H COMPANY, 2ND BATTALION, 5TH MARINES

OCTOBER 1966 — OPERATION PRAIRIE, THE DMZ

Compiled from the 2/5 Command Chronology for 1–31 October 1966

3d Marine Division (Forward) · Task Force Delta · Quang Tri Province, Republic of Vietnam

1. Unit Overview

Unit Designation	Hotel Company (H Co), 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division
Reporting Period	1–31 October 1966
Commander	1st Lieutenant J. J. Kirschke, 1–8 October 1966; Captain J. A. Getchell, 9–31 October 1966
Higher HQ	2nd Battalion, 5th Marines (Maj Leonard E. Wood, 1–2 October; LtCol William C. Airheart from 3 October), OPCON to the 4th Marines under Task Force Delta / 3d Marine Division (Forward)
Area of Operations	Quang Tri Province immediately south of the DMZ — Dong Ha, Con Thien, the Cam Lo district and Leatherneck Square
Combat Posture	Offensive — reconnaissance in force, then sustained patrolling and ambushing from a patrol base near the DMZ
Base of Operations	Dong Ha support base; from 9 October a patrol base 3,000 metres from the western boundary and 4,000 metres from the northern boundary of the DMZ
Corps Area	I Corps Tactical Zone, Republic of Vietnam

2. Commander's Summary

Hotel Company spent October 1966 on the DMZ. It had led the battalion north as the advance party on 30 September, reaching Dong Ha at 0900 to set up the support base, and from 1 October 2/5 came under Task Force Delta for Operation Prairie — the campaign to stop the North Vietnamese 324B Division establishing itself in northern Quang Tri Province.

“The mission of 2/5 during the early phase of employment in Operation Prairie was reconnaissance in force,” the chronology records. “Subsequent to 9 October 1966, the Battalion has operated from a patrol base located 3,000 meters from the western boundary and 4,000 meters from the northern boundary of the DMZ. Aggressive combat patrolling and ambushing dominated this phase.” With a battery of 105mm howitzers and two platoons of tanks attached at that forward location, two companies and a command group were in the field daily at distances of three to five kilometres, and “almost daily contact with the enemy” followed.

For Hotel Company the heavy fighting came between 8 and 17 October: a ten-man enemy force taken under fire at YD 084640 on the 8th for three killed and three submachine guns captured, the fighting of 12 and 14 October in which the company lost one and then two Marines killed, and the ambush of the battalion command group on 17 October, after which the company swept south-west with tanks. Late in the month 2/5 took over Con Thien from the ARVN. The battalion's October cost was 22 killed, two dead of wounds and 137 wounded; the expected multi-division offensive across the DMZ never came.

3. Operations Overview

Operation / Activity	Dates	Description
Operation Prairie	1–31 October 1966 (H Company in the operation from 30 September)	H COMPANY PARTICIPATED. A 3d Marine Division operation in Quang Tri Province to prevent the NVA 324B Division crossing the DMZ and establishing a base area. 2/5 (-) with Companies F, G and H served under the 4th Marines (Col Cereghino) within Task Force Delta; Company E remained at Hill 69 in the Chu Lai TAOR.
Patrol base operations near the DMZ	9–31 October 1966	From 9 October the battalion worked from a patrol base 3,000 metres from the western boundary and 4,000 metres from the northern boundary of the DMZ, with a 105mm battery and two platoons of tanks attached. Two companies and a command group operated daily at three to five kilometres from the base; company and company-minus night ambushes were used throughout.
Con Thien	Late October 1966	2/5 took over responsibility for Con Thien from the ARVN, holding the strongpoint at the north-west corner of Leatherneck Square.

4. Chronology of Company H Activities

Compiled from the S-3 narrative and the chronological sequence of events in the 2/5 command chronology for 1–31 October 1966. Only entries naming Company H, or bearing directly on it, are listed. Grid references are in the YD square, as recorded.

Date	Activity / Events
1–2 Oct	2/5 came under Task Force Delta for Operation Prairie. Hotel Company, which had flown up on 30 September as the advance party, worked from the Dong Ha support base as the battalion closed on the operational area.
3 Oct	The battalion moved out along the routes shown on the operation overlay; Company H departed the command post at about 031545H, the going made difficult by terrain and heat and by halts for air strikes. By 032300H Company H was at YD 063624, setting

Date	Activity / Events
	up a combat base and perimeter defence for the night. LtCol William C. Airheart took command of the battalion.
4 Oct	At 041700H Company H established a combat base at YD 075623 while the command group and Company F set up at YD 078636.
8 Oct	At 081511H Company H made contact with ten enemy at YD 084640 and took them under fire — three enemy killed and three submachine guns captured; the rest fled north toward YD 083647. At 081145H an artillery forward observer with the company observed five bodies after an artillery strike. At 081700H the company found an enemy bulletin board at YD 100700 carrying propaganda, and brought it in.
12 Oct	Hotel Company in contact with NVA units: 1 USMC KIA and 3 USMC WIA documented for the company.
14 Oct	Heavy contact: 16 NVA confirmed killed and six weapons captured. Hotel Company losses were 2 USMC KIA and 5 USMC WIA. At 140915H Company G and elements in blocking position captured a wounded enemy, a machine gun barrel, ammunition, packs and other equipment at YD 108720, with Company H in the landing zone.
17 Oct	The battalion command post group was ambushed at YD 117678. Hotel Company swept south-west with tanks (YD 120666).
24 Oct	At 241100H Company H encountered an enemy force at YD 096745 and took it under fire; the enemy broke contact and fled south, and artillery was called on the suspected location.
27 Oct	At 271100H Company H searched the area of the previous night's artillery strike at YD 119664 and found excellent coverage of the area — 6 NVA killed, with documents and medical supplies.
31 Oct	At 311040H Company H received sniper fire from approximately four VC at YD 126716, returned fire and called artillery on the area; the enemy broke contact. Battalion totals for the month: 22 Marines killed, 2 dead of wounds and 137 wounded; about 89 enemy confirmed killed.

5. Notes and Caveats

This file was rewritten on 19 September 2026 directly from the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines command chronologies. The notes below record what changed and where the record is thin.

1. SOURCE. The 2/5 command chronology for 1–31 October 1966 (Texas Tech item 1201048074), forwarded by 1st Marine Division on 15 December 1966 because “operational commitments prevented its inclusion” in the division chronology at the time.

2. OPERATION MACON REMOVED; PRAIRIE ADDED. The earlier version of this file had Hotel Company in the An Hoa area on the final phase of Operation Macon, which it said concluded on 28 October with 24 Marines and 380 VC killed. None of that involves this company. Throughout October 1966 Hotel Company was on the DMZ in Quang Tri Province on Operation Prairie, 280 kilometres to the north-west, under the 4th Marines and the 3d Marine Division. Macon was a 1st Battalion, 9th Marines operation. The entire October narrative has been replaced.

3. COMMAND. The October organisational data gives 1stLt J. J. Kirschke as commanding officer of Company H for 1–8 October 1966 and Capt J. A. Getchell for 9–31 October. Lieutenant Kirschke, who

commanded the company at the start of the month, wrote an account of this period in his memoir Not Going Home Alone.

4. HILL 65 OR HILL 69. Some accounts give the departure point for the move north as Hill 65. The chronology says Hill 69, the battalion's own combat base in the Chu Lai TAOR, and Lieutenant Kirschke confirms it.

5. CASUALTY FIGURES. The Hotel Company figures for 12 and 14 October are those documented in the chronology; the battalion totals for the month are 22 killed, 2 dead of wounds and 137 wounded. Whole-operation figures for Prairie — about 200 to 226 Marines killed — are drawn from the official history and cover all units over the full operation, not this battalion.

6. ORIGINALS. National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps. For full records contact National Archives II, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park MD 20740, or Marine Corps History Division, Quantico VA 22134.

6. Sources

This document was compiled from the following primary and secondary sources:

PRIMARY SOURCES

— 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines Command Chronology for the period 1–31 October 1966 (Texas Tech University Vietnam Archive item 1201048074), forwarded by 1st Marine Division on 15 December 1966.

— Section I organisational data, 1–31 October 1966, which records the Company H change of command on 9 October 1966.

SECONDARY SOURCES

— Shulimson, Jack and Charles M. Johnson. U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966. History and Museums Division, HQMC, 1982.

— Kirschke, James J. Not Going Home Alone: A Marine's Story. 2001.

— “Hotel Company.” Hotel 2/5 Combat Marines. https://hotel25vv.com/hotel-company

— Related files in this collection: Operation_Prairie.docx, Hotel25claude\Operations.

Document prepared for historical research purposes. For authoritative casualty figures, unit rosters, and engagement details, consult original 2/5 Command Chronology records at NARA RG 127. | Hotel Company, 2/5 Marines, October 1966