Line" along the DMZ. Even with the accelerated troop buildup in I Corps, the number of troops required to man, much less build, the unpopular barrier served as a continuing source of irritation. Added to this, the question arose of what to do with the left flank of the proposed barrier, an area comprising all of western Quang Tri Province. In III Corps a new threat developed. Even though Operations Cedar Falls and Junction City had badly mauled Communist formations in the "Iron Triangle" northwest of Saigon, at least three enemy divisions threatened Long Binh and Bien Hoa. To the south in IV Corps, U.S. riverine operations were expanding, but again the I Corps troop drain reduced the effectiveness of this tactical innovation.

An entirely different and equally perplexing conflict was the dispute between Marine and Air Force fire restrictions in the DMZ. The Air Force contended that it should be responsible for all territory north of the Ben Hai River, but Marine staffs demanded to be allowed to fire to the maximum range of their attached 175mm guns in order to silence North Vietnamese artillery. An interim decision limiting Marine fires to the northern boundary of the DMZ and placing Air Force control north of the same boundary, satisfied neither service, and the issue remained in contention for the rest of the year.

The year 1967 was filled with innumerable perplexing situations for the MACV staff. American troop strength increased from 385,000 to 486,000, but Communist activity also intensified. In August, the MACV Headquarters moved from downtown Saigon to a new complex at Tan Son Nhut Airbase on the outskirts of the city. The improved facilities did not diminish the number of problems, but they did improve the staffs' working conditions. The coming year proved that the move occurred none too soon.

The Embassy Guard

The year 1967 brought on expansion of the Marine Security Guard Detachment (MSGD) at the


TAN SON NHUT
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RESIDENCE GUARD QUARTERS
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MARINE HOUSE
NEW EMBASSY
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American Embassy in Saigon. The detachment of Marines, one officer and 67 enlisted men at the beginning of the year, came under the administrative control of Company C, Marine Security Guard Battalion, headquartered at the U.S. Embassy in Manila. The parent battalion, established in February 1967, was the Marine Security Guard Battalion (State Department) located at Headquarters, Marine Corps. The Saigon detachment's chain of command consisted of one of the longest small unit command links in the world, more than 650 miles from Saigon to Manila and over 9,000 miles to battalion headquarters in Washington. At the beginning of the year, First Lieutenant Philip E. Tucker commanded the Saigon detachment; his deputy, and the only staff noncommissioned officer, was Staff Sergeant Gary G. Stoces.

The Marines assigned to the Embassy protected American lives and property within the Embassy and its associated U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and U.S. Information Service (USIS) buildings. The guard consisted of an administrative section and a watch section. The watch section broke down into three separate units: a Guard Section, charged with protection of the Embassy, USAID, and USIS compounds; an Ambassador's Residency Guard; and the Ambassador's Personal Security Unit, the bodyguard of the Honorable Henry Cabot Lodge and his wife. The Embassy Security Officer, Mr. Robert A. England, exercised operational control of the detachment through First Lieutenant Tucker. The Embassy Marines had no connection with Marines elsewhere in Vietnam.

Weapons and radio equipment for the Marines came from the U.S. Department of State. The detachment's highly sophisticated radio net consisted of extremely reliable fixed and portable units which linked guard posts, vehicles, the detachment office, and the security offices. The standard weapon for the embassy guard was the Smith and Wesson .38-caliber, 4-inch barrel revolver. However, the Residency Guard carried the 2-inch barrel Smith and Wesson .38, while the Personal Security Unit used the Colt "Python," a .357-caliber, magnum revolver. Both the Residency and the Personal Security Units had 9mm Beretta sub-machine guns, which they carried in unobtrusive attache cases. A 1966 test of some of the world's available sub-machine guns resulted in the selection of the Beretta because of its accuracy, reliability, and light weight.* Backing up the arsenal of hand guns, each internal post possessed 12-gauge Remington Shotguns, loaded with 00 buckshot shells.

One major problem encountered by the officer in charge during 1967 was that his command expanded so rapidly that he and his one staff NCO were hard put to exercise adequate control. As a result, sergeants supervised watch sections of as many as 30 Marines, located at different posts in a potentially insecure city. This situation ceased only after Captain Robert J. O'Brien became OIC of the detachment in April and Gunnery Sergeant Alexander Morrison arrived in February.

The security guard faced an additional difficulty during the construction of a new embassy facility. During the construction period, the Marines guarded the site on a 24-hour basis and, because of security considerations, monitored the workers on the job. The Marine guard requirements constantly changed at the new building site and the contractors did not finish the new complex until the fall.

The year 1967 passed without any significant test of the Saigon MSG's mission capability. The events of February 1968 justified the long and tedious hours devoted to drills, alerts, passive defense measures, and tests of the security system.

The Advisors

Major operations such as Cedar Falls and Junction City in III Corps, the Prairie series, the Hickory sweeps, and the protracted defenses of Con Thien and Khe Sanh in I Corps served as focal points for the year 1967. Because of the tactful and often delicate nature of their missions, American advisors often found their activities in Vietnam overshadowed by these more dramatic events. The advisors' role in Vietnam, however, included every aspect of the conflict.

Following the signature of the Geneva Accords on 20 July 1954, the South Vietnamese Government requested U.S. military aid. The United States granted the request and established the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Vietnam. In February 1955, MAAG Vietnam's mission expanded to include the organization and training of the Viet-

*The weapons tested included the Thompson SMG (.45 caliber), the Swedish K, the Israeli Uzi, and the Beretta. LtCol Philip E. Tucker, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981) (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

namese forces. Continued growth of the MAAG led to the formation of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV) in February 1962 to direct the expanding effort. By the end of 1962, MACV personnel strength reached 11,000. As the level of combat increased, MACV grew accordingly, and during 1967 General Westmoreland, recognizing the value of the advisory program, requested the addition of 3,100 advisory personnel. By 31 December 1967, 7,038 U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine advisors served in the field with their Vietnamese counterparts; 76 were Marines.

Marine advisors fell into two categories. The largest contingent, 40 officers and enlisted men, served as members of the 845-man USMACV I Corps Field Advisory Element. The Naval Advisory Group (NAG) carried the other Marine advisors on its rolls. NAG Marines operated with two separate advisory components: The Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ) and the Marine Advisory Unit (MAU). The Rung Sat Special Zone was a small, joint Navy-Marine advisory unit, while the Marine Advisory Unit was directed to the growing Vietnamese Marine Corps.

I Corps Advisors

Marine advisors assigned to I Corps came under the control of the Army Advisory I Corps Headquarters, located at Da Nang, and commanded by Colonel Archelaus L. Hamblen, USA. Colonel Hamblen reported to the senior advisor; I Corps, Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt, who, in addition to commanding III MAF, wore the advisory "hat" in the Corps area.

The Marine advisors in I Corps, 20 officers and 20 enlisted men, spread throughout the entire I CTZ, but most of them concentrated in the 1st ARVN Division while the rest served with the 2d ARVN Division and the 51st ARVN Regiment. The I Corps advisory teams contained U.S. Marine and Army and Australian personnel.[3]

One of the major accomplishments of the Army-Marine advisory teams with the 1st ARVN Division involved the improvement of the division's firepower. During September 1967, the 1st ARVN Division took over a sector of the DMZ defenses, and to strengthen its defensive capabilities, the division received 106mm recoilless rifles and M-60 machine guns. Its mortar allocations increased, and late in the year the entire division was reequipped with M-16 rifles.

Photo courtesy of LtCol James R. Davis

Marine Capt James R. Davis (second from right), the senior advisor to a battalion of the 1st ARVN Infantry Division, and his assistants, pose with the battalion's commander (center). Comprising the team are a Marine lieutenant, an Australian warrant officer, Capt Davis, and an Army sergeant first class.

Five major ARVN actions during 1967 in I Corps demonstrated increased South Vietnamese unit combat effectiveness, the goal of the advisory effort. In February, 2d ARVN Division battalions engaged elements of the *1st VC* and *NVA Regiments* in Quang Ngai Province, killing 813 enemy. To the north, 1st ARVN Division regulars accounted for 392 NVA killed during May as they worked with the 3d Marine Division during Operation Lam Son 54/Hickory.

Lam Son 54 provided an excellent example of the rigors experienced by advisors assigned to I Corps. On the night of 20 May 1967, Marine First Lieutenant William M. Grammar, senior advisor to the 3d Battalion, 1st Regiment, 1st ARVN Division, was with the battalion command group. Suddenly a large North Vietnamese force lunged out of the darkness, completely overrunning the group. During the confused action which followed, enemy fire hit one of Grammar's assistants. Grammar tried to carry him to safety, but the wounded American refused, saying that he would stay behind and pro-

3d MarDiv ComdC, April 1967

Marine Capt Roger E. Knapper, an advisor to the 1st ARVN Infantry Division, inspects a well-constructed bunker at one of the division's bases in April 1967.

vide covering fire. Lieutenant Grammar, with the rest of his team, fought his way through the encircling enemy to the relative safety of a nearby village. There, an enemy search party discovered them. Grammar, trying to draw the Communists away from his group of survivors, broke into the open and ran into an open field. His efforts failed and the enemy force captured him.

Meanwhile, the 4th Battalion of the 1st ARVN Regiment received orders to go to the assistance of the survivors of the 3d Battalion. By 0600 the 4th made contact with the same enemy unit that had overrun the 3d Battalion. The battle raged all morning; close air support and artillery helped the 4th Battalion to drive the North Vietnamese from their original positions. Senior battalion advisor, Marine Captain James R. Davis, directed the supporting arms effort. At 1100, the 4th Battalion located the main enemy force near a church. The South Vietnamese launched a determined assault against the enemy position at 1300 and, despite heavy NVA automatic weapons fire and B-40 rockets, the battalion carried the Communist position. The NVA unit broke off the engagement. The 4th Battalion consolidated the church position, where they found the body of First Lieutenant Grammar. His captors had killed him before they fled.*

Later in the year, during July, the 1st ARVN Division conducted a sweep operation, Lam Son 87, north of Hue. During the operation, the division shattered the *802d VC Battalion*. The final enemy body count reached 252. The next month, in Quang Nam Province, units from the independent 51st ARVN Regiment tracked down a battalion of the *21st NVA Regiment,* and killed 197. Later in the fall, during Lam Son 138 east of Quang Tri City, a 1st ARVN Division battalion smashed another NVA battalion. At the end of the day-long battle, a total of 107 North Vietnamese bodies covered the field. Marine advisors participated in all of these actions. In I Corps during 1967, South Vietnamese large-unit actions killed more than 8,000 enemy troops, as compared to 5,271 in 1966. The advisors were accomplishing their mission.

The Rung Sat Special Zone

Since the beginning of Vietnamese history, the *Rung Sat*, literally "forest of assassins," represented a source of vexation to the rulers of Cochin China. The Rung Sat is a dense maangrove swamp covering the 400 square miles separating Saigon from the sea. Saigon's main waterway to the South China Sea, the Long Tau River, meanders through the tangle of the Rung Sat. The area served as the hideout of countless pirates and other fugitives in the past and remained ideally suited for the Viet Minh and later the Viet Cong. The only way to move in the Rung Sat is by small, shallow draft boat, and its tidal waterways challenged navigation. Only long term residents of the Rung Sat knew its secrets, and the Viet Cong were long term residents. The primary VC threat from the Rung Sat was the possibility of sinking large shipping in the Long Tau, thereby blocking the Saigon port. The VC attempted this many times and forced the South Vietnamese into an extended "cat and mouse" game of finding and expelling the Communists from their sanctuary.

As one solution to the threat posed by the Viet Cong presence in the Rung Sat, the South Vietnamese Government designated the region as a

*Lieutenant Grammar received a posthumous Silver Star Medal for this action. LtCol James R. Davis, Comments on draft ms, 14May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

special tactical operational area, thus the designation Rung Sat Special Zone. As in all other arenas of conflict in Vietnam, American advisors served there. By 1967 the RSSZ Advisory Team consisted of two Marine officers, one Navy officer, three enlisted Marines, and two sailors. The team had its headquarters at Nha Be, seven miles south of Saigon, on the west bank of the Long Tau River. The base provided an ideal operational site since it lay at the junction of the Long Tau and the Soi Rap River, the latter forming the southern boundary of the RSSZ. Boats from Nha Be could reach the entire perimeter of the swamp.

The RSSZ advisors faced multiple duties. As the resident experts, they coordinated all efforts to force the Communists out of the swamp. Initially, they worked with a meager Vietnamese force consisting only of local RF and PF units. As the year progressed the unit's advisory responsibilities increased as the South Vietnamese directed larger formations and more sophisticated equipment against the enemy in the zone. During the year, the United States improved the Nha Be base to support U.S. Navy river patrol boats, minesweepers, landing craft, and the invaluable Navy Sea Wolf helicopter fire teams. On 28 February 1967, the U.S. Navy established the Riverine Assault Force (TF 117), which represented the Navy element of a new tactical organization, the Mekong Delta Mobile Assault Force. This force made its combat debut in a joint operation with the 9th U.S. Division in the Rung Sat during March. Following this penetration, operations in the Rung Sat increased in tempo and scale through the summer and fall.

The Communists responded to the increased allied efforts. They shelled Nha Be twice during August, and during the first attack on 3 August, the Communists wounded 24 men. Enemy attacks against shipping continued. On 16 March the Communists hit the SS *Conqueror* with six 75mm recoilless rifle rounds as it sailed up the Long Tau. On 18 November they hit the SS *Buchanan* 19 times. On 22 December, a mine exploded under the SS *Seatrain Texas* while it lay at anchor near Nha Be.

The *Buchanan* shelling touched off a reaction which is an excellent illustration of advisory activity in the Rung Sat. At the time of the incident, Marine Captain Clifford R. Dunning served as the RSSZ advisor to a specially formed Vietnamese commando/intelligence unit. The unit quickly planned an operation that sent a reaction force in three helicopters after the VC gunners. The helicopters could not land, which forced Dunning and his unit to jump into the swamp from the hovering helicopters from a height of about 12 feet. About 200 meters from the insert point, the reaction force caught up with the Viet Cong. After a sharp firefight, the enemy broke and ran, leaving behind two 75mm recoilless rifles. An air strike intercepted the fleeing VC. One enemy charged out of the swamp toward Captain Dunning. Dunning shot him. Shortly thereafter, the air strike ended and the surviving VC regrouped and counterattacked the Vietnamese commando party. Dunning's unit stopped the VC charge. Another heavy firefight developed, and once more the South Vietnamese attacked. While the South Vietnamese drove the VC back, a smoke grenade dropped from a friendly helicopter injured Dunning. Once more the Viet Cong withdrew and Dunning and his men established a night position. They counted 16 VC bodies on the battlefield. In addition, the capture of the two recoilless rifles deprived the VC of their best antishipping weapons.*

Once inside the dank, smelly confines of the swamp, the rest of Viet Nam seemed as remote as another world. The Rung Sat Advisors fought a very personal, almost private, war in the slime and heat of the Forest of Assassins.

The Marine Advisory Unit

The Marine Advisory Unit adapted its size according to the needs of the expanding Vietnamese Marine Corps (VNMC). Starting as a single battalion in 1955, by the spring of 1967 the Vietnamese Marine Corps had grown to a strength of six infantry battalions, an artillery battalion, and supporting elements. The advisory unit expanded from one officer in 1955 to 25 Marine officers, one Navy officer, and five enlisted Marines by January 1967.

At the beginning of the year, Colonel Nels E. Anderson served as the senior Marine advisor. He assigned teams of two officers, usually a major and a captain, to each battalion, while other members of the group served as technical advisors or performed the diverse administrative functions of the MAG. When the Vietnamese Marines deployed in brigade or task force formations, normally two infantry bat-

*For his actions on 18 November 1967, Captain Dunning received the Silver Star Medal.

talions and an artillery battery, an additional pair of advisors went with the force headquarters.

Both the Vietnamese Marine Brigade and the Airborne Brigade operated as the national strategic reserve. This designation was, however, a misnomer; the so-called strategic reserve seldom sat uncommitted. The units engaged in combat operations more than 80 percent of the year. The role of the Marines resembled that of a theater reserve, but the emphasis was on rotational commitment, rather than retention as a static reserve element.

All but one of the VNMC battalions had their home base on the outskirts of Saigon. The one exception was the 4th, which operated from Vung Tau, located on the sea 60 kilometers southeast of Saigon. For this reason, when a Marine battalion began a scheduled rehabilitation, it usually returned to Saigon and assumed duties in either the Capital Military District, the geographic area including and surrounding Saigon, or the Rung Sat Special Zone, (RSSZ), which also lay near the battalions' base camps.

The strategic role and high commitment rate caused the officers and men of the Marine Advisory Group to see as much, if not more, of Vietnam during their respective 12-month tours than any other group of Americans. The familiar Vietnamese verb, "Di!" (Go!), assumed a special meaning to the advisors. Not only did it raise the immediate question of where, but experience soon taught the unwary that "Di!" could mean "We're going!" for weeks—or possibly months. For example, during 1967, the 1st Battalion remained in the field in Binh Dinh Province for 117 days, from 14 July until 8 November.

Vietnamese Marine operations during 1967 fell into three general categories: security operations in both the Capital Military District and the Rung Sat Special Zone, a year-long campaign against the well-entrenched Viet Cong in Binh Dinh Province in II CTZ, and search and destroy sweeps in III and IV Corps.

One exception occurred with Operation Song Than/Deckhouse V, a joint U.S. Marine-Vietnamese Marine effort. The first large-scale USMC/VNMC amphibious operation, Song Than/Deckhouse V went after VC elements reported active in the coastal regions of Kien Hoa Province. Intelligence officers reported the Communist units there included elements of the *516th, 518th,* and *261st VC Battalions.*

The landing force of Vietnamese Marines came from VNMC Brigade Force Bravo, consisting of the 3d, 4th, and part of the 6th Battalion, reinforced by Battery C of the VNMC Artillery Battalion. The American force came from the Special Landing Force (SLF), then consisting of BLT 1/9 and HMM-362.

Colonel Anderson recalled the problems he encountered in coordinating the command relationships of this operation:

> When I learned that Deckhouse V was to be conducted in Kien Hoa Province, I seized upon the opportunity to get the Vietnamese Marines involved at last in an amphibious operation, which, after all, was supposed to be their primary mission. I knew this would involve certain risks because none of the Vietnamese Marines had had any training whatsoever in this, the most complex of all military operations. One plus factor, however, was that the field-rank officers that were to participate were graduates of Amphibious Warfare School at Quantico, and several junior officers and senior N.C.O.s had attended school at Landing Force Training Command, Pacific.
>
> The first thing I did was to discuss the operation with the Commandant, Lieutenant General Le Nguyen Khang, at his headquarters at Bien Hoa. (Bien Hoa was the headquarters of the III Corps of which General Khang was commander at this time.) Khang, also a graduate of AWS was very enthusiastic when told about the operation. Among other things discussed were the command relations in amphibious operations as established by existing doctrine. He said he understood perfectly and that he would place the Vietnamese Marine units to be in Deckhouse V under the *command* of the Amphibious Task Force Commander. This of course would be a departure from command relationships then existing between U.S. and South Vietnamese Forces.
>
> After embarkation, I learned that the Vietnamese Joint General Staff had disapproved of the command relationships agreed to by General Khang and that the old "cooperation and coordination" system would be in effect. I never could see the logic for such arrangement, and in my opinion the lack of unity of command between the U.S. and Vietnamese forces was a glaring weakness in the entire war.[4]

Song Than/Deckhouse V got off to a bad start. A compromise of the operation occurred even before the Vietnamese Marines embarked. Hurried planning, unclear command structures, faulty radio nets, and poor liaison compounded operational problems. Even the elements turned against the Marines. Rough seas postponed the landing for one day, and after returning to Vung Tau for ship-to-ship transfers, the Marines devised a new landing plan. The new plan called for helilifting most of the assault force. By this time, as many as 40 percent of the Vietnamese Marines had succumbed to seasickness. The landing on 7 January did not

brighten their spirits. Major Donald E. Wood, the operations and training advisor, reported:

> Following the assault across Red Beach . . . Brigade Force Bravo was informed by local inhabitants in the area that VC elements had been alerted regarding the scheduled date and location of the operation three weeks prior to 1 January. The result was that very light contact was gained with VC by assault units.[5]

Song Than/Deckhouse V ended on 15-16 January as Brigade Force Bravo went through the tedious process of reloading from the shallow beaches of Kien Hoa and unloading again at Vung Tau. The week in the recently harvested rice fields and vexing mangrove swamps of the Mekong Delta resulted in five dead VC and the capture of 25 suspects, 10 of whom proved to be Viet Cong. These were lackluster results for an operation conducted by 1,750 Vietnamese Marines. One 4th Battalion Marine drowned and seven other troops suffered accidental wounds. The "lessons learned" were manifold; however Song Than/Deckhouse V represented the last operation of its type. MACV restricted the SLF to I CTZ and the Vietnamese Marines reverted to their previous landlocked role.*

During the year four Vietnamese Marine battalions participated in forays into the foreboding swamps of the Rung Sat:

1st Battalion	2-8 Feburary
4th Battalion	11 March-12 April
1st Battalion	11 April-12 May
6th Battalion	12 May-21 July
3d Battalion	12 August-15 September

The 6th Battalion senior advisor's report of the 12 May-21 July occupation provides an insight into the conditions in the Rung Sat. Major Robert L. Fischer reported:

> The tidal range in the TAOR is 12 feet . . . . At low tide many small streams are dry and larger rivers and streams present high, steep banks. The rapid currents during filling and receding tides make small streams dangerous for troop crossing and difficult for maneuverability of small boats. At high tide it is virtually impossible to move rapidly by foot . . . . Ambushers placed along streams often found themselves waist deep in water for at least half of the ambush period.[6]

Another frustration of Rung Sat duty stemmed from the Viet Cong's ability to recognize Marine intentions, which made decisive engagements virtually impossible. Major Fischer's report revealed some of the simple but effective VC measures:

> The Viet Cong utilize a simple system of early warning and signal towers. Near each active camp located in the TAOR was a tree platform or tower. On ten occasions VC were observed either in the tower or dropping from it and running into the nearest dense area. These towers are located across the Rung Sat and undoubtedly serve to signal elements crossing the Rung Sat between adjacent

*See Chapter 11 for the SLF account of Deckhouse V.

A unit of Vietnamese wades ashore from a landing craft in a flooded part of the Mekong Delta during the joint Operation Deckhouse V in the Delta region in January.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A190966

provinces, as well as providing early warning and unit massing capability.[7]

Simply stated, Rung Sat duty remained hot, wet, filthy, frustrating, and dangerous. Myriad bugs, gnats, mosquitoes, and ants added to the grim atmosphere of the swamp. In spite of these obstacles, the five VNMC Rung Sat battalion-size operations in 1967 cost the Viet Cong 30 killed at a price of four Marines killed and 21 wounded.

Action In Binh Dinh Province

An area of major VNMC action in 1967 was Binh Dinh Province in northern II CTZ. After operating there since mid-1964, all Vietnamese Marines became familiar with the beautiful Bong Son plain and the seemingly endless ridge lines that extend westward to Laos. In 1965, the first U.S. ground forces moved into II Corps. The 1st U. S. Cavalry Division (Airmobile) went to An Khe with the mission of keeping Route 19 open between Pleiku and Qui Nhon. Joint U.S./RVN operations started shortly after the arrival of the "1st Cav."

For the Vietnamese Marines, operations in Binh Dinh proved different from those in III and IV CTZs to the south. The dense forest of the uncultivated areas, the concentration of the population in a narrow coastal strip, cooler weather, long periods of morning fog, and much more solid land forms, all contributed to tactical variations. Generally, the Viet Cong in Binh Dinh represented a different breed. Dominated by the Viet Minh in the Fifties, the province remained notorious for its solid Communist base. The Binh Dinh Cong were "hard core" in every sense of the term.

The terrain in Binh Dinh supports cultivation only in the coastal regions, hence the population centers there. The rest of the province, all forested, served as an enormous VC sanctuary. Only woodcutters and scattered Montagnards roamed the hinterlands; the Communists moved at will under the vast forest canopy. Operating from the spacious inland sanctuary, the VC had the enviable position of operating on interior lines against the densely populated coastal region.

The GVN forces, on the other hand, sought to protect vulnerable Routes 1 and 19, as well as the railroad and the Bong Son Airfield, all in lowland regions, except for the western end of Route 19. Similarly, most of the population requiring protection concentrated in these same lowlands. The concentrated population made government control somewhat easier, but the local citizens remained apathetic; the Communists long dominance made their influence strong.

Operationally, the terrain proved suitable for a different type of guerrilla warfare, unlike that experienced in the swamps and delta region in southern South Vietnam. In Binh Dinh Province the ground is hard, even during the rainy season. Cover and concealment is excellent. Seasonal, dense morning fog neutralizes the effect of air superiority. These factors provided the Communists with excellent mobility and they moved without fear of detection. Consequently, their vast natural hiding place, the inland forests, allowed the Viet Cong to operate more audaciously than elsewhere in the country.

One commodity, food, remained in short supply in Binh Dinh Province. The main cultivated areas lay along Route 1. In 1967, the government still controlled the food producing areas and the Communists wanted them. That brought the Vietnamese Marines and 1st U.S. Cavalry Division to northern II Corps.

The first major VNMC action in II CTZ during 1967 was Operation Pershing/Song Than 9, a joint operation with the 1st Cavalry Division near Bong Son. Song Than 9 was a satisfactory operation. During the period 14-22 February Brigade Force Bravo, the 2d and 3d Battalions, killed 54 Viet Cong. In return, the enemy killed three Marines and wounded 27. Remaining in the Bong Son area, the brigade force spent the rest of February, all of March, and the first part of April conducting sweep operations. They coordinated these operations with the 1st Cavalry Division's operations in adjacent areas, but the Marine sweeps remained separate operations.

On 18-19 April, Brigade Force Alpha flew to English Airfield at Bong Son where it relieved Brigade Force Bravo. On the 22nd, Force Alpha began search and destroy/pacification of a TAOR including Tam Quan on the north, Bong Son to the south, the portion of Route 1 connecting the two towns, with the South China Sea serving as the eastern boundary. Elsewhere in II CTZ, Brigade Force Bravo, under the direction of the 22d ARVN Division, conducted two major operations from 18 March through 18 April. Again, these actions paralleled but remained separate from 1st Cavalry Division operations. Brigade Force Alpha stayed in the Bong Son region until July. At the conclusion of Operation Bac Thien 817 on 12 July, Brigade Force

Alpha resumed patrolling of its TAOR until relieved by Brigade Force Bravo on the 26th. The latter unit started Operation Song Than 14 the next day. Brigade Force Alpha left II Corps in late July; Force Bravo remained until 6 November. The two units again switched places and Force Alpha remained there until well into 1968.

Vietnamese Marine operations in II CTZ during 1967 showed impressive results. Communist losses totaled 202 killed and 282 captured. Marine losses for the year's II CTZ campaign numbered 49 killed and 215 wounded.

Action in the South

Other than periodic assignments to the Rung Sat, security operations around Saigon in the Capital Military District, and rotations to II CTZ, the rest of the Vietnamese Marines' 1967 operations took place in the III and IV Corps Tactical Zones; six occurred in the former and five in the latter.

From 22 February through 11 March, Brigade Force Alpha, consisting of the reinforced 1st and 5th Battalions took part in Operation Junction City, a search and destroy operation with the 25th U.S. Infantry Division. Force Alpha became the only Vietnamese unit to participate in the largest allied operation since the beginning of the war. Marine contact was very light, but the net results of the joint operation included the seizure of more than 364 tons of rice and significant damage to enemy installations in the Communists' War Zone C, This zone lay in a triangular territory formed by Route 13, the Cambodian border, and a line connecting Ben Cat with Tay Ninh. Vietnamese Marine-U. S. relations improved further when the brigade force commander, Colonel Bui The Lan, requested that his force be granted a more aggressive role in the 25th Division's scheme of operations. The Americans granted the request and Brigade Force Alpha avoided acting as a blocking force.

In May, Brigade Force Bravo, then consisting of the reinforced 1st and 5th Battalions moved from Saigon to Vi Tanh, 45 kilometers southwest of Can Tho in IV CTZ. There, under 21st ARVN Division control, the Marine force participated in the uneventful Operation Dan Chi 287/C. On 28 May, Force Bravo left its attached artillery behind and undertook a riverine assault. This operation, Long Phi 999/N, proved unproductive and the Marine elements became the 9th ARVN Division reserve at Vinh Long.

On 7 June, Brigade Force Bravo moved to Tan Uyen village, 13 kilometers north of Bien Hoa in III CTZ where it came under the direct control of III Corps Headquarters. On 20 June the 1st Marine Battalion left to participate with the 1st U.S. Infantry Division in Operation Billings, north of Tan Uyen. The net result of these actions for the Marines included the loss of nine killed, 34 wounded. Among the wounded was the 1st Battalion's assistant advisor, Captain Manfred E. Schwarz. Communist losses were 14 killed and one captured. Vietnamese Marine operations in III and IV Corps got off to a slow start in 1967.

When Operation Billings ended on 9 July, Brigade Force Bravo moved from Tan Uyen to neighboring Phuoc Tuy Province. There, with the 9th U.S. Infantry Division, the 1st Australian Task Force, and the 43d ARVN Regiment, Force Bravo, now consisting of the 2d and 3d Marine Battalions, joined Operation Paddington. The mission involved locating and destroying the *274th VC Regiment.* The Marines opened their phase of the operation at 0900 on 10 July with a helicopter landing in their respective zones of action. Contact continued light throughout the 10th and 11th, but at 0900 on 12 July, elements of the 3d Battalion made contact with what appeared to be an enemy battalion. Heavy fighting continued until 1600 when the VC broke off the engagement. For the next three days the Marines conducted search operations but made no contact. Finally, on the 15th, Brigade Force Bravo regrouped at Xuan Loc and motored back to its base camp at Thu Duc outside Saigon. Brigade Force Bravo reported 43 Communists dead as the result of Paddington; 11 Marines died and 31 suffered wounds during the operation.

One of the most serious problems faced by advisors in the field revolved around establishing the precise status of the advisor vis-a-vis his counterpart. Often the Americans gave advice which their Vietnamese counterparts ignored. Third parties often compounded this situation. Major Charles E. Parker, senior advisor with Brigade Force Bravo during Operation Paddington, summed up the problem when he stated:

> On two occasions coordination with U.S. units consisted of the [American] unit commanding officer simply stating his intentions to the nearest USMC advisor, then leaving without waiting for a discussion with the Task Force Commander. This abruptness, however, was probably more a result of late receipt of orders rather than any obstinacy on the part of the U.S. command. As it turned out,

liaison/coordination problems were solved before dangerous situations developed.

Major Parker continued:

> The U.S. Army commanders and their staffs are not aware of the organization and functions of U.S. Marine advisors. They work on the assumption that we operate with teams similar to U.S. Army advisory teams (which were larger). They also seem to forget that USMC advisors are just what the term implies, advisors, not commanders.[8]

During the last week in July, the 3d Battalion participated in Operation Concordia VII with the 2d Brigade, 9th U.S. Infantry Division. The operation produced no contacts or casualties, but the riverine landing in Long An Province proved that the Vietnamese Marines were prepared for this type of maneuver.

Intelligence sources reported a concentration of elements of at least four VC battalions in Dinh Tuong Province during late July. Accordingly, a quickly planned operation, Coronado II/Song Than 63/67 began under the control of the 9th U.S. Infantry Division. Other units assigned to Coronado II included 1st Brigade, 25th U.S. Infantry Division; 11th Army Armored Cavalry Regiment; and the ARVN 44th and 52d Ranger Battalions. Marine participation consisted of Task Force Alpha made up of the 3d and 4th Marine Battalions and Battery B from the Marine Artillery Battalion.

The first phase of Coronado II started on 30 July. Helicopters put the 3d Battalion into a landing zone north of the Mekong River. It was a bad zone. Immediately upon landing the battalion found itself in trouble. The Viet Cong occupied the heavily fortified area north of the LZ in force. The 3d Battalion could not move. To help, the 4th Battalion went by helicopters into a second LZ north of the 3d Battalion's position. The 4th Battalion moved to put pressure on the Viet Cong positions which now lay between the two Marine battalions. A prisoner revealed that elements of the veteran *263d* and *514th VC Battalions* faced the Marines. The battle raged all day in the jungle-canopied terrain as gunships, air strikes, and artillery pounded the well-entrenched Communists. At dusk the VC tried to break out, but the 3d and 4th Battalions held. Fire fights continued all night.

Captain Jerry I. Simpson, senior advisor to the 3d Battalion, spent the entire day and most of the night directing supporting arms against the tough enemy position. Enemy mortar rounds, rockets, and small arms fire continued to hold back the Marines' advance. Suddenly, at 0500 on the 31st, a VC force of about two companies attempted a mass break-out. Their path led them directly to the 3d Battalion command post located partly in a small hut. In the confused fighting which followed, the VC overran the CP, but Captain Simpson and surviving Marines drove the VC back through the CP toward the VC's original positions. After that, the fighting stopped abruptly. The remaining Viet Cong managed to slip away in the jungle. At 1300, helicopters extracted the 3d Battalion and returned it to Dong Tam. The 4th Battalion continued sweep operations until 1500 the next day when it too withdrew to Dong Tam. On 1 August the 5th Battalion relieved the 3d and the latter moved by transport aircraft to Thu Duc.

Phase II proved uneventful and Vietnamese participation in Coronado II ended on 4-5 August. The 4th and 5th Battalions returned to their Thu Duc bases. The sharp action of 30-31 July hurt the VC in Dinh Tuong Province. The Marines killed 108 and captured six. Total South Vietnamese losses for the operation numbered 44 killed and 115 wounded. Of these, one of the dead and seven of the wounded were the result of friendly fires, an accident which provided a bitter lesson in coordination.

Task force Alpha went to the field again on 11 August. Operation Song Than 701-67, a three-phase operation in Bien Hoa Province, dragged on until 21 October. Various battalion combinations under Task Force Alpha permitted the 2d, 4th, 5th, and 6th Battalions to participate, but the results proved disappointing. They killed one VC. Coordination problems plagued the multibattalion, joint U.S./Vietnamese sweep. The most tragic error happened on 16 September. A 155mm round, fired from an improperly laid howitzer scored a direct hit on the 6th Battalion's command post and killed three Marines and wounded 11.

Credit for the most successful operational series in 1967 belongs to the 5th Battalion. During the period 9 November through 22 December, the 5th served as one of three maneuver battalions of the U.S. Mobile Riverine Force. Their operations concentrated in Dinh Tuong, Kien Hoa, and Kien Phong Provinces. The 5th Battalion took part in nine separate actions during this period. The 44 days of riverine operation netted the battalion the impressive total of 186 dead Communists and 32 prisoners, including one VC province chief.

While assigned to the Mobile Riverine Force, the battalion normally stayed in the field for three days of operations, followed by a stand down period of the same duration. Missions generally started with the battalion moving in boats of the River Assault Division to an area of operations. Once in the assigned area, the battalion moved frequently, either by boat or helicopter, depending on the tactical situation.

A classic riverine operation, executed by Major Huong Van Nam's 5th Marine Battalion, started at midnight on 3 December as the Marines embarked on assault ships at Sa Dec. Their mission: destruction of the *267th Main Force* and *502d Local Force VC Battalions,* then located in eastern Kien Phong and western Dinh Tuong Provinces. The force moved down the northern bank of the Mekong and entered the Rach Ruong Canal to make a landing on the west bank of the canal at 0800. The plan called for the Marines to land, move west, and then sweep south back toward the Mekong. Two U.S. Army battalions, one embarked, supported the operation.

The sun came up as the river craft entered the canal. All remained quiet until 0740 when the rear of the boat column came under light small arms fire from the west bank. As the column moved up the canal, heavier fire, including recoilless rifles and B-40 rockets, opened up from positions further north on the west bank. All of the boats returned fire and the South Vietnamese called in the supporting gunships. A Communist B-40 rocket hit one of the ATCs (an armored troop carrying boat), and wounded 18 Marines. The 5th Battalion continued on toward its original landing beaches. Only the end of the column came under enemy attack. The boat formation carrying the 3d Battalion, 47th U.S. Infantry, which followed the 5th Battalion, heard the enemy fire and took advantage of their warning. The 3d Battalion promptly landed on the west bank, south of the first VC firing position.

At 0800 the Communists opened fire on the 5th Battalion again, this time from another west bank position about 2,500 meters north of the last firing site. Obviously, a large VC force occupied the west bank of the Rach Ruong. Enemy B-40 rounds hit six ATCs. Major Nam ordered his battalion to land on the west bank immediately. The 2d and 3d Companies landed near Objective 18, while the 1st, 4th, and Headquarters Companies landed at Blue Beach 1.

The 1st Company became heavily engaged as soon as it landed, while Headquarters Company and the 4th Company met much lighter opposition. Neither the 2d and 3d Companies, to the north, had any contact. The 4th Company moved 250 meters inland, stopped, and called in air and artillery. Major Nam realized that his left flank units, the 1st and 4th Companies, were engaging the northern portion of the VC formation, by then identified as the *502d Local Force Battalion.* Major Nam ordered the 2d and 3d Companies to retract and land again at Blue Beach 2, move inland, seize objectives 114 and 213, and encircle the Communists. Both companies accomplished the mission; the VC found themselves surrounded. The riverine force boats blocked escape to the east across the canal.

By this time the 4th Company had lost contact, so, on Major Nam's orders, it withdrew to the beach, reembarked, and landed again just south of Blue Beach 1. The VC greeted the company's landing with intense rocket and automatic weapons fire. The guns of the assault craft established fire superiority as the 4th Company Marines scrambled ashore and gained a foothold. The 1st Company closed the ring, moving in from the northwest. Coordinated attacks by both the 1st and 4th Companies slowly rolled up the VC position, as the other companies blocked the rest of the perimeter. Contact was too close to use supporting arms. The Marines destroyed the enemy bunkers systematically, but their progress continued slow because their 57mm recoilless rifle had little effect on the well-constructed Communist bunkers.

The senior battalion advisor, Major Paul L. Carlson, reported final stages of the fight:

> By 1600 one major Viet Cong complex remained 600 meters inland and withstood all assaults. Rocket gunships peppered the bunker system. The assaulting units then stormed the bunkers using grenades to destroy the opposition and physically tore the bunkers apart with entrenching tools.[9]

The battle ended by 1630. Throughout the night and the next morning, Viet Cong survivors continued to emerge from hiding places. Some had reverted to the classic VC trick of hiding under water, breathing through hollow reeds. The Marines knew the trick, also.

Enemy casualties during the "Battle of Rach Ruong" totaled 175 Viet Cong killed by the 5th Marine Battalion. They found the bodies of the chief of staff of the *502d Battalion,* one company commander, two platoon commanders, one doctor, and

two newsmen among the dead. The Marines captured 12 more confirmed VC, including a province chief, and picked up an additional 12 suspects before the 5th Battalion withdrew at 1400 on 5 December. Battalion losses amounted to 40 killed and 103 wounded, 34 of whom did not require evacuation.

Elsewhere in the AO, other units accounted for another 91 enemy killed, at the cost of nine American soldiers killed and 89 wounded. While the 5th Marine Battalion was scoring its resounding victory, the 3d Battalion, 47th U.S. Infantry assaulted the VC positions which had fired the opening rounds. The Army assault prevented the Communists from going to the aid of their besieged comrades to the north. The Army action provided a valuable assist, but the Rach Ruong battle remains as one of the finer moments in the brief history of the Vietnamese Marine Corps.

While the 5th Battalion participated in Coronado IX, the 2d Marine Battalion, the major component of Task Force Bravo, engaged in Operation Song Than 808/Buena Vista. Operating with the 199th U.S. Infantry Brigade, TF Bravo joined Buena Vista on 7 December. The search and destroy operation covered portions of Binh Hoa and Binh Duong Provinces. During the 11-day sweep, the Marines discovered the base camp of the *VC Dong Nai Regiment* and the *Binh Duong Provincial Forces*. The Marines suffered light casualties.

The last Vietnamese Marine Operation of 1967 was Task Force Bravo's Operation Song Than 809. Lasting only three days, 29-31 December, Song Than 809 resulted in a 20-hour battle with the *261st* and *263d VC Main Force Battalions* in Dinh Tuong Province in IV CTZ. At this time TF Bravo consisted of the 1st and 2d Marine Battalions, reinforced by Battery B of the Marine Artillery Battalion; control of the operation rested with the 7th ARVN Division.

Helicopters landed both battalions in separate zones during the morning of 29 December. There was no contact. On the 31st the 2d Battalion executed a second helicopter assault. This time the battalion made contact immediately after landing.

Complications came from an unexpected quarter. At 1700 the 7th ARVN Division forward command post, controlling Song Than 809, shut down operations in anticipation of the New Year's truce. This left TF Bravo in the field and in contact. To make matters worse, the 2d Battalion almost ran out of ammunition and enemy fire drove off a pre-dark helicopter ammunition resupply. As a last recourse, the helicopter crewmen dropped the ammunition during a low pass. Unfortunately, it fell in an open, fire-swept area between the 2d Battalion and the Viet Cong. Senior battalion advisor, Major Jon A. Rindfleisch, and a volunteer squad of Marines raced out into the drop zone, gathered up the scattered containers, and rushed them back to the battalion's lines. The supply kept the 2d Battalion going through the night.*

Meanwhile, to add to the uncertainty of the situation, the 7th ARVN Division released all of its aviation at 1800, again, in anticipation of the New Year's truce. In spite of these disquieting developments, contact continued throughout the night, finally ending at 0530, 1 January when the VC withdrew. First light disclosed 85 VC bodies. The Marines took eight prisoners during the fight and picked up 71 enemy weapons. Task Force Bravo's losses included 28 Marines killed and 83 wounded. This ended the last Vietnamese Marine action of 1967.

During the year 1967, the Vietnamese Marines participated in 24 major combat operations, 15 of which were brigade- or task-force-scale maneuvers. Total VNMC casualties included 201 killed and 707 wounded. The Communists suffered 693 killed and 342 captured from Vietnamese Marine actions. The kill ratio of 3.45:1, though not as impressive as the U.S. Marine 1967 kill ratio of 5.18:1, was a tribute to the courage of the Vietnamese Marines, as well as the dedication of their advisors. The Marine advisors were fortunate during 1967; three suffered wounds but none died. From the advisory viewpoint, 1967 represented a year of investment. The dividends included positive results; the immediate future would affirm the advisors' faith in the abilities of their Vietnamese contemporaries.

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*For this and other actions during Song Than 809, Major Rindfleisch received the Silver Star Medal.

CHAPTER 16

The Situation at the End of the Year

Operational Aspects—Personnel and Logistics—The Outlook for Victory
Enemy Dispositions—The Changed Situation

Operational Aspects

During 1967, III MAF's concerns increasingly focused north as it shifted the bulk of its Marine units toward the DMZ to counter the continuing threat of a North Vietnamese invasion. This threat forced III MAF to change its top priorities from pacification and counter-guerrilla warfare to fighting a conventional war against regular North Vietnamese infantry units. Enemy intentions followed a similar pattern. Beginning in 1966, Hanoi referred to the conflict as a "regular-force war," with the insurgency playing a secondary role.[1]

The MACV commander also recognized the DMZ threat and, in April, reinforced III MAF with the Army's Task Force Oregon at Chu Lai. General Westmoreland also planned to send the 1st U.S. Cavalry Division (Airmobile) to I Corps where it could employ its high mobility around Khe Sanh as it had in the Central Highlands. He saw the latter move as a preparatory step should Washington authorize a drive into Laos or an amphibious landing just north of the DMZ.[2]

Construction of the Dye Marker project continued during December, with emphasis on completing Strongpoint A-3. The North Vietnamese responded with mortar and artillery fire. Marine units conducted continuous search and destroy operations around and north of A-3 in an effort to control the high ground and avenues of approach to the construction site.

An Air Force C-123 "Provider" lands on the air strip at Khe Sanh with supplies after Navy Seabees completed resurfacing the monsoon-damaged strip on 1 November 1967.

3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967

3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967

A Marine, identified only as PFC Bola, shows the damage done to his helmet by a near miss from small-arms fire while at the Con Thien combat base.

Enemy units engaged in two types of activity during the final month of the year. In the early weeks of December, the North Vietnamese initiated a series of limited ground attacks along the DMZ using units as large as companies. Enemy forces also overran and destroyed the Binh Son District Headquarters on 5 December. During the final two weeks of 1967, however, the enemy assumed a more defensive posture, only to sustain heavier casualties because of having to fight at a time and place not of their choosing.

The statistics from III MAF in December provided ample evidence that the enemy was not yet defeated. III MAF conducted 11 large-unit operations during the month. The Marines killed a confirmed total of 1,237 enemy soldiers and listed another 701 as probably killed. Marines also captured 77 prisoners and 362 weapons; however, 96 Marines died in December.

During 1967, U.S. forces under III MAF control killed 25,452 enemy soldiers and listed another 23,363 as probably killed. These enemy losses totaled 14,728 more than in 1966, a reflection of the increased scale of large-unit battles in northern I Corps. These forced the North Vietnamese to feed over 24,000 replacements into their units in I Corps during the year. By comparison, over 3,600 Americans died in I Corps during the same period.

There were bright spots in the picture for III MAF at the end of 1967. During the year, the North Vietnamese had attempted to conquer the northern provinces of South Vietnam only to suffer defeat each time they took the offensive. Meanwhile, the South

Men of the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines stand in a loose formation beside the air strip at Khe Sanh just after arriving in transport aircraft to reinforce the base in December 1967.

3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967

Vietnamese Army, as a whole, grew by 130,000 during the year. Its units in I Corps were at 101.7 percent strength, despite considerable losses due to desertions by former peasants unhappy with assignments far from their home villages and provinces. The arrival of U.S. Army units in I Corps for service under III MAF also eased the Marines' troop density problem.

III MAF had 79 Combined Action Platoons in operation; these killed 259 of the enemy and captured 56 during the second half of the year. Pacification appeared to be regaining the momentum it lost in 1966, which accounted for the increase in ARVN strength and the increasing difficulty faced by the Viet Cong in recruiting new members. Finally, Highway 1, the main north-south artery, was open from the DMZ to the border of Binh Dinh Province.[3]

Personnel and Logistics

The average strength for III MAF during December was 103,591, which was 4,203 higher than the previous month. Most of these personnel were Marines (72,782), but 27,565 were in U.S. Army units. The U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force contributed 3,161 and 83, respectively.

There were some changes underway in III MAF's force structure as the year ended. III MAF had orders to deactivate its antitank battalions and to activate another company, Company E, for the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, a unit of the 3d Marine Division.

III MAF faced several significant logistics problems in the final month of 1967, primarily from the effects of the northeast monsoon. Channel silting brought on by bad weather and high seas forced the closing of the LST facility at Tan My on 10 December. Cua Viet's LST facility also closed from 7-29 December for the same reason. Further, the rough seas prevented transshipment of materials at Da Nang for seven days. The weather also affected airlift capabilities; for example, high winds limited or curtailed C-123 flight operations for 23 days during December. However, the air strip at Duc Pho opened for C-130 use on 4 December 1967.

The M16A1 rifles continued to provide problems for Marines in Vietnam. A random inspection of rifles issued in the first increment of weapons revealed that a large number had pitted and eroded chambers. III MAF then terminated the issue of the second increment. As of 17 December, a FLC contract team had inspected 9,844 rifles and found that 6,603 (67 percent) required replacement. At III MAF's request, Headquarters, Marine Corps initiated action to obtain chromed chambers for installation by June 1968.

3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967

Men from the 3d Engineer Battalion use a bulldozer at Con Thien in December to push aside some of the monsoon-created mud in an attempt to make it easier for Marines to walk inside the combat base.

Finally, III MAF logisticians were not pleased with a MACV study, published late in the year. The theme of the study was a desire for a downward revision of authorized stock levels with the expectation of reducing construction costs and achieving operating economies. In essence, the study called for fighting a war under peacetime management principles under which stock levels reflected previous usage data. Both III MAF and FMFPac took the position that any reduction in authorized stock levels would impair III MAF's operational capabilities and lower the Marines' readiness for emergencies.

The Outlook for Victory

As the year entered its last quarter, the war appeared to be going well. General Westmoreland, in his often-quoted speech on 21 September at the National Press Club in Washington expressed optimism about the future course of the war. He expressed his belief that the defeats inflicted on the enemy in the

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A422006

South Vietnam's Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky meets with LtGen Hoang Xuan Lam, the I Corps commander; LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr., the III MAF commander; and Army MajGen Samuel W. Koster of the Americal Division at Chu Lai on 28 December.

past year, plus the continued growth of the ARVN would permit phasing out U.S. units within about two years. "I am absolutely certain," he said, "that whereas in 1965 the enemy was winning, today he is certainly losing."[4]

Westmoreland's speech coincided with the Johnson Adminstration's highly publicized "progress" campaign in the fall of 1967. That campaign sought to show that the allies were winning the war in South Vietnam. General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., the Commandant of the Marine Corps, was, however, one of the few officials who did speak out on the problems still remaining. His statements, which received little media attention, reflected the concerns of both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and III MAF over inadequate manpower, particularly in the I Corps area. At a speech in Chicago in September, General Greene said:

> In the Marines' area of South Vietnam alone, we have 1,282,000 people inside our security screen. We must double that number. This will take time—and fighting men on the ground.
>
> We have over 2,000 square miles of territory inside the same screen of security. But we need a total of 3,000 square miles.
>
> Again, it will take time—and fighting men on the ground to do this.
>
> I cite these figures just to give you some idea of the problems—in the Marines' area alone.[5]

Enemy Dispositions

The number of regular NVA soldiers in I Corps numbered just over 21,000 at the end of the year. Their distribution was follows:

Quang Tri Province. The major units were the *812th* and *90th Regiments* of the *324B NVA Division*, the *29th* and *95th Regiments* of the *325C NVA Division*, and the *2d Battalion* and regimental headquarters of the *9th NVA Regiment*. Other forces in the province included the *5th NVA Regiment*, the *27th NVA Independent Battalion*, and four independent companies. Total: 10,805.

Thua Thien Province. The *Northern Front Headquarters*, the *5th NVA Regiment*, four independent NVA battalions, and four independent companies operated in the province. Total: 3,645.

Quang Nam Province. This area contained the *368B NVA Artillery Regiment*, four independent NVA battalions, and four independent NVA companies. Total: 2,940.

Quang Tin Province. Operating in this province were the headquarters and other support units of the *2d NVA Division*, the *1st Vietcong Main Force Regi-*

ment, the *21st NVA Regiment*, the *3d NVA Regiment*, three independent NVA battalions, and seven NVA independent companies. Total: 6,075.

Quang Ngai Province. The major units were the headquarters of *Military Region 5*, the *97th Battalion* of the *2d Vietcong Main Force Regiment*, six independent NVA battalions, and nine independent NVA companies. Total: 3,645.

The Changed Situation

The bright element of the tactical situation picture quickly faded at year's end in the face of mounting evidence of an impending major enemy offensive. General Westmoreland's optimistic speech at the National Press Club in September had been based upon an analysis that indicated the allies were winning the war. Hanoi read the same signs and changed its strategy.

Previously, Hanoi followed a strategy of protracted war; however, late in 1967 captured documents began containing exhortations for enemy units to make a maximum effort politically and militarily to win the war quickly. During the same period, the number of enemy defectors decreased and captured prisoners began speaking of the coming "final victory." Intelligence sources in I Corps indicated the *2d NVA Division* was shifting its area of operations in preparation for an offensive. Other sources reported the *325C NVA Division* had moved back to positions near Hill 881 North, while the *304th NVA Division*, which listed Dien Bien Phu among its battle honors, had moved from Laos to positions southwest of Khe Sanh.

General Westmoreland analyzed these and similar reports and detected an alteration in enemy strategy. On 20 December, he explained the changed situation in a message to his superiors in Washington. He emphasized the enemy might seek to gain a major military victory somewhere in South Vietnam, or perhaps even seek to gain an apparent position of strength before assenting to negotiations. "In short," wrote Westmoreland, "I believe the enemy has already made a crucial decision to make a maximum effort."[6]

General Westmoreland considered the base at Khe Sanh an obvious target for an enemy offensive and ordered III MAF to conduct a buildup in preparation for a fight for the base.[7] In the last few days of 1967 he repeatedly advised reporters to expect "an intensified campaign in the coming months." The President echoed these expectations when he told the Australian cabinet about the enemy buildup. "We must try very hard to be ready," said President Johnson. "We face dark days ahead."[8]

Amid the mud, barbed wire, sand-bagged positions, and welter of supplies at the Con Thien combat base, a young Marine stands radio watch as the year 1967 draws to a close.

3d MarDiv ComdC, December 1967

Notes

PART I
The DMZ in Early 1967

CHAPTER 1

THE SITUATION AT THE START OF THE YEAR

Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from: Admiral Ulysses S. G. Sharp, USN, and General Westmoreland, *USA, Report on the War In Vietnam*, hereafter Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; FMFPac, U.S. Marine Forces in Vietnam Mar65-Sep67 Historical Summary, Volume I: Narrative; FMFPac monthly summaries, Operation of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, Jan-Jun67; III MAF ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; 3d Marine Division ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; 1st Marine Aircraft Wing ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; 3d Marine Division AAR, Operation Prairie I, 28 Apr67; Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, "Marine Corps Operation in Vietnam, 1967," *USNI, Naval Review 1969*, hereafter Simmons "USMC Ops in RVN, 1967." Unless otherwise noted all documentary material cited is located in the Marine Corps Historical Center (MCHC), Washington, D.C.

1. Colonel John C. Studt, Comments on draft ms, 14May81. (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
2. Quoted in Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report On The War,* p. 132.
3. LtGen Louis Metzger, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981) (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

CHAPTER 2

SPRING ACTION SOUTH OF THE DMZ—FEBRUARY-APRIL 1967

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from FMFPac monthly summaries, Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, Jan-Jun67, hereafter FMFPac, MarOpsV (month, year); III MAF ComdC Jan-Jun67; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan-Jun67; 1st MAW ComdC, Jan-Jun67; BGen Edwin H. Simmons, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam, 1967," *USNI, Naval Review 1969*, hereafter Simmons, "USMC Ops, RVN." Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located at the Marine Corps Historical Center (MCHC), Washington, D.C.)

Operation Prairie I Continues

Additional material in this section is derived from 3d MarDiv AAR, Opn Prairie I, 28Apr67; 3d Mar ComdC, Jan67; 12th Mar ComdC, Jan67; 3/4 ComdC, Jan67. All documentary material cited is in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Operation Prairie II

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from 3d MarDiv AAR, Opn Prairie II, 19May67; 3d Mar ComdC, Feb-Mar67; 4th Mar ComdC, Feb-Mar67; 9th Mar ComdC, Feb-Mar67; 12th Mar ComdC, Feb-Mar67; 3d Recon Bn ComdC, Feb-Mar67; 2/3 ComdC, Feb-Mar67; 3/3 ComdC, Feb-Mar67; 3/4 ComdC, Feb-Mar67; 1/9 ComdC, Feb-Mar67; 2/9 ComdC, Feb-Mar67. All documentary material cited is in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

1. LtCol Robert F. Sheridan, comments on draft MS, 11Jun81 (Vietnam Comment File).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

Operation Prairie III

Additional material in this section is derived from 3d MarDiv AAR, Opn Prairie III, 13Jun67; 3d Mar ComdC, Mar-Apr67; 3d Recon Bn ComdC, Mar-Apr67; 11th Engr Bn ComdC, Mar-Apr67; 3/3 ComdC, Mar-Apr67; 1/4 ComdC, Mar-Apr67; 3/4 ComdC, Mar-Apr67; 1/9 ComdC, Mar-Apr67; 3/9 ComdC, Mar-Apr67. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

CHAPTER 3

COMBINED US/ARVN OPERATIONS IN THE DMZ

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from 3d MarDiv AAR, Opn Prairie IV, 13Jul67; 3d MarDiv AAR, Opn Hickory, 3Aug67; SLF Alpha (TG 79.4) AAR, Opn Beau Charger/Hickory, 10Jun67; 1/3 AAR, Opn Beau Charger, 12Jun67; HMM 263 AAR, Opn Beau Charger, 10Jun67; SLF Bravo (TG 79.5) AAR, Opn Belt Tight/Hickory, 22Jun67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Operation Prairie IV Begins

Additional material in this section is derived from 9th Mar ComdC, May67; 3/3 ComdC, May67; 1/4 ComdC, May67; 1/9 ComdC, May67; 3/9 ComdC, May67; 11th Engr Bn ComdC, May67.

Attack on Con Thien

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from 1/4 ComdC, May67; 11th Engr Bn ComdC, May67; 1st Amtrac Bn ComdC, May67.

1. LtCol Rheaford C. Bell, Comments on draft ms, 25May81 (Vietnam Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Into the DMZ

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from III MAF ComdC, May67; 3d MarDiv ComdC, May67; 1st MAW ComdC, May67, 3d Mar ComdC, May67; 9th Mar ComdC, May67' 1/4 ComdC, May67; 3/4 ComdC, May67; 1/9 ComdC, May67; 2/9 ComdC, May67; 3/9 ComdC, May67; 2/26 ComdC, May67; HMM-164 ComdC, May67; HMM-363 ComdC, May67.

2. BGen Harvey E. Spielman, Comments on draft ms, 27May81 (Vietnam Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

Operation Beau Charger

Additional material in this section was derived from 1/3 ComdC, May67; HMM-263 ComdC, May67.

Operation Hickory

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section was derived from 3d MarDiv ComdC, May67; 3d Mar ComdC, May67; 2/3 ComdC, May67; 3/4 ComdC, May67; 2/9 ComdC, May67; 3/9 ComdC, May67; HMM-164 ComdC, May67.

3. Col Duncan D. Chaplin, III, Comments on draft ms, 31May81 (Vietnam Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Chaplin comments, May81.
4. Ibid.
5. Col James R. Stockman, Comment on draft ms, 27Jun81; Chaplin comments, May81.

Operation Prairie IV Ends

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from 3d MarDiv ComdC, May67; 3/4 ComdC, May67.

6. Maj Walter E. Deese, Comments on draft ms, 9Jul81 (Vietnam Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Deese comments, Jul81.
7. 3d MarDiv ComdC, May67; Deese comments, Jul81.

CHAPTER 4

THE FIRST BATTLE OF KHE SANH

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan-Jun67; 1st MAW ComdC, Apr-May67; 3d Mar AAR, Khe Sanh, dtd 9Jun67; 1/3 AAR, Opn Prairie I, 7Feb67; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; Capt Moyers S. Shore, II, *The Battle for Khe Sanh* (Washington: HisBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1969), hereafter Shore, *Khe Sanh*; Maj Michael W. Sayers, Comments on draft ms, 18May81 (Vietnam Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Sayers Comments, May81, Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

The Early Days

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from 3d Mar ComdC, Apr67; 1/3 ComdC, Sep66-Feb67; 1/9 ComdC, Feb-Apr67; 2/9 ComdC, Mar67; 2/12 ComdC, Feb-Apr67. Unless otherwise noted all documentary material is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

1. Sayers comments, May81; 2dLt John M. Kramer, intvw by 3d MarDiv dtd 28Feb67, (No. 567, OralHist Coll, MCHC).
2. III MAF ComdC, Mar67, p. 3; LtGen Louis Robertshaw, comments on draft ms, 29May81 (Vietnam Comment File, MCHC).
3. Capt William B. Terrill, et.al., intvw by 3d MarDiv, dtd 24Mar67, (No. 1017, OralHistColl, MCHC).
4. Sayers Comments, May81.

Opening Moves of the Battle

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from: 3d Mar ComdC, Apr-May67; MAG-11 ComdC, Apr-May67; MAG-12 ComdC, Apr-May67; MAG-16 ComdC, Apr-May67; 1/3 ComdC, Apr-May67; 3/3 ComdC, Apr-May67; 1/9 ComdC, Apr-May67; 3/9 ComdC, Apr-May67; 2/12 ComdC, Apr-May67; 3/13 ComdC, Apr-May67; 3d AT Bn ComdC, Apr-May67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

5. SSgt Leon R. Burns intvw by 3d MarDiv, dtd 8May67, (No. 993, Oral Hist Coll, MCHC); 2dLt Thomas G. King, intvw by 3d MarDiv dtd 8May67, (No. 994, Oral Hist Coll, MCHC), hereafter King Intvw.
6. Sayers Comments, May81.
7. King Intvw.

Hill 861

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from: 3d Mar ComdC, Apr-May67; 3/3 ComdC, Apr-May67; 1/9 ComdC, Apr-May67; 3/9 ComdC, Apr-May67.

8. Sayers comments, May81.
9. Capt Bayliss L. Spivey, intvw by 3d MarDiv, dtd 13May67, (No. 950, OralHistColl, MCHC) hereafter Spivey Intvw; LtCol Bayliss L. Spivey, Comments on draft ms, 28May81 and 18Jun81 (Vietnam Comment File, MCHC).
10. Sayers Comments, May81.
11. Spivey Intvw, May67.
12. Sayers Comments, May81.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.

Reinforcing the Hill 861 Attack

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from 1st MAW ComdC, Apr-May67; 2/3 ComdC, Apr-May67; 3/3 ComdC, Apr-May67; 1/12 ComdC, Apr-May67; 2/12 ComdC, Apr-May67.

16. LtCol Rodney D. McKitrick, Comments on draft ms, 15Jun81, (Vietnam Comment File, MCHC), hereafter, McKitrick Comments.

Attacking Hill 881S

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from: 2/3 ComdC, Apr-May67; 3/3 ComdC, Apr-May67; 2/9 ComdC, Apr-May67; 3/9 ComdC, Apr-May67.

17. SSgt Ruben Santos, intvw by 3d MarDiv, dtd 12May67, (No. 949, OralHistColl, MCHC).

The Final Objective: Hill 881N

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from: 2/3 ComdC, Apr-May67; 3/3 ComdC, Apr-May67; 1/26 ComdC, May67.

18. 1stLt Frank M. Izenour, intvw by 3d MarDiv, dtd 12May67, (No. 2105, OralHistColl, MCHC).

19. McKitrick Comments, Jun81.

20. 2dLt Terry M. Weber, intvw by 3d MarDiv, dtd 12May67, (No. 996, OralHistColl, MCHC).

21. *Sea Tiger*, 19May67, p. 3. PFC Lopez received the Navy Cross for this action.

22. BGen Edwin H. Simmons, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam, 1967," USNI, *Naval Review 1969*, p. 136, records a favorable comment on the M-16. For a negative view, see Col Peter L. Hilgartner, Comments on draft ms, 2Jun81, (Vietnam Comment File, MCHC).

End of the Battle

Additional material in this section is derived from: 26th Mar ComdC, Apr-Jul67; 1/26 ComdC, May-Jul67; 3/26 ComdC, May-Jul67.

PART II
Spring Fighting in Southern I Corps

CHAPTER 5

THE WAR IN SOUTHERN I CORPS

Unless otherwise noted, material in this chapter is derived from: FMFPac, "U.S. Marine Corps Force in Vietnam Mar65-Sep67, Historical Summary," v.I: Narrative, FMFPac Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, monthly summaries, Jan-Jun67; III MAF ComdCs Jan-Jun67; 1st Mar Div ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; 1st MAW ComdCs Jan-Jun67; Task Force X-RAY ComdCs, Jan-Apr67. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Operation Desoto

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: III MAF Journal File, Operation Desoto, 27Jan-7Apr67; Task Force X-RAY, sit reps, Operation Desoto, 27Jan-7Apr67; 3/7 AAR Operation Desoto, 1 Jun67; 3/7 ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; HMH 463 ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; 3/12 ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; 1st Engr Bn ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; Col Francis V. White, Comments on draft ms, 22Nov82. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

1. LtCol Edward J. Bronars intvw by 1st MarDiv, dtd 3Apr67, (No. 808, Oral HistCollection, H&MDiv, HQMC).

2. Captain Kenneth W. Johnson, intvw by Combat Information Bureau during Operation Desoto, (No. 0619, Oral HistCollection, HMDiv, HQMC).

3. Col Robert C. Rice, Comments on draft ms, 10Jun81, (Vietnam Comment files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Deckhouse/Desoto

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: SLF (TG 79.5) AAR Operation Deckhouse VI, 14Mar67; 1/4 AAR Operation Deckhouse VI, 9Mar67; HMM 363 AAR Operation Deckhouse VI, 12Mar67. 1/5 AAR Operation Deckhouse VI/Desoto, 10Mar67, hereafter 1/5 AAR, Deckhouse/Desoto. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

4. HMM-363 AAR, Operation Deckhouse VI, 12Mar67.

4A. 1/5 AAR; Desoto/Deckhouse, p. 14.

Desoto Continued

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: III MAF Journal File, Operation Desoto, 27Jan-7Apr67; Task Force X-Ray, sit reps, Operation Desoto, 27 Jan-7Apr67; 3/7 AAR Operation Desoto, 1Jun67; 3/7 ComdCs, Jan-Jun67: HMH 463 ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; 3/12 ComdCs, Jan-Jun67: 1st Engr Bn. ComdCs, Jan-Jun67. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washinghton, D.C.

5. Col Robert C. Rice, Comments on draft ms, 10Jun81, (Vietnam Comment files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

6. Captain Patrick J. Morgan intvw by 1st MarDiv, dtd 4Apr67, (No. 811, OralHistColl, HMDiv, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

7. LtCol Joseph T. Smith, Comments on draft ms, 30May81, (Vietnam Comment files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

8. Ibid.

Operation Union

Unless otherwise noted additional material in this section is derived from: 1st Mar ComdCs, Jan-Apr67; 5th Mar ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; 5th Mar AAR Operation Union, 20Jun67; 1/5 AAR Operation Union, 29May67; 3/5 AAR Operation Union I, Jun67; 3/1 ComdC, Apr67; 1/1 ComdC, Apr-May67. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

9. Col Emil J. Radics, Comments on draft ms, 19May81, (Comments files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

10. Ibid.

11. LtCol Peter L. Hilgartner intvw by 1st MarDiv, dtd 4Apr67, (No. 1233, Oral HistCollHist MusDiv, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

12. Col Peter L. Hilgartner, Comments on draft ms, 2Jun81, (Comments files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Hilgartner comments, 2Jun81.

13. 5th Mar AAR, Operation Union, p.7.

Union II

Unless otherwise noted additional material in this section is derived from: 5th Mar AAR Operation Union II, 17Jul67; 1/5 AAR Operation Union II, 16Jun67; 2/5 AAR Operation Union II, 8Jun67; 3/5 AAR Operation Union II, 11Jun67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

14. Col Mallett C. Jackson, Comments on draft ms, 24May81, (Comment files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
15. Ibid.
16. Hilgartner Comments, 2Jun81
17. Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

TASK FORCE OREGON

Unless otherwise noted, material in this chapter is derived from: "U.S. Marine Corps Forces in Vietnam Mar65-Sep67, Historical Summary," v.I: Narrative, hereafter, FMFPac *HistSum:* FMFPac Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, monthly summaries, Jan-Dec67, hereafter FMFPac USMC *Ops in*RVN; III MAF ComdCs Jan-Dec67: Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations,* 1945-67, 12 Bks (Washington: GPO, 1971), hereafter *Pentagon Papers*. Additional sources for this section are: CMC Trip Reports, Jan and Aug 67, hereafter CMC Trip Report; HQMC Cmd Center Operation Oregon File; III MAF Journal File, Operation Oregon, pts I and II; 1st MarDiv ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; Task Force X-Ray CmdC, Apr67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

1. MACV msg No. 41191 to CinCPac, 13Sep66, as cited in *Pentagon Papers*, bk5, v.II, p.64.
2. LtGen Louis Metzger, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981), (Vietnam Comment files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
3. CMC debriefing at FMFPac Headquarters, 11 January 1967, CMC file (Archives, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
4. MACV msg 09101 to CinCpac, 18Mar67, as cited in *Pentagon Papers*, bk5, v.II, p.64.
5. COMUSMACV 10248 to CinCPac, 28 Mar67, subject: Program 4 Force Requirements, as cited in *Pentagon Papers,*bk5, v.II, p.71.

PART III
Continuing Action Along the DMZ

CHAPTER 7

THE BARRIER—ANOTHER APPROACH

Unless otherwise noted, material in this chapter is derived from: "U.S. Marine Corps Forces in Vietnam Mar65-Sep67, Historical Summary," V. I: Narrative, hereafter *FMFPac HistSum;* FMFPac Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, monthly summaries, Jan-Dec67, hereafter *FMFPac USMC Ops in RVN;* III MAF ComdCs Jan-Dec67; Department of Defense, *United States Vietnam Relations, 1945-67,* 12 bks (Washington: GPO, 1971), hereafter *Pentagon Papers*. MACV Cmd History, 1967. All documentary material cited in located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Evolution of the Concept

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section was derived from: III MAF Dye Marker msg file; III MAF Op-Admin Plans 11-67; III MAF Op-Admin Plans 12-67; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Oct66; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Jan-Mar67; BGen Edwin H. Simmons, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam, 1967," *USNI, Naval Review 1969,* hereafter Simmons "USMC Ops in RVN 1967." All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

1. Dr. Robert J. Watson, Comments on draft ms, 26May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
2. *Pentagon Papers,* bk 5, v.I, p.66
3. Copies of MACV working papers on barrier concept, Encl 2, to 3d MarDiv ComdC, Oct 66.
4. See Briefing Paper, Practice Nine Requirement Plan of 26Jan67, Encl 6, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan67.
5. LtGen John R. Chaisson, intvw by Historical Division, HQMC, dtd 3Apr72, (Oral HistColl MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
6. Memo, Dir JTF 728 to SecDef, dtd 22Dec66, Subj: Plan for Increased Anti-infiltration Capability for SEA in Box 8 Barrier Starbird Folder (MACV Historical Records, 69A702); also FMFPac Journal File.
7. Practice Nine briefing paper, Encl 6 to 3d MarDiv ComC, 6Jan67.
8. Practice Nine briefing paper for Under SecNav Baldwin, Encl 3 to 3d MarDiv ComC, Jan67.
9. CinCPAC 060820Z February 1967 to JCS, Subj: "Barrier Plan." as cited in *Pentagon Papers,* bk 5, v. II, p. 43.

Building the Barrier

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from: III MAF Op-Admin Plans 12-67; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Mar-Dec67; 9th Mar ComdCs, Mar-Dec67; 3d Bn, 4th Mar ComdCs, Aug-Sep67; 11th Engr Bn ComdCs, Mar-Dec67; and Simmons "USMC Operations in Vietnam, 1967." All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

10. ComUSMACV msg to CG III MAF, 261038Z Mar 67, Subj: Strong Point Obstacle System. Also SecState msg to AMEmb Saigon, 161730Z Mar67, Subj: SVN Strong Point-Obstacle System, III MAF, Dye Marker msg file.
11. ComUSMACV msg to CinCPac, dtd 191125Z Apr67, III MAF, Dye Marker msg file.
12. CG III MAF msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 261046Z Apr67, III MAF, Dye Marker msg file.
13. III MAF, Dye Marker msg file, dtd 30Jul67.
14. Col George E. Jerue, Comments on draft ms, 25May81, (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
15. LtCol Lee R. Bendell, Comments on draft ms, 25May81, (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
16. III MAF, Dye Marker msg file, dtd 16Aug67.
17. III MAF, Dye Marker msg file, dtd 5Sep67. The 3 September artillery attack on Dong Ha is covered in Chapter 14.
18. III MAF, Dye Marker msg file, dtd 13Sep67.

19. III MAF Operation Plan 12-67, dtd 12Sep67.
20. MajGen Louis Metzger, ltr to CG, FMFPac, Subj: Debrief, 22Jan68 (Archives, MCHC, Washington, D.C.); LtCol Willard N. Christopher, Comments on draft ms, 31Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
21. III MAF, Dye Marker msg file, dtd 22Oct67.
22. III MAF, Dye Marker msg file, dtd 24Oct67.
23. *FMFPac, USMC Ops in RVN, Dec67.*
24. Quoted in Simmons, "USMC Ops in RVN 1967," p. 134.

CHAPTER 8

CON THIEN AND THE SUMMER BATTLES ALONG THE DMZ

Unless otherwise noted, material in this chapter is derived from; "U.S. Marine Corps Forces in Vietnam, Mar65-Sep67, Historical Summary," v.I; FMFPac Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, monthly summaries, Jul-Dec67; III MAF ComdCs, Jul-Dec67; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Jul-Dec67; 3d Mar ComdCs, Jul-Dec67; 9th Mar ComdCs, Jul-Dec67; 12th Mar ComdCs, Jul-Dec67; MAG-16 ComdCs, Jul-Oct67; 1st Mar ComdCs, Oct-Dec67; LtCol Ralph F. Moody et al, *"Marines in Vietnam,"* Ms. (Archives, MCHC, Washington, D.C.); Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam, 1967" USNI, *Naval Review 1969."* All documentary material cited is located in MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Why Con Thien?

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from: III MAF ComdCs, Jan-Aug67; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Mar-Aug67; 9th Mar ComdCs, Mar-Aug67. All documentary material is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Operation Buffalo

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from: 1/9 AAR Operation Buffalo; 3/9 AAR Operation Buffalo; 1/3 AAR Operation Buffalo; 2/3 AAR Operation Buffalo; 9th Mar AAR Operation Buffalo; 3d Mar AAR Operation Buffalo. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the Historical Branch, History and Museums Division, HQMC.

1. Col Richard B. Smith, "Leatherneck Square," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 83, No. 8 (Aug 69), p. 35.
2. Col George E. Jerue, Comments on draft ms, 25May81, (Vietnam comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
3. 1stLt William F. Delany intvw by 3d MarDiv, dtd 7Jul67 (No. 1269, Oral Hist Collection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
4. Maj Darrell C. Daniels on intvw by 3d MarDiv, dtd 7Jul67, (No.1264, Oral Hist Collection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
5. SSgt Leon R. Burns intvw by 3dMarDiv, dtd 7Jul67 (No. 1265, Oral HistCollection MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Burns intvw.
6. Col Richard J. Schening, Comments on draft ms, 26May81, (Vietnam comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
7. Burns intvw.
8. Maj Henry J. M. Radcliffe intvw by MCHC, dtd 14Dec73.
9. Maj Darrell C. Danielson, intvw by 3d MarDiv, 7Jul67, (No. 1264, Oral Hist Collection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
10. LtCol Albert C. Slater, Comments on draft ms, 21May81, (Vietnam comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Slater comments.
11. Capt Burrell H. Landes, intvw by 3d MarDiv, dtd (No. 1519, Oral HistCollection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
12. Slater comments.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.; Navy Cross Citation, Cpl James L. Stuckey, Dec&Med Br, HQMC, Washington, D.C.
15. Col George E. Jerue, Comments on draft MS of *"U.S. Marines in Vietnam."* pt V, 12Jan70.

PART IV
Fall Combat, North and South

CHAPTER 9

CONTINUING OPERATIONS AGAINST THE *2D NVA DIVISION*

Unless otherwise noted, material in this chapter is derived from: FMFPac, "U.S. Marine Corps Forces in Vietnam Mar65-Sep67, Historical Summary," v. I: Narrative; FMFPac Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, monthly summaries, Jun-Dec67; III MAF ComdCs, Jun-Dec67; 1st MarDiv ComdCs, Jun-Dec67; 1st MAW ComdCs, Jun-Dec67; MAG-36 ComdCs, Jun-Dec67; MAG-16 ComdCs, Jun-Dec67; 1st Mars ComdCs, Jun-Dec67; 7th Mars ComdCs, Jun-Dec67; 2/5 ComdCs Jun-Dec67; 3/5 ComdCs, Jun-Dec67; F.J. West, Jr., *The Enclave: Some U.S. Military Efforts in Ly Tin District, Quang Tin Province 1966-1968,* (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1969), hereafter West, *The Enclave.* All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC Washington, D.C.

Raids and Rockets in Quang Nam

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from III MAF ComdC, Jul67; 5th Mar ComdC, Jul67; 2/5 ComdC, Jul67; and 2/11 ComdC, Jul67. All documentary material is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

1. 2/5 ComdC, Jul67, p. 3.
2. West, *The Enclave,* pp. 42-45.
3. Col Joseph T. Smith, Comments on draft ms, 30May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Operation Cochise

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: Task Force X-Ray Operations Order 1-67 (Operation Cochise), dtd 9Aug67; 5th Mar AAR, Operation Cochise, dtd 20Sep67; 1/5 AAR, Operation Cochise, dtd 3Sep67; 3/5 AAR, Operation Cochise, dtd 1Sep67; 1/3 AAR, Operation Cochise, dtd 3Sep67. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

4. MAG-36, ComdC, Sep67, Encl 1, p. 1.

Operation Swift

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: Task Force X-Ray AAR, Operation Swift, dtd 20Oct67; 5th Mars AAR, Operation Swift, dtd 11Oct67; 1/5 AAR, Operation Swift, dtd 27Sep67; 3/5 AAR, Operation Swift, dtd 22Sep67; 2/11 AAR, Operation Swift, dtd 29Sep67; LtCol Gene W. Bowers, Comments on draft ms, 15Sep81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Bowers comments. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited in located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

5. Col Philip M. Crosswait, Comments on draft ms, 14Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
6. Col Peter L. Hilgartner, Comments on draft ms, 2Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
7. Ibid.
8. Cpl Joseph E. Fuller, et. al. intvw by 1st MarDiv, dtd 19Sep67 (No. 1612, Oral Hist Collection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
9. Sgt James E. Dougherty, et al., intvw by 1st MarDiv, dtd 23Sep67. LCpl Henshaw account in reel 3, side 2 and reel 4, side 1. (No. 1630, Oral Hist Collection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
10. 1stLt Donald R. Dunagan, intvw by 1stMarDiv dtd 20Sep67 (No. 1294, Oral Hist Collection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
11. Bowers comments.
12. Ibid.
13. Col William R. Earney, Comments on draft ms, 2Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
14. Ibid.

A Busy Calm Before the Storm

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 7th Mar AAR, Operation Foster, dtd 14Jan68; 2/3 AAR, Operation Badger Hunt/Foster, dtd 7Dec67; 2/5 AAR, Operation Essex, dtd 29Nov67; and LtCol Gene W. Bowers, Comments on draft ms, 15Sep81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) hereafter Bowers Comments.. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

15. LtGen Donn J. Robertson, Comments on draft ms, 4Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
16. 2/5 AAR, Operation Essex, p. 16-17.
17. Ibid., p. 17.
18. Bowers comments.

CHAPTER 10

FALL FIGHTING IN THE NORTH

Unless otherwise noted, the material for this chapter was dervied from: III MAF ComdC, Jul-Dec67; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Jul-Dec67; 9th Mar ComdCs, Jul-Dec67; 3d Mar ComdCs, Jul-Dec67; 4th Mar ComdCs, Jul-Dec67; 12th Mar ComdCs, Jul-Dec67; 2/9 ComdC, Jul67; 2/4 ComdCs, Aug-Oct67; and 3/26 ComdC, Sept67. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Operation Kingfisher

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 9th Mar AAR Operation Hickory II; 9th Mar AAR Operation Kingfisher; 3d Mar AAR Operation Kingfisher; 1/9 AAR Operation Kingfisher; 2/9 AAR Operation Kingfisher; 2/3 AAR Operation Kingfisher; 3/3 AAR Operation Kingfisher; 2/4 AAR Operation Kingfisher; 3/4 AAR Operation Kingfisher; 3/26 AAR Operation Kingfisher; and 9th MT Bn ComdC, Jul-Aug67.

1. Major Walter E. Deese, Comments on draft ms, 9Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
2. Col Robert C. Needham, Comments on draft ms, 27Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Needham comments.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Needham comments and Col James Stockman, Comments on draft ms, 27Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
6. 9th MT Bn ComdCs, Jul-Aug67.
7. Col Julian G. Bass, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 28May81, (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
8. LtCol Horace A. Bruce, Comments on draft ms, 14Jul81, (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
9. LtGen Louis Metzger, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981) (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Wasington, D.C.), hereafter Metzger comments.
10. Col Lee R. Bendell, Comments on draft ms, 25May81, (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
11. Ibid.
12. 3/26 ComdC, Sep67.
13. Col James W. Hammond, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 18May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Hammond comments.
14. Col Richard B. Smith, Comments on draft ms, 21May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Smith comments.
15. Hammond comments.
16. Metzger comments.
17. Hammond comments.
18. Ibid.
19. LtCol James E. Murphy, Comments on draft ms, 6Aug81, (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Murphy comments.
20. Ibid.
21. 9th Mar AA, Operation Kingfisher (2/4)
22. Hammond comments.
23. Needham comments.
24. Col John C. Studt, Comments on draft ms, 9Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Studt comments.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Murphy comments.
29. Studt comments.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. 2/4 AAR, Operation Kingfisher.

36. Hammond comments.

Medina/Bastion Hill/Lam Son 138

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1st Mar AAR Operation Medina; 1/1 AAR Operation Medina; 2/1 AAR Operation Medina; 1/3 AAR Operation Medina/Bastion Hill.

Adjustments Within the 3d Marine Division

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 3d Mar AAR Operation Lancaster; 9th Mar AAR Operation Kentucky; 26th Mar Operation Scotland; 1st AmTracBn AAR Operation Napoleon.

37. Col Edwin S. Schick, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 11Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
38. Col William L. Dick, Comments on draft ms, 14May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
39. Col James R. Stockman, Comments on draft ms, 27Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

PART V
Special Efforts

CHAPTER 11

THE SPECIAL LANDING FORCE

Unless otherwise noted, material in this chapter is derived from: COMUSMACV Comd Hist, 1967; COMUSMACV Monthly Evaluation Report, Jan-Dec67; FMFPac "U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam," monthly summaries, Jan-Dec67; III MAF ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; 1st MAW ComdCs, Jan-DEc67; LtCol Ralph F. Moody and Mr. Benis M. Frank, "The Special Landing Force" (ms, MCHC, Washington, D.C., 1972). Unless otherwise noted all documentary material cited is located in the Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

Expedient or Doctrine

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: III MAF ComdCs, Aug66-Feb67; 1st MAW ComdCs, Jan-Dec67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

1. Col James R. Stockman, Comments on draft ms, 27Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
2. LtGen Louis Metzger, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981) (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) hereafter Metzger comments.

Operation Deckhouse V

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is dervied from: 1stBn, 9th Marines ComdC, Jan67; HMM-362 ComdC, Jan67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

3. Capt John D. Westervelt, USN, Comments on draft ms, 9Jun81 (Vietnam Comments file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) hereafter Westervelt comments.
4. Ibid.
5. LtGen John R. Chaisson, intvw by Hist Div, HQMC, 3Apr72 (Oral Hist Coll, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Deckhouse VI/Desoto

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1st Bn, 4th Mar ComdCs, Feb-Mar67; HMM-363 ComdCs, Feb-Mar67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

6. Westervelt comments.
7. Metzger comments.
8. Westervelt comments.

Beacon Hill I

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1stBn, 4th Mar ComdCs, Mar-Apr67; HMM-363 ComdCs, Mar-Apr67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

9. VAdm Edwin B. Hooper, USN, Comments on draft ms, 24May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Beacon Star

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdCs, Apr-May67; HMM-164 ComdCs, Apr-May67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Beaver Cage/Union I

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdCs, Apr-May67; HMM-263 ComdCs, Apr-May67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Beau Charger/Belt Tight/Hickory/Prairie IV/Cimarron

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdCs, May-Jun67; 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdCs, May-Jun67; HMM-164 ComdCs, May-Jun67; HMM-263 ComdCs, May-Jun67. Unless otherwise noted all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

10. LtCol Edward K. Kirby, Comments on draft ms of Moody, *et al*, "Marines in Vietnam," 18Jan70 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Day On, Stay On

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; HMM-164 ComdCs, Jan-Jun67; HMM-263 ComdCs, Jan-Jun67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Bear Bite/Colgate/Choctaw/Maryland

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Jun67; HMM-263 ComdC, Jun67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.
11. 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Jun67.

Beacon Torch/Calhoun

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdCs, Jun-Jul67; HMM-164 ComdCs, Jun-Jul67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Bear Claw/Buffalo/Hickory II

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Jul67; HMM-263 ComdC, Jul67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.
12. Col John A. Conway, Comments on draft ms, 8Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Beaver Track/Buffalo/Hickory II

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Jul67; HMM-164 ComdC, Jul67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Bear Chain/Fremont

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Jul67; HMM-164, ComdC, Jul67; HMM-265 ComdC, Jul67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Beacon Guide

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Jul67; HMM-263 ComdC, Jul67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Kangaroo Kick/Fremont

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Aug67; HMM-265 ComdC, Aug67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.
13. 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Aug67.

Beacon Gate/Cochise

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Aug67; HMM-263 ComdC, Aug67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Belt Drive/Liberty

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Aug-Sep67; HMM-262 ComdC, Aug-Sep67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.
14. 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Sep67.

A Change In Scenario—The 46s are Grounded

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: III MAF ComdC, Aug67; 1st MAW ComdC, Aug67; MAG-16 ComdC, Aug67; HMM-262 ComdC, Aug-Dec67; HMM-163 ComdC, Aug67; HMM-463 ComdC, Aug67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Beacon Point/Fremont/Ballistic Charge/Shelbyville

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Sep67; HMM-362 ComdC, Sep67; 4th Mar ComdC, Sep67; 1st Mar ComdC, Sep67, 2d Bn, 1st Mar ComdC, Sep67; 3d Bn, 5th Mar ComdC, Sep67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Fortress Sentry/Kingfisher

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 9th Mar ComdCs, Sep-Oct67; 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdCs, Sep-Oct67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Bastion Hill/Medina/Liberty II/Fremont

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1st Mar ComdC, Oct67; 4th Mar ComdC, Oct67; 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Oct67. Unless otherwise noted all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Formation Leader/Liberty II/Knox

Unless otherwise noted additional material for this section is derived from: 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Oct-Nov67; 7th Mar ComdCs, Oct-Nov67; 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdCs, Oct-Nov67; 2d Bn, 26th Mar ComdCs, Oct-Nov67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Granite/Kentucky II and III

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 4th Mar ComdCs, Oct-Nov67; 9th Mar ComdC, Oct-Nov67; 1st Bn, 4th Mar ComdCs, Oct-Nov67; HMM-361 ComdCs, Oct-Nov67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.
15. 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Nov67.

Badger Hunt/Foster

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 5th Mar ComdC, Nov67; 7th Mar ComdC, Nov67; 3d Bn, 7th Mar ComdC, Nov67; 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Nov67; HMM-262 ComdC, Nov67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Fortress Ridge

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 2d Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Nov-Dec67; 3d Bn, 1st Mar ComdCs, Dec67-Jan68; HMM-262 ComdCs, Dec67-Jan68. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

16. Col Max McQuown, Comments on draft ms, 20May81 (Comments files, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) hereafter McQuown comments.
17. Ibid.

Badger Tooth

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 3d Bn, 1st Mar ComdCs, Dec67-Jan68; HMM-262 ComdCs, Dec67-Jan68.

18. McQuown comments.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.

Ballistic Arch/Kentucky V/Osceola

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 9th Mar ComdCs, Nov67-Jan68; 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdCs, Nov67-Jan68; 2d Bn, 4th Mar, ComdC, Dec67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

21. 1st Bn, 3d Mar ComdC, Nov67.

CHAPTER 12

PACIFICATION

Unless otherwise noted, material in this chapter is derived from: FMFPac, "U.S. Marine Corps Forces in Vietnam Mar65-Sep67, Historical Summary," vols. I and II; FMFPac Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, monthly summaries, Jan-Dec67; III MAF ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; 1st MarDiv ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; 1st MAW ComdCs, Jan-Dec67. Documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

The Problem Defined

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from III MAF ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; and 1st MAW ComdCs, Jan-Dec67. Documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

1. LtCol D. L. Evans, "USMC Civil Affairs in Vietnam: A Philosophical History," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 52, no. 3 (Mar 1968, p. 22.
2. Col James L. Black, Comments on draft ms, 23May81, (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Black Comments.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

County Fair

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: Captain Russel H. Stolfi, USMCR, *U.S. Marine Corps Civic Action Efforts in Vietnam, March 1965 - March 1966,* (Washington D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1968); Captain William D. Parker, USMCR, *U.S. Marine Corps Civil Affairs in I Corps Republic of South Vietnam, April 1966 to April 1967,* (Washington D.C.: Historical Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1970). Documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Marine Grass-Roots-Level Participation

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: Captain William D. Parker, USMCR, *U.S. Marine Corps Civil Affairs in I Corps Republic of South Vietnam, April 1966 to April 1967*, (Washington D.C.: Historical Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps). Documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

5. III MAF ComdC, February 1967.
6. V. Keith Fleming, Jr., personal recollection, 9Nov82.
7. Col Max McQuown, Comments on draft ms, 20May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter McQuown Comments.
8. 1stLt Robert E. Mattingly, intvw by 3d MarDiv, dtd 23Oct67 (No. 1602, Oral Hist Collection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.
9. AO3E-cem, "Personal Response Project," June 1968.
10. Col Donald L. Evans intvw by HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 15Feb72, (Vietnam Comment File, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
11. McQuown comments.

Reporting and Evaluation

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: Captain William D. Parker, USMCR, *U.S. Marine Corps Civil Affairs in I Corps Republic of South Vietnam, April 1966 to April 1967*, (Washington D.C.: Historical Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps). Documentary material cited is located in the Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

12. FMFPac, *Hist Sum*, p. 5-36.
13. Black comments.

PART VI
Support and Conclusion

CHAPTER 13

SUPPORTING ARMS

Unless otherwise noted, material in this chapter is derived from: FMFPac, U.S. Marine Corps Forces in Vietnam, Mar65-Sep67, Historical Summary, vols. I and II; FMFPac Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, monthly summaries, Jan-Dec67; III MAF ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; 1st MAW ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; LtCol Ralph F. Moody *et al.*, Ms, "U.S. Marines in Vietnam," Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, Part VII. Unless otherwise noted all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Marine Air Operations

Unless otherwise noted, additional material in this section is derived from LtGen Keith B. McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962-1970," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, May71, p. 122-155, hereafter McCutcheon "Marine Aviation in Vietnam," and Gen William W. Momyer *Air Power in Three Wars* (GPO, Washington, D.C.: 1978), hereafter Momyer, *Air Power*. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

1. Col Kenneth T. Dykes, Comments on draft ms, 23Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
2. BGen Edward J. Doyle, Comments on draft ms, 14Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Fixed-Wing Operations

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: MAG-11 ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; MAG-12 ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; MAG-13 ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam." Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

3. Colonel John M. Verdi, Comments on draft ms, 4Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) hereafter Verdi comments.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Verdi comments and Col Edgar J. Love, Comments on draft ms, 30May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) hereafter Love Comments.
9. Momyer, *Air Power*, p. 199 and LtCol Earl E. Jacobson, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 8Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) hereafter Jacobson comments.
10. Jacobson comments.
11. Ibid.
12. Love comments.
13. LtGen Louis B. Robertshaw, Comments on draft ms, 22May81, (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
14. Love comments.

Helicopter Operations

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: MAG-16 ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; MAG-36 ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon, USMC. "Air Support for III MAF," *Marine Corps Gazette,* v.51, no.8 (Aug 1967), pp. 19-23. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

15. Cdr F.O. McClendon, Jr., MSC, USN. "Doctors and Dentists, Nurses and Corpsmen in Vietnam," *Naval Review 1970,* Annapolis; U.S. Naval Institute, 1970, p.283.
16. LtCol William R. Fails, Ms, "Development of Marine Corps Helicopters, 1962-1972," Chapter 6.

Artillery

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 11th Mar ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; 12th Mar ComdCs, Jan-Dec67. Unless otherwise noted all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

17. Col Ernest W. Payne, Comments on draft ms, 4Jun81, (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) hereafter Payne comments.
18. Col Edwin S. Schick, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 11Jun81, (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) hereafter Schick comments.
19. Schick comments and Col Clayton V. Hendricks, Comments on draft ms, 31May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
20. Payne Comments.

CHAPTER 14

LOGISTICS

Unless otherwise noted, material in this chapter is derived from: FMFPac, U.S. Marine Corps Forces in Vietnam, Mar65-Sep67, Historical Summary, Vols I and II; FMFPac, Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, monthly summaries, Jan-Dec67; III MAF ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; 1st MarDiv ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; 1st MAW ComdCs, Jan-Dec67. Unless otherwise noted, all cited material is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Upgrading the Logistics System

Unless otherise noted, additional material in this section is derived from: FLC ComdCs, Jan-Dec67; Col G. C. Axtell, intvw by FMFPac, 5Oct66 (No. 219, Oral History Coll, MCHC); Col W. H. Cowper, intvw by FLC, 29Jan67 (No. 377, Oral Hist Coll, MCHC). Unless otherwise noted, all cited material is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

1. LtGen Louis M. Metzger, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981), (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C., hereafter Metzger comments.
2. FMFPac Hist Summ, pp. 6-8.
3. Metzger comments.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Col James C. Short, Comments on draft ms, 29May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
8. Metzger comments.

Navy Support

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: Cdr W. D. Middleton, "Seabees in Vietnam," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, Aug67, v. 93, No. 8, pp. 54-64; US NavSupAct Da Nang, *Naval Support in I Corps 1968*. Unless other noted, all material cited is located in MCHC, Washington, D.C.

9. Capt John T. Vincent, (MC), USN, Comments on draft ms, 7Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
10. Col Robert C. Rice, Comments on draft ms, 10Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

Marine Corps Engineers

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: 1st, 3d, 7th, 9th, 11th Eng Bns ComdCs, Jan-Dec67. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

11. Col James L. Black, Comments on draft ms, 23May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
12. Col Ross L. Mulford, Comments on draft ms, 1Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
13. Col Richard D. Taber, Comments on draft ms, 7Jun81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
14. LtCol Willard N. Christopher, Comments on draft ms, 31Jul81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

CHAPTER 15

OTHER MARINE ACTIVITIES

Unless otherwise noted, material for this chapter is derived from: HQMC Comd Status of Forces rept, Jan-Dec67; Adm U. S. Grant Sharp, USN, and Gen William C. Westmoreland, USA, *Report on the War in Vietnam* (Washington, GPO, 1968). All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Marines with MACV

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from MACV Strength Reports, 1967; BGen John R. Chaisson debrief, HQMC, 1Aug67 (No. 6172, Oral Hist Coll HQMC). All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

1. LtGen John R. Chaisson, Transcript of Remarks at a Basic School Mess Night, 17Nov70 (Oral Hist Coll, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

The Embassy Guard

Material in this section is derived from: HQMC Comd Center Status of Forces rept, Jan-Dec67; MSG Bn Comd ComdCs, Feb-Dec67; MACV Strength Reports, 1967; Maj Philip E. Tucker intvw by HistBr, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 6Jun75 (No. 6019, Oral Hist Coll, MCHC, Washington, D.C.). Unless noted otherwise all documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C..

2. LtCol Philip E. Tucker, Comments on draft ms, n.d. (1981) (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

I Corps Advisors

Unless otherwise noted, additional material for this section is derived from: HQMC Comd Cntr Status of Forces rept, Jan-Dec67; SMA, AA rpts, Jan-Dec67; MajGen W. B. Fulton, USA, *Vietnam Studies, Riverine Operations, 1966-1969* (Washington, GPO, 1973); VAdm E. B. Hooper, USN (Ret.), *Mobility, Support, Endurance*, (Washington, GPO, 1972). Unless otherwise noted, all documentary material is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

3. LtCol James R. Davis, Comments on draft ms, 21May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
4. Col Nels E. Anderson, Comments on draft ms, 17May81 (Vietnam Comment file, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)
5. SMA AA Rept, Song Thanh/Deckhouse V, dtd 1Mar67, Encl (10).
6. SMA AA Rept, RSSZ Ops (unnamed), dtd 28Jul67.
7. Ibid.
8. SMA AA Rept, Operation Paddington, dtd 28Nov67.
9. SMA AA Rept, Operation Coronado IX, dtd 12Feb68.

CHAPTER 16

THE SITUATION AT THE END OF THE YEAR

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from FMFPac ComdC, Jul-Dec67; III MAF ComdC, Dec67; Gen William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), hereafter Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; and Peter Braestrup, *Big Story*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977), hereafter Braestrup, *Big Story*. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

Operational Aspects

Additional material in this section is derived from 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec67; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Dec67; 1st MAW ComdC, Dec67; and FLC ComdC, Dec67. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

1. Douglas Pike, conference remarks, quoted in *A Conference Report: Some Lessons and Non-Lessons of Vietnam Ten Years After the Paris Peace Accords*. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, 1983).
2. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 204; Gen William C. Westmoreland, Oral History Interview, 4Apr83 (Oral History Collection, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).
3. BGen Edwin H. Simmons, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam, 1967," *Naval Review, 1969*; FMFPac ComdC, Jul-Dec67; and III MAF ComdC, Dec67.

Personnel and Logistics

Additional material for this section is derived from III MAF ComdC, Dec67. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

The Outlook for Victory

Additional material for this section is derived from III MAF ComdC, Dec67; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec67; and 3d MarDiv ComdC, Dec67. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

5. Quoted in Braestrup, *Big Story*, p. 53 and 59.

Enemy Dispositions

Additional material for this section is derived from III MAF ComdC, Dec67; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec67; and 3d MarDiv ComdC, Dec67. All documentary material cited is located in the MCHC, Washington, D.C.

6. Gen William C. Westmoreland, quoted in Braestrup, *Big Story*, Vol. 1, p. 61.
7. LtGen Keith B. McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962-1970," *Naval Review, 1969* .
8. Quoted in Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 239.

Appendix A

Marine Command and Staff List January-December 1967

MARINE COMMAND AND STAFF LIST, for III MARINE AMPHIBIOUS FORCE 1 January - 31 December 1967*

**Unless otherwise indicated, dates refer to the period when a unit was in Vietnam. Only permanent Marine organization of battalion/squadron-size or larger are listed; exceptions are 3d Marine Division (Fwd), Task Force X-Ray, and the Force Logistic Command and its components. The following listing reflects administrative rather than operational organization. (For a complete listing of locations and strength of Marine units in the western Pacific, see Appendix F.)*

III MAF Headquarters 1Jan-31Dec67

CG LtGen Lewis W. Walt	1Jan-31May67
LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr.	1Jun-31Dec67
DepCG MajGen Herman Nickerson, Jr.	1Jan-31Mar67
MajGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr.	1Apr-31May67
MajGen Herman Nickerson, Jr.	1Jun-17Oct67
MajGen Raymond L. Murray	18Oct-31Dec67
C/S BGen Hugh M. Elwood	1Jan-31Mar67
BGen Robert C. Owens, Jr.	1Apr-20Dec67
BGen Earl E. Anderson	21Dec-31Dec67
G-1 Col John L. Mahon	1Jan-3Jun67
Col James H. Berge, Jr.	4Jun-15Jul67
Col Poul F. Pedersen	16Jul-31Dec67
G-2 Col Roy H. Thompson	1Jan-13Feb67
Col Benjamin S. Read	14Feb-9Jul67
Col Kenneth J. Houghton	10Jul-31Dec67
G-3 Col Drew J. Barrett, Jr.	1Jan-2Jul67
Col Fred E. Haynes, Jr.	3Jul-13Nov67
Col Thomas L. Randall	14Nov-31Dec67
G-4 Col Joseph F. Quilty, Jr.	1Jan-2Jun67
Col Rex O. Dillow	3Jun-31Dec67
G-5 Col Eric S. Holmgrain	1Jan-31Jan67
Col John T. Hill	1Feb-26Apr67
Col George O. Ross	27Apr-17May67
Col Robert F. Warren	18-31May67
Col George O. Ross	1Jun-1Jul67
Col James A. Gallo, Jr.	2Jul-5Sep67
LtCol James L. Black, Jr.	6-14Sep67
Col Joseph F. Holzbauer	15-17Sep67
Col John E. Hays	18Sep-31Oct67
LtCol James L. Black, Jr.	1Nov-31Dec67

1st Marine Division Headquarters 1Jan-31Dec67

CG MajGen Herman Nickerson, Jr.	1Jan-31May67
MajGen Donn J. Robertson*	1Jun-31Dec67
ADC BGen William A. Stiles	1Jan-23Mar67
BGen Foster C. LaHue*	24Mar-31Dec67

**BGen LaHue was Acting 1st Marine Division Commander during the period 27Oct-28Nov67.*

C/S Col Sidney J. Altman	1Jan-31May67
Col Edward L. Bale, Jr.	1-12Jun67
Col Henry J. Woessner, II	13Jun-31Dec67
G-1 Col Charles C. Crossfield, II	1-18Jan67
Col Arnold L. Emils	19Jan-10May67
Col William R. Earney	11May-31Dec67
G-2 Col John J. O'Donnell	1-14Jan67
Col Stanley Davis	15Jan-30Jun67
LtCol Emmett B. Sigmon, Jr.	1-7Jul67
Col James C. Short	8-11Jul67
LtCol Emmett B. Sigmon, Jr.	12Jul-30Sep67
Col Russell E. Corey	1Oct-31Dec67
G-3 Col Herman Poggemeyer, Jr.	1Jan-31May67
Col Herbert E. Ing, Jr.	1Jun-8Jul67
Col Robert D. Bohn	9-11Jul67
Col James C. Short	12Jul-31Dec67
G-4 Col Edward L. Bale, Jr.	1Jan-27Jun67
LtCol Earl K. Vickers, Jr.	28Jun-31Dec67
G-5 Col Walter Moore	1Jan-2Feb67
Col Donald L. Mallory	3Feb-31May67
LtCol Richard F. Peterson	1Jun-11Jul67
Col Emil J. Radics	12Jul-30Sep67
LtCol Richard F. Peterson	1-4Oct67
Col Herbert L. Beckington	5Oct-31Dec67

Headquarters Battalion

CO Col Warren A. Leitner	1Jan-31Jul67
Col Joseph F. Donahoe, Jr.	1Aug-31Dec67

Task Force X-Ray 1Jan-26Apr67*

**TF X-Ray activated at Chu Lai on 10 October 1966 and*

operated from there until 26 April 1967, at which time it deactivated when Task Force Oregon assumed its mission.

CO BGen William A. Stiles	1Jan-24Mar67
BGen Foster C. LaHue	25Mar-26Apr67
C/S Col Fred E. Haynes, Jr.	1Jan-26Apr67
G-1 LtCol Roland L. McDaniel	1Jan-3Mar67
Maj John C. Hergert, Jr.	4Mar-26Apr67
G-2 Maj Glenn K. Maxwell	1-4Jan67
Maj Daniel Z. Boyd	5Jan-26Apr67
G-3 LtCol Edward J. Bronars	1Jan-2Feb67
LtCol Robert E. Hunter, Jr.	3Feb-26Apr67
G-4 LtCol Louis A. Bonin	1Jan-3Mar67
LtCol Basile Lubka	4Mar-26Apr67
G-5 Maj Joseph T. Smith	1Jan-26Apr67

1st Marines

CO Col Donald L. Mallory	1Jan-28Jan67
Col Emil J. Radics	29Jan-11Jul67
Col Herbert E. Ing, Jr.	12Jul-31Dec67

1st Battalion, 1st Marines

CO LtCol Van D. Bell, Jr.	1Jan-4Jun67
LtCol George E. Petro	5Jun-27Aug67
LtCol Albert F. Belbusti	28Aug-16Nov67
LtCol Marcus J. Gravel	17Nov-31Dec67

2d Battalion, 1st Marines

CO LtCol Haig Donabedian	1-31Jan67
LtCol Marvin M. Hewlett	1Feb-5Aug67
LtCol Archie VanWinkle	6Aug-14Nov67
LtCol Evan L. Parker, Jr.	15Nov-31Dec67

3d Battalion, 1st Marines*

**The 3d Battalion, 1st Marines became part of SLF BRAVO on 1Dec67.*

CO LtCol Hillmer E. DeAtley	1Jan-26Apr67
LtCol Robert C. Rice	27Apr-28Aug67
LtCol Max McQuown	29Aug-30Nov67

5th Marines

CO Col Fred E. Haynes, Jr.	1Jan-27Feb67
Col Kenneth J. Houghton	28Feb-30Jun67
Col Stanley Davis	1Jul-16Oct67
Col Robert D. Bohn	17Oct-31Dec67

1st Battalion, 5th Marines

CO LtCol Peter L. Hilgartner	1Jan-19Sep67
LtCol Oliver W. Vandenberg	20Sep-31Dec67

2d Battalion, 5th Marines

CO LtCol William C. Airheart	1-31Jan67
LtCol Mallett C. Jackson, Jr.	1Feb-18Jul67
LtCol George C. McNaughton	19Jul-31Dec67

3d Battalion, 5th Marines

CO LtCol Dean E. Esslinger	1Jan-27May67
Col Charles B. Webster	28May-6Sep67
Col William K. Rockey	7Sep-31Dec67

7th Marines

CO Col Lawrence F. Snoddy, Jr.*	1-20Jan67
**Surname changed to Snowden 19Apr72*	
Col Charles C. Crossfield, II	21Jan-14Aug67
LtCol Russell E. Johnson	15-21Aug67
Col Ross R. Miner	22Aug-31Dec67

1st Battalion, 7th Marines

CO LtCol Basile Lubka	1Jan-27Feb67
LtCol Jack D. Rowley	28Feb-14Sep67
LtCol William J. Davis	15Sep-31Dec67

2d Battalion, 7th Marines

CO LtCol Warren P. Kitterman	1Jan-16Aug67
LtCol John R. Love	17Aug-31Dec67

3d Battalion, 7th Marines

CO LtCol Raymond J. O'Leary	1Jan-1Feb67
LtCol Edward J. Bronars	2Feb-4Apr67
LtCol John D. Counselman	5Apr-18Oct67
LtCol Roger H. Barnard	19Oct-31Dec67

11th Marines

CO Col Glenn E. Norris	1Jan-28Jun67
LtCol Clayton V. Hendricks	29Jun-18Jul67
Col Ernest W. Payne	19Jul-27Dec67
LtCol Clayton V. Hendricks	28-31Dec67

1st Battalion, 11th Marines

CO LtCol Mark P. Fennessy	1Jan-18May67
Maj Joseph J. Marron	19May-31Jul67
LtCol David A. Rapp	1Aug-6Oct67
LtCol Robert C. V. Hughes	7Oct-31Dec67

2d Battalion, 11th Marines

CO Maj Ivil L. Carver	1Jan-21Feb67
Maj Joseph H. Marron	22Feb-11May67
LtCol Robert E. Hunter, Jr.	12May-28Sep67
LtCol David A. Clark	29Sep-31Dec67

3d Battalion, 11th Marines

CO LtCol Alexander S. Ruggiero	1Jan-28Jun67
LtCol George T. Balzer	29Jun-31Dec67

4th Battalion, 11th Marines

CO LtCol George R. Lamb	1Jan-1Feb67
LtCol Joseph M. Laney, Jr.	2Feb-18Apr67
LtCol Gordon M. B. Livingston	19Apr-31Jul67
Maj John S. Hollingshead	1Aug-31Dec67

1st Reconnaissance Battalion

CO LtCol Donald N. McKeon	1Jan-20May67
Maj Bill G. Lowrey	21May-10Jul67
LtCol Browman C. Stinemetz	11Jul-31Dec67

1st Antitank Battalion*

**The 1st Antitank Battalion deactivated on 21Dec67.*

CO Maj John J. Keefe	1Jan-4Jun67
Maj Pat S. Galligan	5Jun-20Jul67
LtCol Pierre D. Reissner	21Jul-21Dec67

1st Tank Battalion

CO Maj John W. Clayborne	1Jan-1Feb67
LtCol Richard M. Taylor	2Feb-10Nov67
LtCol Vincent J. Gentile	11Nov-31Dec67

1st Motor Transport Battalion

CO Maj Jim T. Elkins	1Jan-31Mar67
Maj Kenneth H. Reagan	1Apr-18Jun67
LtCol Kenneth M. Buss	19Jun-7Nov67
Maj Charles F. Cresswell	8Nov-31Dec67

1st Engineer Battalion

CO LtCol Charles O. Newton	1Jan-24May67
Maj James M. Mackenzie	25May-1Oct67
LtCol Logan Cassedy	2Oct-31Dec67

1st Shore Party Battalion

CO LtCol Edward H. Jones	1Jan-17Sep67
Maj Jack E. Townsend	18-28Sep67
LtCol Nicholas Kavakich	29Sep-31Dec67

3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion

CO Maj Jack D. Rowley	1Jan-26Feb67
Maj Frederick N. Van Sant	27Feb-5Jun67
Maj James E. Swab	6-26Jun67
LtCol Robert L. Shuford	27Jun-31Dec67

1st Medical Battalion

CO Cdr Robert H. Mitchell (MC) USN	1-31Jan67
Cdr John C. Robins (MC) USN	1Feb-12Apr67
Cdr Paul D. Cooper, Jr. (MC) USN	13Apr-31Aug67
Cdr Clinton H. Lowery (MC) USN	1SSep-31Dec67

1st Military Police Battalion

CO LtCol Paul J. Stavridis	1Jan-21May67
LtCol Twyman R. Hill	22May-31Dec67

7th Motor Transport Battalion

CO Maj Sydney H. Batchelder, Jr	1Jan-10Sep67
Maj Lance D. Thomas	11Sep-31Dec67

7th Communication Battalion

CO LtCol William M. Clelland	1Jan-18Nov67
LtCol Harry O. Cowing, Jr.	19Nov-31Dec67

11th Motor Transport Battalion

CO Maj Lee V. Barkley	1Jan-11Feb67
Maj Robert C. Tashjian	12Feb-6Jul67
LtCol Joseph B. Brown, Jr.	7Jul-31Dec67

1st Field Artillery Group

CO LtCol Joe B. Stribling	1Jan-12Mar67
LtCol Robert B. Metcalfe	4May-17Nov67
LtCol Spencer F. Thomas	18Nov-31Dec67

7th Engineer Battalion

CO LtCol Frank W. Harris, III	1Jan-29Jul67
LtCol Ray Funderburk	30Jul-31Dec67

9th Engineer Battalion

CO LtCol Richard W. Crispen	1Jan-6Feb67
LtCol George A. Babe	7Feb-6Aug67
Maj Edward W. Lifset	7-30Aug67
LtCol Horacio E. Perea	31Aug-31Dec67

3d Marine Division Headquarters

CG MajGen Wood B. Kyle	1Jan-17Mar67
MajGen Bruno A. Hochmuth	18Mar-14Nov67
BGen Louis Metzger	15-27Nov67
MajGen Rathvon M. Tompkins	28Nov-31Dec67
ADC BGen Lowell E. English	1-6Jan67
BGen Michael P. Ryan	7Jan-19May67
BGen Louis Metzger	20May-14Nov67
BGen Louis Metzger	28Nov-31Dec67
C/S Col John B. Sweeney	1Jan-2Mar67
Col Alexander D. Cereghino	3Mar-31Jul67
Col Walter H. Cuenin	1Aug-31Dec67
G-1 Col Robert M. Jenkins	1Jan-20Mar67
LtCol Charles S. Kirchmann	21Mar-14Sep67
LtCol James W. Marsh	15Sep-31Dec67
G-2 LtCol Jack L. Miles	1Jan-9Feb67
LtCol Lemuel C. Shepherd, III	10Feb-1Jun67
Col Philip A. Davis	2Jun-22Sep67
Col Edward J. Miller	23Sep-31Dec67
G-3 Col Edward E. Hammerbeck	1Jan-17May67
LtCol Harvey E. Spielman	18-27May67
Col Edward E. Hammerbeck	28May-15Jun67
Col Clifford J. Robichaud, Jr.	16Jun-10Jul67
Col Roy H. Thompson	11Jul-3Sep67
Col James R. Stockman	5Sep-31Dec67
G-4 Col John F. Mentzer	1Jan-28May67
Col Francis I. Fenton, Jr.	29May-31Dec67
G-5 Col Edward R. McCarthy	1Jan-31Jul67
Col Milton A. Hull	1Aug-31Dec67

Headquarters Battalion

CO LtCol Thomas J. Johnston, Jr.	1Jan-13Mar67
LtCol Charles R. Figard	14Mar-10Apr67
Col James R. Stockman	11Apr-17May67
Col John P. Lanigan	18May-3Jul67
Maj Homer L. Welch	4Jul-23Sep67
Col George E. Jerue	24Sep-31Dec67

3d Marines

CO John P. Lanigan	1Jan-17May67
Col James R. Stockman	18May-25Aug67
Col Joseph E. Lo Prete	26Aug-31Dec67

1st Battalion, 3d Marines*

**The 1st Battalion, 3d Marines joined the SLF on 8Feb67 and remained under its control for the rest of the year.*

CO LtCol Peter A. Wickwire	1Jan-7Feb67

2d Battalion, 3d Marines*

**The 2d Battalion, 3d Marines served as a SLF BLT from 13Apr67 until 30Nov67.*

CO LtCol Victor Ohanesian	1Jan-28Feb67
LtCol Earl R. Delong	1Mar-12Apr67
LtCol Henry Englisch	1-31Dec67

3d Battalion, 3d Marines

CO LtCol Earl R. Delong	1Jan-21Feb67
LtCol Gary Wilder	22Feb-30Jun67
LtCol Robert C. Needham	1Jul-31Dec67

4th Marines

CO Col Alexander D. Cereghino	1Jan-14Feb67
Col Roy H. Thompson	15Feb-9Jul67
Col William L. Dick	10Jul-31Dec67

1st Battalion, 4th Marines*

**The 1st Battalion, 4th Marines served with the SLF during the period 1Jan-1Apr67.*

CO LtCol Theodore J. Willis	2Apr-12May67*
Maj Rheaford C. Bell	13May-29Jul67
LtCol Edwin A. Deptula	30Jul-31Dec67

2d Battalion, 4th Marines*

**The 2d Battalion, 4th Marines arrived in Vietnam on 6Jan67.*

CO LtCol Arnold E. Bench	6Jan-15Jul67
Maj Wells L. Field, III	16-18Jul67
LtCol James W. Hammond, Jr.	19Jul-27Oct67
LtCol William Weise	28Oct-31Dec67

3d Battalion, 4th Marines

CO LtCol William J. Masterpool	1Jan-3Mar67
LtCol Wendell N. Vest	4Mar-21Jul67
LtCol Lee R. Bendell	22Jul-31Dec67

9th Marines

CO Col Robert M. Richards	1Jan-20Mar67
Col Robert M. Jenkins	21Mar-17May67
Col Edward E. Hammerbeck	18-28May67
LtCol Joseph J. Kelly	29May-3Jun67
Col George E. Jerue	4Jun-12Sep67
Col Richard B. Smith	13Sep-31Dec67

1st Battalion, 9th Marines*

**The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines served with the SLF during the period 1Jan-4Feb67.*

CO Maj James L. Day	5Feb-17Mar67
Maj Donald J. Fulham	18Mar-21Jun67
LtCol Richard J. Schening	22Jun-9Sep67
Maj Darrell C. Danielson	10-24Sep67
LtCol John F. Mitchell	25Sep-31Dec67

2d Battalion, 9th Marines

CO LtCol John J. Peeler	1Jan-4Jul67
LtCol William D. Kent	5Jul-12Sep67
LtCol John J. Peeler	13Sep-28Oct67
LtCol William M. Cryan	29Oct-31Dec67

3d Battalion, 9th Marines

**The battalion departed for Okinawa on 11Jan67 and returned to RVN on 28Feb67.*

CO LtCol Sherwood A. Brunnenmeyer	1-10Jan67
	1-4Mar67
Maj Samuel G. Faulk	5-8Mar67
LtCol James S. Wilson	9Mar-28May67
Maj Willard J. Woodring, Jr.	29May-8Sep67
Maj Gorton C. Cook	9Sep-31Dec67

12th Marines

CO Col Benjamin S. Read	1-22Jan67
Col William R. Morrison	23Jan-20Jul67
Col Edwin S. Schick, Jr.	21Jul-31Dec67

1st Battalion, 12th Marines

CO LtCol Lavern W. Larson	1Jan-15Feb67
LtCol Wayne H. Rice	16Feb-6Sep67
LtCol Charles H. Opfar	7Sep-31Dec67

2d Battalion, 12th Marines

CO LtCol Willis L. Gore	1Jan-27Apr67
LtCol Jack L. Norman	28Apr-8Sep67
Maj George C. Harris, Jr.	9-10Sep67
LtCol Robert Schueler	11Sep-2Dec67
LtCol Ronald P. Dunwell	3-31Dec67

3d Battalion, 12th Marines

CO LtCol Charles J. Kirchmann	1Jan-28Feb67
LtCol Jack L. Miles	1Mar-12Jul67
LtCol David B. Barker	13Jul-8Nov67
Maj Robert W. Green	9Nov-31Dec67

4th Battalion, 12th Marines

CO LtCol David G. Jones	1Jan-6Apr67
Maj Louis G. Snyder	7Apr-23Jul67
LtCol Joseph K. Gastrock, III	24Jul-31Oct67
Maj Rudolph W. Bolves	1Nov-31Dec67

3d Reconnaissance Battalion

CO LtCol Gary Wilder	1Jan-15Feb67
Maj Charles N. Dezer, III	16Feb-13Apr67
Maj James R.A. Rehfus	14Apr-2Aug67
Maj Rheaford C. Bell	3Aug-9Nov67
LtCol William D. Kent	11Nov-31Dec67

3d Antitank Battalion

CO LtCol Charles R. Casey	1Jan-29Aug67
LtCol Gene M. McCain	30Aug-20Nov67
Maj Robert M. Jordan	21Nov-31Dec67

3d Tank Battalion

CO LtCol William R. Corson	1Jan-14Feb67
LtCol Robert J. Norton	15Feb-23Mar67
Maj Eddis R. Larson	24-26Mar67
Maj Vernon L. Sylvester	27Mar-28Jun67
LtCol Duncan D. Chaplin, III	29Jun-31Dec67

3d Motor Transport Battalion

CO Maj Richard F. Armstrong	1Jan-6Sep67
Maj William O. Day	7Sep-6Oct67
Maj William H. Stewart, Jr.	7Oct-31Dec67

3d Engineer Battalion

CO Maj Joseph A. Shearman, Jr.	1-31Jan67
LtCol Garry M. Pearce, Jr.	1-17Feb67
LtCol James H. Reid, Jr.	18Feb-20Oct67
LtCol Robert C. McCutchan	21Oct-6Nov67
LtCol Jack W. Perrin	7Nov-31Dec67

3d Shore Party Battalion

CO LtCol Donald E. Marchette	1Jan-9May67
Maj Willard T. Layton, III	10May-31Jul67
LtCol James W. Quinn	1Aug-31Dec67

1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion

CO LtCol Albert R. Bowman, II	1Jan-15Jul67
Maj Austin C. Rishel	16-25Jul67
LtCol Edward R. Toner	26Jul-31Dec67

3d Medical Battalion

CO Cdr John T. Vincent (MC) USN	1Jan-22Aug67
Cdr Robert A. Brown (MC) USN	23Aug-31Dec67

9th Motor Transport Battalion

CO Maj Donald R. Tyer	1Jan-20Jun67
Maj David J. Maysilles	21Jun-3Sep67
Maj John R. Stanley	4Sep-31Dec67

11th Engineer Battalion

CO LtCol Ross L. Mulford	1Jan-10Jul67
LtCol Willard N. Christopher	11Jul-4Nov67
LtCol Victor A. Perry	5Nov-31Dec67

5th Marine Division Units in Vietnam

26th Marines*

**The regimental headquarters arrived 26Apr67.*

CO Col John J. Padley	26Apr-12Aug67
Col David E. Lownds	13Aug-31Dec67

1st Battalion, 26th Marines

CO LtCol Donald E. Newton	1Jan-3Jul67
LtCol James B. Wilkinson	4Jul-31Dec67

2d Battalion, 26th Marines

CO LtCol John M. Cummings	1Jan-10Apr67
LtCol Charles R. Figard	11Apr-18May67
LtCol William J. Masterpool	19May-26May67
LtCol Duncan D. Chaplin, III	27May-3Dec67
LtCol Francis J. Heath, Jr.	4-31Dec67

3d Battalion, 26th Marines

CO LtCol Garland T. Beyerle	1-17Jan67
LtCol Kurt L. Hoch	18Jan-20Aug67
LtCol Harry L. Alderman	21Aug-31Dec67

1st Battalion, 13th Marines*

**The battalion arrived in Vietnam on 23Jul67.*

CO Maj Thomas J. Coyle	23Jul-9Dec67
LtCol John A. Hennelly	10-31Dec67

Headquarters, Force Logistic Command*

**(Redesignated Headquarters, 1st Force Service Regiment/Force Logistic Command on 16Feb67. The staff for both units was the same.*

CG BGen James E. Herbold, Jr.	1Jan-5Oct67
BGen Harry C. Olson	6Oct-31Dec67
C/S Col William H. Cowper	1Jan-23May67
Col Lyle S. Stephenson	24May-1Aug67
Col Roy I. Wood, Jr.	2Aug-31Dec67
G-1 Maj Joe B. Noble	1-2Jan67
Maj Leonard E. Fuchs	3Jan-4May67
LtCol Stanley H. Rauh	5May-30Jun67
Capt Harold B. Jensen, Jr.	1-29Jul67
LtCol Minard P. Newton, Jr.	30Jul-31Dec67
G-2 LtCol Richard M. Taylor	1-30Jan67
LtCol Arthur R. Mooney	31Jan-11Jun67
Capt Joseph G. Vindich	12-28Jun67
Maj Clarence E. Watson, Jr.	29Jun-31Dec67
G-3 Col Lyle S. Stephenson	1Jan-23May67
LtCol Nolan J. Beat	24May-21Dec67
Col George K. Reid	22-31Dec67

G-4 Maj Gilbert C. Hazard	1Jan-30Jun67
Maj Richard D. Taber, Sr.	1-11Jul67
Maj William E. Snyder	12-19Jul67
LtCol Robert W. Howland	20Jul-31Dec67
G-5 Maj Leonard E. Fuchs	1Jan-6Oct67
Maj Thomas J. Smyth	7Oct-31Dec67

Force Logistic Command Subordinate Units*

**When the FLC changed its designation to FSR/FLC on 16Feb67, the orders also redesignated and restructured its subordinate units. For clarity, the command list shows, first, the integral FLC units through 15Feb67. The subsequent listing presents the new alignment and, where applicable, the previous unit designation.*

Force Logistic Support Group Alpha

CO Col Robert R. Weir	1Jan-6Feb67
Col George C. Schmidt, Jr.	7Feb-15Feb67

Force Logistic Support Group Bravo

CO Col Kermit H. Shelly	1Jan-15Feb67

Force Logistic Support Unit 2

CO LtCol Rollin F. Van Cantfort	1Jan-15Feb67

Headquarters and Service Battalion, 1st Force Service Regiment*

**Formed 16Feb67 with the arrival of 1st FSR at Da Nang.*

CO LtCol Kenneth D. Seibert	16Feb-27Jul67
LtCol William F. Koehnlein	28Jul-31Dec67

Supply Battalion, 1st Force Service Regiment

(Ex-Force Logistic Support Group Alpha)

CO Col George C. Schmidt, Jr.	16Feb-2Aug67
LtCol Jack O. Arford	3-13Aug67
Col Julian G. Bass, Jr.	14Aug-31Dec67

Maintenance Battalion, 1st Force Service Regiment*

**Established in Vietnam 16Feb67.*

CO LtCol Abie Gordon	16Feb-31Jul67
LtCol Jack M. Hermes	1Aug-31Dec67

3d Service Battalion, Force Logistic Support Group Alpha

(ex-Force Logistic Support Group 2)

CO LtCol Rollin F. Van Cantfort	16Feb-28Apr67
Col Stanley D. Low	29Apr-2Sep67
Col James R. Jones	3Sep-31Dec67

1st Service Battalion, Force Logistic Support Group Bravo

(ex-Force Logistic Support Group Bravo)

CO Col Kermit H. Shelly	16Feb-14Mar67
LtCol Esten C. Carper, Jr.	15-21Mar67
Col Stanley D. Low	22Mar-27Apr67
LtCol Esten C. Carper, Jr.	28Apr-24May67
LtCol Lynn A. Hall	25May-4Aug67
LtCol Richard J. Smith	5-30Aug67
LtCol John H. Maloney	31Aug-31Dec67

United Attached to Force Logistic Command*

**The 5th Communications Battalion was the only battalion-size unit attached to FLC for the entire year.*

5th Communications Battalion

CO Col Phillip K. Leesburg	1Jan-12Apr67
Maj William A. Read	13-20Apr67
LtCol Arnold G. Ziegler	1May-3Nov67
LtCol Donald L. Lindermuth	4Nov-31Dec67

1st Marine Aircraft Wing Headquarters

CG MajGen Louis B. Robertshaw	1Jan-2Jun67
MajGen Norman J. Anderson	3Jun-31Dec67
AWC BGen Robert G. Owens, Jr.	1Jan-1Apr67
BGen Robert P. Keller	2Apr-31Dec67
C/S Col Edward J. Doyle	1Jan-31Mar67
Col Herbert H. Long	1Apr-3Sep67
Col John S. Payne	4Sep-7Oct67
Col Franklin C. Thomas, Jr.	8Oct-31Dec67
G-1 Col Dan H. Johnson	1Jan-4Feb67
Col Jay W. Hubbard	5Feb-3May67
LtCol Harry D. Stott	4May-30Aug67
Col Robert Baird	31Aug-31Dec67
G-2 Col George H. Dodenhoff	1Jan-5Jul67
Col Robert D. Limberg	6Jul-31Dec67
G-3 Col Guy M. Cloud	1Jan-5Feb67
Col Douglas D. Petty, Jr.	6Feb-1Aug67
Col Joel E. Bonner, Jr.	2Aug-31Dec67
G-4 Col Herbert H. Long	1Jan-3Feb67
Col Franklin C. Thomas, Jr.	4Feb-6Jun67
Col Joel E. Bonner, Jr.	7Jun-1Aug67
Col Charles A. Armstrong, Jr.	2Aug-31Dec67
G-5 LtCol Ernest J. Berger	1Jan-9Jun67
LtCol Edward R. Rogal	10Jun-31Jul67*

**The G-5 Section came under Wing G-4 cognizance on 1Aug67.*

Marine Wing Headquarters Group 1 (MWHG-1)

CO Col William L. Atwater	1Jan-5Apr67
Col Kenneth T. Dykes	6Apr-14Aug67
LtCol Wesley H. Rodenberger	15Aug-17Oct67
Col Tolbert T. Gentry	18Oct-31Dec67

Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron 1 (H&HS-1)

CO Maj Carl C. Foster	1Jan-21Feb67
LtCol Stanley A. Herman	22Feb-9Jun67
Maj Thomas R. Maddock	10Jun-6Aug67
LtCol Merton R. Ives	7Aug-20Oct67
LtCol Albert W. Keller	21Oct-31Dec67

Marine Air Support Squadron 2 (MASS-2)*

**MASS-2 transferred to MACG-18, effective 1Sep67.*

CO LtCol Harry Hunter, Jr.	1Jan-15Jun67
LtCol Ben C. Rowe	16Jun-8Dec67
LtCol John M. Johnson, Jr.	9-31Dec67

Marine Air Support Squadron 3 (MASS-3)*

**MASS-3 transferred to MACG-18, effective 1Sep67.*

CO LtCol Donald L. Fenton	1Jan-29Mar67
LtCol Gordon D. McPherson	30Mar-14Sep67
LtCol Hugh R. Bumpas, Jr.	15Sep-31Dec67

Marine Air Control Squadron 4 (MACS-4)*

**MACS-4 arrived in Vietnam from CONUS on 4Jun67 and transferred to MACG-18 on 1Sep67.*

CO LtCol Conrad P. Buschmann	4Jun-20Dec67
LtCol William A. Cohn	21-31Dec67

Marine Air Control Squadron 7 (MACS-7)*

**The squadron returned to CONUS on 15Jul67.*

CO Maj Thomas K. Burk, Jr.	1Jan-15Jul67

1st Light Antiaircraft Missile Battalion (1st LAAM Bn)*

**The battalion transferred to MACG-18, effective 1Sep67.*

CO LtCol Merton P. Ives	1Jan-4Aug67
LtCol Marshall J. Treado	5Aug-31Dec67

2d Light Antiaircraft Missile Battalion (2d LAAM Bn)*

**The battalion transferred to MACG-18, effective 1Sep67.*

CO LtCol Thomas I. Gunning	1Jan-12Jun67
LtCol Stanley A. Herman	13Jun-31Dec67

Marine Wing Communications Squadron 1 (MWCS-1)*

**The squadron activated on 1Sep67 with the reorganization of MWHG-1.*

CO Maj David H. Tinius	1Sep-31Dec67

Marine Wing Facilities Squadron 1 (MWFS-1)*

**The squadron activated on 1Sep67 with the reorganization of MWHG-1.*

CO Maj Edward A. Laning	1Sep-31Dec67

Marine Wing Support Group 17 (MWSG-17)

CO Col Orlando S. Tosdal	1Jan-28Mar67
Col Victor A. Armstrong	29Mar-30Jun67
Col John E. Hansen	1Jul-31Dec67

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 17 (H&MS-17)

CO LtCol John J. Leogue	1Jan-9Aug67
LtCol Eugene V. Goldston	10Aug-31Dec67

Wing Equipment and Repair Squadron 17 (WERS-17)

CO LtCol Lawrence P. Hart	1Jan-11Apr67
LtCol John R. Hansford	12Apr-31Dec67

Marine Air Control Group 18 (MACG-18)*

**MACG-18 activated at Da Nang on 1Sep67. For other units assigned to MACG-18, see the command list for MASS-2, MASS-3, MACS-4, 1st LAAM Bn, and 2d LAAM Bn under MWHG-1.*

CO Col Lyle V. Tope	1Sep-31Dec67

Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron 18 (H&HS-18)*

**H&HS-18 activated with the formation of MACG-18 on 1Sep67.*

CO LtCol John M. Johnson, Jr.	1Sep-5Nov67
LtCol Paul B. Montague	6Nov-31Dec67

Marine Aircraft Group 11

CO Col Franklin C. Thomas, Jr.	1Jan-3Feb67
Col William F. Guss	4Feb-30Jun67
Col Arthur O. Schmagel	1Jul-29Dec67
Col LeRoy T. Frey	30-31Dec67

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 11 (H&MS-11)

CO LtCol Raymond A. Cameron	1Jan-30Apr67
LtCol Charles E. Dove	1May-31Aug67
LtCol Earl E. Jacobson	1Sep-3Nov67
LtCol Anthony L. Blair	4Nov-31Dec67

Marine Air Base Squadron 11 (MABS-11)

CO Maj Guy R. Campo	1-23Jan67
Maj Edgar J. Love	24Jan-30Apr67
LtCol Lonnie P. Baites	1May-11Jun67
Maj Stanley D. Cox	12Jun-9Oct67
LtCol John W. Irion, Jr.	13Oct-31Dec67

Marine Composite Reconnaissance Squadron 1 (VMCJ-1)

CO LtCol William B. Fleming	1Jan-30Apr67
Maj Edgar J. Love	1May-15Oct67
LtCol Robert W. Lewis	16Oct-31Dec67

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115 (VMFA-115)*

**The squadron left Vietnam for Iwakuni, Japan on 15Feb67.*

CO Maj Larry Vandeusen	1-23Jan67
Maj Guy R. Campo	24-15Feb67

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 122 (VMFA-122)*

**The squadron joined MAG-11 from CONUS on 1Sep67.*

CO LtCol John M. Verdi	1Sep-31Dec67

Marine All-Weather Attack Squadron 242 (VMA (AW)-242)

CO LtCol Howard Wolf	1Jan-30Apr67
LtCol Earl E. Jacobson, Jr.	1May-17Aug67
LtCol Lewis H. Abrams	18Aug-26Nov67
Maj Arthur W. D. Lavigne	27Nov-31Dec67

Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron 232 (VMF (AW)-232)

**The squadron departed for CONUS 31Aug67.*

CO LtCol Nicholas M. Trapnell, Jr.	1Jan-22Mar67
Maj Melvin H. Sautter	23Mar-31Aug67

Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron 235 (VMF (AW)-235)*

**The squadron arrived in Vietnam on 15Feb67.*

CO LtCol Edward R. Rogal	15Feb-31May67
LtCol Wallace Wessel	1Jun-15Oct67
LtCol Lee E. Blanchard	16Oct-28Dec67
LtCol Carl R. Lundquist	29-31Dec67

Marine Aircraft Group 12 (MAG-12)

CO Col Jay W. Hubbard	1Jan-15Feb67
Col Baylor P. Gibson, Jr.	16Feb-31Aug67
Col Dean Wilker	1Sep-31Dec67

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 12 (H&MS-12)

CO LtCol Paul G. McMahon	1Jan-31Mar67
Maj Eugene Lichtenwalter	1Apr-28May67
LtCol Robert E. Miller	29May-9Nov67
LtCol Dan C. Alexander	10Nov-31Dec67

Marine Air Base Squadron 12 (MABS-12)

CO LtCol Ralph D. Wallace	1Jan-2May67
Maj Forest G. Dawson	3May-2Sep67
LtCol Leo J. Leblanc, Jr.	3Sep-31Dec67

Marine Attack Squadron 121 (VMA-121)*

**During the period 3Jun-5Sep67, the squadron was at Iwakuni, Japan undergoing rehabilitation.*

CO LtCol Donald R. Stiver	1Jan-16Mar67
Maj Forest G. Dawson	17-30Mar67
LtCol James H. McGee	31Mar-24Sep67
Maj Richard J. Kern	25Sep-31Dec67

Marine Attack Squadron 211 (VMA-211)*

**The squadron departed from Vietnam on 3Sep67 for rehabilitation at MCAF Iwakuni, Japan and returned to Vietnam on 1Dec67.*

CO LtCol William G. McCool	1Jan-25Feb67
LtCol Knowlton P. Rice	26Feb-30Jun67
Maj Gerit L. Fenenga	1Jul-25Aug67
LtCol Francis H. Thurston	26Aug-31Dec67

Marine Attack Squadron 214 (VMA-214)*

**The squadron departed for CONUS 3Apr67.*

CO Maj Richard E. Hemingway	1Jan-3Apr67

Marine Attack Squadron 223 (VMA-223)*

**The squadron arrived from Iwakuni, Japan on 2Mar67 and returned to Iwakuni for rehabilitation on 3Dec67.*

CO LtCol Leonard C. Taft	2-25Mar67
LtCol Claude E. Deering, Jr.	26Mar-26Sep67
LtCol Arthur W. Anthony	27Sep-31Dec67

Marine Attack Squadron 311 (VMA-311)*

**During the period 1Mar-3Jun67 the squadron was at MCAS, Iwakuni, Japan for rehabilitation.*

CO LtCol Roger A. Morris	1Jan-17Jun67
LtCol Eugene Lichtenwalter	8Jun-25Aug67
LtCol Edgar K. Jacks	26Aug-21Sep67
LtCol Richard B. Taber	22Sep-31Dec67

Marine All-Weather Attack Squadron 533 (VMA [AW]-533)

**VMA (AW)-533 arrived from CONUS on 1Apr67.*

CO LtCol William P. Brown	1Apr-1Oct67
LtCol William H. Fitch	2Oct-31Dec67

Marine Air Group 13 (MAG-13)

CO Col Douglas D. Petty, Jr.	1Jan-5Feb67
Col Dan H. Johnson	6Feb-7Aug67
Col Edward F. LeFaivre	8Aug-31Dec67

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 13 (H&MS-13)

CO LtCol Walter E. Domina	1Jan-30Mar67
LtCol Lynn F. Williams	1Apr-19Jul67
LtCol James E. Miller	20Jul-22Sep67
LtCol Paul Sigmund	23Sep-31Dec67

Marine Air Base Squadron 13 (MABS-13)

CO LtCol Owen L. Owens	1-25Jan67
LtCol David W. Morrill	26Jan-23Mar67
LtCol Kenny C. Palmer	24Mar-27Jul67
LtCol Richard E. Carey	28Jul-5Oct67
LtCol Leroy A. Madera	6Oct-31Dec67

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115 (VMFA-115)*

**The squadron arrived in Vietnam from MCAS, Iwakuni, Japan on 15May67.*

CO LtCol Guy R. Campo	15May-27Jul67
LtCol Kenny C. Palmer	28Jul-5Oct67
LtCol Richard E. Carey	6Oct-31Dec67

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 (VMFA-314)*

**During the period 16Aug-16Nov67 the squadron was at MCAS, Iwakuni, Japan for rehabilitation.*

CO Maj William H. Heintz	1Jan-31May67
LtCol Frank D. Topley	1Jun-31Dec67

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 323 (VMFA-323)*

**The squadron departed from Vietnam on 15May67 for MCAS, Iwakuni, Japan for a rehabilitation period; it returned to Vietnam on 15Aug67.*

CO LtCol Aubrey W. Talbert	1-29Jan67
LtCol Gordon H. Keller, Jr.	30Jun-14Jul67
LtCol Edison W. Miller	15Jul-13Oct67
LtCol Harry T. Hagaman	14Oct-31Dec67

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 542 (VMFA-542)

CO LtCol Donald L. May	1Jan-2Feb67
LtCol Frederick L. Farrell, Jr.	3Feb-18Jul67
LtCol John Hubner	19Jul-14Sep67
LtCol Richard C. Marsh	15Sep-31Dec67

Marine Aircraft Group 16 (MAG-16)

CO Col Frank M. Hepler	1Jan-21Apr67
Col Samuel F. Martin	22Apr-4Sep67
Col Edwin O. Reed	5Sep-31Dec67

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 16 (H&MS 16)

CO LtCol Lucius O. Davis	1-31Jan67
LtCol Walter C. Kelly	1Feb-21Apr67
LtCol William E. Deeds	22Apr-20Jul67
Maj Glenn A. Stephens	21Jul-30Sep67
LtCol Lawrence J. Flanagan	1Oct-31Dec67

Marine Air Base Squadron 16 (MABS-16)

CO LtCol Rodney D. McKitrick	1-4Jan67
LtCol Charles E. Wydner, Jr.	5Jan-30Sep67
LtCol Frederick M. Kleppsattel, Jr.	1-25Oct67
LtCol Samuel J. Fulton	26Oct-31Dec67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM-163)*

**The squadron tranferred to the SLF on 9Sep67.*

CO LtCol Rocco D. Bianchi	1Jan-26Apr67
LtCol Walter C. Kelly	27Apr-8Sep67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 164 (HMM-164)*

**During the period 3Apr-13Jul67 the squadron served with the SLF; it transferred to MAG-36 effective 16Oct67.*

CO LTCol Warren C. Watson	1Jan-14Feb67
LtCol Rodney D. McKitrick	15Feb-24Jul67
LtCol Manning T. Jannell	25Jul-16Sep67
LtCol Robert F. Rick	17Sep-15Oct67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263 (HMM-263)*

**On 15Feb67 the squadron returned to MCAS, Futema, Okinawa to assist in the CH-46 repair program.*

CO LtCol Leslie L. Darbyshire	1Jan-15Feb67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 265 (HMM-265)*

**During the period 12Jul-23Aug67 the squadron served with the SLF; on 23Aug67 it returned to MAG-36 and on 16Oct67 transferred back to MAG-16.*

CO Maj Frank B. Ellis	1-31Jan67
LtCol Clifford D. Corn	1Feb-2Apr67
LtCol Robert L. Gover, Jr.	3Apr-18Jun67
LtCol William R. Beeler	29Jun-31Dec67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 361 (HMM-361)*

**The squadron arrived from Okinawa on 16Feb67; on 16Nov67 it transferred to the SLF.*

CO LtCol McDonald D. Tweed	16-28Feb67
LtCol Earl W. Traut	1Mar-23May67
Maj Homer A. Bruce	24May-17Oct67
LtCol Daniel M. Wilson	18Oct-15Nov67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 362 (HMM-362)*

**The squadron joined MAG-16 from the SLF on 8Sep67 and on 15Oct67 it transferred to MAG-36.*

CO LtCol Nick J. Kapetan	8-13Sep67
LtCol Richard W. Cline	14Sep-15Oct67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 363 (HMM-363)*

**The squadron joined MAG-13 from the SLF on 4Apr67.*

CO Maj Marvin E. Day	4Apr-10Jul67
LtCol Robert Lewis, Jr.	11Jul-2Dec67
LtCol Frankie E. Allgood	3-31Dec67

Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463 (HMH-463)*

**The major portion of the squadron arrived in Vietnam from CONUS on 23May67, but a detachment had served with MAG-16 since 26Dec66.*

CO LtCol Samuel G. Beal	23May-5Oct67
LtCol Joseph L. Sadowski	6Oct-31Dec67

Marine Observation Squadron 2 (VMO-2)

CO LtCol William F. Harrell	1Jan-14Jul67
Maj Morris G. Robbins	14-23Jul67
LtCol Philip M. Crosswait	24Jul-10Dec67
LtCol Morris G. Robbins	11-31Dec67

Marine Observation Squadron 3 (VMO-3)*

**The squadron transferred effective 16Oct67.*

CO Maj Kyle W. Townsend	1Jan-17Aug67
LtCol Glenn R. Hunter	18Aug-15Oct67

Marine Air Group 36 (MAG-36)

CO Col Victor A. Armstrong	1Jan-28Mar67
Col Orlando S. Tosdal	29Mar-1Jul67
Col Frank E. Wilson	2Jul-31Dec67

Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron 36 (H&HS-36)

CO LtCol William C. Carlson	1Jan-14Aug67
Maj Harold E. Roth	15Aug-13Oct67
LtCol Richard G. Courtney	14Oct-31Dec67

Marine Air Base Squadron 36 (MABS-36)

CO LtCol Joseph A. Nelson	1Jan-26Mar67
LtCol Thomas E. Fish	27Mar67-30Apr67
LtCol William L. Walker	1May-3Sep67
Maj Claude E. Hendrix	4Sep-5Oct67
LtCol Melvin J. Sternberg	6Oct-15Dec67
Maj James C. Robinson	16-31Dec67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM-163)*

**The squadron joined MAG-36 from the SLF on 30Oct67.*

CO Maj Frederick A. Rueckel	30Oct-19Nov67
LtCol Louis W. Schwindt	20Nov-31Dec67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 164 (HMM-164)*

**The squadron transferred from MAG-16 to MAG-36 on 16Oct67.*

CO LtCol Robert F. Rick	16Oct-31Dec67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 (HMM-165)

CO LtCol William W. Eldridge, Jr.	1Jan-30Apr67
LtCol John A. Reames	1May-31Oct67
LtCol Richard E. Romine	1Nov-31Dec67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262 (HMM-262)*

**The squadron transferred to the SLF on 23Aug67.*

CO LtCol Ural W. Shadrick	1Jan-15Jun67
Maj Gregory A. Corliss	16Jun-23Aug67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263 (HMM-263)*

**The squadron joined MAG-36 from the SLF on 13Jun67 and departed from Vietnam for CONUS on 31Oct67.*

CO LtCol Edward K. Kirby	13Jun-9Jul67
Maj James C. Robinson	10Jul-31Oct67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 265 (HMM-265)*

**The squadron joined MAG-36 from the SLF on 23Aug67 and transferred to MAG-16 on 16Oct67.*

CO LtCol William R. Beeler	23Aug-16Oct67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 362 (HMM-362)*

**The squadron joined MAG-36 from the SLF on 19Jan67. On 8Sep67 it transferred to MAG-16, but on 16Oct67 it rejoined MAG-36.*

CO LtCol Marshall B. Armstrong	19Jan-15Mar67
LtCol Nick J. Kapetan	16Mar-13Sep67
LtCol Richard W. Cline	14Sep-23Dec67
Maj Walter H. Shaver	24-31Dec67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 363 (HMM-363)*

**The squadron transfered to the SLF on 19Jan67 as a replacement for HMM-362.*

CO LtCol Kenneth E. Huntington	1-19Jan67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364 (HMM-364)*

**The advance party of HMM-364 arrived in Vietnam on 29Oct67; the rest of the squadron arrived during November.*

CO LtCol Louis A. Gulling	29Oct-31Dec67

Marine Observation Squadron 3 (VMO-3)*

**The squadron joined MAG-36 from MAG-16 on 16Oct67.*

CO LtCol Glenn R. Hunter	16Oct-31Dec67

Marine Observation Squadron 6 (VMO-6)

CO LtCol William R. Maloney	1Jan-27Mar67
LtCol Joseph A. Nelson	28Mar-16Sep67
LtCol William J. White	17Sep-31Dec67

9th Marine Amphibious Brigade/Task Force 79*

**The 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade (9th MAB) activated on 1 March 1966 and assumed responsibility for Task Force 79 (TF 79) duties on that date. On 15Apr66, 9th MAB assumed responsibility for tactical Marine aviation and ground units in the Western Pacific which were not in Vietnam.*

9th Marine Amphibious Brigade Headquarters

CG BGen Michael P. Ryan	1-4Jan67
BGen Louis G. Metzger	4Jan-18May67
BGen Jacob E. Glick	19May-31Dec67
C/S Col Richard R. Amerine	1Jan-16Sep67
Col Elton Mueller	17-27Sep67
Col James A. Etheridge	28Sep-31Dec67
G-1 LtCol Edward V. Easter	1Jan-10Sep67
Maj Patrick E. Duffy	11-24Sep67
LtCol George H. Benskin, Jr.	25Sep-31Dec67
G-2 Maj James C. Hitz	1Jan-21Feb67
Capt Eugene B. Burleson, Jr.	22-27Feb67
Maj Clark G. Henry	28Feb-25Jul67
Capt Eugene B. Burleson, Jr.	26Jul-28Aug67
Capt Hugh S. Jolley	29Aug67
Maj James V. Knapp	30Aug-31Dec67
G-3 LtCol James G. Dionisopoulos	1Jan-25Jun67
LtCol William L. Smith	26Jun-12Jul67
Col David E. Lownds	13-24Jul67
LtCol Bruce F. Meyers	25Jul-31Dec67
G-4 Col Elton Mueller	1Jan-8Sep67
Col Warren A. Butcher	9Sep-31DEc67

Regimental Landing Team 26 (RLT-26)/Task Force 79.2*

**On 26Apr67, RLT-26 Headquarters became RLT-26 (Forward) when it deployed to Vietnam, leaving RLT-26 (Rear) on Okinawa.*

CO Col John J. Padley	1Jan-11Aug67
Col David E. Lownds	12Aug-31Dec67

Regimental Landing Team 26 (Rear) (RLT-26 [Rear])*

**During the year 1967, RLT-26 and later RLT-26 (Rear) acted as the command headquarters for battalion and battalion landing teams as they arrived in Vietnam for training, rehabilitation, and deployment. All of the regiment's integral battalions had deployed in Vietnam, consequently the listing of battalions which*

follows presents only the periods when the individual battalions came under 26th Marines' control. They appear in the sequence of their arrival during the year, rather than in any numerical sequence.

CO LtCol Joseph K. Gastrock, III 26Apr-15Jul67
LtCol Richard D. Alexander 16Jul-31Dec67

1st Battalion, 13th Marines*

**The battalion arrived on Okinawa on 20Aug66.*

CO Maj Robert L. Christian, Jr. 1Jan-12May67
Maj Alva F. Thompson, Jr. 13May-15Jun67
Maj Thomas J. Coyle 16Jun-14Dec67
LtCol John A. Hennelly 15-31Dec67

1st Battalion, 4th Marines*

**The battalion became BLT 1/4 for planning on 13Jan67, transferred to the SLF on 27Jan67 and departed from Okinawa on 28Jan67.*

CO LtCol Jack Westerman 1-26Jan67

Battalion Landing Team 3/9 (BLT 3/9)*

**The BLT arrived from Vietnam on 14Jan67, deactivated as a BLT on 18Jan67, but rejoined the SLF on 22Feb67, and sailed from Okinawa on 24Feb67.*

CO LtCol Sherwood A. Brunnenmeyer 14Jan-22Feb67

Battalion Landing Team 1/9 (BLT 1/9)*

**The battalion arrived from Vietnam on 24Jan67 and departed for Vietnam on 31Jan67.*

CO Maj James L. Day 24-31Jan67

Battalion Landing Team 1/3 (BLT 1/3)*

**The BLT arrived from Vietnam on 13Feb67 and departed as part of the SLF on 4Apr67.*

CO LtCol Peter A. Wickwire 13Feb-4Apr67

Battalion Landing Team 2/3 (BLT 2/3)*

**The BLT arrived from Vietnam on 13Mar67 and departed as part of the SLF on 14Apr67.*

CO LtCol Earl R. Delong 13Mar-14Apr67

Battalion Landing Team 3/4 (BLT 3/4)*

**The BLT arrived from Vietnam on 11Apr67 and, upon receipt of orders recalling it to Vietnam, departed Okinawa on 16May67.*

CO LtCol Wendell N. Vest 11Apr-16May67

Marine Air Group 15 (MAG-15)/Task Group 79.3*

**Marine Air Group 15, stationed at MCAS, Iwakuni, Japan served as a command and control headquarters for Marine aviation units requiring repair, rehabilitation, and training between Vietnam deployments. The following listing of squadrons both resident and transient, appears in order of arrival during the year 1967.*

CO Col Charles Kimak 1Jan-31Aug67
LtCol David O. Takala 1-27Sep67
Col Wilbur C. Kellogg, Jr. 28-30Sep67
LtCol David O. Takala 1-31Oct67
Col Wilbur C. Kellogg 1Nov-31Dec67

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 15 (H&MS-15)

CO LtCol James McDaniel 1Jan-22Aug67
LtCol Herman L. Mixon 23Aug-31Dec67

Marine Air Base Squadron 15 (MABS-15)

CO LtCol George H. Albers 1Jan-6Sep67
LtCol Clement C. J. Chamberlain 7Sep-31Dec67

Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 152 (VMGR-152)

CO LtCol John Urell 1Jan-15May67
LtCol Royce M. Williams 16May-31Dec67

Marine Air Control Squadron 6 (MACS-6)

CO Maj William K. Hutchings 1Jan-30Mar67
Maj Rollin E. Hippler 31Mar-31Dec67

Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron 235 (VMF[AW]-235)*

**The squadron transferred to MAG-11 on 14Feb67.*

CO LtCol Edward R. Rogal 1Jan-14Feb67

Marine Attack Squadron 223 (VMA-223)*

**VMA-223 transferred to MAG-12, effective 1Mar67 and returned to MAG-15 after relief by VMA-221 on 1Dec67.*

CO LtCol Leonard C. Taft 1Jan-28Feb67
LtCol Arthur W. Anthony, Jr 1-31Dec67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 361 (HMM-361)*

**The squadron transferred to MAG-16 on 17Feb67.*

CO LtCol McDonald D. Tweed 1Jan-17Feb67

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115 (VMFA-115)*

**The squadron departed MAG-11 in Vietnam on 15Feb67 and transferred to MAG-13 on 14May67.*

CO Maj Guy R. Campo 15Feb-13May67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263 (HMM-263)*

**The squadron arrived from MAG-16 on 20Feb67 and departed to the SLF on 3Apr67.*

CO LtCol Edward K. Kirby 20Feb-3Apr67

Marine Attack Squadron 311 (VMA-311)*

**The squadron arrived from MAG-12 on 1Mar67 and returned to MAG-12 on 1Jun67.*

CO LtCol Roger A. Morris 1Mar-1Jun67

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 323 (VMA-323)*

**The squadron arrived from MAG-13 on 16May67 and returned to MAG-13 on 17Aug67.*

CO LtCol Gordon H. Keller, Jr 16May-15Jul67
LtCol Edison W. Miller 16Jul-17Aug67

Marine Attack Squadron 121 (VMA-121)*

**The squadron was joined from MAG-12 on 1Jun67 and returned to MAG-12 on 5Sep67.*

CO LtCol James H. McGee 1Jun-5Sep67

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 (VMFA-314)*

**The squadron arrived from MAG-13 on 18Aug67 and returned to MAG-13 on 15Nov67.*

CO LtCol Frank D. Topley 18Aug-15Nov67

Marine Attack Squadron 211 (VMA-211)*

**The squadron joined from MAG-12 on 6Sep67 and was returned to MAG-12 on 1Dec67.*

CO LtCol Francis H. Thurston 6Sep-1Dec67

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 542 (VMFA-542)*

**The squadron joined from MAG-13 on 15Nov67.*

CO LtCol Richard C. Marsh 15Nov-31Dec67

Special Landing Force Alpha (SLF Alpha)/TG 79.4)

Activated 1Mar67, SLF Alpha was in fact junior to its companion SLF, Bravo, which as Task Group 79.5, formed in 1966.

CO Col James A. Gallo 1Mar-11Jun67
Col John A. Conway 12Jun-31Dec67

Special Landing Force Alpha Battalion Landing Team
Battalion Landing Team (BLT 1/3)*

**BLT 1/3 joined SLF Alpha on 3Apr67. During the period 11-27Aug67, BLT 1/3 served under the operational control of Task Force X-Ray in Vietnam.*

CO LtCol Peter A. Wickwire 3Apr-15Jul67
LtCol Alfred I. Thomas 16Jul-17Nov
LtCol Richard W. Goodale 10Nov-31Dec67

Special Landing Force Alpha Helicopter Squadron*
Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263 (HMM-263)

**HMM-263 joined SLF Alpha on 3Apr67, the same date as BLT 1/3. During the periods 13-27Jun67 and 31Oct-14Nov67, no squadron served with SLF Alpha, and during the period 16-27Aug67 HMM-362 reverted to the operational control of 1st MAW.*

CO LtCol Edward K. Kirby 3Apr-12Jun67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 362 (HMM-362)

CO LtCol Nick J. Kapetan 28Jul-7Sep67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM-163

CO LtCol Walter C. Kelly 8-22Sep67
Maj Fredrick A. Rueckel 23Sep-30Oct67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 361 (HMM-361)

CO LtCol Daniel M. Wilson 15Nov-31Dec67

Special Landing Force Bravo (SLF Bravo)/TG 79.5*

**The first special landing force, Task Group 79.5 became Special Landing Force Bravo on 1Mar67.*

CO Col Harry D. Wortman 1Jan-6Jul67
Col James G. Dionisopoulos 7Jul-5Nov67
Col Maynard W. Schmidt 6Nov-31Dec67

Special Landing Force Bravo Battalion Landing Team
Battalion Landing Team 1/9 (BLT 1/9)

CO Maj James L. Day 1-25Jan67

Battalion Landing Team 1/4 (BLT 1/4)

CO LtCol Jack Westerman 26Jan-28Mar67
LtCol Theodore J. Willis 29Mar-1Apr67

Battalion Landing Team 2/3 (BLT 2/3)*

**Effective 2Apr67, BLT 1/4 transferred to the 3d Marine Division. Its replacement BLT 2/3, activated on Okinawa on 3Apr67 but did not embark until the 13th.*

CO LtCol Earl R. Delong 3Apr-21May67
Maj Wendell O. Beard 22May-12Jul67
Maj John R. Broujos 13-16Jul67
LtCol Emil W. Herich 17Jul-22Aug67
Maj Wendell O. Beard 23Aug-9Oct67
LtCol Henry Englisch 10Oct-31Dec67

Battalion Landing Team 3/1 (BLT 3/1)

CO LtCol Max McQuown 1-31Dec67

Special Landing Force Bravo Helicopter Squadrons
Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 362 (HMM-362)

CO LtCol Marshall B. Armstrong 1-18Jan67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 363 (HMM-363)

CO LtCol Kenneth E. Huntington 19Jan-3Mar67
Maj Marvin E. Day 4Mar-3Apr67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 164 (HMM-164)

CO LtCol Rodney D. McKitrick 4Apr-12Jul67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 265 (HMM-265)

CO LtCol William R. Beeler 12Jul-22Aug67

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262 (HMM-262)

CO Maj Gregory A. Corliss	23Aug-11Oct67
CO Maj John W. Alber	12Oct-23Nov67
Maj David L. Althoff	24Nov-31Dec67

Detachment Alpha, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262*

**Detachment Alpha, HMM-262 formed when the 1st MAW grounded the CH-46s. Used only for emergency operations, the detachment remained with the ARG shipping until correction of the CH-46 structural problems.*

Marine Advisory Unit, Naval Advisory Group

SMA Col Nels E. Anderson	1Jan-23Jul67
Col Richard L. Michael, Jr.	24Jul-31Dec67

Appendix B

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

A-1E—Douglas Skyraider, a propeller-driven, single-engine, attack aircraft.

A-4—Douglas Skyhawk, a single-seat, jet attack aircraft in service on board carriers of the U.S. Navy and with land-based Marine attack squadrons.

A-6A—Grumman Intruder, a twin-jet, twin-seat, attack aircraft specifically designed to deliver weapons on targets completely obscured by weather or darkness.

AAR—After action report.

AC-47—Douglas C-47 Skytrain, twin-engine fixed-wing transport modified with 7.62mm miniguns and used as a gunship.

ADC—Assistant division commander.

AdminO—Administrative officer.

Adv—Advanced.

AGC—Amphibious command ship. The current designation is LCC.

AK-47—Russian-made Kalashnikov gas-operated 7.62mm automatic rifle, with an effective range of 400 meters. It was the standard rifle of the North Vietnamese Army.

AKA—Attack cargo ship, a naval ship designed to transport combat-loaded cargo in an assault landing. LKA is the current designation.

ANGLICO—Air and naval gunfire liaison company, an organization composed of Marine and Navy personnel specially qualified for control of naval gunfire and close air support. ANGLICO personnel normally provided this service while attached to U.S. Army, Korean, and ARVN units.

AOA—Amphibious objective area, a defined geographical area within which is located the area or areas to be captured by the amphibious task force.

APA—Attack transport ship, a naval ship, designed for combat loading elements of a battalion landing team. LPA is the current designation.

APC—Armored personnel carrier.

Arc Light—The codename for B-52 bombing missions in South Vietnam.

ARG—Amphibious ready group.

Arty—Artillery.

ARVN—Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam).

ASRT—Air support radar team, a subordinate operational component of a tactical air control system which provides ground controlled precision flight path guidance and weapons release for attack aircraft.

B-3 Front—North Vietnamese military command established in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam to control military operations in Kontum, Dar Loc, and Pleiku Provinces.

B-52—Boeing Stratofortress, U.S. Air Force eight-engine, swept-wing, heavy jet bomber.

BGen—Brigadier general.

BLT—Battalion landing team.

Bn—Battalion.

Brig—Brigade.

C-117D—Douglas Skytrain, a twin-engine transport aircraft. The C-117D was an improved version of the C-47, the military version of the DC-3.

C-130—Lockheed Hercules, a four-engine turboprop transport aircraft.

CAAR—Combat after action report.

Capt—Captain.

CAS—Close air support.

Cdr—Commander.

CG—Commanding general.

CH-37—Sikorsky twin-engine, heavy transport helicopter which carries three crew members and 20 passengers.

CH-46—Boeing Vertol Sea Knight, a twin-turbine, tandem-rotor transport helicopter, designed to carry a four-man crew and 17 combat-loaded troops.

CH-53—Sikorsky Sea Stallion, a single-rotor, heavy transport helicopter powered by two shaft-turbine engines with an average payload of 12,800 pounds. Carries crew of three and 38 combat-loaded troops.

CIDG—Civilian Irregular Defense Group, South Vietnamese paramilitary force, composed largely of Montagnards, the nomadic tribesmen who populate the South Vietnamese highlands, and advised by the U.S. Army Special Forces.

CinCPac—Commander in Chief, Pacific.

CinCPacFlt—Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet.

Class (I-V)—Categories of military supplies, e.g., Class I, rations; Class III, POL; Class V, Ammunition.

CMC—Commandant of the Marine Corps.

CMH—Center of Military History, Department of the Army.

CNO—Chief of Naval Operations.

CO—Commanding officer.

Col—Colonel.

CORDS—Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, the agency organized under MACV in May 1967 and charged with coordinating U.S. and Vietnamese pacification efforts.

Combined action program—A Marine pacification program which integrated a Marine infantry squad with a South Vietnamese Popular Forces platoon in a Vietnamese village.

ComdC—Command chronology.

ComUSMACV—Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

COSVN—Central Office of South Vietnam, the nominal Communist military and political headquarters in South Vietnam.

County Fair—A sophisticated cordon and search operation in a particular hamlet or village by South Vietnamese troops, police, local officials, and U.S. Marines in an attempt to screen and register the local inhabitants.
CP—Command post.
CRC—Control and reporting center, an element of the U.S. Air Force tactical air control system, subordinate to the Tactical Air Control Center, which conducted radar and warning operations.
CTZ—Corps Tactical Zone.

DASC—Direct air support center—A subordinate operational component of the Marine air control system designed for control of close air support and other direct air support operations.
D-Day—Day scheduled for the beginning of an operation.
DD—Navy Destroyer.
DMZ—Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Vietnam.
DRV—Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam).
Dtd—Dated.
Div—Division.
DOD—Department of Defense.
Duster—The nickname for the U.S. Army's tracked vehicle, the M-42, which mounted dual 40-mm automatic weapons.
EA-6A—The electronic-countermeasures version of the A-6A Intruder.
ECM—Electronic countermeasures, a major subdivision of electronic warfare involving actions against enemy electronic equipment or to exploit the enemy's use of electromagnetic radiations from such equipment.
EF-10B—An ECM modified version of the Navy F-3D Skynight, a twin-engine jet night-fighter of Korean War vintage.
ELINT—Electronic intelligence, the intelligence information gained by monitoring radiations from enemy electronic equipment.
Engr—Engineer.

F-4B—McDonnell Phantom II, a twin-engined, two-seat, long-range, all-weather jet interceptor and attack bomber.
FAC (A)—Forward air controller (Airborne).
FFV—Field Force, Vietnam I and II, U.S. Army commands in II and III Corps areas of South Vietnam.
FLC—Force Logistic Command.
FLSG—Force logistic support group.
FLSU—Force logistic support unit.
FMFPac—Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.
FO—Forward observer.
FSCC—Fire support coordination center, a single location involved in the coordination of all forms of fire support.
FSR—Force service regiment.
Fwd—Forward.

G—Refers to staff positions on a general staff, e. g., G-1 would refer to the staff member responsible for personnel; G-2 intelligence; G-3 operations; G-4 logistics, and G-5 civil affairs.
Gen—General.
Golden Fleece—Marine rice harvest protection operation.
Grenade Launcher, M79—U.S.-built, single-shot, breech-loaded shoulder weapon which fires 40mm projectiles and weighs approximately 6.5 pounds when loaded; it has a sustained rate of aimed fire of five-seven rounds per minute and an effective range of 375 meters.
Gun, 175mm, M107—U.S.-built, self-propelled gun which weighs 62,000 pounds and fires a 147-pound projectile to a maximum range of 32,800 meters. Maximum rate of fire is one round every two minutes.
Gun, 155mm, M53—U.S.-built, medium, self-propelled gun, with a 23,300 meter range, and weighing 96,000 pounds. It has a sustained rate of fire of one round every two minutes.
GVN—Government of Vietnam (South Vietnam).

H&I fires—Harassing and interdiction fires.
H&S Co—Headquarters and service company.
HAWK—A mobile, surface-to-air guided missile, designed to defend against low-flying enemy aircraft and short range missiles.
HE—High explosive.
H-Hour—The specific hour an operation begins.
HistBr, G-3Div, HQMC—Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, the Vietnam-era predecessor of the History and Museums Division.
HLZ—Helicopter landing zone.
HMM—Marine medium helicopter squadron.
Howitzer, 8-inch (M55)—U.S.-Built, self-propelled, heavy-artillery piece with a maximum range of 16,900 meters and a rate of fire of one round every two minutes.
Howitzer, 105mm, M101A1—U.S.-built, towed, general purpose light artillery piece with a maximum range of 11,000 meters and maximum rate of fire of four rounds per minute.
Howitzer, 155mm, M-114A towed and M-109 self-propelled—U.S.-built medium artillery with a maximum range of 15,080 meters and a maximum rate of fire of 3 rounds per minute. Marines employed both models in Vietnam. The newer and heavier self-propelled M109 was largely road bound, while the lighter, towed M114A could be moved either by truck or by helicopter.
Howtar—A 4.2-inch (107mm) mortar tube mounted on a 75mm pack howitzer frame.
"Huey"—Popular name for UH-1 series of helicopters.

ICC—International Control Commission, established by the Geneva Accords of 1954 to supervise the truce ending the First Indochina War between the French and the Viet Minh and resulting in the partition of Vietnam at the 17th Parallel. The members of the Commission were from Canada, India, and Poland.
ICCC—I Corps Coordinating Council, consisting of U.S. and Vietnamese officials in I Corps who coordinated the civilian assistance program in I Corps.
I Corps—The military and administrative subdivision which includes the five northern provinces of South Vietnam.

J—The designations for members of a joint staff which includes members of several services comprising the command, e.g., J-1 would refer to the staff member responsible for personnel; J-2 intelligence; J-3 operations; J-4 logistic and J-5 civil affairs.
JCS—Joint Chiefs of Staff (U.S.).
JGS—Joint General Staff (South Vietnamese).
JTD—Joint table of distribution.

KANZUS—A proposed international brigade to man defenses along the DMZ; the acronym stands for Korean, Australian, New Zealand, and United States.

KC-130—The in-flight refueling tanker configuration of the C-130 Lockheed Hercules.

KIA—Killed-in-action.

Kit Carson Scout—Viet Cong defectors recruited by Marines to serve as scouts, interpreters, and intelligence agents.

L-Hour—In planned helicopter operations, it is the specific hour the helicopters land in the landing zone.

LAAM Bn—Light antiaircraft missile battalion.

LCM—Landing craft mechanized, designed to land tanks, trucks, and trailers directly onto the beach.

LCVP—Landing craft, vehicle, personnel, a small craft with a bow ramp used to transport assault troops and light vehicles to the beach.

LOI—Letter of Instruction.

LPD—Amphibious transport, dock, a ship designed to transport and land troops, equipment, and supplies by means of embarked landing craft, amphibious vehicles, and helicopters. It has both a submersible well deck and a helicopter landing deck.

LPH—Amphibious assault ship, a ship designed or modified to transport and land troops, equipment, and supplies by means of embarked helicopters.

LSA—Logistic support area.

LSD—Landing ship, dock, a landing ship designed to combat load, transport, and launch amphibious crafts or vehicles together with crews and embarked personnel, and to provide limited docking and repair services to small ships and crafts. It lacks the helicopter landing deck of the LPD.

LST—Landing ship, tank, landing ship designed to transport heavy vehicles and to land them on a beach.

Lt—Lieutenant.

LtCol—Lieutenant colonel.

LtGen—Lieutenant general.

Ltr—letter.

LVTE—Amphibian vehicle, tracked, engineer; a lightly armored amphibious vehicle designed for minefield and obstacle clearance.

LVTH—Amphibian vehicle, tracked, howitzer; a lightly armored, self-propelled, amphibious 105mm howitzer. It resembles an LVTP with a turret for the howitzer.

LVTP—Landing vehicle, tracked, personnel; an amphibian vehicle used to land and or transport personnel.

LZ—Landing zone.

MAB—Marine Amphibious Brigade.

Machine gun, .50 caliber—U.S. built, belt-fed, recoil-operated, air-cooled automatic weapon, which weighs approximately 80 pounds without mount or ammunition; it has a sustained rate of fire of 100 rounds per minute and an effective range of 1,450 meters.

Machine gun, M60—U.S. built, belt-fed, gas-operated, air-cooled, 7.62mm automatic weapon, which weighs approximately 20 pounds without mount or ammunition; it has a sustained rate of fire of 100 rounds per minute and an effective range of 1,000 meters.

MACS—Marine air control squadron, provides and operates ground facilities for the detection and interception of hostile aircraft and for the navigational direction of friendly aircraft in the conduct of support operations.

MACV—Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

MAF—Marine amphibious force.

MAG—Marine aircraft group.

Main Force—Refers to organized Viet Cong battalions and regiments as opposed to local VC guerrilla groups.

Maj—Major.

MajGen—Major general.

MarDiv—Marine division.

—Marines—Designates a Marine regiment, e.g. 3d Marines.

MASS—Marine air support squadron, provides and operates facilties for the control of support aircraft operating in direct support of ground forces.

MAW—Marine aircraft wing.

MCAF—Marine Corps air facility.

MCAS—Marine Corps air station.

MCCC—Marine Corps Command Center.

MCOAG—Marine Corps Operations Analysis Group.

MedCap—Medical civilian assistance program.

MIA—Missing-in-action.

MilHistBr—Military History Branch.

Mortar, 4.2-inch, M30—U.S. built, rifled, muzzle-loaded, drop-fired weapon consisting of tube, base-plate and standard; weapon weighs 330 pounds and has a maximum range of 4,020 meters. Rate of fire is 20 rounds per minute.

Mortar, 60mm, M19—U.S. built, smooth-bore, muzzle-loaded, weapon, which weighs 45.2 pounds when assembled; it has a maximum rate of fire of 30 rounds per minute and sustained rate of fire of 18 rounds per minute; the effective range is 2,000 meters.

Mortar, 81mm, M29—U.S. built, smooth-bore, muzzle-loaded, which weighs approximately 115 pounds when assembled; it has a sustained rate of fire of two rounds per minute and an effective range of 2,300-3,650 meters, depending upon ammunition used.

Mortar, 82mm, Soviet-built, smooth-bore, mortar, single-shot, high angle of fire weapon which weighs approximately 123 pounds; it has a maximum rate of fire of 25 rounds per minute and a maximum range of 3,040 meters.

Mortar, 120mm—Soviet or Chinese Communist built, smooth bore, drop or trigger fired, mortar which weighs approximately 600 pounds; it has a maximum rate of fire of 15 rounds per minute and a maximum range of 5,700 meters.

MR-5—Military Region 5, a Communist political and military sector in northern South Vietnam, including all of I Corps. NVA units in MR-5 did not report to COSVN.

MS—Manuscript.

Msg—Message.

NAG—Naval Advisory Group.

NCC—Naval component commander.

NCO—Non-commissioned officer.

NLF—National Liberation Front, the political arm of the Communist-led insurgency against the South Vietnamese Government.

NMCB—Naval mobile construction battalion (Seabees).

NMCC—National Military Command Center.

NPA—National priority area, designated targeted area for

pacification in South Vietnam.
Nui—Vietnamese word for hill or mountain.
Nung—A Vietnamese tribesman, of a separate ethnic group and probably of Chinese origin.
NVA—North Vietnamese Army; often used colloquially to refer to a North Vietnamese soldier.

O-1B—Cessna, single-engine observation aircraft.
OAB, NHD—Operational Archives Branch, Naval History Division.
Ontos—U.S. built, lightly-armored, tracked antitank vehicle armed with six coaxially-mounted 106mm recoilless rifles.
OpCon—Operational control, the authority granted to a commander to direct forces assigned for specific missions or tasks which are usually limited by function, time, or location.
OpO—Operation order, a directive issued by a commander to subordinate commanders for the execution of an operation.
OPlan—Operation plan, a plan for a single or series of connected operations to be carried out simultaneously or in succession; it is the form of directive employed by higher authority to permit subordinate commanders to prepare supporting plans and orders.
OpSum—Operational summary.
OSJS (MACV)—Office of the Secretariat, Joint Staff (Military Assistance Command Vietnam).

PAVN—Peoples Army of Vietnam (North Vietnam). This acronym dropped in favor of NVA.
PF—Popular Force, Vietnamese militia who were usually employed in the defense of their own communities.
POL—Petroleum, oil, and lubricants.
Practice Nine—The codename for the planning of the antiinfiltration barrier across the DMZ.
Project Delta—A special South Vietnamese reconnaissance group consisting of South Vietnamese Special Forces troops and U.S. Army Special Forces advisors.

Recoilless rifle, 106mm, M401A1—U.S built, single-shot, recoilless, breech-loaded weapon which weighs 438 pounds when assembled and mounted for firing; it has a sustained rate of fire of six rounds per minute and an effective range of 1,365 meters.
RF—Regional Force, Vietnamese militia who were employed in a specific area.
RF-4B—Photo-reconnaissance model of the F4B Phantom II.
RF-8A—Reconnaissance version of the F-8 Chance Vought Crusader.
Regt—Regiment.
Revolutionary Development—The South Vietnamese pacification program started in 1966.
Revolutionary Development Teams—Especially trained Vietnamese political cadre who were assigned to individual hamlets and villages and conducted various pacification and civilian assistance tasks on a local level. (See rural reconstruction.)
Rifle, M14—Gas-operated, magazine-fed, air-cooled, semiautomatic, 7.62mm caliber shoulder weapon, which weighs 12 pounds with a full 20-round magazine; it has a sustained rate of fire of 30 rounds per minute and an effective range of 460 meters.
Rifle, M16—Gas-operated, magazine-fed, air-cooled, automatic, 5.56mm caliber shoulder weapon, which weighs 3.1 pounds with a 20-round magazine; it has a sustained rate of fire of 12-15 rounds per minute and an effective range of 460 meters.
RLT—Regimental landing team.
ROK—Republic of Korea (South Korea)
Rolling Thunder—Codename for U.S. air operations over North Vietnam.
Rough Rider—Organized vehicle convoys, often escorted by helicopters and armored vehicles, using Vietnam's roads to supply Marine bases.
Route Package—Code name used with a number to designate areas of North Vietnam for the American bombing campaign. Route Package I was the area immediately north of the DMZ.
RRU—Radio Research Unit.
Rural Reconstruction—The predecessor pacification campaign to Revolutionary Development.
RVN—Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
RVNAF—Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces.

S- —Refers to staff positions on regimental and battalion levels. S-1 would refer to the staff member responsible for personnel; S-2 intelligence; S-3, operations; S-4 logistics; and S-5 civil affairs.
SAR—Search and rescue.
SATS—Short airfield for tactical support, an expeditionary airfield used by Marine Corps aviation that included a portable runway surface, aircraft launching and recovery devices, and other essential expeditionary airfield components.
SEATO—Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.
2d AD—2d Air Division, the major U.S. Air Force command in Vietnam prior to the establishment of the Seventh Air Force.
SecDef—Secretary of Defense.
SecState—Secretary of State.
Seventh AF—Seventh Air Force, the major U.S. Air Force command in Vietnam.
Seventh Flt—Seventh Fleet, the U.S. fleet assigned to the Pacific.
SitRep—Situation Report.
SLF—Special landing force.
Song—Vietnamese for "river".
SOP—Standing operating procedure, set of instructions laying out standardized procedures.
Sortie—An operational flight by one aircraft.
Sparrow Hawk—A small rapid reaction force on standby, ready for inserion by helicopter for reinforcement of units in contact with the enemy.
Steel Tiger—The codename for the air campaign over Laos.
Stingray—Special Marine reconnaissance missions in which small Marine reconnaissance teams call artillery and air attacks on targets of opportunity.
SPOS—Strong point obstacle system, often called the "McNamara Line," which had the intended purpose of controlling movement of NVA units from North Vietnam into I Corps.
Strike Company—an elite company in a South Vietnamese infantry division, directly under the control of the division commander.
TAC(A)—Tactical air coordinator (Airborne), an officer in an

airplane, who coordinates close air support.

TACC—Tactical air control center, the principal air operations installation for controlling all aircraft and air-warning functions of tactical air operations.

TADC—Tactical air direction center, an air operations installation under the tactical air control center, which direct aircraft and aircraft warning functions of the tactical air center.

TAOC—Tactical air operations center, a subordinate component of the air command and control system which controls all enroute air traffic and air defense operations.

TAFDS—Tactical airfield fuel dispensing system, the expeditionary storage and dispensing system of aviation fuel at tactical airfields. It uses 10,000 gallon fabric tanks to store the fuel.

Tally Ho—Bombing campaign under ComUSMACV begun in July 1966 of Route Package I in North Vietnam.

Tank, M48—U.S. built 50.7-ton tank with a crew of four; primary armament is turret-mounted 90mm gun with one .30 caliber and one .50 caliber machine gun. Maximum road speed of 32 miles per hour and an average range of 195 miles.

TAOR—Tactical area of responsibility, a defined area of land for which responsibility is specifically assigned to the commander of the area as a measure for control of assigned forces and coordination of support.

TE—Task element.

TG—Task Group.

Tiger Hound—Airstrikes in Laos directed by U.S. Air Force small fixed-wing observation aircraft, flying up to 12 miles in southeastern Laos.

TU—Task unit.

UH-1E-Bell "Huey"—A single-engine, light attack/obseration helicopter noted for its maneuverability and firepower; carries a crew of three; it can be armed with air-to-ground rocket packs and fuselage-mounted, electrically-fired machine guns.

UH-34D—Sikorsky Sea Horse, a single-engine medium transport helicopter with a crew of three, carries 8-12 combat soldiers, depending upon weather conditions.

USA—United States Army.

USAF—United States Air Force.

USAID—United States Agency for International Development.

USMC—United States Marine Corps.

U.S. Mission Council—Council, chaired by the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam and included ComUSMACV, which developed and coordinated U.S. policy within South Vietnam.

USN—United States Navy.

USOM—United States Operations Mission, the United States civilian organization in RVN including the U.S. Embassy, AID, etc.

VC—Viet Cong, a term used to refer to the Communist guerrilla in South Vietnam; a derogatory contraction of the Vietnamese phrase meaning "Vietnamese Communists."

Viet Minh—The Vietnamese contraction for Viet Nam Doc Lap Nong Minh Hoi, a Communist-led coalition of nationalist groups, which actively opposed the Japanese in World War II and the French in the first Indochina War.

VMA—Marine attack squadron. In naval aviation, the "V" designates "heavier than air" as opposed to craft that were "lighter than air."

VMF (AW)—Marine fighter squadron (all-weather).

VMFA—Marine fighter attack squadron.

VMCJ—Marine composite reconnaissance squadron.

VMGR—Marine refueller transport squadron.

VMO—Marine observation squadron.

VNAF—Vietnamese Air Force.

VNMB—Vietnamese Marine Brigade.

VNMC—Vietnamese Marine Corps.

VNN—Vietnamese Navy.

VT—Variable timed electronic fuze for an artillery shell which causes airburst over the target area.

WestPac—Western Pacific.

WIA—Wounded-in-action.

WFRC—Washngton Federal Records Center.

Appendix C
Chronology of Significant Events

1 January	III MAF strength totaled 65,789.
6 January	Operation Deckhouse V, the first major offensive by U.S. forces into the Mekong Delta, began with helicopter and waterborne landings by the SLF and Vietnamese Marines. The Viet Cong knew of the operation in advance and departed before the Marines landed.
26 January	MACV headquarters completed its Practice Nine Requirement Plan for constructing a strong point obstacle system (SPOS) south of the DMZ.
26 January	Operation Desoto began. Task Force X-Ray controlled this operation which involved elements of the 4th and 5th Marines in a search and destroy mission in Quang Nam Province. The operation lasted 73 days.
31 January	Operation Prairie, the 3d Marine Division's multi-battalion operation, which began in August 1966, ended in Quang Tri Province. The operation opposed elements of two North Vietnamese divisions.
1 February	The 3d Marine Division began Operation Prairie II, a continuation of Prairie I.
8-12 February	These dates marked the ceasefire for Tet, a major Vietnamese holiday. Thereafter, North Vietnamese units, for the first time, defended key terrain from well-constructed, fortified lines and employed artillery weapons ranging from 82mm to 130mm in size.
12-22 February	The 1st Marines conducted Operation Stone in Quang Nam Province. In this operation, Marines destroyed a vast network of caves, tunnels, and bunkers. In the operation's second phase, Marines surrounded elements of the *R-20 Battalion* and then swept back and forth over the cordoned area.
21 February	Dr. Bernard Fall, noted historian of the French combat experience in Indochina, died in a explosion of an enemy mine. Dr. Fall was accompanying the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines on Operation Chinook II.
26 February	The 1st Marines began Operation Lafayette, a multi-battalion effort in Quang Nam Province.
10 March	III MAF completed the introduction of the M-16 to Marines in Vietnam.
18 March	The first woman Marine to serve in Vietnam, MSgt Barbara J. Dulinsky, arrived in Saigon, for assignment to the MACV combat operations center.
18 March	The 3d Marine Division ended Prairie II and began Paririe III the following day. The latter continued until 20 April.
26 March	COMUSMACV ordered III MAF to prepare a plan for locating, constructing, and occupying a strongpoint obstacle system south of the DMZ.
5 April	The 4th Marines began a multi-battalion operation named Big Horn in Thua Thien Province.

6-10 April	The 1st Marines conducted Operation Canyon with South Vietnamese ranger battalions participating.
20 April	Operation Prairie IV began in Quang Tri Province. It ended on 17 May.
20 April	Task Force Oregon arrived at Chu Lai.
24 April	The First Battle of Khe Sanh began. Units of the 3d Marine Division subsequently fought bitter battles with regular NVA forces for control of Hills 881S, 881N, and 861. This battle continued into May.
2 May	11th Engineer Battalion completed clearing a 200-meter wide trace between Con Thien and Gio Linh and began clearing a 500-meter perimeter around each position.
13 May	The 26th Marines began Operation Crockett in the Khe Sanh area.
18 May	Units of the 3d Marine Division, augmented by the SLF and ARVN forces, began Operation Hickory by moving into the southern portion of the DMZ in a three-pronged attack against North Vietnamese units using the area as a sanctuary.
26 May	The 5th Marines began Operation Union II, which continued until 5 June.
31 May	LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr., succeeded LtGen Lewis W. Walt as CG, III MAF.
7 June	A company-size force from the 26th Marines engaged an NVA force on Hill 881 during Operation Crockett and reported killing 59 NVA soldiers.
14-22 June	The 7th Marines conducted Operation Arizona with a multi-battalion force. The operation moved 1,650 refugees to camps at Duc Duc, the headquarters of the An Hoa industrial complex 15 miles south of Da Nang.
18 June	III MAF published its OpPlan 11-67 outling the SPOS concept.
25 June	LtGen Cushman and MajGen Hoang Xuan Lam, the Vietnamese Army I Corps commander, opened the new 1,680 foot prefabricated bridge across the Da Nang River.
3 July	North Vietnamese artillery fired supply dumps at the Marines' base at Dong Ha.
14 July	The name "Dye Marker" became effective as the title of the efforts to construct an SPOS south of the DMZ.
15 July	An early morning enemy rocket attack heavily damaged aircraft and the southern end of the Da Nang Air Base.
28-29 July	The 3d Marine Division sent the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, reinforced with armored vehicles, into the DMZ north of Con Thien on a search and destroy mission. The battalion had to fight its way out on the DMZ on the second day.
7-11 August	BLT 1/3 of the SLF conducted Operation Beacon Gate southeast of Hoi An.
10-28 August	The 1st Marine Division's Task Force X-Ray conducted Operation Cochise in Quang Tin Province in conjuction with the ARVN Operation Lien Ket-122.
27 August	The 1st Battalion, 7th Marines began Operation Yazoo in Happy Valley near Da Nang. There was little contact and the operation ended on 5 September.

3 September	North Vietnamese artillery fire destroyed the large ammunition dump at Dong Ha.
4 September	Navy Chaplain Vincent R. Capodanno died earning the Medal of Honor while serving with the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines.
4-15 September	Task Force X-Ray's Operation Swift pitted elements of two Marine battalions against a large and well-equipped force of NVA soldiers northwest of Tam Ky. ARVN forces and elements of Task Force Oregon fought simultaneous operations in conjunction with Swift.
6 October	BGen Harry C. Olson relieved BGen James E. Herbold, Jr., as commander of the Force Logistics Command.
11-20 October	The 1st Marines conducted Operation Medina near Quang Tri.
20 October	The 1st Marines began Operation Osceola.
24 October	The 7th Marines began Operation Knox, which ended 4 November, in the Phu Loc-Hai Van area.
31 October	Operation Ardmore, Fremont, and Kingfisher, which began in mid-July, ended in northern I Corps.
1 November	Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, on a visit to South Vietnam, presented the Presidential Unit Citation to the 3d Marine Division and the 7th ARVN Airborne.
14 November	MajGen Bruno A. Hochmuth died in a helicopter crash near Hue. BGen Metzger assumed command of the 3d Marine Division pending the arrival of MajGen Tompkins.
6-17 November	The 5th Marines conducted Operation Essex in Quang Nam Province.
13-30 November	The 7th Marines conducted Operation Foster northwest of An Hoa.
1-31 December	The 3d Marine Division continued Operation Scotland, Lancaster, Kentucky, Napoleon, Neosho, and Osceola.
23 December	The 7th Marines terminated Operation Citrus.
31 December	As of this date, III MAF units had expended 757,520 man days and 114,519 equipment hours on the construction of the strong point obstacle system, which many Marines referred to as the "McNamara Line." Enemy action had destroyed $1,622,348 worth of Marine equipment being used on the project.

Appendix D

Medal of Honor Citations, 1967

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS JAMES ANDERSON, JR.
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a rifleman, Second Platoon, Company F, Second Battalion, Third Marines, Third Marine Division in Vietnam on 28 February 1967. Company F was advancing in dense jungle northwest of Cam Lo in an effort to extract a heavily besieged reconnaissance patrol. Private First Class Anderson's platoon was the lead element and had advanced only about 200 meters when they were brought under extremely intense enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire. The platoon reacted swiftly, getting on line as best they could in the thick terrain, and began returning fire. Private First Class Anderson found himself tightly bunched together with the other members of the platoon only 20 meters from the enemy positions. As the fire fight continued several of the men were wounded by the deadly enemy assault. Suddenly, an enemy grenade landed in the midst of the Marines and rolled along side Private First Class Anderson's head. Unhesitatingly and with complete disregard for his own personal safety, he reached out, grasped the grenade, pulled it to his chest and curled around it as it went off. Although several Marines received shrapnel from the grenade, his body absorbed the major force of the explosion. In this singularly heroic act, Private First Class Anderson saved his comrades from serious injury and possible death. His personal heroism, extraordinary valor, and inspirational supreme self-sacrifice reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

LANCE CORPORAL JEDH COLBY BARKER
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a machine gunner with Company F, Second Battalion, Fourth Marines, Third Marine Division, in the Republic of Vietnam on 21 September 1967. During a reconnaissance operation near Con Thien, Corporal Barker's squad was suddenly hit by enemy sniper fire. The squad immediately deployed to a combat formation and advanced to a strongly fortified enemy position, when it was again struck by small arms and automatic weapons fire, sustaining numerous casualties. Although wounded by the initial burst of fire, Corporal Barker boldly remained in the open, delivering a devastating volume of accurate fire on the numerically superior force. The enemy was intent upon annihilating the small Marine force and, realizing that Corporal Barker was a threat to their position directed the preponderance of their fire on his position. He was again wounded, this time in the right hand, which prevented him from operating his vitally needed machine gun. Suddenly, and without warning, an enemy grenade landed in the midst of the few surviving Marines. Unhesitatingly and with complete disregard for his own personal safety, Corporal Barker threw himself upon the deadly grenade, absorbing with his own body the full and tremendous force of the explosion. In a final act of bravery, he crawled to the side of a wounded comrade and administered first aid before succumbing to his grievous wounds. His bold initiative, intrepid fighting spirit, and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of almost certain death undoubtedly saved his comrades from further injury or possible death and reflected great credit upon himself, the Marine Corps, and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

SECOND LIEUTENANT JOHN PAUL BOBO
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS RESERVE

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as Weapons Platoon Commander, Company I, Third Battalion, Ninth Marines, Third Marine Division, in Quang Tri Province, Republic of Vietnam, on 30 March 1967. Company I was establishing night ambush sites when the command group was attacked by a reinforced North Vietnamese company supported by heavy automatic weapons and mortar fire. Lieutenant Bobo immediately organized a hasty defense and moved from position to position encouraging the outnumbered Marines despite the murderous enemy fire. Recovering a rocket launcher from among the friendly casualties, he organized a new launcher team and directed its fire into the enemy machine gun positions. When an exploding enemy mortar round severed Lieutenant Bobo's right leg below the knee, he refused to be evacuated and insisted upon being placed in a firing position to cover the movement of the command group to better location. With a web belt around his leg serving as a tourniquet and with his leg jammed into the dirt to curtail the bleeding, he remained in this position and delivered devastating fire into the ranks of the enemy attempting to overrun the Marines. Lieutenant Bobo was mortally wounded while firing his weapon into the mainpoint of the enemy attack but his valiant spirit inspired his men to heroic efforts, and his tenacious stand enabled the command group to gain a protective position where it repulsed the enemy onslaught. Lieutenant Bobo's superb leadership, dauntless courage, and bold initiative reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

LIEUTENANT VINCENT R. CAPODANNO
CHAPLAIN CORPS, UNITED STATES NAVY

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepedity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as Chaplain of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division (Reinforced), FMF, in connection with operations against enemy forces in Quang Tin Province, Republic of Vietnam, on 4 September 1967. In respnse to reports that the 2d Platoon of M Company was in danger of being overrun by a massed enemy assaulting force, Lieutenant Capodanno left the relative safety of the Company Command Post and ran through an open area raked with fire, directly to the beleaguered platoon. Disregarding the intense enemy small-arms, automatic-weapons, and mortar fire, he moved about the battlefield administering last rites to the dying and giving medical aid to the wounded. When an exploding mortar round inflicted painful multiple wounds to his arms and legs, and severed a portion of his right hand, he steadfastly refused all medical aid. Instead, he directed the corpsmen to help their wounded comrades and, with calm vigor, continued to move about the battlefield as he provided encouragement by voice and example to the valiant Marines. Upon encountering a wounded corpsman in the direct line of fire of an enemy machine gunner positioned approximately fifteen yards away, Lieutenant Capodanno rushed forward in a daring attempt to aid and assist the mortally wounded corpsman. At that instant, only inches from his goal, he was struck down by a burst of machine gun fire. By his heroic conduct on the battlefield, and his inspiring example, Lieutenant Capodanno upheld the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the cause of freedom.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

SERGEANT RODNEY MAXWELL DAVIS
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as the right guide of the Second Platoon, Company B, First Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division, in action against enemy forces in Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam, on 6 September 1967. Elements of the Second Platoon were pinned down by a numerically superior force of attacking North Vietnamese Army Regulars. Remnants of the platoon were located in a trench line where Sergeant Davis was directing the fire of his men in an attempt to repel the enemy attack. Disregarding the enemy hand grenades and high volume of small arms and mortar fire, Sergeant Davis moved from man to man shouting words of encouragement to each of them while firing and throwing grenades at the onrushing enemy. When an enemy grenade landed in the trench in the midst of his men, Sergeant Davis, realizing the gravity of the situation, and in a final valiant act of complete self-sacrifice, instantly threw himself upon the grenade, absorbing with his own body the full and terrific force of the explosion. Through his extraordinary initiative and inspiring valor in the face of almost certain death, Sergeant Davis saved his comrades from injury and possible loss of life, enabled his platoon to hold its vital position, and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. He gallantry gave his life for his country.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS DOUGLAS EUGENE DICKEY
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving with the Second Platoon, Company C, First Battalion, Fourth Marines, Third Marine Division in the Republic of Vietnam on 26 March 1967. While participating in Operation Beacon Hill 1, the Second Platoon was engaged in a fierce battle with the Viet Cong at close range in dense jungle foliage Private First Class Dickey had come forward to replace a radio operator who had been wounded in this intense action and was being treated by a medical corpsman. Suddenly an enemy grenade landed in the midst of a group of Marines, which included the wounded radio operator who was immobilized. Fully realizing the inevitable result of his actions, Private First Class Dickey, in a final valiant act, guickly and unhesitatingly threw himself upon the deadly grenade, absorbing with his own body the full and complete force of the explosion. Private First Class Dickey's personal heroism, extraordinary valor and selfless courage saved a number of his comrades from certain injury and possible death at the cost of his own life. His actions reflected great credit upon himself, the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

SERGEANT PAUL HELLSTROM FOSTER
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS RESERVE

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as an Artillery Liaison Operations Chief with the Second Battalion, Fourth Marines, Third Marine Division, near Con Thien in the Republic of Vietnam. In the early morning hours of 14 October 1967, the Second Battalion was occupying a defensive position which protected a bridge on the road leading from Con Thien to Cam Lo. Suddenly, the Marines' position came under a heavy volume of mortar and artillery fire, followed by an aggressive enemy ground assault. In the ensuing engagement, the hostile force penetrated the perimeter and brought a heavy concentration of small arms, automatic weapons, and rocket fire to bear on the Battalion Command Post. Although his position in the Fire Support Coordination Center was dangerously exposed to enemy fire and he was wounded when an enemy hand grenade exploded near his position, Sergeant Foster resolutely continued to direct accurate mortar and artillery fire on the advancing North Vietnamese troops. As the attack continued, a hand grenade landed in the midst of Sergeant Foster and his five companions. Realizing the danger, he shouted a warning, threw his armored vest over the grenade, and unhesitatingly placed his own body over the armored vest. When the grenade exploded, Sergeant Foster absorbed the entire blast with his own body and was mortally wounded. His heroic actions undoubtedly saved his comrades from further injury or possible death. Sergeant Foster's courage, extraordinary heroism, and unfaltering devotion to duty reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

CAPTAIN JAMES ALBERT GRAHAM
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as Commanding Officer, Company F, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division, in the Republic of Vietnam on 2 June 1967. During Operation Union II, the First Battalion, Fifth Marines, consisting of Companies A and D, with Captain Graham's company attached, launched an attack against an enemy occupied position, with two companies assaulting and one in reserve. Company F, a leading company, was proceeding across a clear paddy area one thousand meters wide, attacking toward the assigned objective, when it came under heavy fire from mortars and small arms which immediately inflicted a large number of casualties. Hardest hit by fire was the second platoon of Company F, which was pinned down in the open paddy area by intense fire from two concealed machine guns. Forming an assault unit from members of his small company headquarters, Captain Graham bodly led a fierce assault through the second platoon's position, forcing the enemy to abandon the first machine gun position, thereby relieving some of the pressure on his second platoon, and enabling evacuation of the wounded to a more secure area. Resolute to silence the second machine gun, which continued its devastating fire, Captain Graham's small force stood steadfast in its hard won enclave. Subsequently, during the afternoon's fierce fighting, he suffered two minor wounds while personally accounting for a estimated fifteen enemy killed. With the enemy position remaining invincible upon each attempt to withdraw to friendly lines, and although knowing that he had no chance of survival, he chose to remain with one man who could not be moved due to the seriousness of his wounds. The last radio transmission from Captain Graham reported that he was being assaulted by a force of twenty-five enemy; he died while protecting himself and the wounded man he chose not to abandon. Captain Graham's actions throughout the day were a series of heroic achievements. He outstanding courage, superb leadership and indomitable fighting spirit undoubtedly saved the second platoon from annihilation and reflected great credit upon himself, the Marine Corps, and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS GARY WAYNE MARTINI
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. On April 21, 1967, during Operation Union, elements of Company F, conducting offensive operations at Binh Son, encountered a firmly entrenched enemy force and immediately deployed to engage them. The Marines in Private Martini's platoon assaulted across an open rice paddy to within twenty meters of the enemy trench line where they were suddenly struck by hand grenades, intense small arms, automatic weapons, and mortar fire. The enemy onslaught killed 14 and wounded 18 Marines, pinning the remainder of the platoon down behind a low paddy dike. In the face of imminent danger, Private Martini immediately crawled over the dike to a forward open area within 15 meters of the enemy position where, continuously exposed to the hostile fire, he hurled hand grenades, killing several of the enemy. Crawling back through the intense fire, he rejoined his platoon which had moved to the relative safety of a trench line. From this position he observed several of his wounded comrades laying helpless in the fire-swept paddy. Although he knew that one man had been killed attempting to assist the wounded, Private Martini raced through the open area and dragged a comrade back to a friendly position. In spite of a serious wound received during this first daring rescue, he again braved the unrelenting fury of the enemy fire to aid another companion lying wounded only 20 meters in front of the enemy trench line. As he reached the fallen Marine, he received a mortal wound, but disregarding his own condition, he began to drag the Marine toward his platoon's position. Observing men from his unit attempting to leave the security of their position to aid him, concerned only for their safety, he called to them to remain under cover, and through a final supreme effort, moved his injured comrade to where he could be pulled to safety, before he fell, succumbing to his wounds. Stouthearted and indomitable, Private Martini unhesitatingly yielded his life to save two of his comrades and insure the safety of the remainder of his platoon. His outstanding courage, valiant fighting spirit and selfless devotion to duty reflected the highest credit upon himself, the Marine Corps, and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS MELVIN EARL NEWLIN
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a machine gunner attached to the First Platoon, Company F, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division, in the Republic of Vietnam on 3 and 4 July 1967. Private Newlin, with four other Marines, was manning a key position on the perimeter of the Nong Son outpost when the enemy launched a savage and well coordinated mortar and infantry assault, seriously wounding him and killing his four comrades. Propping himself against his machine gun, he poured a deadly accurate stream of fire into the charging ranks of Viet Cong. Though repeatedly hit by small arms fire, he twice repelled enemy attempts to overrun his position. During the third attempt, a grenade explosion wounded him again and knocked him to the ground unconscious. The Viet Cong guerrillas, believing him dead, bypassed him and continued their assault on the main force. Meanwhile, Private Newlin regained consciousness, crawled back to his weapon, and brought it to bear on the rear of the enemy causing havoc and confusion among them. Spotting the enemy attempting to bring a captured 106 recoilless weapon to bear on other marine positions, he shifted his fire, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy and preventing them from firing the captured weapon. He then shifted his fire back the primary enemy force, causing the enemy to stop their assaults on the marine bunkers and to once again attack his machine gun position. Valiantly fighting off two more enemy assaults, he firmly held his ground until mortally wounded. Private Newlin had singlehandedly broken up and disorganized the entire enemy assault force, causing them to lose momentum and delaying them long enough for his fellow marines to organize a defense and beat off their secondary attack. His indomitable courage, fortitude, and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of almost certain death reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

CORPORAL WILLIAM THOMAS PERKINS, JR.
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a combat photographer attached to Company C, First Battalion, First Marines, First Marine Division, in the Republic of Vietnam on 12 October 1967. During Operation Medina, a major reconnaissance in force southwest of Quang Tri, Company C made heavy combat contact with a numerically superior North Vietnamese Army Force estimated at from two to three companies. The focal point of the intense fighting was a helicopter landing zone which also serving as the Command Post of Company C. In the course of strong hotile attack, an enemy grenade landed in the immediate area occupied by Corporal Perkins and three other Marines. Realizing the inherent danger, he shouted the warning, "Incoming Grenade" to his fellow Marines, and in a valiant act of heroism, hurled himself upon the grenade absorbing the impact of the explosion with his own body, thereby saving the lives of his comrades at the cost of his own. Through his exceptional courage and inspiring valor in the face of certain death, Corporal Perkins reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

SERGEANT LAWRENCE DAVID PETERS
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a squad leader with Company M, Third Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division in the Republic of Vietnam on 4 September 1967. During Operation Swift, in the province of Quang Tin, the Marines of the second platoon of Company M were struck by intense mortar, machine gun, and small arms fire from an entrenched enemy force. As the company rallied its forces, Sergeant Peters maneuvered his squad in an assault on an enemy defended knoll. Disregarding his own saftey, as enemy rounds hit all about him, he stood in the open, pointing out enemy positions until he was painfully wounded in the leg. Disregarding his wound he moved forward and continued to lead his men. As the enemy fire increased in accuracy and volume, his squad lost its momentum and was temporarily pinned down. Exposing himself to devastating enemy fire, he consolidated his position to render more effective fire. While directing the base of fire, he was wounded a second time in the face and neck from an exploding mortar round. As the enemy attempted to infiltrate the position of an adjacent platoon, Sergeant Peters stood erect in the full view of the enemy firing burst after burst forcing them to disclose their camouflaged positions. Sergeant Peters continued firing until he was critically wounded by a gunshot wound in his chest. Although unable to walk or stand, Sergeant Peters steadfastly continued to direct his squad in spite of two additional wounds, persisted in his efforts to encourage and supervise his men until he lost consciousness and succumbed. Inspired by his selfless actions, the squad regained fire superiority and once again carried the assault to the enemy. By his outstanding valor, indomitable fighting spirit and tenacious determination in the face of overwhelming odds, Sergeant Peters upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pleasure in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR to

MAJOR STEPHEN WESLEY PLESS
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a helicopter gunship pilot attached to Marine Observation Squadron Six in action against enemy forces near Quang Ngai, Republic of Vietnam, on 19 August 1967. During an escort mission Major (then Captain) Pless monitored an emergency call that four American soldiers, stranded on a nearby beach, were being overwhelmed by a large Viet Cong force. Major Pless flew to the scene and found 30 to 50 enemy soldiers in the open. Some of the enemy were bayoneting and beating the downed Americans. Major Pless displayed exceptional airmanship as he launched a devastating attack against the enemy force, killing or wounding many of the enemy and driving the remainder back into a treeline. His rocket and machine gun attacks were made at such low levels that the aircraft flew through debris created by explosions from its rockets. Seeing one of the wounded soldiers gesture for assistance, he maneuvered his helicopter into a position between the wounded men and the enemy, providing a shield which permitted his crew to retrieve the wounded. During the rescue the enemy directed intense fire at the helicopter and rushed the aircraft again and again, closing to within a few feet before being beaten back. When the wounded men were aboard, Major Pless maneuvered the helicopter out to sea. Before it became safely airborne, the overloaded aircraft settled four times into the water. Displaying superb airmanship, he finally got the helicopter aloft. Major Pless' extraordinary heroism coupled with his outstanding flying skill prevented the annihilation of the tiny force. His courageous actions reflect great credit upon himself and uphold the greatest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

SERGEANT WALTER K. SINGLETON
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the rick of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as Supply Sergeant, Company A, First Battalion, Ninth Marines, Third Marine Division, on 24 March 1967. Sergeant Singleton's company was conducting combat operations in Gio Linh District, Quang Tri Province, Republic of Vietnam, when the lead platoon received intense small arms, automatic weapons, rocket, and mortar fire from a well entrenched enemy force. As the company fought its way forward, the extremely heavy enemy fire caused numerous friendly casualties. Sensing the need for early treatment of the wounded, Sergeant Singleton quickly moved from his relatively safe position in the reat to the foremost point of the advance and made numerous trips through the enemy killing zone to move the injured men out of the danger area. Noting that a large part of the enemy fire was coming from a hedgerow, he seized a machine gun and assaulted the key enemy location, delivering devastating fire as he advanced. He forced his way through the hedgerow directly into the enemy strong point. Although he was mortally wounded, his fearless attack killed eight of the enemy and drove the remainder from the hedgerow. Sergeant Singleton's bold actions completely disorganized the enemy defense and saved the lives of many of his comrades. His daring initiative, selfless devotion to duty and indomitable fighting spirit reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps, and his performance upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

CORPORAL LARRY EUGENE SMEDLEY
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a squad leader with Company D, First Battalion, Seventh Marines, First Marine Division, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On the evening of 20-21 December 1967, Corporal Smedley led his six-man squad to an ambush site at the mouth of Happy Valley, near Phouc Ninh (2) in Quang Nam Province. Later that night, an estimated 100 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army Regulars, carrying 122mm rocket launchers and mortars, were observed moving toward Hill 41. Realizing this was a significant enemy move to launch an attack on the vital Da Nang complex, Corporal Smedley immediately took sound and courageous action to stop the enemy threat. After he radioed for a reaction force, he skillfully maneuvered his men to a more advantageous position and led an attack on the numerically superior enemy force. A heavy volume of fire from an enemy machine gun positioned on the left flank of the squad inflicted several casualties on Corporal Smedley's unit. Simultaneously, an enemy rifle grenade exploded nearby, wounding him in the right foot and knocking him to the ground. Corporal Smedley disregarded this serious injury and valiantly struggled to his feet, shouting words of encouragement to his men. He fearlessly led a charge against the enemy machine gun emplacement, firing his rifle and throwing grenades, until he was again struck by enemy fire and knocked to the ground. Gravely wounded and weak from loss of blood, he rose and commenced a one-man assault against the enemy position. Although his aggressive and singlehanded attack resulted in the destruction of the machine gun, he was struck in the chest by enemy fire and fell mortally wounded. Corporal Smedley's inspiring and courageous actions, bold initiative, and selfless devotion to duty in the face of certain death were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

LANCE CORPORAL ROY MITCHELL WHEAT
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life, above and beyond the call of duty, while serving as a fire team leader with the First Platoon, Company K, Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, First Marine Division, in the Republic of Vietnam. On 11 August 1967, Corporal Wheat and two other Marines were assigned the mission of providing security for a Navy construction battalion crane and crew operating along Liberty Road in the vicinity of the Dien Ban District, Quang Nam Province. After the Marines had set up security positions in a tree line adjacent to the work site, Corporal Wheat reconnoitered the area to the rear of their location for the possible presence of guerrillas. He then returned to within ten feet of the friendly position, and here unintentionally triggered a well concealed, bounding type, antipersonnel mine. Immediately, a hissing sound was heard which was identified by the three Marines as that of a buring time fuse. Shouting a warning to his comrades, Corporal Wheat in a valiant act of heroism hurled himself upon the mine, absorbing the tremendous impact of the explosion with his own body. The inspirational personal heroism and extraordinary valor of his unselfish action saved his fellow Marines from certain injury and possible death, reflected great credit upon himself, and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

Appendix E
List of Reviewers

Marines

Gen Robert E. Cushman, Jr. (Ret)
Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr. (Ret)
Gen Lewis W. Walt (Ret)

LtGen Hugh M. Elwood (Ret)
LtGen Jospeh C. Fegan, Jr. (Ret)
LtGen Louis Metzger (Ret)
LtGen Herman Nickerson, Jr. (Ret)
LtGen Louis B. Robertshaw (Ret)
LtGen Donn J. Robertson (Ret)

MajGen Norman J. Anderson (Ret)
MajGen Lowell E. English (Ret)
MajGen William B. Fleming (Ret)
MajGen Kenneth J. Houghton (Ret)
MajGen Wood B. Kyle (Ret)
MajGen Herman Poggemeyer, Jr. (Ret)
MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins (Ret)

BGen Edward J. Doyle (Ret)
BGen Jacob E. Glick (Ret)
BGen Harvey E. Spielman (Ret)
BGen William A. Stiles (Ret)

Col Harry L. Alderman (Ret)
Col Nels E. Anderson (Ret)
Col Marshall B. Armstrong (Ret)
Col Robert Baird (Ret)
Col Arnold W. Barden (Ret)
Col Drew J. Barrett, Jr. (Ret)
Col George F. Bauman (Ret)
Col Julian G. Bass, Jr. (Ret)
Col Lee R. Bendell (Ret)
Col James L. Black, Jr. (Ret)

Col Louis A. Bonin (Ret)
Col Billy D. Bouldin (Ret)
Col Edward H. Boyd
Col Henry K. Bruce (Ret)
Col Alexander D. Cereghino (Ret)
Col Duncan D. Chaplin III (Ret)
Col John A. Conway (Ret)
Col John D. Counselman (Ret)
Col Charles C. Crossfield II (Ret)
Col William H. Dabney

Col Philip A. Davis (Ret)
Col William J. Davis (Ret)
Col William L. Dick (Ret)
Col Rex O. Dillow (Ret)
Col Dale D. Dorman
Col Kenneth T. Dykes (Ret)
Col William R. Earney (Ret)
Col Arnold L. Emils (Ret)
Col Dean E. Esslinger (Ret)
Col Charles R. Figard (Ret)

Col Leroy T. Frey (Ret)
Col James A. Gallo, Jr. (Ret)
Col Tolbert T. Gentry (Ret)
Col Baylor P. Gibson, Jr. (Ret)
Col Vincent J. Gottschalk (Ret)
Col William F. Guss (Ret)
Col Edward E. Hammerbeck (Ret)
Col James W. Hammond, Jr. (Ret)
Col Frank W. Harris III (Ret)
Col William H. Heintz (Ret)

Col Clayton V. Hendricks (Ret)
Col Frank M. Hepler (Ret)
Col Peter L. Hilgartner (Ret)
Col Milton A. Hull (Ret)
Col Kenneth E. Huntington (Ret)
Col Mallett C. Jackson, Jr. (Ret)
Col Robert M. Jenkins (Ret)
Col George E. Jerue (Ret)
Col Wilbur C. Kellogg, Jr. (Ret)
Col Joseph J. Kelly (Ret)

Col William D. Kent, Jr.
Col Charles Kimak (Ret)
Col Edward N. Le Faivre (Ret)
Col Robert W. Lewis (Ret)
Col Robert D. Limberg (Ret)
Col Herbert H. Long (Ret)
Col Joseph E. Lo Prete (Ret)
Col Edgar J. Love (Ret)
Col Stanley D. Low (Ret)
Col David E. Lownds (Ret)

Col John L. Mahon (Ret)
Col Donald L. Mallory (Ret)
Col Samuel F. Martin (Ret)
Col Glenn K. Maxwell (Ret)
Col George C. McNaughton (Ret)
Col Max McQuown (Ret)
Col Ross L. Mulford (Ret)
Col Robert C. Needham (Ret)
Col Ernest W. Payne (Ret)
Col John S. Payne (Ret)

Col Poul F. Pederson (Ret)
Col Richard F. Peterson (Ret)
Col Emil J. Radics (Ret)
Col Robert L. Rathbun (Ret)
Col Stanley Rauh (Ret)
Col Edwin O. Reed (Ret)
Col Robert C. Rice (Ret)
Col David D. Rickabaugh (Ret)
Col William K. Rockey
Col Joseph L. Sadowski (Ret)

Col Richard J. Schening (Ret)
Col Edwin S. Schick, Jr. (Ret)
Col George C. Schmidt, Jr. (Ret)
Col Maynard W. Schmidt (Ret)
Col James C. Short (Ret)
Col Richard B. Smith (Ret)
Col James C. Stanfield (Ret)
Col James R. Stockman (Ret)
Col John C. Studt
Col Richard D. Taber, Sr. (Ret)

Col David O. Takala (Ret)
Col Orlando S. Tosdal (Ret)
Col George M. Van Sant (Ret)
Col Wendell N. Vest (Ret)
Col Kirby B. Vick (Ret)
Col Marvin D. Volkert (Ret)

Col Francis V. White, Jr.
Col Gary Wilder (Ret)
Col Dean Wilker (Ret)
Col Theodore J. Willis (Ret)

Col Donald E. Wood
Col Roy I. Wood, Jr. (Ret)
Col Robert J. Zitnik (Ret)

LtCol Rheaford C. Bell (Ret)
LtCol Gene W. Bowers
LtCol Albert R. Bowman, II (Ret)
LtCol Harold F. Brown (Ret)
LtCol Horace A. Bruce (Ret)
LtCol Willard N. Christopher (Ret)
LtCol Philip M. Crosswait (Ret)
LtCol James R. Davis
LtCol Edwin A. Deptula (Ret)
LtCol Henry Englisch (Ret)

LtCol Frederick L. Farrell, Jr. (Ret)
LtCol Wells L. Field, III (Ret)
LtCol Abie Gordon (Ret)
LtCol John C. Hergert, Jr. (Ret)
LtCol Jack M. Hermes (Ret)
LtCol Earl E. Jacobson, Jr. (Ret)
LtCol Roland L. McDaniel (Ret)
LtCol Rodney D. McKitrick (Ret)
LtCol John J. Mullen, Jr. (Ret)
LtCol James E. Murphy (Ret)

LtCol Raymond J. O'Leary (Ret)
LtCol Charles E. Parker (Ret)
LtCol Wesley H. Rodenberger (Ret)
LtCol Richard E. Romine (Ret)
LtCol Robert F. Sheridan (Ret)
LtCol E. Bruce Sigmon, Jr. (Ret)
LtCol Albert C. Slater
LtCol Joseph T. Smith (Ret)
LtCol Bayliss L. Spivey, Jr.
LtCol Philip E.Tucker

LtCol Charles B. Webster (Ret)
LtCol James B. Wilkinson (Ret)
LtCol James S. Wilson (Ret)

Maj Walter E. Deese
Maj Leonard E. Fuchs (Ret)

Maj Michael W. Sayers (Ret)
Maj William E. Snyder (Ret)
Maj Raymond A. Thomas

Navy

Adm U.S. Grant Sharp (Ret)

VAdm Thomas R. Weschler (Ret)

RAdm Norvell G. Ward (Ret)
RAdm Edwin B. Hooper (Ret)

Capt P.D. Cooper
Capt John T. Vincent (Ret)
Capt John D. Westervelt (Ret)

Others

Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Center of Military History, Department of the Army
Office of Air Force History, Department of the Air Force
Naval History Division, Department of the Navy

BGen James L. Collins, USA (Ret)
Dr. Robert J. Watson
Mrs. Janet D. Beard
Mrs. John H. Maloney
Mrs. Glenn E. Norris
Mrs. Harry D. Wortman

Appendix F

Distribution of Aircraft Fleet Marine Force, Pacific December 1967

UNIT	DA NANG	CHU LAI	PHU BAI	OKINAWA	JAPAN	HAWAII	EASTPAC	OTHER*
MAG-11								
H&MS-11	3/TA-4F							
	1/C-117D							
VMCJ-1	8/EF-10B							
	9/RF-4B							
	4/EA-6A							
VMFA-122	14/F-4B							
VMF (AW)-235	16/F-8E							
VMA (AW)-242	11/A-6A							
MAG-12								
H&MS-12		1/C-117						
		3/TA-4F						
VMA-121		16/A-4E						
VMA-211		21/A-4E						
VMA-311		15/A-4E						
(AW)-533		12/A-6A						
MAG-13								
H&MS-13		3/TF-9J						
		1/C-117D						
VMFA-115		14/F-4B						
VMFA-323		12/F-4B						
VMFA-314		10/F-4B						
MAG-15								
H&MS-15				5/UH-34D	3/C-54			
					4/TF-9J			
					1/C-117D			
VMGR-152				12/KC-130F				
VMA-223					19/A-4C			
VMFA-542					6/F-4B			
HMM-262				12/CH-46A				9/CH-46A
HMM-361								23/UH-34D*
MAG-16								
H&MS-16	1/C-117D							
	14/0-1C							
	4/UH-34D							
VMO-2	29/UH-1E							
HMM-265	6/CH-46A				15/CH-46A**			
HMM-363	29/UH-34D							
HMM-463	36/CH-53A							

*Aircraft indicated in "other" column with SLF, Seventh Fleet
**CH-46A REhab Program.

UNIT	DA NANG	CHU LAI	PHU BAI	OKINAWA	JAPAN	HAWAII	EASTPAC	OTHER
MWSG-17								
H&MS-17			5/UH-34D					
			3/C-117D					
			2/US-2B					
MAG-36								
H&MS-36			3/UH-34D					
			1/C-117D					
VMO-3			20/UH-E					
VMO-6			21/UH-1E					
HMM-163			26/UH-34D					
HMM-164			3/CH-46A	12/CH-46A**				
HMM-165			3/CH-46A	16/CH-46A**				
HMM-362			25/UH-34D					
HMM-364			6/UH-34D					
MAG-33								
H&MS-33							2/T-1A	
VMCJ-3							11/RF-4B	
							7/EF-10B	
VMF-214							17/A-4C	
VMFA-232							17/A-4C	
VMFA-334							15/f-4J	
MWSG-37								
H&MS-37							4/T-1A	
							4/C-117D	
							3/C-54Q	
VMGR-352				4/KC-130F			11/KC-130F	
MHTG-30								
H&MS-30							3/UH-34D	
HMMT-301							24/UH-34D	
HMMT-302							23/UH-1E	
1ST MAR BRIG								
H&MS						3/UH-34D		
						1/VH-34D		
						3/T-1A		
VMF (AW)-212						16/F-8D/B		
MAG-56								
H&MS-56							6/CH-46D	
VMO-5							23/UH-1E	
HMM-263							24/CH-46A	
HMH-462							19/CH-53A	
TOTAL PAC AIRCRAFT								
Fixed Wing (338)	72	129		16	34	15	72	
Helicopters (364)	108	94	24	23		5	68	42

Appendix G

Distribution of Personnel Fleet Marine Force, Pacific 31 December 1967

UNIT	NOTE	ASSIGNED STRENGTH		STR RPT DATE	DANANG		CHU LAI		PHU BAI		DONG HA		OKINAWA		JAPAN		HAWAII		EASTPAC		OTHER	
HEADQUARTERS		USMC	USN		USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN
HQ, FMF, PAC																						
FMF, PAC (FWD)		75		24AUG									75									
H&S BN, FMF, PAC		1065	30	23NOV													1065	30				
CAMP S. M. BUTLER		1241	109	6NOV									1241	109								
CASUAL/TRANSIENT		1287		6NOV									1287									
HQ, V MEF		82	2	23NOV															82	2		
1ST CIV AFF GRP		80	7	23NOV															80	7		
HQ, 5TH MAR DIV																						
HQBN, 5TH MAR DIV		1407	43	23NOV															1407	43		
HQ, FORTRPS, FMF, PAC																						
HQ CO, FORTRPS		321	18	23NOV															321	18		
HQ, 1ST MAR BRIG																						
HQ CO, 1ST MAR BRIG		214	17	23NOV													214	17				
HQ, 9TH MAB																						
HQ CO, 9TH MAB		422	12	23NOV									422	12								
HQ, III MAF																						
H&S CO, III MAF																						
1ST & 2D CAG	4	768	62	2NOV	768	62																
HQ, 1ST MAR DIV																						
HQBN, 1ST MAR DIV		1588	32	16NOV	1588	32																
HQ, 3D MAR DIV																						
HQBN, 3D MAR DIV		1897	32	16NOV					1897	32												
INFANTRY																						
1ST MARINES																						
HQ CO		255	6	16NOV							255	6										
1ST BATTALION		1132	49	16NOV							1132	49										
2D BATTALION		1081	54	16NOV							1081	54										
3D BATTALION	1	1498	94	16NOV																	1498	94
3D MARINES																						
HQ CO		218	5	16NOV							218	5										
1ST BATTALION	1	1533	83	17NOV																	1533	83
2D BATTALION		1123	54	12OCT	1123	54																
3D BATTALION		1081	50	16NOV							1081	50										
4TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		218	3	16NOV					218	3												
1ST BATTALION		1082	48	16NOV					1082	48												
2D BATTALION		1051	49	16NOV							1051	49										
3D BATTALION		1062	53	16NOV							1062	53										
5TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		234	4	16NOV	234	4																
1ST BATTALION		995	53	16NOV	995	53																
2D BATTALION		1081	45	16NOV	1081	45																
3D BATTALION		982	51	16NOV	982	51																
7TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		223	7	16NOV	223	7																
1ST BATTALION		1050	54	16NOV	1050	54																
2D BATTALION		1030	53	16NOV	1030	53																
3D BATTALION		1039	51	16NOV	1039	51																
9TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		219	3	16NOV							219	3										
1ST BATTALION		1052	52	16NOV							1052	52										
2D BATTALION		1079	51	16NOV							1079	51										
3D BATTALION		1040	49	16NOV							1040	49										
26TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		503	17	23NOV							220	2	283	15								
1ST BATTALION		1012	50	16NOV							1012	50										
2D BATTALION		1058	49	16NOV					1058	49												
3D BATTALION		1079	49	16NOV					1079	49												
27TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		216	3	23NOV															216	3		
1ST BATTALION	3	1491	65	23NOV													1491	65				
2D BATTALION		1017	33	23NOV															1017	33		
3D BATTALION		1012	32	23NOV															1012	32		

UNIT	NOTE	ASSIGNED STRENGTH		STR RPT DATE	DANANG		CHU LAI		PHU BAI		DONG HA		OKINAWA		JAPAN		HAWAII		EASTPAC		OTHER	
		USMC	USN		USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN
28TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		313	5	23NOV															313	5		
1ST BATTALION		942	33	23NOV															942	33		
2D BATTALION		945	35	23NOV															945	35		
3D BATTALION		916	33	23NOV															916	33		
ARTILLERY																						
11TH MARINES																						
HQ BTRY		262	7	16NOV	262	7																
1ST BATTALION		431	14	16NOV							431	14										
2D BATTALION		638	11	16NOV	638	11																
3D BATTALION		577	15	16NOV	577	15																
4TH BATTALION		427	11	16NOV	427	11																
12TH MARINES																						
HQ BTRY		296	12	16NOV							296	12										
1ST BATTALION		703	13	16NOV							703	13										
2D BATTALION		541	8	16NOV							541	8										
3D BATTALION		516	9	16NOV					516	9												
4TH BATTALION		646	12	16NOV					646	12												
13TH MARINES																						
HQ BTRY		255	5	23NOV															255	5		
1ST BATTALION		388	8	16NOV							388	8										
2D BATTALION		401	8	23NOV															401	8		
3D BATTALION		627	14	23NOV															627	14		
4TH BATTALION		366	8	23NOV															366	8		
HQ BTRY, 1ST FAG		91	2	16NOV					91	2												
HQ BTRY, 5THFAG		156	5	23NOV															156	5		
1ST 155MM GUN BTRY		118	3	16NOV					118	3												
3D 155MM GUN BTRY		140	3	16NOV	140	3																
5TH 155MM GUN BTRY		150	3	16NOV	150	3																
7TH 155MM GUN BTRY		162	3	23NOV															162	3		
1ST 8" HOW BTRY		189	3	16NOV					189	3												
3D 8" HOW BTRY		197	3	16NOV	197	3																
5TH 8" HOW BTRY		203	2	23NOV															203	2		
1ST SEARCH LIGHT BTRY		111	2	16NOV							111	2										
RECONNAISSANCE																						
1ST RECON BN		441	24	16NOV	441	24																
3D RECON BN		500	34	16NOV					500	34												
5TH RECON BN		334	15	23NOV									31	1					303	14		
1ST FORCE RECON CO		146	4	16NOV	146	4																
3D FORCE RECON CO		161	7	16NOV					161	7												
5TH FORCE RECON CO		116	3	23NOV															116	3		
ANTI-TANK																						
1ST AT BN		303	7	16NOV	303	7																
3D AT BN		348	7	16NOV					348	7												
5TH AT BN		269	7	23NOV									20	1					249	6		
TANK																						
1ST TANK BN		593	15	16NOV	593	15																
3D TANK BN		611	8	16NOV					611	8												
5TH TANK BN		604	12	23NOV									77	1					527	11		
AMTRAC																						
1ST AMTRAC BN		631	15	16NOV							631	15										
3D AMTRAC BN		656	15	16NOV	656	15																
5TH AMTRAC BN		705	17	23NOV									110	1					595	16		
1ST ARM AMPHIB CO		244	3	16NOV	244	3																
ENGINEER																						
1ST ENGR BN		668	14	16NOV	668	14																
3D ENGR BN		672	11	16NOV					672	11												
5TH ENGR BN		493	12	23NOV									37	1					456	11		
7TH ENGR BN		947	22	16NOV	947	22																
9TH ENGR BN		946	14	16NOV			946	14														
11TH ENGR BN		1165	21	16NOV							1165	21										
13TH ENGR BN		869	17	23NOV															869	17		
1ST BRIDGE CO		140		16NOV	140																	
3D BRIDGE CO		156		16NOV	156																	
5TH BRIDGE CO		118	2	23NOV															118	2		
MOTOR TRANSPORT																						
1ST MT BN		246	5	16NOV	246	5																
3D MT BN		395	8	16NOV					395	8												
5TH MT BN		193	8	23NOV									12	1					181	7		
7TH MT BN		387	3	16NOV	387	3																
9TH MT BN		366	9	16NOV							366	9										
11TH MT BN		381	9	16NOV	381	9																
13TH MT BN		358	9	23NOV															358	9		
COMMUNICATION																						
1ST RADIO BN		475	2	23NOV	247												228	2				
5TH COMM BN		712	7	16NOV	712	7																
7TH COMM BN		669	13	16NOV	669	13																
9TH COMM BN		670	4	24NOV									190	3					480	1		
1ST ANGLICO	2	330	10	23NOV													133	2			197	8
SHORE PARTY																						
1ST SP BN		373	15	16NOV	373	15																
3D SP BN		496	35	16NOV					496	35												
5TH SP BN		298	21	23NOV									21	4					277	17		

* UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, STRENGTHS AND LOCATION ARE THOSE REPORTED BY UNIT PERSONNEL STATUS REPORTS AND DO NOT REFLECT DAY-TO-DAY ADJUSTMENTS BETWEEN REPORTING PERIODS.

UNIT	NOTE	ASSIGNED STRENGTH USMC	ASSIGNED STRENGTH USN	STR RPT DATE	DANANG USMC	DANANG USN	CHU LAI USMC	CHU LAI USN	PHU BAI USMC	PHU BAI USN	DONG HA USMC	DONG HA USN	OKINAWA USMC	OKINAWA USN	JAPAN USMC	JAPAN USN	HAWAII USMC	HAWAII USN	EASTPAC USMC	EASTPAC USN	OTHER USMC	OTHER USN
MILITARY POLICE																						
1ST MP BN		614	6	16NOV	614	6																
3D MP BN		688	9	16NOV	688	9																
5TH MP BN		249	6	23NOV															249	6		
SERVICE/SUPPORT																						
FLC, III MAF																						
HQ, FLC/1ST FSR																						
H&S BN		1480	37	16NOV	1480	37																
SUPPLY BN		1536	13	16NOV	1536	13																
7TH SEP BK FUEL CO		145	9	16NOV	145	9																
MAINT BN		1075	1	16NOV	1075	1																
FLSG-A/3D SERV BN		1998	27	16NOV					1998	27												
FLSG-B/1ST SERV BN		752	12	16NOV			752	12														
3D FSR																						
H&S BN		1067	41	23NOV									1067	41								
SUPPLY BN		1318	12	23NOV									1318	12								
MAINT BN		1017		23NOV									1017									
5TH FSR																						
H&S BN		474	35	24NOV															474	35		
SUPPLY BN		554	25	24NOV															554	25		
MAINT BN		562		24NOV															562			
5TH SERVICE BN		612	20	23NOV															612	20		
PROV SERVICE BN, 9TH MAB		922	13	24NOV									922	13								
9TH SEP BULK FUEL CO		256		23NOV															256			
MEDICAL																						
1ST MED BN		112	270	16NOV	112	270																
3D MED BN		111	239	16NOV					111	239												
5TH MED BN		84	149	23NOV									3	7					81	142		
1ST HOSP CO		39	74	16NOV			39	74														
5TH HOSP CO		34	42	23NOV															34	42		
1ST DENTAL CO			76	16NOV		76																
3D DENTAL CO			82	16NOV						82												
5TH DENTAL CO			25	12OCT														9		16		
11TH DENTAL CO			58	16NOV		58																
13TH DENTAL CO			30	26OCT																30		
15TH DENTAL CO		3	42	23NOV															3	42		
17TH DENTAL CO		3	65	23NOV															3	65		
USMC		85,790			25,463		1,737		12,186		15,134		8,133				3,131		16,778		3,228	
USN		3,855			1,154		100		668		575		222				125		826		185	
GROUND TOTAL		89,645			26,617		1,837		12,854		15,709		8,355				3,256		17,604		3,413	
AVIATION UNITS																						
HQ SQDN FMFPAC		74		2NOV													74					
1ST MAW																						
MWHG-1																						
H&HS-1		792	37	16NOV	792	37																
MWFS-1		141		16NOV	141																	
MWCS-1		246		16NOV	246																	
MWSG-17																						
H&MS-17		697	18	16NOV	697	18																
WERS-17		249		16NOV	249																	
MACG-18																						
H&HS-18		178		16NOV	178																	
MASS-2		221	2	16NOV	221	2																
MASS-3		204	2	16NOV			204	2														
MACS-4		263	3	16NOV	263	3																
1ST LAAM BN		563	13	16NOV	563	13																
2ND LAAM BN		481	12	16NOV			481	12														
MAG-11																						
H&MS-11		448		16NOV	448																	
MABS-11		453	30	16NOV	453	30																
VMCJ-1		458	1	16NOV	458	1																
VMFA-122		317	1	16NOV	317	1																
VMF(AW)-235		218		16NOV	218																	
VMA(AW)-242		306	1	16NOV	306	1																
MAG-12																						
H&MS-12		501		16NOV			501															
MABS-12		565	35	16NOV			565	35														
MATCU-67		88		16NOV			88															
VMA-121		192	1	16NOV			192	1														
VMA-211		221	1	16NOV			221	1														
VMA-311		185	1	16NOV			185	1														
VMA(AW)-533		261	1	9NOV			261	1														
MAG-13																						
H&MS-13		334		16NOV			334															
MABS-13		510	28	16NOV			510	28														
VMFA-115		317	1	16NOV			317	1														
VMFA-314		322	1	16NOV			322	1														
VMFA-323		339	1	16NOV			339	1														

MAG-16																						
H&MS-16		496		16NOV	496																	
MABS-16		689	30	16NOV	689	30																
MATCU-62		82		16NOV					82													
MATCU-68		73		16NOV					73													
VMO-2		163	1	16NOV	163	1																
HMH-463		306	1	16NOV	306	1																
HMM-265		179	4	16NOV	179	4																
HMM-363		187	1	16NOV	187	1																
MAG-36																						
H&MS-36		474		16NOV					474													
MABS-36		701	35	16NOV					701	35												
MATCU-70		23		16NOV					23													
VMO-3		192	1	16NOV					192													
VMO-6		202	1	16NOV					202	1												
HMM-163		225	4	16NOV							225	4										
HMM-164		176	1	16NOV					176	1												
HMM-165		185	1	16NOV			185	1														
HMM-362		212	1	16NOV					212	1												
HMM-364		399	2	16NOV					399	2												
9TH MAB																						
MAG-15																						
H&MS-15		568		23NOV									97		471							
MABS-15		383	29	23NOV											383	29						
H&HS IWAKUNI		394	293	15JUN											394	293						
H&HS FUTEMA		244	61	9MAR									244	61								
MACS-6		208	2	23NOV									208	2								
MATCU-60		69	1	23NOV											69	1						
MATCU-66		38		22NOV									38									
VMGR-152		485	6	23NOV	94								391	6								
VMA-223		209	1	16NOV											209	1						
VMFA-542		303	2	16NOV											303	2						
HMM-262		163	1	16NOV									163	1								
HMM-361	1	192	4	16NOV																	192	4

UNIT	NOTE	ASSIGNED STRENGTH		STR RPT DATE	DANANG		CHU LAI		PHU BAI		DONG HA		OKINAWA		JAPAN		HAWAII		EASTPAC		OTHER	
1ST BRIG		USMC	USN		USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN
H&MS 1ST BRIGADE		93		23NOV													93					
MACS-2		235		9NOV													235					
VMF(AW)-212		233	1	9NOV													233	1				
3D MAW																						
MWHG-3																						
H&HS-3		676	6	23NOV															676	6		
MWFS-3		170		23NOV															170			
MWCS-3		149		23NOV															149			
MHTG-30																						
H&MS-30		457	1	23NOV															457	1		
HMMT-301		261	1	23NOV															261	1		
HMMT-302		307	1	23NOV															307	1		
MAG-33																						
H&MS-33		758		23NOV															758			
MABS-33		145	2	23NOV															145	2		
MATCU-65		79		23NOV															79			
VMCJ-3		419	2	23NOV															419	2		
VMA-214		251	1	16NOV															251	1		
VMFA-232		238	1	16NOV															238	1		
VMFA-334		305	2	23NOV															305	2		
MWSG-37																						
H&MS-37		694	3	23NOV															694	3		
WERS-37		251		23NOV															251			
VMGR-352		449	1	23NOV															449	1		
MACG-38																						
H&HS-38		221		23NOV															221			
MASS-5		186		23NOV															186			
MACS-1		301		23NOV															301			
MACS-3		226		23NOV															226			
MACS-7		194	4	26OCT															194	4		
5TH LAAM BN		489	9	23NOV															489	9		
MAG-56																						
H&MS-56		327	1	26OCT															327	1		
MABS-56																						
VMO-5		368	4	23NOV															368	4		
HMH-462		205	1	23NOV															205	1		
HMM-263		229	3	19OCT															229	3		
USMC		27,280			7,664		4,705		2,534		225		1,141		1,829		635		8,355		192	
USN		717			143		85		41		4		70		326		1		43		4	
AVIATION TOTAL		27,997			7,807		4,790		2,575		229		1,211		2,155		636		8,398		196	

RECAPITULATION OF FMFPAC PERSONNEL DISTRIBUTION

		ASSIGNED STRENGTH	DANANG	CHU LAI	PHU BAI	DONG HA	OKINAWA	JAPAN	HAWAII	EASTPAC	OTHER
GROUND TOTAL	USMC	85,790	25,463	1,737	12,186	15,134	8,133		3,131	16,778	3,228
	USN	3,855	1,154	100	668	575	222		125	826	185
AVIATION TOTAL	USMC	27,280	7,664	4,705	2,534	225	1,141	1,829	635	8,355	192
	USN	717	143	85	41	4	70	326	1	43	4
GRAND TOTAL	USMC	113,070	33,127	6,442	14,720	15,359	9,274	1,829	3,766	25,133	3,420
	USN	4,572	1,297	185	209	579	292	326	126	869	189

NOTES:

1. FIGURES IN "OTHER" ASSIGNED TO SLF's AND ARE BLT STRENGTHS.
2. FIGURES IN "OTHER" ASSIGNED TO VARIOUS RVN LOCATIONS.
3. STRENGTH INDICATED IS FOR BLT 1/27.
4. AT VARIOUS I CTZ LOCATIONS.

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