U.S. MARINES IN VIETNAM

THE DEFINING YEAR

1968



COVER: Marine infantry advance cautiously under support of the 90mm gun of a M48 tank in street fighting in Hue. Even with the tank support, the Marines found the enemy resistance difficult to overcome in the first days of the operation.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190400

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1968

by
Jack Shulimson
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and
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HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C.
1997

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Library of Congress Card No. 77–604776
PCN 190 0031 3800

For sale by the U.S. Government Printing Office
Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop: SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-9328
ISBN 0-16-049125-8

Foreword

This is the last volume, although published out of chronological sequence, in the nine-volume operational history series covering the Marine Corps' participation in the Vietnam War. A separate functional series complements the operational histories. This book is the capstone volume of the entire series in that 1968, as the title indicates, was the defining year of the war. While originally designed to be two volumes, it was decided that unity and cohesion required one book.

The year 1968 was the year of the Tet Offensive including Khe Sanh and Hue City. These were momentous events in the course of the war and they occurred in the first three months of the year. This book, however, documents that 1968 was more than just the Tet Offensive. The bloodiest month of the war for the U.S. forces was not January nor February 1968, but May 1968 when the Communists launched what was called their "Mini-Tet" offensive. This was followed by a second "Mini-Tet" offensive during the late summer which also was repulsed at heavy cost to both sides. By the end of the year, the U.S. forces in South Vietnam's I Corps, under the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF), had regained the offensive. By December, enemy-initiated attacks had fallen to their lowest level in two years. Still, there was no talk of victory. The Communist forces remained a formidable foe and a limit had been drawn on the level of American participation in the war.

Although largely written from the perspective of III MAF and the ground war in I Corps, the volume also treats the activities of Marines with the Seventh Fleet Special Landing Force, activities of Marine advisors to South Vietnamese forces, and other Marine involvement in the war. Separate chapters cover Marine aviation and the single manager controversy, artillery, logistics, manpower, and pacification.

Like most of the volumes in this series, this has been a cumulative history. Lieutenant Colonel Leonard A. Blasiol researched and wrote the initial drafts of the chapters on Khe Sanh as well as Chapters 17, 19, and 21 and the account of Operation Thor in Chapter 26. Mr. Charles R. Smith researched and drafted Chapters 16, 18, 20, and 22. Captain David A. Dawson researched and wrote Chapter 27. Dr. Jack Shulimson researched and wrote the remaining chapters, edited and revised the entire text, and incorporated the comments of the various reviewers.

Dr. Shulimson heads the History Writing Unit and is a graduate of the University of Buffalo, now the State University of New York at Buffalo. He earned his master's degree in history at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan and his doctorate from the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland in American studies. Mr. Smith is a senior historian in the Division and served in Vietnam as an artilleryman and then as a historian with the U.S. Army. He is a graduate of the University of California, Santa Barbara, and received his master's degree in history from San Diego State University. Lieutenant Colonel Blasiol is an experienced artilleryman and a graduate of Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, with a degree in history, and of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. Captain Dawson is an infantry officer now stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. He holds a bachelor of arts degree in history from Cornell University, Ithaca, New York and a master's degree in history from Kansas State University, Lawrence, Kansas.



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

Preface

U.S. Marines in Vietnam, The Defining Year, 1968 like the preceding volumes in this series is largely based upon the holdings of the Marine Corps Historical Center. These include the official unit command chronologies, after-action reports, message and journal files, various staff studies, oral histories, personal papers, and reference collections. In addition, the authors have used the holdings of the other Services and pertinent published primary and secondary sources. Most importantly, nearly 230 reviewers, most of whom were participants in the events, read draft chapters and made substantive comments. They are listed by name in a separate appendix. While some classified sources have been used, none of the material in the text contains any classified information.

To a large extent, the measurement of this war relied not upon territory occupied, but upon casualties inflicted upon the enemy. In enumerating enemy casualties, the authors are not making any statement upon the reliability or accuracy of these numbers. These are merely the figures provided by the reporting units. They are important in that the U.S. military and national leadership depended in part upon the comparative casualty yardstick to report and evaluate progress in the war.

In any project this large and that involved so many people, the authors are in debt to several of their associates, past and present, in the History and Museums Division. While it is not possible to list everyone, we would be most negligent if we did not thank the following. First, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, Director Emeritus, provided the vision and backing for the entire series, insisting upon readability and accuracy. Colonel Michael F. Monigan, Acting Director, gave the impetus for final completion of the project. Chief Historian Benis M. Frank, and his predecessor, Henry I. Shaw, Jr., furnished editorial guidance and encouragement. Ms. Wanda J. Renfrow of the Histories Section and Mr. Robert E. Struder, Head of Editing and Design, read the entire manuscript together with Mr. Frank and prevented several minor errors and some embarrassments. Mrs. Cathy A. Kerns, of the Editing and Design Section, typed the photograph captions and the Medal of Honor Appendix. Both Mrs. Kerns and Ms. Renfrow painstakingly inserted the multitudinous entries for the index, carefully checking the index against the text. Finally, Ms. Renfrow patiently and ably made the numerous revisions in the organization of the index. Mr. William S. Hill provided technical direction for both the maps and insertion of the photographs. Ms. Evelyn A. Englander of the library was most helpful in obtaining publications. The Archives staff (under the direction of Fred J. Graboske and his predecessor, Ms. Joyce Bonnett), especially Ms. Joyce M. Hudson and Ms. Amy C. Cohen, cheerfully made their resources available, as did Art Curator John T. Dyer, Jr. The Reference Section under Danny J. Crawford was always most cooperative, especially Ms. Lena M. Kaljot, who assisted in the duplication of most of the photographs. A special thanks goes to Lieutenant Colonel Leon Craig, Jr., Head of the Support Branch; his administrative officer, First Lieutenant Mark R. Schroeder; and his enlisted Marines, especially Staff Sergeant Myrna A. Thomas and Corporal Juan E. Johnson, who assisted in that last push for publication.

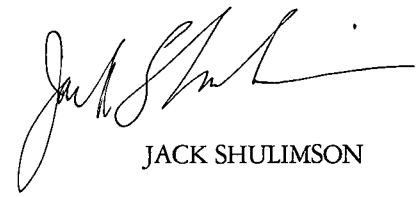
Both Mr. Struder and Mr. Hill adroitly handled the liaison with the Typography and Design Division of the U.S. Government Printing Office in the layout of the book. Mr. Struder deftly and professionally assisted in the reading of page proofs and Mr. Hill meticulously monitored the preparation of charts and maps. The authors also appreciate the efforts of Mr. Nicholas M. Freda and Mr. Lee Nance of the Typography

and Design Division, Mr. Freda for his careful layout of text and Mr. Nance for the final preparation of all maps and charts.

Finally, the authors want to acknowledge the contributions of former members of the Histories Section who reviewed and commented on several chapters, including Lieutenant Colonels Lane Rogers and Gary D. Solis, Majors George R. Dunham, Charles D. Melson, and Edward F. Wells, and Dr. V. Keith Fleming, Jr.

Special mention and most heartfelt thanks go to various interns who have assisted with the preparation of this volume. Naval Academy Midshipman Third Class Thomas Moninger, who prepared the Chronology of Events, and Maderia School students Ms. Jaime Koepsell and Ms. Sylvia Bunyasi who drafted the initial Command and Staff list. Marine Sergeant Neil A. Peterson, a student at the Citadel, sketched over half of the draft maps used in this volume. James E. Cypher, a senior at Loyola University, in New Orleans, assisted in the tedious but most important final editing of the index. Finally, there was Peter M. Yarbo, who as a student at Johns Hopkins, for over a year, once a week, took the early morning train from Baltimore to Washington, to assist with the project. Peter prepared several of the charts in the appendices, but even more significantly, he did almost all of the photographic research, saw that the photos were duplicated, and made the initial selection of photographs, organizing them by chapter. This book could never have been published at this time without his specific assistance and that of the other interns.

The authors are also indebted to Dr. Douglas Pike, who opened up his Indochina Archives, then located at the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, for their examination. Mr. Robert J. Destatte, Defense Prisoner of War and Missing Personnel Office, U.S. Department of Defense, provided a translation of several published Vietnamese documents. Finally our thanks to those who contributed comments on the draft and to our colleagues in the other Defense historical offices, who assisted with their advice and comments. In the end, however, the authors alone assume sole responsibility for the content of the text, including opinions expressed and any errors in fact.



JACK SHULIMSON

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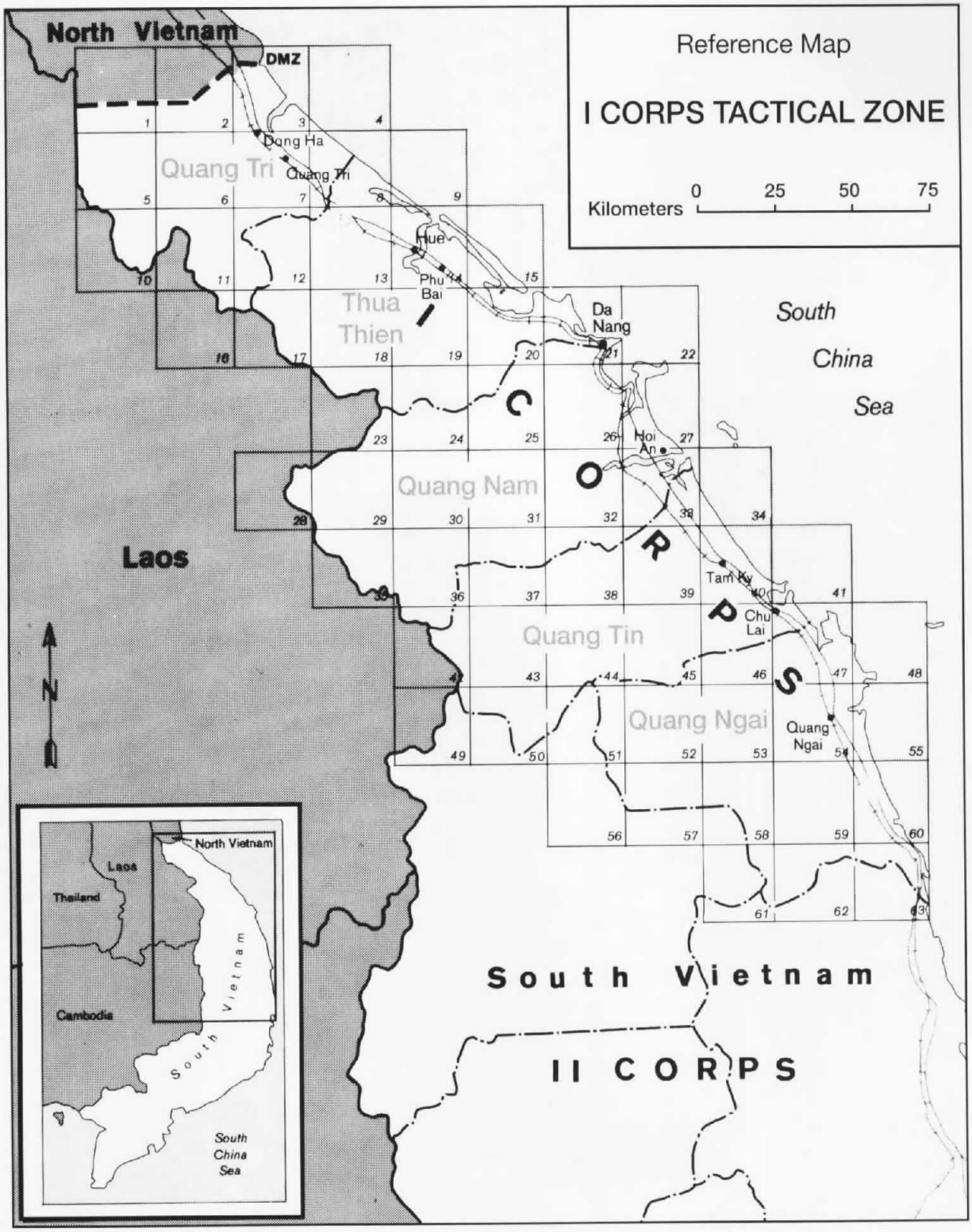
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Reference Map
I CORPS TACTICAL ZONE
Kilometers 0 25 50 75
North Vietnam
DMZ
Dong Ha
Quang Tri
Quang Tri
Hue
Phu Bai
Thua Thien
Da Nang
South China Sea
Hoi An
Quang Nam
Laos
Tam Ky
Chu Lai
Quang Tin
Quang Ngai
Quang Ngai
I CORPS
South Vietnam
II CORPS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

PART I
PRE-TET 1968

CHAPTER 1

A Puzzling War

III MAF January 1968—MACV and Command Arrangements—South Vietnam and I Corps
The Enemy—Focus on the North—MACV Vis-à-Vis Marines—An Ambivalent Outlook

III MAF January 1968

After more than two and a half years since the commitment of major U.S. combat forces to the war in Vietnam, the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) entered 1968 with portents of a possible climax to the conflict. American intelligence indicated a buildup of enemy forces throughout South Vietnam and especially in the northern border region. Regiments from three North Vietnamese Army (NVA) divisions massed in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) dividing the two Vietnams and in Laos near the isolated Marine base at Khe Sanh. To counter this threat, the American command prepared to reinforce the Marines in I Corps Tactical Zone (ICTZ), the five northern provinces in South Vietnam. Although 1967 ended and 1968 began with the usual holiday truces between the opposing forces (more honored in the breach than in the observance), the Marines girded themselves for future heavy fighting.

With its headquarters at the sprawling and centrally located Da Nang base, III MAF at the beginning of January 1968 numbered more than 100,000 Marines, sailors, and soldiers. Lieutenant General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., Naval Academy Class of 1935 and Commanding General, III MAF, since the previous June, had under his command two reinforced Marine divisions, the 1st and 3d; a U.S. Army division, the Americal; the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW); and the Force Logistic Command. Supplementing these units and temporarily attached to III MAF were the nearly 3,000 Marines of the Seventh Fleet's two special landing forces (SLFs). Part of the U.S. Pacific Command's strategic reserve, the SLFs each consisted of a Marine battalion landing team (BLT), a battalion reinforced by supporting elements and a helicopter squadron. In addition, the III MAF commander had "coordinating authority" over the four-battalion Republic of Korea (ROK) 2d Marine Brigade (meaning orders to the Koreans took the form of requests). Including the ROK Marines, General Cushman had available 40 infantry battalions and 23 Marine aircraft squadrons in the III MAF area of operations, extending some 220 miles from the DMZ in the north to the border with II Corps Tactical Zone in the south.[1]



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A192347

Marine LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force, returns a salute during a ceremony at Da Nang. By January 1968, III MAF, the senior U.S. command in I Corps, the five northern provinces of South Vietnam, equalled a field army in size.

The 53-year-old Cushman, commanding nearly a field army in size, had multiple responsibilities which had grown apace with the expansion of III MAF from the original Marine contingent, the 5,000-man 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (9th MEB), which had landed at Da Nang in March 1965. As the senior U.S. general officer in I Corps, General Cushman wore several "hats." As well as Commanding General, III MAF, he was both the U.S. I Corps "Area Coordinator" and "Senior Advisor." In one capacity or another he was responsible for all U.S. forces in the northern five provinces.[2]

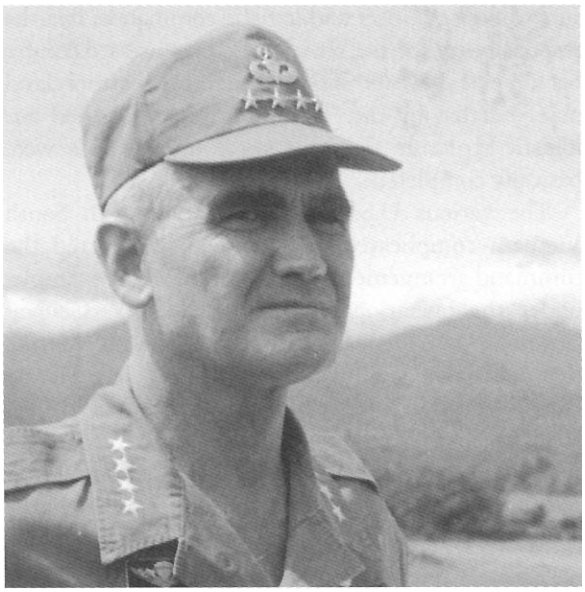
Well respected in the Corps, with a reputation for intelligence and political adroitness, General Cushman brought a broad background in both military and national affairs to his duties at III MAF. The native Minnesotan, a battalion commander in World War II, was awarded the Navy Cross for heroism at Guam. Following the war, he served as an instructor at the Marine

Corps Schools at Quantico, Virginia, and then headed the Amphibious Warfare Branch, Office of Naval Research, in Washington. After two years with the Central Intelligence Agency and a promotion to colonel, General Cushman joined the staff of the Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Fleet, in London, and then returned to the United States as a member of the faculty of the Armed Forces Staff College. In 1956, he commanded an infantry regiment, the 2d Marines, at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and the following year became the assistant for national security affairs to then-Vice President Richard M. Nixon.

Following promotion to general officer rank and a tour with the 3d Marine Division on Okinawa as assistant division and then division commander, General Cushman returned to Washington in 1962 where he filled the positions of assistant chief of staff for intelligence and then for operations at Headquarters, Marine Corps. In 1964, he became commander of Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton, California, where in June 1966 he formed the 5th Marine Division to meet the increasing manpower demands caused by the Vietnam War. Arriving in Vietnam in April 1967 as Deputy Commander, III MAF, General Cushman on 1 June 1967 relieved Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt as commanding general. Cushman's diverse experience would serve him in good stead to face the complications of command in Vietnam.[3]

Army Gen William C. Westmoreland, Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, visits a Marine battalion command post south of Da Nang. Gen Westmoreland is the senior U.S. military commander in South Vietnam.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A371378

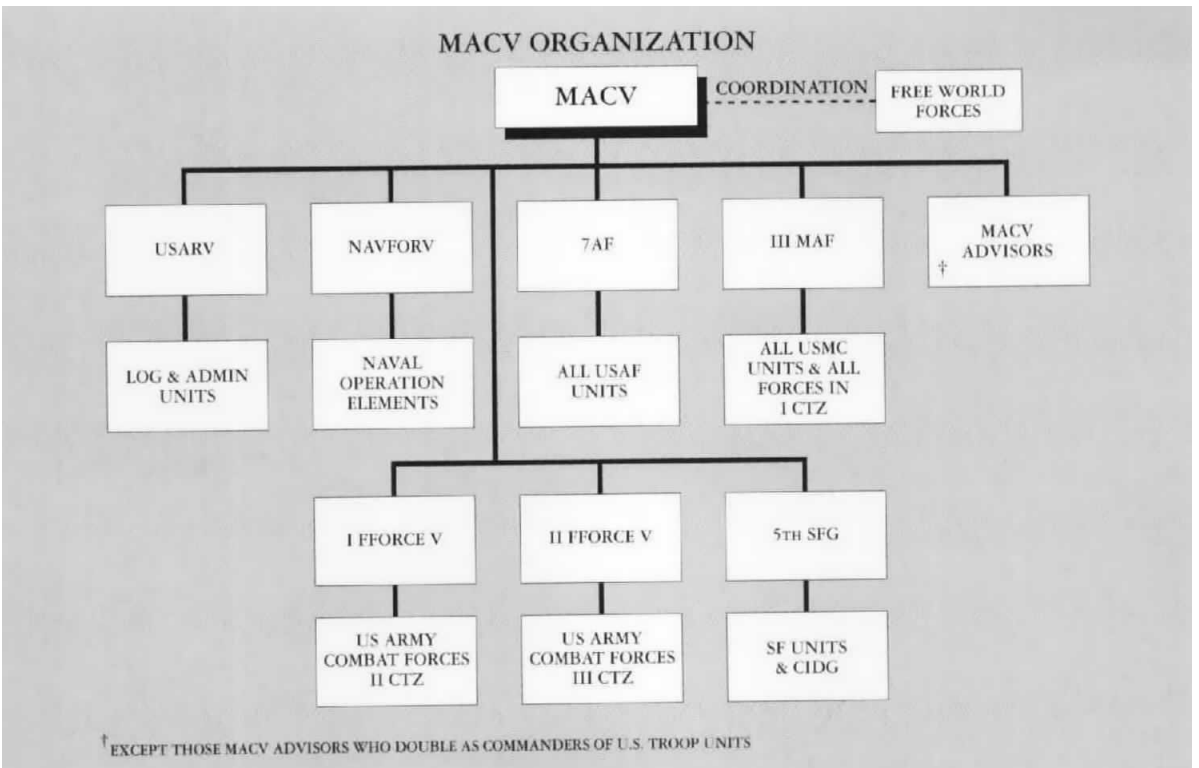


MACV and Command Arrangements

As the war expanded, command arrangements, like the U.S. commitment, evolved over time without a master plan. Having originated in January 1962 as a small advisory organization, the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV), in January 1968 totaled nearly 500,000 and, by that time, had taken over from the South Vietnamese much of the large-unit war. Army General William C. Westmoreland, who became Commander, USMACV, in June 1964, had presided over the buildup and commitment of U.S. troops to battle. A ramrod-straight West Pointer, and, indeed, former Superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy, Westmoreland had full responsibility for the conduct of the war in the south and for all U.S. forces based there. He, however, exercised this authority through the U.S. chain of command reaching back to Washington. MACV, itself, was a unified command directly subordinate to the U.S. Pacific Command in Honolulu, Hawaii. The Commander-in-Chief Pacific (CinCPac), Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, gave Westmoreland a relatively free hand over ground and air operations in the south, but retained personal direction of the air campaign over most of North Vietnam.[4*]

The control of U.S. air activity and forces in Southeast Asia was a complicated affair. While General Westmoreland directed the bombing in Route Package 1, the southern sector of North Vietnam above the DMZ, he shared authority with the U.S. Ambassador to Laos for the "Steel Tiger/Tiger Hound" air operations over that country. The Seventh Air Force provided air support for MACV from airfields both in the Republic of Vietnam and from Thailand. The 46,000 Seventh Air Force personnel in South Vietnam came under the operational control of General Westmoreland, while the Thailand units were under U.S. Air Forces, Pacific, which in turn reported to Admiral Sharp. General William W. "Spike" Momyer, the Commanding General, Seventh Air Force, was also the MACV Deputy Commander for Air and had overall responsibility for the air defense of South Vietnam and

*U.S. Air Force Historian Wayne Thompson observed that "Washington often dealt directly with Westmoreland and cut out Sharp." Dr. Wayne Thompson, Air Force History Support Office, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 23Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File)



air support for Army and allied forces. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, however, remained directly under III MAF and flew close air support for Marine and allied units in I Corps.[5]

In South Vietnam, General Westmoreland controlled his tactical ground forces through three regional commands, roughly corresponding with the corps areas of the Republic of Vietnam. III MAF was in the north in I Corps; the U.S. Army's I Field Force, Vietnam, was in II Corps, consisting of the central highlands and central coastal provinces of South Vietnam; and the Army's II Field Force, Vietnam, operated both in III Corps, centered around the capital city of Saigon, and IV Corps, which included the populous Mekong Delta. All told, MACV ground combat forces, including Marines and "Free World" troops from Korea, Australia, and Thailand consisted of 11 divisions and 14 separate brigades and task forces adding up to 118 maneuver battalions counting both infantry and tank units. Some 60 Army artillery battalions, two heavily reinforced Marine artillery regiments, a 500-man New Zealand artillery battalion, 11 Marine helicopter squadrons, and 96 Army aviation companies supported these maneuver units.[6]

The Navy and the Army divided the logistic support for U.S. and allied troops in Vietnam. General Westmoreland retained direct command of the Army component, the U.S. Army, Vietnam, and had operational control of the naval, U.S. Naval Forces, Vietnam. The latter, through its 22,000-man Naval Support Activity, Da Nang, which included the 3d Naval Construction Brigade, furnished heavy engineering and common item supplies for all U.S. and Korean forces in I Corps. U.S. Army, Vietnam, through its subordinate engineer and logistic commands, had the responsibility for the remaining corps areas. Looking back several years later, General Westmoreland observed that by the "beginning of '68 we had our logistic structure finished: ports and airfields were basically completed . . . ."[7]

The various U.S. service components in South Vietnam complicated and occasionally blurred the command arrangements within MACV. For example, under the operational control of MACV, General Cushman also reported directly through Marine channels to the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, Lieutenant General Victor H. "Brute" Krulak. Krulak retained administrative command and overall responsibility for the readiness, training, and logistic support of all Marine forces in the Pacific. Although not in the operational chain of command, General Krulak was not one to deny General

Cushman the benefit of his advice.* The other service components also had divisions of authority. General Momyer's Seventh Air Force reported not only administratively to U.S. Air Forces, Pacific, but operationally to that command for the "Rolling Thunder" air campaign over North Vietnam. Moreover, the question of control of Marine fixed-wing air remained a matter of contention between Generals Momyer and Cushman, with General Westmoreland often acting as mediator.[8]

Rear Admiral Kenneth L. Veth, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces, Vietnam, also had multiple responsibilities and mixed channels of command. While under the operational control of MACV, he reported administratively through the Seventh Fleet chain of command to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet. In addition to his logistic responsibilities, Admiral Veth directed the coastal and maritime anti-infiltration campaign and was the overall commander of the Navy's segment of the Mobile Riverine Force operating with an Army brigade in the Mekong Delta. In this divided jurisdiction, both the senior Army commander and Admiral Veth permitted the flotilla and brigade commanders flexibility in making local command arrangements.[9]

Obfuscating the command lines even further were MACV relations with external U.S. commands, the U.S. Embassy in South Vietnam, and the South Vietnamese themselves. For naval gunfire support and use of the Marine Special Landing Forces on board the ships of the Navy Amphibious Ready Groups, General Westmoreland had to coordinate with the Seventh Fleet through CinCPac channels. In addition to the amphibious forces, MACV also coordinated through the same Navy channels the carrier aircraft of Seventh Fleet Task Force 77 to supplement the Seventh Air Force and Marine air support of ground forces in South Vietnam. Another chain of command existed with the Strategic Air Command in order to process requests for the use of Boeing B–52 Stratofortresses in bombing missions over the south.[10]

General Westmoreland had a unique relationship with the U.S. Embassy. In April of 1967 he had taken over from the Embassy responsibility for the U.S. pacification assistance program. The newly created Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) agency became part of MACV and its head, the outspoken former presidential advisor, Robert J. Komer, served as Deputy ComUSMACV for CORDS under Westmoreland. Yet the MACV commander shared overall policy formulation in South Vietnam with the U.S. Ambassador, Ellsworth Bunker, a distinguished career diplomat. Ambassador Bunker chaired and General Westmoreland was a member of the Mission Council, the central U.S. policy and coordinating body within the country. Westmoreland and the Ambassador worked in harmony. The MACV commander later wrote: "My military colleagues and I gained a staunch supporter in Ellsworth Bunker. Although his military experience was limited to artillery ROTC at Yale University 50 years before, he understood the application of power."[11]**

The U.S. relationship with the South Vietnamese military was a delicate one. General Westmoreland did not have command of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces and, indeed, rejected the idea of a combined U.S./RVN command headquarters. He believed it important that the South Vietnamese knew "that I recognized that they were running their own country, that I was no pro-consul or high commissioner."[12] In his opinion, his role as senior U.S. advisor to the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff gave him "defacto control over the scope of operations."[13] The watchwords were close consultation and coordination. As one historian observed, the command arrangements for the Vietnam War "were not the best they could have been, but they did work."[14]

*The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., in Washington also had his perceptions on the conduct of the war. In his comments on the draft of this chapter, General Greene wrote that he was in daily communication with General Krulak in Hawaii. The latter "kept me fully informed and enabled me to efficiently do business with the Joint Chiefs . . . and with the White House and other echelons." According to Greene, he did not believe the other Chiefs were kept "fully informed by Gen Westmoreland" and that he [Greene] personally "briefed the Vice President regularly—once a week—privately at the White House—*at his request*—since he was not kept properly informed by the Pres[ident] or the White House staff!" General Greene believed that General Westmoreland "objected to my liaison with General Krulak," but never made an issue of the matter. Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr., Comments on draft Ms, dtd 11Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Greene Comments, 1994.

**Army historian Graham A. Cosmas observed that the CORDS relationship with MACV was more complex than it appeared on chain of command charts: "The CORDS organization was a part of the MACV staff, although in practice it functioned with a high degree of autonomy." Cosmas also noted that when MACV was established in 1962, the State Department and Department of Defense "informally agreed that on policy matters the Ambassador in SVN was *'primus inter pares'*[first among equals], and this remained the case in 1968. Bunker was head of the US country team, and ComUSMACV while as a field commander nominally independent of him, in practice deferred to Bunker on political and policy matters." Dr. Graham A. Cosmas, CMH, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 23Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

South Vietnam and I Corps

Beginning with the French-Viet Minh struggle following World War II, Vietnam had been at war for more than 20 years except for a brief respite during the mid-1950s. After the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the Geneva Accords in 1954 resulted in the breakup of what had been French Indochina and divided Vietnam at the 17th Parallel. The Viet Minh leader, Ho Chi Minh, established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam under the rule of the Communist Lao Dong Party in the north. South of the 17th Parallel, Ngo Dinh Diem, a strong anti-Communist Vietnamese nationalist, became the first president of the Republic of Vietnam, displacing Bao Dai, the former Vietnamese Emperor under the French.

Through the 1950s and into 1960, Diem consolidated his power in the south against what many considered insurmountable odds. He defeated various sectarian armies, suppressed his political enemies, and created a seemingly viable government. Assisted initially by French and American military advisory groups, Diem strengthened his armed forces to meet any armed thrust from the north. South Vietnam appeared to represent a force for stability against what American policy makers perceived as a Communist drive for domination of Southeast Asia.

These relatively halcyon days were soon over. By the early 1960s, Diem and his regime were under heavy pressure in both the political and military arenas. Frustrated by Diem's refusal to hold joint elections as called for by the Geneva Accords that would have unified the two Vietnams, the North Vietnamese began as early as 1959 the sub-rosa campaign to bring down the southern government. By 1961, the South Vietnamese were fully engaged in counter-guerrilla operations against the Viet Cong (VC), a deprecatory name given to the southern Communists. With the introduction of U.S. helicopter units and the expansion of the American advisory effort in 1962, the South Vietnamese started to make measurable gains against the Communist forces. Surviving an aborted coup by a group of "Young Turk" officers in 1960, Diem progressively alienated important segments of South Vietnamese society. In 1963, South Vietnamese Buddhists, led by their clergy, took to the streets in increasingly violent demonstrations against restrictive measures of the Catholic-dominated Diem government. By November, the South Vietnamese military, with American knowledge if not consent, threw over



Photo courtesy of Col Edwin S. Schick, USMC (Ret)

South Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, wearing his aviator's scarf, is seen greeting Marine officers on a visit to I Corps. President Nguyen Van Thieu, a South Vietnamese Army general, eventually overshadowed the more flamboyant Ky in the inner circles of the Vietnamese military who ran the nation.

Diem. South Vietnamese officers killed the deposed president the day after the coup.

The period after the death of Diem was one of turmoil and disintegration. Military leaders and politicians jockeyed for position with one leader emerging and then another. Simultaneously, the Communists reinforced their forces in the south with regular units from the north. The war was going badly and South Vietnam appeared ripe for the plucking.

It was not until 1965 that the situation stabilized. The infusion of U.S. troops staved off defeat at the hands of the North Vietnamese. In June, the South Vietnamese military ended the political chaos by assuming full control of the reins of government. A military council, headed by Army General Nguyen Van Thieu and Air Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, directed South Vietnamese affairs for the next few years.

By the end of 1967, the South Vietnamese government had established a constitutional claim to legitimacy. Overcoming renewed Buddhist agitation in the spring of 1966, the ruling military council held elections for a constitutional convention in September 1966. Following the promulgation of the new constitution, the South Vietnamese, in September 1967, elected Thieu and Ky, heading a military slate of candidates, as President and Vice-President respectively of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN).[15]

The South Vietnamese military establishment was still the dominant factor in South Vietnam. By January 1968, government decrees, although not yet imple-

mented, called for partial mobilization, reduction of student deferments, and increased draft calls. The Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam (RVNAF) totaled more than 620,000 men. These included a small Air Force of 15,000 men, a Navy of nearly 18,000, an even smaller Marine Corps of 8,000, nearly 300,000 in the Army, and another 291,000 in the local militia, the Regional and Popular Forces (RFs and PFs). Nominally, all of the service military commanders reported directly to the Chief of the Joint General Staff, General Cao Van Vien, who also commanded the Army. In fact, however, the actual control of the military remained with the coalition of senior generals centered around President Thieu who formed the military council that had run the country since 1965.[16]

Deployed and recruited generally along regional lines, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) consisted of 10 infantry divisions, two separate regiments, an airborne division, armor and ranger commands, a Special Forces group, and supporting elements. If desertion rates were indicative of efficiency and morale, the ARVN had made vast strides in 1967 with almost a 30 percent reduction from the previous year. Part of this dramatic improvement, however, probably reflected that American forces had largely taken over the large-unit war while the ARVN concentrated on pacification. With the exception of the Marines and airborne, who made up the South Vietnamese general reserve, the ARVN units normally confined themselves to operations in their assigned corps tactical zones.[17]

The corps tactical zones of South Vietnam were more than military subdivisions; they were also regional and political entities. None loomed larger in importance than the northernmost corps area, ICTZ. With its military value enhanced by geographic, economic, and cultural considerations, as well as the significant buildup of enemy forces in the DMZ and Khe Sanh sectors, I Corps had become the focus of the war. In fact one Marine commander, Lieutenant General Krulak, maintained: " . . . the bulk of the war is in the I Corps Tactical Zone."[18]

If the map of Vietnam resembles the traditional peasant carrying pole with a rice basket on either end, the Red River Delta in the north and the Mekong in the south, I Corps lay about in the upper middle of the shaft. With a total of 10,800 square miles and less than 3,000,000 of the 16,500,000 inhabitants of South Vietnam, I Corps was the second smallest of the Corps tactical zones in area and the smallest in population. Although no wider than 75 miles at any one point and 35 miles at its narrowest, I Corps contained three distinct regions: the rugged Annamite chain in the west with some peaks over 6,000 feet, a piedmont area of densely vegetated hills interlaced by river valleys, and the coastal lowlands. The central southern coastal lowlands below Da Nang consist of some of the richest farm lands and densest concentration of population in all of Vietnam. Influenced by the northeast or winter monsoon (lasting from October to February), the weather in this sector, one of the wettest in all of South Vietnam, permits two annual growing seasons. The two major cities in I Corps, Hue, the old imperial Vietnamese capital and major agricultural market center, and Da Nang, an important seaport, added to the economic worth of the region. Despite its limited size, ICTZ was indeed a valuable prize.[19]

Part of what had been Annam in Indochina, I Corps had a distinctive regional cast. With their cultural center at Hue, the Annamites traditionally looked down upon both the Tonkinese from the north and the southerners from Saigon and the Mekong Delta. The Buddhist agitation against Diem had begun in I Corps and, in 1966, the Buddhist "revolt" against the central government again broke out in Da Nang and Hue after the removal of the popular I Corps commander, General Nguyen Chanh Thi. After the suppression of the 1966 "Struggle Movement," I Corps was politically quiescent. Thi's eventual successor, General Hoang Xuan Lam, having neither the ambition nor the charisma of his predecessor, exercised his power cautiously.[20]

As in the rest of South Vietnam, the political and civilian apparatus in I Corps were intertwined, but distinct from one another. General Lam, as I Corps commander, appointed the five province chiefs, usually military officers, who in turn selected the district chiefs, again usually military officers. The province and district chiefs administered their respective domains and also controlled the local militia, the Regional and Popular Forces. Regional Forces operated under the province chief while Popular Forces usually confined their activities to a particular district. Under another chain of command, General Lam had control of the regular military forces in I Corps. These consisted of two divisions, the 1st and 2d; an independent regiment, the 51st; and two airborne battalions from the general reserve; totaling some 34,000 troops. Including the Regional and Popular forces, the South Vietnamese mustered some 80,000 men under arms in I Corps Tactical Zone.[21]

Vulnerable to direct attack and infiltration through the DMZ from North Vietnam to the north and from



Abel Collection Photo

South Vietnamese LtGen Hoang Xuan Lam, Commanding General of I Corps, center, is shown in conversation with U.S. Marine Corps Commandant Gen Leonard F. Chapman, left, and the III MAF commander, LtGen Robert E. Cushman, outside of the I Corps Headquarters located in Da Nang.

Laos to the west, I Corps, by January 1968, resembled an armed camp with a quarter of a million U.S., South Vietnamese, and allied troops deployed within its borders. The 3d Marine Division and 1st ARVN Division were responsible for the northern two provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien. Similarly, the U.S. Army's Americal Division and the ARVN 2d Division operated in the two southern provinces of Quang Tin and Quang Ngai. The 1st Marine Division and the 51st ARVN Regiment provided the protection for the central province of Quang Nam which contained I Corps headquarters at Da Nang, the Da Nang Airbase, the Quang Da Special Sector, and more than 35 percent of the I Corps population.[22]

The relationship between the American and South Vietnamese commands in I Corps paralleled the arrangement at the national level. As Senior Advisor, General Cushman had a direct channel to General Lam. The Marine general later related that he had a rapport with General Lam, whom he considered an excellent administrative and political leader and "a good general considering his resources. . ." but no "Julius Caesar or . . . Napoleon."[23] As with General Westmoreland and General Vien, the emphasis was on advice and close coordination. To facilitate this coordination, each of the American and South Vietnamese units had its specific tactical area of responsibility, where its commander had a relatively free rein. Moreover, in accordance with the combined 1967 plan worked out by the MACV and Republic of Vietnam Joint General Staff, the Vietnamese units were taking an increased proportion of the pacification and revolutionary development mission. Still the ARVN and American units had to operate together. The following excerpt from a 3d Marine Division report exemplifies the working relations between the American and South Vietnamese units in general, and the 3d Marine Division and 1st ARVN Division in particular:

> The basic concept underlying command relations between the division and RVNAF has been one of cooperation and coordination in the conduct of operations. . . . As a matter of practice, decisions regarding multi-battalion combined Marine/ARVN operations are made by personal liaison between CG 3d Marine Division and CG 1st ARVN Division.

After the two commanders approved a basic concept of operation:

> the required staff liaison is accomplished and plans are finalized. When practicable, co-located command posts are established to facilitate coordination, cooperation, mutual assistance, and decision making.

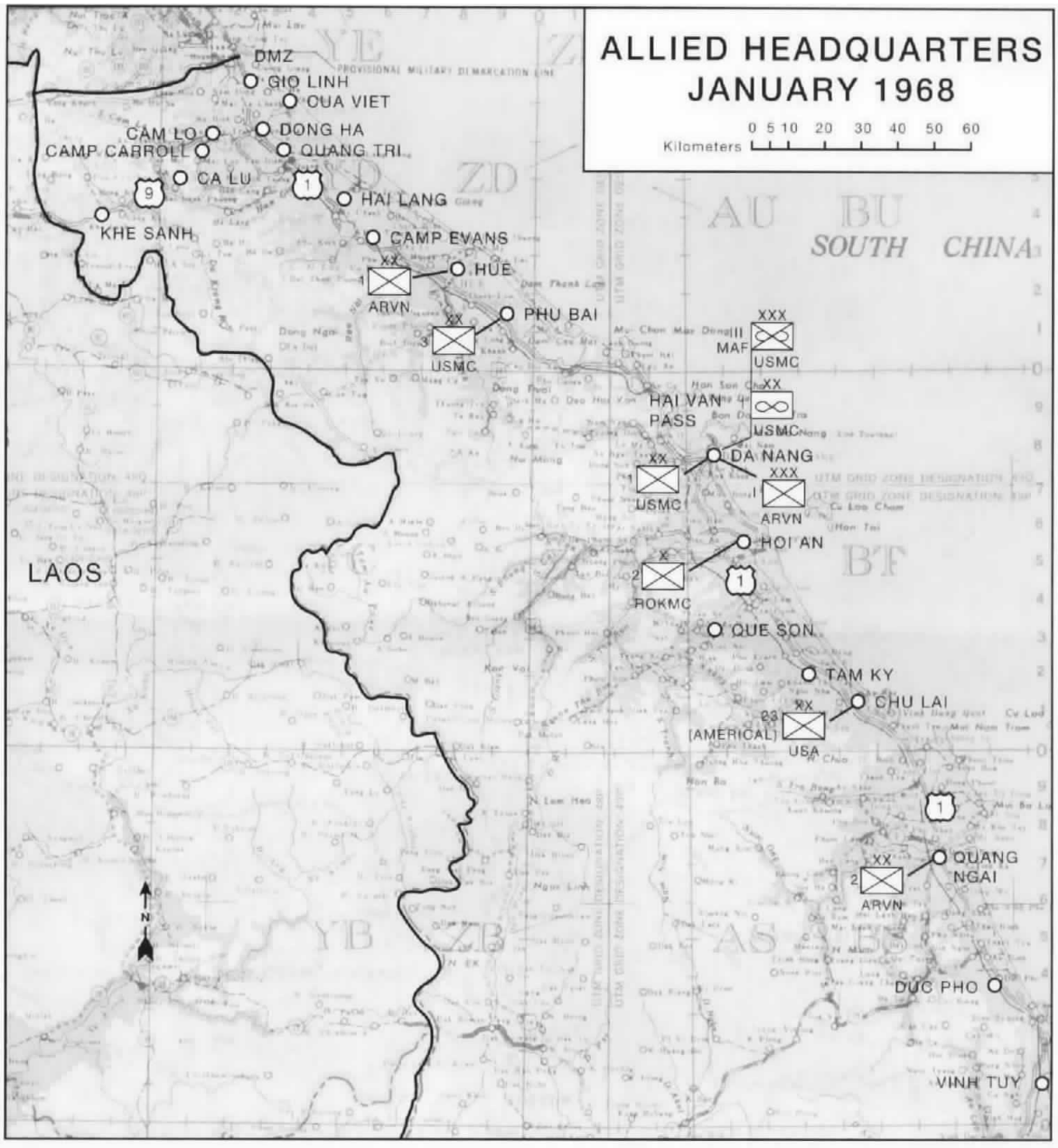
The report concluded:

> The 1st ARVN Division is an aggressive, well-led fighting force. Its commander is responsive to the desirability of combined/coordinated operations and invariably produces required forces. Numerous operations have instilled a sense of mutual respect and confidence between 1st ARVN Division and Marine personnel.[24]

These command procedures worked with the elite 1st ARVN Division, but less so with the average ARVN unit.

The Enemy

From a Western perspective, the Communist command and control apparatus appeared complex and murky, yet there was no doubt about who was in charge. From the beginning of the Viet Cong insurgency, the North Vietnamese directed the war. According to recent revelations by North Vietnamese leaders, the 15th Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party in 1959 decided on a determined policy to overthrow by force the government of South Vietnam. In July of that year, men and material began to flow over the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" through Laos and Cambodia into the south. The "Second Indochina War" had started.[25]



The North Vietnamese masked their direct control through a web of cover organizations. In 1960, the Communists announced the formation of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF), a so-called coalition of "democratic forces" to lead the struggle against the South Vietnamese government and give the appearance of a popular uprising. Even within the Communist apparatus in the south, the North Vietnamese went to extraordinary lengths to conceal their participation. In late 1961, the Communists changed the name of their party in the south from the Lao Dong (Worker's Party) to the People's Revolutionary Party. Shortly afterward, they created the Central Office for South Vietnam (*COSVN*) to coordinate both the political and military aspects of the war in the south. Under *COSVN*, a myriad of interlocking regional, provincial, and district committees tightly controlled the Viet Cong political infrastructure and military forces down to the hamlet and village level. Yet, *COSVN*, itself, reported directly to the Politburo of the Lao Dong Party of North Vietnam through the Reunification Department with its headquarters in Hanoi.[26]

The extent of North Vietnamese involvement and control of the war was more obvious in northern South Vietnam than elsewhere. Very early, the Communists separated the two northern provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien from their *Military Region (MR) V*, which roughly corresponded to I and II Corps. *MR Tri-Thien-Hue*, as the new region was named, came directly under the North Vietnamese high command rather than *COSVN*. All told, "three ill-defined military headquarters" in what had been part of *MR V* reported directly through North Vietnamese channels. In addition to *Tri-Thien- Hue*, there were the *B–3 Front*, which controlled military operations in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam, and the *DMZ Front*, which apparently had command of all units in the DMZ sector and at Khe Sanh. Despite denials and elaborate attempts by the North Vietnamese to cover troop movements through constantly changing unit designations, American intelligence in 1967 identified seven North Vietnamese Army divisions within South Vietnam, five of these divisions in I and II Corps.[27]

By the end of the year MACV held in its order of battle of enemy forces some 216,000 troops. These included some 51,000 North Vietnamese regulars, 60,000 Viet Cong main and local forces, and about 70,000 full-time guerrillas. About 35,000 administrative troops rounded out the total. The MACV estimate, however, omitted certain categories such as VC "self-defense" forces and other irregulars and some 70,000 political cadre. Although extensive disagreement existed within the U.S. intelligence community over these exclusions and the total strength of the enemy, the numbers of regulars and full-time guerrillas were largely accepted.[28] As General Westmoreland later explained: "Intelligence is at best an imprecise science: it is not like counting beans; it is more like estimating cockroaches. . . ."[29] More open to question was the MACV claim that the total enemy strength had diminished.[30]*

From an American perspective, the Communists had suffered only defeats since the U.S. intervention in the war in 1965. American units in extensive operations ranging the length and breath of South Vietnam had taken a large toll of enemy forces. The allies turned back with heavy Communist losses every thrust the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) made from the Ia Drang Valley in the Central Highlands during 1965 to the hills around Khe Sanh in the spring of 1967. For the year 1967 alone, MACV estimated the number of enemy killed in battle as more than 88,000.[31]

The Communist view of the situation remains obscure. In late summer 1967, the North Vietnamese Defense Minister and architect of the Dien Bien Phu victory, General Vo Nguyen Giap, wrote: " . . . the situation has never been as favorable as it is now. The armed forces and people have stood up to fight the enemy and are achieving one great victory after another."[32] Yet, apparently there was divided opinion among the North Vietnamese leadership as to the best course of action. There were the advocates of a reversion to guerrilla warfare and a protracted war while others argued in favor of taking the offensive against the allies and especially the Americans on all fronts. Because of the extraordinary secretiveness and paranoia within the higher reaches of both the Lao Dong Party and the North Vietnamese government, neither the extent of these differences nor even the makeup of the opposing factions was obvious. Much of the speculation centered around Giap whom various authorities identified with one or the other of the cliques or with neither. What is known is that in June 1967 the politburo of the party met to assess the sit-

*Commenting on the MACV perception of the Communist forces, General Krulak, the former FMFPac commander, recently wrote: "our strategic intelligence was uniformly poor." LtGen Victor H. Krulak, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 31Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).

uation and to resolve the issues. At this meeting in which Giap apparently played a large role, the party called for "a decisive blow" to "force the U.S. to accept military defeat."[33]

Within a few months, the Communist forces launched the first phase of their 1967–68 Winter-Spring Campaign. In a reverse of their usual tactics, the North Vietnamese mounted mass assaults lasting over a period of several days instead of attempting to disengage quickly. During September and early October, the Marine outpost at Con Thien in the eastern DMZ sector came under both infantry attack and artillery bombardment. Firing from positions north of the 17th Parallel, enemy gunners employed artillery pieces up to 152 millimeters. Repulsed at Con Thien, the North Vietnamese then tried to overrun the district capital of Loc Ninh near the Cambodian border in Binh Long Province north of Saigon along Route 13.

Again forced to pull back after several days of fighting and suffering extensive losses, the enemy then struck in the Central Highlands at Dak To near the junction of the Cambodian, Laotian, and South Vietnamese borders. After 22 days of bloody combat in November, the North Vietnamese forces withdrew after once more taking staggering casualties.[34]

By the end of December, 1967, the enemy appeared to be ready to make a fresh assault in northwestern South Vietnam at Khe Sanh. Following a period of relative calm since the battles earlier that spring near this isolated Marine base, American intelligence picked up reports of North Vietnamese troop movements in the sector. Although experiencing only limited combat activity at Khe Sanh in December, one Marine company commander declared that he could "smell" the enemy out there.[35]

To MACV, the North Vietnamese strategy appeared clear. It was an attempt to draw the allied forces into remote areas where the enemy had the advantage and then move to a "mobile War of Decision."[36] To Lieutenant General Krulak at FMFPac, the enemy's intent was also apparent. Quoting General Giap, he later wrote: "The primary emphasis [is] to draw American units into remote areas and thereby facilitate control of the population of the lowlands." According to Krulak, the people were the final objective.[37]

Focus on the North

The increasing pressure by the North Vietnamese Army in late 1967 continued the pattern of large-unit operations in the border regions of South Vietnam that had characterized the war, especially in the north, since 1966. With the first incursion of enemy regulars in the summer of that year, III MAF shifted forces north. Forced to fill the gap left in southern I Corps, MACV in April 1967 reinforced the Marines in I Corps with the Army's Task Force Oregon, which later became the Americal Division. After this northward deployment, the DMZ sector and Khe Sanh became the focus of allied concern.[38]

Given the emphasis on the northern battlefield, the Marines at the direction of General Westmoreland in April 1967 began the erection of the strong point obstacle system (SPOS) along the DMZ to prevent North Vietnamese infiltration. Dubbed the "McNamara Line," after the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, this so-called "barrier" was to consist of three parts: (1) a linear-manned obstacle system in the eastern DMZ sector extending some 34 kilometers to the sea and consisting of barbed wire, a 600-meter-wide cleared trace, minefields, and electronic and acoustic sensors; (2) a series of strong points to the Laotian border built along obvious avenues of approach from the north with Khe Sanh as the western anchor; and (3) in Laos, the seeding of suspected infiltration routes with sensors monitored and supported by aircraft. Strong enemy opposition and shortages of men and material slowed the progress of the SPOS. By mid-September the 3d Marine Division had only completed the clearing of the trace from Con Thien to Gio Linh, a distance of 13 kilometers. Faced with mounting casualties, General Westmoreland approved a modification to his original plans. In essence, the division was to halt all construction of the trace until "after the tactical situation had stabilized," and continue only with the work on the strong points and base areas. By the end of 1967, the Marines had completed work on the four strong points and all but two of the base areas. In the western sector of the barrier, only the base at Khe Sanh existed.[39]

With the 3d Marine Division tied down in fixed positions along the eastern DMZ and at Khe Sanh, manpower considerations became an overriding concern for both III MAF and MACV. Earlier in the year, during the spring, General Westmoreland had requested an increase in his authorized strength. Asking for a minimum of 80,000 more men (his optimum figure being nearly 200,000), he planned to reinforce the Marines in I Corps with at least two

Army divisions. Fearful that these new numbers would necessitate a call-up of the Reserves, Washington in the summer of 1967 cut Westmoreland's request nearly in half and established a new authorized force ceiling of 525,000 men for July 1968. This represented an increase of less than 46,000 personnel. MACV was hard pressed to reinforce I Corps at all.[40]*

As the war intensified throughout Vietnam in late 1967 General Westmoreland persuaded President Lyndon B. Johnson to establish earlier arrival dates for units already scheduled to deploy to Vietnam. The deployment of the 101st Airborne Division and the 11th Infantry Brigade in December provided General Westmoreland some room for maneuver. Keeping the 101st and the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) as a general country-wide reserve, he attached the 11th Brigade to the Americal Division in southern I Corps. III MAF began to shuffle its units north to reinforce both Khe Sanh and the DMZ sectors.[41]

MACV Vis-à-Vis Marine

While reinforcing the Marines in I Corps with Army units and concentrating his forces in the north, General Westmoreland had growing doubts about the ability of the Marine command to handle the developing situation. Since 1965, senior Marine generals conducted a "sotto voce" debate with MACV over the direction of the American combat effort. Both Generals Krulak and Greene criticized the MACV emphasis upon the large-unit major war, which they believed failed to provide for population security and, moreover, involved the U.S. in a war of attrition, which in their opinion, favored the Communists. They voiced their concerns directly to General Westmoreland and through the command channels open to them.

Although differing in minor details, the two Marine generals in essence advocated increased pressure upon North Vietnam and basically an "ink blot" strategy in South Vietnam. Both Marine generals recommended in the north the targeting of air strikes against North Vietnamese heavy production facilities and transportation hubs and a blockade of the North Vietnamese major ports including Haiphong. Greene and Krulak emphasized for the south a combined U.S.-South Vietnamese campaign in targeted areas to eradicate the Communist infrastructure in the countryside and replace it with one loyal to the South Vietnamese government. This pacification campaign would consist of a centralized combined allied command structure employing military action together with civic action, and the enhancement of the local South Vietnamese militia forces and government structure. The concept was that initial success would provide the momentum, much as a spreading inkblot, for the linking together of the pacified sectors. While not neglecting the enemy's main forces, both viewed this war as secondary. As General Krulak stated: "The real war is among the people" and not in the hinterlands. He would engage the Communist regulars for the most part only "when a clear opportunity exists to engage the VC Main Force or North Vietnamese units on terms favorable to ourselves."[42]

While the two Marine generals received a hearing of their views, they enjoyed little success in influencing the MACV strategy or overall U.S policy toward North Vietnam. According to General Greene, the Joint Chiefs were interested in his proposal for a coastal pacification campaign but "Westmoreland wasn't and being CG MACV his views of the 'big picture,' the 'broad arrow' prevailed." In November 1965, General Krulak wrote directly to Secretary McNamara, whom he knew from his days as special assistant for counterinsurgency to the Joint Chiefs during the Kennedy administration, hinting at some divergence between the Marine "saturation formula" and the Army "maneuver formula." While allowing that both techniques were sound and maneuver had its place in the sparsely inhabited highlands, he pointedly observed that in the heavily populated area south of Da Nang you "cannot shoot everything that moves." He then continued: "We have to separate the enemy from the people." According to the Marine general, the Defense Secretary told him that the "ink blot" theory was "a good idea but too slow." Both Generals Greene and Krulak would continue to offer

*The question of the total number of American troops required to wage the war in South Vietnam was a continually sensitive issue in Washington, especially since larger numbers probably involved the call-up of Reserve units. General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., the Marine Corps Commandant, recalled that sometime in the late 1965 or early 1966 time-frame he advocated "that a major increase be made in the number of U.S. troops" in South Vietnam. According to an estimate that his staff made at the time, it would take approximately 595,000 American troops five years to conclude a successful end to the war. According to the analysis, "the number of men of military age becoming available each year" in North Vietnam as contrasted to the Communist casualty rate would permit the North Vietnamese "to continue the war indefinitely" at the then-level of American troop commitment. Greene Comments, 1994. For further discussion of manpower constraints upon Marine forces see Chapter 27.

their counter-view to the MACV perspective, but with little effect either in Washington or Saigon.[43]

In Vietnam, from the very inception of its responsibility for I Corps, III MAF, the Marine command, first under General Walt and then by General Cushman, had placed a great deal of emphasis on the small-unit war in the villages. The Marines had developed several new pacification programs to win over the people in the hamlets to the government cause. These included: a vigorous civic action effort to meet the needs of the local villagers, cordon and search "County Fair" operations with psychological warfare overtones in the hamlets, coordination of pacification through the I Corps Joint Coordinating Council (ICJCC), and perhaps most significant, the Combined Action Program. This latter program involved the assignment of a squad of Marines to a Vietnamese Popular Forces platoon. The premise was that this integration of the Vietnamese militia with the Marines would create a bond of understanding and mutual interest with the local populace. The Marines maintained that with the villagers on their side, they could, as General Cushman stated, "break the connection between the guerrillas and the infrastructure, and the enemy main forces . . . ."[44]

Despite the III MAF efforts, General Westmoreland and his staff continued to perceive the principal mission of the U.S. troops to be the defeat of the enemy main forces. The U.S.-South Vietnamese 1967 Combined Plan basically reflected the MACV concept: the South Vietnamese now had responsibility for pacification while the U.S. forces were to conduct the large-unit war. General Krulak, the FMFPac commander, expressed the Marine displeasure in July 1967, declaring: "We have seen what we sincerely believe to be a maldeployment of forces, a misapplication of power . . . ."[45] Years later the Marine general wrote that these differences between the Marines and Westmoreland over pacification went "to the heart of the war."[46]

Despite their differences, the dispute between the Marines and MACV never came to a head. Although the 1967 Combined Plan called for the Americans to take over most of the war against the enemy's conventional forces, there was "no clear-cut division of responsibility" with the ARVN in this area or in pacification.[47] Moreover, III MAF still operated under its 6 March 1966 Letter of Instruction which gave the Marine command a broad all-inclusive mission to carry out operations "in support of and in coordination with CG I ARVN Corps and in other areas of RVN as directed by ComUSMACV in order to defeat the VC/NVA and extend GVN control over all of South Vietnam."[48] Rather than directly challenge the authority of the Marine commanders, General Westmoreland preferred to issue "orders for specific projects that as time passed would gradually get the Marines out of their beachheads."[49] While continuing the "discussion" with MACV over pacification, General Cushman also wanted no controversies. He remembered, "I soon figured out how Westy [General Westmoreland] liked to operate and tried to operate the same way, and get on with the war and not cause a lot of friction for no good reason."[50]

In spite of the efforts of both Westmoreland and Cushman to keep relations on an even keel, substantive differences continued to exist, and not only over pacification. The "McNamara Line" was a constant irritant. General Cushman recalled that he:

> really got in a fit with some of the engineer colonels that would come roaring up from Saigon to see how the fence was doing and . . . I'd say "Well it's doing fine, go up and take a look," which they did. Always had a few people around, but we just weren't going out getting everybody killed building that stupid fence.[51]

In what appeared to be an inconsistency, MACV, on the one hand, criticized III MAF for lack of mobile operations in the rest of I Corps, while, on the other, placed a Marine division in fixed positions along the DMZ and at Khe Sanh. Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins, the soft-spoken but blunt commander of the 3d Marine Division, voiced the opinion of most Marines when he later called the entire barrier effort "absurd." He pointed out that the original design was to stop infiltration, but by the time actual construction began, the North Vietnamese were in strength in the DMZ "supported by first class artillery." Tompkins caustically observed, "it was perfectly obvious that if there would be an incursion, it would be by NVA divisions and not by sneaky-peekies coming through at night."[52]

Unhappy about the Marine defensive measures in northern I Corps, General Westmoreland believed that General Cushman and his staff "were unduly complacent."[53] Westmoreland may have had some justification about the Marine defenses. Major General Raymond L. Murray, Cushman's deputy and a highly decorated veteran of both World War II and Korea, remarked that the Marines were an offensive organization, and "often

we don't do well in organizing defenses." Murray commented that "in many units, the concept of a defensive position seemed to be a big long trench and just put a bunch of Marines there and shoot at any thing that came along rather than truly organizing the defense in some depth."[54]*

Logistics was another area where the Marines and MACV had their problems. The Marine experience with the M16 rifle was a case in point. In December 1967, Marine inspectors found 75 percent of 8,413 rifles in the 3d Marine Division with pitted chambers, which could result in misfirings. Marine logisticians planned an extensive replacement of these M16s with ones equipped with chromed chambers. Another logistic complicating factor was the temporary closing in December of the two LST ports in the north, Tan My in Thua Thien Province and Dong Ha in Quang Tri Province, because of bad weather and silting in the shipping channels. If MACV was to reinforce the Marines with further Army units, General Westmoreland had obvious reasons for concern. Still, the Marines believed that MACV put undue logistic burdens upon them. At the end of the year, III MAF and FMFPac protested a MACV requirement for a reduction in the level of stockpiled supplies. General Murray called such peacetime accounting economies in Vietnam part of a "balance sheet war." Although acknowledging that these procedures "may have saved on waste," Murray maintained they also "took an awful lot of time and effort that a military man felt would be better spent in other ways."[55]

A myriad of elements compounded the difficulties in the relationship between MACV and III MAF, not the least of which were personality traits and service considerations. As General Tompkins observed, some Army and Marine rivalry was natural, "it's the dog and cat business . . . nothing Machiavellian or anything else."[56] Army generals spoke about Marines using unimaginative tactics, either putting their heads down and charging or sitting tight on "top of Semper Fidelis."[57] Marines replied that they trained from the same manuals as the Army and employed basically the same infantry tactics of fire and maneuver.[58] For their part, many Marines believed that their performance in Vietnam would determine the survival of their Corps. General Krulak remarked that the war would not last forever and "as soon as it is over, and perhaps before, the Marines are going to be faced with the same problems that has faced us after every conflict . . . self-defense." The Marines would require "a fund of irrefutable facts which portray our combat effectiveness, our competence, and most of all our readiness to fight when the whistle blows."[59]

General Westmoreland hardly endeared himself to the Marines when inadvertently he became involved in the succession for the Commandancy of the Marine Corps. Both Generals Krulak and Walt, the former III MAF commander, were leading candidates to succeed General Greene. A newspaper account in late November 1967 carried the story that General Westmoreland supported General Walt and had recommended him to the President. General Westmoreland later wrote that in making out General Walt's fitness or efficiency report in 1966, he had observed "that General Walt was fully qualified to be Commandant of the Marine Corps," and that this was not meant to be an endorsement of Walt's candidacy.[60] With the selection of Lieutenant General Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., then Chief of Staff at Headquarters Marine Corps, as the new Commandant, the furor soon blew over.

In more germane matters relating to the war, the differing personalities and styles of Generals Westmoreland and Cushman impacted upon the MACV–III MAF command relations. A large bulky man, the bespectacled Cushman offered a sharp contrast to the rigid military bearing of Westmoreland, who appeared to be "standing at attention while on the tennis court."[61] The MACV commander insisted on detailed plans of operations with no loose ends. On the other hand, General Cushman maintained an informal staff structure, confiding in few persons and relying largely on his chief of staff, Brigadier General Earl E. Anderson. Although concerned about the enemy buildup in the north, reinforcing Khe Sanh in December with another battalion, Cushman was

*Other Marine officers also commented about Marine deficiencies relative to digging bunkers. Colonel John C. Studt recalled that when he was operations officer of the 9th Marines General Westmoreland was unhappy "with inadequate Marine bunkers" and directed that the Marines send representatives to the U.S. Army's 1st Division "to learn how to construct bunkers. As humiliating as this was for Marines, Gen Westmoreland was absolutely right: Marines didn't have a clue how to construct good bunkers. We taught hasty field fortification and that was it." Col John C. Studt, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 22Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File). Major Gary E. Todd, who served on the 3d Marine Division staff, observed that field fortifications "seemed to end up with as much of the thing above ground as below, filling sandbags with soil to raise walls and parapets." Maj Gary E. Todd, Comments on draft chapters, dtd 28Oct and ?Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Todd Comments.



Abel Collection Photo

LtGen Victor H. Krulak, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Pacific, left, visits with Gen Leonard F. Chapman, Commandant of the Marine Corps, in the Commandant's office in Washington, D.C., in May 1968. LtGen Krulak had a strong influence in the development of Marine pacification concepts and had been a leading candidate, together with Gen Chapman and LtGen Lewis W. Walt, for the Commandancy.

confident that he had the situation under control. General Westmoreland, however, worried about what he perceived as the Marine command's "lack of followup in supervision," its employment of helicopters, and its generalship. By January 1968, the MACV commander seriously considered making a change in the command relations in the north.[62]*

An Ambivalent Outlook

Despite the signs of an enemy buildup and concerns about the Marine command, General Westmoreland just earlier had voiced his optimism about the course of the war. Called back to Washington in mid-November 1967, ostensibly for consultation, but more to shore up public support for the administration's Vietnam policy, he assured his audiences that the end was in view and that the "ranks of the Vietcong are thinning steadily."[63] Reflecting this same optimism in his directives, Westmoreland advised his subordinate commanders that the situation was "conducive to initiating an all-out offensive on all fronts: political, military, economic, and psychological."[64]

In drawing up plans for 1968 operations, the MACV staff accentuated this emphasis on the offensive. The 1968 Combined Plan with the Vietnamese continued to assign to the U.S. units the primary mission of destroying the NVA and VC main forces. American planners called for a three-pronged campaign: large-unit operations to keep the enemy off balance, destruction of the enemy base areas, and expanded "territorial security." General Westmoreland and his staff expected to launch "multi-brigade offensives" against enemy strongholds "not previously invaded." American contingency planning included possible operations in such enemy sanctuaries as Cambodia, Laos, and even an amphibious operation north of the Demilitarized Zone.[65]

Notwithstanding the flurry of contingency planning, General Westmoreland realized that administra-

*General Anderson mentioned that since his arrival in December 1967, he "participated in every conference or meeting held by General Cushman during my tenure in Da Nang. Our relationship could not have been closer . . . ." Anderson allowed that on the III MAF staff there were some weak links in that "General Cushman was one prone to accept the personnel sent to him by higher headquarters without complaining, so consequently certain senior staff members had to fill this void." Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). Another III MAF staff officer described General Cushman as a "perceptive gentleman [who] was content to soldier without comment as long as Westy [Westmoreland] didn't try to maneuver subordinate units in ICTZ (as he did in other Corps areas) and left Marine air under Marine control." LtCol John F. J. Kelly, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 13Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

tion policy would confine his operations within the borders of South Vietnam. His Northeast Monsoon Campaign Plan for the period October 1967-March 1968 centered around the 1st Cavalry Division. He wanted to use the division as a "theater exploitation force" in areas where the weather favored helicopter-borne tactics. His original concept delineated a four-phased campaign. The 1st Cavalry was to conduct the first three phases in III Corps and then, as the weather improved, move north to I Corps. The objective in I Corps was the enemy's Do Xa base in western Quang Ngai and Quang Tin Provinces and the suspected headquarters of *Military Region V*. This fourth phase was given the code name "York."[66]

By the end of the year, with one eye on the growing enemy strength in the north, the MACV staff modified the York plans. York, itself, was to be a four-phased operation. As part of a larger task force, the 1st Cavalry Division was to penetrate the western Do Xa in York I. Completing that phase of the operation, the division was then to be inserted into the A Shau Valley in western Thua Thien Province and the site of a former U.S. Special Forces Camp overrun by the NVA in the spring of 1966. Following York II, the 1st Cavalry, in Phase III, was to conduct operations further north in western Quang Tri Province and sweep to the Laotian border. In the fourth phase, the Army division would return to the Do Xa. III MAF was to be responsible for the planning of York II and III and General Murray, the III MAF deputy commander, was to command the A Shau Valley operation. General Westmoreland later wrote that the purpose of the York campaign was to set the "stage for the invasion of Laos that I hoped a new administration in Washington would approve."[67]

While planning for offensive actions in 1968, III MAF and MACV had to counter the enemy threat in the northern border regions. As early as October, General Westmoreland reinforced the Marines with a brigade from the 1st Cavalry in the Que Son sector south of Da Nang which permitted General Cushman to move one regiment, the 1st Marines, from the Da Nang area to Quang Tri Province. The arrival of the Army's 11th Infantry Brigade in December allowed a further realignment of III MAF units. General Cushman began to implement this repositioning of forces in Operation Checkers which called for the deployment of the entire 3d Marine Division to either the DMZ front or Khe Sanh. The 1st Marine Division was to shift what was in essence a two-regiment task force under the assistant division commander to Phu Bai in Thua Thien Province and cover the western approaches to Hue City.[68]

By the end of 1967, Operation Checkers was in full swing. The Americal Division began to take over from the Korean Brigade the TAOR (tactical area of operational responsibility) south of Chu Lai. In turn, the first Korean battalions moved to the Hoi An sector south of Da Nang, relieving units of the 5th Marines. On 20 December, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines deployed north of the strategic Hai Van Pass to the Phu Loc area of Thua Thien Province. All plans were complete. The 1st Marine Division was to activate Task Force X-Ray in early January and the remainder of the 5th Marines was to go to Phu Bai. At that time, the 3d Marine Division was then to transfer its command post (CP) from Phu Bai to Dong Ha in the eastern DMZ. Later in the month, the 1st Marines at Quang Tri was to return to its parent division by taking over from the 4th Marines the CoBi/Than Tan Sector at Camp Evans in Thua Thien Province. The 4th Marines would then rejoin the 3d Division along the DMZ. Thus as 1968 approached, III MAF was in a state of flux as units began to displace.[69]

The signs of progress in I Corps were mixed. Action had flared up in early December throughout the Corps area. On the 5th, the enemy overran a district headquarters in Quang Ngai Province. Along the DMZ, the North Vietnamese launched a series of company-strength attacks on Marine positions in the northeast sector above the Cua Viet River. The 1st Marine Division at Da Nang in its southern TAOR engaged strong enemy forces while the Americal Division units and the attached brigade from the 1st Cavalry Division encountered resistance from the *2d NVA Division* in the important Que Son Valley along the border of Quang Tin and Quang Nam Provinces. By the end of the month, the NVA and VC took a more defensive stance toward the American units and turned on the ARVN and local forces in hit-and-run actions. Although sustaining heavy casualties in these attacks, the enemy "was successful in penetrating and damaging several positions."[70]

Despite the heavy fighting in December, various indicators pointed to some success in the village war in I Corps. After a dropoff in pacification measurements during the first half of 1967, there was a marked increase in the figures for the rest of the year. In December, approximately 75 percent of the village chiefs were living in their home villages as opposed to 50 percent in January 1967. Other categories—the conducting of village censuses, establishment of

defense plans, and functioning of local governments—showed similar, if less dramatic, improvement. According to Marine Corps criteria, 55 percent of the population in I Corps in December lived in secure areas, ranging from a high of 80 percent in the Phu Bai sectors to a low of 34 percent at Duc Pho. The Marines credited several factors for this upsurge, not the least of which was the insertion of Army units in southern I Corps to take up the slack left by the departure of the Marines for the northern battle sector. Yet III MAF believed that its innovative pacification techniques accounted for much of the progress.[71]

With the coming of the Christmas and New Year season, the war continued on its ambivalent course. The holiday truce periods symbolized the cross-currents of the conflict. Giving vague hints of peace, the Communists agreed to a 24-hour truce over Christmas and a slightly longer, 36 hours, respite over the New Year's celebration. Taking advantage of the cease-fires and the halt in U.S. air operations, the North Vietnamese moved supplies to their forward units. Over Christmas, American air observers spotted some 600–800 vehicles and boats hauling and landing military provisions and equipment in southern North Vietnam. MACV reported 118 enemy violations—40 of them major—over Christmas, and 170—63 major—during the New Year's truce period. The New Year's violations resulted in 29 allied soldiers dead and 128 wounded, with two South Vietnamese troops listed as missing in action. In turn, the allies killed 117 of the enemy. The American command called both standdowns a "hoax" and recommended that any cease-fire for the Vietnamese Tet or lunar new year be as short as possible.[72]*

U.S. leaders worried over the Communist intentions for the new year. In a departure from the optimistic public rhetoric of his administration about the war, President Johnson privately warned the Australian Cabinet in late December of "dark days ahead."[73] Much evidence indicated that the enemy was on the move. American intelligence reported two North Vietnamese divisions near Khe Sanh and a third along the eastern DMZ. Further south, prisoner interrogations revealed the possible presence of a new enemy regiment in Thua Thien Province. American commanders believed Hue was a major enemy objective although the 1st ARVN Division could not "credit the enemy with 'the intent' nor the 'capability' to launch a division-size attack" against the city.[74] At Da Nang, III MAF received information that the *2d NVA Division* was shifting its area of operations to Quang Nam Province.[75] Captured enemy documents spoke of major offensives throughout South Vietnam. One in particular observed "that the opportunity for a general offensive and general uprising is within reach . . . ," and directed the coordination of military attacks "with the uprisings of the local population to take over towns and cities."[76]

By January 1968, a sense of foreboding and uncertainty dominated much American thinking about the situation in Vietnam and the course of the war.[77] According to all allied reports, Communist forces had taken horrendous casualties during the past few months, causing one senior U.S. Army general to wonder if the North Vietnamese military command was aware of these losses.[78] Yet, all the signs pointed to a major enemy offensive in the very near future. Although captured enemy documents spoke of assaults on the cities and towns, General Westmoreland believed the enemy's more logical targets to be the DMZ and Khe Sanh, while staging diversionary attacks elsewhere. He thought the Communist objectives to be the seizure of the two northern provinces of South Vietnam and to make Khe Sanh the American Dien Bien Phu.[79]**

While planning their own offensive moves, MACV and III MAF prepared for a NVA push in the north. General Cushman reinforced Khe Sanh and in Operation Checkers began to deploy his forces toward the northern border.

*Major Gary E. Todd, who served as an intelligence officer on the 3d Marine Division staff, commented that the "the last shot fired before the 'cease fire' took effect was like a starter's pistol to the North Vietnamese, crouched down and tensed to explode into a sprint" to resupply their forces in the south. Todd Comments.

**Army Lieutenant General Philip B. Davidson, the MACV intelligence officer, commented that General Westmoreland stated his expectation of the coming enemy offensive "in broad terms as a result of series of war games conducted by and at MACV headquarters. It was considered as nothing more than a 'probable course of enemy action' . . . . " Davidson contends that the MACV commander was open "to consideration of other possible forms of the enemy offensive right up to the initiation of the Tet offensive." Davidson observed also that General Cushman "concurred" with the MACV expectations. LtGen Philip B. Davidson, Jr. (USA), Comments on draft chapter, dtd 25Oct68 (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 2

The 3d Marine Division and the Barrier

The 3d Marine Division in the DMZ—The Barrier

The 3d Marine Division in the DMZ

The war in the north was largely the responsibility of the 3d Marine Division. Since the summer of 1966, the division had parried several successive North Vietnamese Army thrusts in Quang Tri Province, both in the northeast and in the west near the Marine base at Khe Sanh. Commanding one of the largest divisions in Marine Corps history, Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins had more than 24,000 men under him organized into five infantry regiments, one artillery regiment, and supporting elements. U.S. Army artillery units and Navy logistic forces, including Seabees, supplemented the Marines. Two of the regiments of the 1st ARVN Division also reinforced the 3d Division. The division's forward command post was at Dong Ha some eight miles below the Demilitarized Zone. Although one regiment, the 4th Marines, remained in Thua Thien protecting the western approaches to Hue, the bulk of the 3d Division was in Quang Tri Province, mainly facing north, to counter the expected enemy onslaught.

Quang Tri Province contains some 1,800 square miles, extending about 45 miles north and south and 40 miles east and west. Its rugged interior rises to the west with jungled canopied peaks reaching heights of 1,700 meters near the Laotian border. Eastern Quang Tri is characterized by a narrow coastal plain and a piedmont sector of rolling hills. In the north, the Ben Hai River marked the boundary with North Vietnam. The six-mile-wide Demilitarized Zone followed the trace of the river for 30 miles inland and then went in a straight line to the Laotian border. Despite some relaxation of the U.S. rules of engagement in the DMZ south of the Ben Hai, both the Demilitarized Zone and Laos offered a sanctuary for the North Vietnamese Army to mass its forces and position its artillery.

These terrain and political considerations largely determined the enemy's avenues of approach and the 3d Marine Division dispositions in the DMZ sector. The North Vietnamese made their base areas in the Demilitarized Zone and Laos and tried to infiltrate their forces into the river valleys and coastal plain to cut the allied lines of communications. Route 1, the main north and south highway, connected the Marine bases of Dong Ha and Quang Tri in the north to Phu Bai and Da Nang further south. The Cua Viet River provided the division its chief logistic artery, running from the Cua Viet Facility at its mouth to Dong Ha. Little more than a mountain path in its western reaches, Route 9 linked Dong Ha with Khe Sanh. Since August 1967, however the North Vietnamese had successfully severed Route 9 west of the Marine outpost at Ca Lu, isolating the Marines at Khe Sanh and permitting resupply only by air.

East of Khe Sanh, the 3d Division was strung out in a series of outposts and bases that allowed protection for Route 9, the important Cam Lo River Valley which extended to Dong Ha, and the coastal plain. The most significant of these were: Ca Lu, 10 miles east of Khe Sanh; the Rockpile, a sheer 700-foot outcropping, eight miles further north; followed by Camp Carroll, 10 miles to the east; and then the heralded "Leatherneck Square," the quadrilateral outlined by Cam Lo, Con Thien, Gio Linh, and Dong Ha.

For purposes of delineation and control, the division divided this extensive area into a series of regimental and battalion operational areas with designated code names. For example, the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion in Operation Napoleon was responsible for keeping open the Cua Viet waterway. Further north, the 9th Marines, in Operation Kentucky, manned the defenses in the Leatherneck Square sector. In Operation Lancaster, the 3d Marines screened the area from Cam Lo to Ca Lu. Scotland was the code name for the 26th Marines operations at Khe Sanh. To the south, the 1st Marines in Operation Osceola guarded the approaches to the provincial capital and the secondary Marine base near Quang Tri City. The 1st ARVN Division was responsible for the sector east of Route 1 and south of Dong Ha. With its command post at Dong Ha, the 12th Marines, the artillery regiment, supported all of these operations

from firing positions at Dong Ha, Camp Carroll, Gio Linh, Khe Sanh, and Quang Tri.*

By the end of 1967, the DMZ front symbolized the frustrations of the American war in Vietnam. The bloody battle for the outlying hills surrounding Khe Sanh in April and later the struggle for Con Thien highlighted the fighting for the year. As casualty figures mounted on both sides senior commanders voiced their concern. At the height of the fierce contest for Con Thien, General Krulak observed that in September the Marines had suffered 956 casualties and for the year nearly 5,000 dead and wounded in the DMZ alone. Both General Krulak and Admiral Sharp concluded that such a rate could not be sustained and that "the operational benefits now being achieved in the area . . . are not consistent with the losses incurred."[1]

As early as July, General Krulak had warned about the disadvantages of waging the war in the DMZ sector. He told American commanders that they must face "the brutal facts" that the Marines were "under the enemy's guns." Krulak believed the enemy's purpose was:

> . . . to get us as near to his weapons and to his forces as possible, drench us with high angle fire weapons, engage us in close and violent combat, accept willingly a substantial loss of life for the opportunity to kill a lesser number of our men, and to withdraw into his North Vietnam sanctuary to refurbish. [2]

In a message on 23 September, General Krulak outlined to General Cushman the limited options on the northern front available to the Marine command. III MAF could withdraw its forces to defensive positions further south, out of the range of the North Vietnamese artillery north of the Ben Hai. Krulak rejected this move, although tactically sound, as carrying "too large a price." The enemy could claim a propaganda victory, and moreover it meant abandoning the barrier and strongpoint obstacle system. He noted "whatever criticism may have been directed at the concept before, it is now an official U.S./GVN endeavor, and to back away from it now could not conceivably be identified with progress in the war." Another alternative was to invade North Vietnam, which also was not feasible, because of logistic and political ramifications. Krulak believed the only remaining viable choices were the reinforcement of the 3d Division in Quang Tri and the intensification of American air and artillery bombardment of the enemy in and immediately north of the DMZ.[3]

General Krulak's message more or less reflected the thinking of both General Westmoreland at MACV and General Cushman at III MAF of the situation in the north. None of the American commanders seriously considered the abandonment of the U.S. positions north of Dong Ha or Route 9. General Westmoreland established a small group in his headquarters to examine the possibility of an amphibious landing in conjunction with an overland sally through the DMZ into North Vietnam. These deliberations, however, went no further than the planning stage.[4] Thus, left with rather a Hobson's choice, Westmoreland and Cushman elected their only remaining courses of action. General Westmoreland in early October reinforced III MAF with a brigade from the 1st Cavalry Division, which permitted General Cushman to redeploy the 1st Marines from Da Nang to Quang Tri City. At the same time, III MAF received the bulk of available B–52 strikes and naval gunfire support. By 12 October, General Westmoreland reported to Admiral Sharp that "our successful application of firepower through B–52 strikes, tactical air, and extensive artillery fires has caused the enemy to suffer heavy casualties which coupled with increasing flood conditions to his rear renders his massed posture in the vicinity of Con Thien no longer tenable."[5]

Although the action in the DMZ sector abated somewhat during October and November, the situation was again tense by the end of the year. Just before Thanksgiving 1967, General Krulak alerted General Cushman that the enemy was once more moving men and material into the Demilitarized Zone, improving his artillery, and "preparing the battlefield."[6] At MACV Headquarters, General Westmoreland expressed his concern in early December about the enemy buildup. He disagreed with President Thieu's assessment that the North Vietnamese were creating "a diversionary effort" in the DMZ to mask their real objective, the Central Highlands. Westmoreland believed that the next enemy move would be in the northern two provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces.[7] On 16 December, he once more directed that I Corps for the next 30 days receive priority of the B–52 Arclight strikes. At the same time, he ordered the immediate preparation of contingency plans to reinforce III MAF with Army troops and the development of logistic facilities to accommodate those forces.[8]

*Lieutenant General Louis Metzger noted that the operational names had little significance for the Marines who were there: "It was all one big battle. For most of us, one so-called operation looked just like another." LtGen Louis Metzger, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 17Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Metzger Comments.

At III MAF Headquarters, General Cushman also made his adjustments to reinforce the northern battlefield. In late December, he implemented Operation Checkers which would eventually result in the 1st Marine Division taking over responsibility for all operations in Thua Thien Province so that General Tompkin's 3d Division could concentrate its full resources in the DMZ and Khe Sanh sector. By January 1968, elements of the 1st Division's 5th Marines had deployed into the former 3d Division TAOR south of Phu Bai. Both divisions had established timetables for the phased placement of their regiments and battalions into new operating areas. In sort of hop, skip, and jump movements, hence the name Checkers, the units were to displace one another. For example, the 4th Marines was to assume control of Operation Lancaster in the central DMZ from the 3d Marines. In turn, the 3d Marines was to go to Quang Tri and relieve the 1st Marines. The 1st Marines then was to replace the 4th Marines at Camp Evans in Thua Thien Province and return to the operational control of the 1st Division. Both the 9th Marines and the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion would continue with their respective operations, Kentucky and Napoleon. The 2d ARVN Regiment would stay tied in with the 9th Marines on the right and take over more of the strongpoints of the barrier system. On 15 January, General Tompkins planned to transfer his command post from Phu Bai to Dong Ha.[9]

General Tompkins was relatively new to the Vietnam War. He assumed command of the 3d Division in November after the unexpected death of his predecessor, Major General Bruno A. Hochmuth, in a helicopter crash. Holder of the Navy Cross, Silver Star, and Bronze Star, General Tompkins was a veteran of the island campaigns of Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Saipan in World War II. He had the 5th Marines in Korea after the signing of the armistice and oversaw the implementation of its terms in his sector. During the Dominican crisis of April–May 1965, he commanded the Marine forces ashore. While Commanding General, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina, he received his orders to Vietnam.[10]

Regarded in Marine Corps circles as one of its best tacticians, General Tompkins was thought the ideal candidate to take charge of the DMZ War. Vietnam was to be a unique experience for him. Colonel James R. Stockman, his operations officer who had served with him on Saipan, recalled that when General Tompkins arrived he asked one question: "Tell me about the operational folklore in the division's area of operations." According to Stockman, he told the general that from his point of view it "was a bad war, highly inhibited by MACV restrictions . . . [and] political considerations emanating from Washington."[11]

General Tompkins soon became well acquainted with the "operational folklore" of the 3d Marine Division. He learned quickly that a regiment may have responsibility for a sector but have none of its battalions under its command. For example, the 9th Marines in the five-battalion Operation Kentucky only had one of its original battalions, the 2d Battalion with only two of four companies, participating in the operation. The other four battalions came from the 1st Marines, 3d Marines, and 4th Marines. According to Colonel Stockman, General Tompkins "caught on fast to the term 'opcon' [operational control]" which permitted the interchange of battalions from regiment to regiment without the relinquishment of administrative responsibility.[12*]

This tasking of units, as one Marine historical analyst, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, observed, "demonstrated the interchangeable nature of Marine battalions and gave the division commander great flexibility."[13] Yet this flexibility had a price. Command lines were somewhat blurred and tactical integrity was more difficult to maintain. Simmons noted "One regimental commander estimated that it took about two weeks of working with a new battalion to iron out problems of procedures and communications."[14**]

Two other aspects of the "operational folklore" of the 3d Marine Division impinged upon General Tompkins as 1967 drew to a close. One was Khe Sanh and the other was the strongpoint system or barrier. Although ordered to reinforce Khe Sanh with a battalion in December by both Generals Westmoreland and Cush-

*Colonel Vaughn R. Stuart, who served both as executive officer and later commander of the 3d Marines, commented that General Hochmuth believed that regiments were "capable of controlling any number of battalions." The regimental headquarters would be located "in the important areas . . . and the principal tactic was in the shifting of the maneuver battalions to various regiments as the situation dictated." Col Vaughn R. Stuart, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 20Dec1994 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Lieutenant General Metzger, the 3d Marine Division assistant division commander in January 1968, remarked that General Tompkins wanted to bring "the tangle of battalions and regiments into some sort of order; to the extent possible, aligning the battalions with their parent regiments." Metzger believed that Tompkins "was faced with nearly an impossible situation, fighting the battle with an inadequate force for the assigned missions." Metzger Comments.



Abel Collection Photo

LtGen Robert E. Cushman, left, CG III MAF, pins the Distinguished Service Medal on MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins at an award ceremony at Da Nang. Gen Tompkins, who served as CG 3d MarDiv, and later as Gen Cushman's deputy, was very much involved in the building of the barrier and its problems.

man, General Tompkins was more concerned about the situation he confronted in the DMZ sector.* In 1976, he wrote that he still did not understand why the North Vietnamese "did not contain" the base at Khe Sanh "and sideslip the rest of their formations" towards the coast and more lucrative targets.[15]

The barrier or "McNamara Wall" was the other feature of the war in the north that overrode most other considerations confronting the 3d Marine Division. It determined both the disposition and the tactics of the division along the DMZ. According to Colonel Stockman, both Khe Sanh and the barrier had become "sacrosanct" by the end of the year and that the latter "could not even be discussed, much less argued, when I was G–3 . . . ." Stockman claimed that the barrier "became an objective in itself, causing field commanders to be committed to an unattainable act of juggling real tactical considerations and [barrier] requirements."[16]

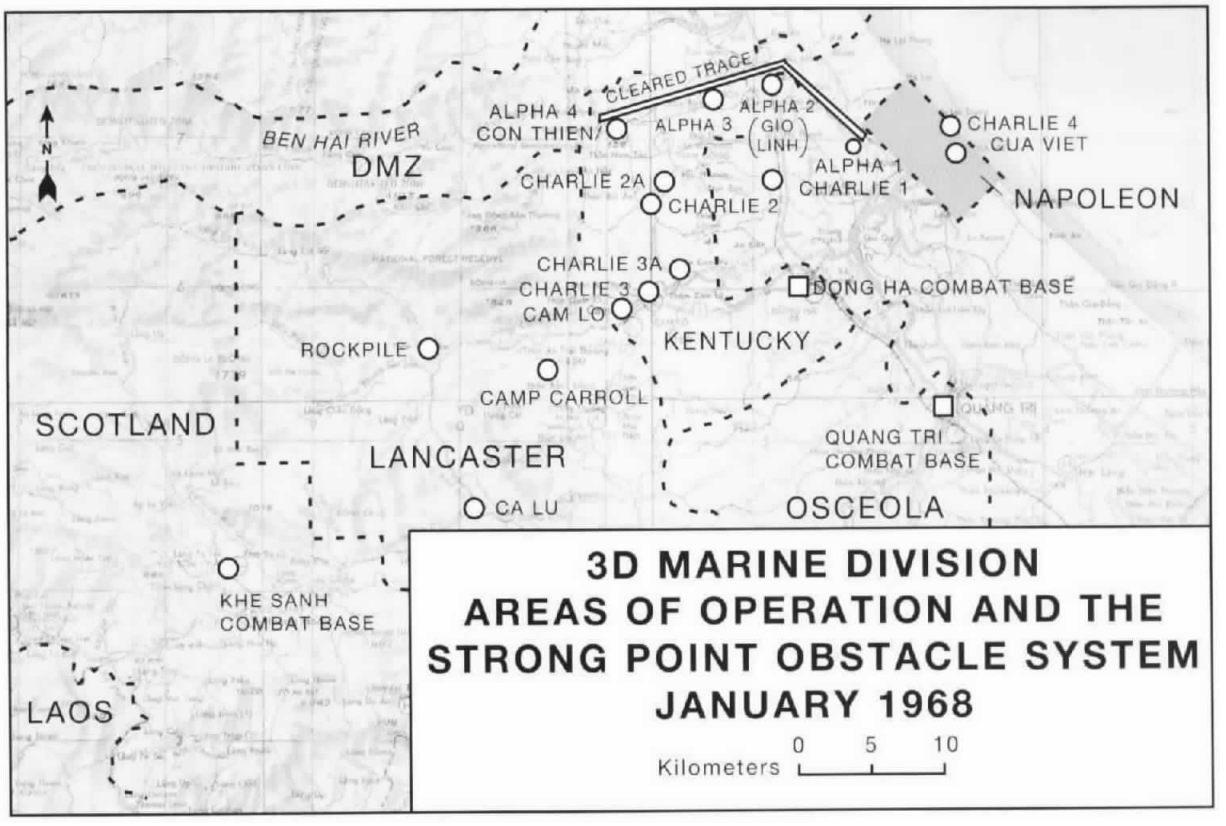
*General Metzger observed that General Westmoreland did not give a direct order to General Tompkins to reinforce Khe Sanh. Although the MACV commander "became perilously close" to violating the chain of command "on his many visits with comments and suggestions . . . ," he never "bypassed III MAF." Metzger Comments.

The Barrier

Although credited to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, the concept of a defensive "barrier" between the two Vietnams had many authors. As early as the late 1950s, President Diem asked his senior U.S. Army military advisor, Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams, to assist in building "a series of strongpoints (concrete) each to hold an infantry squad, across from the sea to Laos just below the DMZ."[17] A few years later, in the fall of 1961, General Maxwell Taylor, President Kennedy's Special Military Representative, on a visit to South Vietnam, directed Brigadier General Edward F. Lansdale, the Air Force counterinsurgency expert who accompanied him on the trip, "to do a study of fortifying the DMZ."[18] In early 1965, before the commitment of major U.S. units to the Vietnam War, Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson, proposed sending a "multinational four-division force . . . to man defensive positions south of the DMZ and to overwatch the Laotian border area to the west, thereby impeding the movement of enemy forces from the north."[19]

The Defense Department, however, only began to give serious consideration to a DMZ barrier in the spring of 1966 when Secretary of Defense McNamara raised the question with the Joint Chiefs. He then directed the establishment of a special study group to examine the technical feasibility of such a plan. Sponsored by the Institute of Defense Analysis, 67 scientists participated in the study and released their findings, known as the Jason Report, on 30 August 1966. The report concluded that a unmanned air-supported barrier could be established in a year's time. This barrier was to consist of two parts—one aimed at individuals on foot and the other against vehicles. The former was to be along the southern edge of the DMZ while the latter was to extend into Laos. Both parts were to contain gravel mines (small mines with the purpose of crippling legs and feet on detonation), button bomblets (mines designed only to make a loud noise which could be picked up by an acoustic sensor) and both acoustic and seismic detectors (sensitive to sound and ground vibrations). Patrol and strike aircraft were to monitor and support the ground barrier.

Although many of the military had serious reservations, especially CinCPac, Admiral Sharp, Secretary McNamara believed the proposal had merit. He appointed Army Lieutenant General Alfred Starbird to head a joint task force within the Defense Department



to study the possibilities of implementing the Jason Report recommendations. The Starbird task force was to devise an anti-infiltration system based on air-dropped munitions and electronic sensors that would slow, if not stop, the flow of men and material from the north into the south. This entire planning effort was to have the code name "Practice Nine."

General Westmoreland had mixed feelings about the barrier proposal. He was well aware of the disadvantages of any barrier. In a message to General Starbird, he observed that the North Vietnamese, "will be able to harass a fixed barrier at selected times and places both during and after the construction phase . . . The enemy will make full use of the 'bait and trap' technique in attempts to lure friendly elements into prepared ambushes." Westmoreland concluded with an analysis of the North Vietnamese: "Our enemy is self-confident, determined, ingenious and uses terrain and weather to his advantage. His solutions to problems are usually elemental, simple and practical from his view point." Despite these doubts about a barrier, he himself, was thinking of building a "strongpoint obstacle system" that would "channel the enemy into well-defined corridors where we might bring air and artillery to bear and then hit him with mobile ground reserves." He saw the Starbird project as an opportunity to institute his own concept.[20]

On 3 October 1966, the MACV commander ordered his own staff to come up with a study of the various defensive options in the DMZ sector and report back to him in six days. In its preliminary findings, the MACV planning group recommended a mobile defense behind a barrier system. The MACV planners suggested a linear barrier extending from Dong Ha Mountain to the sea. This linear barrier would consist of a 1,000-meter wide "trace" with barbed wire, minefields, remote sensor devices, bunkers, watch towers at periodic intervals, all tied together with an extensive communications network. The original scheme called for an ARVN armored cavalry regiment to man, screen, and provide depth to the defense. III MAF would be prepared to provide reinforcements or blocking forces as the situation might demand. West of the trace, the plan would have a strongpoint defense centered around strategic defiles in the mountainous terrain. The western strongpoint system would consist of 20 outposts manned by a Republic of Korea division and reinforced by artillery and air. This preliminary plan would go through several transitions, but would be the basis of all subsequent discussion and planning efforts.

The day after receiving his briefing, 11 October 1966, General Westmoreland met with Secretary McNamara in Vietnam. He recommended his alternative to the Washington plan. The Secretary, after flying over the DMZ, was receptive to the Westmoreland proposal. He directed that MACV should continue with its planning effort and at the same time charged General Starbird's Washington group with the production and delivery of the munitions and sensors to support these measures. Planning would also continue on the development of air-delivered munitions and sensors in Laos to augment the anti-infiltration system to be constructed in South Vietnam. The Seventh Air Force would be responsible for the aviation aspects while III MAF together with the MACV Combat Operations Center were to draw up the designs for the barrier and strongpoints within South Vietnam.

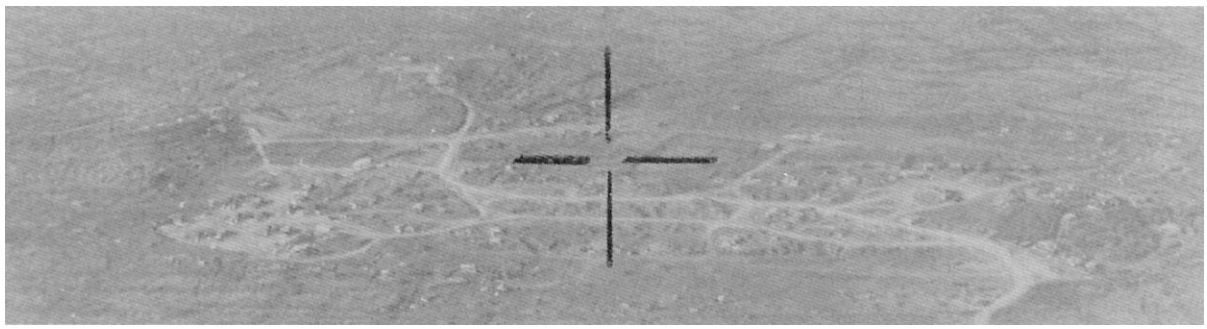
Despite their wishes, the Marine command would be at the center of the barrier developments. Very early, Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt, then III MAF commander, made known his unhappiness with the barrier concept. It was his belief and that of his commanders that if he had the additional forces projected by the barrier planners, "a far better job of sealing the DMZ could be accomplished without the barrier itself." It was the Marine position that a barrier defense "should *free* Marine forces for operations elsewhere *not freeze* such forces in a barrier watching defensive role." With their objections overruled, the Marine commanders had no choice but to comply with their directives.[21]

III MAF submitted its formal operational plan for the barrier at the end of December 1966 and MACV incorporated the Marine concepts, with some modifications, in its Practice 9 Requirements Plan of 26 January 1967. The Marine plan had established a deadline of 1 August 1967 for the construction and manning by an ARVN regiment of the eastern portion of the barrier. III MAF would have started work on a road network and the dredging of the Cua Viet to support the project. A Korean division was to assume responsibility for the area west of Dong Ha Mountain on 1 August 1967 as well, and the 3d Marine Division would then be free of the barrier defense. MACV, in its changes, pushed back the final completion date of the eastern section to 1 November and postponed the entry of additional forces into the western defile area until November. The original plan had called for a deadline of 1 November for the building of the western strongpoints, which MACV changed to read, "the remainder of the system in this area will be completed subsequent to 1 November 1967." Marines, however, were to construct a strongpoint at their Khe Sanh base. MACV did make some cosmetic revisions in wording: anti-infiltration system was substituted for barrier, since the latter had the connotation of an impregnable defense. More importantly, MACV requested an additional division and regiment specifically earmarked for the strongpoint system in the Demilitarized Zone, to supplement its forces already in Vietnam.[22]

Despite not acting upon Westmoreland's request for additional units for the barrier, which became caught up in the Washington review of overall MACV manpower needs during the spring of 1967, Secretary McNamara approved in early March the basic MACV strongpoint proposal. He authorized General Starbird to procure the necessary material to build and equip the strongpoints and base camps for a 10-kilometer "trace" in the eastern DMZ. The Secretary also ordered work to begin on the improvements of Route 1 and the ports near Hue and on the Cua Viet. At the same time, the State Department arranged with the South Vietnamese Government to discuss the necessary land purchases and the resettlement of the civilian population in the area of the trace.

In aerial photograph, Strongpoint A–4 at Con Thien is marked by the cross hairs. Less than 160 meters high and located two miles south of the DMZ, Con Thien still dominated the surrounding flat terrain.

Photo from 12th Mar ComdC, Jan69



General Westmoreland soon passed his directives on to III MAF. He ordered General Walt to prepare a plan in coordination with the South Vietnamese I Corps commander, General Lam, for the Strongpoint Obstacle System. The Marine command was to confine its discussions with the South Vietnamese only to the eastern sector. No mention was to be made of the western strongpoint defile or of the air-supported system in Laos. Even with the lack of a formal plan, Marine engineers in early April began clearing the terrain between Gio Linh and Con Thien under the guise of clearing fields of fire and building modest field fortifications.

By mid-April, the barrier for III MAF had become a reality, and not to the liking of senior Marine commanders. On 19 April, General Westmoreland told General Walt that "the mission of establishing a strongpoint/obstacle system south of the DMZ initially will be given to the U.S. Marines."[23] In his reply, General Walt protested that this order assigned his entire 3d Marine Division to the barrier. In effect, the division would be confined to fixed positions and to the construction and the manning of the strongpoint system. The III MAF commander argued that unless he received reinforcements in the north he would not be able to conduct offensive operations there. General Westmoreland had no additional forces to give him, but indicated that he would reinforce the Marines as troops and units became available. General Krulak, the FMFPac commander, was quick to point out to the Commandant, General Greene, "that we are already embarked on a form of Practice Nine." He observed that the reinforcement of Army troops in Task Force Oregon at Chu Lai had "been counterbalanced by MACV assigning III MAF the barrier mission." Krulak asked General Greene "to demonstrate at the Joint Chiefs and the Department of Defense levels" that Marine resources were going into the strongpoint system "with only a presumptive basis for assuming we will be compensated."[24]

Notwithstanding this unified front on the part of the Marine Corps, III MAF, again, had little alternative but to continue with its planning and building of the strongpoint system. In May, during Operation Hickory, the 3d Division moved some 11,000 civilians from the construction sites to a resettlement village at Cam Lo. The 11th Engineer Battalion cleared the terrain while one or two infantry battalions provided the security. On 18 June, III MAF finally published its operation plan which outlined the eastern strongpoint obstacle system. According to the plan, a cleared trace would extend from a strongpoint (A–5), some six kilometers west of Con Thien, for over 25 kilometers to its eastern terminus at another strongpoint (A–1),* some six kilometers east of Gio Linh. The "trace" would be supported by six company strongpoints, labeled A–1 through A–6. Gio Linh was Strongpoint A–2 and Con Thien was Strongpoint A–4. Behind the strongpoints were to be three battalion base areas, designated C–1 through C–3. An ARVN regiment was to man Strongpoints A–1 and A–2 and Base Area C–3. A Marine regiment was to be responsible for the strongpoints and base areas west of Route 1.

The plan called for the work to be completed in two phases. In Phase 1, a 600 meter-wide trace was to be built from Con Thien to Strongpoint A–1. Four of the strongpoints, A–1 through A–4, as well as all of the base areas were to be finished by 1 November 1967, the deadline for Phase 1. III MAF, at the same time, would improve the road network to include Routes 9, 1, and 561. The latter road was to connect Con Thien to its combat support bases and Route 9. The 3d Marine Division base at Dong Ha was to be the logistics center of the entire effort. It was hoped that by the onset of the monsoon season that the barrier obstacle system of mines, radars, towers, barbed wire, and sensors, would be in place along that part of the trace from Con Thien to Gio Linh. In the second phase, at the end of the monsoon season, III MAF would finish the construction of the two strongpoints west of Con Thien and complete the extension of the trace and its obstacle system from Strongpoint A–1 to A–5. The entire project would be over by July 1968.[25]

The III MAF barrier plan proved to be overly optimistic. By the end of July 1967, Marine engineer and construction units had accumulated an impressive set of statistics pertaining to the number of man and equipment hours devoted to the project, yet progress was relatively slow. The 11th Engineer Battalion committed nearly 50 percent of its total resources to the construction of the trace at a loss of 15 tractors and two dump trucks. As Marine units extended their efforts, North Vietnamese resistance increased. The same infantry battalions that were assigned to construction projects also had security missions. More than one bat-

*General Metzger wrote that the original Dyemarker plan did not contain the A–1 strongpoint: "It was only after the 3d Marine Division emphatically pointed out the area in which A–1 was finally located was the 'rocket belt' from which the enemy, after crossing the Ben Hai River, set up rockets and fired them into the Dong Ha Base. It was essential that this terrain be denied the enemy, thus A–1." Metzger emphasized the need for tactical plans to be developed by those who are closest to the situation. Metzger Comments.

talion commander complained about the strain on his men to build the barrier at the same time they fought the war. Brigadier General Louis Metzger, the 3d Marine Division Assistant Division Commander (ADC), several years later wrote that the "Marines required to do the construction work were exhausted from protracted combat and the so-called security missions were in fact heavy combat."[26]

The Marine command began to view Dyemarker, the new codename for Practice Nine, as an albatross around its neck. Originally, although not happy with the barrier concept, General Krulak in June 1967 thought that it might be feasible to extend the trace from the sea some 25 kilometers inland and deny the enemy "a direct north-south route into the populous areas."[27] General Cushman, who had assumed command of III MAF in June, also thought that the completion of the strongpoint obstacle system would free his forces along the DMZ for operations elsewhere.[28] By the end of July, both men had second thoughts. In messages to the III MAF commander and to General Greene, the FMFPac commander voiced his concerns. Krulak radioed Cushman: "I am fearful, that, unless we call a halt, that MACV is going to nibble us to death in the Dyemarker project." He stated that he understood Cushman's problems: "You must get as much of the job done as possible in advance of the monsoon and you need help to do it."[29] In his message to General Greene, General Krulak remarked on the slow progress and the high costs of the barrier program. He reminded both men that the original barrier concept called for specific forces to take over the barrier, and he now feared that MACV was hedging on this support.[30]

These considerations started to come to a head in August. III MAF briefed General Greene on the Dyemarker situation during the Commandant's visit to Vietnam in the early part of the month. The III MAF briefers observed that the original MACV concept called for a minimum of 7,691 additional men including an infantry brigade, construction battalions, truck companies, and other support units to reinforce the Marines in Dyemarker. None of these units had yet been forthcoming. The III MAF staff ended its presentation with the observation that the "Enemy activity in northern Quang Tri . . . greatly exceeded that assumed . . .," yet the Marines were under directives "to accomplish the tasks within available force levels."[31]

On 16 August, General Cushman appealed directly to General Westmoreland. He made much the same argument that he had in the briefing for General Greene. The III MAF commander reiterated that he had not received any of the additional forces supposedly specified for the Dyemarker project. He emphasized that the buildup of enemy forces in the DMZ made the original estimate of minimum forces for the barrier now hopelessly out of date. Cushman then explained that the seven battalions that he had up in the north "cannot accomplish that task up forward and at the same time construct, man, and operate and defend the Strongpoint/Obstacle System . . . to their rear." He remarked that the only way "to get on with the job," was to shift an Army brigade from Chu Lai to Da Nang, and then move a Marine regiment from the Da Nang TAOR to the DMZ sector. General Cushman then asked General Westmoreland to consider this latter alternative.[32] Cushman received assurances that he could deploy his forces as he saw fit, and on 30 August directed his 1st Marine Division to prepare plans for the movement of two battalions north to the DMZ. He explained to the division commander, Major General Donn J. Robertson, "everyone has to strain during Dyemarker."[33]

At this point, the North Vietnamese took matters into their own hands. In early September, they began an artillery bombardment of Marine positions along the strongpoint system and Marine rear areas from positions above the DMZ. On 3 September, more than 40 rounds of mixed caliber shells struck the overcrowded Dong Ha base. An ammunition storage area and the bulk fuel farm went up in flames. The Marine helicopter squadron at the Dong Ha Airfield sustained damage to 17 of its aircraft, already in short supply. From as far away as 50 miles, Marine pilots aloft could see billowing smoke rising over Dong Ha. Considering the extent of the explosions and fires, Marine casualties were relatively light—no one killed and 77 wounded, and only one man seriously. The impact upon Marine logistics in the north and upon the III MAF capability to continue the Dyemarker project was another matter. In a message to General Westmoreland, General Cushman laid out the implications of the losses of material as a result of the attack on 3 September, and continuing with the barrier under the guns of the enemy. He observed that the destruction of the Dong Ha ammunition supply point "had a direct impact on my ability to proceed with Dyemarker." The III MAF commander then remarked that "We are rapidly approaching the time when a decision must be made as to . . . installation of the Strongpoint Obstacle System." Cushman related again the effort that his forces had been making despite shortages in material for Dyemarker and without the promised troop reinforcements for the project.

Both the ports of Cua Viet and Dong Ha as well as the troops working on Dyemarker were under the "same fan of guns" that had blown up the ammunition dump. According to the barrier plan, nine Marine infantry battalions and the 11th Engineer Battalion were committed to the project. Seven of the nine infantry battalions provided a protective screen while the engineers and remaining infantry units installed the obstacle system and completed the strongpoints. General Cushman estimated that this work would take another six weeks. During that time, troops putting in the obstacle system would be in the open and vulnerable to enemy fire. Cushman stated that he was ready to implement this part of the plan if certain minimum requirements were met. He wanted more artillery, air, and naval gunfire support, as well as a higher proportion of B–52 Arclight strikes. III MAF also needed additional supply, trucking, and engineering units.[34]

Concerned about the increasing enemy strength and the progress of the barrier, General Westmoreland met with General Cushman on 7 September to make his own appraisal of the situation. After listening to the III MAF commander, Westmoreland asked Cushman to estimate the cost in both casualties and in material of continuing the emplacement of the obstacle system within the trace. Obviously expecting that the price tag would be too high, the MACV commander also ordered the Marine general to begin preparation of an alternative plan, based on the assumption of "no continuous obstacle . . . along present trace." III MAF's estimates of the consequences of adhering to the schedule of installing the obstacles caused the inevitable revision of the entire project. The Marine staff projected more than 700 men killed and at least 4,000 wounded, including both U.S. and ARVN troops, if the present course of action were to be followed. On 13 September 1967, General Westmoreland approved a new III MAF barrier plan.[35]

The new Marine barrier plan postponed all work for the time being on the trace and emphasized instead the construction of the strongpoints and the base areas. Strongpoints A–5 and A–6 were eliminated while a new base area, C–4, was added just north of the Cua Viet. The ARVN was to construct the easternmost strongpoint, A–1, while the 3d Division was to remain responsible for the other strongpoints and the base areas. The plan called for the 2d ARVN Regiment to man all of the strongpoints eventually, while the Marines provided a mobile reserve force. In the western defile system, the Marine division would establish seven combat operating bases including Khe Sanh, Ca Lu, the Rockpile, and Camp Carroll. These four operating bases as well as all of the eastern strongpoints were to be completed by 1 November. As far as the trace was concerned, the plan only read that the Marines were to install "the anti-infiltration system in such manner as to provide the option of further development of the obstacle system . . . ."[36]

The enemy and nature were to combine to frustrate the new Marine time schedule. Through September and early October, North Vietnamese artillery, occasionally reinforced by ground forces, in effect, laid siege to the Marines at Con Thien. NVA artillerymen maintained an average of 200 rounds per day on the Marine strongpoint. On 25 September, more than 1,200 shells fell upon Con Thien. In a 10-day period, 18–27 September, the enemy gunners fired more than 3,000 rounds of mortars, artillery, and rockets at the embattled forward positions. Even as the enemy guns blasted away at the Marines, some of the heaviest rains in years fell on northern I Corps resulting in wide-range flooding. Swollen streams and rivers rose above

Portrait photograph of MajGen Raymond L. Murray, a highly decorated veteran of both World War II and the Korean War, who in early 1968 served as Deputy CG III MAF. Gen Cushman, CG III MAF, placed Gen Murray in charge of the barrier project.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A414537





Photo courtesy of Col Lee R. Bendell, USMC (Ret)

Into 1968, Gen Westmoreland continued to show command interest in completing the barrier. He is seen here, left, with LtGen Cushman, CG III MAF, center, and Marine BGen John R. Chaisson, who headed the MACV Combat Operations Center, visiting Marine Base Area C–2.

their banks and the onrushing waters washed away bunkers and trenches and made a quagmire of much of the barrier area. Although the enemy artillery was relatively silent in mid-October, the building of the strongpoints and base areas was at a standstill. In late October, after a period of benign neglect during the struggle for Con Thien and the monsoon rains, MACV again put on the pressure to continue with the strongpoint system. The assistant division commander, General Metzger, much later observed that there was a constantly "changing emphasis" on the Dyemarker project. There would be high interest followed by periods of low interest "with no materials available and response, direction, and guidance from higher headquarters either slow or non-existent." Metzger noted that "Those on the lower levels of the military hierarchy became very expert at reading the indicators" of both high and low interest.[37]

Aware of the difficult circumstances under which the Marines on the DMZ labored, General Westmoreland still believed that General Cushman and his staff should have had better control of the situation. On 22 October, he radioed Cushman that he was unhappy with the "quality control" maintained by III MAF over the construction of the Dyemarker facilities. The MACV commander stated that the project had "not been accorded a priority consistent with its operational importance." He noted that he was "on record with higher headquarters to meet a fixed time schedule." He realized that the schedule could be adjusted but "any slippage . . . must be supported by factors recognized as being beyond our control . . . ." Westmoreland then directed General Cushman "to take immediate steps to correct deficiencies in the construction of the strongpoints and to institute a positive system of quality control over construction and installation of the entire Dyemarker system." The strongly worded message concluded with a reaffirmation that "Project Dyemarker is an operational necessity second only to combat emergency."[38]

General Cushman, in turn, was to relay this new emphasis on the barrier to his subordinate commanders. In transmitting the MACV message to Major General Hochmuth, then the Commanding General, 3d Marine Division, Cushman remarked the "screws are being tightened." He then told Hochmuth: "This was not unpredictable and I am well aware of the factors involved . . . Nevertheless we must give this our closest personal attention and insure that we are taking all possible action within our capabilities and resources."[39]

The III MAF commander's first action was to appoint a completely separate staff under his deputy commander, Major General Raymond L. Murray, to oversee the entire barrier effort. General Murray's Dyemarker staff reevaluated the efforts relative to the barrier and came up with yet another plan. In this new version of Dyemarker, the drafters reinstated Strongpoint A–5 and eliminated any hedging about the installation of the obstacle system along the trace. This latter feature was to be an integral component of the eastern sector of the barrier. Except for Strongpoint A–5, emphasis remained on completion of all of the eastern strongpoints by the end of the year. According to the new schedule of completion, the 2d ARVN Regiment would take over four of the strongpoints in 1968. The Marines would remain responsible for manning Strongpoint A–5 and the combat operating bases, except for C–1. In the western defile system, the plan called for construction to begin only at the Ca Lu combat operating base during the monsoon season.[40]

Despite the elaborations of his staff on the barrier concept, General Murray had serious reservations about the entire project. He later revealed that he never really obtained a handle on the situation. Much of the Dyemarker material had been siphoned off by various commands for their own purposes. Many of the original timbers for the bunkers were green and untreated and began to rot under the pervasive dampness of the monsoon period. The Marines had much the same problem relative to the enormous number of sandbags required for the bunkers, and their rotting caused a "constant replacement problem." General Murray was able to obtain promises from General Starbird's group in Washington of new timbers and of replacement items, but his troubles continued. The III MAF deputy commander partially blamed some of his problems on his own lack of authority. He believed that the Dyemarker staff should not have been separate from the III MAF staff. Murray stated he was not in a position "to directly order anybody to do anything with relation to Dyemarker." As one of the most decorated Marine commanders during World War II and Korea, Murray instinctively "sympathized with the division commander whose primary mission was the tactical handling of his troops . . . rather than build the damn line that nobody believed in, in the first place." The seizure of the site for Strongpoint A–3 in early December confirmed Murray's doubts about Dyemarker: "How in the hell were you going to build this thing when you had to fight people off, while you were building it."[41]

Notwithstanding the handicaps under which they worked, the Marines had made significant progress by the end of the year. The 11th Engineer Battalion, under wretched weather and physical conditions, resurfaced Route 561 with rock and partially sealed it with asphalt. The battalion also worked on the laying of the subbase for Route 566. Route 561 connected Route 9 with Con Thien while 566 was to run parallel to the trace and link the strongpoints. Assisted by the engineers and Navy Seabees, the Marine infantry had built 167 bunkers with another 234 ready, except for overhead cover.* More than 67,000 meters of tactical wire had been laid and 120,000 meters of minefields emplaced. Strongpoint A–1 in the ARVN sector was finished as was the combat operating base C–2, south of Con Thien. The remaining positions in the eastern strongpoint area were about 80 percent completed. In the western defile system, the work at the Ca Lu strongpoint had proceeded with little difficulty with nearly 70 percent of the bunkers and material in place. With the expected arrival of additional supplies in the near future, the Marines expected to finish in February the installation of the obstacle system along the trace. The cost of these gains was dear. Not including the lives lost and the men wounded in trying to build Dyemarker, Marines spent 757,520 man-days and 114,519 equipment-hours. More than $1,622,348 worth of equipment had been lost to enemy action in establishing the barrier up to this point in time.[42]

The bickering, nevertheless, over the strongpoint system continued. Engineer inspectors from the MACV Dyemarker staff made several visits while the

*One Marine battalion commander, Colonel John F. Mitchell, who commanded the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, which occupied Con Thien in the fall of 1967, remembered that he had a detachment of engineers "under my protection and operational control" for the building of Dyemarker. According to Mitchell, the engineer detachment worked "during daylight hours, mostly, in the open with heavy equipment . . . and showed enormous courage setting an example for all of us." Mitchell stated that the detachment suffered a higher percentage of casualties than his infantry Marines. Col John F. Mitchell, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 5Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File).

work progressed and made several criticisms ranging from the size to the color of the bunkers. During two trips to the DMZ sector in December, General Westmoreland expressed his dissatisfaction. He was particularly unhappy about the fortifications at Con Thien. Westmoreland observed that the bunkers there were built to house a 900-man Marine battalion rather than the 400-man Vietnamese battalion which was scheduled to take over the positions in the spring. Venting his frustrations in his personal journal, he wrote:

> I have had no end of problems with the strongpoint obstacle system. The reason seems to be that the Marines have had little experience in construction of fortifications and therefore lack the know-how to establish them in the way I had visualized. I thus have been remiss in taking for granted that they had the background; hopefully it is not too late to get the project on a solid track.[43]

In a formal message to General Cushman, the MACV commander laid out in detail what he wanted relative to the barrier. He stated at the outset that a strongpoint was "to be virtually an impregnable defensive position." Westmoreland noted that it was to be emplaced so that an ARVN battalion with supporting arms could withstand an attack by an enemy division. He wanted the primary defense to be based on "two-man fighting bunkers, that are hardened, mutually supporting, [and] protected by a dense field of defensive wire and mines." Radars, sensors, night observation devices, and searchlights would complement the defenses. General Westmoreland finally reminded the III MAF commander that he could consult *Army Field Manuals 7–11* and *7–20* for further guidance on preparing defensive positions.[44]

The Marine command, on the other hand, viewed the MACV staff and General Westmoreland's criticisms as unjustified. Marine generals saw the barrier largely as an impediment to fighting the war. Building the fortifications for the strongpoints was a case in point. The 3d Division looked at the bunkers as living areas able to withstand "a certain amount of enemy attention."[45] The actual fighting positions were outside the bunkers themselves. General Murray recalled that when General Westmoreland visited the positions, he called them foxholes and directed the building of covered emplacements for the fighting positions and bunkers with loopholes for rifles and automatic weapons. The Seabees then built for the Marines a half dozen of the new types of bunkers which the MACV commander personally inspected. Murray remembered that Westmoreland spent most of the visit discussing the comparative virtues of a sloping front as compared with those of a solid front. According to Murray, he later often wondered why a MACV commander was concerned with "such trifles."[46]

The 3d Division ADC, Brigadier General Metzger, laid much of the difficulties with the barrier directly at the feet of MACV. He remarked on the changing plans "verbally and informally, by General Westmoreland and seemingly on the whim of various staff officers." Several years later, Metzger remembered that the MACV commander constantly altered requirements. At Con Thien, "the 'bursting layer' on top of the bunkers was originally required to stop a mortar shell, that was soon increased to stop a 105mm shell." The Marine general personally suspected that the "Army would not be unhappy if the Marine Corps did not accomplish a first class job on Dyemarker, and is 'nit-picking' with the hope of establishing a background of 'Marine Corps incompetence.'" He believed that "at least some of the problems with MACV Headquarters are motivated by such a feeling."[47]

Thus as 1968 began, the 3d Marine Division, under heavy pressure from higher headquarters, continued with its efforts to complete the strongpoint system according to the new guidelines. The division, on 31 December 1967, issued a detailed operational order, complete with overlays, charts, deadlines, and bunker designs. Based on the III MAF Dyemarker order of November 1967, the 3d Division directive specified the missions for each of the individual units. The 9th Marines had responsibility for most of the eastern strongpoint system. Its tactical area included all of the proposed strongpoints except for A–1 in the ARVN sector and A–5, a site not yet selected. With support of the engineers, the regiment was to complete construction of the strongpoint at Con Thien and the three combat operating bases, C–2, C–3, and C–3A, strung along Route 566. To the west, the 3d Marines was to start on Strongpoint A–5 when so instructed and to finish the strongpoint at Ca Lu in the western defile system. The 2d ARVN Regiment sector contained the easternmost strongpoint, A–1, and the C–1 Combat Operating Base. On the coast, the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion was responsible for the C–4 Combat Operating Base.[48] This emphasis from above had limited impact on the actual units, except for the issuance of additional directives. On 22 January, the 9th Marines published its operational order on the barrier.[49] At the troop level, Dyemarker remained, nevertheless, only a vague concept except for the building of the bunkers. The Marine infantrymen's concern was the ability to defend themselves



Top illustration is Department of Defense (USMC) photo A801126 and bottom is from 12th Mar ComdC, Jan69

Aerial views take in Strongpoint A–1, Gio Linh, top, and Base Area C–3, bottom. Marine BGen Louis Metzger, the 3d MarDiv assistant division commander, noted the triangular shape of A–1 and compared C–3 to "an octagonal French Fort."



from their positions including bunkers, fighting holes, trench lines, wire, and minefields against the enemy with as few men as possible.[50]

Bunkers and fighting holes were still subjects of discussion among MACV, III MAF, and the ARVN 1st Division. General Metzger observed that the ARVN-built bunkers varied greatly from the Marine. He compared the A–1 Strongpoint on the coast to "an immigrants' wagon train deployed in concentric circles to fight off an Indian attack." According to Metzger, C–1 looked like "an octagonal French Fort," and he described the Gio Linh strongpoint as "basically triangular in shape." The ARVN, he maintained, insisted that the bunkers "were not only for living, but also for fighting."[51] By 14 January 1968, the MACV staff and ARVN staff members together with General Murray had worked out an agreement on the organization of the defenses. The ARVN accepted the concept of three-man fighting bunkers as opposed to 14-man living bunkers for primary defense. These fighting bunkers would be mutually supporting and connected by communication trenches. U.S. Seabees and engineers would prepare small prefabricated concrete fighting bunkers as soon as possible. Strongpoint A–1 would be redesigned and the engineers would install new fighting bunkers at Strongpoints A–2 at Gio Linh and A–3.[52]

Work on the bunkers, minefields, and wire emplacements continued until the end of the month when "tactical requirements took precedence over Dyemarker."[53] Earlier, on 20 January 1968, General Cushman and General Westmoreland agreed to suspend the installation of the linear obstacle system along the trace "pending clarification of the enemy situation in Quang Tri Province."[54] For all practical purposes this was to end the command emphasis on the barrier. As General Cushman later admitted, he "just quit" building what he termed the "fence," and "Tet came along and people had something else to think about."[55] Yet, as General Tompkins concluded:

> Dyemarker was a bete noire that influenced almost everything we did and they wouldn't let us off the hook . . . . The 3d Division was responsible for Dyemarker and if we were responsible for Dyemarker . . . then we had to have Carroll, we had to have Ca Lu, we had to have Con Thien, we had to have Khe Sanh. These are all part of this bloody thing . . . it had a great deal to do with the 3d Division being tied to static posts.[56]*

*General Earl E. Anderson, who in 1968 was the III MAF Chief of Staff as a brigadier general, commented that he and General Cushman agreed with the opinion expressed by General Tompkins that Dyemarker influenced the entire tactical situation for the 3d Marine Division. Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 3

The War in the Eastern DMZ in Early and Mid-January

The NVA in the DMZ Sector—Operation Napoleon—Kentucky Operations and the Barrier Operation Lancaster and Heavy Fighting in Mid-January

The NVA in the DMZ Sector

As 1968 began, III MAF looked for the enemy to renew his initiative in the north. According to Marine intelligence, elements of nine North Vietnamese regiments belonging to three different divisions were in or below the Demilitarized Zone. These regiments operated either under their parent divisions or directly under the *DMZ Front Headquarters.* In 1967, the North Vietnamese had created this relatively new command, separate from the *Tri Thien Hue Military Region,* to coordinate NVA operations in and just south of the DMZ. All told, the *Front* controlled some 21,000 troops including divisions, regiments, and separate battalions and companies. In its annual report, MACV observed that the establishment of the North Vietnamese *DMZ Front Headquarters* "was a significant strategic move by the enemy." The North Vietnamese had succeeded in tying down a large allied force in the border area and were in position to mount a major offensive in northern Quang Tri Province.[1]

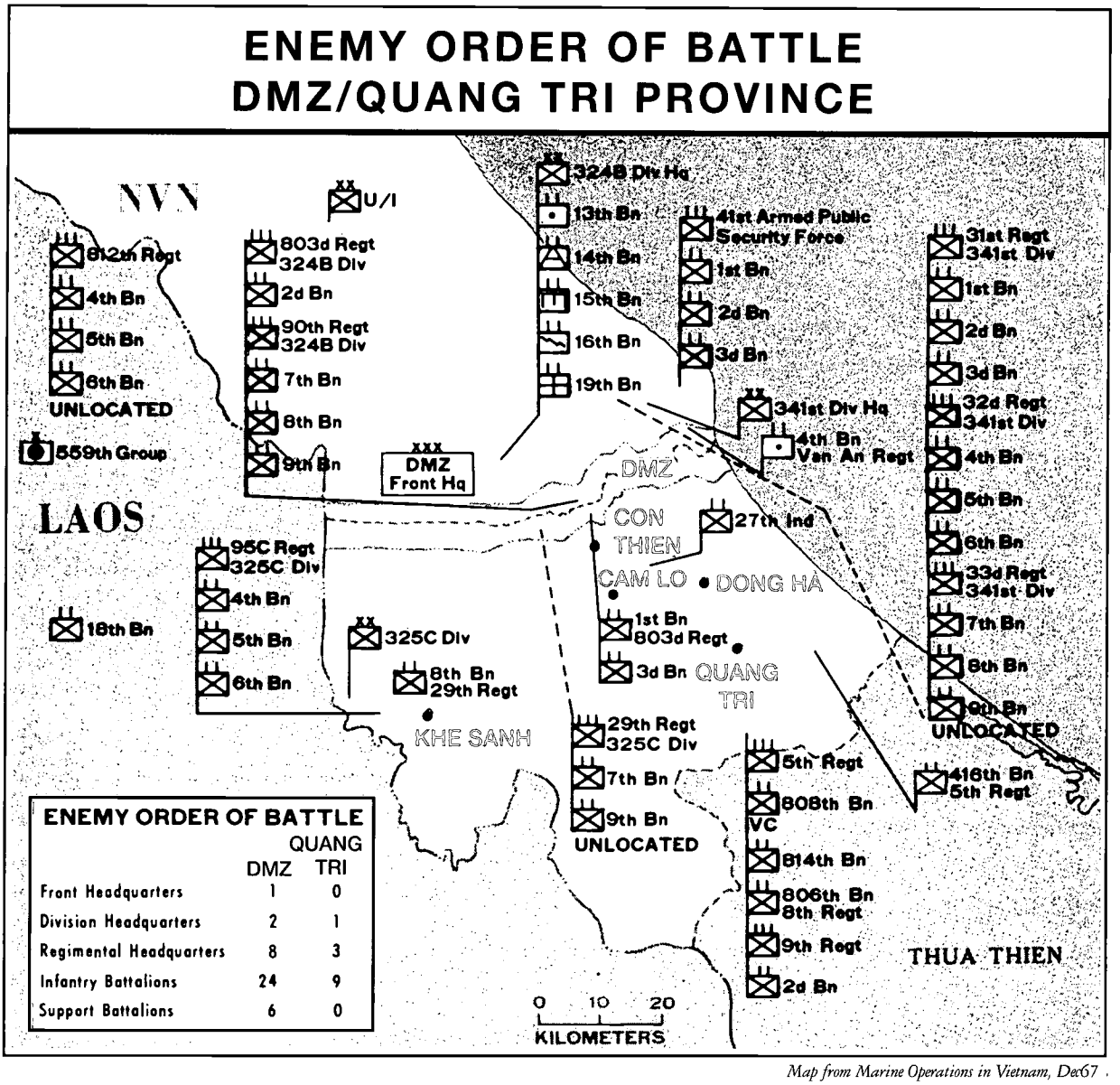
In its December 1967 enemy order of battle, III MAF identified elements of three regiments of the *324B NVA Division*—the *812th*, the *803d*, and *90th*—and two of the regiments of the *325C NVA Division*—the *29th* and *95th*—operating south of the Demilitarized Zone. The Marines believed the headquarters of the *325C Division* and the *95th Regiment* to be five to ten miles northwest of Khe Sanh. The *29th NVA* regimental headquarters and two battalions remained in the southern sector of the DMZ about 20 miles north of Khe Sanh, but with one battalion, the *8th*, located only five miles north of the Marine base.[2]

In the eastern DMZ, FMFPac intelligence officers placed the *324B Division Headquarters* five miles north of the Ben Hai River. The *812th NVA Regiment*, with all three of its battalions, was in the southern DMZ below the river, about five miles north of Camp Carroll. Both the *803d* and *90th* regimental headquarters were supposed to be collocated just above the Ben Hai. According to the FMFPac order of battle, which differed in some details from the III MAF, the *803d* had only one battalion with the regimental headquarters. Contrary to being above the DMZ as III MAF showed in its monthly report, FMFPac indicated the other two battalions, the *1st* and the *3d*, operated inside South Vietnam—the *1st*, north of Con Thien, and the *3d*, near the flat, coastal area east of Gio Linh despite its lack of cover and concealment.[3]

The *90th NVA Regiment* also posed problems for the Marine intelligence community. FMFPac in its December summary displayed all three battalions, the *7th*, the *8th*, and the *9th,* together with the regimental headquarters above the Ben Hai in the DMZ north of Con Thien. III MAF, however, had evidence that two battalions of the *90th* had departed the regimental area, using elephants as pack animals, and moved west into Laos. The enemy units then entered South Vietnam south of Khe Sanh and traveled northeast. Following the *Mientay*, "The Road to the West," in this case actually the road to the east, one 600-man battalion ended up about five miles southwest of Quang Tri City. According to agent reports, the other battalion, about 400 men, infiltrated south into Thua Thien Province. To confuse matters even more, this intelligence indicated that the *90th* was now under the operational control of the *312th NVA Division* rather than the *324B Division*. This appeared to be unlikely, however, since the *312th* had not been in the DMZ region since 1966 and no other reports made reference to this division.[4*]

In addition to the *324B* and the *325C Divisions*, FMFPac intelligence officers reported another division, the *341st NVA,* located in the Vinh Linh District of southern North Vietnam and obviously prepared to reinforce the enemy forces in the DMZ and in Quang

*Major Gary E. Todd, who served as an intelligence officer on the 3d Marine Division staff, commented that the North Vietnamese changed their unit designations "to frustrate our intelligence collection efforts against them, much like a criminal uses aliases to elude police." Maj Gary E. Todd, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 28Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Todd Comments.



Map from Marine Operations in Vietnam, Dec67

Tri Province. The FMFPac order of battle also held another 5,000 enemy troops operating in southern Quang Tri that could be brought up to support the enemy forces in the DMZ sector. These included the *5th* and *9th NVA Regiments*, as well as elements of the *6th* and the *27th Independent Battalions*.[5]

While building up their infantry strength in the DMZ sector, the North Vietnamese maintained a credible artillery threat to the allied forces in the north. With some 100 artillery pieces, rockets, and mortars ranging from 60mm mortars to 152mm field guns, the North Vietnamese had all of the major Marine bases in the central and eastern DMZ well within their artillery fan. Their Soviet-built 130mm field guns with a range of over 27,000 meters easily reached Dong Ha, about 15 kilometers south of the Ben Hai.[6]

Dependent upon a relatively rudimentary supply system, however, the enemy failed to sustain a high rate of fire, seldom reaching a level of 1,000 rounds per day. From April through December 1967, NVA American-made 105mm howitzers and 81mm/82mm mortars accounted for the largest amount of enemy artillery expenditure. Over 13,000 of the mortar shells and slightly more than 5,000 105mm rounds impacted in or near American defensive positions, mostly around Con Thien or Gio Linh. These latter two allied bases were the only ones that were within the range of

the 105s. Although concerned about the enemy 130mm field guns, Major General Raymond L. Murray, the III MAF deputy commander recalled, " . . . they were an annoyance far more than an effective weapon. I don't think we lost very many people from them, and certainly we lost no territory as a result of them but it was a constant annoyance . . . ." During the April-December period, the North Vietnamese fired fewer than 500 rounds from the big guns at allied targets in the south. Brigadier General Louis Metzger, a former artillery officer and the 3d Marine Division assistant division commander, observed that the enemy artillery followed certain patterns. Usually his bombardments occurred around 0600, at noon, and at 1700 with relatively little shelling at night. Whenever enemy use of the heavier calibers lessened, his employment of mortars rose. Metzger gave the North Vietnamese gunners generally only fair grades. Despite their employment of forward observers, the North Vietnamese artillerymen's readjustment fires on American positions were often inaccurate. Yet, Metzger conceded that the enemy gunners and rocketeers had little difficulty in targeting Dong Ha when they wanted.[7*]

Notwithstanding that the North Vietnamese artillery units operated on a logistic margin, Marine commanders could hardly dismiss the danger they posed to the American defenses in the DMZ sector. Mortars and artillery rounds caused more than 70 percent of the allied dead and wounded in the north. For example, from 3–10 December, enemy shelling resulted in 124 Marine casualties from 727 rounds that fell in or around the Marine defenses. Although the artillery fire from the north diminished towards the end of the month, the NVA could increase the pressure whenever it elected to do so.[8]

With the guns massed into two major groupings, the North Vietnamese artillery belt extended westward some 15 kilometers from the Cap Mui Lay coastal region to a finger lake area just above the Ben Hai River. The belt contained about 130 interconnected artillery sites with each site capable of holding one to four guns. Reinforcing their artillery with a sizable antiaircraft concentration including nine SAM–2 (surface-to-air missile) sites and a mix of heavy machine guns and antiaircraft guns up to 57mm, the North Vietnamese impeded American air strikes against the gun positions and hampered air observation for effective counter-battery target acquisition.[9]

Both Generals Westmoreland and Metzger confessed at different times that American commanders lacked the detailed accurate information to determine the damage U.S. air and artillery inflicted upon the enemy defenses in the DMZ. Several years later, General Metzger observed that the American estimates on the number of enemy guns in the DMZ were derived from the III MAF enemy order of battle. According to Metzger, all the order of battle officer did was to take "all the identified enemy units known to be in a certain area and multiplies the weapons known to be in those battalions, regiments, and divisions. The actual numbers can be significantly greater or smaller." Metzger claimed that the North Vietnamese moved their artillery pieces almost nightly from position to position, playing a kind of "moving shell game" with American intelligence officers, gunners, and aviators. At best, the North Vietnamese offered only fleeting targets for the U.S. forces. On 6 January, the 9th Marines reported that the NVA had constructed three new artillery positions north of the DMZ, each consisting of two guns and supported by an antiaircraft unit.[10]

While building up their infantry and combat arms in the north, the North Vietnamese also strengthened their logistic network and combat support capability. According to Marine intelligence estimates, the North Vietnamese had "demonstrated a remarkable degree of ingenuity" in overcoming U.S. air efforts to interdict their lines of communication. They quickly repaired roads and built pontoon or cable bridges to replace those damaged by American bombs. Major roads remained open to through truck traffic, but

*Major Gary E. Todd elaborated in his comments somewhat further on the effectiveness of the North Vietnamese artillery. While acknowledging that the volume of artillery fire was light compared to other wars, he emphasized that "this situation was different from other wars and this fire went beyond what we would call H&I [harassing and interdiction] fire." He observed that the North Vietnamese guns often fired on Dong Ha, for example, "when aircraft were landing or taxiing to take off. By preregistering their fires on the airstrip their first rounds might give them the bonus of one of our aircraft, along with passengers and crew." He noted, nevertheless, that the North Vietnamese gunners were selective in their firing so as not to give away their positions. Todd wrote that the North Vietnamese usually had a logical reason for their bombardment of Dong Ha—to keep voters away from the polls during an election or knowing that a few rounds at the Dong Ha base may explode an ammunition dump. According to Todd, "At any rate, the NVA artillery attack represented clever and cost-effective use of their assets." Todd Comments. Colonel Edwin S. Schick, Jr., who commanded the 12th Marines in 1968, remarked that the North Vietnamese gunners had the benefit of the excellent military maps they had appropriated from the French and that "any point that they wanted to hit, they could." Col Edwin S. Schick, Jr., Taped Comments on draft chapter, n.d. [1994] (Vietnam Comment File).

were subject to delays because of the numerous bypasses, fords, ferries, and damage caused by the bombing. As a result, the enemy often substituted bicycles and porters for trucks. A man on a bicycle could transport about 500 pounds while porters could carry some 50 to 60 pounds.* The NVA supplemented its human pack carriers with mules, horses, and even elephants. A horse or mule could bear about 150 to 300 pounds while an elephant could take about 1,000 pounds on its back. An animal-drawn bull cart could hold up to 1,500 pounds. These alternate modes of transportation were slower, but more maneuverable than motor vehicles. Nevertheless, where and when they had the opportunity, the North Vietnamese continued to rely on both trucks and shipping to bring their supplies into the DMZ sector.[11]

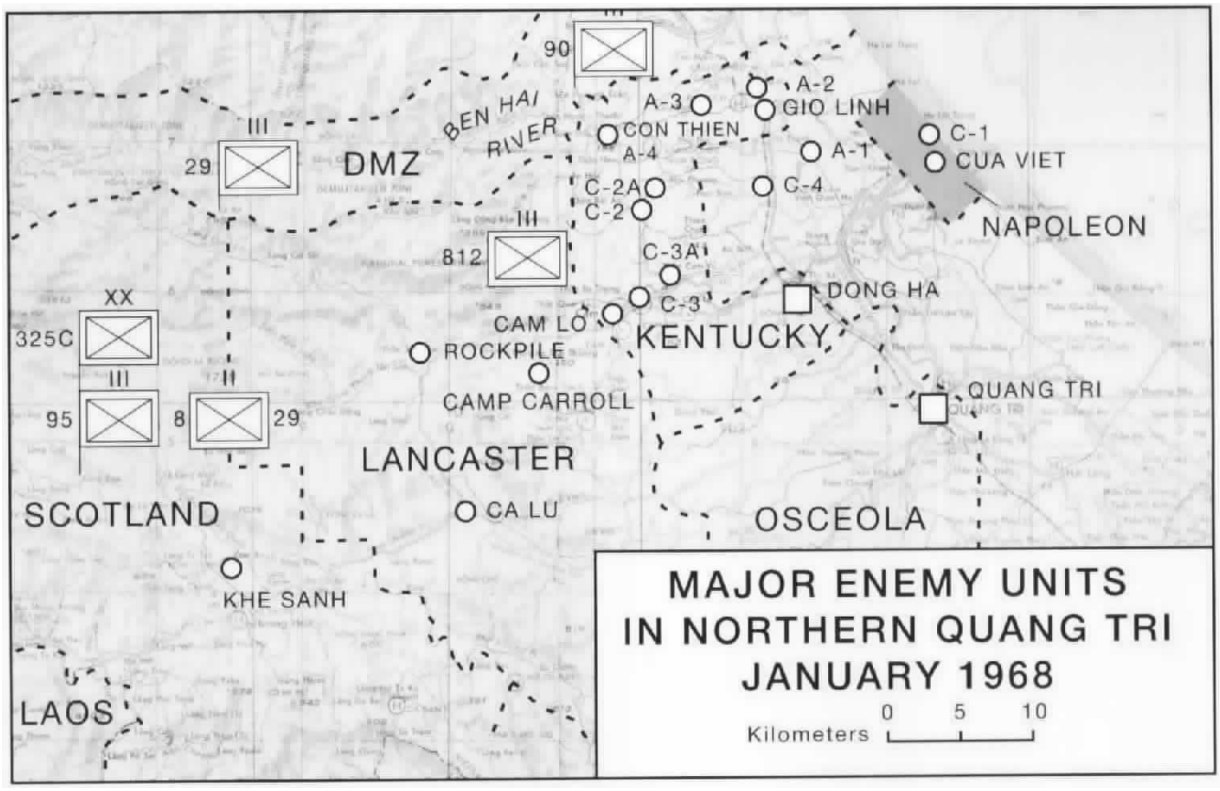
The enemy lines of communication in the North Vietnamese panhandle from Dong Hoi south to the DMZ consisted of 16 interconnecting roads, five waterways, the national railroad, and an extensive trail network. At Dong Hoi, North Vietnamese stevedores unloaded the cargo of seagoing vessels for transfer either to river craft or trucks for transhipment south. The enemy then impressed ships of 800 tons or less, or fishing junks, to ply the deeper waters and occasionally the open sea. Small shallow-draft canoe-like craft called pirogues with attached outboard motors were used on the more restricted inland water passages, such as the Ben Hai and the Ben Xe Rivers. Although the railroad was not functioning, its railbed served as a roadway for foot and bicycle traffic. The main north-south road arteries, Routes 101, 102, 103, and 1A, connected the three main North Vietnamese base areas in and above the DMZ to one another and to the infiltration corridors further south.[12]

The northernmost base area, Base Area (BA) 510, 40 kilometers southeast of Dong Hoi, contained some 19 installations, including general storage areas, a warehouse, a POL (petroleum, oils, and lubricants) facility, and an ordnance depot. Located near the junction of Routes 101 and 103, which run southeast and southwest, respectively, towards the DMZ, the jungle-canopied base provided a relatively safe harbor for both troops and supplies destined for the forces further south. The largest of the base areas, BA 511, some 100 kilometers in area and at one point only 10 kilometers southeast of BA 510, extended to the northern edge of the DMZ. Its confines accommodated three bivouac areas, six troop-staging areas, and logistic storage depots. Lying astride the junction of Routes 101 and 1A, the base area served as the gateway for the North Vietnamese units moving south to attack the positions in the eastern DMZ sector.[13]

The North Vietnamese also moved supplies and troops from both Base Areas 510 and 511 to the westernmost base area, BA 512, situated in the DMZ where North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Laos all joined together. This base area included a large staging complex consisting of both underground shelters and surface structures. Moreover, with Route 103 traversing its lower sector, BA 512 was a major transhipment point for both men and equipment prior to infiltration into the south. As 1967 ended, III MAF received disturbing intelligence that NVA units coming down the "Santa Fe Trail," the eastern branch of the "Ho Chi Minh" Trail in Laos that paralleled the South Vietnamese-Laotian Border, were entering the Khe Sanh sector rather than skirting it as they had in the past. In both the eastern and western rims of the DMZ sector, the enemy appeared to be on the move.[14]

At the end of the year, American commanders and intelligence officers attempted to assess the enemy intentions. Although the North Vietnamese Army had suffered heavy casualties in the DMZ sector, some 10,000 dead according to Marine sources, and had obviously been hurt, it was still a formidable adversary. General Westmoreland recognized the obvious advantages that the situation provided the enemy. He later remarked that the proximity of I Corps to North Vietnam was "always frightening to me." Indeed, he declared that "it was more frightening to me than it was to . . . [Lieutenant General Robert E.] Cushman," the III MAF commanding general.[15]

*The notion that a man either on a bicycle or walking a bicycle could move a load of 500 pounds may very well be hyperbole. Colonel Frederic S. Knight, a member of the 3d Marine Division staff, recalled a conversation that he had with news columnist Joseph Alsop: "he talked and I listened." According to Knight, Alsop presented the case of the bicycle and the 500-pound load. The Marine officer recalled he told Alsop that "such an assertion was unmitigated nonsense; add a 120-pound man to the 500-pound load and the weight of the bicycle itself and you get an unmanageable vehicle. I doubt it could be ridden, and if it could, it would have to be down a gently sloping very smooth paved road. Imagine pushing it up rutted muddy mountainous jungle trails and trying to brake that load on the way down. And if the bicycle fell over, how would one man ever restore equilibrium." Knight remembered that Alsop "did not address my objection beyond saying that he was privy to certain recondite research that indicated it was possible." Knight concluded, however, that this "datum go into the folklore category." Col Frederic S. Knight, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 10Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File)



Marine commanders and staffs, nevertheless, shared some of Westmoreland's concerns. At the beginning of the year, the headquarters of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific in Hawaii prepared a 92-page "Estimate of the Enemy Situation, DMZ Area, Vietnam, 1 January 1968." In this detailed study, the FMFPac intelligence staff outlined both the perceived NVA strengths and weaknesses, the options available to the NVA commanders, and their most likely courses of action.[16]

According to the FMFPac staff, the North Vietnamese Army was "one of the best in Southeast Asia . . . ." The NVA adapted well to the DMZ situation where they knew the exact location of the American positions and were generally more familiar with the terrain than the Marines. Although limited for the most part to movement by foot, the North Vietnamese soldier also gained a singular leverage from this apparent liability. As the Marine report noted, "This is certainly a slow mode, but due to this circumstance he [the NVA soldier] is restricted only from those areas which are virtually impassable to foot movement." Acknowledging the relative high morale and dedication of the North Vietnamese Army, the FMFPac staff writers observed that one of the enemy's major attributes was that he viewed "the present conflict as one which has existed for two generations, and he has no great expectations that it will end soon, thus all of his actions are tempered by patience."[17]

The enemy, nevertheless, had obvious vulnerabilities. His troops lacked technical and mechanical training and experience. North Vietnam's "archaic logistical support system" depended upon a large reservoir of manpower and the NVA "continually revealed an inability to exploit any tactical opportunity calling for the rapid deployment of units and material." Moreover, the lack of modern communications often prevented senior NVA commanders from influencing decisions at critical moments once the battle was joined, handicapped by their limited capability to coordinate and control their units in rapidly changing situations. Prisoner interrogation also revealed that the high morale of the NVA soldier deteriorated "the longer he remains below the Ben Hai River."[18]

Balancing the assets and debits of the NVA forces in the north, the FMFPac staff officers then evaluated the most likely stratagem that the enemy would adopt in the DMZ sector. According to the Marine analysis, the North Vietnamese had various feasible alternatives, the most likely being:

> 1. a division-strength attack into northeastern Quang Tri to "establish temporary control of selected areas . . . .;
>
> 2. conduct multi-battalion or regimental-size attacks against "multiple" allied targets between Highway 9 and

the DMZ using forces both in eastern Quang Tri and near Khe Sanh. Might attempt "to hold Khe Sanh at least temporarily . . . because of its remoteness . . . .;

3. continue the present "pattern of harassing friendly forces with hit and run attacks, interdiction of lines of communication with battalion-size forces . . . .;

4. continue the present pattern and also fortify areas and ambush sites in Quang Tri to trap friendly forces and "dissipate our efforts and to inflict heavy personnel casualties and equipment losses on friendly forces . . . .;

5. withdraw all forces north of the Ben Hai and strengthen defenses.[19]

Given these choices, the FMFPac report concluded that the North Vietnamese would probably elect a combination of options 1 and 2, while at "the same time harass friendly forces with hit and run attacks, mining, and interdiction of lines of communications." Despite the NVA's recent reverses in the DMZ, the FMFPac staff members believed that the North Vietnamese leadership, "imbued with a Dien Bien Phu mentality," wanted to inflict a series of tactical defeats and heavy casualties among U.S. forces that would demoralize the American "home front" and make continued U.S. participation in the war politically untenable. On 13 January, General Cushman, the III MAF commander, radioed General Westmoreland, "An immediate enemy threat to III MAF forces is poised west of Khe Sanh. Additional heavy enemy concentrations are indicated in the A Shau Valley as well as in and north of the DMZ." At this point, both MACV and the Marine command perceived northern I Corps as the most likely setting for any major enemy push.[20]

Operation Napoleon

Along the DMZ, much of the war was indistinguishable from the preceding year. Work on the barrier continued and the same politically based rules of engagement applied to the DMZ. U.S. ground forces could not cross the Ben Hai River, but were allowed to conduct operations in the Demilitarized Zone south of the demarcation line and return fire across the line. Artillery, naval gunfire, and air missions were permitted against valid targets in the north. MACV insisted, however, that the Marine command notify it of every action against the North Vietnamese under these ground rules. Marine units remained in the identical sectors, each with its designated operational name, that they had manned in December.[21]

In the DMZ, the 3d Marine Division maintained three distinct tactical areas designated by operational codenames, Napoleon, Kentucky, and Lancaster. Lieutenant Colonel Edward R. Toner's 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion was responsible for the Napoleon Area of Operations, extending some three miles above and two miles below the Cua Viet waterway and two miles inland from the coast. The battalion's mission was to safeguard the vital Cua Viet Port Facility and

Navy LSTs (landing ship, tank) and smaller seagoing vessels could be unloaded at the Cua Viet Port Facility in the DMZ Sector, and transhipped to the main Marine base upriver at Dong Ha.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A801124



companion logistic support facility as well as protect the river supply route to Dong Ha.

With the establishment at the mouth of the Cua Viet of an LST (landing ship, tank) ramp in March 1967, ships' cargoes could be unloaded onto LCUs (landing craft, utility) and LCMs (landing craft, mechanized) for the trip upriver to Dong Ha. As Marine forces and facilities expanded in northern Quang Tri, the Cua Viet supply channel became even more crucial to the Marine command. By the end of the year, the Navy Cua Viet Port Facility could accommodate two LSTs, three LCU's, and three LCM's, and move 940 short tons daily through to Dong Ha.[22]

The 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion had transferred from the Da Nang TAOR to its new command post at the Cua Viet Port Facility at the end of April 1967 to provide general support for the 3d Marine Division. At the same time, the commanding officer of the amphibian tractor battalion became the Cua Viet installation coordinator and responsible for both the defense and administration of the Cua Viet area. In November, the 3d Marine Division divided Operation Kingfisher, the codename for the division campaign in the DMZ eastern sector, into the three operations of Lancaster, Kentucky, and Napoleon. In Operation Napoleon, Lieutenant Colonel Toner remained responsible for roughly the same area that the "Amtrackers" had been operating all along.[23]

The battalion had the additional duty to construct the C–4 Combat Operating Base, about 2,000 meters north of the Cua Viet, and to assist the adjoining ARVN 2d Regiment to build the A–1 Strong Point, another 3,000 meters to the northwest. The A–1 and C–4 positions marked the eastern terminus of the barrier. While helping with the work on the barrier in December, Toner's Marines on the 11th engaged in some of the heaviest fighting of the month. In the sand dunes and scrub pine growth near the fishing village of Ha Loi Toi just north of C–4, the battalion in a day-long battle killed 54 of the enemy at a cost of 20 wounded Marines. Five days later the Cua Viet Facility came under artillery and rocket attack which resulted in 5 Marines killed and 31 wounded. Through the end of 1967, according to Marine statistics, Operation Napoleon accounted for 87 enemy dead and the capture of 2 prisoners at a loss of 10 Marine dead and 48 wounded and evacuated.[24]

In January 1968, Lieutenant Colonel Toner's battalion consisted of his Headquarters and Support Company, Companies A and B, and an attached infantry company, Company C, from the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines. A platoon of six LVTH–6s (an amphibian tractor with a turret-mounted 105mm howitzer) from the 1st Armored Amphibian Company, attached to the 2d Battalion, 12th Marines, provided artillery support. A mortar section of three 4.2 mortars from the 12th Marines reinforced the fires of the howitzers.[25*]

With its flat sandy coastal plain and the Cua Viet waterway, the Napoleon area of operations was ideal terrain for Toner's battalion. The battalion commander had at his disposal 64 troop-carrying LVTP–5s (landing vehicle tracked, personnel), 6 command and control tractors, 4 LVTEs (landing vehicle tracked, engineer) used for mine clearing, and 2 LVTR–1s (landing vehicle tracked, retriever) for repair purposes. These lightly armored amphibian tractors afforded mobility both on land and water. Within minutes, the Marines could reinforce any trouble spot within the TAOR.[26]

Early January was a relatively quiet period for the amtrac Marines. They busied themselves with civic action in the nearby fishing village of Gia Hai, working on C–4, and building revetments for the tractors. Marine Sergeant Ron Asher with the attached Company C, 3d Marines at C–4 wrote his mother in December 1967 that he spent most of his "'down time' from patrols filling sandbags, and getting the amtracs and tanks dug in."[27]

During a visit to the battalion on Christmas Day, General Westmoreland had expressed his dissatisfaction about the lack of protection for the amphibian vehicles. In relaying this concern to Lieutenant Colonel Toner, the 3d Division commander, General Tompkins, suggested that the battalion use steel revetments combined with oil drums and ammunition boxes filled with sand to safeguard the LVTs.[28]

It was not until mid-month that the North Vietnamese made any serious attempt to probe anew the Marine positions in Napoleon. On 14 January, a Marine patrol, about 2,500 meters south of the Cua Viet near the coast, came across a design drawn in the sand, consisting of four circles with a huge arrow in the

*A later successor to Lieutenant Colonel Toner as battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Walter W. Damewood, observed that the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion in 1968 "had to be one of the most unique Marine battalions of the time in terms of personnel and equipment structure." He noted that in addition to its normal complement of personnel and equipment, the battalion had attached to it: Marine combat engineers, Marine infantry and tanks, and reconnaissance elements as well as Army armored personnel, and South Vietnamese Popular Force troops. He noted that the members of the battalion became known as "Am Grunts" because of the infantry role and mission assigned to them. LtCol Walter W. Damewood, Jr., Comments on draft chapter, dtd 31Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).



Top photo from 12th Mar ComdC, Jan69; bottom photo courtesy of Ron Asher

Combat Base Area C–4 appears in the top photo, while the bottom picture displays a typical bunker at C–4 in January 1968. The 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion in Operation Napoleon had the main responsibility for the construction of C–4 as well as the protection of the Cua Viet sector.



center pointing northwest towards the battalion command post. Making the obvious conclusion that this was a crude aiming stake for enemy mortars, the Marines changed the direction of the arrow so that any rounds fired from that site would fall into the sea. That same night, about 1,000 meters to the southwest, a Marine squad ambush from Company B, 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, just outside the village of Tuong Van Tuong, saw nearly 50 enemy troops moving on line towards them from the southeast. The Marine squad leader immediately called for artillery support. Within two minutes, the 105mms on the LVTH–6s dropped more than 100 rounds upon the advancing enemy. The NVA soldiers regrouped twice, but "broke each time under fire." A Marine looking through his starlight scope observed a number of enemy troops fall, but when two reinforced Marine platoons from Company B checked the area the following morning there were no bodies. Throughout the DMZ sector, the enemy appeared once more attempting to infiltrate into and behind the allied positions.[29]

Kentucky Operations and the Barrier

Aligned along both sides of Route 1, the 2d ARVN Regiment filled in the gap between the Napoleon and Kentucky area of operations. Part of the highly rated 1st ARVN Division, the regiment occupied in December both the A–1 and A–2 Strong Points of the barrier and the C–1 base area. Major Vu Van Giai, the regimental commander, whom the Marines described as "an impressive officer with a good command of English," established his command post at C–1, located just west of the railroad and Route 1, about 6,000 meters south of Gio Linh. Giai kept one battalion at the C–1 base and deployed two battalions forward, one at A–1, near the destroyed fishing village of An My, about 2,000 meters below the DMZ, and the other at A–2, just above Gio Linh. On 3 January, Giai moved his reserve battalion, the 2d Battalion, 2d ARVN, from below Gio Linh to new positions north of the Cua Viet in the vicinity of Dong Ha. As a result of this relocation, the regiment and the 9th Marines in Operation Kentucky readjusted their boundaries. Nominally, the A–2 stronghold at Gio Linh, although manned by the ARVN, remained in the 9th Marines TAOR. According to the barrier plan, the ARVN eventually were to take over also the A–3 Strong Point, located halfway between Gio Linh and Con Thien, when it was finished.[30]

Until that time, however, the defense and building of the barrier lay with the 9th Marines in Kentucky. Encompassing "Leatherneck Square," the approximately six-by-eight-mile area, outlined by Gio Linh and Dong Ha on the east and Con Thien and Cam Lo on the west, the 9th Marines area of operations included three of the five strong points of the "Trace" and two of the combat operating bases of the barrier, C–2 and C–3. The terrain in Kentucky varied from low-lying hills interspersed by woods and rice paddies in the northern sector to the cultivated Cam Lo River Valley in the south extending from Cam Lo to Dong Ha. Route 1 connected Gio Linh to Dong Ha and Route 561 extended from Con Thien to Cam Lo. Route 605 in the north linked the strong points along the trace to one another while Route 9, south of the Cam Lo River, ran from Dong Ha into Laos. All of these lines of communication, except for Route 1, required extensive engineer roadwork, including paving, widening, and resurfacing, to meet the logistical requirements of the barrier effort.

Although Operation Kentucky officially began on 1 November 1967, the 9th Marines was no stranger in its area of operations. The regiment remained responsible for the same ground and positions that it held during the previous operation, Kingfisher. For all practical purposes, the change of designation only served to provide a convenient dividing line to measure with the body-count yardstick the relative progress of the DMZ campaign. The identical concept of operations continued in effect: the 9th Marines was to hold on to Leatherneck Square, protect Dong Ha, build the barrier, and throw back any North Vietnamese forces attempting to infiltrate into the I Corps coastal plain.[31]

In January 1968, Colonel Richard B. Smith, who had assumed command of the regiment the previous September, controlled from his command post at Dong Ha four infantry battalions and part of another, the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines. Except for the two companies of the 2d Battalion, all of the other battalions belonged administratively to other regiments, the 1st, 3d, and 4th Marines. The 2d Battalion, 1st Marines defended the A–4 Strong Point at Con Thien; the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines worked on the fortifications of the A–3 Strong Point with three companies; the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines screened A–3 from positions on Hill 28, north of the trace; and the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines occupied the C–2 and C–2A combat operating bases on Route 561. Further south, the two companies of the 9th Marines protected the Cam Lo Bridge where Route 561 crossed the Cam Lo River and the 2d Battalion, 12th Marines artillery positions on Cam Lo Hill, the C–3

combat operating base. The remaining rifle company of the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, Company M, attached to the 12th Marines, guarded the provisional Marine artillery battalion situated at the Gio Linh fire support base, south of the ARVN in the A–2 Strong Point.[32]

A sea-going Marine during World War II and an infantry company commander during the Korean War, Colonel Smith had definite ideas about the war in the DMZ. He later observed that the Marines were "sitting in defensive positions up there playing strictly defensive combat . . . ." Smith believed that the troops required training in defensive warfare. He claimed that was an unpopular viewpoint since "Marines are always supposed to be in an assault over a beach, but this just isn't the name of the game out there." The emphasis was on good defensive positions and clear lines of fire.[33*]

With the command interest in the barrier at the beginning of the year, the strong points and combat operating bases in the 9th Marines sector took on even more importance. Anchoring the western segment of the cleared trace, the A–4 Strong Point at Con Thien continued to play a major role in the regiment's defensive plan.** Located less than two miles south of the DMZ, Con Thien, although less than 160 meters high, dominated the surrounding terrain. Colonel Smith observed that if the enemy had held the position, "he would be looking down our throats" at Dong Ha.[34]

Lieutenant Colonel Evan L. Parker, Jr.'s 2d Battalion, 1st Marines had taken over the responsibility of the Con Thien defense in mid-December. A 1st Marine Division unit, the battalion quickly learned the differences between the DMZ war and the pacification campaign further south. In contrast to the lightly armed and elusive VC guerrillas in the south, the North Vietnamese here often stood their ground, supported by heavy machine guns, mortars, and artillery. By the time the battalion occupied Con Thien, it had accommodated to the DMZ environment.[35]

The Marines of the 2d Battalion in December worked feverishly on the A–4 Strong Point defenses. During the Christmas truce period the battalion added 11 bunkers and dug a new trench along the forward slope. The troops then sandbagged the bunkers with a "burster layer" in the roofs, usually consisting of airfield matting "to burst delayed fuse rounds." They then covered the positions with rubberized tarps to keep the water out. By the end of the year, all of the new bunkers had been sandbagged and wired in with the new razor-sharp German-type barbed wire. Protected by a minefield to its front, surrounded by wire, and supported by air, artillery, and tanks, the 2d Battalion lay relatively secure in its defenses at the exposed Con Thien outpost.[36]

As the new year began, the Con Thien Marines enjoyed a small reprieve from the shooting war. Both sides more or less adhered to the terms of the shaky holiday truce, despite a small enemy probe of a Marine listening post on the perimeter. According to a Marine reporter, on New Year's Day, a Marine forward artillery observer at Con Thien looking through his binoculars at enemy forward positions across the Ben Hai suddenly spotted a large NVA flag with its single star emblazoned on a bright red background waving "in the breeze atop a rather crude flagpole . . . ." Other Marines, mostly young infantrymen, crowded around to take their turn to see for what most of them was their first tangible symbol of the enemy.*** Secure in their conviction that the Marines would adhere to the cease-fire, the NVA deliberately taunted the American troops. Impatiently the Marine gunners waited the few hours for the

*There is dispute among some officers who served with the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines attached to the 9th Marines, whether there were standing operating procedures relating to restrictions on patrolling. A former company executive officer recalled that there were definite limitations on how far platoons and companies could move from their parent unit, 250 yards for platoons and 500 yards for companies. On the other hand, a former battalion commander and company commander with the 3d Battalion recalled no such limitations. The author found no listing of such restrictions in the 9th Marines Command Chronology for January 1968. The consensus seems to be that if there were such restrictions they were not always enforced and perhaps not even known. For the various viewpoints see Chambers Intvw and Maj Justice M. Chambers, Jr., Comments on draft chapter, dtd 17Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File); LtCol Otto Lehrack, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 29Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File); and Col Robert C. Needham, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Needham Comments.

**Lieutenant General Metzger observed that Con Thien and Gio Linh had been French forts, which indicated very early that both sites were recognized as key terrain. LtGen Louis Metzger, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 17Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Metzger Comments.

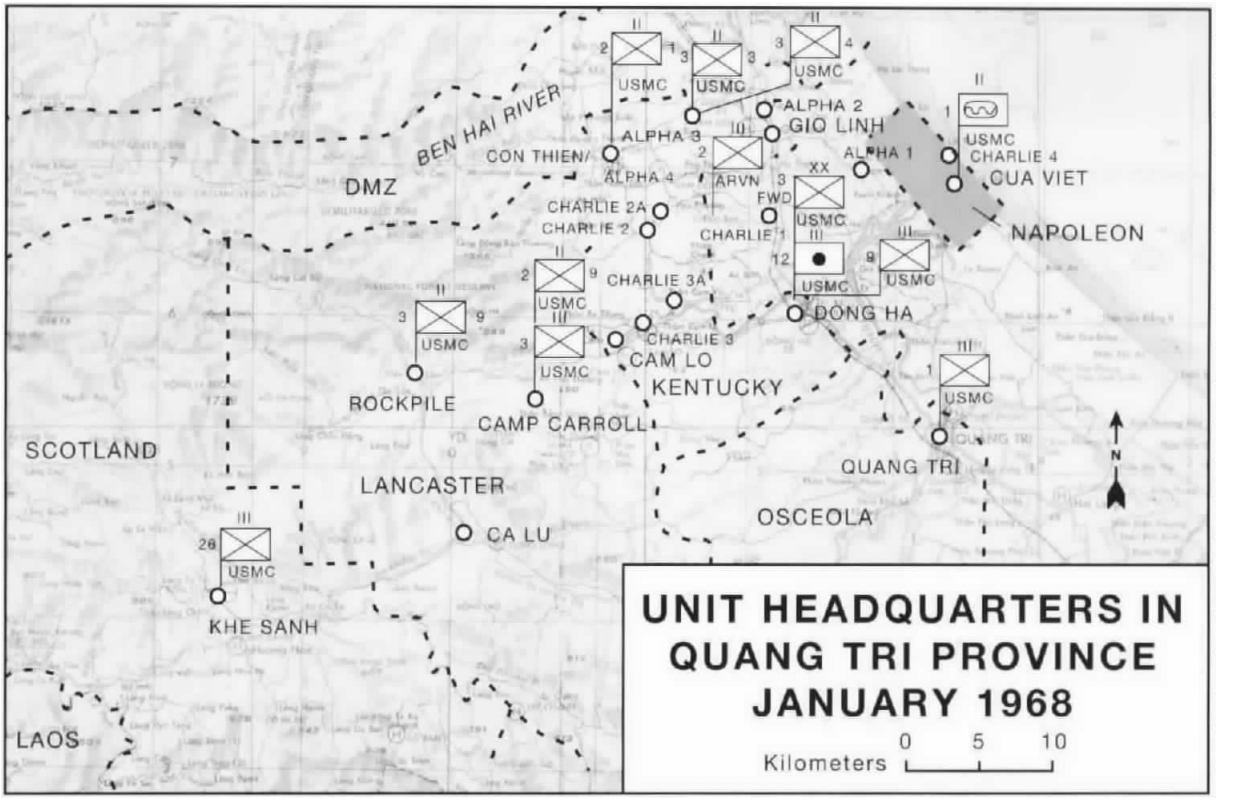
***According to Lieutenant Colonel Otto Lehrack, who was a company commander with the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, it was not so unusual to see a NVA flag north of the Ben Hai River "just about any time you were on the cliffs near Gio Linh." He does concede, however, that the truce period may have been the only time that the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines may have had an opportunity to see the North Vietnamese banner. LtCol Otto Lehrack, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 29Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Lehrack Comments. See also Otto J. Lehrack, *No Shining Armor, The Marines at War in Vietnam, An Oral History* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992), pp. 211–12.



Top photo courtesy of Col Joseph L. Sadowski, USMC (Ret), and bottom photo courtesy of Col Lee R. Bendell, USMC (Ret)

The Marine base at Con Thien (A–4) is seen at top, with Marines constructing bunkers at A–4 in photograph at bottom. Col Lee R. Bendell, whose 3d Battalion, 4th Marines served at Con Thien in 1967, observed that NVA artillery fire "necessitated overhead protection."





"false peace" to come to an end. As the time for the truce expired, the Con Thien guns opened up on the approaches to the defensive perimeter. The defenders then plotted a fire mission to take out the flag. Minutes before the artillerymen fired the first round the NVA hauled down their colors. In a way, this incident mirrored many of the frustrations of the Marines in the DMZ. The average 19-year-old manning the defenses at Con Thien and his commanders had difficulty understanding the validity of such artificialities as demilitarized zones that were not demilitarized, and cease-fires that appeared only to benefit the enemy.[37]

The war soon resumed for the 2d Battalion at Con Thien. Although the intensity of combat never reached the level of September and October, the North Vietnamese persisted in their probes and occasional bombardment of the Marine outpost. The incoming mortar, artillery, and recoilless rifle rounds soon reached the level experienced by the defenders' immediate predecessors. As recorded in the battalion's monthly report, the "incoming was more harassing than destructive in nature . . . ."[38] On 5 January, the NVA gunners mortared Con Thien in groups of three to five bursts between 0945 and 1015. A total of 37 rounds, including five 120mm shells, fell on the Marine positions, with a direct hit on the battalion command post. This resulted in one Marine killed, and eight wounded, including Lieutenant Colonel Parker, the battalion commander. Both Marine air and artillery attacked the suspected enemy firing positions, but the Marine command had no way of knowing the effectiveness of these efforts. After the medical evacuation of Lieutenant Colonel Parker, Major James T. Harrell III, the executive officer, was named acting commander of the battalion. On 9 January, Lieutenant Colonel Billy R. Duncan officially relieved Lieutenant Colonel Parker as battalion commander and Harrell resumed his duties as executive officer. The enemy shelling of Con Thien remained sporadic, averaging about 30 rounds on those days the NVA chose to fire.[39*]

On the ground, the North Vietnamese had taken advantage of the holiday truce period to bring up fresh units and continued the pressure on the Marine outpost. The *803d NVA Regiment* relieved the *90th NVA* in the positions facing Con Thien. Almost daily, small patrols from the *803d* tested the Marine defenses. For example, on 10 January, Company H reported in the early morning hours that "it had spotted three men, by starlight scope, moving in a westerly direction." The Marines

*During January, the enemy fired on Con Thien 22 of the 31 days in the month. 2/1 ComdC, Jan68, p. II–4.

fired three M79 grenade rounds and later checked the area "with negative results." Later that night, about 2100, a Marine squad from Company F on the northeastern perimeter picked up enemy movement on its radar scope and called in a mortar mission. A Marine platoon patrol that went out to investigate the results of the action "blundered into [a] friendly minefield" and sustained three casualties, one dead and two wounded.[40]

A few days after this incident, the night of 14 January, Con Thien Marines heard an explosion in the minefield directly to the north of their defenses. The Marines fired illumination and saw a wounded NVA soldier lying in the minefield and other North Vietnamese troops withdrawing. A Marine squad equipped with a starlight scope then attempted to recover the wounded man. By the time it reached the area, the Marines found no one there. Shortly afterward, a Marine outpost sighted about four to five NVA entering the battalion's perimeter apparently to retrieve their injured comrade. Another mine went off. Lieutenant Colonel Duncan sent a platoon out to check for any enemy casualties. About 0120 on the morning of the 15th, the Marine patrol as it neared the minefield "heard whistling and a great deal of noise," evidence of a large enemy force nearby. Both sides withdrew under covering fires. The NVA used recoilless rifles, small arms, and 60mm mortars to make good their retreat while Marine artillery and mortars targeted the enemy escape routes. Two Marines received minor wounds. About 1000 that morning a Marine patrol returned to the area where the enemy was last seen and found a pick, a wrench, a poncho "with fragmentation holes and large blood stains."[41]

For the Marines of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines in January, their tour at Con Thien, like the units before them, was their "time in the barrel." As Lieutenant Colonel Duncan many years later recalled, the North Vietnamese artillery destroyed much of the northwest minefield protecting the Marine outpost "as well as the forward trenches and bunkers in that area. Casualties were mounting. The hospital bunkers exceeded capacity with wounded on stretchers." The battalion commander remembered that one of the chaplains "broke under stress and attempted suicide."[42]

Route 561, running north and south, was the lifeline for Con Thien. To keep this road open, General Metzger remembered that Marine engineers in 1967 "straightened out the route by cutting a 'jog' in the road that went to a by-then deserted village which reduced the length to Con Thien and simplified security." Despite this improvement, other complications arose. According to Metzger, once the torrential rains came the water washed out the road. It took the engineers an extended time to obtain sufficient rock until they could build "a suitable roadbed" to carry the heavy traffic.[43]

The Marines also established two combat operating bases, C–2 and C–2A, to protect Route 561. About 2,000 meters southeast of Con Thien, the C–2A base overlooked a bridge spanning a stream which intersected the road there. The Marines nicknamed the area the "Washout," because in heavy rainstorms, the waters flooded the low-lying ground. Another 3,000 meters to the southeast was the C–2 base which contained both artillery and infantry fixed positions. The terrain along Route 561 between Con Thien and Cam Lo consisted of low-rolling hills, numerous gullies, and waist-high brush. From both the C–2A and C–2 bases Marine patrols ventured forth "to keep the NVA off the road."[44]

In January 1968, Lieutenant Colonel Edwin A. Deptula's 1st Battalion, 4th Marines occupied both the C–2 and C–2A positions, having just relieved the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines in the sector. Lieutenant Colonel Deptula established his command post at C–2 with Companies A and B. His executive officer, Major John I. Hopkins, formed a second command group and with Companies C and D held C–2A. Throughout the first weeks of the month, the battalion ran numerous squad- and platoon-sized combat patrols out of both C–2 and C–2A for distances of 1,500 meters from each of the bases and from Route 561. Actually the most significant action in the battalion's area of operations involved another unit. On 10 January, a small patrol from the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion came across three NVA in a palm-covered harbor site, about 3,000 meters east of C–2. The reconnaissance Marines killed two of the enemy, took one prisoner, and captured all three of their weapons.[45]

As part of the barrier system, the central effort at C–2 in early January was the completion of the bunker defenses. Several support units, including engineers, artillery, and tank and antitank detachments, shared the base area with the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines. Although the engineers ran daily mine sweeps along Route 561 to Con Thien to keep the road open, they, as all the tenant units, assisted with the construction effort. On 10 January, a "Dyemarker" (barrier) team visited the C–2 site to inspect the defenses. According to the 1st Battalion's monthly chronology, "None of the bunkers could be considered complete. Maximum effort was later directed at bunker completion in keeping with the tactical situation."[46]



Top is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190200 and bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190197.

Marine engineers with a bulldozer are building ammunition storage bunkers at Combat Base Area C–4, top, and a Marine platoon from the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines is seen at work building a bunker emplacement at C–4 with sandbags for overhead cover in January, bottom.



Colonel Smith, the regimental commander, later explained some of the handicaps that the Marine units worked under in getting the work on the barrier completed. Few of the units had "backhoes" to assist in digging foxholes or bunker foundations. He observed that the machines could "do in two hours what it takes a whole battalion to do in two days." Despite scarcity of equipment, Smith also partially blamed Marine training for not teaching the troops "proper bunkering procedures—sandbagging." He compared sandbagging technique to laying out bricks "with headers and stretchers." The regimental commander remarked that he saw more wasted effort with the sandbags "because the man doesn't know what he is doing and the NCO supervising him doesn't know any more about it than he does so the wall gets to be six-feet high and collapses . . . and there goes three days' work gone to Hell." Overcoming the limitations imposed by its own inexperience in constructing bunkers and the lack of heavy earth-moving equipment, the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines would complete 47 of the scheduled 81 bunkers in the C–2 base site by the end of the month.[47]

South of Deptula's 1st Battalion in Kentucky were a small command group and two companies of Lieutenant Colonel William M. Cryan's 2d Battalion, 9th Marines. In December, just before Christmas, the 2d Battalion had moved from positions north of A–3 in Operation Kentucky to Camp Carroll in the 3d Marines' Lancaster area of operations. A few days later, Lieutenant Colonel Cryan detached his Companies F and G and placed them under his executive officer, Major Dennis J. Murphy. While Cryan and the rest of the battalion remained at Camp Carroll, Murphy and his command returned to the Kentucky area of operations and relieved the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines at Cam Lo. Company F occupied the C–3 Cam Lo artillery position, 1,000 meters above the Cam Lo River on Route 561, while Company G protected the Cam Le Bridge (C–3A) on Route 9 at the river.[48]

In the Cam Lo sector, the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines patrolled Route 561 to keep the main supply route open to Con Thien and the farming villages above the river. At the C–3 base, Company F, together with supporting artillery and engineers, worked on the improvement of the Dyemarker defenses. On 15 January, the Marines at C–3 completed the bunker requirements on schedule. During this period, the Marine patrols encountered few enemy troops. In fact, during the first two or three weeks of the month, the enemy limited his activity to a mining incident on Route 561 on 2 January and to infiltrating the hamlets above the Cam Lo River at night. In these nocturnal visits, Viet Cong guerrillas recruited or kidnapped villagers and demanded food and other supplies. During the first two weeks of January, one Popular Force unit west of the hamlet of An My on three separate occasions ambushed VC troops trying to enter the village, killing at least three of the enemy. By the end of the third week, the 2d Battalion reported, however, "it was clear that there was a large amount of movement in and out of these villages, particularly to the east." In their patrolling of the hilly brush terrain in the Cam Lo northern area of operations, 2d Battalion Marines by mid-January made contact with more and more North Vietnamese regulars coming down.[49]

To the northeast of the 2d Battalion at C–3 and C–3A, Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Needham's 3d Battalion, 3d Marines concentrated on finishing the last of the strong points along the "Trace," A–3, in the 9th Marines sector. In November, Marine engineers, later reinforced by a Seabee battalion, had begun work on the strong point. Designed according to ARVN specifications, A–3 was to consist of 30 18 x 32 feet bunkers, heavily timbered and sandbagged and covered by dirt. These were to sleep up to 18 ARVN troops on three-tiered wooden bunks. By Christmas, the Seabees and engineers had completed the raising of the timbers of the bunkers and departed, "leaving to the infantry the task of finishing the sandbagging." Up to this point, the Special Landing Force (SLF) Alpha battalion, BLT 1/3, had been attached to the 9th Marines and assigned to the A–3 position. At the end of December, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines with three companies moved from the Cam Lo sector to the A–3 position and relieved the SLF battalion, which was to join the 1st Marines at Quang Tri.[50*]

*General Metzger commented that A–3 was a special situation: "first we had to fight to clear the ground of the enemy. Then as Christmas approached General Westmoreland suggested we withdraw until after Christmas and abandon the positions 'so there would be no casualties during the holidays.' We resisted to the maximum, pointing out that the enemy would occupy the position in our absence . . . the casualties in retaking the position would far exceed those which we might sustain in completing the position. In order to avoid abandoning the partially completed position we guaranteed that it would be completed before Christmas. A–3 was given the highest priority. Bunker material was flown in by helicopter and maximum effort was expended which was completed well before Christmas." Metzger Comments. Colonel Robert C. Needham, who commanded the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines at the time, remembered "the stringing of defensive wire and emplacing AP mines around the perimeter was, for all intents and purposes, completed when 3/3 relieved SLF 'A' (1/3) at A–3." Needham Comments.

Although the Seabees with their heavy equipment had left, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines had much work to do at A–3. The rains had come during December and the only fill for the sandbags was "sticky mud." A–3 still required defensive wire and some 30,000 mines to be laid. The battalion supported by engineers dug four-man fighting holes. Using mechanical ditchdiggers, the Marines and engineers trenched around the entire position. By 12 January, the 3d Battalion had erected an observation tower and nearly completed the entire project. According to Colonel Smith, the A–3 Strong Point "was a model for this sort of installation. This is the only one in the AO that had a plan to begin with. The others 'just grew' under half a dozen different commanders."[51]*

Although subject to enemy artillery, the 3d Battalion took very few casualties at the A–3 Strong Point because of NVA shelling. The battalion's Company M protecting the American gun positions south of Gio Linh, on the other hand, sustained three killed and two wounded on 9 January as a result of enemy mortar fire. These were more casualties than Lieutenant Colonel Needham's remaining companies suffered at the hands of the enemy for the entire month.[52]

The 3d Battalion, 3d Marines did come under fire from an unexpected source in January. In his monthly chronology, the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Needham, reported: "On 13 separate occasions a total of 54 friendly artillery rounds were received in or near the inner perimeter of A–3 and Hill 28 [just to the north of A–3]." On 5 January, for example, a white phosphorous shell landed inside the 3d Battalion's perimeter. The 9th Marines and the 2d Battalion, 12th Marines investigated the matter which resulted in the relief of the battery commander. Six days later, the battalion was on the receiving end of six 105 rounds within its wire, followed on the 13th by 24 rounds. At the same time, a short round fell on Hill 28 and killed two Marines and wounded six others. Other "friendly fire" incidents occurred on 15 and 19 January. In its monthly report, the artillery battalion, the 2d Battalion, 12th Marines, made no mention of the mishaps but remarked, "considerable difficulty was experienced with computer hot lines to the firing batteries due to the unreliability of radio relay." It then contained the statement that staff visits to liaison officers and forward observers "have resulted in better communications on the conduct of fire nets." Lieutenant Colonel Needham, a former artillery officer himself, remembered several years later that "the situation got top-level attention and quick resolution when I finally told [the 9th Marines] that I refused any further support from the 12th Marines, and prefer no artillery to what I was getting." In his monthly report, he wrote that "corrective action appears to have been initiated and a definite improvement in this regard has been made during the latter part of the month."[53]**

Just north of the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, Lieutenant Colonel Lee R. Bendell's 3d Battalion, 4th Marines screened the approaches to the A–3 Strong Point. On 26–27 December, Bendell's battalion deployed from C–2 and relieved the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines on Hill 28, a slight rise about 600 meters north of A–3 and just forward of the trace. Bendell expanded his battalion's perimeter and moved his companies off the top of the hill to new positions lower down. Marine engineers bulldozed the growth and trees immediately to the west, which provided the battalion better observation of the surrounding terrain and improved fields of fire. Low rolling hills with secondary scrub and thick brush, broken by flat, wet rice paddies of 75 to 150 meters, lay to the north and east. Wide rice paddies also were interspersed with the woods to the west. To the south, the Marines had a clear line of sight to the A–3 Strong Point and the trace which marked the battalion's southern boundary. The northern boundary extended to the southern edge of the Demilitarized Zone, less than 1,000 meters from Hill 28.[54]

Close to the DMZ and with elements of the *90th NVA Regiment* believed to be in his sector, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell insisted on alertness. He deployed his battalion into a three-company perimeter, leaving one company in reserve. Bendell used the reserve company for night ambushes and listening posts (LP) and as a reaction force during the day. According to the battalion commander, he maintained four to six ambushes

*Lieutenant Colonel Otto Lehrack, who commanded a company in the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, wrote that the battalion's operations officer, Major Raymond F. Findlay, "who designed and supervised the system" deserved the credit for A–3. Lehrack Comments.

**Colonel Needham observed in his comments that it was obvious to him "that the friendly fire we received was due to basic breakdowns at the firing battery/FDC [fire direction center] levels." Needham Comments. Lieutenant General Louis Metzger believed that the problem was that the main division headquarters was still at Phu Bai in early January 1968 and the "need for fire control elements was at Dong Ha." He believed the situation was alleviated when the division later in the month moved the main headquarters elements to Dong Ha. Metzger Comments.



Photo courtesy of Col Robert C. Needham, USMC (Ret)

Col Richard B. Smith, second from left, the 9th Marines commander, is seen visiting Strongpoint A–3 in January 1968 and in conversation with LtCol Robert C. Needham, to the right of Col Smith, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines commander, and two of his officers: Maj Raymond F. Findlay, Jr., the 3d Battalion operations officer, is to the left of Col Smith, and Captain Robert R. Beers, the commander of Company I, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, is to the right of LtCol Needham.

and LPs on any particular night. During the day, the battalion patrolled constantly, with as many as two companies out at a time.

Lieutenant Colonel Bendell reinforced the infantry companies with four 106mm recoilless rifles, two .50-caliber machine guns, and six of the battalion's 81mm mortars. He had left the two remaining mortars back in the base camp so that the extra men from the 81mm mortar platoon could ". . . hump . . . additional ammo, if we had to move out."[55] The 2d Battalion, 12th Marines provided direct artillery support and the 1st MAW, close air support.

The "Thundering Third," as the battalion called itself, was no stranger to the DMZ war. It had been at Con Thien in July through early September 1967 during some of the heaviest fighting and bombardment around that strong point. Lieutenant Colonel Bendell, who had assumed command that July, remembered that the battalion "had actively patrolled the surrounding area" that summer and helped establish strong points at C–2, C–3, Cam Lo Bridge, and the "Washout," and also deployed a detachment to Gio Linh.[56]

Soon after the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines arrived on Hill 28, it again found itself engaged with the enemy. On the morning of 30 December, Company M, commanded by Captain Raymond W. Kalm, Jr., on patrol to the southwest of the battalion perimeter came across six empty NVA bunkers facing east, about 2,000 meters from Hill 28. After destroying the enemy bunkers, the company advanced toward the northwest. About 1330 that afternoon near a small stream about 1,500 meters west of Hill 28, the Marines ran into an enemy rear guard of about 4 to 10 men. In the resulting exchange of fire, Company M sustained casualties of one killed and four wounded. Captain Kalm called in artillery and 81mm mortar missions. After the skirmish the Marines found the body of one North Vietnamese soldier.[57]

On the following morning, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell sent out Captain John L. Prichard's Company I into roughly the same area that Company M had met the NVA. Prichard's company moved out from Hill 28 in platoon columns. As Bendell explained, this formation discouraged the troops from stringing



Photo courtesy of Col John D. Carr, USMC (Ret)

LtCol Lee R. Bendell, the commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, center, poses with the company commanders of the "Thundering Third." From left are Capt John L. Prichard (Company I), Capt John D. Carr (Company L), Bendell, Capt Raymond W. Kalm, Jr. (Company M), and Capt Edward O. Leroy (Company K)

out and permitted the company commander "to deploy fire power immediately to the front." Following a trail near the destroyed village of Xuan Hai where the DMZ boundary made a northward hump on the map, 1,800 meters northwest of Hill 28, Prichard's point, Staff Sergeant C. L. Colley, spotted four to five North Vietnamese troops to his front. The company commander ordered two platoons forward to a slight rise in the ground and brought his third platoon in behind the CP (command post) group to protect the rear. In the initial exchange, the North Vietnamese had the advantage, but the Marine company soon had the upper hand. Moving rapidly back and forth across the Marine line, Prichard and his officers and NCOs rallied their troops and "India Company rather shortly gained fire superiority."[58]

At that point, around noon, the Marines observed a second group of NVA maneuvering to reinforce the first. The company brought the reinforcements under 60mm mortar and small-arms fire and forced the enemy to lie low. A half-hour later, the Marines, themselves, came under heavy enemy 82mm-mortar bombardment from their right flank, generally to the northeast. By this time, it was apparent that the enemy was in "strong bunkered positions all across the front and right front of India Company."[59]

Despite marginal flying conditions because of 500- to 1,000-feet cloud ceilings and reduced visibility, an aerial observer (AO) arrived over the scene. Giving his call sign "Smitty Tango," the AO made radio contact with Prichard and adjusted the company's 60mm counter-mortar fire. The Marine mortars knocked out one of the enemy tubes and "caused the others to cease fire." With this success to his credit, the AO pulled off and the company called in an artillery mission, hitting the enemy positions with mixed caliber rounds. The Marine shelling "threw [NVA] bodies in the air as

India [Company I] walked 155mm [fire] towards friendly lines."[60]

The Marine company sustained four wounded and had begun to take fire from its right front. One of the wounded was one of the company's snipers who had moved too far forward and lay exposed to enemy fire. A corpsman attempted to rescue the man, but was hit himself and forced to turn back. With his gunnery sergeant laying down a base of fire, Captain Prichard rushed forward and carried back the seriously wounded Marine to the company positions. A Marine helicopter from HMM–163, in a medical evacuation (MedEvac) mission, flew the wounded out from an improvised landing zone just to the company's rear in a defilade area.[61]

Although the enemy attempted to jam the Marine radio net, "Smitty Tango" remained in communication with Captain Prichard and Second Lieutenant Albert B. Doyle, the company's attached forward artillery observer. At 1350, the AO checked the artillery fire and called in two Marine "Huey" (Bell UH–1E helicopter) gunships from Marine Observation Squadron (VMO) 6 that had covered the landing of the evacuation helicopter. The gunships made several passes at the enemy mortar positions in open bomb craters near the Marine positions. When the air arrived, several NVA soldiers "actually [were] standing up in their holes, only a 100 to 150 meters away from India Company and firing both at the AO and the aircraft as they conducted strikes upon them." As the lead Huey, piloted by Major Curtis D. McRaney, came in on its first run, its guns jammed. According to McRaney's copilot, Major David L. Steele, "one of the NVA must have noticed this because he stepped out of his hole and began firing at us with his automatic weapon on our next pass." This was a mistake. As Steele observed, "on successive passes . . . we were able to cover the crater area with rockets and machine gun fire, killing most of the enemy." The AO reported that he saw the North Vietnamese "dragging eight bodies into a tunnel."[62]

After the air strikes, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell, who had been monitoring the radio traffic, decided to pull India Company back to Hill 28. By this time, the North Vietnamese had brought up further reinforcements and Bendell believed, "There was no need to assault the [NVA] position." According to Bendell, Marine supporting arms, both artillery and gunships, would have "a real desired effect upon the enemy . . . ."[63]

As Company I broke contact and started to withdraw, the troops saw a large NVA unit, apparently dressed in Marine uniforms,* closing in. The Huey gunships then laid down extensive covering fire and then the artillery took over. By 1530, the company had returned to Hill 28. Colonel Smith, the 9th Marines commander, personally greeted "the men of the Hungry I" with a deserved "well done." The company, while sustaining casualties of only four wounded, had accounted for 27 enemy dead, not including the eight NVA taken out by the helicopters, or the unknown number of enemy killed by the artillery. Lieutenant Colonel Bendell recommended Captain Prichard for the Navy Cross; he received the Silver Star.[64]

For the next few days, the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines had a relatively uneventful time in their forward position. In the early morning hours of 6 January, however, a listening post heard movement just outside the battalion's perimeter. The Marines opened fire with both small arms and M79 grenade launchers. One of the defenders saw something fall, but an attempt to check the area drew enemy fire. In daylight hours, the Marines found no evidence of any enemy bodies. It was apparent to the battalion, however, that its quiet period was over.[65]

On the following day, 7 January, the Marines on Hill 28 began to take sniper rounds from an enemy-held ridgeline about 800 meters to their front and situated just to the south of the DMZ boundary. Lieutenant Colonel Bendell ordered Captain John D. Carr, the commanding officer of Company L, to flush out the sniper who had already wounded one Marine. Carr sent out that morning two six-man teams from his 1st Platoon. The two teams approached the enemy-held ridge from both flanks and then linked up into a squad-size patrol. As the squad moved over the ridgeline, enemy AK–47s and machine guns opened up. Positioned in well-entrenched defenses dug out of the numerous American-made bomb craters pocketing the side of the ridge, the NVA gunners killed one Marine and wounded another. Unable to advance or withdraw, the Marines took what cover they could and returned the fire. In radio contact with the squad and aware of its plight, Captain Carr ordered the remainder of the 1st Platoon to reinforce the entrapped Marines.

*Major Gary E. Todd, a former 3d Marine Division intelligence officer, wrote that he doubted that the NVA were dressed in Marine uniforms: "there were several instances when Marines mistook NVA for other Marines, due to the similarity of uniforms. They [the NVA] wore utilities of almost the identical color to ours, and often wore Russian-style steel helmets, frequently with a camouflage net . . . . We, of course, had cloth camouflage covers on our helmets. . . . From a distance . . . the helmets were hard to distinguish." Todd Comments.

Although the platoon reached the embattled squad about 1530 that afternoon, it too found itself in an untenable position. The North Vietnamese had good clear fields of fire and also had brought up reinforcements. Employing M79 grenade launchers, hand grenades, and rifles, the 1st Platoon fought off the NVA and called for further assistance.[66]

Captain Carr then led the rest of Company L to the base of the ridge and flanked the enemy positions. Although unable to link up with its 1st Platoon on the forward slope, the company laid down a base of fire and Carr called in artillery to prevent the enemy from making any further reinforcements. Despite a slight drizzle and a low-lying cloud cover, the company commander made radio contact with an aerial observer who was able to adjust the supporting arms including the company's 60mm mortars. With the increased fire support, the 1st Platoon managed to hold out but with evening fast approaching the situation remained serious.[67]

At this point, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell ordered Captain Carr to have the 1st Platoon "to break contact and pull back across the ridgeline." To cover the platoon's withdrawal, the aerial observer called in air strikes and artillery within 100 meters of the Marines. The battalion commander also deployed two platoons of Company K to high ground about 1,000 meters west of Company L. Despite these protective measures, the enemy took a heavy toll of the Marines of the 1st Platoon as they disengaged and rejoined the rest of the company. Since its first elements made contact with the enemy, Company L sustained casualties of 6 dead and 36 wounded, 28 of whom required evacuation. Captain Carr asked for a MedEvac helicopter to take out the worst of the wounded.[68]

As the Marines waited, a CH–46D Boeing Vertol "Sea Knight" helicopter from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 164 (HMM–164), piloted by Captain Richard G. Sousa, took off from Phu Bai to carry out the evacuation mission. Because of the rain and heavy winds, Sousa flew low to the ground. As the helicopter approached the improvised landing zone, the Company L Marines fired illumination flares to guide the pilot "out of the darkness." Tracers from NVA machine guns made the situation literally "touch and go." After the aircraft landed, the enlisted crewmen immediately jumped out and helped the infantry load their casualties on board. The helicopter then lifted off, still under fire and unable to use its M60 machine guns because the North Vietnamese were too close to the Marine company.[69]

With the safe evacuation of most of its wounded and under cover of supporting arms, Company L made its way to Company K's forward positions without taking any further casualties. Lieutenant Colonel Bendell explained that he had placed Company K's two platoons on the high ground for psychological reasons as much as for tactical: "If you can pass through friendly lines when you are half-way back, it's a big morale boost to the troops, and also covers the rear of the force returning to the battalion perimeter." On the whole, Bendell praised Carr's handling of a difficult situation: "We committed early, the company commander made good time up there, and was able effectively to employ his supporting arms." Otherwise, the battalion commander believed "this one platoon would have been cut off and destroyed." As it was, in the confusion of the evacuation of the dead and wounded, the Marine company left a body of a 1st Platoon Marine on the ridgeline.[70]

On the following day, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell sent Company L out to recover the missing Marine. Bendell ordered Captain Carr to delay the mission until noon because of the continuing rain and low ceiling. The battalion commander wanted an aerial observer overhead to cover the Marine company. As Company L advanced toward its previous day's position, the AO spotted the body of the Marine and about 12 NVA in the vicinity. The North Vietnamese had dragged the dead man into the DMZ. Believing "that the body was being used as a bait for a trap," Bendell recalled the Marine company to Hill 28 and then saturated the area with artillery and air.[71]

Lieutenant Colonel Bendell then decided upon a new tactic. He and his staff worked out plans for a three-company operation, supported by air and artillery, into the Demilitarized Zone to bring back the body. Instead of approaching the objective straight on, the battalion would leave one company in blocking positions on high ground northwest of Hill 28, south of the DMZ. The other two companies were first to move northeast, then wheel due north into the DMZ, and then advance in a southwesterly direction, coming upon the enemy from the rear and the flanks.[72]

After a preliminary artillery bombardment and ground-controlled TPQ radar air strikes all along the eastern DMZ front so as not to give away the route of march, at 0500 on 11 January, the battalion moved out as Lieutenant Colonel Bendell remembered, "with strict radio silence."[73] As planned, Captain Carr's Company L occupied the ridgeline to the northwest. Under the cover of darkness and fog, the two attack

companies, Companies K and M, with Company K in the lead, and Bendell's command group sandwiched between the two companies, advanced in a northeasterly direction toward the DMZ. After about 1500 meters, the battalion veered north and penetrated 500 meters into the southern half of the Demilitarized Zone. Once in the DMZ, according to plan, the two companies swung in a southwesterly direction along parallel paths, separated by a fallow rice paddy. Company M, with the battalion command group, remained still somewhat behind Company K, protecting both the battalion rear and left flank. With the lifting of the morning haze about 0900, the first of a trio of 3d Marine Division aerial observers arrived overhead. At about the same time, Captain Edward O. Leroy's Company K came across the first of several NVA bunkers near the abandoned and largely destroyed village of An Xa. Employing both artillery and air support, the company easily overcame scattered enemy resistance. At one point, Captain Kalm, the Company M commander, saw what appeared to be, at first blush, three bushes, but turned out to be well-camouflaged NVA soldiers, maneuvering to the rear of his company column. He directed machine gun fire in that direction "and then started calling artillery fire and the three bushes were seen to disappear over the hill to our rear."[74]

For the next three hours, the two Marine companies remained in the DMZ. In and around An Xa, Company K blew up some 25 bunkers and captured about 10 weapons including one machine gun, a rocket-propelled grenade launcher (RPG), and several AK–47s and other rifles. The Marines also confiscated or destroyed cooking utensils, pieces of uniform and equipment, food, and documents that identified the North Vietnamese unit in the sector as the *2d Company, 7th Battalion, 90th NVA Regiment.* In their haste, the NVA troops left cooked rice still in the pot and still warm. Further to the south, Company M protected Company K's exposed southern flank and recovered without incident the body of the missing Marine from Company L. By afternoon on the 11th, both companies had passed through Company L's blocking positions and returned to the battalion CP on Hill 28. The Marines sustained only two casualties, both wounded, and only one of whom had to be evacuated. According to Marine accounts, they killed at least 15 NVA and probably inflicted more casualties with artillery and air.[75]

According to Lieutenant Colonel Bendell, by "achieving surprise . . . moving during darkness," he and his operations officer, Major Richard K. Young, believed the sweep of the southern DMZ was a successful demonstration of coordination between the infantry on the ground and supporting arms. On two occasions, the aerial observers called in air strikes on NVA troops in the open attempting to flank the Marine companies. Young, who stayed behind at the battalion combat operations center (COC) on Hill 28, later stated: ". . . we were able to have artillery on 30 seconds before air got there and then we could run air strikes and then turn on the artillery . . . [we] had some type of fire on the enemy almost the entire duration of the operation." The operations officer remembered: "Several times when artillery wasn't getting there fast enough, the company commander would jump on the battalion tac [tactical radio net] and get in touch with myself back at the COC." Young would then "get 81mm fire out there to fill the void in artillery or get with my artillery liaison officer or my forward air controller and get this continuous fire while the troops were advancing along the bunker complex." Shortly after the return of the battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell briefed the 3d Marine Division staff and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., who was on a visit to Vietnam, at the Dong Ha headquarters on the successful completion of the operation.[76]

With the termination of the DMZ sweep, the sojourn of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines on Hill 28 was about over. The completion of the A–3 Strong Point reduced the need for a forward battalion to protect the approaches. On 12 January, Bendell's battalion began its move to a new position along the trace near the abandoned village of An Phu and closer to Con Thien.* For the 9th Marines in Operation Kentucky, the strongpoint system was about as complete as it was ever going to be. Still, as Lieutenant Colonel Bendell several years later observed: "there was evidence of an NVA build up throughout the DMZ sector."[77]

Operation Lancaster and Heavy Fighting in Mid-January

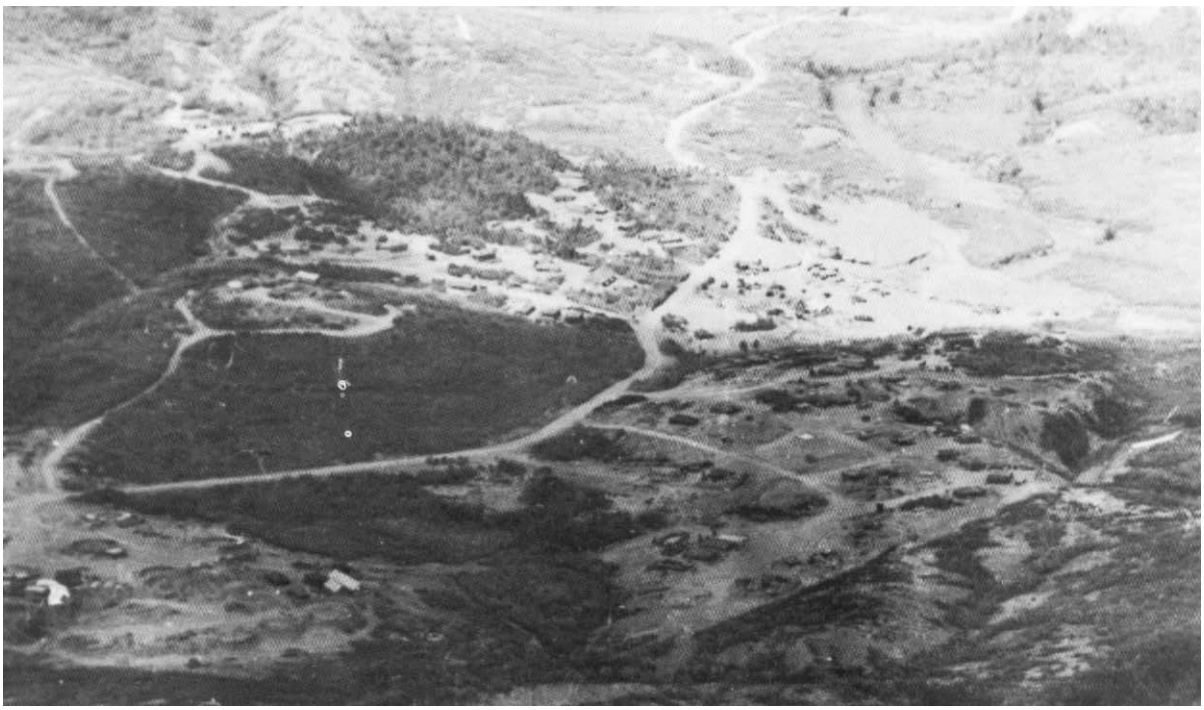
By mid-January, the North Vietnamese began to intensify their efforts to cut Route 9 especially along

*Lieutenant Colonel Lehrack who was with the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines at this time noted that even with the reduced need for a forward battalion and after the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines departed Hill 28, his battalion placed two companies on the hill and kept them there for several months. Lehrack Comments.



Top photo courtesy of Col Gorton C. Cook, USMC (Ret) and bottom is from the 12th Mar ComdC, Dec68.

Route 9 is seen looking south from a Marine outpost located on the northern end of the Rockpile, top, and an aerial photograph shows the Marine base at Ca Lu, bottom. In January 1968, Ca Lu for the Marines was the western terminus of Route 9 since the road was cut between there and the Marine base at Khe Sanh. LtCol Gorton C. Cook's 3d Battalion, 9th Marines manned both the Rockpile and Ca Lu posts.



the tenuous supply route to Ca Lu. Since November 1967, Colonel Joseph E. Lo Prete's 3d Marines had conducted Operation Lancaster protecting the western flank of the 9th Marines in Kentucky. The Lancaster area of operations contained the key Marine bases of Camp Carroll, an important artillery position, the Rockpile, and Ca Lu. The Rockpile, a 700-foot sheer cliff outcropping, dominated the nearby terrain. Perched on its top, Marine observers had a clear view of the most likely approaches into the Cam Lo River Valley and of Route 9, the two most strategic east-west arteries in the DMZ sector. About 12,000 meters below the Rockpile and part of the Dyemarker system was Ca Lu, in effect the southern terminal of Route 9 since the North Vietnamese had effectively cut the road between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh, about 20,000 meters to the west. An obvious way station for any relief effort of Khe Sanh, Ca Lu, at the junction of the Quang Tri River and Route 9, also provided the Marines an outpost to warn of enemy infiltration into the Lancaster area from the west, southwest, and from the Ba Long Valley to the southeast. Similar to much of the terrain in the DMZ area, the Lancaster area of operations consisted of rolling hills rising into jungle-covered mountains of 700–800 feet with tree canopies reaching up to heights of 20 to 60 feet. Fifteen-foot elephant grass and dense brush vegetation restricted movement even in the relatively low regions.

Like Colonel Smith and the 9th Marines, Colonel Lo Prete was tied to his base areas. With only two infantry battalions, and one of those battalions having only two companies, the 3d Marines commander had to make do with limited resources and manpower. Lo Prete maintained his command post at Camp Carroll which was also the home for Lieutenant Colonel William M. Cryan's 2d Battalion, 9th Marines. Cryan with only his Companies E and H under his operational control kept Company H at Carroll and positioned Company E about 3,000 meters southeast of Camp Carroll where it protected a main supply route. Lo Prete assigned his other battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Gorton C. Cook's 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, the responsibility for the defense of both Ca Lu and the Rockpile area. Cook and three of his companies remained in the Thon Son Lam sector just below the Rockpile while he placed his Company L at Ca Lu. An article in the battalion newsletter at the time noted that the sector was "pretty quiet now except for some sporadic ambushes between here and our company-sized outpost at Ca Lu."[78]

Artillery and tanks reinforced the infantry in Lancaster. Three 105mm howitzer batteries and one 155mm howitzer battery all under the 1st Battalion, 12th Marines at Carroll provided direct support to the infantry battalions. An ad hoc battery of mixed caliber guns, Battery W, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, was with Company L at Ca Lu. Company B, 3d Tank Battalion maintained two platoons of M48 medium gun tanks and one heavy section of M67A2 flame tanks at Carroll. For the most part, the tanks bolstered the defenses at Camp Carroll and furnished protection for road convoys to Ca Lu. An attached U.S. Army artillery unit, Battery C, 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery (Automatic Weapons, Self Propelled) also augmented the Marine fire power. The Army M42s or "dusters" armed with twin 40mm antiaircraft guns employed as machine guns gave added protection to Marine convoys and to the Marine fixed defenses.[79]

The Marines worried most about their relatively exposed position at Ca Lu. There, the isolated garrison numbered about 625 Army, Navy, and Marine personnel including the Marine infantry company. Navy Seabees and Marine engineers had nearly completed the permanent facilities required for the Dyemarker project. While not directly attacking the Marine outpost, the North Vietnamese had mined Route 9 occasionally in December and ambushed one Marine convoy on a return trip from Ca Lu to the Rockpile. Despite a relative lull during the first two weeks of January, Marine intelligence indicated that North Vietnamese forces were on the move.[80]

A division "Stingray" reconnaissance team operating in the general area of the Ca Lu base soon confirmed the presence of enemy troops in the general area.* On 12 January, about 1415 in the afternoon, Reconnaissance Team 2C3, using the codename "Blue Plate" and operating in the mountains about 4,000 meters southwest of Ca Lu below the Quang Tri River, radioed back that it was being followed by five NVA "wearing black pjs and carrying automatic weapons." The "Blue Plate" Marines fired upon the enemy but missed. For a time all was quiet and the Marines continued upon their way. About two hours later, the Marines came back on the air to report that they were surrounded by about 30 North Vietnamese troops armed with AK–47s. Marine gunships appeared overhead and provided covering fire while

*Stingray patrols usually consisted of a small Marine reconnaissance unit, usually squad-size, which called artillery and air on targets of opportunity.

another helicopter extracted the Marine team. The reconnaissance Marines sustained only one casualty, one wounded man.[81]

The incident on the 12th was only a harbinger of what was to come. On the following day, the North Vietnamese sprang an ambush on an engineer convoy bringing Dyemarker supplies and equipment to Ca Lu. Under an overcast sky and a slight drizzle, about 1120 on the morning of the 13th, the 20-vehicle convoy departed the Rockpile area. Marine artillery had already fired 15-minute preparation fires at suspected ambush sites. With two tanks in the lead, the convoy consisted of 10 six by six trucks interspersed with two more tanks in the center of the column, four "low boy" tractor trailers, and two of the Army "dusters" bringing up the rear. The vehicles carried about 200 men including engineers, drivers, the M42 crews, support personnel, and Company I, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines.[82]

About 1150, approximately 3,000 meters above the Ca Lu, enemy gunners took the convoy under fire with rocket-propelled grenades, small-arms fire, and mortars. At the same time, the NVA ambushers detonated a command mine which set two trucks on fire, one a "low boy" and the other carrying 81mm mortar ammunition. The truck with the mortars exploded which forced the rear section of the convoy to come to a complete halt. The infantry from Company I hastily dismounted from their trucks to engage the enemy, only for many of the troops to trigger several "surprise firing devices" and mines skillfully hidden along both sides of the road.

Lieutenant Colonel Cook recalled several years later that before the convoy had started out he and his sergeant major had moved to an outpost on a hill top just west of Route 9. From there, he remained in radio contact with both his command post and the convoy and could observe the vehicles as they moved south toward Ca Lu. When he saw the convoy stopped after the initial burst of fire, he directed "the lead element to continue on to Ca Lu and return with reinforcements." He then joined the stalled troops. According to Cook, from the site of the ambush, he "called and directed artillery fire through his COC [Combat Operations Center] on enemy escape and reinforcing routes both east and west of Route 9."

In the meantime, Company L, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines boarded at Ca Lu the lead trucks to relieve the embattled column. At the ambush site, about 1215, an aerial observer using the call sign "American Beauty" arrived overhead to assist in calling in supporting fires. The leaden skies precluded the use of Marine fixed-wing jets, but two helicopter gunships strafed the enemy firing positions. Marine artillery fired over 700 rounds including 54 155mm howitzer shells in support of the convoy after the initial contact.

With the arrival of Company L and the continuing artillery bombardment, the Marines disengaged under occasional enemy sniper fire and completed the trip to Ca Lu, arriving there about 1510. The convoy made the return trip to the Rockpile area late that afternoon without incident. The costs, however, had been high. American dead and wounded totaled 19 killed and over 70 wounded. Most of the casualties were sustained by Company I in the first moments of the ambush. The Marines accounted for 10 enemy dead and captured one prisoner. Marine intelligence officers estimated that a North Vietnamese company participated in the attack.*

For a time after the ambush, the 3d Marines' attention shifted once more to the north and east in that area between Camp Carroll and the Rockpile above Route 9. Shortly after 0800 on the morning of 16 January, a 3d Reconnaissance Battalion "Stingray" team there found itself surrounded by about 40 North Vietnamese on high ground about 2,000 meters north of the Cam Lo River. According to the team, the enemy were obviously NVA regulars, wearing green utilities and helmets impressed with a yellow lightning bolt design, and armed with AK–47 rifles and two machine guns. The 3d Marines immediately sent a reaction platoon from Company H, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines to assist the encircled team. Lifted into a helicopter landing zone about a 1,000 meters east of the reconnaissance team, the 2d Battalion reaction platoon came under machine gun fire. The platoon returned the fire and called in air and artillery. After the artillery and air strike silenced the enemy guns, the infantry platoon joined up with the reconnaissance team. By this time, the North Vietnamese troops had disappeared, leaving six dead behind. At 1340 that afternoon, Marine helicopters

*Colonel Robert C. Needham commented that this ambush was very similar to one that 3/3 had run into in the same area in August and September 1967. Needham Comments. A survivor of the ambush who visited Vietnam in 1994 wrote in a veteran's newsletter that on the road to Ca Lu he reached "the 13 January 1968 ambush site . . . . In my mind's eye I could see the first cloud of black smoke [when] the ambush was sprung, and I smelled the odor of gunpowder in the air." Before leaving, he and his companion planted some flowers in memory of the men killed there. Phil Quinones, "Vietnam—Tour '94'," *Comwire, Vietnam*, Oct 1994, v. 4, No. 1, pp. 3–4, Encl to Todd Comments.

extracted both groups of Marines to Camp Carroll. The units sustained one Navy corpsman killed and four Marines wounded. It was obvious that the enemy was becoming much more aggressive all along Route 9 and the DMZ in general.[83]

After a few brief quiet days, the DMZ war in the western Kentucky sector also flared up. After leaving Hill 28 and uncovering an enemy base area, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell's 3d Battalion, 4th Marines took up its new positions at An Dinh between A–3 and Con Thien to investigate recent probes at the latter base. The battalion immediately began patrolling its area of operations. On the 17th, Bendell planned to send out a two-company patrol the next morning near an abandoned hamlet just north of the trace about two miles northeast of Con Thien. Company M was to be the blocking force while Company L was to be the sweeping force.[84]

The evening of the 17th, Captain John D. Carr, the Company L commander, held a meeting of his platoon commanders. Second Lieutenant Kenneth L. Christy, who headed the 3d Platoon, remembered that Carr briefed them on the next day's planned patrol. According to Christy, he noticed that the route of advance "took us through a bombed out ville that we all referred to as the 'Meat Market'," because it was "Charlies' area—and almost everytime we went there either us or them, somebody got hammered." Christy's platoon had run a patrol in that area very recently, but there had been "no sign of Charlie or Charlie decided not to engage." Captain Carr assigned the point position to his 1st Platoon. Lieutenant Christy argued ("to the degree that a second lieutenant argues with a captain") that his platoon knew the area and should have the point. Captain Carr, however, stated that the 3d Platoon needed a break and he wanted to give one of the other platoons the point experience.[85]

As planned, with the 1st Platoon on point, followed by the 2d Platoon with the command group, and the 3d Platoon bringing up the rear, Company L departed the battalion lines at An Dien in pre-dawn darkness. Suddenly the NVA about 0945 from well-camouflaged bunkers and spider holes near the "Meat Market" sprang their ambush on the Marine company. The 1st Platoon on the point engaged what it thought was a NVA platoon only to find itself divided into separate groups, with the forward element cut off from the rest of the company. Captain Carr brought up the 2d Platoon and his command group and joined the rear element of the 1st Platoon, in a large B–52 bomb crater.[86]

In the company rear, Lieutenant Christy recalled that when the ambush occurred, "it sounded like a few sporadic gun shots and then all hell broke loose." The men of his platoon hit the ground "facing outward as we usually did." Christy took cover in a 105mm shell crater with his platoon sergeant and radio man. At that point, Captain Carr ordered the 3d Platoon commander to join him, about 180 meters to the platoon's front. Under heavy automatic fire, the 3d Platoon joined Carr in a series of rushes taking shelter in shell and bomb craters along the way. Miraculously, the platoon had made the dash without sustaining any casualties. According to Christy, "we closed off the backside of what was the company perimeter."[87]

As Company L more or less consolidated its position, the North Vietnamese continued to direct automatic weapons fire from all sides, mortars, and even large caliber artillery upon the embattled Marines. More urgently, the enemy was using the cutoff squad-size remnant of the 1st Platoon, about 100 meters in front of the rest of the company, as "bait" in a "NVA killing zone." Lieutenant Christy remembered Captain Carr told him that there were "dead and wounded up front and needed 3d Plat [platoon] to go up there and collect them up so we could get the wounded and dead med-evaced and the hell out of the area."[88]

By this time, the North Vietnamese fires had somewhat diminished. Captain Carr and a forward artillery observer who was with the cutoff troops, Sergeant Michael J. Madden, called in supporting U.S. artillery. Sergeant Madden also made radio contact with an air observer in a Huey who brought in helicopter gunships to keep the enemy at bay. Under this protective cover, Lieutenant Christy took one of his squads and joined by Captain Carr reached the 1st Platoon group. Christy then deployed his men and crawled forward to another crater where Sergeant Madden, although wounded, was still calling in artillery strikes. There were four other wounded men with Madden. Christy remembered Captain Carr covering him with a shotgun while he went forward again to reach some Marine bodies, including that of the 1st Platoon commander, some 50 meters to the front. With the supporting artillery fires, the 3d Platoon squad brought back the wounded and dead of the 1st Platoon. According to Lieutenant Christy, he admonished some of his men for being too gentle and that the bodies were not going to be hurt: "Lets get these people policed up and get out of here before Charlie starts firing us up again."[89]

In the meanwhile, upon hearing of the Company L predicament, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell, the battal-

ion commander, replaced Company M with another unit in the blocking position and then with a skeleton command group accompanied Company M to relieve Company L. After the linkup, the two companies overran at least three enemy mortar positions and several machine guns and individual fighting holes. With continuing helicopter gunship support and covering artillery, Marine helicopters evacuated the most seriously wounded. The two companies then "crossed the trace in good order," late that afternoon carrying their remaining casualties. In the action, the two companies sustained casualties of 9 dead and 22 wounded including Captain Carr who was evacuated by helicopter. According to the 9th Marines, the enemy sustained over 100 casualties.[90*]

By 20 January, a new phase of the war was about to begin. Colonel Lo Prete and his 3d Marines staff were about to close out the Lancaster operation and take over the Osceola area in the Quang Tri sector from the 1st Marines. The 1st Marines in turn was to relieve the 4th Marines in the Camp Evans sector. Colonel William Dick, the 4th Marines commander, was then to assume control of the units in Lancaster. For the most part, this phase of Operation Checkers was a case of regimental musical chairs and had little effect on the battalions in the various sectors. Both the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines and the two companies of the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines were to remain in Lancaster, now called Operation Lancaster II.

According to the usual body-count measurements of the war, the 3d Marines in Operation Lancaster I accounted for 46 enemy dead at a cost of 22 Marines killed and 140 wounded. In comparison, during the same period, the 9th Marines in Operation Kentucky sustained 90 dead and over 800 wounded while killing nearly 700 of the enemy. Still the indications were that the North Vietnamese were raising the ante throughout the DMZ sector including Khe Sanh. Near the coast, on 20 January, enemy gunners fired at two Navy craft on the Cua Viet River forcing the Naval Support Activity, Cua Viet temporarily to close that important waterway, the main supply channel to the Marine base at Dong Ha. At the same time, the 3d Marines observed that a large enemy force, probably the *29th NVA Regiment* had moved into the area north of the Quang Tri River and west of Ca Lu. Just as significant, another regiment had replaced the *90th NVA Regiment* in the Lancaster northern area of operations. The *90th NVA* had then shifted to the southwest and had possibly entered the "Scotland" or Khe Sanh area of operations. Perhaps the big enemy offensive in the north was about to begin.[91]

*For this action on the 18th, Captain John Carr, the Company L Commander, was awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart; Captain Raymond W. Kalm, Jr., the Company M commander, received the Bronze Star with V; Sergeant Michael J. Madden also received the Bronze Star with V; and one of the helicopter pilots received the Distinguished Flying Cross. On 25 March 1994 at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Colonel Kenneth L. Christy, Jr., was awarded the Navy Cross for his heroism on 18 January 1968, more than 26 years after the event. Sergeant Madden, who credited Christy for saving his life and the others with him, had submitted an award recommendation. Somehow the paperwork got lost and Madden in 1988 was surprised to learn that Christy had not received any medal for his actions that day. Madden then launched a one-man successful campaign to rectify the situation. The Navy Cross is second only to the Medal of Honor in awards for heroism in the Marine Corps. Bendell Comments; Col Kenneth L. Christy, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 8Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File); Colonel Kenneth L. Christy, Jr., Biographical File, Reference Sec, MCHC.

CHAPTER 4

Khe Sanh: Building Up

The Battlefield—The Early Days—Protecting the Investment—The Isolation of Khe Sanh
The Decision to Hold—The Stage is Set—Sortie to Hill 881 North—The Enemy Plan Unfolds

The Battlefield

The village of Khe Sanh, composed of nine hamlets and also the capital of Huong Hoa District, once sat astride National Route 9 in the extreme northwestern corner of South Vietnam. According to a census, 10,195 civilians lived in the district, mostly clustered within four miles of the village.* Khe Sanh controlled road movement from nearby Laos into northern Quang Tri Province and was the terminus of a number of trail networks which crossed the Laotian border further to the north and wound their way through the valleys and along the rivers to intersect the highway in the vicinity of the village. National Route 9 was actually little more than a wide trail in places, yet it was a key feature of the area because it provided a means of movement between nearby Laos and the coastal region. Between Khe Sanh and Dong Ha, Route 9 ran for 63 kilometers, crossing 36 crumbling old bridges along the way. Most of them, relics of the French colonial era, could be bypassed and often were, due to their deteriorated condition.[1]

The terrain of the Huong Hoa District is characterized by steep, jungle-covered mountains separated by plunging valleys. Mountain peaks tower over the hamlets along Route 9, rising from 200 meters to 600 meters above the elevation of the highway. Streams flow through many of the valleys, emptying into one of two rivers. The Song Rao Quan drains the region to the north, flowing southeast to join other rivers which continue to the sea. West of Khe Sanh, the Xe Pon, or Tchepone, flows east across the Laotian panhandle to a point 15 kilometers from the village, where it turns south forming a part of the international border between South Vietnam and Laos.

There are two types of rain forest in the area. The primary growth is found at higher elevations where some trees reach 90 feet in height, forming a canopy beneath which other trees, some up to 60 feet high, form a second canopy. The dense canopies reduce the light at ground level to the point that growth there is limited to seedlings, flowers, and climbing plants. Because of the sparse ground cover, the jungle can be penetrated on foot with little difficulty.[2]

The secondary rain forest is located at lower elevations where the ground has first been cleared, then later left for the jungle to reclaim. Here, the trees are smaller, allowing more light to penetrate to ground level. The resulting thick growth of bamboo, elephant grass, and climbing plants limits foot travel considerably.[3]

The weather in the region varies through the course of a year. It is warm in the summer, although cooler than at the lower elevations near the coast, while in the winter, it is sometimes oppressively cold and damp. Annual rainfall exceeding 80 inches, much of it occurring during the winter monsoon, feeds the rain forests and contributes to the discomfort caused by the cold temperatures. A thick, milk-colored fog known in Indochina as *crachin*** occurs frequently in the winter months, reducing visibility considerably.

During the war, a Montagnard tribe, the Bru, lived near Khe Sanh, although the people in the village

* Former Navy chaplain Ray W. Stubbe, a noted authority on Khe Sanh and its environs, observed that this census did not include the approximately 12,000 Montagnard tribesmen who lived in "some half dozen villes" in the immediate Khe Sanh area. LCdr Ray W. Stubbe, ChC, USN, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 23Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Stubbe Comments.

** A weather condition which occurs in the highland regions of Southeast Asia for periods of three to five days at a time between October and April. It is described as: "A persistent low-level stratus phenomenon accompanied by prolonged precipitations which greatly affects military operations. Clouds are generally 3,000 to 5,000 feet thick with ceiling under 1,000 feet and frequently below 500 feet. Visibility is . . . generally below 2 miles and frequently below 1/2 mile." Asst Chief of Staff, G–2, memo to Asst Chief of Staff, G–3, dtd 4Jul67, Subj: Planning Conference, in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jul67. Colonel Frederic S. Knight, who served as the 3d Marine Division G–2 or intelligence officer in 1968, noted that the word comes from the French verb, *cracher*, which means to spit: "A friend said the true meaning of the word is best described as 'that which blows back into your face when you spit into the wind.'" Col Frederic S. Knight, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 10Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Knight Comments.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190186

A typical Bru village south of Khe Sanh has simple houses built on stilts to be above the ground and with grass roofs for protection from the elements. One of the aboriginal tribes who inhabited the Vietnamese highlands and whom the French called Montagnards, the Bru had been resettled largely along Route 9 near Khe Sanh by the South Vietnamese government.

itself were ethnic Vietnamese.* A simple honest people without even a written language, the Bru cared little for the authority of the national government or for the political upheavals of the war, preferring to remain neutral, or at most, to sympathize half-heartedly with whichever side controlled their village at any particular moment. While their original territory covered most of the district, as well as equally large areas in Laos and North Vietnam, the South Vietnamese government resettled most of the Bru of Huong Hoa District along Route 9 to prevent the enemy from recruiting among them.

In addition to the Bru and Vietnamese, a few French coffee planters and American missionaries inhabited the area in the vicinity of Khe Sanh. Some of the Bru were employed by the former and a few even received a rudimentary education from the latter.

The Early Days

The history of Marines at Khe Sanh predates their involvement in the Vietnam War by three decades. Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, who served as the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific during the war, remembered that while stationed in China in 1937, his battalion commander, Major Howard N. Stent, visited the area to hunt tiger. Like many visitors to Khe Sanh, Major Stent was impressed with its beauty, and returned to China with stories of the tall, green mountains, waterfalls, abundant game, and the peaceful Bru tribespeople.[4]

In August 1962, MACV established a Special Forces CIDG camp at an old abandoned French fort, about two kilometers east of the village of Khe Sanh and just below Route 9, for border surveillance and anti-infiltration operations.** In November 1964, the Special Forces team moved from the French fort to a light-duty airstrip, built by French forces in 1949 on the Xom Cham Plateau, above Route 9 and about two kilometers north of their former base. This new site, which eventually became the Khe Sanh base, had sev-

*The Montagnard (a French word meaning "mountaineer") tribes were not Vietnamese by descent or culture, but rather, an aboriginal people who inhabited the highlands. Unworldly, poor, and apolitical, the Montagnards were often viewed by the Vietnamese as a lesser people and sometimes were treated with contempt. Colonel Knight wrote that the Vietnamese name for the tribesmen was *Moi* which meant savage. He explained that the term Montagnard came into use "at the insistence of Ngo Dinh Diem who deplored the common Vietnamese usage . . . ." Knight Comments. Chaplain Stubbe noted the sharp contrast between the houses in Khe Sanh Village made of concrete and wood where the ethnic Vietnamese lived and the homes of the Bru made of bamboo with grass roofs and on stilts in the surrounding "villes". Stubbe Comments.

**CIDG is an acronym for Civilian Irregular Defense Group. The CIDG consisted of local militia, armed, trained, advised, and, in fact, led by U.S. and South Vietnamese Special Forces personnel. Such camps were scattered throughout the country. This French fort site was later referred to by the American forces at Khe Sanh as the "old French Fort."

eral advantages. Militarily, it was on relatively level ground and offered good fields of fire in all directions. The terrain provided both good drainage and stable soil, mostly consisting of "laterite clay or weathered iron/aluminum rock." It also contained a "few basalt outcroppings, at what was later called the 'Rock Quarry.'" At their new camp, the Special Forces and CIDG personnel built a number of bunkers which the Marines later at Khe Sanh would refer to, erroneously, as "old French bunkers."[5]

Earlier, in the spring of 1964, Major Alfred M. Gray, later the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, arrived in the Khe Sanh sector with a signal intelligence detachment and an infantry platoon and established a radio monitoring site atop Dong Voi Mep, better known to the Marines as Tiger Tooth Mountain, north of the CIDG camp. The composite force, designated Marine Detachment, Advisory Team 1, was "the first actual Marine ground unit to conduct independent operations in the Republic of Vietnam." After its position had been compromised in July, the team redeployed to Da Nang.[6*]

In 1966, III MAF carried out two battalion-sized operations near Khe Sanh to search for North Vietnamese units reported by Special Forces personnel. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines arrived in April and established a camp around the airstrip from which to conduct Operation Virginia. After searching the mountains around the CIDG camp for a week without finding a trace of the enemy, the battalion marched back to the coast along Route 9, becoming the first "major force" to accomplish this feat in at least eight years.[7]

In late September 1966, Lieutenant Colonel Peter A. Wickwire's 1st Battalion, 3d Marines arrived at Khe Sanh as part of Operation Prairie, beginning 22 months of continuous Marine presence in the area. The monsoon was upon Khe Sanh by this time, and the Marines experienced temperatures as low as 40 degrees and winds which gusted to 45 knots. The bad weather caused the airstrip to close frequently and when aircraft could not land at the combat base, some types of supplies reached dangerously low levels. After four months of vigorous patrolling, the Marines found little in the way of enemy forces, claiming only 15 dead North Vietnamese.[8]

During Operation Prairie, the Special Forces personnel relocated their CIDG camp to the village of Lang Vei on Route 9 between Khe Sanh and the Laotian border. A detachment known as Forward Operating Base 3 (FOB–3),** first located in Khe Sanh village, moved to the old French fort, and then, in the latter part of 1967, deployed to newly built quarters adjoining the Khe Sanh combat base. A small MACV advisory team remained at the district headquarters in Khe Sanh village.[9]

In February 1967, III MAF had established Combined Action Platoon O to work with the Bru in the area. "CAP Oscar," as it was called, was the only unit in the Combined Action program to work with a Montagnard tribe. The CAP headquarters was in Khe Sanh village from where they patrolled the surrounding Bru hamlets.[10]

By this time, February 1967, the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines had departed for Okinawa, but Company B, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines took the battalion's place to protect a detachment of Seabees from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 10 which was assigned to extend and improve the airstrip. The company patrolled the hills and valleys for any sign of Communist forces. Within a month, increased contact led the 3d Marine Division to reinforce Khe Sanh with a second company and in late March the Marines became engaged with a powerful enemy force. The 3d Marine Division assigned control of the forces at Khe Sanh to the 3d Marines on 20 April 1967. Within a matter of days, the Marines encountered strong North Vietnamese forces in fortified positions on the hills to the north of the Khe Sanh Combat Base, prompting the commanding officer of the 3d Marines, Colonel John P. Lanigan, to deploy his 2d and 3d Battalions to the area. The ensuing battles to eject the North Vietnamese from the commanding terrain overlooking the combat base became known as the "Hill Battles" and lasted until 11 May. In some of the most vicious fighting of the war, Marines wrested control of Hills 861, 881 North, and 881 South from the enemy.***

The fighting in the First Battle of Khe Sanh was savage and costly for both sides. Marine casualties

*The Marines would later establish in late 1966 a radio relay station on Hill 950, about 3,500 meters north of Khe Sanh and 9,000 meters southeast of Tiger Mountain. Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, p. 128. See also Stubbe Comments.

**FOB–3 was an element of the Studies and Observation Group (SOG), which trained Nung, Muong, and Bru Montagnards for clandestine operations against Communist forces along infiltration routes.

***For detailed accounts of the Hill Battles, see Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, Chapter 4 and Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, pp. 83–105.

numbered 155 killed and 425 wounded, while the North Vietnamese left nearly 1,000 dead on the battlefield. When the battle ended, the Marines held the hills which overlooked the combat base, thus hampering Communist observation and fire on the vital airstrip through which supplies and replacements flowed.[11]

Protecting the Investment

Immediately following the Hill Battles, III MAF reduced the force at Khe Sanh to a single battalion. The 3d Marines departed the area, giving way to Lieutenant Colonel Donald E. Newton's 1st Battalion, 26th Marines. Overall control of operations around Khe Sanh passed to Colonel John J. Padley, commanding officer of the 26th Marines.

Lieutenant Colonel Newton's Marines maintained company outposts on some of the commanding hills and conducted patrols in the surrounding jungle as part of Operation Crockett. As enemy contacts and sightings increased, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines deployed to Khe Sanh, giving Colonel Padley the capability, if necessary, to meet another major North Vietnamese effort like that encountered during the Hill Battles.

Supplies reached the Marines at Khe Sanh either by air or by vehicle convoys from the 3d Marine Division base at Dong Ha. The trip along Route 9 took the convoys through territory which was far from secure, and they traveled well-armed and protected, usually accompanied by an infantry unit and often by armored vehicles.

On 21 July, an infantry unit sweeping ahead of an 85-vehicle convoy trying to bring 175mm guns to reinforce the Marine base encountered strong enemy forces along the highway. While the Marine infantry engaged the North Vietnamese, the convoy, which included besides the 175s, "trucks loaded with ammunition and C–4 explosives, claymores, mines, and other ordnance," returned to Camp Carroll. The ambush threat was too great to risk the guns.[12*]

While the Marines would continue some road convoys into Khe Sanh in the fall, it soon became clear that for all practical purposes Route 9 was closed.** Since the runway was closed for repairs to damage caused by the constant landing of heavily laden transport aircraft, the Marines had to depend on helicopters and parachutes to maintain their logistic lifeline.

The Isolation of Khe Sanh

With their successful interdiction of Route 9, the Communist forces isolated Khe Sanh from the rest of the ICTZ. Fortunately for the Marines, while the weather remained clear, air resupply could provide for the needs of the combat base. With the onset of the monsoon and the *crachin*, however, low cloud ceilings and limited visibility would severely limit flights to Khe Sanh. III MAF was familiar with this problem. As early as 1966, III MAF staff members conducted a wargame of the defense of Quang Tri Province in which they failed to defend Khe Sanh. During the exercise, when General Westmoreland expressed his dismay at this decision,*** III MAF planners had responded that they considered Khe Sanh too difficult to support, citing the ease with which the enemy could cut Route 9 and the problems with air resupply during the monsoon. Now the game had become real. In July 1967, before the combination of enemy action and monsoon rains ended the convoys, the logisticians of the 3d Marine Division recommended planning for the air delivery of supplies to the combat base whenever the weather permitted. The airstrip remained closed to all but light aircraft and helicopters throughout September while the Seabees peeled up the old steel matting, and laid a new subgrade of crushed rock.[13****]

*One authority on the battle for Khe Sanh, Chaplain Stubbe, commented that he was not sure why the guns were sent in the first place. His supposition was that they would be used to support FOB–3 operations in Laos. He was certain, however, that the guns would have made excellent targets for the North Vietnamese when they attacked the base. Stubbe Comments.

**Lieutenant Colonel Frederick J. McEwan, who in 1967 was the S–4 or logistics officer for the 26th Marines, remembered an occasion when the North Vietnamese blew a bridge over the Roa Quan River. He, with the regimental commander and engineer together with a rifle company, made a reconnaissance on the practicality of repairing the span: "A search was made for alternate crossing points to no avail. Major damage was done to the bridge. There were strong indications of the enemy's presence. It was not the time to build a bridge over the Roa Quan River on Route 9 leading to Khe Sanh." LtCol Frederick J. McEwan, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter McEwan Comments.

***As former *Washington Post* reporter Peter Braestrup commented, "Westmoreland always wanted to hold Khe Sanh as a base for U.S operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail." Peter Braestrup, Comments on draft chapter, n.d. [Dec94–Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File).

****Lieutenant Colonel McEwan remembered that obtaining the crushed rock was not a simple matter. He recalled that it was not until "a sergeant found a hill mass that had rock" which later naturally became known as the "Rock Quarry." McEwan Comments.

In October, the monsoon struck with a vengeance, pouring 30 inches of rain on ICTZ. Khe Sanh did not escape the deluge. The hill positions were especially hard hit. Unlike the Xom Cham plateau, the surrounding hills and mountains did not have soil suitable for construction, and the rain pointed up this weakness. The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel James B. Wilkinson, described some of the damage:

> . . .when the first torrential rains of the season hit [Hill] 861 the results were disastrous. The trenchline which encircled the hill washed away completely on one side of the position and caved in on another side. Some bunkers collapsed, while others were so weakened they had to be completely rebuilt.[14*]

The Marines kept busy repairing damage and improving their positions. New bunkers on Hill 861 stood almost completely above ground, and the new trenchline included a drainage system jury-rigged from discarded 55-gallon drums. Space on board resupply helicopters was critical, and priority for construction materials went to the airfield project, leaving little or no room for imported fortification materials. Logging details searched the nearby jungle for suitable wood, but many trees were so filled with steel fragments from the earlier Hill Battles that the engineers' chain saws could not cut them.[15]

October brought more than the monsoon. That month, the North Vietnamese *325C Division*, which had taken part in the earlier "Hill Battles," appeared again in the enemy order of battle for Khe Sanh.[16] On 31 October, Operation Ardmore ended with Operation Scotland beginning the next day. Little more than a renaming of the continuing mission of defending Khe Sanh and using it as a base for offensive action against Communist infiltration, Operation Scotland became the responsibility of the 26th Marines.

November began clear and sunny at Khe Sanh, but by the 10th, the *crachin* returned. Seabees continued work on the airfield, improving it to the point that it was suitable for use by medium-sized cargo aircraft, such as the Fairchild C–123 Provider, but more work was necessary before it could safely handle the heavy Lockheed C–130 Hercules aircraft.[17]

Anxious to find alternate methods to support the units on the hill outposts, should bad weather or enemy fire prevent helicopter resupply, the 26th



Photo courtesy of Col Robert W. Lewis, USMC (Ret)

An aerial view of the Khe Sanh Combat Base facing northwest (note north arrow at top of photo) was taken in November 1967 at 10,000 feet, with the airstrip seen in the center of the photo. By this time, medium-sized fixed-wing transport aircraft could land on the airstrip, but the road supply network had been cut.

Marines studied the route from the combat base to Hill 881 South. Representatives from the 3d Motor Transport Battalion, the 3d Antitank Battalion, and the 3d Engineer Battalion examined the route and determined that it would require extensive engineer preparation before it could accommodate vehicle convoys.[18]

The 3d Marine Division assigned the 26th Marines to prepare a contingency plan for the relief, if needed, of the Lang Vei Special Forces CIDG Camp.** The new commanding officer of the 26th Marines, Colonel David E. Lownds, ordered his 1st Battalion to find an overland route from the combat base to the CIDG

*Lieutenant Colonel Harper L. Bohr commented that the rain in September resulted in "the collapse of some newly completed bunkers resulting in the deaths of several Marines." LtCol Harper L. Bohr, Jr., Comments on draft chapter, dtd 2Nov1994 (Vietnam Comment File).

**There were actually two Lang Vei Special Forces Camps. The first one had been overrun in May 1967 while the Marine command was engaged in the Hill Fights. The American command decided to relocate the camp a few hundred meters to the southwest. Lieutenant General Louis Metzger, in 1967 a brigadier general and the 3d Marine Division assistant division commander, commented that "Westmoreland was specially interested in this camp . . . and had the Seabees completely rebuild that camp with heavy concrete bunkers . . . so strong . . . [that it could withstand] a tank on top of it without crushing it in." The new camp was finished in the fall of 1967. LtGen Louis Metzger, Comments on draft, dtd 17Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File). See also Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, pp. 188–189. Army Colonel Bruce B. G. Clarke observed that the contingency plan also called for the relief of the district advisors in Khe Sanh village. Col Bruce B. G. Clarke, USA, Comments on draft chapter, n.d. [Apr95] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Clarke Comments.



Photo courtesy of Col Robert W. Lewis, USMC (Ret)

Aerial view of Hill 881 South in November 1967, reveals the strategic outpost northwest of Khe Sanh. The Khe Sanh base can be seen in the background.

camp which could be used by a company-sized relief force. Captain John W. Raymond led Company A into the jungle to find such a route, avoiding well-used trails to reduce the risk of ambush. The straight-line distance was less than nine kilometers, but only after 19 hours of struggling through the treacherous terrain, did the Marines reach the CIDG camp, proving that it could be done, but demonstrating that it could not be done quickly or easily. The 26th Marines attempted no further efforts to locate cross-country routes to Lang Vei.

On 9 November, III MAF moved to increase the intelligence collection capability at Khe Sanh by deploying a detachment from the 1st Radio Battalion* under now Lieutenant Colonel Gray to the combat base. The detachment moved to Hill 881 South and established an electronic listening post, much as Gray's other unit had done four years earlier.[19]

The *crachin* so hampered air operations at Khe Sanh during November that on the 18th, Lieutenant Colonel Wilkinson passed the word to his men to prepare for the possibility of reducing rations to two meals per day.[20] The same weather problems affected direct air support bombing missions. To improve the accuracy of bombing near Khe Sanh during periods of heavy fog or low clouds, the Marines installed a radar reflector atop Hill 881 South which, in theory, would serve as a navigation aid to attack aircraft supporting the combat base. The reflector did not work, however, as it was incompatible with the radar systems on board the Grumman A–6A Intruder attack aircraft which were designed to carry out bombing missions in conditions of restricted visibility.[21]

Enemy activity increased dramatically during December. The 3d Marine Division's intelligence offi-

*Radio battalions are Marine Corps electronic warfare units capable of conducting signal intelligence activities, mainly intercepts.

cers identified two North Vietnamese units between Khe Sanh and Ca Lu: the *8th Battalion, 29th Regiment* and the *95C Regiment*. Around the combat base, Marine patrols sighted new bunkers near Hill 881 North as well as North Vietnamese carrying supplies and heavy weapons. Sniper fire increased around Hill 881 South and the enemy attempted probes against Hills 861 and 950. Intelligence sources reported that both the *304th Division* and the *325C Division* of the North Vietnamese Army were near Khe Sanh and another enemy unit, the *320th Division*, was east of the combat base, near Camp Carroll and Cam Lo. Perhaps the most revealing indicator of increased enemy activity was the rise in North Vietnamese truck traffic along the nearby Ho Chi Minh Trail network from a monthly average of 480 vehicles in the fall to more than 6,000 in December.[22]

With only one battalion at Khe Sanh to protect the combat base and its vital airstrip, as well as the surrounding hills, the 26th Marines' defenses were stretched thin. The III MAF staff, with many sources of intelligence available, recognized the significance of the enemy buildup, prompting Lieutenant General Cushman to call Major General Tompkins on 13 December to direct that another battalion be sent to Khe Sanh. Major General Tompkins, fearing that northeastern Quang Tri was much more vulnerable, argued the point and recorded later that he was "not at all excited about the idea."[23] Nevertheless, within five hours, Lieutenant Colonel Harry L. Alderman's 3d Battalion, 26th Marines touched down at Khe Sanh's recently refurbished airstrip.*

The 3d Battalion conducted a four-day sweep of a ridge line west of the combat base, then settled into new positions. Companies I and K occupied Hills 881 South and 861, respectively, and Company L joined the 1st Battalion at the combat base proper as Colonel Lownds juggled the units among his defensive positions.

Taking advantage of his increased troop strength to conduct battalion-sized operations once again, Colonel Lownds sent the 1st Battalion north of the combat base to search the Rao Quan River Valley during the last three days of December. As on the 3d Battalion's expedition the previous week, the 1st Battalion encountered only light contact, but found ominous signs of freshly built bunkers and small caches of supplies.[24]**

The increased enemy activity noted during December continued. Early in the evening of 2 January, a listening post established by Company L, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines near the west end of the airstrip reported several persons 60 meters to their immediate front. The company commander dispatched a squad to reinforce the listening post. The Marines challenged the unidentified men but received no reply. At the Marines' second attempt to challenge, the intruders opened fire on the listening post. Marines all along the nearby perimeter returned fire. The firing died down, which saw one Marine slightly wounded, and the squad sent to reinforce the listening post searched the area to the immediate front, but found nothing in the dark. At first light, a patrol searched the area again and found five enemy dead. Using a scout dog, they followed the trail of a sixth man, believed wounded, but did not find him.[25]

The 26th Marines' intelligence officer, Captain Harper L. Bohr, Jr., examined the bodies of the five enemy and came to the conclusion that one of them was Chinese, because the man "was just too big and too non-Vietnamese looking." He sent photographs and a medical description to the 3d Marine Division in hopes of receiving confirmation of his supposition. Captain Bohr determined that at least some of the dead were officers, and a legend later grew that one of them was a regimental commander.[26]*** At any rate, it appeared to the Marines that the enemy had indeed been reconnoitering the perimeter, further fueling speculation that a major North Vietnamese attack was in the making.

Colonel Lownds continued to seek information concerning the enemy. Infantry companies scoured the nearby jungle while small reconnaissance teams established observation posts on more remote hilltops and watched for signs of movement. The Marines continued to employ the latest technology to augment their troop patrol effort, including sensors, signal intelli-

*Colonel Frederic S. Knight of the 3d Marine Division G–2, or intelligence staff, recalled that there was the need for a smaller scale map of the Khe Sanh sector to show more detail, one on a scale of 1:10,000, as opposed to the 1:50,000 standard maps. There was none available, but Knight finally found a Seabee, who "laboriously drew on what I would call butcher's paper the tactical map displayed in Colonel Lownds' bunker during the entire siege." Knight Comments.

**Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth W. Pipes, who as a captain commanded Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, commented that his company was the anvil for this operation and that one of his platoons ambushed an enemy reconnaissance unit, killing two or three North Vietnamese soldiers. He remembered some maps and that the enemy gear and weapons were helilifted out. LtCol Kenneth W. Pipes, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 10Mar95 (Vietnam Comment File).

***Captain Bohr later wrote that this claim could not be substantiated. See Maj Harper L. Bohr, Jr., Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," 18Dec68 (Khe Sanh Monograph Comment File).

gence, infrared aerial photo reconnaissance, and a relatively new device formally known as the XM–3 airborne personnel detector (APD), but popularly called the "People Sniffer." The XM–3 was the size of a suitcase, able to be mounted in a Huey helicopter, and designed to measure "ammonia emanations from the skin." While no one technique was sufficient in itself, in tandem, they provided the U.S. command sufficient evidence that the enemy was in the Khe Sanh sector in strength.[27]* For the Marines at Khe Sanh, increased patrol contact indicated an enemy counter-reconnaissance screen in action.

The Decision to Hold

On 6 January, General Westmoreland initiated Operation Niagara, a two-part plan to find enemy units around Khe Sanh and to eliminate them with superior firepower. The first part of the operation, Niagara I, called for intelligence officers to mount a "comprehensive intelligence collection effort" to locate and identify enemy units. In Niagara II, aircraft, including Boeing B–52 Stratofortresses of the 4133d Bomb Wing in Guam and the 4258th Strategic Wing in Thailand, were to saturate target areas with bombs.[28] Major General George Keegan, Seventh Air Force G–2, moved quickly to establish an integrated intelligence collection and analysis effort that would compile and record information from all sources. He went so far as to bring eight French generals, some of whom were survivors of Dien Bien Phu, to Vietnam as experts on Communist siege tactics.[29]**

In the U.S. capital, the Johnson administration focused almost obsessively on the Khe Sanh situation with the President himself poring over detailed maps of the area. On 11 January, General Earle G. Wheeler,



Photo C8543–7 from LBJ Library Collection

The situation at Khe Sanh has intense high level interest as President Lyndon B. Johnson, right, is seen here studying a map of Khe Sanh with Presidential Assistant Walt W. Rostow, left, and CIA Director Richard Helms.

USA, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sent General Westmoreland a message in which he noted that there had been "discussion around town in very high non-military quarters" concerning the enemy's intentions at Khe Sanh. He outlined the two divergent views which were food for thought among the highly placed, but unnamed, individuals who were concerned about the coming battle. One view held that Khe Sanh must be defended because it afforded an opportunity to draw large enemy forces to battle, then to destroy them with a combination of superior firepower and a counterthrust into Laos. The other view strongly counseled abandoning Khe Sanh because "the enemy [was] building toward a Dien Bien Phu."[30]

On a superficial level, the situation at Khe Sanh began to have a certain resemblance to Dien Bien Phu, 14 years earlier.*** Both were remote outposts organized

*Chaplain Stubbe recalled that the "People Sniffers" were bringing back hundreds of contacts. He remembered in the 26th Marines command post, "the map with the little red dots on the plastic overlay, and everyone wondering if this might not be an error—the detections of the ammonia from the urine of packs of monkeys." Stubbe also observed that the Marines also realized that radio pattern analysis could err when the NVA put out false transmitters, "broadcasting as though they were a Hq thus drawing airstrikes on a lone transmitter in the hills rather than a NVA Hq . . . ." Notwithstanding these flaws, Stubbe contended eventually "together and coordinated, the intelligence was of great significance." Stubbe Comments.

**Accomplished without the knowledge of the American Ambassador, this allegedly agitated the Director of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, Saigon. See W. Scott Thompson and Col Donald D. Frizzell, USAF, eds., *The Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Crane, Russak, and Co., 1977), p. 183.

***In November 1953, the French occupied and fortified the village of Dien Bien Phu in northwest Tonkin. The Viet Minh besieged the outpost, capturing it in May 1954 after a dramatic battle involving great loss of life on both sides. The fall of Dien Bien Phu was the final straw which broke the back of French colonialism in Indochina, leading to the 1954 Geneva Accords and the partitioning of the Associated States of French Indochina into autonomous countries. In both his comments and his book, Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, who was CGFMFPac in 1968, took strong exception to the Dien Bien Phu analogy. He observed that militarily the differences far outweighed the similarities. He emphasized the vast advantages in both fire and the overall tactical situation that the Americans possessed at Khe Sanh over the French at Dien Bien Phu. LtGen Victor H. Krulak, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 31Oct1994 and *First to Fight*, pp. 215–16.

around small airstrips in the highlands. They were each served by a single light-duty road which, in both cases, was cut by the enemy, and were forced to rely upon air delivered supplies. In early 1954 the *crachin* restricted flying at Dien Bien Phu as it did at Khe Sanh in early 1968.

The Dien Bien Phu analogy mentioned in General Wheeler's message dated back to at least January 1967, well before it was touted and dissected in Washington's "very high non-military quarters." Even before the First Battle of Khe Sanh, the 3d Marine Division staff prepared an informal document entitled "Khe Sanh Area Report." The report analyzed the terrain and situation which the French had encountered at Dien Bien Phu, comparing them to the terrain and possible enemy action at Khe Sanh.[31]

MACV also made its comparison between the two events, but after the enemy buildup. General Westmoreland ordered his command historian, Colonel Reamer W. Argo, Jr., USA, to prepare a study on the siege of Dien Bien Phu and other "classic sieges" to determine how Khe Sanh fit into the historical precedent. With his study not completed until early February, Colonel Argo presented to the MACV staff the rather bleak conclusion that Khe Sanh was following "the pattern of previous sieges" in which the advantage lay with the besieging forces rather than the defense. In his diary, Westmoreland characterized the entire presentation "fraught with gloom."[32]

Despite the chilling effect of Colonel Argo's study upon his staff, General Westmoreland was determined that Khe Sanh could be held because the Marines there had advantages which the French had lacked at Dien Bien Phu. First, they controlled the hills which dominated Khe Sanh, whereas the French had left the commanding heights around Dien Bien Phu to the enemy in the mistaken belief that artillery could not possibly be moved onto them through the rugged terrain. Further, the French were strangled by lack of sufficient air transport and delivery capability to meet resupply needs. At Khe Sanh, the airstrip could now handle the large C–130 cargo aircraft and, even when weather or enemy fire precluded landing, modern U.S. air delivery methods could ensure that the base remained supplied. Probably most significant, though, was the advantage in firepower which the Marines enjoyed. The French had supported Dien Bien Phu with a few World War II-era aircraft flying from distant bases to reach the battlefield at extreme range, thereby reducing their payload and "loiter time" over the target area. The Marines at Khe Sanh could expect massive and overwhelming fire support from modern, high-performance jet attack aircraft and Boeing B–52 Stratofortresses with their precision, high-altitude, heavy bombardment capability. Marine artillery units at the combat base and on the hill positions, as well as 175mm guns based at Camp Carroll, could provide continuous all weather firepower.[33]

All of the American commanders on the scene had no doubt about their ability to hold the base. Lieutenant General Cushman, the III MAF commander, spoke for all of his Marine commanders when he later stated, "I had complete confidence in my Marines. Of course they were outnumbered, but we had beautiful

U.S. Army artillerymen from the Third Section, Battery C, 2d Battalion, 94th Artillery Regiment at Camp Carroll are seen firing a 175mm gun in support of the Marines at Khe Sanh. The M107 175mm gun fired a 147-pound projectile and had a maximum range of nearly 20 miles.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A801357



air and artillery support." He remarked that while weather was a factor the forecasts were that the weather would improve rather than deteriorate. As he concluded, "I was concerned but not worried about the battle." While General Westmoreland, the MACV commander had less confidence in the defensive measures taken by the Marines at the base, he later wrote that his decision to hold Khe Sanh, "was to my mind militarily sound and strategically rewarding."[34]

Even while General Westmoreland ticked off the reasons why Khe Sanh could be defended, the bigger question was: why should it be defended? General Westmoreland later wrote:

> Khe Sanh could serve as a patrol base for blocking enemy infiltration from Laos along Route 9; a base for SOG operations to harass the enemy in Laos; an airstrip for reconnaissance planes surveying the Ho Chi Minh Trail; a western anchor for defenses south of the DMZ; and an eventual jump-off point for ground operations to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[35]

General Westmoreland's proposal for a ground operation against the Ho Chi Minh Trail took the form of a planned invasion of Laos, codenamed Operation El Paso. Although planning for the operation continued through January, MACV did not intend to execute it until fall or winter, after the northeast monsoon had passed. General Westmoreland said he wanted the plan to be ready in time for the November 1968 presidential elections "so that we would have a military plan that could take advantage of a possible change in national policy."[36]

In addition to these reasons for defending Khe Sanh, General Westmoreland pointed to tactical considerations, noting that "had we not taken a stand in that remote area, our forces would have inevitably been required to fight in the more populous coastal areas where the application of firepower would have been hampered in order to protect civilians."[37]

Lieutenant General Cushman was "in complete agreement" with the decision to hold Khe Sanh, pointing out that, although the combat base did not really deter infiltration, it was "a complete block to invasion and motorized supply." He further felt that it was necessary to retain bases like Khe Sanh because they allowed him to conduct mobile operations in the enemy's base areas at a time when III MAF did not have enough troops effectively to cover all of the territory near the DMZ.[38]

Even General Krulak, who in 1966 had opposed the idea of large unit operations near Khe Sanh, now agreed with General Westmoreland, saying that while "to withdraw would save lives that would otherwise be lost. . . . nobody ever won anything by backing away."[39] Although agreeing with the need to defend Khe Sanh once engaged, Krulak continued to insist that the Marines never should have been there in the first place. He quoted General Giap as wanting to stretch "the Marines as taut as a bow string and draw them away from the populated areas."[40] While the North Vietnamese continued to place pressure on the Marines at Khe Sanh, General Krulak doubted that General Giap would engage the Americans on their terms. For Krulak, "Khe Sanh was an unsound blow in the air."[41]

The intentions of the North Vietnamese at Khe Sanh still are a subject of debate. In contrast to General Krulak, Army Brigadier General Philip B. Davidson, the MACV intelligence officer or J–2, later argued that General Giap meant for "Khe Sanh to be Phase III, the culmination of the Great Offensive, Great Uprising." Davidson maintained that the North Vietnamese planned to overwhelm the American base with two to four divisions and end "the war with a stunning military victory."[42]

In one of their recapitulations of the Khe Sanh experience in 1969, the North Vietnamese appeared to agree in part with elements of General Krulak's analysis of their designs and also those of General Davidson and General Westmoreland. The North Vietnamese authors stated that the mission of the overall general offensive including Khe Sanh "was to draw the enemy out [into remote areas], pin him down, and destroy much of his men and means of conducting war." Specifically, the Khe Sanh-Route 9 campaign portion of the overall offensive had several aims, including the destruction of "an important portion of the enemy's strength, primarily the American." The North Vietnamese wanted to draw the U.S. forces "out Route 9, the further the better," and then "tie them down." The campaign called for close coordination with other North Vietnamese and Viet Cong commands throughout South Vietnam, especially with *Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue*. According to the North Vietnamese study, the destruction of "enemy strength and coordination with other battlefields [military regions] are the most fundamental [and] important." The plan directed that North Vietnamese commanders "focus mainly on striking the enemy outside his fortifications," but "to strike the enemy in his fortifications when necessary and assured of probable victory."In effect, the North Vietnamese would take Khe Sanh if they could, but there were limits to the price they were willing to pay.

Their main objectives were to kill American troops and to isolate them in the remote mountain border region of western Quang Tri Province.[43]

The Stage is Set

On 10 January, Colonel Lownds closed a regimental staff meeting with the warning that he expected an enemy attack within 10 days.[44] The Marines continued the unending process of "digging in" with the objective of providing every fighting position and important facility with overhead protection. Over the next few days, patrols continued to engage the enemy. Units reported that enemy sappers had cut the perimeter wire in some places, but had carefully replaced it to hide the cuts.

Lieutenant General Cushman wired Major General Tompkins on 13 January to expect an attack on Khe Sanh to begin on the 18th. To meet the threat, III MAF, he said, would give Khe Sanh priority on B–52 sorties, effective 16 January. Further, General Cushman requested that two U.S. Army brigades be placed on 24-hour alert for redeployment to ICTZ.[45] The same day Colonel Lownds ordered that all personnel within the Khe Sanh Combat Base, starting on 15 January, would wear helmets and flak jackets and carry weapons at all times.[46]

On the afternoon of 14 January, Second Lieutenant Randall D. Yeary led a reconnaissance patrol back towards friendly lines on Hill 881 South after four days in the jungle. As the patrol moved down the south slope of Hill 881 North, one kilometer from their destination, the North Vietnamese caught them in an ambush. In the opening shots of the fight, an RPG round killed Lieutenant Yeary and Corporal Richard J. Healy. The six remaining men in the patrol, heavily outgunned and all but two wounded, withdrew, leaving the bodies behind. Nearby, under heavy fire, helicopters extracted the survivors. A platoon from Company I, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines searched the area later and recovered the bodies.[47]

Far to the south, as part of Operation Checkers, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines occupied new positions at

Marines at Khe Sanh, wearing their flak jackets, fill sandbags to reinforce bunkers from incoming artillery rounds. The Marines later came under criticism that they left too many positions vulnerable to the enemy bombardment.

Photo from 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68



Phu Bai, freeing the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines to redeploy to Dong Ha. On 15 January, while the latter battalion moved into its new quarters at Dong Ha, Major General Tompkins became concerned about the increase in enemy probes against Khe Sanh. Deciding that Colonel Lownds "didn't have enough people," he sent a message to III MAF advising that he intended to reinforce Khe Sanh. General Cushman concurred and at 1730, the 3d Marine Division contacted the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines and notified the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Francis J. Heath, Jr., that his destination was changed to Khe Sanh.[48]

At 0715 the following day, Heath's Marines began flying into Khe Sanh on board fixed-wing transport aircraft and for the first time since arriving in Vietnam, the 26th Marines was together as a regiment.[49] While the rest of the battalion occupied an assembly area near the western edge of the airstrip, Company F marched three kilometers north to Hill 558. Overlooking the Song Rao Quan at a point where its valley opens toward the combat base, Hill 558 was a good position from which to control movement along the river. Company F reported that the hill was clear of the enemy and on 17 January, the rest of the battalion moved forward and established a three-infantry company strongpoint.

While the 2d Battalion was redeploying, General Cushman inspected the defenses of Khe Sanh. Following the visit, he told General Tompkins that he thought the combat base needed a better patrolling plan, more seismic intrusion detectors, and additional work on the fortifications. Of particular concern to General Cushman was the ammunition storage area which, he advised General Tompkins, needed "tidying up." A large quantity of the base's ammunition was stored outside the revetments, making it vulnerable to enemy fire. Within a week, this last warning would appear a prophecy.[50]*

The Marines at Khe Sanh were well aware of their vulnerabilities. What had been a one-battalion outpost in early December had now expanded to three battalions. With Route 9 closed, U.S. aircraft could keep the Marines supplied with adequate ammunition and rations, but could only bring in limited heavy equipment and fortification material. Lieutenant Colonel Frederick J. McEwan, the 26th Marines S–4, years later remembered that the artillery battalion's bulldozer "was one of the most valuable and overcommitted heavy equipment items." According to McEwan, "it dug gun emplacements, ammo revetments, other berms, . . . tank hull defilade positions, and was used extensively and dangerously maintaining the land sanitation fill."[51]

In an attempt to disperse the ammunition, Lieutenant Colonel McEwan provided for three storage areas. He placed the main ammunition dump on the east end of the combat base, just off the runway and dug in with revetments, but it was filled to capacity. Another ammunition dump was located on the western end of the airstrip near the artillery battalion, and a third closer to the central area of the combat base. As an expedient for further dispersion, he force fed as much ammunition as feasible to the combat units. Still, as Captain William J. O'Connor, commander of Battery C, 1st Battalion, 13th Marines at Khe Sanh, recalled that he personally was "very concerned . . . that the ammo dump was located between my area and the air strip." It was obvious to him that its location would place his battery and the air strip "in jeopardy" and the target of enemy guns. O'Connor insisted that his men dig spider holes outside the gun emplacements and that they wear their helmets and flak jackets.[52]

On 18 January, the 26th Marines reported another sudden heavy increase in enemy sightings and activity. That afternoon, a reconnaissance team made contact with the enemy on Hill 881 North, suffering two casualties and immobilizing the team. The 3d Platoon of Company I, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines, moved out from a patrol base nearby and rescued the team without incident. The reconnaissance Marines, however, lost a radio and a manual encryption device** during the firefight.

*Army Lieutenant General Philip B. Davidson, the former MACV J–2, wrote that on 20 January 1968 he visited the Khe Sanh base with his counterpart on the III MAF staff to talk with Colonel Lownds about the enemy buildup. While there, he noted the "tents, fuel ammunition dumps, and command post—all above ground and unprotected . . . ." In reporting his discussion and what he saw to General Westmoreland, the latter became agitated about the "description of the unprotected installations at Khe Sanh and the general lack of preparation to withstand heavy concentrations of artillery and mortar fire . . . ." Davidson recalled that Westmoreland turned to his deputy, General Creighton W. Abrams, and said, "'Abe, you're going to have to go up there and take over.'" According to Davidson, this was the prelude to the establishment of MACV (Forward). See Chapter 6 for further discussion relative to MACV (Forward). LtGen Philip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War, The History: 1946–1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), pp. 554–56.

**Called a "shackle sheet" by the Marines, this was simply a small printed page containing letters and numbers arranged in random fashion with a key used to arrange them in a rudimentary code. It was used to encrypt certain information, such as friendly positions, for transmission over the radio.

Captain William H. Dabney's Company I received orders to search for the missing radio and codes. At dawn on 19 January, the 1st Platoon, commanded by Second Lieutenant Harry F. Fromme, departed Hill 881 South for the scene of the ambush. At 1200, while moving along a finger which led northeast up to the crest of Hill 881 North, the platoon engaged a North Vietnamese unit in defensive bunkers. Fromme and the platoon had patrolled the hill before and noticed that the trail had been altered, which alerted them to possible danger.[53]

Lieutenant Fromme called for mortar fire and artillery as he led his platoon through the thick vegetation, attempting to maneuver against the North Vietnamese. When three Marines fell with wounds, Private First Class Leonard E. Newton stood erect in the high kunai grass and fired his M60 machine gun from the shoulder, providing covering fire for others who attempted to rescue them. Even after the wounded Marines were carried to safety, Newton continued to stand, engaging North Vietnamese positions until he was killed in action.[54]*

Fromme's Marines broke contact and returned to Hill 881 South with total casualties of one killed and three wounded. Eight North Vietnamese were confirmed dead. The platoon did not find the missing radio nor the code sheet.[55]

Captain Dabney, having a premonition that "something was about to happen," requested and received permission to conduct a reconnaissance-in-force to Hill 881 North with his entire company on the next day. Marine helicopters brought in two platoons and a command group from Company M, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines to Hill 881 South to help man the perimeter during Company I's absence.[56]

Elsewhere around Khe Sanh, sightings of the enemy continued unabated. Reconnaissance patrols reported groups of as many as 35 North Vietnamese at a time and listening posts detected enemy troops moving near Marine positions.[57] It seemed that Captain Dabney's guess was correct: "something was about to happen."

Sortie to Hill 881 North

Company I departed at 0500, 20 January, moving through dense fog into the valley which separated Hill 881 South from its neighbor to the north. Dabney split his company into two columns which moved along parallel fingers about 500 meters apart. On the left, Lieutenant Fromme and his 1st Platoon led the way, followed by the company command group and Second Lieutenant Michael H. Thomas' 2d Platoon. In the column on the right marched Second Lieutenant Thomas D. Brindley's 3d Platoon and the six Marines remaining from Company B, 3d Reconnaissance Battalion who had participated in the patrol of 18 January.[58]

At 0900, the fog lifted as the Marines crossed the narrow valley floor and began the climb up Hill 881 North. As during the first part of their journey, the two columns traveled along parallel fingers. Near the crest, four small hills formed a line perpendicular to Company I's advance.

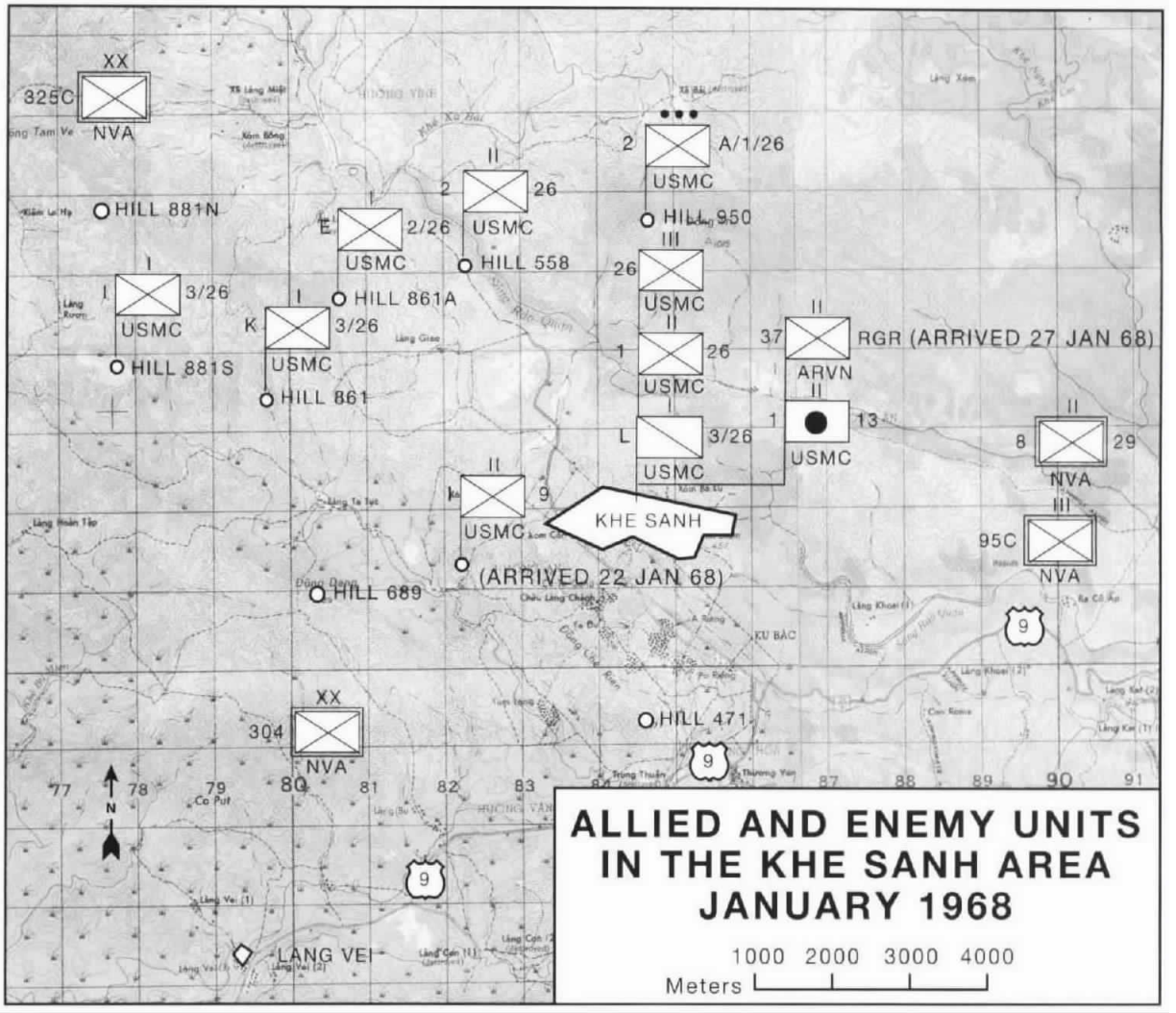
Thirty minutes into Company I's ascent, the enemy opened fire from positions on one of the small hills, forcing the 3d Platoon to the ground. The other column surged forward on the left in an attempt to flank the North Vietnamese, but was almost immediately stopped by heavy fire from another enemy strongpoint which caused several casualties. The company "dug in" and called for fire support. Enemy gunners shot down a Sikorsky UH–34 Sea Horse helicopter from Marine Aircraft Group 36 attempting to pick up Company I's wounded, but the crew escaped injury.[59]**

As Marine artillery fire fell on the enemy, the 3d Platoon, joined by the reconnaissance team, advanced once again, assaulting and overrunning the nearest NVA positions, then continued to the top of the hill. Lieutenant Brindley charged to the crest of Hill 881 North at the head of his platoon, only to fall to a sniper's bullet, mortally wounded.*** With the 3d Platoon now atop the hill but low on ammunition, suffering numerous casualties, and under heavy machine gun fire, Dabney committed his reserve. The 1st Platoon held fast and supported by fire, while the 2d Platoon and command group

*For his courageous act, Private First Class Newton received the Silver Star, posthumously. Lieutenant Fromme remembered that Newton, who was right next to him, was killed in the "first few minutes of the fire fight." The platoon's radioman "tried repeatedly to pull him down." Harry F. Fromme, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 27Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Fromme Comments.

**Lieutenant Fromme remembered that "one of the more daring moments happened after the chopper was hit. It 'slid' off the left side of the finger and down some 50 meters to the draw below." Fromme stated that his platoon sergeant took one of his squads to rescue the crew of the helicopter: "For me, it was 30 minutes of nerves. Still, directing suppressing fire on the hill Brindley's then Thomas' platoons were trying to take. I wonder to this day why the NVA on our finger did not attack at this moment." Fromme Comments.

***Lieutenant Brindley received the Navy Cross, posthumously, for the action on Hill 881 North.



withdrew to the south, crossed to the finger on the right then turned north again to reinforce the beleaguered 3d Platoon. Captain Dabney remembered that at one time he called in an air strike that "dropped napalm 100 meters from 3d Platoon to end a counterattack."[60]

When the 2d Platoon reached the crest, Lieutenant Thomas learned that some Marines from the 3d Platoon and the reconnaissance team were missing. Some had fallen, wounded, during the attack, while others had pursued the fleeing enemy only to be wounded and cut off from the company forward of the hilltop position. Thomas immediately organized a rescue effort, recovering six of the injured Marines under murderous enemy fire. Wounded himself while carrying out the sixth man, Thomas refused evacuation and returned to search for the last two. Moving under fire to rescue the Marines, he was killed in action.[61]*

During the battle, the commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Harry L. Alderman, flew to Hill 881 South with his command group to find the two platoons of Company M and the other Marines left atop the hill pouring recoilless rifle and mortar fire into the North Vietnamese on Hill 881 North as Company I fought at close quarters. Alderman asked Lownds for reinforcements to help clear enemy resistance from Hill 881 North and consolidate the new position. Lownds denied the request, ordering Company I to break contact immediately and return to Hill 881 South. His reasons would become known soon enough.

Using air strikes and artillery to cover its withdrawal, Company I backed down the face of Hill 881

*Lieutenant Thomas received the Navy Cross, posthumously, for the action on Hill 881 North.

North and returned to Hill 881 South at 1800. The company lost 7 killed and 35 wounded. While withdrawing, it estimated at least 100 dead North Vietnamese on the face of the hill.[62]*

The Enemy Plan Unfolds

While Company I battled what appeared to be a Communist battalion for Hill 881 North, a rather bizarre and fortuitous event took place at the combat base: the disclosure of the enemy plan for the attack on Khe Sanh. At 1400 on 20 January the 2d Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines reported that a North Vietnamese soldier was waving a white flag near its position on the northeastern perimeter of the combat base. The company commander, Captain Kenneth W. Pipes, took a fire team approximately 500 meters outside the lines where the Communist soldier willingly surrendered. The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel James B. Wilkinson, questioned the prisoner immediately after his capture and was "impressed by his eagerness to talk."[63]

The rallier,** as he turned out to be, was Lieutenant La Thanh Tonc, the commanding officer of the *14th Antiaircraft Company, 95C Regiment, 325C Division.* He freely provided detailed information on the enemy's dispositions and plan of attack for Khe Sanh, including the fact that the North Vietnamese would attack Hill 861 that very night. Coming as it did on the heels of Company I's encounter with the enemy on nearby Hill 881 North, the information was plausible. Colonel Lownds dispatched an officer courier to 3d Marine Division headquarters with the information. The combat base and the hill positions were as ready as possible under the circumstances. There was nothing left to do but wait.[64]

*Army Colonel Bruce B. G. Clarke commented that on the 20th as well, the Army advisors at the district headquarters led a small force and patrolled an area to the south of the Khe Shan base, but withdrew to make way for a B–52 strike. Clarke Comments.

**The term "rallier" was applied to North Vietnamese or Viet Cong who availed themselves of the "Chieu Hoi" ("Open Arms") program to defect to the Government of South Vietnam.

CHAPTER 5

The 3d Division War in Southern Quang Tri and Northern Thua Thien, Operations Osceola and Neosho

Protecting the Quang Tri Base, Operation Osceola, 1–20 January 1968
Operation Neosho and Operations in the CoBi-Thanh Tan, 1–20 January 1968—Operation Checkers

Protecting The Quang Tri Base, Operation Osceola, 1–20 January 1968

Faced with the buildup of the North Vietnamese forces opposing them at the end of 1967, General Tompkins and the 3d Marine Division staff prepared for the forward deployment of the remaining division units in Operation Checkers from Thua Thien Province to Quang Tri, including the movement of the division command post from Phu Bai to Dong Ha. In turn, the 1st Marines in southern Quang Tri was to take over the 4th Marines TAOR in Thua Thien and then eventually revert to the control of the 1st Marine Division.

The 1st Marines had moved north from Da Nang in early October 1967 to reinforce the 3d Marine Division and conduct Operation Medina. Medina was a multi-battalion operation designed to clear the Hai Lang National Forest, located south and west of Quang Tri City and containing the enemy *Base Area 101*. *Base Area 101*, in the far southwestern reaches of the forest, extended down to and beyond the Quang Tri and Thua Thien provincial border, and was home to the *5th* and *9th NVA Regiments*. After offering resistance in a few heavy skirmishes during the first phase of the operation, enemy forces eluded the Marines for the rest of the operation.* In the nearly impenetrable jungle terrain, the 1st Marines uncovered some enemy base camps and storage areas but no sign of NVA or VC troops. After confiscating more than four tons of enemy rice and miscellaneous weapons and ammunition, the Marines ended Operation Medina on 20 October and immediately began Osceola.[1]

In Osceola, the 1st Marines with two battalions, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines and 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, remained in the same objective area, but also became responsible for the newly established Quang Tri base, near the city of Quang Tri. Out of North Vietnamese heavy artillery range, the Quang Tri base served as a backup to the main logistic base at Dong Ha and provided a new air facility for the Marine forces in the north. On 25 October, the first KC–130 transport aircraft landed at the Quang Tri Airfield.[2]

In command of the 1st Marines since July 1967, Colonel Herbert E. Ing, Jr., an experienced and decorated combat officer, viewed his Osceola mission differently than that of Medina. At the beginning of Osceola, American intelligence warned that the North Vietnamese were reorganizing for an offensive against Quang Tri City. Colonel Ing believed, however, that Operation Medina and ARVN supporting operations had thwarted any such plan. As a native Long Islander and former enlisted Marine who shrewdly selected his options, he took practical steps to safeguard the Quang Tri base and to cut down on his own casualties. Concentrating on defending the airbase rather than fruitless searches for enemy units in the jungle, Ing initiated a pacification campaign and organized an innovative anti-mine program.[3]

During Osceola, the 1st Marines only once engaged an enemy main force unit, the *VC 808th Battalion*, at the edge of the Hai Lang National Forest near the Giang River, about four to five miles south of the Quang Tri base. The *808th* and the *416th VC Battalions* apparently alternated moving into the Quang Tri coastal region to disrupt the South Vietnamese government apparatus there. The VC employed at least three hamlets in the central portion of the Osceola operating area, Nhu Le, Nhan Bieu, and Thuong Phuoc, all on or near the Thach Han River, as way stations for their units travelling to and from the base areas into the populated coastal plain. Colonel Ing considered that securing or at least neutralizing these hamlets was absolutely vital to the success of his mission.[4]

Sustaining most of his casualties from mines and occasional sniper rounds, Colonel Ing, on 27 November 1967, established an infantry cordon around Nhu

*Colonel Gordon D. Batcheller, who as a captain commanded Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, observed that in the initial contact in Medina, the enemy more than held its own: "They were fast and agile and we were slow and clumsy. Terrain, vegetation, insufficient helo support had something to do with it." Col Gordon D. Batcheller, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 10Dec1994 (Vietnam Comment File).

Le and Thuong Phuoc. Believing Nhu Le as the focal point of the VC mining effort, Ing decided to install a permanent company patrol base in the hamlet, which resulted in a dramatic drop in mining and enemy incidents. On 15 December, however, the VC, using Nhan Bieu as a staging and harbor area, mortared the Quang Tri Airfield. The Marines then occupied that hamlet.[5]

Ing, earlier, had initiated Operation Minefind. In the first phase, the 1st Marines commander assigned a Marine infantry company, reinforced by several engineer mine detector teams, to a 1,000-meter area. While the infantry provided security, the mine detector teams would sweep the sector. During the second phase of Operation Minefind, Ing inaugurated an incentive program that appealed both to the Marines and the local civilian population. The regiment rewarded any Marine that uncovered a mine with four days rest and recreation (R&R) within country and placed no restrictions on the number of times that a Marine could receive such a reward. Using a full-fledged advertising campaign, including aerial broadcasts, dropping and passing out leaflets, and passing the word by mouth during Marine Med CAP (Medical Civilian Assistance Program) visits to the local hamlets, the 1st Marines promised money payments for all turned-in explosive devices.

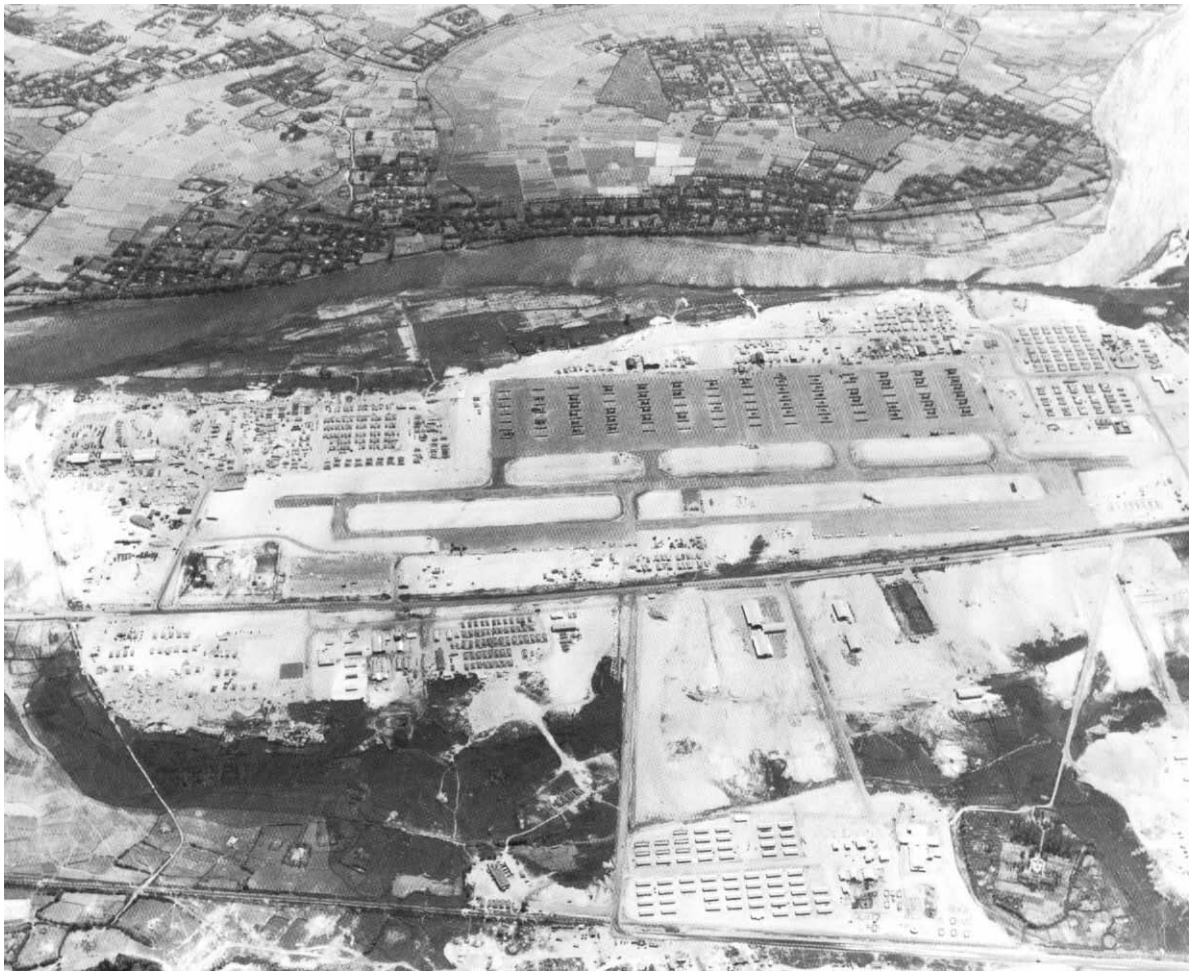
This program soon gained positive results. In November, the 1st Marines reported that its "Mine Awards" strategy brought in 251 pieces of ordnance as compared to some 50 items before the regiment initiated the program. By the end of the year, Marines found over 300 explosive devices themselves and local civilians turned in another 370. Yet, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines soon discovered that at least in one hamlet, Thon Nai Bieu (2), the local children "experienced a prosperous business in exchanging grenades for reward money." The youngsters obtained grenades and other ammunition from the South Vietnamese Popular Force (PF) troops in the village and then brought them to the Marines and claimed their reward. Lieutenant Colonel William Weise, the battalion commander, quickly established liaison with the village chief and the practice became less flagrant.[6]

Despite the obvious potential for fraudulent claims, the program still saved lives. During the Christmas truce, for example, a nine-year-old boy approached the PFs in Thon Nai Bieu (2) where the 2d Battalion's Company G had set up defensive positions. Through an interpreter, he told the company commander, First Lieutenant Richard L. Harshman, that the VC had planted boobytraps. The boy then led the Marines to the site where the troops uncovered a Chinese grenade and two antitank mines. In this case, Lieutenant Colonel Weise gladly presented the boy with a cash "Christmas gift."[7]

With two battalions assigned to him for Osceola, Colonel Ing had divided the area of operations into northern and southern sectors, largely demarcated by the Thach Han River. The northern battalion provided protection to the airfield while the southern battalion secured the avenues of approach. Ing used small reconnaissance teams to patrol the further reaches of the Osceola area under the protective cover of the attached artillery from the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines. Occasionally the southern battalion would make a sortie into *Base Area 101* or into the Ba Long Valley, usually with only limited success.

During late December and early January there was a reshuffling of infantry battalions in the Osceola operating area. In the southern sector, Lieutenant Colonel Marcus J. Gravel's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines shortly before Christmas reverted to its parent regiment's control after a few months' stint at Con Thien. It relieved the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Evan L. Parker, Jr., which took over the Con Thien outpost. Shortly before New Year's Day, the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Richard W. Goodale, formerly the SLF (Special Landing Force) battalion Alpha of the Seventh Fleet, left the operational control of the 9th Marines and came under the 1st Marines. At noon on 1 January, Lieutenant Colonel Goodale assumed command of the Osceola northern sector and responsibility for the security of the Quang Tri Airfield from Lieutenant Colonel Weise. Early on the morning of 2 January, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines transferred to the direct control of the 3d Marine Division in preparation for becoming the new battalion landing team (BLT) of SLF Alpha.[8]

This succession of units caused a minor disruption of operations, especially in the northern sector. With its pending departure, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines evacuated Nhan Bieu on 30 December. On 5 January, however, the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines reestablished a company-size patrol base near Nhan Bieu and the neighboring hamlet of An Don. The Company A commander, Captain David Hancock, formed a provisional rifle company consisting of his 2d and 3d Platoons reinforced by a South Vietnamese Popular Forces (PF) platoon from Mai Linh District. Hancock, together with an improvised command group, the battalion civil affairs officer, and an artillery forward observer team, linked up with the PFs and two South



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A801101

An aerial view in June 1968 shows a much more built-up Quang Tri base and airfield than that seen in January during Operation Osceola. The Thach Han River can be seen in the background and Route 1 and a secondary road in the foreground.

Vietnamese Armed Propaganda Teams at the Quang Tri bridge spanning the Thach Han River on Route 1. By 1830, the combined force had established its base area and constructed its night defensive positions. The company was to conduct "extensive operations in this area to destroy guerrilla forces and the local infrastructure."[9]

On this same date, the battalion's Company B, under Captain Thomas A. Scheib, in its sector about 2,000 meters to the west of Nhan Bieu, came under heavy machine gun fire. The Marines returned the fire and killed at least one of the enemy. In the search for the enemy weapon, the Americans found the VC body, some miscellaneous clothing, and an AK–47 rifle. During the survey of the enemy effects, one Marine tripped a wire and detonated an attached block of TNT. The explosion resulted in one seriously wounded Marine, who was evacuated by helicopter to Quang Tri.[10]

The continued occupation of Nhan Bieu and Nhu Le appeared to stabilize the situation for Lieutenant Colonel Goodale in his base defense mission. Together with the South Vietnamese village chiefs and district officials, the Marines instituted an extensive civil affairs and psychological operations campaign, which according to the 1st Marines, "showed every sign of being a success."[11]

Yet, areas of ambiguity continued to exist. On the night of 10 January, Captain Hancock staked out two ambushes near Nhan Bieu. About 2315, one of them reported movement and requested illumination. The Marines saw six shadowy figures enter a tree line.

About then, the other Marine outpost received incoming small arms fire and someone threw a grenade into their positions. The Marines responded with their own salvo, including M–79 rounds. In the confusion and darkness, the enemy broke contact and slipped away. The next morning, the Nhan Bieu hamlet chief notified Captain Hancock that the VC had murdered a villager during the night. A subsequent investigation disclosed that the 60-year old man may have died as a result of "friendly fire." Many questions still remained: What was he doing in the woods during the night and why did the village chief blame the killing on the enemy? There probably were no good answers.[12]

While maintaining a presence in the hamlets, Lieutenant Colonel Goodale attempted to keep the enemy off balance with an occasional excursion into the foothills and numerous river valleys in his western sector. In one typical such operation on 14 January, Goodale launched a two-company "hammer and anvil" assault against a suspected enemy main force battalion in the area. At 0730, the battalion command group together with Company D, "the anvil," occupied the hamlet of Ai Tu about 2,000 meters west of the airfield. Company D then moved another 2,000 meters further west and settled into a blocking position in the high ground along a secondary road, Route 604, leading off Route 1, and south of the Vinh Phuoc River. The "hammer" company, Company B, located 2,000 meters south, then advanced along a stream bed to the north, hoping to smash any Viet Cong or NVA against Company D.

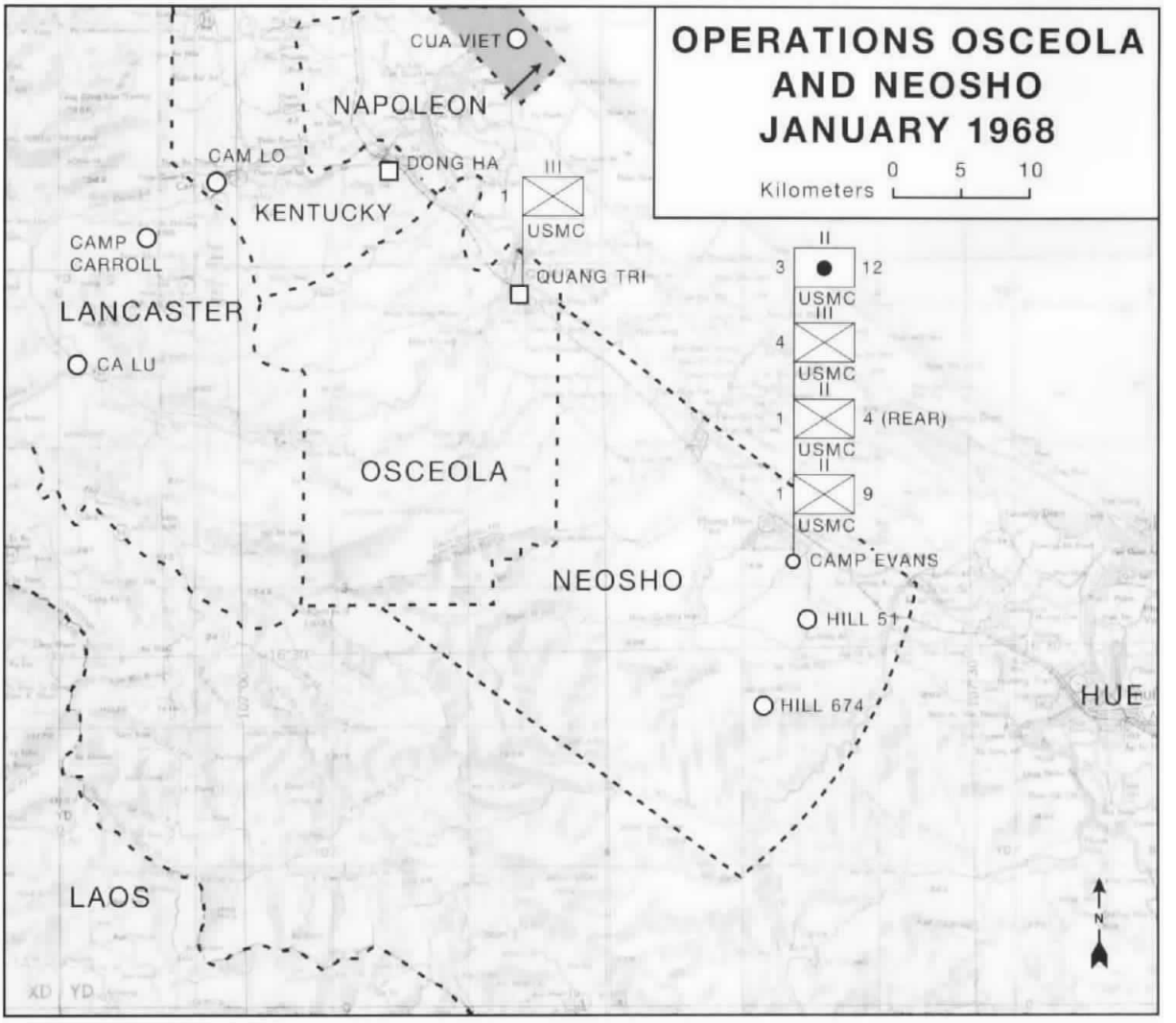
Shortly after beginning its advance, Company B encountered small arms fire, about 30 rounds, from its front. The Marines responded with their M–16s and 60mm mortars. After progressing another 2,000 meters without resistance, the company again engaged the VC, in this instance calling upon artillery support. At the same time, about 0900, the Viet Cong hit a Company D position with about 20 rounds. Fifteen minutes later, members of a Marine Combined Action Platoon (CAP), attached to Company B for the operation, saw seven North Vietnamese soldiers in the open, carrying weapons and packs, attempting to flank the advancing Marines. The CAP warned Company B and called artillery down upon the enemy troops. Company B received some sniper fire from its rear, but otherwise met no further opposition. By noon, the two Marine companies had linked together. The casualty scoreboard was about even: the Marines sustained one wounded man from Company B and found no enemy bodies.[13]

The reconnaissance Marines attached to the 1st Marines and the southern battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, played much the same "cat and mouse" game with the NVA and VC, occasionally with more success. On 2 January, Gravel conducted a two-company operation about three to five miles southwest of Quang Tri City just north of the Thach Han River. Acting on intelligence that a NVA battalion commander, a Captain Minh Chau of the *4th Quyet Tien Battalion*, had established his command post in Thuong Phuoc on the northern bank of the river, the Marine battalion secured the hamlet. A search for the NVA command group proved fruitless, but the battalion, based on its intelligence information, uncovered an NVA "harbor" site in the hills about three miles west of Thuong Phuoc. The site contained a kitchen and a personnel bunker large enough to accommodate nine persons. After destroying the enemy site, the Marines returned to their base area. During the operation, a Company C patrol near a bend in the river saw 13 enemy troops in green uniforms and took them under both rifle and artillery fire, killing at least one. In his January report, the battalion intelligence officer noted that during the day the battalion sighted some 57 enemy at ranges of 500 meters or more and brought them under artillery fire. The battalion claimed killing 10 of the enemy, although these figures are not confirmed in the regimental account.[14]

Two days later, on 4 January, a reconnaissance team from the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion at 1415 engaged about 12 NVA in about the same area where the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines' operation on 14 January took place. The team killed two of the enemy, recovered two AK–47 rifles, a pistol, a pair of binoculars, a wallet containing 5,500 piasters, and miscellaneous papers, rice, and clothing.[15]

On the 14th, another team from the 3d Force Reconnaissance Company, perched on the high ground overlooking the Thach Han River, saw about 30 NVA "with full equipment, helmets, and heavy packs" and one .50-caliber machine gun moving south towards the river. The Marines called an airstrike on the enemy, but were unable to observe the results. These NVA may have been from the same North Vietnamese units that were attempting to evade the two 1st Battalion, 3d Marines companies to the north.[16]

Throughout the operation, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel's 1st Battalion continued to see daily enemy troop movement in small groups of two to eight in the rolling hills south of its combat base at Lang Va, north along the Thach Han River, and across the river in the



1st Battalion, 3d Marines' sector. According to the battalion January report, the battalion Marines counted 166 enemy sightings, not including the 57 reported during the two-company sortie across the Thach Han on 2 January. Most of these sightings were at distances of 500 meters or further. The Marines would either call artillery or, if the enemy were within range, open up with small arms. In either event, the Marines seldom found out how effective their fire was upon the enemy. They did know the NVA and VC kept coming.[17]

The battalion's biggest catch occurred on 16 January. A patrol from Captain Gordon D. Batcheller's Company A came across a wounded North Vietnamese officer in the hills south of the village of Hai Phu. The officer, First Lieutenant Nguyen Van Dinh, was the assistant company commander of the *1st Company, K.8 (808th) Battalion*. A South Vietnamese Armed Propaganda Team had shot Lieutenant Dinh during a reconnaissance he was making of the La Vang and Quang Tri City vicinity. He apparently was trying to make his way back to his base area when the Marines captured him. According to a diary that the enemy lieutenant carried on him, Dinh had participated in a December attack on a Marine position just south of Hai Phu.[18]

Two days later, Captain Merrill J. Lindsay's Company C encountered a significant number of North Vietnamese, south of the Hai Le hamlets, a village complex bordering the Thach Han. At 0945, two VC nearly walked into a Marine position in the hills south of the village. The Marines opened fire and killed both of them and captured one carbine. Later that evening, about 1730, another Marine patrol from Company C encountered about 12 khaki-uniformed NVA just outside Hai Le. In the exchange of fire, the Marines slew another enemy soldier and recovered a submachine gun. One hour later, in about the same area, the

Marines saw another 10 NVA in the open and took them under mortar, grenades, and small arms fire. The result was another dead enemy. Company C apparently intercepted an enemy force either trying to enter Hai Le or more likely, trying to reach the river for operations closer to Quang Tri City.[19]

Despite the sudden flurry of activity, Operation Osceola for the 1st Marines was drawing to a close. The operation officially terminated at midnight on the 20th.[20] For the entire operation, the 1st Marines reported killing 76 enemy troops, 21 of them during January, at a cost of 17 dead Marines and 199 wounded. In addition, the Marines took prisoner one VC and three NVA. From 1 to 20 January, the Marines sustained casualties of 26 wounded and no dead as compared to 7 dead and 70 wounded during December. The December figures were somewhat skewed by the mortar attack on the airfield which accounted for 1 of the dead and 40 of the wounded. Despite the relatively few enemy dead, Colonel Ing considered the operation a success. He pointed to his "Operation Minefind" which accumulated 377 explosive devices uncovered by Marines and another 370 pieces of ordnance brought in by civilians. Ing believed that this program together with the occupation of key hamlets and constant patrolling rendered "a most effective enemy weapon virtually ineffective and drastically reduced the number of Marine casualties incurred as a result of mines." Most significantly, with the one exception of the mortar attack on the airfield, the 1st Marines protected the increasingly important Quang Tri base with its growing logistic facilities from enemy attack. Although enemy units in the Quang Tri sector were on the move, they seemed deliberately to avoid Marine patrols and positions.[21]

Operation Neosho and Operations in the CoBi-Thanh Tan, 1–20 January 1968

Further south, in the CoBi-Thanh Tan sector of northern Thua Thien Province, during January, the remaining 3d Marine Division regiment, the 4th Marines at Camp Evans, was winding up Operation Neosho. Like Osceola and the DMZ codenamed operations, Neosho was a permanent area of operations rather than a tactical campaign with short-term objectives. Marine units had been operating in the CoBi-Thanh Tan since the spring of 1966 and the 4th Marines had established its command post at Camp Evans in December of that year. In 1967, the regiment continued to run operations in the region, changing the name designation from time to time for the usual reporting and record-keeping purposes. On 1 November 1967, Operation Fremont became Operation Neosho with the same units and in the same area of operations.[22]

The area of operations stretched from the My Chanh River south to the river Bo, a distance of some 14 miles. From west to east, from the fringes of the enemy *Base Area 114* to Route 1, the sector consisted of 17 miles of jungled mountainous and hilly terrain. East of the Marine operating area lay the infamous "Street Without Joy," a coastal strip of interlocking hamlets extending 20 miles north and south.* Since the days of the French War against the Viet Minh, the "Street" had been a Communist bastion. The enemy had long used the CoBi-Thanh Tan Valley, the opening of which was located seven miles south of the Phong Dien district capital, Phong Dien City, as the avenue of approach from their mountain base area into the "Street Without Joy." From Camp Evans near Route 1, three miles south of Phong Dien, the 4th Marines could sortie into the valley to impede the movement of NVA and VC regulars into the coastal lowlands. The regiment also maintained manned outposts on two pieces of strategic ground. These were Hill 51, about 4,000 meters north of the valley opening, and Hill 674, about 2,000 meters south of the valley. From Hill 674, which dominated the surrounding peaks, the Marines had established a radio relay station to ensure adequate voice communication within the operating area.

On 1 November 1967, at the start of Operation Neosho, Colonel William L. Dick, the 4th Marines commander, a veteran of four World War II campaigns including Iwo Jima, had three infantry battalions and one artillery battery under his operational control. At Camp Evans, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines provided security for the regimental command post, the artillery battalion, the 3d Battalion, 12th Marines, and supporting forces. The two remaining infantry battalions, BLT 1/3, the SLF Alpha battalion, and the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, were conducting a subsidiary operation to Neosho, Operation Granite, south of CoBi-Thanh Tan, and west of Hill 674.[23]

In Granite, the Marines encountered their stiffest opposition during Operation Neosho in 1967. With its 1st Battalion under its command together with the

* "The Street Without Joy" also refers to that portion of Route 1 from Quang Tri to Hue as well as the coastal strip. See Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Company, 4th edition, 1965), pp. 144–47.



Photo from 12th Mar ComdC, Jan69

An aerial view of Camp Evans (in and below the cross hairs) in the CoBi-Thanh Tan sector was taken a year after Operation Neosho. Like the Quang Tri Base, Evans had expanded during the period, but one can see Route 1 in the foreground and the main road network.

attached SLF battalion, the 4th Marines attempted to penetrate the NVA *Base Area 114*. According to allied intelligence, the base area contained both the headquarters of the *6th NVA Regiment* and the *Tri Thien Hue Front*. Operating in the inhospitable approaches to the enemy base area from 25 October through 6 November 1967, the Marine units brushed up against two battalions of the *6th NVA Regiment*, the *800th* and *802d*. In scattered, but hard-fought skirmishes, the Marines took casualties of 25 killed and more than 80 wounded while accounting for approximately 20 NVA dead and recovering 7 enemy weapons. According to the regimental report, "the enemy employed delaying tactics utilizing the terrain and vegetation to his advantage." Sergeant Ron Asher with Company C, BLT 1/3 remembered that the "last few nights were bad. Not only wet and leeches, but constant harassing and probing at very close ranges."[24]

After the closeout of Operation Granite, the 4th Marines had a reduced number of battalions available to it for Neosho. The SLF battalion deployed to Quang Tri Province and transferred to the operational control of the 9th Marines. After a three-company sweep south of the Bo River back into the CoBi-Thanh Tan, the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines and a command group of the 4th Marines conducted Operation Cove from 18 through 21 November in the Phu Loc sector south of Phu Bai. Upon its return from Phu Bai to Camp Evans on 22 November, the 1st Battalion immediately departed for Dong Ha where it also came under the 9th Marines. At the same time, the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines arrived at Camp Evans and relieved the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines for the defense of the base and manning the outposts on Hills 51 and 674. The 3d Battalion then in conjunction with the ARVN returned to the CoBi-Thanh Tan where it conducted small-unit patrols and company-size sweeps. On 13 December, the battalion rejoined its parent regiment at Khe Sanh to counter the enemy buildup there. Neosho now consisted of the 4th Marines headquarters, detachments from the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, the artillery battalion, the 3d Battalion, 12th Marines, and only one infantry battalion, the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines.[25]

Despite the relatively low casualty figures on both sides recorded in Operation Neosho through the end of

December, both General Tompkins, the 3d Marine Division commander, and Colonel Dick remained concerned about enemy intentions in both the CoBi-Thanh Tan corridor and in the coastal region of northern Thua Thien Province, especially in the "Street Without Joy" sector. The total of 24 enemy dead in Neosho at a cost of 4 Marines killed and 66 wounded reflected neither the casualties in Operation Granite nor the SLF Bravo operation Badger Tooth. Badger Tooth took place in the "Street" from 26–28 December in and near the coastal hamlet of Thom Tham Khe just north of the Quang Tri-Thua Thien border. In the operation, the SLF battalion, BLT 3/1, suffered 48 dead and 86 wounded while inflicting only 30 casualties on the enemy.* To the southwest in Neosho, furthermore, Marine reconnaissance patrols continued to report the heavy movement of enemy forces eastward through the CoBi-Thanh Tan. One battalion of the *NVA 6th Regiment*, the *802d Battalion*, had supposedly departed the valley for the Phu Loc District south of Phu Bai. The other battalions of the regiment remained in the CoBi-Thanh Tan either to screen the approaches to *Base Area 114* or to move into the coastal lowlands when the opportunity presented itself.[26]

At the end of December 1967, General Tompkins provided General Cushman, the III MAF commander, his thoughts about the situation in the CoBi-Thanh Tan and the "Street Without Joy" sectors. He recommended that Cushman obtain the authorization for another SLF operation in the Badger Tooth area to "upset long range plans of *Tri Thien Hue* forces in the coastal area and along routes to their vital base area 114." According to Tompkins' plan, the SLF battalion would land around 6 January 1968 in the former Badger Tooth amphibious operational area (AOA) and stay about five days there. The BLT then would come under the operational control of the 3d Marine Division and 4th Marines and move into the CoBi-Thanh Tan corridor. It would remain in the valley for another nine days to disrupt the continuing infiltration of the NVA regulars into the coastal lowlands. Tompkins mentioned some 27 sightings in the past month of enemy troop movements in the CoBi-Thanh Tan, some consisting of forces as large as 150 to 450 men.[27]

Despite the obvious increase of enemy activity in the CoBi-Thanh Tan, neither III MAF nor the Seventh Fleet had the capability of reinforcing the 4th Marines there at the beginning of the year. SLF Alpha was in the midst of an exchange of units while BLT 3/1, the SLF Bravo battalion, had taken heavy casualties in the Badger Tooth operation and needed time to recuperate. With the buildup of enemy forces along the DMZ and near Khe Sanh, General Cushman had few units to spare for operations in the CoBi-Thanh Tan.

At the beginning of 1968, Colonel Dick, the 4th Marines commander, had little choice but to continue the same mode of operations in Neosho that he had used since the departure of the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines to Khe Sanh. He later credited the 15th Interrogation and Translation Team (ITT), headed by Staff Sergeant Dennis R. Johnson, which had a small facility at Camp Evans, for providing much needed intelligence through a network of village chiefs.[28]

The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John F. Mitchell, continued to man outposts on Hills 51 and 674, provide company-size reaction forces when needed, and conduct sweeps along Route 1 and "saturation patrolling and ambushing in known avenues of approach within 5,000 meters of the Camp Evans perimeter." Lieutenant Colonel Mitchell remembered that he received "detailed briefings" from Colonel Dick and the 4th Marines staff on the situation and terrain. The battalion worked with the village chiefs to improve security in the sector. Mitchell assigned one of his companies to work directly with the local militia force, a Regional Force company. The RFs would raid suspected VC hamlets, while the Marines made up the blocking force. While the technique often resulted in prisoners and captured documents, Mitchell later admitted that to be truly successful it required "longevity, stability, continuity, and prior training of Marine personnel," conditions which "did not exist at this time of the war."[29]

The 4th Marines relied heavily on the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion detachments for the deeper insertions to monitor enemy movement, especially in the CoBi-Thanh Tan corridor. Although the reconnais-

*Colonel John F. Mitchell, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines at the time, remembered that his Company A was supposed to link up with BLT 3/1 in Badger Tooth at a river crossing about 10 kilometers from the SLF landing site. Helicopters lifted the Marine company into its objective area, but the SLF unit had to abort its part of the mission after the fire fight in Thom Tham Khe. With the permission of Colonel Dick, Mitchell took a reinforced platoon from his Company D and mounted tracked vehicles provided by an ARVN armored unit and "blitzed 9,000 meters into the sand dunes." With this support, Company A was able to disengage from a VC force and return to Camp Evans. According to Mitchell, Colonel Dick called this operation "'Rommel's War.'" Col John F. Mitchell, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 5Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File). See also Col William L. Dick, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 1Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Dick Comments.

sance Marines enjoyed some success in calling in artillery and air to disrupt the infiltration of the North Vietnamese regulars, the enemy had begun to take effective countermeasures. The worst incident occurred on 2 January 1968. That day about 0900, under cover of a slight drizzle and morning fog, a Marine helicopter inserted an eight-man patrol from Company A, 3d Reconnaissance Battalion on a hill near the CoBi-Thanh Tan ridgeline, about 8,000 meters southeast of Camp Evans. The hill offered in good weather an excellent view of the valley and Route 554, which served the NVA as a natural infiltration route into the coastal region. The specific missions of the patrol were to determine the nature of enemy activity in the area, call in artillery and air on targets of opportunity, and, if possible, take a prisoner.[30]

The patrol maintained its outpost on an outcropping of the hill. In the belief that the two-feet-high elephant grass on the knoll concealed their presence, the Marines failed to lay out claymore mines, but did deploy in a circular defensive perimeter. In an eight-hour period, the Marines only saw enemy movement on two occasions. In the first, about an hour after arriving at their outpost, they sighted one enemy soldier, who filled his canteen at a nearby stream, and then continued on in a southwest direction. About five hours later, five more North Vietnamese soldiers came into view along the same route as the first. Well-camouflaged with brush, the "enemy appeared to fall down and disappear from view."[31]

For another two hours, the Marines observed no enemy activity. As evening came on, about 1715, the patrol unexpectedly came under attack. Under cover of a grenade barrage and heavy machine gun fire, about 10 to 15 enemy soldiers rushed the Marine positions. Completely taken by surprise, the Americans responded with their own automatic weapons and grenades, "but initial casualties reduced effective return fire." Still, the Marines saw three enemy soldiers felled by their counterfire. The patrol called in an "on call" artillery mission, but was unable to determine its effectiveness.[32]

Of the eight men in the defensive perimeter on the hill, only two survived. Marine Private First Class James P. Brown recalled that "things happened so fast—the enemy was all around us." The other survivor, the patrol radioman, Marine Private First Class James S. Underdue, remembered that he rolled over to attend to the wounds of a downed comrade when a bullet grazed his temple. His sudden movement probably saved his life. At that point, the patrol leader, a corporal, yelled for the remaining men to get out the best they could. As Underdue moved away, a grenade blast killed the corporal. Underdue and Brown both took refuge in a bomb crater about 200 meters down the hill. From the crater, they saw U.S. helicopters circling overhead. According to Underdue, they tried to attract the attention of the pilots by waving a green undershirt but that action failed to do so: "One chopper landed briefly and we thought they had spotted us. But they took off again. I suppose the canopy was too thick." Shortly afterward a Marine air observer reported that he saw the bodies of six Marines on the hill.[33]

After the departure of the helicopter, Underdue and Brown took off in the direction of Camp Evans. Although without a compass, the sound of American artillery provided a bearing for the two Marines. The artillery bombardment soon intensified and the two men "burrowed a hole and settled down to wait." Brown recalled, "several times I thought I heard people approaching us but it was shrapnel whistling through the undergrowth." They waited for the artillery to stop and then continued on. Private First Class Underdue remembered, "the most we stopped for was a minute to catch our breath. We had no water and hadn't eaten in two days."[34]

The morning of the following day, 3 January, the two men crossed an open paddy and then saw what they believed to be "a column of troops" on the crest of a nearby hill. The hill was actually Hill 51 manned by Marines of Company B, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines. About the same time Underdue and Brown spotted the Marines on the hill, a lookout from Company B on the outpost sighted them and "reported two unidentified personnel." The company commander, Captain Robert T. Bruner, then sent out a patrol to determine if they were VC or friendly. For a short period, the survivors and the Marine patrol played a "cat and mouse game." Fording a small stream, Underdue and Brown suddenly came face-to-face with the point man of the Company B patrol. According to Brown, "for a moment it looked as if he were going to open up on us. They seemed just as nervous and scared as we were." Within 40 minutes, the two reconnaissance Marines were back at Camp Evans.[35]

At this point, Colonel Dick ordered Lieutenant Colonel Mitchell, the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, to recover the bodies and equipment of the ill-fated reconnaissance patrol. In turn, Lieutenant Colonel Mitchell directed Captain Francis L. Shafer, Jr., the Company D commander, maintaining a patrol base near Route 554, about 7,000

meters west of Hill 51, to carry out the mission. Reinforced by an engineer team and a forward air control team, two Company D platoons on 4 January boarded Marine CH–46s to accomplish the grisly task. Lieutenant Colonel Mitchell himself boarded the command helicopter, accompanied the mission, and picked the landing zone. While one platoon went into a landing zone near where the reconnaissance team was overrun, the other remained airborne ready to assist the second platoon if necessary. The first platoon found all six bodies and most of the equipment undisturbed by the enemy. Two M–16s and two radios were missing. Loading the dead men and their gear on the helicopters, the Company D Marines returned to their patrol base while the CH–46s took the bodies and equipment back for identification and examination.[36]

While the Company D Marines encountered no enemy troops, they found ample evidence that the attack on the reconnaissance Marines was not a chance encounter. From the fresh shell craters near the site, it was obvious the enemy had used mortars to support the infantry. The failure of the reconnaissance Marines to move from their initial "insertion point" permitted the enemy time "to adequately prepare for the attack." After interviewing the survivors, the Marine debriefer concluded that the enemy force that so carefully planned the ambush was "the most highly trained unit yet encountered by Recon teams on the CoBi-Thanh Tan Ridge." He believed that the effectiveness of previous Marine reconnaissance patrols in the sector and the calling in of artillery on enemy units moving in the valley "prompted this enemy counter-reconnaissance action."[37]

Despite the disastrous results of the reconnaissance patrol of 2 January, the 4th Marines continued to monitor and inflict as much punishment as it could upon the enemy units infiltrating into the coastal region. On 7 January, a Marine aerial observer directed fixed-wing and artillery strikes against enemy bunkers and troops in the CoBi-Thanh Tan, about 2,000 meters southeast of Hill 51 resulting in a secondary explosion. The following day, Company A, under the command of Captain Henry J. M. Radcliffe, thwarted an attempt of the Communists to interdict Route 1, about 5,000 meters east of Hill 51. After studying available intelligence and previous mining incidents with Lieutenant Colonel Mitchell and the battalion intelligence officer, Radcliffe had established a squad ambush in a known enemy infiltration route into the Marine area of operations. Close to midnight, the VC triggered the ambush. The Marines killed five of the enemy, took two prisoners, and captured two 150-pound bombs that the VC were transporting for use as "surprise explosive devices on Route 1 in the vicinity of Camp Evans."[38]

For the next week and a half, the Marine operations in Neosho followed the same pattern. For example, on 15 January, an aerial observer controlled both airstrikes and artillery in the eastern edge of the CoBi-Thanh Tan on an enemy-held fortified hamlet on the west bank of the Bo River. The bombardment resulted in two secondary explosions, the death of seven enemy troops, and the destruction of five bunkers. Four days later, 19 January, about 4,000 meters south of Hill 51, a Company C squad in an ambush site observed about 36 North Vietnamese moving along Route 554. The squad leader reported the sighting to his company commander on Hill 51, Captain John W. Craigle. Craigle dispatched two more squads to intercept the NVA. An aerial observer in a fixed-wing spotter aircraft arrived overhead and called an artillery mission on the enemy. The two Marine squads then "deployed on line" and "swept the area." After a brief firefight, the North Vietnamese "broke contact and moved south into the mountains." The enemy left behind six bodies, one AK–47 and several documents. The documents confirmed the Communist supply routes in the CoBi-Thanh Tan. Finally, on the following day, 20 January, Marines captured an NVA sergeant and two VC officials, who "pinpointed Viet Cong and NVA supply routes, methods and times of resupply, enemy movement and other important tactical information of Viet Cong and NVA activity in the CoBi-Thanh Tan Valley."[39]

The 4th Marines was about to close out Operation Neosho. Through 20 January, the regiment accounted for 53 enemy dead during the month at a cost of 4 Marines killed and 34 wounded. The total results for Neosho, not including the figures for Operations Granite or Badger Tooth, were 77 enemy dead, 9 prisoners, and 10 captured weapons. Marines sustained a total of 12 dead and 100 wounded. Although the 4th Marines somewhat hampered the enemy infiltration through the CoBi-Thanh Tan, the regiment was hardly in a position to prevent it.* According to Colonel Dick, the regimental commander, "We were fighting on their [NVA] terms . . . , [and the] enemy was willing to pay the price."[40]

*Colonel Dick several years later remembered that although he did not know the specific numbers of enemy moving through the valley, they were very large. He wrote: "Groups of several hundred [NVA or VC] were repeatedly sighted" by one regimental outpost alone. Dick Comments.

Operation Checkers

By this time, Operation Checkers in the 3d Marine Division was in full swing. On 15 January, Major General Tompkins turned over the responsibility of the Phu Bai TAOR to the 1st Marine Division Task Force X-Ray and moved his command post to Dong Ha. He left behind at Phu Bai newly arrived Brigadier General Jacob E. Glick, the former commander of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAB) on Okinawa, who had just replaced Brigadier General Lewis Metzger as the assistant division commander. At Phu Bai, Glick had command of the 3d Division rear headquarters and support units, which he was to move to the Quang Tri base at the beginning of February.

With the implementation of Operation Checkers, the Marine regiments in the division began playing a version of musical chairs. The 4th Marines in Operation Neosho in Thua Thien Province was to take over Operation Lancaster in the central DMZ sector from the 3d Marines. In turn, the 3d Marines was to accept responsibility for the Osceola area. The 1st Marines was then to move its command post to Camp Evans and undertake operations in the Neosho sector.[41]

Since the beginning of the month, the three regiments had made preparations for the forthcoming move. For example, on 6 January, the 1st Marines commander, Colonel Ing, issued his order relative to the transplacement of tactical areas. From 6–20 January, armed "rough rider" truck convoys ferried his headquarters staff sections and attached detachments from the 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Engineer Battalion, the 1st Shore Party Battalion, 1st Medical Battalion, the 1st Motor Transport Battalion, and the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines the approximate 20 miles to Camp Evans. Battery A and the Mortar Battery from the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines also made the move. At 0940 on 20 January, the 1st Marines opened its new command post and assumed operational control of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines at Evans. At the same time, Colonel Ing turned over to Colonel Joseph E. Lo Prete of the 3d Marines the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, which both remained in the Osceola area of operations. At Camp Carroll, Colonel Dick, the 4th Marines commander, took control of the 2d and 3d Battalions, 9th Marines and began Operation Lancaster II.[42*]

Events once more altered plans as MACV and III MAF shifted units and rushed reinforcements to meet the perceived threat to Marine positions along the DMZ and to Khe Sanh. The resulting reshuffling of units would make the original Checkers plan almost unrecognizable. In northern Thua Thien Province and southern Quang Tri Provinces, the Army's 1st Air Cavalry Division would establish a new area of operations and in effect provide the filler between the 1st and 3d Marine Divisions. In central and southern I Corps, both the 1st Marine Division and the U.S. Army Americal Division attempted to fill the gaps with diminishing manpower resources.

*While the command chronologies of the 1st and 4th Marines denote that the 1st Marines assumed command of the Neosho sector on 20 January, both Colonels Dick and Mitchell remembered that Colonel Dick was still at Camp Evans on 22 January when the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines deployed to Khe Sanh. 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68; 4th Mar ComdC, Jan68; Dick Comments; Mitchell Comments. See Chapters 6 and 14 relative to the deployment of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines to Khe Sanh.

CHAPTER 6

Heavy Fighting and Redeployment: The War in Central and Southern I Corps, January 1968

A Time of Transition—The Da Nang TAOR—Operation Auburn: Searching the Go Noi—A Busy Night at Da Nang—Continuing Heavy Fighting and Increasing Uncertainty—Phu Loc Operations The Formation and Deployment of Task Force X-Ray—The Cavalry Arrives The Changed Situation in the North

A Time of Transition

In January 1968, Army and Marine units in central and southern I Corps under III MAF attempted to continue operations as best they could in their old sectors while at the same time moving into new tactical areas to counter enemy buildups. As the 3d Marine Division planned to displace from Phu Bai to Dong Ha, the 1st Marine Division began to implement its segment of Operation Checkers. One battalion of the 5th Marines at Da Nang, the 1st Battalion, in December had moved north from positions in the Dai Loc Corridor south of Da Nang in Quang Nam Province to Phu Loc in Thua Thien Province. In the meantime, the 2d Korean Marine Brigade had started its displacement from Cap Batangan in northern Quang Ngai Province, 17 miles south of Chu Lai, to positions north of Hoi An in the Da Nang area of operations.

The U.S. Army's 23d Division, also known as the Americal Division, had the responsibility for the 100-mile expanse of southern I Corps extending from the Hoi An River in Quang Nam Province to the border with II Corps at Sa Huyen in Quang Ngai Province. Formed in Vietnam at Chu Lai from the U.S. Army's Task Force Oregon in September 1967, the division held three primary operating areas: Duc Pho in the south, Chu Lai in the center, and the Que Son Valley in the north. Assuming the command of the division in September, Major General Samuel B. Koster, USA, maintained a rather informal command relationship with General Cushman. Several years later, Koster remembered that he would visit the III MAF commander at Da Nang once a week "to tell him what we were doing." Although nominally under the operational control of the Marine command, the Army division commander stated, "I got the distinct feeling that [I was] to work my TAOR as I saw fit." General Cushman later asserted that he treated the Army division the same as he did Marine units, but admitted that General Westmoreland would not "let me move his Army divisions without there being a plan that he'd okayed."[1*]

Command relations between the Korean Marine Brigade and the U.S. forces under General Cushman in I Corps were more complicated yet. Neither the III MAF commander nor his division commanders had operational control of the Koreans. The phrase "operational guidance" supposedly defined the relationship between the Korean brigade and III MAF, but, according to Cushman, the term "meant absolutely nothing . . . They [the Koreans] didn't do a thing unless they felt like it." Major General Koster recalled that the Korean Brigade, while assigned to the Batangan Peninsula in the Americal Division area of operations, built large "solid compounds," but "seldom launched 'big operations.'" When the Korean Marines began their deployment to Da Nang, Brigadier General Kim Yun Sang, the Korean commander, agreed that the first battalion to arrive would receive "operational direction" from the U.S. 5th Marines until the rest of the brigade completed the move. Yet, Major General Donn J. Robertson, the 1st Marine Division commander, later observed that he "had no command control" over the Koreans and was "not sure how much the MAF commander had." According to Robertson, the Koreans operated very cautiously and he suspected that they were under orders through their own chain of command "to keep casualties down."[2]

Although III MAF command arrangements with the South Vietnamese in I Corps were also complex, they were less awkward. As senior U.S. advisor in I Corps, General Cushman had more influence with General Lam, the South Vietnamese I Corps comman-

*General Earl E. Anderson, who was the III MAF Chief of Staff at this time, emphasized that General Westmoreland, for example, "directed Cushman not to move the 3d Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry Division without his support." Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371163

A Korean Marine lies in position with his M16 with fixed bayonet at the ready during a combined operation with U.S. forces. III MAF exercised an unsure command relationship with the 2d Korean Marine Brigade, which had moved up in January from the Chu Lai area to Hoi An in the Da Nang sector.

der, than he had with the Koreans. Despite not having operational control of South Vietnamese units, the Marines under the guise of coordination and cooperation since 1965 had devised several informal working agreements with local units. As Cushman later declared: "General Lam and I got along well both personally and socially . . . we went through some battles together and that made for mutual respect."[3]

In the extensive and heavily populated Da Nang area of operations, the III MAF elaborate civic action and pacification campaign made for a very close relationship with the South Vietnamese units in the sector. The South Vietnamese Quang Da Special Zone command shared the Da Nang TAOR with the 1st Marine Division. Colonel Nguyen Duy Hinh, the Quang Da Special Zone commander, controlled both the 51st ARVN Regiment and the 59th Regional Force (RF) Battalion. While American advisors had doubts about the commanding officer of the 59th RF Battalion, they rated both Colonel Hinh and Colonel Truong Tan Thuc, the commanding officer of the 51st, very highly. U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel W. Ray Bradley, the senior advisor to the 51st, considered "Thuc as the most effective commander he had ever known." Bradley credited Thuc with "turning around" the 51st and responsible for much of the progress in the South Vietnamese Revolutionary Development Program in the Da Nang area. According to Marine pacification standards, government forces controlled only 40 out of 112 villages in the TAOR but over 61 percent of the population.[4]

The Americal Division relations with the ARVN 2d Division in the southern two provinces of I Corps, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai, were more distant. As Major General Koster, the Americal Division commander, noted, the 2d ARVN Division "seldom worked with us—occasionally they would be brought in as a blocking [force]." Although General Cushman observed that Colonel Nguyen Van Toan, the acting division commander, was not as able a commander as General Truong of the 1st Division, Toan "was adequate." The III MAF commander suggested that Toan's talents were more political than military.[5]

Perhaps the most unique connection between III MAF and the South Vietnamese authorities was the Combined Action Program (CAP). The program consisted of the attachment of the equivalent of a Marine infantry squad and its corpsman to a South Vietnamese Popular Forces platoon in a local hamlet or village. At the end of 1967, III MAF had 27 officers, 1,079 enlisted Marines, and 94 Navy corpsmen assigned to these units. They were organized into 3 Combined Action groups, 14 companies, and 79 platoons. Except for six in northern Quang Tri Province, the remaining 73 Combined Action platoons were located in the other four provinces of I Corps.*

Since the summer of 1967, the Combined Action Program came directly under III MAF rather than the individual divisions. As Director of the Combined Action Program, Lieutenant Colonel Byron F. Brady reported directly to Major General Raymond L. Murray, the Deputy Commander, III MAF. Brady coordinated and loosely controlled each of the three Combined Action groups. He made liaison with the various Army, Korean, and Marine commanders for "fire support, reaction forces, patrols, and ambushes." At the group and company level, the Combined Action Program largely consisted of administrative and logistic support. The heart of the program, however, was the individual Combined Action platoon, usually headed by a U.S. Marine sergeant and a Vietnamese Popular Forces platoon commander. Nominally, the Marine sergeant was the advisor to the Vietnamese leader. In actuality, they often shared command responsibility, depending upon the personal relationship between the two. Operationally, the platoon came under the South Vietnamese district chief, but relied heavily on the U.S. or allied infantry battalion in its sector for fire support and reinforce-

*See Chapter 29 for a more detailed account of the Combined Action Program.



Photo courtesy of Igor Bobrowsky

Marines and South Vietnamese Regional Force troops of Combined Action Platoon D–1 patrol near the hamlet of Thanh Quit south of Da Nang. These platoons were the cutting edge of the Combined Action Program, which integrated a Marine squad with South Vietnamese militia (Popular or Regional Forces) in the surrounding villages and hamlets.

ment. In many respects, these semi-isolated CAPs were the frontline of the Marine war in the villages and hamlets, the target of nearly 40 percent of the enemy attacks in I Corps in November and December 1967. They were among the first to indicate an enemy buildup in the Da Nang and Phu Loc sectors.[6]

By the end of 1967, the allies in I Corps had developed a rather sophisticated analysis apparatus for the collection and processing of local intelligence. The core of this collection effort was the District Operations and Intelligence Center (DOIC). Each center consisted of representatives from the South Vietnamese district-level government structure including the ARVN district S–2 officer, National Police, and Revolutionary Development cadre. A U.S. MACV/III MAF liaison team provided technical expertise. The establishment of 14 such centers since August permitted the analysis and supposedly rapid dissemination of time-sensitive intelligence to those South Vietnamese and allied civilian agencies and military units and agencies able to take action. For example, in November 1967, the Dien Ban center provided information to the National Police that led to the arrest of 64 members of the VC Hoi An infrastructure and the capture of significant enemy planning documents.[7*]

From various sources, III MAF received reports in December 1967 that the enemy was massing his forces in I Corps. There was the buildup of enemy forces at Khe Sanh and the eastern DMZ. In the CoBi-Thanh Tan region the 4th Marines and South Vietnamese sources reported the southeastward movement of elements of the *6th NVA Regiment* and the appearance of a new regiment, the *4th NVA*, in the Phu Loc sector south of Phu Bai. Of even more concern to the 1st Marine Division and the Americal Division was the forward deployment of the *2d NVA Division* north into

*Lieutenant Colonel Olivet W. van den Berg, Jr., who commanded the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines at Da Nang in November 1967, remembered that a sniper team attached to his Company A "killed a VC courier and his armed escort at 700 meters." According to van den Berg, the courier carried a latge bag of documents "which included a pay roster and many other documents." Lieutenant Colonel van den Berg wrote that all of this was turned over to intelligence personnel and may have been the source of information for the National Police arrest of the 64 members of the VC Hoi An infrastructure. LtCol Oliver W. van den Berg, Jr., Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

both the Que Son Valley and the Da Nang TAOR. Allied commanders also learned that the North Vietnamese established a new headquarters in the Quang Da Special Zone in Quang Nam Province called *Group 44*. Commanded by North Vietnamese Army Senior Colonel Vo Thu, the former commander of the *3d NVA Division*, *Group 44* located its headquarters in the mountains of Dai Loc District, about 24 miles southwest of Da Nang. According to a captured enemy officer, the new command was a subordinate or forward headquarters of *Military Region 5* and now controlled all independent enemy regiments, battalions, and separate units in the Quang Nam sector.[8]

Since September 1967, III MAF suspected that the enemy planned a large-scale offensive in the Da Nang area. At that time, according to U.S. intelligence officers, "a very reliable source" reported detailed enemy plans for Quang Nam Province with "Da Nang as the ultimate object." The appearance of new units including the enemy *31st NVA Regiment* in southwestern Quang Nam and the establishment of *Group 44* tended to corroborate the first report. In early December, the allies uncovered further evidence that the *2d NVA Division* was about to escalate its operations in the Que Son sector and reinforce the independent units and local forces in Quang Nam Province.[9]

On 5 December, helicopters and troops of the U.S. 3d Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry Division under the operational control of the Americal Division in Operation Wheeler/Wallowa killed 17 North Vietnamese troops in a skirmish on a ridgeline north of the town of Que Son. In an examination of the enemy bodies, the Americans discovered four were dressed in American camouflaged fatigues while the remaining dead wore North Vietnamese uniforms. Four of the North Vietnamese were officers, including the political officer of the *2d NVA Division*. Among the various documents strewn about were several notebooks and various American maps. In a notebook marked "Absolutely Secret," American intelligence analysts found a plan for a division-size assault against American fire bases in the Que Son Valley, complete with sketches of the targeted sites. The general attack would involve all three regiments of the *2d NVA* and would be coordinated with smaller diversionary attacks against district capitals controlled by *Group 44*. The diversions included a rocket bombardment of the large Da Nang Airbase.[10]

Lieutenant Colonel John F. J. Kelly, a member of the III MAF staff, recalled that all of this intelligence began to fit a pattern. According to Kelly, the

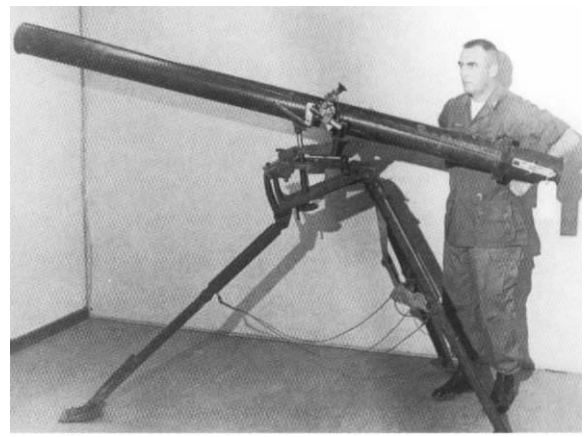


Photo courtesy of LtCol John F. J. Kelly, USMC (Ret)

LtCol John F. J. Kelly is pictured with a captured NVA 122mm rocket launcher which had a range of about 12,000 meters. According to LtCol Kelly, this was the first 122mm launcher captured by Marine forces, a direct result of Operation Claxon in December 1967 to lure enemy units into a premature attack on Da Nang.

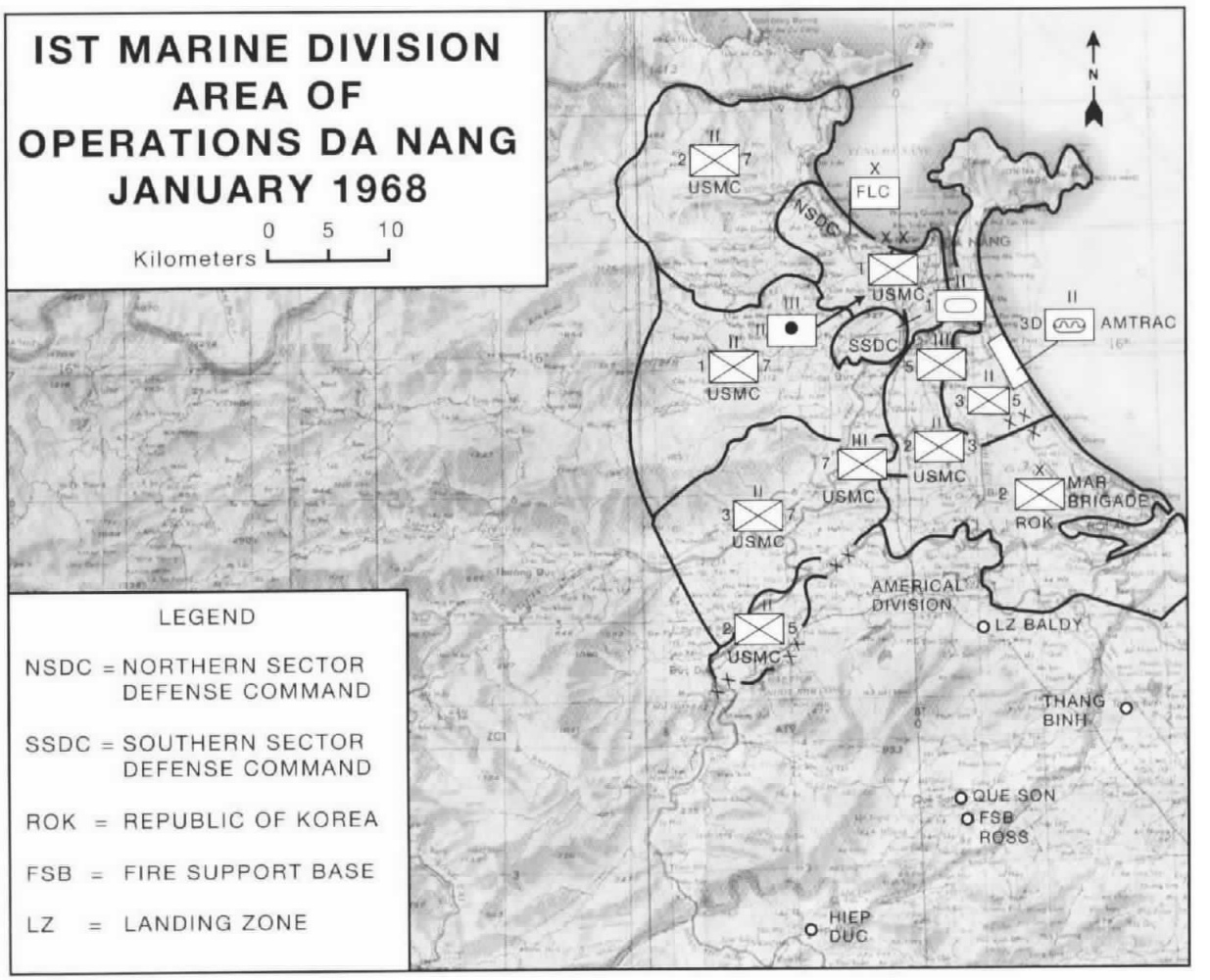
Marine command had "very precise information of his [the enemy] plans in the Da Nang TAOR" and called several commanders' conferences to determine how best to deflect the Communist intents. According to the enemy documents recovered by the 1st Cavalry Division brigade, the enemy was to begin his offensive on 23 December. Lieutenant Colonel Kelly later related that III MAF hoped to confound the enemy by triggering his attack prematurely. In an operation codenamed Claxon, the Marines set off explosive charges throughout the Da Nang TAOR that they wanted the VC forces to mistake for the signal to start the offensive. The enemy refused to take the bait, however, and the *2d NVA Division*, on the 23d, also failed to attack the 3d Brigade's fire bases in the Wheeler/Wallowa sector. In the Que Son Valley, American intelligence officers concluded that the loss of the documents may have caused the NVA to believe their plans were compromised and to postpone, if not cancel, the attacks against the Army's 3d Brigade. At Da Nang, however, III MAF still expected some sort of offensive against the populated centers in the TAOR.[11*]

*Lieutenant Colonel Kelly observed that although the attack failed to materialize, some enemy rocket troops failed to get the word and "tried to rush forward to firing sites . . . ." They were intercepted by Marines and "the first enemy 122mm launcher was captured." LtCol John F. J. Kelly, Comments on draft, dtd 13Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

The Da Nang TAOR

In January 1968 at Da Nang, the 1st Marine Division commander, Major General Donn J. Robertson, had only two of his three infantry regiments, the 5th and 7th Marines, under his operational control. A tall, courtly officer who had a varied Marine Corps career ranging from an infantry battalion commander on Iwo Jima, where he earned the Navy Cross, to Deputy for Fiscal Matters at Marine Corps Headquarters, General Robertson took over the division the previous June. Now, with the pending additional responsibility for the Phu Bai sector and the anticipated departure of the 5th Marines from Da Nang to Phu Bai, Robertson assumed an even more onerous burden. The previous record of the Korean brigade provided little promise that it would fill the holes in the Da Nang defenses when the 5th Marines relocated to Phu Bai. Thus, at Da Nang, the division entered the new year with an expanding mission and diminishing forces with the probability of encountering an even stronger enemy.[12]

The Da Nang tactical area of responsibility (TAOR) stretched from the Hai Van Pass in the north to the Quang Nam-Quang Tin border to the south. From east to west the TAOR extended from the coast to the Annamite Mountain chain. Consisting of 1,048 square miles, the area contained a population of some 812,000 persons, not including the city of Da Nang. Several large waterways, the Cau Do, the Vinh Dien, the Yen, the Thu Bon, the Thanh Quit, the Ky Lam, the Dien Ban among them, traversed the coastal plain south of Da Nang and spilled into the South China Sea, often changing their name along the way. With the resulting rich soil deposits, the Da Nang region was one of the major rice producing areas in South Vietnam, second only to the Mekong Delta.





Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A801132

An aerial view of the Marble Mountain Air Facility and base on Tiensha Peninsula across the river from the main airbase at Da Nang, which can be seen vaguely in the background to the right. Marble Mountain was home to the helicopters of Marine aircraft group based there.

In order to secure the approaches to the city and the nearby Da Nang Airbase, the 1st Marine Division had divided the sector into several defensive zones and tactical areas of operation. The city itself, the Da Nang Airbase, and the Marble Mountain helicopter facility on the Tiensha Peninsula across the Han River from Da Nang and the main air base constituted the Da Nang Vital Area. In the immediate area west of the city and the airbase, the Marines had established two defensive command sectors, the northern and southern. Under the operational control of the 11th Marines, the division artillery regiment, the Northern Sector Defense Command (NSDC), composed of troops from various headquarters and support units, encompassed the division command post on Hill 327 (called Division Ridge), the northern artillery cantonment, and the Force Logistic Command on Red Beach. Bounded by the Cu De River on the north and the Southern Sector Defense Command (SSDC) on the south, a distance of some 10 kilometers, the northern sector command in cooperation with its tenant units manned the fixed defenses and ran patrols in the surrounding paddies, scrub brush, and low-lying hills to the west. Similarly, the Southern Sector Defense Command, under the operational control of the 1st Tank Battalion, covered the southern and southwestern

approaches to the Da Nang Airbase and protected the vital bridges across the Cau Do and Tuy Loan Rivers, south of the airbase.*

The two Marine infantry regiments, the 5th and 7th Marines, and the 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion were responsible for the protection of the regions south of the Cau Do and north of the Cu De Rivers. On the division left, or most eastern sector, the amphibian tractor battalion patrolled the sand flats along the coast south of the Marble Mountain facility. South and west of the "amtrackers" and north of the Thanh Quit River, the 5th Marines with two battalions, the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines and the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, maintained its area of operations. With the north-south railroad track serving as the boundary between the two regiments, the 7th Marines with all three of its battalions provided the shield in the western and northern reaches of the division area of operations. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, under the direct control of the division, operated in the An Hoa sector, located in the southwest corner of the division TAOR south of the Thu Bon River. To the east of the 7th Marines and south of the 5th Marines, the Korean Marine Brigade began its deployment into the Dai Loc corridor between the Thanh Quit and the Ky Lam.

With the introduction of enemy long-range 140mm and 122mm rockets in February and June respectively of the previous year against the Da Nang base, the Marine division took several countermeasures. It established a rocket belt that extended 8,000 to 12,000 meters out from the Da Nang Vital Area, the effective range of the enemy rockets. Within this circumference, the 11th Marines instituted a central control system which included the coverage by two artillery firing batteries of each part of the Da Nang TAOR and the strategic placement of artillery observation posts in the rocket belt. The infantry intensified its patrols and allied aircraft increased their observation flights into and over the approaches towards the most likely rocket-firing positions. At the same time, the Marines imposed an 1800 to 0600 daily curfew on river and other waterway traffic in the rocket belt area. Division psychological operations teams, moreover, developed an extensive campaign among the local villagers including money awards for information on the enemy rockets.[13**]

Despite all these efforts, the NVA rocket threat remained real. Unlike tube artillery, the rockets did not require a great deal of maintenance and they could be man-packed through the difficult terrain of western Quang Nam. Rocket launchers were considerably smaller than howitzers of a comparable caliber, and were thus much easier to conceal from U.S. air observers or reconnaissance patrols. Although mortars shared with rockets these traits of ease of maintenance, transportation, and concealment, the rockets had much greater range: the 122mm rocket could fire 12,000 meters, while the 140mm variety had a range of 8,900 meters. The 120mm mortar, on the other hand, could fire only 5,700 meters. Well-trained crews could assemble, aim, and launch their rockets in less than 30 minutes. In one attack on the Da Nang airfield, six enemy rocket teams fired 50 rounds within five minutes. With a few glaring exceptions, most of the enemy rocket attacks resulted in relatively little damage and few casualties. As Major General Raymond L. Murray, the deputy III MAF commander, observed, however, "it [the enemy rocket capability] was constantly on everyone's mind . . . ." With a relatively minor investment in men and

*Lieutenant Colonel Vincent J. Gentile, who commanded the 1st Tank Battalion at the time, recalled that most of his tank units were under the operational control of various infantry units. As commander of the Southern Sector, he controlled "a group of support unit headquarters elements south of Da Nang." As he remembered, "my impression is that we had more alerts than significant enemy activity in the SSDC." LtCol Vincent J. Gentile, Comments on draft, dtd 25Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Colonel John F. Barr, who served with the 11th Marines and the 1st Field Artillery Group in 1967–68, observed that "rockets are still the least expensive and most effective indirect fire weapon that a non-industrial society can use." He stated that to counter the threat, the 1st Marine Division established "an ad hoc 'Rocket investigation Team,'" to gather intelligence on enemy rocket tactics. This team consisted of a representative of the G–2 or intelligence section, an artillery officer, a demolition man, a photographer, and a security team provided by the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion. At first light, after a rocket was launched, the team would embark in a helicopter and would locate the firing site from the air using coordinates provided by the 11th Marines. The team would then land and "explore the site in detail." It would blow any rockets left behind in place and take back any intelligence it was able to garner about rocket tactics and firing sites. By various countermeasures, the Marines reduced the amount of time that the enemy gunners had to mount their attack. Colonel Barr commented that by late 1967, "every gun in the 11th Marine Regiment, when not engaged in firing was pointed at a possible rocket firing site . . . . The idea was to get as many rounds in the air as soon as possible in order to disrupt rocket firing in progress." Using a combination of visual sightings and sound azimuths, the Marine gunners would try to identify "approximate site locations through map triangulation. " Col John F. Barr, Comments on draft, dtd 26Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).

equipment, the NVA could keep an entire Marine division occupied.[14]*

For the most part, the 1st Marine Division war in the Da Nang TAOR was a small-unit war. The nature of the war and the terrain in the area were such that the most effective form of military action was usually the small-unit patrol or ambush, carried out by a squad or fire team. As a consequence, in 1967, more than 50 percent of division casualties resulted from enemy mines and boobytraps, officially called surprise firing devices (SFD). General Robertson, the division commander, called it a "vicious" type of combat which inflicted the most cruel type of wounds, ranging from blindness to multiple loss of limbs. The enemy exploited anything on hand to make these devices, from discarded ration cans to spent artillery shells, "any time they could get powder, they used it." Operating against an unknown and often unseen enemy in an unfamiliar environment among largely a hostile or at best neutral rural populace, the Marines of the 1st Division fought an unspectacular and difficult war. As Lieutenant General Cushman, the III MAF commander, commented, the Marines at Da Nang "had a lot of slogging to do, a lot of patrolling to do . . . And their casualties from mines were considerable as a result."[15]

Through 1967, the enemy in the Da Nang area of operations consisted for the most part of the VC infrastructure and the local guerrillas in the surrounding villages and hamlets. There was no clear distinction between friend and foe. The innocent appearing farmer in his field, or his wife or child for that matter, could easily be a VC agent or even terrorist. According to Marine estimates at the beginning of 1968, enemy irregular or local force strength in the Da Nang area was about 17,500, but only 4,000 of this number were "full-time guerrillas." The remaining members of the irregular classification belonged to either Communist local "Self-Defense or Secret Self-Defense forces." For the Marine on patrol, however, it made little difference if the enemy who shot or threw a grenade at him was a full-time guerrilla or belonged to the local defense forces. Too often the results were the same.[16]

Operation Auburn: Searching the Go Noi

The appearance of the North Vietnamese units near Da Nang and the formation of *Group 44* added another dimension to the danger that the enemy posed to the airbase and the city of Da Nang. Marine intelligence suspected and later confirmed that the North Vietnamese *31st Regiment*, also known as the *Red River Regiment*, with all three battalions, had moved in December into the Dai Loc sector in the southwestern reaches of the Da Nang TAOR. Although the *2d NVA Division* with its three regiments continued to challenge the U.S. 1st Air Cavalry's 3d Brigade in the Que Son Valley, it had the potential to move north through the Que Sons to reinforce the enemy forces in the Da Nang area of operations. The *NVA 368B Artillery Regiment*, consisting of four independent battalions and five independent companies, armed with the 122mm and 140mm rockets, presumably operating from secret bases in "Happy Valley," some 15 miles southwest of Da Nang, in the far western confines of the division operating area, remained a constant irritant to the Marine defenders. Even with the greater strength of the Communist forces around Da Nang, General Robertson, the 1st Marine Division commander, later maintained: "Ours was a small war, and divisions aren't small, even NVA divisions, but I never had the feeling that we were going to get pushed around or pushed out."[17]**

At the same time, however, the VC local force battalions in the Da Nang area also became more active. Two enemy local battalions, the *V–25th* and the *R–20th*, had long operated in the Da Nang area. In fact, the *R–20* or *Doc Lap Battalion*, as early as September, 1965, launched one of the first enemy attacks against a Marine battalion command post on Hill 22 near the Yen River. By December 1967, agent reports located both battalions on the so-called Go Noi Island, about 25 kilometers south of the airbase near the demarcation between the Marine division and the Americal Division. According to Marine intelligence officers, the enemy in the Da Nang sector during early 1968 would continue to harass the South Vietnamese Revolutionary Development program in the Da Nang

*Colonel William J. Davis, who commanded the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines at this time, observed that the 122mm rocket was most accurate when fired with a tripod and launcher, but that the VC had fired both weapons without tripod or launcher by leaning them against inclined dirt banks, facing the airbase, and then set off. Col W. J. Davis, *Tet Marine, An Autobiography* (San Diego, CA, 1987), pp. 42–48, Encl to Col William J. Davis, Comments on draft, dtd 2Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Davis, *Tet Marine*.

**Brigadier General Paul G. Graham, who was the 1st Marine Division operations officer or G–3 during this period, reiterated in his comments that the war around Da Nang "was strictly a guerrilla war" and that enemy activity "was invariably hit and run tactics by small ambush or rocket firing units." BGen Paul G. Graham, Comments on draft, dtd 20Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Graham Comments.

sector, would conduct attacks by fire including rockets at U.S. and South Vietnamese major installations, and possibly would strike against isolated friendly forces and installations.[18]

In order to preempt any such concentration of the enemy local and main force units, the 5th Marines at the end of December initiated a spoiling action, code-named Operation Auburn, on Go Noi Island. Located 10 kilometers inland from the South China Sea, the Go Noi is not a true island, but is simply an area bounded on all sides by rivers. Irregularly shaped by the meandering of the Ky Lam, the Thu Bon, the Ba Ren, the Dien Ban, and the Cau Lau rivers, the "island" is 12 kilometers long and 4 kilometers wide with generally flat terrain that gradually slopes upward towards the western end. A few streams and canals cut across the low-lying land and the remains of the wrecked National Railroad tracks (known to the Marines as the "B&O") bisected the island. A number of small hamlets and villages dotted the area, mostly inhabited by women and children, the men having gone to war, either for the government or for the Communists. Hedges and bamboo thickets literally formed walls around these rural communities. The terrain between the hamlets varied, and included untended rice paddies overgrown with vegetation, open sandy areas, high elephant grass, and cemeteries with tall grave mounds. Most of the hamlets contained "a network of drainage ditches" to carry off the surplus waters. These ditches, as one Marine battalion commander observed, "provided superb, ready-made fighting trenches," for any VC "fighting a maneuver defense." With rules of engagement that limited the use of supporting arms in populated areas, any Marine penetration of the Go Noi "presented commanders with extremely difficult decisions."[19]

The preparations to move into the Go Noi began on Christmas Day, 1967. At that time, Colonel Robert D. Bohn, the 5th Marines commander, issued his "Frag Order" detailing the participating units and the concept of operations for Auburn. The Marine initial forces were to consist of four infantry companies, two from the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, one from the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, and one from the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines. Another company from the 3d Battalion was to be in reserve. Lieutenant Colonel William K. Rockey, the commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, would command the forces in the field and assume operational control of the other infantry companies. The 11th Marines provided general artillery support with one battalion, the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines in direct support. Marine helicopters from MAG–16 would bring the assault forces into the landing zones and Marine helicopter gunships and fixed-wing aircraft from both Da Nang and Chu Lai would fly landing-zone-preparation and close air support missions.[20]

Auburn was to be part of a larger operation involving both the ARVN Quang Da Special Zone command and the Americal Division. The Marine units were to establish blocking positions along the abandoned railroad track. After the Marines were in position, three ARVN battalions starting from Route 1 would then attack from east to west along Route 537, pushing any enemy units into the Marines. Further south, the 1st Air Cavalry's 3d Brigade in Operation Wheeler/Wallowa would position two companies from its 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry to close any avenue of escape in that direction and also to prevent the enemy from reinforcing his forces in the Go Noi. Operation Auburn was slated to begin at 0900 on 28 December when Marine helicopters were to bring Company E, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines into Landing Zone Hawk, an abandoned dried-up rice paddy, just east of the railroad and about a 1,000 meters south of the Ky Lam River.[21]

After an hour landing zone preparation bombardment by both Marine air and artillery, at 0904, four minutes later than the designated "L–Hour," the first wave of MAG–16 helicopters dropped down into Landing Zone Hawk. The troops of the lead assault company, Company E, 3d Marines, commanded by Australian Army Captain Ian J. Cahill, an eight-year veteran and an exchange officer serving with the Marines, referred to themselves as the "Diggers" after the popular nickname for Australian soldiers. Greeted by desultory enemy rifle and automatic weapons fire, the "Diggers" of Company E quickly secured the landing zone but failed to silence the enemy snipers and gunners. At 0940, the forward elements of the company attempted to advance toward its first objective, a deserted hamlet in the Bao An Dong village complex, just to the southwest of LZ Hawk. Forced to pull back in the face of heavy Communist small arms fire, Captain Cahill called for an airstrike. Following the strike, succeeding waves of Marine CH–46 Sea Knight helicopters brought in the remaining elements of Company E and Company I, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, and Lieutenant Colonel Rockey's command group into the landing zone. According to Lieutenant Colonel Rockey, the enemy fire forced the Marines to move the landing zone progressively westward, "with each helicopter wave landing a little farther west than the last wave."[22]



Abel Collection Photos

Marines from Company I, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines take part in Operation Auburn in the Go Noi Island sector south of Da Nang. In the top photo, PFC Richard C. Spaniel, wearing "In God We Trust" on his helmet, peers cautiously through thick brush for signs of enemy troops. Below, two other Marines from Company I watch an airstrike on enemy positions to their front in the same operation.



With both Marine companies and the battalion command group in the landing zone by 1130, the Marines again tried to take their first two objectives. Company I secured its objective, an abandoned hamlet to the immediate front without encountering any serious resistance. In the second objective, the same hamlet Cahill's Company E had tried to take earlier, the Marine company was again in trouble. The seemingly innocent empty "ville" was in actuality heavily fortified with interconnecting trenches and fighting holes that provided the Communists with fixed fields of fire. In a sudden ambush, the enemy killed five Marines of Company E and wounded another nine. As the "Diggers" literally dug in and fought for their lives, Lieutenant Colonel Rockey ordered Company I to move to the flank of Company E. Taking advantage of the cover afforded by the tall elephant grass that had overgrown the uncultivated paddy field and five-foot-high burial mounds,* other Communist troops prevented the Company I Marines from reaching the embattled company.[23]

At this point, with both of his forward companies unable to maneuver, Lieutenant Colonel Rockey asked for his reserve or "Bald Eagle" company, Company M, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines. Concurrently, he again called for both artillery and fixed-wing support. During the day, Marine fixed-wing and helicopter gunship aircraft flew close to 50 missions in support of the Marine battalion. Many of the 11th Marines artillery rounds fell dangerously close to the Company E positions, with shell fragments wounding several Marines. According to the battalion commander, "this was a calculated risk dictated by the situation." Lieutenant Colonel Rockey was more disturbed about the numerous "check fires" placed on the artillery whenever an aircraft left the runway at Da Nang and maintained until the plane returned. He later wrote in his after action report: "unnecessary check fires imposed on direct support artillery on D–Day was and is a matter of great concern. Vitally required fire support was needlessly withheld from the Battalion because of this imposition."[24]

At 1530, CH–46s from HMM–265 brought in Company M into Landing Zone Hawk. As in the arrival of the other two companies, enemy gunners took the hovering aircraft and disembarking troops under fire. Company M Marine Private First Class Jesse T. Lucero, on the lead helicopter, recalled that as he jumped out an enemy sniper round struck his helmet: "I got a little dizzy and sagged, but another Marine helped me up and I ran across the rice paddy as fast as my feet could carry me." The lead elements then cleared a treeline and secured the landing zone. Together with the battalion command group, Company M moved forward to relieve Company E.[25]

In the hamlet, after the initial shock of combat, and with the support of air and artillery, the Marines of Company E held their own. Able to get in closer and more accurately than both fixed-wing aircraft and the artillery, UH–1E gunships from VMO–2 provided several strafing runs that prevented the enemy troops from overrunning the company's positions.** For example, one Huey aircraft spent five hours in support of the Marine infantrymen. Its machine gunner, Lance Corporal Stephen R. Parsons, earned the nickname of "Sureshot." Credited with killing 15 enemy, Parsons later stated, "I knew I got at least seven." The aircraft itself sustained four hits and Parsons was wounded in the face. An enemy .30-caliber bullet had "entered his left cheek and exited at the roof of his mouth without breaking a tooth." About 1700, an air observer counted in front of the Company E positions 32 NVA dead, mostly clad "in green utilities."[26]

About an hour later, under covering fire from the other two Marine companies, Company E pulled back a few hundred meters to the positions of Company M. Collocated with the battalion command group just forward of Landing Zone Hawk, both Companies E and M established their night defenses. Only about 200 meters separated the two companies from Company I. Unable to reach its dead, Company E in its withdrawal had left the bodies of nine Marines in the hamlet. All told, the

*Lieutenant Colonel Gene W. Bowers, who at the time served as the S–3 or operations officers of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, remarked that these "graves were much bigger and higher than traditional Vietnamese graves, as they had to be built up to accommodate the very high water table." He remembered that the enemy troops "had dug into the graves, evicting the previous occupants, and converted them into mutually supporting bunkers which were seemingly impervious to horizontal small arms fire." LtCol Gene W. Bowers, Comments on draft, dtd 30May95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Bowers Comments.

**Lieutenant Colonel Bowers recalled after talking with Captain Cahill on the radio about the graveyard bunkers: "I instructed the gunships to shoot their door-mounted machine guns straight down into the grave mounds to achieve penetration." He credits this tactic with reducing the effectiveness of the enemy fire. Bowers Comments.

3d Battalion sustained casualties of 19 dead and 25 wounded.[27]

Not sure about the size and composition of the enemy forces, Colonel Bohn, the 5th Marines commander, that night secured permission to expand the operation. He obtained operational control from General Robertson of a command group from the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. Bohn ordered Lieutenant Colonel Robert J. McNaughton, the battalion commander of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, to resume command of his Companies E and G, which were already in helicopter staging areas for Operation Auburn, and reinforce the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines in LZ Hawk. At the same time, Bohn and a 5th Marines command group would also move to LZ Hawk to assume overall direction of the now two-battalion Operation Auburn.[28]

Marine intelligence officers believed that a North Vietnamese Battalion had reinforced the local VC battalions in the Go Noi. A III MAF intelligence estimate showed the battalion, possibly the *190th NVA*, also known as the *311th NVA* or *Quang Da Battalion,* had infiltrated into central I Corps from North Vietnam the previous April and was equipped with crew-served weapons.[29]

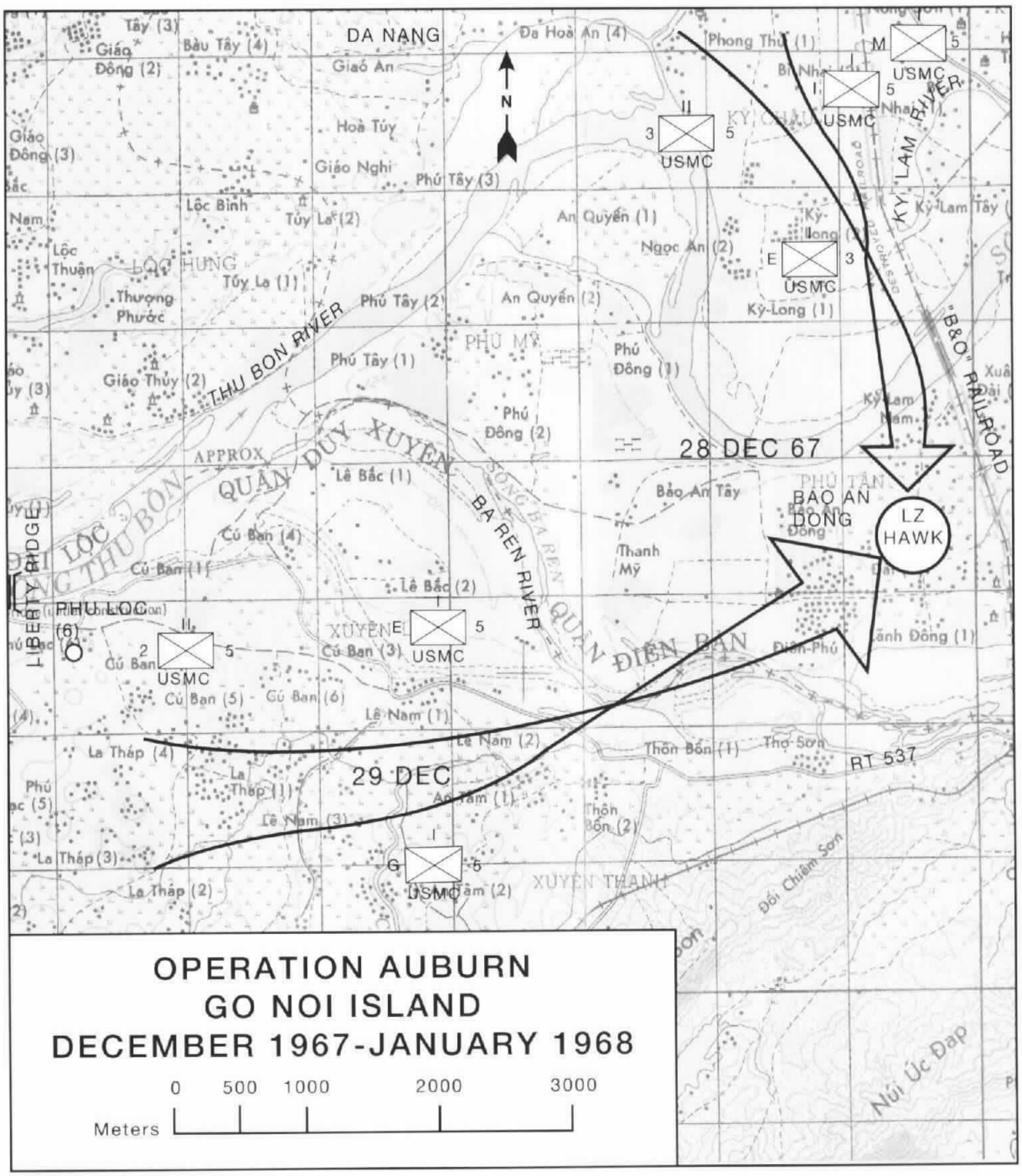
According to the Marine plan, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines with two of its companies was to land in LZ Hawk on the morning of 29 December, followed by the 5th Marines command group. In the meantime, the three companies already in Auburn would secure Objective 1, the abandoned hamlet that Company I had seized the previous day before moving to assist Company E. After the 3d Battalion had accomplished its mission and provided flank protection, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines would attack towards the Bao An Dong hamlet where Company E, 3d Marines had engaged the enemy on the first day.[30]

The operation on the 29th went much as planned with relatively light resistance from the enemy. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines seized its objective without opposition. After its arrival in Landing Zone Hawk, shortly after 1000, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines advanced with its Company E in the lead and Company G on the right flank and slightly in trace. An enemy rear guard of about 20 men in well-camouflaged fighting holes fought the Marines at the edge of the hamlet, but immediately disengaged 10 minutes later after Marine air and artillery pounded the enemy positions. In his account of Operation Auburn, the 2d Battalion commander observed that "realizing that fortified villages would be encountered, artillery and fixed wing air strikes were used to the maximum. Key to the success of the supporting arms was the unit commanders' ability to move under the outstanding coverage provided."[31]

Shortly after noon, the two Marine companies began their search of the hamlet. They detained two suspicious Vietnamese clad in the usual black pajamas and recovered the bodies of the nine Marines killed in the earlier fighting. About 1330, as the battalion command group approached, VC snipers once more opened up on the American troops, wounding one Marine. The Marines returned the fire and searched the suspected area, but the enemy had departed. After another reconnaissance of the hamlet with no further evidence of the enemy, the battalion returned to Landing Zone Hawk. The results of the day's action for the battalion were two VC suspects and an estimated six enemy dead, at a cost of two Marine wounded and evacuated.[32*]

At this juncture, Colonel Bohn expected the operation to come to an end. The South Vietnamese had encountered few enemy forces in their sector and wanted to release their units. General Robertson, the 1st Marine Division commander, had already informed III MAF and the 5th Marines commanders that he intended "to terminate" Auburn at noon on the 30th "barring any unforseen developments." New information, however, caused Robertson to change his mind. About 1000 on the 30th, he radioed Colonel Bohn, "Operation Auburn will continue on reduced scale until further notice." General Robertson declared that "intelligence indicates continuing enemy presence in northwest Auburn AO [area of operations]." The mes-

*Colonel Rockey, the 3d Battalion commander, recalled that he a few days later received a message about an article in the *Washington Star* newspaper on 31 December 1967 about the operation in the Go Noi. The reporter described the desolation of the hamlets destroyed by air and supporting arms. The article mentioned "little fires were still burning" and Marines yelling at old women and children coming out of their shelters. It quoted one Marine saying "we should have killed them all." The article does admit, however, that the Marines had "temporarily driven out the enemy including one Main Force VC and one North Vietnamese battalion, but not certain what else they had accomplished." According to Colonel Rockey, the message originated in Washington and that he had about 30 minutes to get an answer back to headquarters about the accuracy of the article: "Mind you, this was in the middle of the night, in the field, during actual action against the enemy." Col William K. Rockey, Comments on draft, dtd 4Mar95 and attached msg, n.d., reference to 31Dec67, *Washington Star*. Lieutenant Colonel Bowers recalled that the search of the hamlet uncovered an underground storage area containing medical supplies, rifles, and rice. Bowers Comments.


DA NANG
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28 DEC 67
29 DEC
LZ HAWK
BAO AN DONG
PHU LOC
LIBERTY BRIDGE
THU BON RIVER
BA REN RIVER
LAM RIVER
"B&O" RAILROAD
RT 537
QUẢN DUY XUYÊN
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sage did not reveal whether the suspected enemy was the *190th Battalion* or another enemy force. Colonel Bohn in his implementing order only stated "high order intelligence indicates very important enemy unit between Liberty Bridge* and present Auburn AO."[33]

Despite the indication of new intelligence, the remainder of the operation was to be a fruitless search for the phantom unit. On the 31st, both Lieutenant Colonel McNaughton, the 2d Battalion commander, and Colonel Bohn, the regimental commander, returned to their respective command posts leaving Lieutenant Colonel Rockey, the 3d Battalion commander, solely responsible for the operation. Rockey retained both the 2d Battalion's Company E and G, as well as Company E, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines and Company M of his own battalion in the next phase of the operation. For the next four days, the four companies encountered only scattered sniper fire and grenades as they extended the Auburn area of operations to the west. By 3 January 1968, the battalion reached the hamlet of Phu Loc 6, about 7,500 meters west of the "B&O," and just south of Liberty Bridge. Companies E and G, 5th Marines reverted to 2d Battalion control and Company E, 3d Marines departed Auburn for its original area of operations. At 1725 on that date, Lieutenant Colonel Rockey closed out the operation and his forward command group and Company M clambered on board trucks for the return trip to the battalion command post.[34]

For the entire operation, the two Marine battalions sustained casualties of 23 killed in action and over 60 wounded and, according to Marine body count, killed 37 of the enemy. With the exception of four of the Marines and five of the enemy, the deaths in Auburn occurred on the first day of the operation. The action on the 28th also accounted for nearly half of the Marine wounded. In the remaining six days of the operation, enemy snipers, a casually thrown grenade, and the ever-present "surprise firing device" were responsible for the remaining Marine casualties.[35]

Although Lieutenant Colonel Rockey's battalion in the extended phase of Operation Auburn met no significant enemy force, he observed "large enemy forces could evade our search and destroy efforts, concealed in the vast expanses of elephant grass in some cases reaching 12 feet in height." Rockey believed that given the abundant "luxuriant natural cover and concealment" available to the enemy and the extensive area covered, the Marines required a larger force to conduct the operation. No allied order of battle in early 1968 showed the *190th NVA Battalion* in the Da Nang area of operations. Intelligence would indicate that the *Group 44* headquarters later moved into Go Noi Island. This may have been the basis for the information of the "very important enemy unit" that caused the continuation of the operation. In any event, the available evidence pointed to elements of the *V–25th* and the *R–20th* VC battalions being the only units engaged in Auburn.** Colonel Bohn several years later complained about the nature of intelligence available to the Marines: "The major frustration was too much general intelligence and no good tactical timely intelligence."[36]

A Busy Night at Da Nang

As Operation Auburn drew to a close, *Group 44* prepared another surprise for the Marines at Da Nang. On the night of 2–3 January 1968, in an obviously coordinated series of ground and fire attacks, the VC struck at 7th Marines positions north of the Thu Bon, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines command post at An Hoa, and at Combined Action units and South Vietnamese District headquarters throughout the Da Nang area of operations. The Communists capped off their assaults with an early morning rocket barrage of the Da Nang airfield.

The enemy began the night's events about 2200 with several sniping and harassing fire incidents on Marine outposts throughout the Da Nang area of operations. About a half-hour later, some 15 Communist troops attacked the 7th Marines command post on Hill 55, the low-lying but dominant piece of terrain south of Da Nang, with automatic weapons, rifle fire, and antitank rocket propelled grenades (RPGs). They knocked out a security tower and wounded two Marines. The defending troops responded with small

* The bridge across the Ky Lam River connecting the An Hoa combat base to the 7th Marines area of operations.

** Lieutenant Colonel Bowers believed, however, that the Marines engaged an NVA unit rather than the *VC R–20 Battalion*. He felt that the tactics, uniforms, and "unusually fierce tenacity" were indicative of the NVA. According to Bowers, the designation was made the *R–20*, "by default, simply because we couldn't prove that any other unit was present." Bowers Comments. An Army historian, George L. MacGarrigle, suggested that perhaps the *190th NVA Battalion* "was the security force for *Front 44* [*Group 44*] also known as *Front 4*." George L. MacGarrigle, Historian, CMH, Comments on draft, dtd 5Dec94 (Vietnam Comment Files).

arms and 4.2-inch and 81mm mortars. Under illumination provided by a C–117 flareship, a small Marine reaction force tried to locate the attackers, but they had made good their escape.[37]

After a brief uneventful interlude, about 6,000 meters to the northwest of Hill 55, Communist gunners at 0045 3 January mortared the Hieu Duc District headquarters and the U.S. advisory compound located there. They then shelled the nearby 1st Battalion, 7th Marines command post on Hill 10. A Marine lookout in an observation tower spotted the mortar muzzle flashes and immediately radioed the coordinates to Battery G, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, also on Hill 10 and collocated with the infantry battalion command post. Although about 40 enemy rounds impacted near the Marine battery positions, all guns remained "up and firing." The Marine 105mm howitzers responded with counter-mortar fires reinforced by 81mm mortars and 106mm recoilless rifles and silenced the VC weapons.[38]

Fifteen minutes later, about 0100, U.S. advisors at the MACV compound at Hieu Duc reported that about 20 sappers armed with grenades and satchel charges had penetrated the perimeter. Lieutenant Colonel William J. Davis, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines commander whose area of operations included all of Hieu Duc District, remembered that the district's U.S. Army liaison officer radioed: "The VC are throughout our position; request assistance posthaste."[39] Davis ordered an infantry platoon accompanied by two supporting M48 tanks from the 1st Tank Battalion to go to the assistance of the advisors at the district headquarters, about 500 meters east of Hill 10. The tanks had barely departed the hill when an enemy rocket team, laying in ambush, fired nine RPG rounds into the two vehicles. Although still mobile and able to use their 90mm cannons and .50 caliber machine guns, both tanks sustained damage, one a jammed turret, and casualties. Four of the eight Marine crewmen were wounded. Covered by the infantry, the two vehicles pulled back to their former positions and another M48 lumbered forward. While also hit by an RPG round, the third tank followed by part of the Marine infantry platoon smashed through the enemy ambush site, killing one of the enemy gunners. The relief force reached the MACV compound at 0325 and the enemy, estimated at company size, began to disengage. After the breaking of the "siege," the Americans discovered four enemy dead on the defensive wire. There were no casualties among the U.S. advisors. The part of the reaction force that stayed behind in the ambush site was, however, not as fortunate. Enemy gunners mortared its positions which resulted in seven Marines wounded and one killed. Again counter-mortar fire quieted the enemy tubes.[40]

The Communists were up to more mischief. Turning their attention from Hieu Duc and the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, in the next hour, they hit several Combined Action platoon hamlets, the Dien Ban District headquarters, an outpost near the Ba Ren River, and the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines command post at An Hoa. The enemy limited most of these attacks to small-arms harassing fire and mortars. At An Hoa, the enemy fired eight satchel charges from a "tube-like device" near the airfield there. Two of the charges detonated in the air and the other six failed to explode. In somewhat of an understatement, the battalion commander observed in his monthly report, "Although ingenious, the crude mortars proved to have a high dud rate." More serious was the VC assault on the Combined Action Platoon S–1 located in the coastal village of Phuoc Trach, east of Hoi An. After first mortaring the platoon, an unknown number of enemy overran the compound. They destroyed the communication and ammunition bunkers. By the time a relief force consisting of three neighboring Popular Force platoons arrived on the scene after daybreak, the enemy had long gone. Casualties among the Marine and PF troops in the hamlet were heavy. All of the 14 Marines assigned to the Combined Action unit were either dead or wounded. The PFs sustained 19 killed and 12 wounded. Communist losses, if any, were unknown.[41*]

The Communist raiders were not finished for the night. About 0400, a Marine sentry from the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, manning a tower on Hill 10, noticed large flashes about 3,000 meters to the east near the Yen River and immediately sounded the rocket attack alarm. Within a 10-minute time span, nearly 50 122mm enemy rockets impacted on the main airbase. Responding almost immediately to the attack, a Marine M48 tank on Hill 43 in the Southern Defense Sector took the suspected launching site under fire. An Air Force Douglas AC–47 "Spooky" transport equipped with 7.62mm miniguns and floodlights "also opened up immediately and hit area while enemy

*The record shows that four Marines were killed in the action at Phuoc Trach, five wounded, and five listed as missing. Although not specifically mentioned in the report, it is assumed that the five missing Marines were killed and their bodies later recovered.



Photo is courtesy of Col John F. Barr, USMC (Ret)

MajGen Donn J. Robertson, CG, 1st MarDiv, is escorted by LtCol John F. Barr, the operations officer of the 11th Marines, the artillery regiment at Da Nang, as they visit one of the firing sites uncovered by Marines the morning after the rocket bombardment of the base. LtCol Barr is holding a M1 Carbine, "a non-T/O weapon," " that he took as" "an added precaution . . . for a dawn landing at the site."

was launching rockets." Marine 81mm mortars reinforced the M48's 90mm gun and 105mm howitzers from the 11th Marines delivered 620 rounds within two minutes on the enemy firing positions. Still the enemy rockets destroyed three American aircraft, one Marine F–4B and two Air Force prop-driven planes, and damaged 17 other aircraft. Due to cratering, the airbase had to close 3,000 feet of its east runway and 1,000 feet of the west runway until repairs could be made. Despite the barrage, casualties were low, only four Air Force personnel sustained minor wounds.[42]

The next morning, a reaction force from Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines uncovered about three large firing sites and found a total of 21 unfired 122mm rockets and 1 140mm rocket. Near the western bank of the Yen, the Marines came across "four enemy bodies clad in khaki and black uniforms." Marine intelligence officers later determined that the enemy rocketeers fired their missiles from three distinct battery positions "and a total of 18 individual rocket sites." It was obvious that the attack on the airbase was a major coordinated effort, probably carried out by elements of the *NVA 368B Artillery Regiment*, possibly reinforced by a new enemy unit in the sector, the *1st Battalion, 68th Artillery Regiment*. During the night, in addition to the rocket attack, *Group 44* units had initiated some 25 actions by fire often followed by an infantry ground assault in seven of the nine districts of Quang Nam Province.[43]

Continuing Heavy Fighting and Increasing Uncertainty

Despite all of the ado in the Da Nang sector including the rocket attack on the airbase, the main enemy thrust on the night of 2–3 January was further south in the Que Son Valley. Even with the compromise of his plans in December, North Vietnamese Army Major General Chu Huy Man, the commander of the enemy *Military Region 5* or *B–1 Front*, decided to proceed with the offensive against the 1st Air Cavalry 3d Brigade fire bases in the Wheeler/Wallowa operating area.* Man apparently received "explicit instructions from Hanoi" to send the entire *2d NVA Division* against the U.S. brigade's defenses in the Que Son sector. Having deferred the onset of the campaign, the enemy apparently hoped that they had lulled the Americans into a false sense of complacency. Furthermore, they obviously thought the *Group 44* activity at Da Nang on the night of 2–3 January would draw the American command's attention away from the Que Son Valley into the mistaken belief that the *2d NVA Division* had moved north and was about to attack the Marine base at Da Nang. The North Vietnamese commanders might have had another motivation, as well: "the helicopter killing zone in the valley's upper reaches was too tempting to abandon."[44]

Despite release to the news media by MACV about the capture of the North Vietnamese document, General Koster, the Americal Division commander, was not all that sure that the North Vietnamese had abandoned their original plan. With the *NVA 2d Division* maintaining radio silence with the beginning of the new year, Koster became even more suspicious about the enemy's intentions. On 2 January, he ordered Colonel Hubert S. Campbell, the commanding officer of the 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, who maintained his command post at Fire Base Ross near the town of Que Son, to search a few of the enemy attack assembly areas depicted on the NVA map.[45]

That afternoon, Company C, 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry encountered a large enemy force in a rice paddy about 5,000 meters southwest of Fire Base Ross. Company A, 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry reinforced Company C and 3d Brigade helicopter gunships provided air support for both companies. In the ensuing four and a half-hour fire fight that lasted

*Army historian George L. MacGarrigle believed that by Tet 1968, Man most likely was a lieutenant general, but observed that "it's difficult to determine what rank senior enemy generals held at any given time." MacGarrigle Comments.

until near dark when the enemy withdrew, the Cavalry troopers sustained casualties of three dead and five wounded and evacuated. They killed 39 North Vietnamese with the armed helicopters accounting for most of the enemy losses. The American troops also recovered several enemy weapons left behind by the retreating NVA and took two wounded prisoners. Under interrogation, the two captives related that they had recently infiltrated into their new sector through the mountains to the northwest together with about 1,000 other North Vietnamese troops. They stated that they had recently passed a rocket firing position with six 122mm rocket launchers and observed numerous antiaircraft emplacements. Upon learning this intelligence, Colonel Campbell placed his entire 3d Brigade on full alert.[46]

In the early hours of 3 January, shortly after the initial assaults in the Da Nang area, the *NVA 2d Division* struck, under the cover of darkness, four of the 3d Brigade's fire bases: Ross, Leslie, Colt, and Baldy. At Baldy, located about 15,000 meters northeast of Ross near Route 1, and Colt, about 10,000 meters east of Ross, the enemy limited himself to mortar attacks. The NVA division reserved its main efforts for Ross and Leslie, throwing the *3d* and *21st Regiments* against the two firebases. At Leslie, about 5,000 meters to the southwest of Ross, enemy infantry followed closely upon the initial mortar and rocket barrage. Although the North Vietnamese initially broke through the bunker line, the 1st Cavalry defenders threw back the enemy with heavy losses. At Ross, an even larger North Vietnamese force used "human wave" tactics. The men of the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry, however, on Ross, were ready. According to one account, Captain Charles A. Krohn, the battalion intelligence officer, had made an analysis of past NVA attacks and found a pattern. The NVA depended on the preparatory mortars and rockets to keep the defenders under cover with their heads down while enemy sappers cut the wire and cleared away obstacles. Krohn suggested that the 2d Battalion troopers attempt during the shelling to keep their eyes on the perimeter irrespective of the shelling and continue firing. Even with the implementation of the intelligence officer's recommendations, the defense of Ross was a near thing. At one point, 3d Brigade artillerymen on Ross lowered their guns and fired canister rounds directly into the attackers. By 0530, the fighting at Ross was over and the NVA withdrew, defeated. At both perimeters, the 1st Cavalry troopers counted a total of 331 NVA dead at a cost of 18 Americans KIA, 137 evacuated and wounded, and 3 missing in action.[47]

Further south, in the Que Son Valley, near Hiep Duc, an undermanned *1st VC Regiment*, the remaining infantry regiment of the *2d NVA Division*, hit a firebase of the Americal Division's 196th Light Infantry Brigade. Poorly coordinated with its forces badly dispersed, the enemy attack soon faltered. Colonel Louis Gelling, the 196th commander, formed the brigade into two task forces and rapidly took the initiative. By 9 January, the 196th had accounted for over 400 of the enemy.[48]

Although the 1st Cavalry troops on Leslie had repulsed the ground assault on their positions, the North Vietnamese continued to maintain pressure on the American fire base. NVA antiaircraft units had occupied the high ground overlooking Leslie and their guns made any resupply of the base an extremely hazardous venture. Colonel Campbell, the 3d Brigade commander, later recalled that Leslie "was not resupplied for a period of about nine days because of the ring of 12.7mm's [enemy antiair machine guns] around it." During what amounted to the siege of Fire Base Leslie, enemy gunners shot down 7 1st Air Cavalry helicopters and damaged 26 more seriously enough to put them temporarily out of commission.[49]

Despite the deteriorating weather which limited both fixed-wing and helicopter support, the 196th and the 3d Brigade carried the fight to the enemy. With preregistered points based on key terrain earmarked on the captured enemy map, Colonel Campbell's artillery placed heavy fires on suspected enemy positions. Preplanned B–52 strikes flying high above the clouds also rained down a devastating amount of explosives upon presumed NVA concentration areas. With this support, occasionally reinforced by Marine and Air Force tactical fixed-wing aircraft and Army gunships when the weather permitted, the Army infantry attempted to outmaneuver and close with the enemy. Gelling's 196th engaged in several night company-size fire fights, often in a driving rain storm. Both the 3d Brigade and the 196th took a heavy toll of the *2d NVA Division* in the Que Son Valley. By the time the fighting ended in mid-January, the Army brigades had killed more than a 1,000 enemy at a cost of about 100 American lives. Although still remaining in the field, the *2d NVA* suffered losses that impaired its future effectiveness.[50]

Phu Loc Operations

While the Army units turned back the *2d NVA Division* offensive in the Que Son Valley, North Vietnamese units in Phu Loc District, north of Da Nang and the Hai Van Pass, initiated a series of broad-based assaults on allied units in that sector. Their special targets were the Marine Combined Action units, especially CAPs H (Hotel) 5, 6, and 7, protecting Route 1, as it wended its way through the mountains between Da Nang and Phu Loc District Town. The enemy obviously realized that cutting Route 1 here where it was vulnerable reduced the capability of the allied forces to reinforce and resupply their forces to the north.*

To safeguard this important north-south link between Da Nang and Marine forces in Thua Thien Province, III MAF had reinforced the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines at Phu Bai with the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver W. van den Berg. On 26 December, while remaining under the operational control of the 5th Marines at Da Nang, Lieutenant Colonel van den Berg officially assumed from the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines at Phu Bai responsibility for the Phu Loc TAOR extending from Hai Van Pass in the south to the Truoi River to the northwest. Route 1 bisected the area of operations southeast to northwest. The terrain consisted of a narrow coastal lowland east of Route 1, a high, jungled piedmont south and west of Route 1, and the Annamite Mountain Range to the west. Bach Ma Mountain rising above 1,400 meters in height and located about 8,000 meters south of Phu Loc District Town dominated the western and southern area of operations. A large inland bay, Dam Cau Hai, rimmed the northern edge of the battalion's sector. Most of the population was confined to a few fishing villages along the coast and farming communities that lay on either side of Route 1 and in the small river valleys in the district.

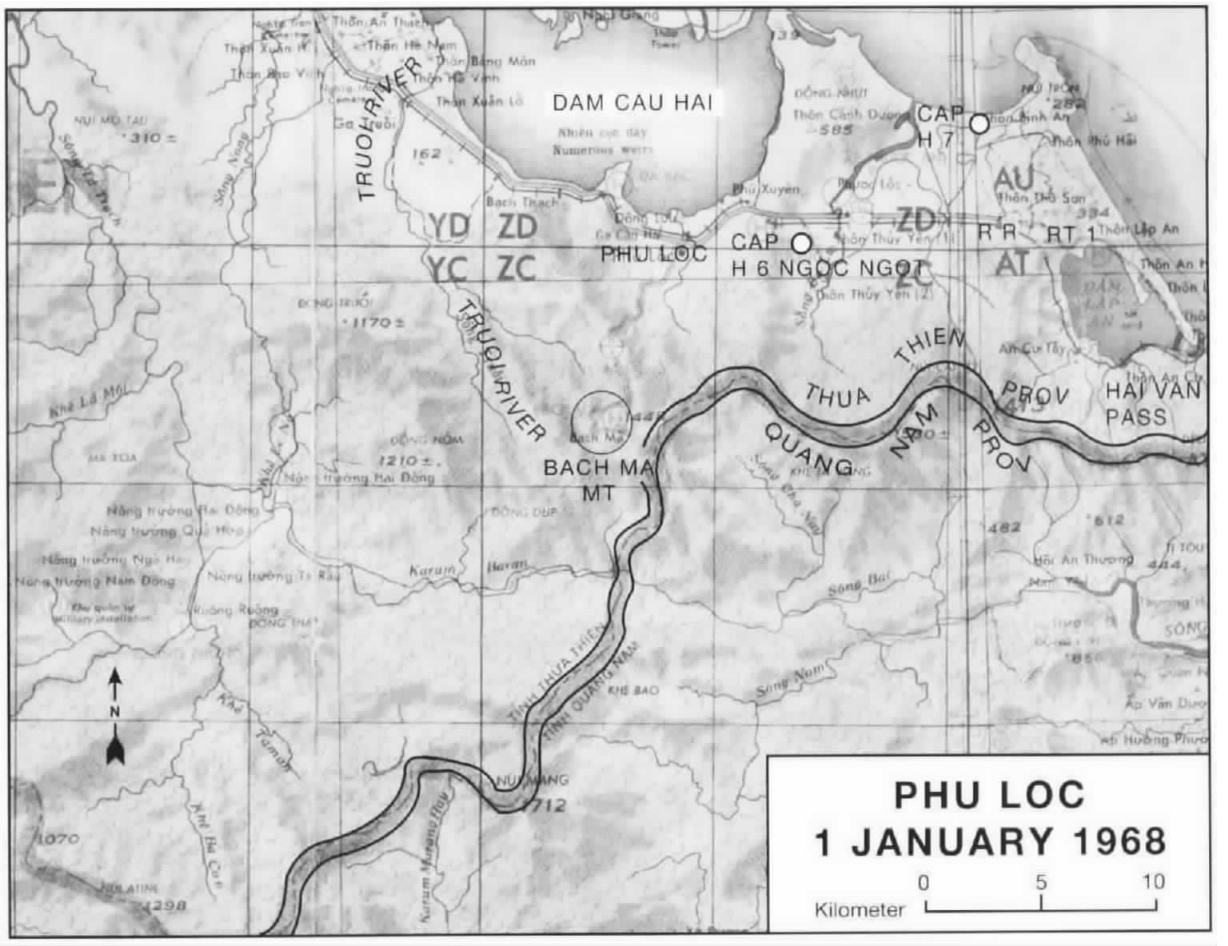
Lieutenant Colonel van den Berg established his command post just south of the town of Phu Loc. Of the battalion's four infantry companies, three deployed in or around the battalion assembly area. The fourth, Company D, established its base area about 15,000 meters to the east of the rest of the battalion and about 10,000 meters north of the Hai Van Pass. The 1st Division attached two artillery batteries from the 11th Marines to Lieutenant Colonel van den Berg's command. Battery D, 1st Battalion, 11th Marines with its 105mm howitzers provided direct support for the infantry from positions within the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines assembly area. A 155mm howitzer battery, Battery L, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines, split into two-gun sections, one section at the battalion assembly area and the second with Company D, north of the Hai Van Pass. From both locations, the Marine infantry battalion and its supporting artillery were in position to cover the Combined Action platoons and Route 1 in the sector.[51]**

While the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines relocated north of the Hai Van Pass, North Vietnamese units had augmented the VC *804th* and *K.4B Main Force Battalions* and VC local force units that traditionally operated in the Phu Loc region. In early December, the Marines received reports of a new *4th NVA Regiment*. On 13 December, a North Vietnamese soldier defected to the South Vietnamese and gave his unit as the *1st Battalion, 4th NVA Regiment*, recently changed from the *4th Battalion, 9th NVA Regiment*. The "rallier" stated that his redesignated unit had arrived in the Phu Loc forward area near Bach Ma Mountain in late November. This together with other prisoner reports of a *2d Battalion, 4th NVA Regiment* in southern Thua Thien Province confirmed the presence of the new enemy regiment. Furthermore, other intelligence sources identified a new VC Battalion, the *802d,* located east of the recently arrived *4th NVA*, along the Thua Thien-Quang Nam Boundary.[52]

This relatively rapid buildup of enemy forces in the Phu Loc sector obviously pointed to some enemy initiative in the very near future. A Combined Action Marine, James Duguid, assigned to CAP Hotel 6 in the hamlet of Nuoc Ngot just off Route 1, and about

*Colonel Robert J. Keller, who at the time commanded the 3d Combined Action Group which included the Phu Loc Combined Action units, observed that in late December 1967 and early January 1968: "In Phu Loc, the NVA was moving from the mountains to the coast and CAPs, stretched along Route # 1, providing nightly ambushes, represented obstacles that had to be dealt with . . . ." Col Robert J. Keller, Comments on draft, dtd 2Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Keller Comments.

**Lieutenant Colonel Oliver W. van den Berg, Jr., several years later commented that the Combined Action platoons "were often placed in untenable positions." To provide a military presence and a sense of security, the Combined Action units were usually in a village perimeter and intermingled with the local population. Lieutenant Colonel van den Berg, Jr., observed that the options open to him "seemed to be to let the Marine/CAPs be overrun or accept civilian casualties." He, nevertheless, employed "off-set registration techniques" that with a few or even one "firing adjustment, fire for effect missions could be called or directed" from his command post to support the Combined Action units. LtCol Oliver W. van den Berg, Jr., Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment file).



6,000 meters east of the town of Phu Loc, recalled several years later that in November or December 1967 while on patrol he stumbled upon what was in effect "a relief map made on the ground." The "map" consisted of "rocks, sticks, and pieces of bamboo and leaves" depicting the Marine base at Phu Bai, Route 1, and all of the Combined Action platoons in "Hotel" Company. Duguid remembered that a rock denoted Phu Loc headquarters and little sticks signified Marine and South Vietnamese defensive bunkers. He passed this information up the chain of command, but received no reaction to the intelligence. Concurrently, however, the defector from the *4th NVA Regiment* provided supporting testimony about enemy intentions. He related that the enemy *Tri-Thien Military Region* had ordered all units under its command to carry out a major campaign before Tet: "The VC would attack like lightning and occupy a few ARVN bases and [then] will use the (Tet) cease-fire period for resupply of food." III MAF intelligence officers gave credence to such a stratagem as in accordance with a North Vietnamese resolution to sever Thua Thien and Quang Tri Provinces from South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese rallier declared that the first phase of the enemy campaign in the Phu Loc area would include the destruction of bridges on Route 1 "to paralyze the supply route" followed by a "coordinated attack against the Phu Loc sub-sector using both infantry and sapper units."[53*]

By the beginning of the year, the enemy forces in Phu Loc had opened their first phase of the offensive. From 23 December through 6 January, enemy guerrillas and sappers launched a series of attacks against allied convoys and bridges along Highway 1 from the Hai Van Pass to the bridge over the Truoi River. For example on 4 January near Company D positions, Marine engineers discovered three destroyed culvert bridges. Not satisfied with blowing the bridges, the enemy sappers had "booby-trapped" the surrounding

*Colonel Robert J. Keller remembered that in late December 1967 or early January 1968 one of the Combined Action Platoons in his sector, CAP Hotel 4, located just south of the Truoi River Bridge "killed up to eleven NVA officers in an ambush in what appeared to be a pre-troop movement scouting mission." Keller Comments.

area with grenades and cement-type mines. The engineers deactivated the "surprise firing devices" without incurring any casualties. In a minesweep mission the same morning on Route 1 further south, just above the Hai Van Pass, the Marine engineers were less fortunate. A Marine truck detonated a 40-pound cement-type mine which seriously wounded six Marines and badly damaged the vehicle. That night, Marines of Company D received reports that a group of 20 VC had the assignment to emplace mines near their sector. A Marine patrol failed to uncover any enemy, but an 81mm mortar fire mission resulted in a secondary explosion.[54]

About 1030 the following morning, 5 January, near the truck mining incident of the previous day, another engineer sweep team, with a squad from Company D for security, triggered a VC ambush. An estimated 25-man enemy force attacked the Marines with grenades and automatic weapons. Two of the grenades landed in the rear of a Marine truck. The driver accelerated but enemy machine gun fire killed him and the truck ran off a steep incline. The remaining Marines regrouped and forced the enemy to break contact. The Company D commander immediately sent two squads supported by two Ontos to reinforce the sweep team. The following morning, on a bridge close to the ambush site, one of the Ontos struck a mine destroying the vehicle and killing the driver and wounding another Marine. About 1300, 6 January, just west of the bridge, one of the Company D squads, searching for an enemy sniper, came across what appeared to be another mine. As the squad stopped in a small clearing to investigate the object, two VC fired some 20 rifle rounds at the Americans, killing another Marine. The rest of the squad maneuvered through some heavy vegetation to reach the enemy positions, but by that time the VC had disappeared. In the three incidents on 5–6 January, the Marines sustained total casualties of 3 dead and 20 wounded, 17 seriously enough to be evacuated.[55]

To the west, near Phu Loc, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines conducted two company sweeps without incident, one by Company A to the south of the battalion assembly area, and the other by Company C to the north and east of the assembly area. On the night of 6 January, however, a Company A listening post, about 5,000 meters south of Phu Loc, spotted about four VC attempting to infiltrate the company's perimeter. The Marines fired 60 rounds and the enemy troops fled.[56]

Through this period, the Combined Action platoons positioned along Route 1 sensed that the enemy was preparing for a large push. Already, the VC had initiated some 30 incidents, mostly minor contacts of various sorts, in the local hamlets or along the highway. As Thomas Krusewski, a former CAP Marine in Hotel 6, several years later observed, "[the] atmosphere around you was tense. We began to have troop movement around [us]." The Combined Action Marines noted motorcycle tracks in the woods which implied that the enemy was paying off the local hamlet chiefs in return for the cooperation of the villagers. Krusewski remarked one "did not need to be a PhD to figure it [the situation] out." The VC were about to attack; the only remaining questions were where and when.[57]

In the early morning hours of 7 January the Communist forces struck. They hit the Phu Loc District headquarters, the command post of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines south of Phu Loc, the Company D base position north of the Hai Van Pass, and three of the Combined Action compounds between Phu Loc and the Hai Van Pass. Although limiting their attacks on the Marine units to attacks by fire, the enemy penetrated the Phu Loc District headquarters and the nearby Hotel 5 Combined Action compound. The Communist troops overran the other two Combined Action platoons, Hotel 6 and 7, located approximately 6 and 14 kilometers respectively east of Phu Loc.[58]

At Hotel 6 in the hamlet of Ngoc Ngot during the night of 6–7 January, Corporal Arliss Willhite remembered that the Marines and PFs had just returned from a large sweep operation along Route 1 with CAP Hotel 7. Following the suggestion of one of the Marine squad leaders, the CAP commander decided against putting out the usual listening posts. The CAP Marines, however, posted a small security force including four Marines at a nearby bridge on Route 1. In the compound itself, another four Marines stood watch. At about 0330 on 7 January, over 150 enemy troops dashed into the compound from two different directions, flinging satchel charges and grenades, and firing automatic weapons. From his vantage point near the bridge on Route 1 where he was in charge of the security group there, Lance Corporal Frank Lopez later described the attack: "All of a sudden hell broke loose, mortars are coming in and rockets and everything." The enemy assault force had placed blankets and mats over the concertina wire surrounding the compound and "just hopped over with sappers and automatic weapons." According to Lopez, "it looked like ants coming over a hill or just coming through the wire towards the compound, yelling, screaming, everyone was just yelling and getting hit." By this time, Lopez and his group were also under attack from about 40

VC and too busy defending themselves and the bridge to observe the fight in Ngoc Ngot.[59]

In the compound itself, pandemonium reigned. Corporal Willhite recollected that the VC were in the compound so fast some Marines and several of the PFs panicked: "Some of them just went out and crawled under hootches and stuff, they forgot their rifles."* On the other hand, several Marines and a few of the Popular Force troops fought off the enemy as best they could. Willhite remembered that as he ran out of his "hootch" with his rifle, enemy soldiers ignored him, concentrating instead upon the communication and ammunition bunkers. Reaching a site with a clear field of fire of the ammunition bunker, Willhite and a mixed group of Marines and PFs attempted to stem the tide. Both he and Krusewski credited one Popular Force member, armed with a Browning automatic rifle, for providing the necessary firepower to hold off the enemy from reaching their positions. Within 25 to 30 minutes, nevertheless, the Communist attackers had nearly destroyed the entire compound. Krusewski later wondered "why they didn't kill everybody, I don't know, they just turned around and left when the sun started coming up." Equally puzzled, Willhite, nearly 20 years later still spoke in disbelief, "It was like a miracle, sun came up, church bells rang. They just picked up their stuff and walked away."[60]

The detail led by Lance Corporal Lopez had withstood the enemy assault in their sector and the bridge still stood. It was the only one of four bridges between Phu Loc and CAP Hotel 7 on Route 1 that remained intact. Seeing the Communist troops withdrawing from the compound, the four Marines returned to Ngoc Ngot and began to attend to the wounded and bury the dead.[61]

Of the more than 40 troops, both Marines and South Vietnamese, in the Hotel 6 compound the night before, only about seven escaped relatively unscathed. The Marines sustained casualties of 5 dead and 16 wounded, 12 of whom had to be evacuated. Among the dead was the Navy corpsman. It would not be until 0900 that a Marine platoon from Company D, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines arrived and called in a helicopter to take out the most seriously wounded. As Corporal Willhite later remarked, the CAP Marines could not depend on supporting infantry and artillery. When the enemy attacks, "they know all about your supporting units, and they tie them up . . . they usually always get you."[62]

In this particular instance, the corporal was absolutely correct. In the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines command post, the battalion received a radio message at 0335 about the attack on the Phu Loc District headquarters. At the same time the Combined Action Group headquarters reported that it had lost radio communication with CAPs Hotel 6 and 7 and that Hotel 5 at Phu Loc was under attack. Less than five minutes later, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines assembly area south of Phu Loc came under an 82mm mortar barrage and recoilless rifle fire. Among the wounded was the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel van den Berg.** Major Harold J. McMullen, the battalion executive officer, temporarily assumed command.[63]

About an hour after the attack on the battalion command post, Communist gunners also took the Company D base area under mortar and recoilless rifle fire. At 0530, the Company D commander sent a reaction force to Hotel 6 and 7, but enemy mortar rounds forced the Marines to turn back. Waiting until daylight to avoid a possible enemy ambush, Major McMullen sent a platoon-sized relief force from Company B to the assistance of the district headquarters and the CAP platoons. As the Company B platoon entered the Phu Loc District compound at 0700, they saw the VC attempting to disengage and took them under fire, killing seven of the enemy. At the headquarters, the combined force of ARVN and U.S. advisors accounted for about 50 of the enemy. An hour later the Marine platoon reached Hotel 5 where the enemy had already departed. The Marines there sustained casualties of one dead and five wounded. At about the same time, 0800, another platoon from Company D arrived at Hotel 7 which had been overrun. The CAP Marines there suffered casualties of seven dead and four wounded. One hour later the Company D platoon arrived at Hotel 6. All told on the morning of 7 January in the Phu Loc sector, the allies sustained casualties of 18 Marines killed and 84 wounded, 4 U.S. Army advisors wounded, and an unspecified number of South Vietnamese regular troops and PFs killed and wounded, while

*In his comments, Willhite believed the reason that some of the Marines panicked was because the VC were into the compound so quickly. He recalled "hearing 'incoming!' then almost immediately 'They're in the compound.' They were at the doors of our hootches." Willhite claimed the reason that he got out with his gear, "because I always tied my backdoor shut with com-wire at night to keep it from being blown open by the wind." Arliss Willhite, Comments on draft, dtd 28Sep94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Lieutenant Colonel van den Berg commented that "due to the lack of reaction time and space, I am not aware of any close defensive fires called by/for any CAP." van den Berg Comments.

inflicting upon the enemy an estimated 80 dead. U.S. and South Vietnamese intelligence officers later identified two enemy battalions as taking part in the coordinated attack, the NVA *1st Battalion, 9th Regiment*, probably attached to the new *4th NVA Regiment*, and the VC *K4B Battalion*.[64]

After the events of the 7th, the enemy units in the Phu Loc area limited their efforts for the most part to intermittent mortar and harassing attacks by fire on both the Combined Action units and the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. The most serious incident occurred on 12 January when an enemy mortar attack on a 1st Battalion, 5th Marines defensive position south of Phu Loc resulted in 6 Marines killed and 11 wounded. At the same time, the NVA and VC units continued their interdiction of Route 1 with minor ambushes of convoys and blowing up bridges and culverts. Between 7–15 January, the enemy had detonated 10 bridges, knocked out 4 culverts, and cut the highway in 3 places. Marine engineers and Navy Seabees repaired most of the damage within three days. On the 15th, however, one bridge was still out, but "bypassable."[65]

The Formation and Deployment of Task Force X-Ray

By mid-January, the 1st Marine Division had established its Task Force X-Ray headquarters at Phu Bai and the deployment of U.S. forces from southern I Corps and Da Nang to the northern battlefield in Operation Checkers had begun in earnest. Initially as part of the Operation Checkers planning in November 1967, the III MAF staff considered sending individual 1st Marine Division units north and placing them under the operational control of the 3d Marine Division. At that point, Major General Robertson, the 1st Marine Division commander, recommended instead that the 1st Division merely extend its area of operations into Thua Thien. General Cushman concurred and on 4 December 1967 General Robertson activated the Task Force X-Ray planning staff, under his assistant division commander, Brigadier General Foster "Frosty" C. LaHue, to carry out the new mission.[66]

After a brief period of consultation between the 3d Marine Division and the Task Force X-Ray staffs, on 18 December, General Robertson's headquarters issued its operational order outlining the transfer of responsibilities. The concept called for Task Force X-Ray to move its headquarters to Phu Bai and take over the 3d Marine Division command post there.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A413469

BGen Foster C. LaHue, here in an official portrait, was the assistant division commander of the 1st Marine Division in January 1968 and also assumed the additional duty of CG, TF X-Ray, in command of the 1st Marine Division forces at Phu Bai.

General LaHue would assume operational control of both the 1st and 5th Marines. The 1st Marines with two battalions would deploy to Camp Evans while the 5th Marines with three battalions would relocate to the Phu Bai and Phu Loc sectors. Thus, the 1st Marines would conduct operations in northern Thua Thien while the 5th Marines would bear the same responsibility in the southern half of the province.[67]

This redeployment would be carried out in a series of "incremental jumps." In an exchange of messages and a conference at III MAF headquarters on 21 December, Task Force X-Ray and 1st and 3d Marine Division staff officers worked out a timetable and agreement on the boundaries between the two divisions. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines in its move to Phu Loc was the vanguard of Task Force X-Ray.[68]

On 11 January, the 1st Marine Division ordered the activation of Task Force X-Ray at Phu Bai. The new command initially was to consist of the 5th Marines regimental headquarters and two of its

infantry battalions, the 1st and 2d. While the 1st Battalion was to remain in the Phu Loc area, the 2d Battalion was to relieve the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines at Phu Bai, which would then revert to the operational control of the 3d Division. The Huong or Perfume River was to be the demarcation line between the 3d and 1st Marine Divisions.[69]

Beginning on the 11th, helicopters, fixed-wing transports, and Navy LCUs transported the Task Force headquarters and the 5th Marines headquarters elements from Da Nang to Phu Bai. Two days earlier, the advance echelon of the 5th Marines had arrived at the new base. From 13–15 January, Air Force transports flew the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines directly from the small airfield at An Hoa south of Da Nang to the Phu Bai airfield. At noon on 13 January, Brigadier General LaHue announced from his new command post at Phu Bai the activation of Task Force X-Ray for operations.[70]

For the most part the shift of forces north had gone without incident. Colonel Robert D. Bohn, the 5th Marines commander, several years later recalled that he had known about the proposed redeployment for over a month and had made preparations. Even before the transfer of his 1st Battalion to Phu Loc, he had visited the sector and talked to friends of his serving on the 3d Marine Division staff at Phu Bai. Colonel Bohn mentioned that perhaps it may not have been proper for a regimental commander to do this on his own, but on the other hand, claimed "it was good . . . informal staff coordination." He recalled very few problems with the actual move.[71]

Still any such large transplacement of forces results in some inconveniences and difficulties for the troops involved. This was to prove no exception. One Marine staff sergeant assigned to the Task Force X-Ray photo imagery section remembered that after his arrival at Phu Bai there were "empty hootches" but no supplies and material. The members of the section had "to scrounge" plywood just to make frames to hold their maps and photographs. On a more personal note, he observed that he had not been paid since December and the headquarters had lost his pay and health records. Although the 5th Marines had a mess hall, Colonel Bohn recollected that the troops had no fresh food and were eating C–Rations. He protested once he learned that helicopters were being used to bring in china for the general's mess and the situation was soon rectified: "It was an inevitable consequence of displacing a hell of a lot more troops up north than they had before."[72*]

Staff problems were almost inherent in the situation. As one staff officer later admitted that when the Task Force X-Ray staff arrived at Phu Bai they "didn't know the magnitude" of the situation that they faced. Although the staff was supposed to be a tactical rather than an administrative headquarters, Colonel Bohn observed that its officers were "so preoccupied with just getting the logistics of being a headquarters that they had no time to really refine their combat operations capability." The fact that the staff was temporary and task organized presented difficulties. As Lieutenant Colonel James C. Hecker, the G–1 officer responsible for personnel affairs, noted, it "introduces into the system austerity . . . austerity in staffing of the unit; the management of the unit; and the economic employment of the material resources of the unit." Colonel Bohn remarked that the fact that the staff was temporary and thrown together was hardly conducive to smooth operations.[73]

Still Task Force X-Ray was operational. On 12 January it issued its first operational order and laid out its concept of operations. The order itself differed little from the original order published by the 1st Marine Division in December. It detailed, however, the task organization and units assigned. The 1st Marines was slated to be attached with its 1st and 2d Battalions "on or about 24 January 1968." At the end of the month, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines was to join its parent regiment at Phu Bai. In essence, Task Force X-Ray was to be responsible eventually for all of Thua Thien Province and General LaHue was to coordinate with Brigadier General Ngo Quang Truong of the 1st ARVN Division.[74]

In Thua Thien Province, Marine commanders shared responsibility for operations with the 1st ARVN Division. U.S. advisors rated General Truong, the division commander and former commander of the Vietnamese Airborne, as "top notch" and General Cushman described Truong as the one Vietnamese commander who "stood out" above the rest. Truong maintained his division headquarters in Hue but kept only one of his infantry regiments, the 3d, in Thua Thien Province. Lieutenant Colonel Phan Ba Hoa, the regimental commander, was also held in high esteem

*Brigadier General Paul G. Graham, who was 1st Marine Division G–3 or operations officer at the time, doubted the story about helicopters bringing in the china for the general's mess: "I am certain I would have heard about such an aberration." Graham Comments.

by his American advisors who described him as a "highly competent tactician and administrator." Hoa positioned two of his battalions and a mobile task group at PK 17, so named because it was located near a road marker on Route 1, 17 kilometers north of Hue. He also retained one battalion and the division headquarters near the city. In addition to these forces, General Truong had under his control two airborne battalions from the General Reserve, one at PK 17 and the other near Hue. The arrival of the General Reserve battalions was part of a new impetus on the part of General Westmoreland and the Vietnamese Joint General Staff to reinforce the northern border areas and provinces.[75]

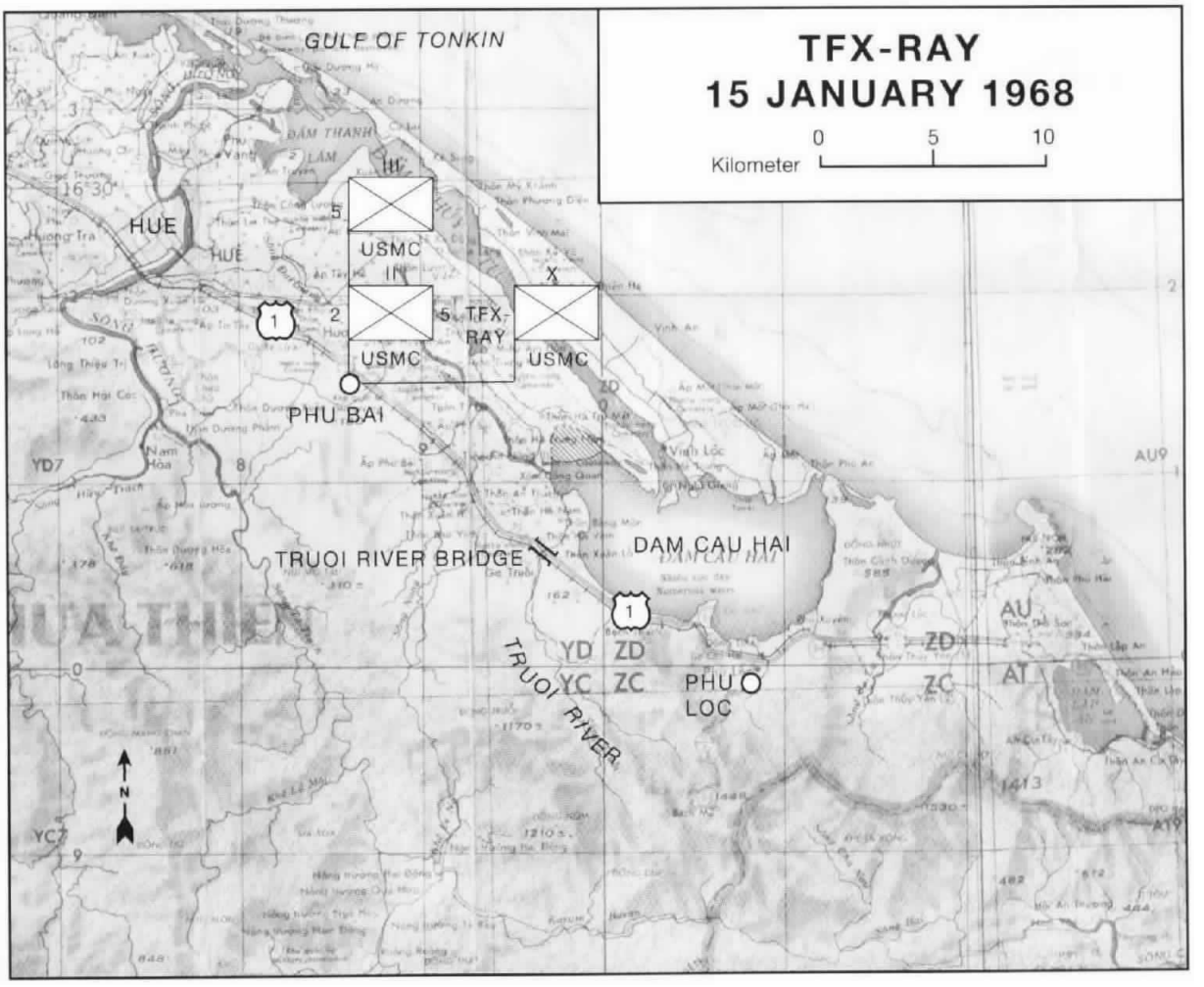
The Cavalry Arrives

In Saigon at MACV headquarters, General Westmoreland had been concerned for some time about the enemy intentions in the northern two provinces. While much of his attention remained riveted on Khe Sanh, the MACV commander also worried about the enemy buildup in the A Shau Valley about 30 miles southwest of Hue near the Laotian Border. Since the fall of the Special Forces camp there in the spring of 1966, the North Vietnamese had used the valley as one of their main base areas and infiltration terminals into South Vietnam. During the summer of 1967, the 4th Marines in Operation Cumberland supported by engineers improved Highway 547 and established a firebase about 20 miles southwest of Hue. From there, U.S. Army 175mm guns fired into the valley. At the onset of the fall-winter monsoon season in September, the Marines abandoned the firebase because of the demands of the DMZ front on Marine manpower and washed-out roads which seriously hampered resupply. Aerial photographic intelligence soon revealed that the North Vietnamese started their own road project in the A Shau. Lieutenant General Cushman jokingly recalled: "Lo and behold, they [the NVA] started building their share of the rural development here, and apparently, they're coming to meet the road we had built." The U.S. immediately started an air bombing interdiction campaign in the A Shau. Cushman remembered "some guy came up with a chemical or something that was supposed to turn dirt into mud. It actually worked to some extent, we really plastered the A Shau Valley with that." According to the III MAF general, the bombing did slow up the NVA in the valley.[76]

About this time in early December, General Westmoreland decided to modify the plans for the York operations involving the 1st Air Cavalry Division.* While York I was to take place in February in the enemy's Do Xa base area in the I and II Corps Tactical Zone border region, MACV planned, as the weather improved, to insert in April a joint task force of the 1st Cavalry and III MAF units into the A Shau. On 16 December, Westmoreland visited General Cushman at Da Nang to discuss accommodations for the 1st Cavalry if the Army division was to reinforce the Marines in the next few months. According to the MACV commander, he believed the enemy would make his next major effort in I Corps and that III MAF should accelerate its York logistic preparations to prepare for an early deployment of the 1st Cavalry Division. He directed Cushman to host a conference to include representatives from MACV, the Army division, and III MAF to plan the necessary construction of helicopter and port facilities to be completed by mid-January. At the same time, Westmoreland met with Major General John J. Tolson, the 1st Air Cavalry Division commander, and alerted him about a possible early deployment to I Corps.[77]

While planning for the York I and II operations continued into January, General Westmoreland and his staff began to place a higher priority on the reinforcement of northern I Corps. As reports indicated the buildup of forces at Khe Sanh and the DMZ, the MACV commander made his decision to send the 1st Cavalry Division north of the Hai Van Pass. On 10 January, he canceled the York operation in the Do Xa sector. Two days later he met with General Cushman at Da Nang to discuss the various contingency plans. Westmoreland then ordered that the 1st Cavalry send two brigades north to Thua Thien Province. These were the 1st Brigade from the 1st Cavalry and the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, temporarily attached to the 1st Cavalry Division. The Cavalry's 2d Brigade remained in II Corps while the 3d Brigade stayed for the time being in the Wheeler/Wallowa area in the Que Sons. In fact, on 13 January, General Westmoreland told Cushman not "to direct movement" of the 3d Brigade to northern I Corps without his specific approval. Two days later, he cabled Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, CinCPac, and Army General Earle G. Wheeler, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, that the 3d Brigade would join the division at Phu Bai at a later date. On

*See Chapter 1 for discussion of the planning for the York operations.



17 January, the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division began its deployment to Phu Bai.[78]

On that same date, General Westmoreland explained to a gathering of his senior field commanders the reasons for the reinforcement of III MAF north of the Hai Van Pass. He believed that the NVA was about to move against Khe Sanh and also against allied forces in the coastal areas of southern Quang Tri and northern Thua Thien Provinces from Base Area 101. As he had earlier observed to Admiral Sharp and General Wheeler, "the odds are 60–40 that the enemy will launch his planned campaign prior to Tet." He told the assembled officers that he realized the tenuous logistic situation, but that the risk had to be accepted. He was especially worried about the lack of a deep-water port and the vulnerability of Route 1 between Da Nang and Hue. He believed that it would take about another regiment to secure the highway.[79]

General Westmoreland was also concerned about command relations, especially in control of air. MACV and III MAF staff officers had already started to address this problem in the initial planning for York II in the A Shau and for an air offensive in support of the Marine base at Khe Sanh, codenamed Operation Niagara. The questions still remained unresolved, however, with deep doctrinal differences between the Marines of III MAF and Seventh Air Force officers representing MACV. Although the MACV air directive called for the Marine wing, operating under III MAF control, to support Marine units and the Seventh Air Force to provide support for Army units, Westmoreland was not sure that the system would work with the 1st Air Cavalry Division deployed north of the Hai Van Pass.[80]

On 19 January, General Westmoreland visited General Cushman and Major General Norman J. Anderson, the commander of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, at Da Nang. The MACV commander brought up the issue of air support for the Cavalry Division in its new area of operations. According to Westmore-

land, he told Cushman and Anderson that he believed "we had to move toward a single management arrangement."* After a rather heated discussion, Westmoreland left the issue open, but told the Marine commanders that he expected them "to take care of the 1st Cavalry Division." What he did not tell them was that he had already sent a message to Admiral Sharp recommending a change in air control procedures. In any event, at the meeting, the MACV commander directed General Cushman to detach the 1st Cavalry's 3d Brigade from the Americal Division to rejoin its parent command.[81]

The 1st Air Cavalry Division quickly established an area of operations in southern Quang Tri and northern Thua Thien Provinces. The division established its command post on 20 January in a sector about five kilometers north of Phu Bai, designated Landing Zone El Paso, that included a Vietnamese civilian cemetery. Major General Tolson, who had been on leave in the United States at the time the order came to displace, arrived at El Paso the following day. With his 1st Brigade battalions located both at El Paso and Landing Zone Jane about 10 kilometers southwest of Quang Tri City and other reinforcing units expected soon, he immediately began to look for a new home for the division. As Tolson later stated, he needed "to get the division out of the graveyard."[82]

Given his immediate mission to protect Quang Tri City from the south and southwest and to be prepared to launch an attack into the enemy *Base Areas 101* and *114*, he took an exploratory reconnaissance flight over his new area of operations. During this flight, on 22 January, he noticed the Marine base at Camp Evans and two possible landing sites just south of Quang Tri City that he believed better suited for base areas than the locations his units now occupied. After his return, he met with General Cushman at Da Nang. He asked the III MAF commander for permission to take over Camp Evans from the Marines and also for the two sites in Quang Tri. Cushman granted him the request for Evans but told him that he would have to coordinate with the 3d Marine Division for the other two areas.[83]

On 22 January, the 1st Cavalry started its operation Jeb Stuart in its new area of operations. Just south of Landing Zone Jane, the 1st Brigade's Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry engaged a large enemy force. In an obviously mismatched fire fight, the Cavalry troopers, supported by their gunships, killed 52 of the North Vietnamese at a cost of one slightly wounded American soldier. Eventually the 1st Brigade moved into the two new Quang Tri sites, redesignated Landing Zones Sharon and Betty, that General Tolson originally wanted. The 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne then assumed responsibility for Landing Zone Jane while General Tolson established his headquarters at Camp Evans together with the Cavalry's 3d Brigade. As one Marine staff officer later remarked there was "a full Army division operating where two reduced Marine regiments had been operating."[84]

The Changed Situation in the North

The arrival of the 1st Cavalry Division altered the Marine Checkers plan. This especially applied to the 1st Marines which just had moved from Quang Tri and relieved the 4th Marines at Camp Evans. The enemy attack on Khe Sanh at the time had an equal impact on the plans. On 22 January, the 1st Marines received orders to detach the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines which was attached to the regiment for a helicopter lift to Khe Sanh. This would leave Colonel Stanley S. Hughes, who relieved Colonel Herbert Ing two days earlier at Evans, with no infantry battalions for Operation Neosho II in the Co Bi-Thanh Tan sector or for security of the base camp. With the concurrence of the Seventh Fleet and MACV, General Cushman inserted the SLF Alpha battalion, BLT 2/4, into Camp Evans. Beginning on 22 January, the SLF helicopter squadron HMM–361 lifted three companies of BLT 2/4 from its amphibious shipping offshore to Camp Evans and then, in turn, flew the companies of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines to Khe Sanh. At the same time, the Marine helicopters flew 380 civilian refugees out of Khe Sanh to Camp Evans. On the 23d, the 1st Marines in a "rough rider" convoy trucked the civilians to a refugee relocation center in Cam Lo. By the afternoon of the 23d, the relief and transplacement of the 1st Battalion was complete. The 1st Marines assumed operational control of BLT 2/4 which assumed responsibility for Neosho II operations.[85]**

It was obvious to all concerned that the Neosho operation was to be of short duration. Although Colonel Hughes on 23 January issued an operational order for Neosho II, he soon received a message that the 1st Cavalry was to assume responsibility for

*See Chapters 23 and 24 for the extended discussion of the Single Manager issue.

**See Chapter 5 for description of Neosho I in Camp Evans and Co Bi-Thanh Tan area and Chapters 4 and 14 for Marine operations at Khe Sanh.

Camp Evans. Colonel Hughes was to close out Operation Neosho on the 24th, and begin redeployment to Phu Bai. He was to assume operational control of his 1st and 2d Battalions and responsibility of the Phu Bai Vital Area from the 5th Marines. BLT 2/4 would then reembark for another operation with the 3d Marine Division.[86]*

On 25 January, the 1st Marines, which had remained attached to the 3d Marine Division, reverted to its parent division and came under the control of Task Force X-Ray. The first elements of the 1st Air Cavalry Division arrived at Camp Evans and formally took over the base two days later. From 25–28 January in a series of phased deployments, Colonel Hughes moved his headquarters and the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines rear elements from Camp Evans to Phu Bai, as well as the artillery battalion, 1st Battalion, 11th Marines. At 0830 on the 28th, Hughes opened his new command post at the latter base. On 30 January, the headquarters and Companies A and B of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines began arriving at Phu Bai from Quang Tri and returned to parent control. The 2d Battalion, 1st Marines infantry companies were still at Con Thien but preparing also to move. Colonel Bohn, the 5th Marines commander, recalled that at this time he visited Hughes and that the 1st Marines commander "was sitting in a hooch . . . [with] one bunk in there and one chair." Bohn asked "'Where the hell's your CP?'" and Hughes replied "'This is it." Colonel Hughes stated that he did not yet have a specific mission and he had under him only "one battalion with two companies."[87]

In contrast, however, after the 5th Marines had arrived at Phu Bai, the regiment had more than enough to keep itself occupied. Since 15 January, Colonel Bohn had responsibility for securing Highway 1 from the Hai Van Pass to Phu Bai. He was also to provide reaction forces for all the Combined Action platoons and for any key populated areas in the sector. For the most part, until the end of the month, the enemy confined his activity to attacks and probes on Route 1 and Marine strongpoints in the Phu Loc sector.[88]

Through 29 January, Colonel Bohn kept his 1st Battalion positioned at Phu Loc and made the 2d Battalion responsible for the Phu Bai Vital Area. Originally, Bohn expected to use his 3d Battalion as his maneuver battalion, but this changed with the arrival of the 1st Cavalry Division in northern I Corps. With the Army taking over Camp Evans, however, and the 1st Marines moving from there to Phu Bai, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines remained in the Da Nang TAOR. The regimental commander then decided to use the 2d Battalion as a maneuver battalion when it was relieved at Phu Bai by the companies of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. On 29 January, Lieutenant Colonel Ernest C. Cheatham, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines commander, began the displacement of his battalion and two of his companies into the Phu Loc sector.[89]

Thus, on the eve of Tet 1968, Task Force X-Ray consisted of two infantry regimental headquarters with a total of three infantry battalions between them. Also under Task Force X-Ray and providing artillery support was the 1st Field Artillery Group (1st FAG) consisting of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 11th Marines and several separate batteries. Brigadier General LaHue, the task force commander, also shared the Phu Bai base with rear echelons of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, Force Logistic Support Group Alpha, the rear headquarters and echelons of the 3d Marine Division, and the Seabees. As one of Lahue's staff officers, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur J. Poillon, observed, the arrival of the 1st Air Cavalry Division had made the original Checkers plan "unrecognizable" and the Marines "found themselves reacting to these Army movements . . . ."[90]

The establishment of the 1st Air Cavalry Division area of operations between the 1st and 3d Marine Divisions also concerned General Westmoreland. Already lacking confidence in Marine generalship, he decided to establish a new forward headquarters at Phu Bai to control the war in the northern two provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien. At first he considered placing an Army Corps headquarters at Phu Bai, but rejected this concept in the belief that it would cause too much inter-Service dissension. On 26 January, he met with General Vien and President Thieu about the establishment of both a Joint General Staff and MACV Forward headquarters at Phu Bai. Army General Creighton W. Abrams, as Deputy MACV, would represent Westmoreland while General Lam, the I Corps Commander, would be the personal representative of the Joint General Staff. At the same time, he notified Admiral Sharp about his intentions and sent General Abrams to Phu Bai to discuss the proposed new command arrangements with General Cushman, the III MAF commander.[91]

*Colonel Bruce F. Meyers, who in 1968 commanded SLF Alpha (TG 79.4), commented that operational control of BLT 2/4 was returned to him at noon on 26 January and that "we had all elements of BLT 2/4 back aboard our shipping in five hours and fifteen minutes." Col Bruce F. Meyers, Comments on draft, dtd 20Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File).

Although both General Cushman at Da Nang and General Krulak in Hawaii had their suspicions about Westmoreland's motivations, they accepted the changes with good grace. The two Marine generals acknowledged the validity of the MACV commander's desire to have his forward headquarters in place, under his deputy, in the northern sector, where, he believed the decisive battle of the war was about to begin. On the 27th, General Westmoreland ordered an advance echelon of the new headquarters under Army Major General Willard Pearson to Phu Bai. With the forward deployment of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, III MAF prepared to counter the expected enemy offensive in the north.[92]*

*The outbreak of the Tet offensive delayed the formal establishment of the MACV Forward headquarters until 12 February. See Chapter 11

PART II
THE TET OFFENSIVE

CHAPTER 7

The Enemy Offensive in the DMZ and Southern Quang Tri, 20 January–8 February

The Cua Viet is Threatened—Adjustment of Forces in Southern Quang Tri Province
Heavy Fighting Along the DMZ—A Lull in Leatherneck Square—The Cua Viet Continues to Heat Up
The Battle For Quang Tri City—Tet Aftermath Along the DMZ

The Cua Viet is Threatened

Beginning on 20 January, the North Vietnamese intensified their efforts in the north from Khe Sanh to the Cua Viet. While most public and media attention was focused upon the Khe Sanh base, the Marine command could not ignore its northern logistical lifeline from the Cua Viet Port Facility to Dong Ha along the Cua Viet River channel. From Dong Ha, Route 9 connected the isolated Marine bases at Cam Lo, Camp Carroll, the Rockpile, and Ca Lu. The continued presence of large North Vietnamese forces along the eastern DMZ as well as the buildup of forces in the west around Khe Sanh limited the ability of the 3d Marine Division to concentrate its forces in any one area. Even with the arrival of the additional Army forces in the north, the division was still spread out from its Quang Tri base in the south, to Khe Sanh in the west, and to the Cua Viet in the east.

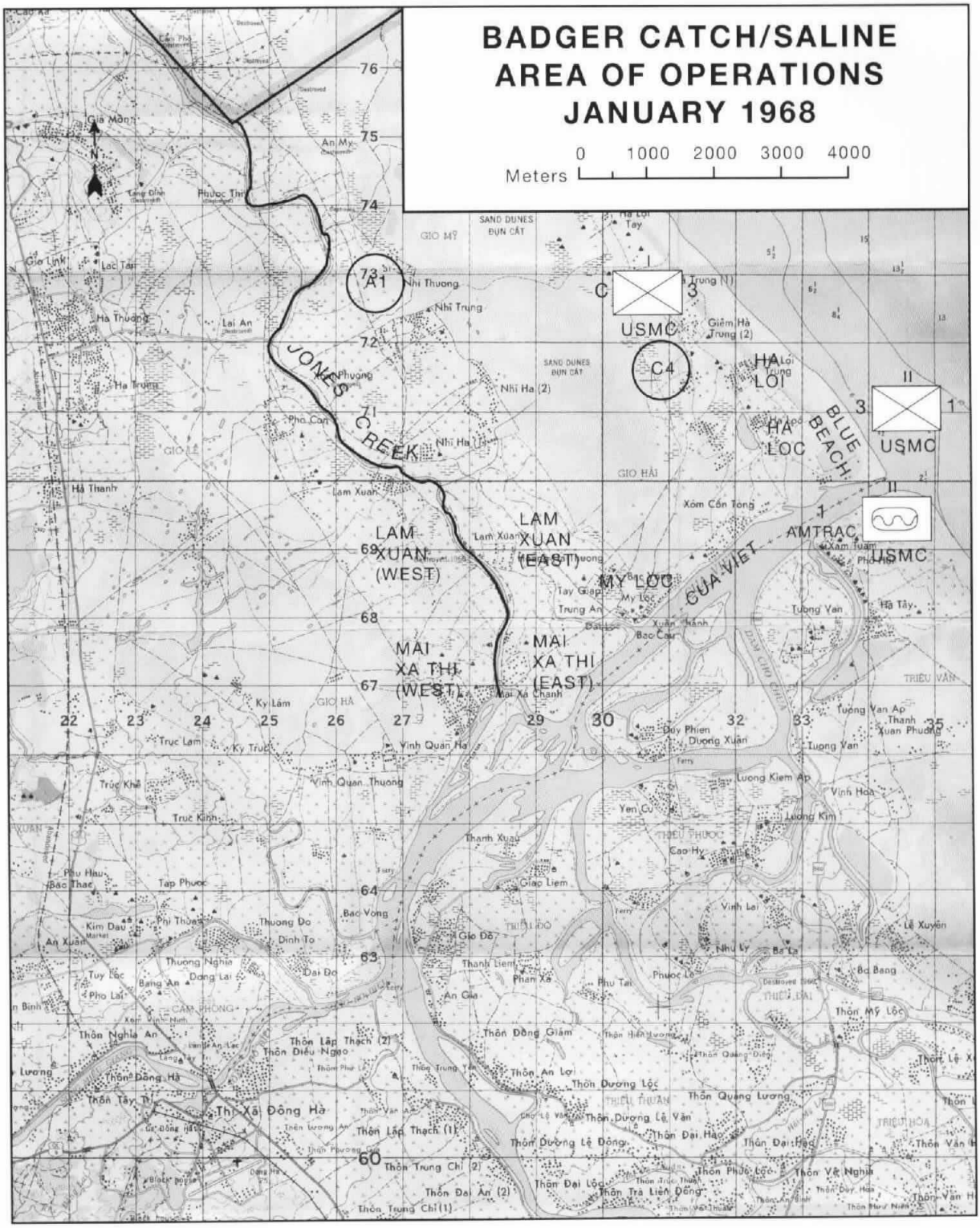
Almost simultaneously with attacks on Khe Sanh, the North Vietnamese appeared to be making a determined attempt to halt the river traffic on the Cua Viet. On 20 January, enemy gunners positioned on the northern bank of the river forced the temporary closing of the Cua Viet. Up to this point, Lieutenant Colonel Edward R. Toner's 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion with an infantry company, Company C, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, attached to his command in Operation Napoleon, largely had responsibility for the security of the river. The battalion was becoming more and more hard pressed to carry out this mission.[1]

Marine forklifts unload Navy landing craft at the Dong Ha ramp. With the Cua Viet too shallow for large-draft vessels, the Navy used both LCMs (landing craft, mechanized) and LCUs (landing craft, utility) to ply the river between the Cua Viet Facility and Dong Ha to bring in supplies to Marines in the DMZ sector.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191332

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191332




BADGER CATCH/SALINE
AREA OF OPERATIONS
JANUARY 1968
0 1000 2000 3000 4000
Meters
JONES CREEK
BLUE BEACH
A1
C
3
USMC
C4
HA LOI
HA LOC
II
3
1
USMC
LAM XUAN (WEST)
LAM XUAN (EAST)
MAI XA THI (WEST)
MAI XA THI (EAST)
MY LOC
CUA VIET
AMTRAC
USMC
76
75
74
73
72
71
69
68
67
64
63
60
22
23
24
25
26
27
29
30
32
33
35
Gia Mon
An My
Phuoc Thi
Gio Linh
Lac Tan
Ha Thuong
Lai An
Ha Truong
Pho Con
Nhi Thuong
Nhi Trung
Nhi Ha (2)
Nhi Ha (1)
Giem Ha Trung (2)
Ha Loi Trung
Ha Loc
Xom Con Tong
Ha Thanh
Lam Xuan
Tay Giap
My Loc
Trung An
Bac Cau
Xuan Thanh
Tuong Van
Ha Tay
Mai Xa Chanh
Ky Lam
Truc Lam
Ky Truc
Vinh Quan Ha
Vinh Quan Thuong
Truc Khe
Truc Kinh
Duy Phien
Duong Xuan
Tuong Van Ap
Thanh Xuan Phuong
Luong Kiem Ap
Vinh Hoa
Yen Cu
Luong Kim
Cao Hy
Thanh Xuan
Giac Liem
Gio Do
Thanh Liem
Pham Xa
Phu Tai
Phuoc Le
An Gia
Vinh Lai
Nhu Ly
Ba La
Le Xuyen
Bo Bang
Thon My Loc
Thon Dong Giam
Thon An Loi
Thon Duong Loc
Thon Quang Luong
Thon Duong Le Van
Thon Duong Le Dong
Thon Dai Hao
Thon Dai Loc
Thon Tra Lien Dong
Thon Phuoc Loc
Thon Ve Nghia
Thon Van H
Thon Dai An (2)
Thon Trung Chi (1)
Thon Trung Chi (2)
Thon Lap Thach (1)
Thon Lap Thach (2)
Thon Dieu Ngao
Thon Dong Ha
Thon Tay Ha
Thi Xa Dong Ha
Thon Nghia An
Kim Dau
Phi Thua
Thuong Do
Dinh To
Bac Vong
Thuong Nghia
Tuy Loc
Dong Lai
Bang An
Pho Lai
Dai Do
Phu Hau
Bac Thac
Tap Phuoc
An Xuan
Cam Phong
Thon Vinh Ninh
Thon Nghia An
Thon Dong Ha
Thon Tay Ha
Thi Xa Dong Ha
Thon Lap Thach (1)
Thon Trung Chi (2)
Thon Dai An (2)
Thon Trung Chi (1)
SAND DUNES
DUN CAT
GIO MY
GIO LE
GIO HAI
GIO HA
TRIEU VAN
THIEU PHUOC
THIEU LOC
THIEU TIEN
THIEU HOA

Only the previous morning, 19 January, a platoon from Company C, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, patrolling the sand dunes along the coast north of the A–1 Strongpoint, and about 5,000 meters above the Cua Viet, ran into a company from the enemy *K–400 Main Force Battalion*. Corporal Ronald R. Asher, the acting weapons platoon sergeant, remembered that he and two of his machine gun teams accompanied the platoon. According to Asher, the "lead squad walked into the NVA positions" and that "within seconds the sound of AK's, M16s, . . . and the unmistakable cough of one of my guns was earth shattering." For a few chaotic hours, the platoon took cover as best it could and attempted to recover its casualties. Corporal Asher recalled that he and another squad leader assumed control of the platoon as both the platoon leader and sergeant were incapacitated.[2]

By late afternoon, Lieutenant Colonel Toner had reinforced the platoon with the rest of Company C supported by tanks and LVTs. Both sides used rifles, automatic weapons, grenades, mortars, and artillery fire in a hard-fought engagement that lasted much of the day. Enemy artillery from north of the Demilitarized Zone fired some 70 130mm rounds into the Marine positions. Still the enemy supporting arms were no match for the firepower that the Americans threw into the battle including air, naval gunfire, conventional artillery, and tank direct fire. By 1500, both sides had disengaged. The Marines losses were 3 dead and 33 wounded, 31 of whom had to be evacuated. According to Marine accounts, they killed 23 of the enemy and recovered six weapons including two light machine guns.[3]

On the following day, the 20th, the enemy not only fired at two Navy craft, but earlier that morning also engaged a South Vietnamese Navy Coastal Patrol Force junk on patrol in the Cua Viet. The 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, conducting a two-company operation nearby in conjunction with the 2d ARVN Regiment, ran up against an even stronger enemy force, approximately a battalion in size, than it had the previous day. This time the battalion had established blocking positions just northwest of the hamlet of My Loc on the northern bank of the Cua Viet. Starting as a small platoon action, the action soon evolved into a fullscale battle employing all supporting arms. The enemy subjected the Marines to an artillery bombardment of about 50 130mm rounds that lasted for about a half hour to cover its withdrawal that afternoon. According to Marine officers, the North Vietnamese artillery used forward observers to adjust its fire. Two of the LVTs in the course of the battle sustained damage, one detonated an explosive device and the other was struck by three rocket propelled grenades. The Marine tractor battalion in this fray suffered casualties of 13 dead and 48 wounded and reported a bodycount of 20 dead North Vietnamese. In the same fighting, the ARVN claimed to have killed an additional 20 and captured 2 prisoners.[4]

The situation on the Cua Viet was becoming untenable. In the early morning hours of 21 January around 0200, a Company C, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines outpost spotted an enemy platoon attempting to dig in along the sand dunes very near the scene of the fighting on the 19th. The Marines called in artillery throughout the night and at 0930 Marine fixed-wing aircraft flew three attack sorties against the enemy troops. According to the Marine account, the enemy wore "green uniforms similar to those of previous contact . . . ." The NVA then withdrew to the north under Marine rifle fire and grenades, but left nine bodies behind. About an hour later, a Navy landing craft (LCM) on the Cua Viet triggered another mine which exploded behind it. The vessel remained afloat, but the explosion knocked out both of its engines. Another LCM which came out to tow the helpless craft back to port came under fire from the northern bank. After all the LCMs had returned safely to the Cua Viet Port Facility, the naval commander of the base announced "All USN river traffic secured."[5]

While the river traffic once again resumed the following day, 22 January was almost a repeat of the 21st. In the early morning hours of the 22d, an American naval gun spotter assigned to the 2d ARVN Regiment A–1 outpost observed about 300 to 500 North Vietnamese troops through his starlight scope moving south in the same general area where Company C had its previous clashes with the enemy. Pulling back a Company C ambush patrol, the American command threw in the entire spectrum of supporting arms including 105mm howitzers, 8-inch guns, Marine fixed-wing TPQ (radar-controlled) aircraft strikes, and an AC–130 "Spooky" minigun strafing run. A later ARVN battle damage assessment of the evidence, including blood stains, freshly dug graves, abandoned web equipment and documents, suggested that the enemy may have sustained as many as 100 casualties. Further south, however, on the Cua Viet the Navy reported another mining inci-

dent. This time, a Navy LCU struck two mines and had to be towed back to port. Again the Cua Viet Facility commander closed the river until the next day when a Navy and Marine underwater demolition team from Dong Ha would sweep the river.[6]

This last was too much for General Cushman at III MAF. He radioed Major General Tompkins, the 3d Marine Division commander, that the "interruption to Cua Viet LOC [line of communications] unacceptable." The III MAF commander observed that command detonated mines and ground fire against shipping on the Cua Viet could only be undertaken from the river banks. He ordered Tompkins to clear banks "at once" and to coordinate his actions with the 1st ARVN Division. Cushman advised the 3d Marine Division commander that he might want to use SLF Bravo, specifically BLT 3/1, for this purpose in the sector for a few days.[7]

The employment of BLT 3/1 in the coastal sector of the DMZ was not a new idea. As early as 5 January 1968, General Cushman had notified the 3d Division commander of an SLF operation to be called Badger Catch/Saline to be carried out in the Cua Viet area from 7 February through 22 February. Tompkins was to insure coordination with the local ARVN commander. On 15 January, Vice Admiral William F. Bringle, the commander of the Seventh Fleet, issued for planning purposes an initiating directive for Operation Badger Catch. He mentioned only that the operation would take place in Quang Tri Province and at a date "to be determined dependent upon tactical situation."[8]

Two days later, on 17 January, General Cushman appeared to change the original mission for the SLF in northern Quang Tri. In a message to General Tompkins, Cushman suggested that the latter should carry out coordinated preemptive attacks in conjunction with the 1st ARVN Division in the general DMZ area. He remarked that he intended "to assign elements of SLF Bravo . . . your opcon on request for immediate employment in support of these operations." The closing of the Cua Viet, however, apparently caused the III MAF commander once more to change his mind. In a later message on 22 January, Cushman told Tompkins to use the SLF in the Cua Viet for a few days. Later that day, General Cushman informed General Westmoreland, the MACV commander, that BLT 3/1 would make an amphibious landing in the Cua Viet sector on the 23d and assist in the clearing of the river. After the completion of that mission, the battalion would then go to Camp Carroll to take part in the planned preemptive offensive to destroy enemy forces that posed a threat to the Camp Carroll and Rockpile sites.[9]

At a planning session at the 3d Marine Division headquarters on 23 January, SLF and division staff officers first selected 0800 the next morning as the time for the landing. With the continued enemy harassment of allied shipping in the Cua Viet channel, General Tompkins and the amphibious commanders decided, however, to push forward H–hour to the early evening of the 23d. Around 1900, Lieutenant Colonel Max McQuown's BLT 3/1 started coming ashore and by 2130 McQuown had established his command post temporarily at Blue Beach, on the northern bank of the mouth of the Cua Viet.[10]

Operation Badger Catch was part of a concerted effort that General Tompkins had started at noon on the 23d to make the Cua Viet reasonably safe for LCU and LCM traffic. At that time, he placed armed guards on all boats, provided continuous HU–1E gunship cover, and placed division "Sparrow Hawk" infantry squads on call for immediate insertion into the region. The mission of the BLT was to eliminate all enemy forces in the immediate vicinity of the northern bank of the Cua Viet and to prevent any new North Vietnamese forces from entering this area. Its area of operations extended some 3,000 to 4,000 meters above the Cua Viet and about 5,000 to 7,000 meters inland. The 1st ARVN Division was to clear the area south of the river and provide blocking positions for McQuown's battalion to the west.[11]

The clearing of the Cua Viet proved to be a harder nut to crack than the planners at III MAF and the 3d Marine Division first contemplated. As an indicator of what was to follow, on the morning of the 24th, the North Vietnamese used a command detonated mine to sink a Navy LCM in the river channel. At that point, General Cushman asked the Navy Amphibious Ready Group commander for the SLF Bravo helicopter squadron, HMM–165, to lift elements of BLT 3/1 to an island in the river channel that the North Vietnamese were using as a firing and command site to disrupt the boat traffic on the Cua Viet.* Although Badger Catch was to last

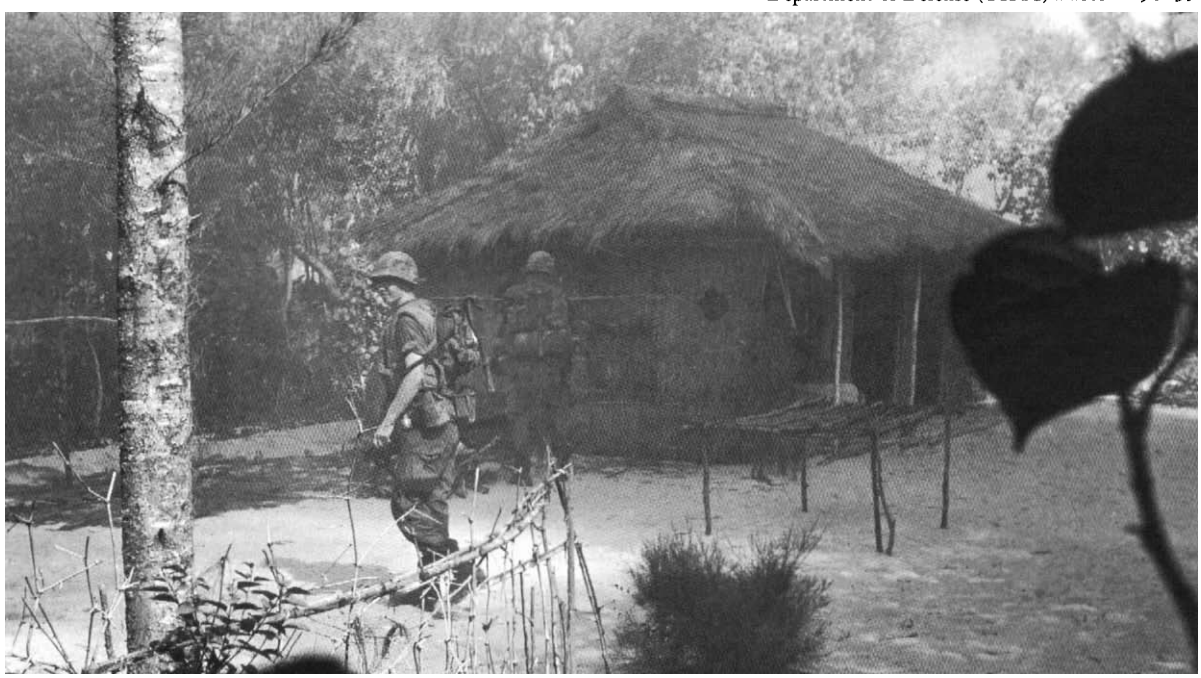
*At this point, Operation Badger Catch was an SLF operation and the SLF battalion and squadron still came under the Navy amphibious ready group commander. Until the amphibious commander officially gave up control of his forces ashore to III MAF or his representative, he still nominally retained control of the SLF units.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190277

Marines of BLT 3/1 of the Seventh Fleet's Special Landing Force (SLF) Bravo go into action in the Cua Viet sector after being brought ashore by helicopters of HMM–165, the SLF helicopter squadron. In the top photo, Marines move inland after arriving in the landing zone, while a Boeing Vertol CH–46 Sea Knight hovers overhead and prepares to return to the ships of the amphibious ready group offshore. Below, Marines of the BLT in their new area of operations move through a Vietnamese village with its thatched-roof huts.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190435



only a few days, BLT 3/1 would remain in the Cua Viet sector with the same mission for over a month. For Lieutenant Colonel McQuown and his battalion it was a time to vindicate themselves after their somewhat uneven performance in their first SLF operation, Badger Tooth, at the end of December.[12]*

Adjustment of Forces in Southern Quang Tri Province

Changes were occurring elsewhere in the 3d Marine Division area of operations as well during this period. As part of the Checkers plan to concentrate the 3d Marine Division in Quang Tri Province, Colonel Joseph E. Lo Prete's 3d Marines took over the Operation Osceola sector centered around the relatively new Quang Tri complex from the 1st Marines. The 1st Marines moved to Camp Evans and the 4th Marines assumed responsibility for the Lancaster area at Camp Carroll. At 0930 on the morning of 20 January, Colonel Lo Prete moved into his new command post at La Vang, about 4,000 meters below Quang Tri City and south of the Thach Han River, and immediately began Operation Osceola II with the same forces that were in Osceola I.[13]

For all practical purposes, the mission and concept of operations for Osceola II were the same as those for Osceola I. The 3d Marines was to protect the Quang Tri base from enemy attack and to prevent NVA units from *Base Area 101* in the far reaches of the Hai Lang Forest Preserve from reaching the coast. Lieutenant Colonel Richard W. Goodale's 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, located at Ai Tu, above the Thach Han and about 3,000 meters northwest of Quang Tri City, was responsible for the defense of the northern sector which included the airfield and the approaches to the base from the west. Collocated at La Vang with the 3d Marines was Lieutenant Colonel Marcus J. Gravel's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. Gravel's battalion covered the southern and southwestern approaches into the Quang Tri coastal region. The 3d Battalion, 12th Marines, with two 105mm batteries, one at Ai Tu and the other at La Vang, and one provisional 155mm howitzer battery, also at La Vang, provided the artillery support. Company C, 3d Tank Battalion, and an Army "Duster" battery, Battery A, 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery, equipped with M42s armed with twin 40mm antiaircraft guns were also at La Vang under the operational control of the 3d Marines and ready to assist the infantry. Elements of the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion screened the approaches to the west.[14]

With only two battalions available to him, Lo Prete barely had sufficient forces to protect the immediate Quang Tri base area let alone carry out mobile operations in the extensive southwestern area of operations toward *Base Area 101*. Although the 1st ARVN Regiment maintained forces to the east and north of the Marine regiment, the North Vietnamese had already infiltrated at least two battalions of the *812th NVA Regiment* into the coastal region east of Route 1 and Quang Tri City. The *NVA Quyet Thaig Artillery Regiment* equipped with 82mm mortars and rockets was deployed to the southwest and west of the Marines. To the west, Marine reconnaissance "Stingray" patrols made continual sightings of small groups of enemy soldiers moving eastward towards the coast.[15]

For the most part, the enemy largely bypassed the Marine positions and confined his attacks on the Marine base areas and the Quang Tri airfield to harassing sniper fire, occasional mortar shelling, and rocket bombardment. On two occasions, 24 and 31 January, enemy 122mm rockets and 60mm and 82mm mortar rounds hit the Quang Tri airfield but caused relatively little damage. Through January, the Marines sustained casualties of 2 dead and 32 wounded and killed 8 of the enemy and took 1 prisoner. They also recovered six weapons.[16]

With the North Vietnamese attacks on Khe Sanh and the Cua Viet, both Generals Westmoreland and Cushman recognized the need for additional forces in Quang Tri Province. Westmoreland's decision to reinforce Marine forces in the north with the 1st Air Cavalry Division provided General Cushman, the III MAF commander, with additional options.** On 22 January, after a conference with both General Westmoreland, and the MACV deputy commander, General Creighton W. Abrams, Cushman outlined his plans for the Army division. He planned to assign Major General John J. Tolson, the 1st Cavalry Commander, an extensive area of operations that would

*Colonel Max McQuown wrote that in contrast to Operation Badger Tooth, Operation Badger Catch was the "proper, profitable use of a potent fighting force. Initially, BLT 3/1 operated within an Amphibious Objective Area with all elements of the BLT ashore or on-call." Most importantly, he had "firm intelligence about the enemy in the area." Col Max McQuown, Comments on draft, dtd 22Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**See Chapter 6 for further discussion about the deployment of the 1st Air Cavalry Division to I Corps.

include the enemy *Base Area 114* in northern Thua Thien Province, and *Base Area 101* in southern Quang Tri Province. The division command post with one brigade would be located at the former Marine base at Camp Evans. This brigade would be responsible for operations to clear out *Base Area 114*. While part of the same operation, Operation Jeb Stuart under the command of General Tolson, the second brigade upon its arrival would deploy to Quang Tri. It would relieve the 3d Marines of its responsibility south of the Thach Han and take over the La Vang base area.[17]

On 22 January, the 1st Air Cavalry's 1st Brigade, under the command of Army Colonel Donald V. Rattan, deployed from Landing Zone El Paso near Phu Bai and established a new fire base at Landing Zone Jane, about 10,000 meters south of Quang Tri City. Three days later, the 1st Brigade, four battalions strong, moved from Jane to Landing Zone Betty, just below the 3d Marines headquarters. One Marine, Corporal William Ehrhart, with the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, recalled the day the Cavalry arrived:

> One morning, army helicopters, mostly Hueys, . . . just kept coming and coming and coming, dropping down and disgorging soldiers like insects depositing eggs, then flying off to be replaced by still more helicopters. All day long they came. I had never seen so many helicopters before. I had never even imagined that so many helicopters existed.[18]

With the arrival of the Army brigade, Operation Osceola II became a one-infantry battalion operation under the 3d Marines and responsible only for the protection of the Quang Tri airfield and its immediate environs. Colonel Lo Prete moved his command post from La Vang to Ai Tu west of the airfield. On 27 January, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines reverted to the control of its parent regiment and joined the 1st Marines at Phu Bai.[19]

Heavy Fighting Along the DMZ

There had also been a readjustment of forces in the central DMZ front. On 20 January, the 4th Marines, under Colonel William L. Dick, had taken over the Lancaster area of operations from the 3d Marines. Outside of a slight change of name, Lancaster II retained the same forces and mission as the old operation. Colonel Dick and his staff moved into the 3d Marines' old command post at Camp Carroll and assumed operational control of the two battalions already in Lancaster, the 2d and the 3d, of the 9th Marines.* Artillery batteries under the operational control of the 1st Battalion, 12th Marines directly supported the infantry base areas in Lancaster: Camp Carroll, Thon Son Lam or Rockpile area, and Ca Lu. Like Colonel Lo Prete before him, Colonel Dick's main task was to keep Route 9 open in an area characterized by rolling hills, an occasional ravine, overgrown brush, streams, and dry streambeds. Still Route 9 was the main land logistic lifeline for the Marine outposts in the DMZ sector.[20]

With the move of the 4th Marines to Camp Carroll, the regiment's "tempo of action picked up immediately." Upon the first night of the arrival of the regimental headquarters and staff, North Vietnamese gunners fired some 30 140mm rockets into Camp Carroll reinforced by 15 rounds of 85mm artillery fire. Although causing relatively little damage, these turned out to be the first shots in a determined attempt by the North Vietnamese to isolate Camp Carroll and cut Route 9.[21]

Four days later, 24 January 1968, elements of the *320th NVA Division*, an elite unit and veteran of the 1954 Dien Bien Phu campaign and newly arrived in the DMZ sector, initiated the enemy campaign in earnest with an ambush of a Marine "Rough Rider" convoy. The convoy was on a routine artillery resupply mission from Dong Ha to Camp Carroll. It consisted of three trucks and a jeep armed with quad .50-caliber machine guns. Around 1330 that afternoon, when the trucks were about to turn into the Camp Carroll access road, about 3,000 meters above the Marine base, the North Vietnamese sprang their ambush.[22]

The enemy soldiers opened up with small arms, mortars, machine guns, and recoilless rifles, immediately immobilizing all four vehicles. Using their weapons, including the quad .50, to defend themselves, and taking what cover they could, the Marines with the convoy called for assistance. The 4th Marines sent a reaction force from Camp Carroll, consisting of a platoon from Company H, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines; two tanks, one a flame tank, from Company B, 3d Tank Battalion; and two Army M42 Dusters from Battery C, 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery. The North Vietnamese, however, were waiting for the reaction column. An enemy gunner fired on the lead tank, stopping it with a recoilless rifle round and killing the

*Actually it was a battalion and a half, as the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines only had two companies in Lancaster. The other two companies were under the command of the battalion executive officer in the neighboring 9th Marines Kentucky area of operations. See Chapter 3.

reaction force commander, Captain Daniel W. Kent, who was also the tank company commander. Again the Marines fought back and called for support. When two UH–1E gunships appeared overhead, about 1830, the North Vietnamese troops broke contact and disappeared. A second relief column of two more dusters and two trucks armed with quad .50s arrived from Dong Ha and assisted with the evacuation of the dead and wounded. The Marines suffered casualties of 8 men dead and 44 wounded. They killed about three of the enemy. Not only did the vehicles of the original convoy require extensive repairs, but two of the dusters and the one tank hit by the RPG round also sustained damage.

General Tompkins, the 3d Marine Division commander, could not tolerate this situation. It appeared that the North Vietnamese at will could cut Route 9 and thus, in effect, deny access to Camp Carroll and the other Marine bases in Operation Lancaster. Upon learning about the ambush, he transferred Lieutenant Colonel Lee R. Bendell's 3d Battalion, 4th Marines from the Kentucky area of operations to the Lancaster one and returned the battalion to its parent regimental control. The battalion was to clear the ambush site and then sweep Route 9.[23]

On the afternoon of 24 January, Marine helicopters brought Lieutenant Colonel Bendell, the battalion commander, a skeleton battalion command group, and Company M to Camp Carroll. At 1900, Bendell and his small headquarters group accompanied Company M under Captain Raymond W. Kalm to the ambush site to assist in the evacuation of casualties. Upon learning that the second relief force had already brought in the wounded and some of the bodies, the Marine company established night positions on a ridgeline, about 1500 meters south of and overlooking Route 9 and also screening "the NVA from Camp Carroll."[24] The next morning the company would begin its reconnaissance of the battalion's planned objective area.[25]

At 0630, on the 25th, the company departed its nighttime positions. Lieutenant Colonel Bendell advised Captain Kalm to occupy a small hill just north of Route 9, about 2,000 meters south of the Cam Lo River. After sending his 3d Platoon under Second Lieutenant John S. Leffen, to occupy the strategic height, the Marine captain led the rest of the company to the ambush site of the previous day, about 1,000 meters to the west.* The company recovered four of the Marine dead from the earlier action and then began a sweep from west to east on Route 9. About 0915, the lead platoon had no sooner passed by the damaged vehicles still strewn along the side of the road when it came under automatic weapons fire.** With the assistance of Leffen's platoon left on the hill, the company obtained fire superiority. Lance Corporal Jack L. Patton, a machine gunner with the 3d Platoon, sighted the enemy gun. Patton later laconically stated, "my gun returned fire and we killed the enemy." In that action, the Marines sustained casualties of two dead and two wounded and killed three of the enemy. They also recovered the NVA light machine gun.[26]***

Company M then established a defensive perimeter on the hill and waited for the rest of the battalion to join it. By mid-afternoon, both Companies I and L as well as the rest of the battalion command group had arrived. Although not suffering any more killed, the battalion sustained 17 more wounded from random mortar fire from nearby enemy gunners. That night the battalion "established a three-company, tied-in perimeter" across both sides of Route 9.[27]

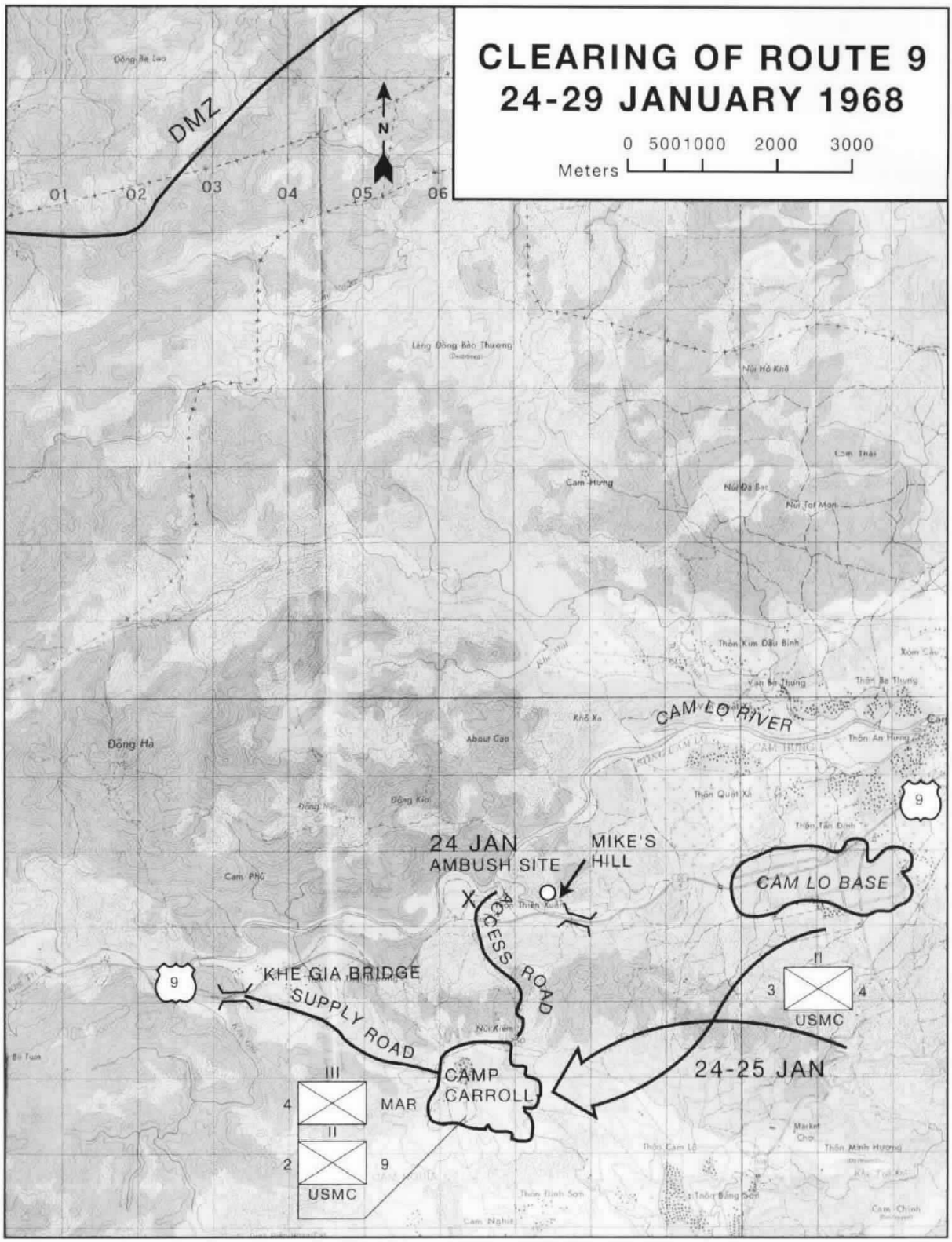
At about 0230 on 26 January, Colonel Dick, the 4th Marines commander, radioed Lieutenant Colonel Bendell that he had received intelligence of large North Vietnamese forces operating just north of the Cam Lo River. The regimental commander wanted the 3d Battalion to secure Route 9 from the Khe Gia Bridge, about 5,000 meters west of the battalion's present position, east to Cam Lo, a distance of about 9,000 meters. Two companies were to deploy north of the river, while the remaining company cleared the road. Lieutenant Colonel Bendell suggested instead that "the mission of securing the road was best performed along the road and south of the Cam Lo River." The regiment, however, insisted that the battalion carry out the mission as originally ordered.[28]

Lieutenant Colonel Bendell then prepared his plans and started to carry out his new orders. Companies I and L were to cross the Cam Lo and operate

*Major John S. Leffen, then the platoon commander, remembered some of the events somewhat differently. He recalled moving to the hill north of Route 9 the previous evening. Maj John S. Leffen, Jr., Comments on draft, n.d. (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Leffen Comments.

**Colonel Bendell recalled that "one Marine managed to start the abandoned tank and pulled all the convoy vehicles back toward Cam Lo." Col Lee R. Bendell, Comments on draft, n.d. [Nov94] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Bendell Comments.

***Major Leffen, the 3d Platoon commander, recalled that the captured enemy weapon was a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) rather than a light machine gun. Leffen Comments.


CLEARING OF ROUTE 9
24-29 JANUARY 1968
0 500 1000 2000 3000
Meters
N
DMZ
01
02
03
04
05
06
Đông Hà
CAM LO RIVER
24 JAN
AMBUSH SITE
MIKE'S
HILL
CAM LO BASE
ACCESS ROAD
KHE GIA BRIDGE
SUPPLY ROAD
CAMP
CARROLL
MAR
USMC
24-25 JAN
9

on the northern banks of the river while Company M secured Route 9, south of the river. The enemy, however, forced the Marines to change the original concept of the mission. At 0845 on the morning of the 26th, a Company M patrol discovered that the enemy had blown a bridge on Route 9 over a small streambed, just below the hill, now dubbed "Mike's Hill" after Company M, where the company had established its night defensive position. The patrol reported that the road was "impassable without engineer improvement." Just as Company I was about to cross the river, the regimental commander changed his order about operating on both banks of the Cam Lo.* Colonel Dick directed the battalion to "continue to secure Route 9, to deny enemy access to bridges and culverts, and to patrol and ambush 375 meters north and south of Route 9, occupying the high ground on either side of the route as necessary." In effect, the battalion was to secure that portion of Route 9 that extended from the opening to Camp Carroll eastward to the destroyed bridge.[29]

During the rest of the morning and afternoon of the 26th, the three companies patrolled the approximately 2,000 meters of Route 9, encountering little resistance except for the occasional sniper and mortar bombardment. Throughout the day, however, the battalion recovered enemy equipment, including pieces of clothing and web gear, ammunition, grenades, and even antipersonnel mines and spotted small groups of enemy soldiers. By nightfall, concerned about the perimeter of the previous night on relatively low terrain, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell ordered the battalion to form three separate company defensive perimeters "on favorable high ground on both sides of Route 9, including Company M on Mike's Hill."[30]

After returning to its hill for the night, Company M also established several small ambush sites. The 3d Platoon commander, Second Lieutenant John S. Leffen, sent out an ambush squad and established a fire team listening post at the bottom of the hill. According to Leffen, both the squad and fire team as they arrived at their designated positions reported there were North Vietnamese soldiers all around them. Lieutenant Leffen pulled back the listening post, but left the ambush squad where it was because of its "tactical importance."[31]

During the night of 26–27 January, North Vietnamese soldiers attempted to infiltrate the Marine positions through a streambed to the west of Mike's Hill and gullies and other streambeds to the north and east.** On Mike's Hill, Lieutenant Leffen remembered that about 0500 on the morning of the 27th, "we heard what sounded like 'wall to wall' NVA all around our positions." He remarked on the poor noise discipline of the enemy troops. Although the Marines could not hear the sound of the movements of the NVA soldiers, "What gave them away was their constant talking." A Marine mortarman, Frank Craven,*** with Company M several years later recalled, "They were at the bottom of the hill and we were at the middle of the hill . . . They didn't know it and we didn't know it until . . . we butted heads." According to Craven, "we heard some noise and then it was automatic machine gun fire from then on. It was terrible."[32]

The fight for Mike's Hill would last through the entire afternoon and spread to Route 9 and involve all three companies of the 3d Battalion. On the hill, itself, the battle turned into a wild melee. Clambering up three slopes of the hill, the North Vietnamese employed mortars, rocket propelled grenades, and automatic weapons to cover their advance. The Marines responded in kind. Lieutenant Leffen remembered "when we ran out of bullets we threw grenades and misdelivered .50 cal rounds in a variable and alternating fashion to keep the NVA honest until the helos could bring us more ammunition."[33] From an enlisted man's perspective, Frank Craven recalled that it was "every man for himself. You still work as a team somewhat . . . but as far as a coordinated formal thing, all that gets wiped away. The thicker the battle the more informal and it was very thick." Craven particularly remembered one machine gunner at the top of the hill that kept the enemy back: "He just kept that area sprayed."[34]

From a nearby hill to the east of Company M, Company L fired 60mm mortars and rifle rounds into an exposed enemy flank. Lieutenant Colonel Bendell, from his temporary command post on

*Colonel William L. Dick explained in his comments that once the bridge was blown, "a change in plans was obviously required" and required a "rapid reevaluation." Col William L. Dick, Comments on draft, dtd 1Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Dick Comments.

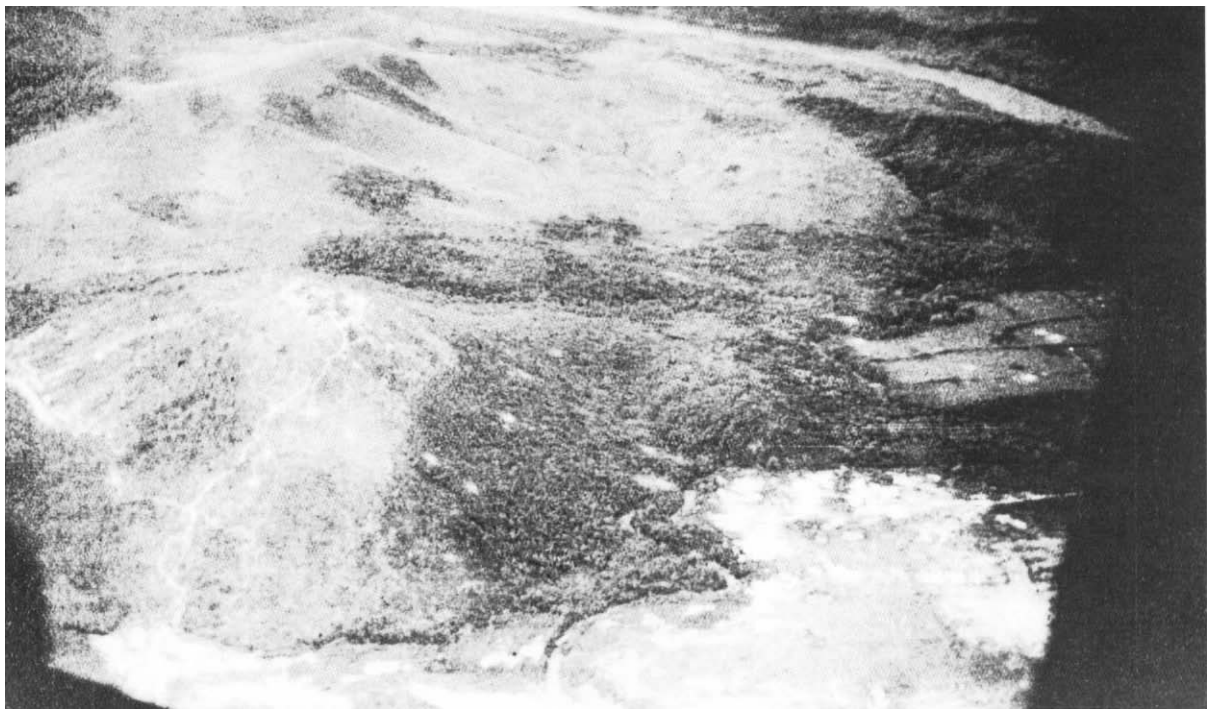
**Colonel Bendell commented that the enemy had moved into attack positions under cover of darkness and that "it appeared their principle attack was along the road where the battalion perimeter had been located the night earlier." Bendell Comments.

***Frank Craven later legally changed his name to Abdullah Hassan.



Top photo is from the John S. Leffen Collection and the bottom is courtesy of Col Lee R. Bendell, USMC (Ret)

The fight for Mike's Hill, named after Company M, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, would be the pivotal battle in the opening up of Route 9 to Camp Carroll in January 1968. In the top photo, the smoke from a Boeing B–52 Arclight strike on North Vietnamese positions can be seen from a Company M position on Mike's Hill. Each of the B–52 Stratofortresses could hold 27 tons of ordnance. Below, Mike's Hill after the battle has much of its foliage destroyed. Route 9 can be seen in the foreground and the Cam Lo River in the background.



Mike's Hill, then ordered Captain John L. McLaughlin, the Company L commander, to maneuver his company down to Route 9 and relieve a Company M squad surrounded by North Vietnamese troops at an ambush site near the destroyed bridge. By noon, after overcoming determined pockets of enemy resistance with the assistance of 81mm mortars and coordinated small arms fire from a Company M squad on Mike's Hill, Company L reached the bridge and relieved the embattled Marines there. In the process, the company took some casualties, but killed 23 of the enemy and captured 3 prisoners.

With the arrival of Company L at the bridge and Mike's Hill now secure, the battalion commander directed Captain John L. Prichard, the Company I commander, to advance eastward along Route 9 from his positions toward Company L, a distance of some 1,000 meters. Because of the nature of the terrain in the sector, open ground interspersed with hedgerows and heavy brush, Bendell called artillery fire upon enemy firing positions north of the Cam Lo River to cover Company I's open left flank.* About 200 meters west of the bridge, a well-camouflaged and dug-in NVA company using streambeds and dense vegetation as cover stopped Company I. Failing to overcome the enemy resistance with repeated frontal assaults, Captain Prichard asked for reinforcements. He ordered up his reserve platoon from his old position and Lieutenant Colonel Bendell directed Company L to send one platoon to Prichard. By 1400, with the support of Huey gunships, the two companies had linked up and began the mop up. For the most part, the battle for Mike's Hill was over.[35]

About that time, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell received a radio message from Colonel Dick that Major General Tompkins, the 3d Division commander, wanted the battalion to return to Camp Carroll. Concerned that the NVA were still in force north of the river, Bendell failed to see the tactical advantage of "re-seizing terrain fought for earlier" and recommended the battalion stay and mop up the area.[36] After first ruling against Bendell, Colonel Dick and General Tompkins decided to permit the battalion to continue with the road-securing mission for another day.** By 1700 on the 27th, "vehicles were able to move without harassment along Route 9 from both directions to the destroyed bridge . . . ."[37]

After evacuating the casualties, which included the Company I commander, Captain Prichard, who later died of his wounds, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell formed his battalion into two companies. He placed Company I under the operational control of Company M and attached one of Company M's platoons to Company L. According to the battalion commander, instead of having "three short-strength companies," he now had two "full-strength" ones. During the day, the battalion had killed more than 130 of the enemy, captured 6 prisoners, and recovered 3 57mm recoilless rifles, 2 60mm mortars, 35 AK–47s, and extensive ammunition and equipment. The 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, however, had paid a heavy price: 21 men dead and 62 men wounded.[38]

On the 28th, the now two ad hoc companies continued their patrolling of Route 9 with relatively little incident. About 1430, a Company L patrol happened upon a tunnel. Its entrance was three feet in diameter and it extended about eight feet underground. Five other tunnels, running east to west, intersected with the first one. In these tunnels were several North Vietnamese bodies, some lying on makeshift litters. The Marines buried the bodies and destroyed the tunnels.*** After completing this grisly task, the battalion received orders once more to return to Camp Carroll. Marine helicopters flew Company L to Camp Carroll, while the revamped Company M returned to the base on foot. Once the Marines were a safe distance away, Air Force B–52s in an Arclight mission carpet bombed suspected enemy avenues of retreat and firing positions north of the Cam Lo River.[39]****

*Colonel Bendell recalled that he directed his operations officer and his artillery liaison officer "to 'seal off' the battle area by artillery fires all along the Cam Lo River at the suspected crossing points. This apparently prevented reinforcements and even made retreat hazardous for those south of the river." Bendell Comments.

**Colonel Dick later wrote, "it was manifest that the battalion couldn't remain in the area indefinitely and there was no available unit for relief. In any event the position would have to be uncovered . . . . when the CG stated his wish for 3/4 to withdraw I certainly wasn't going to 'rule' against him but did demur to the extent that Lee [Bendell] was on the ground and in a better position to make a reasonable estimate of the situation, and could be brought in the following day. Which is what happened." Dick Comments.

***These bodies were included in the figures of North Vietnamese dead listed above for the action of 27 January.

****Major Leffen remembered that an aerial observer "spoke directly to me indicating we were 'in a lot of trouble.' He . . . could see a column of 3's headed south toward our position as far as he could see. We were then told to be five clicks south of the hill by 1700." He wrote that the B–52s struck exactly at that time and "we could see pieces of the enemy in the trees following the arclight." Leffen Comments



Both photos are courtesy of Col Lee R. Bendell, USMC (Ret)

At top a well-camouflaged NVA foxhole was used during the fighting for Route 9. These fighting positions were often interconnected by a complex tunnel network. Below, the first Marine convoy arrives at Camp Carroll after the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines reopened Route 9.



The following day, 29 January, the battalion reinforced by tanks and Company H, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines returned to the destroyed bridge on Route 9. The mission was to provide security for an engineer unit building a bypass for the bridge and to open the road for vehicular traffic. Company L this time occupied Mike's Hill, while Company M and the tanks patrolled Route 9 west to the Khe Gia Bridge. Company H, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines remained with the engineers at the downed span. For the most part, the road-clearing mission was uneventful. Enemy gunners once mortared Mike's Hill which resulted in two wounded Marines from Company L. On the road patrol, a nervous Marine mistakenly shot and wounded a second Marine, whom the first thought to be an enemy soldier. The infantry-tank patrol also came across 30 enemy bodies and several weapons just north of Route 9. At the damaged bridge site, Company H took two wounded North Vietnamese soldiers prisoners. At 1530 that afternoon, the engineers completed the work on the bypass and "a huge Dong Ha convoy began moving through the bridge point, enroute to Camp Carroll." Route 9 was once more open.

With the completion of opening Route 9, the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines returned to Camp Carroll, but remained under the operational control of the 4th Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Bendell sent a personal message to the officers and men of his command, thanking them for their efforts: "You may all take pride in a good job, well done." The following day, the battalion received a message from General Westmoreland, the MACV commander, complimenting "the officers and men of 3/4 for the aggressive attack against the enemy's *64th Regiment* . . . This action undoubtedly pre-empted enemy attack against Camp Carroll."[40]

Despite the hard-won accomplishment of reopening Route 9, the identification of the *64th NVA Regiment* had ominous undertones for the Marine command. Intelligence officers were now sure that a new enemy division, the *320th NVA,* had replaced the *324B NVA Division* in the western Demilitarized Zone. The new division consisted of the *48th* and *56th NVA Regiments* in addition to the *64th*.* All the prisoners captured by the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines were from the *64th*, and most were recent draftees. This new enemy regiment had crossed the Ben Hai about 10 days previously, apparently with the mission of cutting Route 9 and isolating Camp Carroll and the other bases in the Lancaster area. There was no doubt that there would be another attempt.[41]

A Lull in Leatherneck Square

For Colonel Richard B. Smith's 9th Marines in Leatherneck Square, things had been relatively quiet. Because of the uncertainties of enemy intentions in the DMZ, on 20 January, General Westmoreland had agreed to a III MAF request to suspend work on the barrier until the situation clarified. The 9th Marines continued to be responsible for the defense of the A–3 and A–4 (Con Thien) Strongpoints just below the cleared trace, and their supporting combat bases. On the 21st, enemy gunners fired upon the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, then still under the 9th Marines in positions about six kilometers northeast of Con Thien, with about 300 rounds of mixed caliber artillery and mortar rounds. The battalion sustained 10 casualties, all wounded. Until the end of the month, there were several small actions, but no major attempt of the North Vietnamese units to penetrate in strength the Marine defenses.[42]

For the most part, the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines at Con Thien bore the brunt of whatever enemy activity there was, largely continuing mortar and artillery bombardment. Having already lost one commander to enemy mortars, the 2d Battalion earlier had hopes that in Operation Checkers, it would leave Con Thien and rejoin its parent regiment, the 1st Marines. Major General Tompkins, the 3d Marine Division commander, however, told General Cushman that "with present enemy threat . . . the relief of 2/1 at Con Thien is postponed until after Tet."[43]

The small hill, only 160 meters high, but less than two miles south of the Demilitarized Zone, remained a key terrain feature for the Marines and a favorite target for North Vietnamese gunners and small infantry probes. Shortly after noon on 22 January, the enemy bombarded the Marine strongpoint with 100 rounds of 82mm mortar, followed by 130 rounds of 152mm shells from guns within North Vietnam. The battalion sustained 2 men killed and 16 wounded. One-half hour later, about 1,000 meters north of the base, Companies F and G encountered a North Vietnamese infantry company. The enemy unit withdrew under

*There is a minor question whether the *64th NVA* was involved in the fighting for Route 9 from 24–29 January. According to the 3d Marine Division's after-action report for Lancaster II, dated over a year after the action, the *64th* was in reserve, while the other two regiments attacked Route 9. It claims that prisoners captured in the action "substantiated this intelligence." Yet, all the contemporary documents refer only to the *64th* identified in this fighting. If the *64th* was in reserve, it appears contradictory that the prisoners captured by the Marines would be from that regiment.

cover of 60mm mortar fire. In the firefight, the Marines sustained casualties of two men dead and eight wounded and killed three of the NVA. The following night the enemy hit the Marine base again, but with much less force. At 2300, 40 82mm and 20 60mm mortar rounds together with 10 rounds of 152mm artillery shells landed within the Con Thien perimeter. This time the Marines sustained six wounded but no dead.[44]

On 29 January, the battalion demonstrated the value of maintaining the Con Thien outpost despite the continuing harassment. About 0125, a Marine forward observer there looking through his starlight scope discovered a North Vietnamese convoy moving on a secondary road, about a 1,000 meters in the DMZ north of the Ben Hai River, and called in air and artillery missions. The observer then saw the enemy at a site, just below the Ben Hai, launch four to five SAMs (surface-to-air missiles) at the American aircraft. He then ran a radar-controlled (TPQ) mission on the SAM site. After the firing and bombing missions, the Marine outpost reported a "total of nine secondary explosions including a huge fireball, and one secondary fire for area of convoy and suspected SAM sites."[45]

While the enemy activity in the Kentucky area of operations remained relatively low, General Tompkins did not want to deplete his defenses in the sector. The division and 9th Marines continued to receive reports of enemy movement around Marine positions in the operation. News about the arrival of the *320th NVA Division* on the DMZ reinforced the unease that the Marine commanders had about the overall situation on the northern front.[46]

The transfer of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines to the Lancaster area of operations and the unexpected assignment of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines to Khe Sanh forced General Tompkins again to look to the Special Landing Force, this time SLF Alpha with BLT 2/4, for reinforcement. Earlier, on 22 January, BLT 2/4, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Weise, had relieved the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines at Camp Evans and had come under the operational control of the 1st Marines. With the takeover of Evans by the 1st Cavalry Division and the movement of the 1st Marines to Phu Bai, the BLT was once again free.* With the concurrence of the Seventh Fleet, Generals Cushman and Tompkins agreed to assign Weise's BLT the area of operations northeast of Con Thien, just vacated by the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines.[47]

*See Chapter six for operations in Thua Thien Province.

On 26 January, BLT 2/4 reembarked from Camp Evans to SLF Alpha amphibious shipping and the following day, in Operation Fortress Attack, deployed to the Kentucky area of operations. Shortly after 0900 on the 27th, the SLF helicopter squadron, HMM–361, landed the first wave of the battalion in a landing zone near the combat operating base, C–2, on Route 561. By 1900, the entire BLT was ashore and the 9th Marines assumed operational control of the battalion from the Navy. According to plan, most of the supporting elements of the BLT including the Ontos and the amtrac platoons were detached and placed under other division commands. The following day the battalion moved from the C–2 base to its assigned new area of operations near Con Thien.[48]

On 31 January, General Tompkins would shift forces once more. He divided the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines into two command groups, each with two companies. The 3d Division commander sent Command Group A with Companies F and G attached to Camp Carroll and placed it under the operational control of the 4th Marines. Command Group B, under Lieutenant Colonel Weise's executive officer, remained with the 9th Marines in the Kentucky area of operations. As Tompkins explained to General Cushman, he believed that the "enemy will aim a major effort to overrun Camp Carroll, Thon Son Lam [the Rockpile area], and Ca Lu." According to the 3d Division commander, the *"320th Division* is admirably positioned" for such an attack which "offers enemy greatest return [and] more profitable for him than similar major effort against hardened positions" of the barrier strongpoints in the Kentucky area of operations. General Cushman agreed.[49]

The Cua Viet Continues to Heat Up

To the east of the Kentucky area of operations, the North Vietnamese continued their effort to close the Cua Viet River channel. Following the sinking of the LCM on 24 January by a command detonated mine, the next morning NVA gunners struck again. From positions in the hamlet of My Loc on the northern bank of the river they fired rifle propelled grenades and recoilless rifles at a Navy convoy of two LCMs and a LCU (landing craft, utility). Both the two LCMs took hits and returned to the Cua Viet Port Facility. The LCU continued on to Dong Ha. The action resulted in five Americans wounded, four Navy crewmen and a Marine from Company K, BLT 3/1. In their return fire at the enemy positions, the Navy gun crews inadver-

tently struck Company K trying to clear the northern bank in Operation Badger Catch.[50]

Since coming ashore on the evening of 23 January, Lieutenant Colonel McQuown's BLT 3/1 began its mission of attempting to clear the hamlets north of the river. The terrain in the Badger Catch area of operations consisted largely of sand dunes and sandy barren soil extending some 5,000 meters inland to a tributary of the Ben Hai River. This stream, unnamed on the maps but called Jones Creek by the Marines, ran south from the DMZ into the Cua Viet. Bordering both Jones Creek and especially the Cua Viet were extensive paddy areas that supported rice farming. The rice growers lived in hamlets on the banks of the Cua Viet or the adjacent area just above it. Because of the war, many of these hamlets were now abandoned and others were used as refugee centers.

According to agent reports, the enemy force in the Cua Viet sector numbered about 1,200 men, consisting of three North Vietnamese companies and three Viet Cong companies, two main force and one local force. On the 24th, the BLT had secured its first objective, a refugee resettlement village on the river about a 1,000 meters east of My Loc without incident. It also had searched two hamlets to the north, Ha Loc and Ha Loi, again without meeting any resistance. In a separate operation on an island in the river, Company L had little success in locating any of the enemy forces that might have been responsible for the sinking of the LCM that day.[51]

On the 25th, the battalion encountered much stiffer resistance. Even the previous day, it had come under small arms and mortar fire from My Loc, one of the battalion's prime objectives. At dawn, and without preparatory fires, Captain John E. Regal, the Company K commander, ordered his company into an attack on the hamlet along a narrow front. He deployed one platoon to the right to form blocking positions north of the city. While attempting to maneuver around the hamlet, the blocking platoon came under heavy machine gun and small arms fire. With this platoon caught in a deadly cross fire from the hamlet, Regal sent in reinforcements including tanks attached to him for the operation. Even with the tanks in support, Company K had difficulty in pulling out its casualties from the initial action. The tanks exchanged fire with enemy antitank gunners armed with RPGs. Although the tanks sustained five hits, all escaped relatively unscathed. It was about this time, the enemy gunners in My Loc opened up on the Navy convoy. About 1000, the company had succeeded in bringing out its dead and wounded, six killed and nine wounded.[52]

By this time, Lieutenant Colonel McQuown and Captain Regal had learned from nearby ARVN units that a NVA battalion was in My Loc. They decided to pull Company K back and bring in air strikes and supporting arms. From 1030 to 1430, Marine, Air Force, and Navy jets flew four close air support missions against My Loc. Then under covering artillery fire, about 1500, Company K once more moved upon the hamlet, this time meeting almost no resistance except a few occasional sniper rounds. In My Loc, the company recovered an RPG–7 rocket launcher and the bodies of 20 North Vietnamese soldiers. The Marines also captured one prisoner. Later that evening, the company came under artillery fire from firing positions north of the DMZ, but sustained no casualties. Lieutenant Colonel McQuown selected My Loc for his command post and also for the battalion's main combat base because of the hamlet's "strategic location relative to river traffic."[53]

For the time being, the Marine occupation of My Loc appeared to confound the enemy gunners. For the next few days, the enemy was unable to interfere with the American shipping on the Cua Viet. General Tompkins and the commander of the Cua Viet Naval Support Activity also implemented increased security arrangements that may also have contributed to the safe passage of the Navy craft. The Naval Support Activity provided Navy crews with PRC–25 radios that permitted them to communicate with Marine air observers flying overhead and with helicopter gunships. Moreover, the two commanders agreed upon check points along the river where boats could "report their location in relation to any enemy activity." This permitted the 3d Marine Division "to react to any contact with artillery, naval gunfire, air, when available, and ground forces in the form of USMC and/or ARVN Sparrow Hawk reaction forces." Finally, the two commanders concurred upon the assignment of two Navy patrol boats on the river carrying armed Marines, two National policemen, and an interpreter to stop and search "indigenous water craft."[54]

Despite the limited reprieve for the Cua Viet shipping, the enemy still posed a real threat to the 3d Marine Division river lifeline. The fighting for My Loc revealed that the *NVA 803d Regiment*, part of the *324B Division*, had shifted from positions in the Kentucky and Lancaster operational areas to the northern coastal plain east of Route 1. Skirting the 2d ARVN Regiment's positions at the A–1 Strongpoint and the C–1



Both photos are from the Abel Collection

Top, a Marine from Company K, BLT 3/1 carrying a M79 grenade launcher runs gingerly through an NVA-held hamlet during Operation Badger Catch. During the same operation, below, a 60mm mortar team from the BLT casually prepares to fire its weapon in support of the infantry.



Combat Base, at least one battalion of the regiment had infiltrated between the C–4 Combat Base manned by Company C, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines and the Cua Viet River. With the obvious mission to interrupt the flow of supplies along the river to Dong Ha, the *3d Battalion, 803d Regiment* occupied those hamlets fronting on the river and a few just above.[55]

For the most part, the enemy troops built rather formidable fortifications in these hamlets. As in My Loc, their first line of defense was on the edge of the hamlet or village. They constructed these defenses in depth with bunkers, fighting holes, interconnecting tunnels, and trench lines often extending into the center of the hamlet. The North Vietnamese soldiers usually converted the villagers' "family type bomb shelters" into fortified bunkers for their own use. From the nature of the defenses and the skill with which they used them as reflected in My Loc, the enemy intended to hold their positions unless forced out by overwhelming strength.[56]

For BLT 3/1 the taking of My Loc was only the beginning of the attempt to clear the enemy out of the Cua Viet sector. Several small hamlets, while not on the river, but just above it, provided cover for the units of the *803d*. On the following day, 26 January, another company of Lieutenant Colonel McQuown's command, Company I, encountered much the same, if not even more tenacious resistance, in the hamlet of Lam Xuan as Company K in My Loc.

On the morning of the 26th, while Company K continued to secure My Loc, Captain Lawrence R. Moran's Company I covered the northern flank. After a few enemy probes and calling an air strike on Lam Xuan, about 1500 meters to the northwest, Moran's company, that afternoon, advanced upon the latter hamlet. Attacking from east to west, Company I at first met hardly any opposition. The enemy troops allowed the Marines to move into the first tree line of the hamlet before opening up. Firing from well-concealed positions, especially scrub brush immediately to the rear of the Marines, the enemy, according to the battalion's report, "inflicted moderate casualties and . . . [caused] the attack to bog down."[57]

Lieutenant Colonel McQuown immediately sent in his attached tanks and an attached Ontos platoon to assist the beleaguered company. Even with the tanks and the Ontos, the latter equipped with 106mm recoilless rifles, Moran had difficulty in disengaging. Under covering artillery fire, smoke shells, and close air strikes, it took the Marine company more than five hours to extract all of its casualties from Lam Xuan. With night coming on, Lieutenant Colonel McQuown decided to pull back Company I and concentrate the rest of his forces rather than continue the attack. In this first fight for Lam Xuan, Company I suffered 8 dead and 41 wounded. The Marines claimed to have killed 17 of the enemy and taken 2 prisoners.

The first phase of Operation Badger Catch was over. At 1400 on the 27th, the amphibious ready group commander relinquished command of the forces ashore to the 3d Marine Division. In turn, General Tompkins gave operational control of BLT 3/1 to Lieutenant Colonel Toner, the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion commander and senior to Lieutenant Colonel McQuown. The 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion remained responsible for Operation Napoleon and the BLT operation became Operation Saline. For Lieutenant Colonel McQuown, outside of new reporting procedures, his task remained the same.[58]

On the 27th, the battalion consolidated its positions before continuing with the attack. Lieutenant Colonel Toner provided the battalion with five more tanks, the ones detached from the SLF Alpha battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Weise's BLT 2/4. At 1955 that evening, Lieutenant Colonel McQuown informed the amtrac battalion commander that he planned to attack Lam Xuan the following morning.

During the night and early morning hours of 28 January, two Marine fixed-wing aircraft carried out radar-controlled bombstrikes on Lam Xuan. This was followed shortly after 0800 by naval gunfire missions by Navy ships in the South China Sea. Then, supported by two tank platoons and the Ontos platoon, Captain Edward S. Hempel's Company L took its turn against the Lam Xuan defenses. Despite the display of U.S. supporting arms, the North Vietnamese unit in Lam Xuan remained undaunted and relatively unscathed. It had constructed its bunkers and trenchlines with overhead covers which were, as Lieutenant Colonel McQuown observed, "only subject to damage from direct hits."[59]

As the tanks moved up into the attack positions, enemy mines disabled three of them. Another fell into a deep bomb crater full of water and became submerged. Still with the direct fire support of the tanks and the recoilless rifle fire of the Ontos, Company L, attacking from east to west, made slow but deliberate progress. As the enemy resistance stiffened, Captain Hempel pulled his men back about noon, so that Marine supporting arms could work over the area once more. Lieutenant Colonel McQuown then reinforced Company L with Captain Regal's Company K. The

two Marine companies advanced on line. Company M also established a platoon blocking position north of Lam Xuan. At dusk, under cover of North Vietnamese guns from north of the DMZ, the NVA troops tried to withdraw. With a flare plane overhead, the Marines continued to press the attack against the enemy. Most of the NVA in the hamlet, nevertheless, managed to make good their retreat, leaving a rear guard to hold off the Marines. About 2100, Companies K and L consolidated their positions in Lam Xuan. The following morning the Marines continued with their mopping up. At 1445 the afternoon of the 29th, the two companies reported that Lam Xuan was "completely secured." The Marines, however, once more paid a price in casualties: 8 dead and 41 wounded. They had killed 69 of the enemy and captured 2 prisoners.[60]

The war still continued to have its surreal qualities. While the fighting expanded all along the DMZ, the allies still prepared for the usual annual Tet truce. According to MACV directives, the truce period was supposed to extend for 36 hours beginning at 1800 on 29 January. In the DMZ sector, BLT 3/1's fight for Lam Xuan made the implementation of the truce very unlikely. Major General Tompkins recalled that 30 minutes before the prospective cease-fire he received a telephone call from General Cushman, "that exempted the 3d MarDiv . . . from any such foolishness. It was to be 'business as usual' for northern I Corps." An entry in the BLT 3/1 journal read, "29[January]1800H– Received information that the 'Tet cease-fire' will not go into effect." Captain Regal, whose company still remained in Lam Xuan, remembered that he took no chances, cease-fire or no cease-fire. At 1800, his company remained on alert and a few minutes later "we again received the inevitable 40 rounds of incoming." Five minutes after the bombardment the message arrived "to disregard all previous traffic regarding the 'cease-fire;' it would not apply to the northern provinces."[61]

On the day of Tet, 31 January 1968, while Company K remained in Lam Xuan, BLT 3/1 was once more engaged in a struggle for another of the hamlets on the northern bank of the Cua Viet, Mai Xa Thi. Strategically located where Jones Creek emptied into the Cua Viet, the hamlet spread over both banks of the smaller waterway. This time, Captain Raymond A. Thomas' Company M spearheaded the assault against the hamlet. Under cover of darkness, Thomas' company moved out of My Loc into attack positions just southwest of Mai Xa Thi. To the north, Captain Regal sent one of his platoons from Lam Xuan towards Mai Xa Thi, about 2,000 meters to the south. The plan was for the Company K platoon to make a diversionary attack by fire, while Company M made the main assault from the opposite direction.[62]

The Marines achieved surprise and the plan seemed to be working. About 0700, the Company K platoon opened fire from its positions north of the hamlet. About 15 minutes later, under cover of supporting artillery and morning fog, Company M moved through a tree line, into an old graveyard, and then across a rice paddy into the hamlet. The North Vietnamese soon recovered from their initial shock and fought back with RPGs, .50-caliber machine guns, and mortars from covered positions within Mai Xa Thi. The enemy even employed artillery in the Demilitarized Zone against the Marines in the hamlet. With his right platoon heavily engaged, Captain Thomas attempted to call in a close air strike, but the fog had not lifted and the sky remained overcast.[63]

At this point, Lieutenant Colonel McQuown decided to reinforce Thomas. He sent Company I up the Cua Viet in LVTs to take over Thomas' left flank. At the same time, a platoon of LVTH–6s, amphibian tractors equipped with 105mm howitzers, arrived to provide direct artillery support. Even with the reinforcements, the Marines only made slight progress as the enemy continued to resist. From positions across Jones Creek, enemy gunners fired rocket-propelled grenades into the Marine flank. Marine artillery fire soon subdued the North Vietnamese gunners, but the Marine advance remained stalled. While Company I took over his left flank, Captain Thomas and the remaining three platoons had joined the right flank platoon. Frustrated in their attempts to force the enemy out of their well dug-in positions, the Marines needed assistance. About 1500, the two Marine companies received word to pull back as the reduced cloud cover now permitted an air strike. The bombing missions proved somewhat of a disappointment because "of haze and many duds."[64]

About 1600, Companies I and M returned to the attack. Lieutenant Colonel McQuown now sent in Company L to follow in trace the first two companies. While still resisting, the enemy began to give way. At 1900, the three companies reported that they were making better progress. A flare plane arrived overhead and the Marines continued to press forward under illumination. By 2130, the Marines had secured about 80 percent of the hamlet and radioed back that "sniper fire continues, but organized resistance has ceased." The following day,



The top photo is from the Abel Collection; bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190420.

Marines of BLT 3/1 also sustained casualties during the fighting. At top, four Marines from Company K carry one of their wounded comrades to relative safety. Below, Navy Corpsman HM3 Edward F. Darewski, also with Company K, provides a wounded Marine an intravenous solution.





Photo is from the Abel Collection

A BLT 3/1 platoon leader directs his men to attack enemy positions during Operation Badger Catch, as the enemy offered heavy resistance to Marine efforts to clear the hamlets near the Cua Viet.

the three companies occupied all of the hamlet. In the fighting, the BLT sustained 12 dead and 46 wounded. They killed 44 of the enemy and captured 2 North Vietnamese soldiers.[65]

From prisoner interrogation, the battalion later learned that Mai Xa Thi had been the command post of the *3d Battalion, 803d NVA Regiment.* As Lieutenant Colonel McQuown observed, that despite all of the sophisticated intelligence sources, "BLT 3/1 was not able to ascertain when the enemy occupied a given area." He therefore worked on the assumption that "all areas that could be occupied by the enemy" were defended by the enemy. According to McQuown, "This practice consumed time and resources but prevented the kind of surprise encounters which had been costly on previous operations."[66]

Thus for the Marines along the DMZ front, Tet had little meaning. It was the same dogged fighting that they had encountered for the last two to three weeks. There was no truce, but also there was no sudden thrust through the DMZ or attack on Khe Sanh that the allies half-expected. The only significant new enemy initiatives in this period were the attempts to cut Route 9 and more importantly, the Cua Viet supply line.

The Battle For Quang Tri City

While along the DMZ, 31 January was just another day in the war, the same was not true for the allied forces near Quang Tri City. In the early morning hours of 31 January, all of the military installations near the city came under either enemy rocket and mortar attack, or both. This included the 3d Marines base area in Operation Osceola II at Ai Tu, the 1st Air Cavalry's 1st Brigade's LZ Betty, and the 1st ARVN Regiment command post near La Vang east of Route 1. Simultaneously with the bombardment of the military base areas, the *812th NVA Regiment* launched a ground attack against Quang Tri City.

The 1st ARVN Regiment, not noted for its aggressiveness, withstood the shock of the North Vietnamese assault against the city. U.S. military advisors considered the 1st the weakest of the three regiments of the 1st ARVN Division. Only a few months previous, a 3d Marine Division message contained the observation that while Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Huu Hanh, the commanding officer of the regiment, had a "mediocre reputation," he was "not incompetent." The advisors blamed the "present passive" role of the regiment in support of the "Revolutionary Development" program of tending "to adversely effect regiment and Hanh."[67]

It was, nevertheless, because of its participation in Revolutionary Development, that the 1st ARVN was in position to counter the thrust of the North Vietnamese attack. Two of the battalions, the 2d and 3d, were conducting security missions relatively close to Quang Tri City and could be called back into the city at very short notice. Hanh had stationed his 1st Battalion, together with the regimental armored personnel carrier (APC) squadron, at a military installation in the western suburbs of Quang Tri. Just to the northeast of the city, in the Catholic hamlet of Tri Buu, Hanh placed the 9th Airborne Battalion that had been sent north from Saigon and put under his operational control. In the city itself, Regional Force troops and combat police supplemented the regular forces. Because of these dispositions, the 1st ARVN Regiment could readily concentrate its forces and those of the local militia.[68]

The South Vietnamese had some inkling that the city was in some danger. Given the unsettled situation in the north, on 28 January, General Lam, the I Corps commander, flew to Quang Tri City and consulted with Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Am, the

Quang Tri Province Chief and former commander of the 1st ARVN Regiment. They decided to place the city "in a state of emergency" and also imposed martial law. Am also provided weapons to various cadre and government civil servants. At the same time, elements of the *812th NVA Regiment*, which had formerly been operating in the DMZ sector, infiltrated into the hamlets and countryside surrounding Quang Tri City. According to a South Vietnamese account, the arrival of the enemy troops sent "thousands of local people panicking toward the city." By now the entire city was alert.[69]

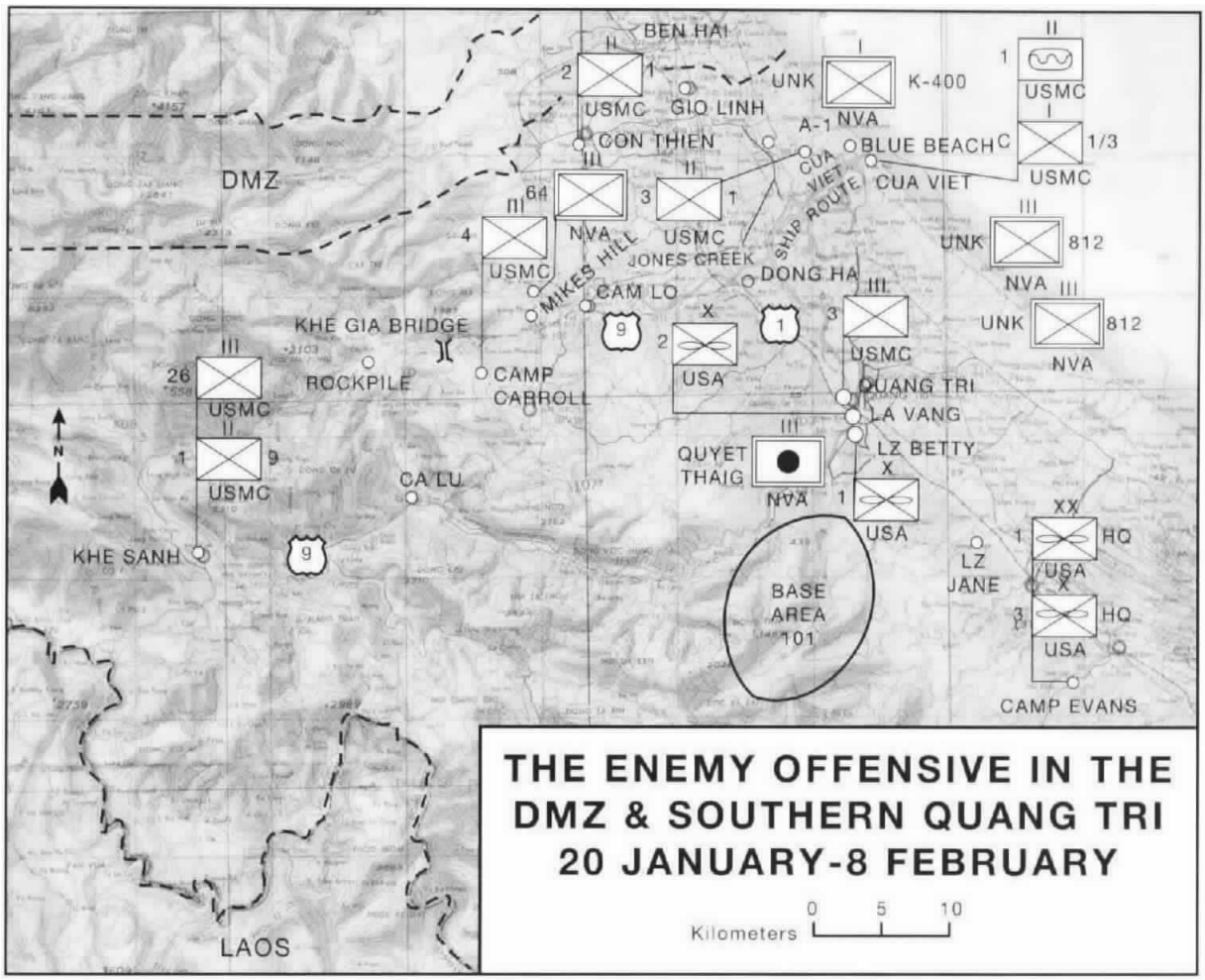
The enemy failed to carry out his plan. Sappers were supposed to infiltrate into the heart of the city on the night of 30–31 January and create a diversion. Once the sappers struck, the *812th* was to launch its attack under cover of a mortar and rocket barrage. The plan went awry for the North Vietnamese, however, almost from the beginning. A platoon from the *10th Sapper Battalion* reached its objectives around 0200 on the 31st, but soon found itself isolated and easily rounded up by local police and militia. The *812th* with five battalions under its



Both photos are from the Abel Collection

Top, after heavy fighting in the Cua Viet area, Marines from BLT 3/1 examine an enemy fighting hole with one Marine actually in the enemy position. Below, Marines from the BLT interrogate a frightened NVA prisoner captured in the fighting





control was more than two hours late in getting started. Rain-swollen streams and the unfamiliarity of the North Vietnamese with the terrain accounted in part for the delay.[70]

Unexpected resistance by the South Vietnamese forces also played a role. At Tri Buu, for example, the *814th VC Main Force Battalion*, attached to the *812th NVA Regiment*, encountered the 9th Airborne Battalion. Apparently the VC tried to take the South Vietnamese troops off guard by donning ARVN paratroop uniforms. The ruse failed when one of the 9th Airborne sentries observed that the "impostors had worn rubber sandals rather then the genuine jungle boots." Despite the uncovering of the Viet Cong, the 9th Airborne at Tri Buu was heavily outnumbered and had little choice but to fall back into Quang Tri City. By daybreak, the *812th* had penetrated the city at several points, but the South Vietnamese had repulsed an attack on the Quang Tri Citadel and the jail. The issue was still in doubt at noon.

At about this time, the civilian director of the CORDs organization in Quang Tri Province, Robert Brewer, and the senior U.S. Army advisor to the 1st ARVN visited Colonel Donald V. Rattan, the 1st Brigade commander, in his command post at LZ Betty. They told Rattan that the situation inside the city "was still highly tenuous." Brewer believed that at least an enemy battalion was in the city and that the ARVN "were badly in need of assistance." The North Vietnamese appeared to be reinforcing from the east "and had established fire support positions on [the] eastern and southern fringes of the city." Colonel Rattan agreed to provide a relief force from his command.[71]

Given the disposition of U.S. and South Vietnamese forces in the sector, Rattan had the only forces available that could reinforce Quang Tri City. West of the city at the Quang Tri Airfield at Ai Tu, Colonel Lo Prete's 3d Marines in Operation Osceola II consisted of only one infantry battalion, some artillery, and a makeshift

infantry company composed of rear elements of the 3d Marine Division headquarters and support troops.* Of these forces, Lo Prete kept two companies of his infantry battalion deployed to the west, out to mortar and sniper range, to screen the vital area. Two companies remained in reserve and the 500-man ad hoc company guarded the perimeter. Lo Prete had no men to spare for the defense of Quang Tri City which was an ARVN responsibility.[72]**

Rattan also could only send a limited force to relieve the ARVN in Quang Tri City. Like the 3d Marines, Colonel Rattan had no responsibility for the defense of the city. Looking to the eventual relief of Khe Sanh and to cleaning out the enemy *Base Area 101*, three of the four battalions attached to the 1st Brigade were oriented to the west and southwest of LZ Betty. With the 1st Battalion of the 8th Cavalry providing the only security for the Cavalry fire bases in the northern reaches of *Base Area 101* and the 1st Battalion, 502d Airborne Infantry committed to base security at LZ Betty, Rattan had only two battalions, the 1st of the 12th and 1st of the 5th, "free to maneuver against the attacking enemy" in Quang Tri City.[73]

After consulting with Brewer and his Army advisor colleague and determining the most likely enemy infiltration and support positions, Colonel Rattan selected his landing assault areas. He wanted to destroy the enemy supporting mortar and rocket positions and then block the North Vietnamese from either reinforcing or withdrawing their infantry units in the city. At 1345, the brigade commander ordered the air assaults "as soon as possible with priority on lift assigned" to the 1st of the 12th. The 1st of the 5th would follow. At the same time, he alerted the 1st Squadron of the 9th Cavalry to fly "armed reconnaissance missions at tree top level" using both gunships and H–13 Aerial Rocket Artillery helicopters.[74]

Within two hours, by 1555, the 1st Cavalry helicopters had landed five companies, three from the 1st of the 5th and two from the 1st of the 12th, into landing zones east of Quang Tri. In the two central landing zones, straddling the rear support positions of the enemy *K–4 Battalion, 812th Regiment*, Companies B and C of the 1st of the 12th encountered resistance from the very beginning. In fighting that lasted until 2000 that night, the "surprised and confused enemy" employed machine guns, mortars, and recoilless rifles against the American soldiers. Between them, the two Air Cavalry companies accounted for over 60 of the enemy left on the battlefield. Already heavily engaged inside the city with the ARVN troops and now in its rear by the two companies of the 1st of the 12th, the *K–4 Battalion* for all practical purposes was "rendered ineffective."[75]

To the north, Company B, 1st of the 5th, attached to the 1st of the 12th for this operation, arrived in a relatively calm landing zone northeast of Tri Buu. Army Captain Michael Nawrosky, the Company B commander, remembered that the "little people [the ARVN] were in pretty good contact that night." Although the Company B position remained quiet for the most part, on two occasions enemy soldiers retreating from Quang Tri and Tri Buu skirted the company's perimeter. In both cases, according to Nawrosky, "we engaged with mortar, 79s, and machine guns, but had negative assessment that night." When the company searched the area the following morning, Nawrosky related, "there were no dead; this is VC and NVA tactics in moving them out." Later that day, Company B joined the other two companies of the 1st of the 5th Cavalry in their landing zones southeast of Quang Tri City between the railroad and Route 1.[76]

Like the two companies of the 1st of the 12th, Companies A and C of the 1st of the 5th on the afternoon of the 31st met relatively large enemy forces near the village of Thong Thuong Xa just south of Route 1. They established blocking positions behind the *K–6 Battalion, 812th Regiment* which had attacked Quang Tri from the southeast. Similar to their sister battalion, the *K–4*, the *K–6* found itself "wedged between the ARVN forces and the cavalrymen." The 1st Brigade's scout gunships and aerial rocket artillery (ARA) helicopters "created pandemonium in the *K–6 Battalion* rear." According to the brigade's account, the NVA soldiers "were obviously completely unfamiliar with Air Cavalry techniques of warfare." The ARA helicopters and gunships "experienced unusual success against the enemy troops." Rather than firing at the approaching helicopters, the NVA

*Lieutenant Colonel Karl J. Fontenot, the commanding officer of the 3d Tank Battalion, remembered that "we organized a provisional rifle company from the tank battalion, H & S Company, supplemented by about 70 men by other division elements and this went to Quang Tri." LtCol Karl J. Fontenot, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec 94] (Vietnam Comment File).

**Colonel Vaughn R. Stuart, who was executive officer of the 3d Marines in 1968, recalled that the Marine battalion at the Quang Tri Air Field "functioned closely with the First Brigade of the 1st Air Cav after it displaced to the outskirts of Quang Tri City." As he remembered, the Marine battalion was under the "op con" of the 1st Brigade for the short period the Brigade was there. Col Vaughn R. Stuart, Comments on draft, dtd 20Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

"would attempt to play 'dead.'" The brigade only lost three aircraft to enemy gunfire.[77]

By the morning of 1 February, it was obvious that the North Vietnamese had given up on the attempt to take Quang Tri City. In the city itself, ARVN and local South Vietnamese militia and police mopped up. Outside the city, the Communists initiated a half-hearted anti-government march against Quang Tri by the residents of Tri Buu. The South Vietnamese police quickly dispersed the demonstration and by that evening, with support of U.S. fixed-wing air support, ARVN forces retook Tri Buu. For the most part, the North Vietnamese were now only interested in getting out the best they could. During the night, many of the NVA units broke down into small groups to make good their retreat. Some North Vietnamese soldiers tried to escape by mingling among the thousands of refugees now leaving the city. Captain Nawrosky told of his company finding at least two North Vietnamese soldiers who "had donned civilian clothing over their own uniforms . . . they'd thrown their weapons away and they tried to get out wearing civilian clothes."[78]

While the mopping up or pursuit phase continued for several more days, most of the major contacts were over by 1 February. In the most significant action of the day, Company A, 1st Battalion, 502d Airborne Regiment, newly inserted into the operation and supported by ARA and gunship helicopters, killed over 75 of the enemy near a large cathedral about 5,000 meters south of Quang Tri City. According to American records, the North Vietnamese lost over 900 men killed, 553 by the ARVN, and 86 captured, as well as substantial weapons and equipment, in their aborted attempt to take Quang Tri City. The allies took substantial casualties as well, but much less in comparison to the North Vietnamese.* The outcome may very well have been different and caused even more complications for III MAF if the Cavalry's 1st Brigade had not been in position to have come to the assistance of the South Vietnamese. Still the unexpected tenacious resistance by the poorly regarded and outnumbered 1st ARVN Regiment and the local militia provided the opportunity for the Cavalry to come to the rescue.[79]

*The after-action reports and the Vietnamese accounts do not provide specific American and allied casualties. Department of the Army records show, however, that for all of Operation Jeb Stuart, not just for the battle of Quang Tri City, through 10 February, U.S. casualties were 58 KIA and 303 wounded as opposed to 855 enemy dead. Dept of the Army, Operational Summary/Brief, dtd 11Feb68 (CMH Working Papers).

Tet Aftermath Along the DMZ

On the DMZ front, the North Vietnamese continued to place pressure on the Marine units, but to a somewhat lesser extent than before Tet. Along the coast, above the Cua Viet, the *803d* continued its efforts to cut that vital waterway. BLT 3/1 in Operation Saline remained the frontline battalion. Of all the battalion's units, Captain John Regal's Company K in the hamlet of Lam Xuan was the most vulnerable and exposed to an enemy attack. Having stayed in Lam Xuan since finally securing the hamlet on 29 January and having observed increased enemy activity, Regal believed "that something was up." On the afternoon of 1 February, he requested and received permission from his battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel McQuown, to move to new night positions, about 300 meters east of Lam Xuan.[80]

Waiting until darkness so that it could not be easily detected, the company shifted to new fighting positions. Later that night, Regal received intelligence that added weight to his opinion that his company had been targeted by the enemy. An enemy officer captured in the fighting for Mai Xa Thi on the 31st told his captors that the *803d* planned a battalion-size attack against one of the Marine companies. Regal had no doubts that the company was his.

Company K had only a short wait until the fireworks began. At about 0245 on 2 February, about 100 82mm mortar rounds followed by a similar number of 130mm artillery rounds fell into the company's former positions in Lam Xuan. According to Regal, "Lam Xuan was sparkling like a Christmas tree . . . Fortunately for us we weren't there." With additional light provided by a flare ship over Gio Linh that lit up the entire Cua Viet area, the Marines then spotted the enemy infantry. Captain Regal later wrote: "There they were; from my position, I could see the enemy walking from right to left in single file. They were just outside a hedgerow, east of the hamlet, no more than 100 meters from our line." As the forward elements of the North Vietnamese unit approached the Marine positions, they appeared confused as officers tried to regroup their men. Regal believed that the enemy "must have been going to sweep through the area into which we had moved after they found we had abandoned the village and just stumbled into our lines."

Regal called for an illumination round which completely exposed the enemy troops in front of the Marine lines. He then gave the signal to fire. For the next few hours until sunrise, the outnumbered Marines of Com-

pany K supported by Navy gunfire, mortars, and artillery repulsed repeated assaults by the NVA battalion. These attacks, however, lacked coordination and consisted for the most part, as described by Captain Regal, of sporadic rushes by small groups of NVA "in a fanatic attempt to penetrate our lines." They all failed.[81]

Lieutenant Colonel McQuown sent forward some LVTs with additional ammunition for the company, but North Vietnamese artillery forced the amtracs to hold up. The battalion commander then ordered Company M with two tanks to reinforce the embattled Marines of Company K whose ammunition was now running low. Arriving at daybreak and with the two tanks as a spearhead, Company M, supported by Company K, launched the counterattack against the NVA. Like the previous actions in Lam Xuan, the fighting "was from hedgerow to hedgerow driving the remainder of the NVA to the northwest through the area covered by NGF [naval gunfire]." With supporting fires from three artillery batteries, the tanks, and a destroyer offshore, the battalion reported at 1445 that afternoon while continuing to meet resistance, "most of hamlet area has been secured. Large numbers of NVA bodies and amounts of equipment are being found throughout the area." The two companies continued their search and collected the enemy weapons and equipment found upon the battlefield. At nightfall, the Marines then pulled out of the hamlet once more, establishing their night positions in Mai Xa Thi to the south. They left behind them, however, the North Vietnamese dead and Lieutenant Colonel McQuown called in "interdicting artillery and fire" on the known trail from the north leading to Lam Xuan. As the battalion commander later explained, he anticipated that the NVA "would attempt to recover the bodies." The American supporting fires "continued through the night until dawn . . . ."[82]

In the third battle for Lam Xuan, the Marines killed 141 of the enemy and captured 7 prisoners at a cost of 8 Marines dead and 37 wounded. The morning of 4 February, Companies I and K returned to Lam Xuan but the NVA had departed. Of the enemy dead, the Marines found only nine bodies in the hamlet which the NVA had not dragged away. Lieutenant Colonel McQuown recalled that those corpses "left behind were still in the makeshift litters that were being used to carry them off." As Captain Regal later observed, "We had not seen the last of the *803d*."[83]

Further to the west in Operation Kentucky, Tet for the 9th Marines was quieter than usual. Even so, on 31 January, Combined Action Marines assigned to hamlets in the Cam Lo sector reported large concentrations of enemy troops in their vicinity. Receiving further intelligence that the enemy might attack the Cam Lo District headquarters, south of the Cam Lo River, Colonel Smith, the 9th Marines commander, ordered Lieutenant Colonel William M. Cryan, the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines commander, to reinforce the Combined Action Company P (Papa) headquarters located there and one of the Combined Action platoons, "Papa" 1, in one of the nearby hamlets on Route 9. Cryan sent an infantry platoon with a detachment of Army M42 Dusters to the Cam Lo District headquarters compound and dispatched an infantry squad to CAP Papa 1.[84]

The Communist forces struck at 0215 the morning of 2 February with mortar and recoilless rifle bombardment of both the district headquarters and CAP Papa 1 compounds. At the district headquarters, the enemy also launched a three-sided ground assault. In the first fusillade, a recoilless round killed the senior U.S. advisor, Army Major James C. Payne. Army Captain Raymond E. McMacken, his deputy, then assumed command of the headquarters compound. McMacken called in artillery "to box the headquarters in." According to the Army captain, the Marine defenders "just stacked them up on the wire."* He recalled that "five Marines rushed across the compound and took over a machine gun bunker. They got a .30 [caliber] machine gun into action to kill 15 NVA on the wires in front of them." An enemy RPG gunner, however, took out the machine gun bunker, wounding all five of the Marines inside. One of the Combined Action Marines, Lance Corporal Lawrence M. Eades, the company clerk of CACO Papa, suddenly found himself a machine gunner. According to Eades, "When we were hit, I grabbed my M16 and a M60 machine gun and ran to my position on the northwest side of the perimeter." McMacken credited Eades with killing over 20 of the enemy.[85]

With the supporting arms including the dual 40mm antiaircraft guns mounted on the Army M42 Dusters, the Cam Lo compound successfully held out against the attackers. In fact, the enemy troops only succeeded in getting through the first of the three belts of wire around the headquarters compound. By

*Colonel Richard B. Smith recalled that before he took over the 9th Marines he was the division inspector. He stated that he was "a great believer in wire. . . . Much of my effort was to get the CAP's wired in and I mean *heavily* wired. The enemy didn't expect this and attackers would get hung up before realizing what was there." Col Richard B. Smith, Comments on draft, dtd 19Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Smith Comments.

0615, a reaction force from the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, including a reinforced Marine platoon and another detachment of Army Dusters, arrived on the scene. Later they were joined by another reaction force from Dong Ha. The Marine infantry intercepted the enemy attacking force attempting to recross the Cam Lo River north of the compound. According to the 9th Marines, the Americans killed 111 of the Communist troops, probably from the *27th Independent Battalion* and the VC *Cam Lo Local Force Company*, and rounded up 23 prisoners.* The U.S. forces sustained casualties of 3 dead, two Marines and the U.S. Army senior advisor, and 18 Marines wounded.

From a III MAF perspective, Colonel Franklin L. Smith described the defense of the Cam Lo District headquarters as a "hot little action," but successful, "largely through the determination of the CAP unit." Colonel Richard B. Smith, the 9th Marines commander, had a dissenting view. He believed that the establishment of the Combined Action units in the DMZ, where the people were relatively unsympathetic to the government, "a waste of time." According to the 9th Marines commander, he continually had to divert line infantry units from their main mission of defending the strongpoints against the NVA to come to the rescue of the CAPs. He saw the Cam Lo action in that context.[86]**

For the most part, for the next few days, the 9th Marines units except for the occasional bombardment of Con Thien had a sort of reprieve along the barrier. This ended on 7 February with an enemy ambush of Company K, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines. Shortly after 1230, Company K's 3d Platoon, patrolling below the main supply route between A–3 and A–2 just west of Route 1, triggered the trap. Using small arms, machine guns, and grenades in a sudden outburst of fire, the North Vietnamese killed nine Marines including the platoon commander and wounded another seven. With the death of the Marine officer, "confusion set in." Captain Donald R. Frank, the Company K commander, with his 1st and 2d Platoons, about 500 meters to the north, moved to reinforce the 3d.[87]

The NVA had expected the Marines to do just that and had set up another ambush slightly to the north of the first. As the 2d Platoon tried to maneuver, a hidden machine gun opened up, followed by small arms fire and then grenades. The platoon suffered 18 dead and 10 wounded in the first five minutes of the action including the platoon commander and two radio operators. In the meantime, the 1st Platoon attempted to relieve the 3d Platoon and succeeded in bringing out some of the wounded and the able bodied. After the helicopter evacuation of the most serious casualties, the 1st and 3d joined the 2d Platoon in its shrinking perimeter.

At the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines combat operations center at A–3, Lieutenant Colonel James W. Marsh, the battalion commander, and Major Raymond F. Findlay, Jr., the battalion operations officer, monitored the radio. Upon being briefed on the situation by Captain Frank, Major Findlay replied "Okay, hang on. We're on our way." He sent Company L to set up blocking positions and alerted Company M. The battalion then called for an air observer to assist in bringing in supporting arms. Flying over the ambush site, the observer, using the codename "Southern Comfort," reported: "I've never seen such a concentration of NVA." Remarking on an extensive NVA bunker system and interconnected trenches, Southern Comfort estimated the size of the enemy force to be between 200 to 400 men. According to Jeff "TJ" Kelly,*** then a corporal, who was handling the communications with Southern Comfort, the "AO was running gunships on the NVA, but it was in the center of the bunker complex, not close to Kilo [Company K] where it was most needed. he could not get it closer because Kilo and the NVA were mixed together."[88]

By late afternoon, Company L had established blocking positions to the southwest and engaged a number of enemy trying to reach the hamlet of Phu Tho, about 2,000 meters below A–3. Company M, accompanied by Major Findlay, had reached Company

*Although the 9th Marines took several prisoners, the regiment's situation and intelligence reports did not cite the specific units that carried out the attack on Cam Lo. On the other hand, the intelligence section of the regimental command chronology shows only the above two units operating in the Cam Lo sector. An article in the III MAF newspaper claims three North Vietnamese battalions participated in the attack. 9th Mar ComdC, Feb68; Clipping "Cam Lo—Hub of the DMZ," *Sea Tiger*, n.d. [Feb68], Encl, Bendell Comments. Colonel Smith recalled that the 9th Marines claimed 130 enemy and 40 prisoners but would not dispute the figures in the text: "I have never seen a body count report that I agreed with." Smith Comments.

**In his comments, Colonel Smith further stated that outside of the Marines assigned to the CAP, the defenders "could not find any CAP people to man their guns. The position was saved by the Marines inside." He recalled that the senior "Army advisor . . . had called on me the day before for this support. He knew from his intelligence sources that he was going to be hit." Smith Comments.

***According to the unofficial historian of the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, Kelly's full name was Thomas Jeffrey Kelly and in Vietnam went by the nickname TJ. He now prefers to be called Jeff. LtCol Otto Lehrack, Comments on draft, dtd 29Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).

K, dug in about 150 meters southwest of the original contact. Corporal Kelly, who had become the radioman for Company M, remembered that "Kilo's platoons: first, second, weapons and what was left of third were strung out in a tactical withdrawal." Major Findlay consulted with Captain Frank. According to Corporal Kelly, the Company K commander "want[ed] to go back in . . . we have people in there." With heavy rain and low cloud ceiling precluding any more air support and well-entrenched enemy, Findlay decided against an immediate assault: "We're going to pull back . . . . Come first light we're going to get some more firepower in here and go after them."

During the night, Company L returned to A–3 while Companies K and M established a two-company defensive perimeter west of Route 1 near Gio Linh. The 12th Marines provided heavy supporting fires around the two exposed companies. Corporal Kelly remembered that it was a wet "miserable night . . . [and] rain swirled into the hole chilling us . . ." At the end of the long and comparatively uneventful night, the Marines prepared to renew the attack. A detachment of tanks from Gio Linh joined the two companies and the Marine artillery opened up with their preparatory fires upon the enemy entrenchments.

Under cover of the Marine artillery bombardment followed by Huey gunship strafing runs, on the morning of 8 February, the two Marine companies crossed Route 1 into a small woods that contained the NVA entrenchments. As Kelly observed: "It was all grunts now." The NVA suddenly began to panic and bolt. Corporal Kelly later described the Marine attack:

> Now Kilo was the grim reaper, killing anything that moved as they assaulted through the North Vietnamese trenches and bunkers in a tactic so simple and direct I was amazed by its effectiveness. Their firepower was a wave of destruction surging before them, overwhelming the enemy. It was over quickly.[89]

Other members of the battalion remembered the events of that morning less melodramatically. Captain Otto J. Lehrack, the commanding officer of Company I, later wrote that his recollection was that Company K "did launch an assault, supported by tanks from Gio Linh, but by that time there wasn't much of an enemy force left and it was pretty much of a walk." According to Lehrack, the company sergeant of Company K, Gunnery Sergeant Jimmie C. Clark, later told him: "What NVA was left in the holes were chained to their guns . . . so they couldn't get up and run." Clark went on to state: "We went in and retrieved our own and brought our own people out. . . . We were pretty beat and torn up, but we had to do it."[90]

During the two-day fight, casualties were heavy for both sides. The Marines claimed to have killed 139 of the enemy, but sustained a total of 30 Marine dead and 35 wounded. Some of the wounded were from the previous two ambushes and perilously survived the night among the North Vietnamese. One American survivor related that an English-speaking North Vietnamese soldier called out "Corpsman, I'm hit," and then shot the Navy medic when he came to assist. Another Navy corpsman, Hospital Corpsman 3d Class, Alan B. Simms, who remained unscathed, hid and tended four wounded Marines, saving their lives. At least four of the North Vietnamese soldiers blew themselves up with grenades rather than surrender. After helicopters evacuated the American wounded from an improvised landing zone, the Marine infantry loaded the American dead and North Vietnamese gear upon the tanks. According to Kelly:

> It was absolutely quiet except for the groans of the loaders and the sounds made by the bodies of the dead being dragged to the tanks. They were stacked four high—one on his back, the next on his stomach—the heads and arms placed between the legs of the body underneath to lock in the stack and prevent it from toppling. . . . The tank crews watched in horror.

The tanks returned the bodies to Gio Linh and the infantry returned to A–3.[91]

Once more, the war along the DMZ for another brief period went into one of its customary lulls. Contrary to General Tompkin's expectations that the North Vietnamese would make their major effort in the Camp Carroll/Rockpile/Ca Lu sector, the 4th Marines in Lancaster had few flareups of any significant action. The enemy made no significant attempt to cut Route 9 after the fighting for "Mike's Hill." Outside of an artillery bombardment on Camp Carroll on 2 February, and an attack on a truck convoy a week later, the Lancaster sector remained quiet during the first two weeks of February. While maintaining pressure all along the DMZ front, the NVA largely limited their Tet offensive in the north to the disruption of the Cua Viet supply line, which apparently was intertwined with the attack on Quang Tri City. As captured enemy documents later indicated, North Vietnamese commanders attributed their failure to take Quang Tri City to their inexperience with the coordination of large forces that involved two major commands: *The DMZ Front* and the *Tri Thien Hue Front*.[92] This failure of coordination characterized the entire enemy Tet offensive and was especially true of the enemy attacks in the Da Nang area further south.

CHAPTER 8

The Tet Offensive at Da Nang

Allied Dispositions—The Enemy Plans His Offensive—The Attack—The Fighting Continues
A Brief Lull and Renewed Fighting

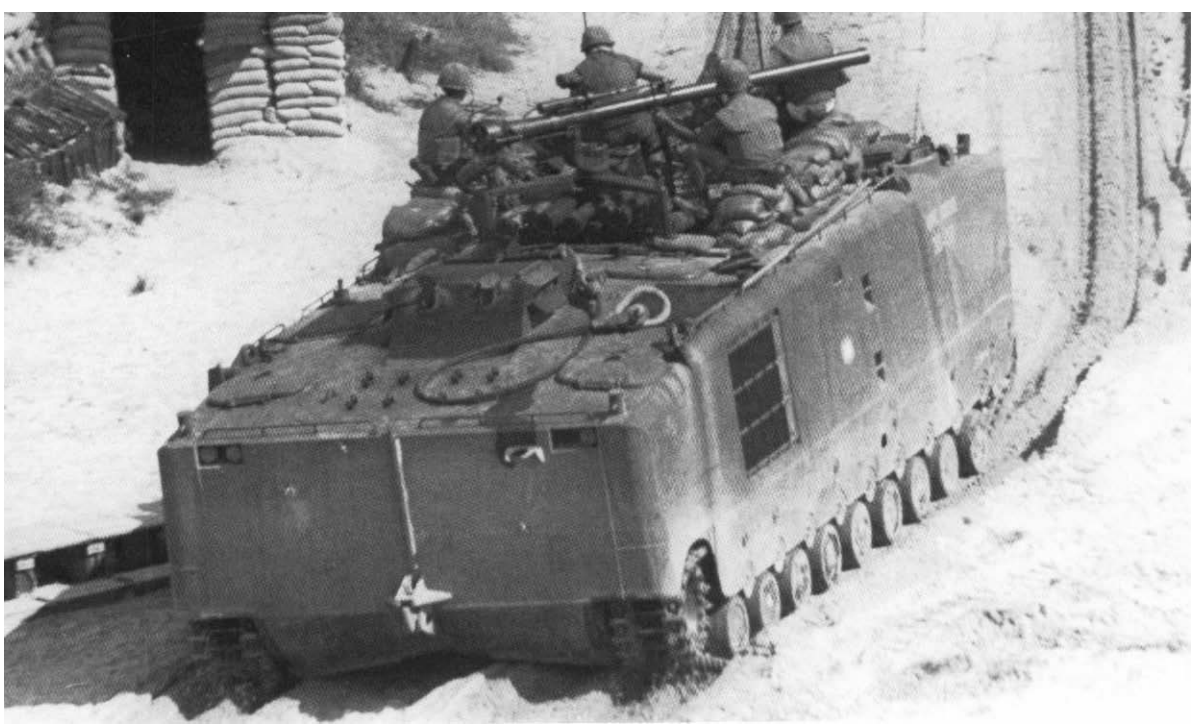
Allied Dispositions

By the time of Tet, Operation Checkers had ended and at Da Nang the situation was precarious. With the departure of the 5th Marines, there was only one Marine infantry regimental headquarters in the extensive Da Nang tactical area of operations. Colonel Ross R. Miner's 7th Marines with all three of its battalions had the responsibility for the northern, western, and southwestern sectors. The 2d Battalion was in the north, the 1st Battalion was in the center, and the 3d Battalion was in the south. With the departure of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines in mid-January for Phu Bai, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines extended its area of operations to include An Hoa to the south. Colonel Miner attached two additional companies to the 3d Battalion—Company L, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines and Company H, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines—to cover its extended area.[1]

A conglomeration of Marine support units, ARVN, Korean Marines, and two Marine infantry battalions attempted to secure the remaining area. In the Da Nang Vital Area, the artillery regiment, the 11th Marines, continued to oversee the Northern Sector Defense Command and the 1st Tank Battalion, the Southern Sector Defense Command. In both these sectors support troops doubled as infantry, manning fixed defensive positions and conducting patrols. Major General Donn J. Robertson, the 1st Marine Division commanding general, kept under his direct control the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines and the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines. Located between the Cau Do and Thanh Quit

A U.S. Marine amphibian tractor from the 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion transports Korean Marines during a sweep operation near Hoi An. The tractor is armed with a 106mm recoilless rifle.

Photo is from the Abel Collection



Rivers and on either side of Route 1, the two battalions provided the last line of defense before the so-called "Vital Area." The most eastern of the battalions, the 2d, shared its area with the 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion, which was responsible for the coastal sand flats south of Marble Mountain. Below the Marine battalions, the Korean Marine Brigade secured the Hoi An sector and the southeastern approaches above the Ky Lam River to the Da Nang base. Behind the Marine and Korean lines, the 51st ARVN Regiment deployed in support of the South Vietnamese Revolutionary Development program. With both fixed-wing and helicopter gunships and more than 120 artillery pieces ranging from 4.2-inch mortars to 175mm guns, General Robertson was confident that he could counter any threat that the enemy posed to Da Nang despite the thinness of his manned defenses.[2]

In the Da Nang sector, the tempo of operations had picked up during the last weeks of January. The Korean Marines, while not finding any sizeable forces, continued to encounter small enemy units and boobytraps which took their toll. In the 7th Marines sector, the Marines described the same type of activity as well as increased enemy infiltration. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines reported "a definite increase of enemy harassment" and the movement of sizeable enemy units into the Go Noi Island area. Lieutenant Colonel William K. Rockey, the 3d Battalion commander, commented on the "increasing frequency and ferocity" of enemy contacts. He remembered that because of the number of casualties his battalion sustained, "it was necessary to employ administrative personnel on patrols" with "clerks, cooks, and drivers" on line. In one operation near Dien Ban, the 51st ARVN Regiment sustained losses of 40 men killed, 6 missing, and 140 wounded while accounting for about 80 enemy dead and 13 prisoners. As Igor Bobrowsky, a former Combined Action member of Delta 2 near the village of Thanh Quit, recalled this period: "It wasn't that something happened . . . It was just that the intensity of what was going on kept on increasing, increasing, increasing."[3]

While activity in the Army's Americal Division areas of operations in Quang Ngai and Quang Tin was somewhat diminished, there was enough enemy in northern and central I Corps to cause concern for both the American and South Vietnamese commands. On 27 January, General Westmoreland announced a cease-fire to be observed by allied forces for 36 hours beginning at 1800 on 29 January in honor of the Tet holidays. Although authorizing the cease-fire, he warned all American commanders to be unusually alert because of "enemy increased capabilities." At 1700 on 29 January, Westmoreland canceled the truce in the DMZ and the entire I Corps sector.[4]*

Major General Robertson remembered that "the Cease-fire was to be in effect . . . and the regimental commanders reported intense fire from the enemy and requested authority to continue artillery fire, if necessary . . . ." Robertson granted the request and then "about 1840 we got the word from III MAF that the cease-fire had been called off."[5]

The Enemy Plans His Offensive

For some time, the American forces had been aware that the enemy was about to launch some type of major offensive. General Westmoreland was convinced that this big push would come either just before or right after Tet—but not during the holidays and probably at Khe Sanh and in the DMZ sector. At Da Nang, III MAF knew that the Communists were on the move. Marine and Army reconnaissance flights using infrared technology and XM–3 "People Sniffer" airborne personnel detectors (APD) mounted on Huey helicopters indicated strong enemy concentrations in the hills near Hieu Duc west of the 7th Marines. Lieutenant Colonel William J. Davis, the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, recalled that his unit began to take fewer casualties from surprise firing devices or boobytraps and began to suspect that enemy troops unfamiliar with the terrain might be attempting to move into his sector. Davis notified the division headquarters of his findings. According to Davis, a few hours later, General Robertson called a division briefing for all battalion commanders. At the briefing, the division G–2 or intelligence officer, told the assembled officers that "they are finally going to come out and fight. We don't know why, but we know they are!" He later confided to Davis, "Bill, your phone call was right on the money! I called all the regiments and battalions and the same was happening to them."[6]

On the evening of 28 January, just west of Hieu Duc, a Marine squad from Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines ambushed a three-man Viet Cong reconnaissance patrol. The Marines killed two of the enemy and wounded the third. The Marines evacuated the

*Lieutenant Colonel John F. J. Kelly, who was an intelligence officer on the III MAF staff, commented that General Westmoreland canceled the truce at "the request of LtGen Cushman, who also requested that the announcement be held until six hours before the scheduled beginning of the truce so as not to tip III MAF's hand." LtCol John F. J. Kelly, Comments on draft, dtd 13Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

survivor to the Naval Support Activity hospital where he died of his wounds. Before his death, however, the Vietnamese identified himself as Major Nguyen Van Lam, the commanding officer of the *R–20 Doc Lap Battalion*. From the recovery of Lam's notebook and a detailed sketch map of Hill 10, the location of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines' command post, the *R–20* commander was obviously on a exploration mission to discover any vulnerability in the Marine battalion's defenses.[7*]

From other sources, the Marine command learned of other ominous measures taken by the Communist forces in the Da Nang sector. According to intelligence reports, on 15 January, *Group 44*, the forward headquarters of Communist *Military Region 5*, moved from the hills in western Quang Nam, to an advance position on Go Noi Island. On 29 January, Marine intelligence officers received a reliable report that the *2d NVA Division* also had established its command post in western Go Noi. According to Marine Chief Warrant Officer Stuart N. Duncan, assigned to the 5th Counterintelligence Team, a Combined Action unit in the northern Da Nang area, a few days before Tet, killed a VC who tried to hide in a tunnel. The CAPs found several documents on the body and in the tunnel which the man obviously had used as his base of operations. In his last report, the Communist agent wrote, "I have been discovered and mission not yet completed." From the details of the other recovered documents, the VC obviously were making an extensive reconnaissance of the Da Nang area. His notes contained descriptions of military structures, distances, weapons, and other information that would be of value to an attacking force.[8]

Additional intelligence tended to confirm the enemy was about to initiate something big. The ARVN 51st Regiment operating in the southern sector of the Da Nang area of operations came across evidence including documents pointing to a buildup of Communist strength together with probes of allied defenses. On 29 January, a local village chief told the security officer of the Naval Support Activity at Camp Tiensha that about 300 VC would attack the Marble Mountain transmitter that night. That same day, the 1st Marine Division notified III MAF that "usually reliable sources" told of staging areas south of Da Nang for an impending attack. Finally, according to Marine intelligence officers, another "very reliable source" flatly stated "that the time of attack throughout *MR {Military Region} 5* would be" at 0130 and no later than 0200 on 30 January.[9]

The Communist forces throughout South Vietnam were about to strike. In I Corps, the allies learned from a defector that the enemy planned an attack against Quang Ngai City. According to this former member of the VC *401st Regimental Security Guard*, local Communist cadre stated that "the war had lasted too long and the Front had to seek a good opportunity to stage a great offensive that would bring the war to an early end." Further, the South Vietnamese National Police reported that Viet Cong local leaders from Quang Tin, Quang Nam, and Quang Ngai Provinces met in a base area in the hills of northern Quang Ngai to plan attacks on Chu Lai and on Quang Ngai City.[10]

While the Communists concentrated their forces for the large offensive, many of these units suffered from too many rapid replacements and in some cases from poor morale. As the defector from the *401st* later revealed, his unit lacked "weapons, experienced soldiers, and transportation manpower." He personally believed the plans were impractical and deserted at the first chance he had. Another Communist soldier, who infiltrated from North Vietnam after receiving a year's training as a radioman in Hanoi, was thrust into one of the attacking battalions south of Da Nang so hastily that he never learned the name of his unit let alone those of his officers. Two members of a VC engineering company, also in the Da Nang area, later recounted that nearly 80 percent of their unit was from North Vietnam. The Communists obviously were bringing the local VC main force units up to strength, even if to do so they had to bring in replacements from the north. For example, while the enemy *R–20th* attempted to maintain a full complement of 400 men through the recruitment or impressment of local villagers and infiltration of North Vietnamese "volunteers," intelligence sources rated the unit only "marginally effective."[11]

Throughout the Da Nang area of operations, the enemy began to move into attack positions. In addition

*Colonel Davis, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines commander, wrote that, according to the interrogation of another prisoner, Major Lam, if he had not been killed would have become an advisor to the *31st NVA Regiment*, also known as the *3d NVA Regiment*, for terrain and operations. Another prisoner claimed that Lam was the chief of staff for the NVA regiment. Col W. J. Davis, *Tet Marine, An Autobiography* (San Diego, CA, 1987), pp. 117-18, Encl to Col William J. Davis, Comments on draft, dtd 2Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Davis, *Tet Marine.*

to the *R–20 VC Battalion*, south of Da Nang, the *1st VC* and *3d NVA Regiments** both part of the *2d NVA Division* started to deploy toward Go Noi Island. Elements of the *368B NVA Rocket Artillery Regiment* were in firing positions to the west and northwest of the 7th Marines. Other units included the *402d Sapper Battalion*, the *V–25th VC Battalion,* and other VC local forces. A warning order and plan prepared by the Communist Da Nang City Committee called for a preliminary attack on the city by sappers and VC troops. The attack force would consist of two groups, one to move by land and the other by water to knock out the bridge separating the city from Tiensha Peninsula and to capture the I Corps headquarters. This would be followed by a rocket barrage and an assault by the main force units on allied military units and installations. Within the city itself, VC cadre were to force the "inhabitants into the street for demonstrations . . . and prepare the people for continuing political struggle against the government as well as kill GVN and ARVN cadre."[12]

Before the Communist forces launched their attack, the commanders prepared to read to their troops a directive supposedly prepared two weeks earlier by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front. The Front announced that the 1968 Tet greeting of "Chairman Ho [Chi Minh] is actually a combat order for our entire Army and population." The soldiers and cadre of the "South Vietnam Liberation Army" were to move forward in the attack:

> The call for assault to achieve independence and liberty has sounded;
>
> The Truong Son and the Mekong River are moving.
>
> You comrades should act as heroes of Vietnam and with the spirit and pride of combatants of the Liberation Army.
>
> The Victory will be with us.[13]

The Attack

By evening on the 29th, the 1st Marine Division at Da Nang was on a 100-percent alert. During the day, the division had positioned 11 reconnaissance "Stingray" patrols along likely enemy avenues of approach. At 1600, one of the Stingray units, using the codename "Saddle Bag," situated in the mountains just south of a bend in the Thu Bon River below An Hoa, about 20 miles southwest of the Da Nang base, reported observing about 75 enemy soldiers wearing helmets and some carrying mortars. The 11th Marines fired an artillery mission with unknown results. About 50 minutes later, another recon team, "Air Hose," about 2,000 meters to the northeast of "Saddle Bag," saw more than 50 enemy troops moving eastward. The artillery fired another salvo, which caused a large secondary explosion. At 1920, in the same general area, still another Stingray patrol, "Sailfish," radioed that about 200 Communist troops, some carrying 40mm rocket launchers, passed its positions. Again the artillery responded with "excellent effect on target." Because of an air observer on station, the Marine gunners checked their fire. At that point, three fixed-wing aircraft and four helicopter gunships then bombed and strafed the enemy column. Darkness prevented "Sailfish" from observing the number of casualties that the artillery and air inflicted upon the enemy.[14**]

At Da Nang, the Marines remained tense. One experienced Marine noncommissioned officer, serving in his third war, First Sergeant Jack W. Jaunal of the Headquarters and Service (nicknamed "Heat and Steam") Company, 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion, located below Marble Mountain, recorded his impressions. He remembered that before midnight "the alert sounded, and it was all hands to the wire [manning defensive positions]." Although Jaunal's sector remained relatively quiet, he recalled that "we could see flashes of other areas being hit" and heard mortars and rockets: "The Marine helicopter strip [Marble Mountain] two miles to our north got hit . . . Also Da Nang Airfield got it."[15]

Major General Raymond L. Murray, the III MAF deputy commander, remembered that he heard a "hell of a lot of racket" and "woke up . . . [to] the airfield at Da Nang . . . being rocketed." At first, the general and

*There is some confusion, probably deliberate on the part of the North Vietnamese, on the designation of the regiments, especially the *3d* of the *2d NVA Division*. According to Marine records the *3d NVA* was also known as the *31st NVA Regiment*. There was also an independent *31st NVA Regiment* that also infiltrated into the western Da Nang TAOR. Although an attempt has been made to use *3d NVA* when referring to the regiment that was part of the *2d NVA Division*, the records do not always differentiate between the two. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Feb-May68.

**Colonel Broman C. Stinemetz, who as a lieutenant colonel, commanded the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, related that "in preparation for the Tet stand-down the 1st Recon Battalion deployed the largest number patrols ever at one time. These coveted the mountainous remote zone west of the Americal Division extending along a line northward up to and including that high ground west of Task Force X-Ray. The collective impact of these patrols, operating in either the Sting Ray—or intelligence gathering—mode, significantly lessened the enemy effectiveness in the 1st Marine Division TAOR during the Tet offensive." Col Broman C. Stinemetz, Comments on draft, dtd 2Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

his steward confused the rockets with the traditional fireworks shot off in honor of Tet. Soon reports came in that the base was under attack and a Marine helicopter flew the general from his quarters to III MAF headquarters.* According to Murray, ". . . from then on until Tet was over, there were just constant attacks."[16]

The 1st Marine Division commander, Major General Robertson later compared the enemy activity that night to a "10-ring circus." In the Da Nang sector, during the early morning hours of 30 January, Communist gunners took under mortar and rocket fire 15 different allied units and installations. On the ground, several enemy infantry and sapper units of varying size probed and attacked various Marine and allied defenses throughout the TAOR. Shortly after midnight, Marine sentries from the 1st MP Battalion, posted near the main I Corps Bridge connecting Da Nang to the Tiensha Peninsula, spotted two swimmers near the span. They fired, killing one of the enemy underwater demolition team, while the other member surrendered to the Marines. About 0100, a Marine platoon from Company G, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, positioned near the Route 1 Bridge crossing the Cu De River north of Da Nang, saw another two enemy on a raft with a wooden box. Again, the Marines killed the VC and once more foiled an apparent enemy demolition effort. Two and a half hours later, on the other side of the main Da Nang Bridge, Armed Forces police noticed two VC in the water and several sampans approaching. The MPs shot one of the swimmers, took the other man prisoner, and drove off the boats with a fusillade of bullets. Once more the enemy failed to cut the main lines of communication into Da Nang.[17]

About 0230, the enemy struck the perimeters of the Da Nang base itself. In the Southern Sector Defense Command, just north of the Cau Do River and west of Route 1, an enemy 12- or 15-man sapper squad blew a hole in the defensive wire of the joint perimeter of the 7th Engineer and 7th Communications Battalion. The enemy troops attacked a Marine bunker and ran through the Communications Support Company area throwing grenades and satchel charges in the living quarters. The only Marine casualties were two men who failed to vacate their "hootches" in time.



Abel Collection

The Da Nang Airbase comes under VC/NVA rocket attack on the night of 29–30 January 1968. Flares light up the sky, top, as raging fires caused by the rockets burn out of control on the ground, illuminating parked aircraft on the airfield, bottom.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190366



*General Earl E. Anderson, who as a brigadier general was the III MAF Chief of Staff, recalled that General Murray at this time was living at the beach house. Because of security concerns after the Tet attack, General Murray moved into the bachelor officer quarters with him. They each had a bedroom and bath and shared a sitting room. Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

Manning defensive positions, the Marine communicators and engineers repelled the attacking force, killing four of the VC. Enemy gunners then replied with a mortar barrage, which resulted in two Marine dead and two wounded.[18]

A half-hour after the assault on the 7th Communication Battalion, the enemy hit even closer to the Marine command nerve center at Da Nang. Another enemy sapper squad, about the same size as the one that carried out the earlier attack, penetrated the 1st Marine Division Subsector Bravo combat operations center and communications facility on Hill 200, less than 1,000 meters from the main command post on "Division Ridge" (Hill 327). Employing small arms fire, satchel charges, rocket propelled grenades, and bangalore torpedoes, the enemy troops thrust through blown gaps in the Marine wire. The communications bunker bore the brunt of the enemy attack where the sappers destroyed both the bunker and the equipment inside and "put the division tactical net off the air until 0400." Headquarters Marines quickly manned their defenses and called in artillery illumination and a fire mission. The Northern Sector Defense Command rapidly assembled its reaction company and deployed one platoon to the division command post. Two other platoons took up positions around nearby hills 244 and 200. In the assault, the Communists killed four Marines and wounded another seven before withdrawing. At first light, a Marine reaction force found enemy blood trails. Major General Robertson later praised the Security and Communications platoons of the 1st Marine Division Headquarters Battalion for their efforts in the defense. He pointed to the rapid reaction of the Security Platoon in reinforcing the perimeter and providing a mobile reserve and "the off-duty personnel from the bunker and staff sections for their provision of security of the immediate bunker area."[19]

At 0330, about one hour after the sapper attack on the Marine command post, enemy forces launched an assault against General Lam's I Corps headquarters. Under cover of darkness, elements of the *VC R–20th* and *V–25th Battalions* had crossed the Cau Do River and penetrated the Hoa Vang village complex. With covering fire provided by 81mm and 82mm mortars, about a reinforced company reached the I Corps headquarters compound actually located within the city of Da Nang just outside the northern perimeter of the main airbase. The enemy attacked the compound from two directions, from the south and the east. From the south, about a dozen of the enemy used boards to cross the outer wire and ladders and boards to clamber over the compound wall into the courtyard below. An alert ARVN sentry took the VC under fire near the flagpole. Four ARVN armored personnel carriers reinforced by a reconnaissance squad maneuvered to contain the attackers. A conglomeration of internal security forces threw back the enemy force from the east that tried to use similar tactics to get inside the compound from that direction.[20]

Colonel Nguyen Duy Hinh, who was acting Chief of Staff, I Corps, at the time, remembered that he had earlier that night received a call from the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff alerting the command to expect "an increased surge of activities" by enemy forces. After informing General Lam and issuing instructions to subordinate units to be on special alert, Colonel Hinh returned to his quarters about 500 meters from the main headquarters building. About 0330, the colonel woke up to the sound of battle. From his bedroom window, he could see tracers lighting up the nighttime sky. He quickly picked up the phone and called General Lam and told him that the headquarters was under enemy attack. An incredulous I Corps commander gave the equivalent reply in Vietnamese to "baloney! baloney!," but, nevertheless, hurriedly dressed and prepared to depart for his headquarters, which was some distance from his house.[21]

The fighting within the compound continued until daylight. After their breaching of the outer defenses, the enemy squad fired B-40 rockets at the headquarters building, but then fought a delaying action, waiting for reinforcements. These reinforcements never came. The bulk of the enemy attack force remained in Hoa Vang Village bogged down in a firefight with local PF and Regional Force troops reinforced by a Combined Action platoon, E–3. Viet Cong gunners from Hoa Vang, nevertheless, maintained an intermittent mortar bombardment upon the I Corps tactical operations center. Shortly after 0445, General Lam ordered the 4th ARVN Cavalry Regiment, a Ranger battalion, and a detachment of National Police to augment the South Vietnamese militia units in Hoa Vang and the headquarters personnel forces in the compound.[22]

III MAF also sent reinforcements. Lieutenant Colonel Twyman R. Hill's 1st MP Battalion operated directly under III MAF and was responsible for the "close-in defense" of the Da Nang Airbase, the two bridges between Tiensha Peninsula and the main airbase, and the Naval Hospital on the Tiensha Peninsula. The MP commander remembered that he received a telephone call at 0345 on the 30th from Colonel Thomas L. Randall, the III MAF G–3, who asked him

"to send three platoons to blocking positions south of I Corps headquarters." With one of his companies on the Tiensha Peninsula and the other three protecting the main airbase perimeter, Hill argued that he could not spare three platoons. He and Randall agreed that they would deploy one of the battalion's two reserve provisional Quick Reaction platoons composed of headquarters personnel. This platoon under First Lieutenant John E. Manning departed the airbase about 0415 and arrived in the blocking positions about 0515.[23]*

About a half-hour later, the 1st Division learned that the enemy squad in the headquarters compound had disengaged and took its casualties with it. In this fighting, which had lasted about three hours, the South Vietnamese defenders sustained casualties of three dead, seven wounded, and two damaged armored vehicles. The skirmishing south of the headquarters near Hoa Vang, however, continued. Mortars and recoilless rifle rounds continued to land inside the headquarters compound from enemy firing positions in Hoa Vang. General Lam arrived at the headquarters compound shortly after dawn. After a quick appraisal of the situation, the I Corps commander turned to the senior U.S. advisor at the I Corps Tactical Operations Center, Army Major P. S. Milantoni. According to *Washington Post* correspondent Don Oberdorfer, Lam pointed with his swagger stick to the enemy's firing positions on the large map in the room and said: "Milantoni, bomb here. Use big bombs." The U.S. major remonstrated that the site was relatively close to the compound, but Lam insisted that the air strikes be flown. Milantoni relayed the request to the air support center. The Air Force watch officer on duty protested, "that's too close, you'll never get a clearance for it." Major Milantoni replied, "General Lam just gave it."[24]

Shortly afterwards, Marine fixed-wing aircraft and helicopter gunships blasted the enemy in Hoa Vang. This apparently broke the back of the VC resistance. Under pressure from the Vietnamese relief forces and the Marine MP platoon, the enemy retreated with the allies in full chase. In the initial fighting for Hoa Vang, the South Vietnamese and Americans accounted for 25 enemy dead. In the pursuit, which amounted to a rout, the VC lost nearly 100 dead. In the attack on the I Corps headquarters and in the defense of Hoa Vang village the allies sustained losses of nine dead and several wounded. Among the casualties were two Marines killed, including Lieutenant Manning, and six wounded from the 1st MP Battalion.[25]

The rockets and mortar bombardment of Da Nang also took a toll of Marine lives and inflicted greater material damage upon the Da Nang base and especially upon the airfield and aircraft. In scattered and intermittent attacks beginning before 0200 and lasting about one-half hour, enemy gunners fired both mortars and rockets that landed near positions of Marine artillery, antiair missiles, and the Force Logistic Command. Battery A, 1st Light Antiaircraft (LAAM) Missile Battalion armed with HAWK (Homing All the Way Killer) surface-to-air missiles, in the mountainous Hai Van Pass sector north of Da Nang, reported about 0140 coming under 82mm mortar fire. About 20 minutes later the missile battery sighted enemy rocket firing sites and two minutes later radioed that 12 rockets of undetermined size landed in and around its area. One of the rockets damaged one of the missile launchers and wounded three of the Marines. At about the same time, approximately 15 enemy 122mm rockets struck an artillery complex in the 11th Marines Northern Sector Defense Command which included a detachment from the 1st Armored Amphibian Company, the 155mm Gun and 8-inch Gun Batteries, as well as Batteries H, 3d Battalion and M, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines. The artillerymen sustained two wounded and some equipment damage, but escaped relatively unscathed. Other enemy rocketeers took the Marine Force Logistic Command compound near Red Beach under fire. Approximately at 0200, about four of the 122mm rockets fell in or near the compound, one landing near the 1st Air Cavalry air pad temporarily located there, damaging four of the helicopters, but resulting in no Marine or Army casualties.[26]

After a lull of about an hour to an hour and a half, the enemy gunners renewed their assault on the airbase and also included the helicopter air facility at Marble Mountain. About 0330, perhaps to divert Marine attention from the ground assault on I Corps headquarters and the city of Da Nang, enemy mortars opened up on Marble Mountain. Approximately 16 rounds impacted in the MAG–16 sector and another four in the Army aviation company area. About the same time, from their firing positions on the western fringes of the Da Nang TAOR, NVA rocketeers let go with a fusillade of 122mm rockets aimed at the main airbase. Some 36 of the large missiles landed on the main base, including the airfield. Fifteen minutes later,

*In his comments, Colonel Hill stated that he deployed only one of his reserve platoons. The battalion's monthly report, however, indicates that both platoons may have eventually moved into the blocking positions south of the I Corps headquarters. Col Twyman R. Hill, Comments on draft, dtd 29Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File) and 1st MP ComdC, Jan68.



Photo from Abel Collection

Firefighters from Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 11 battle flames engulfing two Grumman A–6 Intruder aircraft from Marine all-weather attack squadron VMA–242(AW).

the enemy gunners followed with another 29 rockets, mostly aimed at the southern end of the airbase. Considering the amount of ordnance that the enemy expended, casualties were relatively small. The rocket attacks resulted in the deaths of 3 Marines and the wounding of another 11. Material and equipment losses, however, were much more extensive. The rockets destroyed five aircraft, nine items of ground equipment, two vehicles, and one warehouse outright. Fourteen aircraft, six pieces of ground support equipment, five buildings, and another two vehicles sustained damage of one sort or another.* Lieutenant Colonel William K. Rockey, the commander of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, later wrote: "The rocket trails of approximately 10 to 20 missiles as they rose into the air to arc over our positions to strike the Da Nang Airbase was vividly clear to all." He observed that the "rocket launching position was located directly south" of his command group, "an estimated distance of more than 3,000 meters."[27]

The Marine response to the bombardments was rapid. Immediately the 11th Marines artillery units "initiated counter-rocket fires" at suspected avenues of approach. As various outposts reported their sightings to the Division FSCC, the artillerymen then shifted these fires to actual sites. On the ground, at least one Marine unit prevented a rocket attack. A patrol from Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, operating below the battalion's command post on Hill 10, saw about 10 North Vietnamese soldiers just south of the Tuy Loan River preparing positions. The Marines called in artillery and mortar missions. Although the enemy troops fled, the Marines found five unexpended 122mm rockets on the site. Later that night, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines reported 15 secondary explosions from Marine counter-mortar artillery fire. In the

*Colonel Robert W. Lewis, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded VMCJ-1 at Da Nang at the time, remembered that the "rocket damage at Da Nang consisted almost entirely of aircraft damage. The rockets were accurate and landed on the MAG-11 flight line." Col Robert W. Lewis, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Lewis Comments.

morning, the infantrymen discovered blood trails and three NVA bodies in the vicinity of the explosions.*

Colonel Franklin L. Smith, of the III MAF operations staff, remembered that information about the attacks that night came into the headquarters "in dribs and driblets." As he later explained, however, it soon became apparent "that a general offensive was underway." In the Da Nang area of operations, outside of attacks by fire on the Marine base and outlying positions, and the two ground assaults on Marine command and communications positions, the Communist infantry units largely concentrated on the South Vietnamese units. In the Hai Van Pass area in the north, North Vietnamese regulars attempted to cut Route 1. To the south of the airbase, other enemy main force units attacked the District Town of Dien Ban and the provincial capital of Quang Nam, Hoi An, on Route 4. At 0230 on the 30th at Dien Ban, elements of the *R–20th* and *V–25th* struck the subsector headquarters defended by the 15th Popular Forces Platoon and the 708 Regional Forces Company. Entering the town from the southwest, the VC fired about 70 rocket propelled grenades at the local forces, but never penetrated the defender's perimeter. About two-and-a-half hours later, the enemy units "ceased fire and withdrew." The Vietnamese militia suffered 1 PF killed and 10 wounded. According to the U.S. Advisory Group at Da Nang, the PFs and RFs accounted for eight dead VC and captured one wounded enemy soldier. In the town itself, 10 innocent people, caught in the crossfire, sustained wounds, but no civilians died as a result of the battle.[28]

About 5,000 meters to the east, in Hoi An, however, Communist forces gained somewhat the upper hand. Beginning their attack about 0300, about one-half hour after Dien Ban had been hit, two companies of the *V–25th Battalion* used the noise of firecrackers set off and general firing by Tet celebrants to cover their approach. One of the companies captured a German missionary hospital in the city and the other hit the rear base of the 51st ARVN Regiment, the Chi Long Camp, garrisoned by the ARVN 102d Engineer Battalion. Surprised by the initial assault, the engineers fell back, giving up half the camp to the Communist attackers. Bringing up two artillery platoons, the South Vietnamese gunners lowered their pieces and fired pointblank at the VC. By daybreak, the engineers held their own and the situation in Hoi An was at a stalemate.[29]

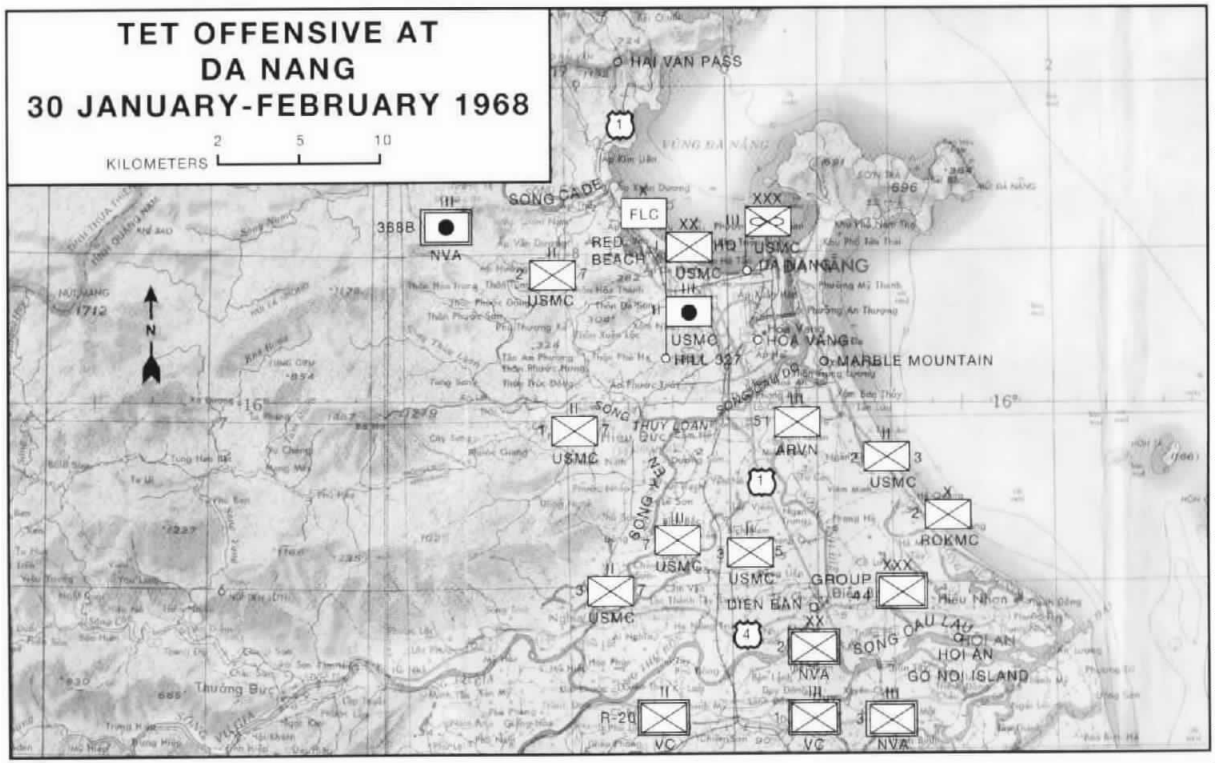
The Korean Marine Brigade deployed six companies around the city and the South Vietnamese 51st Regiment prepared a reaction force. In addition, the 1st Marine Division alerted one company to participate in the relief of Hoi An, if needed. According to Communist documents, captured later, the two VC assault companies were to pull out at first light, but became bogged down in the city. The struggle for Hoi An would continue into the following day.

Still by daybreak on 30 January, the intentions of the Communists were not entirely clear. While the enemy attacks were widespread in the Da Nang area of operations, the intensity of enemy operations in other areas of Vietnam varied. For the most part, the Communist offensive appeared to be limited to its *Military Region 5*. Even here, the assaults were largely confined to the Da Nang area in I Corps and to five provincial capitals in II Corps. In II Corps, the enemy struck the cities of Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, Ban Me Thuot, Kontum, and Pleiku. According to some sources, the Communist high command had scheduled a full nation-wide assault on the night of 29–30 January, but postponed it for one day. Whether *Military Region 5* never received the word, or failed to notify some of its subordinate units is still open to conjecture. Indeed, the Communist leaders may even have had other ulterior motives. At MACV headquarters, at 0700 on 30 January, Brigadier General Philip B. Davidson, the J–2 or MACV intelligence officer, briefed General Westmoreland and predicted "this is going to happen in the rest of the country tonight or tomorrow morning." He was right.[30]

The Fighting Continues

Outside of the Da Nang and Hoi An sectors, most of I Corps remained relatively quiet during the night and early morning hours of 29–30 January. At 0600, however, about nine kilometers north of Tam Ky in Quang Tin Province, about 100 people gathered for an antiwar demonstration. A Popular Forces platoon attempted to disperse the crowd. According to an ini-

*Igor Bobrowsky, a former Combined Action Marine in CAP Delta 2, located near the Thanh Quit River bridge on Route 1 south of Da Nang, remembered that an enemy team fired from a "spot probably within a click of our positions . . . . We took them under fire . . . and cheered when one time, after just getting off/possibly two rockets, they were lit up by a chopper that had apparently been hovering in the dark waiting for them. A number of other choppers/airplanes/ then immediately blasted and raked over the whole area. We added as much machine gun and automatic fire into the mix as we could pump out." Igor Bobrowsky, Comments on draft, dtd 26Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Bobrowsky Comments.



tial advisory report, "an unknown number of grenades were thrown by unidentified persons, killing 20 demonstrators." The report failed to state whether the unidentified grenade throwers were PF troops or members of the crowd. The South Vietnamese militia detained 30 people from the group, 15 men and 15 women, all of whom under interrogation admitted to being Viet Cong cadre. About three and a half hours later in the same vicinity, about 200–300 VC Main Force troops attacked a village in the sector. Elements from the 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry then engaged the enemy force which broke and fled. Joined by Company C, 7th Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment from the Americal Division, the U.S. Army troops eventually killed 36 of the enemy, detained another 18, and recovered 11 weapons.[31]

At Da Nang, on the 30th, the fighting did not subside with the coming of daylight. Elements of the VC *R–20th* and local force units which participated in the attack on Hoa Vang and I Corps headquarters attempted to escape the dragnet of Marine and ARVN forces. While the 1st MP Battalion supported by the 1st Tank Battalion established blocking positions north of the Cau Do River, the ARVN 3d Battalion, 51st Regiment swept the sector south of the river. Caught east of the Cam La Bridge and Route 1, on a small island formed by the convergence of the Cau Do, a small tributary of the river, and the Vien Dien River, the VC turned to fight. A Combined Action platoon at 0830 saw a number of VC attempting to swim across the Cau Do to the island.[32]

By this time, General Robertson, the 1st Marine Division commander, had taken measures to bolster the ARVN south of the Cau Dau. He ordered the 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion to form a blocking position on the southeastern bank of the Vien Dien River. First Sergeant Jaunal of the tractor battalion's H&S Company remembered that he received a telephone call that morning "that a few miles from our area the infantry had some VC or NVA trapped on an island and our Amtracs and Marines were to act as a blocking force."[33]

Simultaneously, the division ordered the helilift of a company from the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines to reinforce the ARVN and the Combined Action Marines. By 0925 Lieutenant Colonel Rockey, the battalion commander, had formed a "jump battalion command group" and had his Company I, under Captain Henry Kolakowski, Jr., reinforced by mortars, at the battalion landing zone where four Marine CH–46 Sea Knight helicopters awaited them. Within a few minutes the helicopters were airborne and then landed in a flat paddy just south of the island and near the Combined Action unit which had taken three casualties. Marine

rifleman John L. Gundersen in the 1st Platoon of Company I remembered that as soon as he and his squad alighted they came under heavy automatic and small arms fire from the island.* The Marines took what cover they could behind a dirt berm and returned the fire. Within a few minutes the enemy weapons were silent. The company then searched the immediate area at first without encountering any resistance, sweeping first to the west and then retracing their route. As they once more entered the paddy where they started, the Marines again came under heavy fire, including mortars, from the enemy-held island.[34]

With the increasing intensity of fire from the island and reports that South Vietnamese forces had observed some 250 people dressed in black pajamas moving toward the west, the Marine command decided upon a combined operation with the ARVN to mount an assault on the enemy forces there.** Company I was to cross over the tributary to the island using a nearby footbridge while the ARVN assaulted from the west and protected the Marine left flank. Marine air and supporting arms were to soften up the enemy positions before the attack. As the infantry waited and the artillery fires lifted, the first Marine McDonnell Douglas F4B Phantoms came in and made "a spotting run," then strafed the enemy positions, and dropped high explosives and napalm. Marine John Gundersen recalled that the

> . . . concussion from each bomb shaking my face and eyeballs. The explosions blurred my vision momentarily. Small pieces of shrapnel were falling on us with some larger pieces buzzing over our head. . . . I couldn't imagine anyone escaping such a pounding.[35]

After the air bombardment, sometime between noon and 1300, Company I rushed over the footbridge, some 50 meters away. Captain Kolakowski dropped off his 3d Platoon to guard the northern entrance of the bridge while the other two platoons continued the attack on the objective, the hamlet of Lo Giang 2 on the island. The Marine assault on the hamlet soon bogged down as the troops followed a path that led to the village gate. An enemy sniper killed the point man on the lead platoon and then the Marines came under heavy fire. According to John Gundersen, his squad then took the point and went through the gate. They had orders to turn west until they reached a tree line and then hold fast. Gundersen remembered as they ran "seeing numerous one and two-man fighting holes on the edge of the treeline." When they reached the tree line, only his fireteam was there: "We did a quick ammo check discovering we were very low on rounds having only two grenades and two magazines of ammo between us. Luckily, we met no resistance before being ordered back to the rest of the platoon to dig in."[36]

By this time it was late afternoon and daylight had begun to fade. The first two platoons of Company I had established a perimeter in the southeast sector of the hamlet while the 3d Platoon remained at the northern end of the footbridge. Gundersen recalled that they had been resupplied and that they had dug their defensive holes along a small path that curved around and led to the river. The Marine rifleman wondered why they established their position there on the low ground and isolated from the rest of the hamlet. At dusk, however, Captain Kolakowski ordered them to leave their vulnerable defenses and silently move up to the top of the slope and again dig in.[37]

Under cover of darkness the enemy struck. The Marines had called for C–130 "Spooky" flareships to light up the area, but one of the lumbering aircraft had run out of flares and departed before its relief appeared overhead. The enemy took advantage of this approximately 30-minute period of pitch blackness to mass a force before the 3d Platoon guarding the bridge escape route. About the same time, the enemy infiltrated into the lines of the other two platoons in the hamlet. Marine John Gundersen recalled hearing someone inside the perimeter whistling. He was about to tell them to be quiet "when a wall of tracers ripped through my position from the north." This continued for a few minutes when he heard another set of whistles very much resembling "various bird calls." This time enemy fire came from the west and then from another direction with still another whistle. By this time, the relief flareship was overhead and dropped illumination canisters. In the eerie light given off by the flares, the Marines "could see the enemy massing in front of us" and called in artillery and mortar support. Gundersen later wrote: "To escape the artillery which was right on target,

*Lieutenant Colonel Gene W. Bowers, the battalion operations officer, recalled the situation somewhat less dramatically, writing that the landing "was uneventful except for some long range sniping from the island." LtCol Gene W. Bowers, Comments on draft, dtd 30May95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Bowers Comments.

**Lieutenant Colonel Bowers commented that the 250 people in black pajamas were "identified by close passes by UH-1E gunships to be villagers, mostly women and children, who were fleeing the fighting in their village. They collected in a huddled group on the northernmost peninsula of the island at the rivers' convergence. They remained there unmolested thtoughout the action." Bowers Comments.

they rushed towards us." He recalled that some broke through, but "became trapped between us and the 2d Platoon."[38]

In the meantime, Lieutenant Colonel Rockey and his small command group had established the battalion command post just below the island on the southern bank of the tributary to coordinate the operation and its supporting fires. Initially the command group consisted of the battalion commander; his operations officer, Captain Gene W. Bowers; the assistant operations officer, Captain Lee C. Gound; and "artillery and mortar F.O.'s, helicopter support team, radio operators, and a few strap hangers who came along for the ride." The first disappointment was the failure of the ARVN forces to support the Marine attack. Although, as Captain Bowers recalled, he heard some outgoing firing from our left flank, but "never saw any ARVNs move forward in the paddy." Bowers sent a senior liaison staff NCO "to find their headquarters to make contact . . . but he came back, saying the ARVNs were in the defensive mode, no one spoke English, and they ignored him." Lieutenant Colonel Rockey during the interim ordered a section of 106mm Recoilless Rifles, mounted on small flatbed four-wheeled drive vehicles, called Mechanical Mules, to reinforce the temporary command group from the 3d Battalion's combat base, some 9,000 meters to the south. The Mule-mounted 106s, however, did not arrive until after dark.[39]

For the command group, the first crisis occurred when the enemy struck the 3d Platoon at the footbridge, causing several casualties. Among the dead was the platoon leader. Captain Bowers remembered talking to a wounded lance corporal who called the situation desperate and "pled for immediate reinforcements . . . ." With the permission of Lieutenant Colonel Rockey, Bowers hastily formed a provisional platoon of about 30 men and placed it under the command of his assistant, Captain Gound. According to Bowers, he pressed all the available men in the CP into the platoon including mortarmen, radiomen, recoilless rifle men, and even a chaplain's assistant. He told Gound to take his makeshift force and attack across the bridge and relieve the embattled 3d Platoon.[40]

According to Bowers, when Gound's troops departed, the only people left in the CP were Lieutenant Colonel Rockey and himself. The battalion commander "carried the Division Tactical net radio and monitored the artillery nets." Bowers carried the battalion tactical net radio, monitoring the forward air controller net as well as the company's tactical net. When the provisional platoon arrived at the 3d Platoon's position, Captain Gound radioed Bowers and asked for 81mm support against enemy troops he could see to his front. Bowers ran to where the mortars were guarded by one mortarman who told the Marine captain that "he was a new replacement ammo humper, who had no idea how to aim and fire the mortar." Captain Bowers told the man to help him break out the ammunition and then for about half an hour, the two "provided overhead free gun, dead reckoning, zero charge fire support to Captain Gound's platoon," while the latter "adjusted the fire by saying . . . 'a little right,' a little closer,' and so forth." This broke the enemy attempt to overrun the Marines at the bridge.[41]

With the support of artillery, air, and mortars, together with their individual weapons and claymore mines, the Marines of Company I broke the back of the enemy attack. According to Gundersen with the 1st Platoon, "the sounds of the arty, the rockets, the mortars, the grenades combined with the eerie swaying of the illumination on their parachutes created a hellish vision. Never before, or since have I been in such an acute state of fear." The fight, however, had gone out of the VC who began to disperse into small groups and tried to make their escape off the island. Captain Bowers recalled that under the light of the flares, the Marines reported "what they described as 'hundreds' . . . of heads of swimmers attempting to escape across the river to the east." On the other bank of the river, however, the small task force from the 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion blocked their way. The amtrac troops rounded up in the water about 105 detainees fleeing the island.[42]

On the morning of the 31st, the Marines of Company I, now reinforced by the ARVN and the AmTrac Marines, surveyed the results of the fighting and continued to mop up the remnants of the enemy force. At dawn, near the positions of the 1st Platoon, John Gundersen remembered "bodies of the enemy soldiers were strewn about not more than 15 meters in front of our perimeter, swelling indepth in front of the machine gun to as much as six deep. I was awed by the sight of all those bodies." He observed that the VC never realized that the Marines had moved from the fighting holes in the lower path and they "spent the whole night and their lives attacking those holes." Captain Bowers related that another "60 or so dead enemy were counted in front of Gound's position." Company I and the small command group remained in the sector until about 1500 on the 31st and then returned to their original combat camp to the south. According to Marine sources, the heavy action on this small island

resulted in 102 VC killed, 88 prisoners of war, 13 VC suspects, and 70 laborers. Apparently the enemy forces were a mixed group from several different units interspersed together. Allied intelligence officers identified members from the *V–25th*, *R–20th*, *C–130th Battalions*, and the *Q–15th* and *Q–16th Local Force Companies*. The Marines failed to determine whether this mixed force had a specific mission or consisted of remnants from units that had participated in the earlier attack on the I Corps headquarters.[43]

The rest of the enemy efforts in the Da Nang area and TAOR were about as haphazard and relatively ineffective as the fight on the unnamed island. In the northeast, near the Force Logistic Command sector, villagers from Nam O just south of the strategic Nam O Bridge, told Popular Force troops, members of the Q–4 Combined Action platoon, that the VC planned to attack the CAP compound. At 0735, enemy gunners fired two rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) at the compound tower and a VC infantry platoon opened up upon the Combined Action unit. The RPGs missed the apertures in the tower and fell to the ground. After a brief firefight, the VC troops withdrew taking any casualties with them. In a sweep of the area, the defenders found ammunition clips and bloodstains. Local villagers told the Marines that at least one VC had been killed in the brief skirmish. Two Marines sustained wounds.[44]

The most serious ground attack against a Marine unit occurred in the western portion of the Da Nang TAOR just below the Tuy Loan and Cau Do Rivers near the eastern bank of the Yen River. About 0745, approximately two companies or a reinforced company from the *31st NVA Regiment* ambushed a Marine platoon from Company G, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines. At this point, Company G was under the operational control of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, which had the responsibility of protecting the western approaches to the Marine base. As the Marine platoon patrolled along the banks of the Yen, a heavy machine gun suddenly opened up. Firing from well-concealed and dug-in firing positions, the enemy machine gunners and infantry took a heavy toll of the Marines. With the enemy too close to call in artillery or fixed-wing air, the Marines radioed for reinforcements. A second platoon from Company G arrived at the site and attempted to maneuver to the NVA flank. The enemy then attacked forcing the Marine platoons to fall back to more defensive positions. By 1100, Marine helicopters evacuated the most seriously wounded and brought in the rest of Company G into blocking positions on the western bank of the Yen.[45]

The Marines now counterattacked supported by artillery and Marine gunships and fixed-wing air. The North Vietnamese fought a delaying action as they began to withdraw. Later that afternoon, the 1st Marine Division helilifted a "Bald Eagle" reaction force from Company E, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines east of the river in an attempt to close the circle around the NVA. Linking up, under artillery and air cover, the two Marine companies continued their advance until forced to halt because of darkness and then took up night defensive positions. Shortly after 1800, an air observer reported seeing 25–30 enemy troops in trenchlines, bunkers, and fighting holes. In the morning when searching the battle area, the Marines would find "ample evidence of enemy casualties, but only two enemy bodies . . . ." Total Marine casualties of this incident on the 30th were 10 Marines killed and 15 wounded. Most of the dead and wounded were from the platoon of Company G that fell victim to the enemy ambush.

The attack on the western perimeter was probably the most serious thrust against Marine positions on the day and evening of 30 January. Throughout the day, however, Marine units throughout the TAOR reported incidents. A Company E, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines squad patrol in its regular area of operations just east of the confluence of the Thanh Quit and Vinh Dien River came under attack from an estimated squad of enemy. A detachment of four LVTs from the 3d AmTrac Battalion quickly arrived, but the enemy had already departed. The Marine squad sustained casualties of one man killed and one nonbattle casualty. Apparently one Marine at the death of his comrade became so distraught that he was unable to function.[46]

In Da Nang City itself, about 1050 in the morning, approximately 500 people gathered at a Buddhist pagoda and attempted to hold a march. The National Police arrested 25 of the crowd and quickly dispersed the would-be demonstrators. This demonstration may have been planned to coincide with an attack on the city which never developed.[47]

South of the Hai Van Pass, in the northern portion of the Da Nang TAOR, in the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines sector, the North Vietnamese were able to close Route 1 temporarily, but failed to penetrate allied defenses. At 0915, a squad from Company G, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines providing road security for a Marine engineer mine-sweeping team on Route 1 just below the pass, encountered a small enemy sapper detachment. Reinforced by another squad, the

Company G Marines killed three of the enemy troops and captured two. The two North Vietnamese prisoners identified themselves as members of the *H–2 Engineering Company*, part of the *2d Sapper Battalion*. According to the enemy soldiers, their mission was to mine and interdict allied traffic in the Hai Van Pass area. Their weapons included AK–47s and B–40 Rockets. Despite the Marine patrolling, NVA sappers, probably from the *2d Sapper Battalion*, blew three bridges and one culvert over Route 1 in the pass area. An entry in the 1st Marine Division Journal for 30 January read "Rt # 1 from Hai Van Pass to Phu Loc closed as a result of enemy action."[48]

On the night of the 30th, elements of a battalion of the *NVA 4th Regiment* attacked an ARVN outpost at the foot of the Hai Van Pass. The South Vietnamese quickly rushed the newly arrived 5th ARVN Ranger Battalion into the area north of Da Nang City. Supported by U.S. artillery and air, the South Vietnamese successfully contained the Communist units in the Nam O and Lien Chien regions. This fighting would continue in a desultory fashion throughout the night.[49]

South of Da Nang, in Hoi An, on the 30th, the South Koreans, reinforced by elements of the ARVN 51st Regiment, tried to tighten the loop and began preparations to retake the city. At 0730, the South Koreans reported about 200 to 300 enemy troops still in Hoi An. An American advisor within the MACV compound reported at 1145 that the VC were digging in the engineer compound and that "numerous boats in river loaded with Charlie." After calling in helicopter gunships, the Korean Marines, at 1320, reached the old MACV compound and linked up with U.S. advisors there. The VC continued to hold the hospital, however, and part of the engineer compound. Although the Koreans and the ARVN surrounded most of the city, the Communist troops still were able to keep their southern flank open.[50]

The Korean Marines sent three companies to close the southern link and then moved forward into the attack. By dark the Koreans had captured the hospital and were in position to relieve the engineer compound. The Koreans kept one company at the MACV compound for security and prepared for a sweep to clear out the city in the morning. During the night, enemy resistance dwindled to sniper fire on the Marine positions. Colonel Franklin Smith, from the III MAF perspective, suggested later that a reluctance upon the part of the South Korean Marine Brigade commander to cause undue damage and to avoid civilian casualties lay behind the slowness and deliberateness of the Korean advance. According to U.S. advisors and to South Vietnamese sources, the fight for Hoi An resulted in allied casualties of 58 killed, 103 wounded in action, 21 missing in action, and 14 weapons lost. The allies claimed they killed 343 of the enemy and detained 195 prisoners. Of the prisoners, the South Vietnamese identified 6 as military, 109 as workers, and the remaining 80 as VC cadre.

Throughout the Da Nang TAOR, the intensity of activity increased during the night. From 1800 to 2400 on the 30th, the 1st Marine Division reported to III MAF over 30 incidents ranging from sightings of large enemy forces, to mortar attacks, and a few infantry assaults. At the same time, the 1st Division had sent out several reconnaissance elements which began to pay dividends. At 1835, Recon team "Ice Bound," positioned in the mountains about eight miles northwest of Da Nang observed an enemy rocket unit prepare a firing position for their missiles. After calling in artillery which resulted in three secondary explosions, the reconnaissance Marines reported seven enemy killed. The enemy launched no rockets from this site.[51]

Another reconnaissance patrol, Recon Team "Rummage," about 30 kilometers south of Da Nang in the Que Son Mountains below An Hoa, had even more spectacular results. About 1900, it spotted a column of about 40 NVA at the head of even a larger column moving east along a trail. The North Vietnamese soldiers wore flak jackets and helmets and carried a machine gun, and a small rocket detachment with six 122mm rockets. "Rummage" soon determined that the total number of North Vietnamese troops approximated 500 or more men, moving in two columns. The lead column consisted of about 100 to 150 men, followed by the main body. The main body advanced in column maintaining about three to four feet space between each man. Instead of calling artillery fire immediately, the reconnaissance Marines arranged with Battery K, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines and a detachment of the 3d 155mm Gun Battery at An Hoa for an "artillery ambush."[52]

After counting 500 men pass their position, Rummage sprung the trap. Landing in large bursts, about 50 to 75 artillery rounds fell on the lead column. Rummage reported about 50 NVA dead with another 100 "probable." Immediately after the artillery shelling, a C–47 Spooky arrived on station and worked over the same area with its Gatling guns. Rummage radioed back that Spooky caught about 50 NVA crossing a stream and the recon Marines could

observe "rounds hitting all around them [the NVA]." Spooky then called in Marine fixed-wing attack aircraft which dropped napalm with "outstanding coverage of target." Darkness prevented any accurate bomb assessment, but the "Rummage" Marines could observe enemy movement when illumination was available. According to the team leader, "We never saw the end of the main body . . . [but] when we stopped the count, there were NVA still in column of 4's as far as we could see with our M49 [rifle spotting scope]."

Later intelligence and interrogation reports of prisoners of war would indicate that the unit that "Rummage" had intercepted was probably a battalion of the *2d NVA Division*. Apparently the division was slow in moving into the Da Nang area and was not in position to support the local forces in the earlier phase of the enemy offensive. According to Marine intelligence sources, Rummage may well "have rendered a reinforced battalion combat ineffective, forcing the enemy to modify his plans at a critical time." In a message to III MAF, General Robertson observed: "Never have so few done so much to so many."

By this time, the Communist Tet offensive was in full bloom, not only at Da Nang, but throughout Vietnam. In the early morning hours of 31 January, Communist forces assaulted provincial and district capitals extending from the Mekong Delta in the south to Quang Tri City in the north. In Thua Thien Province in I Corps, two North Vietnamese regiments held most of Hue City and the Marine base at Phu Bai came under mortar and rocket barrages. Along Route 1 between Phu Bai and Da Nang, VC and NVA main force units on the 31st made some 18 attacks on bridges, Marine company positions in the Phu Loc area, and several of the Combined Action platoons. Elsewhere in I Corps, below Da Nang, around 0400 on 31 January, elements of the *70th VC Battalion* and the *21st NVA Regiment* struck Tam Ky, defended by the ARVN 6th Regiment and an artillery battalion. At daybreak, the South Vietnamese troops counterattacked. According to the South Vietnamese official history, the enemy retreated in disorder leaving on the battlefield, "hundreds of bodies and 31 wounded who were captured." Another 38 of the enemy surrendered.[53]

Much the same occurred at Quang Ngai City in the most southern of the I Corps provinces. At 0400 on the 31st, supported by local guerrilla forces, the VC *401st Main Force Regiment* struck the city and airfield and initially achieved surprise, but failed to exploit its advantage. By that night, with the enemy command and control structure shattered, the fight was over.* The VC lost about 500 killed and some 300 weapons. For its part, the 2d ARVN Division sustained casualties of 56 killed, 138 wounded, and one man missing. The ARVN also lost 43 weapons.[54]

At the American base at Chu Lai, the Communists limited their attacks to mortar and rockets although rumors circulated that the NVA were about to launch a ground assault on the base. While the Americal Division maintained a 100 percent alert, enemy gunners, nevertheless, in the early morning hours successfully launched their rockets and mortars. One 122mm rocket exploded a bomb dump and caused extensive damage. Colonel Dean Wilker, the MAG–12 commander, later recalled that the resulting blast of the bomb dump "caved in one of my hangars and damaged the others."[55] The two Marine aircraft groups at Chu Lai, MAG–12 and MAG–13, sustained 3 fixed-wing aircraft destroyed and 23 damaged, 4 of them substantially. There was no further ground assault.[56]

In the extensive Da Nang TAOR, the early morning hours of 31 January were almost a repeat of the events of the 30th. Enemy gunners fired rockets at both the Da Nang Airbase and this time also included the Marble Mountain helicopter facility on Tiensha Peninsula. No rockets fell on the main airbase but Marble Mountain sustained some damage. The enemy rocket troops fired in two bursts, one at 0342, followed by a second barrage three hours later. About the same time as the rocket attacks on the Da Nang base and Marble Mountain, enemy mortars bombarded the command post of the 7th Marines on Hill 55 south of Da Nang and forward infantry positions. These included Hills 65 and 52 manned by companies of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines in the southwestern part of the TAOR and Hill 41 defended by Company D, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines in the central western sector. The mortar attacks resulted in only five wounded and none killed among the Marine defenders. Countermortar fire quickly silenced the enemy tubes. The Marine staff speculated that the enemy launched the mortar attacks largely as a cover for the rocket attacks against Marble Mountain. Even at Marble Mountain the damage was relatively contained. The Marines lost 1 helicopter and sustained damage to 29 others. Two

*A U.S. Army historian, George L. MacGarrigle, observed that the attack on Quang Ngai City failed because the commander of the *401st* "was unable to coordinate the action." George L. MacGarrigle, Historian, CMH, Comments on draft, dtd 5Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

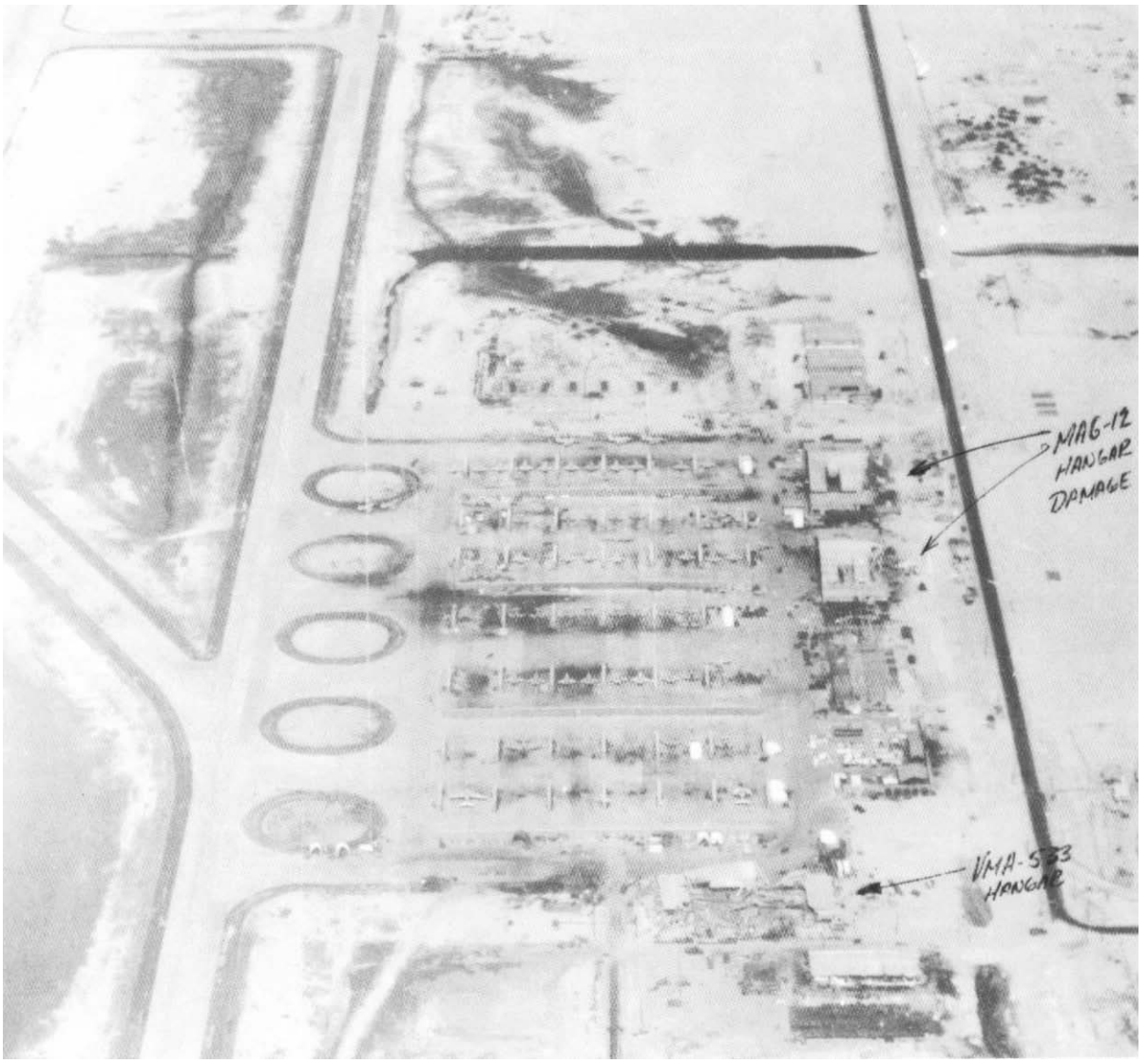


Photo courtesy of Col Robert W. Lewis, USMC (Ret)

Chu Lai airfield is seen in an aerial view after the rocket attack. Note arrows pointing out damage to aircraft hangars at the base.

attached U.S. Army personnel were wounded.[57]

During the day and evening of the 31st, the VC and NVA infantry units pressed the offensive on the ground. In the northern sector of Da Nang, NVA or VC main force troops entered Nam O once again and killed the hamlet chief.* Combined Action platoon Q–4 there continued to hold out. At about 0740, a crowd of 400 Vietnamese civilians made up mostly of women and children and carrying NVA and VC flags approached the Combined Action compound. The Marines and Popular Force troops fired at armed members of the crowd who appeared to be directing the march. The crowd scattered only to gather on the fringes of the Da Nang base near the Force Logistic Compound near Red Beach. Again the crowd dispersed and this time did not recongregate. In the meantime, the VC harassed with sniper fire both CAP Q–4 and the nearby Nam O bridge security detachment from the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.[58]

*Mike McDonell, who was the Northern Sector Defense Command "watch officer", recalled that he tried to warn the "CAPs . . . that there was a battalion of NVA in their ville; we could not raise them, the NVA went into assault and we had to call artillery on their position . . . ." He remembered that time as "when the world turned upside down." Mike McDonell, Comments on draft, dtd 22Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190390

A bandaged VC, wounded in the fighting for Nam O, waits for evacuation. The prisoner talked freely to his captors while he received medical attention.

The Da Nang Northern Sector Defense Command dispatched a provisional company to assist the Combined Action Marines as well as the security detachment. The provisional company linked up with two South Vietnamese Ranger companies that were operating in the area to contain the battalion from the *4th NVA Regiment* which had slipped through the Hai Van Pass the night before. With part of the force establishing blocking positions north of the hamlet, the rest of the provisional company and South Vietnamese Rangers moved through Nam O. By the afternoon of the 31st, the Marines and Rangers had completed their sweep. They collected some 200 people that they detained for further questioning. Some of the VC in the hamlet fled south, but encountered a platoon from Company E, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines coming up to reinforce the allied forces in the Nam O region. In the resulting engagement, the Marines of Company E killed about 13 VC. The enemy unit was from the *Q–55th Local Force Company*, which normally operated in the area. A prisoner captured in Nam O identified a North Vietnamese battalion, probably from the *4th NVA Regiment*, operating below the Hai Van Pass with the "mission to form civilians for demonstrations."[59]

According to a South Vietnamese account, the ARVN Rangers killed 150 of the enemy and captured another 18 in the battle for Nam O and in other fighting below the pass through 31 January. ARVN intelligence officers speculated that the battalion from the *4th NVA Regiment* was supposed to have spearheaded the attack on the city of Da Nang the previous day, but arrived too late to influence the battle.[60]

In other sectors of the Da Nang TAOR, the Communists also maintained the pressure on the allied forces. For the most part, the VC and NVA limited their attacks on the Marines to mortar bombardments and harassing small arms fire. Although agent reports and other intelligence indicated continued enemy assaults north of the Cau Do River against Hoa Vang and Da Nang City, most of these came to naught. The 1st MP Battalion completed three sweeps of the airbase perimeter and the areas just southeast, southwest, and just north of the airbase without incident. The battalion's Company B, however, in an operation with a Combined Action platoon in two hamlets on the Tiensha Peninsula or Da Nang East, surprised a VC force in two hamlets north of Marble Mountain. The Marines and Popular Force troops killed 22 of the enemy and took another 23 prisoner.[61]

There were two serious incidents in the 7th Marines sector. In the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines area of operations, about 2,000 meters west of Hill 55 on the other side of a bend in the Yen River, a squad from Company L at 1145 ran into what eventually turned out to be a fairly large-sized enemy unit. Reinforced by the remainder of Company L and two platoons from Company M together with two tanks and a LVT, the Marines engaged the NVA. Company L, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines set up blocking positions on the east bank of the Yen. Able to establish clear fields of fire in the rice paddy where the heaviest firefight occurred, the enemy prevented the 7th Marines elements from closing with them. After dark, both sides withdrew, the Marines to night defensive positions and the NVA to the west. In the engagement, the Marines lost 5 killed and 12 wounded. They counted 34 enemy dead. Noting the new web gear and weapons with the North Vietnamese bodies left on the battlefield, Marine intelligence officers believed the North Vietnamese unit to be from the *31st NVA Regiment*.[62]

About 5,000 meters to the northwest, later that night, a squad from Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines encountered an enemy force possibly from the

same NVA regiment. The Marine squad was about to establish a night ambush site when an enemy force of about 100 fired upon them. Two other squad patrols from Company C in the vicinity quickly joined the first squad. Another platoon from the Marine company also reinforced the engaged troops about an hour later. Finally the enemy broke contact at 2000 and disappeared. The Marines took the worst in this uneven battle. Initially surprised, the first squad sustained heavy casualties. All told, the Marines lost 12 killed and 6 wounded. They later found three enemy bodies at the site. The dead enemy troops were wearing black pajamas under their green utilities. According to a Marine report, "it was evident that the enemy was prepared to masquerade as Vietnamese civilians in the process of infiltrating the TAOR and that he was attempting to infiltrate his forces in small units."[63]

The greatest danger to the TAOR at this juncture, however, was from the south in that area defended by the Korean Marine Brigade and the 51st ARVN Regiment. Although the Koreans and ARVN in a combined operation finally cleared Hoi An, enemy units to the west, south, and north of that city continued to press the attack. At 0920, enemy forces attacked the district towns of Dien Ban, just above the Ky Lam River, and Duy Xuyen below the river. At Dien Bien, the 51st ARVN reinforced by Korean Marines contained the attack. At Duy Xuyen, however, the Communist troops overran the town, forcing the district chief to flee and take refuge with the Koreans. Americal Division artillery operating in the Que Son sector took the Communist forces under fire, but did not shell Duy Xuyen town because of the civilian population there. The III MAF Command Center later that evening radioed MACV in Saigon: "Although the enemy has suffered heavy losses within his local and main force VC units during the past two days, he still possesses a formidable threat utilizing NVA troops poised on the periphery of the Da Nang TAOR."[64]

While the Communist forces continued to harass allied positions on the night of 31 January–1 February 1968, the intensity of combat did not match that of the previous two nights. Still enemy gunners just before 0100 launched 12 122mm rockets aimed at the Da Nang base and blew up two ammunition dumps, one for napalm and the other for flares. While making for a loud and colorful pyrotechnical display, the explosions caused no casualties and no damage to any of the aircraft. There were no other rocket attacks that night.[65]

Again during the day of 1 February, the number of incidents between allied and Communist forces fell from those of the two previous days. Enemy gunners, however, continued to be active and shot down a Marine CH–46 attempting to insert a reconnaissance team into a landing zone in the hill mass in the western sector of Da Nang below the Tuy Loan River. The helicopter burned upon crashing, but the crew and most of the patrol were able to get out. While Marine fixed-wing aircraft flew strike missions against the enemy gun emplacements, another helicopter evacuated the survivors. Of the 13-man Recon team, dubbed "Dublin City," one was dead, nine were injured, and three escaped unscathed. According to Marine pilot reports, the enemy had approximately 250 men in the area equipped with automatic weapons, including at least one .50-caliber-type machine gun. After the fixed-wing aircraft and evacuation helicopter cleared the area, the 11th Marines saturated the area with artillery fire.[66]

A Brief Lull and Renewed Fighting

On 1 February, General Robertson began to refine his defensive dispositions at Da Nang so as to counter any further incursions on the part of the NVA regulars and the VC main force units pressing on the Marine TAOR. Robertson wanted to "canalize enemy movements in order to develop lucrative targets which could be exploited." Given also the enemy rocket threat, he still needed to maintain extensive patrols in the so-called Rocket Belt. The 1st Marine Division commander decided then to move Company M, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines from its fairly remote position on Hill 52 in the far western reaches of the Vu Gia River Valley above the An Hoa Basin to the more centrally located Hill 65. Because of the location of Hill 65, just above Route 4 about 4,000 meters west of the district town of Dai Loc, and below Charlie Ridge, where the VC had heavy machine gun emplacements which precluded any helicopter lift, the Marine company had to make the move on foot. The company arrived at its dispositions at 0100 the following morning. A contingent of South Vietnamese Nung mercenaries from the Special Forces CIDG Camp at Thuong Duc took over the defense of Hill 52 from Company M.[67]

Still the Marine command believed the new positions of Company M not only covered the approaches to Dai Loc, but provided the division with another reserve force. Further to the east Company G, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, at the battalion's command post

about 500 meters north of Dien Ban town, remained as the division mobile reserve mounted in LVTs and supported by tanks. It also served to block "one of the principal avenues of approach to Da Nang from the south." The only other Marine reserves available to the division were the provisional companies of the Northern and Southern Defense Commands.

For the next few days, there was a relative lull in the Da Nang sector, at least as compared to the last two days of January. There were still ominous signs and actions that the enemy push on Da Nang was not over. Although most of the enemy activity was restricted to small-unit contacts, on the night of 2–3 February, enemy gunners again rocketed the Da Nang base. From firing positions southwest of the base, 28 122mm missiles fell on the airfield, destroying one aircraft and damaging six others. Marine counter-rocket fire from the 11th Marines and 1st Tank Battalion resulted in five secondary explosions.[68]

While from 1–5 February, the enemy ground assaults on Marine positions appeared to diminish, Marine spotters in the tower on Hill 55 reported the constant movement of small groups of enemy troops in the western portion of the Korean Marine area of operations. Marine commanders and staff officers could only speculate that the enemy was probably infiltrating north in small groups to "predetermined rallying points" for a further assault either on the city or on the base. Other disturbing intelligence tended to confirm this analysis. On 2 February, the Marines received a report that the *2d NVA Division* had moved its headquarters four miles north, to a position above Route 4, from its previous location on Go Noi Island. Two days later, Marine intelligence officers learned that the *21st NVA Regiment* was in the Go Noi area. Finally there were rumors that the other two regiments of the *2d Division*, the *1st VC* and the *3d NVA*, had infiltrated even further north. In fact, elements of both regiments had reached jump-off points just south of the Cau Do River. As Lieutenant Colonel John F. J. Kelly, an intelligence officer on the III MAF staff, remembered, III MAF had expected the *2d NVA Division* to have participated in the attack on the 30th and 31st, "and it was waited on with bated breath, we knew that it was coming."[69]

The Marines did not have a long wait. On the night of 5–6 February, the Communist forces began the second phase of its Da Nang offensive. At 2000 on the night of the 5th, a Marine platoon ambush from Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines intercepted about 60 North Vietnamese troops about 4,000 meters south of the Tuy Loan River in the western sector of the area of operations moving northeast toward the river and the base with mortars and automatic weapons. Calling artillery upon the enemy troops, the Marines then swept through the area and recovered about 17 60mm mortar rounds. They later found four enemy dead. While the Marines successfully thwarted this attempt, between 0100 and 0500 on the morning of the 6th, enemy gunners mortared or rocketed all of the command posts, fire bases, and company combat bases in the 7th Marines sector. In the attack, the enemy gunners fired 122mm rockets at Marine artillery positions at An Hoa, Hill 55, and Hill 10. Twenty rockets fell on Hill 10, manned by Battery G, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines which resulted in 23 casualties, including two dead. The remaining rocket attacks were ineffective. Two of the mortar attacks hit the 1st Air Cavalry Division helipad near the Force Logistic Command area in the Red Beach sector. These destroyed two of the Army helicopters and damaged eight others. The mortar rounds killed one U.S. soldier and wounded two.[70]

On the ground in the 7th Marines sector, North Vietnamese units hit several of the Combined Action platoons, especially in the 3d and 1st Battalion areas. One of the major attacks was against CAP B–3 in the hamlet of Duong Lam (1) just below the Tuy Loan River. Shortly after 0100 on the 6th, enemy gunners opened up on the hamlet with intermittent mortar rounds and small-arms fire. About an hour later, North Vietnamese troops who had infiltrated Duong Lam rushed the CAP compound. While successfully beating back the enemy onslaught, the Combined Action leader called for help. At 0240, a squad from the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, supported by two tanks from the 1st Tank Battalion, moved to assist the embattled CAP unit. The reaction force itself came under automatic weapons fire and enemy rocket- propelled grenades disabled the two tanks. About 0330, two more Marine tanks from the district town of Hieu Duc arrived at the northern fringes of the hamlet. The armored force pushed through the hamlet and encountered only occasional small-arms fire. Joining up with the squad from the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines and some newly arrived ARVN troops, the tanks then relieved the Combined Action garrison. The combined force then swept the general area where they found two enemy bodies and took three prisoners. According to the prisoner accounts, they were from the *3d Battalion, 31st NVA Regiment* and confirmed that ". . . Da Nang itself was the ultimate objective."[71]

The heaviest action occurred in the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines and 4th Battalion, 51st ARVN sectors along Route 1. Corporal Igor Bobrowsky with CAP D–2 located near the Thanh Quit Bridge along Route 1 remembered being besieged in his compound by North Vietnamese regulars. As he recalled suddenly the enemy was there and forced his Marines and PFs to take refuge in the compound together with many local villagers: "We were running out of ammunition and everything else, so that was a big fear." According to Bobrowsky, the NVA suddenly disappeared as quickly as they had appeared. He later conjectured that "what saved us from being . . . taken out totally was the fact that they had bigger fish to fry, they were headed to Da Nang."[72]*

The bigger fish was the 4th Battalion, 51st ARVN Battalion base camp about 5,000 meters north on Route 1 above the Thanh Quit River. At about 0300, two North Vietnamese battalions struck the ARVN compound. Two LVTH–6s from the Marine 1st Armored Amphibian Company attached to the 11th Marines responded to a call from the U.S. Army advisor attached to the ARVN unit. Firing 290 105mm shells, the tractor artillery reportedly killed about 80 of the enemy attackers caught in the open.[73]

About 0900, Lieutenant Colonel William K. Rockey, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines commander, ordered a small command group and two companies, Company M of his battalion and Company F, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines attached to his command, to the relief of the ARVN camp. Accompanied by tanks and LVTs, Company F maneuvered to the north of the ARVN base. Company M advanced toward a hamlet to the south of the ARVN. Both Marine companies encountered heavy small-arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades as they approached their objectives. The Marine companies then pulled back and called in artillery and air. Lieutenant Colonel Rockey then directed Company G of the 3d Marines, also attached to him, to move up along the banks of the Bau Xau River toward a blocking position southwest of the ARVN base "to seal up" any escape route in that direction. As Company G began its redeployment along the river route it ran into enemy forces attempting to retreat in that direction. Rockey then ordered a platoon from his Company K to reinforce Company G. By the end of the day, the elements of the four Marine companies had established their night positions. During the day's fighting, Rockey's battalion killed 107 of the enemy and took two prisoners. His Marines sustained casualties of 11 killed and 53 wounded.[74]**

The fighting continued during the night and into the next day. From their night positions, Company G observers saw large numbers of North Vietnamese approaching them from the north. The Marine company called in mortar and artillery fire. Battery F, 2d Battalion, 11th Marines alone shot off some 1,200 rounds. Even in the face of the artillery, the North Vietnamese continued their advance upon the Marine positions. Company G repulsed a number of probes throughout the night until the enemy broke contact at dawn. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines together with Companies F and G, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines then began methodically to eliminate pockets of enemy resistance in the general area. In one contact about 1645, Company M, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines met a force of 100 enemy troops. The Marines and VC in the ensuing firefight fought at a range as close as five meters from one another with the Marines achieving the upper hand. According to the Marine after-action report, Lieutenant Colonel Rockey's battalion and the attached two companies from the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines accounted for more than 320 enemy dead in less than 36 hours.

By this time, Major General Robertson, the 1st Marine Division commander, was worried about the ability to contain the enemy offensive south of Da Nang. The *VC R–20* and *V–25th* Battalions had struck again at Hoi An, engaging both the Korean Marine Brigade and the 1st and 2d Battalions of the ARVN 51st Regiment. North Vietnamese battalions from the *2d NVA Division* had eluded the Korean and ARVN defenses in the southern sector and had penetrated the defensive perimeter of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines and 3d Battalion, 5th Marines just below the main base. While the Marine battalions successfully kept these initial assaults on the night of 5–6 February in check, General Robertson was not

*Igor Bobrowsky commented on the "audacity (stupidity) of the NVA at the start of their push, when—as in our area, they moved in such numbers, openly and in the broad daylight that until they began to fire on us our only thought was that they must be an allied unit that strayed into our area." He added that although the NVA main group moved out they left "a blocking force behind to keep the CAP under fire . . . ." He believed these troops "were deliberately left in place to serve as stepping stones along the line of retreat—in the event of a withdrawal." Bobrowsky Comments.

**Igor Bobrowsky with CAP D-2 remembered that Company M was "ambushed in the streets near the north end of Thanh Quit . . . . A good number of M Company that survived the ambush got down to us, along with some of their dead and a lot of wounded." Bobrowsky Comments.



Photo is from the Abel Collection

Marines from Company M, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines move through tall grass in a hamlet on their way to relieve an embattled ARVN base camp near the Thanh Quit River.

sure how much longer they could. The fighting during the preceding week had drawn down the strength of the ARVN and the two Marine battalions and the enemy division still had uncommitted units that it could throw into the fray. General Robertson shared these concerns with General Cushman, the III MAF commander.[75]

On 7 February, this request led to a strange confrontation, if there was a confrontation, between General Westmoreland and General Cushman. On the previous night as well as attacking at Da Nang, North Vietnamese troops overran the Special Forces Camp at Lang Vei, south of Khe Sanh.* Believing that III MAF should have relieved the camp and fearing that the enemy was about to launch the much-heralded attack on Khe Sanh itself, the MACV commander called for a special meeting on the morning of 7 February of the senior U.S. commanders in I Corps. At the meeting itself, he became even more upset as he learned about the situation at Da Nang. As he later confided, "the VC were getting closer and closer to Da Nang Airbase. There was an absence of initiative by the CG III MAF, in dealing forcefully with the situation."[76]

According to General Westmoreland's account, he acted rather abruptly and made his displeasure known. Shocked at what he considered things left undone, he ordered "in exasperation" Major General Robertson of the 1st Marine Division and Major General Samuel Koster of the Americal Division from the room. The MACV commander told the two generals "to return only when they had worked out a viable plan for closely coordinated offensive action against the enemy threatening the airfield."[77]

Apparently, however, although conscious of Westmoreland's sense of urgency about the tactical situation at Da Nang, the Marine commanders were unaware of Westmoreland's unhappiness about the arrangements. According to both Generals Cushman and Robertson the meeting was not acrimonious. General Robertson remembered that he briefed the MACV commander on the enemy and stated that he needed more troops. Westmoreland then turned to Major General Koster and merely said: "'Sam, you let Robby have two, three, or even four battalions if he needs them.'" The MACV commander then dismissed Koster and Robertson from the meeting "to go out and work out the details." General Cushman later commented that he did not normally order the movement of Army units until he and General Westmoreland "got together and agreed

*For the overrunning of Lang Vei see chapter 14.

upon a plan." His view was that the purpose of the meeting was to obtain Westmoreland's approval for the reinforcement of Da Nang by the Americal Division.[78]*

Despite the mixed perceptions about the meeting, the various parties quickly worked out a plan of action. Colonel Smith of the III MAF staff, who sat in on the conference between Generals Koster and Robertson, remembered that after studying the situation map, the conferees "came to the conclusion that the best way of stopping this attack was to interpose an equally strong force between the 2d NVA Division and the Da Nang Vital Area." The idea was to stop the enemy division from entering the Vital Area rather "than pushing him from the south and in effect pushing him" into the sector. The planners decided to send a two-battalion Army task force from the Americal Division into the northern sector of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines near Route 1 south of the Cau Do.[79]

The afternoon of 7 February, General Cushman issued the orders for the movement of the Army units to Da Nang. Major General Koster was to deploy one battalion immediately and to send the task force command group and remaining battalion the following day. Upon arrival at Da Nang, the Army units were to be under the operational control of the 1st Marine Division. The mission of the Americal task force was to "block enemy movement to the north, deny enemy access to the Da Nang Vital Area, and destroy enemy forces."[80]

According to plan, late in the afternoon of 7 February, Marine helicopters brought the lead Army battalion, the 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, commanded by Army Lieutenant Colonel William J. Baxley, into a landing zone near the hamlet of Duong Son (1) just off the old railroad tracks, about 2,000 meters south of the Cau Do. The Army troops quickly moved into night positions and encountered only harassing sniper fire or an occasional mortar round.[81]

The night of 7–8 was relatively uneventful throughout the Da Nang TAOR until about 0345. At that time, enemy mortar rounds fell into the CAP E–4 compound in Lo Giang (1) hamlet, about 2,000 meters northeast of Duong Son (1). While beginning with the mortar bombardment, the enemy soon escalated the fighting. By daylight, enemy ground forces surrounded the CAP hamlet.

At that point, to ease the pressure on the CAPs, General Robertson about 0700 deployed the Army battalion to Lo Giang (5), about 1,000 meters north of Lo Giang (1), just below the Cau Do. The Army troops soon found themselves engaged with another enemy battalion. The 1st Marine Division commander then reinforced the Army unit with two Marine companies, Company G, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines and Company I, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines. This fighting continued to rage until late afternoon.

In the meantime, CAP E–4 continued to hold out against overwhelming odds. A small Combined Action headquarters detachment of 15 men from Hoa Vang also attempted to reinforce the embattled CAP, but never reached Lo Giang (1). Only 1 of the original 15 men survived. By mid-afternoon CAP E–4 was nearly out of ammunition. At 1550, under cover of helicopter gunships and fixed-wing aircraft, Marine helicopters successfully evacuated the Combined Action platoon out of Lo Giang (1). In Lo Giang (5), the action lasted for another hour and a half, when the NVA/VC forces tried to break contact. In that fighting, the soldiers and Marines killed over 150 of the enemy.

By that evening, Army Task Force Miracle, under Army Colonel Louis Gelling, the commander of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, had been established in the Da Nang area of operations. Gelling, the task force headquarters, and the 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry, under the command of U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Lyman H. Hammond, Jr., had arrived from Chu Lai that afternoon. Establishing his command post near Duong Son, Colonel Gelling assumed operational control of the 1st of the 6th near Lo Giang (5) and placed the 2d of the 1st in blocking positions below Lo Giang (1). During the following day, while the 1st of the 6th mopped up in its area, the 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry attacked north. The latter battalion ran into a North Vietnamese battalion and engaged it in a nine-hour battle. Pulling back its assault elements, the Army unit saturated the

*General Westmoreland commented that he was "critical of Cushman's lack of initiative in responding to an immediate tactical situation," not of the command arrangements. He assumed that Cushman "appreciated that the Americal Division was under his tactical command." Gen William C. Westmoreland, USA, Comments on draft, dtd 18Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).

Marine Brigadier General John R. Chaisson, the head of the MACV Combat Operations Center, who also attended the meeting, wrote to his wife about "recriminations" at the meeting, but these related to the Lang Vei situation. BGen John R. Chaisson, ltr to wife, dtd 8Feb68 (Chaisson Papers, Hoover Institute). Cushman related that he was "criticized because I didn't send the whole outfit from Khe Sanh down there [Lang Vei], but I decided . . . that it wasn't the thing to do." Cushman Intvw, Nov82, p. 31. General Earl E. Anderson, the III MAF Chief of Staff, also attended the meeting and agreed "that it was not acrimonious." Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). See also Chapter 14.

area with artillery. They later found 46 enemy bodies and took a wounded man prisoner. Intelligence indicated that the enemy unit in the southern hamlet was from the *3d Battalion, 31st NVA Regiment*, and the units in Lo Giang (5) were from the *1st VC Regiment*. In the meantime, that day, on the eastern flank of the Army units, on the east bank of the Vinh Dinh River, the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines encountered two companies from the *1st VC Regiment* and killed about 90 of the enemy.

The enemy offensive in the Da Nang sector had spent itself. During the next few days, Task Force Miracle conducted sweeps in its sector and encountered relatively little resistance. Both the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines to the east of the Army task force, and the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines to the south, also reported relatively little enemy activity in their sectors. Only the 7th Marines to the west experienced an increase in incidents as North Vietnamese regulars and the VC main force troops moved through the western TAOR to return to their mountain strongholds in *Base Area 114* and through Charlie Ridge into "Happy Valley."[82]*

To the south, in the Korean sector, the ROK Marines with the assistance of the ARVN again drove Communist forces out of the Hoi An environs. According to an enemy NCO from the *31st NVA Regiment* captured in the fighting, the mission of his unit was to "attack Hoi An, five times if necessary, and set up a liberation government." Hoi An still remained in friendly hands. In the Que Son Valley on 9 February, the Americal Division engaged elements of the *21st NVA Regiment*, the only regiment of the *2d NVA Division* that had not been in the Da Nang sector. The *21st* was also in retreat.[83]

According to Marine intelligence reports, on 9 February, the *2d NVA Division* moved its headquarters back to the Go Noi from its more forward positions. The following day, the same sources indicated that both the *1st VC* and the *3d NVA* Regiments had also withdrawn to the Go Noi. On 11 February, General Cushman observed the *2d NVA Division* "appeared to be withdrawing from contact southward" and ordered his subordinate commanders to continue to press the attack. He, nevertheless, released TF Miracle from the operational control of the 1st Marine Division and returned it to its parent command. The task force headquarters and its two battalions returned to Chu Lai the following day. The battle for Da Nang was largely over. Despite limited attacks later in the month, these were largely, as a report stated, "an attempt to maintain the facade of an offensive."[84]

During the Da Nang Tet offensive, both sides experienced heavy casualties, but the Communist forces proved to be no match for the allied forces. According to III MAF figures, from 29 January through 14 February at Da Nang, Marines sustained 124 killed and more than 480 wounded. Army forces in the Da Nang area including the troops from Task Force Miracle suffered 18 dead and 59 wounded. South Vietnamese and Korean casualties probably equalled or slightly exceeded the American. U.S. estimates of enemy casualties ranged between 1,200 and 1,400 dead. Colonel Smith believed that the *1st VC Regiment* alone lost about 600 men. The *2d NVA Division* still remained intact, but obviously was not about to renew the offensive.[85]

From almost every account, the Communist attack in the Da Nang TAOR was very inept. Despite the thinness of the Marine lines and the ability of both the NVA and VC to infiltrate, the enemy never capitalized on these advantages. According to a VC after-action report early in the offensive, the writer complained that the "commander did not know . . . [the] situation accurately . . . and that orders were not strictly obeyed." In a 1st Marine Division analyses, the author commented that the *2d NVA Division*'s approach was "along a single axis of advance so that his eventual target was easily identifiable." Moreover, once the NVA units arrived south of Da Nang they "made no further attempts at maneuver even while being hunted by Marine and Army units, and when engaged, seldom maneuvered, except to withdraw." General Robertson, the 1st Division commander, observed that the delay of the *2d NVA Division* into the picture may have been because the Communist forces "got their signals mixed . . . ." The VC were supposed to be inside "when the NVA division came marching down main street. You get your timing off and you've got problems." Another possible explanation was that the Da Nang attack may have been a secondary assault—to cause as much damage as possible and divert allied forces from the almost successful effort of the Communist forces to capture the city of Hue.[86]**

*Igor Bobrowsky with CAP D-2 remembered the "retreating NVA/VC were certainly more pathetic on the way back out to their lairs than they were coming in on us. At the same time though, they were . . . somehow scarier—because they were so clearly desperate in trying to get away, like small packs of cornered rats looking for holes to scurry through in a burning building." Bobrowsky Comments.

**Brigadier General Paul G. Graham who was the 1st Marine Division Operations Officer (G-3) at the time disagreed with the last statement, writing "Hue had no military value to the NVA/VC. Da Nang was the prize—for success in that endeavor could have had a serious effect on the Allied efforts in the III MAF area." BGen Paul G. Graham, Comments on draft, dtd 20Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 9

The Struggle for Hue—The Battle Begins

The Two Faces of Hue—The NVA Attack—Redeployment at Phu Bai and Marines Go to Hue

The Two Faces of Hue

As the former imperial capital, Hue was for most Vietnamese the cultural center of the country. With an equal disdain for both northerners and southerners, the religious and intellectual elite of the city held themselves aloof from active participation in the war. Instead they advocated local autonomy and traditional Vietnamese social values that led to a distrust of the central Saigon government and its American allies as well as Communism. In both the 1963 Buddhist uprising and the 1966 "Struggle Movement," the monks from the Hue pagodas and students and professors at Hue University provided the informal leadership against the successive Saigon regimes.

Despite the city's reputation for dissidence, the Communists failed to take advantage of the Hue protest movements. Both the South Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong troops for the most part refrained from any show of force in the immediate vicinity or in the city itself. With a sort of unspoken truce in effect, Hue afforded both sides a certain respite from the war.* With a wartime population of about 140,000 persons, Hue retained much of its prewar ambience. Divided by the Huong or Perfume River, the city emitted a sense of both its colonial and imperial pasts. It was, in effect, two cities.

North of the river, the three-square-mile Citadel with its ramparts and high towers gave the appearance of a medieval walled town. Built by the Emperor Gia Linh in the early nineteenth century, it contained the former imperial palace with its large gilt and dragon-decorated throne room. Within the Citadel walls lay formal gardens and parks, private residences, market places, pagodas, and moats filled with lotus flowers. Buddhist bells and gongs as well as the chant of prayers resounded through its streets.

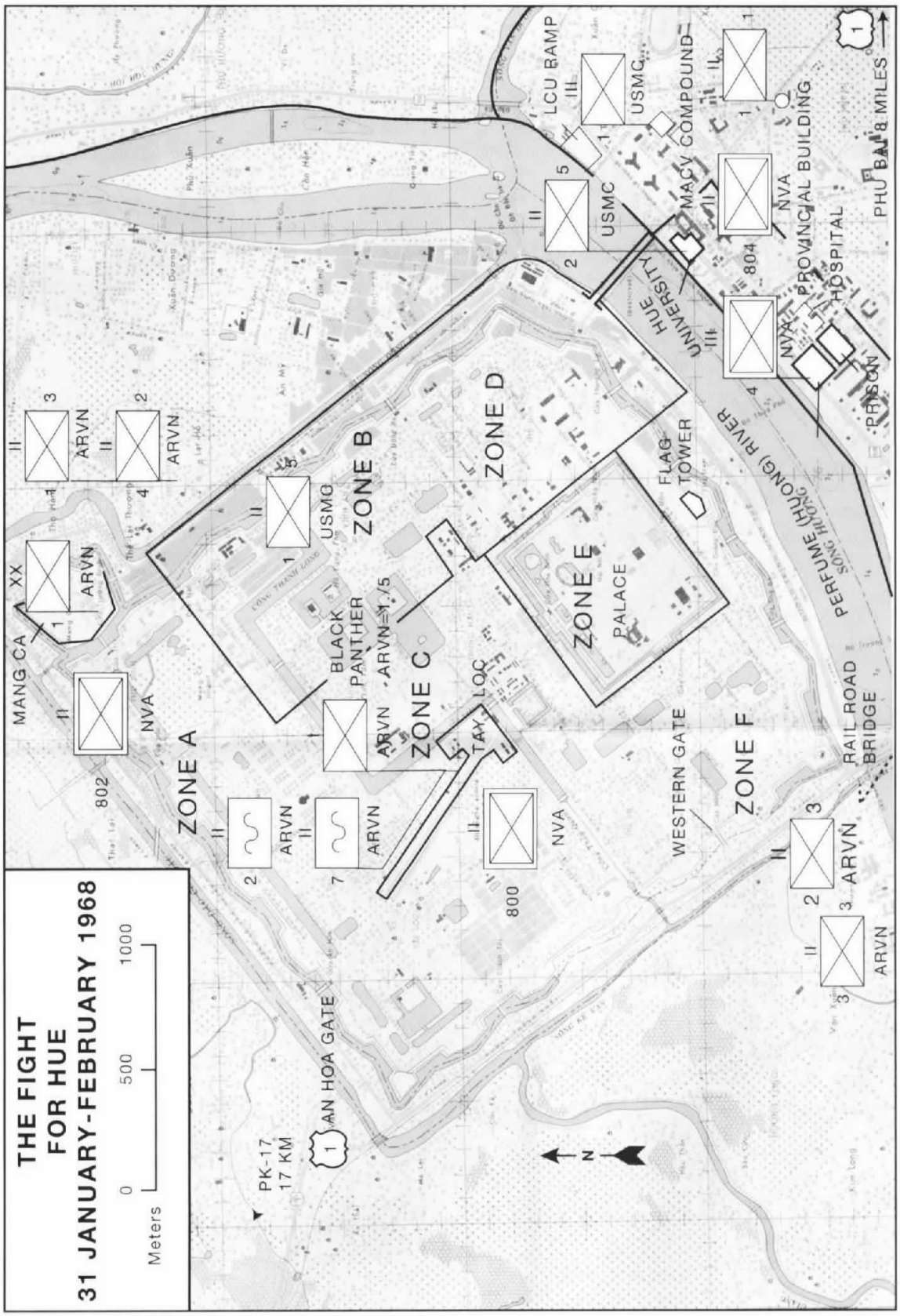
South of the river lay the modern city. Delineated by the Perfume River and the Phu Cam Canal into a rough triangle, southern Hue was about half the size of the Citadel. The university, the stadium, government administrative buildings, the hospital, the provincial prison, and various radio stations were all in the new city. Attractive Vietnamese schoolgirls dressed in the traditional *Ao Dai* bicycled or walked along stately Le Loi Boulevard, paralleling the riverfront. The *Cercle-Sportif* with its veranda overlooking the Perfume River evoked memories of the former French colonial administration.

In January 1968 as the Tet season approached, however, a certain uneasiness lay over the city. The cancellation of the Tet truce and the enemy attacks on Da Nang and elsewhere in southern I Corps dampened the usual festive mood of the holiday season. On 30 January, Brigadier General Ngo Quang Truong, the commanding general of the 1st ARVN Division, canceled all leaves and ordered his units on full alert. Most of the troops, however, already on leave, were unable to rejoin their units. Moreover, the only South Vietnamese forces in the city itself were the division staff, the division Headquarters Company, the Reconnaissance Company, a few support units, and Truong's personal guard, the elite "Black Panther" Company. The division headquarters was in the walled *Mang Ca* military compound, self-contained in the northeast corner of the Citadel. General Truong positioned the Black Panthers on the Tay Loc airfield in the Citadel, about a mile southwest of the division compound. In the southern city, the U.S. maintained a MACV compound in a former hotel which served as a billet and headquarters for the U.S. advisory staff to the 1st ARVN Division.[1]

The NVA Attack

Although allied intelligence reported elements of two NVA regiments, the *4th* and the *6th*, in Thua Thien Province, there was little evidence of enemy activity in the Hue sector. Indeed, the 1st ARVN Division dismissed any conjecture that the enemy had either "the intent" or "capability" to launch a division-size attack against the city. U.S. order of battle records listed the *6th NVA* headquarters with its *804th Battalion* in the jungle-canopied *Base Area 114*, about 20 to 25 kilometers west of Hue. One battalion, the *806th*, was supposed to be in the "Street Without Joy" area in

*Peter Braestrup, then the Saigon Bureau Chief for the *Washington Post*, observed that this informal truce only applied to Hue. Peter Braestrup, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File).


THE FIGHT
FOR HUE
31 JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1968
0 500 1000
Meters
ZONE A
ZONE B
ZONE C
ZONE D
ZONE E
ZONE F
MANG CA
ARVN
NVA
802
800
804
BLACK PANTHER
ARVN
USMC
LOC
TAY
PALACE
FLAG TOWER
WESTERN GATE
RAIL ROAD BRIDGE
PERFUME (HUONG) RIVER
SONG HUONG
HUE UNIVERSITY
MACV COMPOUND
PROVINCIAL BUILDING
HOSPITAL
PRISON
LCU RAMP
AN HOA GATE
PK-17
17 KM
PHU BAI 8 MILES
N

Phong Dien District, 35 kilometers northeast of Hue, successfully evading ARVN forces in the sector. American intelligence officers believed the remaining battalion, the *802d*, to be about 20 kilometers south of the city or with the regimental headquarters in *Base Area 114*. According to the best allied information, the *4th NVA Regiment* was in the Phu Loc area near Route 1 between Phu Bai and Da Nang.[2]

Unknown to the allies, both enemy regiments were on the move towards Hue. The *6th NVA* had as its three primary objectives the *Mang Ca* headquarters compound, the Tay Loc airfield, and the imperial palace, all in the Citadel. South of the Perfume River, the *4th NVA* was to attack the modern city. Among its objective areas were the provincial capital building, the prison, and the MACV advisors compound. The two regiments had nearly 200 specific targets in addition to the primary sites, including the radio station, police stations, houses of government officials, the recruiting office, and even the national Imperial Museum. The target list contained detailed intelligence to the extent of naming suspected government sympathizers and their usual meeting places.[3]

On 30 January, some of the enemy shock troops and sappers entered the city disguised as simple peasants. With their uniforms and weapons hidden in baggage, boxes, and under their street clothes, the Viet Cong and NVA mingled with the Tet holiday crowds.* Many donned ARVN uniforms and then took up predesignated positions that night to await the attack signal.[4]

By this time the *6th NVA Regiment* was only a few kilometers from the western edge of the city. About 1900, the regiment had assembled on a slope designated "Hill 138" for its evening meal. According to a North Vietnamese Army account, the troops ate a meal of "dumplings, Tet cakes, dried meat, and glutinous rice mixed with sugar." The commander and his officers inspected the men's gear and many of the soldiers



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A188251

Top, picture taken in February 1967, long before the battle, shows the elaborate entrance and part of the surrounding wall to the Imperial Palace grounds in the Citadel. This wall is separate from the walls of the Citadel itself. Bottom, the Golden Throne of the former Vietnamese Emperors is at the heart of the palace, which the North Vietnamese used as a headquarters during the fighting for the city.

Photo courtesy of Alex Wells, Jr.



*Colonel John F. Barr, who as a lieutenant colonel, commanded the 1st Field Artillery Group, had recently arrived at Phu Bai as part of Operation Checkers. (See Chapter 6) Barr remembered that on the morning of the 30th, he visited Hue "to effect command coordination between the 1st Field Artillery Group and the ARVN artillery commander in the Citadel. While into and through the city, I noted the unusual number of young men in civilian clothes; unusual in that most Vietnamese youths were either drafted by the ARVN or off in the hills with the Viet Cong. I mentioned this upon arrival at the ARVN artillery headquarters. I was assured by the artillery commander that it was customary for local farmers to come into Hue to celebrate the Tet holiday. Since he was a thoroughly professional soldier with eight years combat experience in the province, I accepted his explanation—to my subsequent regret." Col John F. Barr, Comments on draft, dtd 24Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

"changed into new khakis." At 2000, the regiment "resumed its march."[5]

At this point the *6th NVA* divided into three columns, each with its particular objective in the Citadel. At 2200, about four kilometers southwest of Hue, the commander of the 1st ARVN Division Reconnaissance Company, First Lieutenant Nguyen Thi Tan, was on a river surveillance mission with about 30 men, when a Regional Force company to his east reported that it was under attack. Remaining under cover, Lieutenant Tan and his men observed the equivalent of two enemy battalions filter past their positions, headed toward Hue. Tan radioed this information back to the 1st Division. The two battalions were probably the *800th* and *802d Battalions* of the *6th NVA*.[6]

Despite Tan's warning, the enemy troops continued toward Hue unmolested. In the enemy command post to the west of the city, the NVA commander waited for word that the attack had begun. At approximately 0230 31 January, a forward observer reported, "I am awake, I am looking down at Hue . . . the lights of the city are still on, the sky is quiet, and nothing is happening." Anxiously, the NVA officers looked at one another, but no one voiced their doubts. A few minutes later, the observer came back upon the radio and announced that the assault was under way.[7]

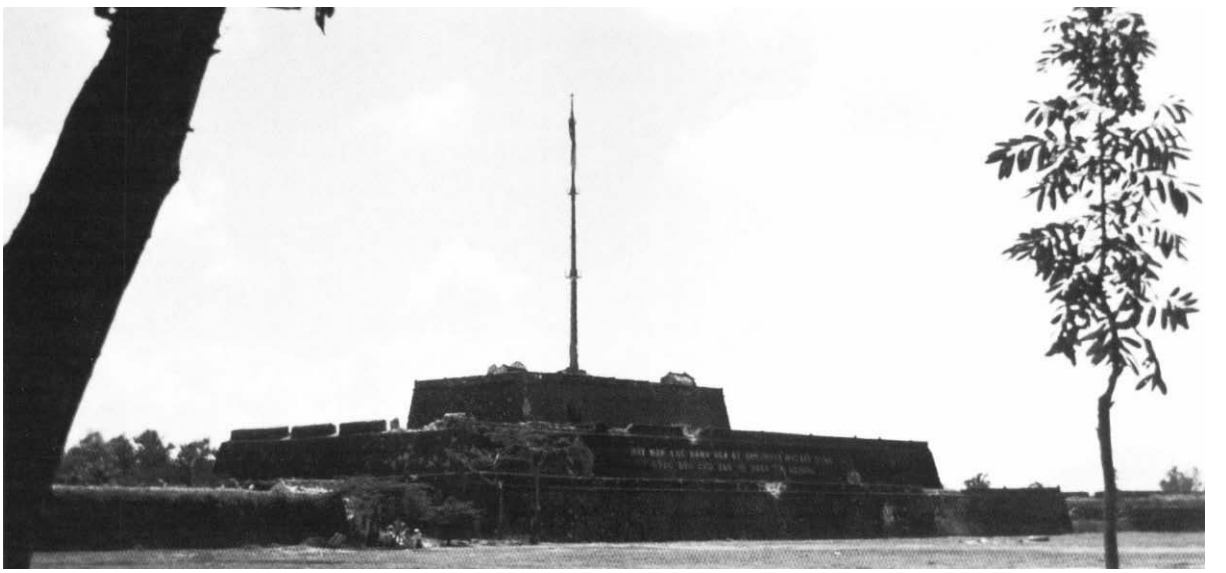
At 0233, a signal flare lit up the night sky above Hue. At the Western Gate of the Citadel, a four-man North Vietnamese sapper team, dressed in South Vietnamese Army uniforms, killed the guards and opened the gate. Upon their flashlight signals, lead elements of the *6th NVA* entered the old city. In similar scenes throughout the Citadel, the North Vietnamese regulars poured into the old imperial capital.[8]

The *800th* and *802d Battalions* pushed through the Western Gate and then drove north. On the Tay Loc airfield, the "Black Panther" Company, reinforced by the division's 1st Ordnance Company, stopped the *800th Battalion*. Although the enemy battle account stated that the South Vietnamese "offered no strong resistance," the NVA report acknowledged "the heavy enemy [ARVN] fire enveloped the entire airfield. By dawn, our troops were still unable to advance."[9]

While the fighting for the airfield continued to seesaw with first the ARVN having the upper hand and then the Communists, the *802d Battalion* struck the 1st Division headquarters at *Mang Ca*. Although the enemy battalion penetrated the division compound, an ad hoc 200-man defensive force consisting of staff officers, clerks, and other headquarters personnel managed to stave off the enemy assaults. General Truong called back most of his Black Panther Company from the airfield to bolster the headquarters defenses. With the reinforcements, the division headquarters remained secure. Nevertheless, by daylight, more than

The southern gate to the Citadel, with its flagpole, is where the North Vietnamese raised the Viet Cong banner.

Photo courtesy of Col Talman C. Budd II, USMC (Ret)



60 percent of the Citadel, including the imperial palace, was in the hands of the NVA. At 0800, North Vietnamese troops raised the red and blue Viet Cong banner with its gold star over the Citadel flag tower.[10]

Across the river in southern Hue, much the same situation existed. U.S. advisors to the 1st ARVN Division in the MACV compound, a complex of several two- to three-story buildings, including a former hotel, awoke in the early morning hours to the sound of bursting mortar and rocket rounds. The Americans grabbed any weapons that were at hand and manned their defenses. Like the 1st Division staff, the advisors successfully repulsed the initial enemy ground attack. While not mounting any further ground assaults, the NVA maintained a virtual siege of the compound with mortars, rockets, and automatic weapons fire.[11]

The *4th NVA Regiment* with the *804th NVA Battalion*, supported by local force companies and elements of the *Hue City Sapper Battalion*, had launched its offensive against the modern city. Divided into several attack groups, the enemy sought out key civil and military facilities. Even according to the North Vietnamese official account, the enemy actions and preparations in the new city lacked the cohesion and timing of those in the Citadel. The North Vietnamese author wrote: "The attacks on southern Hue were carried out by many forces which employed many very different forms of tactics." One unit lost its way in the darkness and did not arrive in the city until 0600. Despite confusion and some reverses, that morning, the NVA had control of most of southern Hue except for the prison, the MACV compound, and the Hue LCU (landing craft, utility) ramp on the waterfront to the northeast of the compound.[12]

In the Citadel, on 1 February, the embattled General Truong called in reinforcements. He ordered his 3d Regiment; the 3d Troop, 7th ARVN Cavalry; and the 1st ARVN Airborne Task Force to relieve the pressure on his *Mang Ca* headquarters. Responding to the call at PK 17, the ARVN base located near a road marker on Route 1, 17 kilometers north of Hue, the 3d Troop and the 7th Battalion of the Airborne task force rolled out of their base area in an armored convoy onto Route 1. A North Vietnamese blocking force stopped the ARVN relief force about 400 meters short of the Citadel wall. Unable to force their way through the enemy positions, the South Vietnamese paratroopers asked for assistance. The 2d ARVN Airborne Battalion reinforced the convoy and the South Vietnamese finally penetrated the lines and entered the Citadel in the early morning hours of the next day. The cost had been heavy: the ARVN suffered 131 casualties including 40 dead, and lost 4 of the 12 armored personnel carriers in the convoy. According to the South Vietnamese, the enemy also paid a steep price in men and equipment. The ARVN claimed to have killed 250 of the NVA, captured 5 prisoners, and recovered 71 individual and 25 crew-served weapons.[13]

The 3d ARVN Regiment had an even more difficult time. On the 31st, two of its battalions, the 2d and 3d, advanced east from encampments southwest of the city along the northern bank of the Perfume River, but North Vietnamese defensive fires forced them to fall back. Unable to enter the Citadel, the two battalions established their night positions outside the southeast wall of the old City. Enemy forces surrounded the 1st and 4th Battalions of the regiment, operating to the southeast, as they attempted to reinforce the units in Hue. Captain Phan Ngoc Luong, the commander of the 1st Battalion, retreated with his unit to the coastal Ba Long outpost, arriving there with only three clips per man for their World War II vintage M1 rifles.* At Ba Long, the battalion then embarked upon motorized junks and reached the Citadel the following day. The 4th Battalion, however, remained unable to break its encirclement for several days.

South of the city, on 31 January, Lieutenant Colonel Phan Huu Chi, the commander of the ARVN 7th Armored Cavalry Squadron attempted to break the enemy stranglehold. He led an armored column toward Hue, but like the other South Vietnamese units, found it impossible to break through. With the promise of U.S. Marine reinforcements, Chi's column, with three tanks in the lead, tried once more. This time they crossed the An Cuu Bridge into the new city. Coming upon the central police headquarters in southern Hue, the tanks attempted to relieve the police defenders. When an enemy B–40 rocket made a direct hit upon Lieutenant Colonel Chi's tank, killing him instantly, the South Vietnamese armor then pulled back.[14]

Redeployment at Phu Bai and Marines Go to Hue

The first U.S. Marines to bolster the South Vietnamese in the city were on their way. They were from the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, part of Task Force X-

*Although the U.S. was reequipping the South Vietnamese Army units with the magazine-fed automatic 5.56mm M16, most South Vietnamese Army units in February 1968 were equipped with the semi-automatic, 8-shot, .30-caliber clip-fed M1. See Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965–1973*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington: CMH, 1988), p. 284.

Ray, the new command just established at the Marine base at Phu Bai, about eight miles south of Hue.[15] As part of Operation Checkers, the Task Force X-Ray commander, Brigadier General Foster "Frosty" C. LaHue had opened his command post on 13 January.* Two days later, as planned, he took over responsibility for the Phu Bai base from the 3d Marine Division. LaHue, who had been at Da Nang until that time, serving as the 1st Marine Division assistant division commander, had barely enough time to become acquainted with his new TAOR, let alone the fast-developing Hue situation. This was true as well for most of his commanders and units at Phu Bai.[16]

With several changes making the original Checkers plan unrecognizable by the eve of Tet, LaHue had under him two regimental headquarters and three battalions. These were the 5th Marines, under Colonel Robert D. Bohn, with its 1st and 2d Battalions, and the 1st Marines, under Colonel Stanley S. Hughes, with its 1st Battalion in the Phu Bai sector. While Colonel Bohn had arrived with Task Force X-Ray on the 13th, Colonel Hughes did not reach Phu Bai until 28 January. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Marcus J. Gravel, began making its move from Quang Tri about the same time. His companies C and D had reached Phu Bai on the 26th while his Company B, and Headquarters Company came three days later. The battalion's remaining company, Company A, deployed on the 30th. Captain Gordon D. Batcheller, the Company A commander, remembered that while most of his troops were at Phu Bai on that date, two of his platoon commanders "had mistakenly stayed at Quang Tri" and the third was at a "Division Leadership School . . . ."[17]**

On 30 January, the 1st Marines assumed from the 5th Marines responsibility for the Phu Bai area of operations as far south as the Truoi River. At the same time, Colonel Hughes took formal operational control of his 1st Battalion. Companies B, C, and D of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines had already relieved the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines at various bridges along Route 1 and other key positions in this northern sector. When Company A arrived on the 30th, it became the Phu Bai reserve or "Bald Eagle Reaction Force." Captain Batcheller years later recalled that the company actually was to "stand down" until 1 February when it was to assume security of the LCU Ramp in Hue itself, just north of the MACV compound.[18]***

In the meantime, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines had moved into the Phu Loc sector and took over that area south of the Truoi River and as far east as the Cao Dai Peninsula. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines remained responsible for the rest of the Phu Loc region, extending to the Hai Van Pass.[19]

In the Phu Loc area on 30 January, about 1730, a Marine reconnaissance patrol, codenamed "Pearl Chest," inserted about 3000 meters south of the town of Phu Loc, observed a North Vietnamese company moving north armed with three .50-caliber machine guns, AK–47s, and two 122mm rockets. "Pearl Chest" set up an ambush, killing 15 of the enemy troops. The North Vietnamese fell back and surrounded the Recon Marines, who called for assistance. Both air and the artillery battery attached to the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines at Phu Loc responded to the request. The fixed-wing aircraft, however, could not "get a fix" on the enemy troops and were unable to assist.[20]

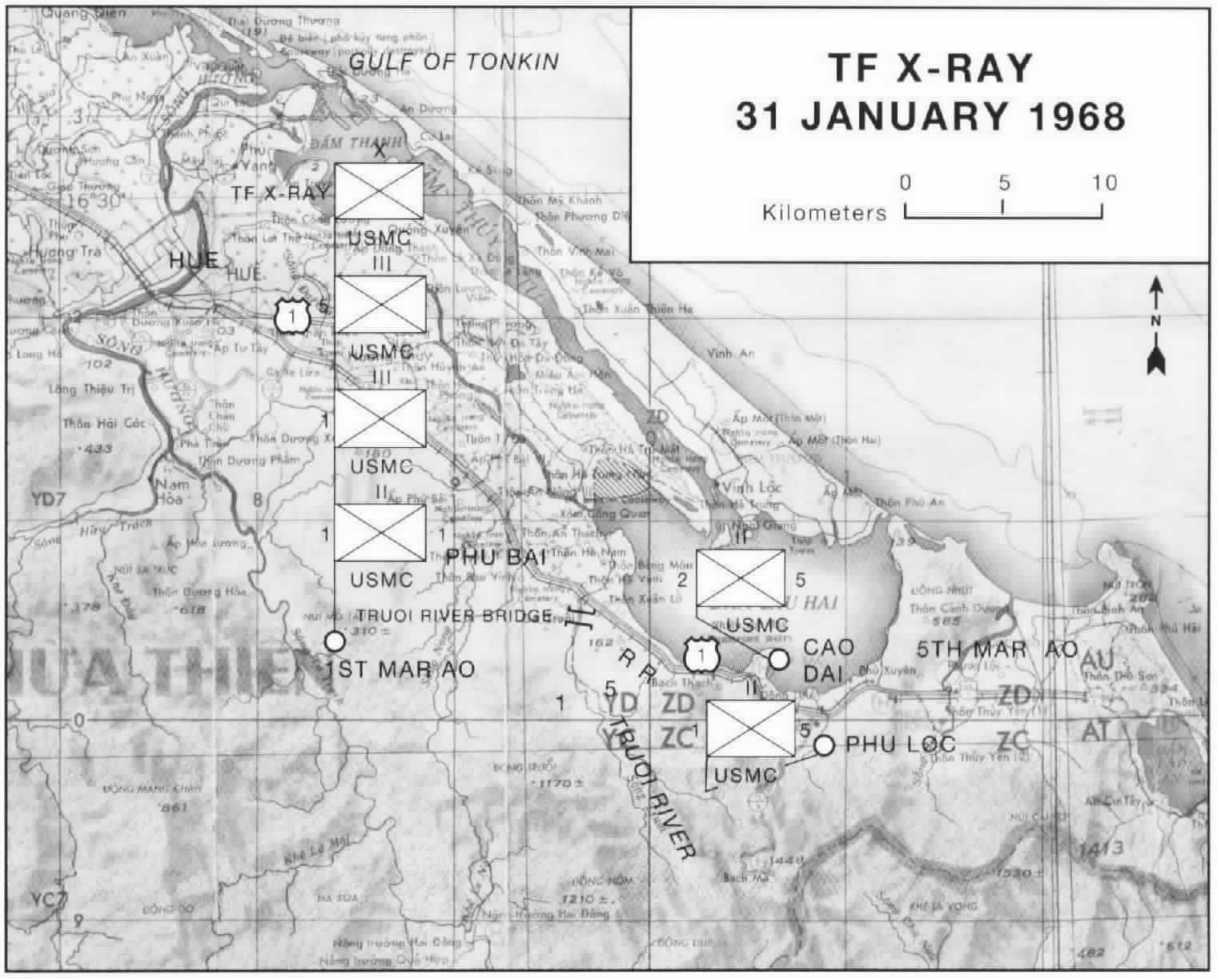
At that point, about 1930, Lieutenant Colonel Robert P. Whalen, the 1st Battalion commander, sent his Company B to relieve the Recon team. As the relieving company approached the ambush site, they heard Vietnamese voices, movement, and someone threw a grenade at them. In return, the Marines hurled grenades of their own and then moved in where they had heard the commotion. The enemy was no longer there, and the Marine company advanced cautiously. Lieutenant Colonel Whalen asked Colonel Bohn, the 5th Marines commander, for reinforcements so as not to uncover his defenses at Phu Loc itself.[21]

At the direction of Colonel Bohn, Lieutenant Colonel Ernest C. Cheatham, Jr., the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines commander, who had just established his command post on the Cao Dai Peninsula, sent his Company F to reinforce the 1st Battalion. Captain Michael P. Downs, the Company F commander, later recalled that the North Vietnamese ambushed his company as it moved into the 1st Battalion sector. Approximately around 2300, on the 30th, about 1,000 meters southeast of the Cao Dai Peninsula along Route 1, enemy troops opened up on the Marine com-

*See Chapter 6 for the establishment of Task Force X-Ray at Phu Bai.

**Batcheller related that the platoon leader at the division leadership school was there "as a student, although already nominated for a Silver Star! . . . Battalion could not refuse to fill a Division quota." Col Gordon D. Batcheller, Comments on draft, dtd 10Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Batcheller Comments.

***It is not clear that the 1st Marines planned to assign a company permanently to the LCU Ramp. According to the Task Force X-Ray operating orders, the 1st Marines had the responsibility to ensure the security for road convoys enroute from Phu Bai to the LCU Ramp. It is probable that Company A was to be assigned to road convoy security to the LCU Ramp. See TF X-Ray OpO, dtd 26Jan68, Encl, 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68.



pany from the railroad tracks which paralleled the road with both automatic and semi-automatic weapons, killing one Marine and wounding three. After the initial burst, the NVA broke contact and the Marine company secured a landing zone to evacuate the wounded. Company F then returned to the 2d Battalion perimeter.[22]

By 2400 on the 30th, the engagement south of Phu Loc was about over. The Marine command did not want to commit any more troops and ordered the Recon Team "to break out and move to the north." Lieutenant Colonel Whalen then directed his Company B to return to Phu Loc, which it did without incident. The results of this activity including that of Company F were 1 Marine dead and 5 wounded and 16 enemy dead, 15 killed initially by the Recon Team, and another by Company B. Colonel Bohn, the 5th Marines commander, believed that this action prevented a full fledged attack upon Phu Loc itself.[23]

On the night of 30–31 January, the same time the North Vietnamese struck Hue, the Marines had their hands full throughout the Phu Bai area of operations. Enemy rockets and mortars struck the Phu Bai airstrip and Communist infantry units hit Marine Combined Action and local PF and RF units in the region including the Truoi River and Phu Loc sectors. At the key Truoi River Bridge, about 0400 a North Vietnamese company attacked the South Vietnamese bridge security detachment and the nearby Combined Action Platoon H–8. Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham ordered Captain G. Ronald Christmas, the Company H commander to relieve the embattled CAP unit. The Marines caught the enemy force beginning to withdraw from the CAP enclave and took it under fire. Seeing an opportunity to trap the North Vietnamese, Cheatham reinforced Company H with his Command Group and Company F, which by this time had returned from its abortive venture to Phu Loc.[24]

With his other companies in blocking positions, Cheatham hoped to catch the enemy against the Truoi River. While inflicting casualties, the events in Hue were to interfere with his plans. At 1030, 31 January, Company G departed for Phu Bai as the Task Force reserve. Later that afternoon, the battalion lost operational control of Company F. Captain Downs years later remembered the company "disengaged . . . where we had them [the NVA] pinned up against a river, moved to the river and trucked into Phu Bai." With the departure of Company F about 1630, the NVA successfully disengaged and Companies H and E took up night defensive positions. According to the casualty box score, the Marines of Second Batalion 5th Marines in this engagement killed 18 enemy troops, took 1 prisoner, and recovered sundry equipment and weapons including 6 AK–47s, at a cost of 3 Marines killed and 13 wounded.[25]

While the fighting continued in the Truoi River and the Phu Loc sectors, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines had begun to move into Hue city. In the early morning hours of 31 January after the rocket bombardment of the airfield and the initial attack on the Truoi River Bridge, Task Force X-Ray received reports of enemy strikes all along Route 1 between the Hai Van Pass and Hue. All told, the enemy hit some 18 targets from bridges, Combined Action units, and company defensive positions. With Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines as the Phu Bai reserve, Colonel Hughes directed Lieutenant Colonel Gravel to stage the company for any contingency. At 0630, Colonel Hughes ordered the company to reinforce the Truoi River Bridge. All Captain Batcheller recalled several years later was that "we were rousted up about 0400 on the 31st and launched south on trucks to rendezvous with and reinforce . . . [ARVN] forces about a map sheet and a half south of Phu Bai."[26]

According to Captain Batcheller, the truck convoy carrying his company was escorted by two Army "Dusters," trucks armed with four .50-caliber machine guns, one at the head and the other at the rear of the column. When the convoy reached its destination, there were no ARVN troops to meet them.* On their way south on Route 1, the company had passed several Combined Action units, whose troops told them "'boo-coo' VC moving towards Hue, but none had been hit, and all bridges were up." Batcheller then received orders from Lieutenant Colonel Gravel to reverse his direction, either to reinforce an Army unit north of Hue or, on the other hand, to go to the assistance of a Combined Action unit just south of Phu Bai.** In any event, whatever the case, this new mission was short-lived. About one-half hour later, about 0830, the company again received another set of orders, presumably from Task Force X-Ray, "to proceed to the Hue Ramp area . . . to investigate reports that Hue City was under attack."[27]***

Up to this point the fighting for Hue had been entirely a South Vietnamese affair. General LaHue, the Task Force X-Ray commander, actually had very little reliable intelligence on the situation. All he knew was that Truong's headquarters had been under attack, as was the MACV compound. Because of enemy mortaring of the LCU ramp in southern Hue, the allies had stopped all river traffic to the city. As LaHue later wrote: "Initial deployment of forces was made with limited information."[28]

With this "limited information," Company A continued north towards Hue. As the convoy proceeded along Route 1, it met up with four tanks from the 3d Tank Battalion. The tanks had been on their way from Phu Bai to the LCU ramp at Hue for embarkation and transfer north to the 3d Marine Division at Dong Ha. These tanks had happened upon some of the burnt-out hulks of the 7th ARVN Armored Cavalry Squadron and had decided to return to Phu Bai when Company A "came up behind them." Batcheller remembered that he talked over the situation with the major in charge "and he agreed to join us as we moved towards the MACV compound." According to the Company A commander, a short time later, Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. LaMontagne, the 3d Marine Division embarkation officer,

*These trucks were not actually "Dusters," which refers to the Army M42 tracked vehicle mounting 40mm antiaircraft guns. Battery D, 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery, U.S. Army at Phu Bai was equipped with both the trucks equipped with the quad .50-caliber machine guns (M55) and the M42s. The Marines referred to both vehicles as "Dusters." See 1st Mar AAR, Opn Hue City, p. 12 and Shelby L. Stanton, *Vietnam Order of Battle* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. News Books, 1981), pp. 104, 278, and 355.

**Batcheller remembered that Gravel told him to reinforce the Army division, which would have had to have been the 1st Air Cavalry Division located at Camp Evans, 12 miles north of Hue. On the other hand, the 1st Marines Command Chronology states that at 0805 "Bald Eagle (A/1/1) [was] diverted from Truoi Bridge to the location of CAP A–3 . . . to investigate reports of NVA activity." Batcheller Comments and 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68, p. III–A–4.

***Batcheller later wrote that he had "never heard of Task Force X-Ray, or General LaHue." As far as he knew, he "was working for Mark Gravel and Major [Walter D.] Murphy," the battalion operations officer. Batcheller Comments.

accompanied by a Navy chief petty officer, sought him out and "made the valid observation that we were moving too slow." Batcheller stated that he was "never clear" about the status of LaMontagne, "who never tried to assume command," but offered excellent advice. Actually LaMontagne was on the way to the LCU Ramp to supervise the loading of 3d Marine Division (Rear) equipment and personnel who were still redeploying from Phu Bai to Dong Ha.[29]*

As the Marine company approached the southern suburbs of the city, they began to come under increased sniper fire. In one village, the troops dismounted and cleared the houses on either side of the main street before proceeding. The convoy then crossed the An Cuu Bridge, which spanned the Phu Cam canal, into the city. Caught in a murderous crossfire from enemy automatic weapons and B–40 rockets, the Marines once more clambered off the trucks and tanks. Sergeant Alfredo Gonzalez, a 21-year old Texan and acting 3d Platoon commander, took cover with his troops in a nearby building. When enemy machine gun fire wounded one Marine in the legs, Gonzalez ran into the open road, slung the injured man over his shoulder, and despite being hit himself by fragments of a B–40 rocket, returned to the relative safety of the building. Responding to orders from Captain Batcheller, Gonzalez rallied his men, who were on the point, and the column was again on the move.[30]

This time the Marine convoy only advanced about 200 meters before Communist snipers again forced them to stop. The enemy was on both sides of the road with a machine gun bunker on the west side of the road. A B–40 rocket killed the tank commander in the lead tank. At that point, Sergeant Gonzales, on the east side of the road with some men of his platoon, crawled to a dike directly across from the machine gun bunker. With his Marines laying down a base of fire, Gonzales jumped up and threw four grenades into the bunker, killing all the occupants.

As the Marine company cautiously made its way northward in the built-up area, Captain Batcheller maintained "*sporadic* radio contact" with Lieutenant Colonel Gravel at Phu Bai. For the most part, however, he heard on his artillery and air radio nets nothing but Vietnamese. The convoy reached a "causeway or elevated highway in the middle of a large cultivated area," and once again came under enemy sniper fire. Batcheller went to the assistance of a fallen man and was himself wounded seriously in both legs. Gunnery Sergeant J. L. Canley, a giant of a man, six feet, four inches tall and weighing more than 240 pounds, then took command of the company.

As Company A engaged the enemy on the outskirts of Hue, Colonel Hughes, the 1st Marines commander, requested permission from General LaHue to reinforce the embattled company. The only available reinforcements were the command group of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, which earlier that morning had become the Phu Bai reaction force in place of Company A. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel, the 1st Battalion commander, remembered that there was no intelligence on the situation in Hue and that his own battalion was "strung out" in the Phu Bai sector with elements still at Quang Tri. He had never met Captain Charles L. Meadows, the Company G commander, until "that first day." Gravel said the only planning he was able to accomplish was to give the order: "Get on the trucks, men." For his part, Captain Meadows recalled that his task was to "get into the trucks with . . . [his] company, go up to the 1st ARVN Division headquarters and escort the CG [commanding general] back down to Phu Bai." The mission should "take no longer than two to three hours."[31]**

Crossing the An Cuu Bridge, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel's relief column reached Company A in the early afternoon. With the linking up of the two forces, Gravel kept the tanks with him, but sent the trucks and the wounded, including Captain Batcheller, back to Phu Bai. The vehicles returned without escort, just "truck drivers and the wounded. Some of the wounded could fire weapons." Lieutenant Colonel Gravel determined that this was the only feasible way to evacuate the wounded because "we weren't going to get

*Lieutenant Colonel Karl J. Fontenot, who at the time commanded the 3d Tank Battalion, remembered that the 3d Battalion was in the midst of displacing from Phu Bai to Quang Tri and that the last four tanks, two gun and two flame tanks, in the battalion were slated to go by LCU from Hue to Dong Ha. According to Fontenot, LaMontagne was to supervise the loading of these tanks at the LCU. Fontenot recalled that he happened by chance to be at Phu Bai on the 31st, and was informed that the MACV compound was under attack and that the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines was going to Hue. He claimed that he radioed these tanks and "briefed them on the enemy threat and advised them to load and prepare to fight." LtCol Karl J. Fontenot, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File).

**According to the 1st Marines account, Colonel Hughes directed Gravel to reinforce Company A at 1030. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines Journal shows that the command group departed Phu Bai at 1243 that afternoon. 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68, p. III–A–4; 1/1 Jnl, 31Jan68, Encl, 1/1 ComdC, Jan68.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371336

A Marine M48 tank moves in one direction on one of the broad streets of modern Hue, while a group of South Vietnamese citizens flee the fighting in the other direction. Marine tanks from the 3d Tank Battalion supported the first Marine units to enter the city

any helicopters in there . . . ." According to Gravel, this "was a terrible longshot . . but it worked . . . ."[32]

With the tanks in the lead, then Company A, the battalion headquarters group, and Company G following in trace, Gravel's makeshift command made its way toward the MACV compound, arriving there about 1515. By this time, the enemy attackers had pulled back their forces from the immediate vicinity of the compound. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel met with Army Colonel George O. Adkisson, the U.S. senior advisor to the 1st ARVN Division. According to Marine accounts, Adkisson told the Marine battalion commander that the "Citadel was in fine shape," but that they needed assistance in evacuating American nationals.[33]

This contradicted an earlier telephone conversation between the South Vietnamese I Corps and the III MAF command centers, both located at Da Nang. General Lam, the I Corps commander, had heard that the ARVN troops in Hue were surrounded and out of ammunition. The Task Force X-Ray commanding general, Brigadier General LaHue, remembered that reports came in that the 1st ARVN Division was "in trouble" and "we were ordered to go across the river to relieve some of the pressure." He relayed these orders to Lieutenant Colonel Gravel.[34*]

Leaving Company A behind to secure the MACV compound, the Marine battalion commander took Company G, reinforced by the three tanks from the 3d Tank Battalion and a few South Vietnamese tanks from the ARVN 7th Armored Squadron, and attempted to cross the main bridge over the Perfume River. Gravel left the armor behind on the southern bank to provide direct fire support. As he remembered, the American M48s were too heavy for the

*In a personal letter to Captain Batcheller, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel expressed his anger about the order: "We proceeded to the MACV compound then were gifted with the most stupid idiotic mission to cross the Perfume River Bridge and go to the aid of the CG 1st ARVN Division." He stated that he told "Task Force X-Ray" about his concerns, but was ordered to "go anyway." LtCol Mark Gravel ltr to Capt Gordon D. Batcheller, dtd 24Feb68, Encl to Batcheller Comments, hereafter Gravel ltr, Feb68.

bridge and the South Vietnamese tankers in light M24 tanks "refused to go."[35]

As the Marine infantry started across, an enemy machine gun on the other end of the bridge opened up, killing and wounding several Marines. One Marine, Lance Corporal Lester A. Tully, later awarded the Silver Star for his action, ran forward, threw a grenade, and silenced the gun. Two platoons successfully made their way to the other side. They turned left and immediately came under automatic weapons and recoilless rifle fire from the Citadel wall. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel recollected that it was late in the afternoon and the sun was in their eyes: "We were no match for what was going on . . . I decided to withdraw."[36]

This was easier said then done. The enemy was well dug-in and "firing from virtually every building in Hue city" north of the river. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel radioed back to Colonel Adkisson "for some vehicle support . . . to come and help us recover our wounded." According to Gravel, "the trucks didn't come and they didn't come . . . ." Becoming more and more agitated, the battalion commander took his radio man and an interpreter "to find out where in the hell the vehicles were." They came upon some U.S. naval personnel and a few of the American advisors in two Navy trucks and brought them back to the bridge. In the meantime, the Marines commandeered some abandoned Vietnamese civilian vehicles and used them as makeshift ambulances to carry out the wounded. Among the casualties on the bridge was Major Walter D. Murphy, the 1st Battalion S–3 or operations officer, who later died of his wounds. Captain Meadows remembered that he lost nearly a third of his company, either wounded or killed, "going across that one bridge and then getting back across that bridge."[37*]

By 2000, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines had established defensive positions near the MACV compound and a helicopter landing zone in a field just west of the Navy LCU Ramp in southern Hue. On that first day, the two Marine companies in Hue had sustained casualties of 10 Marines killed and 56 wounded. During the night, the battalion called in a helicopter into the landing zone to take out the worst of the wounded. According to Lieutenant Colonel Gravel, "it was darker than hell and foggy," and the pilot radioed "'Where are you? I can't see.'" The sergeant on the ground, talking the aircraft down, knocked on the nose of the CH–46, and replied, "'Right out here, sir.'" Gravel marvelled that the sergeant "had a knack about working with helicopter pilots . . . He brought it [the helicopter] right on top of us."[38**]

The American command still had little realization of the situation in Hue. Brigadier General LaHue later commented: "Early intelligence did not reveal the quantity of enemy involved that we subsequently found were committed to Hue."[***] General Westmoreland's headquarters had, if possible, even less appreciation of the magnitude of the NVA attack on the city. Westmoreland cabled General Earle G. Wheeler, the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, that the "enemy has approximately three companies in the Hue Citadel and Marines have sent a battalion into the area to clear them out."[39]

*Lieutenant Colonel Gravel in his letter to Batcheller gave the number of Marines from Company G that were wounded as 44. Eric Hammel in his account gives the casualties for Company G as 5 dead and 44 wounded, which probably does not include Major Murphy. Colonel Meadows, years later, commented that "to my recollection LtCol Gravel did *not* join us on the other side of the bridge. I remember calling him on the radio and giving him my sitreps and eventually the urgent need for vehicles." Gravel ltr, Feb68; Eric Hammel, *Fire in the Streets, The Battle for Hue, Tet 1968* (Chicago, Ill: Contemporary Books, 1991), p. 90; Col Charles L. Meadows, Comments on draft, dtd 13Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**One of the co-authors expressed doubts about the accuracy of the above account: "Not very long ago, I stood on an LZ trying to communicate with a CH–46 pilot through the helicopter's own IC [internal communication] system. Impossible, and this helicopter was on the ground, at low power. A hovering helicopter is louder by at least a magnitude. I have been under them . . . when they are less than 10 feet off the deck and I can tell you that I don't believe this story for a minute. Having said all this, I still feel it's too good to pass up." Maj Leonard A. Blasiol, Comments on draft chapter, dtd 30Jun88 (Vietnam Comment File).

***General Earl E. Anderson, then the III MAF Chief of Staff at Da Nang as a brigadier general, recalled that he was in "constant contact by phone . . . [with] Frosty LaHue . . ., neither of us sleeping more than an hour or two a night." Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 10

The Struggle for Hue—The Second Phase

More Reinforcements—The Beginning of the Advance 3–4 February—Block by Block 5–8 February

More Reinforcements

By the morning of 1 February, the actual situation was becoming only too apparent to both the South Vietnamese and American troops in Hue. In Da Nang, General Lam, the I Corps Commander, and General Cushman, CG III MAF, agreed that the 1st ARVN Division would assume responsibility for the Citadel while Task Force X-Ray would clear that part of the city south of the Perfume River. General LaHue, the TF X-Ray commander, ordered Lieutenant Colonel Gravel's "bobtailed" 1st Battalion, 1st Marines in southern Hue to advance to the Thua Thien provincial headquarters building and prison, a distance of six blocks west of the MACV compound. Still unaware of the extent of the enemy forces in both the old and new cities, LaHue told a group of American reporters at Phu Bai: "Very definitely, we control the south side of the city . . . I don't think they [the Communist forces] have any resupply capability, and once they use up what they brought in, they're finished."[1]

Marine infantry advance cautiously under support of the 90mm gun of a M48 tank in street fighting in Hue. Even with the tank support, the Marines found the enemy resistance difficult to overcome in the first days of the operation.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190400



At 0700, Gravel launched a two-company assault supported by tanks towards the jail and provincial building. As a M79 grenadier from Company G, 5th Marines recalled: "We didn't get a block away [from the MACV compound] before we started getting sniper fire. We got a tank . . . got a block, turned right and received 57mm recoilless which put out our tank." The attack was "stopped cold" and the battalion returned to the MACV compound.[2]

By this time, General LaHue realized the enemy strength in Hue was much greater than he had originally estimated. Shortly after noon, he called in Colonel Stanley S. Hughes of the 1st Marines and gave him tactical control of the forces in the southern city. In turn, Hughes promised Gravel reinforcements and provided him with the general mission to conduct "sweep and clear operations in assigned area of operation . . . to destroy enemy forces, protect U.S. Nationals and restore that portion of the city to U.S. control."[3]

North of the Perfume River, on the 1st, the 1st ARVN Division enjoyed some limited success. Although the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 3d ARVN Regiment remained outside of the Citadel walls unable to penetrate the NVA defenses, the 2d and 7th Airborne Battalions, supported by armored personnel carriers and the Black Panther Company, recaptured the Tay Loc airfield. About 1500, the 1st Battalion, 3d ARVN reached the 1st ARVN command post at the *Mang Ca* compound. Later that day, U.S. Marine helicopters from HMM–165 brought part of the 4th Battalion, 2d ARVN Regiment from Dong Ha into the Citadel. One of the pilots, Captain Denis M. Dunagan, remembered that the call for an emergency trooplift came in about 1400. Eight CH–46 "Sea Knights" made the flight in marginal weather with a 200–500 foot ceiling and one mile visibility, arriving in an improvised landing zone under enemy mortar fire. The deteriorating weather forced the squadron to cancel the remaining lifts with about one-half of the battalion in the Citadel.[4]

In the meantime, Marine helicopters had completed a lift of Captain Michael P. Downs' Company F, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines into southern Hue. Captain Downs, whose company had relieved Company G as the Task Force X-Ray reserve the previous day, remembered that on the 1st he reported to Major Ernest T. Cook, the 1st Marines operations officer, who told him he was going into the city and be under the operational control of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. Although coming under machine gun fire from the Citadel walls across the river shortly after 1500, the Marine CH–46s carrying the company landed south of the LCU Ramp "with minimum difficulty." Upon arrival, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel told Downs to relieve a MACV communications facility surrounded by a VC force. Downs remembered that nothing he had been told back in Phu Bai prepared him for the situation he encountered. The company "spent the better part of the afternoon" trying to reach the isolated U.S. Army signal troops and "never made it." According to personal records that he kept, Captain Downs stated his company sustained casualties of 3 dead and 13 wounded.[5]

Company F then returned to the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines command post at the MACV compound. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel prepared to renew his effort to reach the jail and provincial headquarters. At 2300, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel requested air support "to suppress heavy resistance . . . ." The tactical air observer reported that the low ceiling precluded any aviation support. Gravel received orders to remain in his night positions.[6*]

At Da Nang, General Cushman continued to discuss the situation with General Lam. The two commanders decided against the employment of fixed-wing aircraft or artillery in Hue. As Cushman later related, "I wasn't about to open up on the old palace and all the historical buildings in there. I told Lam he was going to have to do it." While the South Vietnamese would remain responsible for the Citadel and the Marines for the southern city, Cushman made plans to cut the enemy lines of communication to the west.[7]

With the concurrence of General Westmoreland, the III MAF commander made arrangements for

*Former captain and now retired Brigadier General Downs remembered that he received orders after returning to the MACV compound to take his company and a couple of tanks to the jail. He stated that he "found the order no more reflective of what the situation was in the city at the time and questioned the sensibility of it." Lieutenant Colonel Gravel agreed with him and sent a message drafted by Downs to Task Force X-Ray suggesting that the order be rescinded. The order was rescinded. As far as the air support, General Downs probably correctly observed that the rules of engagement at the time probably would have prevented any use of air support in the city. BGen Michael P. Downs, Taped Comments on draft, dtd 11Dec92 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Downs Taped Comments, Dec92 and BGen Michael P. Downs, Comments on draft, dtd 19Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Downs Comments, Dec94. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel described the order to go take the provincial jail slightly differently. He stated that when Company F arrived he was given "another stupid mission. Go down and secure the Provincial prison. Well I didn't go, I finally convinced them that we didn't have the power and that the prisoners had been released on 30 January." LtCol Gravel ltr to Capt Gordon D. Batcheller, dtd 24Feb68, Encl to Col Gordon D. Batcheller, Comments on draft, dtd 10Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

bringing the newly arrived 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) into the Hue battle. In late January, the 1st Air Cavalry with two of its brigades had relieved the 1st Marines at Camp Evans, about 12 miles north of Hue. Since 31 January, the division's 1st Brigade, reinforcing the 1st ARVN Regiment, was committed to the fight for Quang Tri City. On 1 February, General Cushman then alerted the 1st Air Cavalry commander, Major General John J. Tolson, to be ready to deploy his 3d Brigade from Evans into a sector west of Hue. By 2215 that night, Tolson's command had asked III MAF to coordinate with I Corps and Task Force X-Ray its designated area of operations in the Hue sector.[8]

Tolson's plan called for the insertion of two battalions of the 3d Brigade northwest of Hue. The 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry was to arrive in the landing zone first, followed by the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry and the 3d Brigade headquarters. Attacking in a southeasterly direction, the two battalions would then attempt to close the enemy supply line into Hue. An attached battalion from the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), the 2d Battalion, 501st Airborne, would cover the Camp Evans base area. The 1st Brigade would continue to operate in the Quang Tri sector.[9]

Under difficult circumstances, the "First Team" began its movement into the Hue area. Peter Braestrup of the *Washington Post* remembered that he dined with General Tolson a week later and that he "heard and saw how the bad weather was hampering . . . [the] newly moved division's logistics buildup and its efforts to move down on Hue."[10] In mid-afternoon on the 2d, the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry arrived in a landing zone about 10 miles northwest of Hue and then pushed towards the city.[11]

In southern Hue, on 2 February, the Marines made some minor headway and brought in further reinforcements. The 1st Battalion finally relieved the MACV radio facility that morning and later, after a three-hour fire fight, reached the Hue University campus.* Although the NVA, during the night, had dropped the railroad bridge across the Perfume River west of the city, they left untouched the bridge across the Phu Cam Canal. About 1100, Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, commanded by Captain G. Ronald Christmas, crossed the An Cuu Bridge over the canal in a "Rough Rider" armed convoy.[12]



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371126

Marines of Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines lower a wounded comrade from the rooftop of one of the buildings of the Hue University campus.

As the convoy, accompanied by Army trucks equipped with quad .50-caliber machine guns and two Ontos, entered the city, enemy snipers opened up on the Marine reinforcements. Near the MACV compound, the Marines came under heavy enemy machine gun and rocket fire. The Army gunners with their "quad .50s" and the Marine Ontos, each with six 106mm recoilless rifles, quickly responded. In the resulting confusion, the convoy exchanged fire with a Marine unit already in the city. As one Marine in the convoy remembered, "our guys happened to be out on the right side of the road and of course nobody knew that. First thing you know everybody began shooting at our own men . . . out of pure fright and frenzy."[13]**

*Although the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines Journal makes reference to securing the University at 1630 on 2 February, Brigadier General Downs recalled that the battalion did not secure the University that day: "We got to Hue University. Had a tank hit and didn't get any further. We were then ordered back to our MACV positions." 1/1 Jnl File, dtd 2Feb68, Encl 1/1 ComdC, Feb68; Downs Comments, Dec94.

**General Downs recalled that his company was shot at by one of the Marine convoys that entered Hue. He believed, however, this occurred on 3 February rather than 2 February. Downs Comments, Dec94.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190816

One of the collapsed bridges across the Perfume River connecting the new city with the Citadel. The NVA destroyed the Perfume River bridges, but left standing for a time the bridge over the Phu Cam Canal leading into the new city from Phu Bai along Route 1.

Within a few minutes, the guns were silent. Neither of the Marine units took any serious casualties and the Marine fire had suppressed the enemy weapons. One rocket, however, disabled a truck and the Marines successfully towed the vehicle to safety. Two journalists, Cathy Leroy and Francois Mazure, both French citizens, took asylum with the convoy after their release by North Vietnamese soldiers.[14]

About mid-day, Company H joined Lieutenant Colonel Gravel where the 1st Battalion had established its toehold near the MACV compound. The NVA, however, continued to block any advance to the south. An enemy 75mm recoilless rifle knocked out one of the supporting tanks. By the end of the day, the Marines had sustained 2 dead and 34 wounded and claimed to have killed nearly 140 of the enemy. As one Company G Marine remarked, the unit spent the day "hitting and seeing what was there." The battalion consolidated its night defensive positions and waited to renew its attack on the following day.[15]



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371335

Machine gunner PFC Dominick J. Carango, Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, provides covering fire for advancing troops of his company with his M60 machine gun in the Hue street fighting. His assistant, with bandoliers of 7.62mm ammunition rounds wrapped around him, crouches beside him

At Phu Bai, during the meantime, Colonel Hughes prepared to bring his headquarters group into Hue. On the afternoon of the 2d, Colonel Robert D. Bohn, the 5th Marines commander, called in his 2d Battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ernest C. Cheatham, three of whose companies were already in Hue. According to Cheatham, a big man who had played professional football, Bohn told him, "saddle up what you need . . . [the 1st Marines] headquarters is going to Hue tomorrow. There's problems up there . . . We're going to put you in . . . ." The battalion commander remembered, "and so the next morning we went. We went blind. And that was it."[16]

On the 3d, both the command groups of the 1st Marines and the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines arrived in Hue in another "Rough Rider" armed convoy. The weather had taken another turn for the worse: a cold 50 degrees with constant precipitation in the form of fog, a fine mist, or rain. Although the Marine trucks came under enemy sniper and mortar fire, they safely reached the MACV Compound in the city. Colonel Hughes established his new command post there and held a hurried conference about 1330 with his two battalion commanders. While Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham then took control of his three companies already in the city, Gravel retained command of his Company A. The regimental commander gave the latter the task to keep open the main supply route while Cheatham was to continue the attack south from the University towards the provincial headquarters.[17]

At this point, Hughes, a pre-World War II enlisted Marine, who had been awarded the Navy Cross for action on Cape Gloucester in the Pacific campaign, turned to Cheatham. According to the 2d Battalion commander, Hughes told him: "I want you to move up to the Hue University building, and your right flank is the Perfume River and you're going to have an exposed left flank . . . . attack through the city and clean the NVA out." Cheatham expectantly waited for further clarification of his orders, but the regimental comman-

der gruffly stated, "if you're looking for any more, you aren't going to get it. Move out!" He then softly added: "You do it any way you want to and you get any heat from above, I'll take care of that."[18]

The Beginning of the Advance 3–4 February

Establishing his command post at the University, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham ordered a two-company, tank-supported attack against a complex of buildings—the public health, the provincial treasury, and the post office—just across the street from his positions. While Company G remained in reserve, Company H was to capture the public health building and Company F, the post office and treasury facilities. Like Lieutenant Colonel Gravel before him, Cheatham discovered there was no quick solution. The thick walls of the treasury and postal buildings appeared to be impervious to the Marine bullets and LAAWs (Light antiarmor weapons).* According to Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham, the battalion tried to take the post office and treasury buildings about five or six different times: "That means mustering everybody's courage and energy up. . . . You'd assault and back you'd come, drag your wounded and then muster it up again and try it again."[19]

Although Company H reached the public health building by evening, it had to fall back to the University. As Captain Christmas later explained, the Marines just did not have enough men. The frontage for a company was about one block, and with two companies forward "that left an exposed left flank" subject to enemy automatic weapons fire. The battalion stayed in its night defensive positions and waited for daylight.[20]

In the meantime, Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines maneuvered to the southeast of the MACV Compound and captured an abandoned South Vietnamese police station against nominal resistance. The Marines found 30 carbines, 2 Browning automatic rifles, 10 M1 rifles, 20 60mm mortar rounds, and 40 cases of small arms ammunition. At 1900, the battalion reported that the nearby International Control Commission (ICC) team was safe and that "no USMC personnel entered ICC building," thus not providing any grounds that U.S. troops violated the terms of the 1954 Geneva accords.[21]**

The following morning, 4 February, Colonel Hughes discussed the situation with his two battalion commanders. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel was not surprised to learn that the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines was "exactly where we'd left them" the day before. Believing "that there perhaps was some second-guessing down at headquarters on the inability of 1/1 to attack," Gravel now felt somewhat vindicated. In any event, Colonel Hughes decided to place the 1st Battalion on Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham's exposed flank and continue the push against the enemy defensive positions.[22]

As the 1st Battalion began to clear its objective area, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel had only one infantry company, Company A, now under First Lieutenant Ray L. Smith, who had relieved the wounded Captain Batcheller. Lieutenant Smith recalled that from the 2d, when he arrived in Hue,*** until then, the battalion had basically held its own near the MACV Compound. Now on the morning of the 4th its first objective was the Joan of Arc School and Church, only about 100 yards away. According to Smith, the building "was square with an open compound in the middle and we found by about 0700 that it was heavily occupied." Smith's Marines found themselves engaged in not only building-to-building, but room-to-room combat against a determined enemy. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel remembered that in the convent building "in these little cloisters that the ladies live in . . . we went wall-to-wall . . . ." One Marine would place a plastic C–4 charge against the wall, stand back, and then a fire team would rush through the resulting gaping hole.[23]

In the school building, Sergeant Alfredo Gonzalez' 3d Platoon secured one wing, but came under enemy rocket fire from across the courtyard. The Marine sergeant dashed to the window and fired about 10 LAAWs to silence the enemy. A B–40 rocket shattered the grilled pane and struck Gonzalez in the stomach, killing him instantly. Lieutenant Smith credited Gonzalez for taking out two enemy rocket positions before he was killed. Sergeant Gonzalez was

*The M72 LAAW was a 66mm single-shot rocket-propelled antitank weapon with an effective range of 325 meters. The launcher tube was discarded after firing. It can penetrate 36 inches of concrete. Brigadier General Downs, who commanded Company F, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines in Hue, commented that despite what the manuals say, there was "no way" the LAAW could penetrate 36 inches of concrete. Downs Comments.

**The International Control Commission was created by the Geneva Agreement of 1954 to ensure the provisions of that treaty. It consisted of Polish, Indian, and Canadian members. Although by this time, the Commission was unable to enforce anything, it still retained facilities and personnel in both North and South Vietnam.

***Lieutenant Smith had arrived in Hue in the convoy with Company H on 2 February.



Top is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A374463 and bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371436

Top, a Marine from the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines from a classroom at Hue University returns fire with his M16 at a NVA sniper in a building across the street. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines made its command post in the University. Below, Marine Sgt Reginald Hiscks, Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, wearing an unauthorized beret, fires his M3A1 submachine gun. Strapped to his back are four extra clips of .45-caliber ammunition.



later awarded the Medal of Honor for both his actions here and on 31 January.[24]

After securing the school, Smith's Company A maneuvered to the sanctuary which lay among a grove of trees and houses. Gravel wistfully recalled that it was "a beautiful, beautiful, church." As the troops advanced upon the building, the NVA threw down grenades, killing or wounding several Marines. According to the battalion commander, "They [the enemy soldiers] were up in the eaves, the wooden overhead; and they were in there and we couldn't get them out." Reluctantly, Gravel gave the order to fire upon the church. Marine mortars and 106mm recoilless rifles pounded the building. In the ruins, the battalion found two European priests, one Belgian and one French, both unhurt, but according to Gravel, "absolutely livid," that the Marines had bombarded the building. Believing he had little choice in his decision, Gravel thought the clerics in their dark clothing were fortunate to escape with their lives as the troops were "braced" to shoot at anyone in a black uniform.[25]

At 0700 on 4 February, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham's companies renewed the attempt to take the public buildings across from the University. Captain Christmas' Company H blasted its way through walls and courtyards with 3.5-inch rockets, employing squad and fire team rushes, and captured the public health building. From there, the company was in position to support Company F's assault upon the treasury building.

Captain Christmas recounted that his company employed the 106mm recoilless rifles to cover its movements. At first, the Marines attempted to use smoke grenades, but the NVA clearly saw through this tactic. As if on signal, "everything that was on our flank just opened up on that street." To counter the enemy ploy, the Marines would "pop smoke" to ascertain the enemy machine gun position or positions and then "here would come a mule-mounted* 106 and those Marines would wheel that thing out. Go through the full drill . . . crank off" a .50-caliber spotting round and then the 106mm round. The backblast of the 106 raised a cloud of dirt and the recoilless rifle shell forced the enemy troops to keep their heads down. Taking advantage of the opportunity and the dust cover, the Marine infantry dashed across the street. Christmas then explained, "once we got across that street . . . that first lead element could direct its fire back toward that automatic weapon [or weapons]."[26]

*The mechanical mule was a small flatbed four-wheeled drive vehicle which often was used to carry a 106mm recoilless rifle.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190301

Top, A Marine from Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, armed with a M16 and with two LAAWs (light antiarmor weapons) strapped to his back, runs for cover. A Marine 106mm recoilless rifle on a trident can be seen in the gateway to the house in the background. Below, the ruined interior of the St. Joan of Arc Church appears after its capture by the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. LtCol Marcus J. Gravel, the battalion commander, reluctantly gave the order to fire upon the sanctuary, remarking that it was a "beautiful, beautiful church."

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190474





Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371216

A Marine 106mm recoilless rifle team set the weapon on its tripod in one of the Hue University classrooms, to take out an enemy machine gun. According to one of the gunners, "we fired it with a lanyard where we knocked out our objective—we kind of knocked out the building that the 106 was in too, but it didn't hurt the gun, once we dug it out."

According to one of the NCOs, the recoilless rifles teamed up with both the 81mm mortar crews and the infantry. The 106s would blast "holes into the back of buildings so that units could get in without using the normal exit." Marine recoilless rifle gunners flushed out the NVA and then forward observers for the 81s called in the mortars: "Blowing the buildings open so that the infantry could get through." Sergeant Terry Cochrane, the platoon sergeant of the 2d Battalion's 106mm platoon, remembered that the gunners even fired one recoilless rifle from inside one of the University buildings. Unable to position their weapon to knock out a machine gun that blocked the battalion's advance, Cochrane and his gunners took their 460-pound recoilless rifle "inside . . . and we fired it with a lanyard where we knocked out our objective—we kind of knocked out the building that the 106 was in too, but it didn't hurt the gun, once we dug it out."[27]

The North Vietnamese, nevertheless, were still in force inside the treasury building. With its thick walls and large steel door, the structure remained impervious to Company F's repeated efforts to force its way into the building, despite the use of recoilless rifles and tanks. The NVA covered with fire all avenues of approach. At this point, according to one account, Major Ralph J. Salvati, the 2d Battalion's executive officer, suggested employing CS (a variant of tear gas) against the enemy. Salvati told Cheatham that he had seen a stack of E–8 CS launchers in the MACV compound and proposed that he go and obtain them. Lightweight and compact, one launcher could fire 64 CS canisters in four volleys of 16 each. After a jeep trip in which he acquired the launchers, Salvati joined Captain Downs in an abandoned school near the treasury.[28*]

Putting on their gas masks, Salvati and two enlisted Marines ran into an adjoining courtyard and set up the launcher. After a misfire, the Marine major hooked up a battery to the trigger mechanism. This time the E–8 launcher hurled the gas canisters into

* According to a member of the 1st Marines staff, Colonel Hughes "stressed the use of the E–8 CS dispenser until no more were available." Maj Ernest Cook, Comments on draft ms, dtd 20Oct69, Donnelly and Shore, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble" (Vietnam Comment Files).



Top picture is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371122 and bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A372950

Top, Marines from the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines wearing gas masks are about to flush out enemy soldiers holding out in a stronghold. The Marines used CS (a variant of tear gas) to disable the enemy and curtail casualties. Bottom, a Marine M48 tank is stationed next to the blown An Cuu bridge. With the bridge down, the main land resupply route into the city from Phu Bai was closed.



the treasury compound and within minutes produced a huge chemical haze. With the gas permeating the building and under the protective fire of 81mm mortars and 3.5-inch rockets, goggle-eyed Marines of Company F pushed forward in their gas masks. According to Captain Downs, once the Marines got inside the building, "the NVA wanted no part of us and they exited the building as quickly as they could."[29]

Until 4 February, the An Cuu Route 1 bridge over the Phu Cam Canal still stood and permitted the Marines to reinforce the troops in Hue. On the morning of the 4th, Company B, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines arrived in a "Rough Rider" armed convoy and joined Lieutenant Colonel Gravel's command. That night, however, North Vietnamese sappers blew the bridge, effectively closing the land route into the city. This left the Marine command only two alternatives to resupply the Hue forces—river traffic and helicopters. With the continuing mist and overcast, every helicopter mission was a hit-and-miss venture. More than once, heavy enemy 12.7mm antiaircraft fire forced Marine pilots to jettison their loads of ammunition slung underneath their low-flying helicopters. The river route also presented problems. Taking advantage of the narrow ship channel up the Perfume River from the sea, the enemy subjected allied craft to both mortar bombardment and automatic weapons fire.[30]

In the interval, nevertheless, Task Force X-Ray had taken advantage of the reprieve to build up the combat stocks of the 1st Marines in Hue. On the 4th, Marine trucks from Company B, 1st Motor Transport Battalion brought in enough rations to sustain both infantry battalions in Hue for two days. The following day, a Navy LCU from Da Nang braved the NVA crossfire from both banks of the Perfume River and docked at the LCU ramp in the city. In Hue, the 1st Marines now had enough rations to last through 16 February. With the arrival of a second LCU on the 5th, and another landing craft three days later, the regiment experienced no shortage of ammunition despite its expenditure at 10 times the normal combat rate in Vietnam.[31]

Block by Block 5–8 February

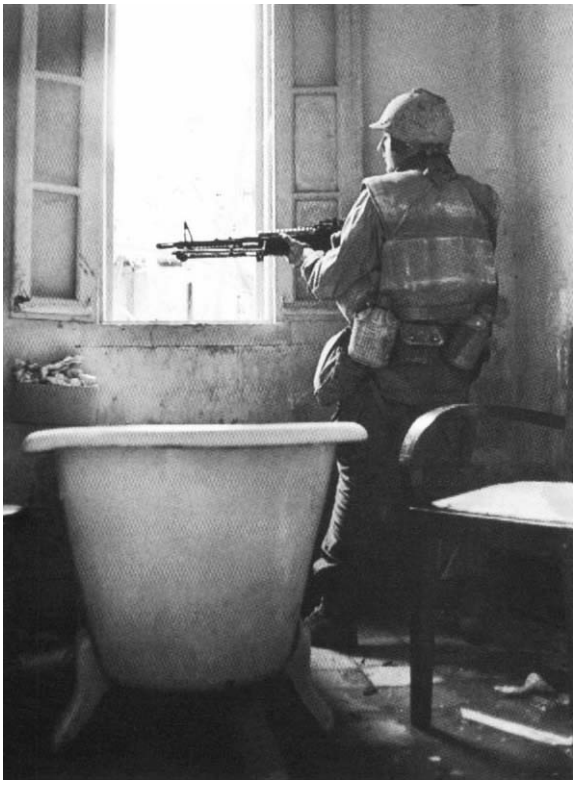
The Marines in Hue began to adapt to the street fighting, so different from the paddies and jungle of the Vietnamese countryside in their previous sectors. As Captain Christmas of the 2d Battalion later observed, "street fighting is the dirtiest type of fighting I know." Although one Marine fire team leader agreed with Christmas that "it's tougher in the streets," he also remarked, "it beats fighting in the mud . . . . You don't get tired as quickly when you are running and you can see more of the damage you're doing to the enemy because they don't drag off their dead."[32]

One of the immediate problems caused by the change of locale from the countryside to the urban was in orientation. Both Lieutenant Colonels Gravel and Cheatham complained about the inadequacy of their maps. Originally their only references were the standard 1:50,000-scale tactical maps which showed little of the city detail. As Captain Meadows, commander of Company G, observed, "you have to raid the local Texaco station to get your street map. That's really what you need." Both battalions eventually obtained sufficient maps, which numbered the government and municipal buildings and prominent features of the city. Cheatham and Gravel and their commanders used the numbers to coordinate their activity.[33*]

Prior to that time, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham and his commanders used colors to designate their positions. Captain Christmas later related some of the resulting confusion. He would radio Captain Downs and yell, "Hey, I'm in a pink building." Downs would reply, "Hey, that's fine. I'm over here in a green building." Then Captain Meadows would chime in with "Good! I'm in a brown building." At this point, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham would come up on the network and ask, "Where the hell are the green, brown, and pink buildings?"[34]

By this time, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham had a firm idea about the extent of the task that his battalion faced. The 2d Battalion had an area of operations about 11 blocks wide and 8 to 9 blocks deep. As the battalion commander later declared: "It wasn't that big [but] it looked plenty big at the time." He recalled that he "attempted to . . . attack with two companies up and keep that third company of mine back, protecting our left flank." Cheatham admitted that usually he had to commit his reserve: "The area was just too large for one infantry battalion, minus a company, to attack."[35]

*General Downs commented on the map situation as follows: "Chuck Meadows may well have taken a map off the gas station wall but the ones we used were 1:12,500 AMS [Army Map Service] maps. They were most valuable. Initially, I think there were only three in the battalion with only the company commanders having one." Downs Comments.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371220

A Marine from Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, holding a M60 machine gun inside the bathroom of a private household, looks out the window for enemy forces in house-to-house fighting in Hue. Strapped to his back is an apparent ammunition box.

With little room to outflank the enemy, the battalion had to take each building and each block "one at a time." According to Cheatham, "we had to pick a point and attempt to break that one strong point . . . and then we'd work from there." After a time, Cheatham and his officers noted that the enemy "defended on every other street. . . . When we would take him off one street, we would usually push through the next row of houses fairly quickly and then hit another defensive position."[36]

The close-quarter combat and the low-lying cloud cover prevented both Marine infantry battalions from depending upon air and artillery. Fixed-wing close air support was out of the question. Both units used artillery only occasionally and then usually later in the operation and for interdiction missions on suspected enemy approach and escape routes. As Lieutenant Colonel Gravel explained, "artillery in an area like that is not terribly effective because you can't observe it well enough. You lose the rounds in the buildings, in the streets . . . and you have a difficult time with perspective."[37*]

Supported by the four tanks from the provisional platoon of the 3d Tank Battalion which arrived with the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines on the 31st and a platoon of Ontos from the Anti-Tank Company, 1st Tank Battalion, the Marine infantry advanced methodically against stubborn enemy resistance. Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham had reservations about the employment of the tanks in his sector. He later commented, "you couldn't put a section of tanks down one of those streets. The moment a tank stuck its nose around the corner of a building, it looked like the Fourth of July." The enemy opened up with all the weapons in its arsenal from B–40 anti-tank rockets to machine guns. According to Cheatham, one tank sustained over 120 hits and another went through five or six crews. The battalion commander observed that when the "tankers came out of those tanks . . . they looked like they were punch drunk."[38]

The Marine infantry commanders were much more enthusiastic about the Ontos with its six 106mm recoilless rifles. Despite its "thin skin," Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham described the vehicle "as big a help as any item of gear that we had that was not organic to the battalion . . . ." An even stronger backer of the Ontos, Colonel Hughes, the 1st Marines commander, later commented "If any single supporting arm is to be considered more effective than all others, it must be the 106mm recoilless rifle, especially the M50 Ontos . . . ." Hughes believed that the mobility of the Ontos made up for the lack of heavy armor protection and that its plating provided the crew with sufficient protection against enemy small arms fire and grenades. From ranges of 300 to 500 meters, the 106mm recoilless rifles rounds routinely opened "4 square meter holes or completely knock[ed] out an exterior wall." Even at distances of 1,000 meters, the recoilless rifles proved effective. Because of the Ontos' vulnerability to enemy RPGs and B–40 rounds, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham

*Colonel Robert C. V. Hughes, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines in artillery support of TF X-Ray, commented that while use of artillery was limited, especially the 105mm howitzers, "the heavier more accurate, 155mm and 8-inch were utilized more effectively." He declared that his battalion's fire support coordinator with the 1st Marines "from an OP [outpost] on the roof of the MACV Headquarters building, called and adjusted fire missions. He was able to accurately 'walk' rounds along streets disrupting enemy troop buildup and sniper emplacements." Col Robert C. V. Hughes, Comments on draft, n.d. [1995] (Vietnam Comment File).



The top picture is courtesy of LtCol Ralph J. Salvati, USMC (Ret) and the bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371125

Top, LtCol Ernest C. Cheatham, in forefront of the picture, directs a target for a Marine Ontos equipped with six 106mm recoilless rifles, along Le Loi Street. The Perfume River can be seen in the background as well as the Citadel across the river. Bottom, Marines from Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines take cover behind a partially destroyed brick wall in heavy street fighting in Hue City.





Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371124

A Marine from Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines carries an elderly woman patient out of the hospital complex to relative safety. During the heavy fighting, the Marines evacuated the patients from the hospital as best they could.

employed the vehicle in hull defilade, "even if the defilade was only behind a brick wall . . . ."[39]

Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham reserved his greatest praise for his own battalion's organic supporting weapons, including 106mm recoilless rifles, the 3.5-inch rockets, and mortars. He especially liked the 3.5-inch rockets that could penetrate 11 inches of steel and "that thing would pop these walls." He specifically remembered one firefight that lasted for nearly two hours between Marine and enemy gunners shooting 3.5-inch and B–40 rockets at one another at a range of 50 meters. Cheatham recalled "hundreds and hundreds of rockets going out . . . And the same thing is coming back at us. But we had more ammunition than they did."[40*]

Company F's commander, Captain Downs, recollected the similar use of 81mm mortars at extremely close quarters. He regularly brought his own mortar fire within 35 meters of his men: "We were on one side of the street and the 81s were fired on the other side of the street." Cheatham compared his battalion's application of 81mm mortars to a sledge hammer: "If you put enough 81 rounds on top of a building, pretty soon the roof falls in." Captain Downs remembered that his orders from Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham were that "if we even suspected that the enemy were in a building to blow it down." In Down's opinion, this was when "we really became serious about retaking the city."[41]

On the morning of 5 February, both Marine battalions resumed the attack in a southwesterly direction toward the city hospital and provincial headquarters. On the right flank, Captain Christmas' Company H advanced along Le Loi street, paralleling the riverfront. The two companies of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines secured the left flank. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel tried to keep a two-block front, which he later explained, "is simple enough. But when you realize that there's no one on your left . . . you've got to expand this out . . . ." This took troops, "resources that we were very, very short of." Lieutenant Smith later wrote that 5 February was "an extremely rough day"

*Brigadier General Downs, who commanded Company F in Hue City, wrote in 1994 that Cheatham should receive credit for bringing the 3.5 rocket launchers and ammunition into the city with him: "He collected them from the 2/5 company supplies at Phu Bai. We had not been carrying any with us." Downs recalled that the manuals stated that the 3.5s and the LAAWs were similar, but "in fact the 3.5's were far more effective." Downs Comments, Dec94.

with the battalion sustaining 19 casualties and advancing "only 75 yards." Gravel remembered, "The going was slow. We would go, maybe a block. We fought for two days over one building."[42]

Although both battalions encountered "moderate to heavy" enemy resistance on the 5th, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham's 2d Battalion, 5th Marines made somewhat faster progress. About 1630, Captain Meadow's Company G secured the main hospital building after a 90-minute firefight supported by a M48 tank, 106mm recoilless rifles, and 3.5-inch rockets. The Marines removed the civilian patients as best they could from the line of fire, killed 4 NVA soldiers, and took 30 wounded prisoners. For the day, the three companies of the battalion accounted for over 70 North Vietnamese dead and 40 captured enemy weapons.[43]

The following morning, Cheatham's battalion continued clearing the hospital complex with all three companies on line. Two of the companies, H on the right and G in the center, met with relatively minor resistance, and quickly consolidated their positions. Company F on the battalion's left flank, however, took heavy fire from its front and pulled back to call in both 81mm mortars and for one of the few times, even 105mm howitzer support from Marine artillery forward gun sites. About 40 high explosive 105mm shells fell upon the enemy. By late afternoon, the NVA broke contact under fire and the Marine company secured the last of the hospital buildings. Down's company sustained 4 dead and 11 wounded, but killed over 20 of the enemy.[44]*

In the interim, Captain Meadow's Company G, from the hospital complex, launched its attack against the provincial prison, just to the southwest. While the 1st Platoon provided protective fire from the second story of the main hospital building, Marine mortarmen and 106mm recoilless rifle gunners blasted a hole in the prison walls. One Marine corporal remembered that the Marines fired CS canisters into the gaping hole, hoping to force the enemy troops out, but "they threw it [the CS] back against us."[45]

Believing the NVA were also equipped with gas masks, the Marine infantry, wearing their masks, cautiously searched the rooms and cells of the prison beginning with the top floor. As a Marine squad leader, Sergeant G. B. Zachary, related: "Clear the top deck and work your way down." Second Lieutenant Michael A. McNiel, Company G's 1st Platoon commander, described the taking of his unit's first prisoner, an NVA sniper, equipped with both a SKS and a M1 rifle and eight grenades. Although McNiel had a Thompson submachine gun in the man's face, the prisoner tried to jump Sergeant Zachary and take one of the latter's grenades. The Marine lieutenant wrestled the NVA soldier down to the floor with a "half nelson" and then bound his hands behind his back. Yet, the Marines "had to carry him down, with him fighting all the way." According to McNiel's account, his platoon took eight more prisoners, who threw "down their weapons, raised their hands and came walking out."** In the capture of the prison, Company G killed 36 NVA at a cost of only 1 Marine wounded.[46]

On the 2d Battalion's right flank, Captain Christmas' Company H encountered tough going after it left the hospital and pushed forward toward the nearby provincial headquarters. Like its sister companies, Company H employed mortars, gas, and 106mm recoilless rifles to soften up the objective. A Marine driver of one of the flatbed mules mounting a 106mm recoilless rifle later stated:

> [The] NVA threw everything they had at us. We took incoming mortars and rockets and automatic fire. We had to push the mule out, fire, and pull it back in under heavy sniper fire while we were firing. We opened up the way for the 'grunts' [the infantry] to take the building.

Two Marine tanks came up to support the attack. One of the tanks took two direct hits from B–40 rockets but continued to fire. In addition, the Marines expended over 100 81mm mortar shells, 60 recoilless rifle rounds, and 4 E8 CS launchers in support of the assault on the headquarters. Wearing their gas masks, the tired Marines of Company H, in midafternoon, finally overwhelmed the NVA defenders in the provincial headquarters. They killed 27 enemy soldiers, took

*Then captain, now Brigadier General Downs, recalled years later, that after securing the hospital complex, his company entered a nearby building by the Perfume River. As Downs joined his men, one of his platoon sergeants "had two Vietnamese spread eagled up against the wall." When the company commander asked who they were, the sergeant answered that one of them was "trying to tell me that he is the mayor of Hue." One of the Vietnamese turned out to be Lieutenant Colonel Pham Van Khoa, the South Vietnamese Thua Thien Province Chief who had been hiding until then in an attic cubby hole with his body guard. Downs Taped Comments, Dec92. See also Chapter 12.

**Lieutenant McNiel's version is somewhat at odds with the official after-action report. The report shows only two prisoners captured in the fight for the prison. If the report is accurate, McNiel may have confused the five ARVN soldiers and two South Vietnamese prison officials who were liberated in the battle with North Vietnamese soldiers. 2dLt Michael A. McNiel in LCpl Charles D. Bedford et al., intvw, 10 May 68, Tape 2673 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); 2/5 AAR Hue City.

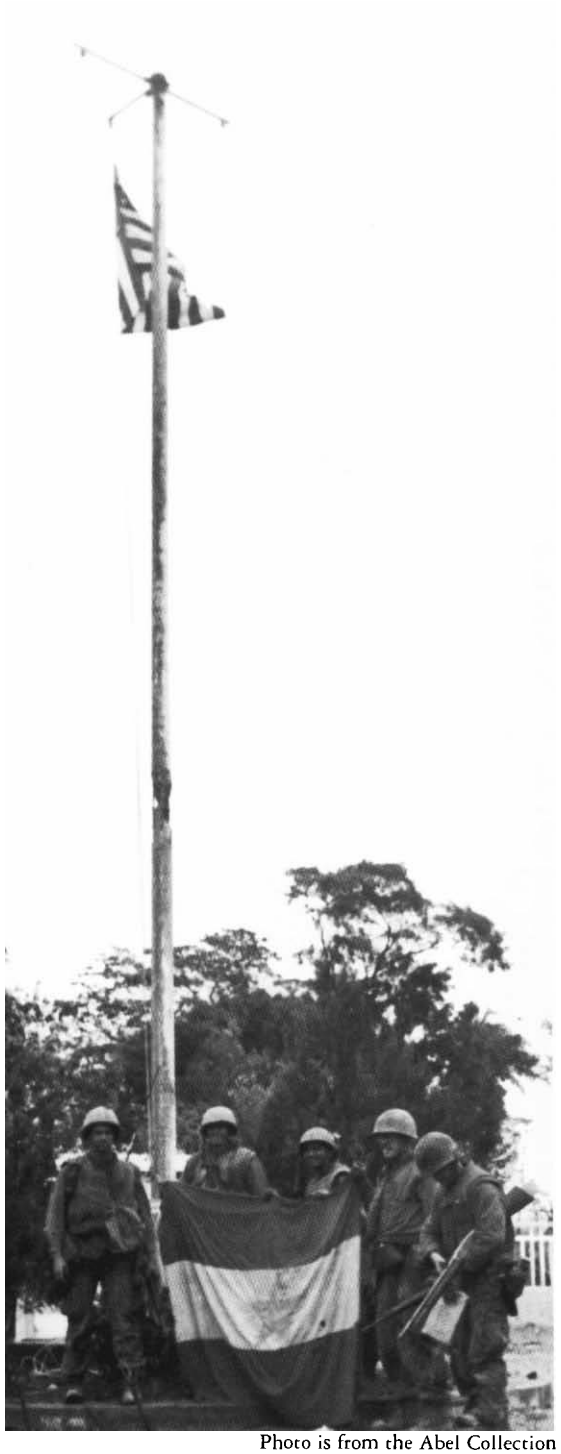


Photo is from the Abel Collection

Happy Marines from Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines display the Viet Cong banner that flew from a flagpole in the courtyard of the Provincial Building. The Marines raised the American flag in its stead, ignoring for a time a MACV directive that forbade the display of the U.S. flag without the South Vietnamese flag beside it.

3 prisoners, and captured an assortment of enemy small arms and ammunition. The company sustained 1 dead and 14 wounded in the fight.[47]

The province headquarters had served as a symbol for both the NVA and the Marines in the modern city. A now-frayed flag of the Viet Cong National Liberation Front had flown from the flagpole in the courtyard of the provincial building since the NVA initial takeover of the city. Immediately after the capture of the headquarters, two Marines rushed into the courtyard and hauled down the enemy ensign. Gunnery Sergeant Frank A. Thomas "vaulted through a hole in the wall" and ran to the flagpole clutching an American flag. As a CBS television crew filmed the event, Thomas raised the Stars and Stripes on the pole.* According to Thomas, "We never knew exactly where the flag came from, but when we said we wanted an American flag to raise, one of our Marines produced one a very few minutes later." For this one time, the Marines ignored the MACV directive that forbade the display of the U.S. flag without the South Vietnamese national banner beside it.[48**]

The capture of the provincial headquarters was more than symbolic. The building apparently had served as the command post for the *4th NVA Regiment*. Once the headquarters fell to the Marines much of the enemy organized resistance in southern Hue collapsed. Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham remarked on the enemy's lack of maneuverability. Once the Marines overcame a NVA strongpoint, although a gap might exist between the Marine companies, the enemy troops "never enveloped, they never came back around behind us or anything." As Lieutenant Smith from the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines wrote, from 6 February forward "[Company] A began to roll and although we took more casualties, we never had a day to match" the earlier fighting. Lieutenant Colonel Gravel was even more emphatic:

> He [the NVA] seemed to lose his stomach for the fight. . . . once we started rolling . . . the main force sort

* Former *Washington Post* Correspondent Peter Braestrup commented that as the flag was raised, "NVA soldiers in covered foxholes were discovered at the same time—and shown on CBS film." Peter Braestrup, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94–Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File).

** Brigadier General Downs, who commanded Company F in 1968, related that in September 1991 when the Aegis Cruiser CG 66 *Hue City* was officially commissioned, "The first flag raised on that ship was the same flag that was raised in front of the Provincial Headquarters Building on 6Feb68 and the flag was raised by Gunny Thomas and the two Marines who assisted him." Downs Taped Comments, Dec92.

of evaporated . . . and left some local force—rinky dinks . . . when his defense crumbled, it crumbled.[49]

On the morning of 7 February, both Marine battalions renewed their offensive. On the right flank, Cheatham's battalion with two companies on line and one in reserve made rapid progress. According to the battalion's entry for the day in its after-action report, "it became quite obvious the enemy had retreated leaving bodies and weapons behind." On the left flank, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines also moved forward, but at a slower pace, and met pockets of heavy resistance. The NVA knocked out an Ontos supporting the battalion with a B–40 rocket, killing the driver and wounding the vehicle's commander. After a firefight, a platoon from Company B retrieved the damaged vehicle, evacuated the wounded Marine, and recovered the body of the dead man.[50]

By 10 February, despite some desperate efforts by isolated groups of NVA and the occasional sniper, the two Marine battalions had reached their objectives. With the Marines in control south of the Perfume River and the NVA still holding fast in the Citadel north of the river, Hue was now indeed two cities. Three days earlier, North Vietnamese sappers had blown the main bridge across the Perfume, literally dividing the city in two. Marine engineers destroyed the Le Loi Bridge at the end of Le Loi Street to prevent the enemy from bringing reinforcements into southern Hue from the west. At the same time, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, reinforced by Company G, had secured the northern end of the wrecked An Cuu Bridge over the Phu Cam Canal. Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham and the remaining companies of the 2d Battalion prepared to cross the Phu Cam and enter a new area of operations south of the city.[51]

In clearing the modern city, the Marines took a heavy toll of the enemy, but at a high cost to themselves. The Americans had accounted for over 1,000 enemy dead, took 6 prisoners, and detained 89 suspects. Marine casualties included 38 dead and about 320 wounded. Company H had been particularly hard hit. Every officer, including Captain Christmas, and most of the staff NCOs had sustained wounds. Corporals were now squad leaders. One Marine from Company G observed, "we would start getting new guys and it just seemed that every time we got new guys we would lose them just as fast as we got them." Another Marine from the same unit remarked, "the stink—you had to load up so many wounded, the blood would dry on your hands. In two or three days you would smell like death itself."[52]

With the Marine lines secure, the South Vietnamese authorities assisted by U.S. military and civilian advisors began to bring some semblance of order into southern Hue. They established a refugee center at the University for the hapless civilians unexpectedly caught in the middle of a war. The National Police began to take harsh measures against both civilians and ARVN troops participating in the wholesale looting that occurred behind the Marine advance. By 13 February, Marine engineers had built a pontoon bridge alongside the destroyed An Cuu span and Marine truck convoys brought in much-needed supplies and food for both the troops and the civilian population. Although the battle for southern Hue was largely over, the fight for the Citadel had just begun.[53]

CHAPTER 11

The Struggle for Hue—Stalemate in the Old City

A Faltering Campaign—Going into the Walled City—The Fight for the Tower—Continuing the Advance

A Faltering Campaign

While the Marines cleared the new city, the South Vietnamese offensive in the Citadel had faltered. In the first days of the campaign, the 1st Battalion, 3d ARVN Regiment had cleaned out much of the northwest corner of the old city while the 1st ARVN Airborne Task Force, just south of the 1st Battalion, attacked from the Tay Loc airfield towards the western wall. To the east, the 4th Battalion, 2d ARVN Regiment advanced south from the *Mang Ca* compound toward the former imperial palace grounds, enclosed within its own walls and moats.* The battalion made excellent progress until enemy resistance stiffened about half-way toward the objective. By 4 February, the 1st ARVN Division reported that it had killed nearly 700 NVA troops in the Citadel.[1]

At this point, General Truong, the 1st ARVN Division commander, decided to make some readjustment in his lines. On the 5th, he moved the airborne task force's three battalions into the northeast sector, relieving the 4th Battalion, 2d ARVN. Assuming responsibility for the airfield, the 4th battalion, on the following day, pushed forward all the way to the southwest wall. At the same time, the 1st Battalion, 3d ARVN Regiment recaptured the An Hoa gate in the northwestern corner of the Citadel. South of the Citadel, just north of the Perfume River, the remaining three battalions of the 3d ARVN Regiment, futilely butted against the southeastern wall of the old city in an effort to roll up the enemy defenses from that direction.[2]

On the night of 6–7 February, the NVA counterattacked. Using grappling hooks, fresh North Vietnamese troops scaled the southwestern wall and forced the 2d Battalion, 4th ARVN to fall back with heavy losses to the Tay Loc airfield. That afternoon, the cloud cover lifted enough for South Vietnamese Air Force fixed-wing aircraft to drop 25 500-pound bombs on the now NVA-occupied southwest wall of the Citadel.[3]

With the NVA pouring reinforcements into the old city, General Truong once more redeployed his own forces. He ordered the three battalions of the 3d ARVN Regiment south of the Citadel to give up the apparent hopeless effort to force the southeastern walls and move into the city. On the afternoon of the 7th, the 3d ARVN Regimental headquarters and the three battalions embarked on South Vietnamese motorized junks which landed the troops at a wharf north of Hue. The 3d ARVN units then entered the Citadel through the northern gate and took up new positions at the 1st Division *Mang Ca* compound. By that evening, General Truong had inside the Citadel four airborne battalions, the Black Panther Company, two armored cavalry squadrons, the 3d ARVN Regiment with all four battalions, the 4th Battalion from the 2d ARVN Regiment, and a company from the 1st ARVN Regiment.[4]

Despite the ARVN troop buildup in the old city, General Truong's forces made almost no further headway against the enemy. For the next few days, the ARVN ran up against dug-in NVA who refused to be budged. The North Vietnamese still controlled about 60 percent of the Citadel. Infiltrating well-fed and well-equipped replacements each night into the old city, the North Vietnamese continued to hold their own against the ARVN.[5]

To the west, the U.S. Army's 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) was having about as little luck as the ARVN forces in the Citadel against the North Vietnamese. Major General John J. Tolson, the division commander, recalled, "I was to seal off the city from the west and north with my right flank on the Perfume River." Tolson observed, however, that the weather and low-ceiling of 150–200 feet combined with the enemy antiaircraft weapons "made it impractical and illogical to contemplate an air assault by any unit of the Division, in the close proximity of Hue."[6]

As the vanguard of Colonel Hubert S. Campbell's 3d Brigade, the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry started out on foot the early morning of 3 February in a cold driz-

*Col Arthur J. Poillon, the operations officer of Task Force X-Ray, recalled that the term Citadel caused some initial confusion as it was "sometimes used to identify the old walled city and sometimes to identify the palace grounds." Col A. J. Poillon, Comments on draft ms, 30Oct69, Donnelly and Shore, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble" (Vietnam Comment Files). In the present text, Citadel is used to refer to the entire old walled city.

zle from its landing zone, some 10 miles northwest of Hue. With the mission "to move towards Hue, make contact with the enemy, fix his location, and destroy him," the battalion advanced southeastward along a route paralleling Route 1. About 1000, the American troops saw a North Vietnamese battalion setting up defenses in Que Chu, about 500 meters to their front. A tree-lined and thickly vegetated hamlet in a model Revolutionary Development village called La Chu by the South Vietnamese and the La Chu Woods by the Communists, Que Chu extended 200 meters north and south and was about 75 meters wide. Armed with machine guns, AK–47s, and recoilless rifles, and supported by mortars, the North Vietnamese occupied positions originally prepared by ARVN troops. Under cover of rocket fire from especially equipped helicopter gunships of the division's Aerial Rocket Artillery (ARA) Squadron, the American infantry attacked. Finally after several hours, the 2d Battalion cracked the enemy defenses and established a night perimeter in northern Que Chu.[7]

After a relatively uneventful night disturbed by an occasional enemy mortar round, the 1st Cavalry unit faced a fire storm early the following morning. Under cover of darkness the enemy had moved up reinforcements in regimental strength and, after a heavy mortar barrage at daybreak, launched a counterattack. Surrounded and outnumbered, but supported by artillery and the ARA helicopters, the 2d Battalion repulsed several of the enemy efforts. Forced into a shrinking perimeter, the 2d Battalion had sustained casualties of 11 dead and 51 wounded in the two days fighting for Que Chu. The battalion had accounted for eight known enemy dead and captured one prisoner. In assessing the situation that night, General Cushman's III MAF headquarters informed MACV, "it is believed that the 2/12 Cav is blocking a possible exfiltration route for the [NVA] forces involved in the battle of Hue City."[8]

At this time, Lieutenant Colonel Richard S. Sweet, the commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, more concerned about the enemy overrunning his positions rather than blocking any exfiltration route from Hue, held a hasty conference with his staff and company commanders. Although the 3d Brigade headquarters and Lieutenant Colonel James B. Vaught's 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry had arrived in the landing zone to the north, the 2d Battalion could not expect any reinforcements until the next day. Sweet and his officers decided upon a night march to elude the enemy and set up their defenses in a more favorable terrain. Believing the North Vietnamese would expect a breakout toward the north, Sweet decided to move to the high ground, 4,000 meters to the southwest, overlooking a secondary road and the Song Sao, one of the tributaries of the Perfume River. Under the cover of darkness, the battalion slipped out of Que Chu at 2200 unnoticed by the North Vietnamese. Slogging its way through the wet paddylands, the battalion arrived at the hill mass, Nha Nhan, by 0700 the next morning. Dominating the approaches to Hue six kilometers to the east, the exhausted men of the 2d Battalion established their new perimeter. As one of the troopers later related: "We had gotten less than six hours sleep in the past 48 hours. We didn't have any water and the river water was too muddy to drink."[9]

While the 2d Battalion remained on Nha Nhan, the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry advanced into the Que Chu sector on the afternoon of the 5th. Patrolling the area west of the hamlet, Lieutenant Colonel Vaught's men encountered only token resistance. In the meantime, Lieutenant Colonel Sweet's 2d Battalion believed it stopped all enemy daylight movement "by calling down artillery on the plains before them." Major General Tolson even gave thought to move the 2d Battalion back to Camp Evans. Tolson later stated: "At this point, . . . I was faced with a couple of situations that strained my resources. . . . when Hue was occupied, my main land supply line was out." Concerned about protecting Camp Evans and his helicopters and supporting his 1st Brigade at Quang Tri City, Tolson believed it "obvious at the time I was told to attack towards Hue that I already had at least three missions that I felt had to be carried out."[10]

For the time being, General Tolson dismissed any idea about bringing the 2d Battalion out of the fight for Hue. On 7 February, just northwest of Que Chu, Lieutenant Colonel Vaught's 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry encountered a strong NVA force that had reoccupied Que Chu. Unable to push the NVA out, Vaught called in ARA helicopters and artillery. The next morning, the Army troopers renewed the attack, but were forced back in the face of NVA automatic weapons fire, RPGs, and mortars. In frustration, the American battalion dug in for the night.[11]

At this point, the 3d Brigade commander ordered Sweet's 2d Battalion to deploy off its hill and come in behind the enemy, squeezing the NVA between the two American units. On the morning of 9 February, the 2d Battalion troops departed their positions only to bump into a North Vietnamese battalion in the hamlet of Bon Tri, about 3,000 meters south of Que Chu.

Like Vaught's unit, Sweet's battalion had little success against the strong enemy defenses.[12]

For the next few days, the 1st Cavalry units west of Hue, like the ARVN in the Citadel, faced stalemate. They were able to hold their own, but did not have the wherewithal to push the NVA out.* During this period, the North Vietnamese command maintained its "own support area outside the western wall [of the Citadel] . . . capitalizing on the failure of friendly forces to isolate the Hue battlefield." As Peter Braestrup, the *Washington Post* correspondent, later wrote, "sealing off an eight-mile perimeter [west of Hue] would have demanded far more troops . . . than were available."[13]

With the clearing of southern Hue by the 1st Marines, General Cushman prepared to bring more forces into the fight for the entire city. After the arrival of General Abrams and the formal establishment of the MACV Forward headquarters at Phu Bai on 12 February, Cushman met with the Army general the following day. They both agreed that the "successful conclusion to Operation Hue City was the number one priority in ICTZ." The III MAF commander relayed this concern to General Tolson, who still wanted to return the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry to Camp Evans. Cushman admonished the 1st Cavalry commander to give up any notion of withdrawing the 2d Battalion from the fight. The Marine general stated that the battle was about to reach a climax and ordered Tolson to keep his forces in position to prevent the enemy from escaping to the southwest.[14]

In the interim, General Westmoreland and the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff had sent reinforcements to I Corps. The 1st Battalion, 327th Airborne Regiment from the 101st Airborne Division had arrived at Phu Bai and came under the operational control of Marine Task Force X-Ray. Another battalion from the division was on its way by sea. The South Vietnamese flew the first elements of the Vietnamese Marine Task Force A to Phu Bai from Saigon to relieve the battered Airborne Task Force in the Citadel. At Phu Bai, on 9 February, Brigadier General Foster C. LaHue, the Task Force X-Ray commander, had ordered his 1st Battalion, 5th Marines to prepare to move into Hue.[15]

*As U.S. Army historian George L. MacGarrigle observed, "the enemy probably was content to contain him [the Army forces west of Hue], rather than risk a major fight should the weather clear, giving the 1st Cavalry an opportunity to 'pile-on.'" George L. MacGarrigle, Historian, CMH, Comments on draft, dtd 5Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

Going Into the Walled City

At 0700, 10 February, Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines departed the battalion's Phu Loc operating area south of Phu Bai for the latter base. Reaching Phu Bai about 1100, the company came under the direct operational control of the 5th Marines regimental headquarters. Colonel Robert D. Bohn, the 5th Marines commander, ordered the company into Hue city to reinforce the 1st Marines. Approaching the An Cuu Bridge that afternoon in a "Rough Rider" convoy, the Marine infantrymen dismounted from their trucks, crossed the broken span, and entered southern Hue on foot. At the same time, the 1st Battalion's Company B arrived at Phu Bai as did the lead elements of the Army's 1st of the 327th Airborne. The Army battalion made ready to relieve the remaining companies of the Marine battalion in the Phu Loc sector. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, in turn, was about to expand the Marine Operation Hue City into the old Citadel to reinforce the ARVN.[16]

Simultaneously, the Marine command attempted to improve the coordination for artillery, naval gunfire, and other supporting arms for the Citadel fighting. Earlier on 8 February, the 1st Field Artillery Group (FAG) at Phu Bai, the artillery command for Task Force X-Ray, deployed four 155mm howitzers of Battery "W", 1st Battalion, 11th Marines to firing positions at Gia Le, about 3,000 meters west of Phu Bai, to improve supporting fires for the forces in Hue. Two days later, the 1st FAG sent two 4.2-inch mortars from the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines to the stadium in southeast Hue to provide CS (teargas) and heavy mortar support for the forces in the Citadel. About the same time, a 105mm howitzer battery from the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines entered the city across the newly established pontoon bridge over the Phu Cam Canal. From its positions in southern Hue, the battery was in position to support the Marines to the north and to the west.[17]

On 10 February, the 1st FAG commander, Lieutenant Colonel John F. Barr ordered two officers on his staff to the Citadel area as forward observers. One of the officers, First Lieutenant Alexander W. Wells, Jr., the S–2 [intelligence officer] on the FAG staff, remembered that he received word that morning that the "colonel" wanted to talk to him. Barr informed Wells that he had volunteered the young lieutenant "*for a 24-hour mopping-up mission* [emphasis in the original]" to General Truong in the Citadel to coordinate supporting fires. Wells, whose tour in Vietnam was about over,

indicated he would rather stay where he was, but Lieutenant Colonel Barr gave him little choice.[18]

Shortly after 1630 on the 10th, Wells and his radio operator flew by helicopter to the Tay Loc airfield in the Citadel where the Marine lieutenant was to provide support to the 2d Battalion, 4th ARVN and the Black Panther Company, which had just retaken the field. As the aircraft approached Tay Loc, the enemy took it under sniper fire. The two Marines leaped out of the hovering craft and ran into a Quonset hut, near the airfield tower, and "full of Australians [advisors to the Vietnamese units there] playing cards and drinking scotch." At that point, Wells recalled he was told that General Truong wanted to see him at the *Mang Ca* division headquarters compound, about a mile to the east.[19]

Upon Wells reaching the division headquarters, General Truong briefed him upon his new assignment as a forward observer with the "supporting remnants of an ARVN Airborne battalion pinned down in a forward area." Wells remembered that he "was shocked to learn that the [1st Battalion,] 5th Marines had not arrived yet and that he and his radioman would be the only Americans in actual combat with the ARVN." The Vietnamese general pointed out to Wells, on a large wall map, the location of his designated outpost, surrounded by enemy troops. Truong explained the Vietnamese unit required "his 'big guns' immediately to break the siege." According to Wells, "Truong emphasized . . . that the Emperor's Palace of Perfect Peace and the Royal City itself were in a strict no-fire zone, but H&I [harassing and interdiction] fires could be designated on the outer wall surrounding the Palace grounds."[20]

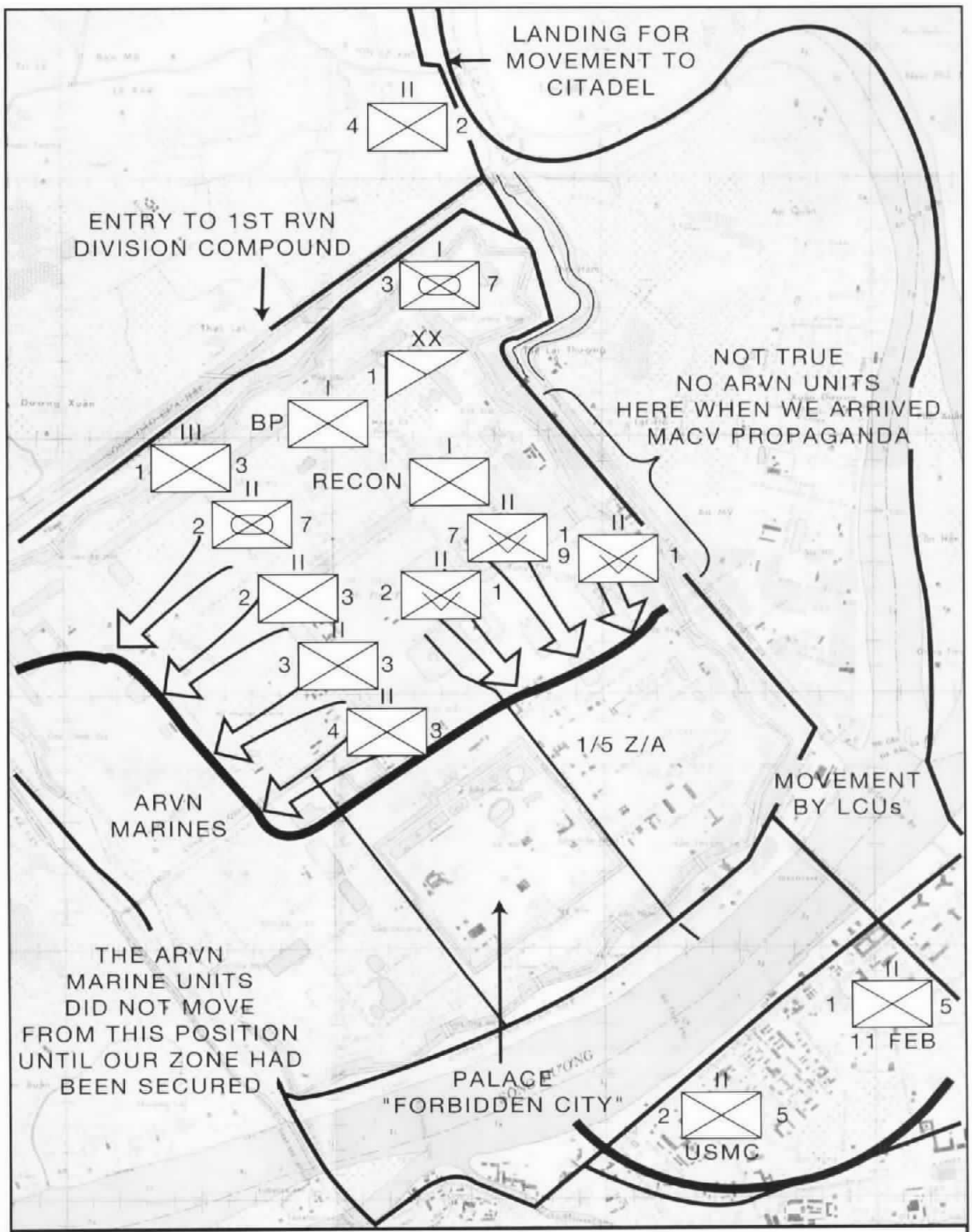
After the briefing, two ARVN soldiers, whom Wells remembered as rangers, escorted the Marine lieutenant and his radioman through the dark streets and alleyways to the ruins of a Buddhist pagoda, about 500 meters west of the Dong Ba tower. Wells recalled it took him about three hours to negotiate the half-mile distance from the *Mang Ca* compound to the pagoda. Inside and around the courtyard of the temple only a short distance from the Imperial Palace were about 100 Vietnamese troops. According to Wells, they were surrounded by North Vietnamese forces. Given his ominous circumstances, Lieutenant Wells nicknamed his refuge the "Alamo." For the next two weeks, Wells called in Marine supporting artillery and naval gunfire from ships off the coast, adjusting his target selection by reference to his map and to sound.[21]

In the meantime, General Truong revised his plans for the battle of the Citadel. With the arrival of the South Vietnamese Marine Task Force A at Phu Bai, he proposed to have them replace the battered Vietnamese airborne battalions in the eastern sector. The airborne units would then return to Phu Bai and be flown back to Saigon. Through the chain of command, he asked for Task Force X-Ray to provide him with a U.S. Marine battalion. The U.S. Marine battalion would then relieve the Vietnamese Marines and attack to the south. After the arrival of the American Marines, the Vietnamese Marines would push to the west and then turn south, advancing along the western wall. In the meantime, the four 3d ARVN Regiment battalions would continue to clear the northwest sector. Eventually the allied forces would surround and isolate the NVA forces, holed up in the former imperial palace

Vietnamese Marines deploy after U.S. Marine helicopters, in the background, have brought them into a landing zone near Hue. While not depicted in this photo, on 11 February, Marine helicopters had brought one company and the Task Force Headquarters directly into the Citadel.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A422067





COPY OF BRIEFING MAP AND COMMENTARY PROVIDED BY COL ROBERT H. THOMPSON, USMC (RET.), TO KEITH B. NOLAN

grounds, which separated the Vietnamese and American Marine sectors.[22]

As was often the case, events overtook the plans. Although the Vietnamese Marine Task Force A and its 1st Battalion arrived at Phu Bai from Saigon on 9 February and came under the operational control of the 1st ARVN Division, the Vietnamese Marines remained at Phu Bai. In a meeting with the Vietnamese Marine commander, Major Hoang Thong, at Task Force X-Ray headquarters, Brigadier General LaHue suggested that Thong deploy immediately to the Citadel. Major Thong, however, declined until the rest of his command joined him. The Vietnamese commander explained that he "was acting under written instructions promulgated by the Vietnamese Joint General Staff which prohibited piecemeal [commitment] . . . of his force."[23]*

The support elements of the Vietnamese Marine Task Force reached Phu Bai on the night of 10 February from Saigon and Major Thong began his preparations to move the 1st Battalion into the Citadel. On the morning of 11 February, U.S. helicopters started the helilift of the Vietnamese Task Force headquarters and 1st Battalion into the Citadel. Low ceiling and drizzle forced a halt in the air movement of the Vietnamese Marines with only the task force headquarters and one company of the 1st Battalion in the old city. General LaHue proposed to Major Thong that he order the remainder of the battalion be trucked to southern Hue and then board LCM (landing craft mechanized) for the trip downriver to a landing site north of the Citadel. The Marines would then move on foot into the city. Again Major Thong refused "as he did not feel that either route was sufficiently secured." It would be two days before additional units of the Vietnamese Marine task force joined the one company in the Citadel.[24]

In the meantime, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines began to go into the old city. Shortly after 1045 on 11 February, Marine CH–46 "Sea Knight" helicopters lifted three platoons of Company B from the Phu Bai airfield to the *Mang Ca* compound in the Citadel. Enemy gunfire wounded the pilot of the helicopter carrying the 3d Platoon, forcing him to abort the mission and return to Phu Bai with the troops still on board. Later that day, Company A with five tanks attached from the 1st Tank Battalion embarked in a Navy LCU at the ramp in southern Hue. After their relatively uneventful cross-river passage, the Marine company and tanks joined the two platoons of Company B at the 1st ARVN Division headquarters.[25]

On 11 February as well, Major Robert H. Thompson, the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, and his command group accompanied his remaining companies from the Phu Loc sector to Phu Bai. Only 10 days before, Colonel Bohn, the regimental commander, had chosen Thompson, who had served with him before as a battalion operations officer, to take over the battalion after the wounding of its previous commanding officer. Before assuming command of the battalion, Thompson, a lieutenant colonel selectee, had been the III MAF Embarkation officer.** The NVA had prepared a rather undignified assumption of command ceremony for the new battalion commander. Thompson recalled:

> The moment I stepped off the helicopter [at Phu Loc] we received mortar incoming. My first 15 minutes with 1/5 was spent at the bottom of a muddy fighting hole with my baggage and several Marines piled on top of me.[26]

When Major Thompson arrived at Phu Bai, he reported to General LaHue. The Task Force X-Ray commander told him that the 1st Marines had largely cleared southern Hue, "but that the 1st ARVN Division was having a very difficult time in the Citadel." General LaHue stated that Major Thompson's battalion would be given a zone of action in the Citadel to assist the ARVN in cleaning out the remaining NVA forces from the city. LaHue expressed some concern about Thompson's rank or rather lack of it. According to the battalion commander, LaHue feared that "since I was only a major, I might be dominated or overly influenced by General Truong." General LaHue even suggested "making me a brevet colonel." Major Thompson replied that he did not believe that unusual action would be necessary, since he did not usually wear rank insignia in combat. The battalion commander had the impression that "no one seemed to know

*Colonel Talman C. Budd II, who as a major served as an advisor to the Vietnamese Marine Task Force at Hue, commented that Major Thong was correct in that Vietnamese Armed Forces "policy precluded the piecemeal commitment of an operational unit so waiting until the other battalion (the 5th) arrived was appropriate." Col Talman C. Budd II, Comments on draft, dtd 30Mar95 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Colonel Rex C. Dillow, who served as the III MAF G–4 or logistic officer, recalled that Major Thompson had headed the III MAF embarkation transportation section and had the responsibility for shipping of resupply to Marine units. According to Dillow, Thompson had always wanted an infantry assignment, but still had done an "outstanding job" for him. Dillow stated that he, therefore, "offered no objection when Colonel Bohn wanted him for the 5th Marines." Col Rex C. Dillow, Comments on draft, dtd 10Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A194565

A Marine M48 tank in support of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines enters the Citadel. On the front turret is an ironic commentary on the war and the anti-war movement reading, "The Original Flower Children."

what the actual situation was in the Citadel. I can remember General LaHue commenting that it shouldn't take more than a few days to clean up the Citadel affair."[27]

After concluding his conversation with General LaHue, Major Thompson and his command group, together with the 3d Platoon of Company B, departed Phu Bai by "Rough Rider" convoy to Hue. Like the other 5th Marines battalions, the 1st Battalion came under the operational control of the 1st Marines. Upon his arrival at the 1st Marines command post in the former MACV compound in the new city, the battalion commander immediately discussed the situation with Colonel Stanley S. Hughes, the 1st Marines commander. According to Thompson, Hughes ordered him to "move up the Perfume River in LCUs, land and enter the Citadel from the north." He then was "to seek out General Truong and advise him of my intentions." Thompson recalled that he was to launch a three-company attack southward "within a zone of action that extended from the inner palace wall on the west to the Citadel Wall on the east."[28]

Major Thompson and his advance group spent the night of 11–12 February in some damaged Hue University buildings. Just before he retired for the night, the battalion commander remembered that "an Army major appeared before me in full battle dress, including a .45-caliber pistol." The man identified himself as Father Aloysius S. McGonigal, a Catholic chaplain assigned to the MACV advisory group. He understood that "my chaplain had not accompanied us and asked that he be allowed to accompany us to the Citadel." According to Thompson, he gladly accepted the offer.[29]

The following afternoon Companies C and D from Phu Bai joined Thompson and his small advance party at the LCU ramp in the new city. He transferred Company D to the operational control of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. Thompson then completed his preparations for the crossing of the river to the Citadel side. After some delays because of enemy mortar and sniper fire on river traffic, Major Thompson's headquarters group, the Company B 3d Platoon, and Company C embarked on board a Navy LCU for the river passage. Although encountering an occasional RPG round or enemy sniper fire from both banks of the Perfume

River while on board the Navy craft, the Marines landed at the ferry landing north of the city without incident. As the troops were about to start their march to the Citadel, Major Thompson later related that "villagers warned me that the NVA had set up an ambush along the route I had chosen." The Vietnamese civilians guided the Marines along another road. Upon entering the northern gate into the Citadel, the battalion was met by Captain Fernandez Jennings, Jr., the Company B commanding officer, who had arrived the previous day, and some ARVN officers. After some misunderstanding, the battalion commander convinced the South Vietnamese to permit the Marine battalion to come into the 1st Division compound.[30]

After his arrival at the *Mang Ca* compound, Major Thompson met with General Truong and the staff of the 1st ARVN Division. According to Major Thompson, General Truong "was very eager to accommodate our plan of attack or anything we wanted to do, for that matter." The staff briefed Thompson on the situation, advising him that "an ARVN Airborne battalion was holding a position in the vicinity of where we wanted to launch our attack from and that they would hold that position until we passed through that morning."* Thompson then prepared his plan. He remembered several years later that he proposed "to move from our assembly area [in the division compound] at first light the next morning in a column of companies to make contact with the Airborne battalion which was to serve as our line of departure [LOD]." The battalion would then advance "with two companies abreast" and one company in reserve.

Again the actual situation differed from what was supposed to be. Apparently when the one Vietnamese Marine company came into the Citadel the previous day, the Vietnamese airborne units departed for Phu Bai and Saigon. Unaware of the interruption in the airlift of the Vietnamese Marines, Major Thompson radioed Colonel Hughes late on the night of 12 February that he had no information on the whereabouts of the two Vietnamese Marine battalions but, "unless directed otherwise, intend to commence attack at 13 [February] 0800 . . . ." Thompson also did not know that the Vietnamese airborne had departed the Citadel.

The Fight for the Tower

As planned, on the morning of 13 February, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines moved out of the *Mang Ca* compound with two companies abreast—Company A on the left and Company C on the right. Company B would remain in reserve. From the outset, the Marines encountered "enemy elements of squad and platoon [size] in well prepared positions and bunkers dug in built up areas and along the Citadel walls." In Major Thompson's words, "[within] fifteen minutes . . ., all Hell broke loose. There was no Airborne unit in the area and Company A was up to their armpits in NVA." Under fire from automatic weapons, fragmentation grenades, B–40 rockets, mortars, and AK–47s, Company A, within minutes, sustained 35 casualties. Among the wounded was Captain John J. Bowe, Jr., the company commander.[31]

At that point, Major Thompson ordered his reserve, Captain Jennings' Company B, to relieve Company A. First Lieutenant Scott A. Nelson's Company C resumed the attack with Company B on its left flank. With two tanks in the lead, Company C advanced about 300 meters before heavy enemy fire from an archway tower along the Citadel's eastern wall leading to the Dong Ba Bridge, once more stopped the Marines. The NVA had dug in at the base of the wall there and "tunneled back underneath this structure." While protected by the thick masonry from allied supporting fires, the enemy could use the archway to bring further reinforcements into the Citadel. With the Marine battalion about 75 meters short of its original proposed line of departure, Colonel Hughes radioed Major Thompson to hold his positions, "reorganize and prepare plans for continuing attack indicating type fire support deemed necessary and desirable."[32]

Unable to budge the enemy with his present resources, Major Thompson replied that he required the entire arsenal of allied power to support his attack the next morning. Thompson wanted "to walk the artillery in front" of his advancing troops and close air support missions to soften the enemy defenses. He also asked that his Company D, still in the southern city, be returned to his operational control in the Citadel.[33]

On the morning of the 14th, the battalion resumed the attack. Offshore, Navy cruisers and destroyers

*In a copy of a map that Colonel Thompson received in his briefing and which he in turn provided Keith Nolan, three ARVN airborne battalions are shown attacking south in the eastern sector of the Citadel. The four battalions of the 3d ARVN Regiment supported by an armored cavalry company are attacking towards the western wall. Another armored cavalry company, the division headquarters, the Black Panther Company, and the division reconnaissance company are in the *Mang Ca* Compound. The 2d Battalion, 4th ARVN Regiment is outside the Citadel protecting the northern approaches. Map attached to Col Robert H. Thompson ltr to Keith W. Nolan, dtd 16Sep80 (Nolan Papers, MCHC).

opened up with their 5-inch and 8-inch guns. Marine 8-inch and 155mm howitzers from firing positions at Phu Bai and Gia Le added to the bombardment. For the first time in several days, the cloud cover lifted for a brief period and Marine F–4B Phantoms and F–8 Crusader jets flew support missions. First Lieutenant Andrew C. Delaurier, a Crusader pilot from VMF–235, observed that as his two-plane flight arrived over Hue City there was "extremely heavy air activity everywhere." They had to make two runs to acquire the target, the Dong Ba tower. Once they had it, his wingman "proceeded with one run with zunis and snakes and I followed up with the napalm."* Although enemy antiaircraft fire hit Delaurier's aircraft causing him to leak fuel, he made his way safely back to Da Nang.[34]

Despite the heavy bombardment, the tower still stood. As Major Thompson later explained, the naval guns "were accurate, but of little value because their flat trajectory either hit the outside of the Citadel wall or passed over the wall and any targets that we might have had inside the wall." Thompson also praised the accuracy of the Marine artillery, but with the battalion on the "gun target line** . . . it [was] virtually impossible for us to lean into our fires." In other words, with the Marine artillery firing at extreme range and parallel to the direction of attack, the shell dispersion could cause friendly casualties. According to Thompson, the NVA also moved forward when the Marines fell back to use their supporting arms, "so when the fires were lifted we had to fight to retake more ground."[35]

The Marine attack soon stalled. On the right, Company C advanced about 100 yards, destroyed an NVA rocket position, and captured an enemy soldier who walked into the company lines. But on the left flank, Company B made no progress against the enemy-occupied tower. After several futile attempts to take the tower, Major Thompson ordered both companies back into night defensive positions.

Earlier that day, Captain Myron "Mike" C. Harrington's Company D had reverted to Thompson's command. Harrington brought two of his three platoons to the LCU ramp in southern Hue for transportation down river to the Citadel. At the ramp, there were two LCUs, but fully loaded with supplies for the



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A373668

In the fighting in the Citadel, a Marine grenadier fires his M79 grenade launcher. Apparently he has modified his jacket to include a belt pouch for grenades. He also has one grenade stuck in his helmet strap.

1st Battalion. Harrington squeezed on board one of the craft with his headquarters group and one infantry squad. Although taking fire from NVA gunners on the Citadel wall, the Navy craft safely made the trip across the river. Harrington and his small force jumped off and waited for the LCUs to make a return trip with the rest of the company.[36]

At the LCU ramp, the remaining two platoons boarded the Navy craft to join their company commander and his small detachment. Again as the LCUs made their way across the Perfume, NVA gunners took them under fire. On the opposite shore, two Marine 4.2-inch mortars responded with both high explosive and CS shells. A sudden shift of wind brought the gas fumes back on the Navy boats, blinding and choking both the sailors and Marines. The two LCUs returned to the southern ramp. The ship commanders decided against another attempt to cross the river. Fortunately after several hours, a Navy Swift boat arrived with three Vietnamese junks in tow. Armed with a mounted .50-caliber machine gun, the Swift boat commander agreed to take the Marines on board the junks and tow the small convoy to the other

*"Zunis" refer to 5-inch Zuni rockets, an air-to-surface unguided rocket with solid propellant while "Snakes" pertain to 250- and 500-pound bombs configured with a special tail called "snake eyes."

**The gun target line was an imaginary straight line from the guns to the target.

side. After the Swift boat left the junks at a point off shore, the Marines rowed them to the northern landing site where an impatient Captain Harrington was waiting for them.

Arriving in the Citadel while it was still light, about 1800–1900 on the 14th, Harrington and his command joined the remainder of the battalion. That night, Major Thompson briefed Harrington on the situation and told him that it would be Company D's turn to go against the tower the next morning. Harrington returned to his company and prepared them for the coming attack.[37]

On the 15th, Marine artillery and naval gunfire once more hit the enemy positions. Under the pounding this time, part of the tower gave way. With another break in the cloud cover, two Marine A–4 jets darted in under the gray skies and dropped 250- and 500-pound bombs on the target.* Backed both by tanks and Ontos, the Company D Marines pressed forward with Company C protecting its right flank. The North Vietnamese, nevertheless, defended their positions tenaciously and Major Thompson ordered Company B, which had been in reserve, again into the attack. After six hours of hard fighting, including hand-to-hand combat, Harrington's 1st Platoon established a foothold at the base of the tower. According to one account, Marine Private First Class John E. Holiday made a "one-man charge" against an enemy machine gun bunker on the wall, firing his "machine gun from the hip, 'John Wayne' style." The rest of the company followed him and captured the tower.[38]**

The capture of the tower came at no small cost. Thompson's battalion lost 6 men killed and sustained more than 50 wounded, while claiming 20 enemy dead. That night, Captain Harrington left one squad in the tower and established his CP in a damaged house below the wall. In a surprise night attack, the NVA retook the tower for a brief period. According to Harrington, the Marine squad fell back without orders and the company commander at the base of the tower suddenly saw North Vietnamese soldiers crawling over the rubble of the tower. Laying down a base of fire from his defensive positions, Captain Harrington led another squad in a counterattack. The tower finally remained in Marine hands.[39]

Continuing the Advance

On the morning of the 16th, the battalion continued to push southeast along the Citadel Wall. Major Thompson's Marines immediately made contact, "engaging the enemy at extremely close range." Despite heavy enemy resistance, the 1st Battalion advanced about 150 yards. At that point, Major Thompson called a halt to allow fresh supplies reach the battalion. In the days' fighting, the Marines accounted for another 63 North Vietnamese dead while sustaining casualties of 7 killed and 47 wounded.[40]

For the next few days the 1st Battalion met the same close-quarter resistance from the enemy. In contrast to the enemy in southern Hue, the battalion discovered that the NVA units in the Citadel employed "better city-fighting tactics, improved the already formidable defenses, dug trenches, built roadblocks and conducted counterattacks to regain redoubts which were important to . . . [their] defensive scheme." Major Thompson later observed that the older city consisted of "row after row of single-story, thick-walled masonry houses jammed close together and occasionally separated by alleyways or narrow streets." The Marines encountered "hundreds of naturally camouflaged, mutually supporting, fortified positions." Moreover, according to the battalion commander, "both of our flanks were exposed to enemy." To the east, or left flank, four- or five-story houses stood outside the moat from which the "NVA were able to dominate the top of the Citadel wall with observation and fire." To the west, or right flank, the "imperial palace provided the enemy a haven from which he could deliver small arms, rocket and mortar fire." Eventually Thompson received permission to fire mortars and on a "few occasions to have the ARVN fire artillery for us inside. . . the palace walls." As Major Thompson wrote in 1980, the enemy "had everything going for him."[41]

Thompson countered the enemy fixed defenses with heavy artillery, naval gunfire, liberal use of riot control agents, and when the weather permitted, fixed-wing support. Major Thompson observed, however, "there was slow, misty cold rain falling constantly. I don't recall seeing the sun during that period and the cloud cover broke enough to allow close air support on about three brief occasions." The Marine battalion commander depended largely on his unit's own firepower, espe-

*In 1980, Colonel Harrington in his comments to Keith Nolan recalled only one air strike while he was in Hue and that was while he was attached to the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. Harrington Comments on Nolan ms, dtd 24May83 (Harrington Folder, Nolan Papers). The battalion report, however, mentions that the battalion controlled a flight of A4s against the Citadel wall. 1/5 AAR, Opn Hue City.

**A search of award recommendations failed to locate any prepared for Private First Class Holiday for this action.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190588

During a lull in the fighting in the Citadel, a Marine takes time out to clean his M16 rifle. Marines had discovered through bitter experience that the M16, if not cleaned regularly, was prone to jamming.

cially his mortars and automatic weapons, and the tanks and Ontos that reinforced his battalion. He placed both the tanks and Ontos under the control of the attached tank platoon commander. The infantry provided a screen while the mobile Ontos or tanks furnished direct fire support. In order to enhance observation, the tank or Ontos commander together with the infantry commander would reconnoiter the target area, generally a building blocking the Marine advance. The tank or Ontos commander then returned to his vehicle, prepared to move forward at full speed as the infantry Marines laid down a heavy volume of fire: "Upon reaching a position where fire could be placed on the target, the vehicle commander halted his vehicle and fired two or three rounds into the target then reversing his direction, returned quickly within the friendly front lines."

At first, the M48 tank's 90mm guns were relatively ineffective against the concrete and stone houses; shells occasionally even ricocheted back upon the Marines. The tank crews then began to use concrete-piercing fused shells which "resulted in excellent penetration and walls were breached with two to four rounds." Although casualties among the Ontos and tank crews were high, the tanks themselves withstood with relatively little damage direct hits by the enemy RPG rounds. Major Thompson compared the tankers to the "knights of old sallying forth daily from their castles to do battle with the forces of evil . . . ." One Marine rifleman stated: "If it had not been for the tanks, we could not have pushed through that section of the city. They [the NVA] seemed to have bunkers everywhere."[42]

From its firing positions in southern Hue, the two-tube 4.2-inch mortar detachment from the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines supported the battalion's advance with both high explosive and CS rounds. One of the Marine gunners, Private First Class Edward M. Landry, remembered several years later, "I did my job . . . on the mortar, followed orders, was scared . . . the whole time, and took care of my buddies." Landry recalled, "we had one sergeant in charge . . . and no officer. Which we didn't need anyway as we knew our job." On 18 February, he noted in his diary: "Firing a CS



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371377

In heavy house-to-house fighting in the Citadel, a Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines machine gunner, with his assistant close by, fires his M60 machine gun on its tripod at an enemy position. Both Marines are laden with bandoliers of ammunition for their weapon.

mission across the river again today. The air is full of gas. . . . We are almost used to it unless it is very heavy. We then use our masks." In the Citadel, the 4.2-inch CS shells proved more effective than the E–8 dispensers. The rounds penetrated the tile roofs of the buildings and "concentrated the full power of the round in the building rather than relying on the infiltration of the CS gas from outside." Enemy prisoners testified to the demoralizing effect of the gas on their units, although some NVA officers and senior NCOs carried gas masks with them into battle.[43]

After heavy fighting on 17 February, Major Thompson called another temporary halt to the advance. NVA mortars sank an LCU attempting to resupply the battalion in the Citadel. Facing shortages in food and ammunition, especially in 106mm rounds for the Ontos and 90mm rounds for the tanks, Thompson rested his exhausted men until the supplies reached his battalion. The attack was at a standstill.[44]

An exhausted Marine crew member lies on top of his Ontos tracked vehicle among its six 106mm recoilless rifles.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190767



CHAPTER 12

The Struggle for Hue— The Taking of the Citadel and Aftermath

The Struggle in the Western Citadel—An Estimate of the Situation and Mounting the Offensive—Closing Out Operation Hue City—A Summing Up

The Struggle in the Western Citadel

While the American Marine battalion fought for the Dong Ba tower and painfully inched its way forward, the Vietnamese Marine task force also entered the battle. After several delays, on 13 February, U.S. Navy landing craft ferried the command group and the remaining companies of the 1st VNMC Battalion and the entire 5th VNMC Battalion from the LCU ramp across the Perfume River to the northern landing site. At his *Mang Ca* headquarters, the 1st ARVN Division commander, General Truong assigned the southwest sector of the Citadel, west of the Imperial Palace, to the Vietnamese Marine Task Force.* According to Truong's concept of operations, the following morning, the task force would pass through friendly forces south of the headquarters and then attack first to the west and then make a left turning movement with the 1st Battalion on the eastern flank and the 5th Battalion on the western.[1]

As planned, at 0900 on the 14th, the Vietnamese Marines left their line of departure, but both battalions immediately ran into strong enemy forces. From 0930–1200, the 5th Battalion engaged in heavy house-to-house fighting until it reached its first objective. In its sector, the 1st Battalion failed in its mission to secure a small school, stubbornly defended by the NVA.[2]

According to a South Vietnamese reporter who accompanied the 1st Battalion's 4th Company, a Vietnamese Marine platoon leader, Third Lieutenant Nhut, led his men supported by a tank into a pagoda from which to launch the assault on the school. After a supporting air strike on the enemy positions, Lieutenant Nhut suddenly dashed forward toward an abandoned house, halfway between the school and the pagoda. Enemy automatic fire cut the lieutenant down. The company commander shouted over the radio: "I never told anyone to charge ahead yet. I told everyone to wait . . . ." He then reported to the battalion commander "the loss of a 'big child'" [referring to a "comrade in arms"]. During a lull in the fighting, a small group of Marines recovered Nhut's body and equipment. On the helmet was the inscription "Live beside you, darling, die beside buddies." The reporter later learned that this was the slogan of the 4th Company. During the 14th, the 1st Battalion took casualties of 9 dead and 24 wounded. Repulsing early morning probes on its positions on the 15th, the 1st Battalion counterattacked and finally captured the schoolhouse that afternoon. In two days of heavy fighting, the two Marine battalions had advanced less than 400 meters.[3]

To the north of the Vietnamese Marines, the 3d ARVN Infantry Regiment in the northwest sector of the Citadel also met with setbacks. On 14 February, the enemy forces broke out of their salient west of the Tay Loc airfield and cut off the 1st Battalion of the 3d Regiment in the western corner of the Citadel. It took two days for the ARVN to break the encirclement.[4]

By this time, the enemy also had its problems. On the night of 16 February, the ARVN troops at the "Alamo" with Lieutenant Wells, monitoring enemy radio frequencies, intercepted a transmission ordering "an attack of battalion-size reinforcements into the Citadel through the 'west gate' and over the moat bridge." Wells immediately called upon the Marine 155mm howitzers at Gia Le and all available Navy gunships on station to "'fire for effect' at the on-call targets around the gate and bridge." According to the Marine lieutenant, the howitzers "and a 5-inch mount from one of the destroyers responded simultaneously within three minutes and continued firing for approximately 10 minutes." Lieutenant Wells remembered that after approximately 100 rounds, "there was

* For purposes of control, Truong had divided the Citadel into six zones or areas of operations: Zone A was the *Mang Ca* compound; Zone B was the area immediately south of the headquarters and under friendly control; Zone C was in the northwest sector and given to the 3d ARVN Regiment; Zone D was the sector of the U.S. 1st Battalion, 5th Marines; Zone E was the Imperial Palace and grounds still occupied by enemy forces; and the Vietnamese Marine sector was to be Zone F. Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 257–58.

screaming on the radio." The enemy had received a direct hit on the moat bridge, killing a high-ranking (possibly a general) North Vietnamese officer and blowing several enemy troops into the water.[5]*

About midnight, the ARVN intercepted another enemy message from the commander of enemy forces inside Hue to his immediate superior. The NVA commander in Hue announced that his predecessor had been killed, that he had assumed command, and that "many other men had either been killed or wounded." He recommended that his troops be permitted to withdraw from the city. The senior officer denied the request and "ordered the new cmdr [commander] to remain in position and fight."[6]**

An Estimate of the Situation and Mounting the Offensive

At the same time, the U.S. command feared a buildup of NVA forces in the Hue sector. Earlier on the 16th, General Abrams, the MACV (Forward) commander, had talked to Major General Tolson, of the 1st Cavalry Division, and then flew over the Army division's objective area west of the city. According to his observations and information, the NVA had at least three battalions still in the city: "They are resupplied nightly from a base camp 18 kilometers west of the city, generally through the west gate. They have plenty of 60mm mortar and B–40 rocket ammo." Moreover, allied intelligence now identified a new enemy battalion west of the city and a new regimental headquarters two kilometers north of the city with at least one battalion. Abrams radioed General Cushman to expect "a renewed attack in the Hue area at any time" and that "we must seek every means to reinforce the 3d Bde [Brigade] of the 1st Air Cav [Air Cavalry] Div to bring additional forces to bear north and west of Hue." According to the MACV (Forward) commander, "we should make every effort to move against the enemy, now, straining our logistic base to the maximum to include air supply if required."[7]

Later on the same afternoon at Phu Bai, General Abrams hosted a meeting with Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky and Lieutenant General Hoang Xuan Lam, the I Corps Commander. Lieutenant General Cushman, the III MAF commander, and Brigadier General LaHue, the Task Force X-Ray commander, also attended the conference. The MACV Forward staff and General LaHue briefed the Vietnamese dignitaries on the Hue situation. According to Abrams, Vice President Ky stated that his intelligence sources concurred with the American assessment of an enemy buildup west of the city. Ky voiced the opinion that the North Vietnamese were willing to sacrifice "thousands of men to win a slight political gain." The South Vietnamese Vice President declared that the U.S. forces should not allow the enemy use of pagodas, churches, and other religious symbolic buildings to deter their advance and that he would "accept responsibility" for any destruction.[8]

The following day, General Westmoreland, the MACV commander, met with both Generals Abrams and Cushman. Westmoreland concurred with their belief that the enemy was about to launch a major operation with Hue as its target. He also accepted the judgment of both of his field commanders in I Corps upon the need for further reinforcements. The American commanders decided to place under Task Force X-Ray the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division with two battalions. They also agreed to reinforce the 3d Brigade of the 1st Air Cavalry Division with two more battalions. According to the allied plans, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines would continue mopping up in the modern city and expand operations to the east and south of Hue. The 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne would block avenues of retreat to the south and southwest, while the 3d Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry Division pressed the NVA from the northwest.[9]

In the Citadel, itself, General Truong, the ARVN 1st Division commander, prepared for the final thrust against the entrenched and determined enemy forces. He assigned the Vietnamese Marine Task Force, now

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*Wells was convinced that the 155mm howitzers hit the bridge since the enemy message about the attack "came just after I heard arty rounds coming in." Wells, "Excerpts from Combat Report."

**According to a recent Vietnamese history, the Communist Central Party Military Affairs Committee issued instructions that the Citadel must be held until 18 February. On the 20th, the local *Tri Thien Region Party Committee* suggested to the Central Party committee that it permit the withdrawal from Hue. The Central Party then instructed the Communist military region headquarters to: "Strive to hold, you will be supplied, including by air." The Vietnamese account then goes on to state "From the night of the 20th through the 23d of February IL–14 aircraft of our Air Force flew parachute resupply to our forces in Hue. Although the effectiveness was low, the resupply by our air force stimulated the fighting morale of our troops and people on the battlefield." *Tuan Khu No. 4 {Military Region 4}, Lich Su Khang Chien Chong My Cuu Nuoc (1954-1975) {History of the War of National Salvation Against America* (1954-1975)] (Peoples Army of Vietnam Publishing House: Hanoi, 1994), pp. 236–38. The authors are indebted to Mr. Robert J. Destatte of the Defense Prisoner of War and Missing Personnel Office, U.S. Department of Defense, for the above translation. The authors know of no source that confirms or mentions the Vietnamese claim of an airlift to the NVA forces in the Citadel.

reinforced by a third battalion from Saigon, to clear the southwestern wall.* With the Vietnamese Marines on the western flank, he placed the 3d ARVN Regiment in the center with orders to attack south towards the Imperial Palace. The Vietnamese general placed his Reconnaissance Company on the right flank of Major Thompson's 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, which renewed its assault in the southeastern sector.[10]

From the 18th through the 20th, the American Marine battalion and South Vietnamese units in the Citadel continued to meet dogged resistance from the enemy. If the NVA in the Citadel were now fighting a rear guard action, they contested nearly every piece of ground. Even with mounting casualties, the North Vietnamese continued to throw replacements into the fight and their supply lines remained open. During the early morning hours of 19 February, two enemy battalions attacked the South Vietnamese Marines in the southwestern sector of the Citadel. Although the Marines, supported by artillery, beat back the enemy assault, several high-ranking NVA officers and political leaders used the "diversion" to make good their escape from the city.[11]

In the southeastern sector, on 19 February, after regrouping, the American Marine battalion resumed the offensive. With Companies B, C, and D in the vanguard, and Company A still in reserve, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines only made nominal advances against its stubborn foe, holed up in the rubble, structures, and walls of the Citadel. Major Thompson, the battalion commander, later remembered that one particular building, "a large, two-storied administrative building (the largest in the Citadel)" was of particular concern to him. From it, the enemy had excellent observation and fields of fire. According to Thompson, he "felt that if we could take this position, the rest would be easy." By the 20th, however, Thompson believed that most of the companies had run out of steam and that some new approach was needed.[12]



Photo is from the Abel Collection

Walter Cronkite, the CBS Evening News anchorman, is filmed covering Marine operations in Hue. The battle for Hue provided dramatic footage for the TV cameras which Americans at home could view almost the next day.

At Phu Bai and Da Nang, both Generals Abrams and Cushman shared Major Thompson's concern about progress in the Citadel and American casualties. News correspondents with the Marines in the old city filed dispatches and film about the intensity of the fighting in the old city that American audiences viewed and read almost the next day.** One dramatic picture showed a Marine tank with a makeshift litter on its rear, carrying wounded from the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines back to the battalion aid station. Reporter Lee Lescaze wrote an article entitled "Shortage of Men, Air Support Slows Marine Drive in Hue" that, on 19 February 1968, appeared on page 1 of the *Washington Post*. According to Lescaze's account, the battalion had only advanced four blocks and still were two blocks from the southern wall of the Citadel. He quoted Marine company officers asking "when are they going to get help." Lescaze described the lead companies "trying to keep on line as they maneuver through buildings and rubble of Hue." In some instances, corporals were acting

*Colonel Talman C. Budd II, then Major Budd and advisor to the Vietnamese Marine Task Force, remarked that Major Thong, the Vietnamese Marine Task Force commander, maintained his command post with his 1st Battalion commander, since they were close friends. According to Budd, he did so because Colonel Yew, "the ceremonial Asst. Commandant, was sent up to Hue to oversee the TF 'A' operations." The Task Force Commander "resented rhat Col Yew had been senr up to Hue so rather than locating the TF CP [Command Post] in the vicinity of the 1st ARVN Division where Colonel Yew was . . . [he] chose to move his CP forward with his old friend the 1st Battalion commander ro keep Colonel Yew out of his hair." Col Talman C. Budd II, Comments on draft, drd 30Mar95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Budd Comments.

**Two of the news correspondents, Alvin B. Webb, Jr., of the United Press and H. D. S. Greenway of *Time Magazine*, were wounded when rhey and Charles Mohr of the *New York Times* pulled a wounded Marine to safety in the Citadel. Braestrup, *Big Story*, I, p. 238.

platoon leaders taking the place of wounded or dead company officers. One officer remarked, "We don't have enough men, enough air support, or enough artillery to do this thing quickly . . . ."[13*]

On 20 February, General Abrams radioed General Cushman that he recognized the efforts of everyone "to reduce the siege of Hue and that the weather has had considerable impact." Abrams, nevertheless, considered "the measures so far taken to be inadequate and not in consonance with the urgency of the problem or the resources you command." The Army general considered it "essential that we bring to bear every available means at our disposal in firepower and support to eliminate the enemy forces in Hue." He directed Cushman to give priority on artillery fires to both the ARVN and Marine units in the city. Abrams declared that General Truong should coordinate "all outside support rendered and we should be responsive to his requests." He told Cushman: "In accomplishing all the above, I direct that the resources owned by the U.S. be unstintingly committed to the support of the Vietnamese forces of all types cutting out all the red tape and administrative procedures that in any way hinder the conduct of the battle." According to Abrams, "this is one battle and anything anyone has that is useful should be committed to its early and final conclusion."[14**]

At the same time he radioed Cushman, General Abrams also sent a message to General Tolson of the 1st Air Cavalry Division. He told Tolson: "You have a priority task to clear the northwest, west and southern approaches to Hue within the next 48 hours, using all resources at your disposal . . . ." Abrams then ordered General Tolson to "make personal contact with BG Truong . . ., assess the situation within the city . . . and report personally to this headquarters with your proposed plan of action." The MACV (Forward) commander then promised Tolson that he would issue the "necessary orders" to General Cushman "to insure that all available resources are placed at your disposal to accomplish this mission."[15]

Despite the note of anxiety in Abrams' messages, the battle for Hue was in its last stages. On 20 February, reenforced by the 2d Battalion, 501st Infantry and the 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry, the 1st Cavalry's 3d Brigade, now four battalions strong, prepared to clear the Que Chu area. With clearing weather and both air and artillery support, the 3d Brigade advanced against stubborn enemy forces, who fell back towards Hue. By the end of 22 February, the Brigade was within 2,500 meters of the city walls. In the two days of the attack, the U.S. troops had killed more than 120 of the enemy. The brigade was about to close the western approaches to Hue, cutting the enemy supply route into the city. On the previous day, U.S. Army Brigadier General Oscar E. Davis, the assistant division commander of the 1st Cavalry, had become the coordinator of supporting arms fire in the Citadel with his headquarters collocated with General Truong at the *Mang Ca* compound.[16]

In the Citadel, Major Thompson had decided on another tack to get his battalion moving again. On the afternoon of the 20th, he held a conference with his company commanders. Thompson stated that "to continue the attack as before would be sheer folly" and suggested the possibility of a night attack. According to Thompson, most of the company commanders "were not very enthusiastic . . . they were willing to try, but I could see that their hearts were not in it." He understood their reluctance, "they had endured a great deal during the past two weeks." On the other hand, a few days earlier, he had given his reserve company, Company A, to First Lieutenant Patrick D. Polk. In a brief period, Polk had revived the morale of the company, which had taken horrendous casualties on the first day of action in the Citadel. Thompson believed that "Pat Polk and Company A were ready to go." According to the plan, a platoon from Company A was to seize three key facilities, including the two-story administrative building, flanking the North Vietnamese positions during the night. At first light, the rest of the battalion was to launch the general attack.[17]

As planned, the 2d Platoon, Company A, led by Staff Sergeant James Munroe, moved out at 0300 on the 21st from the company perimeter. Divided into three approximately 10-man teams, the Marines cap-

*The 1st Marine Division responded to obvious concern by higher headquarters. Although not disputing the accuracy of Lescaze's article, a division message stated that of the 10 platoons of the battalion in the Citadel, three were commanded by lieutenants, one by a gunnery sergeant, two by staff sergeants, two by sergeants, and two by corporals. In its message, the division observed that weather permitted fixed-wing support only on three days, 14–16 February 1968. Because of the need for accuracy, the division stated it used only 8-inch howitzer and naval gunfire in support of the battalion. It admitted that "1/5 casualties have been high. During past week, priority of personnel replacement has been given to the 5th Marines." 1st MarDiv msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 21Feb68, Encl 14, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Feb68.

**Brigadier General Paul G. Graham, who as a colonel served as the G–3 or operations officer of the 1st Marine Division, believed that this message, "was simply a case of a frustrated Abrams trying to direct one of his subordinate commanders to hurry the Hue campaign which would relieve him of some political stress caused by the Hue attack." BGen Paul G. Graham, Comments on draft, dtd 20Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Graham Comments.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371416

Marines of Company L, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines use walls and the sides of houses to cover their advance on a key North Vietnamese position in bitter street fighting in the Citadel. On 21 February, the company reinforced the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, relieving the 1st Battalion's Company B.

tured all three buildings with only minimum resistance by the enemy. Major Thompson later speculated that the North Vietnamese withdrew from the buildings during the night to sleep elsewhere. In the morning about daybreak, the enemy troops started to move back, providing "a turkey shoot" for the Marines of Company A. According to one of the Marine enlisted men, "Hell, the first thing in the morning we saw six NVA . . . just standing on the wall. We dusted them all off." According to Major Thompson, "this threw the NVA into utter confusion and . . . gave our other companies the spirit they needed to continue the attack with zest." Despite the initial success, the North Vietnamese "defended the ground within the zone of action with tenacity." By the end of the day, the battalion had killed about 16 North Vietnamese, taken 1 prisoner, and captured 5 individual weapons at a cost of 3 dead and 14 wounded Marines. The battalion was still about 100 yards short of the southeastern wall.[18]

The end, however, was in sight. On the 21st, Company L, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines had relieved Company B, which received a well-earned rest. The following morning, the 1st Battalion prepared for the final assault on the southern wall. Lieutenant Polk carefully briefed Company A, which this time was to be in the vanguard of the attack. At 0930, the Marines once more pushed forward. Except for some scattered snipers and an occasional mortar round, the enemy seemingly had melted away. Upon reaching the southeastern wall of the Citadel, Lance Corporal James Avella took out a small American flag from his pack and fastened it to "a sagging telegraph pole." The battalion's after-action report documented this event with the phrase, an "element" of Company A "hoisted our National Ensign."

Upon the securing of the wall, Major Thompson ordered the new company under his command, Company L, to capture the southern gate and the immediate area outside the Citadel leading to the bridge across the river. The company commander, Captain John D. Niotis, made his preparations for the assault. Major Thompson set up his temporary command post in a building about 300 meters from the objective so that he could witness the attack. Thompson recalled it was "a classic combined arms effort that could not have been executed better on a blackboard." The sun was out for the first time in two weeks and Marine fixed-wing aircraft dropped napalm within 800 meters of the advancing troops. A M48 tank provided suppressive fire to the company's rear at enemy positions on the palace wall. At



Top is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A801236 and bottom photo is courtesy of Col Talman C. Budd II, USMC (Ret)

Top, on 24 February, South Vietnamese soldiers from the 212th Company, 3d ARVN Regiment raise the South Vietnamese flag over the Citadel. Below, Major William P. Eshelman, the senior advisor to the 4th Vietnamese Marine Battalion, is seen at the CP of the 4th Battalion along the West Wall with Vietnamese Marines.



one time, the tank turned around and trained its 90mm main gun directly at the building occupied by Thompson and his command group. The tank fired but according to the battalion commander "the round hit a stone archway between us and exploded." Again, the tank opened fire, raking the building with its .50-caliber machine gun, but Thompson's operations officer "had the presence of mind to get on the radio and get the tank from firing at us." Major Thompson later related that the tank commander, the tank platoon sergeant, "was very embarrassed about taking his battalion commander under fire." Without any other major incidents but sustaining casualties of 3 dead and 30 wounded during the day, by 1800, the Marine battalion succeeded in attaining all of its objectives. According to the battalion's report, "enemy contact . . . was lighter than any previous offensive day." One Marine observed, "Hey it's Washington's birthday."[19]

To the west of the American Marines, however, the North Vietnamese continued to fight for nearly every inch of the old city still in their hands. In the Vietnamese Marine sector on the 22d, the enemy fired 122mm rockets followed by ground attacks on the Marine positions. Although forced back, the North Vietnamese maintained the pressure on the Marine task force. On the 23d, the Vietnamese Marines "were in moderate to heavy contact" throughout the day and "no advances were made . . . ." Venting his anger at what he considered the slow progress of the Vietnamese Marines in a message to General Westmoreland, General Abrams threatened to recommend to the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff the dissolution of the Vietnamese Marine Corps. He complained to Westmoreland that the Vietnamese Marines in the last three days "have moved forward less than half a city block," although being the "strongest force in the Citadel either Vietnamese, U.S., or enemy."[20*]



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A800450

A Marine sergeant from the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines sits with his weapon on the throne inside the Imperial Palace. The palace was recaptured from the North Vietnamese by South Vietnamese forces, not by the U.S. Marine battalion.

Notwithstanding Abrams' frustrations, both the 3d ARVN and the Vietnamese Marines were about to close out the chapter on the battle for the Citadel. On the 22d, the 3d ARVN Regiment had assisted the Vietnamese Marines in quashing the enemy attack and mounted a counterattack spearheaded by the 1st Division's Black Panther Company. ARVN and American artillery, on the night of the 23d, spoiled another NVA attempt to break through South Vietnamese defenses in the western sector of the Citadel. The 2d Battalion, 3d ARVN then launched its own surprise attack along the southern wall. At 0500 on the 24th, soldiers of the ARVN battalion pulled down the Viet Cong banner and raised the Republic of Vietnam standard in its place on the Citadel flag tower. By 1025 on the 24th, the 3d ARVN Regiment had reached the southern wall and secured it. General Truong then ordered the Black Panther Company and the 2d Battalion, 3d ARVN to assault the Imperial Palace. Meeting little resistance, the ARVN troops, by late afternoon, recaptured the palace with its surrounding grounds and walls by late afternoon. In the meantime, the Vietnamese Marines took the western wall. By nightfall, only the southwest corner of the Citadel remained under enemy control. Under cover of darkness at 0300 on the 25th, the 4th Vietnamese Marine battalion launched a surprise attack and eliminated this last pocket of North Vietnamese organized resistance in the

*Colonel Talman C. Budd II, a former advisor to the Vietnamese Marine Corps, commented that the criticism of the Vietnamese Marines was unjust. He claimed that U.S. commanders were critical without understanding the Vietnamese limitations. He remarked that the Vietnamese Marines were basically light infantry with their battalions numbering about 400 to 600 men and "were standing toe to toe with the same NVA with far less resources than the Marine units had. The VNMC had a battery of 105mm howitzers; no tanks, Ontos, or other supporting arms." According to Budd, "the battle in the western sector of operations was in many respects more difficult and ferocious because the enemy had the unrestrained ability to replenish his forces and supplies with impunity through the west wall." Budd admitted, "the Vietnamese could have been more aggressive under some circumstances but I'm still not sure that Hue City was one of those cases." Budd Comments.

Citadel. Outside of the eastern walls of the Citadel, a two-battalion ARVN Ranger task force cleared the Gia Hoi sector, a small enclave located between the Citadel and the Perfume River that had been under NVA control since 31 January. Save for mopping-up operations, the fight for the Citadel was over.[21]

For the U.S. 1st Battalion, 5th Marines in the Citadel, except for isolated skirmishes, its last significant action occurred on the 22d with the seizure of the southeast wall and its approaches. Major Thompson had hoped to participate in the taking of the Imperial Palace, but as he later ruefully observed: "For political reasons, I was not allowed to do it. To save face, the Vietnamese were to retake the 'Forbidden City' . . . ." Marine tanks, Ontos, and recoilless rifles, however, provided direct support for the assault on the palace. On 26 February, ARVN forces relieved the Marine battalion, which departed the Citadel to join the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines in a two-battalion sweep east and north of the city.[22]

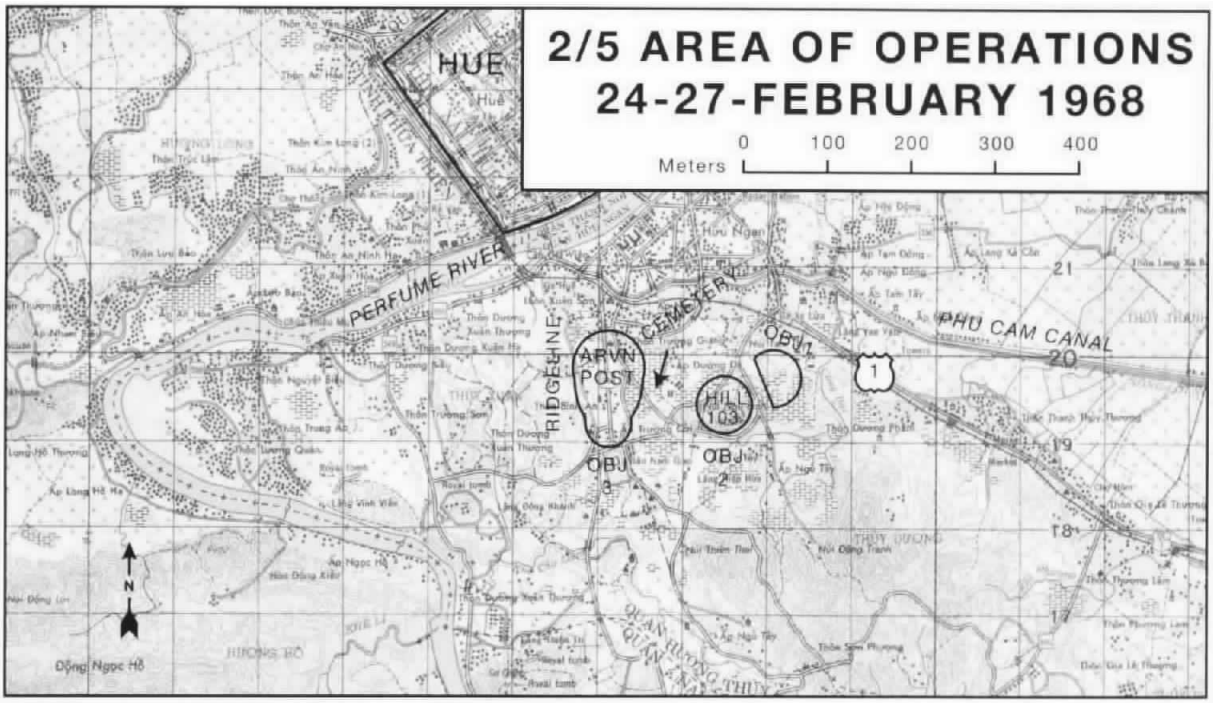
Closing Out Operation Hue City

For the Marines, the operation, now officially called Hue City, lasted about another week. While the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines essentially mopped up in southern Hue,* the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, since 12 February, had conducted numerous company and platoon-size combat patrols south of the Phu Cam Canal. The battalion relieved the 101st ARVN Engineering Company that had been surrounded by NVA just southwest of the new city. On 24 February, the battalion began a three-company sweep south of the city in conjunction with the two battalions of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. Under cover of darkness at 0300, the battalion advanced south of the Phu Cam Canal along Route 1 and then swung west and easily took its first objective around 0500, a piece of high ground 1,000 meters south of the canal and west of the highway. About an hour later, Company F secured its second objective, Hill 103, another 1,000 meters south, again without meeting any resistance.** On Hill 103, Lieutenant Colonel Ernest C. Cheatham, the battalion commander, established an outpost manned by an artillery forward observer team, a forward air controller, and an infantry squad from Company F for security. He then prepared to advance through a Vietnamese cemetery upon his main objective, an ARVN engineer battalion compound, about 1,500 meters to the west. The engineers had held out against repeated VC and NVA assaults since the beginning of the month.[23]

Close to 0700, with Company G on the right, Company H on the left, and Company F following in trace, the battalion began its attack to secure the ARVN compound. Enemy mortars and automatic weapons fire forced the Marines to take cover among the tombs. After the battalion called in artillery and mortars on the suspected enemy positions, Company G, about 0830, reached the perimeter of the base and tied in with the ARVN engineers there. After discussing defensive arrangements with the ARVN base commander, the Company G commander, Captain Charles L. Meadows, reported back to Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham about the situation. The company commander warned Cheatham that the ARVN engineers had extensively mined the approaches to their compound and that a guide was required to pass through safely.

*First Lieutenant Ray L. Smith, the acting Company A commander, recalled that his company on 10 February together "with a militia of cooks etc., that they called 'B' Company," returned to the MACV compound and "began pushing east." At first, the battalion encountered little resistance as it covered two blocks and reached the soccer stadium. Smith remembered that they had a road to cross east of the stadium and "we bumped hard again." According to Smith, an ARVN major, who had been on leave and hiding from the NVA, joined them and informed the Marines that a North Vietnamese battalion headquarters was next door to his house. With clearances obtained from the Vietnamese authorities for "unobserved fire . . . for the first time," the Marine battalion called in supporting artillery and mortar missions. The following morning, the Marine infantry "went in" under a CS gas cover: "We had some fairly heavy resistance, but we cleared it out easily . . . ." Smith remembered, "we found where they had their battalion headquarters," but the enemy bodies had been cleared out. After the taking of the headquarters, Smith wrote that Company A got some rest "and were used mostly for security until we left." 1stLt Ray Smith to Capt Gordon D. Batcheller, dtd 25Mar68, Encl to Col Gordon D. Batcheller, Comments on draft, dtd 10Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). Unfortunately, the 1/1 Command Chronology and journal file is silent on this incident. 1/1 ComdC, Feb68.

**Brigadier General Michael P. Downs, who as a captain commanded Company F, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, recalled that on the 24th, his company passed the remains of a Marine convoy that had been ambushed earlier in the month in an attempt to bring supplies to an isolated Marine artillery battery located at the Rock Quarry across the Perfume River from Phu Bai. Two men from his company who had been wounded and trying to rejoin the company were among the casualties: "It was a demoralizing site." BGen Michael P. Downs, Comments on draft, dtd 19Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Downs Comments. Colonel Robert C. V. Hughes, who had commanded the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, recalled the same convoys. He wrote: "All the vehicles were disabled and remained at the ambush site until control was reestablished later in the month." According to Hughes, the Marine artillery battery was not attacked during the entire period and occasionally initiated counter battery fire on enemy rocket launching sites in the Phu Bai sector. Col Robert C. V. Hughes, Comments on draft, n.d. [1995] (Vietnam Comment File).



Despite all precautions, the Navy corpsman with Cheatham's command group triggered a mine and was seriously wounded.[24]

Throughout the remainder of the day, the Marine companies in their defensive positions in the compound and around the perimeter came under mortar and automatic fire from a VC-held Buddhist temple to the immediate south and a ridgeline to the west, overlooking the ARVN base. Cheatham observed that the Communist gunners had preregistered their mortars and automatic weapons fire on the key Marine defensive positions and terrain objectives. Deciding upon much the same tactics as he had already employed, the battalion commander planned upon enveloping the enemy's positions under cover of darkness and coming upon him in the morning.[25]

The enemy, however, was not taken in by the Marine stratagem. Companies F and G moved out of the perimeter as planned and then waited for artillery and airstrikes to soften the enemy defenses. At 0700 on the 25th, the two companies launched their attacks to take the ridgeline and were met by mortar salvos and continuous and accurate automatic weapons fire. As one Marine infantryman with Company G observed, "everyplace we'd go they would mortar us." With supporting artillery fires, naval gunfire, and close air support, the Marine infantry finally reached the crest of the eastern portion of the ridgeline. In their efforts during the day, the two companies sustained casualties of 1 Marine killed and 11 wounded. The Marines, in turn, killed three of the enemy and took one prisoner. In the meantime, Company H, which had cleared out a hamlet in support of the Army airborne brigade operating to the south of the Marines, joined the other companies on the eastern ridgeline.[26]

On the morning of the 26th, the Marine battalion continued the attack to clear the ridgeline. In scattered skirmishes, Companies F and G on the ridgeline killed about 20 NVA and took casualties of 2 Marine dead and 13 wounded. About 500 meters to the north, Company H, supported by air and artillery, maneuvered to take the last hill on the ridgeline, where the enemy remained entrenched in fixed positions. About 1330, enemy defenders, using mortars, machine guns, and 57mm recoilless rifles, forced Company H to pull back and call for an air strike. In the fighting, the Marines sustained casualties of one dead and five wounded and later counted six North Vietnamese bodies.[27]

Resuming the attack after the air strike, Company H once more pushed forward. Again, the Communist troops doggedly resisted the Marine advance. About 1620, once more unable to make any further headway, the Marine company called upon air to take out the enemy defenses. Two flights of A–4 Skyhawks came in low and dropped their ordnance. Although the bombs knocked out two enemy mortars and two machine guns, killing about 20 North

Vietnamese troops, one fell short and burst near the Marines, killing four and wounding two. With darkness coming on, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham recalled the company and waited for the next morning to renew the assault.

On the morning of the 27th, Marine air and artillery bombarded the enemy defenses. After the last fires had lifted, all three companies of the 2d Battalion rushed forward. Reaching the crest of the hill without encountering opposition, the Marines discovered that the enemy had departed during the night. Strewn around the hillscape were 14 enemy bodies. The Marine battalion then completed its sweep south of the new city the next day and prepared for a joint operation with the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines to the east and north of Hue.

Leaving the southern sector to the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne on the 29th, the two Marine battalions entered their new area of operations to cut off any NVA forces trying to make their way from Hue to the coast. Although encountering few enemy forces, the two battalions uncovered "fresh trench work along the route of advance, 3,000 meters long with 600 fighting holes." Captain Michael P. Downs, the Company F commander, remembered a trench complex that "traveled in excess of five miles" with overhead cover every 15 meters. As Downs remarked, "that had to be a way to get significant reinforcements into the city." The search for significant North Vietnamese forces proved fruitless. Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham observed, "we couldn't close it [the loop around the enemy]. To be honest, we didn't have enough people to close it." On 2 March 1968, the Marines closed out Operation Hue City.[28]

A Summing Up

The battle cost all sides dearly. Marine units of Task Force X-Ray sustained casualties of 142 dead and close to 1,100 wounded.* U.S. advisors with the 1st ARVN Division in Hue reported 333 South Vietnamese Army troops killed, 1,773 wounded, and 30 missing in action. According to the U.S. Marine advisors with the Vietnamese Marine task force in Hue, the Vietnamese Marines suffered 88 killed, 350 wounded, and 1 missing in action. The 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) listed casualties of 68 killed and 453 wounded for their part in the battle while the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne showed 6 dead and 56 wounded in its battle account. Thus, all told, allied unit casualties totaled more than 600 dead and nearly 3,800 wounded and missing. Obviously the enemy did not escape unscathed. Allied estimates of NVA and VC dead ranged from 2,500 to 5,000 troops. According to the South Vietnamese, captured Communist documents admitted to 1,042 killed and an undisclosed number of wounded.[29]

Just as speculative were the size and number of units that the allies engaged in the one month battle. The allied command, however, knew that the enemy was in Hue in force. South Vietnamese and U.S. intelligence officers initially identified at least three North Vietnamese regimental headquarters controlling subordinate units during the early fighting. These were the *4th*, *5th*, and *6th NVA Regiments*. Later, American and South Vietnamese units confirmed battalions from at least three more NVA regiments—the *29th* from the *325C NVA Division* and the *90th* and *803d* from the *324B Division*. The 1st Air Cavalry Division reported prisoners from yet another regiment, the *24th Regiment*, *304th NVA Division*. Allied intelligence estimated that from 16 to 18 enemy battalions took part in the battle for Hue in one form or another, not including VC local force units. It would be a safe bet that from 8,000 to 11,000 enemy troops participated in the fighting for Hue in the city itself or the approaches to the former imperial capital.[30]

Until the battle for Hue, the allied order of battle estimates carried the battalions from the *29th* and the *90th NVA* as part of the besieging force at Khe Sanh, approximately 45 miles to the northwest. The *803d Regiment* was supposed to be in the eastern DMZ, another 45 miles to the north. One prisoner from the *803d*, captured on 23 February by Vietnamese Marines, told his captors that his unit on the night of 21–22 February made a forced march from Gio Linh District to the Citadel. Although wounded himself, he spoke of the high morale and fairly low casualties in his unit. On the 23d, he stated that his unit received orders to withdraw, but did not know why. In the hasty departure, he lost his way and ran into the South Vietnamese troops.[31]

*The breakdown of casualties among the Marine infantry battalions are as follows: The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines sustained 67 dead and 403 wounded. The incomplete 2d Battalion, 5th Marines after-action report does not show total Marine casualties, but the battalion's command chronology for February shows 65 Marines killed and 421 wounded. It can be assumed that over 90 percent of these casualties occurred during the Hue City fighting. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines did not submit an after-action report for Hue, but its command chronology for February reflects 17 dead and 154 wounded. Again it can be assumed that the bulk of the casualties occurred in the Hue City fighting. 1/5 AAR Hue City; 2/5 ComdC, Feb68; 1/1 ComdC, Feb68.



Photo courtesy of Col Talman C. Budd II, USMC (Ret)

The South Vietnamese Marine Task Force Alpha commander, the officer on the right holding a map, confers with officers of the 1st Vietnamese Marine Battalion west of the city, after leaving Hue.

The allies remained unsure about the North Vietnamese command and control for the battle of Hue. U.S. after action reports referred to a division-size force, but never identified any particular enemy division headquarters. Lieutenant Colonel Pham Van Khoa, the South Vietnamese Thua Thien Province chief, who remained in hiding until rescued by American Marines,* accidentally overheard a conversation among some enemy officers. According to Khoa, the North Vietnamese mentioned a division taking part in the battle and the division headquarters was "in an unknown location south of the city of Hue inside a pagoda." Khoa could not remember the number of the division, but recalled that it ended with a 4. In all probability, however, Khoa confused the division headquarters with the *4th NVA Regiment*. Given the disparity of so many regiments from so many different divisions, allied intelligence officers believed that a forward headquarters of the *Tri-Thien-Hue Front* under a North Vietnamese general officer directed the NVA Hue offensive.[32]

Given both the resources that the North Vietnamese put into the battle and the tenacity with which they fought, it was obvious that the Hue campaign was a major component of the entire Tet offensive. According to an enemy account, the North Vietnamese military command in planning the offensive took into consideration that the U.S. and South Vietnamese had concentrated their forces in the north, expecting an attack along Route 9. It viewed Hue a weak link in the allied defenses in the northern two provinces. As the North Vietnamese author wrote: "The enemy knew nothing of our strategy; by the time our forces approached the city of Hue, the enemy still had not taken any specific defensive measures."[33]

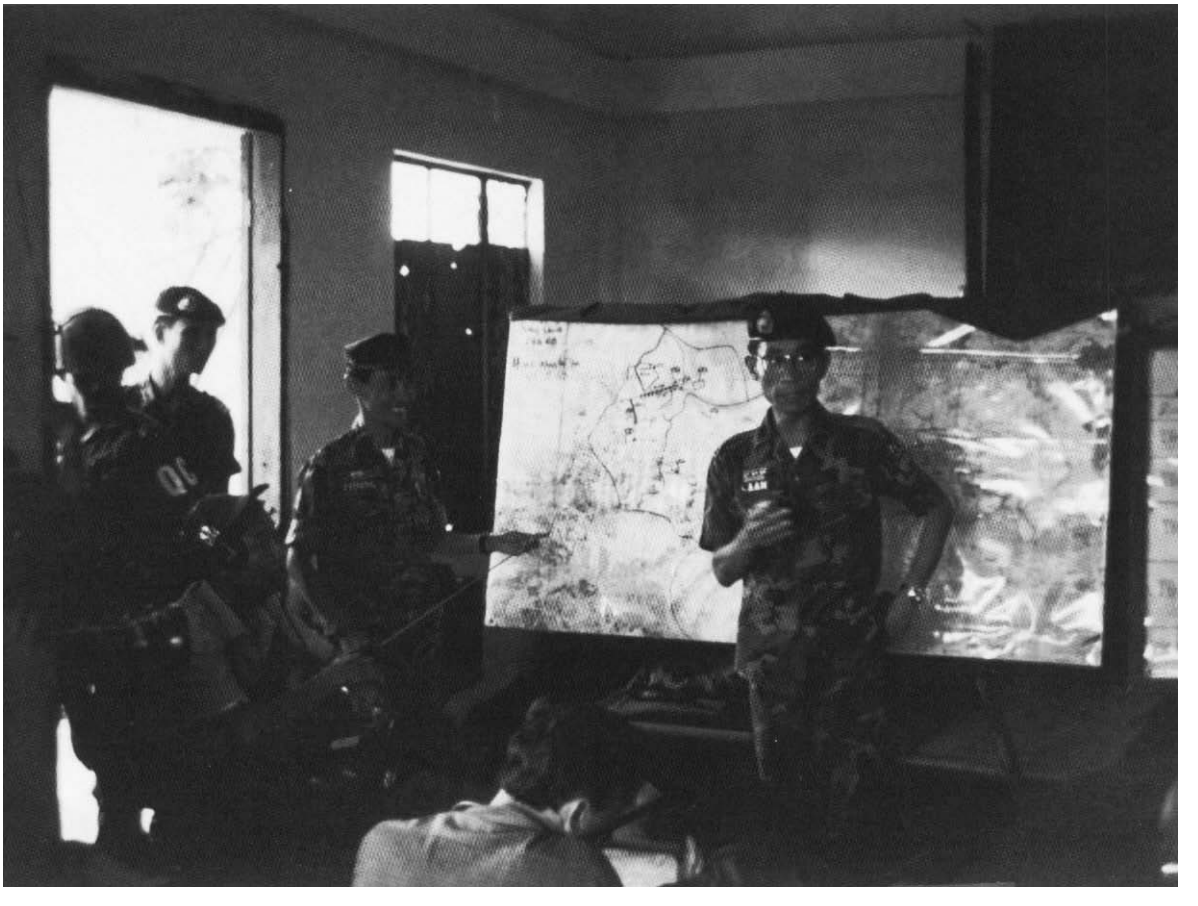
Once in Hue, the North Vietnamese were there to stay. The Communists established their own civil government and their cadres rounded up known government officials, sympathizers, and foreigners including American civilians and military personnel in the parts of the city they controlled. After the recapture of Hue, South Vietnamese authorities exhumed some 3,000 bodies thrown into hastily dug graves. In all probability, these were the victims of the Communist roundups. Although the North Vietnamese admitted the tracking down and punishing of "hoodlum ringleaders," they claimed most of the reported civilian deaths were the result of happenstance, exaggerations by the South Vietnamese, or caused by the allies. The true sufferers in the battle were the people of Hue.

* See Chapter 10.



Top is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190581 and bottom photo is courtesy of Col Talman C. Budd II, USMC (Ret)

At top, a bound North Vietnamese prisoners captured in the fighting for Hue are waiting to board the Army "Huey" helicopter in the background for evacuation and later interrogation. In bottom photo, a South Vietnamese Marine colonel, the Assistant Commandant of the Vietnamese Marine Corps, briefs the press on the battle for Hue and prisoners captured by the South Vietnamese Marines.



Some estimates held that over 80 percent of the structures in the city sustained damage or were destroyed. Out of a population of about 140,000, more than 116,000 people were homeless and 5,800 were either dead or missing. According to most reports, Hue was a devastated city.[34*]

From the allied perspective, the struggle for Hue was a near thing, especially in the first few days. Only the failure of the North Vietnamese to overrun the *Mang Ca* and MACV compounds permitted the allies to retain a toehold in both the Citadel and the new city. With the holding of these two positions, the Americans and South Vietnamese were able to bring in reinforcements to mount a counteroffensive. The battalion commander of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, Lieutenant Colonel Marcus J. Gravel, observed that the enemy had oriented his defenses to fend off forces coming into the city: "When we got in and were able to stay in there in strength . . . we fought him from the inside out." Even then, if the enemy had blown the An Cuu Bridge across Route 1 on the first day, the Marines would not have been able to bring in their initial battalions and supplies into the city.[35]

Fortuitously for both the Americans and the South Vietnamese, the 1st Air Cavalry Division had arrived in northern I Corps before Tet and was in position to commit eventually a four-battalion brigade to the battle. Overcoming strong enemy opposition, including elements of three separate regiments, on 25 February, the 3d Brigade reached the walls of the Citadel, closing out the enemy avenues of approach to the city from the west. By this time, the American and South Vietnamese forces had overwhelming superiority and the North Vietnamese units, fighting a rear guard action, abandoned the struggle to hold on to the city. Major General Tolson, the 1st Cavalry commander, remembered that General Truong told him that if "I could ever get the Cav to the walls of Hue, the enemy would 'bug out.'" The problem was that it took 22 days for the 3d Brigade to fight its way there. Major Talman C. Budd II, the U.S. Marine advisor to the Vietnamese Marine Task Force, later wrote that if the 1st Cavalry had been reinforced or replaced "to enable sealing off the west wall sooner, . . .[it] would have shortened the struggle to reach the south wall."[36]

Although the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese harassed ship traffic in the Perfume River and the other water routes into the city, they made no serious attempt to close the waterways. Even with the An Cuu Bridge closed for over a week, the Marines had stockpiled and brought in enough supplies by LCU to support operations in both the Citadel and southern Hue. By 14 February, with a pontoon bridge in place over the canal, the road network into the new city, at least, was once more open. On two occasions, nevertheless, because the NVA sank one LCU and temporarily shut down the boat traffic on the Perfume River, Major Thompson in the Citadel stopped his battalion's advance because of a shortage of 106mm and 90mm rounds for his recoilless rifles and tanks.[37] If the enemy had made a stronger effort to cut both the water and land lines of communications, the outcome of the struggle for Hue would have been less predictable.

Despite marginal flying conditions that curtailed resupply missions and the haphazard attempts of the enemy to cut the lines of communications, the Marines eventually built up their logistic facilities in Hue. Marine helicopters eventually lifted more than 500 tons of all types of supplies into Hue while five Navy LCUs brought in another 400 tons. After the opening of Route 1 on 12 February, Marine trucks from Company B, 7th Motor Transportation Battalion carried the bulk of the resupplies into the city. More than 100 truck convoys made the round trip from Phu Bai to Hue.[38]

The 1st Marines first established its logistic support area (LSA) in the city next to the LCU ramp. Because of the LSA's exposure to enemy mortar fire and snipers, the Marines moved it to a South Vietnamese government complex next to the MACV compound. With the stockpiling of supplies resulting in a premium for space, the 1st Marines then relocated the LSA to the Tu Do Soccer Stadium several blocks to the east of the MACV buildings. On 22 February, Force Logistic Sup-

*Former *Washington Post* reporter Peter Braestrup, an eyewitness to the battle, cautioned in his book against overdramatic comparisons that appeared in the media of the Hue battle with World War II battles. According to Braestrup, "to the uninitiated or imaginative observer on the ground, it [Hue] suggested Seoul or Stalingrad. . . . Actually Hue got off fairly lightly by World War II or Korean War standards for three-week urban battles." Braestrup, *Big Story*, vol. 1, p. 202. For contrasting views of the Hue "massacres," see Douglas Pike, "Viet Cong Strategy, New Face of Terror," and D. Gareth Porter, "The 1968 Hue Massacre" in Hue Tet Folder, A&S Files, Indochina Archives. William D. Ehrhart a former Marine who served with the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines in Hue and has written extensively on the Vietnam experience, commented that he personally saw a lot of dead civilians, killed not by intent, "but only because they were in the midst of some of the fiercest fighting of the war." While admitting he did not know "what actually happened," Ehrhart believes "there is more room for doubt than your account (and most others suggest)." William D. Ehrhart, Comments on draft, dtd 23Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File). The authors of this work feel no need to change the description in the text.



Top is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190503 and bottom photo is courtesy of Col Talman C. Budd II, USMC (Ret)

The fighting for Hue caused extensive damage in the city. Top, the ruins of the Hue market place can be seen, while below is a view of the south wall of the Citadel taken from the west wall. The devastation upon the homes and buildings in between the two walls is obvious.





Top photo is courtesy of Col Talman C. Budd II, USMC (Ret) and bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190492

After the destruction of the bridges Marines depended upon river traffic for resupply. At top is an aerial view of the river after the battle with several damaged river craft. The picture was taken from a helicopter whose machine gun can be seen in the forefront. Below, Marine infantry have M16 rifles and M60 machine guns at the ready to return enemy sniper or harassing fires from on board a LCM (landing craft, mechanized) carrying 105mm ammunition.



port Group (FLSG) Alpha took over from the 1st Marines the running of the LSA.

In his after-action report, General LaHue, the Task Force X-Ray commander, observed that his command made few if any logistic innovations, but implemented some procedures "which were necessary and effective." According to LaHue, these usually "involved force feeding and preplanning." Because of the nature of the fighting, the 1st Marines and the committed battalions found it almost impossible to anticipate their needs in advance. The result was that their "requests escalated quickly from routine, to priority, to emergency." Based on the experience of the first four days of combat, Task Force X-Ray then prestaged a "balanced package of usually needed supplies. As soon as higher priority cargo was delivered, these would then be delivered without a request." The Task Force commander credited the logistic support with enabling the infantry battalions to clear the city.[39]

With the low ceilings limiting the number of helicopter flights, medical support and evacuation also operated under different and more difficult circumstances. It soon became apparent to the 1st Marines for the need of forward medical facilities. Colonel Hughes established the regimental aid station at the MACV compound with eight doctors. The regimental facility provided "definitive" emergency care and control and coordination of all medical evacuation. It also served as a battalion aid station for the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. The other two battalions, the 1st Battalion and 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, each had its own aid station. Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham, the 2d Battalion commander, declared that medical evacuation was "a throwback to World War II. [I] Had my doctor . . . one block behind the frontline treating the people right there."[40]

The Marines used trucks, mechanical mules, and any available transportation to carry the wounded back to the treatment facilities. According to the 1st Marines account, it averaged about two to three minutes to bring a wounded man from the battle site to an aid station. It took another two to three minutes from the aid station to the helicopter landing zone for further evacuation if required. Eventually, the regimental surgeon established two categories of wounded to be evacuated by helicopter—Class I, emergency medevac, weather permitting; and Class II, immediate evacuation. Army helicopters assisted in Class I while Marine helicopters had sole responsibility for the emergency Class II, "which they accomplished under severe weather conditions, and with great risk to the helicopter crews, often times flying with a 100-foot ceiling and 0 visibility."[41]

On the south side of the Perfume River, only two casualties who arrived alive at the forward aid stations died. These were two men from the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines who died minutes after their arrival, one of gunshot wounds (GSW)to the head and the other of a wound to the neck with "severance of both carotid arteries." Across the river, where the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines was dependant upon air or water evacuation, six men died "after emergency care while awaiting helicopter evacuation during severely inclement weather." The battalion surgeon declared, however, that four "would have died regardless of evacuation because of the nature of their wounds, and of the remaining two it is equivocal whether they could have been saved if evacuated quickly." In the Hue City battle, like all operations in Vietnam, despite the problems with helicopter evacuation, if a Marine reached an aid station alive, his chances of survival were close to 99 percent.[42*]

One other problem that the allies faced was population control. With the widespread destruction in the city, the estimated 116,000 homeless had to be fed and temporarily housed. Much of the population just fled the city and took refuge with relatives and friends in the surrounding villages. After the initial confusion, both U.S. and South Vietnamese agencies began to set up refugee centers. U.S. Army Major Jack E. Walker, a subsector advisor, recalled that his superior about a week after the NVA struck told him that he was now the "CORDS 'refugee man.'" According to Walker, he surveyed the situation and discovered that he had 5,000 refugees in a Catholic church and another 17,000 at Hue University. Another 40,000 displaced people were in the Citadel sector. Walker initially concerned himself with three tasks: restoring city services including water and power; eliminating health hazards including burying the dead; and securing food. With the assistance of the local Catholic hierarchy and American resources and personnel, Walker and his people began attacking all of these problems. By the end of February, a full-time refugee administrator was in place and local government slowly began to function once more.[43]

*Brigadier General Michael P. Downs observed that the 99 percent chance of survival after reaching a battalion aid station was probably true after 4 February. He stated he had at least two Marines of his company before that date die of wounds after being evacuated to an aid station. Downs Comments. Those two Marines, however, may have been the two who died referred to in the text.



Top photo is courtesy of Col Talman C. Budd II, USMC (Ret) and the bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A372930

The civilian population of Hue was caught in the middle of the battle. Top, survivors from the house-to-house fighting in the Citadel attempt to make themselves as comfortable as possible on a dirt embankment, apparently in one of the parks of the old city. Below, Marines lead and assist South Vietnamese refugees carrying what belongings they can away from the combat area.



In the first two weeks there was hardly any semblance of public order. The authors of the South Vietnamese official history of Tet wrote: "Thievery and looting were widespread. War victims stole from their fellow sufferers. All deserted houses were emptied of valuables. Robbed victims sought to steal from others." At least one Marine battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel, complained about the "ARVN looting behind us."[44]

More serious, from an American perspective, were reports that U.S. Marines were also involved in the looting. The Associated Press was supposed to have a photograph of an American soldier or Marine carrying a large painting under his arm. A Swiss newspaperman reported to MACV that he saw "numerous breaches of discipline which would not be tolerated in the Swiss Army." He claimed that a Marine tried to sell him a Longines watch and that he saw other Marines help themselves to photographic equipment from a partially destroyed store. The newspaper man came across another group of Marines near the Royal Palace manning a strongpoint, and "drinking whiskey, cognac, and beer, and cooking chickens." Moreover, he observed several Marines "amusing themselves by shooting at dogs, cats and chickens." A CORDS official told Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker that Marines vandalized the offices of the manager and deputy manager of the Hue power plant, alleging they took as well "whiskey, piasters, and dollars."[45]

On 26 February, General Westmoreland ordered both Generals Abrams and Cushman to give their "personal attention" to this potentially explosive issue. In turn, General Cushman asked both the commanding generals of Task Force X-Ray, Brigadier General LaHue, and the 1st Marine Division, Major General Donn J. Robertson, to inform him of all measures taken by members of their commands to avoid such incidents: "Looting obviously cannot be tolerated, and we must insure that every step is taken to prevent it. Officers and NCOs must be held responsible for looting by their subordinates." For his part, General Abrams assigned the MACV (Forward) staff judge advocate to begin a formal investigation. At the same time, General Robertson sent an attorney from the 1st Division legal office, Captain Bernard A. Allen, to Hue to assist in the probe.[46]

On 2 March 1968, General Abrams reported to Westmoreland the results of the investigation. He first disposed of the question of the Associated Press photograph. According to the AP Bureau heads in Vietnam, they knew of no such picture. They did remember a photograph taken before Tet of a 1st Cavalry soldier carrying a religious painting of the Virgin Mary in a sector south of Da Nang. After interviewing all commanders, newsmen, and CORDS personnel, the investigators concluded that "probably some small articles were looted by the Marines . . . however, these reported incidents were in extreme contrast to extensive and systematic looting by ARVN troops and civilians." Captain Allen learned that ARVN troops employed trucks to carry away their booty. Colonel Khoa, the Thua Thien Province Chief, had received no formal complaints from South Vietnamese citizens against the Marines. General Abrams observed: "At this time, investigation has failed to produce sufficient evidence upon which to base prosecution for any instance of looting by U.S. personnel."[47*]

Abrams generally commended the Marine commanders. He observed that Colonel Hughes of the 1st Marines very early took "positive measures to deter looting." On 4 February, Hughes told all officers and NCOs that "looting and pillage would not be tolerated." He directed that battalion and company commanders carry out periodic "shakedowns" of personnel. Many valuables were turned into the regimental CP and returned to the rightful owner. Hughes did authorize the commandeering and "cannibalization of vehicles as it became necessary to transport casualties."** He also ordered the shooting of dogs, cats, and pigs because the animals were "eating bodies, both of U.S. and [Vietnamese] . . . which could not be immediately retrieved because of the tactical situation." Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham stated that in the University his men used blankets and broke windows "to avoid fragmentation from incoming rounds." General Abrams concluded "Marine commanders appear to have taken reasonable measures to prevent looting and needless destruction."[48]

Obviously in a fluid situation and close-quarter street fighting such as Hue, commanders did not have absolute control or know all of the activities of their men. One Marine lance corporal reported, "anything that was of any value we took . . . to keep for souvenirs and stuff." He mentioned random destruction caused by Marines in the University of microscopes and other

*Brigadier General Paul G. Graham, the former 1st Marine Divisions Operations Officer or G–3, commented that looting "was not a problem as far as the Division was concerned . . . ." Graham Comments

**Peter Braestrup, the former *Washington Post* reporter commented that he remembered reading a sign "'Hotel Company Kicks Ass' . . . on a seized van, used to haul supplies." Peter Braestrup, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94–Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File).

laboratory equipment. The lance corporal was particularly amused by the troops seizing stray vehicles such as motor scooters, trucks, and even jeeps: "A grunt . . . would just jump on it and start riding it around the streets . . . that was pretty funny—right in the middle of this war riding up and down the streets in motor scooters and even a 1964 black Mercedes goes flying down the street filled up with a bunch of Marines in it." A Navy corpsman with the Marines recorded in his diary: "Looting is widespread. The ARVN's wait until the Marines secure an area and then move in to loot. The Marines do well for themselves also."[49]

Although admitting to the validity of some of these accounts, Marine commanders in Hue believed that their men acted with general restraint considering all the temptations confronting them. Five years later, Lieutenant Colonel Gravel recalled, "we took things to our use; I wouldn't kid you about that. I saw some things and I saw that they were returned." He remembered: "We used bedding, we used food, we used alcohol that was there; but there was no looting to one's own advantage. There were a couple of attempts at it, but word got around and I daresay there was damned little, if any." In a similar vein, Lieutenant Colonel Cheatham and his company commanders made much the same case. At the Marine Corps Schools, in July 1973, Captain Meadows, the Company G commander, related: "We did take things for our use . . . blankets, food, water. We must have taken every candle in that side of the city for illumination for our own use at night. These things—you want to call it looting? O.K., we looted." Despite some admitted pilfering of small items such as watches and money, all of the company commanders denied there was any real problem. As Captain Meadows concluded: "Your troops don't have time to pick up big things to carry them around. They have other, more pressing things [to do]."[50]

Some independent accounts supported the contention of the Marine commanders that their troops acted with reasonable forbearance in the city. The

Marine PFC James M. Jones from Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines assists a Vietnamese child to climb out of a window of her house to escape the house-to-house fighting in the new city. Marines did what they could for the hapless civilian population caught up in the fighting.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371127



Washington Post carried one story describing Marines holed up in a residence that obviously belonged to a wealthy man. The house contained a fully stocked liquor cabinet, furniture, television set, and various other furnishings. About 0700, as the Marines sat around eating their breakfast of cold C–Rations, the owner's servants arrived with a note asking permission to remove the household goods. It took four servants three round trips to carry out the items. The only things that were missing were the beer that the Marines had drunk and one broken bottle of Johnny Walker whisky. In another report, an American volunteer worker, who had been visiting Vietnamese friends in Hue when the offensive erupted, described his rescue by Marines from Company B, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. His friends provided him with sanctuary in their house while the North Vietnamese held the city. As the fighting intensified, the "family heard soldiers firing nearby" and hid the American under one of the beds. According to the newspaper account, one Marine reached the side of the house and shouted: "Are there any VC in there?" The volunteer scrambled outside and identified himself. An unbelieving Captain Fernandez Jennings, Jr., the company commander, wondered aloud about the Marine asking if there were VC inside. When assured that was the case, Jennings muttered to himself, "It's a great war."[51]

The suddenness and the extent of the enemy offensive in Hue caught both the South Vietnamese and American commands offstride. At first underestimating the strength of the enemy in Hue, the allies sent too few troops to drive the attackers out. Although the South Vietnamese and U.S. commands in I Corps eventually deployed additional units piecemeal into the Citadel and the southern city and inserted the 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division to the west, command and control and coordination remained a problem until the last weeks of the operation. In a sense, Task Force X-Ray, the 1st ARVN Division, and the 3d Brigade all fought their own battles in isolation from one another. Outside of General Cushman of III MAF and General Abrams, MACV (Forward), there was not even an overall American, let alone single commander of the Hue campaign. Both Cushman and Abrams were at too high a level and distracted by Khe Sanh to focus much of their attention, except periodically, to the Hue situation. From his headquarters at the *Mang Ca* compound, General Truong, the 1st ARVN Division commander, did control the South Vietnamese effort in the Citadel. Major Talman C. Budd II, the U.S. Marine advisor to the Vietnamese Marine Task Force A, observed, however, that the lack of an overall commander resulted in no general battle plan and competition for supporting fires, air, and logistic support. A Task Force X-Ray staff officer sardonically remarked that by the time Army Brigadier General Davis of the 1st Cavalry Division became the Hue coordinator, "he didn't have anything to coordinate, but he had the name." The command relationships in northern I Corps under MACV (Forward) were tenuous at best.[52*]

With the date approaching for the end of his stay at Phu Bai in early March, General Abrams provided General Westmoreland his assessment of the enemy situation in the north. Abrams was less concerned about Khe Sanh, but worried about the NVA using the A Shau Valley and Route 547 leading from the valley to "turn our flank." He also expressed some anxiety about the recent move of the *803d NVA Regiment* into the Hue vicinity. Abrams stated that and the "continuing movement of [NVA] replacements to coastal plains supports my belief that Hue is the objective he [the enemy] would most like to have." The MACV [Forward] commander acknowledged, however, that the NVA might "settle for an objective of less importance should the opportunity present itself." He believed both sides were fighting for time and that "both sides require time to overcome manpower and logistical deficiencies." In the long run, however, he believed that time was on the allied side. General Cushman and General Westmoreland concurred in Abrams assessment. All three American commanders believed that the recapture of Hue was only a lull before the North Vietnamese launched another wave of attacks.[53]

*See Chapter 13 for further discussion of command relations in northern I Corps.

PART III
AFTER TET, KHE SANH, AND MINI-TET

CHAPTER 13

Post-Tet in I Corps

The Immediate Ramifications of the Tet Offensive—Readjustment in I Corps
Readjustments in the U.S. I Corps Command Structure—Planning for the Future
March Operations in the DMZ Sector—March Operations in the Rest of I Corps—Regaining the Initiative

The Immediate Ramifications of the Tet Offensive

By the end of February and the beginning of March with the securing of the city of Hue, the enemy's countrywide Tet offensive had about shot its initial bolt. According to American estimates, the Communists lost about half of their attacking force, more than 40,000 from an estimated 84,000 men. In I Corps alone, from January through March 1968, Lieutenant General Robert Cushman, the III MAF Commander, later calculated that allied forces killed over 30,000 of the enemy, the equivalent of 74 infantry battalions.[1*]

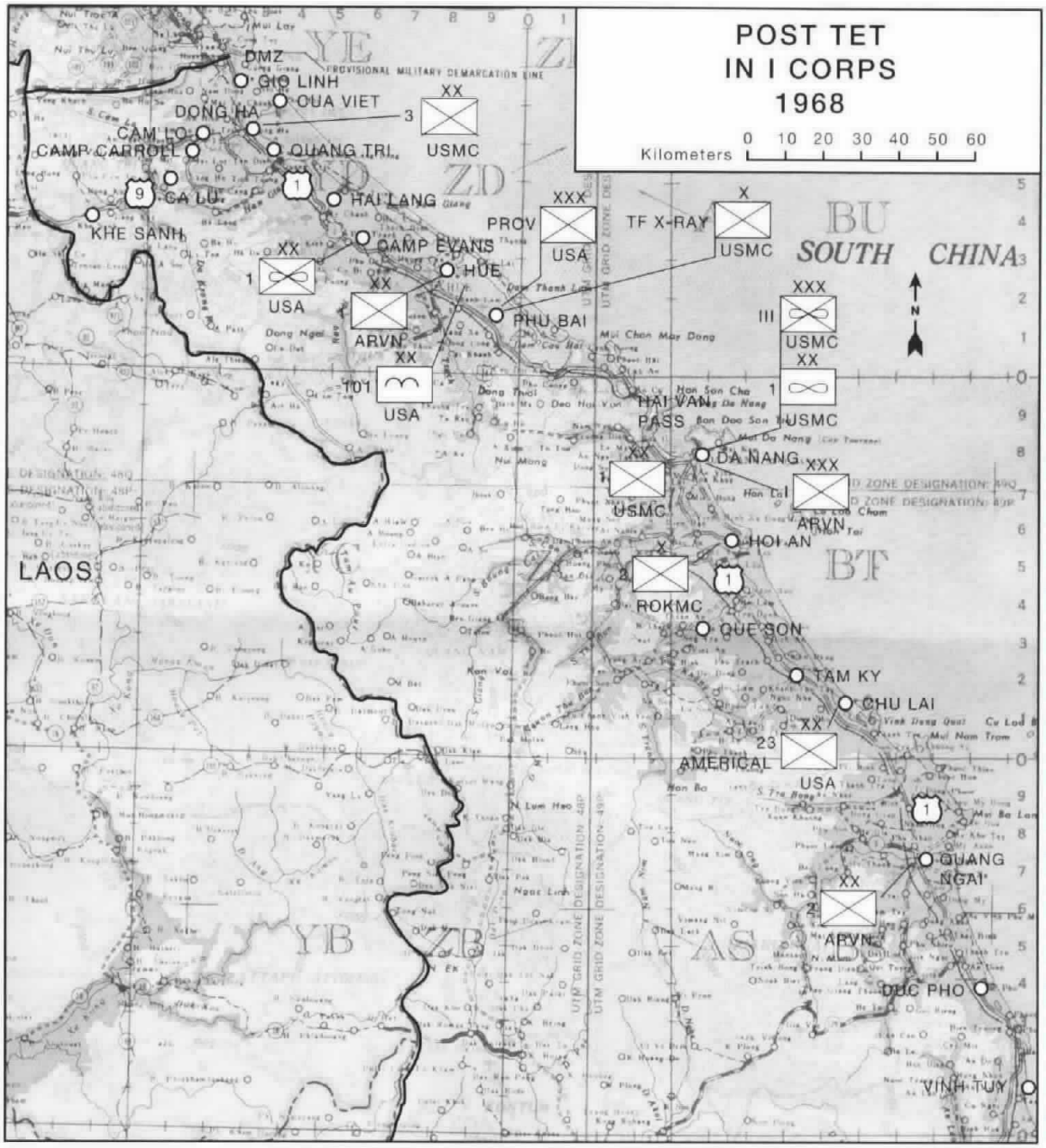
The Communist command, itself, admitted to several shortcomings. As early as 1 February 1968, the Central Office of South Vietnam, the Viet Cong governing body, issued a circular to its subordinate commands. According to the Communist leadership, "we failed to seize a number of primary objectives and to completely destroy mobile and defensive units of the enemy." The memorandum blamed the Viet Cong military forces for failure "to hold the occupied areas," and, moveover, held the political cadre accountable for not motivating the "people to stage uprisings and break the enemy oppressive control." In *Military Region 5*, which included both Quang Ngai City and Da Nang, the Communist headquarters conceded that its troops and cadre within the cities were not strong enough to assist the main force units outside of the cities. In an official history, the Communist author acknowledged that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese attacking units "did not meet the basic requirements that had been set forth." Contrary to the enemy expectations, the South Vietnamese Army had not disintegrated and in many sectors acquitted itself reasonably well, especially on the defensive.[2]

Still the tenor of the Communist communiques was one of defiance. They all claimed the achievement of great victories and made references to final victory for their cause. At the same time, however, the enemy leadership warned their supporters: "Our people's struggle has stepped into an extremely tense and fierce phase and is developing very rapidly." They no longer spoke of a short-term campaign, but that "the General Offensive and General Uprising will not last for only a few days, but that it is a phase of a general attack against the enemy." One phase was over and another was to begin.[3]

The American military was also examining the consequences of the enemy's offensive. While confident that Tet was a major military defeat for the Communists, U.S. commanders were well aware of the cost to their side. Allied casualties during the fighting totaled in excess of 12,000, with about two-thirds suffered by the ARVN. The battle of Hue was a near thing, especially in the first few days. While expecting an attack, especially in the north around Khe Sanh or possibly the DMZ, General Westmoreland and the MACV staff had underestimated the breadth and extent of the enemy general offensive. Some 600,000 civilians were now refugees, about 100,000 in I Corps alone. The pacification effort had sustained a major setback. In mid-February, Marine Brigadier General John R. Chaisson, the director of the MACV Combat Operations Center, observed in a letter home, "the damage in the cities and to the economy is staggering. ARVN will be somewhat less than effective for weeks." He then wrote, however, " . . . there is a general tightening up of everything, and if the guys on top don't panic this could be the turning point of the war—even though he [the enemy] initiated it for us." Chaisson expressed the sentiments of many of the MACV commanders including both Generals Westmoreland and Cushman.[4]

In Washington, the Johnson administration also began its reevaluation of the Vietnam War in light of the enemy offensive. Other factors also clouded the situation. On 23 January, North Korean gunboats captured the U.S. intelligence ship, *USS Pueblo* (AGER–2),

*Cushman's statistics include figures before and after Tet and, therefore, give a somewhat distorted picture of the enemy's Tet casualties. It, nevertheless, is indicative of the intensity of the fighting in the I Corps sector during the Tet period and of the enemy's losses.



off the Korean coast and took the officers and crew prisoner.* In response, the administration called up 14,000 Navy and Air Force Reserves, so as not to divert any active forces from the Southeast Asia battlefield. Continued domestic opposition to the war, often led by influential members of his own party, also served to distract the President's attention. Although forewarned about a possible enemy offensive, "it was more massive," than President Johnson, like Westmoreland, "had anticipated."[5]

*The North Koreans claimed territorial waters off their coast up to 20 miles, while the U.S. only recognized Korean territorial waters of 3 miles. According to the official inquiry the *Pueblo* was boarded approximately 15 miles off the Korean coast. CinCPacFlt, Findings of Fact, Opinion, etc. of Court of Inquiry, Case of *Pueblo* (AGER–2), n.d., *Pueblo* File, Post 1Jan46 Comd File (OAB, NHD). See also Center of Naval History, Comments on draft, dtd Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File) and VAdm Edwin B. Hooper, *Mobility, Support, Endurance, A Story of Naval Operational Logistics in the Vietnam War, 1965–1968* (Washington: Naval Historical Division, 1972), p. 219.

If possible, the mood in Washington was grimmer than that in Saigon. While the President rejected proposals by the Joint Chiefs to intensify the air war over Haiphong and Hanoi, he was willing to rush ground reinforcements, if necessary, to prevent the fall of the Marine base at Khe Sanh. On 3 February, at the behest of the President, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Earle G. Wheeler, asked Westmoreland, "if there is any reinforcement or help that we can give you." In reply, Westmoreland only requested another squadron of C–130 cargo aircraft and air-drop equipment. At the same time, Westmoreland asked his staff to make a study of the long-range requirements. At this point, Wheeler rather tartly observed that the long-range could wait, "we can handle only one major problem at a time." The Chairman emphasized that the Joint Chiefs and the President were concerned about Westmoreland's "immediate requirements stemming from the present situation in Vietnam." In another cable, Wheeler warned the MACV commander: "The United States Government is not prepared to accept a defeat in South Vietnam. In summary, if you need more troops, ask for them."[6]

These exchange of messages between Westmoreland and Wheeler developed into a strange colloquy in which the Chairman eventually maneuvered Westmoreland into requesting significant additional forces which would require a callup of the Reserves. On 12 February, at a meeting at the White House, however, President Johnson delayed his final decision, but approved the immediate deployment of a brigade of the U.S. Army 82d Airborne Division and the 27th Marines to Vietnam. Both the Army Brigade and the Marine regiment were to reinforce General Cushman's forces in I Corps.[7*]

Readjustment in I Corps

By the end of February, the reinforcements for I Corps were in place or on their way. On 10 and 12 February, the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John E. Greenwood, at Hawaii embarked on board three Navy ships, the USS *Vancouver* (LPD 2), the USS *Bexar* (APA 237), and the *Washburn* (AKA 108). Originally scheduled to participate in two landing exercises on Okinawa, the newly formed BLT received a change of orders while at sea on 13 February, as a result of the President's decision, to proceed to Da Nang. Between 14 and 21 February, the rest of RLT (Regimental Landing Team) 27 deployed by sea and air from Camp Pendleton, California to Da Nang. U.S. Air Force Military Airlift Command planes flew more than 3,300 men of the regiment together with 1,196 short tons of their equipment from California to Vietnam. By 17 February, the 27th Marines headquarters, under Colonel Adolph G. Schwenk, Jr., together with those of BLTs 2/27, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Louis J. Bacher, and 3/27, under Lieutenant Colonel Tullis J. Woodham, Jr., opened their command posts at the Da Nang base. The forces arriving as part of RLT 27 also included personnel from the artillery battalion, 2d Battalion, 13th Marines, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Rhys J. Phillips, Jr. On 21 February, the USS *Thomaston* (LSD 28) departed San Diego with the surface elements of the RLT, some 200 personnel and over 5,000 tons of equipment for Vietnam. By the end of the month, the 1st Battalion had joined the other two battalions of the regiment at Da Nang. General Cushman later declared that he had not known the 27th Marines was available and that he had not requested them, but that they arrived in "response to overall requirements set by Westmoreland." As the 1st Marine Division assistant division commander and Task Force X-Ray commander, Brigadier General Foster C. LaHue, remembered, however, III MAF was "happy to get them [RLT 27]."[8]

Throughout this period, General Westmoreland continued to deploy U.S. Army units north. From mid-January through the end of February, MACV reinforced III MAF with over 20,000 Army troops in I Corps, including support units. The combat forces included the 1st Air Cavalry Division headquarters and two brigades, two brigades of the 101st Airborne Division, and the 3d Brigade of the 82d Airborne Division, which, like the 27th Marines, had just arrived in Vietnam from the United States. First located at Chu Lai in Quang Tin Province under the Americal Division, elements of the 82d Airborne brigade then joined the 1st Marine Division Task Force X-Ray in the Phu Bai Vital Area in Thua Thien Province.[9]

By the end of February, III MAF numbered nearly 129,000 officers and men, an increase of nearly 12,000 over the previous month. These figures included over 82,000 Marines and nearly 45,000 U.S. Army personnel. In Quang Tri Province, encompassing U.S. units at Khe Sanh, the DMZ sector, and south of Quang Tri City, there were 16 maneuver battalions (infantry, amphibian tractor, and tank), 13 Marine and 3 Army.

*Chapter 27 will go into further detail on the manpower decisions of February 1968 and the question about the activation of the Reserves.

Sixteen battalions, 12 Army and 4 Marine, operated in Thua Thien Province. Seven Marine battalions, including the 3d Amphibian Tractor battalion, stayed in the Da Nang area of operations while five Army battalions from the U.S. Army Americal Division continued Operation Wheeler/Wallowa in the Nui Loc Son sector. Of the remaining eight battalions of the Americal, four were at Chu Lai and the rest split between Quang Ngai and Duc Pho.[10]

With the possible exception of the Khe Sanh sector and continuing harassment of Marine positions along the eastern DMZ, by the end of the month, the enemy tempo of operations throughout I Corps had diminished. Even along the DMZ, the intensity of the NVA attacks no longer matched those at the beginning of February. In fact, the number of ground assaults in February actually declined while the NVA confined most of its activity to artillery, rocket, and mortar bombardment. Taking advantage of the apparent lull in the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong Tet offensive, the American commanders continued to make adjustments and to take the fight to the enemy throughout the I Corps sector.[11]

In southern I Corps, the Americal Division continued with Operation Muscatine in Quang Ngai Province. For the most part, the Army units experienced relatively light contact except for two significant clashes with a VC battalion. In the first, on 12 February, Americal Task Force Barker conducted a combined operation with the 2d ARVN Division and engaged in a five-hour firefight. The Americal task force reported killing 78 of the enemy with the loss of 1 U.S. soldier. Eleven days later, on the 23d, Company A, 3d Battalion, 1st Infantry apparently encountered the same enemy unit with almost the same results. The Americans claimed to have killed 68 of the enemy at a cost of the lives of 2 U.S. soldiers. For the entire month, the Americal Division in the operation killed over 270 of the enemy and sustained casualties of 13 killed and 124 wounded. The division also reported recovering 35 individual enemy weapons and accidentally killing 8 innocent civilians caught in the crossfire between American and VC units.[12]

Further north, in the Wheeler/Wallowa area of operations, the Americal Division also accounted for a significant number of enemy casualties. On 9 February, in the Que Son Valley, elements of the division engaged a battalion of the *29th NVA Regiment*. In little over seven hours, the American soldiers killed more than 200 of the enemy and recovered 53 individual and 13 crew-served weapons. Near the end of the month, 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry and a troop of the 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry ran into another fairly large Communist unit and accounted for 148 enemy dead and recovered 32 individual and 9 crew-served weapons. For the month, the Army units in the operation sustained casualties of 98 dead and 455 wounded while in turn killing nearly 1,200 of the enemy, taking 24 prisoners, and recovering 274 individual and 37 crew-served weapons. The division acknowledged that 92 "innocent civilians" also inadvertently met their death as a result of the operation. Despite the two battalion-sized actions, Operation Wheeler/Wallowa mostly involved numerous contacts between American and NVA/VC small-unit patrols.[13]

The war in the 1st Marine Division Da Nang area of operations, especially after the repulse of the *2d NVA Division*'s offensive in the second week of February, also reverted to a small-unit war. For the Marine units in the TAOR it was a period of retrenchment and readjustment. By the end of the month, the newly arrived 27th Marines took over the sectors formerly held by the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines and the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Bacher, the commander of the 2d Battalion, 27th Marines, remembered that when he arrived he was met by a

A Marine combat engineer carefully disarms a booby-trapped 105mm artillery round south of Da Nang.
Abel Collection





Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A708081

Mines and explosive devices were among the greatest dangers to Marines at Da Nang. Two members of Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines administer to a fallen comrade who had just tripped a "surprise explosive device."

lieutenant colonel from III MAF who took him to headquarters, "where I was given orders to report to the 1st Marine Division." At the same time, "troops and equipment of 2/27 were being trucked southwest of Da Nang to the CP [command post] of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines." After about three or four days, the 3d Battalion departed for Phu Bai and "2/27 assumed the mission and TAOR" of the latter battalion. The 3d Battalion, 27th Marines relieved the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines which also left for Phu Bai. Lieutenant Colonel Woodham, the 3d Battalion commander, recalled that his unit's main responsibility was the patrolling of the Rocket Belt.[14]

The 7th Marines and the Korean Marine Brigade remained responsible for the southern and western area of operations, including An Hoa. At An Hoa, Colonel Ross R. Miner, the 7th Marines commander, later remarked that his 3d Battalion there was "barely keeping its head above water." The enemy had closed the land lines of communication and resupply could be carried out only by air.[15]

Indicative of the demoralizing characteristic of the 1st Division war in the Da Nang TAOR, nearly 54 percent of all division casualties in February were as a result of mines and explosive devices. Lieutenant Colonel Woodham later observed his area of operations contained "the highest saturation of mines and booby traps in the history of land warfare."[16*]

*It must be remembered that the percentage figure above relates to all 1st Marine Division casualties, not only those at Da Nang. For February 1968, the 1st Marine Division suffered a total of 369 KIA and 2,400 wounded. Of that total, 142 of the dead and 1,100 of the wounded were sustained by TF X-Ray in the battle for Hue City. Mine warfare and explosive devices played only a small role in that battle. It would be safe to assume then that the percentage of 1st Marine Division casualties at Da Nang as a result of enemy mines would be even higher than the 54 percent quoted above. 1st MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, p. 7. See also Chapter 12.

With the securing of Hue in late February, Task Force X-Ray at Phu Bai prepared to take the offensive to open Route 1 between Da Nang and Phu Bai, which had been closed since Tet. On 26 February, Colonel Robert D. Bohn's 5th Marines began Operation Houston in the Phu Loc and Hai Van Pass sectors. To carry out the operation, Bohn received the two battalions from Da Nang relieved by the 27th Marines, his 3d Battalion and the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines.* In addition, Brigadier General LaHue, the Task Force X-Ray commander, provided the 5th Marines with operational control over three U.S. Army battalions, the 1st and 3d Battalions, 327th Infantry and the 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry.[17]

While the infantry provided security in Operation Houston, Seabees, Marine engineers, and the U.S. Army 35th Engineer Battalion worked on the repairs of Route 1 and its bridges and culverts. According to Marine reports, the VC and NVA during the Tet offensive had damaged or destroyed 20 bridges and 26 culverts along Route 1, largely between Hai Van Pass and Phu Bai. Oddly enough, the enemy pioneers and demolition teams caused relatively little damage in the Hai Van Pass itself, where Route 1 was most vulnerable. On 29 February, the engineers completed the repair work on the final section of Route 1 between Hai Van Pass and Phu Loc. Technically Route 1 was now open throughout the entire length of I Corps. III MAF, nevertheless, postponed the first road convoy from Da Nang to Phu Bai until March.[18]

With the end of Operation Hue City in sight, General LaHue planned to use the 1st Marines to operate along the area northeast of Phu Bai in order to secure the water route of communication from the mouth of the Perfume River to Hue City. Although the NVA and Viet Cong during the battle for the city, occasionally harassed river traffic along the Perfume River, they never succeeded in cutting this vital logistic lifeline for the allied forces in the city and at Phu Bai. On 12 February, Task Force X-Ray had taken over from the 3d Marine Division the responsibility for the protection of the Naval Support Activity at the Col Co/Tan My LST ramp at the mouth of the Perfume River. From the LST ramp, supplies were either transhipped by truck to Phu Bai or loaded on board LCUs and smaller river craft for delivery at the LCU Ramp in Hue City. During the month of February, enemy gunners struck 44 of the smaller naval craft and destroyed two LCUs.[19]

With the closing of Route 1 during much of February and the continuing arrival of Army units in Thua Thien and Quang Tri Provinces, resupply by sea became even more critical. One Marine staff officer later remembered that when the 1st Air Cavalry and the 101st Airborne units first deployed north, "it was touch and go." Fortunately, the Army's 1st Logistical Command together with III MAF and a Navy pontoon causeway unit had already made preparations for the development of a logistic over-the-shore facility along the coast running parallel to Hai Lang in southern Quang Tri Province. Army logistic planners estimated that the Army forces would require, "3,600 tons of supplies daily in an area where existing supply lines were just barely able to keep up with requirements." While work began in February, the new logistical facility, called Wunder Beach, did not become fully operational until mid-March.[20]

During February, the 1st Air Cavalry Division continued Operation Jeb Stuart in northern Thua Thien and southern Quang Tri Provinces. While operating to some extent in enemy *Base Areas 114* and *101*, the division confined most of its activity to the battle for Hue City, the establishment of Camp Evans, and the buildup of its forces near Quang Tri City at Hai Lang.** Indicative of the growing influence of the Army in this sector, the 1st Air Cavalry took over more of the 3d Marine Division area of operations. On 16 February, the Cavalry's 1st Brigade assumed operational control of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines and responsibility for the 3d Marines' former Osceola II tactical area near Quang Tri. While the 3d Marines, with only rear echelon troops attached to it, still remained accountable for the interior defense of the new Quang Tri base and airfield, the Army's 1st Brigade now provided the protection to the approaches for both the Marine base and the new Army bases at Hai Lang and Wunder Beach.[21]

*The other two battalions of the 5th Marines, the 1st and 2d Battalions, were attached to the 1st Marines in Operation Hue City. See Chapter 12.

**During the month, the 1st Air Cavalry consisted of its 1st Brigade at Hai Lang; the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division at Camp Evans; and its 3d Brigade taking part in the battle for Hue, although still nominally part of Operation Jeb Stuart. The division's participation in the battle for Hue, which was included in its overall statistics for Jeb Stuart, accounted for nearly half of the 1st Cavalry's 1,167 casualties for the month as well the reportedly 2,000 losses it inflicted on the enemy for the month. The 1st Air Cavalry's 2d Brigade was slated to relieve the 101st Airborne's 2d Brigade at Camp Evans in March. III MAF ComdC, Feb68; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year, 1968," pp. 19–20. See also Chapter 12.



Photo is from the Abel Collection

A Navy LCU (landing craft, utility) arrives at the Dong Ha LCU ramp laden with drums of asphalt. Although the NVA made some attempts to close the Cua Viet, the Navy had established Task Force Clearwater to convoy river traffic from the coast to Dong Ha.

Another reason for the relief of the 3d Marines at Quang Tri was to free the regiment to assume control over the ground operations to safeguard the vital Cua Viet water passageway to Dong Ha. With the interdiction of much of Route 1 during and after Tet, the lifeline of the Marine forces in the north depended more and more upon the sea and to a somewhat lesser extent upon air resupply. During February, III MAF sent by ship from Da Nang to Dong Ha over 45,700 short tons of material as compared to 342 tons arriving at Dong Ha by air. With the disruption of the land lines of communication and the occasional enemy interdiction of the Cua Viet, the 3d Marine Division reported that the "division's [supply] requirement fell short." The division especially lacked communications equipment and repair parts. In order to meet the division's needs, III MAF limited shipment to those supplies considered "combat essential."* With the approval of MACV, General Cushman also curtailed the shipment of "Dye-marker" material and halted all construction work on the barrier. Still Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins, the 3d Marine Division commander, recalled that in mid-February at a very critical juncture, the division received for three days large "shipments of cement and culverts from Da Nang." According to Tompkins, he sent an angry message to III MAF to "delay the culverts and cement in favor of food and ammunition."[22]

* Lieutenant Colonel Otto Lehrack, who as a captain commanded Company I, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, commented that during this period resupply was difficult for the Marines of his battalion: "We took helmets, flak jackets and boots off our dead. I knew a Marine in Graves Registration who was my only reliable source for compasses." LtCol Otto Lehrack, Comments on draft, dtd 19Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Lehrack Comments.

Despite certain "snafus" such as the unwanted cement, the American command quickly took steps to ensure the logistic support to its forces in the north. In the Cua Viet sector, on 24 February, the Navy established Task Force Clearwater under III MAF to coordinate river traffic and convoys of Navy craft from the Cua Viet facility to Dong Ha.* During the month, enemy gunners killed 7 sailors, wounded 47 more, and damaged 27 Navy vessels. On 27 February, for example, an enemy B–40 rocket-propelled grenade struck an LCU on the Cua Viet laden with explosives resulting in the disabling of both the LCU and an escort patrol boat. Most of the convoyed vessels, however, completed the trip without incident.[23]

The 3d Marine Division also took measures to safeguard the Cua Viet and attempt to keep North Vietnamese regulars and VC main force units out of the northeastern quadrant of Quang Tri Province above the Cua Viet. On 29 February, Major General Tompkins combined the two operations in the sector, Operation Napoleon and Operation Saline into one operation, Operation Napoleon/Saline under the control of the 3d Marines. Colonel Milton A. Hull, who had assumed command of the 3d Marines on 18 February from Colonel Joseph E. Lo Prete, moved his command post on the 29th, from the Quang Tri airfield to the Cua Viet facility and collocated it with the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion.[24]

While Lieutenant Colonel Edward R. Toner, the commander of the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, during February nominally had operational control of both Operations Napoleon and Saline, his concerns were mainly with the activities of his own battalion. In February, during Operation Napoleon, the amphibian tractor battalion, with one attached rifle company, limited itself to patrols generally around the Cua Viet Naval Facility at the mouth of the river. While ground contact remained light, the enemy subjected the base to heavy incoming rocket and artillery fire and continued efforts to interdict the river with uneven results. For the month in Operation Napoleon, the Marines sustained casualties of 4 dead and 30 wounded while accounting for 79 of the enemy.[25]

The SLF Bravo battalion, BLT 3/1, under Lieutenant Colonel Max McQuown, in Operation Saline, operating for the most part above, but occasionally below, the Cua Viet, on the other hand, continued to encounter elements of the *803d NVA Regiment*.** In February, the battalion killed over 270 of the enemy, took 18 prisoners, and recovered 72 individual and 35 crew-served enemy weapons. According to both Marine and ARVN sources, since 29 January, the allies had killed 1,000 enemy troops in the Cua Viet region and had prevented an attack on Dong Ha.[26]

While the watch on the Cua Viet remained somewhat tenuous, the enemy forces continued to mount pressure on Khe Sanh and still posed a threat to the Marine positions south of the DMZ in Operations Kentucky and Lancaster II.*** As one 3d Marine Division staff officer remarked, the NVA in the border region, "always had someone pressing us somewhere." In the 4th Marines Operation Lancaster II, after an ambush of a convoy near Camp Carroll on Route 9 in early February and a company engagement near Ca Lu, the North Vietnamese forces largely limited themselves to artillery and mortar bombardments of Marine positions. On 28 February, a NVA antiaircraft gun shot down a Marine CH–46 not far from Ca Lu resulting in the death of 22 Marines. For the month

*Task Force Clearwater consisted of 20 river patrol boats (PBRs), reinforced with monitors, armored river craft, PACVs (Patrol Air Cushioned Vehicles), landing craft, and minesweepers. The Task Force was responsible not only for the Cua Viet, but also the Perfume River further south which provided access to the sea for the city of Hue. It maintained its headquarters at Mobile Base II, a floating barge complex, located first at Tan My and then moved north to the Cua Viet. Edward J. Marolda, *By Sea, Air, and Land, An Illustrated History of the U.S. Navy and the War in Southeast Asia* (Washington: Naval Historical Center, 1994), p. 188. See also Chapter 28.

**See Chapter 7 for description of the BLT's activities during late January and early February in Operation Badger Catch/Saline. In the final stages of the battle of Hue, the South Vietnamese Marines captured North Vietnamese troops from the *803d NVA Regiment*. See Chapter 12. Colonel Max McQuown, the then BLT commander, later recalled two significant operations south of the Cua Viet. In the first case, the BLT attached reconnaissance platoon, operating south of the river, sighted NVA formations. Employing LVTs and LCUs to cross the river, the rest of the battalion supported by tanks surrounded the NVA in a village. With the tanks lighting up the area with their Xenon lights and after an artillery and mortar bombardment, McQuown launched a night attack and secured the hamlet. While the battalion remained south of the river, the reconnaissance platoon spotted another group of NVA in a neighboring village and the battalion secured this hamlet as well. Before the BLT returned to its base area north of the river, the Marines searched another village and collected a large number of young males in civilian clothes. Suspecting they were North Vietnamese, the Marines turned them over to the South Vietnamese. Col Max McQuown, Comments on draft, dtd 22Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter McQuown Comments.

***See Chapter 14 for description of operations at Khe Sanh and Chapter 7 for Operations Kentucky and Lancaster II in early February.



Top is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A801311 and bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A650034

Top, Marines from BLT 2/4 taking part in Operation Lancaster II exchange fire under smoke cover across an open field with North Vietnamese troops about 2,000 meters north of Camp Carroll. Below, Marines from the same battalion and operation rush across open ground with two of the troops carrying 3.5-inch rockets.





Photo is from the Abel Collection

A Marine M48 tank from the 3d Tank Battalion rumbles past a battle-damaged church just east of Con Thien. Marines from Con Thien outpost had spotted three North Vietnamese tanks north of their position in North Vietnam.

in Operation Lancaster II, the Marines reported killing 85 of the enemy and sustained casualties of 58 dead and 321 wounded.[27]

In the 9th Marines sector in the Kentucky area of operations, the Marines confirmed the presence of the *320th NVA Division* which had replaced the *324B Division* in the DMZ war. The North Vietnamese maintained a screening force south of the DMZ and the Marine outpost at Con Thien, on 16 February, observed three North Vietnamese tanks north of their position and called in air. According to Marine reports, the North Vietnamese had two armored regiments, the *202d and 203d NVA*, each with 80 tanks (40 T–34s and 40 PT76s). Although not knowing the location of the two armored regiments, American intelligence acknowledged the capability of the enemy to use tanks in areas where he could secretly mass his forces "and overrun friendly outposts with little opposition." The Marines prepared anti-mechanized plans.[28]

For the most part, the ground action in Kentucky slackened after the first two weeks of February. In one of the sharpest encounters, however, on 16 February, a 3d Battalion, 3d Marines two-company sweep of the southern DMZ encountered NVA infantrymen in bunkers, but no tanks. With the assistance of air, the Marines killed approximately 20 of the enemy at the cost of 4 Marine dead and 6 wounded.* While the enemy mounted no major offensive against Marine positions in Kentucky during the latter part of the month, the NVA continued to deploy forces in and through the DMZ.[29]

As in the Lancaster area of operations, the enemy intensified his artillery, rocket, and mortar shelling of Marine positions and base areas in the Kentucky area. In one of the more spectacular instances, on 26 February, the North Vietnamese gunners fired some 400 artillery and mortar rounds and scored direct hits on the Dong Ha airfield and the Force Logistic Support Group Bravo complex located there. While casualties were relatively low, one dead and several wounded, material damage was heavy. The shelling destroyed two light Army observation aircraft, an

*Lieutenant Colonel Otto Lehrack observed that his Company I was the only one of the two companies involved that had contact in this particular action. He remembered that the contact took place in the northern sector of a prime enemy infiltration route. Lehrack Comments.



Photo is from the 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68

An officers' quarters in the 3d Marine Division command post sector at Dong Ha has been completely demolished by a direct hit from a North Vietnamese 122mm rocket.

ammunition storage dump, and 20,000 gallons of diesel fuel. In Kentucky during the month, the Marines sustained casualties of 89 dead and 267 wounded. During the same period, they reported killing nearly 400 of the enemy and capturing 39 prisoners.

While the bombardment of the Dong Ha base exposed its vulnerability to enemy weaponry, some relief of the logistic situation for the allied forces in the north was in sight. The new Quang Tri base, which was for the most part out of enemy artillery range except for mortars and the occasional rocket, was about half completed and could begin to share part of the logistic burden. By the end of the month, the remaining 3d Marine Division rear echelon forces still at Phu Bai prepared to shift their operations to Quang Tri. At the same time, FLSG Bravo at Dong Ha moved some of its equipment and ammunition still in exposed storage sites to the Quang Tri base. The new Wunder Beach facility also was nearing completion. While the North Vietnamese forced the allies to convoy naval craft along both the Cua Viet and Perfume Rivers, the supplies were getting through. As the III MAF commander, Lieutenant General Cushman, five months later explained, "with the increased forces in Northern I Corps and logistic support problems . . ., we had to move cautiously until our logistics pipeline was capable of supporting a bold and aggressive campaign throughout ICTZ."[30]

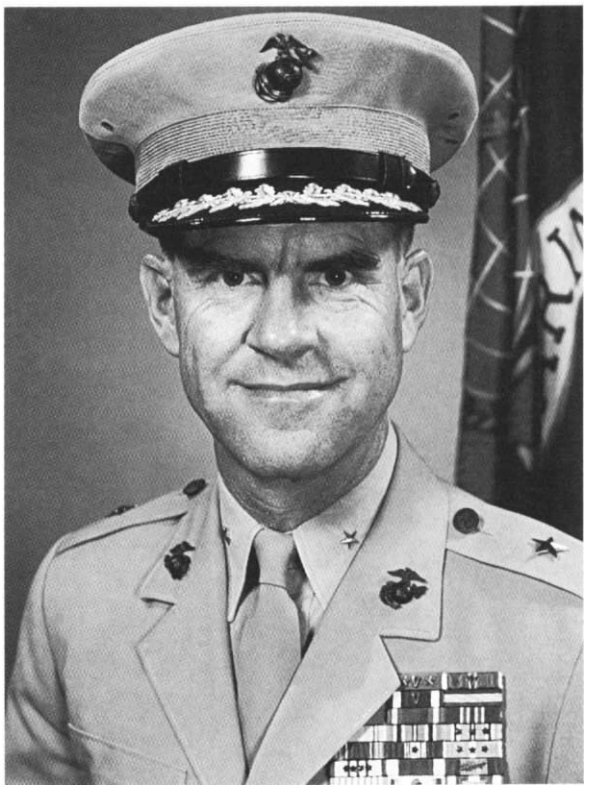
Readjustments in the U.S. I Corps Command Structure

With the arrival of Army forces in northern I Corps, MACV and III MAF continued to readjust the command structure in the north. From the beginning of the year, General Westmoreland had his doubts about the capability of the III MAF and Marine division staffs to control the expanding war in the north.* In early January, he convinced the new Marine Corps Commandant, General Leonard F. Chapman, who was on a visit to Vietnam, that both the 1st and 3d Marine

*See chapter 1 for the discussion of Westmoreland's doubts about the Marine Corps command structure.

Divisions required an additional brigadier general assistant division commander. According to the MACV commander, the "wide dispersion" of division units dictated that the Marine Corps adopt the Army practice of two assistant division commanders "for most effective command and control." General Chapman concurred as did Admiral Sharp, the Pacific theater commander. By mid-January, the Defense Department authorized each of the Marine divisions two assistant division commanders.[31]

With the new authorization, General Chapman immediately set out to fill the new billets. On 19 January, he informed both MACV and Lieutenant General Krulak, the FMFPac commander, that he had ordered Brigadier General Jacob Glick, the former commander of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A419340

3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68

Right, BGen Jacob E. Glick, here in an official portrait, relieved BGen Louis Metzger, who was about to be promoted to major general, as Assistant Division Commander of the 3d Marine Division. Below, from left, MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins, the 3d Division commander; Gen Leonard F. Chapman, Commandant of the Marine Corps; MajGen Metzger; and LtGen Robert E. Cushman, CG, III MAF, hold the two-star flag of newly promoted MajGen Metzger.



on Okinawa, to Vietnam as the second assistant division commander (ADC) for the 3d Marine Division. Chapman was "searching for another brig gen for 1st MarDiv and will send him earliest."[32]

Actually Brigadier General Glick relieved Brigadier General Louis Metzger, whose tour of duty was about to end. Metzger had controlled the 3d Marine Division (Fwd) headquarters at Dong Ha until Major General Tompkins had moved his command post there from Phu Bai.* Tompkins wanted Glick back at the division rear at Phu Bai to supervise the transfer from Phu Bai to the new 3d Division rear base at Quang Tri. The enemy's Tet offensive, however, delayed the move and through February General Glick shared space with Brigadier General Foster C. LaHue's 1st Marine Division Task Force X-Ray headquarters at Phu Bai. According to Glick, he looked after the logistic support forces there while LaHue controlled operations.[33]

Brigadier General Carl W. Hoffman, who arrived in Vietnam a few days after Glick, in fact, became the second assistant division commander of the 3d Marine Division. With the greater emphasis upon the 3d Division area of operations which included the DMZ and Khe Sanh, General Cushman delayed until February appointing a second assistant division commander to the 1st Marine Division. Indeed, when General Hoffman, who had just served as Military Secretary to the Marine Corps Commandant, landed at the Da Nang Air Base, Cushman first thought to place him temporarily in a special III MAF billet. According to the III MAF commander, he considered establishing a "III MAF War Room (Fwd) at Dong Ha" and making Hoffman his personal representative to the 3d Marine Division. General Westmoreland's decision to create the new MACV (Forward) headquarters** at Phu Bai under his deputy, General Abrams, made the idea of a forward III MAF headquarters superfluous. Brigadier General Hoffman joined General Tompkins at Dong Ha as the 3d Marine Division ADC for operations.[34]

By this time, it was clear that III MAF was to become truly a joint command rather than basically a Marine Corps headquarters. As General Hoffman several years later remembered, "at that time we realized that the United States Army was moving to the north in earnest." In mid-January, General Westmoreland assigned Army Brigadier General Salve H. Matheson, the former commander of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, to Lieutenant General Cushman's staff as Deputy Commander, Army. In a reclama, the III MAF commander asked Westmoreland for permission to change Matheson's designation to "Deputy for Army Matters." As General Cushman explained, Marine Major General Raymond L. Murray was already Deputy Commander for all U.S. forces in III MAF. Cushman wanted to use Matheson as a "point of contact for major Army commanders" and as an advisor to the III MAF command as to "Army capabilities in both the operational and logistical fields." Westmoreland agreed to the change, but stated that in the meantime that Matheson would temporarily be made the J–3 or operations officer for the new MACV (Forward) headquarters at Phu Bai.[35]

From the Marine perspective, the activation of the MACV (Forward) headquarters at Phu Bai did nothing to ease the command relationships in the north. If anything, it added to the problem by laying an inter-



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A414846

BGen Carl W. Hoffman became the Assistant Division Commander (ADC) of the 3d Marine Division for operations. The 3d Marine Division now had two ADCs.

*See Chapter 3 for the move of the 3d Marine Division headquarters north to Dong Ha in January.

**See Chapter 11 for the establishment of MACV (Fwd) at Phu Bai.



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army Center of Military History

In February 1968, MACV established a forward headquarters at Phu Bai under U.S. Army Gen Creighton W. Abrams, Deputy ComUSMACV, which caused some resentment among Marine officers.

posing headquarters between III MAF and MACV and providing an additional layer of command from above. According to General Cushman, "when Abrams came north, oh Christ, we got messages all night long, in the middle of the Goddamned night and everything else."* Colonel Franklin L. Smith, a member of the III MAF G–3 staff, recalled: "They [the MACV (Forward) Headquarters staff] were located up there and forgot that they were a senior headquarters to III MAF on one hand [by not keeping III MAF informed on its actions] and remembered very well on every other hand because they began to interpose themselves between III MAF" and subordinate units. Cushman concluded, "as would be expected, having the senior commander's agent in the battle area resulted in his exercise of more command influence and direction of III MAF Forces . . . than is customarily exercised by the senior command."[36]

The creation of the MACV (Forward) headquarters also caused resentment among Cushman's subordinate Marine commanders, if not Cushman himself. Major General Murray, the III MAF Deputy Commander, later stated that he assumed that MACV established the forward headquarters because it did not trust III MAF to control the situation. The 3d Marine Division commander General Tompkins was even more blunt: "I thought it was the most unpardonable thing that Saigon did." Despite the disclaimers on the part of MACV that it had still utmost trust and confidence in Cushman, Tompkins declared, "you don't move a MACV (Forward) up in a combat area unless you're very, very, very worried about the local commander, afraid he can't hack it. . . . it's tantamount to . . . a relief of a commander."[37]

On 14–15 February, the sudden relief of Major General Murray because of illness by Marine Major General William J. Van Ryzin, who arrived from Washington, only compounded the confusion. Rumors circulated in Saigon about a shakeup in the Marine command, which was not the case. On the 14th, Murray informed General Cushman of his incapacity and turned himself into the hospital. Van Ryzin received the news on the morning of the 14th and was on an aircraft for Vietnam by 0600 the following day.[38]

By mid-February there was an obvious need to clarify the command relations in northern I Corps. On 17 February, at a meeting at Phu Bai with Generals Abrams and Cushman, Westmoreland announced that he planned to form a provisional corps (which would formally be called Provisional Corps) in northern I Corps sometime in early March that would consist of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, the 101st Airborne Division, and the 3d Marine Division. The MACV (Forward) headquarters would then be deactivated and the new Provisional Corps would be subordinate to III MAF. General Westmoreland stated that he hoped to appoint U.S. Army Lieutenant General William B. Rosson to head the new command. Rosson, the previous spring, had commanded the U.S. Army's Task Force Oregon which later became the Americal Division at Chu Lai. Having enjoyed excellent personal relations with III

*General Earl E. Anderson, who served as the III MAF Chief of Staff, remembered: "More than once I had to go to General Cushman's quarters to awaken (not an easy task as he was a very sound sleeper and had a hearing loss suffered at Pearl Harbor when he was aboard the *Pennsylvania*) and ask him to come to the command center to take a call from Abrams on the scrambler phone, which he hated to use. While General Cushman respected Abrams as a combat officer, Abrams was very opinionated and often abrasive." Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

MAF, Rosson was an ideal selection.* To further allay Marine suspicions about the proposed command relations, the MACV commander told Cushman that he might ask the Marine Corps to provide a major general as deputy commander for the new Provisional Corps (Prov Corps). While the 3d Marine Division would still receive close air support from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, the whole question about air control still remained unresolved.[39]

For the time being, however, III MAF and MACV concentrated on working out the wrinkles for the establishment of the Provisional Corps. On 20 February, General Abrams sent out to the various interested parties a proposed letter of instruction (LOI) for the new command. According to Abrams' proposal, the commander of the new corps would have operational control of all units in the northern two provinces of I Corps with the exception of the Hai Van Pass area of Thua Thien Province. The corps would be similar in organization to the U.S. Field Forces I and II, with the exception that it would operate under the Commanding General, III MAF, General Cushman. Cushman would still remain the Senior Advisor in I Corps and maintain his relationship with the CORDS organization. III MAF would not have operational control of Seventh Air Force units in I Corps. The U.S. Army, Vietnam would provide a headquarters to coordinate logistic support in the two northern provinces. Furthermore, the Prov Corps commander would have the authority to have direct liaison with General Lam, the I Corps commander and with the ARVN forces in his sector.[40]

In their comments on the proposed directive, General Cushman and Rear Admiral Kenneth L. Veth, Commander, Naval Forces, Vietnam took exception to or wanted further elaboration on some of the provisions. Admiral Veth desired assurances that he remain in the operational chain of command over the naval forces in I Corps including the Naval Support Activity, Da Nang and the Seabees. He also assumed that the Navy would retain the responsibility for common items of supply for all U.S. forces in I Corps. General Cushman suggested that the tactical situation determine the boundary between the 1st Marine Division



U.S. Army Center of Military History,

Top, U.S. Army LtGen William B. Rosson, Provisional (Prov) Corps Commander, is seen with South Vietnamese Col Quang Toan, the commander of the 2d ARVN Division. Below, Marine MajGen Raymond G. Davis, a holder of the Medal of Honor, was made Deputy Commander, Prov Corps. The new command replaced MACV (Fwd) and was a subordinate command of III MAF, which helped to smooth relations between the Marines and MACV.

U.S. Marine Corps



*At the time, Lieutenant General Rosson was then Commanding General I Field Force Vietnam. According to General Westmoreland, Rosson would retain his position as commander of the I Field Force, so as to retain his third star while serving in a subordinate position. His deputy would become acting commander of the I Field Force command. Westmoreland msg to Abrams, dtd 26Feb68 (EO Files, Abrams Papers, CMH.)

and Provisional Corps. He also opposed any proposal to place Task Force X-Ray under Prov Corps or any change in operational control or coordination in relation to other U.S. or South Vietnamese forces in I Corps. The III MAF commander also asked that there be no diminishment in his authority over the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing to support both the 1st and 3d Marine Divisions. Relative to the logistic setup, Cushman recommended that the III MAF FLC and the Army Logistic Command at Qui Nhon support their respective Services and that they work out an agreement on mutual support.[41]

The proposed letter of instruction for Provisional Corps continued to be refined. On 27 February, General Abrams sent a revised draft to General Westmoreland that incorporated some of the wishes of the Marines. The new draft still called for the establishment of an Army logistic headquarters in I Corps and left unresolved the boundary between the 1st Marine Division and Provisional Corps. It also failed to mention the command relationship between Task Force X-Ray and Provisional Corps. In a message to General Westmoreland, General Cushman asked for a clearer demarcation of his authority. He wanted the letter of instruction to state specifically that Prov Corps would exercise operational control "of only ground tactical units" and that III MAF would retain control of all wing assets in I Corps. Again Cushman argued strongly that the 1st Division retain operational control of Task Force X-Ray and that its area of operations include the Phu Loc District as well as the Hai Van Pass sector of Thua Thien Province.[42]

On 3 March 1968, General Westmoreland finally issued the letter of instruction for Provisional (Prov) Corps. The final approved version designated Lieutenant General Rosson as the commanding general and 10 March as the effective date for the formal establishment of the new command. Marine Major General Raymond G. Davis became the deputy commander under General Rosson. General Westmoreland also incorporated into the directive most of the changes recommended by General Cushman. Still, Westmoreland's final directive clearly indicated that there was a special relationship between Prov Corps and MACV. Although General Cushman was to be his immediate superior, General Rosson was to submit reports "simultaneously" to MACV and III MAF "to insure timely reporting." On the cover sheet of the III MAF copy of the LOI, a III MAF staff officer wrote, "I wonder why they don't want 1st Div and Americal Division reports direct?" General Cushman initialed the routing slip without comment. He had already lost one major battle. On 7 March, General Westmoreland ordered, "all Marine fixed-wing strike and reconnaissance aircraft, and their associated Marine air control assets, be assigned effective 10 March 1968, to the mission direction of Deputy for Air Operations, the Commanding General, Seventh Air Force."[43*]

While assured, at least temporarily, of the primacy of his authority in northern I Corps, at least over all ground forces, and despite denials to the contrary, General Cushman and his staff still harbored suspicions about the Army's, if not Westmoreland's, motivations.** As Brigadier General Hoffman later declared, "it became necessary, or it became desirable, from our viewpoint to be sure that the Army didn't take over everything that we'd built up in that particular area." Colonel Franklin Smith of the III MAF staff remembered that the transition of MACV (Forward) into Provisional Corps was rather painful. The PCV staff was largely composed of the same personnel that made up the forward headquarters and "they tended to carry over the authority they had as MACV Forward people." According to Smith, "we would have from time to time to pick up the phone and say you can't do this." Aware that the PCV G–3 was to be a brigadier general, Cushman assigned Brigadier General Hoffman temporarily to be the III MAF G–3.*** As General Cushman concluded, III MAF was a Marine command only in relation to Marine peculiar things, "but for tactical operations it's a joint command."[44]

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*See Chapters 23 and 24 for discussion of the Single Manager issue relative to Marine aviation.

**In his interviews, Cushman supported both the creation of MACV (Fwd) headquarters and the establishment of Provisional Corps. At the same time, however, his remarks indicated a suspicion that the Army was attempting to move into northern I Corps and that he took measures to guard against this. See Cushman Mar69 intvw, pp. 459–60 and 465–66 and Cushman Presentation, tab F, pp. 18–9. Army historian Graham A. Cosmas observed: "It seems clear that Westmoreland expected a much bigger Communist offensive in the north than actually developed. He did not trust III MAF to handle it and wanted Abrams on the scene with a headquarters to control the battle if necessary. Westmoreland authorized Abrams at MACV Fwd to give tactical direction to III MAF's subordinate units if the situation required. ProvCorps did ease III MAF's span of control problems, but its presence raised Marine suspicions, although Rosson evidently did a good job of smoothing out relations with III MAF." Dr. Graham A. Cosmas, CMH, Comments on draft, dtd 23Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

***Hoffman nominally continued to be 3d Marine Division assistant division commander, but was carried on the 3d Marine Division rolls as TAD (temporary additional duty) at III MAF. 3d MarDiv and III MAF ComdCs, Feb–Apr68.

Planning for the Future

With the new command structure in I Corps largely in place at the beginning of March, the allies began to plan the counteroffensive. As General Cushman later explained, the idea was to go "after the enemy first in the coastal areas in a series of short duration operations, using the mobiliry of our forces to fix and destroy enemy forces which had escaped from the major Tet battle areas." On 2 March, at a meeting at III MAF headquarters in Da Nang, Generals Cushman and Abrams approved the planning concept for the final phase of the offensive, Operation Pegasus, the relief and breakout from Khe Sanh.[45]

On 10 March, with the formal establishment of Prov Corps, Lieutenant General Rosson* at his headquarters in Phu Bai outlined for both Generals Westmoreland and Cushman his full plans for the counteroffensive in the north. The first effort would be the continuing operations against enemy forces in the Con Thien-Gio Linh forces north of Dong Ha. At the end of March and the beginning of April, the 1st Air Cavalry Division and the 3d Marine Division would give priority to the opening of Route 9 and beginning Operation Pegasus for the relief of Khe Sanh.** Following the relief of Khe Sanh, Prov Corps would then undertake a reconnaissance-in-force into the A Shau Valley southwest of Hue.[46]

At the 10 March meeting, General Westmoreland approved Rosson's concept and also directed General Cushman to undertake a broad-based study to estimate the future requirements for the defense of northern I Corps. General Cushman turned the task over to his acting G–3, Brigadier General Hoffman with a due date of 1 April. For planning purposes, Hoffman's study group was to assume that the political aspects of the war would not change and that there would be no further refinement of the rules of engagement. The planners were to assume that by 1 September Khe Sanh was no longer in danger and that Route 9 would be open from Khe Sanh to Dong Ha. By that date, one of the Army divisions, either the 1st Air Cavalry or the 101st Airborne, would have been detached from I Corps. Also included in the scenario for the study were the assumptions that the enemy would not have made any major reinforcement of his forces in the north and that the situation elsewhere in I Corps would not have required any depletion of the remaining units in the northern two provinces. According to MACV's guidelines, Hoffman's group was to look especially at "the pertinent aspects of the dyemarker system" relative to Khe Sanh and the DMZ strongpoints. Westmoreland directed that the analysis be "'wide open' and not constrained by past policies or precedents."[47]

Hoffman's group completed its study within the designated time and made several proposals relative to the war in the north. Given their guidelines, the III MAF planners concentrated on the future of the barrier, the strongpoints and allied forces along the DMZ, and the base at Khe Sanh. As far as the A Shau Valley, the group recommended only the establishing of a fire base in the approaches to the valley, and limiting operations to artillery and infantry raids. In probably one of its more controversial conclusions, the panel suggested the abandonment of Khe Sanh in favor of a much smaller base at Ca Lu. The group argued that the defense of Khe Sanh would require a force of at least 10 battalions. Relative to the barrier, the Hoffman panel observed that the enemy threat in the DMZ sector was "*invasion,* as opposed to infiltration." The study group contended that the barrier strongpoints actually assisted the enemy by placing Marine and allied forces in fixed and static positions within NVA artillery range. Still the III MAF study advised against cancellation of Dyemarker because a "major conceptual change at this time might not be politically or psychologically acceptable." Instead, the III MAF panel suggested an "indefinite *deferral* of further Dyemarker SPOS [strong point obstacle system] while maintaining current positions with a reduced number of forces." While most of its recommendations were not immediately implemented, the III MAF study clearly outlined the future prospects facing the allied forces in the northern war.

March Operations in the DMZ Sector

While the American command planned to take the initiative from the enemy, the North Vietnamese still maintained formidable forces in the field, especially in the eastern DMZ sector in Operations Kentucky and Napoleon/Saline. In the Cua Viet region, in early March, this became increasingly evident. In Operation

*Although General Rosson did not assume command of Prov Corps until 10 March, since 1 March he had been the Deputy Commander, MACV (Forward). Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year, 1968," p. 19.

**According to General Rosson, he first wanted to mount a major offensive in the center and eastern portion of the 3d Marine Division and then sometime later follow with the Pegasus operation. He wrote that both Generals Cushman and Westmoreland overruled him "in turn based on what I was told was President Johnson's insistence that Khe Sanh be relieved soonest." Gen William B. Rosson, USA, Comments on draft, dtd 27Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File). See also Chapter 14 for the Pegasus planning.

Napoleon/Saline, on 1 March, Company M, BLT 3/1, supported by two engineer LVTE–1s and two howitzer LVTH–6s from the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, crossed Jones Creek just above where it emptied into the Cua Viet for a sweep into the hamlet of Mai Xa Thi (West).[48*]

Earlier, the LVTEs and LVTHs "swam down the Cua Viet to a position a few meters south of the village and west of Jones Creek. From there, the LVTEs shot line charges over the houses fronting the river, levelling the structures and "clearing the way for the follow on Marines." The LVTHs fired canister rounds into the village and then moved to new positions off shore to support the infantry. While still on the LVTs carrying them across the river, the Marine company came under accurate fire from the western bank of Jones Creek.** Lieutenant Colonel Max McQuown, the BLT commander, immediately ordered his Company I to secure the left flank of Company M and the southern portion of Mai Xa Thi. In heavy fighting that lasted until nightfall, the two companies killed 36 of the enemy and took 3 prisoners. During the next two days, BLT 3/1 operated in the village and secured a small island, just below Mai Xa Thi, in the Cua Viet River. The battalion uncovered 83 more bodies and captured another prisoner. Marine casualties were also heavy—27 killed and 81 wounded.

In this renewed fighting for Mai Xa Thi, the Marines learned that elements of the *320th NVA Division* were coming into the Cua Viet sector to replace the *803d NVA Regiment* which had the previous month moved south into Thua Thien Province. While most of the enemy dead were from the *270th Main Force Regiment*, which had long operated in the region, two of the prisoners, a lieutenant and a private, were from the *52d NVA Regiment, 320th NVA Division.* Up to this time, the *52d* had been in reserve above the DMZ in North Vietnam, while the other two regiments of the division, the *48th* and *64th* had moved into the Kentucky and Lancaster areas.[49***]

Under questioning, the two prisoners declared they were part of a small detachment from a heavy weapons company and an advance party of their regiment. Their mission had been to provide RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) support for the *270th* unit in Mai Xa Thi against Marine amphibian tractors and tanks in the Cua Viet sector. Both prisoners claimed that the bulk of their regiment was to infiltrate south on the night of 1–2 March, but gave conflicting accounts. According to the lieutenant, the rest of the regiment was to cross the Ben Hai River, just west of the so-called "Freedom Bridge" into South Vietnam and that the final destination of the regiment was Quang Tri City. The private, on the other hand, related that the regiment would cross the Ben Hai by boat near the ocean and then infiltrate into the Cua Viet sector. Although cooperative, the 18-year-old enlisted man had little other information except that "they had orders to remain close to the Cua Viet." While the lieutenant may have known more of the big picture, his Marine interrogators were suspicious of his testimony. They reported that "the captive continually tried to lie throughout the interrogation" and that "his reliability could not be determined."[50]

While the intelligence of a new North Vietnamese unit in the Cua Viet pointed to the continued presence of enemy units in this vital area, the Marines had already started their own buildup in the sector. With his new command post at the Cua Viet base, Colonel Hull, the 3d Marines commander, had just taken control of the operation. The forces in Napoleon/Saline included both BLT 3/1 and the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion. On 4 March, Hull's 1st Battalion, 3d Marines joined the operation, moving up from the Quang Tri base to the Cua Viet sector. The following day, there was another adjustment of forces, but this was an exchange of missions rather than a reinforcement. BLT 2/4 under Lieutenant Colonel William Weise redeployed from the Lancaster II area of operations to the Napoleon/Saline operation, replacing BLT 3/1. The latter battalion then took the place of the former in the Lancaster area of operations.[51****]

* This was to differentiate it from that portion of the village of Mai Xa Thi on the eastern bank of Jones Creek.

** Colonel McQuown noted as a safety precaution "against mines and RPG rounds," the Marine infantry rode on top of LVTs rather than inside when they were used as troop carriers. McQuown Comments.

*** Colonel McQuown related that he turned over his prisoners together with weapons and documents to the 3d Marine Division: "These NVA troops were fresh, mostly young males, and carried brand new weapons . . ." including a flame thrower and a "fragmentation grenade launcher 'far superior to its U.S. counterpart'." Relative to the flame thrower, McQuown observed, "this was the first and only time we had seen one in the hands of the NVA." McQuown Comments.

**** Colonel Bruce F. Meyers, who at the time commanded SLF Alpha, observed that BLT 2/4 remained under the administrative control of the SLF commander for medical evacuation of casualties and "a significant portion of logistic support," even while under the operational control of various regimental commanders. He recalled that the embarked SLF helicopter squadron, HMM–363, helilifted BLT 3/1 to Camp Carroll and in exchange brought BLT 2/4 to the Cua Viet sector. Col Bruce F. Meyers, Comments on draft, dtd 20Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File).



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A194604

Marines of BLT 2/4 ride amphibian tractors (LVTs) in the Cua Viet during Operation Napoleon/Saline. Note the sandbags on the tractors to protect the Marines from explosive rounds. The BLT redeployed from the Lancaster area to the coastal Napoleon sector in early March.

Even with the enemy reinforcement in his sector, the addition of another battalion to his forces permitted Colonel Hull to undertake expanded operations on both sides of the Cua Viet. While at the beginning of the month, the North Vietnamese continued their attempts to interdict the river, they eventually limited these efforts to attacks by fire. On 8 March, the Navy announced that the Cua Viet was open and that allied shipping no longer required convoys.[52]

Still the enemy was far from quiescent. On 10 March, enemy artillery hit the Cua Viet base, igniting 150 short tons of ammunition. The resulting explosion and fire caused the death of one American serviceman and injuries to several others. It also destroyed a mess hall, a communications van, and 47 out of the 64 sites holding 10,000-gallon POL bladders. By the end of the month, the base had only repaired or replenished 60 percent of the sites, equipment, and supplies destroyed in the attack.[53]

In several sharp encounters north of the Cua Viet during the month, Marine infantry sweeps also met with stiff resistance. Lieutenant Colonel Weise's BLT 2/4, just arrived in the sector, bore the brunt of this fighting. On 18 March, one of the bloodiest actions occurred in an abandoned hamlet about 1,000 meters southwest of Mai Xa Thi (West). Supported by artillery north of the DMZ and with well-designed fields of fire for their small arms and machine guns, the entrenched enemy held off three companies of BLT 2/4 throughout the day. With the assistance of their own artillery and close air strikes, the Marines finally forced the enemy to withdraw. After entering the hamlet the next day, the Marines found 72 bodies and captured 4 prisoners. Other sources estimated that the enemy death toll may have been as high as 130 as a result of the airstrikes on the retreating forces. The cost had been high to the Marines as well. BLT 2/4 suffered casualties of 13 dead and 110 wounded. For the entire month in Operation Napoleon/Saline, the 3d Marine Division reported to have killed more than 440 of the enemy while sustaining in turn 65 fatalities and over 450 wounded. According to Lieutenant Colonel Weise, the Marines were doing the best they could in a "very active area." Weise praised Colonel Hull, the 3d

Marines commander and in charge of the operation, calling him, "an extremely competent Marine, a good leader," but "frustrated as we all were without adequate resources to do the job . . . ."[54]

During the month, there were also continued clashes to the west of Napoleon/Saline in the 2d ARVN Regiment sector and in the 9th Marines' Kentucky area of operations. Located between Napoleon/Saline and Kentucky, the 2d ARVN operated largely east of Route 1 and west of Jones Creek. For the most part, the ARVN regiment gave a good account of itself. In their most significant engagement, on 12 March just east of Route 1 and about 2,000 meters below Gio Linh, the South Vietnamese unit claimed to have killed over 200 of the enemy at a cost of 4 ARVN killed and 15 wounded.[55]

Further to the west along the DMZ front, the North Vietnamese remained active in the 9th Marines' Kentucky sector. Most of the action centered in the area between Gio Linh and Con Thien. On 3 March, in one of the more significant of the encounters, Company L, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines intercepted an NVA battalion attempting to infiltrate the Marine positions. The battalion maintained a two-company outpost on Hill 28 just north of the A–3 Strong Point, manned by Companies I and L. On the morning of the 3d, Captain Roger Zensen, the Company L commander, accompanied his 2d Platoon on a reconnaissance patrol to the northwest. Just before noon, at one of the patrol checkpoints, the Marines "spotted an NVA soldier about 800–1,000 meters to the north. He appeared to be an officer with binoculars scanning the terrain to the south in our direction." Zensen recalled that the platoon sergeant asked him for permission to shoot at the man with a M16, but the company commander denied the request so as not to give away their position. Captain Zensen later wrote, "Oh if we only had our snipers, it would have been a sure kill." Instead he had his enlisted artillery forward observer call in a fire mission. The Marine platoon then checked out the area "right along the southern edge of the DMZ." While finding no enemy casualties, there was "obvious evidence of recent activity."[56]

At that point, the Marine platoon came under rifle and grenade fire. The Marines returned fire but the enemy troops continued to close and Captain Zensen requested reinforcements. The only available forces were two platoons of his own company on Hill 28, 600–800 meters to the southeast. At the same time, an air observer called in fixed-wing airstrikes and helped to coordinate artillery missions. Zensen remembered that the enemy "moved in close to avoid the air strikes" and also "circled our right flank." Another 20 or so enemy troops took up position to the Marine rear, taking cover in a bomb shelter. With the assistance of machine gun fire, the platoon prevented the NVA from advancing any further until the "AO was able to direct the fire of Huey gunships at the enemy and silence" one of the positions. By this time, the two other platoons arrived and reinforced both flanks. As the company disengaged, enemy artillery fired upon them, but "fortunately was not on target." In the skirmish, the Marine reports showed over 100 of the enemy killed at a cost of one Marine dead and 13 wounded.* Zensen called it "a hell of a fight and a scary afternoon." He observed that lucky for the Marines the enemy force "was apparently on the move and had not fortified their positions."

A few days later, on 16 March, again near the A–3 Strong Point, Companies M, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines and C, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines clashed with another battalion-sized enemy force. The two Marine companies called in artillery and air upon the North Vietnamese troops. Under the supporting arms bombardment, the bulk of the enemy battalion disengaged, but left a company behind to fight a rear guard action. North Vietnamese artillery from north of the DMZ answered the American supporting arms with a 400-round barrage of its own on the Marines. According to one Marine report, because of the "inaccuracy of the hastily delivered enemy artillery," the two Marine companies "assaulted into the enemy trenches, killing 83 NVA before contact was broken at 1530." Marine casualties were two killed and nine wounded. For the entire month in Operation Kentucky, the 9th Marines reported over 400 enemy dead while Marine casualties were 37 killed and more than 200 wounded.[57]**

*Lieutenant Colonel Zensen commented that he believed that the official listing of enemy casualties was exaggerated, but stated that "it is hard to know just how many enemy soldiers were killed." The reports also indicate that Marine snipers killed the enemy officer with binoculars, which was not the case. LtCol Roger Zensen, Comments on draft, dtd 4Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Lieutenant Colonel Otto Lehrack, who commanded Company I, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, observed that Company M, earlier on 6 March, in the same area as Company L on 3 March, encountered a sizeable enemy force with the Marines sustaining casualties of 15 dead and a number of wounded. [For a detailed account of that action, see LtCol Otto J. Lehrack, *No Shining Armor, The Marines at War in Vietnam, An Oral History* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992), pp. 243–52.] Lehrack then observed that all of these actions including the one of 16 February took place along a major infiltration route which included Route 561 and an area that the Marines called the "Marketplace." He believed that the battalion "forays into this area presented the NVA with little choice but to fight." LtCol Otto Lehrack, Comments on draft, dtd 19Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

Further to the west, in the 4th Marines' Lancaster II operation, the tempo of enemy activity remained relatively low. For the month of March, the regiment reported killing nearly 60 enemy dead and capturing 2 prisoners while sustaining 13 killed and over 140 wounded. An enemy ambush of Company K, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines in the hills 3,000 meters west of Ca Lu caused most of the Marine casualties for the month, accounting for all of the dead and nearly half of the wounded. After completing an unsuccessful search for suspected enemy mortars on the high ground, the Marine company had started down towards Route 9. Enemy 60mm mortars caught the company in the open resulting in 13 killed, and over 40 wounded. Among the more seriously wounded was the company commander, Captain Alexander K. Ward. While evacuating all of the wounded, the Marines had to leave behind eight of the dead. A reconnaissance team finally retrieved the bodies four days later.[58]

In northern I Corps, nevertheless, by the end of the month, especially along the DMZ front, the situation for the allies had improved dramatically. For the most part, with the notable exception of that portion of Route 9 from Ca Lu to Khe Sanh, the supply lines were now open. With the opening of Route 1, Brigadier General Glick moved the rest of the 3d Marine Division (Rear) from Phu Bai to the Quang Tri base. During the month, Marine and allied trucks made over 2,000 resupply runs between Phu Bai and Quang Tri. In the last week of the month, III MAF moved over 3,866 short tons of supply from Dong Ha to Ca Lu. All told for March, 162 American truck convoys carried over 12,690 short tons of cargo in northern I Corps. The sea lanes and river routes also remained active. With the opening of Wunder Beach and the installation of the pontoon causeway there on 17 March, the allies landed more than 10,000 short tons. All of the ports in the north during the month registered record tonnage unloaded. The logistic situation had improved to the extent that III MAF lifted the limitation on equipment and material beyond just the combat essential. In fact, while not bringing in additional construc-

A Marine Sikorsky UH–34D Sea Horse helicopter is about to land with supplies as U.S. Army troopers from the 5th Armored Cavalry Regiment watch from their armored personnel carrier. The Army unit was under the operational control of the 3d Marine Division for a joint operation with BLT 2/4.

Photo is from the Abel Collection





Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371414

A Marine M67A2 flametank in a blocking position and in support of Company I, 3d Battalion, 27th Marines aims a streak of fire at suspected enemy positions in the Da Nang area of operations. The 27th Marines, newly arrived in February, began conducting small unit operations in late February and early March.

tion materials for the barrier strongpoint system, Marine engineers completed the strongpoint bunkers on Con Thien, made some minor repairs of bunkers damaged by artillery, and installed an additional minefield for the strongpoint at Gio Linh. At Ca Lu, Marine and Army engineers and Navy Seabees had started the building of a major base to include an airfield, ammunition storage facilities, bunkers and helicopter revetments, and a supporting road network.[59]

By the end of the month, the allies in the north were about prepared to launch their counteroffensive for the relief of Khe Sanh and to alleviate the pressure on the DMZ front. On 28 March, the 1st Air Cavalry Division took over from the 3d Marine Division and the 4th Marines in Lancaster II the responsibility for the combat base at Ca Lu. While the 3d Marine Division complained that the construction of the facilities at Ca Lu and the effort to keep Route 9 open from Dong Ha to the base restricted its mobility to a certain extent, the division still prepared to carry out its own limited offensive. As a counter to any enemy tank threat in the north and to provide the Marines on the DMZ a more potent armored punch, in March, MACV had attached to the 3d Marine Division the U.S. Army 3d Squadron, 5th Armored Cavalry Regiment reinforced by a company from the 2d Battalion, 34th Armored Regiment. On 29 March, General Tompkins formed, under the command of Colonel Hull, the 3d Marines' commander, Task Force Kilo, which consisted of the Army armored cavalry squadron and BLT 2/4. The following day, in coordination with the 2d ARVN Regiment, Task Force Kilo mounted an attack in the Gio Linh sector as a cover for the Pegasus operation. The allied counteroffensive in the north was underway.[60]*

March Operations in the Rest of I Corps

By the beginning of March, the enemy main force units, outside of Thua Thien and Quang Tri Provinces, pretty much lay low. In the Americal Division operation Wheeler-Wallowa in the Que Son Valley, the 196th Light Infantry Brigade accounted for about the same number of enemy dead as the previous month, while sustaining about a quarter less casualties. As far as the Americal Division's Operation Muscatine south of Chu Lai was concerned, III MAF listed it among several operations that "did not have any significant combat." Still, as General Cushman observed, the Communist forces in I Corps had largely won the countryside "by default" as the ARVN, South Vietnamese militia forces, and Revolutionary Development teams during Tet fell back to defend the cities and

*See Chapter 14 for further discussion of Task Force Kilo and its relationship to Operation Pegasus.



Top photo is from Abel Collection while the bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A372933.

Top, Marines from a 60mm mortar section of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines run from a landing zone in the "Arizona Territory" southwest of Da Nang. The last man has the mortar base strapped across his shoulders while the mortar tube can be seen carried by the Marine in front of him. Below, Marines during Operation Worth form a chain to move supplies out of a landing zone in "Happy Valley."



towns. According to U.S. measurements, GVN control in the countryside reached its lowest point in March.[61]

In much of southern I Corps, however, the American and South Vietnamese forces in March began to reenter the hamlets abandoned to the Viet Cong. Lost in the reporting of these numerous engagements was a 16 March 1968 United Press dispatch describing an operation by Task Force Barker of the Americal Division's 11th Light Infantry Brigade in the hamlet of My Lai, called "Pink Village" by the American troops. According to the news report, "'Pink Village' had become 'Red, White, and Blue' Village." A U.S. spokesman reported that the American troops had killed "128 Communists." The 128 "Communists," however, turned out to be all villagers, mostly women, children, and old men. It would be nearly a year later when the details about the My Lai massacre surfaced.[62]*

In the large Da Nang area of operations, the 1st Marine Division faced many of the same circumstances that the Americal Division did—a low-level war fought in the surrounding hamlets and villages. In regimental reserve, the newly arrived 1st Battalion, 27th Marines spent much of March getting acclimated and adjusted to its new mission. Second Lieutenant William R. Black, Jr., a platoon commander with Company A, remembered that his company conducted a lot of patrols to keep "on our toes tactically while getting our act together." Lieutenant Black admitted that the battalion was still not too effective as the troops were still unfamiliar with their sector and not yet battle-hardened. While the other two battalions of the 27th Marines were more active, their great concern remained surprise firing devices. Overall, the regiment undertook over 2,900 small unit patrols throughout its TAOR resulting in about 310 contacts, 182 initiated by the Marines and the remainder by the VC.[63]

The Communist forces made only one serious attack on the Da Nang base in March and that was limited to a series of rocket bombardments. On 4 March, beginning at 0100 and lasting until 0255, enemy gunners fired some 50 122mm missiles onto the base. Nine landed near the 7th Communication Battalion, six on the FLC compound near Red Beach, and the remainder at the Marble Mountain Facility. The rocket attacks resulted in 6 deaths and nearly 30 wounded. They also destroyed 1 CH–53 and damaged 37 other helicopters and observation aircraft. Lieutenant Colonel William S. Fagan, commander of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines at the time, remembered "our primary and overriding mission . . . was to prevent the enemy from firing his 122mm rockets toward the Da Nang vital area." His battalion sent out squad-sized patrols and ambushes "every day and night with emphasis on night." He estimated that "virtually half of our infantry squads, with normal attachments, were on ambush every night." According to Fagan, the enemy was able to fire only a few rockets successfully from his sector, but there "was fairly continuous enemy contact with casualties on both sides."[64]

Based on intelligence that the Communist forces continued to work on upgrading their road network from *Base Area 607* northwest of Da Nang and possibly infiltrating units south into "Happy Valley" and the "Arizona Territory" (named after the U.S. western badlands), the usual approaches to the base from the mountains to the west, the 7th Marines launched two spoiling attacks. In the first, Operation Rock, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines conducted a one-battalion sweep on the peninsula formed by the Vu Gia and Thu Bon Rivers, the so-called "Arizona Territory," about 6,000 meters northwest of the battalion's base area at An Hoa. During the four days of the operation, from 6–10 March, the Marines encountered only small units, sustaining casualties of 3 dead and 24 wounded while killing about 35 of the enemy. On 13 March, in the second operation, Operation Worth, the 1st and 2d Battalions, 7th Marines supported by tanks of the U.S. Army's 3d Squadron, 5th Armored Cavalry, entered into the anything but "Happy Valley." In the nearly two-week operation, which ended on 26 March, the Marines and Army tankers only met scattered resistance. Still the Marines took casualties of 27 dead and 89 wounded and killed an estimated 160 of the enemy.[65]

In March, while the Marine units at Da Nang continued to hold their own, to the north, Task Force X-Ray consolidated its area of operations and made the necessary adjustments with the Provisional Corps. With the formal end of Operation Hue City on 2 March, General LaHue, the Task Force X-Ray commander, started to bring the respective battalions under the 1st Marines back to their own sectors. The two 5th Marines battalions that participated in Hue City, the 1st and 2d Battalions, rejoined their parent regiment in the 5th Marines' Operation Houston in the Phu Loc District. LaHue assigned the 1st Marines the defense of the Phu Bai vital area and Col Co/Tan My naval support activity with two battalions, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines which moved up from Operation Houston. At the same time, the two Army battalions in Operation Houston, the 2d Battalion,

*See Chapter 29 for further discussion of My Lai.

502d Regiment and the 1st Battalion, 327th Regiment reverted to Army control.[66]

While trying to build up the defenses of Phu Bai and protect Route 1 and the vital water routes, General LaHue also wanted to expand operations into the approaches towards both the base and the city of Hue. On 3 March, giving the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, two battalions—the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and the 2d Battalion, 327th Airborne Regiment—LaHue ordered the Army brigade, still under his operational control, to conduct an operation in the old Cumberland area, along Route 547, the gateway to the A Shau Valley. Lasting only four days, from 3 March until 7 March, the two-battalion operation, code-named Mingo, had little to show for the effort except for five dead VC and two captured rifles. Faced with the changing command relations with the establishment of Provisional Corps, General LaHue cut short the operation.[67]

On 8 March, two days before the activation of Prov Corps, III MAF implemented the agreed-upon change of boundaries between Task Force X-Ray and the new command. Task Force X-Ray retained responsibility for the Phu Bai vital area and Phu Loc District with the 1st Marines in the former and the 5th Marines in the latter. General LaHue returned the two U.S. Army brigades under his operational control, the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division and the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, to Army Major General Olinto M. Barsanti, the commander of the 101st, who had just established his command post to the west of Phu Bai. The 101st was to take over the expanse between the 1st Air Cavalry at Camp Evans and Task Force X-Ray at Phu Bai. This included the area around Hue, Route 1 north of Phu Bai, the Col Co/Tan My area, and Route 547 towards the A Shau Valley.[68]

With a smaller area of operations and with five infantry battalions under his operational control, General LaHue decided upon a three-phased operation to the east of Phu Bai. The first phase, Operation Ford, was to be a two-battalion sweep of the Phu Thu Peninsula which had long been a staging area for the *804th Main Force Battalion*. He gave the mission to Colonel Stanley S. Hughes, the 1st Marines commander, and coordinated the operation with the 1st ARVN Division Lam Son 194 to the north of the Marines. On 14 March, Marine helicopters deposited in landing zones, the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines on the northern, and the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines on the southern part of the peninsula. The two battalions than began to advance towards one another. In several sharp clashes, the two Marine battalions killed 145 of the enemy and captured 5 prisoners. The Marines lost 14 men dead, including a Navy corpsman, and sustained 113 wounded. On 20 March, Task Force X-Ray closed out the operation. General LaHue canceled the planned second and third phases of Operation Ford.[69]

By this time, the planning for Pegasus, the relief operation for Khe Sanh, was in full swing. The 1st Air Cavalry Division prepared to close out its Operation Jeb Stuart and move to its new staging area at Ca Lu. With the westward deployment of the 1st Cavalry Division, the 101st Airborne Division was to move to a new operating area some 18 miles northwest of Hue. At the same time, the 1st Marines with its 1st and 2d Battalions, reinforced by the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, was to join the 1st Air Cavalry in Operation Pegasus. Task Force X-Ray was to take over then the area vacated by the 101st Airborne Division.[70]

Brigadier General LaHue, thus once more, was to expand his area of operations, while at the same time having fewer troops to do so. At the end of the month, Major General Donn J. Robertson, the 1st Marine Division commander, provided some relief by transferring one of the 27th Marines' battalions, the 1st Battalion, from Da Nang to assume the security of Route 1 between Hue and Phu Bai and the protection of the ColCo/Tan My base. The battalion relieved the remaining Army units still there and operated almost to the suburbs of Hue. At the same time, General LaHue expanded the 5th Marines' Houston area to include the remaining portion of the X-Ray TAOR, excluding the area occupied by the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines and the Phu Bai Vital Area. At the same time, the task force commander ordered the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines with two companies to take over from the 1st Marines the protection of key outposts and bridges, especially the Truoi River Bridge on Route 1 southeast of Phu Bai.[71]

While Task Force X-Ray made these various adjustments, the Communists were not slow to take advantage of what they perceived as possible chinks in the American defenses. On 21 March, in a relatively minor attack, enemy gunners fired some 20 mortar and rocket rounds on the Phu Bai Base, which resulted in two Marines wounded and some structural damage to a building. Five days later, between 0300 and 0330 on the morning of the 26th, however, 108 122mm rockets and nearly 80 82mm mortar rounds fell upon both the airfield and the

Phu Bai compound. This barrage resulted in 4 dead, 2 Marine and 2 ARVN, and 46 wounded, most of whom were Marines. Despite hitting the airfield, the Force Logistic Support Group sector, and an ARVN training area, the rockets and mortars caused only relatively light damage to three aircraft, two helicopters and a C–117D transport, and destroyed two 10,000-gallon fuel bladders.[72]

Instead of further bombardments on the Phu Bai base, on 31 March 1968, under cover of a mortar and ground attack, enemy sappers successfully placed demolitions on the Truoi River Bridge and a smaller bridge, designated Bridge No. 4. The *K–2 VC Battalion* with three companies reinforced by three sapper platoons had simultaneously attacked the two bridge outposts and a nearby Combined Action Platoon, CAP H–3. Alerted by one of their ambushes, the Combined Action Marines repulsed the enemy attack after it reached the outer wire. The bridge outposts were not so lucky. Both the Truoi Bridge and Bridge No. 4 sustained substantive damage with both bridges impassable for motor traffic and Bridge No. 4 to foot traffic as well. Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines had placed two squads on the smaller bridge supported by a machine gun and a recoilless rifle and a platoon supported by two machine guns and two mortars on the Truoi River Bridge. The attacking force on Bridge No. 4 killed eight Marines and wounded seven more. On the Truoi River Bridge, the Marine platoon sustained casualties of 6 dead and 23 wounded. The Communists lost a total of 12 men in the attacks. In an investigation of the attack, Colonel Bohn, the 5th Marines commander, reported "the strength of the security forces was adequate." He blamed the success of the enemy attack partially on the fact that the company was new to the sector and had only occupied these positions the day before.[73]

Although the Marines improved their defensive dispositions and coordination of supporting arms and placement of reaction forces, Task Force X-Ray at the end of the month was hard pressed to maintain any initiative. Originally Task Force X-Ray had planned to expand operations in April, but General LaHue admitted that he had postponed the detailed planning for these undertakings. Any new offensive actions "were contingent upon the developing situation and what economies of forces can be instituted . . . ." Still if the war had reached a stalemate in the Task Force X-Ray area of operations, the allies were ready to launch their major counteroffensive in the north.[74]

Regaining the Initiative

While the much-heralded relief of Khe Sanh, Operation Pegasus, grabbed most of the attention, the allies in April appeared to have regained the initiative in most of I Corps. According to U.S. pacification statistics, 7,000 more civilians in I Corps were living in secure areas than the previous month, marking the first increase since the enemy Tet offensive. In what amounted to a corps-wide offensive, III MAF conducted 17 major operations of battalion-size or larger, resulting in over 3,500 enemy casualties. The South Vietnamese were also active. In Quang Tin Province, for example, the 2d Battalion, 6th ARVN Regiment opened up 15 miles of road between the district town of Tien Phouc and the province capital of Tam Ky. For the most part, however, in the three southern provinces of I Corps, the Communist forces avoided battle and limited most of their activity to scattered guerrilla attacks and mines and boobytraps.[75]

At Da Nang, as in the rest of southern I Corps, the 1st Marine Division reported that "irregular activity . . . continues to inflict more casualties than actual contact with the enemy." At the same time, however, the division for the first time since Tet began offensive operations about 12 miles south of the airbase in the Go Noi Island, formed by the channels of the Thu Bon, Ky Lam, and Ba Ren Rivers. From 10–14 April, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines conducted Operation Jasper Square in the western Go Noi. In the four days of the operation, the battalion killed 54 of the enemy at the price of 6 Marine dead and 30 wounded. While the operation ended on the 14th, the 3d Battalion remained in the Go Noi "with all units becoming part of the Da Nang TAOR."[76]

In the interlude, Marine and Army radar imagery aircraft and "Stingray" reconnaissance patrols reported continued enemy improvement of the enemy road network leading through Charlie Ridge into Happy Valley and also into the Arizona Territory and Go Noi Island sectors. The Marine reconnaissance teams not only observed enemy troop movement, but also directed artillery and air onto the enemy forces. For example, on the morning of 7 April, one Stingray patrol with the radio call sign "May Fly" from its perch on a ridgeline looking into



Photo courtesy of LtCol Charles E. Mueller, (USMC) Ret

Prior to Operation Allen Brook, MajGen Donn J. Robertson briefs syndicated columnist Joseph Alsop on the situation at Da Nang. Trudging up the hill to view the terrain are LtCol Charles E. Mueller, the commander of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, in the lead, followed by Gen Robertson, then Mr. Alsop. Two of the Marines are carrying what appears to be a briefing map.

the Arizona spotted some 200 main force troops wearing green utilities, helmets, and flak jackets. The Marines called in helicopter gunships and an artillery fire mission. "May Fly" reported 51 of the enemy killed. During the rest of the day and through the night of 8 April, the reconnaissance team counted nearly 170 more enemy troops in nine sightings which resulted in an estimated 70 enemy dead. Later in the month, from 23 April through the 30th, two other Marine Stingray teams, one overlooking the Arizona and the other the Go Noi, in 17 sightings, reported nearly 370 enemy troops moving through the Thu Bon and Vu Gia River Valleys and claimed 191 of the enemy killed by Marine supporting arms.[77]

On 27 April, III MAF organized Operation Quick Track, under Lieutenant Colonel John F. T. Kelly, of the III MAF G–2 staff, to track the *2d NVA Division*. According to Marine intelligence, the enemy division had retreated southwest to the Laotian border after the failure of its Tet campaign, but was planning now to mount a new offensive in the Da Nang area of operations. With his command post on Hill 55 south of Da Nang, Lieutenant Colonel Kelly's task force consisted of a small headquarters, the provisional company of the 1st Reconnaissance Company, a detachment of Sub-Unit 1, 1st Radio Battalion with signal intelligence capability, and the U.S. Army Special Forces 14th Company, Mobile Strike Force and the 245th Surveillance Airplane Company, 16th Aviation Group. The 1st Marine Division and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing would provide support when necessary. Task Force Kelly, named after its commander, began its first inserts on 30 April and continued the operation into May. According to Kelly, Operation Quick Track reflected Lieutenant General Cushman's "innovative use of intelligence to track ahead of the enemy rather than report history."[78]

With the obvious movement of enemy regulars into the western and southern avenues of approach to the Da Nang base, General Robertson decided upon a series of preemptive operations. In the first, Operation Ballard, on 29 April, the 7th Marines sent one

battalion into the Charlie Ridge area. At the same time, both the 7th and 27th Marines prepared to conduct a two-regiment operation, Operation Allan Brook in the Go Noi. This would then be followed by another 7th Marines operation, later called Mameluke Thrust, into both the Arizona and Happy Valley regions. As one regimental commander observed, these operations reflected a III MAF "change of emphasis . . . to go after the enemy in his base camps, rather than attempt to interdict him by patrols close into the vital area."[79]*

In April, however, the capability of the 1st Marine Division to conduct these expanded operations was fairly limited, especially in the Task Force X-Ray sectors at Phu Bai and in Phu Loc. As Brigadier General LaHue, the Task Force X-Ray commander admitted, whenever the division mounted such an operation it was taking a chance of reducing the density of operations. With four of the nine infantry battalions of the 1st Division assigned to X-Ray, LaHue stated that he had adequate forces to "do assigned operations . . . [but] not adequate . . . to go after the enemy . . . . " According to LaHue, he could "keep Highway 1 open, aggressively patrol, and keep after the enemy in some strength." His tenure at Phu Bai, however, was about over. On 7 April, Brigadier General John N. McLaughlin relieved LaHue as the commander of Task Force X-Ray. The latter returned to Da Nang where a week later, Brigadier General George D. Webster replaced him there as the assistant division commander.[80]

The Phu Bai forces under McLaughlin operated much the same as they did under LaHue. The 5th Marines continued its expanded Houston operation. On 13 April, in a no-name operation, literally called No Name No. 2, the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines ran into two North Vietnamese companies, probably from the *804th Main Force Battalion*, in a fortified hamlet along a small canal north of Route 1 and a few miles east of Hue. According to Second Lieutenant William R. Black, Jr., of Company A, "the enemy [was] in [a] great situation to fight us off . . . ." When Black's 2d Platoon reached the hamlet, the company's 3d Platoon, under Second Lieutenant Roger Charles had already been hit hard and trying to withdraw. Black later wrote his family:

> In retrospect, I now know I should have written up Lieutenant Charles for a decoration. He had advanced as close to the enemy as he could get. He had lost his radio to enemy fire. He was taking care of the wounded man near him. He guided the rest of us as we arrived at this position to help, & he continued to fight the enemy. At the time, I was naive enough to think that this was expected of us, as routine combat performance by a good Marine.

The Marine battalion lost 24 dead and 37 wounded while accounting for an estimated 60 of the enemy. On the following day, Easter Sunday, the Marines picked up the dead. Lieutenant Black several years later remembered the scene as a macabre "Easter Procession—pulling dead bodies back in ponchos."[81]**

From 19–26 April, in a rice-denial operation, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines supported by two ARVN battalions conducted Operation Baxter Garden on the Phu Thu Peninsula. During the seven-day operation, the Marines engaged enemy platoon-sized forces, but for the most part met up with scattered enemy groups. Most of the Marine casualties were the result of triggering enemy land mines. The Marines sustained 13 dead and 125 wounded while killing 55 of the enemy. At the end of the month, Task Force X-Ray continued to be responsible for an expanding area of operations with limited forces.[82]

While the 1st Air Cavalry Division ended its participation in Operation Pegasus on 15 April, the airmobile division and the 101st Airborne Division undertook the long-postponed offensive in the A Shau Valley.*** For some time, American commanders had viewed with concern the activity of the enemy to improve his lines of communication leading from the A Shau into Quang Nam Province and also towards

*See Chapter 17 for coverage of Operations Allan Brook and Mameluke Thrust.

**William Black commented that "in the Episcopal Church, where I grew up, the Easter 'procession' is a glorious parade by the choir, acolytes, priest, and children into the church at the beginning of the Easter worship service. It is a vivid and joyful celebration of Christ's triumph over death. Hence the irony that hit me that Easter morning . . . ." In his letter to his parents, he remarked upon battlefield discipline of the enemy: "He not only took with him his own wounded (& did *something* with his dead if he did not take them too); he even gathered up his spent cartridges and took them. In the very trench that he had fought us for five hrs, we could hardly find a spent cartridge! The enemy knows how to discourage us. We found bits of meat in trenches where direct arty hits had destroyed the enemy, but we only found *two* enemy bodies." William R. Black, Comments on draft, dtd 4Jan95 and attached ltr to parents, dtd 20–21Apr68 (Vietnam Comment File).

***The 2d Brigade of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, however, remained at Khe Sanh under the operational control of the 3d Marine Division. See Chapter 14. For the earlier planning for A Shau operations, see the discussion of the proposed York operations in Chapter 1.

the approaches to Hue. For example, on 28 March, an aerial photo reconnaissance mission over the valley revealed the existence of what Marine intelligence officers dubbed the "Yellow Brick Road," a newly constructed corduroy road extending from the A Shau through Laos and *Base Area 607* into Quang Nam Province. Beginning on 19 April, after two days of B–52 preparatory strikes in the valley, the 3d Brigade of the 1st Air Cavalry and the 1st Brigade of the 101st reinforced by an ARVN airborne task force began Operation Delaware in the A Shau.[83]

For about a month, units of the two Army divisions conducted a series of "leap-frog" helicopter assault operations throughout the length and breadth of the A Shau. While initially encountering heavy antiaircraft fire, U.S. supporting air and artillery eventually silenced the enemy guns.* The Army troops met mostly local enemy rear echelon troops and engineers, but occasionally fought engagements with regular infantry. At the end of the operation, the Americans reported killing 735 of the Communist soldiers, while suffering 142 dead and 731 wounded. The ARVN task force lost 26 killed and 132 wounded. As General Cushman observed, the A Shau was "not a . . . a fortress of combat troops . . ., but . . . a highway, you might say, for logistics supply and for the movement of reinforcements and replacements." The allies captured huge caches of enemy weapons, equipment, ammunition, foodstuffs and other military supplies including more than 70 trucks, two bulldozers, and a destroyed PT–76 tank from the *3d Battalion, 203d Tank Regiment* before the operation concluded.[84]

To fill in the gap in the forces in the north during the Delaware A Shau operation, General Cushman, with the concurrence of MACV, transferred the Americal Division's 196th Light Infantry Brigade to the operational control of General Rosson in Prov Corps. In turn, the Prov Corps commander assigned the new brigade to Camp Evans as the corps reserve under the operational control of the 1st Air Cavalry Division. About the same time, on 18 April, after the close of Operation Pegasus, the 26th Marines moved from Khe Sanh to the Quang Tri base and took over the area of operations there. Further north at Dong Ha, the 3d Marine Division had established a small division reserve built around an armored task force, called Task Force Robbie, after the nickname of its commander, Colonel Clifford J. Robichaud, the former division inspector.[85]**

For the larger part of April, the three 3d Marine Division operations along the DMZ, Lancaster II, Kentucky, and Napoleon/Saline, continued with most of the same forces as they had the previous month. As a sub-operation of Lancaster II, from 12–16 April, BLT 3/1 carried out Operation Charlton in the Ba Long Valley. The battalion captured one crew-served weapon and held 56 detainees, but sustained 11 wounded. While in April, the 3d Marine Division reported higher enemy activity in the form of artillery, mortar, and rocket attacks on Marine positions on the DMZ front, the number of American and Communist casualties in Operation Kentucky were actually lower than the previous month. In Operation Lancaster II, however, at the end of April, the North Vietnamese increased their artillery bombardment of Camp Carroll to about 40–50 rounds a day.[86]

In the Cua Viet sector at the end of the month, the enemy posed the greatest threat. On 27 April, the Navy's Task Force Clearwater warned III MAF that the enemy was apparently preparing to interdict the waterway. North Vietnamese artillery and rocket attacks on the port facilities at the mouth of the Cua Viet and the offloading ramps at Dong Ha also increased. On 29 April, the ARVN 2d Regiment engaged an NVA unit from the *320th NVA Division.* During the night of 29–30 April, enemy machine gunners opened up on Navy patrol craft in the Cua

*Lieutenant General Richard E. Carey, who served in Vietnam in 1968 as a lieutenant colonel and as a squadron leader, observed that during Delaware, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing "provided massive fixed wing and helo support for an entire day." He recalled that the Army lost several helicopters in several minutes and required the Marine air since the Army units were out of range of Army heavy artillery. LtGen Richard E. Carey, Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**According to Lieutenant Colonel Karl J. Fontenot, Major General Tompkins established Task Force Robbie in mid-February. Fontenot while still commanding the 3d Tank Battalion also served as the executive officer of the task force. He recalled that General Tompkins "briefed us personally on his expectations which essentially was to form a very flexible organization ready for employment in any direction at any time." The task force made its headquarters at Cam Lo since it was a centralized position. While the task force organization was flexible, it usually consisted of a tank company; two Army M42 tracked vehicles mounting twin 40mm antiaircraft guns; two Army truck companies with trucks equipped with quad .50-caliber machine guns (M55); other assorted motor transport; an engineer detachment; and usually one rifle company. Fontenot wrote "TF Robbie made itself pretty visible in the division area with rapid moves over the roads to Camp Carroll, Dong Ha, etc." LtCol Karl J. Fontenot, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File).

Viet from the Dai Do village complex about 1,000 meters north of Dong Ha. Colonel Hull sent BLT 2/4 to clear out the enemy. In fighting that would last nearly a month, the battle for Dong Ha with the *NVA 320th Division* was joined and the enemy had begun a new offensive on the eastern DMZ to counter the allied thrusts to the west.[87*]

From late February through the end of April, the allied forces in I Corps had regained the initiative. From Quang Ngai in the south to Quang Tri Province in the north, allied troops had taken a large toll of both enemy main force and guerrilla units. Still the cost had been high, and the enemy was far from defeated. Outside of the battlefront, events in Washington and Hanoi were also to influence the course of the war. On 31 March, in a televised speech to the nation, after a relatively poor showing earlier in the month in the New Hampshire primaries, President Johnson in a surprise statement announced his decision not to stand for reelection, to restrict the bombing campaign over North Vietnam,** and to authorize only a limited reinforcement of American troops in Vietnam. On 5 April, unexpectedly, the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh declared that his government was willing to negotiate with the Americans. The following month a North Vietnamese and American delegation met in Paris. In the meantime, with the arrival of the two Army divisions, the 101st and the 1st Air Cavalry, III MAF and Provisional Corps had entered the foreboding A Shau for the first time since 1966 and most importantly earlier had broken the siege of Khe Sanh.[88]

*For the fighting at Dai Do and its aftermath see Chapter 15.

**U.S. Army Colonel Bruce B. G. Clarke wrote that according to Army sources, at the time of the President's speech the 1st Air Cavalry Division was preparing plans for its next mission, Operation Delaware, after Operation Pegasus. According to Clarke, the planners developed a concept "to press west into Laos and then turn south along the Ho Chi Minh Trail into Laos to enter the A Shau Valley from the northwest rather than the east." Apparently "General Tolson shut off this planning by noting that the planners obviously hadn't heard the President's speech and what they were proposing was politically impossible." Col Bruce B. G. Clarke, USA, Comments on draft, n.d. [Apr95] (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 14

The Siege of Khe Sanh

Digging In—Opening Moves—"Incoming!"—The Fall of Khe Sanh Village
Reinforcement and Fighting Back—Round Two—The Fall of Lang Vei—The Intensifying Battle
Settling the Score—Operation Pegasus

Digging In

By late January, U.S. planners at every level were determined to defend Khe Sanh, despite the suggested possibility of "another Dien Bien Phu."* General Westmoreland voiced numerous reasons for defending the remote outpost. It was a valuable base for monitoring North Vietnamese infiltration through Laos along the "Ho Chi Minh" and "Santa Fe" Trails.** It was also important to Westmoreland's planned invasion of Laos by which he intended physically to cut the trails. Moreover, Khe Sanh served as left flank security for the Strong Point Obstacle System, also known as the Dyemarker Project. Finally, and vitally significant when considering the unpopularity of the war to many Americans by 1968, was the psychological significance of Khe Sanh. While it had no intrinsic political importance, being neither a cultural nor economic center, to relinquish it in the face of North Vietnamese pressure would result in a major enemy propaganda victory.*** Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, and Westmoreland's immediate superior, concurred in this analysis, saying "withdrawal from any portion of Vietnam would make immediate and sensational news, not only through the Western news media, but also through the Communist capitals as a major propaganda item."[1]

At Khe Sanh, the 26th Marines had the responsibility to prevent the base from falling to the surrounding Communist forces. With three infantry battalions, an artillery battalion, and a full range of supporting units, including tank and antitank detachments, antiaircraft weapons, engineers, shore party, air control, communications, and a host of others, Colonel David E. Lownds, the 26th Marines commander, continued improving his defenses.



Unnumbered Department of Defense (USMC) Photo

An aerial view of the Khe Sanh Combat Base looking west was taken during the siege. The runway of the airstrip can be seen below and in the top right of the picture is what appears to be a rocket pod hanging below the aircraft taking the picture.

The Marine positions arced around the combat base from the westnorthwest to the north, forming a line of heavily fortified, mutually supporting strongpoints. Seven kilometers northwest of the combat base, Company I and Company M occupied Hill 881 South, from which Company I sortied on 20 January

*See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of the events preceding the Battle for Khe Sanh.

**The "Santa Fe" Trail was actually part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail network, entering South Vietnam from Laos northwest of Khe Sanh. See Chapter 3.

***In his comments, General Westmoreland wrote that "the abandonment of that central terrain feature [Khe Sanh] would have made available to the enemy a route to the populated area near the coast. Our control of Khe Sanh forced the enemy to change his battle plans and to reduce the threat to the coastal areas and its population." Gen William C. Westmoreland, USA), Comments on draft, dtd 18Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).

meeting heavy Communist resistance.* Three kilometers to the east of Hill 881 South, Company K sat atop Hill 861. The 2d Battalion's main position was on Hill 558, just over a kilometer east of Company K, overlooking the Song Rao Quan valley. Further still to the east, and almost four kilometers north of the combat base, the 2d Platoon of Company A sat high atop the dominant precipice known as Hill 950 to guard the radio relay site there. At the combat base proper, the 1st Battalion and Company L, 3d Battalion defended the airstrip with the headquarters elements, and the firing batteries of the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines.

Adjacent to the combat base and just north of Route 9 was the massive bunker complex of the secretive SOG Forward Operating Base 3 (FOB–3) whose members conducted clandestine anti-infiltration operations in Laos and along the border. Outlying defensive positions further south included those of Combined Action Platoons Oscar and the 915th Regional Force Company protecting the hamlets of Khe Sanh Village as well as the small MACV advisory team at the district headquarters located there. Further to the southwest was the Lang Vei Special Forces CIDG Camp located on Route 9, nine kilometers from the combat base and only two kilometers from the border with Laos.**

In every position, the defenders continuously worked to prepare for the coming battle. Following a visit to Khe Sanh, General Cushman directed that all fighting holes have overhead cover capable of withstanding direct hits from 82mm mortars and that the ammunition supply point be reorganized to provide better protection for the ammunition stocks, much of which were outside the revetments.[2] Fortification material was in short supply, but the Marines used many field expedients, including damaged portions of the airstrip's steel matting and metal pallets used for air delivery of supplies. Rolls of "German tape," with its razor-like edges, were added to the multiple layers of protective barbed wire ringing the combat base and the hill outposts in a band 25 meters wide in many places. Marines placed explosives inside rolls of barbed wire to produce boobytraps which, when activated by a tripwire or detonated on command, would send sharp shards of twisted metal flying in every direction. In some places, the defenders emplaced drums of *fougasse*, a mixture of gasoline and diesel fuel detonated by plastic explosive which produced a wall of flame certain to discourage even the most determined attacker. Still there were shortcomings in the Marine defenses. Former *Washington Post* correspondent Peter Braestrup, who served as a Marine officer during the Korean War, remembered that after he visited Khe Sanh at the end of January, 1968, "I saw on main base [that] many perimeter trenches were waist high, no more. Marines don't like to dig."[3]***

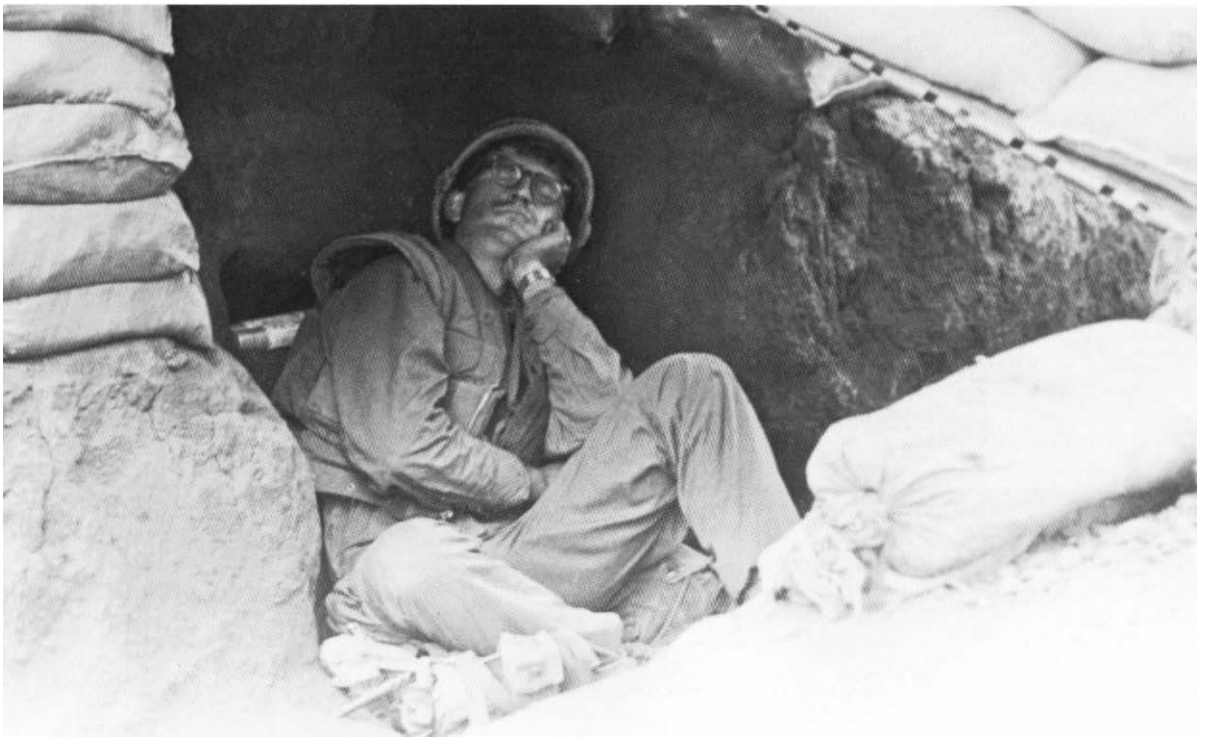
In addition to the physical preparation of the ground at Khe Sanh, higher headquarters entered the picture to assist in the defense of the combat base and its outlying positions. General Westmoreland ordered that Khe Sanh receive maximum support from Boeing B–52 Stratofortress heavy bombers and ordered the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division to prepare to deploy to I Corps Tactical Zone on 24-hour notice. General Cushman directed the 3d Marine Division to shift heavy artillery units for better support of Khe Sanh and requested that the 3d Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry Division be alerted for deployment to the Hue-Phu Bai area on 24-hour notice.[4]

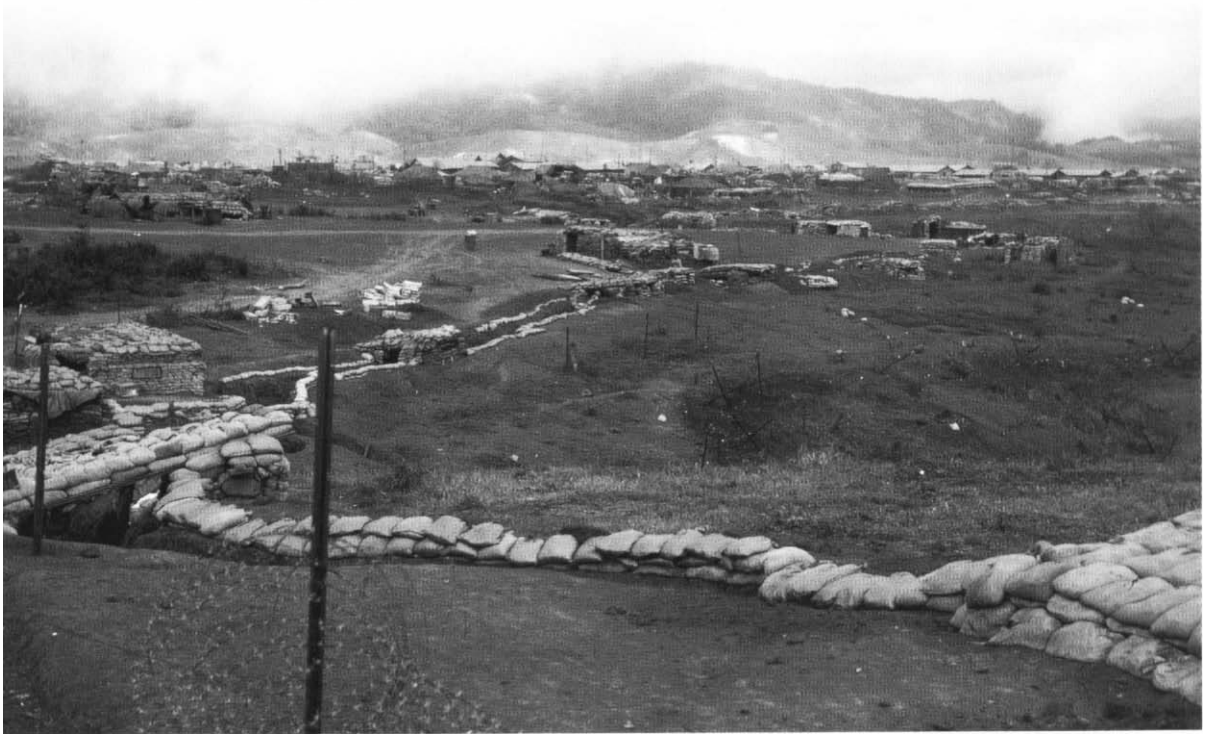
Logistical preparations went forward at the same time. By the third week in January, Khe Sanh had at least a 30-day supply of ammunition for all of its

*A detachment of three 105mm howitzers from Battery C, 1st Battalion, 13th Marines was attached to Company I on Hill 881 South to provide additional fire support for the base. Colonel Kent O. W. Steen, who served with the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines as a young officer in 1968, wrote: "There were times when these three artillery pieces were all that could be brought to bear on attacks on the . . . main base." Col Kent O. W. Steen, Comments on draft, dtd 1Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Steen Comments; 1/13 ComdC, Feb68.

**See Chapter 4 relative to the activities and establishment of these organizations in the Khe Sanh sector.

***For discussion of Marine vulnerabilities at Khe Sanh see Chapter 4. See also LtGen Philip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War, The History: 1946–1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), pp. 554–56; LtCol Frederick J. McEwan, Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File); and William J. O'Connor, Comments on draft, dtd 29Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter O'Connor Comments. See also the references to Marine shnrtcomings in building fortifications and bunkers in Chapter 1, especially with reference to comments by Major Gary E. Todd who served on the 3d Marine Division intelligence staff in 1968 and Colonel John C. Studt. Colonel Studt, who as a lieutenant colonel took over the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines at Khe Sanh in March 1968, observed that "the first thing I undertook was a total reconstruction of our defensive positions starting with the company commanders building a proper bunker with me." Col John C. Studt, Comments on draft, dtd 22Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File). From another perspective, Colonel Kent O. W. Steen, an artillery officer at Khe Sanh, commented, "we did homemade bunkers not because we wanted to or didn't know better, but that there weren't enough airlift and construction resources in Vietnam to provide the materials we need once the threat was understood." Steen Comments.





Top is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190273 while the bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190685.

Top, a Marine infantryman takes a brief nap in his covered overhead bunker, protecting him from incoming artillery and mortar rounds. Below, the photograph is an overview of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines bunker defenses along the western perimeter of the base. The Marines had come under criticism for not "digging in."

howitzers, mortars, and small arms. Even so, Cushman declared that when aircraft became available, he intended to increase those stocks by another five days' supply.[5]

The rallier who surrendered to Captain Kenneth W. Pipes' Company B Marines on 20 January proved to be a gold mine of information.* Lieutenant La Thanh Tonc answered questions freely, providing intelligence officers detailed information concerning the North Vietnamese plan for the attack and reduction of the Khe Sanh Combat Base. Tonc claimed that the Khe Sanh campaign was the most important effort undertaken by the North Vietnamese since the U.S. became involved in the war. Their objective was to seize Quang Tri Province and force the U.S. out of South Vietnam by capturing every U.S. base between the Laotian border and Con Thien. According to La Thanh Tonc, the effort was so important that the North Vietnamese Defense Ministry controlled it directly.[6]

The enemy plan called for a major offensive effort by the North Vietnamese *325C Division*. The *5th Battalion* of the division's *95C Regiment* was to capture Hill 1015, the highest peak of Dong Tri Mountain, which would neutralize the Marine-manned nearby Hill 950. From this high ground overlooking the airfield and its approaches, Communist gunners could interdict aerial supplies and reinforcements. The *6th Battalion, 95C Regiment* was to seize Hill 861. The *4th Battalion, 95C Regiment* had orders to attack the western end of the airstrip, near where, on 2 January, the Marines had killed the North Vietnamese reconnaissance party. The *101D Regiment* was to attack the east end of the airstrip in coordination with the effort by the *4th Battalion, 95C Regiment* at the other side of the combat base. Lieutenant La Thanh Tonc told the interrogators that the North Vietnamese *29th Regiment* was in division reserve, its location unknown to him (it was, in fact, headed for Hue City and the savage battles of the Tet Offensive). The cooperative lieutenant was unable to provide specific information concerning the size, designation, location, or equipment of any NVA artillery units, but he was certain that heavy artillery and rockets would support the attacks. The offensive, he claimed would begin before Tet—only 10 days away.[7]

*The details concerning the actual capture of Lieutenant La Thanh Tonc are contained in Chapter 4.

Opening Moves

Just after 2000 on 20 January, an eight-man Marine reconnaissance team, four kilometers west of Khe Sanh on Hill 689, reported that it was surrounded, under attack, and required artillery support. Lieutenant Colonel John A. Hennelly's 1st Battalion, 13th Marines responded. Through the night, Hennelly's gunners enclosed the reconnaissance team in a protective box of artillery fire, preventing the North Vietnamese from overrunning its position. In all, over 2,200 rounds of friendly artillery fire fell around the trapped Marines, sometimes within 20 meters of them. The technique was effective. Marines reported 25 North Vietnamese casualties, while the patrol sustained only two wounded.[8]**

Within a few hours, however, the fight on Hill 689 would become a sideshow. Shortly after midnight, two red star cluster signalling flares soared into the darkness above Hill 861, and immediately 300 North Vietnamese fell upon Company K's lines from the northwest. Striking from attack positions within 100 meters of the crest, the enemy blasted holes in the protective wire with bangalore torpedoes and quickly advanced, supported by mortars targeting Company K's bunkers and trenches. The NVA moved up the northwest slope, keeping the crest of the hill between the combat base and their attacking units, thus curtailing the Marines' use of artillery fire in the defense.[9]

Company K, commanded by Captain Norman J. Jasper, Jr., fought back hard as enemy rifle, machine gun, and mortar fire poured into Hill 861, but the North Vietnamese penetrated the 1st Platoon's defenses and overran the company's landing zone. Moving through his company area, directing the defense of the hill, Captain Jasper was wounded three times and unable to carry on. His executive officer, First Lieutenant Jerry N. Saulsbury, took command of Company K in the middle of the fight.

**Lieutenant Colonel Hennelly remembered that his artillery used eight 105mm howitzers "to keep literally a wall of fire" between the Marine patrol and the enemy. The plan had been to extract the men by helicopter, but this proved infeasible because in order to do so the artillery had to stop firing and the North Vietnamese . . . [would have] moved back in. By this time, the entire base was under attack and he recalled that he had the three howitzers firing the east end of the box cease fire and passed the word to the reconnaissance team to move east to the base. Hennelly stated the ream arrived safely back about dawn, which he believed was a miracle. LtCol John A. Hennelly, Comments on draft, dtd 30Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Hennelly Comments.



Photo is from the Ted Vdorick Collection

A photo of Hill 869 was taken from the trenchline of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines at the Rock Quarry.

The 3d Battalion command group was still on Hill 881 South, where it had gone earlier in the day to monitor Company I's battle on Hill 881 North.* The weather had closed in during the afternoon, grounding helicopters and effectively trapping Lieutenant Colonel Harry L. Alderman and key members of the battalion staff atop Hill 881 South.

Alderman's operations officer, Major Matthew P. Caulfield, contacted Hill 861 by radio during the fight and learned that Lieutenant Saulsbury had assumed command. Caulfield knew that Saulsbury had recently been dropped from flight training and had no infantry experience. Concerned, Major Caulfield told Saulsbury to rely on the company gunnery sergeant, who was well known in the battalion as an effective and experienced combat leader. "The Gunny is dead," Saulsbury replied. When Caulfield next told Saulsbury to get advice from the company first sergeant, Saulsbury informed him that the first sergeant was in the wreck of the company command post, dying.[10]

Lieutenant Saulsbury turned to the task at hand, fighting Company K like a veteran combat commander. The action was close and fierce, with North Vietnamese moving through parts of the position, heaving satchel charges into bunkers. The enemy next penetrated the southwest side of 861's perimeter, forcing the 3d Platoon from its positions and occupying the Marines' bunkers. Sergeant Mykle E. Stahl singlehandedly counterattacked, distracting the enemy troops while other Marines recovered casualties. As he advanced up the trenchline, three North Vietnamese attempted to capture him and Stahl suffered a bayonet wound before killing two of them. When his rifle malfunctioned, another Marine killed the third man. Stahl then picked up an enemy AK–47 assault rifle and attacked a third bunker, killing three of the enemy and capturing three others. When the 3d Platoon reoccupied its positions, Stahl, although wounded three times, manned a .50-caliber machine gun and continued to fight.[11]**

Major Caulfield ordered some of the battalion's 81mm mortars on Hill 881 South to fire in support of Hill 861, ever mindful that the NVA might also attack Hill 881 South at any time. The mortars fired 680 rounds that night, causing the tubes to become so hot that the Marines cooled them first with water, then fruit juice, and finally, by urinating on them.[12]

By 0530, the enemy onslaught had spent itself against the determined defense of Hill 861. Marine signal intelligence personnel reported hearing the

*See Chapter 4.

**For his actions, Sergeant (later Captain) Stahl received the Navy Cross.

commander of the attacking NVA unit ask for reinforcements. But it was too late for that. Company K hit the enemy with a final blast of fire, driving them off the hill.[13]

The battle for Hill 861 left 4 Company K Marines dead and 11 wounded. At daybreak, elements of the company swept the area outside their wire, finding 47 dead North Vietnamese and capturing 3 wounded. One of the prisoners claimed to belong to the *4th Battalion, 95C Regiment*, a slight conflict with Lieutenant La Thanh Tonc's revelation of the previous afternoon, but, nonetheless, close enough to lend further credibility to his information.

"Incoming!"

No sooner had the North Vietnamese abandoned their attempt to take Hill 861 than they struck the Khe Sanh combat base itself. At 0530, enemy artillery, mortar, and rocket fire smothered the airstrip and its surrounding bunkers and trenches. The first round landed in the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines area, scoring a direct hit on the generator which powered its digital fire control computer, but the battalion continued to fight back with the fire direction center computing firing data manually.[14]

Within minutes of the opening salvo, enemy shells hit the base's ammunition supply point known as "ASP Number 1". More than 1,500 tons of ammunition began exploding, throwing fragments and unexploded rounds, some of them on fire, through the air to land in and around the Marines' fighting positions. Captain Pipes, the commanding officer of Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, moved his command post three times because the explosions continued showering his position with smoldering mortar and artillery projectiles which threatened to detonate at any moment.[15*]

Incoming rounds smashed into the airstrip, ripping apart the steel plates and damaging helicopters. A direct hit destroyed the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines mess hall and another struck the tiny post exchange. Company D, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines lost all of its personnel records to enemy shell fire. Riot control grenades burned in the inferno at ASP Number 1, sending choking clouds of "CS" gas rolling through the trenches and bunkers to add to the Marines' misery. Some did not have gas masks and could only cover their faces with wet towels.[16]

Lieutenant Colonel Hennelly's artillerymen remained at their howitzers, providing counterbattery fire. In Battery C's position, near the ASP, scores of hot, smoking shells thrown skyward by explosions, fell once more to earth. Captain William J. O'Connor, First Lieutenant William L. Eberhardtt, and Sergeant Ronnie D. Whiteknight, all of Battery C, picked up between 75 and 100 of these dangerously hot projectiles and moved them away from the gun pits. Captain O'Connor recalled that one Marine driver abandoned his truck loaded with ammunition "sitting in the middle of my Battery area." At that point, Sergeant Whiteknight "rushed out of a bunker and drove the truck away from the guns and into a less dangerous area." When CS gas rolled over the gun line, Lieutenant Eberhardtt and Sergeant Whiteknight brought gas masks to the cannoneers so that Battery C might continue its duel with the North Vietnamese gunners.[17**]

At 1000, a large quantity of C–4*** and other explosives went up with a tremendous blast, rocking the entire combat base. A shock wave rolled through Khe Sanh, cracking the timbers holding up the roof of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines command post. The battalion staff fell to the ground but the roof, after settling about one foot, held fast.[18]

As the enemy shells continued to fall and ASP Number 1 continued to burn, each new explosion took its toll on the Marines' ammunition supply.[19] Ammunition technicians from Force Logistic Support Group–B fought the flames with fire extinguishers and shovels, but by afternoon the garrison was dangerously low on many types of ammunition. General Cushman's warning of the previous week to "tidy up" ASP Number 1 was driven home. Worse, the logistical air effort to build up ammunition stocks would have to begin again, meaning that other types of supplies would wait even longer for delivery while the priority for space on board planes continued to go to ammunition.

*Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth W. Pipes, the commander of Company B in 1968, remembered that one of the first Marines killed was his radio operator: "I found him slumped over the entrance to our bunker, as I exited to search for him." LtCol Kenneth W. Pipes, Comments on draft, dtd 10Mar95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Pipes Comments, 1995.

**William O'Connor, the Battery C commander, recalled that when he took over the battery, the troops had a dog mascot with the mange. O'Connor related, "despite my orders the dog was not destroyed but was cleaned up. He was smart enough to hide from me, but when we got hit . . . [on 21 January] CS rolled into the area from the exploding dump and I found myself sharing my gas mask with the dog. That dog later left for the States with one of our rotating troops and did make it back safe and sound." O'Connor Comments.

***A plastic explosive.



Photo from the David Douglas Duncan Collection, MCHC

A lone combat boot and helmet are seen among the debris where a Marine's "hootch" stood before it was destroyed when a 122mm rocket hit the nearby ammunition dump.

Nightfall brought no respite for the defenders of Khe Sanh. At 1950, the 2d Platoon, Company L, 3d Battalion reported about 35 North Vietnamese crawling toward its wire near the western end of the airstrip. The Marines opened fire with grenade launchers and light antiarmor weapons (LAAWs).* When the action ended an hour later the North Vietnamese were seen dragging away casualties and 14 enemy dead remained in the wire.[20]

The fighting and shelling of 21 January resulted in 14 Marines dead and 43 wounded. Combined with the ammunition dump explosions, the shelling destroyed a Bell UH–1 Iroquois helicopter, all of the weather monitoring equipment, most of the airstrip's night lighting system, many field telephone lines, bunkers, engineer equipment, generators, the post exchange, a mess hall, and other facilities.[21]**

III MAF immediately moved to replenish the ammunition lost in ASP Number 1, but the task was complicated by damage to the airstrip. With only 1,800 feet of the 3,900-foot runway open, large-capacity cargo aircraft could not land. Further, the damage to the night lighting system and poor weather added to the problem. Nonetheless, six Fairchild C–123 Provider light cargo aircraft of the 315th Air Commando Wing landed at Khe Sanh after dark on 21 January under artillery illumination, bringing in 26 tons of much needed ammunition. After midnight, a 1st Marine Aircraft Wing Sikorsky CH–53 Sea Stallion helicopter delivered whole blood after an extremely dangerous landing on the "socked-in" airstrip.[22]

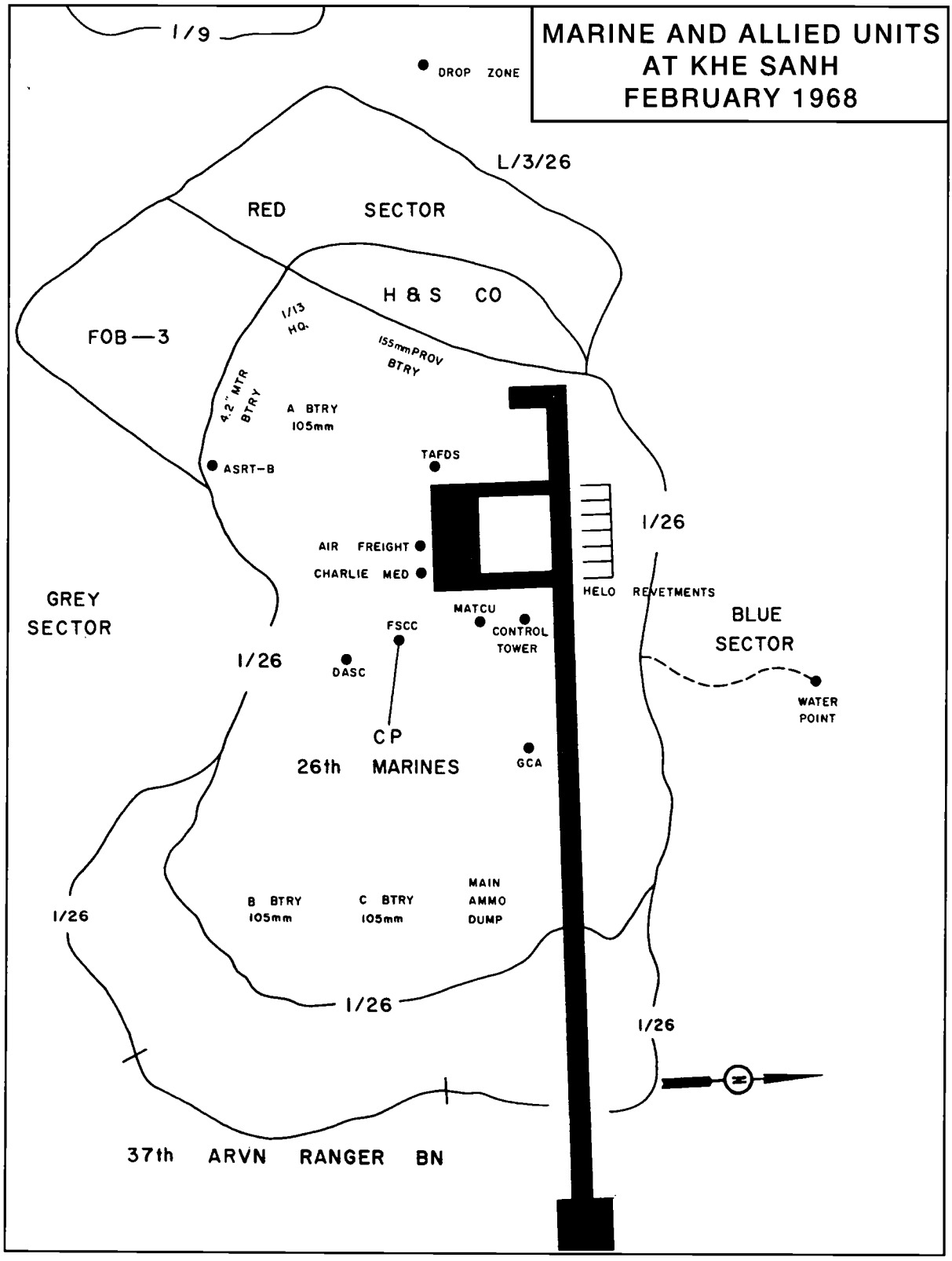
The Fall of Khe Sanh Village

Almost simultaneously with the attack on the main base, the North Vietnamese launched an assault against the Regional Force troops and Combined Action Oscar units in Khe Sanh Village about 3,000 meters to the south.*** Early on the morning of the 21st, under cover

*The M72 Light Antiarmor Weapon (LAAW) is a 66mm antitank rocket system in which a projectile is prepackaged in a disposable launcher. In Vietnam, the Marines used these weapons against enemy bunkers and as on this occasion even against infantry.

**Colonel William H. Dabney, who as a captain commanded Company I on Hill 881S, recalled that as well as the main base being bombarded, "several rounds of 120mm mortars struck" Hill 881S, wounding several Marines, and that "as they were being evacuated, several more rounds struck the helicopter zone, killing the company corpsman and two other Marines and destroying a CH–34 helicopter and wounding its crew." Col William H. Dabney, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Dabney Comments.

***Marine records state that the attack on Khe Sanh Village occurred at 0630 on the morning of the 21st while Colonel Bruce B. G. Clarke, USA, who was the senior U.S. Army advisor for Huong Hoa District, in an account he wrote in April 1968, states that the NVA attack began at 0500. See 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, and Capt Bruce Clarke, untitled account, dtd Apr68, attached to Col Bruce B. G. Clarke, Comments on draft, n.d. [Apr95] (Vietnam Comment File).


MARINE AND ALLIED UNITS
AT KHE SANH
FEBRUARY 1968
1/9
DROP ZONE
L/3/26
RED SECTOR
H & S CO
FOB—3
1/13 HQ.
155mm PROV BTRY
4.2" MTR BTRY
A BTRY 105mm
ASRT-B
TAFDS
AIR FREIGHT
CHARLIE MED
HELO REVETMENTS
1/26
GREY SECTOR
MATCU
CONTROL TOWER
FSCC
DASC
BLUE SECTOR
WATER POINT
CP
26th MARINES
GCA
B BTRY 105mm
C BTRY 105mm
MAIN AMMO DUMP
37th ARVN RANGER BN

of fog, elements of the *66th Regiment, 304th North Vietnamese Division* struck the Huong Hoa District headquarters in the village complex. The mixed group of defenders included two platoons of the 915th Regional Force Company, the small four-man U.S. Army advisory group headed by Army Captain Bruce B. G. Clarke, and two Combined Action Platoons of Combined Action Company "Oscar," commanded by Marine First Lieutenant Thomas B. Stamper. The total strength of the allied force consisted of approximately 175 soldiers and Marines. Combined Action Platoon Oscar–1 (CAP O–1) consisting of 10 Marines and 1 Navy corpsman, headed by Sergeant John J. Balanco, and about an equal number of Bru tribesmen, was in the headquarters hamlet. The second Combined Action Platoon, Oscar–2 (CAP O–2), led by Sergeant Roy Harper, at about the same strength, was in a nearby hamlet about 200 yards to the west.

With Captain Clarke and Lieutenant Stamper coordinating artillery and air support from the headquarters command bunker, CAP O–1 and the RF troops stood off the initial attacks in fierce fighting.* While eventually forced to give up most of the hamlet, the two units established a final defensive perimeter in the headquarters compound. CAP O–2 also managed for that first day to stave off the NVA in their sector.

As the fog lifted about midday on the 21st, the intensity of the combat slackened somewhat. While the North Vietnamese continued to place pressure upon the defenders with mortar and RPG bombardments, they limited their infantry action to small arms fire and probes. Helicopters attempted to resupply the embattled headquarters compound, but could not land. According to Corporal Balanco, the crews managed, however, to kick out some much needed ammunition.

Two relief expeditions also failed in their attempts. In the first, the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines from the Khe Sanh base sent out a platoon from Company D to the village. The platoon reached Hill 476 overlooking Khe Sanh Village and could see North Vietnamese troops deploying. Receiving new orders that the relief mission was too dangerous, the platoon returned to base. The second expedition was a disaster. The U.S. Army 282d Assault Helicopter Company attempted to bring in that evening the South Vietnamese 256th Regional Force Company from Quang Tri City. Unfortunately, in a series of mishaps and misunderstandings, the aircraft came down in a landing zone near the abandoned French Fort, 2,000 meters east of Khe Sanh, the former home of FOB–3, and now a North Vietnamese stronghold. It was a near slaughter: the North Vietnamese killed over 25 of the American pilots and crew and 70 or more of the RF troops. Among the dead was the expedition leader, U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Seymoe, the deputy advisor for Quang Tri Province. According to authors John Prados and Ray Stubbe, this failed expedition "in terms of proportionate casualties and equipment losses . . . would be the worst military debacle of the entire campaign at Khe Sanh."[23]

During the night of 21–22 January in Khe Sanh village, the situation remained tense but relatively quiet, except for some enemy sniper fire. During this time, the Marines and surviving Bru of CAP O–2 to the west, fought their way to the headquarters compound.** The Marines sustained several wounded but no dead. On the morning of the 22d, Sergeant Balanco, who was later awarded the Silver Star for his part in the fight, led a patrol towards the Old French Fort, hoping to find survivors of the aborted relief mission. At the bottom of the hill upon which the fort was situated, Balanco turned back, fearing he was being set up for an ambush after seeing some Vietnamese in strange uniforms. Upon approaching the western sector of the headquarters compound, Balanco and his men recovered what he claimed to be 150 weapons, including RPGs and assault rifles, many of them

*Captain Clarke was on a separate advisoty radio net ftom Lieutenant Stamper. Clatke managed to keep in tadio contact with Robett Btewet, the Senior Quang Tti Ptovince Advisot in Quang Tti City, and mote impottantly established tadio contact with an Air Force forward air controllet who called in repeated air sttikes against the Notth Vietnamese. Lieutenant Stampet had ditect tadio contact with the 26th Matines and was able to call in attillery supportt and Matine air through the Matine tadio net. Col Bruce B. G. Clatke, USA, Comments on dtaft, n.d. [Apr95] (Vietnam Comment File), hereaftet Clatke Comments; Capt Bruce Clatke, untitled account, dtd Apr68, attached to Clatke Comments. Accotding to Ptados and Stubbe, Captain Clarke was out on an early morning pattol just befote the enemy onslaught on the 21st, but "mitaculously got back to the perimetet and undet covet" to help cootdinate the defense. John Ptados and Ray W. Stubbe, *Valley of Decision, The Siege of Khe Sanh* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1991), p. 258.

**Fotmet Navy Corpsman John R. Robetts, who served with CAP O–2, tecalled that Setgeant Hatpet, although badly wounded, continued to coordinate the defense. Robetts wtote that most of the othet Marines in the CAP wete also wounded. Despite their wounds, the CAP–2 Marines decided that the only choice they had was to bteak out and attempt to teach CAP–1 in the headquarters compound, which they successfully did. John R. Robetts, "The Bastard Sons of Khe Sanh, the Matines of CAP, Oscat II," ms, attached to John J. Balanco, Comments on dtaft, dtd 15Nov94 and 5Apr95 (Vietnam Comment File).

brand new, from the bodies of the "hundreds of mutilated and mangled NVA" there.[24]

During the late morning of 22 January, a Marine helicopter took Lieutenant Stampler back to the Khe Sanh base to consult with Colonel Lownds about the feasibility of continuing the defense in the village. According to Lownds, upon Stampler's recommendation and after "long consideration and proper evaluation of the facts," he decided to evacuate the units.[25]

The resulting evacuation took place under chaotic conditions including North Vietnamese shelling. Sergeant Balanco remembered, "We received an agonizing radio message . . . from an emphatic and concerned Lt. Stampler telling us to pack up." According to Balanco, "no R.F.'s or Bru with their *'weapons'* would be allowed on the helicopters to return to the combat base." He recalled that six helicopter evacuation missions flew out of the village that day. As the first helicopters took off, a group of frightened Vietnamese civilians rushed to board the aircraft. Balanco fired "a few M–70 rounds" in the opposite direction, causing them to hold back so that the wounded could be taken out first.[26]

The helicopters took out all of the American wounded including two U.S. Army sergeants from the Advisory Group. Captain Clarke also had received orders from Robert Brewer, the Senior Quang Tri Province Advisor, to evacuate the headquarters. According to Clarke, Brewer had not wanted to abandon Khe Sanh Village, but in that Colonel Lownds could not provide any further artillery support, there was no longer any choice. Clarke and one of his advisory sergeants declined to board the helicopters. They led the remnants of the 195th RF Company and several of the Bru safely to the FOB–3 compound along a secret trail.[27]*



Photo courtesy of John J. Balanco

Cpl Bruce Brown, LCpl Frank Batchman, and Sgt John J. Balanco, members of Combined Action Company Oscar who served with the Bru Montagnards in the Khe Sanh village complex, are seen at the secretive Forward Operating Base (FOB) 3, next to the Khe Sanh base, where they set up new positions with their Bru Popular Force troops.

Sergeant Balanco departed on the last helicopter to leave the headquarters compound. Just before he boarded the aircraft, two civilian Bru approached him carrying a badly burned man and asked the Marine to take him on board. At the same time, the pilot was shouting: "No one except Americans could go on the LAST CHOPPER OUT and he was departing RIGHT NOW!" Taking out his pistol and thinking to put the wounded man out of his misery, Balanco suddenly changed his mind. He returned the pistol to his holster and "screamed for everyone to move back and got him on that last chopper out." After arriving at the Khe Sanh base, the Marines of Combined Action Company Oscar, including CAP–3 which also evacuated its hamlet located north of the headquarters, joined the RF troops and the Popular Force Bru at the southern edge of the FOB–3 compound.[28]**

Reinforcement and Fighting Back

On 22 January, Khe Sanh Combat Base was the scene of frenetic activity. The resupply effort continued as 20 Air Force C–123 sorties delivered another

*There seems to be some doubt whether Colonel Lownds ordered that the RFs and the Brus not be evacuated by helicopter. According to Lownds' interview, he ordered the evacuation of the Bru CAPs and RFs, but they and Captain Clarke elected to walk out rather than board the helicopters. Col David E. Lownds intvw, 13Mar68, pp. 22–23, in Khe Sanh: Transcriptions of Oral History, MCHC. Given the accounts on the ground by both Clarke and Sergeant Balanco, it is obvious that the RFs and the Bru would have boarded the helicopters if they had the choice. It may very well have been that Colonel Lownds' orders may have been misunderstood or that the situation on the ground may have derermined the decision not to evacuate them. In any event the relations between the Army advisors and the Marine command with the exception of the CAP Oscar Marines was not very good. Colonel Clarke later wrote: "It was so bad that the Marines were eavesdropping on our radio nets . . . In this regard, I had coordinated to have my own alternate communicarions back to Quang Tri." Clarke Commenrs.

**Captain Clarke later that afternoon led a Special Forces Strike Force from FOB–3 which destroyed everything of value in the Khe Sanh Village headquarrers. Clarke Comments and Balanco, "Abandoned," p. 186.



Photo from the Abel Collection

An Air Force C–123 Provider transport is about to land just beyond the leveled ammunition dump at Khe Sanh, bringing in much-needed supplies.

130 tons of ammunition. After unloading, the empty aircraft joined the helicopters of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 362 in evacuating wounded Marines and civilian refugees. Attack aircraft of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, as well as Navy and Air Force planes, struck known and suspected Communist positions in the surrounding area. The North Vietnamese did not remain silent. Artillery, rockets, mortar, and small arms fire pounded the base and hill positions at intervals throughout the day, playing havoc with efforts to repair damage. Enemy fire hit one CH–46 helicopter as it was lifting off from the airstrip, causing it to crash within the perimeter.[29]

At 1200 on the 22d, the 3d Marine Division ordered Lieutenant Colonel John F. Mitchell's 1st Battalion, 9th Marines to deploy to Khe Sanh.* Lieutenant Colonel Mitchell recalled that his battalion command group and two rifle companies arrived by helicopter that day. Mitchell remembered that as the helicopters landed the battalion was greeted by "a hail of automatic weapons fire followed by mortar fire" and the unit sustained its first casualties at Khe Sanh. According to the battalion commander, there were no guides and he directed his company commanders "to disperse their companies as best they could, seek protective cover or trenches, and await further orders." Then Mitchell sought out Colonel Lownds in the 26th Marines command post. The 26th Marines commander told Lieutenant Colonel Mitchell to assemble his troops and "be prepared for immediate deployment due west" of the Khe Sanh base. At Mitchell's request, given the lateness of the hour, Colonel Lownds agreed that Mitchell could wait until the following day to deploy to his new sector.[30]

The next morning, the battalion moved out from the combat base and spent much of the time in "clearing/reconnoitering the area west/southwest" of the combat base. Lieutenant Colonel Mitchell selected a small hill that fronted a rock quarry approximately 1,500 meters to the west southwest of the main base for his command post and main defensive area. Mitchell then sent the 1st Platoon of Company A about 500 meters outside the battalion perimeter on an

*See Chapter six for the redeployment of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines from Camp Evans.

even smaller hill to set up an outpost on a knoll west of the quarry, which he designated Alpha 1.* His priority at both sites was the building of his defensive positions starting "from scratch." While "building materials, wire, and mines" arrived from the main base as they "became available," the battalion first depended upon its own "ingenuity and hard work—digging—scrounging, . . . to survive the incoming."

Over the next several days, Khe Sanh maintained a high level of activity, as helicopters and cargo aircraft flew in and out as often as the weather permitted, and Marines worked to improve their defensive positions. On 23 January, enemy antiaircraft fire became a significant threat, with NVA gunners downing a helicopter and a jet attack aircraft in a 20-minute period.[31]

Communist shelling continued, completely destroying the base post office and further damaging bunkers, trenches, and the airstrip.[32] The Marines fought back, expending massive quantities of artillery and mortar ammunition in attempts to silence the enemy guns. This, however, proved to be a difficult task. The enemy gun positions were well-concealed in dense jungle, visible only when actually firing. Because these positions were usually located on the reverse slopes of hills, they were often not even visible from Marine positions. Air observers of the 3d Marine Division maintained constant patrol over the area during daylight hours, providing some of the information the Marines needed to return fire effectively.[33]**

Enemy long-range artillery presented an even more difficult problem. The accepted view was that the artillerymen fired their large guns from positions on Co Roc Mountain, a precipitous cliff southwest of the combat base, across the Laotian border and outside the maximum range of the artillery pieces of the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines. One 3d Marine Division intelligence officer, Major Gary E. Todd, wrote that the reports he read stated that "NVA artillery was dug into the eastern face of Co Roc so as to be almost impossible to hit with counter-battery fire, even if we had the artillery with range." These same sources reported that the NVA gun emplacements were in "man-made caves, completely camouflaged, and fitted out with rails similar to railroad tracks." The North Vietnamese gunners "would roll their guns to the mouth of the cave and, with barrel protruding, fire, then roll back smoothly into the cave and restore the camouflage." Navy Lieutenant Junior Grade Bernard D. Cole, attached to the 26th Marines as the assistant target intelligence officer, remembered that he "personally targeted Arc Light strikes (which came in flights of three B–52s) on Co Roc." According to Cole, "The strikes would quiet down the NVA gunners for a couple of hours—from the shock . . ., but then they would resume firing."[34]

Captain William H. Dabney, who commanded Company I, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines on Hill 881 South had a different perspective. According to Dabney, "Co Roc was a myth, perhaps because of the imposing look of the mountain and the romantic sounding name." While granting that some rounds were fired from artillery at Co Roc, he argued that the more destructive NVA firing positions were located to the west of Hill 881 South. Dabney contended that being seven kilometers west of Khe Sanh and 1,500 feet higher than the Marines on the base, his company was in a better position to locate the enemy artillery positions. While not always hearing the guns being fired, he declared, "we could usually hear the rounds going over."[35]

He described how one of his artillery spotters, Corporal Molimao Niuatoa, a native Samoan and blessed with unusually good eyesight, using powerful ships' binoculars, found several of these enemy guns to the west. Because of the location of Hill 881 and its height, the Khe Sanh DASC often passed off aircraft with unexpended munitions to Company I. As Dabney explained, the Khe Sanh DASC "rarely could see targets of opportunity" and "we, conversely, *always* [emphasis in the original] had targets." On one such occasion, according to the Marine captain, he just had

*Bert Mullins who served as a radioman to Lieutenant Colonel Mitchell recalled that after leaving the main base that they actually reached first the small hill which later became A–1. He remembered Mitchell "remarking that we must be on the wrong hill because it was much too small." Bert Mullins, Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Mullins Comments. Lieutenant Colonel Mitchell stated that he ordered the establishment of the A–1 outpost because he believed that the NVA would need more than one avenue of approach to make an all-out assault on the main base and that A–1 lay "astride the west to east axis" to Khe Sanh. Moreover, he needed "as much warning as possible before the enemy would reach 1/9's MLR [main line of resistance]." Col John F. Mitchell, Comments on draft, dtd 5Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Mitchell Comments.

**Navy Captain Bernard D. Cole, who as a lieutenant junior grade and naval gunfire officer assigned to the 26th Marines, served as an assistant target intelligence officer in the 26th Marines Fire Support Coordinating Center. He recalled that "air dropped sensors were a primary source of targeting data for us." These sensors "were still classified . . . and we were not supposed to refer to them as an info[rmation] source . . . ." Cole remembered that "we received a formatted readout from the sensors . . . [which] would indicate the sensor location and type, and the type of target (troops or vehicles) and the approximate number . . . ." Capt Bernard D. Cole, USN, Comments on draft, dtd 27Oct94 and 23Jun96 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Cole Comments.



Photo is from the Ted Vdorick Collection

A lone Marine can be seen standing up along the trenchline of Company D, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, located in the Rock Quarry about 1,500 meters west of the main base. Note the sandbags along the trenchline.

The American flag flies over the command bunker of Company I, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines on Hill 881 South, one of the main hill outposts. Captain William H. Dabney, the Company I commander, who had the colors raised every morning, argued that his company was in one of the best positions to locate the enemy guns.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191078



several flights of "Navy and Air Force birds handed off" to him when Corporal Niuatoa suddenly "spotted a flash and then several others." A few seconds later, the Marines on the hill heard the rounds going overhead and then saw them impacting on the main base. This time, Dabney contacted a Marine airborne forward air controller codenamed Southern Oscar flying a Cessna light single-engine fixed-wing O–1E. Turning over control of the aircraft given to him to Southern Oscar, Captain Dabney described to the airborne controller the nature of the target and relayed to him Corporal Niuatoa's directions. When Southern Oscar had one of the aircraft drop his bombs on a ridgeline and ask for an adjustment, Dabney recalled the corporal's response: "Left a click, add two ridge lines." Given these new bearings, the air controller spotted first one gun and then several others. While not sure because of enemy antiaircraft fire, Southern Oscar believed that the resulting airstrikes took out four of the guns. Dabney wanted to call in B–52 strikes on these positions, but declared that one of his everlasting frustrations was that nothing ever came of his recommendations.[36*]

*In his comments, Colonel Dabney wrote: "For what it's worth, the folks in the Khe Sanh COC [Combat Operations Center] never realized how the NVA artillery was emplaced and employed, but then, they never came up to [Hill] 881S and looked." He believed that they were unnecessarily fixated upon Co Roc. Although respecting the abilities and brilliance of Captain Mirza M. Baig, the 26th Marines Target Intelligence Officer, Dabney believed the latter too engrossed in his "technological acquisition goodies" and "forgot he had . . . eyeballs working for him." In supporting his viewpoint, Colonel Dabney asked why would the North Vietnamese employ their Russian-made 130mm guns with a 27,000 meter range from Co Roc which was only 12,000 meters from Khe Sanh and risk losing them. He observed that Hill 881 South was three to four miles off the gun target line from Co Roc, and "if we could *hear* [emphasis in the original] the rounds whistling over, they couldn't be coming from Co Roc!" Instead, he believed the main enemy guns were located about five kilometers north of Co Roc and about 15,000 meters west of Hill 881 South. Instead of emplacing them in battery positions, they placed individual guns "along the gun-target line, about 500 meters apart, since the target (Khe Sanh) was fixed, they had only to adjust each gun for range based on its location. Deflection was a constant." He concluded: "It made sense, really, to put their artillery, guns firing at extreme range . . . to the west, where they could fire down the long axis of the target. That way, 'over and shorts' still had effect on target." Dabney Comments. Captain Bernard D. Cole, USN, after reading Colonel Dabney's comments, wrote: "I do not dispute that Col Dabney was able to spot arty firing at Khe Sanh from positions other than Co Roc, but I certainly disagree that 'Co Roc was a myth.' We obviously knew about and targeted non-Co Roc arry, which we located through 'all source' intelligence—although Harry Baig regularly went out to the perimeter (without helmet or flak jacket!), our job in the FSCC was of course not observation but fire support coordination. I simply think that Col Dabney is basing his conclusion on inadequate information." Captain Cole also insisted that "If anyone called in a viable Arclight target, we would hit it . . . ." Cole Comments, dtd 23Jun96.

While there may have been some question about the location of the enemy guns, there was little dispute that enemy rockets, especially the 122mm Soviet type, posed possibly an even greater threat to the Khe Sanh base. Used in great volume and difficult to suppress, the enemy gunners fired them from west of the base which offered "the long axis of the base" as a target. Given the limited range of the missiles, Hill 881 South was in a strategic position. From the hill, the Marines of Company I could observe the NVA gunners shoot off their rockets, usually in sheaves of 50 rockets firing simultaneously towards Khe Sanh. This permitted Dabney to give the main base about a 10-second warning to sound the alarm and for the Marines there to take cover. While unable to suppress the rockets when they fired because of their sheer volume, Dabney's Marines were able to take countermeasures. According to the Company I commander, the North Vietnamese regularly used the same sites over and over so he employed his mortars and 106mm Recoilless Rifles against them "at night while they were setting up sometimes producing secondary explosions." The Marines also called in air strikes against the sites, but with mixed results because of the weather.[37]

An ominous indication of an even more extensive North Vietnamese campaign against the Marine base occurred in mid-January. On the morning of the 24th, Communist tanks overran the BV–33 Battalion, Royal Lao Army, at Ban Houaysan, an abandoned airfield on Route 9, just across the border in Laos. The appearance of NVA tanks outside North Vietnam was extremely unusual. Later the same day, an air observer reported sighting a MiG aircraft 10 to 15 miles west of Khe Sanh.

Closer to home, the 3d Platoon, Company F, 26th Marines engaged an NVA company only one kilometer north of the battalion's position on Hill 558. The Communist troops were equipped with helmets and flak jackets and used whistle signals. They were not afraid to leave their positions to maneuver, at one point sending 50 men against the Marines' flank. The Marines reported that the enemy fought tenaciously, refusing to withdraw even after "four hours of pounding" by artillery and aircraft. One North Vietnamese machine gunner remained at his post until killed by rifle fire at a range of only five meters.[38]

In light of the major battle anticipated at Khe Sanh, General Westmoreland requested that Lieutenant General Hoang Xuan Lam, the I Corps com-



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A801114

ARVN Rangers occupy a defensive trench east of the runway and actually just outside the main base. The American command wanted a Vietnamese unit to participate in Khe Sanh for "psychological" reasons as well as military.

mander, provide South Vietnamese units to participate in the defense of the combat base, citing "psychological reasons as well as military." Lam agreed, and on 27 January, Captain Hoang Pho and his ARVN 37th Ranger Battalion arrived at the combat base and took their place at the east end of the runway just forward of Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, actually outside of the base defensive perimeter. According to one source, Colonel Lownds wanted "to gain more elbow room . . . to push out the perimeter" since he had received implied criticism from his superiors about the limited extent of his defenses in this sector.[39] Although their unit, 318 men strong, was about 100 short of its authorization, these tough, disciplined soldiers would prove themselves time and again during the battle, earning the respect of the Marines.[40]

Enemy sappers were at work, apparently preparing the way for planned ground attacks. Marines on the perimeter found barbed wire cut, but replaced to look as if it were whole, and Claymore mines* turned around to face Marine trenches.[41] Intelligence reports from higher headquarters warned Colonel Lownds to be watchful for signs of NVA tunneling. The Marines monitored seismic intrusion detectors, drove metal engineer stakes into the ground and listened to them with stethoscopes borrowed from the medical unit, and even employed divining rods. They dug a number of "countermines" in response to possible indications of tunneling, but found no enemy tunnels.[42]

Beyond Marine positions, American aircraft opened a new era in warfare, planting unattended ground sensors near likely enemy avenues of approach and assembly areas.** These devices were extremely sensitive and could monitor sound or vibrations, transmitting their information by radio to intelligence personnel. The position of each sensor was carefully recorded, permitting the Marines to quantify unusual enemy activity. By noting the activation of a number of different sensors, intelligence personnel could estimate the size and composition of an enemy unit, as well as its direction of march and speed. The devices would play a key role in the battle.[43]***

Round Two

By the end of January, intelligence officers painted a frightening picture of the magnitude of the North Vietnamese effort around Khe Sanh. Reacting to developments, Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins, the commanding general of the 3d Marine Division, ordered Lownds to limit patrolling to within 500 meters of friendly lines. Tompkins feared that the North Vietnamese wanted to draw the Marines out into the open, away from the protection of their bunkers, trenches, mines, and barbed wire. Patrolling, he reasoned, was unnecessary because intelligence was

* A directional anti-personnel mine emplaced above ground facing the enemy.

** According to Colonel Dabney, he observed that these sensors were planted "by black, unmarked, 'Air America' [a CIA sponsored aviation company] birds which looked to me to be B–26s." Dabney Comments.

***Colonel John F. Mitchell, who in 1968 commanded the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines at Khe Sanh, commented that the 26th Marines provided him in early February with a "black box" that monitored sensors along Route 9. He observed that "it was very productive." His battalion S–2 or intelligence officer listened in on the NVA radio nets in conjunction with the sensor monitoring and "the raw intelligence gleamed . . . was put to good use throughout the siege." Mitchell Comments.

providing accurate information on enemy unit locations and activities.[44*]

Tet Mau Chanh, by far the most significant and celebrated holiday season in Vietnamese culture, approached. During some previous holiday periods, both sides had agreed to temporary cease-fires which were observed more often in the breach. In 1968, the Tet cease-fire was scheduled for the period from 1800, 29 January until 0600, 31 January. At 1100, 29 January the command post of the 37th ARVN Ranger Battalion received a radio message in a "northern accent" stating that the NVA had an ARVN Ranger patrol in sight, but would not fire because of Tet. The voice advised the Rangers to recall their patrols until after the holidays. The ARVN unit changed radio frequencies.[45] Later that day, the 3d Marine Division notified Khe Sanh that the Tet truce was canceled. One unit history recorded that "as if to signal that they also heard the news the NVA dropped six 60mm mortar rounds into the Combat Base at precisely 311800 January."[46**]

With the truce cancellation, the massive air campaign under Operation Niagara continued unabated. On 30 January, B–52s carried out the biggest strike of the war to that date against targets in the Khe Sanh area, dropping 1,125 tons of bombs.[47***]

The troop and logistics buildup at Khe Sanh, as well as the massive air support effort, indicated the resolve of U.S. forces to defend the base. Commanders and officials at every level, including the President, expressed concern for the situation in northwest Quang Tri Province. President Johnson, in particular, was sometimes depicted as having had a fixation with Khe Sanh. Indeed, an enduring legend of the campaign concerns an incident in which the President supposedly asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to sign a letter to the effect that they believed Khe Sanh could be defended. In truth, President Johnson asked for General Westmoreland's personal assessment of the situation, which was then circulated among the Service chiefs for comment. The Joint Chiefs of Staff unanimously endorsed Westmoreland's conclusion that Khe Sanh could and should be held.[48]

Perhaps the most dramatic indication of the President's concern was his question to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler, about the feasibility of using tactical nuclear weapons to resolve the battle on favorable terms. Westmoreland established a "small secret study group" to examine the consequences of what was nicknamed Operation "Fracture Jaw." The group reported that "because the region around Khe Sanh was virtually uninhabited, civilian casualties would be minimal." Although planning never proceeded beyond this stage, the President's interest in the possibility of such a drastic step underscored his perception of the seriousness of the situation at Khe Sanh.[49]

Bru refugees streamed into Khe Sanh seeking evacuation from the war-ravaged area. They told the Marines that the North Vietnamese claimed they would "liberate the Khe Sanh airstrip" by 5 February. Indeed, on the night of 3–4 February, sensors northwest of Hill 881 South detected the movement of 1,500 to 2,000 people. Captain Mirza "Harry" M. Baig, Colonel Lownds' Target Intelligence Officer, initially believed the movement to be a North Vietnamese resupply effort and passed the information to fire support units for their attack. On the following night, however, the massed movement continued and further study caused Baig to change his opinion. He now thought the sensors had detected a North Vietnamese regiment in attack formation.[50]

The 1st Battalion, 13th Marines, joined by four batteries of Army 175mm guns to the east, pounded the area indicated by Baig with volley after volley of artillery fire. The dreadful hammering had a telling effect. The sensors transmitted the rumble

*This limitation on patrolling did not apply to all of the forces at Khe Sanh. The members of FOB–3, the Studies and Observation Group (SOG), with their attached Montagnards continued to run their clandestine operations. Navy Captain Bernard D. Cole, who served in the 26th Marines FSCC, recalled that Colonel Lownds "had a small map room separate from the main FSCC Hq. When he took proposed B–52 strikes for approval, a Special Forces captain there plotted the progress of long-range patrols into Laos." Cole Comments. Former Marine Sergeant John A. Balanco who served with CAP O–2 at FOB–3 recalled: "Black helicopters would land with no markings on them and take men dressed in civilian clothes away." He mentioned that Captain Clarke and the mixed group with him also patrolled and the CAP Oscar Marines occasionally joined them. Balanco, "Abandoned," pp. 185–91. Colonel Mitchell stated that he did not adhere to the 500-meter limit either and that "1/9 patrolled evety day of the week" north, south, and west of his positions, "up to 1,200 meters or more." He mentioned that he and FOB–3 were the only commands that patrolled daily and that he and the FOB–3 commander "devised a coordinated plan for patrolling and intelligence gathering." It was his opinion "that you must have maneuverability to complement fire power and to keep your enemy having doubts about your intentions." Mitchell Comments.

**Both the North Vietnamese and the allied forces at Khe Sanh routinely monitored each others' radio nets. Colonel Mitchell with the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines commented that by monitoring the enemy nets, it was apparent that the North Vietnamese had "complete knowledge of the . . . T/O and T/E of the Marine units at Khe Sanh," including the "names of key commanders." Mitchell Comments.

***For further discussion of Operation Niagara see Chapter 23.



Photo from the David Douglas Duncan Collection, MCHC

MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins, the CG, 3d MarDiv, is seen as a passenger with an unidentified crew member in a Marine helicopter on one of his frequent visits to the Khe Sanh base.

of impacting shells, as well as the voices of hundreds of panic-stricken men running to escape the deadly barrage.

Just to the east of the target area, the men of Captain Earle G. Breeding's Company E, 2d Battalion, 26th Marines watched the scene from a hilltop position just 500 meters northeast of Company K's strongpoint on Hill 861. Company E had occupied the hill (dubbed "861A") that morning, 5 February, because it blocked direct observation between Hill 861 and the 2d Battalion strongpoint on Hill 558. There were no sensors near Hill 861 or 861A.[51]

At 0300, about two hours after the Marine and Army artillerymen shelled the suspected North Vietnamese regiment, the combat base came under Communist rocket, artillery, and mortar fire. Five minutes later, Captain Breeding reported that 200 North Vietnamese were breaching the wire atop Hill 861A and Colonel Lownds immediately set a "Red Alert" for the 26th Marines.[52]

Smoke from a B–52 massive Arclight airstrike rises in the background as photographed from FOB–3. During Operation Niagara, the Boeing Stratofortress long-range bombers based at Guam and Thailand conducted hundreds of these strikes in support of the Marines at Khe Sanh.

Photo courtesy of John J. Balanco



Intense mortar and small arms fire rained down on Company E from the attacking NVA even as the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines poured on a heavy answering barrage. Communist sappers blasted holes in the protective barbed wire through which following infantry advanced, shooting as they came. Company E, having occupied the hill only a few hours before, was not well-entrenched. Still, the Marines used every weapon they could bring to bear, including CS gas grenades, against the oncoming North Vietnamese.[53]

The enemy troops pressed their attack vigorously, reaching and penetrating the 1st Platoon's perimeter. First Lieutenant Donald E. R. Shanley and his platoon withdrew in good order to alternate positions from which they continued the fight. Meanwhile, friendly artillery rolled back and forth over the slope upon which the North Vietnamese were attacking, seeking to cut off any following reinforcements. Aircraft joined in, dropping their loads under radar control accomplished by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing's Air Support Radar Team (ASRT) B of Marine Air Support Squadron (MASS) 3 at the combat base.

Shortly after the North Vietnamese penetration, at 0500, Lieutenant Shanley led his men from their fighting holes in a bold counterattack. The 1st Platoon fell upon the enemy with knives, bayonets, rifle butts, and fists. Captain Breeding later described the scene as "just like a World War II movie . . . Charlie didn't know how to cope with it . . . we just walked all over him."[54] The North Vietnamese who survived the counterattack fled the hilltop, then regrouped and attacked again, halfheartedly. The Marines quickly repulsed the discouraged enemy.

While the fight for Hill 861A cost Company E, 7 dead and 24 wounded, a company sweep at dawn revealed over a 100 enemy dead on the slope of the hill

President Lyndon B. Johnson confers with U.S. Army Gen Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Joint Chiefs concurred with Gen Westmoreland's assessment that Khe Sanh could be successfully defended

Photo Courtesy of Center of Military History

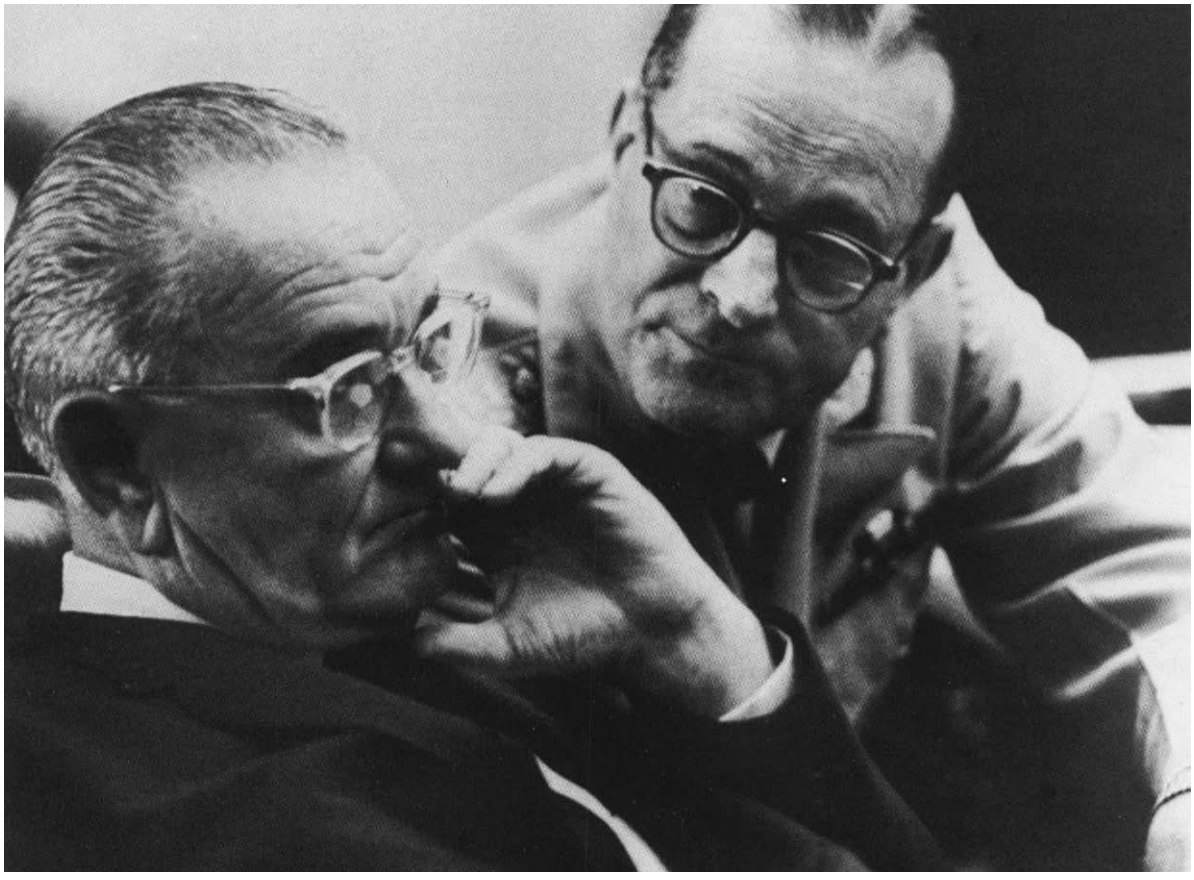




Photo from the David Douglas Duncan Collection, MCHC

A Marine sniper team on Hill 861A from Company E, 2d Battalion, 26th Marines goes into action. On the left is LCpl Albert Miranda with his Remington 700 sniper rifle, taking aim at a distant target, while his partner, in the center, LCpl David Burdwell, points out the enemy soldier to his platoon commander, Second Lieutenant Alec J. Bodenweiser, with the binoculars.

and within the perimeter. Captain Baig later speculated that the heavy and accurate artillery fire (almost 2,000 rounds from the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines alone) on and behind the assaulting Communists had prevented their reserves from joining the attack.[55]

The Fall of Lang Vei

Having failed to capture first Hill 861, then its neighbor 861A, the North Vietnamese turned their attention elsewhere. Their next target was the new Lang Vei Special Forces Camp, defended by Detachment A–101, Company C, 5th Special Forces Group and four CIDG companies of Bru Montagnards.

Lang Vei was a heavily fortified position on Route 9 about two kilometers from the Laotian border from which Detachment A–101 ran patrols to monitor North Vietnamese infiltration into Quang Tri Province. About a kilometer closer to Khe Sanh was the village of Lang Vei, site of the old Special Forces camp. Here, the survivors of the Royal Lao BV–33 Battalion, overrun by North Vietnamese tanks at Ban Houaysan a few days before, rested with thousands of civilian refugees, including their own families.[56]

The many missions assigned to the 26th Marines for the Khe Sanh battle included responsibility for providing fire support for Lang Vei and for reinforcing the camp should the enemy attack it. Lieutenant Colonel Hennelly sent a 1st Battalion, 13th Marines forward observer to the camp on 6 January to register defensive fires. A month earlier, Colonel Lownds sent a company from Khe Sanh to Lang Vei to rehearse the reinforcement plan. It stayed off the road under the assumption that the enemy would set ambushes along Route 9 as part of an attack on Lang Vei. Because of the heavy jungle, the company took 19 hours to cover the nine-kilometer distance.[57]

At 0030, 7 February, the North Vietnamese struck the Lang Vei camp. In the first engagement between



Both photos are from the David Douglas Duncan Collection

Top, Capt Earle G. Breeding, Commander of Company E, 2d Battalion, 26th Marines, with cigar in his right hand and radio in his left, reports the successful counterattack of his company against the enemy on Hill 861A. Below, two Marines of Company E repair the unit's barbed wire after its successful defense of Hill 861A. The body of one of the attackers is in the foreground.



American troops and enemy tanks since the Korean War, 12 Soviet-built PT–76 light amphibious tanks of the *202d Armor Regiment*, followed closely by infantry from the *304th Division*, crashed through the chain link fence surrounding the compound and rolled through the camp shooting. The defenders destroyed a number of the tanks with 106mm recoilless rifle fire, but to no avail. In a desperate and hard-fought action, the enemy overwhelmed Detachment A–101 and the Bru CIDG companies. Survivors remained in bunkers, among them the detachment commander, Army Captain Frank Willoughby, a former Marine noncommissioned officer.[58]

From his underground combat operations center (COC), Willoughby called for air and artillery support. The 1st Battalion, 13th Marines responded to Willoughby's request with repeated missions, firing the brand-new, top-secret controlled fragmentation munitions (COFRAM), colloquially known as "Firecracker," for the first time in combat.* Overhead, Marine and Air Force attack aircraft tried to follow Willoughby's directions in the darkness to drop their bombs on enemy concentrations in and around the camp.[59]

For most of the night, Willoughby and a few other survivors remained in the COC bunker with an enemy tank on top of them, firing, while the North Vietnamese rolled countless fragmentation and gas grenades into the bunker and called to the soldiers in English to surrender. Willoughby remained in radio contact with the 5th Special Forces Group in Da Nang which requested that the 26th Marines execute the previously arranged contingency plan for the reinforcement of Lang Vei. Colonel Lownds refused, reporting that the combat base itself was even then being heavily shelled and that he expected an enemy assault against the airstrip at any time. Further, the difficulty of moving through the difficult terrain to Lang Vei at night with enemy tanks on Route 9 made reinforcement, in the words of one Marine staff officer, "suicidal."[60]

Generals Westmoreland, Cushman, and Tompkins accepted Lownds' decision. Westmoreland later wrote, "honoring the prerogative of the field commander on the scene, I declined to intervene until I could ascertain more on the situation." During the late morning of 7 February at Da Nang, General Westmoreland met with General Cushman and other senior commanders in I Corps. While the conference dealt with the situation throughout I Corps, General Westmoreland expressed his concern about the Lang Vei situation. Among the participants at the meeting were Army Colonel Jonathan F. Ladd, the commander of the 5th Special Forces Group, who had just flown from Khe Sanh to Da Nang, and Army Lieutenant Colonel

Bru civilian refugees, including many children, walk toward Ca Lu along Route 9 after the fall of Lang Vei. Not having the resources to care for them and fearing the possibility of enemy infiltrators, the Marines decided against allowing the refugees into the Khe Sanh base.

Photo from the 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68



* A projectile containing a number of "submunitions" or bomblets, which are ejected from the shell and spread over a wide area, each bomblet exploding like a small grenade. It is considerably more lethal than the standard high explosive projectile. This ammunition is still in use today under the name Improved Conventional Munitions (ICM). Lieutenant Colonel John A. Hennelly who commanded the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines recalled that sometime earlier an Army brigadier general and warrant officer "flew into Khe Sanh with some 105mm cofram and a hand-written set of firing tables for the new ammo." From his understanding, "it sounded like COFRAM would be good against troops in the open on terrain without much vegetation." Hennelly stated that when "things hit the fan" and the Special Forces required artillery support, he would have preferred "HE [high explosive] rounds" with variable or time fuzes. He, however, received orders to use the COFRAM, "The orders were coming from Washington, D.C. (honest to Pete)." Hennelly stated that "we fired a mission or two with Cofram but it was not the time or situation to be messing around with a new ammo. It was slowing the fire missions down." He directed that they switch back to conventional ammunition and "that's primarily what we fired although I was telling folks up-the-line we were using cofram." Hennelly Comments.

Daniel L. Baldwin, III, the northern SOG commander. Ladd strongly advocated that a relief force be sent immediately to relieve or evacuate the survivors. Lieutenant Colonel Baldwin recommended that the Special Forces troops at FOB–3 conduct a helicopter-supported evacuation of the camp. After much discussion and some recrimination, General Westmoreland ordered General Cushman to provide helicopter and fixed-wing support to Baldwin.[61]*

By this time, however, the defenders were largely dependent upon their own efforts. Individually and sometimes in groups, the Special Forces and Bru CIDG troops broke out of the camp and most made their way to Lang Vei Village where the Royal Laotian BV–33 Battalion still remained. Special Forces personnel with the battalion in the old camp there attempted to encourage and plead with the Laotians to assist their comrades in the new camp, but the results were only a few feeble and begrudging counterattacks. Shortly after 1700, under strong air cover from fixed-wing aircraft and helicopter gunships, Marine CH–46s helilifted the relief force from FOB–3 into old Lang Vei. Despite some mobbing by Laotian and some of the Vietnamese troops, the helicopters brought out most of the Americans and the most seriously wounded of the Laotians and Vietnamese troops. The rest made their way to Khe Sanh on foot. The loss of life was heavy for the Special Forces and CIDG troops at "new" Lang Vei. Almost 300 of the camp's 487 defenders were killed, wounded, or missing, including 10 Americans killed and missing, and another 13 wounded from a total of 24.[62]

Of the debacle and its aftermath, General Cushman later said:

> The base was overrun in the middle of the night, in a matter of a couple of hours. . . . The garrison had already been defeated. There was nothing one could do really, to salvage the situation. . . . it would have been a grave risk to send Marines from Khe Sanh to Lang Vei in the hours of darkness.[63]**

The destruction of Lang Vei created a secondary problem for Colonel Lownds. More than 6,000 refugees, many of them Laotians of the BV–33 Battalion and their families, as well as a number of Vietnamese Special Forces and Bru CIDG personnel who had escaped Lang Vei alive, crowded outside the gates of the combat base. Lownds refused to admit them

*Colonel Ladd, the 5th Special Forces Commander, in an oral history several years later described his activities and participation in the 7 February meeting. He declared that he had been at Lang Vei up to the night before the camp had been hit, and that the Special Forces there "could hear the tanks moving around." Ladd departed by helicopter to obtain anti-tank mines and assistance. According to Ladd, he talked to General Cushman at Da Nang who wanted to help him, but the people in Saigon did not believe that there were tanks there and that the Special Forces "didn't need" the mines. He then flew back over Lang Vei the following morning and saw tanks sitting on top of the base. According to his account, he then went to Khe Sanh and asked Colonel Lownds to mount a relief expedition which Lownds refused to do. Ladd then flew back to Da Nang and found General Westmoreland there. According to the Special Forces colonel, he then told Westmoreland there were three choices: "Stay there and hold; abandon the place; or the Marines reinforce." Frustrated at the meeting, Ladd declared he then called General Abrams, stating: "I just can't get Westmoreland's attention long enough to do anything. He is just putting it off." Ladd claimed that it was General Abrams who called General Norman Anderson, the Marine 1st MAW commander and ordered him to provide aircraft support for an evacuation. Col Jonathan F. Ladd, USA (ret) intvw, n.d. [1977?] (U.S. Army, Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pa), pp. 22–30, attached to Clarke Comments, hereafter Ladd Intvw. The discussions at the meeting of 7 February were wide ranging and involved the situation at Da Nang as well as at Lang Vei (See Chapter Eight). Many of the participants at the meeting had very different perceptions of what occurred. General Westmoreland later wrote that he was "shocked at things that virtually begged to be done . . . ." Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 342. On the other hand, both General Cushman and General Earl E. Anderson, Cushman's chief of staff, remembered no acrimony at the meeting. Cushman Intvw, Nov82, p. 29 and Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). Marine Brigadier General John R. Chaisson, however, who headed the MACV Combat Operations Center, in a letter soon after the meeting, wrote about "recriminations between the Green Berets and the Marines." BGen John R. Chaisson ltr to his wife, dtd 8Feb68 (Chaisson Papers, Hoover Institute).

**Most Marines agreed with General Cushman and would accept the statement of Navy Chaplain Ray W. Stubbe, who has written and researched extensively on the subject of Khe Sanh, that an entire NVA regiment "waited to ambush any rescue force." LCdr Ray W. Stubbe, USN, Comments on draft, dtd 23Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File). Major Gary E. Todd, who served as an intelligence officer on the 3d Marine Division staff during this period, supported this view in his comments that Bru refugees "had seen what amounted to an NVA regiment lying in ambush between KSCB [Khe Sanh Combat Base] and Lang Vei that night during the attack." Maj Gary E. Todd, Comments on draft, dtd 28Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File). One Marine exception to the contention that a relief expedition was infeasible that night was Colonel John F. Mitchell, who commanded the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, at the time, the unit slated to carry out the Marine contingency plan for the relief of Lang Vei. Colonel Mitchell commented that at the end of January Colonel Lownds assigned him the Lang Vei relief mission. According to Mitchell, the plan at that time called for the battalion to make the relief overland. The battalion commander suggested to Colonel Lownds that "the only successful way to accomplish this mission, would be by Helo Assault." At that point, Lownds answered, "Hell you would lose one-half your force and helicopters during the landing." While not taking exception to Colonel Lownds projection, Mitchell replied, "Yes, but I would be there." Colonel Mitchell still contends: "In my opinion the Marines should have done the 'right thing' by sending a relief unit." Mitchell Comments, dtd 9Feb96.

because he did not have the resources to care for them and because he feared that the crowd might conceal enemy infiltrators. But neither could he allow them to remain outside the wire for fear that the enemy might use them to shield an attack on the perimeter.

On the afternoon of 7 February, General Tompkins issued guidance for dealing with the refugees in the event the NVA attempted to use them to screen an attack. First, the Marines were to use CS gas in an attempt to disperse the crowd. If that failed, they would fire over their heads. If the North Vietnamese continued to push the refugees in front of an attack, Tompkins authorized the garrison to shoot into the crowd.[64] To preclude such a disastrous occurrence, Lownds arranged to move the refugees about two kilometers from the perimeter for the night. Some were eventually processed and flown out, but most simply walked away, down Route 9 to the east.*

The Intensifying Battle

Fresh from their first major success of the Khe Sanh campaign, the Communist forces moved quickly against their next objective. During the night following the Lang Vei battle, three companies of the *101D Regiment* moved into attack positions near the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines.

About 500 meters west of the battalion's perimeter, Second Lieutenant Terence R. Roach, Jr., and Company A's 1st Platoon, occupied "Alpha 1," named after the platoon's designation. With added machine gun teams, forward observers, and corpsmen, Lieutenant Roach's reinforced platoon numbered 66 men. The outpost provided an extra measure of security for the battalion through its ability to detect and report enemy activity well forward of the lines.

The Alpha 1 outpost was a well-prepared defensive position. The hill itself was quite steep on all but the northwest slope. It was ringed by multiple layers of barbed wire on the slopes and, at the crest, a trench network which included a number of sandbagged bunkers.[65]

At 0415 8 February, in heavy fog and near-total darkness, the North Vietnamese struck the outpost, laying down a heavy and accurate mortar barrage that covered the hilltop for three to four minutes. Enemy infantry followed close on the heels of the mortar fire, attacking from the northwest.

The North Vietnamese assault troops threw canvas over the outpost's protective barbed wire and rolled over it. Almost immediately, enemy soldiers swarmed into the inner perimeter. Lieutenant Roach tried to stem the breakthrough almost singlehandedly, killing several of the enemy with his rifle and attempting to rally the troops on the perimeter. While able to pull one of the badly wounded Marines to relative safety, he died in a hail of automatic weapons fire. The enemy had successfully captured half of the hilltop, while the remnants of the platoon attempted to regroup, especially in the southeastern portion of the outpost.[66]

While the defenders of the Alpha 1 outpost fought desperate hand-to-hand encounters in the trenchlines, sometimes swinging entrenching tools or five-gallon water cans, the rest of the battalion endured persistent and heavy shelling, apparently intended by the NVA to prevent the dispatch of reinforcements. Nonetheless, the battalion's mortar crews braved the incoming rounds to fire in support of Alpha 1.

On the hill, about 30 Marine survivors gathered in the southern portion of the trench network and used sandbags to wall off their part of the trench from the enemy. Some of their weapons were damaged or destroyed, ammunition was scarce, and many of the men were wounded. The North Vietnamese did not rush them, but instead contented themselves with

*The situation with the refugees especially with the Bru exacerbated the already strained relationships between the Army Special Force troops and the Marine command at Khe Sanh. The Special Force units believed that the Bru who had served with them faithfully and well were being misused. Colonel Ladd stated in an interview several years later that when the Bru arrived at the Khe Sanh base they were stripped of their weapons and turned back. According to Ladd, the Marines at the base said, "they couldn't trust any gooks in their damn camp." Ladd Intvw. Both Army Colonel Bruce B. G. Clarke, who had been at Khe Sanh Village and later brought his forces to FOB–3 and former Marine Sergeant John J. Balanco CAP O–2 also at FOB–3 wrote of the suspicion that they received. As a CAP Marine, Balanco identified very closely with the Bru with whom he served and stated that he felt very isolated after the CAPs were "not allowed on the base with our fighting Bru!" While at FOB–3, he noticed that the Marine tanks at Khe Sanh had their guns trained on FOB–3. Balanco, "Abandoned," pp. 185–91. Colonel Clarke noted that at FOB–3, "We often took more fire from behind than from the NVA to our front." Clarke observed that the basic difficulty at Khe Sanh was "that there was no unity of command in the AO [Area of Operations], a lack of communication and coordination and misunderstanding of the interrelated destiny that would be ours." Clarke Comments. In relationship to unity of command, Colonel Lownds was in a difficult situation. As one Marine officer, Colonel William H. Dabney, who at the time commanded Company I, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines on Hill 881S, observed the Special Forces had their own command channels separate from the Marines and were not under Colonel Lownds' operational control. From the Marine perspective, the Special Forces including the FOB–3 troops, "were so secretive and so independent that they were impossible to coordinate as part of a larger battle. . . . Special units do not belong near a pitched battle. They only inhibit fire support and get in the way." Dabney Comments.

showering great numbers of grenades on the Marines. One survivor later recounted, ". . .they continued throwing 25 or 30 grenades every 4 or 5 minutes. It was unbelievable how many . . . grenades they had actually transported into battle."[67]

At 0740, the commanding officer of Company A, Captain Henry J. M. Radcliffe, gathered up his 2d Platoon and went to the rescue of the outpost. The relief force fought its way to the base of the hill in 25 minutes. There, Radcliffe directed an air strike on the North Vietnamese, then led his Marines in a frontal assault which forced the enemy off the hill and directly into the fire of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines. Companies B and D joined the 106mm recoilless rifles and a tank in cutting down the retreating enemy troops. By 1100, the battle was over and the charred and blasted remains of the outpost were again in Marine hands.[68]*

Alpha 1 Marines had paid a high price. Worse than the utter destruction of their position, casualties numbered 24 dead and 27 wounded. Over 150 North Vietnamese bodies littered the hill and many more may have died. Additionally, the Marines captured much enemy equipment, including 13 machine guns, an indication that the North Vietnamese fled the battlefield in disorder.[69]

Although the hill was once more under friendly control and evidence suggested that the Communist forces had suffered a defeat, Colonel Lownds ordered the outpost abandoned. Captain Radcliffe and his men withdrew to the battalion perimeter.

In the four days from 5 February through 8 February, the North Vietnamese launched three major assaults on positions in the Khe Sanh complex, succeeding only at Lang Vei. The battles for Hill 861A and the Alpha 1 outpost, though desperate and bloody for the Marines, had ended as stinging defeats for the Communist forces. The second round was over.

Apparently still smarting from heavy casualties suffered in their assaults on the outlying positions, the Communist forces tried a new approach. They stopped attempting to seize the outposts and increased their attentions to the combat base itself.

North Vietnamese trenches reached toward the eastern end of the airstrip, growing at the astonishing speed of several hundred meters in a single night.[70] One Marine recorded that, "we watched with some fascination and no small apprehension, day by day, as the trenches crept closer and closer to our perimeter."[71] Some of the enemy trenchlines stretched 2,000 meters from assembly areas to within 35 meters of the Marines' perimeter.[72]

The Marines tried a number of tactics to discourage the enemy's digging. Aircraft attacked the trenches with rockets, 2,000-pound bombs, and "napalm baths," a scheme in which they dropped a number of unfused napalm tanks on the target which were then ignited by rocket or cannon fire from following planes. Despite the Marines' best efforts, however, the digging continued apace.[73]** At the same time, North Vietnamese gunners kept up their program of daily firing on the base, especially during periods when fog or clouds reduced visibility and hampered U.S. air operations, thereby helping to conceal the enemy guns.[74]

Throughout the siege, the base remained totally dependent upon air-delivered supplies, which fact the North Vietnamese were obviously aware. Enemy antiaircraft guns appeared in the hills surrounding the airstrip, forcing cargo aircraft to run a gauntlet of fire both on their approach to and their retirement from Khe Sanh. Aircraft attempting to land prompted an avalanche of incoming fire seemingly from every weapon, of every caliber, which the North Vietnamese could bring to bear on the airstrip. The destruction on 10 February of a Marine KC–130 dramatized on television the vulnerability of the air link to Khe Sanh.***

The incredible firepower the Marines marshalled to defend Khe Sanh scarred the countryside so that it looked, in General Tompkins words, "like pictures of the surface of the moon, in that it was cratered and pocked and blasted."[75] Aircraft and howitzers pounded the surrounding countryside with unrelenting ferocity, treating the NVA to a steady diet of attacks. A diverse and highly developed targeting system supported this process, using input from air observers, sensors, signal intelligence, agents, prisoners, ralliers, refugees, and

*Colonel Mitchell, the battalion commander, stated that he had wanted to launch the relief mission earlier, but did not receive permission until 0730. Mitchell also explained that he had one tank attached to his battalion, but would move the tank every night. This way the enemy would know "1/9 had a tank capability, but he wouldn't know how many." Mitchell Comments.

**Colonel Mitchell, nevertheless, claimed that his 1st Battalion, 9th Marines attained some success against the enemy's digging efforts. He stated that he ordered his Company D commander to send out units from fire team to platoon, before the fog lifted, to destroy or collapse the enemy tunnels. He also stepped up patrols to 400 meters "to ensure the beginning of tunnel activity." According to Mitchell, his intelligence officer who monitored the NVA radio nets, heard "discontinue tunneling activities in the 1/9 sector as it is non-productive." Mitchell Comments.

***See Chapter 23 for the detailed account relative to the air supply of the Marine base.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190852

Two Marine forward observers lying on top of a bunker train high-powered binoculars on enemy trenchlines in an attempt to locate NVA mortars. Another Marine can be seen resting inside the bunker.

special operations units, as well as information provided by the Marines manning the defenses of Khe Sanh. In one instance, the 26th Marines scheduled a special air and artillery strike in reaction to a report concerning a "force-wide meeting" of enemy commanders and their staffs in a schoolhouse on the Laotian border. Twenty minutes after the scheduled start time of the meeting, 2 Grumman A–6 Intruders and 4 McDonnell-Douglas F–4 Phantoms dropped 152 500-pound bombs followed by 8 artillery batteries firing 350 rounds into an area large enough "to take in the hangers-on and other idlers who usually congregate around large staffs."[76]

Near the end of February, the intensity of enemy shelling increased even further, reaching a crescendo on the 23d, when according to an official count, 1,307 rounds of artillery, rocket, and mortar fire slammed into the base, killing 12 and wounding 51.* A chance hit on Ammunition Supply Point Number 3 caused secondary explosions which consumed over 1,600 rounds of 90mm and 106mm ammunition.[77]

On 25 February, Second Lieutenant Donald Jacques led the 3d Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines through the perimeter wire of the combat base and headed south on a short-range patrol as part of the regiment's effort to gather information on enemy activity close to the base. About a kilometer south of the base, the patrol spotted three North Vietnamese near the road leading to Khe Sanh Village and gave chase. Just south of the road, the Marines ran into an ambush. A company-sized enemy unit occupying a bunker complex allowed the platoon to advance to within point-blank range before opening fire and driving the Marines to cover.[78]

The platoon attempted to maneuver, but under the intense enemy fire, casualties mounted rapidly. Jacques ordered a withdrawal while the company commander, Captain Pipes, sent another platoon to assist. Second Lieutenant Peter W. Weiss led the 1st Platoon through the gaps in the perimeter wire and headed for the scene of the ambush. About 300 meters from the beleaguered 3d Platoon, Weiss and his men received enemy machine gun fire from 20 meters to their front, forcing them to the ground.[79]**

*Colonel Dabney doubted the accuracy of this official count, making the point that "when you are getting that many rounds, nobody is fool enough to sit around and count them." Dabney Comments. On the other hand, Captain Cole related that "the FSCC made a serious attempt to count incoming rounds—and . . . . Jack Hennelly [Lieutenant Colonel John A. Hennelly, commander of the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines] was very conservative about this, so if 1,307 was too exact, it probably was not too far off the mark." Cole Comments, dtd 23Jun96.

**According to George W. Jayne, who was a fireteam leader with the 1st Platoon, his squad received the bulk of the enemy's first burst of fire, killing both the squad leader and Navy corpsman. George W. Jayne, Comments on draft, dtd 1Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A190594

Large clouds of dust and smoke obscure part of the Khe Sanh combat base after an enemy rocket and artillery bombardment. On 23 February another Marine ammunition supply point took a direct hit, which resulted in several secondary explosions

With both platoons still under extremely heavy close-range fire, the Marines at the combat base attempted to provide supporting fire from tanks, heavy machine guns, and 106mm recoilless rifles, but fog and the proximity of friendly and enemy forces hampered their efforts. To add to the confusion, the North Vietnamese entered Company B's radio net, possibly using a radio captured from one of the 3d Platoon's destroyed squads, compounding communication problems in the critical situation.[80]

Several survivors from the 3d Platoon filtered back to the 1st Platoon. Lieutenant Weiss ordered his men to gather the wounded and withdraw. The 3d Platoon was a shambles. Lieutenant Jacques was severely wounded, and most of his men were either wounded, dead, or missing. The 81mm mortar forward observer, a Blackfoot Indian corporal named Gilbert Wall, threw Lieutenant Jacques over his shoulder and carried him, with his radio, back to the perimeter, adjusting mortar fire missions all the way back. The lieutenant, however, was hit in both femoral arteries and bled to death even as Wall carried him.[81*]

For what had started out as a platoon patrol, the casualties were staggering: 6 killed in action, 17 wounded, and 25 missing.[82**] No enemy casualties could be confirmed. On 27 February, Colonel Lownds issued further restrictions on patrolling,

*Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth W. Pipes, who commanded Company B at Khe Sanh, observed that Lieutenant Jacques was one of his strongest platoon leaders. His platoon had occupied one of the key defensive positions at the base and Jacques' men had ambushed an NVA reconnaissance unit in late December 1967. Pipes remarked that all the leaders of this platoon including the squad leaders were killed in this action—in front and leading their men. According to Pipes, "the extent of the NVA entrenchments and fortifications were not as evident until the tragic action . . . ." Pipes Comments, 1995.

**One of the Marines listed as killed in action was Sergeant Ronald L. Ridgway, who turned out to have been captured by the North Vietnamese and released in March 1973 after the Paris Agreement of January 1973.

limiting it to that which was "necessary to insure the security of . . . defensive obstacles and local security elements."[83]

Apparently buoyed by their success against the ill-fated Marine patrol, the North Vietnamese once more tried their hands at penetrating the combat base perimeter. During the night of 28–29 February, sappers prepared the ground to the front of the ARVN 37th Ranger Battalion, cutting holes in the wire, and removing mines and trip flares. Their activity went undetected until the next morning.[84]

The following night at 2130, in heavy fog, a battalion of the North Vietnamese *66th Regiment, 304th Division* struck the ARVN positions. Unknown to the enemy, electronic sensors had silently heralded their impending attack and by the time the first waves of assault troops rushed the wire, two B–52 strikes, diverted from other targets, were on the way. The 1st Battalion, 13th Marines, accompanied by the Army's 175mm guns and radar-directed attack aircraft, pounded the North Vietnamese infantry with telling effect. The B–52s saturated the area to the rear of the assault waves with tons of high explosive bombs, devastating what the sensors indicated was a second enemy battalion moving forward to attack.[85]

Once again, the weight of U.S. fire support wrecked the enemy's efforts. The Rangers reported that the North Vietnamese left 7 dead in the perimeter wire, but a search the following morning revealed 71 more with many bangalore torpedoes and satchel charges. Of the carnage, one account read,

> . . . the dead were still huddled in trenches, many in the kneeling position, in three successive platoon lines, as if they had been caught in the assault position. The devastating effect of the firecracker round was apparent.[86]

The only friendly casualty was a single wounded Ranger.

For the remainder of the Khe Sanh battle, the enemy concentrated most of his efforts against the ARVN 37th Ranger Battalion, attacking its position seven times during March, including another battalion-sized assault on the 18th. Although North Vietnamese sappers breached the wire during one of these attacks, the Rangers repulsed every attempt, with the assistance of supporting fires from the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines and attack aircraft.[87] In addition to these assaults, the North Vietnamese employed psychological warfare against the ARVN, using loudspeaker broadcasts enticing them to defect.[88*]

At the beginning of March, III MAF began planning Operation Pegasus, a major effort to reopen Route 9 from Dong Ha to Khe Sanh. In the meantime, air delivered supplies remained the order of the day.** The monsoon ended in March, greatly easing the weather problems which had earlier plagued air operations in the area.[89] Antiaircraft fire and incoming rounds on the airstrip, however, remained a problem. The first day of the month, mortar fire struck a C–123 as it landed, destroying the aircraft.[90] On 6 March, enemy gunners downed another C–123 about five miles east of Khe Sanh, killing 43 Marines, a sailor, and the crew of 4.*** Only one and a half hours later, incoming fire damaged and grounded another C–123 attempting to take off. This aircraft remained at Khe Sanh awaiting repairs, where it was hit once more on the 17th and destroyed.[91] Helicopters suffered as well, with two Boeing CH–46 Sea Knights and a Bell UH–1 Iroquois falling to enemy gunners during the month.[92]

In early March, North Vietnamese propaganda teams entered Montagnard villages, announcing that the final, major attack on Khe Sanh Combat Base would soon begin. But, by the middle of the month, the theme had changed to "Ho Chi Minh would be unhappy if they [the NVA] wasted their time on only 6,000 Marines at Khe Sanh!"[93] At the same time, U.S. intelligence sources reported that the North Vietnamese *325C Division* was relocating to Laos and the *304th Division* was withdrawing to the southwest.[94]

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*Former Marine Bert Mullins, who served with the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines at Khe Sanh, observed that the NVA also employed psychological war techniques against the Americans as well. He recalled leaflets fired by North Vietnamese artillery that urged American troops to surrender. Mullins Comments.

**While supplies were adequate for very basic needs and no one starved, Navy Captain Bernard D. Cole recalled that food was in "relatively short supply during the 'siege.'" He remembered that he received just "two C–ration meals per day . . . ." Cole stated that this was an "observation, not a complaint: obviously, the troops in the trenches had higher priority than those of us sitting on our butts in the relative safety of the FSCC!" Cole Comments. Colonel Kent O. W. Steen, a former artillery officer at Khe Sanh, wrote that the priority for resupply was upon ammunition and "at times, we were down to one C–Ration per day . . . ." He observed that the "uncomfortable-tired-dirty-stressed souls at Khe Sanh were quite hungry for the most part." Steen comments.

***This aircraft is variously reported as either a C–123 or a C–130. Air Force records indicate the former. Nalty, *Air Power*, p. 46; 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 7Mar68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File.

Despite these indications that the battle was drawing to a close, the North Vietnamese continued pounding the Marines with artillery fire. On 22 March, over 1,000 rounds fell on the combat base and hill positions. Once again, a hit on ASP Number 1 resulted in several hours of secondary explosions and a fire which destroyed more than 900 rounds of artillery ammunition, almost 3,000 rounds of antitank ammunition, and lesser quantities of fuzes, demolition kits, and other assorted items. The enemy bombardment continued the following day with even more shells striking the Marine base.[95]

The enemy had far from given up the fight. On 24 March, Company A, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines engaged two North Vietnamese platoons for over four hours. The contact resulted in 5 Marines killed and 6 wounded, a UH–1 helicopter gunship downed, and 31 dead North Vietnamese.[96] Two days later, a small-unit patrol* from Company B, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines encountered a North Vietnamese company entrenched on a small hill that the battalion used as a daylight observation post, about 200 meters west of its perimeter. According to the Marine forward observer with the patrol, Larry J. Seavy-Cioffi, they walked into "a well-entrenched NVA company, 15 feet from the top . . . . " Seavy-Cioffi recalled that the patrol point man spotted an enemy soldier "adjusting his helmet otherwise we would have been walking dead right into their laps." The patrol withdrew under heavy fire and called for fire support. Company B reinforced the patrol and the Marines finally retook the hill. According to Marine documents, the North Vietnamese lost 26 men and Company B suffered 3 dead and 15 wounded. Lieutenant Colonel Mitchell later wrote: "This was the closest penetration by a company size NVA to 1/9's defensive perimeter, and never happened again during the siege."[97]

Settling the Score

Since the fateful patrol of 25 February, the men of Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines had a score to settle with the North Vietnamese. On 30 March, they got their chance in what one report termed "the first planned . . . attack of a known enemy position in the battle for Khe Sanh Combat Base." Lieutenant Colonel Frederick J. McEwan, who relieved Lieutenant Colonel James B. Wilkinson as the battalion commander on 15 March, recalled that he and his operations officer, Major Charles E. Davis III, planned the attack "with careful attention to every detail." With the assistance of the battalion artillery officer and air officer, they especially laid out the projected fire support to box the enemy troops in and to prevent the NVA from reinforcing. Morning fog and low air cover, however, forestalled the effective use of air and made the attack even more dependent upon its artillery arm.[98]

In the early morning hours, under cover of fog and darkness, Captain Kenneth W. Pipes led Company B through the perimeter wire and into attack positions 300 meters south of the combat base. As the company deployed for the attack in a line along the enemy's left flank, the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines began preparation fires to soften the enemy positions. By noon, the cannoneers would fire over 2,600 rounds in support of Company B.[99]

At 0755, the company launched its assault behind a rolling barrage fired by nine batteries of artillery, including heavy artillery firing from near the Rockpile. The 2d Platoon under First Lieutenant John W. Dillon seized the first objective, an NVA trenchline, near the lower slopes of Hill 471. From there, the platoon laid down a base of fire while the Company B command group and the other two platoons passed through and attacked toward the second objective, an NVA bunker complex near where the earlier patrol had been ambushed.[100]

The Marines advanced through the bunker complex with fixed bayonets, grenades, flamethrowers, and antitank rockets, and in the words of one account, "killing all NVA in sight."[101] Engineers followed the infantry, setting demolition charges to destroy the larger bunkers. According to Major Davis, "the only serious glitch occurred when the NVA came up on the conduct of fire net and called for a cease-fire." Davis declared that before the battalion was able to get "the fire turned back on," enemy mortars opened up on the attacking Marines and "inflicted most of the casualties." Among the wounded was Captain Pipes, who still retained command. One Marine in the 3d Platoon, Wayne Morrison, who later was awarded the Silver Star, as was the captain, remembered that Pipes, carrying two radios with his right arm and with a wound in his left shoulder, came up behind him and said "we were going to have to attack because we were pinned down."[102]

*There is some question about the size of this patrol. The official reports indicate a platoon, while both Colonel Mitchell and his radioman, Bert Mullins, state that it was a reinforced squad. Larry J. Seavy-Cioffi, who was an artillery forward observer with Company B, stated that he was on that patrol and it consisted of no more than six men, including himself. See Mitchell Comments, Mullins Comments, and Larry J. Seavy-Cioffi, Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 and 29Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File).

The initial Marine attack, nevertheless had stalled. Captain Pipes recalled that his command group had been "decimated." Among the dead was his artillery forward observer First Lieutenant Marion H. "Hank" Norman, who died in his arms and assisted in the preparation of the firing plans. Lieutenant Dillon brought up the 2d Platoon and "covered the ordered withdrawal back to the base."[103]

The North Vietnamese bunker complex was a flaming ruin, but the Marines had failed to locate the remains of the men killed in the February ambush.* Casualties on both sides had been heavy. The Marines claimed to have killed 115 of the enemy and intercepted enemy messages indicating that the NVA unit, later identified as the *8th Battalion, 66th Regiment, 304th Division*, sustained grievous losses. Company B, however, had not gone unscathed: it suffered 10 dead, 100 wounded and 2 missing. One Marine artillery officer later wondered if the raid to try to bring back the bodies had been worth the additional bloodshed: "No matter whether you get the bodies back at that point or not, you still [had] left your bodies out there." He argued at that point "getting the bodies simply wasn't that important." Nevertheless, as Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, the FMFPac commander who happened to have witnessed the Company B attack, later wrote, the attack served to signal "that the siege was ended." It may not have been over as yet, but it was indicative that the Marines on the ground had started to bring the fight to the NVA and a new phase was about to begin.[104]

On the day following Company B's raid, Operation Scotland ended, giving way to Operation Pegasus. Elements of the *101D Regiment* still remained in the area, possibly to cover the withdrawal of their comrades. Although the official enemy casualty count for Operation Scotland totalled 1,602 dead, 7 prisoners, and 2 ralliers, intelligence estimates placed the death toll in the neighborhood of 10,000 to 15,000.[105]

The allies had applied an incredible amount of firepower upon the North Vietnamese. Tactical aircraft and B–52s flew 24,449 sorties in support of Khe Sanh, dropping 103,500 tons of ordnance. The artillerymen of the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines and the 2d Battalion, 94th Field Artillery fired 102,660 rounds of various calibers at enemy positions.[106]

The North Vietnamese, in turn, fired 10,908 rounds of artillery, mortars, and rockets into U.S. positions in and around Khe Sanh. This fire, combined with small-unit action from Operation Scotland, beginning on 1 November 1967, caused the deaths of 205 defenders of Khe Sanh. Another 1,668 fell wounded, about half of them serious enough to require evacuation.[107]*

Operation Pegasus

While in March the garrison of the Khe Sanh Combat Base remained in the grip of strong North Vietnamese forces, the allies had already taken initial steps to lift the siege. During Operation Scotland, the defenders had endured daily pounding by enemy artillery, mortar, and rocket fire, as well as frequent probes which kept alive the threat of a massive ground assault. Route 9, the only practical overland route to Khe Sanh from the east, was impassable due to its poor state of repair and the presence of enemy units. Supplies continued to reach the combat base by air, but the massive logistical effort strained the already thinly stretched supply of transport aircraft available in Vietnam. Intelligence officers at General Tompkins' 3d Marine Division headquarters noted reports from prisoners, ralliers, and agents that the North Vietnamese were moving missiles into the DMZ and northern Quang Tri Province for use against Con Thien and Khe Sanh. It was obvious the American command could not permit this situation to continue for much longer.[108]**

On 2 March, General Cushman met in Da Nang with his subordinate commanders and, with General Abrams present, approved the initial concept to open Route 9 and relieve Khe Sanh. The following week, in a meeting on 10 March, also at Da Nang, General Westmoreland, in turn, agreed to the concept of operations for the relief of Khe Sanh, now codenamed Operation Pegasus. Among the members of this conference was Army Lieutenant General William B. Rosson, the commander of the newly created Provi-

* The remains were recovered a few days later.

* U.S. casualty figures for Operation Scotland are sometimes questioned as being too low. The casualty reporting system listed only those casualties suffered by the unit (and its attachments) responsible for a given operation. Other casualties incurred in an operational area, by air crews flying in support, for instance, were usually reported by the parent unit. For example, some of the 43 men killed in the C–123 crash of 6 March are not included in Operation Scotland figures because they were members of the aircrew and others were Marines who had not yet reported to the 26th Marines.

** Prados and Stubbe quote Captain Dabney about the possible firing of a Soviet FROG (Free Rocket Over Ground) missile, but found no other evidence of the NVA employing ground to ground missiles during the Khe Sanh campaign. Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, p. 392.

sional Corps or Prov Corps.* While a subordinate command of III MAF, Prov Corps included the 1st Air Cavalry Division, 101st Airborne Division, and 3d Marine Division and was responsible for all operations in northern I Corps. General Rosson assigned to Major General John J. Tolson, the commander of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, the responsibility for the detailed planning of the operation in coordination with the 3d Marine Division. Rosson also placed under the operational control of the 1st Air Cavalry Division the 1st Marines, the 11th Engineers, and a Seabee battalion.[109]

According to the concept of operations for Pegasus, the 1st Air Cavalry Division together with the 1st Marines would deploy from positions near Hue to a new base to be specially constructed at Ca Lu, 16 kilometers east of Khe Sanh. Capitalizing on its air mobility, the Army division would advance along the axis of Route 9. Engineers would follow, repairing culverts and bridges to make the road passable to vehicles. The South Vietnamese promised an ARVN airborne task force of three battalions to participate in the operation. D–day was set for 1 April 1968.

Preparations began immediately. The 11th Engineer Battalion and Naval Mobile Construction (Seabee) Battalion 5 joined the 1st Air Cavalry Division engineers in building the base at Ca Lu, to be called "Landing Zone Stud." The project included bunkers, supply storage facilities, and an airstrip capable of handling Fairchild C–123 Provider cargo aircraft. At the same time, the 1st Air Cavalry Division completed the detailed plans for the attack westward and the 3d Marine Division scheduled a deception operation designed to divert the enemy's attention from Khe Sanh to Dong Ha. The 1st Marines at Phu Bai began "extensive retraining and rehabilitation" as a recuperative measure following its participation in the battle for Hue City.[110**]

The 1st Air Cavalry Division began preparing the battlefield on 26 March when Lieutenant Colonel Richard W. Diller's 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry began helicopterborne reconnaissance patrols in ever-widening arcs from LZ Stud. Diller's squadron located and targeted NVA positions, and prepared landing zones by directing air strikes using delay-fuzed or "daisy cutter" bombs to blast gaping holes in the dense vegetation.[111]

At 0600, 30 March, the 3d Marine Division launched the diversionary operation northeast of Dong Ha. Task Force Kilo, composed of the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines; the 3d Squadron, 5th Cavalry; and two ARVN infantry battalions, attacked north toward the DMZ along the coastal plains near Gio Linh. Encountering light resistance, the task force reached its objectives the first day, but continued the operation through 1 April to mask the preparations for Pegasus.[112]

As a final step for the coming offensive, Operation Scotland at Khe Sanh came to a close on 31 March, and General Rosson at that time placed the 26th Marines under the 1st Air Cavalry for Operation Pegasus.*** Intelligence reports from Khe Sanh indicated that the North Vietnamese were abandoning their positions around the combat base and retiring to Laos, leaving a few units in place to cover the withdrawal. Prisoners reported that NVA units suffered from low morale as a result of heavy casualties and severe supply problems.[113] The enemy, reportedly, was having "difficulty coordinating anything larger than a company operation."[114] The allied forces poised to attack these battered North Vietnamese units numbered over 30,000 troops organized into 19 infantry battalions with a host of supporting artillery, engineer, and aviation units, making Operation Pegasus "the largest III MAF offensive of the war," up to that time.[115]

Despite the extensive preparations and high expectations, Operation Pegasus started not with a bold and powerful thrust, but with a decidedly more ponderous motion. At H–hour—0700, 1 April—foul weather grounded the helicopters of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, but the men of the 1st Marines, on foot, crossed the line of departure on time, initiating the offensive. The regiment attacked along Route 9 with the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines north of the road and the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines south of it. As the infantry moved forward, the 11th Engineer Battalion opened Route 9, removing mines and obstacles from the road and repairing bridges, culverts, and bypasses. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines remained at Ca Lu, providing security for the recently completed LZ Stud.[116]

By 1300, the weather cleared, allowing Tolson's 3d Brigade to conduct the planned air assaults into landing zones along Route 9 west of the 1st Marines.

*See Chapter 13 for the establishment of Prov Corps.

**Actually outside of the 1st Marines regimental headquarters, only the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines had participated in the battle for Hue. See Chapters 9–12.

***General Rosson remembered that Major General Tompkins "suggested to me that the 26th Marines be placed under the operational control of the 1st Cavalry Division to facilitate coordination as the relieving forces approached the combat base." Gen William B. Rosson, Comments on draft, dtd 27Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File).

Despite the delay, the brigade secured its landing zones and flew in its artillery before nightfall. Throughout the area of operations, allied forces made only light contact with the North Vietnamese. In the following days, the operation continued in the pattern set on D–day, including the seemingly obligatory bad weather in the mornings, which forced delays in airmobile operations. The North Vietnamese remained elusive.[117]

The garrison at Khe Sanh joined the offensive on 4 April from the combat base when the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines sortied against Hill 471. With Company B protecting the perimeter at the rock quarry west of the combat base, the battalion moved to the line of departure at 0230, finally leaving the positions it had defended for 73 days. At 0600, the Marines attacked along the fog-shrouded Che Rien Ridge toward Hill 471, which lay two kilometers to the southeast. Following a lengthy artillery and air preparation, Company A assaulted the hill at 1500. The defenders, a reinforced platoon of the *8th Battalion, 66th NVA Regiment*, put up a spirited fight, but Company A soon overwhelmed them, securing the hill at 1600. The attack cost the battalion 10 dead and 56 wounded. The enemy left 16 dead on the objective.[118]

The North Vietnamese were not content to give up Hill 471 that easily. Shortly after the Marines overran the hill, enemy rocket fire began and by midnight, 192 rounds had fallen. At 0430, two companies of the *66th NVA Regiment* assaulted Captain Ralph H. Flagler's Company C on the eastern half of the hill. Company A, located on the western side, was masked by the crest of the hill and could not fire in support. North Vietnamese infantry swarmed up the slope firing rifles, sub-machine guns, and RPGs, while heavy machine guns pounded Company C's positions. The enemy advanced to within 20 meters of the Marine fighting holes, but Flagler's men stood fast, with the help of almost 1,000 rounds of artillery fire from the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines. By 0630, the enemy attack was spent and the North Vietnamese withdrew. At a cost of 1 Marine dead and 28 wounded, the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines killed over 140 North Vietnamese and captured 5 prisoners.[119]

Other units of the Khe Sanh garrison went on the offensive as well. On 6 April, Captain Lee R. Overstreet's Company G, 2d Battalion, 26th Marines left Hill 558 in the early morning on the battalion's first long distance patrol of the Khe Sanh battle. Its mission was to determine if the enemy occupied the ridge which extended southeast from Hill 861 like a huge, stubby finger pointed at the combat base.[120]

Just before noon, as the company reached the crest of the ridge, North Vietnamese concealed in camouflaged, mutually supporting bunkers opened fire, cutting down several Marines at point-blank range. Unable to advance into the heavy and accurate enemy fire, Company G suffered additional casualties as Marines tried to recover the fallen men nearest the enemy positions. Captain Overstreet called for artillery and air support, but the number of aircraft available was limited and the artillery frequently entered a "check fire" status to allow for the safe passage of planes supporting other units. Because of these fire support coordination problems, the Marines could not overcome the stiff enemy resistance atop the ridge. With six Marines missing in action, but presumed to be dead within the enemy perimeter, Captain Overstreet ordered Company G to withdraw to Hill 558 at nightfall "as a result of regimental policy to recall units to the defensive positions for the night." In addition to the 6 MIAs, Company G lost 4 killed and 47 wounded and claimed 48 NVA died in the fight.[121]*

Elsewhere in the area, many major events took place on 6 April, giving Operation Pegasus the appearance of a three-ring circus. The 1st Battalion, 26th Marines attacked out of the combat base to the south, sending Company D against the NVA bunker complex where 25 missing members of Company B had last been seen during operations on 25 February and 30 March. Company D recovered the remains of 21 Americans.[122] The 1st Air Cavalry Division's 3d Brigade, clearing Route 9 in the area west of the 1st Marines, encountered a strong NVA blocking position and fought a day-long battle which ended when the enemy fled, leaving 83 dead.[123] At noon, the men of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines became the first defenders of Khe Sanh relieved in Operation Pegasus when the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry landed at Hill 471 and assumed responsibility for its defense.[124] The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines immediately attacked westward toward Hill 689. As a climax to the many events of the day, the ARVN 84th Company, 8th Airborne Battalion landed by helicopter at the Khe Sanh Combat Base and linked up with the ARVN 37th Ranger Battalion. This marked the first entry of an organized ground combat unit into the base since the Rangers themselves had arrived on 27 January.[125]

The momentum of the offensive continued unabated on 7 April. The 2d Battalion, 26th Marines returned to the scene of the previous day's ambush,

*The six missing Marines were later found dead on the ridge.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191220

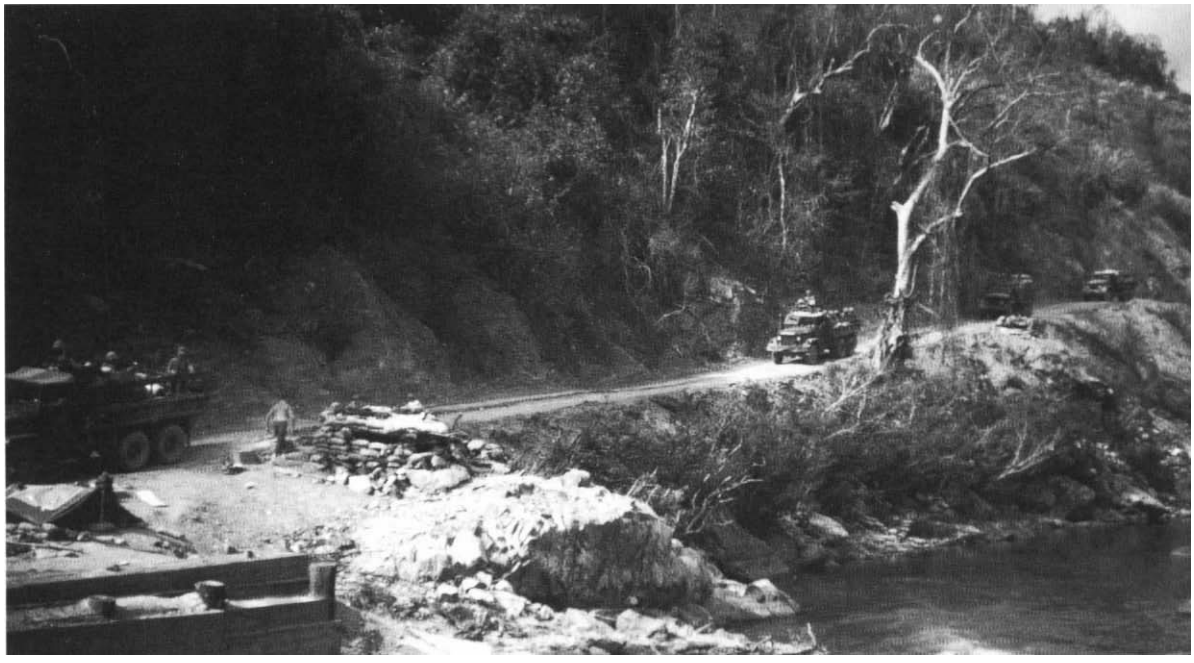
Top, PFC Murray C. Henderson of Company F, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines cools himself off using his helmet as a bucket on the way from Ca Lu to relieve Khe Sanh during Operation Pegasus. Below, a Marine convoy moves along Route 9 between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh. This road had been closed since the previous summer.

this time with two companies, and cleared the ridge of enemy, killing over 30. The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines continued the westward advance it had begun the previous afternoon, capturing Hill 552 with no enemy resistance. Near Khe Sanh Village, the 2d Brigade of the 1st Air Cavalry Division captured the old French fort after a three-day battle against an NVA battalion. Along Route 9, the 1st Marines conducted a few airmobile operations of its own, as the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines and the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines searched the vicinity of the highway for signs of enemy activity which might threaten the 11th Engineer Battalion's road repair project. The 3d Brigade of General Tolson's division pressed on along Route 9, still west of the 1st Marines.[126]

Enemy resistance began crumbling even further as the allied force maintained pressure. Units reported finding many abandoned weapons and large numbers of North Vietnamese bodies and mass graves as enemy units withdrew toward Laos. Some organized resistance remained, however, as the Communist forces continued to conduct limited objective ground attacks and probes in some areas.[127]

The much awaited linkup of U.S. forces at the Khe Sanh Combat Base proper occurred at 0800 on 8 April, when the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry entered the base along the coffee plantation road.[128] As the 3d Brigade began moving in, the 26th Marines prepared to depart the base it had defended amid so much

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191584



adversity and for so long. But the offensive did not slow down, even for this event. West of the base, the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines advanced onto Hill 689 which had, for 11 weeks, dominated its position at the quarry. The enemy, although unseen, made their presence felt through steady and accurate mortar fire which killed 9 Marines and wounded 27 during the battalion's advance.[129]

No enemy artillery fire fell on the combat base on 9 April, and General Rosson, commander of the recently formed Provisional Corps, Vietnam, reported to General Cushman that airdrops of supplies were no longer necessary because the airstrip was open to all types of aircraft up to and including C–130s.* In keeping with a plan to begin supplying all units in northwestern Quang Tri from LZ Stud, Operation Pegasus forces began using the ammunition at Khe Sanh in an attempt to draw down the huge stockpiles to a manageable level which III MAF could later evacuate.[130]

The engineers declared Route 9 open to vehicular traffic on 11 April, ending a project involving the replacement of 9 bridges, the construction of 17 bypasses, and the repair of 14 kilometers of road. It was the first time the road was passable from Ca Lu to Khe Sanh since September 1967.[131] The same day, General Rosson ordered the 1st Air Cavalry Division to make ready immediately for offensive operations in the A Shau Valley. Hours later, the division's 1st Brigade left the Khe Sanh area and the ARVN 37th Ranger Battalion followed shortly afterward.[132]

As Army units prepared to move south, the 1st and the 26th Marines continued offensive operations around Khe Sanh. With patrols reporting enemy units remaining on Hill 881 North, Colonel Bruce F. Meyers, the new commanding officer of the 26th Marines, ordered the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines to clear the hill, scene of the bitter fighting which had marked the beginning of the siege almost three months before and "the last enemy position posing a threat to Khe Sanh."[133]**

Unlike Company I's reconnaissance in force of 20 January which was the last time U.S. forces had been near Hill 881 North,*** the attack planned for Easter Sunday, 14 April, called for the entire 3d Battalion to take part. With the relief of the main base by the Army, Lieutenant Colonel John C. Studt, who had assumed command of the 3d Battalion the previous month, had consolidated his companies on Hill 881 South. Studt had expanded the area of operations to include "Pork Chop Hill," the high ground immediately to the north, which the North Vietnamese had vacated. With the order to take 881 North, the battalion commander laid on a full menu of fire support, even lining up all eight of the battalion's 106mm recoilless rifles to support the assault. In addition to the howitzers and guns emplaced at the main base and Ca Lu, the battalion also had the support of the three 105mm howitzers on Hill 881S.[134]

After nightfall on the 13th, the battalion prepared to mount the attack. Shortly after midnight, under the cover of darkness, all four companies accompanied by two scout dog teams moved along routes previously secured by patrols into assault positions in the "saddle" located between Hills 881 South and North. Lieutenant Colonel Studt left one platoon of Company I together with his H&S Company on Hill 881 South. He had relieved Captain William Dabney, who had been selected for promotion to major, and placed him in command of a battalion Provisional Weapons Company and rear security on Hill 881 South.**** Throughout the night Marine artillery and mortar shells crashed into Hill 881 North, destroying the enemy's bunkers and trenches, as Lieutenant Colonel Studt's Marines waited for daybreak and the order to mount the final attack.[135]

*Colonel Bruce F. Meyers, who relieved Colonel Lownds shortly after this order, remembered that on 13 April 1968, an Air Force C–130 was hit by "rocket shrapnel" as it came in for a landing, shredding its tires, lunging partially off the runway, hitting some equipment, and bursting into flames. Ground rescue crews saved the lives of the crews and most of the passengers. The only person who died in the crash was Felix Poilane, the French planter, who was returning to his plantation located near the fire base. According to Meyers, "while the C–130 was burning on the runway, it shut down the bulk of our airfield activity until it burned down and was finally put out with foam and bulldozed off the runway." Col Bruce F. Meyers, Comments on draft, dtd 20Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Meyers Comments, Feb95.

**Colonel Meyers, who commanded Special Landing Force Alpha prior to his assignment to the 26th Marines, assumed command of the 26th Marines on 12 April. He remembered that on 10 April he departed the LPH *Iwo Jima* and flew to the 3d Marine Division CP at Dong Ha where he received a briefing and his orders: "Move out in the attack and retake the hills around Khe Sanh . . . ." He then traveled by helicopter to LZ Stud where Major General Tolson and his staff briefed him further. After the briefing, he flew to Khe Sanh and "began walking the perimeter" with Colonel Lownds. The turnover continued during the next day and finally on the 12th, "we had a very brief change of command ceremony." Meyers Comments, Feb95.

***See Chapter 4.

****Studt not only wanted to use Dabney's experience, but also to keep him relatively safe after being in such an exposed and isolated position for so long. See LtCol John C. Studt, "Battalion in the Attack," *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 1970, pp. 39–44.



Top Photo is courtesy of Col Bruce F. Meyers (Ret) and bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A416482

Top, at a change of command ceremony of the 26th Marines, Col David E. Lownds, left front, is about to turn over command of the regiment to Col Bruce F. Meyers, standing next to him. Col Lownds still has the distinctive moustache that he wore during the entire siege. Below, President Lyndon B. Johnson presents the Presidential Unit Citation Streamer to SgtMaj Agrippa W. Smith, who is holding the colors of the 26th Marines, as Col Lownds, right, who has shaven off his moustache, watches.



Finally, shortly after dawn about 0530, following closely its artillery final preparation fires, the battalion attacked with three companies abreast and the command group and one company in reserve close behind. Surging forward through an eerie and barren landscape of charred limbless trees and huge bomb craters, the Marine battalion rolled up the enemy's defenses on the southern slope of the hill. Colonel Meyers, who watched the attack with Captain Dabney from 881 South, remarked on the effective use of the supporting 106mm recoilless rifle fire. As the Marine lead elements approached a tree line in their "uphill assault . . . the 106's [on Hill 881 South] literally blew the tree line away."[136] Finally, with the crest of Hill 881 North before it, the battalion called for a massive artillery firing mission. When over 2,000 rounds of artillery fire had fallen on the objective, Company K attacked along the right flank. Captain Paul L. Snead's men rushed through the smoking debris of the NVA defenses, rooting out the defenders from the ruins of bunkers and trenches. At 1428, Company K marked Hill 881 North as friendly territory by raising a U.S. flag which a squad leader had brought along. The 3d Battalion lost 6 dead and 21 wounded. The Marines took two prisoners from the *8th Battalion, 29th Regiment, 325th NVA Division* and killed over 100 of the North Vietnamese troops. With the enemy driven from the hill, at least for the time being, the Marines began withdrawing to Hill 881 South, their mission accomplished. According to Colonel Meyers, the Marine Corps Schools at Quantico, Virginia, later used the assault on Hill 881 North "as a classic example of a Marine battalion in the attack."[137]

The attack on Hill 881 North was the last battle of Operation Pegasus. At 0800, 15 April, the 3d Marine Division once again assumed responsibility for the Khe Sanh Combat Base and Operation Pegasus gave way to Operation Scotland II. The 1st Air Cavalry Division transferred its command post to Camp Evans, but left its 2d Brigade under the control of the 3d Marine Division. The 1st Marines, to this point still operating along Route 9 just west of Ca Lu, moved to Khe Sanh to assume responsibility for defense of the combat base from the 26th Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Studt recalled that his 3d Battalion, on 15 April, "was shuttled out of the 881 area by choppers . . . first to Khe Sanh than to Quang Tri [Airfield]." Even as the Marines boarded their helicopters out of the Khe Sanh sector, Company K came under enemy mortar fire. As the helicopters landed at the Quang Tri Airstrip, the 3d Marine Division band, playing the Marine Corps Hymn, was there to greet the troops. According to the band master,

> . . . it was the most inspiring performance of his career: chopper after chopper disgorging filth covered Marines in tattered and torn utilities, some with bandages, many carrying NVA souvenirs, but the expressions on their faces as soon as they perceived the strains of the Hymn was what moved him.

With a sense of irony, Captain Dabney many years later observed that the attacks on Hill 881 North marked the beginning and the end to the siege.[138]

In Operation Pegasus, allied forces accomplished their mission of reopening Route 9 between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh at a cost of 92 Americans dead and 667 wounded, and 51 ARVN killed. The North Vietnamese lost over 1,100 killed and 13 captured. III MAF units found supply caches estimated as "exceeding the basic load for an NVA division," including 3,000 tons of rice, over 200 crew-served weapons, 12,000 rounds of large caliber ammunition, 5 wheeled vehicles, and a tank.

A cloud of controversy has surrounded the story of Khe Sanh in the years since the battle. Some of the unsettled issues remain: 1. the reasons for defending the base in the first place; 2. the importance of the roles played by the various supporting arms (particularly B–52s, as opposed to tactical aircraft and artillery); 3. the failure of the 26th Marines to reinforce Lang Vei; 4. speculation why the North Vietnamese made no attempt to cut the source of the water supply for the base, pumped from a stream north of the Khe Sanh perimeter and in the area controlled by NVA troops; 5. and finally whether Khe Sanh was an attempted replay of Dien Bien Phu or a diversion for Tet.*

*Both Lieutenant General Krulak, the former CGFMFPac, and Colonel Frederic S. Knight, the 3d Marine Division G–2 or staff intelligence officer, remarked on the failure of the North Vietnamese to cut the water supply. In his book, General Krulak argued that the fact that the North Vietnamese did not do so is an indication that the enemy may have "had no intention of undertaking an all-out assault on the base." LtGen Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight, An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Naval Institute Press: Annapolis, Md., 1984), p. 218. Colonel Knight called this failure the most "puzzling aspect of the siege. . . . They literally could have cut off our water." He observed that the airlifting of the water would have "added an enormous logistical burden." Col Frederic S. Knight, Comments on draft, dtd 10Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File). In his comments, Colonel Steen observed that "when the hose was cut by artillery fragments or the pump was down, we were out of water and on our knees." He observed that as it was the Marines rationed their water until they left in April and "personal sanitation was at a minimum." Steen Comments. Navy Captain Bernard D. Cole also commented on the failure of the NVA to interrupt the water and as well remarked that they made no attempt to cut the land line telephone connection from Khe Sanh ro MACV. Cole Comments.

Controversy aside, there is little question that the North Vietnamese committed considerable resources to the battle and that their units fought hard in what appeared to have been a major effort. The U.S. and South Vietnamese defenders of the Khe Sanh Combat Base surrounded and outnumbered, nevertheless, with the use of extensive supporting arms skillfully fought a difficult battle against a resolute enemy until the siege was lifted in Operation Pegasus. By any accounting, Pegasus regained the initiative for III MAF forces in northwestern Quang Tri Province.

CHAPTER 15

The Battle for Dong Ha

Why Dong Ha?—The Fight for Dai Do, The First Day—The Continuing Fight for Dai Do
The End of the First Offensive—The Second Offensive

Why Dong Ha?

With the commitment of large U.S. forces to the far western reaches of I Corps in Operations Scotland II around Khe Sanh and Delaware in the A Shau Valley, the North Vietnamese decided to mount a new offensive in the eastern DMZ. Perhaps hoping that the American command with its attention riveted to the west would be caught off guard, the *320th NVA Division* at the end of April and early May struck in the sector just above Dong Ha. Dong Ha served not only as the command post for both the 3d Marine Division and the 9th Marines, but also remained the main logistic base for the north. It lay at the junction of Routes 1 and 9 and was the terminus of the Cua Viet River route. During the month of April, while the new Quang Tri base and Wunder Beach further south in Quang Tri Province alleviated some of the logistic pressure on Dong Ha, nearly 63,000 tons of supplies came in by sea at the Cua Viet port facility for the 3d Marine Division and then were shipped up the Cua Viet River to Dong Ha.[1]

Despite its obvious importance, Dong Ha was vulnerable to a determined enemy attack. The most immediate available troops were from the nearby 2d ARVN Regiment which had its command post in the town of Dong Ha. Marine support units rather than line infantry were at the Dong Ha base itself. Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins' only reserve was Task Force Robbie, under Colonel Clifford J. Robichaud, consisting of a rifle company, Company D, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, and an armored company,-Company A, 3d Tank Battalion, reinforced by four Army vehicles including two M42 "Dusters," a pla-

An aerial photo shows the sprawling Dong Ha base and surrounding terrain. Dong Ha was the headquarters and forward base of the 3d Marine Division. The airstrip can be seen in the center of the picture.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A801122



toon of Ontos, and a platoon of engineers. For the most part, even this modest force was committed elsewhere.[2]

Furthermore, Dong Ha lay just below where three ongoing operations converged. To the west of Route 1, the 9th Marines conducted Operation Kentucky with three battalions, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines; 1st Battalion, 4th Marines; and the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines. The 3d Marines, to the east of Route 1, was responsible for the Napoleon/Saline sector, also with three battalions under its operational control, the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines; the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion; and BLT 2/4. Between the two Marine regiments, the 2d ARVN Regiment with four battalions* held the area of operations along both sides of Route 1, north of the Bo Dieu River** and Dong Ha, to the Demilitarized Zone. This sector included both the A–1 and A–2 (Gio Linh) and the C–1 and C–2 Dyemarker positions, and much of the Leatherneck Square sector east of Route 1 to Jones Creek, the tributary of the Ben Hai that ran north and south, and emptied into the Cua Viet. The North Vietnamese were well aware of the unit boundaries, which only changed occasionally after some negotiations, and were not slow to make use of the allied dispositions for their own advantage.

During most of April, in both the Kentucky and Napoleon/Saline areas, the tempo of operations had slowed from the previous month. This was especially true of the Napoleon/Saline coastal sector after the Task Force Kilo offensive at the beginning of April. With only scattered actions during the rest of the month, the 3d Marines had turned much of its attention to civic action and refugee resettlement. After the initial clearing offensive north of the Cua Viet, many of the South Vietnamese farmers and fishermen attempted to return to their abandoned villages north of the waterway. As Lieutenant Colonel William Weise, the BLT 2/4 commander, remembered, "things had calmed down" but he suspected "that the enemy had shifted his major efforts westward into the ARVN area."[3]

For some time, through prisoner interrogations and captured enemy documents, the 3d Marine Division staff knew that elements of the *320th NVA Division* had infiltrated into the eastern DMZ sector. During the last week of April, Navy Task Force Clearwater, which was responsible for convoying and protecting the shipping on the Cua Viet, received reports of enemy intentions to interdict the waterway. Also during this period, the North Vietnamese guns north of the Demilitarized Zone increased their bombardment of allied positions and especially of the port facilities both at Dong Ha and at the mouth of the Cua Viet.[4]

On the afternoon of the 29th, the *320th* initiated attacks against the ARVN 2d Regiment and against the Marines in the Kentucky area of operations. On 29 April, enemy sappers blew a culvert on Route 1 near the hamlet of An Binh, about four miles north of Dong Ha. Acting upon intelligence that North Vietnamese regulars had entered An Binh, the ARVN 2d Regiment sent in its 1st and 4th Battalions north from Dong Ha and south from C–1 to investigate the incident and trap any enemy forces between them. The ARVN units themselves, however, encountered heavy resistance "which they could not handle" and called for assistance. According to a newspaper account, Lieutenant Colonel Vu Van Giai, the 2d ARVN commander, told Major General Tompkins that "he was holding on the road but that he was worried about some new pressure that was starting to build up on his left flank." At that point, about 1415, Major General Tompkins ordered Task Force Robbie to move from C–3 with Company D, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, reinforced by Company A, 1st Tank Battalion, to assist the ARVN.[5]

At Cam Vu on Route 88, a secondary route running parallel and 3,000 meters north of Route 9, about 5,000 meters west of An Binh, the Marine task force ran into a North Vietnamese blocking force waiting for them. In a seven-hour "sharp engagement," lasting from 1600 till nearly midnight, Task Force Robbie suffered casualties of 11 dead and 22 wounded and reported killing 26 of the enemy. Four of the tanks with the task force also sustained damage. Task Force Robbie returned to its original positions at C–3. In the meantime, the two South Vietnamese battalions had disengaged and retreated to C–1. The ARVN reported killing 130 of the enemy while taking casualties of 17 dead and 47 wounded.

On the evening of 29 April, concerned about the obvious presence of North Vietnamese units on Route 1, General Tompkins alerted additional forces. He directed Colonel Milton A. Hull, the 3d Marines commander, to be prepared to send a company from the

*An ARVN battalion numbered between 200 and 400 men, less than half of the 900-man Marine battalion.

**The Cua Viet just above Dong Ha becomes the Bo Dieu. On some maps it is also shown as the Mieu Giang. Brigadier General William Weise observed that the "Bo Dieu River (a continuation of the Cam Lo and . . . Mieu Gang) flows east from Dong Ha and empties into the Cua Viet . . . (about 3 km northeast of Dong Ha) which in turn flows into the . . . Gulf of Tonkin . . . ." BGen William Weise, Comments on draft, dtd 29Oct92 (Vietnam Comment File).



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191498

A Marine M48 tank and two Marines, part of Task Force Robbie, engage an enemy force near Dong Ha. Task Force Robbie was the 3d Division's small armored reserve force, called after the nickname of its commander, Col Clifford J. Robichaud.

Napoleon/Saline sector to a new defensive position near Route 1. At 1715, Marine helicopters lifted Company E, BLT 2/4 from near the hamlet of Nhi Ha in the Napoleon northwestern sector to just north of the Dong Ha bridge.* Later that night, Tompkins ordered the helicopter lift of the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines from the 4th Marines Operation Lancaster II sector to C–3 to reinforce Task Force Robbie.[6]**

On the afternoon of the 30th, the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines arrived at C–3. Reinforced by four tanks from Task Force Robbie, the battalion then pushed forward towards Cam Vu. Just north of Cam Vu, about 1610, Company I of the 3d Battalion, like Task Force Robbie the previous day, came up against North Vietnamese, probably in company strength, in an L-shaped ambush. As Company I attempted to establish a defensive perimeter, the other companies of the battalion and the tanks pushed forward to assist the exposed company. With the coming of the reinforcements, the Vietnamese disengaged under cover of artillery north of the DMZ and their own mortars.*** The Marine reports showed 41 enemy killed at a cost of 20 Marines dead and 72 wounded. Despite the severity of the clash at Cam Vu the fiercest fighting of the day occurred about 10,000 meters to the northeast, involving BLT 2/4 and units of the *320th NVA Division* in the village of Dai Do, about 2,500 meters north of Dong Ha. The battle for Dong Ha had begun.[7]

The Fight for Dai Do, The First Day

Dai Do was actually a cluster of five hamlets, only one of which was actually named Dai Do, on a small peninsula carved out by the Cua Viet where it runs into the Bo Dieu. The Cua Viet rims the eastern edge while the Bo Dieu forms the southern boundary. Two unnamed small tributary streams of the larger rivers outline the northern and western reaches of the peninsula. The northernmost stream which flowed into the Cua Viet marked the boundary between the 2d ARVN Regiment and the 3d Marines. This stream separated the hamlet of Bac Vong in the Napoleon/Saline area of operations from the hamlet of Dong Huan on the northeastern lip of the peninsula. About 500 meters south of Dong Huan was the hamlet of An Loc which overlooked the Bo Dieu. Dai Do was another 500

*There is some question whether Company E actually deployed near the Dong Ha Bridge or to another smaller bridge spanning Route 1 another 5,000 meters north of the Dong Ha Bridge. Brigadier General William Weise insists that it is the latter bridge and the BLT 2/4 CAAR is in error on this matter. BGen William Weise intvw, 21Feb83 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

**Major Gary E. Todd, who at the time had just joined the battalion as the acting operations officer alpha, remembered that only three of the companies and the battalion command group were committed to the operation. The remaining company stayed at the Rockpile under the executive officer. Maj Gary E. Todd, Comments on draft, dtd 28Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Todd Comments.

***Major Todd recalled that the intermingling of forces limited the use of air support. He observed that the North Vietnamese professionally adjusted their artillery fire and that the Marines faced an "army that was as well equipped as their government and its supporters could afford." Todd Comments.

meters to the northwest abutting the western stream, as were the two remaining adjacent hamlets Dinh To and Thuong Do to the north. Rice paddies and two cemeteries lay interspersed among the five hamlets.

Sometime during the previous days, at least four North Vietnamese battalions, two of them for certain from the *48th* and *52d NVA Regiments* of the *320th NVA Division*, had made their way without being noticed in relatively flat and open terrain, south from the DMZ through the 2d ARVN Regiment into the Dai Do peninsula complex. In a relatively short time, the enemy troops were in formidable defenses. These included a series of fortified A–frame bunkers "covered with several feet of earth, reinforced by bamboo legs, and well-camouflaged" and supplemented by trenches, and fighting holes. Lieutenant Colonel Weise recalled that the bunkers "could support the weight of an M48 tank without collapsing."[8]

All of the North Vietnamese defenses were well designed, protected by barbed wire, mutually supporting, with clear lines of fire, and took advantage of the terrain, especially the hedgerows on the perimeter of each of the hamlets. Lieutenant Colonel Weise later stated that over time, small North Vietnamese units had come into the area and used the local populace to do "most of the work with a few of their officers in there to direct the placements of the various positions." This was all done according to a very careful plan so that all the regulars had to do when they arrived on the scene were to man the positions. Weise personally believed that the only way the enemy accomplished this task was because the 2d ARVN Regiment which was responsible for the sector "was asleep at the switch."[9*]

*Colonel Max McQuown, whose BLT 3/1 had been relieved by Weise's BLT 2/4 in the Cua Viet, observed that a Vietnamese village or hamlet, "viewed from the air . . . looks like a group of small squares delineated by dense bamboo hedgerows . . . Bamboo will bend with the wind but will not break. The roots are as strong as iron. The NVA converted these natural barriers into formidable defensive positions. They built interconnecting tunnels under each hedgerow, reinforced the tough overhead root system and cut and camouflaged ground level firing apertures for rifles, machine guns, and RPG's. Mortar positions were located in houses, our buildings, pig sties, or haystacks. The beauty of this defense was the NVA remained in a concealed protected position and, using the connecting tunnels, they could move to any side of a village that was being threatened and engage the enemy without exposing themselves." McQuown agreed in his comments with Weise that "villagers participated in the construction of these bastions," probably having little choice, but that he believed "some of the ARVN had to know what was going on." He declared that the lesson that his BLT learned "was to assume all villages had similar defenses" and to attack with sufficient troops "to get the job done quickly." Col Max McQuown, Comments on draft, dtd 26Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter McQuown Comments.

While the 3d Marine Division had intelligence of the *320th* moving into the eastern sectors with a vague mission of interdicting the Cua Viet, the allies had almost no inkling of the buildup in the Dai Do area. Up to this time, the 3d Marines and 2d ARVN Regiment had encountered mostly small groups in squad or platoon formations, and occasionally a company-size unit to the north, east, and west of Dai Do. The most recent actions provided some evidence that the enemy was perhaps making his main effort to the northwest.[10]

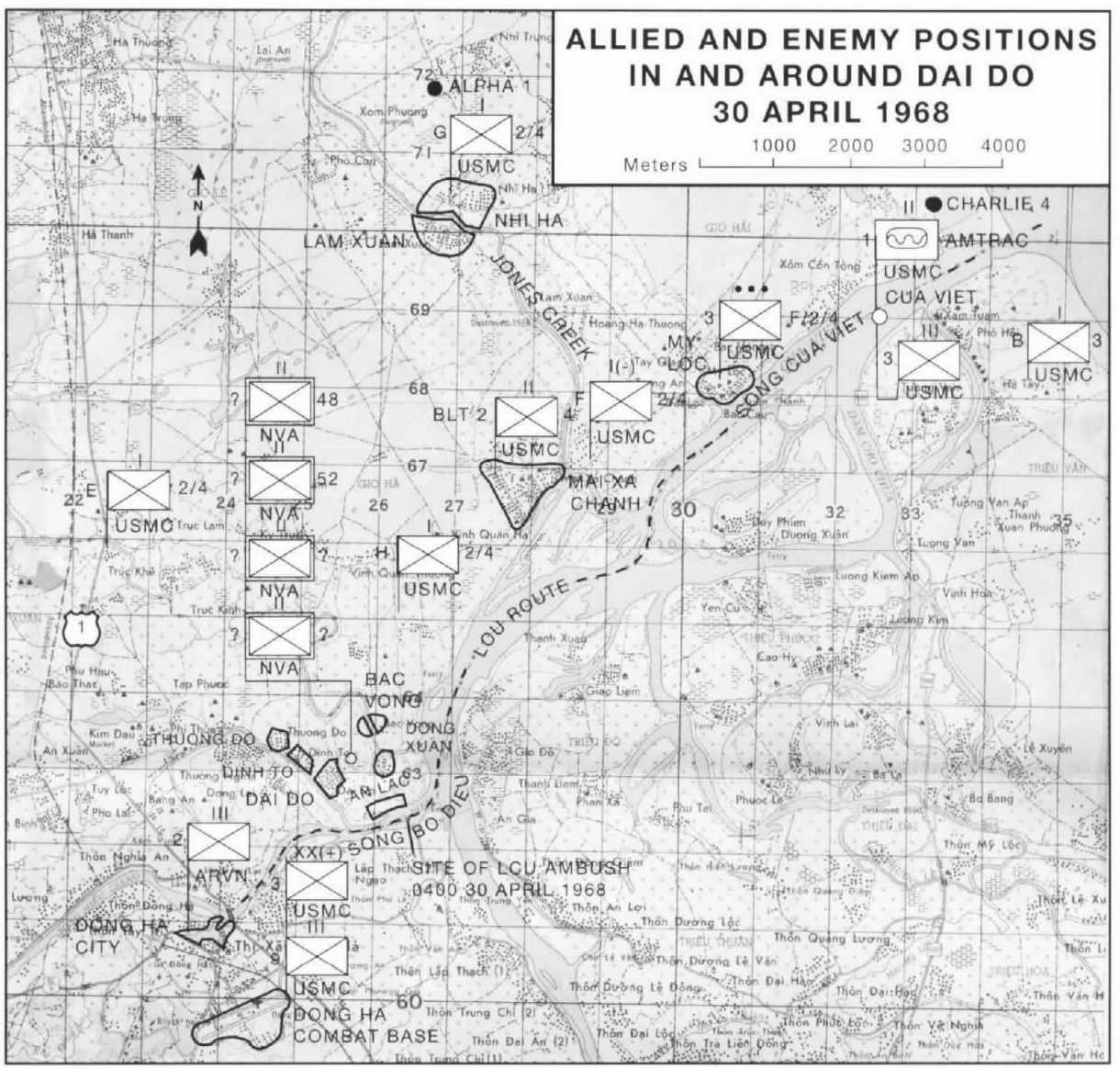
In the early morning of the 30th, the North Vietnamese revealed their presence in the Dai Do sector. About 0330 enemy soldiers from positions in the hamlet of An Loc on the northern bank of the Bo Dieu fired upon a Navy Task Force Clearwater river patrol boat with small arms and machine guns. The Navy craft returned the fire and turned back for the Dong Ha ramp area. Approximately a half-hour later, the NVA from the same position opened up upon a Navy LCU, this time with rocket-propelled grenades as well as rifle and machine gun fire. The Navy ship sustained several hits and casualties, one sailor dead and six wounded. This ship too returned to the Dong Ha ramp.[11]

Lieutenant Colonel Weise remembered that he routinely monitored the Task Force Clearwater radio net and overheard the report relative to the last incident, the attack on the LCU. Shortly afterwards, Captain James L. Williams, the commander of Company H, radioed that one of his patrols not too far from the hamlet of Bac Vong had also seen the incident. Weise relayed the information to Colonel Hull, the 3d Marines commander. About two hours later, at daybreak, about 0600, Hull ordered Weise to investigate the incident. Since An Loc was in the 2d ARVN regimental sector, Lieutenant Colonel Weise requested Colonel Hull for a shift of boundaries, which had to be authorized by the 3d Marine Division. While waiting for the permission, Weise then alerted Captain Williams about the situation. About 0700, with the boundary shift approved, the battalion commander ordered Williams to send the platoon near Bac Vong across the adjacent stream and to "reconnoiter area from which attack occurred." At the same time, he directed Williams to "assemble remainder of Hotel [Company H] which was widely dispersed on patrol."[12]

For that matter, at this point of time, Lieutenant Colonel Weise's entire command was widely dispersed. Weise maintained his command post at Mai Xa Chanh at the southern terminus of Jones Creek, about 5,000 meters northeast of Bac Vong, collocated with his Company F. One platoon of Company F

was at My Loc on the Cua Viet, about 3,000 meters east of the company and battalion command posts. Company G was positioned another 3,000 meters to the north of the battalion command post near the hamlets of Lam Xuan and Nhi Ha on both sides of Jones Creek. The previous day, Weise had lost operational control of his Company E, now positioned on Route 1, about 5,000 meters to the west of the Napoleon sector, to the 3d Marine Division. Moreover, according to the battalion commander, he could not move Company G and the Company F platoon at My Loc from their positions without first obtaining the approval of the 3d Marine Division. This, in effect, only left him two maneuverable infantry units to carry out the mission, Company H and the two platoons of Company F with him at Mai Xa Chanh. At the time he ordered Captain Williams to assemble his company, Lieutenant Colonel Weise also told Captain James H. Butler, the Company F commander, to mount his two platoons on amphibian tractors and to deploy from Mai Xa Chanh to Bac Vong.[13]

About 0830, as the initial platoon of Company H advanced through Bac Vong and approached the stream which had been the original boundary with the 2d ARVN Regiment, the platoon came under heavy rifle and machine gun fire as well as mortar and rocket bombardment. The enemy was well entrenched in the hamlet of Dong Huan just across the stream from Bac



Vong. It was obvious to both Captain Williams and Lieutenant Colonel Weise that it would take more than a platoon to get the North Vietnamese out of the objective area. The battalion commander directed Williams to pull his platoon back and wait for the rest of his company and the two platoons from Company F to arrive. He also reinforced Williams with the reconnaissance platoon attached to his BLT and two M48 tanks. Before the Marines could reach An Loc, they had to eliminate the NVA from Dong Huan.[14]

Expecting resistance from the enemy, Weise asked for permission to move Company G from Nhi Ha and the Company F platoon from My Loc to Bac Vong to support the attack. At this time, about 0900, Lieutenant Colonel Weise and a small operational group, consisting of his sergeant major, air liaison officer, and three radio operators, boarded a Navy monitor (an armored LCM 6) so that he could see and possibly control the course of events. According to Weise, the "monitor proved to be an ideal command post with good communications and significant fire power—a breech-loaded 81mm mortar, two 20mm cannons, plus .50- and .30-caliber machine guns." The Navy ship sailed up the Cua Viet from Mai Xa Chanh to a point on the river opposite Dong Huan.[15]

Weise's plan for the attack was to have artillery and air to prepare the objective area and then for William's Company H to cross the stream. The two M48 tanks, the reconnaissance platoon, and Company F and the amphibian tractors reinforced with two 106mm recoilless rifles were to lay down a heavy base of fire to cover the Company H attack. Once Company H was well established on the other side of the stream, Company F with the two 106s and the amphibian tractors would cross. Company F was to create a diversionary effort to draw the enemy's attention from Company H, which would then attack Dong Huan. With the securing of Dong Huan, Company F would then take Dai Do. If the situation became tenuous, Lieutenant Colonel Weise, who had received back operational control of his Company G at Nhi Ha, hoped to helilift the latter company back to the former battalion CP at Mai Xa Chanh. From there, the company with the BLT's two tanks would board an LCM–8 to reinforce the two other companies in the Dai Do sector.[16]

At first, the plan appeared to be working. With radio links to an aerial observer, the battalion directed helicopter gunship and fixed-wing airstrikes as well as artillery on suspected enemy positions throughout the entire five-hamlet village complex. According to the aerial observer, the airstrikes knocked out at least three of the North Vietnamese .50-caliber machine gun positions. With the lifting of the air bombardment, Company H crossed the stream about 400 meters northwest of Bac Vong. According to Lieutenant Colonel Weise, "Captain Williams did a masterful job of moving his company . . . across open rice paddies under enemy fire," ford the stream, and then move south, literally crawling the last 1,500 meters, again in the open, to reach the assault position with relatively light casualties. As planned, the tanks, the amphibian tractors, the reconnaissance Marines, and the Marines of Company F provided covering fire for the assault company. The artillery batteries of the 12th Marines used white phosphorous and smoke shells to cloak the movement of Company H.[17]

With Company H in the assault positions, the two platoons of Company F on top* of the amphibian tractors crossed the stream and took positions on the right flank of Company H. While Company H was to attack Dong Huan, Captain Butler was to secure Dai Do, about 700 meters to the west of Dong Huan. About 1400, both companies launched their assaults. In a relatively short, but fierce struggle, Company H successfully fought its way into Dong Huan, but at some cost. Among the casualties was Captain Williams, wounded by a grenade about halfway through the hamlet. Williams killed his assailant with a well-placed shot from his .45-caliber service pistol. With the company commander down, First Lieutenant Alexander F. Prescott assumed command, rallied the troops, and continued the attack. By 1500, the Marines controlled Dong Huan. Company H had consolidated its positions and began evacuating its casualties.[18]

Captain Butler's Company F with the amphibian tractors had not fared as well. Sporadic enemy artillery from the north and enemy mortars, recoilless rifles, and machine guns from positions in Dai Do prevented the company from reaching its objective. The enemy recoilless rifles took out two of the tractors. As a field expedient, the Marines had mounted their two 106mm recoilless rifles on top of two of the tractors, "secured by sandbags." Despite the added fire power, the 106s failed to silence the enemy weapons in Dai

*Brigadier General Weise later explained that "we usually avoided riding inside the LVTP–5 Amphibian Tractor . . . because its highly volatile gasoline fuel tanks were located beneath the troop compartment. It was feared that there would be little chance of escape if the amtrac struck a land mine. Land mines were plentiful in our area." Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," Footnote 4, Footnotes, p. 3.

Do. Although one of the platoons reached the eastern edge of the hamlet, the other remained in the open in a cemetery about 300 meters to the east. At one point in the course of the afternoon, Captain Butler radioed that he only had "26 effective Marines."[19]

Lieutenant Colonel Weise had wanted to reinforce Company F with Company G, but these hopes were soon dashed. The company had prepared for the helilift from Nhi Ha and Lam Xuan back to the battalion CP. After the first wave of helicopters had taken out the 81mm mortar section and some of the supplies, enemy artillery and mortars bombarded the landing zone followed by a ground assault against the company positions. Left with little choice, Captain Manuel S. Vargas,* the company commander, canceled the rest of the helilift. The company beat back the enemy attack and then Vargas ordered the company to make a night march back to Mai Xa Chanh.[20]

Earlier in the afternoon, Colonel Hull had boarded one of the Navy patrol boats, a lightly armed, 14-foot, fiberglass boat with a 35-horsepower outboard motor that the Marines called "skimmers," to have a look at the situation for himself. He first stopped at Dong Huan and discussed the fighting and evacuation of the casualties with Lieutenant Prescott and then joined Lieutenant Colonel Weise on board the "monitor." According to Weise, Hull told him that now that the "battle was joined we had to maintain pressure on the enemy to keep him off balance." Hull promised the battalion commander operational control of Company B, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, which had a platoon of LVTPs attached to it south of the Bo Dieu.[21]

First Lieutenant George C. Norris, the Company B commander, radioed Lieutenant Colonel Weise to report his availability. Weise briefed Norris on the situation and then ordered "his company to mount the amtracs, cross the river, attack and seize An Loc, the hamlet from which the enemy had earlier attacked the Navy Utility Boat." At 1625, the first of two waves of Company B landed on the northern shore of the Bo Dieu River just south of An Loc under covering fire from the weapons of Task Force Clearwater's River Assault Group boats. By 1710, the second wave was ashore, but Company B had only succeeded in establishing a rather insecure beachhead.[22]

The enemy greeted the company with automatic weapons, RPGs, mortars, and heavy small arms fire, not only from inside An Loc but also from the hamlet of Dai Do to the north, and from the hamlet of Dong Lai, about 1,000 meters to the northwest and across the second or western stream in the Dai Do sector. NVA recoilless rifles damaged several of the amphibian tractors, disabling one of the amtracs and destroying another. Despite the strong enemy resistance, in its initial assault, the company pushed through into about half of An Loc. At this point, the casualty toll forced the advance to falter. Lieutenant Norris, the company commander, was dead. A hidden enemy sniper killed the Marine lieutenant as he was being helped to the rear after being seriously wounded. According to Lieutenant Colonel Weise, who had carefully monitored the events ashore, about an hour before dark, he "ordered Bravo Company (now confused, disorganized, and with only one officer left) to halt, reorganize, form a defensive perimeter in the western half of the hamlet . . . ."[23]

Concerned at the same time about being able to coordinate three separate perimeters, the battalion commander also told Captain Butler of Company F to gather his unit together as best he could outside of Dai Do and withdraw to the positions held by Company H in Dong Huan. Under cover of darkness and with supporting fires provided by Company B and Company H, Company F reached Dong Huan without sustaining further casualties. In fact, Captain Butler discovered that when he had reassembled his company he had about twice the force that he thought he had. With the establishment of the two defensive perimeters at Dong Huan in the north and An Loc in the south, the fighting on the 30th was about over.

During the night of the 30th, the enemy made several probes at Dong Huan, but Companies F and H with the assistance of friendly artillery easily repulsed them. At 2330, although under artillery bombardment by enemy guns north of the DMZ, Company G to the east completed its night march to Mai Xa Chanh from Nhi Ha and Lam Xuan. Company E, however, was still under operational control of the division and remained in its defensive positions on Highway 1, northwest of the Dai Do complex. In the day's action, both the North Vietnamese and the Marine BLT including Company B from the 3d Marines had sustained heavy casualties. The Marines reported approximately 90 enemy killed while suffering losses of 16 dead and 107 wounded.[24]

At the end of the long day, Lieutenant Colonel Weise remained frustrated. He believed that if he had Companies E and G attached to him from the very beginning that he could have seized both Dai Do and

*On December 26 1973, then Major Vargas legally changed his name from Manuel Sando Vargas to Jay R. Vargas. Col Jay R. Vargas Biographical File (Ref Sec, MCHC).

An Loc after Company H had captured Dong Huan. Moreover, he had requested additional airstrikes* and 8-inch artillery missions which were not forthcoming. He was especially disappointed that he "did not get a radar controlled 2,000 pound bomb strike by Marine A–6 Intruder aircraft." He asserted that the heavy air and artillery ordnance with delayed fuses would have "cracked some of the enemy's . . . fortifications" and "followed by napalm" would possibly have destroyed the enemy's defenses. It was obvious to Weise that his unit did not have priority for either air or artillery support. He did not blame Colonel Hull who had given him all the reserve force he had available—Company B, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines. With the piecemealing of his forces into the battle, Weise declared later "I felt 'an hour late and a dime short' throughout the fight."[25]

From the perspective of General Tompkins at the 3d Marine Division command post, he could not be sure that the main thrust of the enemy was in the Dai Do sector. At the same time that BLT 2/4 fought in Dai Do, the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines at Cam Phu, about three miles to the west, had engaged other elements of the *320th NVA Division*, the same place where Task Force Robbie had run into trouble the day before.** Along Route 1, the 2d ARVN Regiment also reported continuing contact with enemy forces. Together with the attacks on the Navy river boats, Tompkins believed the North Vietnamese poised a real threat to the entire coastal plain from Cam Phu south to Quang Tri. Still, according to Major William H. Dabney, recently promoted and a former company commander at Khe Sanh reassigned to the 3d Marine Division G–3 staff at this time, General Tompkins entered the division FSIC (Fire Support Information Center) on the evening of the 30th and ordered the artillery commander, "to take every tube that is in range of Dai Do . . . to shift its trail so that it is pointing at the Dai Do area and . . . fire max sustained rate with every tube all night."[26]

In an interview a few days after the initial action, a reporter quoted General Tompkins as stating, "Yes, I can tell you the exact moment when I made up my mind it was going to be a real battle—it was at 9:15 Tuesday morning (April 30)." According to the Tompkins interview, when the general looked at the map, the "situation was pretty obvious." He believed, "the whole picture adds up to one of two things—the enemy was either driving through to Dong Ha itself, or he was planning to . . . slip by one or both sides of Dong Ha, and go for the provincial capital of Quang Tri, just eight miles due south." According to Tompkins such a threat was more than the 2d ARVN Regiment could handle, "it was time to call in the Marines."[27]

The 3d Marine Division commander only had a limited number of reserves that he could throw into the battle.*** Tompkins believed that the insertion of the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines at Cam Phu contained the enemy forces to the west. He still remained concerned, however, about the capability of the ARVN to hold the center and also about the uncovering of the northern approaches to Dong Ha with the withdrawal of Company G from Nhi Ha and Lam Xuan. As Lieutenant Colonel Weise later observed, "Nhi Ha had always been a key staging area for NVA infiltrating south along 'Jones Creek'." With BLT 2/4 committed to Dai Do, only the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines remained in the Napoleon/Saline sector, safeguarding the southern banks of the Cua Viet. General Tompkins request-

*Up to this point, possibly because of the new single manager system that had just been established "fixed-wing air support required a 36-hour notice before it could be planned on. This caused problems when situations would change between the planning stage and actual execution of an operation order." According to the BLT 2/4 after action report, "as the battle of Dai Do proceeded it became less difficult to get the close air support that the BLT requested." BLT 2/4 CAAR, Operation Napoleon, pp. 3–4. Colonel Max McQuown, who at the time commanded BLT 3/1, observed, however, that in the 3d Marine Division, "close air support was always a crap shoot. Requesting units just never knew if the requested strike would occur." He claimed that these air support problems existed even before the advent of "Single Manager." McQuown stated that the "glaring problem was that all air support requests had to be forwarded to the 3d Division air officer instead of going directly to the DASC, . . . the agency that was supposed to coordinate and control all air." McQuown Comments.

**In fact a contemporary Army historical account of the battle gives much more emphasis on the ARVN and Cam Phu action and does not even mention the fighting in Dai Do on 30 April, but begins its description with events there on 1 May. Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year," pp. 57–59.

***While the 26th Marines had deployed to the Quang Tri base after Khe Sanh on 18 April, the regiment was basically recuperating from its ordeal at Khe Sanh. Colonel Bruce F. Meyers, who had just assumed command of the 26th Marines in April, recalled that the regiment was "being reequipped and obtaining replacements (the bulk of the regiment's artillery, motor transport, generators, mess equipment, virtually all of the 'heavy' TO/E gear had been shot up and/or left at Khe Sanh when we pulled out." Temporarily the regiment conducted a rice protection operation appropriately named "Operation Rice" in the area south of the Quang Tri base. Col Bruce F. Meyers, Comments on draft, dtd 20Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File). On the other hand, Colonel Max McQuown, who commanded BLT 3/1 at the time, asserted that either his battalion or the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines were both at Ca Lu, and therefore, "there was a 'swing' battalion available to go anywhere in the division TAOR. It could have been 2/9 or BLT 3/1—it turned out to be neither." McQuown Comments.

ed a battalion of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, the Prov Corps reserve, from Lieutenant General William B. Rosson, the corps commander, to fill any gaps in the division's defenses. General Rosson remembered Tompkins telling him "that the *320th NVA Division* had Dong Ha in its sights."[28] At 0900, 1 May, the 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry arrived by helicopter in a landing zone just north of Dong Ha. Later that day, General Tompkins turned over operational control of the Army battalion to the 3d Marines to insert into the Nhi Ha and Lam Xuan area.[29]

The Continuing Fight for Dai Do

The fighting in the Dai Do area, however, was far from over. Just before daybreak on 1 May, a reconnaissance patrol from Company B in An Loc noticed that the North Vietnamese had slipped out of the hamlet. At that point, on order of Lieutenant Colonel Weise, who had come ashore by skimmer boat, the company took over all of An Loc. At daybreak, Company H in Dong Huan noticed about 60 enemy soldiers moving across an open field rice paddy west of Dai Do and north of An Loc. Calling in supporting arms as well as employing their own rifle and automatic weapons, the Marines of both Companies H and B participated in what amounted to a "turkey shoot." Lieutenant Colonel Weise later speculated that the North Vietnamese may have been "a reinforcing unit looking for the village of Dai Do" or possibly "stragglers . . . from An Loc."[30]

After this initial action, there was a relative lull in the fighting largely confined to the continuous artillery shelling of Dai Do, as both sides attempted to marshal and reinforce their forces. At first, Lieutenant Colonel Weise had planned to have Captain Vargas' Company G make a night landing at An Loc and then launch a predawn attack on Dai Do. The Navy landing craft that were to carry the Marine company from Mai Xa Chanh to An Loc, however, were not available. Instead Company G, reinforced by the BLT's two tanks, waited at Mai Xa Chanh until about 0830 to board two

Two Marines from BLT 2/4 survey the ruins of the hamlet of Dai Do after several days of heavy fighting. The Marine on the left is carrying three LAAWs (light antiarmor weapons) strapped to his back.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191498



LCM–6s. Lieutenant Colonel Weise, once more in his "skimmer" boat, intercepted Company G on the water. He joined Captain Vargas on the lead LCM and briefed the company commander on the situation and the revised plans. The company was to come ashore at An Loc, pass through Company B's lines, and then take the hamlet of Dai Do. Company B was to remain in reserve, while Companies F and H would provide covering fire from Dong Huan.[31]

As planned, around 1000, Company G landed at An Loc and prepared to launch its attack on Dai Do. So as not to reveal the presence of the two M48 tanks, the amphibian tractors with Company B revved up their engines and made several false starts. Marine artillery and naval gunfire continued to pound the North Vietnamese troops in Dai Do and just after the artillery fire lifted, two Marine A–4s swooped low and dropped bombs and napalm on the hamlet. Passing by the eastern flank of Company B, the Marines of Company G with the tanks between the two assault platoons and under covering smoke and white phosphorous rushed forward to cover the 500 meters of open rice paddy between them and Dai Do.

While heavy mortar and automatic weapons stopped the left flank about 200 meters short of Dai Do, the rest of the company reached the enemy's first line of bunkers. As one company officer told a newspaper reporter later: "We could have used 10 tanks. We had two and we had to send both of them to the rear with damage." The fighting in Dai Do reverted to intensive short-range fighting, with the Marines blowing holes in the enemy bunkers with satchel charges and grenades. Bypassing some of the defenses, by 1400, the company attained the northern reaches of Dai Do. Indicative of the heavy combat, Captain Vargas later related that "I started out with 123 men and by the time I got through the village I was down to 41. . . . Every trooper had a captured AK–47." The Marines also had taken several prisoners.[32]

The North Vietnamese were not about to allow the Marines to stay in Dai Do and mounted a counterattack in about battalion strength from both north and west of Dai Do. Employing both well-aimed artillery from positions north of the DMZ and mortars, the enemy troops forced Company G to give ground. Also North Vietnamese troops in Dai Do who had been bypassed, especially in the southwestern part of the hamlet, opened fire on the Marines of Company G from the rear. Given the situation, Lieutenant Colonel Weise ordered Vargas "to fall back and establish a defensive perimeter in the eastern part of Dai Do." By 1700, Company G had established its new perimeter, called in supporting arms, and waited for resupply and reinforcements and a new enemy attack. In the process, Captain Vargas was wounded but not seriously enough to relinquish command.

While sitting in its new perimeter, Company G reported the sighting of a large number of enemy troops in the vicinity of Truc Kinh, about 3,000 meters northeast of Dai Do. At about the same time, an aerial observer spotted the troop movement at Truc Kinh and also a North Vietnamese artillery forward observation team and called in fixed-wing and helicopter gunships on both positions. According to one report, the fixed-wing sorties killed all 13 of the NVA artillery spotter team, which resulted in a reduction of the effectiveness of the enemy artillery. Lieutenant Colonel Weise remembered that "on our air net we could hear the excited pilots as they strafed, bombed, and rocketed enemy in the open in daylight, a rare sight!" BLT 2/4 now had priority for close air support, although Weise later asserted not as much as "we requested nor as quickly as we needed it."[33]

At An Loc, Lieutenant Colonel Weise tried to reinforce Company G. At first, he ordered Company F to attack from Dong Huan to relieve the embattled company. Enemy artillery and automatic weapons and small arms fire stopped the attack far short of its objective. Although the North Vietnamese attempted to jam the Marine radios, the battalion by changing frequencies was able to call in supporting arms including airstrikes to provide protective cover for the second Marine company. At this point, around 1700, Weise had few reserves that he could send into the battle. Although earlier in the day, he had requested and received operational control of his Company E from the 3d Marine Division, the company had not yet arrived from its former position along Route 1. With the number of casualties that it sustained the day before, Company H in Dong Huan was not in any position for "a major effort." This left only Company B, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines at An Loc, where its parent battalion had sent in several replacements including a new company commander, executive officer, and several experienced noncommissioned officers.[34]

About 1700, Lieutenant Colonel Weise ordered Company B, 3d Marines into the attack. According to Weise, the plan was for the company, on top of the LVTs, to cross rapidly the 500 meters of rice paddy separating it from Dai Do, "dismount and fight its

way to link up with Golf [Company G]." It did not work. The enemy laid down a tremendous amount of both automatic and small arms fire that literally stopped the attack dead in its tracks. Both the new company commander, First Lieutenant Thomas A. Brown, and many of his key personnel were wounded. According to Weise, Company B was in very bad straits—a young, inexperienced Marine officer had assumed the command and was close to panic. At that point, Captain Vargas of Company G made radio contact with him and in a "calm, confident voice settled the excited Marine down, enabling him to gain better control of the situation."[35]

Fortunately, Weise's Company E under Captain James E. Livingston, after crossing the dangerous stream* to the west, arrived at An Loc about 1730 from its former position on Route 1. With the coming of darkness, Lieutenant Colonel Weise ordered Company B to pull back to An Loc. Both Captain Livingston and First Lieutenant Clyde W. Mutter, the commanding officer of the reconnaissance platoon, "personally led a number of small expeditions during darkness, across the fire-swept rice paddies, and helped Bravo Company successively withdraw back to An Loc with all its wounded." By this time, Company F had rejoined Company H in Dong Huan. In its tight perimeter in the northeastern part of Dai Do, with supporting arms and light provided by flare ships, Company G repulsed several attempts of the North Vietnamese to overwhelm its positions. Casualties had been heavy for both sides on 1 May. The Marines suffered 24 dead and 44 wounded and evacuated. BLT 2/4 took 2 prisoners and reported 91 enemy dead.[36]

With enemy probes all along his positions, Lieutenant Colonel Weise spent a long sleepless night as he prepared his plans for the next day. Worried about the ability of Company G to continue to hold out in Dai Do, after learning according to one prisoner that the North Vietnamese had at least 12 companies in Dai Do, Weise decided upon a predawn attack. Company E was to attack to the northwest from An Loc into Dai Do and link up with Company G. The two companies would then clear the hamlet. If the attack stalled, Weise planned to send in Company H. Companies F and B would continue to secure Dong Huan and An Loc, respectively, and be prepared to reinforce.[37]

About 0500 on 2 May, while Company G provided covering fire, Company E left its line of departure for attack positions south of Dai Do.** Heavy enemy fire caused two of the Company E platoons to hesitate, but Captain Livingston personally led his reserve platoon to regain the momentum. At the same time, Company G attacked the enemy positions in southern Dai Do from the rear. The fighting would continue for several hours at close range with the Marines using flamethrowers, white phosphorous, grenades, satchel charges, and LAAWs (light antitank assault weapons) to crack the NVA bunkers and kill the enemy troops inside them. As one Marine squad leader with Company E observed, the NVA were "in fortified positions and bunkers and not moving."[38] Although wounded by grenade fragments, Captain Livingston continued to encourage and prod his men forward. By about 0930, the two companies had secured Dai Do.[39]

About a half-hour earlier, Colonel Hull made another visit to Lieutenant Colonel Weise's temporary command post at An Loc. Satisfied with the progress of the attack, Hull directed the BLT commander to continue "to keep the pressure on the enemy." Weise remonstrated that his unit "had just about run out of steam." He recommended instead reinforcement by other battalions to his north and on both his flanks. Using anvil and hammer tactics, the battalions on the north would attack south and squeeze the NVA between them and the Marines in Dai Do. At this point, however, Colonel Hull had few available resources and could only promise Weise that he would try to get the 2d ARVN to cover BLT 2/4's western flank.[40]

About noon, Colonel Hull informed the BLT 2/4 commander that an ARVN mechanized battalion would be available. Using the stream to the west of Dai Do as a boundary, the ARVN were to capture the ham-

*According to Lieutenant Colonel Weise the stream was "nearly unfordable," being about five and a half feet deep and fairly swift running. Livingston solved the problem by having a "half dozen of his tallest Marines strip down, plant themselves in the deepest part of the stream, and pass the shorter, heavily laden Marines hand-to-hand to the shallow water." Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 19.

**Master Gunnery Sergeant James W. Rogers, who at the time was the 1st Squad Leader, 3d Platoon, Company E, tecalled that during the night of 1–2 May his squad had the mission of establishing an "ambush\listening post outside of An Loc and to remain in position until dawn." He and his squad emplaced their position near a burial mound about 75–100 yards in front of the company perimeter. Just before daylight, they heard voices in front of them. Assured by Captain Livingston that this was not a friendly patrol, Rogers thought that they may be NVA attempting to surrender and called out to them in Vietnamese asking if they were Chieu Hoi. The NVA opened fire and the Marines responded with their M16s and a M60 machine gun. The firefight ended and the Marine squad pulled back to the company perimeter to take part in the attack. MGySgt James W. Rogers, Comments on draft, dtd 21Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

lets of Dong Lai and Thong Nghia across the stream. The Marines would attack north into the hamlets of Dinh To and Thuong Do.

Following his orders to continue the pressure, Lieutenant Colonel Weise ordered Company H into the assault. He told First Lieutenant Prescott, the company commander, to pass through the lines of Companies E and G and seize Dinh To. Leaving the line of departure about 1300, Company H fought its way into about a third of the hamlet. At that point, the enemy counterattacked. While the company maintained its positions, Lieutenant Prescott radioed for assistance, believing that he would be overwhelmed by the next enemy attack.[41]

According to Lieutenant Colonel Weise, Captain Livingston in Dai Do did not wait for orders. He gathered up what remained of his company, about 30 men, and rushed forward into Dinh To. Lieutenant Prescott remembered the change in his men when they learned that Company E was on its way:

> We were really desperate. Then my radio operator told me, "Captain Livingston is coming." I knew then that we would be O.K. I yelled "Echo is coming." The cry was repeated by others, "Echo is coming . . . Echo is coming." Everyone felt like I did.[42]

For a time, both companies rallied and appeared to have gained the upper hand, but not for long. Although Lieutenant Prescott sustained a serious wound and was evacuated to the rear, Second Lieutenant Bayard V. Taylor assumed command of Company H and effectively took control. The two companies fought their way through a series of trenches until stopped by an enemy machine gun. At that juncture, the North Vietnamese mounted yet another attack. According to Lieutenant Taylor:

> The enemy counterattack dwarfed the fighting that had gone before in intensity and volume. I recall seeing banana trees and the masonry walls of a hootch cut down by the [NVA] automatic weapons fire. The bushes to our front seemed to be alive with heavily camouflaged NVA soldiers.[43]

Sergeant James W. Rogers, an acting platoon leader with Company E, remembered much the same: "NVA soldiers were all over . . . as soon as you shot one, another would pop up in his place. We were receiving a lot of machine gun fire." Rogers credited the "coolness and calmness" of the Company E commander, Captain Livingston, "who seemed to be everywhere," with keeping the Marines "from panicking."[44]

About 1430, Lieutenant Colonel Weise, who had moved his forward command post to Dai Do, ordered the two companies to disengage and return to the battalion command post. An injured Captain Livingston, unable to walk because of machine gun rounds in both his legs, insisted that he not be helped to the rear until the rest of the wounded had been evacuated. Under the cover of Marine airstrikes and supporting artillery, the two companies pulled back with all of their wounded to the relative safety of Dai Do.

By this time, Weise received the information that the ARVN mechanized battalion had occupied Dong Lai, about 500 meters to the west of Dai Do. With the approval of Colonel Hull, the Marine battalion commander worked out a plan for the Marine and ARVN battalion to advance abreast along both sides of the stream—the Marines again to move into Dinh To and the ARVN to push from Dong Lai to Thuong Nghia, a distance of some 1,000 meters to the northwest. According to Weise, "coordination and communication was difficult at best," but he had no spare officer to send as a liaison to the ARVN. Both he and his operations officer, Major George F. Warren, however, talked by radio to the U.S. Army advisor with the ARVN unit who assured them that the ARVN battalion commander understood and agreed to the plan.[45]

For the attack, Weise selected Companies G and F. Although Company G was down to about 40 men, it still had four officers. Company F, which had been reinforced by the platoon at My Loc, had about 80 men. Captain Vargas' Company G was to be in the lead followed "in trace by Company F." The idea was for Company G to advance rapidly until it encountered enemy resistance and then for Company F to push through and continue the attack. Lieutenant Colonel Weise and a small command group accompanied Company G. Major Warren, the operations officer, assumed command of the perimeter formed by Companies E and H in Dai Do. Company B remained in An Loc in what had become the BLT rear sector.[46]

Close to 1600, under cover of Marine air and artillery, the two companies moved into the attack. This time, Company G only met sporadic small arms fire as it pushed through Dinh To. Company F, however, became bogged down in the rice paddies east of the hamlet where it came under artillery and heavy automatic weapons fire from its northeast. Unaware that Company F was not behind it, Company G drove to the southern edge of Thuong Do. At that point, however, the company took fire from its front and

right flank. According to Weise, he told Captain Vargas to halt and for Company F to move up, only then to discover that the latter company was not where he thought it was. About the same time, about 1700, Company G came under automatic weapons fire on its left flank and left rear from across the stream, an area supposedly secured by the ARVN mechanized battalion in its armored personnel carriers (APCs). In fact, Lieutenant Colonel Weise remembered that when "we first received fire from over there, we thought it was them [the ARVN] . . . We saw a large number over there to the left and we didn't realize that they were NVA and not ARVN that were on the move until we realized that we saw no APCs. Ten or 15 minutes we looked at those guys."[47]

BLT 2/4 was in an untenable situation. In effect, its lead companies were in unprotected perimeters with enemy troops in between them. Weise later related, "There was just one hell of a donnybrook and 'Charlie, bar the door situation.'" The battalion commander called in artillery, "all around and top of us." An enemy RPG round killed Weise's Sergeant Major, John Malnar, and Weise himself was seriously wounded by an NVA AK–47 rifle. The battalion commander praised Captain Vargas, who also had sustained a minor wound, for his conduct of the battle: "He was everywhere at once . . . ."[48]

Company G stopped the initial enemy frontal attack and then turned around "and picked off most of the enemy" coming at it from the rear. According to Weise, "every Marine who was able to shoot, including wounded who could handle a weapon, fired and the fighting was violent and close." Using the tactic of withdrawal by fire teams, with two able-bodied Marines dragging a wounded man, the company fought its way back to the positions held by Company F. The two companies then retreated to Dinh To where they were met by Major Warren, the operations officer, who had organized a provisional platoon supported by amphibian tractors.[49]

After evacuating the most seriously wounded, including Lieutenant Colonel Weise,* by 1800, the battalion had once more consolidated its perimeter in Dai Do. With replacements and some reorganization, each company consisted of 40 men and 1 officer.

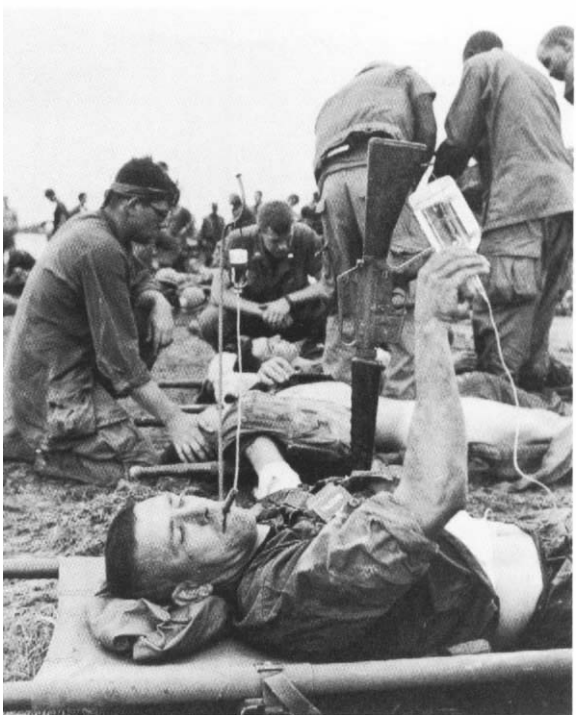


Photo courtesy of BGen William Weise, USMC (Ret)

A seriously wounded but still feisty LtCol William Weise, with a cigar in his mouth, lies on a litter holding his own albumin serum bottle awaiting medical evacuation. In the background, Navy medical personnel and Marines attend to other wounded.

Major Warren had assumed command of the battalion from Lieutenant Colonel Weise and was in turn relieved later that night by Major Charles W. Knapp, the battalion executive officer, who had maintained the BLT rear headquarters on board the *Iwo Jima* (LPH 2). In the fighting for the Dai Do village complex on 2 May, the 3d Marines reported casualties of 40 Marines dead and 111 wounded and the killing of nearly 380 of the enemy.

The fight for Dai Do was practically over. Although there were further probes on the night of 2–3 May on the Marine lines in the hamlet of Dai Do, by daybreak there was little sign of the enemy. Aerial observers saw small groups of North Vietnamese retreating north from Thuong Do and called in airstrikes. Later that day, Lieutenant Colonel Charles V. Jarman's 1st Battalion, 3d Marines took over from BLT 2/4 responsibility for the Dai Do sector. The 1st Battalion made a sweep through the hamlets of Dinh To and Thuong Do without incident. Companies G and H of BLT 2/4, which were temporarily under the operational control of Jarman, followed in trace and collected the Marine dead

*An Associated Press photograph taken at the time shows a still feisty Lieutenant Colonel Weise with a fat cigar in his mouth lying on a litter holding his own plasma bottle in an evacuation area near Dai Do. Clipping from the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, p. 2 (Weise Folder, Dai Do).



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191447

Marines of BLT 2/4 board a "Mike" boat (landing craft, mechanized) for return to their base area in the Napoleon/Saline area of operations, after inflicting and sustaining large casualties in the Dai Do village complex.

from the previous day's fighting who could not be evacuated.* By 1935, on 3 May, Companies G and H had completed their grisly mission and began to depart the Dai Do area. Shortly after 2100, the last elements of the two companies had returned to the BLT's old command post at Mai Xa Chanh.[50]

The three-day fight for the Dai Do complex had been a bloody one for both sides. From 30 April through 2 May, BLT 2/4 had sustained casualties of 81 dead and nearly 300 wounded.** Marine estimates of the number of enemy dead ranged from nearly 500 to over 600. According to Lieutenant Colonel Weise, based on the estimates and counts made by other units around Dai Do, the Marines found 600 bodies in the immediate area of the battle and another 500 to 600 in the extended battle area. Admitting that "body count figures are always suspect," Weise, nevertheless argued that even if one "cut these figures in half for inflation, you're talking about the equivalent of two enemy regiments that were decimated in that area." Lieutenant Colonel Weise later received the Navy Cross and Captains Vargas and Livingston were later awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions in the Dai Do battles.[51]

The End of the First Offensive

While the Dai Do sector may have been the site of the heaviest fighting during this period, the *320th NVA Division* had not limited its efforts only to this area. Throughout the three-day period, from 30 April through 2 May, the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines near Cam Phu continued to have sporadic contact with scattered units of the enemy division. The 2d ARVN Regiment also reported continuous action during the night of 1–2 May. Its 1st Battalion sustained 5 dead and 16 wounded in taking Dong Lai to the west of Dai Do and claimed killing 39 of the North Vietnamese.[52]

To the northeast, the Army's 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry ran into the most intense combat outside of that in Dai Do in the Nhi Ha sector along Jones Creek. The departure of Company G from the Nhi Ha and the Lam Xuan village complexes on the night of 30 April–1 May, left the entire Jones Creek area open to the North Vietnamese. With the assignment of the Army battalion of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade to the operational control of the 3d Marines on the evening of 1 May to fill that gap, Colonel Hull ordered the commander of the 3d Battalion, Army Lieutenant Colonel William P. Snyder, to reenter the area the following morning.[53]

About 0800 on 2 May, the battalion landed in a helicopter landing zone near Lam Xuan East (located on the eastern bank of Jones Creek and so designated to differentiate it from its neighboring hamlet with the same name located on the opposite bank about 1,000 meters to the northwest). The battalion occupied the two Lam Xuans with relative ease, and then moved on to Nhi Ha. At this juncture, the North Vietnamese sprung one of their traps. In close combat, the enemy killed 9 of the American soldiers and wounded 15.

*Colonel Charles V. Jarman, whose 1st Battalion, 3d Marines relieved BLT 2/4, recalled that several of the Marine dead had their hands tied behind their back. It was his belief that these Marines "were captured and subsequently executed by the NVA when the battle appeared to be going against them." Col Charles V. Jarman, Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**All of the sources basically agree about the number of Marine dead. The listing of the number of wounded, however, vary from 247 mentioned by III MAF to 297 according to Brigadier General Weise. According to General Weise, his personnel officer gave the figures of 81 KIA and 297 wounded and evacuated while he "was in the hospital ward aboard the U.S.S. *Iwo Jima*." BGen William Weise (Ret) ltr, dtd 11Mar83 to BGen Edwin H. Simmons (Ret) (Weise Folder, Dai Do).

Another four were missing. The Army battalion fell back to night positions in Lam Xuan West and called in supporting arms on the enemy in Nhi Ha.

On 3 May, while BLT 2/4 and the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines had a relatively quiet time in the Dai Do sector, the Army battalion again fought a see-saw battle with the North Vietnamese in Nhi Ha. After Marine artillery softened the enemy defenses, the 3d Battalion launched another attack into Nhi Ha. The troops recovered the bodies of the four members of the battalion reported missing the night before. About noon, the enemy struck back with the first of three counterattacks. While repulsing the attacks, the Army unit fell back to permit Marine air once more to hit the enemy defenses. The airstrikes were accurate but North Vietnamese antiaircraft guns downed one of the Chance Vaught F–8 Crusaders, killing the pilot. Although unable to take Nhi Ha and returning again to their night positions at Lam Xuan West, the Army battalion sustained relatively light casualties during the day, 1 dead and 7 wounded while accounting for 67 of the enemy.[54]

The fighting at Nhi Ha the following day was a repetition of that of the 3d. Once more, Marine air and artillery bombarded the enemy in Nhi Ha. At 0936, the Army troops again attacked, but only to find themselves once more enmeshed in the North Vietnamese field fortifications and bunkers. The 3d Battalion spent another night in defensive positions in Lam Xuan West. At 0940 on the morning of 5 May, after the usual air and artillery bombardment, the 3d Battalion again moved into the attack. Encountering almost no resistance, the battalion reported at 1135, "Nhi Ha was secured." The Army soldiers found 64 North Vietnamese bodies in the hamlet, all killed by supporting arms. All told, the 3d Battalion suffered 16 dead and 33 wounded while it estimated that the North Vietnamese lost more than 200 men in the three-day struggle for Nhi Ha.[55]

In the meantime, the fighting had shifted westward. After a short hiatus in the Dai Do area, on the morning of 5 May, Lieutenant Colonel Jarman's 1st Battalion, 3d Marines attacked north from Thuong Do towards Truc Kinh, a distance of 1,200 meters to the northwest. The 2d ARVN regiment was to protect the battalion's western flank. With Companies C and D in the lead and Company B following in trace, the Marine battalion reached its first objective, the hamlet of Som Soi, about 300 meters southeast of Truc Kinh, encountering only token resistance. Within a short time, however, about 1130, the Marine battalion came under heavy fire from Truc Kinh and some scattered fire from the southeast. Calling in artillery and fixed-wing airstrikes, especially against Truc Kinh, the battalion fought its way through Som Soi.[56]

At this point, about 1250 on the 5th, the North Vietnamese launched a counterattack from Truc Kinh with Company D on the eastern flank bearing the brunt of the assault. Lieutenant Colonel Jarman then ordered Company C to swing around to the right to contain the enemy attack while Company B screened the movement. This maneuver, however, exposed the battalion's western flank since the 2d ARVN Regiment's attack to the southwest had already stalled and the South Vietnamese were in no position to support the Marines. According to Jarman, an aerial observer radioed him that "500 Charlies were preparing to flank our position."[57] Colonel Hull, the 3d Marines commander, upon learning of the situation, immediately requested reinforcements. The 3d Division released Companies I and M, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines to the operational control of the 3d Marines. Marine helicopters brought the two companies into a landing zone near Thuong Do. Despite the loss of one helicopter, the two 4th Marines companies quickly advanced to the northwest to provide protection for Jarman's western flank. After consolidating his positions in a defensive perimeter established by Companies I and M in a tree line, about 1,000 meters to the south of Truc Kinh, Lieutenant Colonel Jarman described the situation "relatively routine" as Marine air and artillery continued to pound the enemy.[58] About 1800, the North Vietnamese broke contact.

On the morning of the 6th, Companies C and D again reoccupied Soi Son without meeting any resistance. While Company D provided protective fire, Company C then advanced upon Truc Kinh. By 1400 that afternoon, the 1st Battalion had secured the latter hamlet. Most of the North Vietnamese had fled except for the dead from the previous fighting, and three NVA soldiers who surrendered to the Marines. In the two-day action for Truc Kinh, the Marines reported 173 of the enemy dead, captured 3 prisoners, and recovered 75 rifles and 19 crew-served weapons. The Marines sustained casualties of 15 dead and 71 wounded.

While Lieutenant Colonel Jarman's command enjoyed a relatively uneventful day on the 6th, about five miles to the northeast, the U.S. Army 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry's Nhi Ha sector again became active. The North Vietnamese ambushed the battalion's Company A which was conducting a sweep

northwest of Nhi Ha. Before the Army unit could disengage under cover of air and artillery support and return to Nhi Ha, it lost 5 men dead and 17 wounded. Company A reported another 14 soldiers missing. Two of the missing returned to the company's lines that evening, and the battalion recovered the bodies of 11 of the others. One soldier remained on the rolls as missing in action.[59]

With the continuing contact with elements of the *320th* by the Army battalion in the Nhi Ha area and by the ARVN 2d Regiment, whose 4th Battalion on the 6th engaged a North Vietnamese unit just east of Route 1, Major General Tompkins decided to insert the two-battalion 2d Brigade of the 1st Air Cavalry Division into the fight to exploit the situation. Earlier he had asked General Rosson for and received permission to redeploy the brigade if needed from the Scotland II area of operations near Khe Sanh into the Dong Ha sector. With few other reserves available to him, the Air Cavalry brigade provided Tompkins, not only additional troops, but a force, with sufficient helicopters, "ideally configured for operations against a retreating enemy force operating in small formations" and to "patrol large areas effectively and move forces quickly to exploit sightings and contacts."[60]

At 1715 on 6 May, the first battalion of the brigade, the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, under Lieutenant Colonel C. E. Jordan, landed in a landing zone about 3,000 meters east of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines in Truc Kinh. Temporarily, General Tompkins placed the Cavalry battalion under the operational control of Colonel Hull of the 3d Marines. From 7–8 May, the 1st Cavalry battalion made a careful sweep northwest toward the Marine battalion. At Truc Kinh, Lieutenant Colonel Jarman's Marines continued to patrol, finding a few more enemy dead and capturing three more prisoners. On the morning of the 9th, the 2d Brigade of the Air Cavalry under Army Colonel Robert N. McKinnon, with the 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry, arrived and took over the sector. The 3d Marines relinquished operational control of the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, and Lieutenant Colonel Jarman's battalion returned to its former operational area south of the Cua Viet River.[61]

On the morning of the 9th, the 2d Brigade then began Operation Concordia Square in an area of operations carved out of that of the 2d ARVN Regiment, sandwiched between the ARVN on the west and the 3d Marines in Operation Napoleon/Saline to the east. Its heaviest action of the operation actually occurred on that very day. About 5,000 meters southeast of Gio Linh, about 0800, a North Vietnamese force heavily engaged two companies of the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, cutting off one and preventing the other from coming to its assistance. The brigade quickly deployed units of its 2d Battalion into blocking positions north of the action and ordered the remaining two companies of the 1st Battalion to relieve the embattled companies. In the fast-moving action supported by Marine fixed-wing aircraft and helicopter gunships, enemy gunners shot down one UH–1H helicopter, the Army version of the Bell "Huey," and hit eight others. By 1300, the North Vietnamese had disengaged leaving behind an estimated 80 enemy dead. The Army troopers sustained casualties of 16 dead and 52 wounded.[62]

Except for scattered action in Concordia Square, and one large engagement on 10 May north of Nhi Ha involving the 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry, the *320th Division* was no longer engaging the allied forces. In the action on the 10th, Company C, 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry in predawn darkness spotted about 300 enemy troops moving toward its positions. The company pulled back all of its night patrols and called in continuous illumination and artillery upon the NVA. The enemy answered with artillery from north of the DMZ and mortars, and then about 0600 launched a ground assault against the entire battalion front. With the support of fixed-wing aircraft, helicopter gunships, artillery, and naval gunfire, the Army troops broke the back of the enemy attack in a one-sided battle. By 1500, all enemy resistance had ended. The 3d Battalion suffered only 1 soldier dead and 16 wounded. It reported killing 159 of the enemy, took 2 prisoners, and recovered 55 rifles and 18 crew-served weapons.[63]

After the one assault on Nhi Ha on the 10th, rather than attempting to infiltrate south to close the Cua Viet and possibly attack Dong Ha, the *320th* was now breaking into small groups who were trying their best to make their way north into the Demilitarized Zone. Operation Concordia Square ended on 17 May. From 9–17 May, the 2d Air Cavalry Brigade reported enemy casualties of 349 dead while sustaining 28 killed and 117 wounded. Both the Air Cavalry Brigade and the Americal's 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry returned to their base camp at Camp Evans. The enemy offensive had petered out.[64]

With what appeared to be the end of the "most awesome battle by the standards of the Vietnamese War," General Tompkins asked his operations staff to



Photo courtesy of Col Francis I. Fenton, USMC (Ret)

U.S. Army LtGen William B. Rosson, CG Prov Corps, officiates at a 3d Marine Division change of command ceremony. Standing behind Rosson is MajGen Raymond G. Davis, left, who is relieving MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins, right, as the commanding general of the division.

come up with a statistical summary of the action since 30 April. According to the division account, in an 18-day period, the allies killed over 2,100 of the enemy (including 221 by air). Perhaps more reliable and indicative figures were the 41 prisoners captured by the allies and the recovery of more than 500 enemy weapons including 132 crew-served weapons. The cost, however, had been high. In the fighting, the Army and Marine units under the operational control of the 3d Marine Division suffered losses of 233 killed, over 800 wounded, and 1 missing soldier from the 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry. Task Force Clearwater took casualties of 15 dead and 22 wounded, while the ARVN lost 42 dead and 124 wounded. With the extensive bloodletting, Major General Tompkins "had good reason to believe . . . that the *320th NVA Division* would not pose a serious threat to the allied positions along the DMZ for some time to come." General Tompkins also had received word that he was about to relinquish his command.[65]

The Second Offensive

Contrary to General Tompkins' expectations, the *320th* was to come south again and the results were to be much the same, but even more one-sided then the previous attempt. Within the brief interlude between the two enemy thrusts, the enemy had been relatively quiescent except for an artillery attack on the 3d Marine Division base area at Dong Ha. On 14 May, a North Vietnamese artillery barrage exploded there about 110 tons of ammunition, killing 1 Marine and wounding 15. The division's Kentucky and Napoleon/Saline sectors, however, remained relatively inactive through 21 May.[66]

On 21 May, there was a sort of a musical chairs shift throughout the Marine Corps Vietnam command structure. Major General William J. Van Ryzin, the III MAF Deputy Commander, received a promotion to lieutenant general and became the Chief of Staff to the Commandant at Headquarters, Marine Corps in

Washington.* Since Major General Tompkins was the next senior Marine ranking officer in country, Lieutenant General Cushman, the III MAF commander, selected Tompkins to become his new deputy. With the concurrence of the Commandant, General Chapman, Cushman appointed Marine Major General Raymond G. Davis, the deputy commander of Prov Corps, to take Tompkins place as commander of the 3d Marine Division.

On 21 May, in a brief change of command ceremony at Dong Ha, Major General Davis, a native of Georgia and holder of the Medal of Honor from the Korean War, assumed command of the 3d Marine Division. From his former vantage point at Prov Corps, Davis had become impressed with the airmobile tactics of the 1st Air Cavalry Division during Operation Pegasus. As one Army officer remembered, the senior members of Rosson's Prov Corps staff would "take turns having dinner with him every night in the headquarters mess, giving him our ideas on mobile warfare, and during the day we flew around with him." Davis was well aware of the purposes of the attentions of the Prov Corps staff. As he declared later, he had known the Prov Corps commander for some time and when Davis arrived at Prov Corps headquarters, Rosson began "orienting me towards . . . the effectiveness of forces [an euphemism for the airmobile tactics]." Davis believed that the 3d Marine Division had become tied down to its fixed positions and too defense-minded. As he confided to Marine Brigadier General John R. Chaisson on Westmoreland's staff, it was his opinion that the 3d Division earlier in May at Dai Do and afterwards had "missed a great opportunity" and allowed the North Vietnamese to "get away."[67]**

General Davis was to have his "opportunity" almost as soon as he took over the 3d Marine Division. The *320th NVA* had once more left the sanctuary of the DMZ and entered Quang Tri Province. As Davis later stated, "It was gone just nine days and came back to welcome me the night I took command . . . ." Although not expecting the enemy division to make another foray so soon after the first, this time the Marines were ready for the *320th.*[68]

In what the 3d Marine Division listed as the first phase of the new offensive, the North Vietnamese division moved into the Operation Kentucky Leatherneck Square sector northwest of Dong Ha halfway between Con Thien and Gio Linh. This sector had been somewhat quiet since 8 May when the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines had overrun an NVA regimental headquarters, but had sustained heavy casualties during an enemy artillery bombardment.[69] During this lull, Captain Matthew G. McTiernan assumed command of Company I, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines. He recalled that the Marine battalions during this period would shift boundaries between A–3 and Con Thien to confuse the North Vietnamese who had the tendency of working the unit boundary lines. On the morning of 22 May, his company had the mission of establishing "a series of ambushes along the old AO [area of operations] line." The company left the perimeter about 0400 that morning with his 3d Platoon in the lead. Just southwest of the A–3 Strong Point, the company encountered what it first thought was a small enemy patrol. The Marines soon realized that the enemy was in at least company strength and called for reinforcements. McTiernan then asked for air support and received helicopter gunship support "which proved too much for the NVA." According to the Marine captain, the enemy had been on the move, had no prepared positions, and were easy targets for air: "We had caught the NVA unit cold."[70]

In the meantime, a Company A, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines patrol ran into another enemy force just east of Con Thien. Given the intensity of the enemy resistance supported by artillery, Colonel Richard B. Smith, the 9th Marines commander, assumed that the North Vietnamese had infiltrated possibly a battalion if not a larger force into his sector. While the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines reinforced from A–3 and the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines attacked east from Con Thien, Smith attempted to exploit the contact. He asked General Davis for and received operational control from the 4th Marines of the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines. Marine helicopters landed the battalion into blocking positions to

*General Van Ryzin later recalled that he received a telephone call from General Chapman, the Commandant, who had already spoken to General Cushman. The Commandant told Van Ryzin that "I'm going to ask you to come back as my Chief of Staff. I'm going to give you exactly two hours to say yes or no." General Van Ryzin talked the matter over with General Cushman who told him that, "I was stupid if I didn't take it." Van Ryzin accepted the position. LtGen William J. Van Ryzin intvw, 2Apr75, p. 218 (Oral HistColl, MCHC). In his comments, General Van Ryzin observed that he "was still becoming acquainted with the situation [in Vietnam] when I returned to the U.S." LtGen William J. Van Ryzin, Comments on draft, n.d. [Oct94] (Vietnam Comment File).

**General Rosson years later observed: "Unhappily, a substantial portion of the *320th* was able to elude us, reorganize and return in a matter of days. General Davis, who had followed the action as my Deputy, harbored the view that the *320th* should have been destroyed south of the DMZ." Gen William B. Rosson, Comments on draft, dtd 27Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File).

the south of the contact. At the same time, Colonel Smith ordered the helicopter lift of his 1st Battalion, 9th Marines into other blocking positions to the north.

During the next two days while the enemy sought to disengage, the 9th Marines with 12 companies attempted to place a cordon around the NVA forces. When either of the two assault battalions, the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines or the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, found itself in too close to an action, "the unit involved backed off and assaulted the NVA with massive supporting arms." According to a 9th Marines account: "On one occasion, the encircled enemy attempted to escape across the trace; however, artillery . . ., gunships, fixed wing and tanks were brought to bear . . . with devastating effect." By noon on the 24th, the fight was over in the 9th Marines sector. Since the morning of the 22d, the Marines had sustained about 100 casualties, 23 dead and 75 wounded and evacuated, but had reported killing 225 of the North Vietnamese and captured 3 prisoners.[71]

On 25 May, the flats above Dong Ha in both the 2d ARVN regimental sector and the Napoleon/Saline area again became the centers of action. That morning Company E, BLT 2/4 encountered an NVA force in about battalion strength near Nhi Ha, while the ARVN about 2,000 meters above Dong Ha ran into a similarly sized force. Once more the Marines rapidly reinforced both over land and by helicopter-borne forces. In the Nhi Ha sector, Colonel Hull, the 3d Marines commander, ordered the helilift of Company H BLT 2/4 into blocking positions to the south while Company E attacked the hamlet from the north under a rolling barrage. In fighting that lasted all day, the two Marine companies together with supporting artillery and air reported killing 238 of the enemy. Marine casualties were also heavy, 18 dead and 33 wounded and evacuated. To the southwest, the 2d ARVN Regiment in their contact, near Thuong Nghia, just west of the former Dai Do perimeter, repulsed the enemy attack, and claimed killing 122 of the enemy.[72]

On the 26th, concerned that the North Vietnamese *320th* was again attempting to cut the Cua Viet or even strike at Dong Ha itself, General Davis attempted to cordon off the North Vietnamese units. He ordered the helilift of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 9th Marines into blocking positions west of Nhi Ha and placed the two battalions under the operational control of the 3d Marines. At the same time, he ordered Colonel Smith, the 9th Marines commander, to move the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines and the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines overland to exploit the ARVN contact near Thuong Nghia.[73]

In the southern cordon on the 26th, the two Marine battalions, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines and 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, formed blocking positions about 3,000 meters north of Thuong Nghia. The 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, in the vicinity of Truc Kinh, twice encountered resistance from North Vietnamese in entrenched defenses. In the first clash, about 1300, the battalion ran into a force of about 100 enemy troops. After first contact, the Marines pulled back "to allow heavy pounding of enemy positions by air and artillery." The battalion sustained casualties of 10 Marines dead and 12 wounded. At the same time, it captured 5 prisoners and reported killing 56 of the enemy.[74]

In the second action later that afternoon, about 1630, Company K, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines outside of Truc Kinh came under intensive small arms and automatic weapons fire. Tanks attached to the infantry attempted to reinforce the company, but became bogged down in the rice paddies. An aerial observer called in close air support so that the company could withdraw before last light. Captain McTiernan, whose Company I protected Company K's left flank, recalled that during this action, his troops "saw a long column of troops moving out of a small hamlet located 200 yards to our left front." Apparently the enemy was attempting to reinforce their units engaging Company K. With assurances that the column was NVA, Company I opened fire with devastating effect in what Captain McTiernan described "as target practice . . . In the course of ten or fifteen minutes the entire column was destroyed." Still the 3d Battalion had not gone unscathed, Company K sustained 23 wounded and reported 5 missing in action. During the same day, the ARVN about a 1,000 meters to the north of Thuong Nghia claimed to have killed 110 of the enemy while suffering casualties of 2 dead and 7 wounded.[75]

On the 27th, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, reinforced by the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, took its objectives, meeting only scattered enemy resistance. In Truc Kinh, the Marines recovered the bodies of the five men from Company K reported missing the day before. Throughout the day, the Marine units in the southern cordon killed about 28 of the enemy while sustaining only four wounded. For the next two days, the Marines in the two battalions together with the ARVN maintained the cordon subjecting the North Vietnamese units between them to "massive fixed-wing and general support ordnance . . . ." Finally on the 30th, enemy resistance broke and the two battalions "swept through the area," taking 18 prisoners and recovering 23

weapons. For the days of the cordon, 26–30 May, the 9th Marines reported that the two battalions killed a total of 161 of the enemy, captured 26 prisoners, and retrieved over 100 enemy weapons, including 29 crew-served weapons. Marine casualties were also heavy, 41 dead and 119 wounded. The ARVN during their participation in the southern cordon operation claimed to have killed 384 of the enemy and sustained 19 killed and 45 wounded.[76]

During the same period, the 3d Marines in the northern cordon sector around Nhi Ha encircled a North Vietnamese battalion in the hamlet of Lai An, about 2,500 meters northwest of Nhi Ha. While BLT 2/4 and the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines established blocking positions, the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines reinforced by the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines attacked Lai An. Using 11 companies to form the cordon, the 3d Marines finally secured the hamlet on 30 May. Again the price was high. In the taking of Lai An, the Marines sustained casualties of over 20 dead and 200 wounded. From 27–30 May, the 3d Marines reported the finding of 90 bodies and the capture of 8 prisoners in the fight for Lai An.[77]

The "second" battle for Dong Ha was over. Once more the *320th NVA Division* had taken heavy casualties and retreated north of the DMZ. In the two phases of the second offensive, the 3d Marine Division reported killing over 770 of the enemy. Combined with the number estimated killed by the ARVN, the enemy division would have lost more than 1,000 dead from the period 22 May to the end of the month, not including the 61 prisoners captured by the allies. Allied casualties including 112 dead totaled 558.[78]

Thus in the two offensives mounted by the *320th NVA Division*, the North Vietnamese had lost over 3,000 troops. While American casualties had been heavy, their total of dead and wounded was about half of the reported number of North Vietnamese killed. What was even more apparent was that the second offensive was even more futile than the first. While the North Vietnamese may have sustained fewer casualties in the second offensive, they also fought much less effectively. According to the 3d Marines, the enemy troops in the later encounters showed poorer discipline and while well-equipped were less experienced and more willing to surrender. General Davis related that one captured North Vietnamese sergeant stated that of the 90 men in his company, 62 were new. One frightened enemy soldier captured near Lai An told the Marines that his unit lost 200 out of 300 men since crossing the Ben Hai River. In any event, the *320th* remained out of action in the DMZ war for the next two months.[79]

In many respects, questions still remain about the intent of the enemy. Obviously, the thrust of the *320th* was part of the overall NVA so-called "mini-Tet offensive" that the enemy attempted in May to initiate country-wide, a somewhat "poor man's imitation" of the January-February Tet offensive. More than the earlier offensive, except for increased fighting in the capital city of Saigon, the North Vietnamese May offensive was largely limited to attacks by fire at allied bases and acts of terrorism in the hamlets and villages. In I Corps, while the North Vietnamese may have attempted to cut the Cua Viet, they did not or were not able this time to coordinate that attempt with attacks against the major cities of Quang Tri, Hue, and Da Nang. Moreover, the *320th* apparently mistakenly fired early upon the shipping on the Cua Viet, giving away its presence and triggering the Marine response, before all of its units were in position. After once engaged, while showing tenacity, the North Vietnamese division revealed little imagination and an inability to counter the American advantages in manpower, equipment, and supporting arms.

For its part, the 3d Marine Division made several changes in the way it was fighting the DMZ war. Immediately upon taking command of the division, General Davis issued a directive to reduce the number of units manning the strongpoints. In Davis' words, "battalion positions . . . immediately . . . [became] company positions." For example, in the 9th Marines sector, one battalion was responsible for all the strongpoints with one company positioned at each. The other three battalions were "'swing' units" to reinforce a developing battle using helicopter assault and cordon tactics.[80]

Some controversy has arisen over the question about the 3d Marine Division tactics in the earlier offensive. If the division had used more mobile operations and attempted to reinforce Lieutenant Colonel Weise's BLT 2/4 at Dai Do would it have destroyed or trapped more of the *320th*? This is one of the questions that may never be answered and it is of course much easier to answer with hindsight after the event. In all fairness to Major General Tompkins and his staff, his attention and that of his command had been directed towards Khe Sanh since the beginning of the year. He had inherited the barrier and Dyemarker situation from his predecessor and was under constant MACV pressure to maintain and man these defenses. Even if Dyemarker and Khe Sanh were not factors, General Tompkins at

the same time as Dai Do had good reason to believe that the attacks on Nhi Ha to the northeast and at Cam Phu to the southwest may have been the main effort of the *320th*. With the beginning of the drawdown of forces from the Scotland area of operations, General Davis had more freedom of action to implement a more mobile concept in the 3d Marine Division sector, a strategy that the Marines had recommended in the DMZ area since late 1966 and early 1967. At that time, instead of the barrier, the Marines had recommended "a mobile defense by an adequate force—say one division give or take a battalion . . . ." Different circumstances provided different opportunities.[81]*

*Many of the reviewers of this chapter still had strong opinions about the differences between the earlier and later tactics of the division. Captain McTiernan, for example, wrote that, "the decisive change in tactics initiated by General Davis" was the most important factor in the defeat of the NVA offensive. Capt Matthew G. McTiernan, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan 1995] (Vietnam Comment File). Colonel Max McQuown argued that prior to Davis assuming command there were "a myriad of static defensive positions of little tactical value. These positions and the rigid control the Division exercised over every combat unit, fragmented battalions, reduced their combat capability, and severely limited their freedom of action. Thus, after soundly defeating the NVA 'Tet' offensive the initiative passed to the NVA by default in the 3d Marine Division TAOR." McQuown Comments. On the other hand, Colonel Vaughn R. Stuart, who served on the division staff and as a regimental commander later under General Davis, observed that although members of the division "knew very well that we were not mobile, that we were not carrying the war to the enemy . . ., General Tompkins did what he could to change the status quo." He blamed Tompkins' problems, in part, on the factor that the 3d Marine Division commander could not obtain enough helicopters from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. Col Vaughn R. Stuart, Comments on draft, dtd 20Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). See the discussion in Chapter 25 on this last subject. Colonel William M. Cryan, who was the 3d Marine Division G–3 under General Davis, agreed that the division "was stymied by Dyemarker and fixed bases . . .," and credits General Davis for getting "the division moving." Col William M. Cryan, Comments on draft, 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). Colonel William H. Dabney, who served on the division staff under both Generals Tompkins and Davis, agreed with the statement in the text that "different circumstances provided different opportunities." He also declared that intelligence "was far from perfect the first time around, and that General Davis had the benefit of General Tompkins' experience for the second round." Dabney concluded, however, that the *"difference in style"* [emphasis in the original] between Davis and Tompkins may also have affected the outcome of Round II." Col William H. Dabney, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 16

Khe Sanh: Final Operations and Evacuation 16 April–11 July 1968

To Stay or Not to Stay—The "Walking Dead"—Operation Scotland II—Operation Robin
Razing Khe Sanh: Operation Charlie

To Stay or Not to Stay

General Westmoreland originally had ordered the defense of Khe Sanh as a block to enemy infiltration along Route 9 and as a possible "jump-off point" for a planned invasion of Laos.[1] By the end of the siege, the Paris negotiations with the North Vietnamese had ended all thoughts of expanding the war into Laos. With the increased availability of additional mobile forces following the defeat of the enemy's Tet offensive, Westmoreland faced an entirely new tactical situation. As he recorded later:

> It was clear . . . that the base had outlived its usefulness. We now had the troops and helicopters to control the area, . . . and we had the logistics and a secure forward base at Ca Lu to support these operations.[2]

In light of these new developments, Lieutenant General Cushman, the III MAF commander, and Army Lieutenant General William B. Rosson, the Provisional Corps commander, pressed for the evacuation of Khe Sanh immediately. According to General Rosson, he had prepared a plan which General Cushman had endorsed and that he thought had the tacit approval of General Westmoreland. Rosson had proposed the immediate redeployment of the 1st Air Cavalry Division to operation Delaware, and the "progressive deployment eastward" of the 3d Marine Division units. As he recalled, he talked personally by telephone with Westmoreland and told the MACV commander that the Marine and ARVN units would remain at Khe Sanh only to ensure security for the "removal of supplies" during the proposed "inactivation of the base." In Rosson's opinion, "General Westmoreland understood the plan that General Cushman and I had agreed upon," and offered no objection.[3]

On 15 April, this understanding, if there was such an understanding, fell apart at a commander's conference that General Rosson hosted at his headquarters at Phu Bai. Rosson had called the meeting which originally was to include the 3d Marine Division and 1st Air Cavalry Division commanders and various staff members "to finalize the plan and issue orders." As a courtesy, Rosson invited his immediate superior, General Cushman, who in turn had invited General Westmoreland. The Provisional Corps commander remembered that he had just finished outlining the concept and had asked for comments when: "General Westmoreland—to Cushman's and my own surprise and embarrassment—stated that Pegasus would not be terminated." While permitting the greater part of the 1st Air Cavalry Division to redeploy to Operation Delaware, one brigade of the Air Cavalry and Marine and ARVN units would continue "to comb the area" using Khe Sanh as their base of operations. Any decision to curtail "these activities," dismantle the base, or redeploy the remaining forces "would await further developments." General Westmoreland later would say that he basically agreed with Rosson's plan, "but not its timing." General Rosson remained puzzled: "In essence, I either misunderstood General Westmoreland's approval, or he had second thoughts. . . . Why he did not communicate his disagreement to us prior to the conference continues to perplex me." In any event, while Operation Pegasus did officially end on 15 April, U.S. units would continue to operate in and around Khe Sanh, for the time being, under the operational name of Scotland II.[4**]

**Like the meeting on 8 March (See Chapters 8 and 14) the participants had different interpretations about General Westmoreland's demeanor at the April meeting. According to Marine Brigadier General John R. Chaisson, who headed the MACV Combat Operations Center, when General Westmoreland learned that General Cushman, the III MAF commander, and General Rosson, the Prov Corps commander, planned to evacuate the base, "Westy lowered the boom. He was so mad he wouldn't stay around and talk with them. Instead he told me what he wanted and left me to push it with Rosson and Cushman." BGen Chaisson ltr to Mrs. Chaisson, dtd 17Apr68 as quoted in Ronald H. Spector, *After Tet, The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (N.Y., N.Y.: The Free Press, 1993), p. 129. On the other hand, General Rosson wrote: "General Westmoreland certainly did not 'lower the boom' on me when he learned of the plan during our telephone conference. Nor did he do so during the commanders conference. While he was incisively firm in expressing himself on that occasion, he did not exhibit anger. Moreover, he remained after the conference for a short time to converse informally with various commanders, key staff officers, Cushman and myself. I frankly do not remember John's [Chaisson] remaining to 'push it with Rosson and Cushman.'" According to Rosson, he rather recalled "resuming the conference after General Westmoreland's departure to forge a new course of action and revise the orders." Gen William B. Rosson, USA, Comments on draft, dtd 29May95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Rosson Comments, May95.

The "Walking Dead"

When the 3d Marine Division once more prepared to assume control of operations at Khe Sanh with the end of Operation Pegasus, General Tompkins, the 3d Marine Division commander had sent his Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General Jacob E. Glick, to command the forces there. General Glick several years later remembered that his orders were to "close the base down. . . . I went up with a minimum staff with instructions to just hold on, without mounting operations . . . Then the rules changed" after General Westmoreland reversed the original decision.[5]

Glick's command, not surprisingly, was designated Task Force (TF) Glick and included the 1st Marines; the 26th Marines; the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines; and the 2d Brigade of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, which was operating east of Khe Sanh. The 1st Marines began relocating to Khe Sanh from Ca Lu, relieving battalions of the 26th Marines, which, in turn, started to redeploy out of the Khe Sanh sector. On 16 April, Colonel Bruce F. Meyers, the 26th Marines commander, still had one artillery and five infantry battalions under his control and was also responsible for Operation Scotland II, which had just begun. Meyers reported directly to General Glick and oversaw the relief of his battalions by those of the 1st Marines. Lieutenant Colonel John J. H. Cahill's 1st Battalion, 9th Marines remained at the base as part of TF Glick and continued offensive operations west of the combat base.[6]

At 0700 on 16 April, Captain Henry D. Banks led two reinforced platoons of Company A, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines on a patrol southwest of the battalion's perimeter on Hill 689 and a small adjoining hill. Banks ordered the company to halt at 1000 and sent two squads to search for signs of the enemy on a nearby ridge that was covered with four-to-six-foot-high elephant grass. The squad came under small arms and mortar fire, then fell back and reported two Marines killed.* Banks deployed the company with the 1st Platoon establishing a base of fire and the 2d Platoon attacking up the ridge against what he believed to be the enemy's left flank.[7]

First Lieutenant Michael P. Hayden led the 2d Platoon up the north end of the ridge and against the enemy position, but the North Vietnamese, firing from well-concealed bunkers, drove the Marines to the ground. In rapid succession, first Hayden and then his platoon sergeant were killed. The 2d Platoon halted in the deep grass at the fringe of the North Vietnamese bunker complex and returned fire, but with little effect.

Captain Banks ordered the 2d Platoon to fall back so that he could call for supporting arms, but word reached him that dead and wounded Marines still lay within 10 meters of the bunker complex, under the enemy's guns. The intense enemy fire continued and casualties mounted to 10 dead and 20 wounded.* Banks reported to Lieutenant Colonel Cahill that he was engaged with an estimated North Vietnamese squad in heavily fortified positions, then refused Cahill's offer of help. He again tried to evacuate casualties and withdraw, but was unable to do so. Cahill alerted Companies C and D.[9]

At noon, Banks reconsidered and asked for help. Two platoons of Captain Lawrence Himmer's Company C moved out first, with Lieutenant Colonel Cahill accompanying them. On reaching the scene of the action, Cahill found Company A on the north end of the ridge, with heavy casualties and unable to move. He ordered Himmer to attack from the south. Colonel Meyers, monitoring the radio reports from the regimental command post, asked Cahill if he needed help, but like Banks earlier, Cahill refused.[10]**

*Colonel Meyers recalled that the action actually began when a Marine fire team about 1030 or 1100 "ran into a reverse slope horseshoe shaped NVA bunker complex." In this contact one of the members of the team was killed and two others wounded as "they crested the ridge." Col Bruce F. Meyers, Comments on draft, dtd 20Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Meyers Comments.

**Colonel Meyers noted that there were problems with message transmission. Lieutenant Colonel Cahill at 1320 had informed Colonel Meyers that he was committing his two other companies to the action. Because of the necessity of the various radio relays, Meyers did not receive this message until 1543. Within two minutes of receiving this message, Meyers contacted Cahill to "request his current status and to ask if he needed any additional assistance. Cahill . . . declined the proffered additional support." Colonel Meyers also had more than the predicament of Company A on his mind. He recalled that on 16 April, "we received three direct hits of 122mm rockets which set the ASP [ammunition supply point] three on fire." Meyers observed that, "when you are the regimental commander and one of your main ammo dumps within your perimeter is hit, burning, and blowing up, it became more than a line entry in the command chronology!" Meyers Comments and Copy of Statement of Col Bruce F. Meyers to Board for Correction of Naval and Military Records, n.d. [1968], attached to Meyers Comments, hereafter Meyers Statement, Meyers Comments.

Company C deployed on line and advanced up the ridge against what appeared to be the enemy's right flank. As the Marines approached the bunkers, enemy fire broke out from another hidden fortified position on their left flank. Within moments, Himmer, both platoon commanders, a platoon sergeant, and several squad leaders fell with wounds. The acting company executive officer, First Lieutenant William C. Connelly, assumed command. An artillery fire mission on the bunker complex to the company's left resulted in friendly fire impacting within 50 meters of the Marines, so the artillery forward observer ended the mission.[11]

At 1500, Companies A and C were both in desperate straits. Casualties were high, including many unit leaders, and the Marines were nearly immobilized in the elephant grass by the intense enemy fire from two mutually supporting bunker complexes and from nearby mortars which steadily pounded the slopes of the ridge. Nearby, Company D was helping Company A to evacuate the wounded who had been able to crawl away. Cahill moved toward the LZ, suffering three wounds along the way, and ordered Captain John W. Cargile's Company D to deploy along Company A's right flank, then attack across the ridge from northwest to southeast.[12]

Heavy casualties had by now rendered Company A ineffective, and Captain Banks was concentrating on attempts to evacuate casualties as Company D began its attack. Cargile's men advanced through the grass, receiving heavy and accurate sniper fire which dropped four Marines with single shots to the head. The deep grass and the profusion of units and individuals on the hill firing weapons left Cargile's men uncertain of the enemy's exact location and dispositions. Although Company D continued to move forward, progress was painfully slow and casualties mounted.[13]

At about 1730, Banks was seriously wounded and Second Lieutenant Francis B. Lovely, Jr., assumed command of Company A. Cahill learned by radio of increasing casualties in Company D and ordered his companies to evacuate their wounded and withdraw, leaving their dead. Having assumed command of the battalion in the field only two weeks before, Cahill was not aware of General Tompkins' standing orders emphasizing that all KIAs should be evacuated.[14*]

It was 0300 before the last company closed on the battalion perimeter, and another hour before a casualty count reached Cahill showing 20 killed and 20 missing. The battalion continued taking musters and comparing statements of participants which soon reduced the number of missing to 15.[15]

At 0630 on the morning of the 17th, several Marines heard the voice of Corporal Hubert H. Hunnicutt III, calling across the valley from the ridge where the battle had taken place. Two squads moved into the valley and shouted back to him, attempting to pinpoint his location. After hearing two shots near where they thought Hunnicutt was located, the patrol no longer heard his voice.[16]

A few hours later, after Cahill had presented Meyers and General Glick his plan to recover the bodies on 19 April, an air observer (AO) reported seeing a live Marine about 50 meters from the enemy bunkers. Volunteers from the battalion boarded two Boeing CH–46 Sea Knight helicopters for a rescue attempt. One helicopter held a fire team and the other a body recovery detail. When the first helicopter landed atop the ridge, it crushed an enemy soldier with the tail ramp and the fire team ran out shooting. Four North Vietnamese who popped up from fighting holes fell dead immediately. Others surrounding the landing zone poured fire into the helicopter as the Marines quickly searched for the survivor. Finding only dead bodies which had been decapitated and disemboweled, the fire team ran back on board the badly shot up CH–46, which flew 1,000 meters back to Hill 689, then crash landed with about 20 hits in the engine. An AO watching the rescue attempt reported that the search party had missed the live Marine who could still be seen waving

*Several years later, General Glick declared that "the division policy on recovery of MIAs and KIAs was, to my mind, not clearly defined, because in the previous months that I had been there, there had been a general understanding that the forces should not risk additional deaths and casualties unnecessarily to recover KIAs, but that all reasonable effort should be made to recover MIAs. . . . yes, we always recovered KIAs if we could. But, it definitely was considered not right to go into high-risk areas if it was a known KIA. . . . If the person might still be alive, then it would justify to take some risks with other Marines." The general stated that Colonel Meyers of the 26th Marines "was fairly cautious about ground operations to recover people that were probably KIAs." BGen Jacob E. Glick intvw, 20 Jun and 11Jul89, pp. 10–11 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

from a shell hole only meters from where the helicopter had landed.[17*]

Shortly after the failed rescue attempt, an Army helicopter pilot using the call sign "Blue Max 48" volunteered to make another try. With Army helicopter gunships blasting enemy positions atop the ridge, Blue Max 48 sat down near the bunker complex and a crewman leaped out and carried the wounded Marine on board. The helicopter then delivered him directly to the field hospital. Lieutenant Colonel Cahill logically assumed that the Marine who was rescued was the same Marine, Hunnicutt, who had called across the valley earlier in the day. Only later would he learn that the rescued Marine was not Hunnicutt, but a member of Company C named Private First Class G. Panyaninec.[18]

Certain that no live Marines remained on the ridge, Cahill and his staff set to work once more on a plan to recover the remains of those killed in the engagement of the 16th. Attack aircraft bombed the objective through the night of 17 April and the early morning hours of the 18th. But at about 0630, 18 April, Marines on the battalion perimeter once again reported hearing Corporal Hunnicutt calling for help. Lieutenant Colonel Cahill directed that a patrol be dispatched to rescue Hunnicutt and he informed Colonel Meyers of his plans. Meyers approved, but ordered that the patrol not proceed further than 500 meters from the perimeter because the 26th Marines was scheduled to pass control of all forces in the area to the 1st Marines at 0800 and he did not wish to leave in the middle of an engagement. In the meantime, he offered to retain control of the operation until the recovery of the Marine could be accomplished, but Brigadier General Glick, envisioning that the recovery could take a day or more, ordered that control of the operation pass at 0800, as scheduled. Twenty some years later, General Glick remembered:

> I had instructions from the division to go ahead with the relief of the 26th Marines. They had been in Khe Sanh for months on end, and General Tompkins wanted them moved out. The other regiment was on the way; it was all set up to go at a certain time. There was a very questionable situation as to whether sending a patrol out was going to do anything anyway. So the decision was made to go ahead with the relief of the 26th Marines on schedule.[19**]

In a repeat of the previous day's performance, an Army helicopter pilot agreed to attempt Hunnicutt's rescue. Corporal Hunnicutt tells the story:

> About noon I guess, an Army Huey started flying around me, a spotter plane. The spotter plane dropped two red smokes on me and scared me to death. I thought they were going to blow me away. I tried to stand up and wave to them. I threw paper all over the place and waved, and one of the copters came right down on me about three times. I could see the man's face, and then finally he set down and one of the machine gunners came out and helped me into the plane.[20]

Lieutenant Colonel Cahill met Hunnicutt at the Khe Sanh aid station. To Cahill's astonishment, Hunnicutt claimed that Captain Himmer had still been alive as late as the afternoon of the 17th. Although wounded himself, Hunnicutt had cared for the severely injured Himmer since the 16th, moving him down the ridge toward the battalion perimeter until they became separated when Hunnicutt fell into a gorge. Himmer was never seen alive again. For his courageous

*Colonel Meyers remembered the circumstances of the aborted rescue attempt somewhat differently. According to him, the helicopter landed and the fire team ran out and immediately came under fire. The helicopter also took about 20 hits in the engine and fuel compartments. At that point, the gunners on board the aircraft fired their .50-caliber machine guns to suppress the enemy fire and the "fire team reboarded and the 46 'backed out' from the touch down point and as they did, the tail ramp crushed the NVA soldier . . . ." Meyers Comments. Colonel John E. Hansen, who commanded Provisional MAG 39 which controlled Marine helicopter support in Quang Tri Province, wrote that he and Major David L. Althoff, the executive officer of HMM–262, piloted the aircraft that landed with the fire team. Hansen could not see from the cockpit either the fighting or the soldier crushed by the tail ramp: "Our crew chief was in the rear of our helicopter and reporting to us on our radio internal communications system on the progress of the search . . . ." Hansen recalled that as soon as the fire team returned they took off: "We were fortunate to be able to get back to Hill 689 with the aircraft still operating. The helicopter was later recovered by a heavy lift copter and returned to Quang Tri." Col John E. Hansen, Comments on draft, dtd 16Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File).

**According to Colonel Meyers, he was very distressed at the situation. He remembered that General Tompkins denied his request for a delay in the change of operational control between the two Marine regiments. Meyers immediately briefed the incoming 1st Marines commander Colonel Stanley S. Hughes of the situation. Colonel Hughes stated that he would initiate the recovery operation at 0630 despite the fact that he was not to assume operational control until 0800. Meyers stated that as a "control feature" he permitted the patrol to go out 500 meters at which point "they would check in with whichever regimental commander had opcon at the time they reached this checkpoint." According to Meyers, the rescue took place before the patrol ever reached the 500 meter checkpoint, so the entire subject became moot. Meyers Comments. In an earlier statement, Meyers stated that before reaching the 500 meter checkpoint, the patrol saw Hunnicutt who warned them not to approach since he believed the NVA were using him as a decoy. The patrol called in gunships which provided cover while one of the aircraft rescued him. By this time, Colonel Meyers had been relieved of responsibility for the operation and was on his way to the Quang Tri base. Meyers Statement, Meyers Comments.

attempt to save his commanding officer's life, Corporal Hunnicutt was awarded the Navy Cross.[21]

In an operation conducted on 22 April, the 1st Marines recovered all but three of the bodies.* The final casualty count toralled 38 Marines and 3 Navy corpsmen killed in action and 32 Marines wounded, almost half of them seriously. But the story did not end there. General Tompkins appointed Colonel Walter H. Cuenin to investigate the operation and its aftermath. In reviewing the report of this investigation, General Tompkins noted "inexcusable" failures in reporting to division headquarters, as well as actions which "did not reflect the urgency of the occasion." He took administrative action to correct the problems, and relieved Lieutenant Colonel Cahill of command.[22]**

This tragic and costly incident served as a sour note on which to end the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines' gallant part in the defense of the Khe Sanh Combat Base. The aftermath of the engagement, moreover, points up the extraordinary depth of responsibility faced by a military commander. Lieutenant Colonel Cahill, though thrice wounded while doing his utmost in a difficult and confused situation, nonetheless, bore the burden for the mistakes and failures laid at the doorstep of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines.***

*Bert Mullins, who served as a radioman with the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, commented: "This was a truly botched mess!" He remembered that Company B, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines "was scheduled to recover the bodies, but that was canceled when the air officer transmitted the plan in the clear to the 26th Marines." Since the 26th Marines departed the area on 18 April, this must have occurred probably on 17 April. After that period "Bravo went opcon to 1st Marines and three of their companies recovered the bodies." Bert Mullins, Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**General Tompkins also stated that Colonel Meyers "failed to display the initiative and force the situation called for." Colonel Meyers in his rebuttal defended his conduct stating that he offered assistance to the battalion commander and was told it was not needed. He did not learn about the actual seriousness of the situation until the early hours of 17 April. When he arrived at the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines CP later in the morning and discovered there were 20 Marines still missing, he immediately made plans for a rescue operation. Meyers Statement, Meyers Comments.

***Lieutenant Colonel Cahill was later promoted to Colonel and continued to serve until his retirement in 1978. Colonel Frederic S. Knight, who also served as a battalion commander in 1968, wrote that "but for the grace of God, went I and every battalion commander in the 3d Marine Division." He recognized that Major General Tompkins' policy on recovering the bodies of Marine dead was part of the deep tradition of the Marine Corps of "taking care of each other, dead or alive . . . ." Nevertheless, this policy of bringing back all the KIAs "had the effect of creating Tar Babies for the commanders; they wanted to disengage to reduce casualties and seek a more advantageous tactical situation, but under that stricture they could not." He would advocate a policy of weighing "our traditions . . . against the utilitarian principle of the greatest good for the greatest number and actions taken accordingly." Col Frederic S. Knight, Comments on draft, dtd 10Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File).

Operation Scotland II

By this time, Operation Scotland II was in full swing. General Glick recalled that his new orders directed him now "to continue operations in . . . [the Khe Sanh] area, at least in a limited scope," rather than dismantle the base.[23] The units of the 1st Marines commanded by Colonel Stanley S. Hughes had begun to take the places of battalions of the 26th Marines. For example, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines left LZ Stud to the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines and shifted west to the hills near Khe Sanh: 558, 950, 861, and 881 South. The 2d Battalion, 1st Marines and the regimental command post set up in the combat base and the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines remained along Route 9, providing security. The operation continued to grow as elements of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines arrived at Hill 689.[24]

For the rest of April, the battalions patrolled the rugged country of the Huong Hoa District, occasionally making contact with the enemy, but for the most part finding only abandoned North Vietnamese bunkers and equipment and the remains of Communist soldiers left behind. Still, the NVA threatened to cut the road. On 19 April, a convoy of five trucks belonging to Battery B, 1st Battalion, 11th Marines ran into an enemy ambush halfway between Khe Sanh and Ca Lu. In the ensuing firefight, three Marines died and seven others suffered wounds. Only one truck continued on to Ca Lu, as the others were either damaged, pressed into service by the infantry to evacuate casualties, or left without drivers as a result of the casualties sustained in the ambush. Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. V. Hughes, the commander of the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, remembered that the ambush site "was up a draw leading into the river . . . The NVA dug bunkers into the root masses of trees lining the top of the draw . . . The firing ports . . . were almost impossible to see unless you observed a muzzle flash."[25] The 1st Marines Commander, Colonel Stanley Hughes, responded by restricting vehicle traffic on Route 9 "to only those vehicles performing tactical missions." To help control the road, he formed a "Provisional Mechanized Company" by combining elements of the 3d Tank Battalion: the Antitank Company (–); the 3d Platoon, Company B; and the 3d Platoon, Company G.[26]

Near the end of April, Brigadier General Carl W. Hoffman relieved General Glick. For a short time the task force was known as "TF Hoffman," but soon became known as "TF H." In the habit of pronouncing all single letters by the phonetic equivalent used on the

radio, the Marines referred to the new command as "Task Force Hotel." General Hoffman continued to maintain his CP at Khe Sanh and directed the same type of limited mobile operations as General Glick. He also instituted what he called "key hole missions" consisting of four-man deep reconnaissance patrols. Using a "touch and go" insertion system, four or five helicopters with only one carrying the team would "come in at various locations, set down, and be gone almost immediately." The same procedures would be used to extract the teams. According to Hoffman these reconnaissance probes brought back invaluable intelligence about the location of enemy forces in the sector.[27]

The units conducting Operation Scotland II continued to draw their supplies from the logistic support unit at Khe Sanh, as had the units in Operation Pegasus, in an effort to reduce the stocks which had accumulated there during the siege. On 5 May, Khe Sanh reported a five-day level of supplies and the logistic support unit closed down. TF Hotel transferred the remaining stocks to Ca Lu by convoy and helicopter. From that time on, units in northwestern Quang Tri Province drew their supplies from Ca Lu.[28]

The requirement to resupply from LZ Stud once again increased the level of traffic along Route 9, prompting the NVA to respond with another ambush on 14 May. A convoy enroute to the combat base from Ca Lu encountered an enemy force along Route 9 just over one kilometer from the intersection where the coffee plantation road led north into Khe Sanh. Company G, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, which was providing security for the convoy, deployed and engaged the enemy.

Nearby, the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines was assembling for a helicopter lift to Hill 1015. When the ambush took place, the battalion canceled the move to Hill 1015 and went to the rescue of the convoy. The NVA fled in haste, but the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines caught up with them 1,500 meters south of the ambush site and attacked them from two sides. The North Vietnamese, in company strength, withdrew into a bunker complex, pursued by the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines. The ensuing fight lasted into the following day, leaving 74 enemy dead. The Marines lost 7 killed in action and 36 wounded.[29]

The ambush of 14 May signalled the onset of increased enemy activity in the area. While patrolling

Marine M48 tanks patrol Route 9 between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh, passing a Marine small encampment along the way. The 3d Tank Battalion formed a "Provisional Mechanized Company" to monitor road traffic in this sector.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191580



Route 9, halfway between Khe Sanh and Lang Vei on 17 May, Company H, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines spotted five enemy soldiers and gave chase. The five led the company into an ambush where an NVA company lay in bunkers firing from close range and shouting, "Die Marine!" Company H withdrew slightly, called in artillery and air strikes, then assaulted and overran the bunkers. The Marines lost 6 dead and 8 wounded in the ambush, and counted 52 dead North Vietnamese.[30]

From 17 to 19 May, two kilometers north of Company H's engagement on Route 9, elements of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines patrolled the ridge between Hill 552 and Hill 689. A dominant terrain feature overlooking the combat base, the ridge had been occupied or patrolled by U.S. forces regularly since the early part of Operation Pegasus. The 3d Battalion, 4th Marines encountered, nonetheless, several NVA units there, killing a total of 84 enemy and capturing 5 others in a three-day period.[31]

An even bigger fight was yet to come. During the night of 18–19 May, the enemy moved a battalion to within two kilometers of the combat base. At about 0400, an enemy platoon attacked Company H, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines southeast of Khe Sanh along Route 9. Assaulting from all sides with heavy small arms fire, grenades, satchel charges, and RPGs, the North Vietnamese killed three Marines and wounded three others before retiring. They left behind eight dead. Almost simultaneously, an enemy company, using 60mm mortar support, probed Company I, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines on Hill 552. After a short fight, the Marines heard the North Vietnamese digging in. Exchanges of fire continued through the night. In the morning, the Marines assaulted the nearby enemy, driving them from their positions with 42 dead and 4 taken prisoner. Four Marines suffered wounds.[32]

At 0710, 19 May, while Company I was still fighting near Hill 552, a platoon of Company F, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines and two tanks headed south from Khe Sanh along the coffee plantation road, sweeping ahead of a convoy bound for Ca Lu. About 300 meters from the road's intersection with Route 9, the Marines triggered an NVA ambush at a range of 25 meters. An enemy company, dug in, forced the Marines to take cover under a storm of automatic weapons fire, RPGs, and grenades. The Marines attempted an assault, but the enemy repulsed them, adding a heavy barrage of mortars to the Marines' discomfort. The rest of Company F, waiting at the combat base with the convoy, immediately reinforced the endangered platoon, then assaulted with the entire company. The Communists not only threw back the Marines a second time, but even left their own positions to counterattack. This time, it was Company F's turn to hold fast, and the Marines repulsed the enemy assault. Lieutenant Colonel Billy R. Duncan, the battalion commander, recalled that by this time he had arrived at the scene with a small command group. The company commander, however, had been mortally wounded and "contact during the next hour was mixed with serious probes by both sides."[33]

Company G advanced south along the road to join the fight, killing three North Vietnamese who had sneaked to the rear of Company F. After the two companies linked up, Lieutenant Colonel Duncan asked for napalm air strikes. According to Duncan, the enemy was anywhere between 35 to 50 yards distant from the Marine positions and too close for artillery support, therefore the call for napalm. While some of the Marines accidentally also were covered by napalm jelly, the fixed-wing strikes broke the enemy "will to stay and fight."[34] As the enemy retreated, Company E, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines struck the NVA from the flank. With the ambush site cleared, the rest of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines went to the field and searched the area south-southwest of the combat base trying to regain contact until 22 May, but met only minor resistance. During the operation, 8 Marines died, including the commanders of Companies F and G, and 34 fell wounded. The battalion captured 3 North Vietnamese and reported killing 113, of whom 69 were found in the ambush site.[35]

The enemy troops killed and captured by the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines were described as "clean, well dressed, and neatly groomed."[36] According to Lieutenant Colonel Duncan, one of the prisoners stated the enemy mission was to "stop all movement along Route 9."[37] This did not match the depiction of the enemy forces in the Khe Sanh area as defeated and on the run. Coupled with the extraordinary surge in North Vietnamese offensive operations, such reports prompted the 1st Marines to warn of "a high probability of a division-size attack on the Khe Sanh Combat Base or one of the outlying units."[38] According to a rallier, Private (who claimed to be a former Warrant Officer) Vo Manh Hung, the NVA *308th Division* had arrived in northwestern Quang Tri Province with its *88th* and *102d Regiments*. The *308th Division* was one of the five so-called "Steel Divisions" of the North Vietnamese Army which could only be committed by the Joint Military Staff. Claiming that the *308th* had been committed because "the war is going to end," Hung told intelli-

gence officers that the *304th*, *308th*, *325th*, and another unidentified division would attack Khe Sanh. The North Vietnamese, he said, would cut Route 9, bring antiaircraft guns in from Laos and overrun the combat base "as Dien Bien Phu was." Intelligence officers placed little confidence in Hung's information, rating it "F–6" (the lowest rating for reliability and likelihood of being true). Still, III MAF sent Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. Lamontagne's 3d Battalion, 9th Marines to reinforce the 1st Marines for the defense of Khe Sanh against another possible major NVA effort.[39]

For the rest of May, TF Hotel continued the original plan for Operation Scotland II, conducting offensive operations to maintain the initiative around Khe Sanh. Enemy contact was frequent and sometimes heavy, with the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines fighting a running battle which lasted for over a week.

On 24 May, Company G, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines engaged an NVA company on a hill overlooking Route 9 four kilometers southeast of the combat base, the same position to which enemy ambushers had retreated after attacking the convoy 10 days before. The enemy occupied bunkers which withstood a preparation of artillery fire and air strikes. Indeed, when the fires lifted, the enemy left their bunkers and attempted to envelop the Marines. Observing a larger enemy force to the rear of the closest North Vietnamese positions, Company G fell back and called for additional air, artillery, and mortar support. At 1800, the Marines attacked once more, still under extremely heavy fire. With helicopter gunships, artillery, and mortars supporting their advance, Company G swept up the hill, reaching the high ground at 2015 that night. The enemy broke contact, leaving behind the bodies of 58 dead. In the day's fighting, Company G suffered 15 dead and 21 wounded. The following morning, an air observer reported a "ragged enemy withdrawal to the south and southeast."[40]

The 2d Battalion, 3d Marines remained near the site of the 24 May engagement. Three companies spaced about 700 meters apart stretched to the northwest in a line starting from Company F, on a small finger overlooking Route 9 about a kilometer west of the NVA bunker complex. Company E was at the intersection of Route 9 and the coffee plantation road, and Company G was on a finger between the other two companies.

At 0245, 28 May, Company F Marines, using a Starlight Scope, observed enemy movement outside their perimeter, and the acting company commander, First Lieutenant James L. Jones, called for an artillery mission. Three North Vietnamese with satchel charges suddenly leapt into one of the company's listening posts north of the perimeter and blew themselves to bits, also killing three of the four Marines at the post. Immediately, an NVA battalion charged up the slope from the north on a wide front using a very heavy volume of small arms fire and more than 40 RPG rounds. With the enemy already in the perimeter, Lieutenant Jones gave the order to employ the final protective fires.*

Noticing that the North Vietnamese were using pencil flares, apparently as signals, Lieutenant Jones fired a red pencil flare of his own, at which the NVA precipitously broke contact.** The respite was brief, however. After a momentary lapse, the assault continued with renewed fury as the enemy battalion poured machine gun and rocket fire into Company F's lines. After several minutes of fierce fighting, the enemy drove the 1st Platoon from its holes and overran the company's 60mm mortar position. Under intense fire, the 2d and 3d Platoons restored the defensive perimeter while the 1st Platoon regrouped to establish a new position on a knoll to the east of the company perimeter.[41]

At 0330, after the enemy gained a foothold in the Marine perimeter, their attack slackened momentarily, but as if to demonstrate coordination, 40 rounds of 130mm artillery fire from enemy guns fell on Company G. A Douglas AC–47 "Spooky" gunship, accompanied by a flareship, reported on station at 0415 to light the battlefield and fire in support of the Marines. The NVA took the planes under heavy fire with .50-caliber machine guns and resumed their attack on Company F, this time from all sides.[42]

For two hours, the battle raged, literally within Company F's original perimeter. Again and again, the NVA regrouped and stormed the Marines, attempting to overwhelm their defenses with massive ground assaults as RPG gunners on dominant high ground to the southeast smothered Company F under an estimated 500 rounds of rocket fire. With the flareship lighting the scene, "Spooky"

*The "FPF" is a defensive tactic used to stop imminent penetration of a unit's defensive lines. It employs supporting arms firing in pre-planned locations and the unit's own riflemen and machine gunners firing along predetermined lines at the maximum rate to create what is known as "interlocking bands of grazing fire." The significance of firing the FPF lies in the fact that it is an act of near desperation, a final resort which, if unsuccessful, will give way to hand-to-hand combat within the fighting holes of the defending unit.

** Harold R. Blunk, who in 1968 was a PFC and a forward observer with Company F, commented that now-Lieutenant General James L. Jones told him in June 1996 that he fired the red flare rather than the green one because "'Green for go—Red for stop. It was that simple.'" Harold R. Blunk, Comments on draft, dtd 27Jun96 (Vietnam Comment File).

slammed machine gun fire into the enemy at the rate of 18,000 rounds per minute and Battery B, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines joined the infantry battalion's own mortar platoon in pounding the North Vietnamese.[43]

At 0700, air observers reported that "the entire battle area was littered with NVA dead."[44] The observers directed attack aircraft against enemy reinforcements moving in from the west. A napalm strike killed 30 North Vietnamese and ended the enemy effort but, unfortunately, also resulted in napalm impacting less than 20 meters from Company F. Fanned by the wind, the fire spread, soon forcing Company F from their positions after an all-out attack by an enemy battalion had failed. When the flames died down, the Marines quickly reclaimed their positions and fired on the withdrawing enemy.[45]

Only 20 minutes later, at 1150, Company E arrived to help, first sweeping the ridge to the west of Company F. After securing this area, Company E turned on the North Vietnamese RPG gunners firing from the high ground near Company F's 1st Platoon. Within two hours of their attack, Company E put the enemy to flight. Following an emergency resupply and the evacuation of casualties from both companies, Company E moved out in pursuit. The battle cost the 2d Battalion 13 dead and 44 wounded. A search of the area revealed 230 dead North Vietnamese.[46]

The shelling which fell upon Company G during the battle was a reminder that the enemy still maintained artillery positions within range of Khe Sanh. All through the siege, these guns had kept firing, despite many efforts to silence them. Even afterwards, the North Vietnamese continued to pound Marine positions. General Glick, the former Task Force commander, remembered that through the period he was there: "Khe Sanh was receiving heavy shelling on a daily basis . . ." and that "all commander, service, and living facilities [at Khe Sanh] were in underground bunkers or deep trenches."[47] On 30 May, TF Hotel provided security for a convoy of four 175mm self-propelled guns and four 8-inch self-propelled howitzers from Camp Carroll to Khe Sanh. These heavy artillery weapons took up firing positions from which they could reach the Co Roc cliffs, where the enemy guns were believed to be, and fired for 48 hours in a limited duration artillery raid dubbed Operation Drumfire II. Like the previous attempts at counterfire, which used even B–52s against Co Roc, Operation Drumfire II had no noticeable effect.[48*]

The enemy's infantry showed that they could match the annoying persistence of their gunners. At 0400, 31 May, the North Vietnamese attacked Company E, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines from all sides on the very ridge where the battle had taken place three days before. The enemy again coordinated their attack with 130mm artillery fire, as well as 82mm mortar fire. The ground attack, however, in no way matched the fury of the previous engagement and the NVA disengaged in the morning.[49]

Only one kilometer to the north, Company B, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, moving toward Company E's engagement at 0850, ran into a North Vietnamese platoon entrenched just off Route 9. Company G, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines and Company E, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines fell in on the right of Company B. Attacking with all three companies abreast, supported by tanks, the Marines closed with the North Vietnamese and overran their trenches, finishing the fight hand-to-hand. They killed 42 North Vietnamese and lost 8 dead and 31 wounded. A single prisoner reported his unit to be the *102d Regiment* of the *308th Division.* Total Marine casualties for the morning's fighting were 32 dead and 99 wounded. A search revealed 136 enemy dead.[50]

Operation Robin

As May ended, III MAF intelligence analysts confirmed reports that the North Vietnamese had infiltrated the *88th* and *102d Regiments* of their *308th Division* into northwestern Quang Tri Province. Further, aerial photography revealed a new enemy road under construction in the jungle south of Khe Sanh. The road entered South Vietnam from Laos and ran parallel to Route 9, but about 15 kilometers further south. When discovered, the road extended approximately 30 kilometers into South Vietnam along a path that seemed to

*Colonel Robert C. V. Hughes, the commander of the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, observed that "Operation Drumfire II like most preplanned, not observed, fire missions merely caused the NVA to pull back into their tunnels and wait it out. Our 'Rules of Engagement' forbid flying aerial observers over Co Roc who could have adjusted fire missions while the enemy was actively shelling the base." Col Robert C. V. Hughes, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95?] (Vietnam Comment File). Colonel William H. Dabney's explanation for the limited effect of Drumfire II on Co Roc was very simple: "That's not where the guns were!" Col William H. Dabney, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec 94] (Vietnam Comment File). For further information about the debate on the location of the enemy guns near Khe Sanh see the discussion in Chapter 14. See Chapter 26 for a further account of Drumfire II.

lead directly toward Hue City. A III MAF intelligence report on the road said, "agent reports have mentioned the possibility of enemy tank battalions in eastern Laos awaiting the completion of this road."[51]

TF Hotel planned a two-part operation in accordance with the 3d Marine Division's fresh emphasis upon mobility and firebases, under its new commander, Major General Raymond G. Davis, to counter the enemy buildup in the area.* The first phase, Operation Robin North, called for Colonel Hughes' 1st Marines to thrust south from the combat base into the mountains, engaging the newly introduced enemy forces near Route 9. In the second phase, Operation Robin South, Colonel Edward J. Miller's 4th Marines would conduct airmobile operations even further south to locate and destroy the enemy road.[52]

Preparations for Operation Robin began at the end of May. Units garrisoning the hill positions around Khe Sanh shifted to make battalions available for the attack. Marine Aircraft Groups 36 and 39 delivered a five-day supply of ammunition to the units left around Khe Sanh so that helicopter assets could concentrate on supporting the extensive airmobile requirements of the operation. For the five days prior to D–Day, TF Hotel coordinated preparation fires which included 219 sorties of attack aircraft and 30 B–52 sorties delivering thousands of tons of bombs to blast landing zones in the jungle and to destroy enemy weapons and troop concentrations. Nine artillery batteries representing every caliber of artillery weapon in the Marine Corps fired over 10,000 rounds into the area of operations.[53]

D–Day, 2 June, began with the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines occupying blocking positions along Route 9 immediately south of the combat base. At midday, Lieutenant Colonel Archie Van Winkle's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines conducted a helicopterborne assault into LZ Robin, a newly prepared landing zone situated in the steep hills 10 kilometers southeast of Khe Sanh. After landing, the battalion attacked north, hoping to drive the enemy into the blocking positions along Route 9. The 2d Battalion, 4th Marines flew from Ca Lu to LZ Robin and set up a defensive perimeter for the night.[54]

On 3 June, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines continued its attack to the north and TF Hotel fed the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines into the operation at LZ Robin. Relieved of the responsibility for defending LZ Robin, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines boarded helicopters once

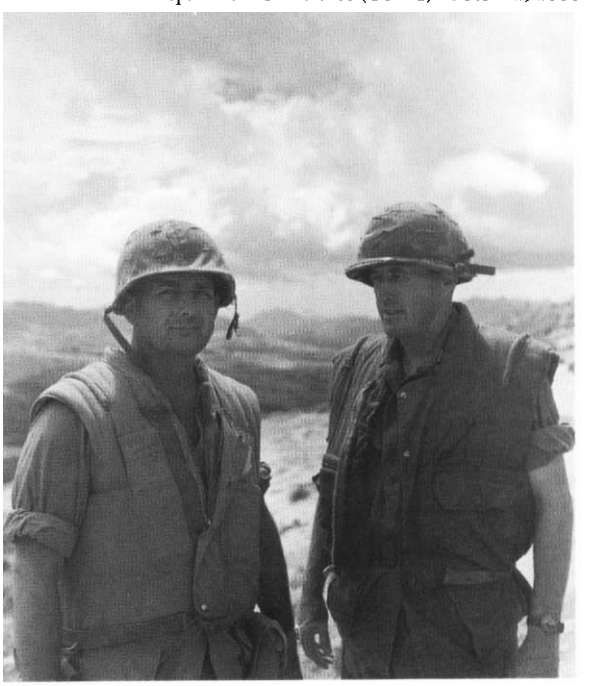
*See both Chapters 15 and 18 for discussion of the tactical concepts introduced by General Davis.



12th Mar ComdC, Jan69

Top, from the air, Landing Zone Robin, located in the steep hills, is about 10 kilometers southeast of Khe Sanh. Below, LtCol Archie Van Winkle, left, with the 3d MarDiv commander, MajGen Raymond G. Davis. LtCol Van Winkle's 1st Battalion, 1st Marines opened Operation Robin with the helicopter assault onto LZ Robin in line with Gen Davis' tactical emphasis upon mobility and fire support bases.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191666





Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191807

Marines of Company A, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines barely can be seen as they climb up a hill through five-foot-high elephant grass near Landing Zone Robin.

again and assaulted LZ Loon, four kilometers to the west. The enemy, quiet on D–Day, greeted the Marines at LZ Loon with light small-arms, mortar, and artillery fire, delaying the helicopter lift but not seriously hampering the landings.[55]

North Vietnamese interest in LZ Loon became apparent the following morning, only hours after the Marines arrived. At 0600, a company of the NVA *88th Regiment* probed Company F, 2d Battalion, 4th Marines. After a short engagement, the enemy withdrew at dawn, leaving 34 dead. Company F lost 2 killed and 24 wounded.[56]

With both of the new landing zones secured by the 1st Marines, TF Hotel began preparing them to serve as firebases to support the 4th Marines during the second phase of the operation. The headquarters of the 4th Marines and the 1st Battalion, 12th Marines landed at LZ Robin and prepared to assume control as engineers used equipment lifted in by helicopters to construct artillery emplacements, bunkers, trenches, and barbed wire entanglements.[57]

Companies C and D, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines flew into LZ Loon, freeing the 2d Battalion to join the attack north toward the blocking positions. In keeping with the airmobile character of the operation, the 2d Battalion advanced by conducting still another helicopterborne assault into LZ Crow, two kilometers northeast of LZ Loon and near the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines.[58]

The attack northward met its first significant resistance on 5 June, when Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines engaged an enemy unit four kilometers south of Route 9. The enemy troops fought from bunkers and from trees. Company C attacked the position, supported by artillery and the battalion's 106mm recoilless rifles. In a fight which lasted into the following afternoon, the Marines overran and destroyed a North Vietnamese bunker complex which documents identified as belonging to the *304th Division*, a veteran of the earlier fighting during the siege of Khe Sanh.[59]

During the evening of 5 June, the 4th Marines assumed control of its own 1st Battalion, disposed between LZ Loon and LZ Robin, in preparation for the beginning of Operation Robin South the next morning. Before the Marines could strike, however, the North Vietnamese hit first. At 0600, an enemy battalion assaulted LZ Loon, supported by artillery and mortar fire.[60] Companies C and D fought back, calling for their own artillery and mortars, as well as attack aircraft and helicopter gunships. After a two-hour battle, the enemy withdrew slightly, leaving 154 dead, but kept up a galling fire with their small arms, and frequent shelling from nearby 82mm mortars and the ever-present 130mm guns. By midday, the continued shelling had rendered LZ Loon untenable.[61] Helicopters lifted Company C back to LZ Robin at 1400, followed a few hours later by Company D. The last helicopter out, a CH–46, took heavy fire from a North Vietnamese .50-caliber machine gun and crashed in flames, bringing the total U.S. casualty count for the defense of the LZ to 24 dead and 37 wounded.[62]

Despite the attack on LZ Loon, on 6 June, as scheduled, the 4th Marines launched Operation Robin South. Helicopters lifted the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines into a landing zone southeast of LZ Robin, near the eastern extension of the North Vietnamese jungle road. The battalion located the road and found it to be quite well-developed, up to 18 feet wide in places, with stone bridges, culverts, and a surface graded smooth by heavy engineering equipment. The North Vietnamese had concealed the road by bending trees over it and

tying them together to form a living archway of vegetation beneath which troops and vehicles could pass unseen from the air. Along the road, the Marines found fighting holes, living bunkers, hospitals, kitchens, and a wealth of equipment, especially tools. There were picks, shovels, wrecking bars, axes, and explosives. Captain Gary E. Todd, who commanded Company I, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines and a former division intelligence officer, observed that the road "was a virtual clone of the Ho Chi Minh Trail." According to Todd, it was "more than a road, it qualified as a type of logistics infrastructure."[63] Prisoners and captured documents showed that the construction of the road was the mission of the NVA *83d Engineer Battalion.* One prisoner said that the construction schedule called for the road to reach Hue by 30 July, a formidable task which would have required pushing the road through the steep jungle terrain at a rate of over one mile—as the crow flies—per day.[64]

For several days, the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines advanced along the road to the west, blasting apart bridges and culverts (sometimes with captured North Vietnamese explosives), cratering the road surface, and destroying the enemy facilities found along the way. Company A, 3d Engineer Battalion provided much of the technical expertise for the demolition project. The North Vietnamese avoided contact.[65]

As battalions returned to Khe Sanh from participating in Operation Robin North, they freed other units to join the 4th Marines in Operation Robin South. On 11 June, helicopters landed the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines near Lang Hole, a Montagnard village south of LZ Loon said by prisoners to be the site of a major enemy supply cache. The battalion searched the area for almost a week with only light contact.[66]

The 2d Battalion, 4th Marines joined its parent regiment in Operation Robin South on the morning of 14 June by conducting a helicopterborne assault onto the NVA road near the border with Laos. They advanced east along the road, toward the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, which was still moving down the road from the other end. The 2d Battalion found the western portion of the road as well developed as the rest. In one area they found a complex of over 500 bunkers and storage areas containing 400 pounds of ammonium nitrate (a crude explosive), hand tools, a welding machine, a one-and-one-half-ton truck and a complete machine shop mounted on a Russian three-ton truck. Unwilling to leave the latter prize behind, ingenious young Marine tinkerers dismantled the entire truck and machine shop, then transferred the pieces to Khe Sanh by helicopter where they reassembled it for the drive along Route 9 to the 3d Marine Division headquarters at Dong Ha.[67]

One hour before dawn on 15 June, a battalion or more of the North Vietnamese *88th Regiment* struck the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines south of Lang Hole. Pressing their attack behind heavy RPG fire, the enemy infantry penetrated Company M's lines and occupied several fighting holes, setting up a machine gun in what had been the company command post. As the battle entered its third hour, the Marines counterattacked, ejecting the North Vietnamese from the perimeter. Helicopter gunships harried the enemy attack formations, helping to reduce their enthusiasm to continue the assault. Just before 0900, the North Vietnamese fired a "green star cluster"* and the attack ended. The Marines swept the area, occasionally engaging North Vietnamese troops who feigned death, then "popped up" to fire their weapons. The final tally was 219 enemy killed along with 11 prisoners, 82 weapons, and 20 radios captured. The Marines lost 16 killed and 58 wounded.[68]

Despite the seemingly staggering casualties the North Vietnamese suffered on 15 June, the battle near Lang Hole appeared only to whet their appetites for fighting. The very next morning at 0215, they struck LZ Torch, a new fire support base near the jungle road which was defended by the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines since its withdrawal from LZ Loon. An enemy company fell upon the perimeter from the south and west, using mortar fire, RPGs, machine guns, and satchel charges to pave the way. Concentrating their assault on a small part of the perimeter, the enemy penetrated Company I's lines and advanced on the guns of Battery C, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines. Under the light of flares, the Marine gunners leveled the tubes of their howitzers and slammed round after round of "Beehive" ammunition** into the attacking North Vietnamese. Although the enemy reached one of Battery C's gun emplacements, the "Beehive" proved too much for them. Leaving 28 dead, they fell back at 0400. Fourteen Marines died in the assault.[69]

The North Vietnamese continued their program

*A pyrotechnic signaling device.

**An artillery antipersonnel round which explodes sending thousands of tiny darts, called flechettes, toward the enemy.

of predawn attacks on 18 June, when NVA sappers crawled to within 30 feet of Company K, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines near the jungle road. Preceding their assault with a mortar preparation, the enemy sprang from their nearby positions against Company K, quickly penetrating the lines. The Marines held their ground and fought back, using artillery and air support to help repulse the attacking North Vietnamese battalion. After four hours of fighting, the Marines drove back the Communist troops. Three Douglas A–4E Skyhawks of Marine Attack Squadron 311 pounded the retreating enemy, killing many. Sporadic fighting continued through the day; the Marines engaged enemy snipers and automatic weapons emplacements left behind to cover the withdrawal. When the last resistance ended, 131 North Vietnamese lay dead in and around Company K's position. Marine casualties numbered 11 killed and 30 wounded.[70]

On the day after Company K's battle along the jungle road, Operation Robin South ended and the 4th Marines returned to Khe Sanh having accomplished its mission. The Marines cratered the road in 28 places, destroyed 2 bridges and 4 culverts, and created a rock slide in one place. In addition, they reported killing 635 enemy and captured 48 NVA, an extraordinary prisoner count. Large quantities of enemy facilities were destroyed and supplies captured in the area of operations, dealing the North Vietnamese a hard blow.[71]

Operations Robin North and Robin South were the first multi-regiment Marine Corps operations "supported entirely by helicopter."[72] Marine commanders were highly enthusiastic, touting the "mobile offensive concept."[73] One unit's official account recorded that the operations:

> . . . confirmed that fire base techniques are well within the operational scope of the Marine Corps, both conceptually and doctrinally . . . . Experience will improve our ability to manage the fire base concept. "Robin South" gave us a running start.[74]

Razing Khe Sanh: Operation Charlie

General Westmoreland departed Vietnam on 11 June, in the middle of Operation Robin South, and was relieved by General Creighton Abrams, his former deputy, as Commander USMACV. Just over a week later, on 19 June, TF Hotel began executing the 3d Marine Division plan for the evacuation and destruction of Khe Sanh Combat Base: Operation Charlie.[75]*

The units returning from Operation Robin South assumed new positions to screen and support the evacuation. Along Route 9, battalions of the 4th Marines occupied key terrain from which they could control the road and protect the many convoys between Khe Sanh and Ca Lu required to move the supplies and equipment out of the combat base. The 1st Marines defended Khe Sanh and the surrounding hill positions. The 3d Battalion, 9th Marines reported to the 1st Marines at the combat base to serve as a work force to assist Company A, 1st Engineer Battalion in the physical dismantling and destruction of the facilities at Khe Sanh.[76]

The plan for Operation Charlie called for the Marines to withdraw all salvageable supplies and equipment and to destroy all fortifications and anything of possible use which they could not move. They went about the task thoroughly. Convoys rolled from Khe Sanh to Ca Lu daily, heavily laden with stockpiled supplies, salvaged fortification materials, and previously stranded damaged equipment. Detachments from the 3d and 11th Engineer Battalions and the 3d Shore Party Battalion arrived with bulldozers and mechanics to help with the work. Even burned out vehicle hulks and damaged equipment were cut apart into smaller pieces, moved to secure areas, and buried to prevent their use in enemy propaganda. The same Navy Seabee unit which had toiled to repair and upgrade the airstrip months before now returned to

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General Rosson observed that he was involved "directly and personally" with the decision to deactivate Khe Sanh." He remembered that after the "decision [to deactivate] had been made early in June. I discussed with General Davis the methodology and timing of the deactivation." Gen William B. Rosson, Comments on draft, dtd 27Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File). General Hoffman remarked that he received a decision from higher headquarters sometime in June "that we would abandon Khe Sanh combat base in favor of moving to a new combat base" initially called Stud. While Hoffman believed his units "were successfully conducting reconnaissance-in-force operations in any direction we wanted to," he recognized the desirability of consolidating mobile operations and shortening supply lines. MajGen Carl W. Hoffman, Comments on draft, dtd 15Dec94 and MajGen Carl W. Hoffman intvw, 14Nov68, pp. 151–53 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Hoffman Comments and intvw. According to Army historian George L. MacGarrigle: "Westy never wanted to abandon Khe Sanh; Abrams certainly did. When Westy returned to Washington for his confirmation hearing [for his appointment as Army Chief of Staff], Abe was the "acting ComUSMACV." The agreement was, the base would not be abandoned on Westmoreland's 'watch' and I'm almost certain that MACV provided Westy with his 'cover' statement." George L. MacGarrigle, Comments on draft, dtd 5Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).



Both photos are from the Abel Collection

Top, Marines of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines at Khe Sanh salute their fallen comrades during a memorial service for those who gave their lives to defend the base. Below, a Marine from the battalion takes a long look at the Khe Sanh airstrip before preparing to depart



rip up the steel matting runway. Working parties destroyed over 800 bunkers and 3 miles of concertina wire, throwing the wire into the trenches and filling them with soil. They slit open the countless sandbags and emptied them, wrecked standing structures, and burned what remained to the ground. As a final step to discourage the North Vietnamese from attempting to dig through the ruins for useful material, the Marines sprinkled the area with CS powder, an irritant chemical agent.[77*]

The enemy could not, and did not, misinterpret the activity at the combat base. Communist political officers proclaimed the U.S. withdrawal from Khe Sanh as a victory for the North Vietnamese Army. III MAF warned units at Khe Sanh that, as the withdrawal proceeded, the enemy might conduct limited offensive operations to lend credibility to their claims.[78**]

The prophecy came true on 1 July. Three kilometers southeast of the combat base near the old French fort, the NVA began a series of light probes against Company I, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines at 0325. The probes, accompanied by mortar fire, continued for four hours. At 0725, a NVA unit of at least company-size launched a full-scale assault on the Marine perimeter to the accompaniment of mortar fire and 130mm guns. Alerted by the probes, Company I quickly blunted the enemy attack and the North Vietnamese broke contact. Later that morning, the Marines sighted the enemy unit nearby and engaged it once more, calling in helicopter gunships and attack aircraft. The fighting continued until late afternoon, with the Marines reporting over 200 dead North Vietnamese, half of them within 100 meters of Company I's lines. Two Marines died in the engagement.[79]

For the next several days, the enemy continued to step up the pressure. Occasional heavy incoming artillery and mortar fire fell on the hill positions, and small groups of North Vietnamese probed Marine perimeters attempting to cut through barbed wire barriers. There were no further attacks, however, on the scale of that of 1 July.[80]

At 2000 on 5 July, the Khe Sanh Combat Base, now just a smoldering scar on the land, officially closed.[81] On the following day, the 1st Marines sent their remaining rolling stock to Ca Lu by convoy. As the last trucks passed over Route 9, engineers removed and recovered the tactical bridging equipment which they had installed during Operation Pegasus. Just before midnight on 6 July, Operation Charlie ended.[82]

The 1st Marines remained near Khe Sanh for another week, attempting to recover the remains of the Marines who died in the fighting near Hill 689. After days of seesaw battles which left 11 Marines and 89 North Vietnamese dead, the 1st Battalion finally recovered 7 bodies under cover of darkness on 11 July using small teams operating by stealth. With this accomplished, the 1st Marines boarded helicopters and flew east to Quang Tri City.[83]

Twenty years after the battle, when asked to name the decision of which he was the most proud, General Westmoreland replied, "The decision to hold Khe Sanh."[84] It had been a controversial move in 1968, but after the commitment in men and materiel to hold it, the decision to evacuate the place was even more difficult for many to understand. In fact, there were more American casualties at Khe Sanh and its immediate vicinity after the breakout until the final evacuation of the base than during the siege.*** As a battle which

*Colonel Billy R. Duncan, the commander of the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, wrote that at the time his unit departed Khe Sanh, "much of the steel matting was still in place. Too difficult to remove . . ." and the enemy guns were "still a daily threat." Col Billy R. Duncan, Comments on draft, dtd 15Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). Major Gary E. Todd, the commander of Company I, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, observed that the dismantling required "working parties to move around exposed and 'non-tactical' in what was still very much a *tactical* situation. The more bunkers we destroyed and trenches we filled, the less protection we had against incoming artillery, a fact not wasted on an ever-watchful enemy." Maj Gary E. Todd, Comments on draft, dtd 28Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**General Hoffman stated he had instituted an orderly program of withdrawing his units so as not to reveal his intentions to the North Vietnamese. He blamed Correspondent John S. Carroll from the *Baltimore Sun* for breaking news confidentiality and printing a story that the Marines were abandoning Khe Sanh. According to Hoffman, the North Vietnamese increased their bombardment after the publication of the story. MACV suspended Carroll's press credentials for six months. Hoffman intvw and Comments. For the suspension of Carroll's accreditation, see also John Prados and Ray W. Stubbe, *Valley of Decision, The Siege of Khe Sanh* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991), p. 448.

***The confusion about the number of Marine casualties in the Khe Sanh battle is one aspect of the controversy over the defense of the base. According to general Marine Corps records, the Marines sustained casualties of 205 dead from November 1967 through the end of March, the period of Operation Scotland. The casualty reporting system was based on named operations rather than on actual locale. Another 92 Marines were killed in Operation Pegasus during April, and another 308 during Operation Scotland II through 30 June. Scotland II continued through the end of the year with another 72 Marines added to the KIA list. Obviously all of the operations included a broader area than the perimeter of the Khe Sanh base itself, thus compounding the difficulty in determining an exact number of casualties. To do so, the researcher must "clarify the time span and geographical area of the so-called 'Battle of Khe Sanh.'" Jack Shulimson, Sr. Vietnam Historian, ltr to Bert Mullins, dtd 2Sep1983 (Vietnam War, Khe Sanh

captured the personal interest of many Americans, to include President Johnson, Khe Sanh became a symbol. When U.S. forces withdrew from the hills of Khe Sanh, the inevitable question arose: "Why did we defend it in the first place?" At that point in time, in January 1968, there was probably no choice unless the U.S. was prepared to air evacuate its troops and abandon its supplies there. Whether the base should have been closed immediately after Pegasus or whether a base should have been established there at all are still subjects of debate as is the motivation of the North Vietnamese in laying siege to the base.

File, RefSec, MCHC). Former Navy Chaplain Lieutenant Commander Ray W. Stubbe, who has done extensive research in this area, has provided the following figures based on his findings: He found the number of Marines killed for Operation Scotland to be 274 as opposed to 205. He cautions, however, that there are differences between the figures given in the command chronologies and those in the after-action reports and that none of the totals really jibe. Lieutenant Commander Stubbe gives as the best total for Operation Scotland and Pegasus, not including Lang Vei, as 560, including specialized Marine, Army, and Air Force units. He gives a total of 219 KIA (Army and South Vietnamese) for Lang Vei. Chaplain Stubbe explained that there were many reasons for the discrepancies including staff officers frequently engaged with an on-going operation, "while still attempting to write reports on a previous operation." He also observed that for most troops, "the entire period from the beginning of the siege until their departure is, for them, their 'Khe Sanh battle.' Dates of the beginnings and endings of the various operations are as artificial and abstract as the border of Laos and Vietnam! It is the difference between 'lived' battles and 'officially recorded' battles." LCdr Ray W. Stubbe, USN, Comments on draft, dtd 23Oct and 25Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 17

Mini-Tet and Its Aftermath in Southern I Corps

Going into the Go Noi—Mini-Tet and Operation Mameluke Thrust, May 1968
Operation Allen Brook Continues—Mameluke Thrust Also Continues

Going into the Go Noi

By the beginning of May 1968, both the Marines at Da Nang and the Communist forces in Quang Nam were in the midst of preparations to launch offensive operations against one another. While during April the enemy in Quang Nam had largely confined its activities to guerrilla activities, the increased number of reconnaissance Stingray sightings indicated that Communist regulars were reinfiltrating their old positions. The Marine command was especially concerned about the Go Noi Island sector, about 25 kilometers south of Da Nang, outlined by the confluence of the Ky Lam, Thu Bon, Ba Ren, and Chiem Son Rivers.

In the Go Noi, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines in April had conducted Operation Jasper Square* in the western sector with relatively limited contact. Nevertheless, the Communists had controlled the area for years. With the continued existence of both a Communist political and military command infrastructure there, the local populace maintained a strong Viet Cong orientation, making the island a relatively "safe haven" for both NVA and VC military units. III MAF knew Go Noi was home to three local Viet Cong units, the *R–20 Battalion*, *V–25 Battalion*, and *T–3 Sapper Battalion*, as well as *Group 44*, the headquarters for the enemy's operations in Quang Nam Province. It also suspected that elements of the *2d NVA Division* were trying to reenter the sector.[1]

In early May, Major General Donn J. Robertson, the 1st Marine Division commander, ordered the 7th Marines into the Go Noi to forestall the NVA from staging a new offensive. On 4 May at 0500, Lieutenant Colonel Charles E. Mueller's 2d Battalion, 7th Marines launched a two-company "No Name Operation" into the Go Noi. Crossing Liberty Bridge at 0500, Companies E and G, supported by a platoon of tanks, attacked eastward towards the main north-south railroad tracks. On the first day of the operation, the Marines evacuated some 220 civilians, mostly old men, women, and children, out of the Go Noi to the district capital of Dai Loc.[2]

In the first phase of the operation, which soon became Operation Allen Brook,* the battalion encountered light although persistent resistance from enemy local force and guerrilla units. For the next few days, the 2d Battalion attacked to the east towards the main north-south railroad tracks experiencing increasing but still relatively scattered opposition to their advance. Although the terrain was flat with relatively clear fields of fire, the local units were familiar with the locale and took full advantage of the advantages offered by the fortified hamlets that dotted the Go Noi. Surrounded and interlaced by dense hedges, these hamlets were connected one to another by a series of trenches and tunnels which provided "excellent cover and concealment" for their defenders.[3]

While Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines relieved Company G on 7 May, Colonel Reverdy M. Hall, the 7th Marines' commander, also reinforced the 2d Battalion on the same day with Company K from the 3d Battalion. Through 8 May, the Marine companies accounted for some 88 enemy troops at a cost of 9 Marines killed and 57 wounded. On the 9th, about 1820, the sweep forces just west of the railroad tracks came under heavy small arms and machine gun fire as well as a mortar salvo outside of the hamlet of Xuan Dai (2). Taking casualties of 1 dead and 11 wounded, the infantry pulled back and called for artillery support and airstrikes. After the last air mission, the Marine companies clambered over the tracks which fronted the hamlet on the west and pushed into Xuan Dai (2). Thirty minutes after the initial action, the Marines secured the hamlet. As a result of this action, the Marine battalion reported 80 enemy killed. A Stingray patrol about 1900 observed some 200 enemy troops moving to the southwest of Xuan Dai and called in

*See Chapter 13.

**Lieutenant Colonel Mueller recalled that the operation "very quickly became operation Allen Brook" in that his two other companies "and a myriad of support was attached to my battalion." A "No Name" operation usually involved two companies with minimum support. The concept was to "reinforce quickly when significant contact was made." LtCol Charles E. Mueller, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File).



Photo is from Abel Collection

Liberty Bridge over the Ky Lam River and a collapsed bridge beside it are visible from the air. The bridge connected An Hoa and Go Noi Island to Da Nang

both artillery and another air strike which resulted in a secondary explosion.[4]

For the next four days, the Marines again met only sporadic resistance and encountered no regular NVA units. In fact, up through the 13th, the indications were that the enemy troops that the Marines had engaged to that point except for the fight for Xuan Dai were from the usual VC units known to be in the Go Noi. Even the enemy force in Xuan Dai did not appear to be an NVA tactical unit. According to recovered documents and to a prisoner captured in that fight, the enemy in Xuan Dai were from the *155th Battalion, 2d NVA Regiment*. Marine intelligence officers believed the *155th* to be a temporary infiltration group rather than a regular NVA battalion.[5]

Hoping to find the suspected NVA regular units from the *2d NVA Division* believed to have returned to the Go Noi, the Marine command decided to reorient Allen Brook from east to west. On 13 May, General Robertson reinforced the 2d Battalion with Company I, 3d Battalion, 27th Marines. While the other three companies attached to the 2d Battalion reversed their direction, Marine helicopters lifted Company I, 27th Marines into a landing zone in the Que Son Mountains to the south overlooking Go Noi Island. The following day Company I moved down to blocking positions near the Ba Ren River where it was joined by the other Marine companies now advancing to the west. On the 15th, at 1400, the 2d Battalion with all four Marine companies with the attached tanks arrived back at Liberty Bridge. In their reverse march, the Marines had encountered the same "harassing small arms and mortar fires and fluid guerrilla tactics" that had characterized the operation for the most part up to that time.[6]

Operation Allen Brook appeared to be at an end. At least that was what the Marines wanted the enemy to believe. At 1800, on the 15th, Marine helicopters helilifted Company E and the command group of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines out of the operational area. The commander of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, Lieutenant Colonel Roger H. Barnard, then assumed command of the remaining forces in Allen Brook. To continue the "tactical deception," Lieutenant Colonel Barnard ordered the units still in Allen Brook to cross Liberty Bridge as if the Marines were closing out the operation. Then shortly after midnight on the 16th,



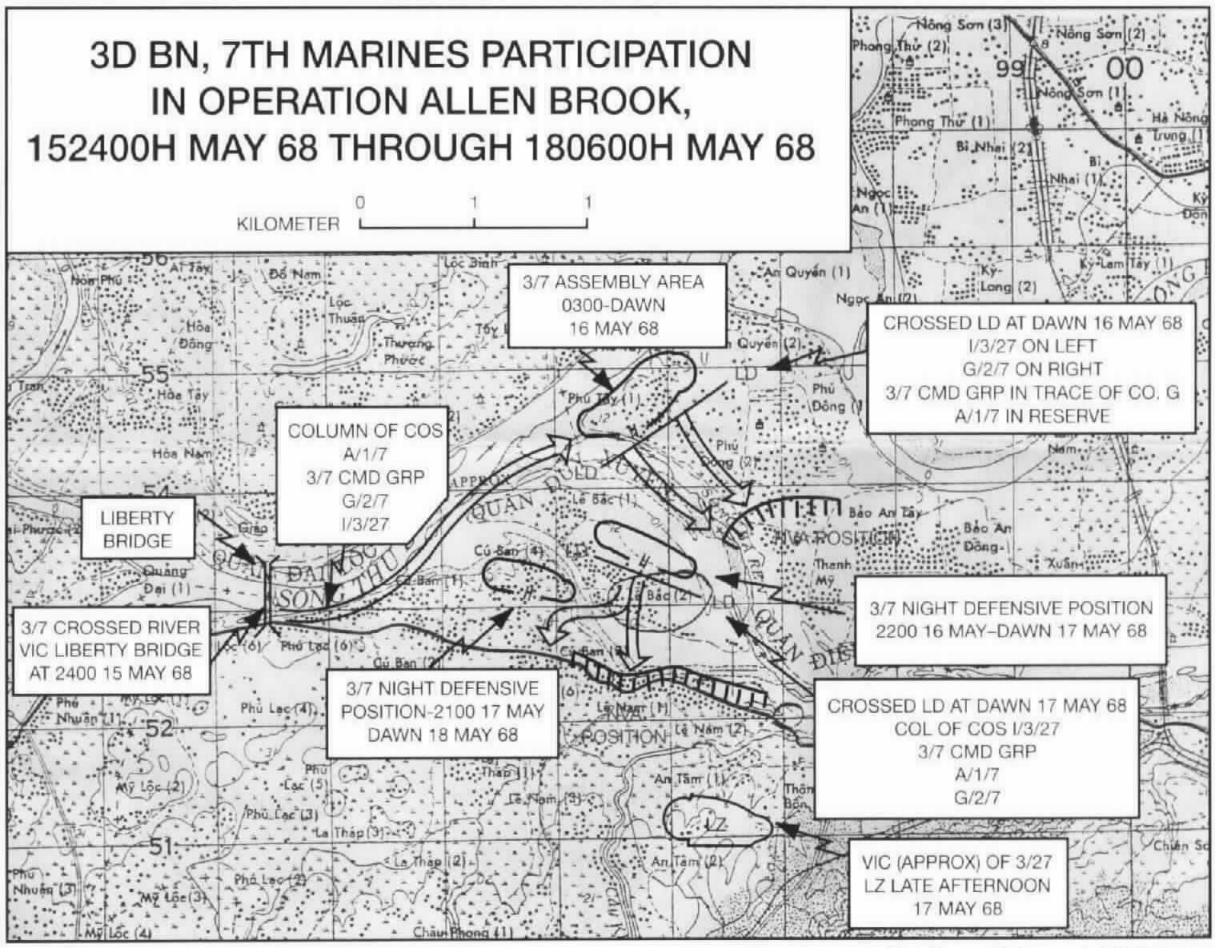
Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A374442

A Marine from the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines during Operation Allen Brook cautiously approaches a damaged hut. The VC dominated the hamlets in the Go Noi.

the command group of the 3d Battalion together with Companies A of the 1st Battalion and G of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, together with Company I, 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, recrossed the Thu Bon River and "moved in a single file under cover of darkness for security." Ironically, the 3d Battalion had none of its own organic companies in the operation as it reached its line of departure about 2,500 meters northeast of Liberty Bridge, just north of the objective area, a few hours prior to dawn. According to Barnard, Colonel Hall, who had monitored the radio traffic, "was beside himself with the success" of the plan to reenter the Go Noi.[7]*

Lieutenant Colonel Barnard remembered that his objective "was a suspected NVA installation . . . . We had reason to believe they did not know we were there . . . ." According to the battalion commander he was to attack to the south with the mission "to search for, fix, and destroy the enemy." As the Marines advanced with two companies on line and one in reserve, they were "hoping to execute a major surprise." In fact, both sides were to surprise one another. About 0900 on the morning of the 16th, the 3d Battalion encountered an NVA battalion in the hamlet of Phu Dong (2) about 4,000 meters west of Xuan Dai, the scene of the latest heaviest fighting. According to Barnard, "we hit a hornet's nest." Two of his companies came under deadly machine gun fire and the battalion commander described the situation "like being in the butts at the rifle range." The Marine battalion tried to flank the enemy position, but as Barnard recalled, "we needed more resources than we had for the situation." He recalled that even maximum supporting artillery and mortar fire failed to break the NVA defenses. Finally, extensive close air support, including over 50 air strikes, "carried the day." By early evening, the Marine infantry which had fought continuously throughout the day in the oppressive heat finally forced the NVA out of their trenches and bunkers. Afraid of encirclement, the

*Colonel Barnard credited the 7th Marines commander, Colonel Hall, with the idea of openly pulling out the 2d Battalion, and unobtrusively bringing in the 3d Battalion under cover of darkness. According to Barnard, Hall "was convinced that after a week of 2/7 stirring up the AO [Area of Operations], we could fool the enemy into believing the Marines had had enough." Col Roger H. Barnard, Comments on draft, dtd 13Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File).



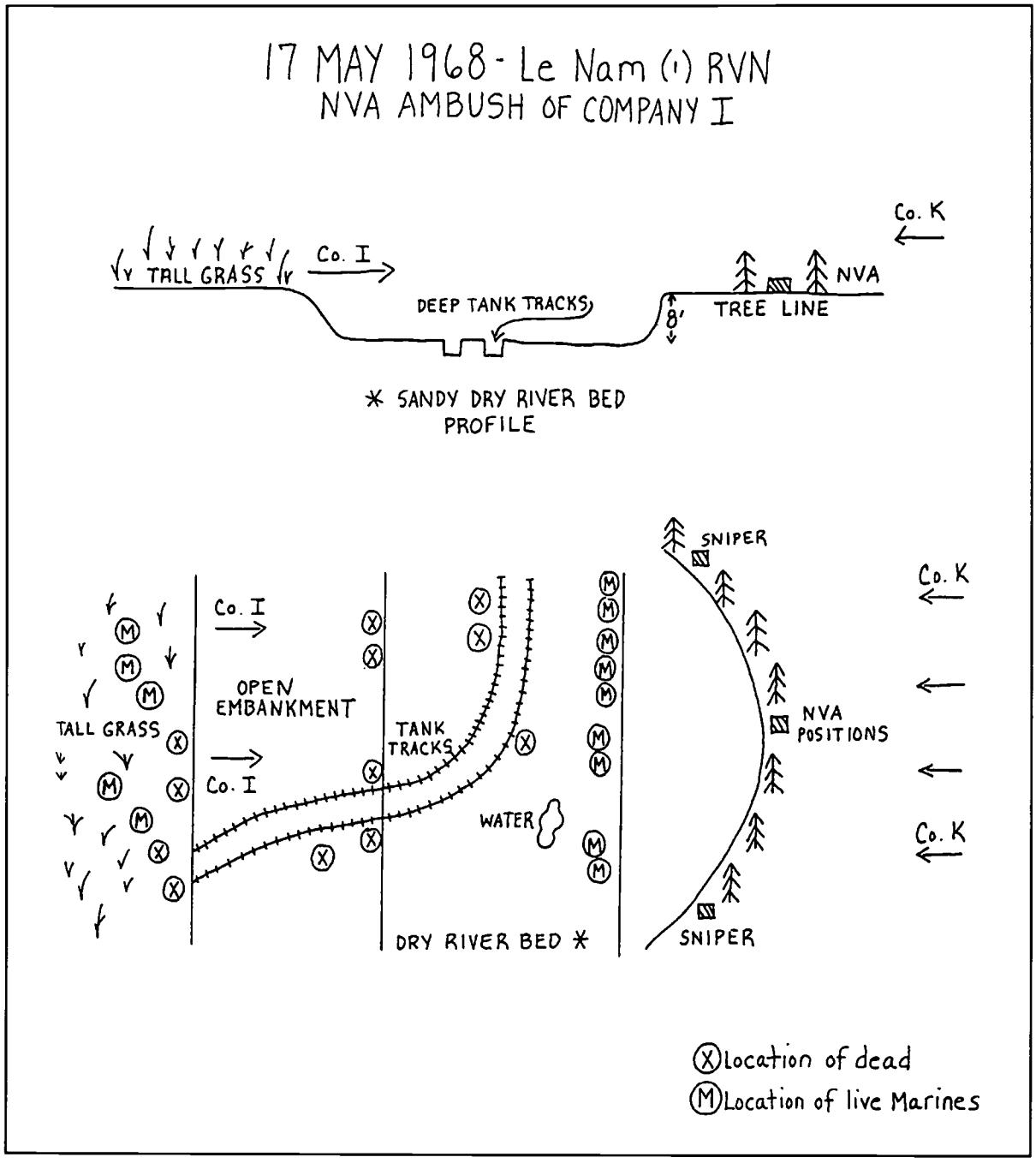
Map Courtesy of Col Roger H. Barnard, USMC (Ret)

enemy withdrew leaving more than 130 dead in the hamlet. Marine losses were also heavy: 25 dead and 38 wounded. One Marine, Second Lieutenant Paul F. Cobb, a platoon leader with Company A, and one Navy hospital corpsman, Robert M. Casey with Company G, were both awarded the Navy Cross posthumously for their actions in the fight for Phu Dong (2).[8]

Despite the Marine losses, Colonel Hall, the 7th Marines commander, believed that his plan had been a success. Barnard's unit had uncovered the North Vietnamese units in the Go Noi and hit them before they were able to mass their forces. Lieutenant Colonel Barnard later wrote, "when all enemy resistance ceased and the dust had settled it was clear we had . . . achieved a significant victory." The suspected NVA installation was an "NVA regimental headquarters, with attendant security and a major staging area for supplies . . . ." The battalion commander remembered that the enemy supplies were so extensive, that they could not evacuate them to the rear. Marine helicopters, however, took out the casualties and the battalion "received water and ammo resupply." Colonel Hall directed Barnard to continue his southward advance the next morning.[9]

After an uneventful night, in which the battalion had moved twice, it started out at dawn from a line of departure, just north of the hamlet of Le Bac (2). Advancing southward, the battalion was again in a column of companies, with Company I, 27th Marines in the lead, and Companies A and G of the 7th Marines, and the battalion command group, following in trace. Lieutenant Colonel Barnard remembered, "We were in open country, without a defined objective." If Company I made contact, Barnard planned to use Company A as a maneuver unit and Company G in reserve.[10]

As events turned out, the Marine battalion ran into even stronger resistance than the previous day. That morning, as Company I came upon a dry river bed with a densely wooded treeline on the northern bank bordering the hamlet of Le Nam (1), just above Route 537, the North Vietnamese sprung an ambush from elaborate defenses "of significant width." Strong enemy



Courtesy of Col Tullis J. Woodham, Jr., USMC (Ret)

resistance and the terrain combined to prevent Lieutenant Colonel Barnard's initial efforts to come to the assistance of his embattled company. Upon hearing of the contact and the extent of the enemy defenses, he immediately ordered Company A to attempt to flank the enemy from the west. While the ground was flat, it was covered with tall grass which impeded the flanking movement. In the meantime, as the reports from Company I "were not good," Barnard ordered Company G to join the embattled unit. Enemy resistance, however, proved too strong and prevented Company G from advancing. A frustrated battalion commander called for artillery and air support. He remembered that as his command group with Company A strug-

gled through the tall grass, he had his artillery and air officers "calling mission after mission . . . ." The situation for Company I was already desperate when Colonel Hall, the 7th Marines commander, radioed Barnard that the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines would make a helicopter assault to the south in order to relieve the pressure on his battalion.[11]

Lieutenant Colonel Tullis J. Woodham, Jr., the commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, remembered that his unit had been on alert for Allen Brook and was to relieve the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines. In fact the 27th Marines, under Colonel Adolph G. Schwenk, Jr., was scheduled to take responsibility for the operation from the 7th Marines later that day. Early on the morning of the 17th, Lieutenant Colonel Woodham had received orders to truck his battalion down to Liberty Bridge and then cross the bridge on foot to make the planned relief. At this point, he had only two of his companies with him, Companies K and L. His Company M was the Da Nang Air Base security company and Company I, of course, was attached to Barnard's battalion. Upon learning of the predicament of his Company I, Woodham conferred with Schwenk and agreed upon the helicopter assault. For the time being, Woodham's battalion would be under the operational control of the 7th Marines.[12]

After some unexpected delays in the arrival of the aircraft and in coordination with the air preparation of the landing zone, about 1500 on the 17th, Marine helicopters finally brought the battalion into An Tam (1) about 1,000 meters southeast of Le Nam (1). Even

Heavily sweating Marines from the Command Group of the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines assist in the evacuation of an injured Capt Robert R. Anderson, who had attempted to reach the embattled Company I. With temperatures reaching 110 to 120 degrees, heat was as much the enemy as the NVA.

Photo courtesy of Col Tullis J. Woodham, Jr. USMC (Ret)



as the battalion landed, it came under mortar and long-range weapons fire. Despite the enemy fire, the two Marine companies immediately attacked northward to link up with the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines. With extensive air and artillery support, Company K, 27th Marines broke through the enemy defenses in Le Nam (1), and finally linked up with Company I about 1930 that evening. According to Lieutenant Colonel Woodham, as darkness approached, the North Vietnamese resistance ceased and they began to withdraw from the battle area.[13]

The heavy fighting for Le Nam (1) had resulted in 39 Marines dead and 105 wounded as opposed to 81 North Vietnamese dead. Company I especially had suffered grievous losses. Of the total Marine casualties in the battle, Company I had sustained 15 killed and 50 wounded. Among the dead were Captain Thomas H. Ralph and two of his platoon leaders. The casualties of the company may have been even higher if it had not been for the heroics of Private First Class Robert C. Burke. A machine gunner with the company, he quickly took his weapon "and launched a series of one-man assaults" against the enemy emplacements. Providing covering fire, he permitted other members of Company I to come up and remove the wounded from exposed positions. He continued to advance upon the enemy and to suppress enemy fire until he fell mortally wounded. He was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously.[14]

During the night of 17–18 May, the two Marine battalions, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines and the 3d Battalion, 27 Marines, remained in separate positions, but in radio contact. Lieutenant Colonel Barnard had moved to a night position near Cu Ban (4), about 1,000 meters to the northwest of Le Nam (1), while Lieutenant Colonel Woodham retained his command group at An Tam (1). About 1900, Lieutenant Colonel Barnard had turned over operational control of Company I to Woodham and then began preparations to start out at dawn on the 18th for Liberty Bridge. Essentially, Operation Allen Brook was over for the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, which would leave as planned the next day and be replaced by the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines.[15]

By that time the 27th Marines, under Colonel Schwenk, had assumed responsibility for Operation Allen Brook which would continue in the Go Noi. On the morning of the 18th, Lieutenant Colonel Woodham began to expand his perimeter around Le Nam (1). About 0930, the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines began to take sniper fire from Le Bac (2), about 300 meters to the north. Lieutenant Colonel Woodham immediately sent Companies K and L to clear out what he thought were a relatively few snipers. The "few snipers" turned out to be a formidable North Vietnamese force which quickly brought the Marine attack to a halt. Under an "exceedingly heavy" volume of fire, the lead elements of both Companies I and K remained isolated and unable to maneuver. Woodham called for both artillery and air, but their effectiveness was limited because of the proximity of the Marines to the enemy. Both companies, but especially Company K, sustained several casualties and the intolerable heat soon became as much a factor as the enemy bullets.[16]

At 1500 that afternoon, Marine helicopters brought in Company M, which had already been alerted to replace the combat-impaired Company I. As the latter company boarded the helicopters for the return trip to Da Nang, Woodham thrust the newly arrived Company M into the battle for Le Bac (2). With the reinforcements, Company K, which had taken the most casualties, was able to pull back and Lieutenant Colonel Woodham placed it in reserve. The fighting raged on until the night when the NVA withdrew. The Marine companies pulled back to Le Nam (1) and Woodham brought in air and artillery to the rear of the former NVA positions. The battalion had sustained serious casualties: 15 Marines were dead, another 35 were wounded, and 94 troops had succumbed to the heat. In and around the abandoned enemy position lay 20 dead North Vietnamese.

Operation Allen Brook would continue to focus through 27 May largely on the Cu Ban, Phu Dong, and Le Bac village complexes. Beginning with the action of the 16th, the 7th, and later the 27th Marines, were in a more or less a conventional battle against well dug-in and relatively fresh and well-trained North Vietnamese regulars. Colonel Schwenk, the 27th Marines commander, commented that while the enemy troops did not initiate any offensive actions, they fought back "tenaciously" from concealed positions within treelines and in the hamlets themselves. To offset the Marine advantage in supporting arms, the NVA would allow "the point of advancing units to pass through" and then open up on the "main body" with both intense small arms fire and mortars. At this close range, the Marine command could then make only limited use of artillery and air support.[17]

To counter this tactic, the 27th Marines used heavy preparatory fires from both U.S. Navy gunfire ships offshore and artillery in coordination with air strikes to blast the enemy out of their bunkers and trenches



Photo courtesy of Col Tullis J. Woodham, USMC (Ret)

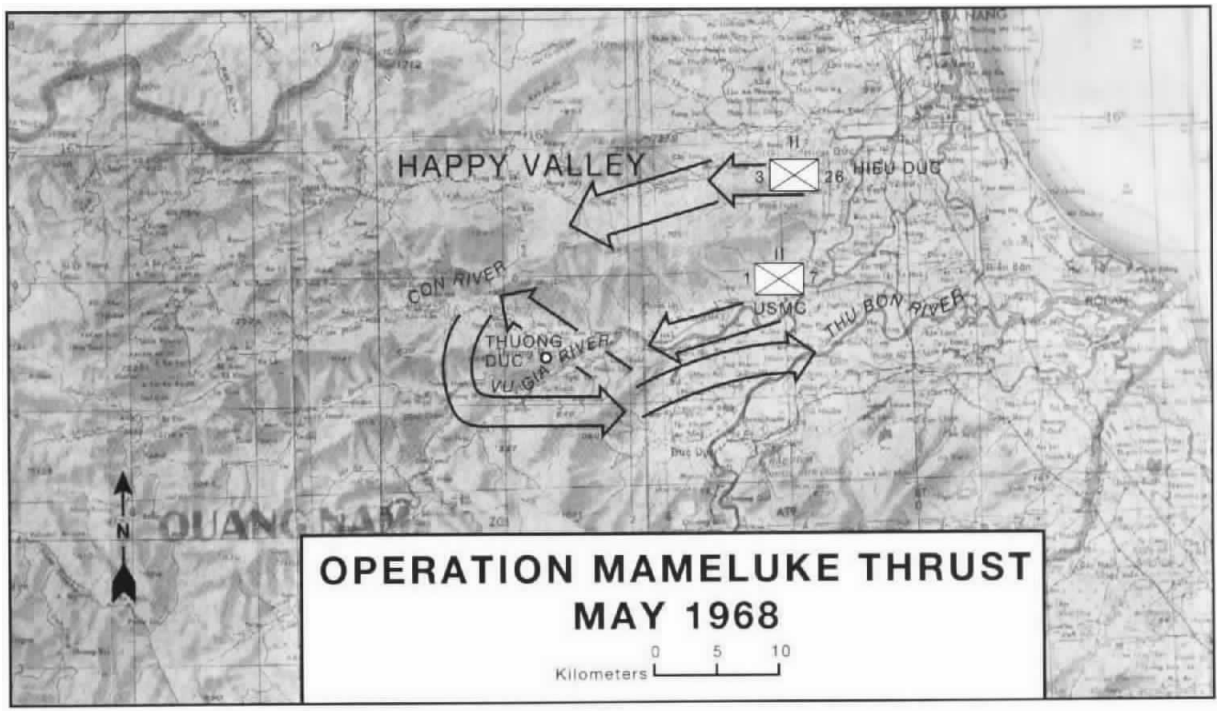
LtCol Tullis J. Woodham, Jr., commander of the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, left, waits to hear about the situation in Le Bac from his operations officer, Maj Ernest T. Fitzgerald, using the radio, during Allen Brook.

before moving into an area. If a Marine unit encountered heavy small arms fire, it was either to hold its position or move back so that supporting arms could be employed as much as possible under the circumstances. Colonel Schwenk remarked that tanks with their 90mm guns proved most effective in these circumstances, both with high explosive rounds to breach enemy fortifications and with canister rounds against troops in the open. Schwenk wrote that once he committed the tanks, "the enemy would break contact almost immediately." The tanks were also at a disadvantage, however, in that the terrain "caused . . . [them] to become channelized making them highly vulnerable to RPG fire and mines." On 24 May, two Marines from the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, Corporal Richard W. Buchanan from Company M and Private First Class Charles R. Yordy, from Company K, were later awarded the Navy Cross for their actions that day in Le Bac (1) about 800 meters northwest of Le Bac (2). The fight for Le Bac (2) lasted until the 27th and featured some of the heaviest combat of the campaign until a torrential rain storm ended the fighting. Lieutenant Colonel Donald N. Rexroad, the commander of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, remembered that his battalion near the end of the month overran "an apparent NVA regimental command post."[18]

Casualties on both sides had been heavy. For the entire operation through the end of May, the Marines reported to have killed over 600 of the enemy. They themselves sustained since the beginning of the operation 138 killed, 686 wounded including 576 serious enough to be evacuated, and another 283 non-battle casualties that had to be evacuated. The number of heat-induced "non-battle casualties" had soared towards the end because of the extreme high temperatures averaging almost 110 degrees and the physical exertion expended in the firefights. In many engagements, the number of heat casualties equalled or exceeded the number of Marines killed and wounded.[19*]

In Operation Allen Brook, the Marines believed they had broken the back of a planned enemy attack on

*The 7th Marines in its account reported only seven non-battle casualties through 17 May. It can be assumed then that the bulk of the heat casualties occurred after the 27th Marines took over the operation. For the period 4–17 May, the 7th Marines account showed that the Marine units in Allen Brook sustained 85 killed and 359 wounded, 323 of whom were evacuated in addition to the non-battle casualties. 1/7 AAR, Allen Brook.



Da Nang. Colonel Hall of the 7th Marines later wrote that his 3d Battalion's reentry into the Go Noi under cover of darkness in the early morning hours of 16 May foiled the designs of the enemy which had begun to stage its forces. Hall observed that the North Vietnamese unit engaged by his units was from the *36th Regiment, 308th NVA Division*. According to a North Vietnamese prisoner from the *2d Battalion* of that regiment, his unit had departed North Vietnam in February and only arrived in the Go Noi the night of the 15th with orders to assault allied positions north of the Thu Bon and Ky Lam Rivers. The 27th Marines would engage both the *2d* and *3d Battalions* of the *36th* during the fighting in the Cu Ban and Le Bac complex.[20]

The appearance of the *36th Regiment* in the Go Noi was of some concern to the Marine command. III MAF and the 1st Marine Division had expected to find elements of the *2d NVA Division* which previously had used the sector during the Tet offensive. This was the first evidence that any unit of the *308th NVA Division* had ventured so far south. There were already indications that the North Vietnamese had built up their regular forces in the Da Nang sector. From 16–25 May, just to the east of the Marine units on the Go Noi, the 51st ARVN regiment, reinforced by two Ranger battalions, in a series of running battles engaged approximately two enemy battalions. While sustaining casualties of 53 dead and 144 wounded, the ARVN claimed to have killed 284 of the enemy during this period.

Mini-Tet and Operation Mameluke Thrust, May 1968

By mid-May it was apparent that the enemy buildup in the Go Noi sector was part and parcel of the long-awaited second phase of the enemy's "Tet" offensive. Outside of the flareups in the capital city of Saigon and especially in the eastern DMZ near Dong Ha* with some of the bloodiest combat of the war, the renewed fighting elsewhere was only a pale reflection of the first "Tet." Called "Mini-Tet" by the allies, this second enemy offensive largely confined itself to rocket and mortar fire and small ground probes against the major bases and attacks against the most vulnerable of the Special Forces camps near the Laotian border.

Still the enemy "Mini-Tet" could not be taken lightly. At Da Nang, in all probability it was the Marine thrust into the Go Noi that forestalled a renewed enemy ground assault on either the airfield or city itself. While enemy infantry units were unable to penetrate the Marine defenses, NVA rocketeers increased their efforts throughout I Corps. [See Chart] At Da Nang, from 5 May through 29 May, enemy rockets fell on major installations, including Marble Mountain, the main airfield, the FLC, and III MAF headquarters, on 12 separate occasions with the highest number of incidents, 4, on the first day of the attacks. In the Da Nang TAOR,

*See Chapter 15.

ENEMY EFFORTS AGAINST MAJOR III MAF BASES: MAY 1968

DANANG

DATE	TIME	INSTALLATION	TYPE ATTACK	CASUALTIES	MATERIAL DAMAGE
5 May	0120	III MAF Hq	5-122mm Rkts	4 KIA, 8 WIA	Minor
5 May	0150	Airbase	1-122mm Rkt	None	None
5 May	0200	FLC	15-122mm Rkts	3 KIA, 15 WIA	Minor
5 May	0600	FLC	5-122mm Rkts	None	None
8 May	2100	NSA Bridge Cargo Complex	4-122mm Rkts	None	None
9 May	0031	Airbase	4-122mm Rkts	None	None
9 May	0155	Airbase	5-122mm Rkts	5 WIA	1 Air Force F-101 and 1 C-130 (light), 1 crater in runway
11 May	2345	Airbase	6-140mm Rkts	None	2 EA-6A and 1 RF-4B (minor), 1 crater in runway
12 May	1758	Airbase	4-122mm Rkts	1 WIA	2 VNAF A-1 (minor)
22May	0004	FLC	12-122mm Rkts	1 WIA	10 2 1/2 ton trucks and 1 supply building damaged
29May	0140	Airbase	5-140mm Rkts	None	1 C-117 (substantial) and 1 TA-4F (limited)

MARBLE MOUNTAIN

DATE	TIME	INSTALLATION	TYPE ATTACK	CASUALTIES	MATERIAL DAMAGE
5 May	0151	Air Facility	41 Rds Mtr/Rkts	1 WIA	2 CH-53 (minor)
12 May	1905	Air Facility	20 Rds Rkts	1 KIA, 17 WIA	4 CH-53 (2 substantial, 2 minor), 3 CH-46 and 1 O-1 (minor)
20 May	0120	Air Facility	11 Rds Mtr	3 WIA	7 UH-1E (1 substantial, 1 minor, 5 limited), 4 CH-46 (limited), Control Tower (minor) and Base Operations Building (minor)
22 May	0211	Air Facility	12 Rds Mtr	4 WIA	2 CH-46 (limited), 2 UH-1E (minor)

CHU LAI

DATE	TIME	INSTALLATION	TYPE ATTACK	CASUALTIES	MATERIAL DAMAGE
5 May	0151	MAG-13 and Runway	27-122mm Rkts	None	3 F-4B (minor), 1 HAWK missile launcher and 3 missiles destroyed
8 May	1750	MATCU-67	2-122mm Rkts	1 KIA, 2 WIA	Ground Approach Radar Installation destroyed
11 May	2207	MAG-13 Ordnance Area	3-122mm Rkts	None	Minor
14 May	2317	MAG-13 Barracks Area	2-122mm Rkts	2 KIA, 15 WIA	1 Living Quarters destroyed, 5 Living Quarters and 1 Supply Building damaged
23 May	0155	MAG-13 Area	10-122mm Rkts	None	MAG-13 PX destroyed
26 May	0125	Runway	7-122mm Rkts	None	None

PHU BAI/CAMP EVANS/CAMP EAGLE

DATE	TIME	INSTALLATION	TYPE ATTACK	CASUALTIES	MATERIAL DAMAGE
5 May	0205	Camp Eagle	14-Rkts	None	None
19 May	1925	Camp Evans	12-122mm Rkts	1 KIA, 13 WIA	5 US Army helicopters destroyed, 107 helicopters and 6 fixed wing aircraft damaged
21 May	0030-0630	Camp Eagle	300 Rds 122mm Rkt/82mm Mtr, and Ground Atk	8 KIA, 20 WIA	Minor
21 May	0057	Phu Bai (Camp Hochmuth)	153-82mm Mtr	33 WIA	Minor
27 May	0250	Phu Bai Airfield	98-82mm Mtr	5 KIA, 32 WIA	5 US Army fixed wing aircraft (minor), 6 CH-46 (minor), 6 UH-1E and 3 CH-53 (limited)

QUANG TRI

DATE	TIME	INSTALLATION	TYPE ATTACK	CASUALTIES	MATERIAL DAMAGE
5 May	0310	New Quang Tri Airfield	20-122mm Rkts	None	1 CH-46 destroyed, 2 UH-34 and 1 UH-1E (limited)
17 May	0950	Old Airfield (South of Quang Tri City)	4-122mm Rkts	4 WIA	3 US Army CH-47 (substantial)

Chart from FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 58



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371543

Under a covering smoke screen, Company D, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines crosses the Vu Gia River in Operation Mameluke Thrust. The battalion would follow the river into the western highlands near Thuong Duc.

the 7th Marines alone reported 77 mortar incidents as opposed to 15 in April.[21]

The whereabouts of the *2d NVA Division* also was worrisome. In their one major success during Mini-Tet, on 10–12 May 1968, elements of that North Vietnamese division had overrun the Special Forces camps at Ngog Tavak and Kham Duc in western Quang Tin Province near the Laotian border, about 60 miles southwest of Da Nang. Concerned about the buildup of enemy forces in the Go Noi and to the west near the Special Forces Camp at Thuong Duc about 35 miles closer to Da Nang than Kham Duc, General Cushman had few troops to commit to the relief of the other two Special Forces camps. Supported by both Generals Abrams and Westmoreland, Cushman ordered the evacuation of Kham Duc.*

Even before the abandonment of Ngog Tavak and Kham Duc, Cushman had planned an operation in the western highlands to include the region near Thuong Duc. On 9 May, III MAF had directed Major General Robertson, the 1st Marine Division commander, to conduct a spoiling attack deep into the valley region west of Da Nang, that was eventually to be codenamed "Mameluke Thrust." While Allen Brook in the Go Noi delayed the initiation of the new operation, the possibility that the NVA units that overran the more southerly Special Forces camp might next try to take Thuong Duc was an ever-present consideration. This was the reason for the replacement of the 7th Marines' battalions in the Go Noi by the 27th Marines.[22]

The 1st Marine Division's mission for Operation Mameluke Thrust was to conduct "offensive operations to find, fix and destroy en[emy] forces in [the] tactical area of interest." The NVA units believed to be located in the area of operations included the *31st Regiment*, *341st Division*, the *368B Rocket Regiment*, two unidentified battalions, the headquarters of *Military Region V*, and possibly, command elements of *Group 44*. The expected duration of the operation was 21 days.[23]

On 19 May, the 1st Marine Division struck. Colonel Hall's 7th Marines, with its own 1st Battalion, attacked west along the Song Vu Gia toward Thuong Duc. Further north, Colonel Bruce F. Meyers' 26th Marines, which the previous day, on short notice, had deployed south to Da Nang from Quang Tri, attacked with its 3d Battalion into the hills overlooking the eastern end of the Song Lo Dong Valley—known to

*See Chapter 26 for more details about the fight and evacuation of Ngog Tavak and Kham Duc.

the Marines as "Happy Valley."* The 1st Reconnaissance Battalion placed Stingray patrols under the operational control of the two regiments to support the operation and, as the attack progressed westward, the artillerymen of Lieutenant Colonel Clayton V. Hendricks' 11th Marines moved firing batteries forward to keep up with the advance.

By the end of May, Lieutenant Colonel William S. Fagan's 1st Battalion, 7th Marines had swept the hills along both banks of the Song Vu Gia and its tributary, the Song Con, to a point four kilometers beyond Thuong Duc, and returned to their starting point at the eastern end of the valley. Lieutenant Colonel John C. Studt's 3d Battalion, 26th Marines was deep in the jungle-clad hills south of Happy Valley.** Neither unit made significant contact with the enemy, but both found large supply caches. While the much-heralded enemy "Mini-Tet" offensive appeared to have spent itself at least in the Da Nang area of operations, the 1st Division decided to keep both Operations Allen Brook and Mameluke Thrust going and carry the fight to the enemy in his former strongholds.

Operation Allen Brook Continues

During the last four days of May, the 1st Marine Division rotated fresh units into the Allen Brook area of operations. Lieutenant Colonel Frederick J. McEwan's 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, veterans of the defense of Khe Sanh, arrived on the 26th, and Lieutenant Colonel John E. Greenwood's 1st Battalion, 27th Marines relieved Lieutenant Colonel Woodham's 3d Battalion, 27th Marines two days later. As May ended, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines departed Go Noi Island and became the 1st Marine Division reserve.[24]

Thereafter, III MAF maintained at least two battalions in Operation Allen Brook. At the beginning of June, both the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines and the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines were involved, still under the control of the 27th Marines headquarters. The 1st Marine Division expanded the area of operations to include the 27th Marines forward command post at Liberty Bridge, as well as about 35 square kilometers of rice farming area southwest of Go Noi Island.

The regiment's orders called for an ongoing "search and clear" operation, a euphemism for the tedious process of methodically searching an area for enemy personnel, facilities, supplies, and equipment. When carried out to the degree of thoroughness which provided a measure of success, the procedure was slow and sometimes ponderous. The extreme heat encountered during Operation Allen Brook, combined with terrain that included man-high elephant grass, as well as a hostile, uncooperative local population, and frequent encounters with boobytraps and mines, made the "search and clear" mission far more challenging than its name implied.

On the morning of 1 June, a flight of nine Lockheed C–130 Hercules aircraft conducted what was accurately known as an "inferno" mission, dropping more than 31,000 gallons of fuel in 55 gallon drums with igniters attached. While the intent was to burn away a considerable portion of the island's foliage, the mission was not as successful as desired due to excessive dispersion of the fuel and a heavy thunderstorm which followed the drop.[25]

After this disappointment, the two battalions of Marines began the process of physically searching the area for signs of the enemy. The Marines trudged steadily across the island, from west to east and then back to the west again. Short, sharp contacts resulted when enemy troops fired from well-concealed positions, causing the Marines to return fire and call for supporting arms. Upon overrunning the area from which the enemy had fired, the Marines usually found little or nothing. Occasionally, Marines detonated mines or boobytraps (referred to as "surprise firing devices" in the reporting system), often disguised as soft-drink cans, tea bags, or even "Chieu Hoi" leaflets.[26]*** At night, with the Marines in defensive positions, the enemy would

*Colonel Meyers recalled that he "received an excellent briefing from Lieutenant Colonel [Charles E.] Mueller [whose battalion, the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines] . . . had operated on the western edge of the valley for three weeks." Meyers described Happy Valley as having a triple canopy, with the first layer consisting of dense Kunai grass, elephant grass, and thick vines, extending up to 20 feet. The second layer contained trees rising up to 60 feet, and the third layer consisted of large teak, mahogany, and ironwood trees which reached heights of 110 feet. Colonel Meyers stated that he knew some jungle techniques, having "done deep jungle patrols with the Gurkhas in Malaya in their campaign in 1959 . . . ." Col Bruce F. Meyers, Comments on draft, dtd 20Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Meyers Comments.

**Colonel Studt described the Happy Valley operation as "a change of pace for 3/26, operating under triple canopy, constantly on the move." He observed that enemy tactics counted "on neutralizing our normally superior supporting arms by knocking down our point elements close in to their positions." Studt stated that, rather than walk blindly into any ambush, "we used dogs extensively . . . consequently in the several months that we spent operating in Happy Valley, we never had a man ambushed, although we lost a few dogs." Col John C. Studt, Comments on draft, dtd 22Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

***A leaflet distributed by hand or airdrop as part of psychological operations in support of the "Chieu Hoi" or "Open Arms" Campaign, which urged enemy troops to rally to the government of South Vietnam.

fire on listening posts from close range, or use mortars to harass the main perimeters. These activities caused additional casualties and further frustration for the Marines, who could not strike back effectively.

By 3 June, the 27th Marines had found little evidence of the enemy, causing the 1st Marine Division to determine that the "recent lack of significant contact indicates enemy forces departed Allen Brook AO."[27] Accordingly, the division reduced the scale of Operation Allen Brook, ordering the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines to depart Go Noi Island for operations elsewhere, and shrinking the Allen Brook AO. It would now include only that portion of Go Noi Island west of the National Railroad and a small area on the north bank of the Song Thu Bon, opposite the island.

The 27th Marines ordered the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines to move westward along Route 537 on its departure from the island, continuing the "search and clear" process along the way. Simultaneously, the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines also would move westward, on the right flank of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines.

By mid-morning on 5 June, the two battalions were approaching their final objectives, having lost 4 killed and 26 wounded to sniper fire and mines along the way. As Company D, 26th Marines, under First Lieutenant Daniel L. McGravey, neared the hamlet of Cu Ban (3), North Vietnamese hidden in a trenchline and bunkers to the south fired on the 1st Platoon. The Marines maneuvered to one flank, attempting to envelop the enemy, and Communist mortars joined the action. At the same time, 500 meters to the east, Company B, 26th Marines, under Captain James H. Champion, also came under heavy fire and had a platoon caught in the open, unable to maneuver.

As the Marines called for mortars, artillery, and air support to assist in suppressing the enemy fire, Lieutenant Colonel Greenwood, commanding the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines, dispatched his Company C, commanded by Captain Martin T. Farmer, to assist the beleaguered 1st Battalion, 26th Marines. Company C hurried southward and made contact with the northernmost flank of Company B, 26th Marines, then swung to the west and assaulted the nearby Communist positions. Almost immediately, Captain Farmer and his second in command were wounded by mortar fire. Attacking without "a proper base of fire" and without time to "adequately reconnoiter" enemy positions, Company C, said Lieutenant Colonel Greenwood later, "lost momentum, faltered, and stopped."[28]

Company D, 26th Marines was still heavily engaged near Cu Ban (3) and now, both Company B, 26th Marines and Company C, 27th Marines were being held down by enemy fire 500 meters east of the hamlet. The Communists, fighting from well-covered and expertly concealed positions, kept up heavy fire with rifles, machine guns, and mortars. The Marines, long accustomed to the luxury of fire superiority, found that they were unable to employ their supporting arms effectively in such close quarters without endangering friendly troops.

As casualties mounted, helicopters landed under fire to evacuate the wounded. Two Sikorsky UH–34 "Sea Horse" helicopters suffered hits in the process, but neither were lost. In mid-afternoon, with the fight still raging, Company A, 27th Marines, accompanied by three tanks, departed Liberty Bridge to join the fray. Supported by the tanks and carefully using artillery and air support, the Marines attacked and overran the enemy positions.

The Marines lost 7 killed and 55 wounded in this hard-fought, but confused, action. They found 30 North Vietnamese dead. A machine gunner with Company C, 1st Battalion, 27th Marines summed up the battle from an infantryman's perspective: "We had a bad-ass fire fight...it lasted for awhile. Then we moved on."[29]

Although the Marines had finally made solid contact with the enemy, the plan to reduce the Operation Allen Brook commitment to a single battalion remained in effect. On 6 June, the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines left the area and elements of the 1st Engineer Battalion arrived with the heavy equipment needed for the new task assigned to Operation Allen Brook forces: the virtual razing of Go Noi Island. The new mission called for the 27th Marines to "provide support and protection for [an] engineer effort to systematically eliminate all fortifications, dwellings, harbor sites, and hedgerows in [the] AO."[30] The first area scheduled to be cleared was Cu Ban (3).

The clearing project presented many challenges especially since Go Noi Island was thoroughly infested with well-constructed enemy field fortifications. The typical Go Noi bunker, based on a deep hole, had overhead protection constructed from rails and ties from the nearby National Railroad. Some actually included concrete. Covered with earth and camouflaged effectively, these positions were invisible from the air and only barely apparent from the ground. In some areas, farmers had worked away the ground surrounding the



Photo courtesy of Col Tullis J. Woodham, Jr. USMC (Ret)

Carrying out a program of "total destruction," Marine engineers bulldoze the hamlets in the Go Noi after the civilian population has been evacuated.

bamboo groves for so long that the groves appeared to be raised on flat mounds of hard earth. The Communists burrowed under these groves to construct hidden bunkers with firing slits at ground level. In addition to the fortifications built by the NVA and VC for their own use, the hamlets contained bunkers built by the local populace for family protection. These bunkers, also built with materials salvaged from the National Railroad, featured sloped roofs which deflected bombs and artillery projectiles. So strong were these bunkers that some were undamaged by 2,000 pound bombs detonating 50 feet away.[31]

As the engineers went about the business of destroying bunkers and filling in trenchlines, Lieutenant Colonel Greenwood provided them security and continued a program of aggressive patrolling with his four companies. Contact with the enemy remained sporadic. As before the battle at Cu Ban, the enemy contented themselves with occasional sniping, attacks on listening posts, harassing mortar fire on company night positions, and an ever-increasing number of mines and boobytraps. Marines continued to fall prey to heat, as well as to enemy action, for the daily temperature averaged 100 degrees, with humidity greater than 80 percent. In the still, thick air, heat casualties sometimes ran as high as 10 percent, causing commanders to limit troop activity to the early morning and late afternoon. While moving, the Marines did not carry excess equipment, leaving behind even their flak jackets. To further exacerbate the Marine problems with the intense heat, the enemy contaminated the water wells in the area with oil and dead animal carcasses and the local river water was seemingly impervious to the attempts to purify it with halazone tablets.[32*]

The battalion continued the "search and clear" routine (while the engineers gave a whole new meaning to the "clearing" aspects of the mission) without significant contact until 15 June. At 0330 that morning, behind a curtain of B–40 rockets and heavy automatic weapons fire, Communist troops fell upon Company B's night position near the National Railroad. The Marines returned fire with all organic weapons, from rifles to antitank rockets, and called for artillery fire support. In the face of Company B's tenacious defense, the North Vietnamese broke off their attack and attempted to flee, but Company B Marines pursued the broken enemy into the night, ending the engagement decisively. The next day, the Marines tallied 21 dead North Vietnamese, all victims of the abortive attack. Company B suffered only three wounded.

The 1st Marine Division ordered the area of operations extended to permit the Allen Brook forces to venture east of the National Railroad in pursuit of the enemy. Early on 19 June, an ad hoc force composed of elements of Companies B and D (under the command

*Halazone tablets were carried by the individual Marine for use in purifying locally gathered water.

of the executive officer of Company B) ran into a North Vietnamese force near the hamlet of Bac Dong Ban. One Marine platoon immediately went to ground in the face of overwhelming enemy fire. As the Marines called for air and artillery, another ad hoc company (also composed of elements of Companies B and D) moved to the rescue under the command of Company B's commanding officer, First Lieutenant Richard M. Wozar.

The North Vietnamese were thoroughly dug in, occupying a line of trenches and bunkers with their backs to the Song Ky Lam. For nine hours, the battle raged with neither side able to gain the upper hand. Finally, at 1800, the battalion command group, with Company A and a platoon from Company C, arrived and attacked from the west. Swinging northward, the reinforcements assaulted the enemy positions while Companies B and D provided a base of fire. By 1900, the Marines overwhelmed the enemy, suffering 6 dead, 19 wounded, and 12 heat casualties. By noon the next day, the Marines found 17 North Vietnamese dead.[33]

The fight at Bac Dong Ban was the 1st Battalion's last major battle in Operation Allen Brook. After completing a sweep of the eastern portion of Go Noi Island, they departed the area on 23 June and in their place, the 2d Battalion, 27th Marines assumed responsibility for Operation Allen Brook. That night the North Vietnamese welcomed the fresh battalion to Go Noi Island with 60 rounds of mortar fire on Companies E, F, and H.

The 2d Battalion, tasked to continue the land clearing operations on Go Noi Island, arrived intent on carrying out a program of "total destruction." Their policy included elimination of natural assembly areas, concealing foliage, treelines, bamboo groves, hedgerows, trenchlines, fighting holes, caves, bunkers, tunnels, building structures, and any natural or man-made feature providing cover. Material which could be used to build bunkers, such as concrete blocks, beams, posts, pillars, and tree trunks, would be destroyed by crushing or burning. In the words of the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Albert W. Keller, "we were to level that island."[34]

The 2d Battalion experienced only light enemy contact throughout its stay at Go Noi Island. The enemy appeared only in small groups, usually fleeing when sighted by the Marines. Because of the sporadic nature of enemy contact, much of the battalion's efforts centered on land clearing. In one 18-day period, the engineers completely leveled the largest forested area on Go Noi Island.[35] Lieutenant Colonel Keller later remarked that "by the time we destroyed and leveled that whole area . . . it looked almost like a parking lot for a major ball park in the United States."[36] As part of its land clearing effort, the battalion arranged two air-delivered herbicide missions which "were found to be quite effective."[37]



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A650927

Two Marines from BLT 2/7 step gingerly through muck and water in a narrow ravine during Operation Swift Play in the Da The Mountain area south of the Go Noi. The unauthorized floppy hat worn by the Marine in the rear probably provides more protection from the elements than the helmet.

On 16 July, the 2d Battalion, 27th Marines departed Go Noi Island, having reported killing 144 enemy at a cost of 4 Marines dead and 147 wounded. Simultaneously, the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines moved into the area and assumed responsibility for Operation Allen Brook. The character of the operation remained unchanged as the companies of the 3d Battalion alternated between patrolling and providing security for the engineers who were methodically scraping the island clean. The Communists continued to avoid significant engagements, but they did muster the temerity to fire on the aircraft which sprayed the island with herbicides on 18 July and 21 July. Meanwhile, the Marines continued to fire on small groups of enemy or on Vietnamese voices heard in the night, then searched the areas later to find an occasional body or blood trail.*

*Colonel Tullis J. Woodham, Jr., at the time the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines commander, commented that he positioned a sniper and a 106mm recoilless rifle team on the north/south railroad trestle: "The sniper would spot and kill or wound an enemy soldier. As other enemy forces would attempt to aid the dead or wounded NVA the 106 would take them under fire." Col Tullis J. Woodham, Jr., Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).



Photo is from the Abel Collection

Two Boeing Vertol CH–46 helicopters from HMM–165 have landed troops from the 26th Marines in a landing zone in the An Hoa basin densely covered with elephant grass. The Marines will be taking part in Operation Mameluke Thrust.

Although it appeared that the NVA battalions once thought to be based on Go Noi Island were gone, intelligence sources indicated that the Communists would soon try to reoccupy the area.[38] At the request of the 1st Marine Division, Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2/7 (Seventh Fleet Special Landing Force "B") launched Operation Swift Play on 23 July 1968, only 17 hours after having embarked on board amphibious shipping at the close of Operation Eager Yankee in Thua Thien Province.

Designed to complement Operation Allen Brook, Operation Swift Play was a surprise thrust into the Da The Mountain area, six kilometers south of Go Noi Island. After landing by helicopter, BLT 2/7 swept north toward the Song Chiem Son and the Allen Brook area of operations. During the week-long sweep, the Marines of BLT 2/7 uncovered numerous enemy caches and base areas, including what appeared to be a training center, complete with lecture hall, carefully hidden in the steep, forested mountains. On 31 July, BLT 2/7 crossed the Chiem Son to Go Noi Island and relieved the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines of responsibility for Operation Allen Brook. Three days later, the 27th Marines ended its participation in the operation altogether, passing control of BLT 2/7 to the 5th Marines, which had previously exchanged its area of operations near Phu Bai with the 26th Marines.

Land-clearing operations continued until the Communists launched their long-awaited "third offensive" on 23 August. With enemy activity on Go Noi Island only minimal, the 1st Marine Division terminated Operation Allen Brook so that the forces could be employed to battle the enemy forces threatening Da Nang. Company E remained behind temporarily to escort the engineers to Liberty Bridge while the remainder of BLT 2/7 departed by helicopter. On 24 August, as Company E and the engineer convoy of trucks and earth-moving equipment headed westward the enemy harassed them with sporadic sniper fire until they cleared Go Noi Island.

Operation Allen Brook lasted three and one half months and resulted in 917 enemy killed. An additional 11 were captured, and 2 rallied to the Government of Vietnam. The III MAF units which sought to bring Go Noi Island under government control lost 170 Marines and 2 sailors killed in action and a further 1,124 wounded. Even more fell to heat, disease, snakebite, accidents, and a host of other hazards. All the while they fought, Operation Mameluke Thrust continued in the west.

Mameluke Thrust Also Continues

On 3 June, General Robertson expanded the Mameluke Thrust area of operations eastward to include the Song Thu Bon-Song Tinh Yen valley.[39]

The western portion of this basin was the "Arizona Territory" and the area on the east bank of the river was the An Hoa sector. While the Arizona Territory, like Go Noi Island, had been tightly in the grip of the Viet Cong for many years, the Marines had managed to maintain a presence at An Hoa, even while committed to the fighting on the nearby Go Noi. While the 26th Marines took control of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, General Robertson reinforced the 7th Marines with his only reserve, the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines for operations in the An Hoa basin.

In the western sector of Mameluke Thrust under the 26th Marines, on 6 June, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines established a patrol base on Hill 1235 (known locally as Tho Thenon), the dominant peak of the massif which overlooked the Da Nang-Hoi An-Dai Loc Triangle, the Arizona Territory, Happy Valley, and the valley of the Song Thu Bon. At the same time, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines established its own battalion patrol base about two kilometers to the south, atop Hill 1062.

In the 7th Marines portion of the operation, Lieutenant Colonel McEwan's 1st Battalion, 26th Marines began operations in the An Hoa area on the morning of 7 June.* It did not have to wait long for action. At 0730, while moving southwest from Liberty Bridge, Company B came under fire from a North Vietnamese force atop a low hill only 1,200 meters from the bridge. The rest of the battalion quickly joined the action. As the Marines maneuvered, the North Vietnamese poured on a heavy fire, including machine guns and RPGs. The Marines called for artillery and close air support, but the enemy doggedly held the hill for nine hours, finally melting away at day's end. Marine casualties totaled 17 killed in action and 46 wounded. They found 64 dead North Vietnamese.[40]

In the mountains to the west, the enemy remained elusive, avoiding contact even at the risk of losing large caches and base areas to the Marines. On 9 June, Company L, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines, under the command of Captain Jesse D. Bennett, captured a recently abandoned NVA hospital. The complex contained 125 beds, medical supplies (including U.S.-made antibiotics), a clean operating room, a sterilizing area, a kitchen, food, medical records, a system of running water built with bamboo pipes, and 16 pounds of marijuana.[41]**

On 11 June, acting on a prisoner's information, Company I, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines located what turned out to be the command post of the notorious *368B Rocket Regiment*. The quantity of equipment captured there was staggering: rocket warheads, plotting boards, fire control devices, drafting tools, compasses, binoculars, hundreds of uniforms, and items of personal equipment. The entire haul totaled 18 helicopter loads.[42]

During the second week in June, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines swept eastward, down from the mountains, then terminated participation in the operation. At the same time, the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines moved northward from An Hoa to the area bounded by the Thu Bon, Ai Nghia, and La Tho Rivers known as "Dodge City," and Lieutenant Colonel Donald N. Rexroad's 3d Battalion, 5thMarines moved to An Hoa.

The action seemed to follow the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines. On 13 June, only two days after entering the Dodge City area, the battalion encountered a North Vietnamese force near the village of Ky Chau, one kilometer west of a line of ROK Marine blocking positions along the National Railroad. The Communists were cut off by the Song Ky Lam to the west and south, the ROK's to the east, and the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines attacking from the north. They resolutely defended their position using heavy machine guns, 60mm mortars, and RPGs. In a nine-hour battle, the Marines lost 3 killed and 24 wounded, killing 44 of the enemy in the process.[43] Late that night, as Company B lay in ambush at the junction of a trail and the railroad bed, approximately 30–50 North Vietnamese attempted to escape to the east. In the ensuing fight, 15 of the enemy died, with the Marines sustaining no casualties.

Two days later, the enemy again ran afoul of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines. Two kilometers southeast of the 7th Marines' command post on Hill 55, a large North Vietnamese unit occupied a heavily fortified triangular-shaped position 500 meters wide, which included a trenchline and a number of bunkers. The

*Lieutenant Colonel McEwan related that Colonel Reverdy M. Hall, the commander of the 7th Marines, referred to him as the "magnet . . . [since] 1/26 always made contact with the enemy . . . ." LtCol Frederick J. McEwan, Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Colonel Bruce F. Meyers, the commander of the 26th Marines, related that under the Geneva Agreement, the medical supplies had to be used to treat captured prisoners of war. He remembered that all the supplies had to be evacuated out by helicopter. Among the supplies were cartons of brassieres and tampons, although there was no other indication of the presence of women. According to Meyers, "the battalion surgeon practically cried when he had to give up the finely crafted East German medical instruments. He lamented to me, 'Col. Meyers, these are better medical instruments than we get!'" Meyers Comments.

Marines fought the Communists through the afternoon of 15 June and into the early evening, making liberal use of close air support and artillery. When they overran the enemy positions at 1930, the Marines reported 84 North Vietnamese dead. Their own casualties were 7 killed in action and 15 wounded.[44]

The action near Hill 55 marked the end of the sweep through the Dodge City area and the focus of Operation Mameluke Thrust moved once again to the western valleys. On 14 June, the 3dBattalion, 5th Marines marched out from An Hoa, leaving Company K to guard the fire support base, and crossed the Song Yen into the Arizona Territory. Just across the river from An Hoa, Company I came under attack. A Communist mortar round killed the company commander, a platoon commander, and the company gunnery sergeant and seriously wounded the company executive officer, First Lieutenant Joseph T. Campbell. As the only officer left alive, Lieutenant Campbell refused evacuation and assumed command of the company. He directed medevac helicopters into and out of the landing zone and organized suppressive fire on the Communist positions nearby. Before he himself could be flown out, Lieutenant Campbell succumbed to his wounds. For his heroic action, he received the Navy Cross, posthumously.[45]

Northeast of Thuong Duc, another dramatic action took place the following day when Company K, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines received mortar fire while escorting a convoy. Corporal David M. Sivak volunteered to recover a machine gun abandoned during the initial contact. He crept uphill toward the weapon until a North Vietnamese soldier in a nearby fighting hole spotted him and began throwing hand grenades. Although wounded in the chest by a fragment, Sivak emptied 12 full magazines from his M16 at his tormentor.

Sivak finally reached the machine gun and continued advancing into the enemy position. The NVA soldier suddenly stuck his head out from a hidden tunnel. Deciding against running toward his comrades for fear of being shot in the back, Corporal Sivak threw the machine gun at the North Vietnamese, who then ducked back into the tunnel.

The enemy soldier looked out from the tunnel a second time and Sivak attacked with his bare hands.



Photo is from the Abel Collection

Marine Cpl David M. Sivak from the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines poses with various North Vietnamese weapons captured in a recent operation. In his hand he holds the K–Bar knife with which he killed a North Vietnamese soldier in a hand-to-hand fight.

The Communist fired his rifle, creasing Sivak's leg, and Sivak knocked the weapon from the man's hands. As the two grappled in the confines of the hole, the North Vietnamese bit the Marine savagely on the arm. Angered, Sivak bit him back, then drew his Kabar* and stabbed his opponent. The enemy soldier produced his own knife and stabbed Sivak in the back, but it was too late. The Marine had gained the upper hand. Sivak continued stabbing until he realized that the man had died.

Corporal Sivak remained in the hole until his comrades overran the hill. From captured documents, the Marines learned that the dead man was part of a nine-man North Vietnamese mortar forward observer team. Only when Sivak lost consciousness did his fellow Marines realize that he was wounded.

Corporal Sivak's adventure was not yet over. The story of his experience at the 1st Hospital Company is best told in his own words, recorded only three weeks after the incident:

> I went to 1st Hospital and the doctor started checking me out for malaria and I told him that wasn't wrong and he said, "What's wrong?" . . . . I said, "Well, I got stabbed in the back, I got bit in the arm, I got shrapnel in the chest, and I got shot in the leg." He couldn't believe it until he looked at it. He thought it was kinda funny. I wasn't in a mood to laugh at it. They thought I might have to get rabies shots from where I got bit in the arm, but I made out. All I had to do was get a tetanus shot. I was scared because rabies shots, you get 16 of them, they said, in the stomach. I got a weak stomach.[46]

Corporal Sivak's platoon sergeant, reflecting on Sivak's harrowing experience, said only, "I think the bite was worser than the stab."[47]

Retaining control of the 3d Battalion, the 26th Marines now absorbed the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, as well as Lieutenant Colonel Roger H. Barnard's 3d Battalion, 7th Marines. At 0815 on 17 June, two of Barnard's companies conducted a helicopter assault into the Hill 1235 area and began the task of patrolling in the difficult terrain of Tho Thenon. After a respite of five days for refurbishing, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines conducted a helicopter assault into the western end of Happy Valley, near the confluence of the Song Yang and the Song Iang. Meeting no opposition, the Marines turned to the now-familiar tasks of establishing a battalion patrol base and sweeping the assigned area.

On 19 June, the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines moved westward from the fire support base at Hill 52, following the Song Vu Gia toward Thuong Duc and searching the same ground covered one month before by the 3d Battalion at the beginning of the operation. It was the nature of the war that the only areas which were known to be secure were those areas physically occupied, thus, it was often necessary to retrace old steps in the search for the enemy. But this time, the Communists carefully avoided contact.

The 1st Battalion, 26th Marines continued to push through the valley, past Thuong Duc, then turned northward and followed the trace of the Song Yang to link up with the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines in Happy Valley on 27 June. The next day, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines linked up with the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines at the western edge of the Arizona Territory, southeast of Thuong Duc, then left the operation.

Southeast of An Hoa, in the Que Son area, the U.S. Army's Americal Division planned an offensive dubbed Operation Pocahontas Forest. The 1st Marine Division developed a plan to intercept Communist forces driven into the upper Song Thu Bon Valley by the Americal Division. At 1815 on 7 July, Battery A, 1st Battalion, 13th Marines established a fire support base on the west bank of the Song Thu Bon, near Nong Son, about 11 kilometers southwest of An Hoa.[48] Its mission was to provide artillery support to the Marine units which would be engaged in Operation Mameluke Thrust/Pocahontas Forest. The next morning, the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines conducted a helicopter assault into a landing zone along the Khe Dienne, also just west of the Song Thu Bon, but about three kilometers upstream of the new fire support base at Nong Son.

Elsewhere, on 9 July, Mameluke Thrust began to expand once again as the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines attacked into the Dodge City area and the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines entered the Song Cu De Valley (called "Elephant Valley") to conduct the "Northern Phase" of the operation. In Elephant Valley, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines found "no signs of well-utilized trails, prepared positions, [or] camp and harbor sites of any sizeable enemy force."[49] On 19 July, the battalion secured from the operation and returned to Phu Bai.

As intelligence reports continued to indicate the enemy planned a major attack on Da Nang during late July, the 1st Marine Division redistributed forces to meet the threat.[50] On 20 July, the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines shifted from its blocking position near Nong Son, back to An Hoa. Two days later, the 26th Marines, with the 1st and 3d Battalions, went north to Phu Bai,

*The Marine Corps issue combat knife.

relieving the 5th Marines in Operation Houston.

The expected Communist ground assault on Da Nang did not materialize during July. In place of it, the enemy launched the heaviest mortar and rocket attack on Da Nang since Tet. On 23 July, 143 rounds of rocket and mortar fire fell on the city and air base, killing 6 and wounding 76. The enemy fire damaged a runway, six helicopters, a Rockwell International OV–10 Bronco, and an Air Force Fairchild C–123 Provider. Recognizing the need for further protection against the rocket threat, III MAF earlier had directed the erection of a Da Nang Anti-infiltration System (DAIS) in cooperation with ARVN forces. At the beginning of July, generally following the outer trace of the Da Nang rocket belt, the 1st Marine Division had started work on the DAIS, which was to include concertina and barbed wire fencing, sensors, towers, and bunkers. By the end of the month, Marine engineers and ARVN had completed about 65 percent of the first of two increments of the planned project. Obviously, the uncompleted DAIS offered only a minor impediment to the enemy rocketeers during the month.[51]*

The Marines attributed the enemy's failure to carry out the expected ground attacks in the city to the success of Operation Mameluke Thrust. As one unit history recorded:

> Prisoners and documents continued to indicate that the enemy had a definite plan for infiltration of Da Nang city proper with sapper and related forces. . . . It appeared that *Group 44 (Quang Da Special Zone) Headquarters* endeavored to carry out such a plan . . ., but was unable to consummate the action due to interdiction of his forces prior to initiation of his offensive.[52]

During the last week of July, Colonel Paul G. Graham's 5th Marines redeployed to An Hoa from Phu Bai and began operations in the An Hoa basin immediately. The day it arrived, the 2d Battalion moved to the field, northeast of the fire support base, and soon encountered numerous small North Vietnamese units. After these initial engagements, contact tapered off dramatically. By the end of the month, the enemy appeared to have evacuated the An Hoa area.

In the Arizona Territory, the month ended with an unusual sighting reported by a reconnaissance team. On 28 July, Stingray patrol "Scandinavia" sighted four Soviet-built PT–76 tanks and a wheeled vehicle barely 3,500 meters northwest of the An Hoa fire support base. An air observer confirmed the sighting and Scandinavia called for close air support and artillery fire on the area, resulting in four secondary explosions.[53] The following morning, Teams Albrook and Scandinavia reported two vehicles, at least one of which was tracked, moving in circles about a kilometer northeast of the previous sighting. Scandinavia directed artillery and air attacks against the vehicles, but could not observe the target effectively. Later that day, an agent report told of two destroyed armored fighting vehicles in the same location as the first sighting.[54] To verify these reports, Companies D and F, 5th Marines searched the area of the sightings, but found no evidence of tanks.

August began with a significant enemy contact for Stingray patrol "Flaky Snow" in the Arizona Territory. At 0405 on 1 August, a company of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong rushed Flaky Snow's position from the north, using grenades, satchel charges, bangalore torpedoes, and RPG fire to overwhelm the Marines. The enemy withdrew immediately, having killed 5 Marines and wounded 11. To complicate matters further for Flaky Snow, the attack temporarily knocked its radio out of action, which prevented it from calling for help. The team got the radio working again at 0600, and called for the reaction force. Within 20 minutes, help arrived. The reaction force landed by helicopter, under fire from the west, to find all of the observation post's bunkers destroyed and a North Vietnamese flag flying over the position. The Flaky Snow Marines claimed to have killed seven of their attackers, but a search of the area revealed only three bodies.[55]

The frequency of enemy contact continued to rise in the beginning of August. In the Arizona Territory during the first two days of the month, A Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, 1st Air Cavalry Division, under the operational control of the 5th Marines, killed 96 Communists in 30 hours.[56] The 5th Marines continued search and clear operations with Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Thompson's 1st Battalion in the Arizona Territory and Lieutenant Colonel James W. Stemple's 2d Battalion northeast of An Hoa. Lieutenant Colonel Stemple recalled that his battalion "was invested from the An Hoa combat base to Liberty Bridge, and was involved in activity with the enemy on a daily basis . . . ."[57]

At 0915, on 6 August, Companies E and F engaged a North Vietnamese company near the village of Cu Ban, scene of many fights between the Communists and Operation Allen Brook forces in the previous weeks. Corporal Robert G. Fante, a squad leader assigned to Company F, maneuvered his men forward, pressing home the attack on the Communist positions.

*See Chapter 28 for further discussion of the Da Nang barrier.

Spotting a 75mm recoilless rifle, he singlehandedly assaulted the position, capturing the weapon and killing or driving off its crew members. Corporal Fante continued to lead his squad on a rampage through the enemy's defenses, clearing bunkers with hand grenades and pursuing the retreating North Vietnamese. He was leading this advance when killed by enemy fire. For his courageous acts, Corporal Fante was awarded the Navy Cross posthumously.[58]

After overrunning the enemy position, the Marines found 23 North Vietnamese dead and 34 tons of rice, in addition to the recoilless rifle captured by Corporal Fante. Fante was the only Marine killed in the fight, but 21 others and 1 Navy corpsman suffered wounds.[59] An additional 46 Marines sustained injuries when an aircraft accidentally dropped a load of napalm bombs on Company F's position during the fight. Lieutenant Colonel Stemple recalled that a bomb hit the reserve platoon of Company F and just missed his command group by a few yards.[60]

The two battalions continued the search and clear operations in their assigned sectors for the next nine days without significant contact. The Marines searched caves, bunkers, and dwellings, patrolled roads and rice paddies, and killed Communists one or two at a time. Casualties continued to trickle into the hospitals and aid stations in the rear as Marines fell victim to the familiar enemy formula: mines, boobytraps, and sniper fire by day; harassing mortar fire by night.

Indications that the enemy was preparing to launch his expected offensive continued to build. On 10 August, acting on intelligence reports, the 1st Marine Division issued instructions directing subordinate units to prepare to assist in the defense of the DaNang vital area. The order called for reduced "day workloads . . . to allow adequate rest [for] all hands" and a concomitant increase in night activities. The tanks sighted in the Arizona Territory a few weeks earlier now caused a flurry of interest in reviewing and updating the division's antimechanized plans.[61]

On 16 August, "usually reliable sources, in addition to two counter intelligence agents" disclosed that the *402d Sapper Battalion*, the *R–20 Battalion*, and possibly a regimental headquarters were located three kilometers southeast of Liberty Bridge in the village of Chau Phong.[62] The location of such a large concentration of enemy troops less than 30 kilometers south of Da Nang was a further indication that the enemy offensive would soon begin, accompanied by the previously anticipated sapper attacks on the city proper. The 1st Marine Division acted quickly, ordering the 5th Marines to surprise the enemy battalions at Chau Phong and to destroy them in their staging areas.

At 2300, the night of 16 August, three Marine infantry battalions silently converged on the hamlet of Chau Phong (2). Lieutenant Colonel LeRoy E. Watson's BLT 2/7, participating in Operation Swift Play in the hills south of Go Noi Island, shifted into a blocking position 1,200 meters east of the objective along a major stream. Stemple's 2d Battalion, 5th Marines sealed the west side of the objective along another stream 2,000 meters from Chau Phong. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, now under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Rufus A. Seymour, flew into An Hoa and conducted a night approach march into an assembly area near My Son (1), about five kilometers southwest of the Communist positions. H–hour was set for 0700, 17 August.[63]

Lieutenant Colonel Ben A. Moore, Jr.'s gunners of the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines drew first blood with an artillery preparation that began at 0400 and lasted until 0700. The original plan called for the artillery barrage to be followed by a low-level air attack, also dropping smoke and CS gas on the objective area. According to Lieutenant Colonel Stemple, torrential rains after midnight, however, forced the cancellation of the air strikes until mid- and late-morning without the smoke or CS. The original plan called for his battalion to initiate a predawn "attack by fire" so as to confuse the NVA as to the direction of attack and to hold them in place. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines was then to make the main assault attacking northeast into Chau Pong (2). Stemple's troops opened fire, according to plan, but he recalled that inadvertently, elements of BLT 2/7 moved in front of Seymour's battalion and delayed the main assault. About 200 North Vietnamese, however, attempted to flee to the east at 1200, and Companies F and G, BLT 2/7 were waiting for them. Marines of these two companies reported killing 53 of the enemy while suffering only 11 men wounded. At 1500, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines finally assaulted and captured the hamlet, finding "many enemy dead, weapons, equipment, and food supplies." The enemy cache yielded significant quantities of stores, including 88 tons of rice and enough medical supplies to support 500 men.[64]

During the night of 17 August, the three battalions adjusted their lines. At first light, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines moved northward across a branch line of the National Railroad to search the hamlet of Chau Phong (1). At the same time, BLT 2/7 crossed

the stream toward the hamlet, then swung northward with orders to attack and seize the hamlets of La Thap (1) and Le Nam (3), which were about 1,500 meters north of Chau Phong. At 0700, Company E, BLT 2/7 engaged a North Vietnamese company defending a low hill just northeast of Chau Phong. The enemy troops, described as "fresh" and "determined," were well-equipped, even to the point of wearing helmets and body armor.[65] The Marines returned fire and attempted to envelop the enemy, but the determined defense put up by the North Vietnamese drove them to cover. Taking up positions 600 meters away, the Marines directed artillery fire and airstrikes (the latter including CS gas) on the enemy, driving them from the hill. The North Vietnamese left 12 dead in the position, while Company E lost 6 Marines killed, and 25 wounded.[66] On Company E's left, Company G, BLT 2/7 also encountered a North Vietnamese unit which similarly impeded the battalion's attack to the north. With BLT 2/7 bogged down by these pockets of resistance, the 5th Marines modified the original plan and ordered the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines to capture the hamlets of La Thap (1) and Le Nam (3).

At 1500, as Company G, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines approached the objective, they engaged an enemy platoon defending the hamlet of La Thap (1). The Marines advanced, returning fire, but enemy resistance increased. A five-hour shootout ensued, during which six flights of aircraft bombed the enemy, while the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines provided a heavy dose of artillery fire on the hamlet. At 2000, Company G assaulted and captured the position, killing 37 North Vietnamese and effectively ending the battle of Chau Phong. Seven Company G Marines died and 19 were wounded in the fight.[67]

Operation Mameluke Thrust continued for some time. But soon after the battle for Chau Phong, the Communists launched their long-awaited offensive in the Da Nang area, diverting III MAF's energies to deal with the new threat. By this time in northern I Corps, the 3d Marine Division had launched its own offensive against the North Vietnamese Divisions in both the DMZ sector and in western Quang Tri Province.

PART IV

THE WAR CONTINUES: OFFENSIVE AND COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

CHAPTER 18

3d Division Takes the Offensive

The Enemy Situation—The Offensive Takes Shape—The Eastern DMZ
The Pressure Continues—Into the Western Mountains—Southern Quang Tri and Thua Thien

The Enemy Situation

In northern I Corps, enemy activity throughout Quang Tri Province was light and sporadic during the early days of June. With the virtual destruction of two regiments of the veteran *320th NVA Division* in the eastern sector of the DMZ in late May, enemy ground activity in the province's northeastern quadrant decreased markedly. What enemy activity there was, was generally limited to long-range rocket and artillery attacks on allied positions from within and north of the Demilitarized Zone. Although squad- and platoon-sized enemy units did engage wide-ranging allied patrols, no large North Vietnamese force attempted to attack allied installations or formations.

Further west, agent reports placed the *270th NVA Regiment* and *27th Independent Regiment* in Leatherneck Square, the area bounded by Con Thien (A-4), Gio Linh, Dong Ha, and Cam Lo. Intelligence analysts assumed that these two enemy units would not only attack allied installations in the region, but attempt to destroy the Cam Lo Refugee Resettlement Project and interdict Route 9.

Within the central portion of the province, units subordinate to the *Quang Tri Liberation Front* or *7th Front*, including elements of the *812th Regiment*, and the *808th* and *818th Separate Battalions*, although unlocated, were poised to venture out of their jungle sanctuaries on the Quang Tri-Thua Thien provincial border and launch attacks against Quang Tri City and surrounding allied bases. Forward elements of the three enemy units were known to be in the countryside surrounding the city, attempting to obtain rice and recruits.

In the western reaches of the province, centered on the Khe Sanh Plateau, the *304th NVA Division* was joined in late May by the *88th* and *102d Regiments*, *308th NVA Division*. The enemy regiments, which had arrived recently from Hanoi, were to reinforce the *304th* and launch attacks against Khe Sanh Combat Base and Route 9, from Ca Lu west to the Laotian border. The number of enemy units located within the Demilitarized Zone area and in Quang Tri Province at the beginning of June was estimated at 36 infantry and 6 support battalions, and confirmed enemy combat strength placed at 23,100 troops.[1]

The Offensive Takes Shape

Upon taking over in late May, the new 3d Marine Division commander, Major General Raymond G. Davis, found the maneuver elements of the division generally occupying fixed positions in four operational areas centered on the Demilitarized Zone from Cua Viet to Khe Sanh. In the coastal lowlands, or Napoleon-Saline area of operations, Colonel Milton A. Hull's 3d Marines and Lieutenant Colonel George F. Meyers' 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion occupied Camp Kistler at the Cua Viet's port facility. The 1st and 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, located nearby, conducted periodic sweeps of the area north and northwest of the port facility, while companies of Lieutenant Colonel Meyers' battalion occupied the C–4 strongpoint and conducted similar sweeps of the immediate area. Also under the operational control of the 3d Marines were elements of Lieutenant Colonel Michael V. Palatas' 1st Battalion, 9th Marines.

Northwest of Cua Viet, in the Kentucky area of operations, the 9th Marines under Colonel Richard B. Smith provided security for the outposts within the area of operations, from Gio Linh to Cam Lo, as well as the major lines of communications, Routes 1, 9, and 561. Under Smith's operational control was Lieutenant Colonel Francis J. Heath, Jr.'s 2d Battalion, 26th Marines which secured the strongpoints at Con Thien, A–3, C–2, and C–2 bridge, all strung along Route 561, a north-south provincial road stretching from the Demilitarized Zone to Cam Lo. The regimental headquarters and 1st and 3d Battalions, 26th Marines had been deployed to Da Nang on 18 May from the Quang Tri sector to

participate in the 1st Marine Division's operation Mameluke Thrust.*

Headquartered at Camp Carroll in the Lancaster II area of operations were Colonel Edward J. Miller's 4th Marines and a battalion of the 9th Marines. The 1st and 2d Battalions, 4th Marines, the latter organized as a battalion landing team (BLT), and the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines secured combat bases at Camp Carroll, Thon Son Lam, and Ca Lu, all centered on Route 9. At Ca Lu, under the operational control of the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines was Lieutenant Colonel Daniel J. Quick's 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, which like the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, was organized as a battalion landing team.**

The largest of the division's four operational areas was Scotland II, which encompassed the western third of Quang Tri Province. Primary responsibility for operations within this area lay with the 3d Marine Division's Task Force Hotel, a multi-battalion task force commanded by Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General Carl W. Hoffman. Hoffman's task force consisted of two battalions of Colonel Stanley S. Hughes' 1st Marines, and the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Jack W. Davis.

The three battalions under Brigadier General Hoffman's command were assigned the task of maintaining the defense of Khe Sanh Combat Base and the surrounding outposts on Hills 881, 861, 950, and other prominent terrain features. In addition, troops of the task force secured Route 9, the vital overland resupply route for the division's western-most fortified positions, from Landing Zone Stud and Ca Lu to Khe Sanh.

Providing artillery support for the division's ground elements were the four organic battalions of the 12th Marines under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Wilson A. Kluckman. A battery from the regiment, or another allied artillery unit under its operational control, was in position at every combat base and strongpoint, ready to support the maneuver battalions and to respond to enemy attacks by fire on allied installations or populated areas.

With the ground elements of the division generally tied to fixed positions, the tactical effectiveness of such a disposition of forces was limited. A considerable number of troops were needed to defend these installations strung out along the Demilitarized Zone. In turn, these fixed installations presented lucrative targets for both North Vietnamese ground forces and artillery gunners. Beyond immediate allied patrol zones, large areas of Quang Tri Province virtually belonged to the enemy.

The overall tactical situation in late May, therefore, might be viewed as one of balance. On the one hand the North Vietnamese had been soundly defeated in their attempts against major Marine bases at Khe Sanh and Dong Ha. On the other, allied forces had not attempted to penetrate the enemy's large base areas nor attempted to disrupt his supply and infiltration routes deep in the mountainous jungles of western Quang Tri.

This tactical disposition of the division's forces would be turned around with General Davis' assumption of command. Buttressed by the presence of two U.S. Army divisions, which greatly strengthened troop density in northern I Corps, Davis prepared to take the war to the enemy. After reducing the number of troops at fixed positions, he placed the 3d Marine Division in a more mobile posture, characteristic of ongoing Army air cavalry and airborne operations. "The way to get it done," Davis later recalled, "was to get out of those fixed positions and get mobility, to go and destroy the enemy on our terms—not sit there and absorb the shot and shell and frequent penetrations that he was able to mount."[2]

As Lieutenant General Rosson's deputy at Provisional Corps, Vietnam, Davis had observed first-hand the mobile operations of the 1st Air Cavalry Division. With extensive helicopter support, air cavalry troops "forgot about real estate" and applied the necessary forces directly against enemy troop dispositions.[3] Drawing not only on these experiences, but also on classical amphibious concepts, and deep vertical envelopment techniques developed during the late 1950s, he devised a synthesis that combined elements of all three.[4]

Davis' concept of mobile operations was dependent upon adequate and timely helicopter support. "I was very fortunate in this," he was later to state, "that the later [and more powerful] model of the CH–46 was arriving in-country in large numbers." In addition,

*See Chapter 17 for Mameluke Thrust. Colonel John C. Studt, who commanded the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines, observed that his battalion's stay at Quang Tri "was like R&R (rest and recreation) for the troops after Khe Sanh." Much of the mission around Quang Tri for the battalion involved rice protection and night security. He recalled that they had some success with "the idea of building small ambush killer teams around experienced deer hunters, i.e. if you can ambush a deer, you should be able to ambush a VC." Col John C. Studt, Comments on draft, dtd 22Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**BLT 2/4 and BLT 3/1 were the landing forces of SLFs Alpha and Bravo, respectively. Both battalions had been ashore and attached to the 3d Marine Division since late January. On 3 June, BLT 3/1 returned to the operational control of SLF Bravo. See Chapter 30.

due to his close working relationship with General Rosson, Davis had the promise of Army helicopter support if needed.

> This was a fine thing about my command out there, Rosson...guaranteed me that when we'd go into these tactical operations, I never needed to look back over my shoulder a single time and wonder if I was going to be supported. I knew that they were going to give me the helicopters I would need."[5*]

More important, however, was the creation of Provisional Marine Aircraft Group 39 at Quang Tri in April and the assignment later, initially on a temporary basis, of Assistant Wing Commander, Brigadier General Homer S. Hill, to the 3d Division headquarters. Acting as the Marine air commander for northern I Corps, General Hill, as Davis noted, "had enough authority delegated to him from the wing, where he could execute things, he could order air units to do things." Highly flexible mobile operations and the lives of individual Marines taking part in such operations would be totally dependent upon air. Without a responsive air commander on the scene, these operations, Davis continued, would be "a shambles" and Marines would suffer.[6] With helicopter transport assured, division Marines would begin to move from relatively static positions south of the Demilitarized Zone, into the mountainous regions of Quang Tri Province in search of the enemy, his infiltration routes, and his supplies.**

In addition to moving the division toward a more mobile posture, General Davis reinstituted unit integrity. As a result of the promulgation of the M series table of organization, Marine battalions were delegated the capability of self-administration. The regiment was to be "responsive to an administrative concept in which fiscal, personnel, supply and maintenance functions and transactions usually proceed directly from subordinate elements to the division."[7] The regiment, therefore, was essentially a tactical headquarters.

Prior to the reinstitution of unit integrity, there was a constant rotation of battalions among regiments. The 4th Marines in early June, for example, controlled a battalion of the 1st Marines, two battalions of the 9th Marines, and only one of its organic battalions. Under such circumstances, one of Davis' regimental commanders termed regiments "warlords" and the battalions "roving bands of mercenaries. The regiments had little interest in the logistics, personnel, supply, and maintenance fields of the battalions."[8] Battalions, on the other hand, "felt . . . they were commanded by strangers. Every unit has kind of a personality of its own, often reflecting the personality of the commander, so you never got to know who did what best, or who would you give this mission to."[9] Davis gradually changed that; each regiment, under normal operating circumstances, would now control its organic battalions. With the change came unit cohesion, cooperation, esprit de corps, and "a greater awareness on the part of the staff officers in the regiment and their counterparts in the battalions, about one another's capabilities and personalities."[10***] Davis later commented that this was "the key to our success."[11]

The most lucrative targets for the division's first mobile operation were the large enemy formations which remained to the south and west of Khe Sanh. These included remnants of the defeated *304th NVA Division* and at least two regiments of the recently infiltrated *308th NVA Division*. Elements of the two enemy divisions were concentrating their main efforts at interdicting the segment of Route 9 between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh and in constructing a new supply route from

*Colonel Vaughn R. Stuart, who assumed command of the 3d Marines in July, commented, however, that there were very few Army helicopters available to the 3d Marine Division except for command and control and the Army Sikorsky CH–54 Flying Crane. He recalled a situation when he was sent only two CH–46 helicopters and that "it took all day and all that night to get the infantry and artillery into position and ready to fire missions at first light the next morning." He wondered where the helicopter support from the Army and Provisional Corps was on that occasion. Col Vaughn R. Stuart, Comments on draft, dtd 20Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Stuart Comments.

**See Chapter 25 for further discussion of the relarionship between the 3d Marine Division and the Wing over the employment of helicopters.

***Colonel Stuart, who assumed command of the 3d Marines on 15 July 68, took exception to the above statements. He wrote that the regiment "had absolute tactical authority over those organizations under its Op[erational] Con[trol], and the regimental commander with any leadership ability at all knew the full status of the subordinate units. If there were any deficiencies in supply, maintenance, or personnel, he had all of the authority necessary to get those deficiencies corrected." He also took exception to terms such as "warlord" and "roving bands of mercenaries." According to Stuart, the battalions "had missions directed by the regiments in response to missions given by the division." As regimental commander, he could not worry about such niceties concerning the personality or ability of a particular battalion commander to carry out a particular mission. During this period, his selection usually depended upon whatever "battalion was the least occupied." Stuart Comments. On the other hand, Colonel Billy R. Duncan, who commanded the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines from January to August 1968, wrote that the relationships of the attached battalions to the regiments was ". . . difficult at best." He stated that the regiments had little interest in the logistics and support elements of the battalions. Col Billy R. Duncan, Comments on draft, dtd 15Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

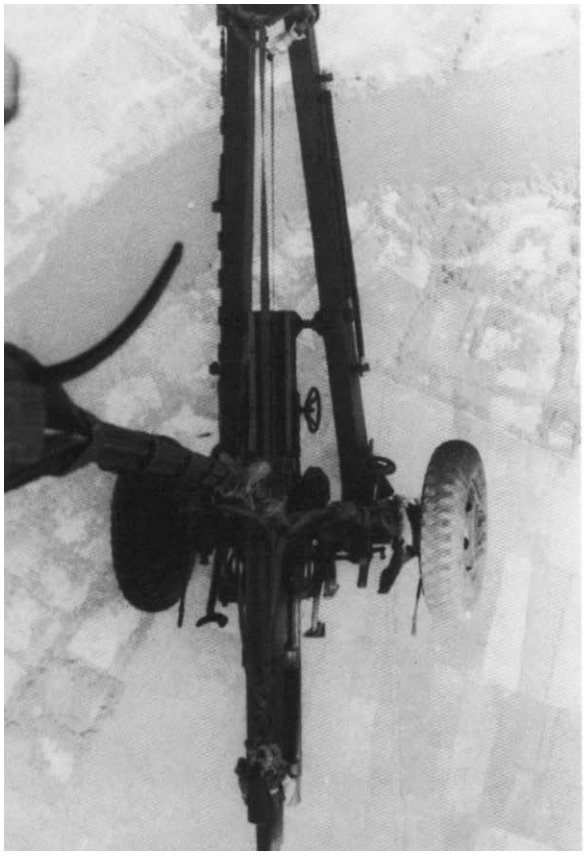


Photo courtesy of Col Roger W. Peard, USMC (Ret)

The crew chief's view through the "Hell Hole" of a Marine Sikorsky CH–53 Sea Stallion is of an artillery piece dangling below the helicopter. The crew chief had the responsibility to report any swinging of the load to the pilot.



Photo from the Abel Collection

Troops from the 9th Marines unload mortar ammunition from a Marine Boeing Vertol CH–46 Sea Knight helicopter on top of a mountain fire base near the Laotian border. The fire base concept enhanced the mobility of the Marine infantry in the rugged terrain.

Laos across the southern portion of the Vietnamese Salient, that portion of southwestern Quang Tri Province which juts into Laos.

The primary responsibility for offensive operations within the Scotland II area of operation rested with Brigadier General Hoffman's Task Force Hotel. Working closely with representatives of the 3d Division and the 1st and 4th Marines, Hoffman and his staff prepared an operations plan which called for a series of heliborne assaults far to the south and west of Route 9. During discussions leading up to the final plan, Hoffman noted that in moving into the operational area, the Marine units involved would be placing themselves beyond the maximum range of allied artillery at Khe Sanh and Ca Lu. The solution was simple; the artillery would accompany the infantry. This was not the first time artillery would be moved to forward positions to support the maneuvering elements of the division. In this case, fire support bases would have to be established in the very heart of enemy-held territory.

Since these fire support bases would be constructed in mountainous, jungle-covered terrain, almost always on an easily defensible mountain peak or razorback ridgeline, the artillery would have to be inserted and extracted by helicopter. All resupply for the fire support bases and maneuver elements would likewise have to be accomplished by air. Once established in mutually supporting pairs, 8,000 meters apart with a 3,000-meter overshoot to cover enemy mortars, these fire bases would provide continuous, overlapping artillery support to infantry units operating beneath the fan. When infantry operations moved beyond the range of the 8,000-meter artillery fan, another fire support base would be established.

Initially, the construction of these forward artillery positions would prove to be a complicated and difficult

task. Often selected from the air, the sites had to meet three specific criteria in addition to satisfying the requirement that they be at specified ranges from each other to support the scheme of maneuver. The site needed to be large enough to accommodate at least one six-gun 105mm howitzer artillery battery and it had to be defensible by an infantry platoon, or in rare cases by a reinforced platoon. To meet the third criteria, the position itself had to be capable of being constructed within 24 to 36 hours.[12] Once the Marines had selected a site that met the criteria, they accomplished the initial clearing with aerial ordnance or artillery. Engineers supported by infantry either moved overland or were helilifted to the site and would then secure the area and complete the work of demolition. A small air-transportable bulldozer would be brought in to prepare berms and pits for the artillery. Finally, helicopters would transport to the fire support base the guns, battery personnel and their supplies, and the initial stock of ammunition.

Task Force Hotel initially established two fire support bases, Robin and Loon, to support the search operations south of Route 9. As in all subsequent operations of the division that involved the use of forward artillery positions, these two fire bases were positioned so that their artillery fans overlapped.

Following five days of extensive artillery preparation, which included 30 B–52 sorties, Colonel Stanley S. Hughes' 1st Marines launched the first phase of the operation on 2 June. Early that morning, the members of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines conducted heliborne assaults from their assembly areas on Hill 558 and Landing Zone Stud into Landing Zone Robin and then further south into Loon. Both landing zones, south of Route 9, were near the limit of the range of Khe Sanh-based artillery. The two battalions then swept north towards Route 9, encountering scattered but light enemy resistance.

While the 1st Marines conducted their sweep northward, four battalions under the operational control of Colonel Edward J. Miller's 4th Marines assaulted into the area and began search operations to the south and west of Robin and Loon, where they encountered stiff enemy opposition. A battalion-sized enemy ground attack on Loon coupled with heavy artillery support from guns based at Co Roc in Laos dictated that Loon be abandoned in favor of a new fire base, Torch, five kilometers to the southwest.

Despite heavy enemy resistance, not only directed against Torch, but also against the maneuvering elements, the 4th Marines destroyed sections of a newly constructed enemy road and large quantities of equipment and supplies. With the operations' end on 18 June, the 1st and 4th Marines moved out of the area, leaving more than 650 enemy dead. Four of the six battalions committed by the *308th NVA Division* were decimated, and subsequently the division itself was dropped from the allied order of battle of enemy forces. First Lieutenant William J. Spangler, the commander of Company B, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, recalled the operation as very successful, but that the North Vietnamese "use of border sanctuaries precluded total destruction." Although the Marines patrolled up to the Laotian border and took both direct and indirect fire from NVA forces in Laos, Spangler observed, "we did not pursue them with troops or supporting arms."[13*]

It was clear from the search operations conducted southwest of Khe Sanh that the enemy was not prepared to cope with this new form of highly mobile warfare. Artillery batteries providing a movable support fan under which the infantry could maneuver; maneuver from the high ground to the low in contrast to the older method of moving up to search the high ground. In these operations, each company of a battalion operated independently of the others in terms of mutual support. As long as they remained within the 8,000-meter artillery fan, there was no requirement that rifle companies operate together. Each company was assigned a four- to nine-kilometer-square area within which a landing zone was established to facilitate resupply and the evacuation of casualties. Patrols would then fan out from the landing zone until the company's assigned square was thoroughly searched and cleared. Once the initial square was cleared, the company was then lifted by helicopter to another area within the artillery fan and the search and clear process would begin again. This type of maneuver would continue until the entire area of operations had been given a careful and detailed search.

An alternative method developed during these operations was for a battalion to be inserted onto a heavily wooded ridgeline where an artillery fire support base would be quickly established. One company would then move out from the fire support base and seize a high knob along the ridgeline where a landing zone would be cut out of the jungle while the company's platoons searched the fingers. At the same time, a second company would pass through the first and attack along the ridgeline, seize the next hilltop,

*A detailed account of Operations Robin North and Robin South can be found in Chapter 16.

cut a landing zone, and again search down the fingers. Using this technique a battalion could search a major ridgeline thoroughly and in the process discover major enemy trail networks and supply caches. Both of these search and clear methods proved highly successful in the operations carried out southwest of Khe Sanh and would become standard for all future division operations run in the mountainous areas of Quang Tri Province.

The use of these two search methods resulted in the disclosure of the enemy's mode of logistical support. The North Vietnamese, it was discovered, relied heavily on a series of pre-positioned store sites and interconnecting trail networks to support his forces. Along a trail at intervals of about an eight-hour walk apart, Marines would find a sizeable enemy way station, composed generally of bunkers, supply caches, huts, and a hospital. Enemy porters apparently would carry supplies from large depots in Laos or North Vietnam, stopping at a way station where they would remain hidden during the day and then proceed to the next station or return for another load. In general, most enemy porters relied on guides instead of maps and used well-marked, high-speed trails. "We came to realize," noted General Davis, "that if we were able to keep Marines on these trails, even from time to time, and were able to clean out his way stations, destroy his bunkers and his supplies periodically, that we could severely limit his activity." This realization, he concluded, "was a major reason for our change in our concept of operation."[14]

With the end of Operations Robin North and Robin South, the 1st Marines returned to the task of providing mobile security for Khe Sanh Combat Base, the surrounding high terrain, Route 9, and supply convoys travelling the road from Landing Zone Stud to Khe Sanh. Colonel Edward J. Miller's 4th Marines, instead of returning to Camp Carroll, were helilifted to Ca Lu where a temporary regimental headquarters was established, and the regiment's battalions were assigned the task of securing vital installations along Route 9, east from Khe Sanh to Camp Carroll.

In early June the decision was made to deactivate Khe Sanh Combat Base and shift the major Marine installation in western Quang Tri eastward to Landing Zone Stud. The 3d Marine Division units were now operating well beyond the range of Khe Sanh-based artillery, and the base itself had become more of a liability than an asset since it tied down large numbers of division troops to defend it, while they might have been better employed in mobile operations carried out on the pattern of Robin North and Robin South. Finally, the base presented a large and continuing target for North Vietnamese attacks, and was no longer considered as vital to allied defensive plans as it had under those championed by former MACV commander, General William C. Westmoreland.*

Echoing the views of General Creighton Abrams, who relieved Westmoreland in mid-June, General Cushman of III MAF, General Rosson of Prov Corps, and General Davis, the MACV press release noted:

> Friendly forces must make maximum use of their superior fire power and mobility. Mobile forces, tied to no specific terrain, must be used to the utmost to attack, intercept, reinforce or take whatever action is most appropriate to meet the increased enemy threats. Therefore, we have decided to continue the mobile posture adopted in western Quang Tri Province with Operation Pegasus in April. This decision makes the operation of the base at Khe Sanh unnecessary.[15]

During the latter days of June as Marine engineers made steady progress in converting Landing Zone Stud into a permanent forward operating base, the 1st Marines, now under the command of Colonel Ross T. Dwyer, Jr., continued with the evacuation and destruction of Khe Sanh. The regiment also provided security for Route 9 and Fire Support Bases Shepherd and Cates, formerly known as Landing Zones Mike and Lima, respectively, and the development of Landing Zone Hawk. But the enemy, who in the past had exerted such strenuous efforts to dislodge Marine forces from the base, now appeared reluctant to let them leave. In a series of sharp engagements fought during late June and the early days of July, elements of the 1st and 4th Marines thwarted repeated enemy attempts to break the security screen around Khe Sanh and Route 9 and disrupt the orderly deactivation of the base.**

The closing of Khe Sanh marked the definite abandonment of the static defense concept against North Vietnamese Army units in western Quang Tri Province. The 3d Marine Division henceforth was committed to what General Davis termed the "mobile concept" of offensive operations. This concept, or combination of techniques, was to rely on forward artillery positions and deep vertical envelopment to carry the war to the enemy throughout the division's area of operations.

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*See the discussion in Chapter 16.

**For a more detailed examination of the deactivation of Khe Sanh Combat Base, see again Chapter 16.

The Eastern DMZ

The enemy generally avoided contact with 3d Marine Division forces operating within the Lancaster II, Kentucky, and Napoleon-Saline areas of operation during the month of June. Although wide-ranging division patrols did engage small groups of enemy forces, no major engagements such as those of May took place.

Within the Napoleon-Saline area of operations, Colonel Hull's 3d Marines, with the assistance of the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion and companies of the Army's 8th and 9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, continued to patrol the northern and southern banks and tributaries of the Song Cua Viet with the mission to ensure both the uninterrupted passage of shipping and to deny the enemy access to possible rocket sites. Patrols from the 3d Marines also continued to scour the coastal region of the province to protect the ongoing rice harvest. In addition, the regiment provided security for both equipment and personnel involved in dredging operations throughout the Cua Viet river system.

Throughout the month the 3d Marines conducted numerous daily sweeps and ambushes within its area of operations, concentrating on trail networks, river crossings, and village complexes known to harbor enemy sympathizers. Although finding and destroying a large number of enemy bunkers, spider holes, and supply caches, the Marines encountered few enemy.

While avoiding direct contact with Colonel Hull's patrols, the enemy instead relied on his DMZ-based artillery to inflict casualties on friendly forces. On 19 June and again on the 21st and 24th, Camp Kistler received a total of 111 rounds of enemy artillery resulting in 10 minor casualties and the destruction of a large ammunition bunker and gasoline storage facility. Artillery and naval gunfire counter-batteries produced several secondary explosions.

On 25 June, the 3d Marines assumed responsibility for the eastern portion of Leatherneck Square. Despite the lack of enemy contact, the heliborne assault and five-day search of the area marked the first time in a year that the regiment, its three organic battalions, and direct support artillery had operated together.

To the west, in the Kentucky area, Colonel Richard B. Smith's 9th Marines continued to conduct numerous sweeps and ambushes from static positions at Con Thien, A–3, C–2, and C–3. At the same time, Colonel Smith gradually reduced the regiment's security commitment to these four positions by shifting an ever-increasing proportion of Marines under his command to field operations. In addition, regimental forces continued to develop a viable road network and a series of landing zones within the western portion of Leatherneck Square.

While there was a sharp decrease in enemy contact and artillery, mortar, and rocket fire compared to the previous month, the few engagements which took place were sharp and deadly. Shortly after noon on 6 June, for example, a reinforced platoon from Company E, 26th Marines observed and then engaged an estimated enemy company while on patrol 1,800 meters southeast of Con Thien. Reinforced by the command group and a rifle platoon from Company H, the patrol took the enemy under fire with small arms and 81mm mortars. The result was 14 enemy killed and 25 Marine casualties, 14 killed and 11 wounded.

The same day, the 9th Marines assumed responsibility for the Lancaster II area of operations from the 4th Marines, and a regimental command group was deployed from Dong Ha to Camp Carroll. Like the Kentucky area, the Lancaster area experienced no major enemy-initiated ground action during June, although the enemy did attempt to interdict Route 9 with ambushes and land mines and took Camp Carroll and Landing Zone Stud under rocket fire, resulting in the destruction of several ammunition and gasoline dumps and the wounding of 10 Marines.

Near the end of June, Lieutenant Colonel Michael V. Palatas' 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, in conjunction with Army Special Forces and Vietnamese regional, popular, and National Police Field forces, began a deliberate cordon in the Cua Valley, southeast of Camp Carroll. During operations around Khe Sanh earlier in the year, many native Montagnards were brought to the Cam Lo area where they were resettled temporarily with a large number of Vietnamese that had been evacuated from Leatherneck Square following Operation Hickory in 1967. In early June, it was decided to resettle the Montagnards permanently in the Cua Valley near the village of Thon Duc Kinh, four kilometers southeast of Camp Carroll. Palatas' battalion was given the task of clearing the village of known Viet Cong suspects and ensuring the area was secure enough to begin construction of the resettlement camp.

On the night of 21 June, squad-sized patrols from the battalion walked into the area, secured landing zone sites, and blocked likely enemy escape routes. At dawn the following morning, a platoon was helilifted into each landing zone, completing the cordon around Thon Duc Kinh. Later in the day, Marine and



Top photo is from the Abel Collection and bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371563

Top, Marines of the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion help South Vietnamese villagers pack their worldly goods, even to the extent of placing a thatched roof on top of the vehicle, to be transported to a resettlement village. Below, Navy Corpsman HM–3 Forrest G. McDonald bandages a Montagnard child's head to prevent scalp sores from becoming infected, as the mother looks on.



Vietnamese forces conducted a house-to-house search of the village, arresting more than 100 Viet Cong suspects of whom half were detained. Once the village was secured, Marine engineers immediately began construction of the resettlement camp. Palatas' Marines remained in the area for a week, conducting medical and dental examinations of the refugees and participating in other civic action projects.[16] Following the Thon Duc Kinh cordon, the 9th Marines passed control of the Lancaster II area of operations to Task Force Hotel and the regimental command group returned to Dong Ha and the battalions to patrol and security sweeps throughout Leatherneck Square and the remainder of the Kentucky area of operations.

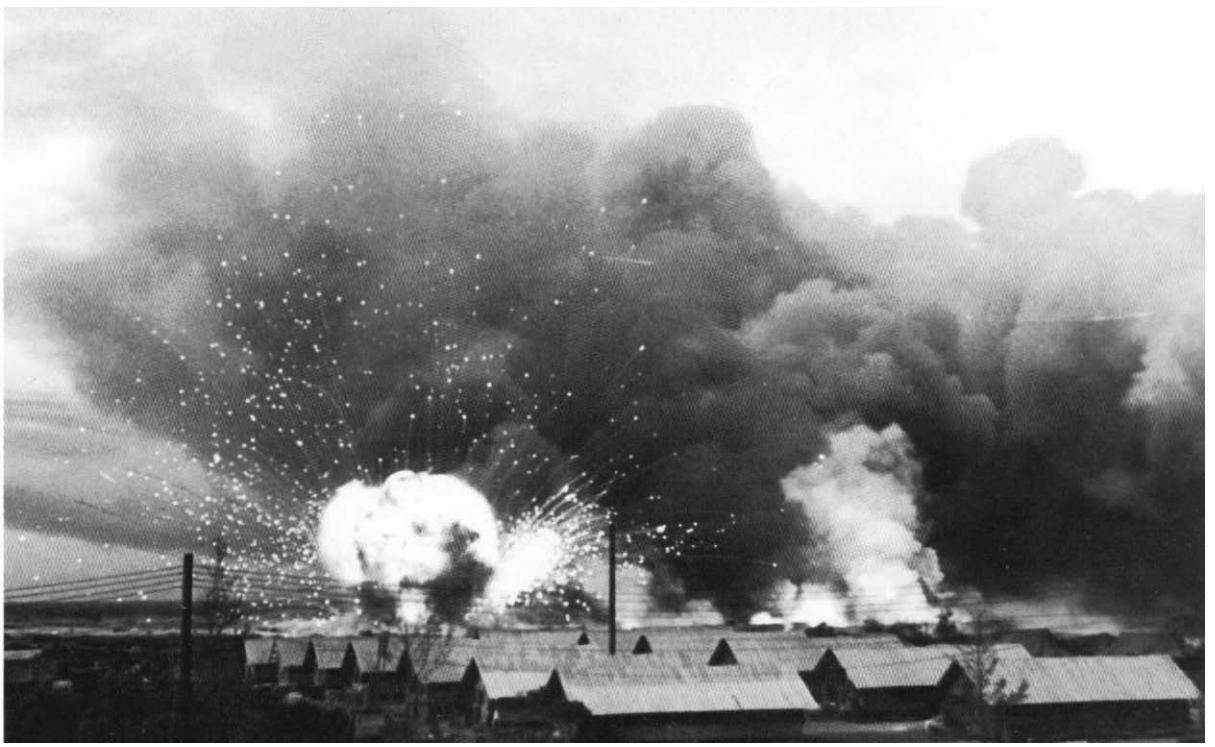
The Pressure Continues

The enemy continued to remain reluctant to commit his forces to decisive combat in large numbers during July. Although the NVA's aversion may have been due to a planned, periodic pause to provide temporary respite for its combat units, it was clear this reluctance was in part due to the continuing and unrelenting pressure applied by 3d Marine Division forces during June. Enemy assembly and staging areas, bases, supply caches, and trail networks were subjected to constant allied air, artillery, naval gunfire, and ground attacks, taxing his capacity to maintain frontline and support units at an effective combat strength. Despite the enemy's reluctance, there was no diminution of the 3d Marine Division effort in July.

On the first day of the month, a massive combined supporting arms attack was launched against enemy artillery and antiaircraft concentrations located in the Cap Mui Lay Sector of North Vietnam. The sector encompassed that region from the southern edge of the Demilitarized Zone, north some 14 kilometers to Cap Mui Lay, and extended from the South China Sea westward to a point approximately 25 kilometers inland.

Planning for the attack began on 24 March when General Davis' predecessor, Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins, proposed a combined and coordinated supporting arms attack against the Cap Mui Lay Sector to destroy enemy long-range shore batteries and artillery, limit the flow of enemy supplies to the south, and relieve the artillery threat against the Dong Ha-Cua Viet area. Provisional Corps, Vietnam developed a formal plan and submitted it to III MAF,

An ammunition supply dump at Dong Ha goes up in flames after an NVA artillery bombardment.
Photo from the Abel Collection





Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190381

The photo shows the power of the resulting explosions. The axle wheels of a truck that was parked at the dump are the only identifiable remains of the vehicle seen strewn among the wreckage.

which in turn submitted a modification to MACV for approval. Following a preliminary planning conference which included representatives from MACV, Seventh Air Force, Seventh Fleet, III MAF, and Prov Corps, General Creighton Abrams, the MACV commander, approved the plan on 21 June, with D-Day set for 1 July.

To ensure that the operation, codenamed Thor, would be a success, several preparatory steps were taken. As a deceptive measure, work continued on Dyemarker or "McNamara" Line positions at A–2, A–3, and Con Thien to cover the construction of several forward artillery positions. In addition, the large amount of artillery ammunition, heavy artillery, and supporting ships were moved into place by 30 June. The destruction of the Dong Ha ammunition dump by enemy artillery on 20 June also in an ironic way helped the deception. According to Marine staff officers, the blast at the dump "practically blew the 3d Marine Division headquarters off of the map" and left the division "desperately short" of artillery ammunition.[17] The execution of a massive supporting arms attack so shortly after a huge loss of ammunition seemed out of place, especially since the bulk of the artillery forces engaged in the attack would have to depend on the Dong Ha ammunition dump for supply.

Preceded by three days of target reconnaissance by both Marine and Air Force aircraft, the first phase of the operation began as scheduled with a massive bombing effort against the sector. Controlled by Seventh Air Force, 664 Marine, Navy, and Air Force attack aircraft and 114 B–52 sorties delivered more than 4,000 tons of ordnance against predetermined enemy targets during the first two days of the operation. In phases two and three, the artillery fire of 13 batteries, composed of 59 guns, was integrated with the naval gunfire support of two cruisers and six destroyers and the continuing air attacks against target lists which were continually updated by 1st Marine Aircraft Wing reconnaissance flights.

On the morning of 8 July, the artillery batteries involved in Operation Thor began withdrawing from their forward positions and by the 10th had returned to their normal support locations.[18] Also on the 8th, control of the area reverted from Prov Corps, which since 1 July was under Army Lieu-

tenant General Richard G. Stilwell,* to the Seventh Air Force which would coordinate future surveillance and air attacks on reemerging targets.

Damage to the North Vietnamese combat capability in the Cap Mui Lay Sector as a result of Operation Thor was substantial: more than 500 artillery and antiaircraft positions, numerous bunkers and storage areas, and at least two surface-to-air missile sites were destroyed. Also, allied observers detected 352 secondary explosions and 236 secondary fires, providing evidence of probable hits on ammunition and supply dumps. The operation, however, was to have a more lasting effect. Artillery fire from north of the Demilitarized Zone declined significantly following Thor, as did the frequency of antiaircraft opposition experienced by reconnaissance aircraft at all altitudes.**

While Operation Thor was in progress, the 3d and 9th Marines, in coordination with the 2d ARVN Regiment, launched attacks against enemy troops driven south of the Demilitarized Zone by the massive air and artillery bombardment. On 2 July, Colonel Hull's 3d Marines, composed initially of the 1st and 2d Battalions, began moving from the Cua Viet into an area north of A–1, centered on Jones Creek, a tributary of both the Song Cua Viet and Song Ben Hai. Lieutenant Colonel Charles V. Jarman's 1st Battalion, the first unit to move out, swept north along the west bank of the tributary, while providing security for the ARVN engineer effort on the Lai An road. To the east, the 2d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Jack W. Davis, swept north toward the village of Nui Trung.

As Jarman's Marines moved northward toward the abandoned and destroyed village of Lai An on the 4th, Captain Gary D. Dockendorff's Company C came under mortar and small arms fire from an estimated enemy platoon in the village ruins.[19] The remainder of the battalion immediately maneuvered to exploit the contact, preventing the enemy from withdrawing. Pressing the attack, Jarman's Marines, covered by air, artillery, naval gunfire, and the direct fire of 90mm tank guns on the flanks, advanced from position to position. "If it gets too tough," Lieutenant Colonel Jarman told one of his company commanders, "pull back and we'll pound them some more. Then we'll see how tough they are."[20] By the 6th, the battalion secured Lai An and reported 134 North Vietnamese dead among its ruins.

The following day, after endeavoring to regain contact with the retreating NVA, a battalion patrol encountered an enemy company occupying positions around Tai Nu, one kilometer northeast of Lai An. The NVA company, armed with an 85mm light field gun, mortars, and automatic weapons, was first taken under artillery fire and then overrun by a coordinated tank and infantry assault.[21] In the Tai Nu action, the Marine

U.S. Army LtGen Richard G. Stilwell, left, the new CG, Prov Corps, talks with South Vietnamese BGen Ngo Quang Truong, CG, 1st ARVNDiv. Although under III MAF, Prov Corps had operational control of the two Army divisions and the 3d Marine Division in northern I Corps.

Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Center of Military History



*On 1 July, Army Lieutenant General William B. Rosson, the former Prov Corps commander, became Acting CG III MAF while General Cushman, the III MAF commander took a month leave in the United States. Major General Richard G. Stilwell, who had served a short tour as Deputy Commanding General, III MAF, Army, on 1 July assumed command of Provisional Corps, Vietnam. That same day, in a brief ceremony held at Phu Bai, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General by Secretary of the Army Stanley R. Resor. Fifteen days later, Headquarters, XXIV Corps was activated and the personnel and equipment of Provisional Corps, Vietnam, were absorbed by the newly activated Army corps. Operational Report, Headquarters, XXIV Corps for Period Ending 31 October 1968, 15Nov68, p. 1. In contrast to Rosson, who enjoyed excellent relations with the Marine command, Stilwell's relations were somewhat more tenuous. Marine Brigadier General Earl E. Anderson, Cushman's Chief of Staff, wrote in May 1968 that Stilwell was rather "unpopular" at III MAF headquarters and predicted that when he assumed command of Prov Corps, "he's going to be a hard one to deal with after he gets his three stars." A few months later Anderson wrote that Stilwell was often "by-passing General Cushman and going directly to ComUSMACV. The boss has spoken to him about this on one or two occasions . . . ." BGen E. E. Anderson ltr to MajGen Murray, dtd 17May68, and ltr to MajGen McCutcheon, dtd 9Sep68, Encls, Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). More diplomatically, General Cushman stated that Stilwell "could be abrasive . . .", but that "he was a fine combat man." Gen Robert E. Cushman, Jr., intvw, 1Nov 1982, (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), pp. 34–35.

**For a detailed account of the artillery's role in Operation Thor, see Chapter 26.

battalion reported another 42 NVA killed and 23 weapons captured, including two 82mm mortars.

Advancing on the right flank, Lieutenant Colonel Davis' 2d Battalion had swept through Nhi Trung and approached a rice paddy area, one kilometer south of the abandoned village of An My. At that point, North Vietnamese automatic weapons and rocket propelled grenades opened up on the Marines. Maneuvering around the ARVN position at A–1, the battalion, with naval gunfire support, took the enemy position. Searching the area, the Marines found over 20 NVA dead. Battalion losses were placed at three killed and two wounded, all a result of sniper fire. Lieutenant Colonel James W. Marsh's 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, which had been held in reserve, moved north on the 7th and seized the area around the destroyed village of Giem Ha Trung without incident. Captain Matthew G. McTiernan, the commanding officer of Company I of the 3d Battalion, remembered that his company's specific mission in Operation Thor "was to seize and then search a small abandoned fishing village on the coast just below the Ben Hai River." In the attack on the hamlet, he had a Navy cruiser in direct support. According to McTiernan, he had the guns of the ship "under my exclusive direction for about three to four hours." He described the effect on the troops as "truly electric" as he used the "8-inchers directly on the village" prior to the assault and then "shifted their fire to the high ground across the Ben Hai during our assault and search." His troops found no bunkers and obtained "no body counts," but the action "had a far more intangible, positive and lasting effect on the company's combat capability."[22]

The 1st and 2d Battalions, 3d Marines, began withdrawing southward on the 8th, followed by the 3d Battalion on the 9th. On the evening of the 9th, as Lieutenant Colonel Davis' battalion, the last of the regiment's battalions to displace to Quang Tri to undergo rehabilitation, the 3d Marines ended their participation in Operation Napoleon-Saline and

Marines of Company F, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines throw grenades at suspected enemy positions in the coastal sector near the DMZ. They are taking part in the infantry portion of Operation Thor to counter any NVA forces moving south to escape the air, naval gunfire, and artillery bombardment of NVA positions north of the DMZ.

Department of Defense (USMC) A191900



passed responsibility for the area of operations to the 1st Marines. The following day, the 3d Marines assumed responsibility for the Lancaster II area of operations and the regimental headquarters was deployed to Camp Carroll.

Throughout the Napoleon-Saline area of operations during the remainder of the month, Colonel Dwyer's 1st Marines continued search and sweep operations on both the northern and southern banks of the Song Cua Viet to insure the uninterrupted passage of allied shipping and to deny the enemy access to rocket positions oriented towards Dong Ha, Quang Tri, and Cua Viet. In addition, Dwyer's Marines coordinated the defense of outposts at C–4 and Oceanview, both within a kilometer of the southern boundary of the DMZ.

While contact with elements of the *138th NVA Regiment*, known to be operating in the area, was negligible, contact with the *V–51* and *C–59 Local Force* Viet Cong units was light and widespread. One of the heaviest engagements took place on the 22d when Company H, 1st Marines, while occupying a patrol base south of the Cua Viet, 10 kilometers east of Dong Ha, spotted an armed enemy platoon dressed in black pajamas, moving along the coastal sand dune east of the village of Thon My Loc. The Viet Cong platoon was taken under fire with small arms, artillery, and 81mm mortars. A sweep of the area by the Marine company revealed numerous spider holes, punji traps, a bamboo house with hot food for approximately 30 people, and 10 Viet Cong bodies.[23]

The second of the two ground operations to exploit the results of Operation Thor began on 7 July when the 9th Marines began a west to east sweep of the area between Con Thien and the DMZ in the Kentucky area of operations. Unlike the violent action experienced by the 3d Marines in the Napoleon-Saline area, the 9th Marines attack met little enemy resistance. If enemy forces had been driven south of the Song Ben Hai into the Kentucky area by the massive artillery and air attack, they quickly had returned to their sanctuaries in the north. High temperatures and equally high humidity, however, posed a major hazard, and everything possible was done to ensure an adequate water supply. Heavy U.S. Army ammunition trailers hooked up to ARVN armored personnel carriers were filled with water cans, greatly reducing the need for continual helicopter water resupply.[24] Despite the precautions, Smith's regiment suffered numerous heat casualties.

The most significant contact during the regiment's drive northward occurred on 11 July, four kilometers northeast of Con Thien, when elements of Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. LaMontagne's 3d Battalion discovered a reinforced NVA platoon in the open. Fixing the enemy platoon in place with small arms fire, LaMontagne's Marines, with air, artillery, and tank support, launched a coordinated air-ground attack through the area killing more than 30 enemy troops and seizing 26 weapons.

Elsewhere in the area, attacking units of the 9th Marines uncovered and destroyed numerous enemy fortifications, many of which contained ammunition and equipment. A few of the positions were lightly defended, but the majority were abandoned. One bunker system discovered by LaMontagne's Marines, 4,000 meters due north of Con Thien, spanned more than one kilometer. In addition to 242 well-constructed bunkers, the complex contained a large mess hall with hot food still on the tables. Supplies and equipment abandoned by the enemy in his flight included weapons, 935 mortar rounds, 500 pounds of explosives, 55 antitank mines, and 500 pounds of rice. LaMontagne's Marines also found 29 NVA bodies, killed by artillery and airstrikes during the advance on the complex.

After 10 months as commanding officer of the 9th Marines, Colonel Richard B. Smith was relieved on 13 July by Colonel Robert H. Barrow. A veteran of China service during World War II and the Chosin Reservoir campaign in Korea, Colonel Barrow was assigned to the division at the request of General Davis. Three days later, the regiment displaced to Landing Zone Stud in preparation for future operations under Task Force Hotel in the Lancaster II area of operations. With the move to Stud, the regiment's battalions were brought together for the first time since May 1967, "to the enthusiasm and jubilance of all hands."[25]

As the 9th Marines departed, Colonel Dwyer's 1st Marines assumed tactical responsibility for the Kentucky area. The regiment also had operational control of newly created Task Force Mike, consisting of a command group from the 3d Tank Battalion and a company of 3d Reconnaissance Battalion Marines, and Lieutenant Colonel Francis J. Heath's 2d Battalion, 26th Marines. During the remaining days of July, Dwyer's Marines concentrated on aggressive day and night ambushes, patrols, searches, and minesweeping operations, while concurrently securing fixed installations throughout the area of operations. Although enemy contact was very light, the 1st Marines did take a number of casualties from mines and surprise firing devices.

On 23 July, Lieutenant Colonel Heath's battalion began assuming operational control of the rifle companies of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines as they were phased into the battalion's positions in preparation for a relief in lines. Company E, 26th Marines, relieved by Company G, 1st Marines, proceeded to Quang Tri Combat Base on the 24th and assumed positions along the base's defensive perimeter. Following a brief, unproductive, one-day sweep northward from Con Thien along the Kinh Mon Trail to the DMZ and southward from A–3 through Leatherneck Square, the remaining elements of Heath's battalion departed the Kentucky area of operations. On 28 July, they proceeded to Quang Tri Combat Base to prepare and train for service afloat with Seventh Fleet's Special Landing Force. The battalion, by 8 August, had embarked on board ships of Amphibious Ready Group Alpha, and the battalion, on the 13th, once operational control had been passed to the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade, was redesignated Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2/26.[26]

Into the Western Mountains

During June, 3d Reconnaissance Battalion patrols reported increased enemy activity north of Thon Son Lam, an area that had seen little enemy activity for the previous several months. It appeared that the enemy, estimated to be of battalion strength, possibly an element of the *64th Regiment, 320th NVA Division*, was moving through the large valley to the north of the Dong Ha-Dong Ma Mountain ridgeline into the region around Thon Son Lam.[27]

The vital allied area straddled not only Route 9, the major east-west line of communication in Quang Tri Province, but also included two major III MAF artillery positions, Camp Carroll and Thon Son Lam. Although these fire support complexes presented the enemy with inviting targets, the successful destruction of which would provide both a tactical as well as a propaganda victory, the enemy had yet to mount a strong attack upon either position. Instead, his forces had concentrated on periodically interdicting Route 9 and harassing the installations with artillery, rocket, and mortar attacks. With the Demilitarized Zone and North Vietnam less than 20 kilometers distant, the enemy threat to the area remained constant.

In mid-June, upon receipt of a warning order from General Davis, Task Force Hotel began planning an operation in the area north and northwest of Camp Carroll over which the enemy had long enjoyed control. General Davis informed Task Force Hotel, however, that the necessary forces, two Marine infantry regiments, the 3d and 9th Marines, and elements of the 2d ARVN regiment, and accompanying resources, would not be available until mid-July. On 5 July, General Davis approved the concept for the proposed operation, which "for want of a better name, we dubbed . . . 'July Action.'"[28]

The approved scheme of maneuver was one of area saturation. Davis simultaneously placed the forces involved at various locations throughout the region—including three battalions near the DMZ—in order to "upset the enemy quickly and decisively."[29] The 9th Marines' zone of action would include a wide swath of piedmont from the DMZ to Route 9, west of Con Thien, while the zone assigned the 3d Marines embraced the rugged National Forest Reserve, which included Dong Ha Mountain and Mutter Ridge, a high ridgeline which generally parallels the southern boundary of the DMZ. The zone assigned the 2d ARVN Regiment lay west and northwest of the Rockpile and consisted of a maze of valleys and sheer ridgelines.

General Davis directed that the operation begin on 16 July, following a series of B–52 Arclight strikes throughout the area. However, on the 15th, MACV canceled the proposed Arclight strikes for the lack of sufficient intelligence justification.* Later in the day, Lieutenant General Stilwell, the Prov Corps commander, suggested that if the operation were postponed 24 hours, the strikes would be carried out. The promised B–52 strikes never occurred and, instead, Marine tactical air and artillery strikes carried out the preparation of the area. While air and artillery strikes were effective, General Davis noted that they "lacked the mass destructive effect and shock power of the Arclights." According to Davis, "intelligence reports indicated that the enemy was surprised and confused by the operation but due to the protection afforded by bunkers from our fires, he was not disorganized to the point where he lost his capacity to resist."[30]

*The selection process for Arclight targets required the submission of only current, hard intelligence restricted to the proposed target nomination. The division's request for Arclights included not only specific target intelligence, but an immediate area intelligence summary. Prov Corps forwarded the request without the area intelligence summary to MACV where it was reviewed and subsequently rejected on the basis of insufficient specific target intelligence in comparison with other proposed targets. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGProvCorpsV, dtd 20Jul68, in III MAF Message File.

Shortly after dawn on the 17th, the 2d and 3d Battalions, 9th Marines assaulted two landing zones in what was commonly called Helicopter Valley, three kilometers south of the DMZ. At the same time, the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines walked from the vicinity of C–2 into blocking positions south of the 2d Battalion in the area of operations most eastern sector. To the west, the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines assaulted into a landing zone at the upper end of Helicopter Valley, while the 1st and 3d Battalions, 2d ARVN Regiment moved overland into blocking positions west of the Song Cam Lo valley. The remaining battalions, the 1st and 3d, of the 3d Marines, since 15 July under Lieutenant Colonel Vaughn R. Stuart, would join the operation on the 18th and 19th, respectively, with a heliborne assault into landing zones just north of Dong Ha Mountain.

As Captain Jack D. Schaeffer's Company K, 9th Marines moved from Landing Zone Sparrow north toward Mutter Ridge, it was engaged by an estimated reinforced NVA squad deployed in an extensive, well-fortified bunker system. Schaeffer's Marines immediately returned fire and moved back a sufficient distance to employ artillery and air. While four Marine A–4 Skyhawks and two F–4 Phantoms flew close support missions directed at destroying enemy automatic weapons and mortar emplacements, it became evident that the NVA unit was at least of company size. As the battalion's other forward companies moved into position for a flanking assault, Schaeffer's Marines carried the enemy complex late in the afternoon. The Marines lost 9 killed and 29 wounded while counting 38 NVA dead.

During the course of the operation, elements of Lieutenant Colonel Frederic S. Knight's 2d Battalion, 9th Marines maneuvered northward to secure the high ground in preparation for the final attack.* Moving to within one kilometer of the DMZ on the afternoon of 21 July, the battalion came under a heavy 82mm mortar attack, which caused the death of one Marine and the wounding of nine others. Within an hour of the mortar attack, First Lieutenant Arthur A. Pierce's Company F observed approximately 35 NVA, carrying two mortars, moving west on a trail paralleling the southern boundary of the DMZ. The company took the enemy force under fire with mortars and artillery, and then moved to close with the NVA unit. Preceded by eight fixed-wing sorties, one of which scored a direct hit on an active 82mm mortar position, Pierce's Marines reached the trail and found over 20 NVA dead. A subsequent search of the area revealed 10 weapons, 59 packs, 41 gas masks, and a large variety of equipment, all of which were new, indicating that the enemy unit recently had infiltrated from the north or had been resupplied.

Lieutenant Pierce's company contact on the 21st prompted Colonel Barrow to request permission to enter the southern half of the DMZ if the tactical situation so dictated. The request went forward rapidly through the chain of command to MACV, which denied it to the surprise of Colonel Barrow.[31] As he later commented:

> . . . it . . . still has not been sufficiently explained to me why at any time we seemingly arbitrarily give the enemy our half of the DMZ, particularly when we know he uses it not only as a sanctuary, but as an area from which he can launch mortar attacks against our forces.[32]

Without the permission to enter the southern half of the DMZ, the regiment swung its attack to the south, "the direction which he [the enemy] was primarily oriented anyway."[33]

Although the sweep south through jungle-covered hills and valleys produced little contact, the 9th Marines did discover a number of large elaborate base areas, which the enemy had been able to construct and maintain during more than a year without allied interference. One fortification, located by Lieutenant Colonel Knight's battalion, six kilometers southwest of Con Thien, was unique. Composed of 60 A-frame timbered bunkers built into the sides of bomb craters, each with an average overhead cover 10-feet-thick, the system was connected to a large command bunker by a network of interconnecting tunnels. The command bunker, capable of accommodating up to 40 personnel, featured an aperture overlooking Con Thien and C–2. Documents found in the bunker indicated that the NVA had been plotting, tallying, and reporting the traffic patterns of helicopters, tanks, and trucks entering and leaving those two positions.

In addition to fortifications, the attacking forces also uncovered tons of enemy ordnance, ranging from 122mm rockets to small arms ammunition and explosives. On the 19th, Captain Matthew G. McTiernan's Company I, 3d Marines unearthed the most significant

*Colonel Knight remembered that General Davis had "dropped in" at his headquarters and told him "Fred . . . I have decided to make you my swing battalion." Knight asked what a swing battalion was and received the answer "Whenever anyone finds the enemy, I'm going to drop you right on top of them." Col Frederic S. Knight, Comments on draft, dtd 10Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File).



Photo from the Abel Collection

Capt David N. Buckner, right, and 1stLt Kenneth Tolpingrud of the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines examine two captured NVA 12.7mm antiaircraft guns near the DMZ.

weapons cache on the northeast slope of Dong Ha Mountain. Dug into the side of the mountain were six large bunkers, which, upon closer inspection were found to have false floors. Beneath the flooring, McTiernan's Marines discovered two complete 75mm pack howitzers and 26 rounds of howitzer ammunition. The howitzers were believed to be the ones that had harassed Camp Carroll sporadically during the preceding months.*

A second phase of the operation followed quickly on the heels of the first. One enemy infiltration corridor within the area of operation had not been touched by the 9th Marines, 3d Marines, or the 2d ARVN Regiment: it was the upper Song Cam Lo basin. On 27 July, the 1st and 3d Battalions, 3d Marines simultaneously assaulted three landing zones, Joan, Margo, and Becky, which subsequently were developed into fire support bases for future operations.** In addition, a permanent observation post was established on Dong Ha Mountain. During the two-battalion sweep of the river basin, "the enemy chose to avoid contact," observed Brigadier General Carl Hoffman, the Task Force Hotel commander, "and therefore we can't point at any statistics to prove the worth of this particular effort." Hoffman noted, however that "in penetrating this corridor we demonstrated our capacity to do this and we also opened another half dozen landing zones."[34]

Colonel Barrow's 9th Marines was phased out of the operation on the 31st, followed on 3 August by the 3d Marines, now under Colonel Richard L.

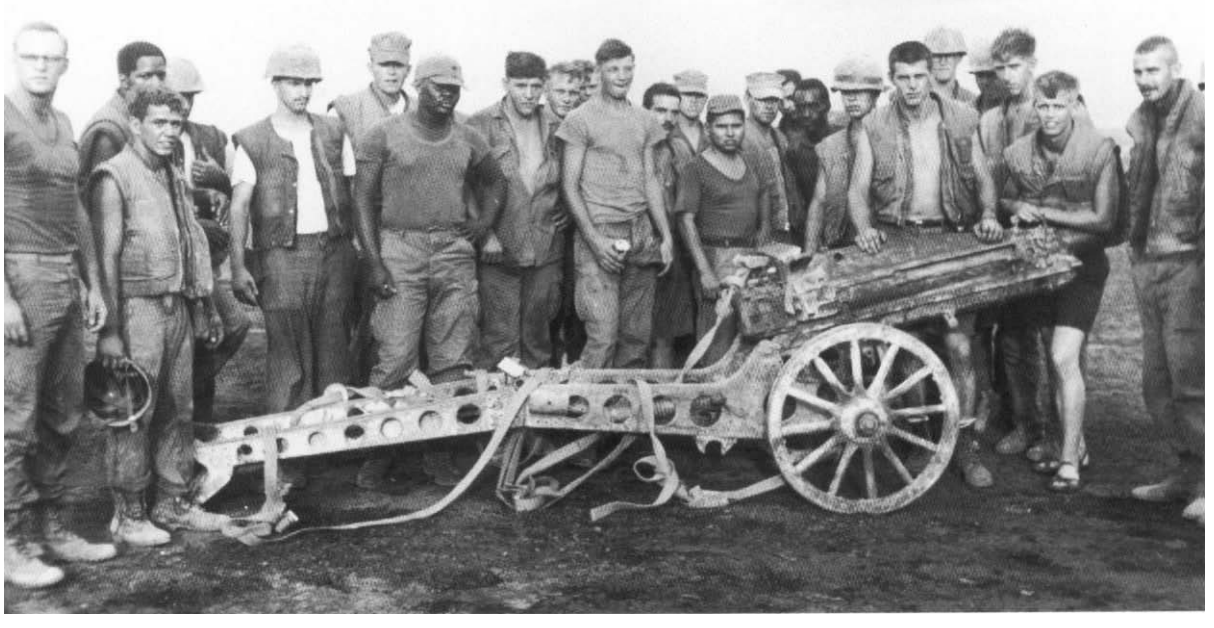
*Captain McTiernan remembered that they assembled one of the pack howitzers in the enemy bunker and that "you could fire and hit Camp Carroll by simply using line of sight to elevate and traverse the gun." McTiernan Comments. Colonel Stuart recalled that the Marine Corps Commandant, General Leonard F. Chapman, directed that the 75mm pack howitzers be sent to the Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C. Stuart Comments.

**Colonel Vaughn R. Stuart, the 3d Marines commander at the time, stated that according to Marine Corps intelligence this was a major NVA infiltration route into Vietnam from Laos. Stuart remembered that General Davis told him "that if we made a sizeable contact, he would give me as many battalions as I needed . . . [and] that I was free to cross the Laotian border, provided the contact we made was sizeable. He attached one proviso to this verbal directive . . . I was to call before my first troops crossed. . . . he would not stop me from going, but he wanted to know just before I commenced to cross." Stuart Comments.



Top photo is from the Abel Collection and bottom photo is courtesy of Col Vaughn R. Stuart, USMC (Ret).

Top, members of the 9th Marines stack boxes of captured enemy mortar and artillery rounds found in an NVA base area. Below, members of a U.S. Army artillery battery at Camp Carroll pose with one of the two 75mm pack howitzers captured by Company I, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines.



Michael, Jr., who had assumed command two days earlier. The operation was considered a success not only in terms of enemy troops and equipment destroyed, but also in providing the units involved with additional experience in the conduct of highly mobile mountain warfare. The operation, as the task force commander later wrote, "taught us that, with effort and energy properly focused on a selected location, we can prepare LZs, build FSB's, virtually anywhere. The tougher the terrain, the more vital the systematic application of resources. But we reject the notion that there are areas too difficult to conquer." Operation July Action, he continued, "also reminded the enemy that he has no safe havens. . . . Most important, perhaps, our pioneering greatly facilitates our return whenever we choose."[35]

While the planning for operations in the Dong Ha Mountain and Mutter Ridge complex took place, Task Force Hotel looked longingly at the rugged terrain west of Landing Zone Stud in the Scotland II area of operations. The area was known to contain the base area of the *8th Battalion, 29th NVA Regiment* and was a source of a variety of nasty enemy activities. Allied fixed-wing planes and helicopters that wandered over the region often received antiaircraft fire which resulted in a number of lost aircraft. Supply convoys travelling Route 9 to Landing Zone Stud faced a constant threat of ambush as they turned south at the Rockpile. Also, with the closing of Khe Sanh and the movement of Task Force Hotel to Landing Zone Stud, the new combat base was increasingly a target for enemy rocket gunners.

General Hoffman's task force originally planned to employ a battalion of the 1st Marines, upon its departure from Khe Sanh, to land on Dong Ca Lu or Hill 715—the area's dominant feature—and search the surrounding terrain, six kilometers west of Landing Zone Stud or Vandegrift as it was to be renamed. Colonel Dwyer nominated the 1st Battalion, but by 6 July, when the 1st Marines departed Khe Sanh, the 1st Battalion remained behind to battle an enemy force on Hill 689. The battalion spent another six days in battle before it could retrieve eight Marine bodies from the forward slope of the hill.

On 9 July, the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines arrived at Landing Zone Stud and relieved the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines temporarily as the combat base's security force. The following day, Landing Zone Stud took several volleys of enemy 122mm rockets. On the 11th, Task Force Hotel assumed direct operational control of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, as no other battalion was available, and the battalion was transported by helicopter to Hill 715.*

The first wave of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas H. Galbraith's Marines scrambled from their CH–46s, and like the two waves that followed, encountered no enemy opposition. But a helicopter in the fourth wave, while hovering a few feet above the landing zone, took several bursts of .50-caliber machine gun fire and crashed in a ball of flames. Miraculously, the CH–46's full load of troops made it to safety, and only one of the air crewman sustained injury.

Braving constant mortar and sniper fire as they swept the area, Galbraith's Marines found numerous heavily fortified enemy positions that recently had been occupied. On the 13th, as Company B moved westward down a trail, the company's point element was struck by a command detonated mine. The company immediately pulled back, set up a perimeter, and sent a squad forward to retrieve the body of one Marine and to look for another. As the squad inched forward, the enemy detonated another mine and raked the company's position with .50-caliber, mortar, and grenade fire. The following day, Company A assisted with the recovery of casualties, but it too encountered command detonated mines, resulting in four additional killed, including the company's commanding officer, Captain Henry D. Banks.** The company withdrew, and on the 15th, Galbraith's battalion was flown to Landing Zone Stud to relieve forces slated to participate in Operation July Action.[36]

During the next 10 ten days, Colonel Edward J. Miller's 4th Marines conducted mobile defense operations to the west of Fire Support Bases Shepherd and Cates with little enemy contact. In addition, elements of the regiment secured Ca Lu, Landing Zone Stud, and Route 9 from Ca Lu north. As the division's reserve regiment, it could, if ordered, provide forces for operations anywhere within the division's area of operations.

On 25 July, Lieutenant Colonel Galbraith's battalion was ordered back to Hill 715, not only to expand

* Elements of the 4th Marines were committed to assisting the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines with the fighting on Hill 689 and securing Fire Support Bases Shepherd and Cates.

** This was the same Captain Banks, who had commanded Company A, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, and had been seriously wounded in that company's engagement on Hill 689 near Khe Sanh on 16 April. See Chapter 16. Colonel Galbraith wrote that when he assumed command of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, Captain Banks was the battalion assistant S–3 and that the Company A commander had just been transferred: "Hank asked for the company, and I gave it to him. His death has always weighed heavily on me." Col Thomas H. Galbraith, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec68] (Vietnam Comment File).

its previous search, but also to recover the bodies of the two Marines killed on 13 July. BLT 2/4, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Louis A. Rann, simultaneously massed on Hill 679, 12 kilometers west of Stud, and began search operations to the north.

Split into two command groups of two companies each, Galbraith's battalion advanced toward Hill 715 from the south and east, under heavy enemy small arms, rocket-propelled grenade, and mortar fire. The Marines found the hill, once secured, to be heavily mined and boobytrapped. While seating an 81mm mortar baseplate, for example, Company B Marines detonated a booby-trapped antitank mine which killed one and wounded four. Continuing the search, Galbraith's Marines recovered the bodies of the two missing Marines, and at the same time discovered sizable caches of weapons, ammunition, and rice scattered throughout the hill complex, but encountered no enemy forces. While destroying the captured weapons and ammunition, the battalion prepared to evacuate the rice for distribution to refugees in the province. On 4 August, after the completion of the search mission, Marine helicopters lifted the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines out of the area and returned the unit to Landing Zone Stud.

By the morning of 29 July, Lieutenant Colonel Rann's Marines had reached Hill 606, four kilometers north of Hill 679. Shortly before noon, Marines from Company G observed and took under fire 15 enemy troops. Later a platoon moved forward to check the area and encountered a well-concealed and well-entrenched enemy force. Four Marines were killed and nine wounded by the enemy's initial heavy burst of claymores and small arms and grenade fire. The bodies of three of the four Marines killed remained unrecovered as artillery and air pounded the bunker complex throughout the remainder of the day. The following morning, after an additional artillery mission, Company G moved forward and recovered the bodies without incident.

Landing Zone Stud has now become Vandegrift Combat Base, complete with a makeshift radio tower to control helicopter traffic. LCpl John L. Phillips, in the tower, is bringing in for a landing a resupply Boeing CH–46 Sea Knight aircraft

Photo is from the Abel Collection



On 3 August, after establishing a temporary fire support base, named Shoup, on Hill 606, Rann's battalion received the additional mission of searching the northern slope of the Khe Giang Thoan Valley, three kilometers to the northeast. The area was believed to harbor the launching sites of rockets that had harassed Thon Son Lam and the Rockpile for several months. As Company F moved down Hill 606 toward the valley the following day, it discovered seven abandoned huts. Below each, Marines found caches of arms, ammunition, and equipment, the total of which they estimated at 20 tons.[37]

The search of the Khe Giang Thoan Valley during the next two days produced no additional weapons caches and few rocket launch sites. However, the companies involved were probed continually once they had moved into night defensive positions. In one instance, Company E Marines heard movement along their perimeter throughout the night, and awoke the following morning to find their claymores turned inward toward the company's lines. In another, Company G's lines were probed by an estimated force of 10 NVA under cover of small arms and grenade fire. The company sustained four killed and six wounded in the attack. On 6 August, Rann's battalion ended its search of the valley and was helilifted to Landing Zone Stud, now officially designated Vandegrift Combat Base.

The 3d Marine Division, during the months of June and July, slowly and methodically shifted from the defensive posture of the past to a more flexible mobile offensive posture which would characterize future division operations. It established large numbers of fire support bases and landing zones in areas that the enemy once considered havens and untouchable by allied forces. In addition, these months witnessed the reorientation of division forces from the coastal lowlands to the mountainous region of western Quang Tri Province. The remaining months of 1968 would see this move accelerated.

Southern Quang Tri and Thua Thien

While Marine operations were conducted in central and western Quang Tri Province, responsibility for the coastal lowlands, piedmont, and jungle-covered mountains south of Dong Ha and north of Hue was shared by the 3d ARVN Regiment and the U.S. Army's 1st Cavalry Division. The ARVN Regiment operated mainly in jungle canopy of enemy *Base Area 114*, southwest of Quang Tri City, while the 1st Cavalry Division's three brigades, under the command of Major General John J. Tolson III, USA, secured the coast and piedmont from Quang Tri City south to Camp Evans. It also conducted search and clear operations in enemy *Base Areas 114* and *101*.[38*]

During June and July, the division continued its participation in Operation Jeb Stuart III, accomplishing the two-fold mission of rice denial and offensive operations in the two enemy base areas within the division's area of operations. In the coastal plains, it conducted rice denial operations in conjunction with elements of the 1st and 3d ARVN Regiments to ensure that rice from the spring harvest was withheld from the enemy. In *Base Area 101*, west of Quang Tri City, the division's 1st Brigade initiated combat operations in search of enemy forces. At the same time, in *Base Area 114*, elements of the division's 3d Brigade and a battalion of the 3d ARVN Regiment conducted operations over rugged terrain in search of not only enemy forces, but also known headquarters and support installations.

During the middle of June, advancing elements of the 3d ARVN Regiment encountered heavy enemy resistance in the southeastern portion of *Base Area 114* as elements of the *803d NVA Regiment* defended a large cache area. The battle for the area continued with sporadic, but heavy contact through the 21st. This action resulted not only in the demolition of the enemy cache area and the capture of large quantities of ammunition, but also in the destruction of the enemy regiment's antiaircraft company and the seizure of the regiment's headquarters complex. South of the base area, elements of the cavalry division's 2d Brigade entered what appeared to be the enemy's *Tri-Thien Military Region* headquarters bunker and tunnel complex, occupied during the attack on Hue. While searching the complex, the Army troopers captured numerous maps and documents relating to the enemy's activities from the DMZ south to Da Nang. Among the maps was one which detailed the construction of a supply road from the A Shau Valley east into *Base Area 114*. Reaction to this information resulted in the destruction of several enemy trucks, construction sites, and a large portion of the road.

While elements of the ARVN regiment and the division's 2d Brigade battled the enemy's *803d Regiment* in the mountains, two other enemy regiments were on the move in the coastal lowlands, centered in the Trieu Phong area, northeast of Quang Tri City. On

*Major General Tolson was replaced on 15 July as division commander by Brigadier General Richard L. Irby.

26 June, elements of the 1st ARVN Regiment made heavy contact with the *4th Battalion, 812th NVA Regiment*, and claimed killing 128 enemy troops. The following day, in a two-day battle, elements of the Air Cavalry's 5th Armored trapped the *814th NVA Battalion* in the coastal village of Binh An, 14 kilometers northeast of Quang Tri, and reported more than 230 enemy soldiers dead and 44 prisoners taken.

At the conclusion of the spring rice harvest, the 1st Cavalry Division shifted tactical emphasis to an even more intensified campaign against the two enemy base areas. Elements of all three brigades air assaulted deep into the base areas, established new landing zones and constructed fire support bases capable of interdicting the enemy's communication routes through the A Shau Valley. Although numerous NVA complexes, arms caches, and training areas were discovered and destroyed, the enemy increasingly employed antiaircraft fire against troop-laden helicopters to limit the mobility and flexibility of the division's ground forces operating in the jungle-covered base areas. By the end of July, the 1st Air Cavalry Division had driven several combat and support elements of the enemy's *7th Front* further west, possibly into the northern A Shau Valley, the site of a major logistical storage area.*

In central Thua Thien Province to the south, the 101st Airborne Division, under the command of Major General Olinto M. Barsanti, continued to conduct the follow-on, division-level operation, Nevada Eagle, which began in mid-May with the termination of Operation Delaware.** During June and July, the division coordinated rice denial operations in Thua Thien Province and conducted offensive operations to defeat North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces and destroy the enemy's base areas and lines of communication. The division's 1st Brigade conducted reconnaissance in force operations along Route 547, which parallels the Song Bo, west of Hue; the 2d Brigade continued reconnaissance in force operations in the coastal plains north and east of Hue and provided security and support for the rice collection effort; and the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, to a limited extent, secured major fire support bases astride Route 547 and conducted search and clear operations along major enemy entry and exit routes to the coastal plains.***

The division's combat operations during the summer months were characterized by infrequent enemy contact, increased boobytrap incidents, and the capture of rice caches. With the defeat of multi-battalion NVA attempts to seize and hold areas of the coastal plains in May and their retreat into mountain base camps, a tactical void was created that eventually was filled by local guerrillas and the Viet Cong infrastructure. Despite extensive reconnaissance in force operations and numerous saturation patrols and ambushes, the enemy, which had broken down into squad-sized or smaller units, chose not to engage the division's maneuver elements. When he was engaged, the contacts were of short duration and involved few casualties on both sides.

As guerrilla activity increased, so did division casualties from surprise firing devices. Of the 40 airborne troopers killed and 375 wounded during June and July, Viet Cong-emplaced boobytraps, generally hand grenades or 105mm artillery rounds with trip wire devices attached, accounted for 18 killed and 173 wounded. Despite increased friendly and few enemy casualties, the division's vigorous program of patrols and ambushes did result in the discovery and capture of numerous rice caches. Working closely with South Vietnamese Regional, Popular, and National Police Field Forces, the division's rice denial campaign resulted in the capture of more than 345 tons of rice and in impeding enemy movement through the area of operations.

During the last week of July, the division began preparations for a return to the A Shau Valley, with a logistical build-up and the construction of fire support bases. The plan called for one brigade of the division and elements of the 1st ARVN Regiment to conduct a combined helicopter and ground assault into the valley,

*On 27 June, the Department of the Army directed that the 1st Cavalry Division be redesignated the 1st Air Cavalry Division and the 101st Airborne Division redesignated the 101st Air Cavalry Division. However, the terminology was withdrawn on 26 August and the new designations established were 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), to preserve the "heritage and traditions and to enhance further long established *esprit* associated with these famous divisions." MACV ComdHist, 1968, p. 245.

**Major General Melvin Zais assumed command of the division from Major General Barsanti on 19 July 1968.

***The 3d Brigade, undergoing a reorganization from its deployment task force organization to that of a light infantry brigade, was experiencing extreme personnel turbulence. The upheaval was caused not only by the reorganization, but also by a decision by the Department of the Army to give each individual who had deployed with the brigade in February the option of returning to Fort Bragg or remaining in Vietnam with the unit. Of the 3,650 personnel who deployed from Fort Bragg, 2,513 chose to return. The training of more than 2,900 replacements therefore limited combat operations. By the end of July, the brigade was declared combat ready and began full-time operations in its assigned area.

along Route 547A. The 1st Air Cavalry Division was to conduct concurrent operations, partially as a deception, to the north and east of the valley.

South of the 101st Airborne Division's area of operations in Thua Thien Province lay that of Marine Task Force X-Ray, under the command of Brigadier General George D. Webster. On 1 June, Phase III of Operation Houston began under the control of the 5th Marines. National Route 1, from Phu Bai south to the Hai Van Pass, was successfully kept open as elements of Colonel Paul G. Graham's regiment provided security for key bridges and installations and conducted patrols and ambushes on avenues of approach to the vital highway. In addition, the regiment conducted extensive rice denial operations in the Phu Thu and Vinh Loc Districts, east and southeast of Phu Bai, in conjunction with South Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces. During the month, the Marines captured more than 31,000 pounds of rice and returned them to government control, and relocated more than 44 tons to secure storage areas. The regiment also conducted a number of short operations in the jungle canopy south of the Phu Bai vital area, in the Phu Loc and Hai Van Pass areas of the operation, to locate and destroy enemy forces, supply caches, and base areas.

During Phase IV of Operation Houston, which began on 1 July, Task Force X-Ray assumed operational control of BLT 2/7, which on 9 July assaulted into the Vinh Loc District by helicopter and amphibian tractors, and continued the task force's vigorous rice denial campaign. A week later, the battalion landing team joined the 5th Marines and was helilifted to the Thon Mu Kham Valley, southwest of Phu Bai, where fire support bases were constructed and search operations begun. With the departure of the battalion landing team and the 5th Marines, Colonel Bruce F. Meyers' 26th Marines, assumed tactical responsibility for the Task Force X-Ray area of operations and began Phase V of Operation Houston on 25 July.*

Throughout the summer months, Marine, U.S. Army, and ARVN troops continued the relentless and successful pursuit and destruction of enemy forces in northern I Corps. From Thon Mu Kham Valley in the south to the Demilitarized Zone in the north, allied forces aggressively and repeatedly forced the North Vietnamese troops and their Viet Cong allies to withdraw deeper into their border sanctuaries, thereby delaying any enemy attempt at initiating a major offensive in the northern two provinces of South Vietnam.

* For the beginning of Operation Houston see Chapter 13.

CHAPTER 19

The Third Offensive: Da Nang

Indicators—The Storm Breaks—Counterattack—Pursuit—Typhoon Bess

Indicators

As the 1st Marine Division Operations Allen Brook and Mameluke Thrust entered their later stages in the summer of 1968, the Communists cautiously avoided decisive contact, giving rise to the theory that they were husbanding their resources for another offensive. Rumors of an impending major attack by the enemy began to take on lives their own. The expected Communist thrust was referred to variously as the "third offensive" (the Tet and the May offensives being the first and second, respectively), the "autumn offensive," or the "summer offensive." South Vietnamese President Thieu had warned on 10 July that "the expected Communist summer offensive against Saigon and other major cities might come in two weeks and could be the last battle, the last all-out effort by the Communists."[1] Ironically, 10 days later, North Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh seemed to have confirmed this statement when he exhorted his countrymen to "a final victory during the third offensive."[2]

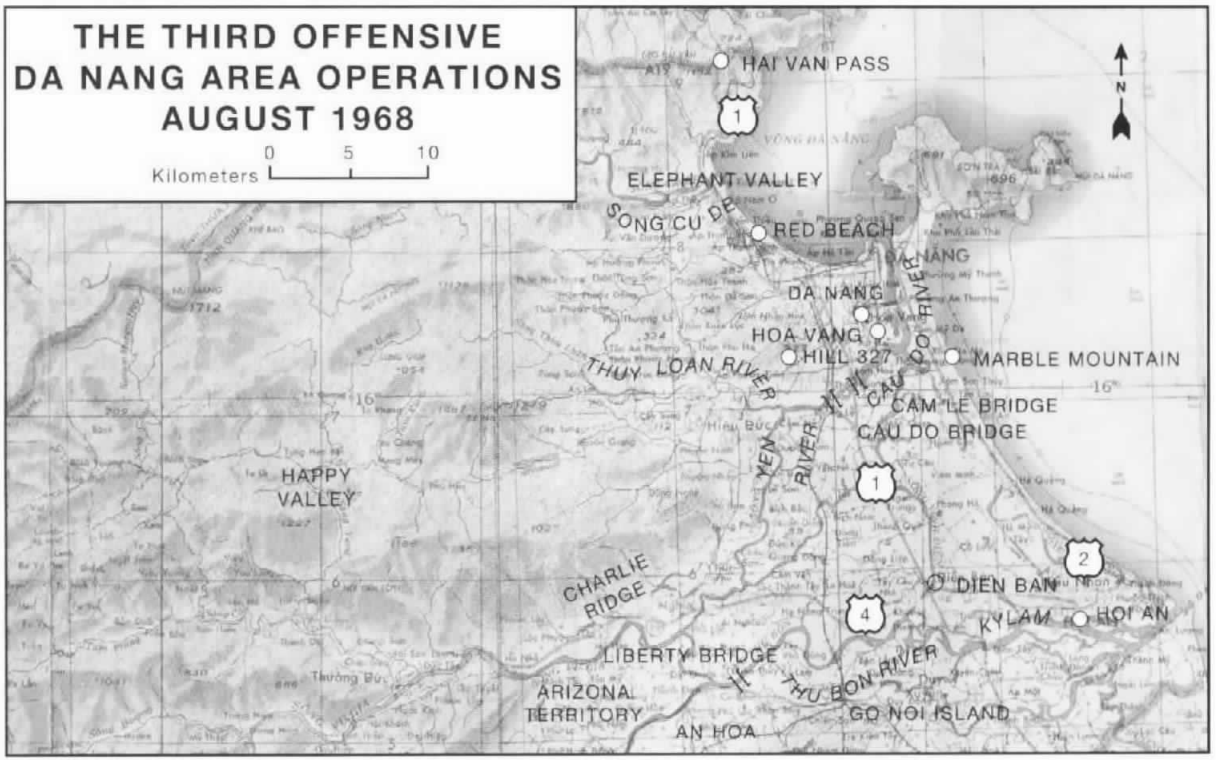
Marine infantry units captured prisoners, who, and documents, which, further indicated Communist intentions. By late July, III MAF intelligence officers knew enough about the enemy's plan to be certain that Da Nang was the target of the threatened offensive. The Da Nang National Police service captured a North Vietnamese officer who revealed details of what he referred to as the "X2 Offensive." The objective of this attack, he claimed, was to create a "favorable political situation for the North Vietnamese delegation at the Paris peace talks to commemorate the forthcoming VC holidays and to attempt to gain the support of the civilian populace." According to his account, the Communist forces would conduct the campaign in several phases. First, Viet Cong sappers would infiltrate Da Nang disguised as ARVN troops and National Police. During a series of attacks on cities and military facilities throughout the country, these "fifth columnists" would seize control of key facilities in the city. *Group 44 Headquarters* assigned two of these Viet Cong units, *Reconnaissance Team X.2/89* and the *C.23 Reconnaissance Company*, the tasks of assassinating South Vietnamese government officials, hanging propaganda flags, distributing propaganda leaflets, and harassing U.S. and ARVN units in Da Nang.[3]

While rocket and mortar batteries shelled the airbases and U.S. headquarters facilities within the city, ground units would attack from the west, south, and east (the latter across the Trinh Minh The Bridge north of Marble Mountain Air Facility). Finally, the Communists would "call upon ARVN and U.S. forces to stage military revolts and desert to the VC forces." The prisoner claimed that the VC had collected 30 U.S. servicemen (deserters) who would assist them in fomenting an uprising.* If the attack on Da Nang and the military revolt were successful, the Communists would gather South Vietnamese intellectuals to coordinate with the National Liberation Front for the formation of local coalition governments in Da Nang and other captured areas and eventually, a national-level coalition government.[4]

The enemy appeared to be throwing everything he had into the effort against Da Nang. Enemy units scheduled to participate in the attacks in the Da Nang TAOR included the *31st*, *36th*, and *38th North Vietnamese Army Regiments*, the *R–20*, *V–25*, and *T–89 Battalions*, as well as the *368B Rocket Regiment*.** A rallier later reported that the Communist plan even included a contingency for the use of North Vietnamese tanks and aircraft to turn the tide as a last resort.[6] Indeed, in late July, Marine reconnaissance teams and air

*Indeed, Marine reconnaissance and infantry units operating in the Da Nang TAOR during this period reported numerous sightings of Caucasians moving with enemy units. One reconnaissance team shot and wounded one of the Caucasians in an ambush, then heard the man call for help in English.

**The *38th NVA Regiment* represented no actual increase of enemy units in the Da Nang TAOR. It was basically a coordinating headquarters for several VC battalions that had operated there over the years. According to Marine intelligence sources, it was established in early May 1968 and collocated with *Group 44* "to afford greater control" during the mini-Tet and Third offensives. It consisted of the *V–25*, *R–20*, and *V–7 VC Infantry Battalions*, and the *3d* and *T–87 Sapper Battalions*. III MAF PerIntRep No. 35–68, dtd 3Sep68, p. A–47, in III MAF PerIntReps, 14Jul–31Aug68.



observers had twice sighted enemy armored fighting vehicles west of An Hoa.

Originally, intelligence estimates had set the start date for the offensive on 20 July, to coincide with the new moon when illumination would be low. Although speculative, this theory fit a pattern of increased enemy activity during the darkest nights of a given month.[7] However, when this date passed without serious incident, intelligence officers revised their estimates to reflect the next new moon phase as the start date: 23 August 1968. In tenuous confirmation of this supposition, a prisoner revealed that the month of August was to bring the "decisive battle for revolutionary history."[8]

As III MAF developed intelligence concerning the third offensive, subordinate units prepared for the coming battle. Acting on the reports of enemy tanks and extensive Communist road-building activity southwest of Da Nang, the 1st Marine Division revised its anti-mechanized defense plan to meet the new threat.[9] Major General Carl A. Youngdale, who had relieved Major General Robertson as division commander in June, directed his subordinate commanders to review plans for the defense of the Da Nang TAOR and to increase the readiness of their units. Anticipating that the enemy would strike during darkness, he ordered that all units maximize night activities and "reduce day workloads accordingly to allow adequate rest for all hands."[10] In the area surrounding Da Nang, Operations Allen Brook and Mameluke Thrust continued with the participating units frequently shifting their areas of operations in an effort to engage and destroy the major Communist units which would have to concentrate to conduct an offensive of the magnitude III MAF anticipated.

Just past noon on 18 August, less than a kilometer west of Marble Mountain Air Facility, a patrol from Company B, 1st Military Police Battalion apprehended a 16-year-old Vietnamese boy who confessed that he was a member of a VC platoon which was hiding nearby. The MPs cordoned off the area and, with the assistance of the South Vietnamese 106th Regional Force Company and Company C, 3d Military Police Battalion, conducted a thorough search. Several light contacts with small groups of VC resulted, leading to the discovery of weapons, ammunition, and explosives caches as well as a radio receiver.[11]

Major General Youngdale, in a report to Lieutenant General Robert E. Cushman at III MAF headquarters, noted:

> . . . enemy activity has increased . . . . there are indications that the enemy may be in the latter stages of preparation for his third offensive. As yet, however, there are no indications that the enemy is prepared to conduct a major attack within the next twenty-four hours.[12]



Photo from Abel Collection

From an observation tower in his company sector, Capt Charles S. Robb, the son-in-law of President Johnson and commander of Company I, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, points out key terrain features to the South Vietnamese Chief of the Joint General Staff, Gen Cao Van Vien, who is on an official visit to Da Nang. MajGen Carl A. Youngdale, the new commander of the 1st Marine Division, is seen directly behind Robb.

Early the following day, 19 August, a Viet Cong company attacked and overran Combined Action Platoon 2–4–3 northeast of Hoi An. At 2100 that night, 30 to 40 VC attacked recon team "Trailer Park," atop Hon Coc Mountain, south of Go Noi Island. Only the quick intervention of a Douglas AC–47 Spooky gunship, with its potent, multiple Gatling guns, saved the team from destruction.

Following a battalion-sized VC attack on Combined Action Platoon 2–3–4 during the early morning hours of 20 August, Youngdale's view of the situation changed. In a report to General Cushman that day, he estimated that the enemy could "close on principal targets in the First Division area in one night in launching his 3d phase offensive."[13]

While the 5th Marines, under Colonel Paul G. Graham, pursued Communist survivors of the Battle of Chau Phong south of Da Nang,* the 27th Marines continued final preparations for redeployment to the U.S. and the 1st Marines began arranging its move from Quang Tri Province to the Da Nang TAOR.** It was a hectic period in the 1st Marine Division and the specter of the heralded third offensive continued to grow. General Youngdale made minor adjustments to the plan for the defense of Da Nang, reinforcing those sectors which appeared to be most in danger.[14] His daily report for 21 August concluded that:

> The enemy appears to have completed his preparation for his offensive. Small scale mortar attacks on Dai Loc and Thuong Duc in the last 24 hours possibly reflect last minute registration. The enemy may launch his offensive at any time . . . .[15]

The Storm Breaks

The streams which drain the rugged mountains of central Quang Nam Province follow the slope of the land toward the South China Sea, growing in size and strength as they meet other streams. By the time they reach the flat coastal plain, the streams have become rivers which twist through the populated farmlands, branching and rejoining again in a crazy patchwork. In every area through which a river passes, the local Vietnamese give it a name, so that by the time it reaches the South China Sea, it has acquired many titles along the way. The river which flows along the southern boundary of Da Nang, separating the city from the fertile paddy region of the coastal plain, is called Song Cau Do, at least along that particular stretch. About

*See Chapter 17.

**From the beginning, the President had indicated that the deployment of the 27th Marines to Vietnam was temporary and in March he and his advisors directed that the regiment return in July. This was later delayed until September. See Chapter 27 for the deployment and redeployment of the 27th Marines. See also Chapter 13 for the initial deployment.

two kilometers south of the river, Highway 1 forks, sending each of its branches across the Song Cau Do toward Da Nang on its own bridge. The easternmost of these, called the Cam Le Bridge, after the hamlet on its northern side, led directly to the Da Nang Airbase, less than two kilometers away. Two kilometers upstream from the Cam Le Bridge, to the west, lay a combination highway bridge-railroad trestle known as the Song Cau Do Bridge.

Marines guarded these bridges, both to prevent VC saboteurs from destroying them and to prevent enemy infiltrators from crossing them with weapons and explosives for use in the city. The numerous support units stationed in Da Nang each assumed responsibility for a sector within the city and its suburbs. The 1st Tank Battalion's area included the Song Cau Do Bridge; the 1st Military Police Battalion's area included the Cam Le Bridge. For the most part, bridge security consisted of checking the identification papers and packages of civilians crossing the bridge and keeping a lookout beneath the bridge to foil sapper attacks. At random intervals, bridge sentries dropped small explosive charges into the water nearby to discourage enemy swimmers from approaching the pilings.

At the Song Cau Do and Cam Le Bridges, the duty was routine, the only excitement being the occasional detention of a Vietnamese whose identity papers were not in order. South of the river, infantry units of the 1st Marine Division formed an additional screen protecting the city from major attacks, so it seemed unlikely that the enemy, in force, would ever get as far as the bridges.

Company D, 1st Military Police Battalion was responsible for security at the Cam Le Bridge. The company command post was in a bunker at the north end of the bridge, alongside of which stood an observation tower. An old French bunker and another observation tower stood at the approach to the south end. Normally, one of Company D's platoons occupied the bunkers, towers, and several listening posts and ambush sites on both sides of the river, while the other two platoons remained in the company's rear area at the edge of the Da Nang Airbase, two kilometers to the north.

On the afternoon of 22 August, the company commander departed Da Nang for an "R&R" in Hawaii, leaving his executive officer, First Lieutenant Michael J. Kelly, in command.* Lieutenant Kelly was scheduled to begin his own R&R in Hawaii on 28 August, but for the next six days, he would bear responsibility for the protection of the Cam Le Bridge.[16] Unknown to him, during the early morning hours of 22 August, 80 Viet Cong of the *Q.91 Company, 2d District, Quang Da Special Zone*, in disguise and using forged identification papers, had individually crossed the Cam Le Bridge, then took a city bus to a safe house on Quang Tung Street to retrieve previously cached weapons and equipment and to await the hour for their attack.[17]

At 2130, responding to reports of movement along the Song Cau Do, Lieutenant Kelly ordered the 2d Platoon to move from its barracks to reinforce the 3d Platoon at the bridge. Within an hour, the Marines had reached the bridge and took up positions on the peninsula that curves out from the north bank to touch the span itself. At midnight, the Marines of the 1st Tank Battalion who were guarding the Song Cau Do Bridge, two kilometers to the west, spotted six people in the water and took them under fire, but because of the extreme darkness, could not determine whether the fire was effective.[18]

The Marines at the Cam Le Bridge did not have to wait long for their share of the action. At 0100, 23 August, Sergeant Larry K. Bucklew, the platoon sergeant of the 2d Platoon, spotted six sampans crossing the river near his position on the peninsula. The 2d Platoon opened fire, driving some of the sampans back across the river, while others pressed on, landing on the north bank.[19]

Before the Marines on the Cam Le Bridge could react to the firefight on the river to their west, exploding RPG rounds and mortar shells engulfed the security position on the south bank. The 1st Squad, 3d Platoon, under Lance Corporal Stephen D. Hott, was taken by surprise as Communist troops swarmed over its position. Lance Corporal Arthur Costello, manning a .50-caliber machine gun mounted in an old French bunker, tried to get his gun into action, but an enemy soldier outside the bunker held the barrel fast, and Costello could not bring it to bear.[20]

Lance Corporal Hott, in the nearby observation tower with Private First Class Pedro L. G. Francisco, ordered Costello to disable the machine gun and withdraw. Hott then grabbed an M60 machine gun and ammunition and ran for the bridge. Costello, finding the enemy already inside his bunker, fought his way out, then paused to throw in a fragmentation grenade in hopes of "spiking" the machine gun.[21] Making his way onto the bridge, Costello joined Lance Corporals John W. Thomas and Hylan L. Crowder running with

*Abbreviation commonly used for "Rest and Recreation." Each Marine was authorized one "R&R" during his 13-month tour of duty in Vietnam. Many sites were available throughout the Pacific area, including Hong Kong, Australia, Thailand, Japan, and Malaysia.

Hott towards the company command post on the north bank. Francisco was still on the south side, his fate unknown. The rest of the squad, dispersed in listening posts and ambush sites near the bridge's southern approaches, remained in their positions, unseen by the enemy.

Moments after the Communists struck, Lieutenant Kelly organized a counterattack from the north bank of the river. Corporal Wayne D. Brown led his squad across the bridge toward the fight, meeting Hott's squad halfway. Hott had been wounded in the head, so Brown ordered him back to the command post at the north end for treatment and, in the confusion, Hott took the machine gun with him. Unwilling to risk an attack without the machine gun, Brown organized his men for a defense of the middle of the bridge, using a sandbagged position already in place, then sent Lance Corporal John A. Eller back for the gun.

Eller returned with the gun, but with no ammunition. Brown himself went back to the north side, which was now under heavy mortar and rocket fire, and retrieved the ammunition. Finally ready to counterattack, the Marines charged across the bridge, hugging the sides for protection as Eller, leading the way, sprayed the enemy with machine gun fire. Reaching the observation tower, Eller was felled by a long burst from an enemy automatic weapon. While down, a ricochet struck him in the chest, wounding him a second time. He tossed a grenade into an enemy fighting hole, then died.[22]*

Within one minute of Eller being hit, Brown himself and two of his men were wounded. With the machine gun lost and enemy fire mounting, Brown ordered a withdrawal to the bridge. As the Marines assumed new fighting positions near the water's edge, the enemy hit them with either tear gas or CS gas.** Only one Marine in the squad had a protective mask, and the effects of the gas soon made the position untenable. The Marines withdrew further, to the sandbagged position in the middle of the bridge from which they had counterattacked. The gas, although still present, was not as strong there and the men were able to keep fighting. Brown reported the situation to Lieutenant Kelly. The lieutenant's response was, "Hang tight."

At that moment, there was little Lieutenant Kelly could do to help Corporal Brown. Enemy troops on the north bank were pressing hard against the company command post, advancing under heavy mortar, RPG, and small arms fire. The north bank observation tower, pounded by Communist shells, collapsed at 0200, burying three Marines sheltering beneath it, and immediately afterwards, the enemy used gas against the Marines on the north bank. As with Corporal Brown's squad, the Marines had no protective masks. Some withdrew to the middle of the bridge where the gas was not as strong, while others dipped their heads in the water to clear their eyes and throats, and desperately tried to hang onto their positions.[23]

While Company D, 1st Military Police Battalion fought to hold the Cam Le Bridge, the third offensive erupted all over the Da Nang area. The security force at the nearby Song Cau Do Bridge, although not under ground attack, was shelled by enemy mortars. Downstream from them, toward the Cam Le Bridge, Communists continued to cross the river in sampans and the Marines on the Song Cau Do Bridge kept up steady machine gun fire into the enemy boats. Between 0245 and 0315, 19 units in the Da Nang area recorded over 300 rounds of mortar and 122mm rocket fire detonating on or near their positions. Enemy infantry attacked the 1st Tank Battalion, three company positions held by the 27th Marines, the headquarters of the 11th Marines, and three Combined Action platoons in the 7th Marines TAOR. Many other units received mortar fire. Viet Cong sappers struck the Special Forces compound two kilometers south of Marble Mountain Air Facility. Advancing under a mortar barrage, the sappers penetrated the perimeter and swept through the position with satchel charges, killing 16 Special Forces and Civilian Irregular Defense Group personnel and wounding 125 more. When finally driven off, the enemy left behind 32 dead. Later, a prisoner revealed that this enemy force was a company of the *R–20 Battalion*, reinforced by a platoon of the *Q.92 Sapper Company*. Their mission was to seize the Marble Mountain Air Facility and hold it for one day, destroying as many aircraft and facilities as possible.[24]

The 2d and 3d Platoons of Company D, 1st Military Police Battalion were still under heavy attack at the Cam Le Bridge when the 1st Platoon left the airbase shortly after 0300 to relieve them. Moving in trucks down Highway 1, the rescuers came to a sudden stop after moving only a few hundred meters from the

*For his courageous action, Lance Corporal Eller was posthumously decorated with the Silver Star.

**"CS" is the designation of a chemical riot control agent used in Vietnam. Its effects are similar to those caused by tear gas: burning of the eyes, throat, and mucous membranes. Although powerful, the effects are temporary, usually disappearing within minutes of the gas dissipating.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191816

In fighting for the Hoa Vang headquarters in August, Marines take cover from an unseen VC sniper. The interior of a destroyed structure can be seen with only the floor and a chair still undamaged.

airbase because a battle was raging around the Hoa Vang District headquarters, which lay along the highway, midway between Da Nang and the north end of the bridge. A company of the *402d Sapper Battalion* had assaulted the district headquarters and blocked movement along Highway 1. In their initial attack, the sappers penetrated the headquarters defenses and were repulsed only after hand-to-hand fighting inside the compound with U.S. advisors, South Vietnamese National Police, and even local government officials taking part.[32] The attack waned at about 0400, allowing the relief force to move into the headquarters where they left eight Marines as reinforcements before continuing toward the bridge. No sooner had the platoon started toward the bridge than the enemy sappers resumed their attack.[26]

The 1st Platoon reached the river at 0430, just in time to meet another enemy onslaught directed against the bridge. From the airbase, a larger, combined relief force under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Joseph J. N. Gambardella, Commanding Officer, 3d Military Police Battalion, moved south toward the bridge.* This force, designated Task Force Kilo, consisted of two platoons from the 3d Military Police Battalion; Company K, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines; Company A, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion; and Ontos antitank vehicles, reinforced by a company of ARVN Rangers mounted in armored personnel carriers. Behind them, crash crews from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing followed with fire-fighting equipment, attempting to extinguish the fires caused by the attack on the Hoa Vang District headquarters.[27]

At 0500, Lance Corporal Henry Lowery, leading a nine-man ambush patrol southwest of the bridge, radioed Lieutenant Kelly that he intended to attack and recapture the south end. Lowery's squad advanced to within 25 meters of the south tower, receiving only sniper fire. Two Bell UH–1 Iroquois "Huey" helicopter gunships appeared overhead and Lowery attempted to signal them to provide supporting fire on the tower. The helicopters mistakenly attacked the Marines instead of the entrenched Communists. With one man killed and two wounded, Lowery withdrew his squad to the relative safety of a nearby rice paddy to await help.[28]

When dawn broke over Da Nang just after 0600, aircraft began attacking the Viet Cong in the bunkers at the south end of the Cam Le Bridge. The two "Hueys" were joined by a Douglas AC–47 Spooky gunship, a Douglas A–1 Skyraider, and McDonnell-Douglas F–4 Phantom jets which unsuccessfully pounded the enemy bunkers with napalm, high explosive bombs, and cannon fire.[29]

*Colonel Gambardella, the MP battalion commander, recalled that this was the second call for assistance on the night of 22–23 August. Just before midnight, he responded to a request for assistance from the commander of the ARVN Special Forces headquarters in the center of Da Nang city which was under attack. He deployed two platoons from his battalion who cordoned off the headquarters. Four of the attackers were killed and two were captured. Col Joseph J. N. Gambardella, Comments on draft, dtd 16Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File).

Counterattack

The infantry unit nearest the south end of the bridge was the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines, with its command post at Duong Son, four kilometers to the southwest. At 0645, the battalion commander, Major Kenneth J. Skipper, ordered Company A, located at the battalion command post, to launch an immediate counterattack to recapture the Cam Le Bridge. Two of the company's three platoons were already detached, with one deployed to Christmas Island, 1,000 meters northeast of the bridge, and the other supporting a Combined Action platoon in the hamlet of Lo Giang (1), 1,000 meters southeast of the bridge. Further, one squad from the remaining platoon was on a patrol, leaving a total of two rifle squads available to the company. The company commander, Captain William O. Moore, reinforced these two squads with other members of the company who were present in the command post. Marines trained to operate mortars, rocket launchers, and even typewriters suddenly became riflemen again. Said Captain Moore, "we took our clerks, we took our sick, lame, and lazy, we took everybody we had and moved out."[30] Within five minutes of receiving the order, the small force was on the march.

Having departed without full knowledge of the enemy situation, Captain Moore tried to gather information along the way. Passing through an ARVN compound, he spoke with the U.S. Army advisors who pointed out suspected Communist positions lining both sides of Highway 1. The company continued north along the highway, stopping outside of Cam Nam, only two kilometers from the Communist positions on the south end of the bridge. While there, Captain Moore received orders from Major Skipper to detach yet another squad from his seriously depleted force to assist the platoon in Lo Giang (1), which had reported being surrounded and under attack. He sent 16 Marines to reinforce the supposedly beleaguered garrison and requested permission to proceed toward the bridge. Major Skipper, however, told him to remain in position and wait for a platoon of tanks which would support the attack.

The Marines sent to Lo Giang (1) soon radioed back that they had arrived to find the hamlet quiet, with the Combined Action Marines reporting they had not had contact with the enemy for three hours. Captain Moore, assuming that someone had "cried 'wolf,'" asked for the return of the 16 Marines, but Major Skipper denied his request.

At 1145, the tanks arrived: four 90mm gun tanks and a flame tank from Company B, 5th Tank Battalion. The Marines of Company A had never operated with tanks before. Indeed, many of those with Captain Moore had never participated as riflemen in any operation before. Nevertheless, the "company," reduced in strength once again to two ad-hoc squads, pressed forward toward the hamlet of Cam Nam on their way to the Cam Le Bridge. The road was raised above the surrounding paddies with a sharp drop down on both shoulders, so the tanks were forced to advance in column, with one infantry squad on either side. At the same time, Company D, 1st Battalion, 27th Marines prepared to attack Cam Nam from the west.

When Captain Moore and his men were less than 400 meters from Cam Nam, the enemy opened fire with RPGs, mortars, and small arms. The initial burst killed two Marines and wounded four others, but the rest continued the attack, firing and maneuvering toward the enemy, inching forward with only low paddy dikes for cover. Two hundred meters from the hamlet, an RPG hit the lead tank, causing minor damage. Captain Moore spotted the RPG and pointed it out to the tankers, who returned fire with 40 rounds of high explosive, 4 rounds of "Beehive," and 3 rounds of white phosphorous.[31] With this, Communist troops began to run from one dwelling to another within the hamlet, the tanks cutting them down with machine gun fire and blasting with 90mm rounds any structure they entered. A machine gun fired at the Marines from within a straw hut, and the flame tank drenched the hut liberally with burning fuel. Soon, the entire hamlet was ablaze, with virtually every structure leveled. "This," related Captain Moore, "about ended our problem."[32]

The Communists had blocked the highway with vehicles, which also provided cover for the enemy. Five more rounds of 90mm fire blasted away this makeshift obstacle and the tiny force again surged forward toward the Cam Le Bridge. As they passed through the burning hamlet, the company received word that a platoon from Company E, 2d Battalion, 27th Marines would soon join them. Captain Moore ordered his platoon on Christmas Island, which had already made one unsuccessful bid to recapture the bridge, to join the counterattack from the east.

The .50-caliber machine gun abandoned in the bunker the previous night had not been destroyed by Lance Corporal Costello's hand grenade and the Viet Cong now had it in action against the Marines. Even after a fearful pounding by aircraft, there was no sign

that the Communists in the old French bunker were ready to quit. The tanks led the attack toward the south end of the bridge, pumping round after round of 90mm cannon fire into the bunker and the nearby observation tower. The accurate, concentrated fire proved to be too much for the Communists, who rushed from their positions, attempting to escape. Several of them jumped into a vehicle and tried to drive away, but a tank fired into the vehicle, sending it up in flames. Other enemy soldiers leaped into the river and tried to swim to safety, but the Marines rushed to the riverbank and shot them in the water.

At 1545, nine hours after receiving the order to counterattack, Captain Moore reported to his battalion headquarters that the objective was secured, then set about reorganizing the position. Several local Popular Force troops were found under the bridge where they had been hiding since the previous night. Beneath the tower, the Marines found the body of the gallant John Eller, and in the vicinity of the bridge, 22 enemy dead. Company A had suffered three dead and eight wounded. Captain Moore linked up with Lieutenant Kelly's military policemen on the north bank and his own platoon from Christmas Island, then sent a squad down the riverbank to the west to ferret out any Viet Cong who might be hiding there.

Marine Cpl Henry A. Casselli, holding his M16 rifle, is seen returning to the northern end of the Cam Le Bridge over the Cau Do River after helping to secure the bridge. Other Marines cross in the background. An ad hoc force from the 1st and 2d Battalions, 27th Marines and including tankers and MPs had taken part in the fighting.

Department of Defense (USMC) A191818



To the north, Lieutenant Colonel Gambardella's Task Force Kilo fought through the remnants of the enemy sapper company which had laid siege to the Hoa Vang District headquarters, reaching the north bank of the river at approximately 1900. Lieutenant Colonel Gambardella recalled that in the attack south to the Cam Le Bridge, Task Force Kilo came under heavy fire and took several casualties. In the two fights, the Marines sustained 4 killed and 12 wounded and the RVN forces with them 3 dead and 21 wounded. Among the casualties was Navy Hospitalman Allan R. Gerrish, who placed himself between a wounded Marine and enemy machine gun fire and posthumously was awarded the Navy Cross for this action. Enemy casualties in the battles for the district headquarters and the Cam Le Bridge totaled 184. ARVN Rangers took control of the area, allowing Captain Moore and his company to move to Christmas Island. Although weary from the day's hard fighting, Company A maintained 100 percent alert in their new positions.[33]

Through the night of 23–24 August, there were several incidents, relatively minor as compared to the events of the previous night, indicating that the "third offensive," though seriously compromised locally, was not yet over. At 2200, a short firefight erupted at the Song Cau Do Bridge when two sampans filled with enemy troops attempted to cross the river from south to north under the cover of small arms fire and a brief mortar barrage. Return fire directed at the Communist positions resulted in 11 secondary explosions.[34] Between 0200 and 0400, over 100 rounds of mortar fire fell on the command post of the 5th Marines, positions held by Company M, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, and Battery H, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines.[35]

With the situation in Da Nang restored, it remained for III MAF to pursue and destroy the escaping Communist units while at the same time remaining vigilant for another wave of attacks on the city. The heaviest fighting of the "third offensive" was yet to come.

Pursuit

At dawn on 24 August, a patrol from Company C, 1st Battalion, 27th Marines made contact with two companies of the Viet Cong *V–25 Battalion*, five kilometers south-southwest of the Cam Le Bridge in a hamlet named Qua Giang (2). The ARVN 1st Battalion, 51st Infantry, an ARVN armored cavalry unit, Company F, 2d Battalion, 27th Marines, and the 3d Platoon, Company B, 5th Tank Battalion surrounded the hamlet and directed supporting arms fire on enemy positions throughout the day and night.[36]

On 24 August, elements of the 1st Military Police Battalion, Company A, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion and the South Vietnamese 111th Regional Force Company swept Highway 1 from the airbase to the bridge. Despite the previous sweep by Task Force Kilo, pockets of enemy resistance remained. Rooting them out, the task force counted 1 prisoner and 30 enemy dead at a cost of 6 Marines wounded.[37] South of Marble Mountain Air Facility, in a rare daylight attack, a dozen 122mm rockets fell in the 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion compound during mid-morning, but they caused only minor structural damage and no personnel casualties or equipment losses.[38]

General Youngdale felt that the Communists had not yet played their full hand. On 24 August, he predicted that the enemy would continue attacking the Cam Le Bridge, Marble Mountain Air Facility, and major installations within the city. He also expressed concern that another Viet Cong sapper battalion might attempt to infiltrate Da Nang from the northwest.[39]

On 25 August, after pounding the *V–25 Battalion* at Qua Giang (2) with supporting arms for two days and a night, the combined Marine-ARVN force entered the hamlet, finding approximately 150 North Vietnamese dead and the remnants of what appeared to be a battalion command post, complete with radios.[40] That evening, Youngdale reported to General Cushman that:

> . . . infantry and sapper units may have aborted their attempts to penetrate Da Nang from the south and may move to the south to reposition in the vicinity of Go Noi Island. However, rocket and mortar attacks may resume.[41]

Acting on this analysis, General Youngdale issued orders to mount an operation which would block the withdrawal of the Communists from the Da Nang area and defeat them in detail.[42] Named Operation Sussex Bay, it would employ elements of the 5th Marines and the 7th Marines, supported by ARVN and Republic of Korea Marine Corps (ROKMC) units. H-hour was set for 0900, 29 August.

At 0815, 29 August, while occupying a blocking position in preparation for Operation Sussex Bay, Company M, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines made heavy contact with the enemy in the "Dodge City" area, four kilometers south of Hill 55. While maneuvering against the enemy flank, the company came under heavy fire from three sides which wounded several men. A corpsman, Hospitalman Richard L. Powell, braved the enemy fire to assist the wounded and was himself hit by machine gun fire, rendering his arm useless. Despite his wounds, Powell continued to treat the casualties, at one point advancing to assist a fallen Marine who lay within 15 meters of a Communist machine gun. Here, Powell was hit again and killed. For his selfless act, Powell posthumously received the Navy Cross.[43]

Company D, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and Company G, 2d Battalion, 27th Marines joined the action with tanks. Assisted by aircraft and artillery, the Marines dislodged the North Vietnamese. Friendly losses totalled 2 dead and 41 wounded and the Marines reported killing 42 of the enemy.[44]

While Company M fought, the other units involved in Operation Sussex Bay assumed their positions. Just east of the National Railroad, a contingent of Korean Marines established a blocking position along the Co Ca stream. To the south, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines occupied its own blocking position in the western half of Go Noi Island, along the Song Ky Lam, while the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines began a sweep of the eastern half of the island. The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines hemmed in the area of operations by establishing a defensive line two kilometers west of the railroad. Finally, two ARVN units, the 21st and 37th Ranger Battalions, attacked south along the railroad from their line of departure along the Song La Tho.

Shortly after launching their sweep, the ARVN Ranger battalions engaged a large enemy unit spread out between the hamlets of Dong Lien and Ha Nong Tay (2). The Rangers returned fire and called for fire support from the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines and ARVN artillery units. The battle resulted in over 80 North Vietnamese dead at a cost of 8 ARVN Rangers killed and 33 wounded.[45]

Further south, in the Arizona Territory, Marine units participating in Operation Mameluke Thrust recorded significant contact with the enemy. An NVA platoon ambushed a platoon of Company D, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines on 29 August near the Song Tinh Yen, killing 12 Marines and wounding 18. The

Marines directed 5 airstrikes and over 700 rounds of artillery fire onto enemy positions only 200 meters away, reporting as a result 25 Communists dead.[46]

General Youngdale remained convinced that the enemy intended to attack Da Nang from the west and northwest.[47] To counter this threat, he requested that a B–52 mission be diverted from a previously scheduled target to strike the valley of the Song Cu De (called Elephant Valley by the Marines), 10 kilometers northwest of the city.[48]

The action, despite Youngdale's analysis, remained centered to the south, mainly in the Operation Sussex Bay area. Just after midnight on 30 August, Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines ambushed a group of approximately 30 North Vietnamese fording the Song Ky Lam in an apparent effort to reach Go Noi Island. A search of the area conducted at first light revealed 29 enemy dead. There were no Marine casualties.[49] Later that morning, the ARVN Ranger battalions swept south once again, claiming to have killed 27 Viet Cong and 4 North Vietnamese.[50]

On 31 August, the units involved in Operation Sussex Bay closed the net around the escaping Communists. During the morning, both of the ARVN battalions pressed the enemy into a bend in the Song Ky Lam on the other side of which the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines waited in blocking positions. The encircled Communists fought desperately, but artillery and airstrikes flown by Marine helicopter gunships and RVNAF fixed-wing aircraft smashed them in the trap. The attack resulted in over 80 North Vietnamese dead and netted 1 prisoner at a cost of 7 ARVN Rangers killed and 45 others wounded.[51]

The fighting of 31 August crushed the major Communist force attempting to flee south after the failed attack on Da Nang, but small units still slipped through the net and continued to work their way toward Go Noi Island. At 2000, 31 August, Company H, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines ambushed one of these groups, approximately 30 North Vietnamese attempting to cross the Song Ky Lam. Unlike the group engaged two nights earlier, these

Two Marines from Company M, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines rush to a landing zone to pick up supplies left by a Boeing Vertol CH–46 Sea Knight helicopter from HMM–164, during Operation Sussex Bay near An Hoa and Go Noi Island sectors.

Photo from Abel Collection



latest prey of Company H started to cross the river in boats. Under illumination provided by the battalion's 81mm mortar platoon, the Marines sunk both boats with small arms fire.[52]

Amid the efforts to defend Da Nang and the pursuit of the fleeing enemy by Operation Sussex Bay forces, the 1st Marine Division continued its preparations for the redeployment of the 27th Marines. As elements of Colonel Robert G. Lauffer's 1st Marines arrived at Da Nang, they took up positions in the 27th Marines sector, the first phase of an orderly turnover. By 1 September, Colonel Lauffer had two of his battalions in place and controlled two others of the 27th Marines. Those battalions, the 1st and 2d, still occupied defensive positions in the area. General Youngdale reorganized the Da Nang TAOR, extending the 1st Marines' new area of operations east to the sea, thereby relieving the 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion of the responsibility for securing the area south of the Marble Mountain Air Facility. This move allowed the amphibian tractor Marines to concentrate on their primary mission of supporting infantry units in the field.[53]

Operation Sussex Bay continued into September, but the area of operations shifted to Go Noi Island. During the evening of 1 September, Battery E, 2d Battalion, 11th Marines moved by helicopter to the Go Noi to support an operation to be carried out by the 2d and 3d Battalions, 5th Marines. On 2 September, the 5th Marines launched its attack into the eastern half of the island. Lieutenant Colonel James W. Stemple, the commander of the 2d Battalion, remembered that the aim was "to sweep Go Noi from the railroad berm to the eastern end of the island with the two battalions advancing abreast by phase lines." Contact was light. By 5 September, the Marines had rooted out and killed only 6 North Vietnamese and 5 Viet Cong, and had suffered 5 dead and 22 wounded. Of the Marine casualties, 4 dead and 11 wounded were the direct result of enemy action, while the remainder were victims of accidents and incidents including short mortar rounds and a friendly airstrike. The last two Marines to become casualties during this phase of Operation Sussex Bay were wounded by an aroused denizen of Go Noi Island, a water buffalo who embodied the hostile attitude held by the rest of the island's population toward the Marines. The heavy rains of Typhoon Bess would force the Marines temporarily off the Go Noi.[54]

Typhoon Bess

On 5 September, Typhoon Bess struck the I Corps Tactical Zone, catching many units far afield. Winds in excess of 50 knots, accompanied by heavy rain and a ceiling of less than 100 feet, grounded all aircraft for two days.[55] The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines quit Go Noi Island and marched to nearby Liberty Bridge. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines was not as lucky, since it was, as Lieutenant Colonel Stemple recalled, "occupying positions at the very east end of the island." The battalion moved to what high ground there was along the railroad berm as Stemple "knew there would be no way we would be able to 'walk off' the island." The next day Marine Corps helicopters lifted the 2d Battalion out of the Go Noi except for Company H. This latter company was supposed to remain on the island, directly under the operational control of the 5th Marines, and then sweep back to Liberty Bridge the following morning. According to Lieutenant Colonel Stemple, he convinced Colonel Graham, the 5th Marines commander, to helilift this company out after one Marine in the company drowned in the attempt.[56] By this time ground units all over ICTZ suspended operations and moved to high ground to wait out the storm.

Even units in base areas were not safe from the typhoon's effects. Rising water flooded defensive perimeters, filling trenches and washing away bunkers. Some minefields were under a foot of water.[57] The 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, scheduled to relieve the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines, halted movement, as the storm's effects threatened the fragile timetable for the 27th Marines' redeployment to the United States.[58]

The civilian populace suffered as well. A III MAF intelligence report estimated that, in addition to the thousands of homes blown down or washed away by Typhoon Bess, the storm destroyed 60 percent of the rice crop and 55 percent of the stored rice. Intelligence officers speculated the flooding damaged enemy caches, bunkers, and tunnels, as well.[59]

By 7 September, the storm abated and the weather improved enough that field operations could resume, although the flooding still hampered movement considerably. Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines provided security for a recovery unit of Company B, 3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion attempting to retrieve two inoperative amphibian tractors abandoned by the 5th Marines on Go Noi Island during the storm. Normally, when a vehicle broke down in

the field, it was guarded until it could be repaired or recovered. To abandon a vehicle was highly unusual, but in this instance necessary, because of the flooding. When the Marines reached the vehicles on the morning of 8 September, they found both destroyed by demolition and fire, the result of enemy action.[60]*

The Communists, hardly heard from during the typhoon, also resumed operations. At 1800, 8 September, a Stingray patrol in the mountains west of the Arizona Territory sighted 146 enemy moving through a rice paddy at the base of Charlie Ridge. The reconnaissance team called for air and artillery support, killing 25 of the Viet Cong. The following morning, an enemy burial party appeared to recover the bodies. The Stingray patrol directed an airstrike against them, as well, accounting for another 20 Viet Cong.[61]

The 1st Marine Division ended Operation Sussex Bay on 9 September, citing as the reason the disruption caused by the "unfavorable weather conditions which prevailed during Typhoon 'Bess'."[62] In fact, enemy activity in the Da Nang TAOR and the area to the immediate south was minimal, indicating that the combination of Operation Sussex Bay and Typhoon Bess had taken the fight out of the Communist units which had originally struck Da Nang on 23 August.

Group 44, the Communist unit which carried out the third offensive in the Da Nang TAOR, suffered heavily during the effort. According to Marine intelligence sources, *Group 44* units lost 637 killed while staging for the offensive. In the attacks of 23 August, the main effort of the offensive, III MAF estimated over 230 enemy died. The heaviest Communist casualties, however, occurred during the next two weeks, when III MAF intelligence reports listed another 1,200 enemy killed, thus bringing the total estimated enemy losses during their offensive to more than 2,000 dead.[63]

Although not everyone in III MAF was certain at the time, the "third offensive" was over.[64] Bold in concept but unspectacular in results, the offensive did not materially affect the progress of the negotiations in Paris, nor the balance of power in the Da Nang TAOR. In fact, it signalled the end of an enemy effort begun during Tet and continued in May, whose purpose was to inflict a decisive military defeat on Free World Forces in the Republic of Vietnam. Communist losses in these offensives were staggering, forcing them to change tactics. For now, their timetable would be delayed once more.

* Both the 2d and 3d Battalions, 5th Marines had to abandon tanks and LVTs that had accompanied the battalions into the Go Noi. The VC or NVA burned two LVTs that had been left by the 3d Battalion, but Colonel Stemple, the 2d Battalion commander, recalled that the Navy several months later provided a LCU (Landing Craft Utility) with a tank retriever and recovered all of the tanks and the two remaining LVTs. According to Stemple, "miraculously, the enemy had not discovered them and except for the water damage, they were recovered intact." Col James W. Stemple, Comments on draft, n.d. [1995] (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 20

Autumn Offensive Halted

A New Orientation—The Eastern DMZ—Defeat of the 320th Division
Coastal Quang Tri and Thua Thien: A Shift

A New Orientation

Combat action throughout Quang Tri Province had been intermittent during June and July. Enemy forces engaged by 3d Marine Division, U.S. Army, and ARVN forces were, by and large, elements of the *304th*, *308th*, and *320th NVA Divisions*, and the *27th*, *138th*, and *270th Independent NVA Regiments*. Only occasionally encountered or employed in strength, these units primarily undertook reconnaissance in force missions, shellings, ambushes, probing attacks, and assisted in the movement of arms and supplies to local force Viet Cong units and guerrillas. The aggressive air and infantry attacks had caused the enemy to keep his forces dispersed, off balance, and denied him access to many areas and avenues of approach necessary to carry out a large-scale ground attack against major population centers and allied military units and installations. By the end of July, allied forces in the north had blunted but not curtailed the forward deployment and positioning of forces for the forthcoming autumn or "Third Wave" Offensive by elements of the *320th NVA Division* and the three independent regiments.

With an area of operation that encompassed more than 3,000 square kilometers, the 3d Marine Division could not continue to rely on battalion- or regimental-sized operations as it had done in the past. "In my field visits," Major General Raymond G. Davis noted, "I find that battalion level operations mentality still exists in most instances."[1] With the dispersal of enemy forces over such a large area, General Davis, in an effort to standardize operations, reemphasized the need for the employment of numerous coordinated infantry company patrols working under the protective umbrella of supporting arms. The idea was not only to increase coverage, but also to deny the enemy sanctuary and discourage him from developing extensive logistics bases and resupply caches during the coming months.[2]

Incorporating lessons learned during June and July as the division moved toward a more mobile posture, Davis urged his regimental and battalion commanders to reorient "their thinking and staff planning toward infantry company operations to find and fix enemy forces within their AO's."[3] Even though an operation would be planned at the regimental- and battalion-level, it was not now necessary for it to be executed by the regiment or battalion as a single unit. Companies would be given specific objectives within the area of operations and encouraged to operate independently within a particular area oriented to terrain rather than grid lines and within reinforcing distance of another company. Night operations would be emphasized.

The division commander, likewise, encouraged rifle company commanders to employ the highly successful tactics developed during the past two months. Once a company entered the area of operations, either by foot or by air, it would immediately and unobtrusively select the first of what would become a series of defensible patrol bases. Before eating or resting, Marines dug in and registered the company's defensive weapons on all possible avenues of enemy approach.

In sweeping out from the base toward a series of preselected, limited objectives, companies and platoons would move cross-country in two or more mutually supporting columns. They were to avoid well-travelled trails and draws, while remaining within supporting and reinforcing distance of the patrol base. Supporting arms would be registered at frequent intervals, normally 500 meters to the front and flanks of the column. In addition, landing zones would be cut to facilitate the evacuation of casualties and resupply. The Marine unit on the move, Davis stressed, would have "what it needs, where it needs it, and at the time it needs it."[4] The pursuit of small groups of enemy troops, composed of fewer than five individuals would be avoided, as the North Vietnamese frequently relied on this tactic to lure the advancing unit into an ambush.

Once the advancing Marine unit established contact, massive, coordinated supporting arms fire would be employed prior to launching an assault on the enemy's position. Blocking forces, simultaneously, would be moved up or inserted to seal off all possible avenues of escape. Upon the lifting of supporting arms fire, the combined force would then conduct a method-

ical search of the area with the objective of destroying the enemy position and capturing weapons, equipment, and personnel.

While both reemphasizing time-honored infantry company operations and incorporating a number of recently learned tactics, General Davis reiterated that "any tactic which denies the enemy sanctuary—physical or psychological for rest, resupply and security—will enhance the effectiveness of future operations by the Division."[5]*

In addition to placing a greater emphasis on infantry company operations as the basis for all future division operations, Davis also stressed the importance of intelligence, specifically intelligence gathered by long-range reconnaissance patrols, which would be continuously employed throughout the division's area of responsibility. Lieutenant Colonel Donald R. Berg's 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, reinforced by the 3d Force Reconnaissance Company, would continue to maintain a large number of teams in the field at any one time.** "This has meant," Davis noted, "that every indication of enemy activity from whatever means is explored by the insertion of reconnaissance teams . . . . everywhere—on a continuing basis, a massive reconnaissance team effort is maintained."[6]

Reconnaissance Marines generally employed two types of long-range patrols in this massive intelligence effort. The 8- to 12-man, heavily armed Stingray patrols operated within range of friendly artillery. Their mission was to seek, fix, and destroy the enemy with all available supporting arms. These patrols would be reinforced by "Sparrow Hawk" or "Bald Eagle" rapid-reaction forces, if the opportunity arose to destroy the entire enemy force. In the more remote areas of Quang Tri Province, beyond artillery range, "Key Hole" patrols would be used. Much smaller in size, normally composed of four to five men, and armed with only essential small arms, ammunition, and communications equipment, "Key Hole" patrols were to remain out of sight and observe. If discovered, they were to evade the enemy and attempt escape. These long-range patrols would not normally be reinforced unless artillery could be inserted; if under fire and taking casualties, the team would be extracted by helicopter.[7] The 3d Marine Division, as Davis later stated, "never launched an operation without acquiring clear definition of the targets and objectives through intelligence confirmed by recon patrols. High mobility operations [were] too difficult and complex to come up empty or in disaster."[8]

The increased number of operations and clear weather experienced during the mid-summer months increased the ability of Marine forces to observe the enemy's movement, provide close air support, and interdict his lines of communication and logistic operations, causing him difficulties in the resupply of personnel and equipment. This, coupled with a steady increase in the loss of food, ammunition, personnel, and previously prepared forward positions, forced the North Vietnamese to reassess or alter their plans for the major offensive, slated to be launched sometime in mid-August. Despite inroads by the 3d Division, the infiltration of personnel, supplies, and equipment into Quang Tri Province continued, but at a slower pace. Division intelligence analysts, however, still considered the *320th Division* and three independent regiments to be combat ready and capable of conducting regiment or division-sized attacks on allied units, fire support bases, and installations along the Demilitarized Zone. In addition, the disposition of these four enemy units was such that a large-scale attack could come at any time.[9]

The Eastern DMZ

As August began, allied forces continued the pressure on enemy units throughout Quang Tri Province. The heaviest fighting was to take place in the northeastern portion of the province in the Napoleon-Saline area of operation. The first significant contact occurred on 2 August when several squads of North Vietnamese attacked the forward naval gunfire observation post at Oceanview, 10 kilometers north of Cua Viet. Support-

*Colonel Thomas H. Galbraith, who commanded the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines at the time, observed that actual company tactics employed by his battalion differed very much in practice than the ideal described by General Davis. Galbraith wrote that these tactics "may have been feasible in the eastern portion of Quang Tri Province, but in the mountainous jungle terrain of the western portion, particularly north of Route 9, they were virtually impossible to employ." He explained that "conditions simply would not permit companies and platoons to 'sweep out' of patrol bases in 'mutually supporting columns,' registering supporting arms and cutting LZs as they went." Col Thomas H. Galbraith, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Galbraith Comments.

**See Chapter 26 for chart showing average number of 3d Reconnaissance Battalion daily patrols for the months July–December 1968. Lieutenant Colonel Berg observed that the number of patrols varied for several reasons. For example during September and October, monsoon rains "made inserts and extraction schedules unpredictable and difficult." Other variables besides the weather included operations by other battalions and changes in enemy locations. LtCol Donald R. Berg, Comments on draft, dtd 4Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Berg Comments.

ed by Marine tanks, amphibian tractors, and naval gunfire, the defenders drove off the enemy who left eight dead. Later the same day, allied observers spotted a platoon of NVA in the same area and called in artillery and naval gunfire, resulting in two reported additional enemy killed.

On 8 August, two battalions of Lieutenant Colonel Vu Van Giai's 2d ARVN Regiment engaged elements of the *1st Battalion, 138th NVA Regiment*, two kilometers east of Gio Linh and two and one-half kilometers south of the DMZ. As the engagement intensified during the afternoon, the ARVN committed the remaining two battalions of the regiment. Despite receiving more than 150 rounds of mixed artillery and mortar fire, the ARVN battalions pressed the attack, supported by artillery and tactical airstrikes. Suffering more than 100 casualties the enemy battalion withdrew northward under the cover of darkness after the six-hour battle.

Following a week of brief, but sharp clashes around Gio Linh, Lieutenant Colonel Giai's 2d ARVN Regiment launched an attack into the southern half of the Demilitarized Zone in an effort to reestablish contact with the enemy regiment. Early on the morning of 15 August, elements of Company A, 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, with 15 LVTs and 2 tanks, rolled out of Outpost C–4 and proceeded to within one kilometer of the zone's southern boundary, turned, and proceeded back to C–4. Company A's diversion was to set the stage for the ARVN attack.

The raid into the DMZ, planned and controlled by the South Vietnamese, was to be executed by the elements of the 2d ARVN Regiment, 11th ARVN Armored Cavalry, and the 3d Marine Division's tank battalion, organized into four cross-reinforced task elements. According to the plan, the combined infantry and tank force was to attack north of the Song Cua Viet into the DMZ. The task force would then turn west, envelop the *1st Battalion, 138th NVA Regiment*, and attack south.

The combined elements of the ARVN and Marine task force departed their respective bases at 0400 on the 15th, and by dawn had moved up the beach to the northernmost point of advance without detection. The task force then turned west, moving from the beach into an area composed of abandoned rice paddies. Although a number of tracked vehicles and tanks became mired in the swampy ground, 10 tanks from Companies A and B, 3d Tank Battalion, continued to sweep northwestward toward the Song Ben Hai and then south, where they surprised the enemy "who were eating breakfast."[10] After preplanned B–52 Arclight strikes and under covering artillery and tank fire, the allied task force eventually overran the well-entrenched enemy command post, supported by its own 105mm artillery. Marine tankers, who described the day's action as a "turkey shoot," were credited with 189 killed and 70 probables out of a total of 421 reported enemy dead.[11] Although the Marine tank companies suffered no casualties, two tanks and a retriever were damaged by mines.

Lieutenant Colonel Giai in his report on the raid, stated the mission was only 50 percent accomplished; Lieutenant General Richard G. Stilwell, the XXIV Corps (formerly Prov Corps) commander, was less restrained in his observations about the success of the ARVN. He reported to General Creighton Abrams, the MACV commander, that the *1st Battalion, 138th NVA Regiment*, "was, . . . to have attacked south across DMZ last night; it will do no attacking for some time to come. Meanwhile, the morale of the 2d ARVN Regiment has never been higher. It was a good days work."[12]

Several days later, in Paris, Ambassador W. Averill Harriman informed North Vietnamese negotiators that South Vietnamese infantrymen had conducted a reconnaissance of a suspected North Vietnamese concentration south of the Song Ben Hai in the "South Vietnamese portion of the Demilitarized Zone. Here they encountered the 1st Battalion of the 138th North Vietnamese Army Regiment . . . . Once again, I urge that you accept my proposal for restoration of the Demilitarized Zone to its original status."[13]

For the balance of the month, the remaining elements of the *138th NVA Regiment* evaded all but minor engagements with Marine and ARVN patrols in the area. The North Vietnamese, however, continued to use the Demilitarized Zone as a base for attacks into South Vietnam, especially into the central and western portions of Quang Tri Province.

In the Kentucky area of operations, to the west, Colonel Ross T. Dwyer's 1st Marines experienced little activity other than minor squad-sized encounters during the first half of August. The exception was an encounter with 30 enemy troops by First Lieutenant Arthur A. Pierce's Company F, 9th Marines, three kilometers east of Con Thien. In the face of U.S. artillery and fixed-wing support, the enemy broke contact and Pierce's Marines began a sweep through the area. During the sweep, the Marines regained contact, but the enemy again broke and ran, and Company F moved through the area, capturing a number of weapons and packs while counting 11 enemy dead.

With enemy activity in the eastern DMZ, particularly north of Con Thien, on the rise, General Davis decided to act. In addition to sightings of enemy tanks, Marine tactical fighter pilots and aerial observers reported spotting trucks, truck parks, camouflaged revetments, storage bunkers, and trenchlines. Of special interest were repeated sightings of low, slow moving lights during hours of darkness which, it was assumed, emanated from enemy helicopters or some other vertical take-off and landing aircraft. The enemy, it was thought, "might well be using aircraft to resupply forward positions with high priority cargo such as ammunition and medical supplies or conducting medevacs after our techniques."[14]

Having strengthened his tactical position, but having committed all of his available forces, General Davis requested that Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2/26 be made available to conduct a raid into the DMZ. In the event the landing team could not be committed to the incursion, Davis asked that the battalion relieve the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, so that it could initiate the raid. On 17 August, Lieutenant General Cushman approved Davis' request for BLT 2/26 to relieve the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, but stipulated that the battalion landing team would have to return to its amphibious shipping by 20 August.

Davis, however, was concerned. In a message to General Stilwell the following day, Davis noted that the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines had been alerted to deploy to the Da Nang area on 22 August. In addition, "there are other indications, that two battalions of the First Regiment will be moved prior to the first of September. These moves follow on the heels of the loss of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines in May and the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines earlier this month." The Army's lst Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized), over which the division had assumed operational control on 1 August, not only would not offset the loss, but also was not scheduled to be fully operational before September. "It is obvious," he concluded, "that a severe draw down on 3d Mar Div capability at this time will seriously limit my ability to maintain the present flexible, mobile posture which I feel is necessary if I am to continue the effective suppression of enemy activity in this area." He therefore recommended that the present 12 maneuver battalion strength of the division be maintained.[15]

In discussions with General Cushman, Stilwell reported Davis' concern. General Cushman responded that only the two battalions of the 1st Marines were to be reassigned to the 1st Marine Division. General Stilwell immediately informed Davis of the decision: "You are advised to plan on moving the two bns of the First Marines to First Mar Div in the latter part of this month and to plan on retaining the Second Bn, Third Marines, as an organic element of Third Mar Div."[16] The maneuver strength of the division would remain at 12 battalions, nine Marine and the equivalent of three Army.*

In the event of a crisis in the northern sector, Stilwell notified the 101st Airborne Division to prepare to assume Task Force X-Ray's area of operations in Thua Thien Province, which was occupied by the 1st and 3d Battalions, 26th Marines. These two battalions then could be airlifted to Quang Tri Province to reinforce the 3d Marine Division.

On 18 August, Marine helicopters brought BLT 2/26 ashore into the Mai Xa Thi area on the Song Cua Viet, relieving the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. Following two days of vigorous day and night patrols and ambushes, the battalion returned to its amphibious shipping off Cua Viet.[17]

Within a hour of the last of 60 B–52 Arclight strikes on 19 August, Lieutenant Colonel John E. Poindexter's 2d Battalion, 1st Marines assaulted three landing zones in the Trung Son region of the southern DMZ, five kilometers north of Con Thien. Covered by Companies A and B, 1st Marines and a platoon of tanks from Companies A and B, 3d Tank Battalion, deployed near Hill 56, 4,000 meters to the east, Poindexter's Marines swept east for approximately four kilometers,

* The 1st Marines was to replace the 27th Marines, which regiment would return to the United States in September. In personal correspondence in September 1968, Brigadier General E. E. Anderson, the III MAF Chief of Staff, outlined the hard bargaining that occurred over the displacement of the 1st Marines. He wrote: "We've had a considerable hassle over the move of the 1st Marines . . . ." He declared that General Cushman made the original decision because the 3d Division would have operational control of the 1st Brigade, 5th Mechanized Division, but that "Davis [the 3d Division commander] really complained that he just couldn't get along with eight maneuver battalions plus an SLF, but had to have a minimum of nine, plus a BLT." According to Anderson, "General Cushman stood his ground for quite some time, but then Stilwell and Davis came down and came forth with a counter-proposal . . . ." According to the proposal, XXIV Corps would assume responsibility for the area between Phu Bai and Phu Loc, then controlled by the 1st Marine Division Task Force X-Ray. The III MAF commander then "reluctantly accepted the proposal . . . ." III MAF and XXIV Corps, however, continued to discuss the specific details about responsibilities and command structure in the former Task Force X-Ray sector. BGen E. E. Anderson to LtGen W. J. Van Ryzin, dtd 11Sep68, Encl, Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Anderson ltr to Van Ryzin, Sep68 and Anderson Comments, Dec94.

exploiting the effects of the Arclight strikes. The battalion found many potential landing zone sites, but discovered no evidence of current or past use of the area by enemy aircraft.

As Companies G and H consolidated at several landing zones in preparation for extraction by helicopter, Poindexter's Marines suffered their only casualty during the day-long raid. While one flight of helicopters attempted to set down at one of the landing zones, a command detonated claymore rigged to an 82mm mortar round exploded, destroying one CH–46 helicopter and damaging several others. Three of the CH–46's crewmen and one of the battalion's Marines were killed, while two Marine pilots were wounded.[18]

Because of darkness and sporadic enemy fire, Companies E and F and the battalion command group remained in the DMZ until the following morning. At 0700 they began moving south on foot. The heat was overwhelming, making the cross-country movement slow and, as a result, helicopters eventually extracted the battalion at 1730 from landing zones five kilometers north of Con Thien.

Although the raid into the DMZ uncovered no evidence of enemy helicopter or other air activity, it did force out a large number of enemy troops from the area. Scattered by the combination of air and artillery attacks and Poindexter's heliborne assault, the fleeing enemy fell prey to other Marine blocking forces in both the Kentucky and Lancaster areas of operation. The first contacts were initiated by Company B, 1st Marines and the Army's Company A, 77th Armored Regiment near Hill 56. On the morning of the 19th, both companies, whose defensive positions had been probed continuously during the night, engaged an enemy platoon attempting to escape to the east. Supported by the platoon of tanks from the 3d Tank Battalion, which at the time was advancing toward the hill from the east, the combined Army and Marine force killed a reported 26 enemy troops.

Also on the 19th, while moving eastward through the piedmont, six kilometers southwest of Con Thien, Company M, 9th Marines intercepted an estimated reinforced enemy platoon fleeing in its direction. Company M Marines suppressed the enemy's small arms, automatic weapons, and RPG fire, and maneuvered toward the commanding terrain under an umbrella of artillery fire and fixed-wing airstrikes. A later search of the area resulted in the discovery of over 30 enemy bodies and the capture of two prisoners of war.

Sporadic contact with fleeing enemy forces continued throughout the night of the 19th and into the following day. As five tanks of the 3d Tank Battalion returned to Hill 56 on the morning of 20 August, with Companies G and H, 9th Marines serving as blocking forces, two enemy squads attacked the advancing Marines with small arms, rocket propelled grenades, mortars, and artillery. Responding with a similar combination of weapons, the Marines forced the two enemy units to withdraw northward, leaving their dead, all of whom were credited to the marksmanship of Marine tankers.

Less than 1,000 meters northwest of Company M's encounter on the 19th, shortly after noon on the 21st, Company I, 9th Marines began receiving sniper fire. Within a hour, the company had engaged an enemy unit of undetermined size, firing small arms and grenades at the Marines. Countering with accurate rocket, mortar, and artillery fire, the Marine company forced the enemy to break contact and withdraw to the north. In one instance during the two-hour engagement, a grenadier with an M72 (LAAW) rocket destroyed an enemy 60mm mortar emplacement. A search of the area before dark revealed a reported 14 North Vietnamese bodies and 12 weapons.

While the enemy seemed reluctant to expose his large units to combat along the eastern DMZ, he displayed no hesitation in attacking small Marine reconnaissance patrols in the Kentucky area of operations during the month. In two Leatherneck Square actions, he paid a high price for his efforts, miscalculating on the proximity of reinforcing units and the immediate availability of supporting arms.

At 1000 on 15 August, an estimated enemy company attacked a four-man reconnaissance team southeast of Con Thien near the abandoned airstrip at Nam Dong. The patrol returned fire and requested reinforcement, while simultaneously calling in preplanned artillery fires. Within minutes a platoon from Company A, lst Marines, accompanied by three tanks, moved out of positions a kilometer away and headed south to assist. The coordinated attack, which included more than 150 rounds of 105mm artillery, 40 rounds of 4.2-inch mortar, 75 rounds from the 90mm guns of the tanks, and airstrikes by Marine UH–1E gunships accounted for several enemy dead.

In a second attack, the enemy paid an even greater price. At 1700 on 24 August, reconnaissance team "Tender Rancho" was moving north through high grass, seven kilometers southeast of Con Thien near Dao Xuyen, when the point man observed 15 khaki-clothed enemy troops cooking and talking. The team in a burst of small arms fire killed three, then another

three. Within minutes the team received a barrage of 82mm mortars and immediately formed a 360-degree security. A hour and a half after the first burst of fire, gunships arrived on station and informed the team that enemy troops surrounded them. The team later reported that 30 to 40 enemy "to the east, north and west" got up and ran when the gunships arrived.[19]

In immediate response to Tender Rancho's request for assistance, a Marine helicopter lift brought in a reinforced platoon from Company D, 1st Marines to help. Despite receiving .50-caliber and mortar fire in the landing zone, the Company D platoon fought through to link up with the reconnaissance team at 1930. Once consolidated, the team and reaction force received "a fire for effect" of 60 82mm mortar rounds, resulting in the death of three and wounding of eight Marines.[20]

Moving overland from the east, additional platoons from Company D, along with Company C, reached blocking positions just north of the encircled reconnaissance team before dark. At daylight on 25 August, Marine helicopters inserted the remainder of Company D. During the insertion, however, a UH–34, while dodging enemy fire, struck a tree breaking off the tail section, killing 3 and wounding 14. With the arrival of elements of the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines and Company M, 9th Marines later in the day, the Marines effectively cordoned the area, preventing an enemy withdrawal.

During the remainder of the 25th and into the 26th, as Companies C and D, 1st Marines pushed southward toward the other blocking forces, the enemy made several determined, but unsuccessful attempts to break the cordon. Just before midnight on the 25th, Company B, 1st Marines, which anchored the western portion of the cordon, began to receive enemy artillery fire. For the next seven hours the company was subjected to an artillery attack of more than 220 rounds. The enemy fire was so inaccurate that only one Marine was wounded. By 26 August, after three days of fighting, the enemy had lost a reported 78 killed and 28 weapons captured; Marine casualties were 11 killed and 58 wounded.

With the end of the cordon in Leatherneck Square, the 1st Marines, now commanded by Colonel Robert G. Lauffer, with its 1st and 2d Battalions, was relieved of the responsibility for the Napoleon-Saline and Kentucky areas of operations. The regiment boarded trucks for Dong Ha and then flew in Air Force C–130s to Da Nang, while Navy LCUs and LSTs carried the regiment's equipment south. On 31 August, the 1st Marines assumed the area of operations and mission formerly assigned to the 27th Marines.*

Upon the departure of the 1st Marines from Quang Tri Province, the Army's 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) assumed control of the Kentucky and Napoleon-Saline areas of operation. Composed of the 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry; 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry (Mechanized); and 1st Battalion, 77th Armored Regiment, Colonel Richard J. Glikes' brigade was reorganized at Fort Carson, Colorado in late March for movement to Vietnam.** After months of training, the brigade's main body began moving on 22 July, and by the 31st the brigade had completed the movement of personnel from Fort Carson to Da Nang and then to Quang Tri. At Da Nang, the brigade offloaded 148 armored personnel carriers and 67 tanks which were then transshipped to Wunder Beach, southeast of Quang Tri City.

Glikes' brigade originally was to assume the area of operations then assigned to the Army's 1st Cavalry Division, and possibly a portion of the Napoleon-Saline area. But because of enemy pressure and the approaching monsoon season, the 3d Marine Division ordered a realignment of forces and changes in areas of operations. The brigade, in conjunction with the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, would assume responsibility for a reduced Kentucky and Napoleon-Saline area of operation. The remaining portion of the sector was to be given to the 2d ARVN Regiment. The 3d Marines would take over a modified Lancaster area of operation, while the 4th Marines retained responsibility for the slightly altered Scotland II area of operations. The 9th Marines, the division's "swing" regiment, would be given the responsibility for a new area of operations, southwest of Quang Tri City.

In addition, General Davis requested that the Seventh Fleet's Amphibious Ready Group 76.4, with its accompanying special landing force be held off ashore, near the entrance to the Song Cua Viet. The landing

*At Da Nang, the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, which had moved south in late May to participate in operations during "Mini-Tet" in the Elephant Valley, northwest of Da Nang, rejoined its parent regiment on 7 September. The same day, the 1st Marines passed operational control of the 2d Battalion, 27th Marines to Regimental Landing Team (RLT) 27. See Chapter 19 relative to the arrival of the 1st Marines and departure of the 27th Marines at Da Nang.

**Included as part of the 24,500 additional military personnel spaces approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for deployment to Southeast Asia in 1968, was a 4,769-man mechanized brigade (separate) requested by U.S. Army, Vietnam. The mechanized brigade was to replace the 1st Marines who, in turn, would replace RLT 27. MACV ComdHist, 1968, pp. 225–228. See also Chapter 27.

force was to be prepared to assume responsibility for the Napoleon-Saline area of operations on six-hours notice. General Cushman approved the request and asked the task force commander to place a hold on the movement of the amphibious ready group.

The shift of forces in Quang Tri Province was part of a general realignment of units then taking place in Northern I Corps Tactical Zone. In early June, MACV undertook a study to determine the feasibility and desirability of reassigning tactical responsibilities within I Corps, a continuation of the long-range force deployment planning study, "Military Posture, Northern I Corps, 1 September 1968," submitted on 31 March 1968. The March study expressed the desirability of having the two Marine divisions operate in contiguous areas, areas which included deep-water port facilities and existing Marine logistic installations. Over the next several months the proposals contained in the March study were refined, and in June the MACV study group suggested that the 1st and 3d Marine Divisions be assigned the three southern provinces of I Corps under III MAF, while the 23d Infantry (Americal) Division and 101st Airborne Division be given the northern two provinces of the corps tactical zone.[21]*

While the proposal had a number of obvious tactical and logistical advantages, there were a number of drawbacks. First, if such a readjustment were to take place, the Army would, in all probability, create another field force that would report directly to MACV. More importantly, Lieutenant General Hoang Xuan Lam, as Commanding General, I Corps Tactical Zone, would be placed in the position of having to deal with two separate and competing commands within the zone, each of which reported directly to MACV. The proposed transplacement of Army and Marine units within I Corps, however, would be quashed for the moment by General Cushman with the support of Lieutenant General Rosson, who at the time was still Provisional Corps commander. In a message at the end of June, General Cushman observed that "Gen Rosson continues to share my views [and] . . . that current command relationships and projected troop dispositions should not be disturbed at this crucial period of the conflict . . . . However, if COMUSMACV decides to transplace . . . the earliest practical time to consider changes of this nature is late spring 1969."[22] General Chapman, the Marine Corps Commandant, noted that the Marines would acquiesce to the plan only if "CG, III MAF retains overall command of U.S. forces in ICTZ for the purpose of facilitating coordination with ARVN, CORDS and the advisory effort, and for coordinating tactical operations."[23]

As a collateral result of the proposed transplacement of Army and Marine units within I Corps was the approval in early August of the exchange of the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, under the operational control of the 101st Airborne Division, with the 101st's own 3d Brigade, then operating in III Corps. Conversion, involving the formation of two new companies per battalion of the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne to a separate light infantry brigade, was to be completed before the exchange, scheduled to take place in September or October.[24]

While Lieutenant Colonel George F. Meyers' 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, split between two positions on the Song Cua Viet and outposts at C–4 and Oceanview, continued a vigorous program of patrols and ambushes throughout the Napoleon-Saline area of operations, elements of Colonel Glikes' 1st Brigade concentrated on company and platoon patrols in Leatherneck Square, that area bounded by Con Thien, Gio Linh, Dong Ha, and Cam Lo.[25] On 4 September, a platoon from Company A, 61st Mechanized Infantry was sent to the relief of Company M, 9th Marines, engaged in battle with a reinforced NVA company in bunkers west of Con Thien. Joined by a reaction force from Company C, 61st Infantry, and supported by artillery and airstrikes, the combined Marine and Army force fought back. In the two-and-one-half hour battle that followed, the American units reported killing more than 20 enemy soldiers. Friendly losses were placed at 6 killed and 55 wounded, the majority as a result of enemy rocket-propelled grenade hits on armored personnel carriers. Darkness and typhoon warnings prevented further exploitation of the battle area.[26]

Beginning late on 4 September, the rains came to Quang Tri Province and the Marine command took precautions to prepare for Typhoon Bess. First MAW units in Quang Tri either secured their helicopters or flew them to safe areas away from the storm. Other Marines sandbagged the collections of Southeast Asia huts with their tin roofs and other structures that characterized U.S. bases in the province. These preparations together with the expected heavy downpours and high winds greatly hampered military operations.

The typhoon struck the coast of northern I Corps between Da Nang and Phu Bai on the afternoon of the 5th. As the rains and wind began to subside, the

*See Chapter 13 for earlier discussion of the 31 March 1968 planning effort.



Photo from the Abel Collection

A member of the 9th Marines operating near the DMZ hunches up as best he can under his poncho to protect himself from the torrential rains that struck Quang Tri Province in September.

typhoon instead of moving on shore and dissipating, had moved back to sea and was rapidly regaining strength. During the night of the 5th and the early morning hours of the 6th, Typhoon Bess began slowly to move up the South Vietnamese coastline. At a point almost due east of Hue, the typhoon plunged ashore with heavy rains and strong winds.

Slamming into the mountains, west of Hue, late in the day, the typhoon began to dissipate and by late afternoon, Bess was relegated to a tropical storm. But as the typhoon roared across northern I Corps, Bess dropped torrents of rain, collapsing tents and bunkers, and flooding much of the low-lying areas of Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces. Disaster relief operations initiated by the division took priority over all other activities not directly related to combat support.

Although the torrential rains sharply curtailed both allied and enemy ground combat activity, it did not halt future planning. Due to steadily increasing enemy ground, artillery, and mortar activity along the eastern half of the DMZ, south of the Ben Hai, the 3d Marine Division again proposed a one-day raid into the zone, scheduled for 12 September. The plan called for Colonel Glikes' 1st Brigade to conduct an armored attack to the Ben Hai, composed of three task forces: one tank heavy, one mechanized infantry heavy, and an armored cavalry force. As before, the armored attack was to exploit B–52 Arclight strikes. To the brigade's east, Lieutenant Colonel Giai's 2d ARVN Regiment would also launch an armor attack into the Demilitarized Zone. Both forces were to withdraw to positions south of the zone before darkness.

As Glikes' forces prepared for the DMZ strike, the enemy resumed artillery, rocket, and mortar attacks on allied installations throughout Quang Tri Province, following a three-day lull brought about by Typhoon Bess. In addition, small groups of enemy began to be sighted along the DMZ. On the 8th, Companies A and C, 61st Infantry, dismounted, and Company B, 11th Infantry assaulted into three landing zones, eight kilometers northwest of Cam Lo. Meeting no resistance in the landing zones, the companies attacked to the southwest the following day, encountering only a few pockets of enemy resistance.

Shortly after noon on 11 September, Company D, 11th Infantry engaged an enemy force of unknown strength occupying bunkers near the "Market Place," four kilometers northeast of Con Thien. The company called for Marine tactical airstrikes against the enemy, followed by artillery. A platoon of tanks from the 1st Battalion, 77th Armor moved up to reinforce. At 1830 the enemy attempted to break contact, but the artillery hampered the enemy withdrawal. Fixed in position by the heavy shelling, one group of enemy raised a white flag. The American gunners ceased fire momentarily to allow the group to surrender. Instead the North Vietnamese broke and ran and the artillery barrage resumed. A later sweep of the area revealed more than 40 enemy bodies. Of seven enemy soldiers captured, one identified his unit as belonging to the *27th Independent NVA Regiment*, a unit identified in frequent contacts with allied forces in the area since March.

On 10 September, General Abrams informed General Davis that the proposed allied raids into the Demilitarized Zone had been approved and that two Arclight strikes would be provided. Preceded by the pre-planned B–52 strikes and a 55-minute artillery and naval gunfire barrage of the objective area, the attacking force moved into the DMZ on the morning of 13 September. Two 1st Brigade reinforced company-size task forces, one tank heavy and the other mechanized infantry heavy, attacked on an axis to the northeast of Con Thien. A third brigade task force, armored cavalry heavy, moved into position five kilometers west of Gio Linh. Lieutenant Colonel Giai's 2d Battalion,

with the 1st Squadron, 7th ARVN Armored Cavalry, supported by two platoons from Company A, 3d Tank Battalion, simultaneously attacked to the north and northeast of A–2 and Gio Linh.

South Vietnamese infantry troops on the right flank achieved almost immediate contact. Providing a base of fire for the advancing ARVN infantry, Marine tanks, firing 90mm canister and high-explosive rounds, led the assault, killing a reported 73 North Vietnamese troops. Contact was so close at times that Marine tankers were forced to use machine gun, as well as main gun fire, to break through the enemy's defenses and reach their objective.[27] Following in the wake of the tanks, and supported by helicopter gunships, the ARVN infantry claimed to have killed an additional 68 enemy and captured one NVA soldier. On the left flank, after encountering mines and antitank fire, the three Army task forces soon joined the action, accounting for another reported 35 dead enemy soldiers and seizing a large cache of mortar rounds.[28] The allied forces reached their northernmost objectives, turned south, and returned to their bases by late afternoon.

Demoralized and unable to defend against yet another combined ground and massive supporting arms attack, the enemy withdrew northward. The captured North Vietnamese soldier identified his unit as an element of the *138th NVA Regiment*. He further indicated that the *138th Regiment* had assumed control of the *27th Independent Regiment*'s area of operations, due to the heavy casualties suffered by the regiment in recent months.[29]

On 20 September, continuing the mission of denying the enemy freedom of action and movement throughout the Kentucky area of operations, Colonel Glikes' brigade began a series of search and clear operations in the Khe Chua Valley, eight kilometers north of Cam Lo. While elements of the 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry occupied blocking positions stretching for 2,000 meters at the head of the valley, Companies B and C, 77th Armor moved from positions at C–2 Bridge and C–4, along Route 561, and swept up the valley toward the 61st's blocking positions.[30] During the next three days, the units cleared the valley of small enemy units that could threaten not only nearby brigade outposts, but also Cam Lo. At the same time, the Army troops discovered and destroyed several large enemy tunnel complexes.

Heavy monsoon rains during the later part of September had swollen the Ben Bai, forcing remnants of the *320th NVA Division* and independent regiments northward across the river. Intelligence, however, indicated that some groups had been trapped in the south by the rising water. Despite the weather, Companies B, C, and D, 11th Infantry moved out from C–2 and C–2 Bridge at 0400 on the morning of 26 September. In coordination with the 2d and 3d Battalions, 2d ARVN Regiment, and the 3d Marines, the companies moved to a position west of Con Thien and then attacked north across the southern boundary of the DMZ, toward the Dong Be Lao mountain complex.

During an eight-day foray into the DMZ, the attacking elements of the 11th Infantry encountered no opposition. What few engagements took place were with the enemy's rear guard, which attempted to slow the advance. Searches of numerous bunkers and other complexes indicated that the enemy had abandoned the positions only recently. In his hasty retreat the enemy left behind numerous poorly concealed booby-traps and mines, and several large caches of ammunition and equipment which were destroyed by advancing forces. From all indications what enemy troops had been in the area had withdrawn north across the Ben Hai to the relative safety of North Vietnam.[31]

The battleship *New Jersey* (BB 62), arrived on station, off the DMZ, on 29 September, and fired her first mission in support of division and ARVN troops the following day. The arrival of the *New Jersey* considerably enhanced the range and destructive power of fire support available to the division. Her nine 16-inch guns could each hurl a 2,760-pound shell to a maximum range of more than 38,000 meters, exceeding the range of a cruiser's 8-inch gun by 9,000 meters.

By the end of September enemy forces normally positioned along the eastern DMZ had withdrawn north of the Ben Hai, possibly into North Vietnam. The enemy had not been able, because of continued Army, Marine, and ARVN pressure, to initiate any portion of his planned Autumn Offensive. His attacks by fire and attempts at interdicting friendly lines of communication continued. Allied installations and tactical units in the northern portion of the province received periodic mortar, artillery, and rocket attacks. The heaviest attack occurred on 3 October when elements of the 2d ARVN Regiment received 170 rounds of 105mm artillery fire while engaged in a search and clear operation northeast of Gio Linh.

In addition, enemy sappers continued in their attempts to deny friendly forces the use of the Cua Viet. There were several instances when Navy patrol craft were hit by rocket propelled grenades, small arms, and automatic weapons fire from the banks of the river. Although the Navy continually swept the river for

mines, mining incidents along the vital waterway continued.

In October the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel George F. Meyers, maintained security of the Cua Viet waterway and conducted numerous patrols, cordons, and sweeps in the Napoleon-Saline area of operations. North of Lieutenant Colonel Meyers' battalion, elements of the 2d ARVN Regiment continued reconnaissance-in-force operations in the vicinity of A–1 and Gio Linh. To the west, in the Kentucky area of operations, Colonel Glikes' 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) emphasized offensive actions away from fixed positions, focusing on the enemy rather than terrain, employing infantry/armored task forces.

The first significant ground contact occurred on the 11th, when a brigade mechanized infantry and tank force, composed of Companies B and C, 61st Infantry and Company B, 77th Armor, engaged an estimated platoon of well-entrenched NVA troops. From heavily fortified bunkers, 2,500 meters northeast of Con Thien, the enemy effectively employed rocket propelled grenades and 60mm mortars, crippling three tanks and one armored personnel carrier (APC). Mines disabled another two tanks and one APC, killing a total of 3 and wounding 20 brigade troops. Fighting back with 90mm tank, artillery, and small arms fire, the companies swept through the area after five hours of battle and counted 26 North Vietnamese bodies.[32]

Heavy monsoon rains again fell throughout the area during mid-October, curtailing both ground and air operations. On 15 October, nevertheless, elements of the 2d ARVN Regiment engaged an estimated enemy company, four kilometers east of Gio Linh. Artillery, gunships, and Marine tactical air supported the ARVN infantrymen. One troop of the 11th ARVN Armored Cavalry moved up to reinforce, but was delayed due to the water-logged ground. Fighting continued throughout the 15th and into the next day. On the morning of 16 October, the 1st and 3d Troops, 11th Cavalry joined with the ARVN infantry, and by noon the enemy force now estimated at battalion-size was supported by artillery and mortar fire. The proximity of the opposing forces prohibited the use of airstrikes and the ARVN, like their opponent, relied heavily on accurate artillery fire. When the enemy force, thought to be an element of the *138th NVA Regiment*, broke contact at the end of the day, it had suffered more than a reported 105 killed in two days of fighting, while the ARVN units sustained 5 killed.

Marines from the 3d Marine Division visiting the New Jersey (BB 62) watch as the 16-inch guns of the battleship blast North Vietnamese positions near the DMZ.

Photo from the Abel Collection



South of the ARVN encounter on the 16th, in the Napoleon-Saline area of operations, Lieutenant Colonel Meyers' battalion assumed operational control of BLT 2/26. The following day, the battalion landing team cordoned the Xuan Khanh Resettlement Hamlet, five kilometers northeast of Cua Viet, in conjunction with a sweep and search of the hamlet by elements of the Vietnamese Coastal Group 11, National Police, and the local Marine Combined Action company. While detaining no villagers, the Marines evacuated two civilians for medical treatment. Before returning to its amphibious shipping on the 19th, the BLT conducted a search and destroy mission from Oceanview to the DMZ, uncovering and destroying numerous bunkers and boobytraps.[33]

Despite extended periods of torrential rains brought on by the northeast monsoon during October, both ground and aerial reconnaissance missions indicated the presence of a sizable enemy force south of the Ben Hai between Gio Linh and Con Thien. On 15 October, the 3d Marine Division set in motion yet another one-day raid into the DMZ to prevent any further enemy build-up in the area.[34] Weather caused the Marines to postpone the raid from 18 October until the 22d.[35] The scheme of maneuver called for a coordinated armored attack into the Demilitarized Zone by a 1st Brigade task force from Con Thien, Marine infantry and armor from the Napoleon-Saline area of operations, and a 2d ARVN Regiment task force from Dong Ha.

In preparation for the strike, on 21 October, Lieutenant Colonel Meyers' battalion assumed operational control of Company H, 9th Marines, which unit, LVTs transported to Outpost C–4, five kilometers northeast of Cua Viet. The following morning Company H, supported by tanks and amtracs, moved up the coast and took up blocking positions in the vicinity of Ha Loi Trung, within one kilometer of the southern boundary of the DMZ.[36]

At 0800 on 23 October, elements of the 2d ARVN Regiment attacked on two axes into the DMZ, north of Ha Loi Trung. The main attack, led by the 1st Battalion, 2d ARVN Regiment, supported by two troops of the 11th ARVN Armored Cavalry and a platoon of tanks from Company C, 3d Tank Battalion, moved across the boundary, approximately two kilometers from the coast. Three kilometers to the west, the secondary attack, led by the 2d Battalion, 2d ARVN Regiment, supported by Company H, 9th Marines and a platoon of tanks from Company A, 3d Tank Battalion, was launched. By noon, the two ARVN and Marine task forces were not only heavily engaged, but also had trapped an enemy unit of undetermined size between their positions and the sea. With artillery, U.S. Army gunships, and naval gunfire reinforcing friendly tank fire, the combined tank and infantry assault swept through the area, killing a reported 112 enemy soldiers, 63 of whom were credited to the tank crewmen of Company A. By dusk, the enemy broke contact and what remained of the North Vietnamese unit escaped further up the coast.[37]

On the same day, attacking north from A–3 and Con Thien into the DMZ and then eastward along the Ben Hai toward the site of the Marine and ARVN action, the brigade task force, composed of three companies of the dismounted 1st Battalion, 61st Mechanized Infantry, encountered only light resistance. As the task force continued eastward during the 24th, through Kinh Mon, Tan Mon, and An Xa along an abandoned railroad, Company A engaged an enemy platoon, reporting another seven NVA killed. At 0830 the following morning, Company A reestablished contact, this time with an estimated enemy battalion in well-fortified bunkers. Minutes later, Company B took a volley of heavy small arms and mortar fire. By 1030 the engaged companies had linked up, and while Company A attacked to the northeast against the enemy's flank, Company B assaulted and overran the enemy position, capturing one 82mm mortar, two 60mm mortars, and two .50-caliber antiaircraft weapons. Both companies, later reinforced by Company B, 77th Armor, remained in contact until 1800, during which time they made maximum use of air, artillery, and naval gunfire support. As a result of the action, the Americans reported 231 enemy dead. Brigade losses were 4 killed and 24 wounded. The task force withdrew southward on the 26th and during the remainder of the month, brigade troops continued to exploit minor contacts north of A–3 and recover their destroyed and damaged tanks in the DMZ.[38]

Despite the destruction of major elements of the *138th* and *270th NVA Regiments*, the victory was cause for concern. The reappearance of these two regiments in northeast Quang Tri Province, after suffering heavy casualties in several engagements during the past three months, not only confirmed their capacity to regroup rapidly and assimilate replacements, but also attested to both their flexibility and their maneuverability in frequently attacking and then withdrawing across the Ben Hai.

The combined ARVN, U.S. Army, and Marine attack into the Demilitarized Zone during the last week of October would be the last. Effective 2100 hours, 1 November, Saigon time, as announced by President Lyndon Johnson, the United States would cease all offensive operations against the territory of North Vietnam. The halt in no way applied to offensive operations within the Republic of Vietnam, but it did apply to offensive operations north of the Demilitarized Zone's southern boundary. The pre-November rules of engagement authorizing operations by ground forces in the DMZ south of the Provisional Military Demarcation Line were now revoked. However, General Abrams later sought authority, and gained approval from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to send squad-size patrols into the southern portion of the DMZ to "capture prisoners and obtain other positive proof that the NVA rather than the VC are operating in the southern portion of the DMZ."[39] What these patrols would find would be disturbing.[40]

Defeat of the 320th Division

Unlike the Napoleon-Saline and Kentucky areas of operations at the beginning of August, the Lancaster II and Scotland II areas remained relatively quiet. Colonel Edward J. Miller's 4th Marines continued extensive company patrol operations throughout the central portion of the Scotland area of operations with Lieutenant Colonel Thomas H. Galbraith's 1st Battalion searching the jungle canopy 10 kilometers west of LZ Stud. The battalion also retained responsibility for security operations in the immediate area of the combat base. Lieutenant Colonel Louis A. Rann's 2d Battalion operated from Fire Support Base Cates and the 3d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Frank L. Bourne, Jr., operated out of Fire Support Base Shepherd.

To the east, in the Lancaster area of operations, the 3d Marines, under the command of Colonel Richard L. Michael, Jr., continued to conduct search and destroy operations and to provide security for Thon Son Lam, Camp Carroll, and Route 9. Lieutenant Colonel Charles V. Jarman's 1st Battalion provided security for the Marine installation at Thon Son Lam, Khe Gio Bridge, and conducted company patrols and daily road sweeps of Route 9. The 2d Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Jack W. Davis, secured not only Thon Son Lam, but Camp Carroll, Dong Ha Mountain Observation Post, and the battalion's assigned portion of Route 9. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William H. Bates, who, on 28 July, had replaced Lieutenant Colonel James W. Marsh, the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines continued anti-infiltration operations from Fire Support Bases Margo and Joan, northwest of Camp Carroll.

To the south of the Lancaster area, lay a small area of operations in the Ba Long Valley, carved out of the east portion of the Scotland area and western portion of that assigned to the 1st Air Cavalry Division, being swept by Colonel Robert H. Barrow's 9th Marines. Originally planned as a multi-battalion sweep of the long fertile valley, which extends west from Quang Tri City to LZ Stud, the 9th Marines soon lost Lieutenant Colonel Francis X. Colleton's 1st Battalion to the defensive needs of both LZ Stud, now renamed Vandegrift Combat Base, and Ca Lu, and Lieutenant Colonel Frederic S. Knight's 2d Battalion to a competing operation in Leatherneck Square.

On 2 August, following a 48-hour delay due to a lack of helicopter transports, Company I, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines under Captain Gary E. Todd, was helilifted onto Hill 385, 12 kilometers southeast of Ca Lu. After the infantry company had established a defensive perimeter and had the artillery register supporting fires, Marine helicopters brought in the following day an engineer detachment and its equipment to begin construction of a new fire base there, Fire Support Base Holcomb. As Captain Todd later remarked, "the engineers couldn't contribute much until we established security."[41] In the meantime, other helicopters had inserted Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. LaMontagne, the 3d Battalion commander, and his command group and two rifle companies into the Cua Valley, or Mai Loc area, to the north, who initiated a sweep south along Route 558 toward Holcomb and the Ba Long Valley.

The construction of Holcomb was, as Colonel Barrow recalled, a new experience for the regiment:

> We went about it in a very methodical, carefully planned manner. We reconnoitered with the engineers, who would have a large hand in building it; the artillery, who would have to shoot from it; the infantry, who would have to defend it; and helicopter personnel, who, of course, would have to use it to resupply and build up the forces.[42]

Following two days of air preparation, which included the dropping of several "daisy cutters," the Marines occupied the hill, and infantry and engineers working side by side using demolitions, chain saw, and

hand tools, cleared the site.* A bulldozer was then brought in to build ammunition berms and gun pits, later to be occupied by Battery F, 12th Marines and elements of the 1st Provisional 155mm Howitzer Battery. Captain Todd remembered that as soon as the bulldozer arrived, "the artillery position quickly began taking shape" after relatively slow progress by hand until that time.[43] The building of Holcomb was, Barrow concluded, "rather amusing because we almost over-killed the effort with detail planning. But it was an experience that led us into refining our techniques."[44]

During the next 13 days, LaMontagne's Marines swept through the rice paddies and cornfields that dotted the valley floor and into the double-canopied jungle that covered the high ground to the north and south of the valley. LaMontagne temporarily closed Fire Support Base Holcomb as the battalion began construction of Fire Support Base Henderson, five kilometers to the southwest. The lack of contact and any evidence to indicate recent enemy activity brought the Ba Long Valley operation to a close on 16 August. The battalion then abandoned the two fire support bases and returned to Vandegrift Combat Base.

Reconnaissance patrols operating north of Route 9 in the Lancaster and Scotland areas of operation reported a dramatic upsurge in enemy activity during the first two weeks of August. In the region around Helicopter Valley, south of the DMZ, patrols sighted numerous small bands of enemy troops moving south, indicating that the area was either a much-used infiltration route or the possible site of several enemy base camps. The area further west, and north of the Rockpile, also witnessed an increase in enemy activity. A document captured by one patrol in the area indicated that elements of the *52d Regiment, 320th NVA Division* had moved into the region recently. The Khe Sanh plateau and the mountains west of Thon Son Lam and Ca Lu likewise were sites of increased enemy activity.[45] Taken together, these indicators pointed to the fact that following several abortive attempts in the coastal flatlands during the first half of the year, the division's three infantry regiments again were moving south through the DMZ and into the mountains north and west of the Rockpile, toward prepositioned caches of equipment and supplies.[46]

Colonel Michael's 3d Marines was the first to establish contact with the forward elements of the enemy division. On 4 August, while conducting a two-company sweep on the southern slope of Dong Ha Mountain, Lieutenant Colonel Davis' battalion uncovered a 20-bunker complex just north of the Cam Lo River. The following day, Davis' battalion was joined in the area by three companies of Lieutenant Colonel Bates' 3d Battalion which assaulted into landing zones near Cam Hung, five kilometers further north. During the next seven days, elements of both battalions discovered and destroyed more than 400 newly constructed bunkers and captured large quantities of enemy equipment and munitions.

On 12 August, a North Vietnamese sergeant belonging to the *7th Battalion, 64th Regiment, 320th Division* rallied to the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines at Con Thien. He informed the Marines that his regiment had crossed the DMZ in the vicinity of Bay Nha, seven kilometers west of Con Thien, and would move south along Mutter Ridge to Co Dinh within three days. From there, the enemy planned to move southeast toward Cam Lo and Route 9.[47] With the confirmation of the sergeant's information by aerial and ground intelligence, elements of Colonel Michael's regiment deployed rapidly to block the enemy.

On the 13th, Companies B, C, and D, 3d Marines assaulted into Landing Zones Amy and Mack at the western end of Mutter Ridge. Finding little activity in the area, the three companies, on the morning of the 15th, moved by helicopter to Landing Zone Dick, six kilometers further east. Lieutenant Colonel Davis' 2d Battalion simultaneously began deploying north, while Lieutenant Colonel Bates' 3d Battalion moved into blocking positions centered on the Dong Kio Mountain complex. As Davis' Marines moved north of the Cam Lo River, sporadic sniper and occasional automatic weapons fire soon turned into a full-scale engagement. The Marine companies had run headlong into two companies from the *64th's 8th Battalion* entrenched on Kho Xa, one-half kilometer north of the river. The Marines reported 43 of the enemy killed during this initial engagement.

On 16 August, in a further effort to cordon elements of the enemy regiment, the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Richard B. Twohey, who had replaced Lieutenant

*The daisy cutter was a conventional bomb, in this case a 2,000-pound bomb, with a pipe extension on its nose that caused it to detonate just above the ground, thereby clearing a large area. Major Gary E. Todd, the Company I commander, recalled that "while the experiment of using daisy cutters to help with initial tree-clearing seemed like a good idea during the planning stage, experience quickly showed otherwise." He declared that "instead of usable clearings, the first troops in were faced with jumbles of fallen and partially fallen tree trunks intertwined into veritable logjams." Maj Gary E. Todd, Comments on draft, dtd 19Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

Colonel Jarman, moved by helicopter to Hill 162, northwest of the supposed enemy position. With Twohey's Marines blocking enemy movement to the north, Bates' battalion occupying positions to the northwest, and Davis' troops pushing from the south, the forward elements of the enemy regiment could only turn east or west. If they did so, batteries of the 12th Marines located at Thon Son Lam, Camp Carroll, and C–2 could seal off the enemy's movement in either direction.

Learning that the assault by Twohey's battalion had split the *64th Regiment*, General Davis decided to commit the 9th Marines in an effort to halt any attempt by the regiment to reinforce its forward elements. Early on the morning of the 17th, Lieutenant Colonel LaMontagne's 3d Battalion helo-assaulted into Landing Zone Sparrow, nine kilometers southwest of Con Thien and the site of the battalion's 17 July engagement.* Lieutenant Colonel Colleton's 1st Battalion landed at LZ Saturn, three kilometers west of C–2, later that morning, and with elements of Company A, 3d Tank Battalion in direct support, moved west. But as Colleton's Marines left the open, rolling terrain and entered the canopy, where the tanks found it impossible to maneuver, the tank company returned to C–2.

With Colleton's battalion moving west toward the 3d Battalion, LaMontagne's Marines began a series of intense and aggressive company-size patrols throughout its assigned area of search. While on patrol near Sparrow on the morning of the 19th, Captain Richard A. O'Neil's Company M surprised and engaged a squad of North Vietnamese soldiers with small arms fire as well as artillery and airstrikes. As the enemy reinforced, swelling his ranks to two companies, LaMontagne ordered Captain Jack D. Schaeffer's Company K to join O'Neil's Marines. During Schaeffer's reinforcement of O'Neil, enemy ground fire hit and destroyed a Marine F–4 Phantom flying in support of the two companies. Both pilots ejected and were later rescued. A sweep of the battle area resulted in a reported 38 enemy bodies and miscellaneous weapons and equipment. The Marines also captured two enemy soldiers from the *7th Battalion, 64th Regiment*.

Two days later, on the 21st, Captain Gary E. Todd's Company I, while on patrol one kilometer west of Company M's contact on the 19th, encountered an enemy unit of undetermined size. Using artillery and airstrikes to the maximum extent possible, Todd's Marines forced the enemy to break contact leaving 14 dead behind. During a sweep of the area, the Marines of Company I discovered a large enemy complex containing 60 well-constructed bunkers, a mess area, and laundry hanging out to dry. On 23 August, helicopters returned Company I and the remainder of the battalion to Vandegrift Combat Base.

While Company I was engaged west of Lang Dong Bao Thoung on 19 August, Lieutenant Colonel Colleton's battalion assaulted into three landing zones, two kilometers further west, leap-frogging over LaMontagne's Marines. Moving toward the high ground, within one kilometer of the DMZ's southern boundary, a patrol from First Lieutenant Stephen E. Stacy's Company B encountered an enemy company armed with small arms, automatic weapons, and 60mm mortars. Within minutes an aerial observer arrived on station and called in air and artillery strikes. But as darkness fell, the patrol was unable to break contact and return to the company's main position, 600 meters away. Early the following morning, a misdirected fixed-wing airstrike resulted in the wounding of 10 other Marines, part of a relief force attempting to make its way to the patrol's position. The first patrol eventually rejoined the company, but was forced to leave its dead on the battlefield. Lieutenant Stacy's company, on the 24th, recovered the bodies of seven Marines and one Marine earlier reported as missing. The following day, Lieutenant Colonel Colleton's battalion rejoined the regiment at Vandegrift Combat Base.[48**]

Although the 9th Marines reported 72 enemy soldiers killed in eight days, Colonel Barrow believed that the *64th NVA Regiment* lost many more. "I believe very much," he later stated, "that we killed a great many more because we had an unusual operation in which the 1st Battalion, 9th was on a narrow ridgeline and brought under heavy attack from within the DMZ and we responded with massive air, artillery, and mortar fire on forces that were observed by the AOs as being massed and large in number, and we brought great devastation on the area, on these forces." Although unable to enter the DMZ and confirm enemy casualties, Barrow believed, "that our activities in that area

*See Chapter 18.

**Colonel Thomas H. Galbraith, who commanded the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines at the time, commented "What happened to Stacy's patrol was the kind of thing we constantly worried about. Simply getting food, water, and ammo to small units that were operating any distance from an LZ was difficult, and getting help to them in a timely manner when they were in trouble was sometimes almost impossible. Supporting arms and air were the best you could hope for, and, of course, if the weather was bad, you couldn't count on air." Galbraith Comments.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191909

Marines from the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines examine a LZ on Mutter Ridge as a Marine UH–1E helicopter sits nearby.

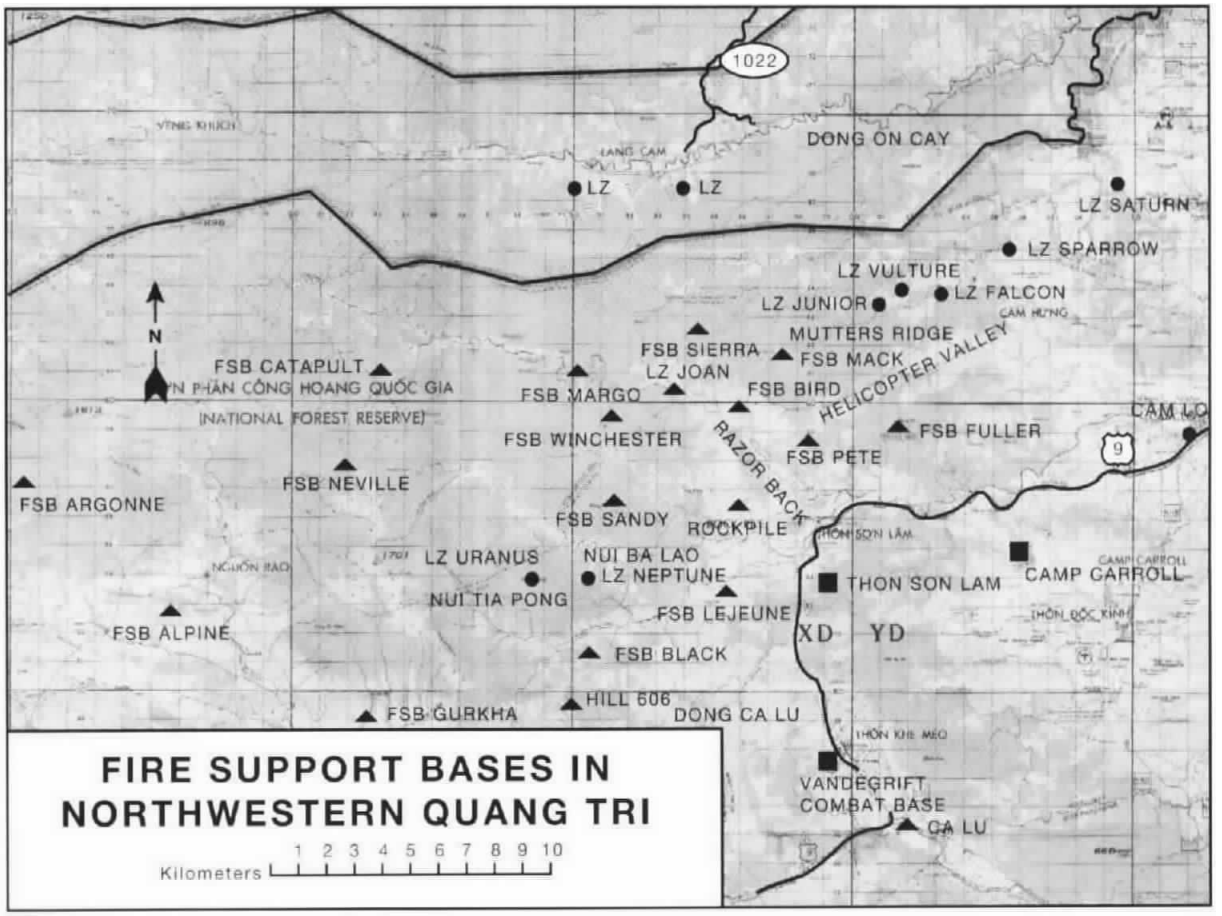
dealt that regiment a pretty severe blow, far beyond the confirmed body count."[49]

While Colonel Barrow's 1st and 3d Battalions were heavily engaged to the north, Colonel Michael's 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Twohey, continued to sweep south down Mutter Ridge, finding numerous platoon- and company- sized bunker complexes. Each find led to a more sophisticated one further south. The most significant finds were an enemy supply battalion's storage area and what appeared to be a regimental command post. The supply cache included more than 1,000 82mm mortar rounds and close to 15,000 AK–47 rounds. In the regimental complex, the Marines found numerous ammunition storage bunkers, messhalls, kitchens, several 60mm and 82mm mortar positions, and an extensive Chinese-built field phone communications system.

On 19 August, Lieutenant Colonel Twohey's battalion continued southwest along Mutter Ridge while Lieutenant Colonel Davis' 2d Battalion swept west through Helicopter Valley, between Dong Ha Mountain and Mutter Ridge. At the same time, Lieutenant Colonel Bates' 3d Battalion moved four kilometers northwest of the Rockpile to the Razorback, a large sharp ridgeline paralleling the Cam Lo River. With two companies conducting company-sized patrol operations on either side of the river, Bates' Marines engaged numerous small enemy groups in short, but sharp encounters, and frequently came under heavy artillery and mortar fire. With the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines in place, blocking the western end of both Mutter Ridge and Helicopter Valley, Marine helicopters lifted the 1st and 2d Battalions, once they had completed their searches, to Thon Son Lam and Camp Carroll for refurbishment.

During the last week of August, the enemy was once more on the move. He not only increased his artillery and rocket attacks against Thon Son Lam and Camp Carroll, but the large number of contacts and sightings indicated he had entered the upper Cam Lo Valley, north of Thon Son Lam and northwest of Dong Ha Mountain.[50] With this information in hand, General Davis decided to insert the 1st and 2d Battalions, 9th Marines west of the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines positions, into a rugged, jungle-covered, mountainous region never before entered by Marines in force.

Prior to the insertion of the two battalions, Marine aircraft dropped a large quantity of heavy ordnance to



create landing zones on the ridgelines. The idea was to facilitate entry on the high ground instead of the low, but it did not succeed.[51] On the morning of 27 August, Lieutenant Colonel Knight's 2d Battalion lifted into three dispersed landing zones along the Suoi Tien Hien Valley floor, six kilometers west of the Rockpile, and immediately encountered stiff resistance. The flight of helicopters carrying Captain Joel D. Ward's Company E, as it approached the proposed landing zone near the river, received a heavy volume of ground fire. Enemy gunners shot down one CH–46 in the zone and damaged two others but there were no Marine casualties. While employing Marine UH–1E gunships in an attempt to suppress enemy fire in the zone, however, Ward's Marines were hit with a pod of rockets, resulting in two killed and two wounded.

Unlike elements of Knight's battalion, the insertion of Lieutenant Colonel Colleton's battalion into the broad Khe Giang Thoan Valley, southwest of the Rockpile, was unopposed. Once in the area of operations, the two battalions immediately moved up the ridges and secured positions on the high ground. The Marines established Fire Support Base Sandy atop the needle-point pinnacle, Dong Khe Soc, seven kilometers west of the Rockpile, to support the two battalions. Sandy, because of its size, could only accommodate one battery of 105mm howitzers, but it was the first of many that would be constructed throughout the area.[52]

As September began, Lieutenant Colonel Bates' 3d Battalion, 3d Marines found itself heavily engaged with elements of the enemy's *52d NVA Regiment*, attempting a reinforcing thrust north and northwest of the Razorback. On the 3d, the enemy shelled Captain William B. Gray's Company L with 172 rounds of 60mm and 82mm mortars and 25 rounds of 130mm artillery. Immediately following the enemy artillery preparation, two companies of NVA troops assaulted the Marine company's position. But, before the enemy had an opportunity to open fire, Ward's Marines pelted the enemy force with more than 300 hand grenades. A search of the area revealed a reported 11 enemy bodies and 19 weapons, three of which were machine guns that had been fired.

Companies B and C, 3d Marines reentered the area of operations on 3 September, and the following day began search and destroy operations west and then south along the slopes of Mutter Ridge. Four days later, after the torrential rains of Typhoon Bess had eased, the remaining two companies of the 1st Battalion were helilifted onto the ridge to assist, while Companies E and F of the 2d Battalion secured and established blocking positions on the high ground to the west. As Lieutenant Colonel Twohey's 1st Battalion Marines moved southwest, they increasingly came into contact with the forward elements of the *48th NVA Regiment* which were endeavoring to reinforce the scattered remnants of the *52d*. Late, on the 7th, First Lieutenant Richard A. Andrews' Company A encountered an enemy squad in bunkers on the southern slope of Hill 461. The company immediately formed a defensive position, but the enemy unit continually probed its lines throughout the night. A check of the area at first light revealed an assortment of miscellaneous equipment and arms, but no enemy bodies. Andrews' Marines lost three killed and an equal number of wounded during the engagement. The most significant contact began on the 8th as Company A and the rest of the battalion continued to move up Hill 461. An estimated two companies from the *48th Regiment*, from well-camouflaged bunkers, tenaciously defended themselves using 60mm and 82mm mortar and 130mm artillery supporting fires. As Twohey's Marines pressed on, the enemy counterattacked twice, first on the 10th and then on the 11th, when they attempted to employ a double envelopment of Company B. During the three-day battle, the enemy regiment lost an estimated 50 killed and numerous weapons captured.

While Twohey's battalion moved slowly through the triple canopy toward the northwest, Lieutenant Colonel Knight's 2d Battalion, 9th Marines turned its attention to two large hill masses southwest of the Rockpile, Nui Tia Pong and Nui Ba Lao.

The battalion's search of the Suoi Tien Hien Valley had not proved fruitful. There were no trails nor evidence of the enemy which had fired on the battalion from the high ground to the northeast of the valley in late August. Knight decided to split the battalion. He placed Bravo Command Group and Companies E and H on the Nui Ba Lao ridgeline and directed them to attack east. Alpha Command Group and Companies F and G were lifted out of the valley, inserted into landing zones on eastern slopes of Nui Tia Pong, and ordered to attack west up the mountain.

Both elements made contact shortly after entering their new landing zones, the most significant occurring on Nui Tia Pong. As the two rifle companies, alternating in the attack, slowly moved up the narrow ridge, punctuated with peaks and saddles, from the 200-meter level to the first prominent high ground at 800 meters, they encountered a small but determined, well-dug in enemy force. "It was difficult fighting," recalled Colonel Barrow, "there was no opportunity for maneuver because you could not attempt any sort of enveloping movement because the terrain was so precipitous. So it was a masterful use of firepower and moving straight ahead against the resistance."[53] While suffering few casualties of their own, the companies inflicted a damaging blow upon the defending enemy force.

Once atop Nui Tia Pong, the heavy rains associated with Typhoon Bess struck, cutting off resupply to the two companies for several days. According to Barrow:

> We had units down to zero availability rations; they tightened their belts. They conserved their rations and had no problem with water, of course. It was an experience in learning how to endure the monsoon-type weather in this very inhospitable terrain, and they did it well.[54]

As soon as the heavy rains ended, Companies F and G moved down off the ridge, searching the fingers and finding numerous small ordnance and ration caches. On 8 September, in an effort to increase troop density, Marine helicopters brought in Company C, 9th Marines. The pattern of search during the next several days had one company ahead, moving up the ridgeline to the west, pushing the enemy back, while the remaining two companies searched the fingers off the ridgeline and, when required, alternated with the lead company. This pattern of company search would continue as the regiment moved further north.

On 9 September, as the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines prepared to leave the Khe Giang Thoan Valley and return to Vandegrift Combat Base, Lieutenant Colonel LaMontagne's 3d Battalion assaulted into Landing Zone Winchester on Dong Tien, six kilometers north of Nui Tia Pong, and immediately developed contact to its east and west. LaMontagne's battalion easily dealt with the enemy forces on its eastern flank, killing more than an estimated 20 NVA, and then threw its weight toward the western flank. As the battalion moved further west, it encountered successive delaying actions by well-dug-in enemy platoons and companies, employing command detonated mines, mortars, and automatic weapons, the same tactics experienced by the 2d Bat-



Both photos are from the Abel Collection

Top, a covey of Boeing Vertol CH–46s carrying elements of the 4th Marines into a landing zone just south of the DMZ is viewed through the door of one of the helicopters. The outline of the helicopter's machine gun can be seen at the opening. In the bottom photo, Marines in the same operation, now on the ground, wade through a stream whose water comes up to their waists.



talion on Nui Tia Pong. Colonel Barrow later reflected, "our tactics were to employ massive firepower, air, artillery, and mortars, and 106s, and when the area was virtually devastated, move in." He observed, "always there seemed to be enough left for the infantry to have to do a little of its own fighting, but most of it resulted in counting confirmed dead."[55] In its drive west, the battalion reported killing more than 200 enemy soldiers and uncovered large caches of mortar rounds, Chinese Communist hand grenades, anti-personnel mines, and long-range rockets.

As the 2d and 3d Battalions, 9th Marines pushed westward, the 3d Marines continued in heavy contact north of the Razorback. Lieutenant Colonel Bates' 3d Battalion, with three companies on line, swept through the low ground, northwest of Mutter Ridge, against dug-in enemy troops who resisted with heavy 60mm, 82mm, and artillery fire. Although Bate's Marines reported killing more than 17 enemy, they suffered in turn 8 dead and 87 wounded, most as a result of the enemy's indirect fire.

Working in conjunction with Bates' Marines were the other two battalions of the 3d Marines on Mutter Ridge. While enemy contact was light, both battalions discovered and then destroyed numerous enemy bunkers complexes, fighting positions, and ammunition storage areas.

Replacing Bates' 3d Battalion on 13 September, Lieutenant Colonel William F. Sparks' BLT 2/26 landed at LZ Margo, two kilometers north of Landing Zone Winchester. Three days later, as the battalion's four companies pushed east and then north from the landing zone, a hill overlooking the deep, prominent bend in the Cam Lo River, the command post on Margo underwent a 158-round 82mm mortar barrage at 1520. Despite returning fire initially with machine gun and small arms and then with 81mm mortar and artillery fire in an effort to silence the enemy mortars, the command group suffered 21 killed and 135 wounded. The command post took another 64 rounds two hours later, resulting in 1 killed and 11 wounded. The following day, the command group was again bombarded with 117 mortar rounds and lost another 1 dead and 16 wounded.

The enemy's continued use of delaying tactics such as that employed against the command post of BLT 2/26 and the oftentimes tenacious defense of caches throughout the rest of the area of operations, indicated that the remnants of the three regiments of the *320th NVA Division* were endeavoring to gain time in order to make their escape north of the DMZ. "It was apparent," General Davis later wrote, "that the situation was ripe for the lift of two battalions into the DMZ to trap as many of these scattered units as possible."[56] Colonel Barrow noted the idea was "to move south against the enemy that was believed to be between the Ben Hai and Cam Lo."[57]

On 16 September, the regimental command post of the 9th Marines displaced from Vandegrift to Landing Zone, now Fire Support Base, Winchester. From Winchester, Colonel Barrow would direct the northward deployment of additional Marine battalions and oversee the destruction of the enemy division. With the movement of the regimental command post forward, the regiment assumed operational control of BLT 2/26 and the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines.

The next morning following nine B–52 Arclight strikes on the DMZ north of the operational area, Lieutenant Colonel Colleton's 1st Battalion, 9th Marines and Lieutenant Colonel Galbraith's 1st Battalion, 4th Marines were inserted into the DMZ, within a kilometer of the Ben Hai River. "The mission which we assigned 1/9 and 1/4," Colonel Barrow recalled, "was to attack on multi-axes to the south in a most deliberate, methodical manner, searching out ridgelines, draws, looking both for the enemy and for any caches which he might have in the area. It was by no means a matter of land and move rapidly to the south. It was to be a deliberate search."[58] Meanwhile, Barrow directed Lieutenant Colonel Sparks' BLT 2/26 to attack rapidly to the north on two axes, one generally in the direction of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines and the other toward the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines.*

Pushing south toward the high ground, the two battalions captured a number of prisoners who confirmed that their units were moving north, attempting to cross the Ben Hai and escape into North Vietnam. They also indicated that they were plagued by severe food shortages, low morale, and had been seriously hurt by Arclight strikes. In addition to prisoners, both Colleton's and Galbraith's Marines, when not engaging small groups of enemy troops moving north, found a number of mass graves, containing the bodies of more

*At 1330 on 17 September, a Marine UH–1E bound for Winchester from Vandegrift, hit a tree and crashed 200 meters south of the fire support base. Among the passengers on board the aircraft were Brigadier General William C. Chip, who had replaced Brigadier General Carl W. Hoffman as Commanding General, Task Force Hotel on 22 August, and Lieutenant Colonel Frederic S. Knight, Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines. Although injured, both men survived the crash.

than 150 enemy soldiers, and large stores of arms, ammunition, and food.

The 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, which was operating in an area generally east of Sparks' battalion and south of Galbraith's battalion, was placed under the control of Colonel Barrow's regiment on 19 September. For the next several days, the 9th Marines controlled six battalions, two thirds of the division's infantry battalions. These six battalions were attacking in all directions and Colonel Barrow noted:

> The 2d Battalion, 9th Marines . . . [was] still attacking generally to the west with part of . . . [its] forces and generally to the east with another; the 3d Battalion, 9th was attacking to the west; the 1st Battalion, 9th and 1st Battalion, 4th were attacking to the south; the 2d Battalion, 26th was attacking to the north; and the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines was generally conducting heavy patrol activities in all directions. So the pattern of activity was one that would frustrate the Marine Corps School's problem directors I am sure, but the tactical situation dictated this type of maneuver.

According to Barrow, "this was all done from a very austere regimental command post in the field." He continued: "It is a great credit to my staff that they performed all of the fire control effort and the rest of the activities related to fire and maneuver in the most exemplary fashion."[59]

There were indications by 23 September that the north-south push was having an effect on the scattered elements of the three enemy regiments. Instead of moving north and being trapped, the enemy forces began to reorient their attempts at escape to the east and west. Responding to this apparent shift, Colleton's battalion was directed to drive west while Galbraith's Marines pushed east.

Lieutenant Colonel Twohey's 1st Battalion, 3d Marines would continue its attack east along Mutter Ridge as Lieutenant Colonel Sparks' battalion landing team and Lieutenant Colonel Bryon T. Chen's 2d Battalion, 3d Marines attacked north.* This maneuver, coupled with an attack on 26 September by three companies of the Army's 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry and two battalions of the 2d ARVN Regiment west from C–2, was designed to cut the enemy's escape routes and destroy what remained of the three regiments.

While Colleton's Marines continued to search the 400-meter high ridgeline generally paralleling the southern boundary of the DMZ, sweep operations west of the Rockpile came to an end. On 29 September, the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, now commanded by Major Frederick E. Sisley, was helilifted to Vandegrift Combat Base, followed on 1 October, by the regimental command group and Lieutenant Colonel LaMontagne's 3d Battalion, 9th Marines. With the departure of the 9th Marines from Winchester, operational control of Sparks' BLT 2/26 was passed to the 3d Marines.

The division expanded its search operations within the DMZ as the new month began. On 1 October, BLT 2/26 replaced the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines in the DMZ and was tasked with destroying a recently built road, an extension of North Vietnam Route 1022 southward into the DMZ. Discovered by Galbraith's Marines,** with the assistance of an aerial observer, in late September, the road complex generally followed the Ben Hai River before turning south, two kilometers west of Dong Ong Cay, and ending 2,000 meters north of the DMZ southern boundary. North of the river, the road was well-developed, open and easily located from the air as well as from prominent terrain features in the southern DMZ. Once it crossed the river, it was well-camouflaged and difficult to spot because of overhead cover. Built entirely by hand labor, the road was hacked out of the jungle, lined with timber, and ringed with base camps and fighting positions.

Sparks' battalion, with two companies in the attack and one in reserve, moved slowly north along the road, destroying all enemy structures as they searched for elements of the *52d Regiment* and its suspected command and control complex. Continually bombarded by artillery and mortars, the battalion's Marines fought small groups of determined and well-trained enemy soldiers in well-concealed and heavily bunkered reverse-slope defensive positions. Once friendly supporting arms were brought to bear, the enemy would withdraw, only to take up a defensive posture in yet another prepared position.

*Lieutenant Colonel Chen replaced Lieutenant Colonel Jack W. Davis on 20 September as Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines.

**Colonel Thomas H. Galbraith, then the commander of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, later remembered that his battalion discovered the road on about the third or fourth night after they had entered the DMZ and started to move south: "I heard motors off in the distance. Seems that I heard them for two or three nights and couldn't figure out who had trucks operating in these hills." His recollection was that he "reported hearing them to Colonel Barrow . . . and in the next day or so a helicopter came to pick me up to see if I could point out where the sounds had come from." Galbraith wrote: "I recall having been very disappointed in not being able to see anything at all—I felt like the boy who had cried 'wolf'—but as it turned out, the road was indeed there, superbly hidden by canopy and camouflage, and what I had heard was the motors of the trucks and/or heavy equipment that were being used to build it." Galbraith Comments.

On 4 October, Company H found a 152mm artillery position, ringed with machine gun and mortar emplacements, and 12 rounds of 152mm ammunition, 1,600 meters south of the Ben Hai. To the northeast, Marines discovered two 85mm howitzer positions with accompanying antiaircraft guns. Several hundred meters from the howitzer positions, they found a partially burned Soviet, six-cylinder diesel, full-tracked prime mover, capable of towing a 152mm artillery gun, which appeared to have been hit by a 105mm howitzer round. It was suspected that the 152mm guns were removed from the area shortly after the insertion of the battalion. Not only were there signs indicating the use of tracked vehicles, but one night Sparks' Marines reported hearing heavy engine noises to the north.

The most significant enemy contact occurred on 8 October as First Lieutenant Tyrus F. Rudd's Company H approached Dong Ong Cay from the south. Despite a tenacious fight the defenders lost a reported 17 dead, while Rudd's Company suffered 2 killed and 11 wounded. During the engagement the Marines observed numerous bodies being dragged away, 11 of which were found the following morning. In a search of the hill, the Marines found another vehicle, a 12-cylinder diesel Soviet medium tracked artillery tractor with a rear winch.

BLT 2/26 continued to search the road until 16 October when it returned to the Cua Viet area by helicopter. There it participated in two short operations, the cordon of Xuan Khanh Resettlement Village and a sweep north from Oceanview to the DMZ. With the departure of Lieutenant Colonel Sparks' battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Twohey's 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, which had moved into the DMZ on the 8th and was sweeping to the east and west of the BLT, assumed the mission of searching the road and destroying enemy installations in the area.

Twohey's Marines discovered more than 488 rounds of 152mm artillery ammunition, truck parks, and support camps as they moved north. By 17 October they had reached the Ben Hai, one kilometer north of Dong Ong Cay, where they found a shallow fording site built of rock and three cable bridges over the river. The rock, or "underwater bridge" was rendered unserviceable by several 8-inch howitzer missions and the cable bridges were destroyed by fixed-wing and artillery strikes. Using 422 of the captured 152mm artillery rounds, 3,000 pounds of C–4, and cratering charges placed in and along the road, Twohey's battalion, working together with a detachment of engineers, destroyed major portions of the road. They also blasted holes in the canopy to make the road more visible from the air. The 1st Battalion, 3d Marines was helilifted from the DMZ on 22 October to provide security for installations along Route 9. Although both Sparks' and Twohey's Marines continually heard tracked vehicles moving north and responded with a massive artillery and air assault, the *320th NVA Division* was able to remove its heavy artillery from the area.

As October began, 8,000 meters to the west, Lieutenant Colonel Colleton's 1st Battalion, 9th Marines continued to sweep westward in the DMZ. The search, however proved fruitless and on the 7th the battalion withdrew. The same day, Lieutenant Colonel Chen's 2d Battalion, 3d Marines was inserted into the DMZ, 8,000 meters further west. Unlike September, when enemy contact was heavy, Chen's Marines engaged few enemy troops, mostly logistical support personnel who seemed startled that Marines had invaded what they considered their rear area. Although numerous caches, supply trails, and rest centers were discovered, the greatest enemy soon became the weather. The rain, constant and torrential, not only caused difficulties in movement and resupply, but numerous cases of immersion foot. After 17 days in the DMZ, the battalion was helilifted to Camp Carroll and from there by foot moved to the Mai Loc area for operations with Regional and Popular Forces. By 26 October all Marine units had left the DMZ and the allies terminated the series of operations against the three regiments of the *320th NVA Division*.

Thwarted in two attempts at victory in the lowlands during April and May, the enemy division, in August, chose another route which, as Colonel Barrow stated, led to a third defeat:

> He had to choose some other way to attempt to do his dirty work of interdicting our roads and attacking civilian settlements. And so he chose this inhospitable area, northwest of the Rockpile, and if one will look at a map you can see that to him that it was a wise choice because, one, it was an area that made his targets quite accessible. He was only six, eight, or ten clicks away from the Rockpile. It was an area that was so rugged that he could assume that it was inaccessible to us, that we would not have the means to enter it unless we chose to do it overland and we would pay a heavy price if we did. The fact that we moved in and forced our way, if you will, onto the ridgelines on an equal footing with him and showed great determination in seeking out his supplies which were so carefully concealed, upset his plans. He had prepared this area as his battlefield . . . We couldn't have hit him at a better time. We hit him

when his forces had not yet gotten to their battlefield and we dealt his forces a blow.[60]

During three months of fighting, the Marine command estimated that the *320th NVA Division* lost more than 1,500 killed as well as large numbers of individual and crew-served weapons. The Marines, in addition, destroyed hundreds of prepared positions and huge stockpiles of munitions. In contrast to the heavy losses of the enemy, Marine casualties were less that 200, many from indirect artillery and mortar fire.

When the 9th Marines left the battle with the *320th Division*, they turned their efforts toward the expanding pacification program. At 1000 on the morning of 1 October, as the regimental headquarters prepared to depart Fire Support Base Winchester, it received an order from Task Force Hotel to place a three battalion cordon that night around the Beng Son-Doc Kinh or Mai Loc village complex, a known Viet Cong haven in the Cua Valley. Throughout the day, Army helicopters made a visual reconnaissance of the area, battalions briefed down to the squad level, and the regiment carried out coordination with South Vietnamese officials and the U.S. Army district advisor. At dusk the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines and 3d Battalion, 4th Marines arrived by truck at Camp Carroll, and shortly after dark, the two battalions began their overland movement. Lieutenant Colonel Bourne's 3d Battalion travelled in a easterly direction, while Major Sisley's 2d Battalion headed south and then turned east. According to Colonel Barrow:

> Their movements were sort of like the pincers of a crab, moving out into the night, getting around the village and the open side of the cordon was then to be filled in by the 3d Battalion, 9th, landing at night into two landing zones, one up near where the 3d Battalion, 4th would have the head of its column and one not too far from where the 2d Battalion, 9th would have the head of its column.[61]

Lieutenant Colonel LaMontagne's 3d Battalion, 9th Marines lifted out of Vandegrift and touched down in the area two hours before midnight. Within 30 minutes his lead elements made contact with Bourne's and Sisley's Marines, closing the cordon. Early the following morning, Colonel Barrow made a helicopter reconnaissance of the area: "It was a very dramatic sight to see the next morning an entire infantry regiment wrapped around this large village complex with a Marine every 5 to 10 meters in physical contact all the way around the cordon."[62] During the next several days, the regiment tightened the cordon and completely searched the village complex.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A801136

1stLt James Luker, Jr., a member of the fire support group with the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, pauses for a moment near LZ Cates in Operation Scotland to fill a canteen with water. He apparently has the water duty as three more canteens are on the rocks waiting to be filled as well.

While detaining only 40 individuals, who were later identified as prominent members of the local Viet Cong infrastructure, Barrow considered the cordon a success. "We were particularly proud of it," he stated, "because it showed the versatility of this regiment and our capability to respond rapidly, having come out of a month-long mountain jungle operation and that very same night of the same day we came out we conducted a very successful cordon operation, which was, of course, entirely different and involved operating with other forces and involved working in an area that was heavily populated."[63]

While the 3d Marines, and later 9th Marines, were pursuing the regiments of the *320th NVA Division*, Colonel Edward J. Miller's 4th Marines continued to conduct mobile defensive operations within the Scotland area of operations. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas H. Galbraith's 1st Battalion, 4th Marines conducted extensive company patrols, searching for enemy troops, caches, and constructing landing zones for future heliborne assaults throughout August and into September. On 7 August, the battalion command group and three companies were helilifted to Hills 679 and 505 in the Huong Vinh region, approximately 10 kilometers west of Vandegrift. The Marines cut landing zones and conducted numerous patrols throughout the area without

results. On the 23d, in an effort to assist the 3d Battalion, Galbraith's Marines assaulted into the Huong Phuc region, south of Route 9, approximately 17 kilometers southwest of Vandegrift. Once again the troops, except for two short encounters with small groups of enemy soldiers as they attacked to the northwest, found little of interest. The Dong Ca Lu mountain complex west of Vandegrift, a favorite harboring site for the North Vietnamese, became the battalion's chief interest during the last days of August and first two weeks of September. Although Galbraith's Marines sighted several large groups of enemy in the area and responded with mortar, artillery, and airstrikes, no significant engagements took place.

Between these series of short operations, the battalion maintained responsibility for the defense of Vandegrift Combat Base and Ca Lu. Assigned the mission of planning a new perimeter defense, Galbraith's Marines, in coordination with the 11th Engineers, cleared fields of fire, laid defensive wire, and assisted with the placement of tanks, Ontos, M42 "Dusters", and searchlights at strategic points along the perimeter. On 17 September, the battalion was placed under the operational control of the 9th Marines and assaulted into the DMZ.

Further west, Lieutenant Colonel Louis A. Rann's 2d Battalion, 4th Marines maintained a continuous series of patrols from Fire Support Base Cates. The 2d Battalion also manned strategic hills overlooking the abandoned base at Khe Sanh. Enemy contact was light during August, consisting of small unit probes of all battalion defensive positions. September brought long periods of rain and overcast weather to the western mountains, hindering the battalion's long-range patrol effort and resulting in numerous accidents and several collapsed bunkers.

On 17 September, Rann's Marines observed enemy activity around the abandoned Khe Sanh Combat Base. Several artillery missions were called in on a possible enemy truck convoy, antiaircraft positions, and on the former helicopter revetments, but without success. Later, several patrols reported hearing and seeing an unidentified aircraft near the base, but no positive identification could be made due to heavy fog.

To the southeast of Rann's battalion, the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Frank L. Bourne, Jr., continued to defend Fire Support Base

FSB Shepherd, in this aerial view, overlooks Route 9 where two rivers, the Song Rao Quan and Da Krong come together. Unfortunately neither the road nor the rivers can be made out in this picture.

Photo from the 12th Mars ComdC, Dec68



Shepherd, overlooking Route 9 and the confluence of the Song Rao Quan and Da Krong. Bourne maintained one rifle company at the fire support base and employed the three remaining companies, on a rotating basis, in a mobile defense. According to the plan, the companies moved from patrol base to patrol base in the field every two to three days. In addition to company patrols out of Shepherd, the battalion conducted a two-company search operation in the Huong Phuc region to the southwest near Hills 549 and 587. Soon after entering the region on 21 August, Companies L and M came under heavy and continuous rocket-propelled grenade, 75mm recoilless rifle, 60mm, and 82mm mortar fire. The companies maintained a tight defensive position on Hill 549 for several days before being relieved by elements of the 1st Battalion.

Despite extended periods of inclement weather during September, Bourne's battalion continued the program of constantly patrolling its sector of the regimental area of operations. On 13 September, the battalion was split with the Bravo command group and Companies I and L displacing to Vandegrift Combat Base. The Alpha command group and Companies K and M remained on Shepherd.

Although the two remaining companies continued to send out long-range patrols, the Marines encountered only friendly Montagnards and no enemy troops during the month. However, while on patrol, north of Ra Co Ap, three kilometers west of Shepherd, elements of Company M captured two Vietnamese males, carrying a white flag. Initially thought to be North Vietnamese soldiers, they later revealed that they were ARVN officers who had been captured at Hue during the Tet Offensive in February. They reported that they had escaped from an enemy prisoner of war camp, located near the junction of Route 9 and Xe Pon, on the Laotian border, and said to have contained at least 30 American prisoners. The enemy, they noted, were in the process of taking them and others to a camp in North Vietnam.

During August and early September there were indications that the *246th Independent NVA Regiment* had reentered South Vietnam and was moving east toward Huong Hoa, south of the Khe Sanh Combat Base. In addition, the elements of the *83d Engineer Regiment* were believed to be constructing a road from Laos into the Vietnam Salient. The *1st Battalion, 66th NVA*

BGen Frank E. Garretson, right, CG, TF Hotel, accompanies MajGen Ormond R. Simpson, center, and MajGen Raymond G. Davis, left, CG 3d MarDiv. MajGen Simpson assumed command of the 1st Marine Division on 21 December 1968.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A801184





Department of Defense (USMC) A192247

Marines of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines on side of hill prepare to fire LAAWs (light antiarmor weapons) at enemy positions in the valley below. The Marine with the soft hat in the background apparently is holding a M14, rather than the M16 rifle.

Regiment also had moved into an area just north of the abandoned Marine Combat Base.[64]

Although Brigadier General Frank E. Garretson, who assumed command of Task Force Hotel at the end of August, had hoped to begin operations in the area during September, inclement weather forced a series of postponements. But by early October, with the completion of four fire support bases and the movement of Marine 155mm howitzers and 8-inch self-propelled guns eight kilometers west along Route 9 to Fire Support Base Stormy, and a battery of Army 175mm guns to Ca Lu, all was ready.

While the 9th Marines secured all fire support bases east of Khe Sanh and patrolled the high ground surrounding Vandegrift Combat Base, the 4th Marines, now under the command of Colonel Martin J. Sexton, began search and clear operations to the west of Khe Sanh. On 5 October, Major John E. O'Neill's 2d Battalion, 4th Marines assaulted into landing zones just south of Lang Vei (2) and Lieutenant Colonel Bourne's 3d Battalion was helilifted into the area just north of Lang Vei (1). Seizing the two objectives without enemy opposition, both battalions began to sweep east astride Route 9. The following day, Lieutenant Colonel Galbraith's 1st Battalion assaulted into landing zones near Hill 503, three kilometers southwest of Huong Hoa, on the southern flank of the two attacking battalions. The battalion's mission was to interdict enemy movement along the north-south routes leading to and out of the Khe Sanh area. Simultaneously, the 3d and 4th Battalions, 2d ARVN Regiment were helilifted into landing zones seven kilometers north of Bourne's Marines and moved toward Hills 881 North and 881 South.

Galbraith's and O'Neill's battalions travelling east toward the Da Krong Valley, uncovered numerous munitions caches and grave sites while engaging several small, but isolated groups of enemy soldiers. On 16 October, the 2d Battalion, now under the command of Major William L. Kent, returned to Vandegrift Combat Base for a period of rehabilitation prior to a helicopter lift into the northwestern portion of the Scotland area of operations. Elements of Galbraith's battalion left the Khe Sanh area the same day and deployed to various fire support bases throughout the regimental area. Marines of the 1st Battalion spent the remainder of October in a normal perimeter defensive posture, manning patrols, listening and observation ports, and killer teams. Composed of artillery and 81mm mortar forward observers, a forward air con-

troller, an M60 machine gun team, grenadier, radioman, corpsman, team leader, and a sufficient number of riflemen to accomplish the assigned mission, the killer teams, which ranged in size from 14 to 22 men, operated in remote areas for a three to five-day period. Unlike long-range reconnaissance patrols, these teams were encouraged to engage enemy forces attempting to move within striking distance of regimental fire support bases.

By 10 October, Lieutenant Colonel Bourne's Marines had taken their final objectives: Hills 689, 552, and 471; and the villages of Khe Sanh and Houng Hoa. The 3d Battalion and the two ARVN Battalions then shifted the emphasis of their attacks. The 3d and 4th Battalions, 2d ARVN Regiment swept north off Hill 881 toward Lang Suat until the 19th when they returned to Dong Ha. At the same time, Bourne's battalion conducted extensive reconnaissance and search operations in the Khe Xa Bai Valley where it was believed that the enemy had stored extensive caches of ammunition, food, and weapons. After establishing Fire Support Base Gurkha, atop Hill 632, on 12 October, 3d Battalion Marines moved off the hill and into the surrounding river valley. During the last days of October, they were in the process of slowly working their way toward the summit of Dong Pa Thien, one of the highest pieces of terrain in South Vietnam. Their search failed to uncover any evidence of recent enemy activiry in the area. What they did find were three to four-month old grave sites, unserviceable bunkers, and four to six-month old enemy equipment and weapons. What enemy that the Marines sighted showed no inclination to contest the battalion's forward movement.

The 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, now under the command of Lieutenant Colonel James L. Fowler, was joined during the last week of October by Major Kent's 2d Battalion which was helilifted onto Hill 665 and established Fire Support Base Alpine before sweeping north in an effort to seize a regimental objective near Lang Ho. After Kent's Marines reached the objective, they conducted extensive patrols in the area, uncovering small caches of new and used medical equipment and supplies. On 30 October, Companies F and G assaulted into landing zones west of Alpine and began a sweep to the east, encountering no enemy resistance.

The 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Elliott R. Laine, Jr., who had replaced Lieutenant Colonel LaMontagne on the 24th, searched Dong Ca Lu and the hills west of Vandegrift without success. Meanwhile, Major Sisley's 2d Battalion moved into the northeast portion of the Vietnam Salient on 26 October. Like Kent's Marines to the north, Laine's battalion, operating 20 kilometers southwest of Vandegrift near the Laotian border, encountered only token resistance as it searched the 10-meter-wide road running from Laos into South Vietnam. As Colonel Barrow reported: "We searched out the road, interdicted it, destroyed it, conducted extensive patrol operations, killed a few, [and] picked up some gear."[65]

The *246th NVA Regiment* had moved back into Laos to regroup and refit. Combined with the defeat of the *48th* and *52d Regiments*, *320th NVA Division*, the northwestern region of I Corps was now devoid of major enemy units. This lack of sizeable enemy forces allowed the highly mobile attacking elements of the 4th and 9th Marines to cover a wide expanse of terrain in the far reaches of western and southern Quang Tri Province in a series of heliborne maneuvers. The 3d Marine Division would continue to refine these highly mobile tactics during the last two months of 1968.

Coastal Quang Tri and Thua Thien: A Shift

The 1st Air Cavalry Division and the 3d ARVN Regiment, as August began, continued to conduct company and battalion-sized cordon and search and clear operations in the populated coastal plains of Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces. Their mission was to ferret out the Viet Cong infrastructure, destroy enemy main force units, and support the Revolutionary Development Program. Company and battalion reconnaissance-in-force operations were conducted simultaneously in enemy Base Areas 101 and 114 in the mountains, aimed at destroying the enemy's logistics and command and control facilities.

There was moderate contact as elements of the division's three brigades searched the coastal lowlands for the Viet Cong and his rice storage areas. Shortly after midnight, in the early morning hours of 16 August, enemy forces launched a mortar and ground attack against Landing Zone Nancy, nine kilometers northwest of Camp Evans. The positions of Companies D and E, 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry, at Nancy, took more than 150 rounds of 82mm mortar, followed by a ground attack by 20 enemy sappers who broke through the perimeter, killing 18 soldiers and wounding another 71. Four days later, a helicopter from A Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry came under heavy automatic weapons fire while conducting a "snatch" operation in an area seven kilometers north-

east of Quang Tri City.* Three companies of the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry and two troops of the 3d Squadron, 5th Cavalry air assaulted into the area and eventually placed a cordon around the suspected villages, trapping the *808th VC Battalion.* Fighting over the next three days resulted in the capture of 14 prisoners, 58 weapons, and the reported deaths of 144 enemy soldiers.

During late August a gradual concentration of Communist forces was noted in the eastern portion of Base Area 101, a region known to be heavily fortified and believed to contain several battalion base areas and storage facilities. The area also lay across a major rice route and was an important link in the transportation of rice from Hai Lang District to the western mountains. On 11 September, Operation Comanche Falls-Lam Son 261 began in the base area in an effort to destroy enemy forces, caches and bunker complexes prior to the arrival of the northeast monsoon. Two battalions of the 5th and 8th Cavalry and two battalions from the 1st and 3d ARVN Regiments assaulted into landing zones along the southern boundary of the base area. One battalion of the 7th Cavalry seized landing zones in the southeast portion and a Regional Force battalion from Quang Tri secured landing zones in the northeast portion. As the latter two battalions established blocking positions and interdicted enemy trails in the piedmont, the four maneuvering battalions attacked through jungle canopy to the northeast. After 21 days of sustained combat, the combined cavalry and ARVN force had succeeded in denying the enemy his forward support base area and disrupting his lines of communication. In addition to destroying several large base camps, allied forces reported killing more than 270 NVA soldiers.

With the destruction of enemy installations in Base Area 101, the division began operations to interdict enemy movement toward the A Shau Valley and to destroy reported large supply installations west of the base area. On 2 October, the 2d Battalion, 12th Cavalry, followed by two battalions of the 1st ARVN Regiment, assaulted into landing zones southwest of the base area and began a sweep to the western limits of the division's area of operations. Although contact was light and sporadic during the remainder of the month, the combined allied force destroyed several large enemy supply installations and captured tons of ammunition.

As elements of the 1st Cavalry Division continued their search for enemy forces in the mountains and throughout the coastal plains, General Stilwell, on 26 October, alerted the division's commanding general, U.S. Army Major General George Forsythe, that his forces would be deployed to III Corps Tactical Zone. Once in place, II Field Force, Vietnam would assume operational control of the division. In a message to General Cushman, General Abrams outlined the threat in III Corps which necessitated the move. He noted:

> I have directed the move on the basis of the tactical situation in South Vietnam and my continuing assessment of the enemy's capabilities throughout the country to include his capability to reinforce from out of country. I believe that a part of his problem in northern I Corps is inadequate logistic support. This may be temporary. The absence of some enemy units from northern I Corps may also be temporary. In the meantime he has steadily built his capability in III Corps and the sanctuaries in Cambodia.

As Abrams viewed the situation, the mounting enemy threat to III Corps had to be blunted and therefore he was forced to make the decision to move the 1st Cavalry Division sooner instead of later. Should a change in situation warrant it, he concluded, the division could be moved quickly back to I Corps. Although it had no bearing on his decision, Abrams saw the move as a opportunity for the 1st ARVN Division to "shoulder a bigger part of the load."[66]**

The advance party of the Army's cavalry division departed I Corps on 27 October. The following day the 3d Brigade was airlifted to Quan Loi and put under the operational control of the 1st Infantry Division. Combat elements of the 1st Brigade simultaneously deployed to Tay Ninh and came under the control of the 25th Infantry Division.

*"Snatch" operations were conducted in restricted areas, along waterways or roads and in populated areas. Using a UH-1H "Huey" helicopter with an infantry fire team, interprerer, and a national policeman on board and an armed OH-6A "Loach," the snatch team patrolled restricted areas looking for targets. If individuals were discovered, the team would swoop out of the sky and round them up. After interrogation by the policeman, Viet Cong suspects would be transported to detainee collection points and innocent civilians transferred to the district headquarters.

**General Earl E. Anderson, in 1968 the III MAF Chief of Staff, observed that the Marine command lost the 1st Air Cavalry Division, "just on the basis of a phone call." As early as 11 September 1968, III MAF had received a message from General Abrams, "asking us to comment on the effect upon III MAF of our furnishing an AirCav troop and an air-mobile brigade for use in III Corps, commencing 1 Dec." BGen E. E. Anderson ltr to MajGen F. E. Leek, dtd 4Nov68, encl, Anderson Comments, Dec94; Anderson ltr to Van Ryzin, Sep68; Anderson Comments, Dec94.



Photo from Abel Collection

An Army company commander from the 1st Air Cavalry Division points out terrain features to Capt William O. Moore, Jr., whose company will relieve the Army unit south of Quang Tri City. The 1st Air Cavalry Division began departing I Corps in October for III Corps.

In light of the anticipated loss of the 1st Cavalry Division, XXIV Corps ordered an adjustment in the boundary between the 3d Marine and 101st Airborne Divisions. The adjustment, scheduled to be completed on 8 November, would generally correspond to the provincial boundary between Quang Tri and Thua Thien. To fill the void, the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division would be shifted south and a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division would move north. In an attempt to make the transition as smooth as possible, the remaining elements of the cavalry division were directed to cordon the village of Thon My Chanh and eliminate the Viet Cong infrastructure from the village to the coast. On 2 November, the cordon around Thon My Chanh was established by an armored battalion task force from the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division, an armored battalion from the 101st Airborne Division, and a cavalry squadron from the 2d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. U.S. helicopters brought into forward landing zones maneuver elements of the 1st ARVN Regiment which began search operations throughout the area. Although enemy resistance was light, the combined Army and ARVN force discovered several food caches, containing more than 12 tons of unpolished rice. With the end of the 2d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division's participation in the cordon on 7 November, the area was released to the 1st Brigade and the 2d Brigade deployed to Phuoc Vinh.[67]

South of the 1st Cavalry Division, the 101st Airborne Division continued to conduct operations in coordination with the 1st ARVN Regiment to provide security for Hue City; interdict Routes 547 and 547A; implement the rice denial program; destroy the enemy's main force units and infrastructure; and assist in the Thua Thien Province pacification program. In late July, the division finalized plans, marshalled forces, and constructed fire support bases for a combined Army and ARVN two-brigade airmobile assault into the A Shau Valley. On 4 August, Army helicopters flew the 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry and 2d Battalion, 327th Infantry into landing zones in the vicinity of A Luoi and Ta Bat. While the 2d Battalion, 327th Infantry secured landing zones near Ta Bat, the 2d and 3d Battalions, 1st ARVN Regiment were helilifted into the valley on the 5th. The combined reconnaissance in force encountered only a few squad- and company-sized enemy units, much smaller than anticipated by intelligence sources. The enemy employed a series of delaying and harassing tactics to slow the advance. While finding no major enemy caches or installations, the maneuver forces implanted minefields and sensors at three choke points in the valley before withdrawing on the 20th.

On the heels of the A Shau Valley operation, the 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry assaulted into landing zones in the Nui Ke mountain complex southeast of Hue. Led by a North Vietnamese Army corporal who had rallied to a local Marine Combined Action platoon, the battalion moved west toward the suspected base camps of the *5th NVA Regiment*. Following two weeks of heavy fighting, the 1st Battalion reported killing more than 180 enemy troops and captured numerous individual weapons and tons of munitions.

As a result of the decreasing number of engagements in August with North Vietnamese main force and Viet Cong local force units in the coastal lowlands surrounding Hue, a series of operations, or "soft cordons," were carried out to destroy the Viet Cong infrastructure in the area. These operations, targeted at Vinh Loc, Phu Vang, Huong Thuy, Phu Thu Districts, emphasized coordination with and use of local South Vietnamese forces, surprise, isolation of the battlefield, detailed search, minimum destruction of civilian property, and population control. The soft cordon normally took place in populated areas where enemy forces were suspected to be widely dispersed among the civilian population. The expectation was that the enemy forces would

attempt to escape rather than establish an organized resistance. Preparatory fires would be placed only on barren areas near landing zones and fires on other targets, such as known or suspected enemy locations, would be planned but not fired unless necessary to prevent friendly casualties. The soft cordon proved to be an effective technique for the division and local South Vietnamese authorities to find the Viet Cong and blunt its influence.

In mid-September, in an effort to prevent enemy reinforcement and recovery from the losses suffered in Phu Vang, Phu Thu, and Vinh Loc Districts, the 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry and 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry assaulted into the Dong Truoi mountain complex south of Hue. For the next month, the two battalions conducted extensive company operations in search of five infantry battalions of the *4th* and *5th NVA Regiments*, known to be in the area. Although not encountered in large numbers, the enemy fled to the southwest, relieving the pressure on Da Nang, Route 1 from Phu Bai to the Hai Van Pass, and on Phu Loc District to the east.

While the division's 2d Brigade continued to conduct the series of cordon operations in the coastal plains and the 1st Brigade operated in the mountains to the south and west of Hue, the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division prepared to deploy from I Corps to III Corps. The 82d Airborne brigade was released from the operational control of the division on 4 October and, simultaneously, the division's own 3d Brigade moved from III Corps to I Corps and returned to the operational control of the 101st.

As the division regained its 3d Brigade, its boundary was extended to the east to include the Phu Loc District and south to include the remaining portion of Thua Thien Province, with the exception of the Hai Van Pass. With the deactivation of Marine Task Force X-Ray in August and the subsequent movement of the 26th Marines south, General Abrams authorized the boundary extension.[68*] In late October, the division's area of operations was extended north to the Thua Thien-Quang Tri boundary as the 1st Cavalry Division was alerted to deploy to III Corps.

In recalling the memory of his service, Lieutenant Colonel Galbraith, the commander of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, probably expressed the feelings of most Marine and Army officers and troops who fought in northern I Corps during this period:

> Much of what stands out in my mind . . . is the totally miserable existence of the squad and fire team grunt, the guy who lived day after day in a hole he just dug, trying to do his job and at the same time stay halfway dry, opening his can of C-rations, wondering when he was going to get his next hot meal and a new pair of utility trousers to replace the ripped and torn pair he sort of had on, and remembering the hot shower he'd had a month ago when he was herded through the shower unit at Vandegrift.[69]

*See also Chapter 21.

CHAPTER 21

Counteroffensive Operations in Southern ICTZ

The Situation in September—Operation Maui Peak—The End of Mameluke Thrust and Renewed Attacks on Da Nang—Operation Meade River—Operation Taylor Common

The Situation in September

Following the failure of the Communist "Third Offensive" in late August, III MAF forces in southern ICTZ pursued enemy forces, attempting to defeat them in detail, until Typhoon Bess brought most offensive operations to a halt. During the first week in September, 60-knot winds and 20 inches of rain battered the Da Nang area. Rivers swelled, flooding low-lying areas and carrying away bridges. Trenches and bunkers collapsed, mud slides closed Route 1 over Hai Van Pass, and aircraft remained grounded. In consolation, III MAF Marines had the satisfaction of knowing that the typhoon brought misery to the enemy, as well, flooding their many underground caches of food and arms.[1*]

In the wake of the typhoon, III MAF forces underwent major organizational changes. On 10 September, the 27th Marines redeployed to the United States following seven months of combat in Vietnam, reducing by three the number of infantry battalions available to General Cushman. Colonel Robert G. Lauffer's 1st Marines, under the operational control of the 3d Marine Division since late March returned at the end of August and early September to the 1st Marine Division and relieved the 27th Marines. The 2d Light Anti-Aircraft Missile Battalion, based near Chu Lai, which had stood ready to engage enemy aircraft since September 1965, but had never fired one of its HAWK missiles in anger, prepared for redeployment to the U.S. Operation Houston ended on 12 September, after more than six months during which the 5th Marines, and then the 26th Marines, kept Route 1 open between Phu Bai and Da Nang, killing a reported 702 enemy in the process. As Houston ended, XXIV Corps units assumed control of the area around Phu Bai, allowing General Youngdale to dissolve Task Force X-Ray and move the 26th Marines south to the Da Nang TAOR.[2**]

While III MAF realigned forces, the enemy began recovering from the effects of the typhoon and the defeat of the Third Offensive, albeit the recovery was somewhat slow. At the same time, the Communists maintained pressure through small-scale terrorist and sapper attacks. In one small, but spectacular incident, an enemy sapper, using a bamboo reed as a snorkel, swam through heavy debris clogging the Vinh Dien River to place an explosive charge under the Tu Cau Bridge. The Marines guarding the bridge saw the sapper and took him under fire, but could not stop the attack. The charge exploded, damaging a 28-meter section of the bridge and closing it to vehicles.[3]

Southwest of Da Nang, Operation Mameluke Thrust continued, with the 5th Marines conducting offensive operations in the Arizona Territory and the An Hoa area, and the 7th Marines resumed offensive operations north of Go Noi Island immediately following the typhoon. On 14 September, Lieutenant Colonel Francis X. Quinn, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines commander, sent two of his companies, L and M, to establish blocking positions in support of an ARVN operation in the "Dodge City" sector outlined by the Thu Bon, Ai Nghia, and La Tho Rivers. As Company L started to move into its blocking position about 4,000 meters south of Hill 55, it came under automatic weapons and small arms fire as well as a mortar barrage from a Communist force of unknown-size, well-entrenched in concealed bunkers. In the ambush, the Marine company suffered heavy casualties, reporting 1 known dead, 21 wounded, and 4 Marines missing in action (MIA). Reinforced by Company M, Company L "returned fire and tried to retrieve the MIAs, but [were] unable to do so." Pulling back to more defensive positions, the two Marine companies called upon supporting artillery and airstrikes as the fighting continued into the night. The Marines did capture one North Vietnamese prisoner who identified his unit as the *D–3 Sapper Battalion.*[4]

During the early morning hours of the 15th and under the cover of darkness, Lieutenant Colonel Quinn brought up his command group and newly attached

*See Chapters 19 and 20 for accounts of the havoc that Typhoon Bess caused at Da Nang and in the DMZ respectively.

**See Chapters 19 and 20 as well about the departure of the 27th Marines and the arrival of the 1st Marines at Da Nang.



Photocopy of III MAF Briefing Map (Nov–Dec 1968) Gen Earl.E. Anderson Collection

Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines. Quinn consolidated the three companies in defensive positions about 3,000 meters to the southwest of the original contact. By this time, Colonel Herbert L. Beckington, the 7th Marines commander, had alerted Lieutenant Colonel LeRoy E. Watson, whose BLT 2/7 (the SLF battalion) was under the operational control of the 7th Marines. While BLT 2/7 established blocking positions, Quinn's 3d Battalion was to sweep through the previous day's contact area.[5]

As planned, at first light on the 15th, Marine helicopters landed the BLT 2/7 command group and Companies F and H in the southern Dodge City sector. At the same time, the three companies of Quinn's battalion attacked to the northeast. At 1700, Company L found the bodies of the four Marines who had been reported the previous day as missing in action. The two battalions linked up on the morning of 16 September and continued to sweep the area. While encountering no significant resistance, the Marines uncovered and destroyed 72 heavily fortified bunkers.[6]

Both battalions continued the search until the afternoon of 17 September. At that time, Colonel Beckington, the 7th Marines commander, ordered a change in plans. The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines was to return to its combat base area the following morning while BLT 2/7 was to stay in place, receive reinforcements, and then support the 51st ARVN Regiment.[7]

As scheduled, on the morning of 18 September, Marine helicopters brought in Companies E and G of BLT 2/7 and took out the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines. BLT 2/7 advanced southeast below Route 4 toward the main north-south railroad line. The mission of the Marine battalion "was to conduct sweeps to find, fix and destroy the enemy" in the new area of operations. At the time, "the only certain information . . . was that ARVN forces of the 51 ARVN Regiment . . . were in contact with a 'large' NVA force" north of the La Tho River near the railroad. On the evening of the 18th, the BLT established defensive positions just west of the railroad berm.[8]

The following morning, the BLT reached the railroad near its intersection with Route 4 and prepared for resupply. Company F sent a security element into a treeline 250 meters east of the railroad. When the Marines approached to within 15 meters of the heavy

band of kunai grass and banana trees, hidden enemy troops opened fire. As the company mounted an attack, North Vietnamese troops in bunkers, holes, and trenches pounded the advancing Marines with heavy, grazing fire. Enemy rifles, machine guns, mortars, RPGs, and snipers positioned on the flanks, where the treeline extended in a crescent, inflicted 42 casualties on Company F in the initial moments of the battle including the company commander. Lieutenant Colonel Watson threw Companies G and H into the fight on either flank and Company E, previously in reserve, surged forward to replace the bloodied Company F.[9]

The heavy growth in the treeline compounded the Marines' problems in estimating the enemy's strength. While initial reports showed a North Vietnamese platoon in the treeline, the estimate later grew to two companies. To make matters worse, constant overflights by RVNAF aircraft supporting a nearby ARVN unit hampered the Marines' efforts to bring artillery fire on the enemy. For safety reasons, the Marines were compelled to "check fire" the artillery during these unannounced overflights.

Companies G and H pressed hard against the enemy's flanks, but more and more Marines fell under the ferocious hail of fire coming from the NVA position. Late in the afternoon, the 7th Marines directed the helilift of two companies of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, who established blocking positions along the Suoi Co Ca, 1,000 meters to the east. The battle raged, however, until 1900, when BLT 2/7 broke contact and withdrew to the railroad berm so that supporting arms could engage the enemy without endangering friendly troops. Casualties totalled 14 Marines dead and 54 wounded, as well as 19 non-battle casualties (a category which included accidental injuries, heat casualties, and the like).[10]

On 20 September, BLT 2/7 directed a heavy preparation fire against the treeline, pounding it liberally with artillery, mortars, and airstrikes. At first light, the Marines moved forward in the attack once again, this time meeting no resistance. Inside the treeline, they found a well-developed fortified position and three dead enemy soldiers of the NVA *2d Battalion, 36th Regiment*.[11]

Companies G and H continued past the treeline toward the 3d Battalion blocking positions near the Suoi Co Ca. By 0800, Company G was engaged with a large enemy force, which it believed to include a battalion command post, in the hamlet of Nong Son (2), about 600 meters from the river. Company G disengaged with 5 Marines dead and 19 wounded, then called for air and artillery support, while Company H attacked the enemy's right flank against strong resis-

A Navy corpsman serving with BLT 2/7 south of Da Nang rushes forward toward the smoke cover to take care of a wounded Marine. Strands of a barbed wire fence can be seen behind him.

Photo is from the Abel Collection





Photo is from the Abel Collection

PFC R. R. Kransiewski, right, adjusts the antenna of radioman LCpl A. J. Terry, who is talking on the radio during a routine sweep south of Da Nang by Company L, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines. Other Marines of the company can be seen advancing in the background.

tance. At 0900, while the battle raged, Lieutenant Colonel Charles F. Bunnell, Jr., replaced Lieutenant Colonel Watson as Commanding Officer, BLT 2/7.

In the early afternoon, ARVN units to the north began pushing the enemy southward. BLT 2/7 maintained steady pressure from the west, so that the North Vietnamese were forced into the 3d Battalion's blocking position. Airstrikes and artillery fire tore into the trapped enemy. At 1600, with the North Vietnamese still resisting strongly, aircraft unloaded 500-pound bombs and napalm on them, prompting enemy troops to begin fleeing in groups of 20 to 30. Aircraft and artillery continued to bombard the area, but a North Vietnamese flag still flew over an enemy bunker.

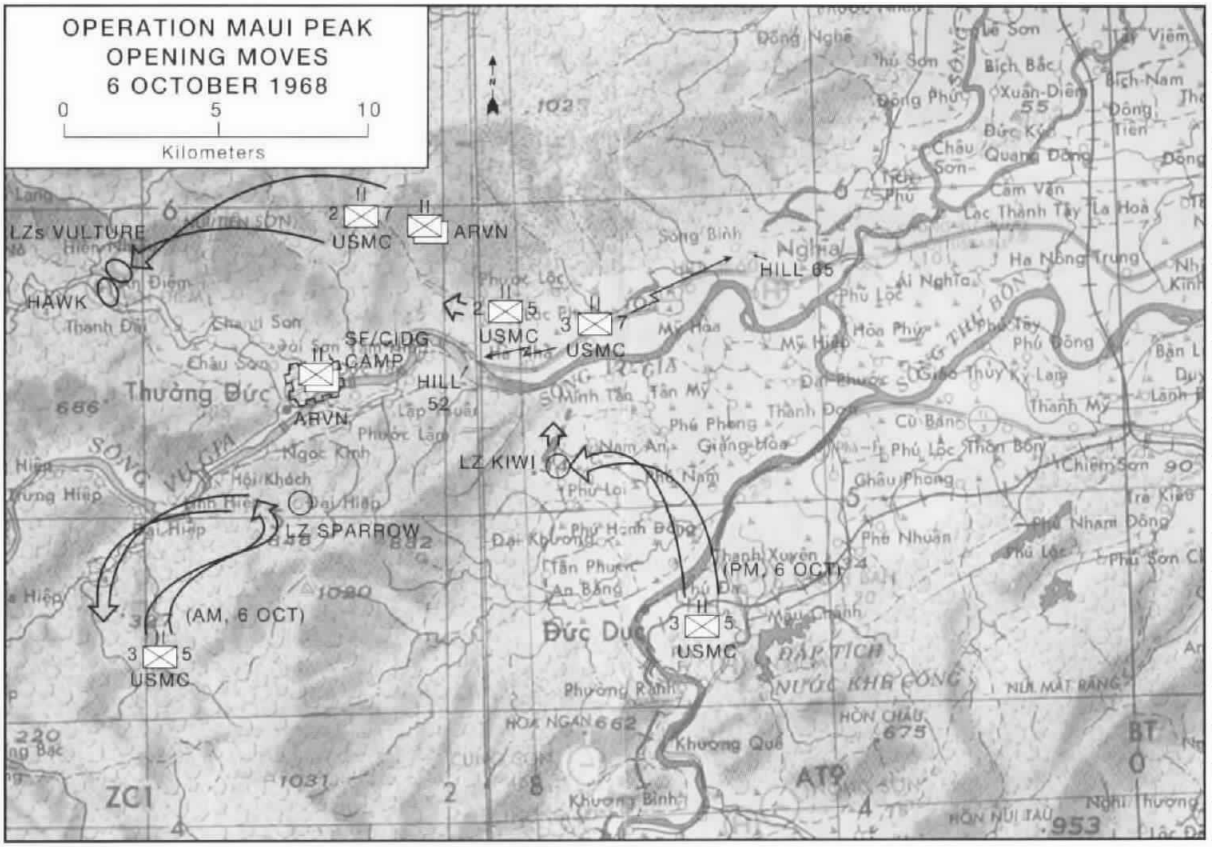
Companies G and H moved forward in the assault, soon hitting antipersonnel mines and boobytraps. Despite the heavy bombing, the remaining North Vietnamese maintained heavy and accurate fire from their fortifications. At dusk, the Marines dug in, hard by the North Vietnamese bunkers. Late that night, Marines reported a strong odor of marijuana drifting from the enemy's positions.

At dawn on the 21st, the Marines attacked once more, and quickly captured the objective. They found the area so liberally seeded with mines and boobytraps that, after three Marines suffered wounds, both companies withdrew and called an airstrike against the area in hopes of detonating the devices. Returning once again, they found the usual assortment of bunkers, trenches, and fighting holes, food, equipment, and documents. Three prisoners indicated that the area was the command post of the NVA *36th Regiment* and the main position of that organization's *2d Battalion*. The Marines reported 69 enemy dead, and the prisoners admitted that their battalion had lost 80 dead and 60 wounded in the previous day's fight at the treeline. Their battalion's assistant commander was killed in the action.[12]

After another day of sweeping the area, BLT 2/7 returned to the Dai La Pass sector west of Hill 327 and assumed a division reserve mission. The 3d Battalion remained south of Hill 55, searching for the enemy, but the destruction of the *2d Battalion, 36th NVA Regiment* brought at least temporary calm to that part of the province.[13]

As often happened, however, a hard-fought victory in one part of the province had no effect on enemy activity elsewhere. Shortly after midnight on 21 September, three explosions rocked the Esso gasoline depot at the northern end of Da Nang Bay. With two large fuel storage tanks ablaze, sentries fired on a man who entered the water immediately after the attack, but the man apparently escaped. Later, Marines found a ladder, satchel charges, blasting caps, and a length of fuze in and around the compound.[14]

The following night, Communist rocket units attacked Marble Mountain Air Facility, damaging 45 helicopters. Other rockets struck Da Nang Airbase, Force Logistic Command, the NSA Hospital, and I Corps headquarters. At the same time, enemy forces launched company-sized ground attacks on Hoi An,



Dien Ban, and several Combined Action Platoons. One of these attacks, carried out against the Vinh Dien Bridge, one kilometer north of Dien Ban, temporarily closed Highway 1.

On 29 September, south of the Thu Bon River near Liberty Bridge in the Go Noi Island sector, elements of the 5th Marines engaged a large enemy force in the village of Cu Ban, a notorious Communist hideout and scene of many firefights. In a two-day battle, the Marines surrounded and pressed hard against the North Vietnamese. Late on the 30th, Company F, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines assaulted the village and overwhelmed the defenders, reporting 57 enemy dead and 3 prisoners. Seven Marines died and 12 suffered wounds in the fight. Further to the west at the end of the month, NVA regular forces threatened the Special Forces Camp at Thuong Duc, resulting in a III MAF multi-battalion operation.[15]

Operation Maui Peak

The Special Forces camp at Thuong Duc was nestled in a valley at the confluence of the Song Vu Gia and the Song Con, where "Green Berets" trained and advised CIDG troops recruited from the local villages. By controlling these two river valleys, the Special Forces soldiers and their CIDG counterparts forced the enemy to move troops and supplies bound for the Da Nang area along far more difficult routes through the mountainous jungle. Additionally, they denied the enemy access to the source of food and recruits located in the populated areas along the rivers.

Near the end of September, the Communists were ready to strike. III MAF intelligence officers identified elements of two NVA infantry regiments surrounding the camp: the *21st* from the *2d NVA Division* and a new *141st Regiment*. The *368B Rocket Regiment* was in support. In a pre-dawn attack on 28 September, the enemy overran and occupied two of the camp's outposts, seriously threatening the main compound. With bad weather hampering normal close air support operations, a Marine Tactical Air Control Party flew into Thuong Duc in the late afternoon. Using a radar beacon, the forward air controller directed 18 sorties of Grumman A–6A Intruder all-weather attack aircraft against the enemy force. By the afternoon of the 29th, the enemy troops occupying the two outposts with-

drew, their position rendered untenable by the A–6A Intruders of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.[16]*

With Thuong Duc temporarily safe, but still surrounded, General Youngdale moved to lift the siege, assigning Colonel Beckington's 7th Marines the task. For Operation Maui Peak, Youngdale gave Beckington control of the 7th Marines' own 3d Battalion and BLT 2/7 (still the SLF battalion, but temporarily under the operational control of the 7th Marines), and the 2d and 3d Battalions, 5th Marines. General Cushman placed one brigade of the 1st Air Cavalry Division on six-hour standby to reinforce, and General Lam assigned four ARVN battalions to operate in coordination with the Marines.[17]**

On 1 October, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines was conducting operations along the southern bank of the Thu Bon River in the An Hoa sector and Company G had engaged a small enemy force near the river edge. Lieutenant Colonel James W. Stemple later related that in the middle of this firefight he received orders from the 5th Marines that he was being attached to the 7th Marines for a new operation and that he should prepare his battalion for immediate helicopter movement to Hill 65, about 15 kilometers east of Thuong Duc. Immediately detaching from the engagement, the battalion consisting of Companies E and G, and Company A from the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, arrived at Hill 65 about 1300. At that point, Stemple remembered he was told to report to Colonel Beckington at the 7th Marines command post on Hill 55. After some delay to obtain a jeep, he arrived in time to attend the 7th Marines briefing for the operation. Stemple later observed that he was not too inspired when one of the briefing officers remarked, "I don't know how we are going to support this operation; I guess we'll play it by ear."[18]

According to Stemple, the concept of operations called for his battalion to secure not only Hill 65, but also Hill 52, only six kilometers from Thuong Duc, before nightfall. Upon his return to Hill 65 and maintaining an outpost there, the battalion moved out in a column of companies following Route 4. With an attached engineer platoon from the 1st Engineer Battalion assisting in the detecting and clearing of antipersonnel, antivehicle, and antitank mines, the battalion arrived at Hill 52 about 1630. In taking the hill, the Marines captured one prisoner from the *141st NVA Regiment*.[19]

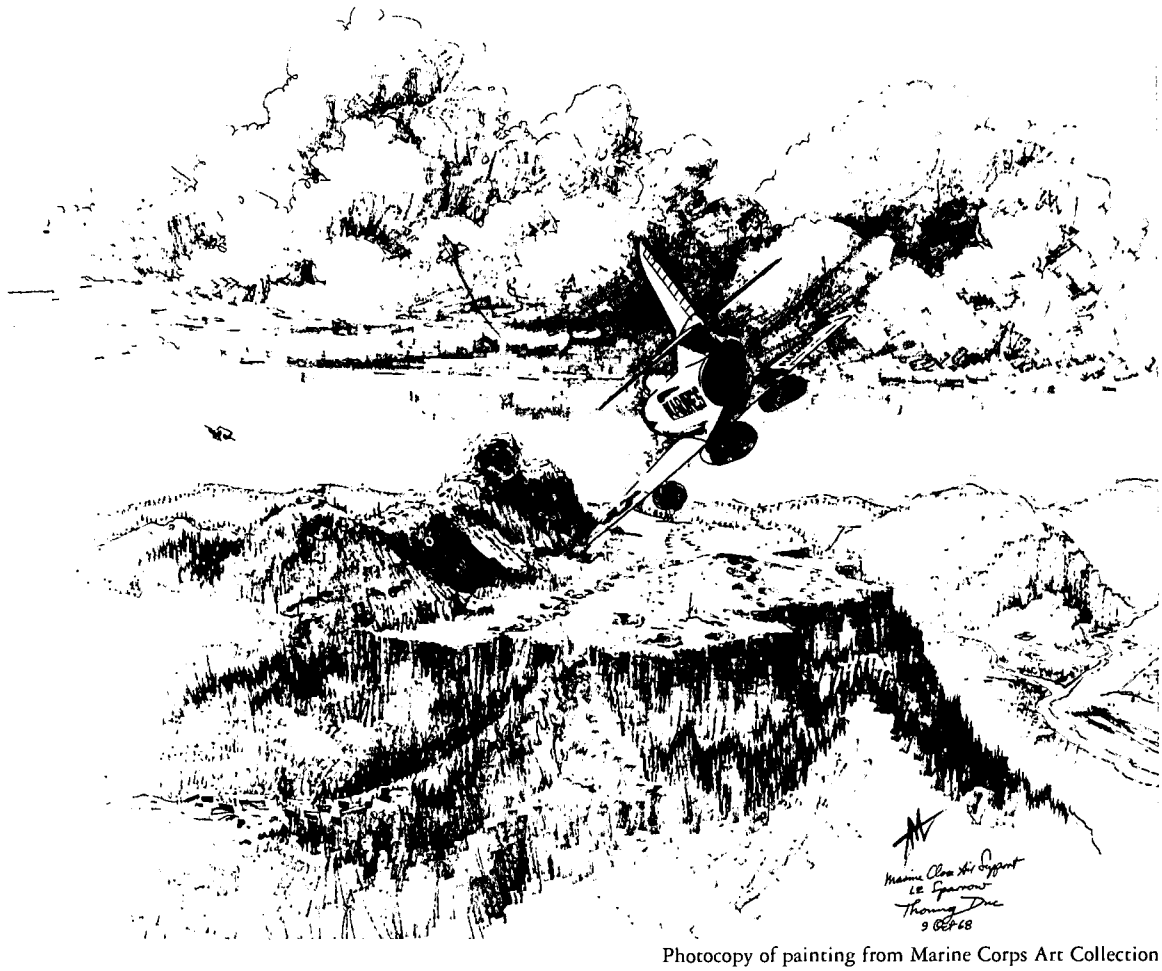
While the battalion gained a measure of control over Route 4, which was the only road available for ground resupply, Lieutenant Colonel Stemple vaguely recalled that an enemy road mine accounted for at least one Marine vehicle. During the next four days, artillery units of the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines and Army 175mm guns of the 4th Battalion, 8th Field Artillery took up firing positions at Hills 65 and 52. The 3d Battalion, 7th Marines moved into the area between the two hills, guarding the road and freeing the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines to direct its efforts westward, toward the enemy.

On the morning of 6 October, attack aircraft and B–52s began bombarding landing zones in the hills surrounding Thuong Duc.*** At the same time, the 2d

*About mid-July, III MAF intelligence officers reported that captured enemy documents indicated that a new regiment, the *141st NVA Regiment, 312th NVA Division*, was operating in Quang Nam Province. The first prisoner from the regiment was captured on 5 September, and stated that the regiment had been activated in North Vietnam in 1966. It left North Vietnam in January 1968 and arrived in western Quang Nam about the end of May. In mid-September, the *21st NVA Regiment, 2d NVA Division* had moved up from Quang Tin Province into southern Quang Nam. According to a Marine intelligence analysis of 15 September, three North Vietnamese Regiments, the *31st*, *21st*, and *141st*, were in position to pose a threat to Thuong Duc. In the attacks on the Special Forces Camp on 28–29 September, the allies captured prisoners from both the *21st* and the *141st*. See: III MAF PerIntRep No. 30–68, dtd 28Jul68, p. A–44, in III MAF PerIntReps, 14Jul–31Aug68; III MAF PerIntRpts, No. 37–68, dtd 15Sep68, pp. 4 and B–3, and No. 40–68, dtd 8Oct68, p. B–3, in III MAF PerIntReps, 1Sep–12Oct68. Lieutenant Colonel Merrill L. Bartlett, who as a captain in September 1968 assumed command of the 13th Interrogation and Translation Team assigned to the 5th Marines, remembered that when he arrived at An Hoa, he "immediately formed sub-teams of one officer, one NCO, and one ARVN each and sent them to the bush with the three infantry battalions of the 5th Marines." Bartlett recalled that the 5th Marines in September captured a North Vietnamese private whose interrogation revealed that he was from the *141st NVA Regiment*, but that intelligence officers from the 1st Marine Division refused to accept that he was from that regiment. Lieutenant Colonel Bartlett faulted the Marine intelligence system in the 1st Marine Division for "failure to get the word down to the subordinate units, reluctance to believe anything unless it was supported by 'usually reliable sources' (intercepts by radio battalion or counter-intelligence agent report), and unwillingness to change an opinion or assessment once it was determined." LtCol Merrill L. Bartlett, Comments on draft, dtd 8Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Bartlett Comments.

**There is also some confusion about the allied supporting forces. Although some sources indicate that the only ARVN units participating were the 1st and 2d Battalions, 51st Regiment, others note that two ARVN Ranger battalions were in reserve. Also, where 1st MarDiv FragO 405–68 specifies a brigade of the 1st Air Cavalry Division on standby, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Oct68, p. 21 claims that it was a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division.

***Colonel Stemple remembered that several bombs from one of the B–52s, "fell short of their objective with two bombs landing in the E/2/5 area to the rear of Hill 52." Fortunately there were no Marine casualties and the rest of the errant bombs fell harmlessly into the river. Col James W. Stemple, Comments on draft, n.d. [1995] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Stemple Comments.



Photocopy of painting from Marine Corps Art Collection

In this contemporary painting by Marine combat artist Maj Albert M. "Mike" Leahy, the artist depicts a Marine Douglas A–4E Skyhawk in a close air support mission during Operation Maui Peak about to bomb and rocket enemy positions on a ridgeline near LZ Sparrow. Thuong Duc can be seen in the background.

Battalion, 5th Marines stepped off in the attack westward along Route 4 toward the Special Forces camp. This was to be a feint to distract the enemy from the landing of the helicopter-borne elements. Soon after crossing the line of departure, however, the Marines became decisively engaged with the NVA *1st Battalion, 141st Regiment*, and Colonel Beckington canceled the plan for a feint and ordered the 2d Battalion to clear the enemy from the battlefield.[20]

While the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines mounted the hills overlooking Route 4 and came to grips with the enemy, other units joined the operation. At 1030, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing helicopters, carrying the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, swooped down into LZ Sparrow, four kilometers south of Thuong Duc. The preparation fires had ended at 0730, after severely pounding the LZ and surrounding area. If the fires had hurt the North Vietnamese units in the vicinity, the enemy commander apparently made good use of the three-hour break between the end of the preparation and the landing of the helicopters. As the first wave of aircraft touched down in the landing zone, a hail of heavy machine gun fire filled the air. Unable to complete the mission against such stiff resistance, the helicopters turned away, carrying the 3d Battalion back to An Hoa.[21]

At 1100, BLT 2/7 and two ARVN battalions landed unopposed in LZ Vulture and LZ Hawk, seven kilometers northwest of Thuong Duc. While the rest of the battalion remained at the LZ with Battery W, 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, Companies E and G, 7th Marines struck out for the high ground overlooking Thuong Duc from the north. The terrain was extremely chal-

lenging. At times, the Marines needed lifelines to negotiate steep hills covered by a thick jungle canopy and dense undergrowth.[22]

Back on Route 4, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines was still involved in a heated battle against North Vietnamese units in the hills overlooking the road. At one point, where the road passed along a very narrow gap between the river and a large, steep hill, the enemy put up a spirited defense, beating back the Marines' first two assaults. After a third pounding by supporting arms, the battalion attacked and captured the hill, gaining control of the vital pass.[23]

In the late afternoon, Colonel Beckington ordered the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, already "shot out" of one LZ that day, to mount a helicopter-borne assault into LZ Kiwi, nine kilometers northeast of LZ Sparrow. Accordingly, the battalion landed at 1740, then marched a kilometer north and established a defensive position on a hilltop overlooking the southern bank of the Song Vu Gia. With the exception of an assault by two squads of North Vietnamese against the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, the night passed quietly.[24]

On 7 October, the 7th Marines began to close the circle around Thuong Duc. To the west, the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines attacked along the valley of the Song Con and along the ridges overlooking it. It did not make contact with the enemy, but lost one Marine to heat stroke in the torturous terrain. Likewise, southeast of Thuong Duc, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines moved southwest into the rugged mountains, suffering eight casualties from a combination of heat and falls from the steep slopes.[25]

General Youngdale assigned the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines to the operation, and Colonel Beckington ordered it to attempt another helicopter-borne assault into LZ Sparrow. Since the aborted assault of the previous day, attack aircraft had thoroughly blasted the area around the LZ with 750-pound bombs and Fuel-Air Explosive (FAE)* bombs, but this, apparently, "did not faze the defenses." As the helicopters once again descended into LZ Sparrow at 0910, Communist antiaircraft gunners once more opened up with an overwhelming fire, turning away the assault for the second time.[26]

The main action of 7 October occurred along Route 4 where the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines ran into strong enemy opposition. Company A, 5th Marines, under the control of the 2d Battalion, engaged two entrenched North Vietnamese platoons on a steep hill adjacent to the highway, only 200 meters west of the hill the battalion had seized the previous day. Even after aircraft and artillery fire pounded the objective, the North Vietnamese still resisted fiercely. Company A fell back with 12 wounded and occupied the same position as it had the previous night. According to Marine sources, the enemy lost 42 dead in the fight.[27]

After another full day of preparation fires, Company E, 5th Marines, supported by four M48 tanks, attacked the hill late in the afternoon of 8 October, finally capturing it just before dusk after a brisk fight in which one Marine died and nine others suffered wounds. On the hill, the Marines reported 37 dead North Vietnamese.[28]

Elsewhere in the operation, the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines continued its slow advance along the steep ridge west of Thuong Duc which separated the Song Vu Gia from the Song Con. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines moved ever deeper into the mountains south of the Special Forces camp, struggling against heat and rough terrain which combined to result, on 8–9 October, in 40 nonbattle casualties, some fatal.[29**]

The North Vietnamese reserved their main effort against the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines in the fight for control of Route 4. At 0400, 12 October, 82mm mortar fire began falling on Company E. Following a preparation of about 40 rounds, an NVA company struck the Marines. As the North Vietnamese infantry attacked, the mortar fire continued, but shifted to Company G, which was to the rear of Company E. Using a heavy volume of small arms and RPG fire, the enemy closed to within grenade-throwing range. Company E held fast, calling for fire support, which involved more than 1,000 rounds of artillery (including 8-inch howitzers) and mortar fire, attack aircraft, and AC–47 gunships. The Marines reported killing 46 North Vietnamese and capturing 1 in the fight. Lieutenant Colonel Stemple, the battalion commander, commented "this was a particularly vicious attack against 'E' Company that almost succeeded." He cred-

*An aircraft-delivered canister which releases an explosive aerosol vapor over an area, then ignires the vapor, creating blast overpressure which causes casualties and explodes mines.

**The largest number of non-battle casualties involved Marine helicopters. In addition to the casualties on the 8th and 9th, on 11 October, a resupply helicopter from HMM–265, "carrying replacements and supplies . . . was struck from below by a H–34D helo [from HMM 362] that had just taken off." According to Colonel Stemple, who witnessed the accident, "both helicopters exploded in flames a few hundred feet over the river [Song Vu Gia] and crashed." There were no survivors. Stemple Comments. See also MAG–16 ComdC, Oct68; HMM–265 ComdC, Oct68; and HMM–362 ComdC, Oct68.



Photo is from the Abel Collection

Troops from the 5th Marines cross a small stream in Operation Maui Peak. The second Marine in the water is carrying a 3.5-inch rocket launcher and a following Marine carries a rocket round for the weapon in addition to his rifle.

ited the close air support "very instrumental in turning the tide of battle . . . . " Friendly casualties totalled 8 dead and 20 wounded.[30]

During the next few days, enemy contact diminished. BLT 2/7 finished its sweep of the high ground and moved into the valley, nearer the Special Forces camp. The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines maintained its position and conducted patrols. South of the Song Vu Gia, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines continued to struggle through the heavily forested and treacherous slopes, finally capturing LZ Sparrow on 14 October with the only enemy resistance being desultory mortar fire. Later that day, Company F of BLT 2/7 entered the Thuong Duc Special Forces camp, officially lifting the so-called "siege."[31*]

In mid-October, Tropical Storm Elaine struck Quang Nam, dramatically curtailing operations.[**] In the seven days ending on 18 October, 39 inches of rain fell around Thuong Duc, with as much as 13 inches falling in a single day. Swollen rivers washed away many bridges and left others under six feet of water. Air operations slowed to a near halt and many units, particularly those in the hills, suffered a lack of critical supplies. The Special Forces unit at Thuong Duc supplied some food to the Marines to see them through the crisis. Eventually, the rain washed out Route 4 between Hills 52 and 65, then Route 540, to the east, over which convoys carried supplies to Hill 65 for distribution to the forces participating in Operation Maui Peak.[32]

*Lieutenant Colonel Ronald R. Welpott, who as a captain commanded Company F during the operation, recalled that his company was the only one to enter the camp "as the size of the camp and heavy rains made it more suitable for the rest of the battalion to remain in the hills above the camp to the northwest." Lieutenant Colonel Ronald R. Welpott, Comments on draft, dtd 19Mar95 (Vietnam Comment File).

**General E. E. Anderson, the III MAF Chief of Staff, observed at the time in personal letters that the storm had brought both U.S. and enemy operations "to a standstill," and that for "several days we needed wading boots and rain suits." BGen E.E. Anderson, ltrs to MajGen McCutcheon, dtd 17Oct68 and LtGen W. J. Van Ryzin, dtd 25Oct68, Encl to Gen E.E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

On 17 October, with the mission accomplished, the rain seriously hampering offensive operations, and the enemy relatively quiet, Colonel Beckington ordered all units to prepare to withdraw. By 19 October, only the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines remained, and Operation Maui Peak officially came to a close.[33*]

The End of Mameluke Thrust and Renewed Attacks on Da Nang

Operation Mameluke Thrust** ended on 23 October, after five months, with the participating units reporting 2,730 enemy killed, 47 prisoners, and 8 ralliers. As the 5th Marines closed Mameluke Thrust, it opened Operation Henderson Hill in the same AO. The net result of this was a continuation of the same operation, in the same area, under a new operational codename. Lieutenant Colonel Stemple remembered that the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines had returned to the An Hoa sector after Maui Peak, and on the 23d, his battalion command group and two of his companies were patrolling the area east of Liberty Road, when he received word to disengage. The Marines boarded trucks and returned to An Hoa where Stemple was met by Major General Youngdale and several members of the 1st Marine Division staff. According to Stemple, the division commander told him that a new NVA regiment, the *90th*, was suspected of having moved into the Arizona Territory and that there had been numerous sightings of enemy troops in the area. After a quick aerial reconnaissance, Stemple and the MAG–16 helicopter coordinator selected a primary and secondary landing zone. While enemy small arms fire prevented the landing in the primary zone, the Marine battalion reached its assigned objectives in the Arizona before nightfall, but no indication of the reported large numbers of North Vietnamese troops. In a series of sweeps as part of Henderson Hill during the next few days, both the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 5th Marines developed little enemy contact, but captured a 24-page document describing the enemy's proposed "Winter-Spring 1968–69 Campaign." The operation then continued in the An Hoa and Go Noi Island sectors into November.[34]

October ended as the first month since December 1967 during which the enemy launched no rocket attacks. NVA commissars and VC cadres, though, dramatically stepped up their political proselytizing. They visited hamlets, ostensibly to "train" the populace for upcoming elections which were supposed to result in the formation of "People's Revolutionary Committees." Enemy propagandists distributed leaflets and used loudspeakers to appeal to ARVN troops to desert. In the village of Nui Dat Son, which was adjacent to the large Marine base at Hill 55, the villagers conducted an antiwar demonstration calling for an end to U.S. bombing of villages. South Vietnamese National Police arrested 71 of the demonstrators, 60 of whom they later released. Intelligence reports filtering in to III MAF indicated that the Communists planned a nationwide demonstration during November, in which "the people" would demand the neutralization of central Vietnam.[35]

On Halloween night, President Johnson announced from Washington that, effective 0800, 1 November (2100, Saigon time), the U.S. would halt all bombing of North Vietnam. The North Vietnamese, who had stridently insisted on an unconditional bombing halt, had finally accepted a compromise agreement which allowed the inclusion of the South Vietnamese and Viet Cong in the Paris peace negotiations. The only military conditions imposed were an end to North Vietnamese violations of the DMZ, and an end to their attacks on cities and towns in South Vietnam. The President's announcement had no noticeable effect on the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing's "out-of-country" sortie rate. The missions previously flown over North Vietnam were transferred to Laos.[36***]

Again, the Communists stepped up political and propaganda activity in the villages of ICTZ. Commissars hailed the bombing halt as a great Communist victory. They conducted further controlled elections of so-called "Liberation Committees", proclaiming that "a coalition government for South Vietnam is near at hand."[37]

Meanwhile, the war went on. In Operation Henderson Hill, the 5th Marines surrounded and attacked the NVA *1st Battalion, 36th Regiment* at the familiar battlefield of Chau Phong, site of so many earlier engagements. Uncharacteristically, the enemy did not defend, but rather, attempted to escape, the NVA

*Colonel Stemple, the commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, believed it was obvious that the North Vietnamese were "not investing too much in Thoung Duc except using it as 'bait' to invite a III MAF response along Route 4 where they could select and prepare positions from which they could attack the U.S. reaction force." While stating that "2/5 beat its head out against the *141st* (well dug-in)," Stemple understood that later reports indicated that the NVA regiment "took such a beating that . . . [it] never recovered." Stemple Comments.

**See Chapters 17 and 19.

***See also Chapters 20 and 24.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A 371827

Marine engineers probe for more rockets as they explore an enemy rocket site. On a mud ramp ready to fire are three NVA 140mm rockets.

troops donning disguises, hiding their weapons, and attempting to slip through Marine lines in the dark.[38]

On 16 November, the enemy went on the offensive around Da Nang, conducting ground attacks and firing 122mm rockets at Da Nang Airbase and the port, one of which scored a direct hit on the deep-water pier, killing 2 people and wounding 16 others. Within the city, several small firefights erupted, in which Free World security units captured seven prisoners claiming to belong to the *Q.91 Special Action Sapper Unit.* North of the city, near the Song Cu De, North Vietnamese forces overran and annihilated a seven-man ambush team from the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines. The dead Marines all suffered bullet wounds to the head inflicted at close range, in execution fashion. At the opposite end of the Da Nang TAOR, at the Vinh Dien Bridge north of Dien Ban, elements of the NVA *36th Regiment* attacked ARVN bridge security units and a Combined Action platoon. In heavy fighting that lasted through the following day, the Marine command reported 305 North Vietnamese dead.[39]

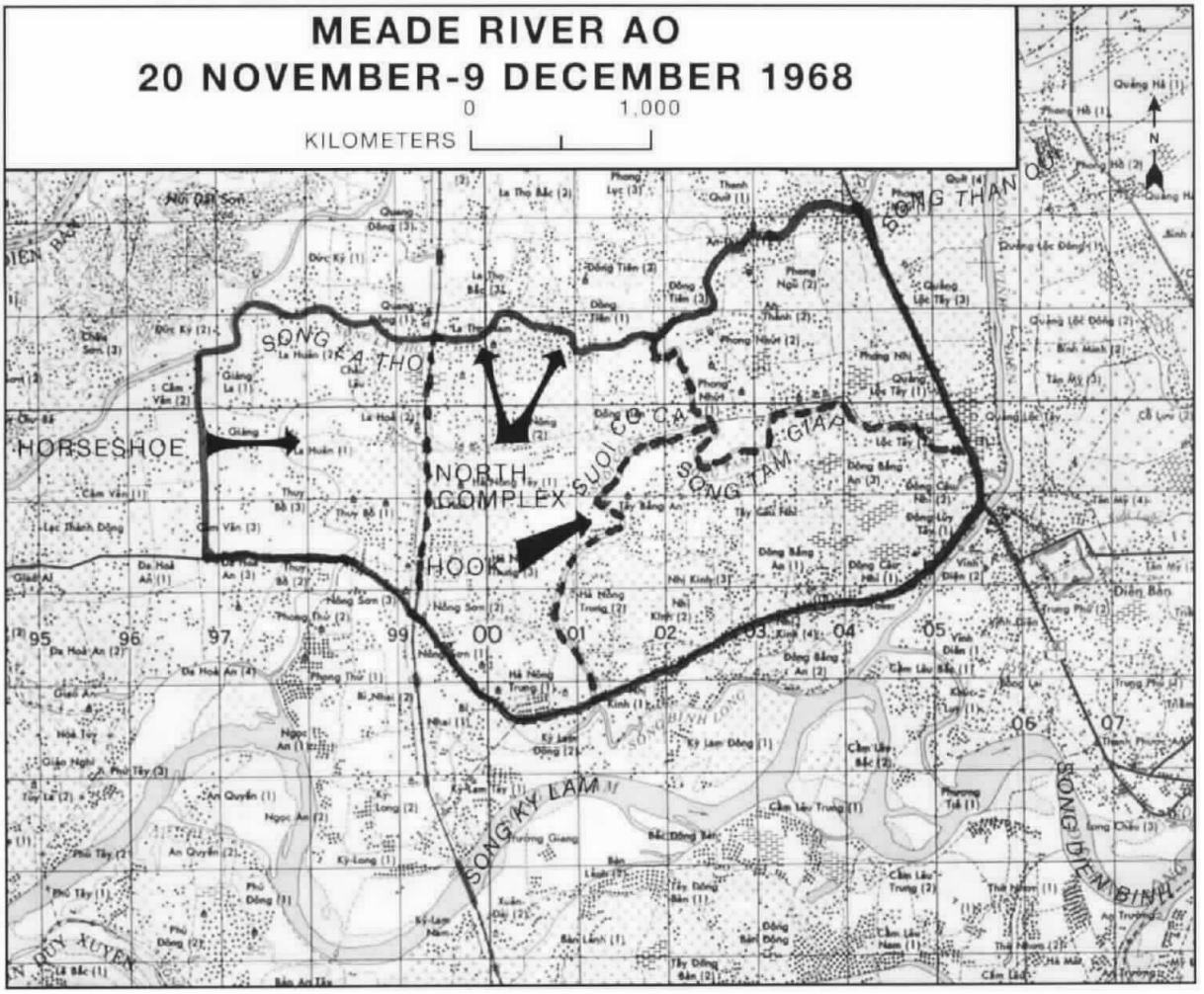
The enemy offensive around Da Nang continued for several days. In an indirect fire attack during the night of the 19th, 13 rockets fell on the Force Logistic Command, and another 12 struck the city. At Marble Mountain Air Facility, mortar fire wounded 7 men and damaged 13 helicopters. Mortar fire also struck the NSA Hospital. On the morning of the 21st, 10 rockets hit the 1st Marine Division command post, killing 2 American soldiers and destroying a helicopter and 2 jeeps.[40]

During the night of the 21st, an enemy battalion attacked An Hoa. Supported by fire from 82mm and 60mm mortars, 57mm recoilless rifles, and B–40 rockets, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops advanced against the base's eastern perimeter. When the attack began at 2200, Marine tank and artillery crews on the perimeter began direct fire against the advancing enemy, using "Beehive" antipersonnel ammunition.* Amphibian tractors arrived and added the weight of their machine guns to the battle.

CAP 2–9–1, positioned in the hamlet of Mau Chanh (2), about a kilometer east of the base, lay in the path of the attack. The CAP Marines and their PF counterparts took the enemy flanks and rear under fire, calling for air and artillery support. At 2330, the Communist troops fell on CAP 2–9–1. AC–47 gunships held back the enemy while a platoon of Marines mounted in amphibian tractors, with tanks and helicopter gunships escorting, attacked east from An Hoa to reinforce the hamlet and bring an ammunition resupply.

The battle raged for five hours, during which the Marines threw back four waves of attacking NVA and VC. At 0330 the shooting died down. Despite the

*Each "Beehive" projectile contains thousands of tiny darts, called flechettes, which are expelled and thrown forward at high velocity, spreading in a deadly pattern.



heavy fighting, friendly casualties numbered only three Marines and a PF with minor wounds. Marine sources listed 21 dead Viet Cong in the area.[41]

The enemy offensive reached a crescendo on the night of 24–25 November. Communist rocket and mortar fire fell on Da Nang Airbase, Marble Mountain Air Facility, the 5th Special Forces Group compound in east Da Nang, and Hoi An. Enemy company-sized units carried out ground assaults against Dien Ban, Liberty Bridge, and three bridges spanning the Song Cau Lau and the Song Vinh Dien along Highway 1. U.S. Marines, Korean Marines, and South Vietnamese soldiers fought off the enemy attacks, and 25 November dawned with all of the enemy's objectives still in friendly hands.[42]

The attacks of 24–25 November were the last gasp of the Communist November offensive. Fifteen kilometers south of Da Nang, in the infamous Dodge City Area, the 1st Marine Division had begun an offensive of its own, the largest "County Fair" operation conducted up to that time: Operation Meade River.

Operation Meade River

On 1 November, the Government of Vietnam announced the start of a country-wide "Accelerated Pacification Campaign," named *"Le Loi"* in Vietnamese. Scheduled to last three months, the campaign's objective was to extend the legitimate government's influence into many hamlets still afflicted by the three major Communist offensives launched during 1968. Of the 1,000 hamlets targeted for the campaign throughout the country, 141 were in ICTZ.[43*]

The 1st Marine Division planned Operation Meade River to support the *Le Loi* campaign. It was to be a cordon and search operation under the 1st Marines,

*For additional coverage of the *Le Loi* Campaign, see Chapter 29. The three enemy offenses were Tet, the May Offensive, and the Third Offensive in August.



Photo is from the Col Robert G. Lauffer, USMC (Ret), Collection

In an aerial view of the 36-square-mile "Dodge City" area south of Da Nang, the Ky Lam River, the southern boundary of the sector, is at the top.

like many which had been conducted previously, but on a much grander scale. Rather than surround and search single hamlets or villages, the division planned a cordon around 36 square kilometers in the Dodge City area, south of Da Nang.

Like Go Noi island to the south, Dodge City was heavily infested with Communists. At the center of the fertile Da Nang-Hoi An-Dai Loc Triangle, the area's terrain was almost completely flat, reaching only four to five meters above sea level. Many hamlets dotted the countryside, homes to the farming families who tended the vast tracts of rice paddies. Waterways of various sizes crossed Dodge City, as did the National Railroad and Route 4. The characteristics of the area gave it special potential as a source of food and recruits for the enemy. Its proximity to Da Nang, Hoi An, and the Dien Ban District headquarters gave it tactical significance as a possible enemy staging area for attacks on those key locations.[44]

Colonel Lauffer, the commander of the 1st Marines, recalled that the Korean Brigade had the tactical responsibility for the area, but had failed to keep the Communist forces out. Since its arrival at Da Nang, the 1st Marines TAOR included the area to the north of Dodge City, but in almost self-defense, the regiment had conducted several small-scale operations "to familiarize units with the situation and to gain additional intelligence." According to Lauffer, "we were fully apprised of the fluid and rapidly changing situation concerning enemy troop strength in the Dodge City area." For Operation Meade River, Marine intelligence officers estimated that enemy forces in Dodge City numbered between 100 and 150 Viet Cong infrastructure personnel and could include up to 900 NVA or VC regular forces. The only identified units in the sector, however, were two VC companies, the *R–20 VC Battalion* and the *1st Battalion, 36th NVA Regiment*, totalling an estimated 630 enemy troops.[45]

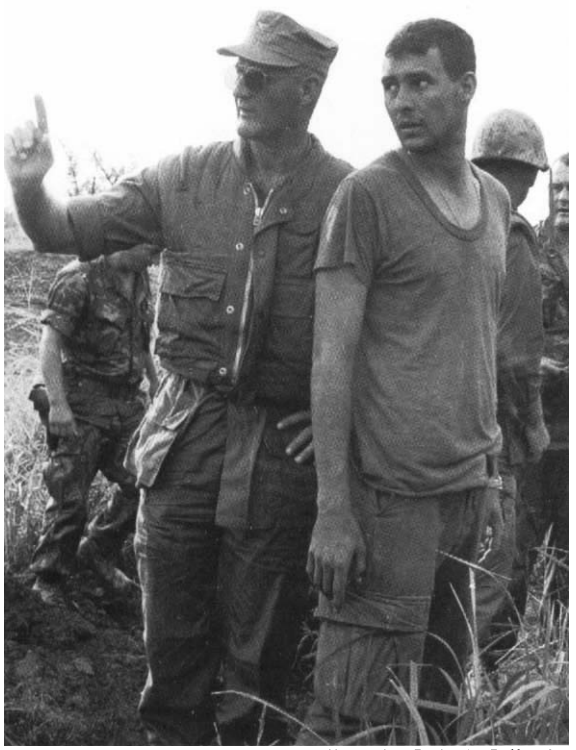


Photo is from the Col Robert G. Lauffer, USMC (Ret), Collection

Col Robert G. Lauffer, the commander of the 1st Marines in Operaton Meade River, is accompanied in the field by 1stLt Francis B. Ahearn, the S–2, or intelligence officer, of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines.

Early on the morning of 20 November, seven Marine battalions, under the control of the 1st Marines, began moving into prearranged positions to form a ring around part of Dodge City.* Using 72 aircraft, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in one of its largest helicopter operations lifted four battalions (one of them from amphibious shipping lying offshore). Trucks moved another battalion, and two battalions marched in. By 0825, Dodge City lay within the 1st Marines' cordon. Colonel Lauffer observed that a helicopter was available to him throughout Meade River and that "concerned commanders were given numerous airborne views to enhance our tactical decisions."[46]

In the initial hours of the operation, the Marines encountered light resistance. The Communist forces shot down two 1st Marine Aircraft Wing helicopters and damaged several others during the assault. On the ground, they used a command-detonated mine to destroy a truck, killing 1 Marine and wounding 23 Marines and 2 ARVN soldiers.[47]**

Along the Song La Tho, where the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines manned the northern edge of the cordon, helicopters lifted in two towers. In the flat terrain, these towers provided improved observation for Marines controlling artillery fire and airstrikes. Snipers also manned the towers and engaged enemy troops in Dodge City. Clockwise around the cordon from the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines were: BLT 2/26; the 2d and 3d Battalions, 5th Marines; the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines; BLT 2/7; and finally, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines.[48]

Just before noon, Lieutenant Colonel Neil A. Nelson's BLT 2/7 began the next phase of the operation by attacking from its position on the western side of the cordon toward the railroad berm. By 1600, Company H secured the southern end of the battalion's objective, after only minor contact with the enemy. At 1630, however, the battalion ran headlong into a strong Communist defensive complex located at a large bend in a stream which Marines called the "Horseshoe." Company G, attacking in the center of the BLT 2/7 zone of action, made heavy contact with what proved to be North Vietnamese regulars. Under fierce fire from mutually supporting bunkers, Company G withdrew one kilometer, leaving behind six Marines, believed dead.[49]

When darkness fell over Dodge City, artillery and aircraft units illuminated the area with flares. Psychological operations (PsyOps) team used powerful loudspeakers to advise civilians of the cordon and to direct them to central collection points for the questioning which was intended to winnow out the Communists among them. BLT 2/7 licked its wounds and prepared to resume the assault on the Horseshoe.[50]

Colonel Lauffer decided to reinforce BLT 2/7 for the attack. He ordered Company D, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and Company L, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines to report to Lieutenant Colonel Nelson for duty. Nel-

*Colonel Lauffer commented that he actually had operational control of nine infantry battalions. While seven participated in Operation Meade River, he kept two battalions in his regular area of operations, "particularly concentrating on the rocket and mortar belts." Because of the large size of his TAOR, he normally had four battalions under his control. Col Robert G. Lauffer, Comments on draft, dtd 29Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Lauffer Comments.

**According to Colonel Lauffer, the mine knocking out the truck could have been even more devastating: "Highway 1, in many areas was rimmed on either side with rice paddies or low wet areas. A breech in the road could have been catastrophic." To prevent such a breech, the Marines had "strategically prepositioned dump trucks loaded with gravel and marsten matting." This precaution permitted the convoy to continue "to join those in front of the explosion with little delay." Lauffer Comments.



Photo is from the Abel Collection

Infantrymen from the 5th Marines advance through five-foot elephant grass after being dropped into a landing zone during Operation Meade River. In one of the largest lifts, Marine helicopters brought four Marine battalions into the cordon operation.

son placed all four of his own companies on line for the assault, then used Company L as his new reserve. He ordered Company D to move south and to sweep the northern flank of Company F, which was on the battalion left.[51]

Nelson scheduled a preparation fire to begin on the Horseshoe at 0630. The fire support units found it difficult to coordinate their fires because of the proximity of friendly units to one another, and the almost circular shape of the cordon, which required extraordinary care to deliver fires safely. Thus, the preparation was delayed until 0920.

The enemy reacted violently, even before the infantry attack began. As Company G moved into positions from which it was to provide supporting fire, the North Vietnamese went into action. Heavy fire drove Company G to cover. Company F attempted to carry out a flank attack from the north to relieve the pressure, but, according to Captain Ronald R. Welpott, the company commander, "due to sporadic enemy contact, boobytraps, and difficult terrain," it could not find a place to ford the stream separating it from the enemy bunkers.[52] Once again, the attack bogged down and ground to a halt.[53]

The next day, 22 November, BLT 2/7 launched a third attack on the Horseshoe. Following essentially the same plan as the previous day, Company G established a base of fire while Companies D, 1st Marines and E, 7th Marines attacked from the north, crossing the stream to strike the enemy's right flank. The North Vietnamese hid in their bunkers during the preparation fire, then, when the fire lifted, assumed mutually supporting fighting positions. They usually attempted to keep a rice paddy or other natural barrier between them and the Marines, and in this case, caught Company E at the stream and poured on extremely heavy fire from a range of 100 meters. In 10 minutes, the company lost 7 killed and 23 wounded. With the company commander among the wounded, Company E broke contact and withdrew to the north bank of the stream.

Meanwhile, Company D crossed the Song La Tho and attacked south along the railroad berm, about a mile east of where the BLT 2/7 attack had stalled. The

North Vietnamese within the Horseshoe pounded the advancing Marines with machine guns, rifles, and mortars, but Company D advanced to within 300 meters of the Communist positions as casualties continued to mount. Enemy fire struck down the radio operators for the forward air controller and the battalion tactical radio net, greatly compounding communications problems. Finally, with 2 Marines dead and 17 wounded, Company D withdrew to the stream, but remained on the south bank, setting up an LZ to evacuate the wounded. Medevac helicopters arrived, only to have the North Vietnamese drive them away under heavy fire. Only after dark could Company D begin to medevac its casualties, even then still under heavy fire. Another night fell with the Horseshoe still in enemy hands.

During the morning hours of 23 November, while BLT 2/7 remained in position, still evacuating casualties from the previous day's action, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines advanced from the southwest corner of the cordon into Dodge City. With its right flank anchored on the railroad berm, the battalion attacked across Route 4, moving north. As the battalion approached the Horseshoe, the NVA opened fire and the Marines took cover.[54]

BLT 2/7 joined the attack once again. Company G opened fire on the Communist positions, and Company H, now on the left of the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines swept northward and overran one group of enemy positions. BLT 2/7 recovered the bodies of the six Company G Marines missing from the initial attack. To restore the integrity of the cordon, Company H withdrew and linked up with the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines. Although the attack had been partially successful, many enemy positions remained within the Horseshoe.

In an aerial view of the "Horseshoe" sector of Operation Meade River, looking east, from the bend of the stream it is easy to see why the area was so named.

Photo is from the Col Robert G. Lauffer, USMC (Ret), Collection



Determined to eliminate the enemy bunker complex, Colonel Lauffer reinforced BLT 2/7 still again, placing Company K, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines under Nelson's control. On the 24th, after a morning of preparatory fire, Companies H, BLT 2/7 and K, 26th Marines attacked from the south, in the Marines' fifth attempt to eject the North Vietnamese from the Horseshoe. At 1530, the two companies came under extremely heavy fire from enemy troops in bunkers and a treeline 100 meters to the front. Unable to force the position by frontal assault, both companies tried to drive in an enemy flank, but to no avail. Colonel Lauffer added yet another unit, Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, to the attack. Company C moved in from the north, but not in time to help. At 1830, once again frustrated by the enemy's stiff resistance, the Marines broke contact and withdrew with 5 dead and 31 wounded.

On the morning of the 25th, the Marines near the Horseshoe pulled back and began pounding the area with artillery. Low clouds over Dodge City precluded airstrikes. Following the preparation, BLT 2/7 surged forward, encountering no resistance. By noon, the Marines overran the entire Horseshoe and the battalion consolidated its position along the railroad berm. A search of the area revealed bunkers constructed of reinforced concrete, railroad ties, and rails, covered with six feet of earth. Lieutenant Colonel Nelson, the BLT commander, remembered an order "to destroy" the railroad berm, but "after many tons of explosion being wasted the destruction was called off."[55]

Marine Sgt H. D. Vines, a section leader of an 81mm mortar section with BLT 2/7, snaps off a shot with his M79 grenade launcher at an enemy-held treeline during Meade River. A puff of smoke from the grenade can be seen by the trees.

Photo from the Abel Collection



It was apparent that the enemy forces trapped within the cordon was somewhat larger than originally anticipated. At the Horseshoe, the Marines had encountered regular enemy troops, specifically the *3d Battalion, 36th NVA Regiment*. While pushed back, the NVA battalion remained a formidable fighting force.[56]

Since the beginning of the operation, South Vietnamese troops and police had worked to evacuate 2,600 civilians from Dodge City to interrogation centers. With these civilians out and the Horseshoe finally cleared, Colonel Lauffer launched the next phase of the operation. BLT 2/26 and the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines attacked from the eastern edge of the cordon toward the Suoi Co Ca to relieve the 51st ARVN Regiment which had earlier established blocking positions at the river.

Over the next four days, the Marine battalions tightened the cordon as they advanced. Using probes fashioned from metal stock especially for Operation Meade River, the Marines located many caches of enemy arms and supplies. Enemy troops attempted to evade at night, but almost continuous flare illumination and Marine ambushes turned them back. When engaged, the enemy would break contact and flee. Captain James F. Foster, the commander of Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, later related that his Marines not only found several enemy caches, but also captured "13 North Vietnamese soldiers who all had automatic weapons and a large amount of South Vietnamese Piasters."[57]

As the cordon grew smaller, fire support coordination problems grew larger. Units in contact with the enemy often experienced interruptions in fire support caused by interference from neighboring units. Worse still, the close quarters created by seven battalions in a constantly shrinking area resulted in severe safety problems and occasional instances of friendly fire impacting Marine positions. One unit reported, "continuing problems with friendly artillery fire which



Photo from the Abel Collection

South Vietnamese Maj Tran Phouc Xang, a battalion commander with the 51st ARVN Regiment, hatless in the left center of the picture, tries to explain to Vietnamese villagers why they have to be evacuated from their homes during Operation Meade River.

inflicted casualties, destroyed confidence in the supporting units, and lowered morale."[58]

On 28 November, Thanksgiving Day, BLT 2/26 and the 2d Battalion 5th Marines reached the Suoi Co Ca. On the same day, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines which had been helilifted earlier into the southern Dodge City area, relieved the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines along Route 4. The latter battalion was then to attack north toward a series of phase lines between the railroad berm and Suoi Co Ca. Lieutenant Colonel John W. P. Robertson, the commander of the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines, remembered that his unit "enjoyed" a Thanksgiving dinner of turkey loaf and prepared to follow the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines in the attack.[59]

At midnight on the 28th, Marine artillery began a heavy and concentrated barrage on the now greatly diminished area within the cordon. Following six hours of intense artillery fire, PsyOps teams used loudspeakers in an attempt to convince the enemy to surrender or rally. The broadcasts continued for an hour between 0600 and 0700 on the morning of 29 November and painted a grim, but true picture:

> Why is your unit still surrounded? Why have your leaders found no way for you to escape? There *is* no way to escape. North, south, east, and west, you are completely surrounded and the circle is getting smaller. Today, you cannot go a thousand meters in any direction. Tomorrow, will you be killed in your bunker? Tomorrow, will your legs be blown from your body and will you die in a hole in the ground far from your home?
>
> There is a way to avoid being killed. Many of your friends have become Hoi Chanh [ralliers]; surrender today, or will you be killed tomorrow?
>
> For awhile, now, the artillery and bombs will stop falling. Put down your weapons, pick up your wounded comrades and Chieu Hoi [rally]. Your wounded will receive medical treatment and you will not be harmed.
>
> You are completely surrounded. You cannot move a thousand meters in any direction. Will you Chieu Hoi today or die tomorrow? Chieu Hoi now, while the bombs and artillery are stopped for a little while.[60]

The enemy troops were unimpressed by the broadcasts. As the 1st Marines reported, "they chose to fight."[61]

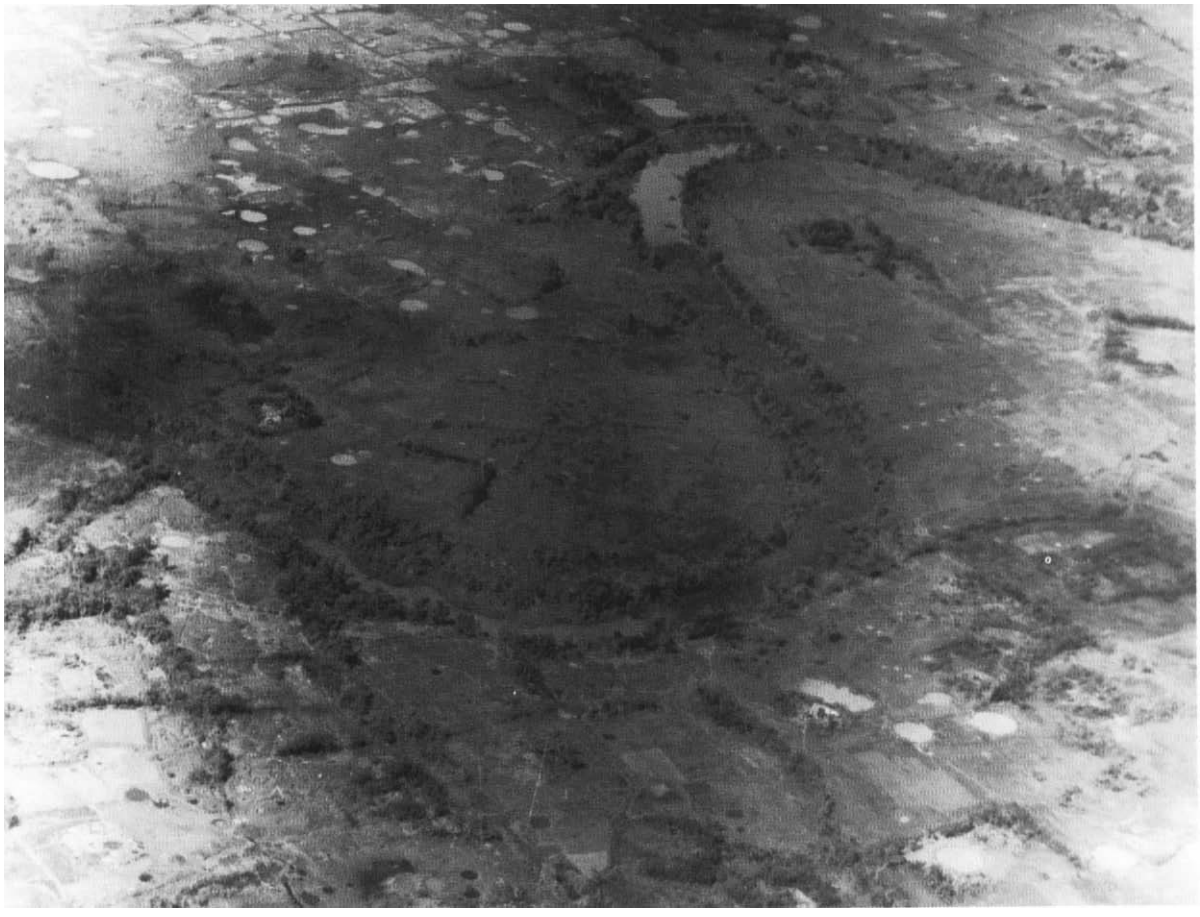
After the broadcasts, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines launched its attack. Although the enemy resisted in isolated groups, clearing even small fortified positions was dangerous and difficult. It took the Marine battalion the entire day of 29 November to secure the first objective, Phase Line Alpha, about 800 to 1,000 meters above Route 4.[62]

On 30 November, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines continued its northward advance, reaching Phase Line Bravo, where the area between the railroad berm and the Suoi Co Ca becomes narrow, constricting maneuver and further compounding fire support coordination problems. Still, the blocking forces on the eastern bank of the river, BLT 2/26 and the 2d Battalion 5th Marines ambushed and took under fire enemy troops attempting to avoid the tightening cordon. Marines called nightly upon Air Force AC–47 gunships to add their deadly fires to those of the Marines on the ground. Lieutenant Colonel Stemple, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines commander, remembered that enemy troops tried to swim the river at night to escape to the south.[63]

On 1 December, about two kilometers north of Route 4 and just above Phase Line Bravo, at a small bend in the Suoi Co Ca which would become known as the "Hook," the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines ran into a strong bunker complex. As the 1st Marines reported, "the Hook was not to be taken in a few hours. The enemy fire from well entrenched, reinforced bunkers was devastating." In the first encounter, Company L sustained 2 dead and 28 wounded. The Marine battalion pulled back and called for artillery and air support.[64]

An aerial view of the bend of the Suoi Co Ca River, called the "Hook" by the Marines, makes it obvious how the "Hook," like the Horseshow obtained its name.

Photo is from the Col Robert G. Lauffer, USMC (Ret), Collection



The fighting for the Hook would continue for the next four days. On 2 December, even after heavy air and ground bombardment, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines failed to make any headway against the North Vietnamese defenders. That evening the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Harry E. Atkinson, left one company to isolate the Hook, while the rest of the battalion moved north another 1,000 meters to Phase Line Charlie. On 3 December, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines advanced from Route 4 to Phase Line Bravo to continue the attack on the Hook.[65]

Lieutenant Colonel Robertson, the battalion commander, recalled that Colonel Lauffer, the 1st Marines commander, took him and his battalion operations officer up in a helicopter to make an aerial reconnaissance of the enemy defenses there. According to Robertson, he saw a tremendous bunker and trench complex and it was obvious that the only stratagem was to enfilade the area and then make the final assault on the Hook defenses from the rear. With continuing heavy resistance, the Marines again called upon air and artillery, using 750-pound bombs, napalm, and "danger close supporting arms." Across the Suoi Co Ca, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines pulled back and dug into the soft mud, but Lieutenant Colonel Stemple, the battalion commander, remembered that the exploding bombs from across the river covered his Marines with debris. After the aerial bombardment, an artillery officer, according to Stemple, suggested and Colonel Lauffer approved, "the pin-point destruction of the bunkers using a single 8-inch artillery piece, controlled by an airborne spotter."[66]

With the supporting destructive fires, Company I punched its way into the Hook and by nightfall on 4 December, the battalion had maneuvered to the rear of the bunker complex. After continuing artillery support and airstrikes through the night, at first light the next morning, the "field commander and I Corps Commander both taped broadcasts to entice the enemy out . . . ." With only a few takers, the 3d Battalion prepared its final assault. After fixed-wing aircraft gave the defenders a final dousing of napalm and bombs, the battalion overran the position. The heavy preparation fires had done the job. Without a single casualty, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines seized the objective, where the Marines, according to differing reports, found 75 to 100 enemy dead and pulled out some 5 to 15 prisoners from "partially destroyed tunnels and bunkers."[67]

With the securing of the Hook, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines started a sweep to the west and Robertson's battalion prepared to take its place on Phase Line Charlie. At the same time, the changing shape of the cordon squeezed out the two battalions on the eastern side of the Suoi Co Ca, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines and BLT 2/26. The latter battalion except for its Company E departed the area of operations and Lieutenant Colonel Stemple ordered his 2d Battalion, 5th Marines to prepare for helicopter extraction and the return to An Hoa.[68]

Captain Ronald J. Drez' Company H, on the 2d Battalion's southern flank, waited for the lift. After 15 days of what had been, for them, a very unexciting operation, the Hotel Company Marines were anxious to return to the base. They sat eating C–rations and idling away the time until the helicopters arrived. At 1400, Stemple radioed Drez, ordering him to prepare his company, not to return to base, but to conduct a helicopter-borne assault under the operational control of the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines. Even more startling, Drez learned that the assault lift was to begin in five minutes! Lieutenant Colonel Stemple later remembered that he selected Drez' company since it was closest to the 3d Battalion. He made the turnover just as the rest of his unit departed the area.[69]

Drez and his company gunnery sergeant quickly put together a plan for what Drez later characterized as one of the "shortest tactical airlifts in history."[70] The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing helicopters which lifted the still surprised Company H Marines from the eastern bank of the Suoi Co Ca set them down again less than 1,000 meters away. At about the same time, helicopters also brought in Captain James F. Foster's Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, which "landed in a 'hot' landing zone, dispatched the enemy" and took up positions west of Company H.[71]

Lieutenant Colonel Robertson's 3d Battalion, 26th Marines, now reinforced with two additional companies, lined up with five companies abreast to continue the move to Phase Line Charlie. In the meantime, Company E, BLT 2/26, which had been under the operational control of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines remained in "a reconnoitering role" north of the Phase Line. On the 6th, while the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines reached Phase Line Charlie without incident, Company E encountered strong NVA forces in a bunker complex that the Marines called the "Northern Bunker Complex," about 1,000 meters to the north, just below the La Tho River. The company remained in position until first light the next morning and then crossed the La Tho River and joined the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines in blocking positions there.[72]



Photo is from the Col Robert G. Lauffer, USMC (Ret), Collection

Aerial view of the Northern Bunker Complex reveals its location just below the La Tho River, near the top of the picture. This was the scene of some of the heaviest fighting during Meade River.

On the 7th, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines launched its assault into the Northern Bunker Complex. Companies I, K, and L, maintaining their line, swung to the left like a huge door, pivoting on Company H, 5th Marines and formed the battalion in a giant inverted "L." With the railroad berm on their left and a three-company blocking position on their right, Company A, 7th Marines and Drez' Company H launched a frontal attack. Soon, the Marines ran headlong into stiff enemy resistance. Company H made contact in a cemetery where North Vietnamese troops fighting from two pagodas laid down heavy fire. Much of the ground was under water, forming a quagmire through which the Marines were unable to maneuver. On the left flank, NVA units in a fortified hamlet opened fire on Company A and casualties began to mount. Soon, 10 Marines were dead and another 23 were wounded. Under the intense fire, the attacking companies recovered their wounded only with great difficulty. Both companies halted, dug in for the night, and called for preparation fires. After dark, volunteers moved forward to recover the dead. Captain Foster, the commander of Company A, recalled that he, six Marines, and a Navy corpsman participated in the recovery of the dead and the wounded of his company. According to Foster, the Navy corpsman continued treating casualties although wounded himself and was among the last to be evacuated.[73]

Having had a taste of the enemy's tenacious defense, the Marines prepared themselves for the coming battle. Captain Drez remembered that:

> We dug in and prepared for what we knew would be a real hard push the next day. The enemy had shown themselves to be there in force, and they also showed that they were not going to give up easy. The word came down from battalion that we could expect . . . the *3d Battalion, 36th NVA Regiment* to die fighting. They had shown no inclination to surrender or to become Hoi Chanhs [ralliers]. They were good, hard North Vietnamese Army troops.[74]

At 1120 on the 8th, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines attacked to the north with five companies abreast. The 2d Troop, 4th ARVN Cavalry, which had arrived the previous evening, consisting of 12 armored personnel carriers (APCs), reinforced the Marine assault. In their path, the Marines reported 79 dead North Vietnamese near the site of the previous day's battle. When Company H reached a rice paddy a few hundred meters from their starting point, Communist troops hidden in a treeline suddenly opened fire, trapping Marines in the paddy. For 30 minutes, the Marines returned fire individually, then began moving in small groups toward a large bunker which appeared to be the linchpin of the Communist defenses. Just beyond the bunker and treeline, they could see the Song La Tho, on the other side of which the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines remained in its blocking position.[75]

The Marines requested air support. Because of the proximity of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, the aircraft had difficulty attacking targets without endangering friendly troops. In one instance, a napalm bomb impacted directly on Company H, but miraculously bounced safely away before detonating. Captain George B. Meegan, the commander of Company L, 26th Marines in another sector, recalled that a "napalm strike landed" by his 1st Platoon and that several Marines sustained minor burns.[76] Neither the airstrikes nor mortar and 3.5-inch rocket fire overcame the enemy resistance.

When supporting arms failed to silence the enemy in the bunker facing him, Captain Drez requested Lieutenant Colonel Robertson to provide him with some of the ARVN APCs. The APCs arrived, armed with recoilless rifles, and halted in the rice paddy. According to Drez, however, the ARVN refused to help. Instead, Drez had his attached combat engineer, Private First Class Michael A. Emmons, jerryrig a satchel charge consisting of C–4, hand grenades, two 3.5-inch rockets, and a five-second fuze. With the assistance of another Marine, they carried the satchel charge to the top of the bunker where Drez lit the fuze and Emmons flipped the charge through an embrasure. When the others ran, Emmons momentarily remained atop the bunker. The explosion tossed him into the air, but he landed unhurt.* The blast smashed the bunker, killing all but one of the North Vietnamese inside. The Marines reported 39 enemy dead and 1 prisoner in the vicinity of the bunkers.[77]

The other attacking companies also had their share of fighting. Captain Foster's Company A overran an enemy fortified position containing 12 bunkers and 30 covered fighting holes, reporting 47 North Vietnamese dead. Several hours later, Company A attacked and killed nearly 20 North Vietnamese in a firefight which ended with 6 Marines dead and 12 wounded. Late in the afternoon, Captain Meegan's Company L engaged an enemy platoon. In a short, but fierce encounter, Lima Company accounted for another reported 15 enemy killed, at a cost of 5 Marines dead and 11 wounded.[78]

The combat on 8 December was so intense that some senior Marines said that it was "the fiercest fighting they had ever seen."[79] That night Staff Sergeant Karl G. Taylor of Company I led a rescue effort to relieve the company's lead platoon, cut off by enemy fire. After his Marines took out several of the most severely wounded, Sergeant Taylor returned with another four volunteers to reach yet another group of seriously wounded men lying near an enemy machine gun position. Finding the position too strong, Taylor told his Marines to go back and then armed with a grenade launcher charged across the open paddy. Although wounded several times, Sergeant Taylor silenced the enemy weapon. The sergeant was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.[80]

On the morning of 9 December, the enemy still occupied a narrow strip of ground between the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines and the Song La Tho. It would take another push to finish the job.

After supporting arms, including the battleship *New Jersey* lying off the coast with its 16-inch guns, bombarded the enemy's last remaining toehold all night and most of the morning, the 3d Battalion launched its final drive at 1000 on the 9th. The Marines assaulted violently, yet methodically, destroying and searching every bunker and fighting hole in their path. Enemy resistance was tenacious, but lacked

*Emmons was later awarded a Silver Star Medal for his action.

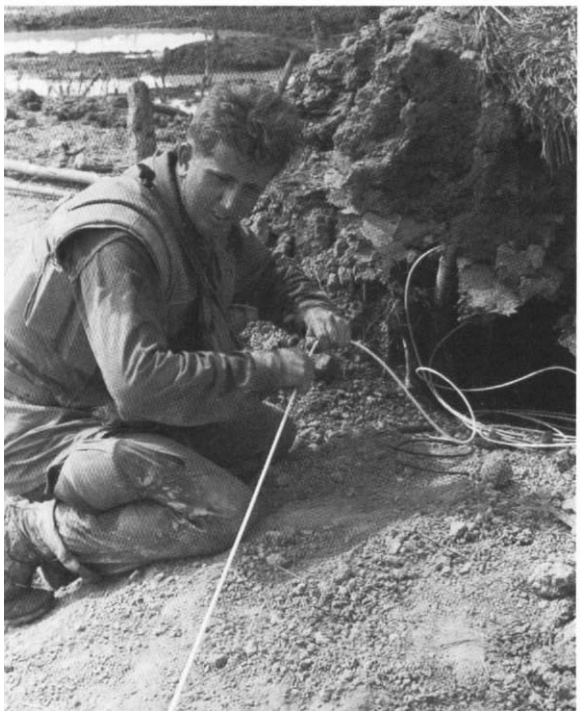


Photo from the Abel Collection

Marine engineer LCpl Jerry Kanone runs a detonating cord from a charge placed inside an enemy bunker that can be seen at the right of the picture.

the organization encountered earlier. Lieutenant Colonel Robertson credited the ARVN 2d Troop, 4th ARVN Cavalry with their APCs in providing the necessary shock action to break the final NVA resistance.[81]* It was apparent that the fighting had taken its toll on the NVA. Collapsed bunkers and scores of dead North Vietnamese gave evidence of the ferocity of the fighting. Within some bunkers, the Marines found stacks of enemy bodies. Other dead were undoubtedly buried under the rubble of their destroyed bunkers.[82]

Company A was first to shoot its way through the North Vietnamese and reach the river. Captain Foster, the Company A commander, later wrote that his Marines chased "the enemy at a sprint into the Song La Tho . . . [and a] 'turkey shoot' ensued."[83] Company H followed shortly afterward, killing a reported 9 enemy only 20 meters from the river's banks. The battalion swept through the Communist stronghold thoroughly, tabulating 130 dead North Vietnamese—some killed during the preceding days—and took 8 prisoners. Captain Meegan, the Company L commander, remembered that one of his platoons captured an enemy warrant officer who told the Marines that it took him six months to reach the Dodge City sector.[84]

At 1800, 9 December, the 1st Marines terminated Operation Meade River. What had begun as a giant "County Fair" had turned into a major battle pitting determined Marines in the assault against equally determined North Vietnamese soldiers defending from heavily fortified positions.

According to Marine sources, the immediate, tangible results of Operation Meade River included 1,023 enemy dead, 123 prisoners, and 6 ralliers.** Intelligence personnel, working with South Vietnamese police, questioned 2,663 civilians, identifying 71 members of the VC political infrastructure. The attacking Marines destroyed 360 bunkers and captured 20 tons of rice. The price the Marines paid for their success was high, 108 dead and 510 wounded. The ARVN sustained 2 killed and 37 wounded. In a message to General Cushman, General Youngdale speculated that " . . . these results should signify the end of the enemy's stranglehold on the Dodge City Area."[85]

The aftermath of Operation Meade River, however, is more a statement on the nature of counterinsurgency. After the other units departed the area, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines crossed the Song La Tho into Dodge City to exploit the success of the operation. By 11 December, the battalion added to its tabulation of enemy dead, 20 more North Vietnamese while taking 1 prisoner. A week later, patrols observed an increase in sniper fire. As 1968 ended, the 1st Marine Division reported that ". . . the enemy is persistent. By the end of [December] he had reoccupied the Meade River

*The role that the ARVN APC troop played still remains a matter of controversy. Captain Drez complained that the ARVN failed to come to his aid on 8 December and then claimed credit for participating in the battle by reporting the serial numbers of captured weapons. Mr. Ronald J. Drez intvw, 29Mar89, Tape 6512 (Oral HistColl, MCHC). Captain George B. Meegan, the commander of Company L, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines in his comments supported Captain Drez, writing "the same APCs milled around [the] L/3/26 position [on the] last day and then claimed credit for NVA dead that had been killed the previous evening by my machine gunner . . . ." Capt George B. Meegan, Comments on draft, dtd 2Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Records disagree on the number of enemy casualties. Figures in the text are from FMFPac, MarOpsV, Nov68, p. 3; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec68, p. 17; 1st Mar ComdC, Dec68, p. II–C–4, 5; 1st Mar AAR, Meade River. Other reports were prepared so soon after the end of the operation (in one case, only 57 minutes later) that they did not include enemy dead later found on the battlefield. See 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 78, Opn Meade River, in 1st MarDiv Operation SitReps. Lieutenant Colonel Merrill L. Bartlett, who served as commander of the 13th Interrogation and Translation Team, commented that he personally believed some of the statistics were "suspect, especially the number of enemy captives." He believed that many of the prisoners listed as VC POWs were either Vietnamese civilians or possibly members of the VC infrastructure. Bartlett Comments.



Photo is from the Col Robert G. Lauffer, USMC (Ret), Collection

One can see the formidable nature of the enemy bunkers with their reinforced timbers that the Marines encountered during Meade River. This bunker was in the Hook sector.

area, and gave indications of again preparing for a thrust against Dien Ban/Hoi An and Da Nang . . . ."[86]

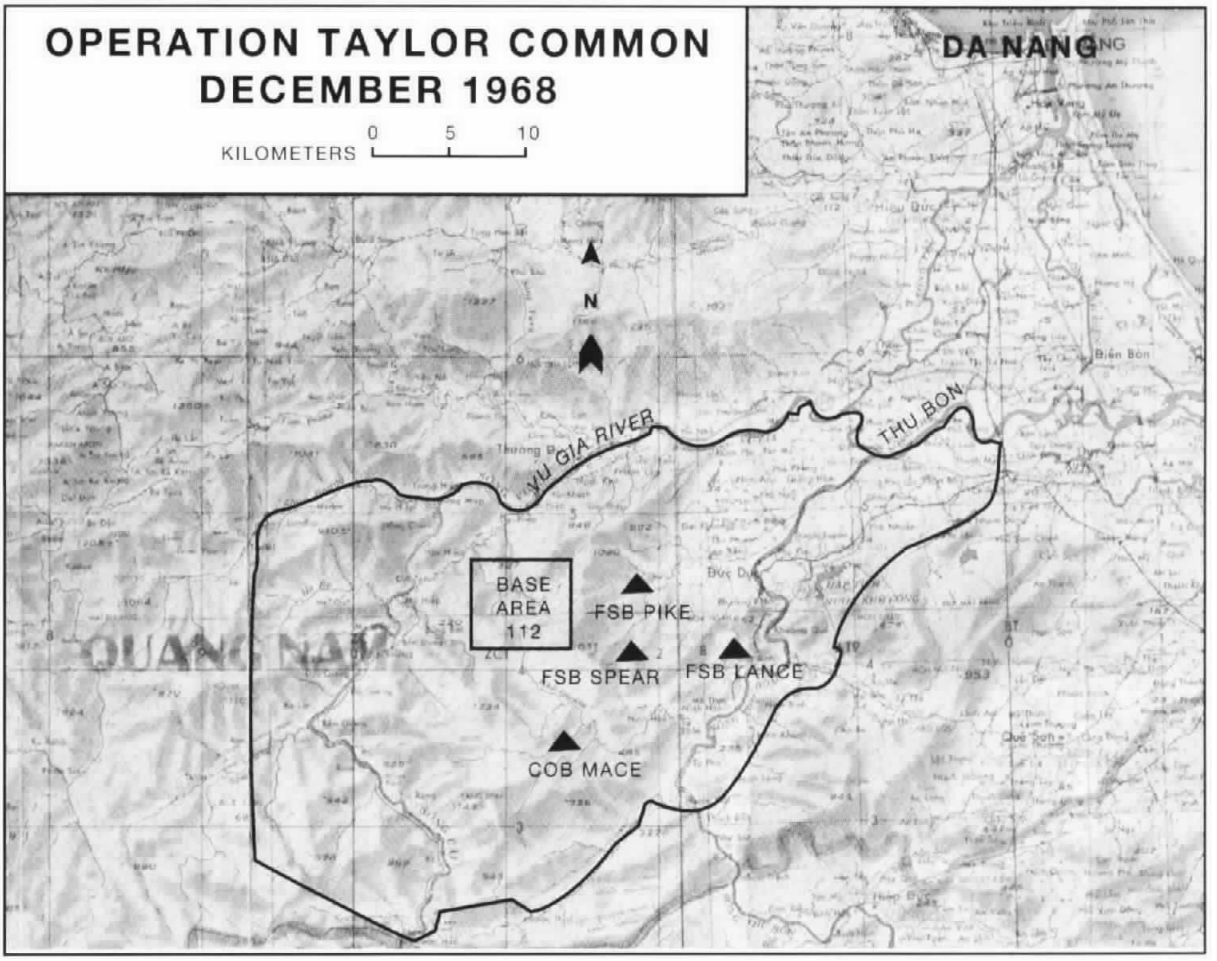
By that time, though, the 1st Marine Division had turned its attention to another operation. Far to the west, a new subordinate command of the division was to strike at a major enemy base area in an operation named Taylor Common.

Operation Taylor Common

As Operation Meade River ground to a close, MACV ordered a strike into Base Area 112, the rugged mountainous region southwest of the Arizona Territory, between the Song Thu Bon and the Song Cai. Base Area 112 was a staging and logistic base for enemy units operating in southern Quang Nam Province. Multi-layered jungle canopy 70-feet thick concealed an estimated 7,000 North Vietnamese troops of the *21st Regiment*, the *3d Battalion, 68B Rocket Regiment*, and the *2d Battalion, 141st Regiment*, as well as support and headquarters units.[87]

Under the codename Operation Taylor Common, Brigadier General Ross T. Dwyer, Jr., one of the two assistant division commanders, would form and command an ad hoc organization under the 1st Marine Division, dubbed Task Force Yankee.* The Task Force was built around Colonel James B. Ord's 5th Marines, which would include BLT 2/7, with the normal complement of supporting organizations. Lieutenant Colonel Raymond B. Ingrando's 1st Field Artillery Group served as the higher headquarters for a force of two direct support artillery battalions and elements of other units, including 8-inch howitzers, 155mm guns, and 175mm guns.[88]

*General Dwyer, who as a colonel commanded the 1st Marines until 14 August, became a 1st Marine Division ADC on 15 August upon his promotion to brigadier general. Brigadier General Carl W. Hoffman on 18 August became the second ADC with the division. General Hoffman was previously an ADC with the 3d Marine Division until his transfer to the 1st Marine Division. Hoffman while with the 1st Marine Division served in a dual capacity as G–3 or operations officer for III MAF. He later wrote that Major General Ormond R. Simpson, who relieved General Youngdale as division commander on 21 December 1968, called him [Hoffman], "his phantom ADC." General Youngdale on that date relieved Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins as Deputy Commanding General, III MAF. See Command and Staff list and MajGen Carl W. Hoffman, Comments on draft, dtd 15Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).



On 6 December, General Dwyer issued the order launching Operation Taylor Common. The task force's mission was to "neutralize" Base Area 112 and to develop Fire Support Bases (FSBs) to interdict Communist infiltration routes leading from the Laotian border. The plan included three phases. The first step was to be a search and clear operation to ensure that An Hoa was secure. Units of the task force, in coordination with the ARVN 1st Ranger Group would sweep the Arizona Territory and the area between Liberty Bridge and An Hoa. In the second phase, TF Yankee would penetrate Base Area 112, establish a series of fire support bases in the eastern half of the area, and begin reconnaissance-in-force operations to locate and destroy the enemy. Phase three was to be an extension of the second phase, with Marine battalions operating out to the western edge of Base Area 112 in search of enemy units and facilities.[89]

In order to free the 5th Marines for assignment to TF Yankee, the 1st Marine Division ended operation Henderson Hill at midnight, on 6 December. Exactly one minute later, Operation Taylor Common began.[90]

At 0830, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadrons 165 and 364 delivered BLT 2/7 to the Arizona Territory to act as a blocking force for the 1st ARVN Ranger Group. Other units, including the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, were already in the field when the operation began. To these Marines, the fact that Operation Henderson Hill had given way to Operation Taylor Common made little difference, at least initially, for the mission of the units around An Hoa remained the same as before. Having completed Operation Meade River, the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 5th Marines departed Dodge City, sweeping the area from Liberty Bridge to the hills south and southwest of An Hoa. Lieutenant Colonel Stemple recalled that during this sweep his Company G "flushed a group of six Vietnamese in civilian clothes." The company commander sent a platoon to investigate. As the Marines approached, someone among the Vietnamese fired a weapon. The troops dropped to the ground, but soon discovered they were not the

target. When the shots ended, one of the Vietnamese stood up with his hands in the air. The other five were dead, killed "execution style by a bullet to the back of the head, apparently while in a kneeling position." The sole survivor refused to answer any questions, but, according to Stemple, his "manner and dress indicated that this was not a run-of-the-mill local VC." The battalion commander later learned that his prisoner turned out to be the chief political officer of the North Vietnamese *Command Group 4*.[91]

Starting on 11 December, a major reshuffling of III MAF units occurred as a result of Operation Taylor Common. The requirement to penetrate and "neutralize" the vast reaches of Base Area 112, while simultaneously maintaining the security of the Da Nang TAOR, called for the employment of a large force. With the 27th Marines no longer in Vietnam, the 1st Marine Division did not have enough units to accomplish both tasks. To assist in the effort, General Cushman ordered Colonel Michael M. Spark's 3d Marines to redeploy from Quang Tri Province to Quang Nam. General Raymond G. Davis' success in reducing the 3d Marine Division's requirement for fixed garrisons by employing his forces in mobile operations made this move possible.[92]

In a formal change of command ceremony, MajGen Ormond R. Simpson, left, accepts the colors of the 1st Marine Division from his predecessor as division commander, MajGen Carl A. Youngdale. Gen Youngdale became the Deputy Commander, III MAF.

Photo from the Abel Collection



Colonel Spark's headquarters moved to An Hoa on 9 December, ahead of the regiment's subordinate battalions. The plan called for the 3d Marines to conduct the actual penetration of Base Area 112 while the 5th Marines secured An Hoa. As the enemy situation around An Hoa did not indicate the need for a full regiment to protect the base, General Dwyer ordered elements of the 5th Marines placed under Colonel Spark's control. Lieutenant Colonel Harry E. Atkinson's 3d Battalion reported on 11 December and became the first unit to penetrate Base Area 112 during Operation Taylor Common.[93]

On the morning of the 11th, artillery and aircraft blasted and bombed Hill 575, about eight kilometers southwest of An Hoa, in an attempt to create a suitable landing zone in the heavily forested terrain. When the fires lifted, some trees remained, so a platoon from Company B, 3d Engineer Battalion and a platoon from Company K, 5th Marines rappelled from helicopters into the LZ to complete the job. At 0950, the rest of Company K landed and the Marines set to work developing the hilltop into what would be called FSB Lance, part of Dwyer's planned network of fire support bases from which TF Yankee units could range throughout Base Area 112.[94]

Two days later, on the 13th, Spark assumed control of Lieutenant Colonel Stemple's 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. Again a platoon of Company B, 1st Engineers Battalion accompanied this time by a platoon from Stemple's Company E rappelled onto a hilltop near the southwest corner of the Arizona Territory and blasted out an LZ. By evening, the rest of the 2d Battalion had landed and was busy establishing FSB Pike. Just as in the landings at FSB Lance, there was no enemy resistance.[95]

The organic units of the 3d Marines began arriving in Quang Nam on 13 December. By the following day, both the 1st and 3d Battalions were at An Hoa, preparing to enter Base Area 112.[96]

Meanwhile, TF Yankee was employing a new weapon to prepare LZs for the introduction of the newly arrived battalions. The M–121 Combat Trap was a 10,000 pound bomb which parachuted to the



Both photos from the Abel Collection

Top, Marine engineers have just cleared with explosives a landing zone for Operation Taylor Common to take place in Base Area 112 in the rugged terrain southwest of An Hoa. After the "big blast" some stubborn trees and brush remain to be cleared. Below, artillerymen from the 11th Marines at Fire Support Base Lance watch as a Sikorsky CH–53 Sea Stallion brings in ammunition. A 105mm howitzer can be seen in the foreground.



earth and detonated over a potential LZ at a height which would blow down trees without creating a crater. General Dwyer personally directed this experimental operation from a helicopter. Air Force C–130s dropped the M–121s from high altitude, aiming for small hilltops selected by Dwyer and his staff. In terms of explosive power, the Combat Traps proved impressive. In General Dwyer's words, ". . . it looked like a mini-nuclear weapon burst. The concussion rocked us in the helicopter. . . . it just really blew down this high, hundred foot canopy. . . ."[97] Accuracy, however, left something to be desired. Although some near misses still created marginally suitable LZs, Dwyer concluded that the technique was of little use in situations requiring pinpoint accuracy. TF Yankee returned to the proven technique of bringing in low-flying attack aircraft with heavy ordnance, followed by engineers with chain saws and explosives to finish the job.[98]

With help from the indispensable Company B, 3d Engineer Battalion, the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines landed, unopposed, atop Hill 558 on 15 December. A steep prominence four kilometers west of the recently established FSB Lance, Hill 558 was, by then, awash in a sea of splintered timber, the results of numerous M–121 near-misses. Following the pattern

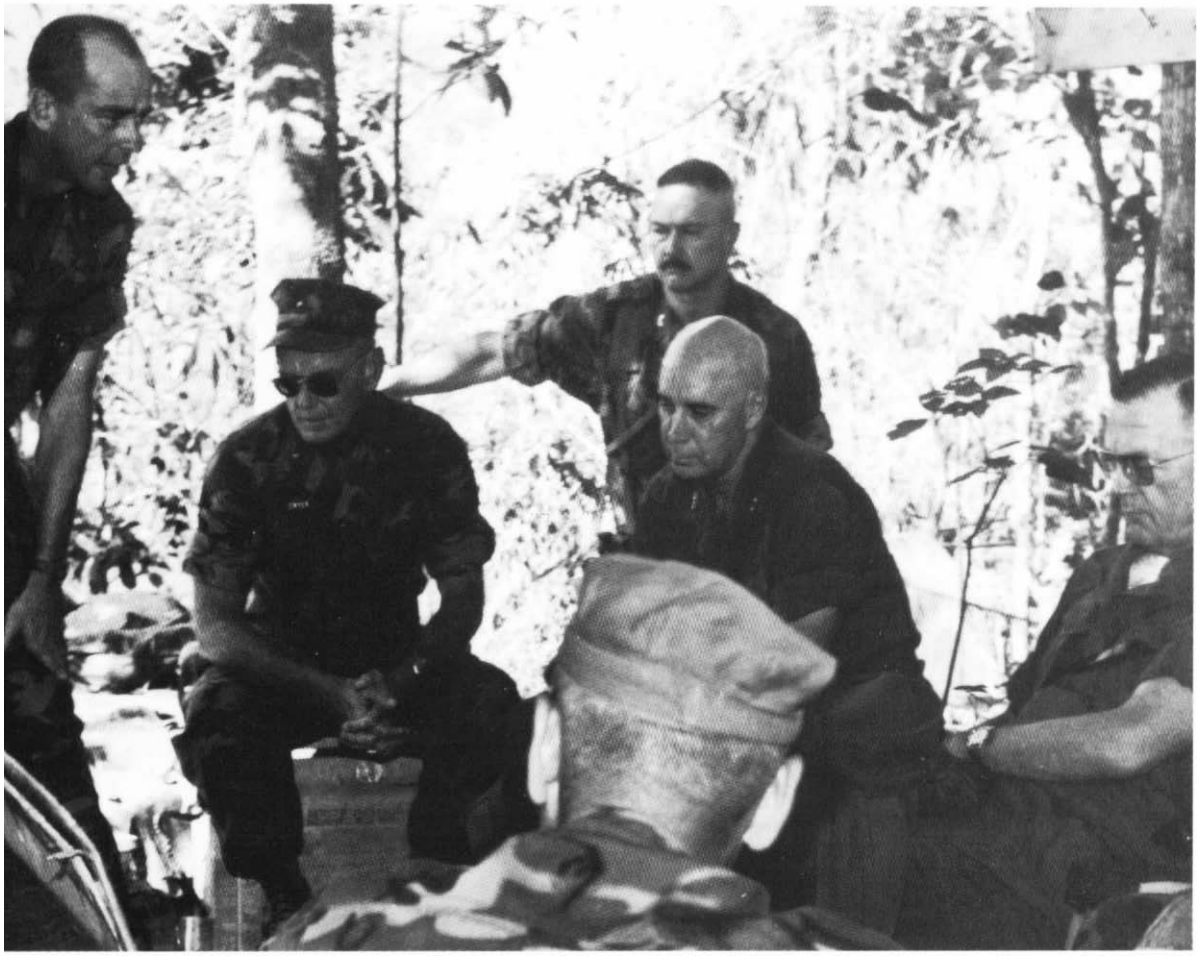


Photo courtesy of Col James W. Stemple, USMC (Ret)

Gen Leonard F. Chapman, Commandant of the Marine Corps, at right with back to tree, receives a briefing on use of Scout Dogs during Operation Taylor Common at Fire Support Base Pike on Christmas Day, 1968. Other officers in the picture are, from left: LtCol James W. Stemple, commander of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines; BGen Ross T. Dwyer, Jr., CG of TF Yankee; Col James B. Ord, commander of the 5th Marines (standing); and MajGen Carl A. Youngdale, Deputy Commander, III MAF (seated). Col Michael M. Spark, commander of the 3d Marines, has his back to the camera.

previously established, the battalion began constructing FSB Spear atop the hill. With Fire Support Bases Lance and Pike, FSB Spear formed the point of a triangle which extended TF Yankee's thrust ever deeper into the heart of Base Area 112.[99]

Northeast of Base Area 112, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines and BLT 2/7 maintained the security of An Hoa through constant patrolling. Having accomplished its blocking force mission in the Arizona Territory, BLT 2/7 conducted a helicopter assault into an LZ near the western end of Go Noi Island, at the edge of the huge Taylor Common area of operations. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines patrolled in the vicinity of An Hoa, frequently encountering small groups of the enemy.[100]

TF Yankee completed the initial penetration of Base Area 112 on 18 December, when the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines mounted a helicopter-borne assault on Hill 375, about four kilometers south of FSB Spear. After scoring yet another unopposed landing for the task force, the battalion began developing the hilltop as Combat Operations Base (COB) Mace.*

The four battalions ensconced in the eastern half of Base Area 112 began a program of saturation patrolling and reconnaissance-in-force operations, depending upon helicopters alone for all logistic sup-

*A Combat Operations Base differed from a Fire Support Base, primarily, in not having any artillery.

port. Fortunately, the seasonal monsoon did not develop, and incoming loads totalled some 250 tons per day, which were dispersed among the units at bases and those on patrol. General Dwyer later characterized the helicopter support during the operation as "a mixed performance," noting numerous instances of performance that was less than adequate. In the final analysis, however, he allowed that, ". . . the net effect was: We had plenty of artillery, plenty of food, plenty of ammunition. . . ."[101]*

Throughout the last half of December, units of the 3d Marines searched the eastern half of Base Area 112, frequently finding signs of the enemy's recent presence, but only rarely encountering Communist troops. The area included scores of NVA rest camps, kitchens, small unit headquarters, surgical facilities, and even apparent prisons (or POW holding areas), all abandoned. Usually, the Marines found enemy graves, small quantities of stored food, weapons, ammunition, medical supplies, or documents. Occasionally, patrols engaged small groups of North Vietnamese or Viet Cong, but no major contacts developed. Lieutenant Colonel Stemple remembered that his F and H Companies, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines during patrols on a slope west and south of FSB Pike had "sharp short engagements with small NVA units." According to Stemple, he initially assigned two scout dog teams to each company in this triple canopy terrain "to sniff out any enemy to the front or flank." Because of the restricted visibility, the advantage lay with the side who spotted the other first. The battalion commander stated that the North Vietnamese very quickly observed that it was to their benefit to kill the dogs before shooting at Marines. In late December, he recalled that he had the opportunity to make his case for more dogs during a visit to Vietnam by the Commandant of the Marine Corps General Leonard F. Chapman. The flow of scout dogs to the combat units soon increased and that in the later stages of Taylor Common, Stemple assigned three dogs to a company.[102]

The second phase of Operation Taylor Common ended with 1968 on New Year's Eve. During the third and final phase of the operation, which lasted until March, TF Yankee pushed west to within 30 kilometers of Laos, finally encountering more enemy troops.** The task force accomplished its mission by locating and destroying the enemy logistics infrastructure in Base Area 112. Although Operation Taylor Common did not attract a great deal of attention—owing this, thought General Dwyer, to the remoteness of the AO—it was a successful large, mobile operation. The multi-regiment task force, operating far from its permanent bases, carried III MAF offensive striking power deep into enemy territory, using much the same tactics as that of the 3d Marine Division in the north.

*Colonel Stemple, the commander of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, remembered that while his unit established itself on Fire Support Base Pike and the battalion was in the process of building ammunition storage revetments there he was told that a large number of helicopters was to bring in the next day the entire ammunition storage level to Pike. According to Stemple, he protested the order, stating that the ammunition dumps were far from ready. Nevertheless, the following morning, "a literal daisy chain of helicopters" brought in heavily laden cargo nets filled "with 155mm artillery shells and boxes of green and white bag gun powder for the 155s and boxes of 105 and 81mm mortar ammunition." With the operation in full swing, enemy rocketeers took the base under fire. Two rockets landed in one of the revetments containing 155mm gun powder. The battalion commander related the "resulting explosion was visible for miles around and secondary explosions rocked the fire support base." Miraculously only one Marine was killed. A Marine and Army ordnance disposal team deemed tons of the ammunition as unstable which had to be then helilifted to facilities at Da Nang. Colonel Stemple remembered that, "the ammunition stock levels at the support base were reduced and the stocking completed as safe storage was completed." Stemple Comments.

**For a complete treatment of the closing phase of Operation Taylor Common, see Charles R. Smith, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1969: High Mobility and Standdown* (Washington, D.C.: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1988), pp. 88–102.

CHAPTER 22

The 3d Division's Labors Bear Fruit

Elimination of the Infrastructure—Rough Soldiering—Thua Thien and the End of the Year

The 3d Marine Division's persistent mobile offensive during the autumn forced the enemy back into his base areas in the hinterlands and the sanctuaries of North Vietnam and Laos. The withdrawal, motivated more by necessity than by choice, nevertheless, afforded the enemy an opportunity to refurbish his consistently outmaneuvered and battle-depleted combat units. Hampered both by heavier than normal monsoon rains during September and October and the offensive mobility of the 3d Division, the enemy, nonetheless, retained the capability for harassing attacks against allied installations and population centers. He also could still initiate a major offensive against the South by marshalling his forces positioned north of the DMZ.

The Government of South Vietnam, with United States assistance, instituted a country-wide accelerated pacification (Le Loi) campaign, on 1 November, designed to drive the enemy from populated areas and provide extra momentum to the 1968 Revolutionary Development Program. The purpose of the campaign was to organize government functions, establish self-help projects, bolster local security, and eliminate the Viet Cong infrastructure in a number of selected hamlets.

The inauguration of the Government's wide-ranging pacification campaign coupled with the withdrawal north in late October of the three regiments of the *320th NVA Division*, as well as the *138th* and *270th NVA Regiments*, now allowed the 3d Marine Division to turn a large portion of its efforts toward implementing and expanding the pacification initiative. In the province's populated coastal lowlands and piedmont, the 3d Division, and forces under its control, would seek out those elements actively attempting to disrupt the campaign. At the same time, it continued the bold employment of Marine infantry in the mountainous jungles to the west.

Elimination of the Infrastructure

The departure of the 1st Cavalry Division from northern I Corps in early November forced a realignment of forces in the division's eastern area and a reduction in the commitment to the anti-infiltration system along the DMZ. On 1 November, the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry (Mechanized), under the command of U.S. Army Colonel James M. Gibson, was directed to move from the Kentucky area of operations into an area near Quang Tri City. The new area, labeled Napoleon-Saline II, incorporated all of the former Napoleon-Saline area, centered on Cua Viet, and the northern, or Quang Tri, portion of the cavalry division's area of operations. Lieutenant Colonel George F. Meyers' 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, as a result, was placed under the operational control of the brigade and continued search operations in the former Napoleon-Saline area, now designated Area of Operations Green. Lieutenant Colonel George E. Hayward's 3d Tank Battalion, which had been operating in the Napoleon-Saline area, was put in direct support of the 3d Marines, which assumed control of the Kentucky area.

With the evacuation of the 1st Brigade from positions just south of the DMZ, General Cushman requested and received authority from General Abrams to close the strongpoints at A–3 and C–3.[1] The two outposts, part of the Dyemarker strongpoint and trace system, initially were scheduled to be manned by a Marine regiment and a reinforced ARVN regiment. Although all the strongpoints, with the exception of A–5, had been, or were in the process of being completed, by mid-June, the 2d ARVN Regiment had only secured three, A–1, A–2, and C–1. Marine forces occupied the remaining strongpoints and combat bases. A revised plan, codenamed Duel Blade, submitted by III MAF on 15 June, called for the ARVN regiment to relieve Marine units at A–3 and A–4 by December and the elimination of the two westernmost combat bases. However, in follow-on discussions between Lieutenant General Cushman and Lieutenant General Lam, the I Corps Tactical Zone commander, the Vietnamese general balked at committing ARVN forces to the two positions until the sensors and intermediate barriers had been installed. Lam instead suggested that two battalions of the 2d Regiment continue to occupy A–1, A–2, and C–1, while the regiment's remaining two battalions be employed in a mobile role

with Marine forces along the DMZ. General Cushman recommended to General Abrams that General Lam's suggestion be adopted and that he, General Cushman, would proceed on the premise that the original concept be abandoned in favor of a revised, more mobile posture.[2] Although General Abrams subsequently accepted General Cushman's recommendation, he suggested that the South Vietnamese should be eased into both sites after sufficient training.

As ARVN and Marine commands continued their Duel Blade planning with respect to construction and specific control procedures, General Abrams on 22 October ordered all construction and planning efforts associated with the anti-infiltration effort halted.[3] The 1 November bombing halt in the DMZ and North Vietnam, aimed, in part, at restoring the DMZ to a true buffer zone, combined with manpower demands on U.S. forces in the north, made the strongpoint and obstacle barrier system no longer feasible.

Under the new concept, still referred to as Duel Blade, allied forces, supported by air, artillery, and naval gunfire, would, while maintaining a mobile posture, actively resist infiltration from the North by maintaining a comprehensive surveillance effort. While ground reconnaissance inserts would be a part of the effort, attended and unattended detection devices or sensors would provide a majority of the around-the-clock capability. By the end of December, the engineers had implanted three sensor fields in the eastern portion of the DMZ, south of the Ben Hai River.*

At the same time the American command had made rapid progress in the defoliation of a 2,000-meter-wide trace, adjacent to the Laotian border south of the DMZ, which neared completion, and began planning to implant sensors in the western area. Despite these efforts, little evidence existed reflecting a decline in the enemy's intention to continue to use the DMZ for staging troops and supplies, infiltration, and, north of the Ben Hai, as a sanctuary. Marine units, nevertheless, were now under standing orders not to enter the DMZ.

According to the revised concept, the "A" and "C" strongpoint sites considered essential would be used as fire support bases. Those of no value, such as A–3 and C–3, would be closed. With the departure of General Westmoreland in June and the launching of more mobile operations, III MAF halted construction and shifted much of the material set aside for the Duel Blade effort to the construction of an anti-infiltration barrier around Da Nang.

The 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division moved south into the populated coastal sand dune and rice paddy region, covering the districts of Trieu Phong, Mai Linh, Hai Lang, and Quang Tri City. Here, it found an area largely devoid of battalion-sized Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army units. These units, having suffered a number of decisive defeats, had retired west into the jungle-covered mountains bordering on Laos. The remaining Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces continued to maintain liaison with local force units and the VC infrastructure. They also continued to move rice and other supplies to main force units further west. These elements included units of the *808th NVA Battalion* which endeavored to reinforce two local force companies, the *C–59* in Trieu Phong District and the *H–99* in Hai Lang District. These two companies, in an effort to avoid allied capture, had broken down into small groups of five to six men and tended to operate with village and hamlet guerrilla forces, which varied in size from cells to squads and in some cases platoons. Allied intelligence estimates placed Viet Cong strength in the region, including infrastructure members, at 4,000. Seventy-eight of the 234 hamlets within the brigade's area of operations were considered to be under Viet Cong control. Intelligence analysts rated 18 as being contested and they considered the remainder to be under South Vietnamese control.

Taking advantage of the absence of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese main force units, Gibson's mechanized brigade concentrated on conducting strike operations. Emphasizing search and clear and cordon and search operations in cooperation and coordination with local forces and the 1st ARVN Regiment, whose area of operation coincided with that of the brigade's, Gibson's troops sought to weed out and destroy the Viet Cong infrastructure. Organized into two infantry and one armored task forces, the 1st Brigade supported the Le Loi campaign and conducted a series of large-scale cordon and search operations and deployed numerous patrols, ambushes, and small "Hunter Killer" teams throughout its new area of operations during the months of November and December. In addition, it provided transportation, hauled construction materials, assisted in road building, and provided security for the long-awaited reset-

* Colonel John F. Mitchell recalled that from July to October 1968, he was given the task of "establishing the 1st Ground Surveillance Section" in the 3d Marine Division. According to Mitchell, the group used sensors with laser technology to track enemy forces. Col John F. Mitchell, Comments on draft, dtd 5Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File).

tlement of coastal fisherman and their families into the Gia Dang fishing village.

The cordon on Thon My Chanh, which began on 2 November as a transition operation to introduce the brigade into the area, involved elements of the 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry; 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry (Mechanized); 1st Battalion, 77th Armor; and 4th Squadron, 12th Cavalry. In coordination with three battalions of the 1st ARVN Regiment, the brigade cordoned the village which straddled the Quang Tri and Thua Thien provincial boundary, while ARVN infantry and South Vietnamese local forces swept through the area. On 5 November, Company B, 9th Marines and Company G, 3d Marines were placed under the operational control of the brigade and assigned security duty at Landing Zone Nancy, relieving other brigade forces which began an extensive campaign of local ambushes and patrols. The Thon My Chanh cordon ended on 16 November with a total of 60 Viet Cong reported killed, 58 of which were credited to the 1st ARVN Regiment.

The following day, Companies B, C, and D, 11th Infantry; Company I, 4th Marines; and Companies B and C, 9th Marines, in conjunction with two battalions of the 1st ARVN Regiment, established a cordon around the Thon Thuong Xa and Thon Mai Dang village complex, eight kilometers southeast of Quang Tri City. The three Marine companies anchored the eastern portion of the three village cordon and provided security for the checkpoint of Route 1. While elements continued to sweep through the Thon Mai Dang area, Companies B and C, 9th Marines, working with the 2d Battalion, 1st ARVN Regiment, established a 360-degree cordon around the village of Thon Thuong Xa on the 24th, and sent out patrols in all directions from the cordon.[4] With the end of the cordon on 27 November, the three Marine companies returned to their parent units and like the Thon My Chanh cordon, the 1st ARVN Regiment garnered the lion's share of the enemy killed and weapons captured.

Throughout the first nine days of December, Gibson's brigade continued large-scale cordon and search operations in the rice growing area east of Quang Tri City at Thon Tra Loc, and in the sand dunes north of Fire Support Base Tombstone and west of Wunder Beach. On the 9th, Operation Napoleon-Saline came to an end. According to Marine sources, the operation which began at the end of February, when operations Napoleon and Saline were combined, resulted in the death of more than 3,500 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops and the capture of 831 weapons. Marine, Army, and ARVN losses were put at 395 killed and 1,680 wounded.

As Napoleon-Saline ended, the brigade moved into Operation Marshall Mountain. Relying heavily on dismounted infantry units, Gibson's troopers continued to operate extensively throughout their assigned area of operation with elements of the 1st ARVN Regiment and local Popular and Regional Forces. These combined operations included the integration of Popular Force squads and platoons into mechanized infantry and tank platoons, assigning a Popular Force squad to one tank as a means of transportation and fire support for the local South Vietnamese. The tank and mechanized infantry platoons would be used as blocking units while the Popular and Regional Forces searched an area. Although used elsewhere, the brigade concentrated the efforts of these combined search and clear operations during the remainder of the month on the area immediately south and west of Quang Tri City to interdict enemy movement from the piedmont into the populated coastal lowlands.

In addition to small combined operations, the 1st Brigade continued to conduct a large number of cordons of suspected Viet Cong-dominated villages and initiated a series of strike operations in the mountains to the west. On 20 December, three companies from the 11th Infantry conducted heliborne assaults into the southern portion of enemy Base Area 101, but encountered no sizeable enemy forces. By the end of the month, all three companies had returned to Fire Support Base Sharon. The brigade's activities including combat operations and civic action projects resulted in a heightened sense of security throughout the region and an increase in the effectiveness and fighting spirit of local Regional and Popular Force platoons.

To the north of Gibson's brigade, the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George F. Meyers, who was replaced in mid-November by Lieutenant Colonel Walter W. Damewood, Jr., continued to conduct an extensive program of combat patrols, and ambushes throughout the Green area of operations. First Lieutenant Peter N. Schneider's Company A conducted mechanized and infantry patrols, night ambushes, and search and destroy missions, concentrating on the area along the Song Cua Viet between My Loc and the Mai Xa Thi village complex to the southwest. During the sweeps, Schneider's Marines discovered and destroyed numerous bunkers, some of which were old and deteriorated and others recently constructed which indicated enemy activity in the area. Company A, however, encountered no enemy troops.

Further north, Company B, under the acting command of First Lieutenant Thomas M. Whiteside, continued the consolidation of the C–4 Strong Point and the outpost at Oceanview, the eastern anchors for the Duel Blade anti-infiltration effort. Reinforced by a platoon of Marine tanks, a section of 40mm Dusters, an Army artillery target acquisition team, and a naval gunfire spotter team, the company maintained both visual and radar coverage of the DMZ and requested fire missions on sighted squad- to company-sized enemy forces, bunker and trenchline complexes, suspected supply and staging areas, heavy trail activity, and sampan and boat movement. While tactical air, artillery, and naval gunfire missions destroyed or damaged many of these targets, the enemy reacted to aerial reconnaissance flights over the DMZ on several occasions by firing at friendly aircraft with small arms as well as .30- and .50-caliber antiaircraft weapons.

With the end of Operation Napoleon-Saline II in early December, operational control of Damewood's battalion was transferred from the 1st Brigade to the newly formed Marine Task Force Bravo. The Task Force, commanded by Colonel Thomas W. Clarke, took over responsibility for Operation Kentucky and, in addition to the amtrac battalion, consisted of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines and the 3d Tank Battalion. According to Lieutenant Colonel Damewood, as part of Operation Kentucky, the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion had one of the largest area of operations in the division sector extending from the DMZ south to the Cua Viet and west of the mouth of the Cua Viet to Dai Do village.[5] While Company A launched numerous mechanized and infantry patrols along the Cua Viet, in coordination with the Navy Task Force Clearwater, Company B maintained both visual and night detection radar coverage of the eastern DMZ in an effort to prevent enemy infiltration.* The company, in late December, joined the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines in an extensive cordon and search of Xuan Khanh Resettlement Village, one kilometer northwest of the mouth of the Cua Viet. While the Marine units maintained the cordon, elements of the 2d ARVN Regiment swept through the village with negative results.

To the west of the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion's area, the 2d and 3d Battalions, 3d Marines supplanted the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division in early November, which had moved into the 1st Cavalry Division's former area. Operating primarily from Cam Lo, C–2, C–3, and Con Thien, elements of both Marine battalions conducted extensive patrols in their new sector. They also participated extensively in the pacification effort in Cam Lo and Huong Hoa Districts.

Early in November, Lieutenant Colonel Bryon T. Chen's 2d Battalion moved into the Cam Lo District, on a test basis, and began the process of integrating with local Regional and Popular Forces in an attempt to upgrade their training, efficiency, and overall combat effectiveness. The initial effort to place a Marine platoon with each of the district's Regional Force companies met with limited success and the battalion then shifted to a program of total integration. Captain Donald J. Myers' Company H had a fire team with each Regional Force squad, a squad with each platoon, and a platoon with each of the three Regional Force companies in Cam Lo District. Command, control, and coordination was maintained by appointing the Marine unit leader as an advisor or assistant commander to a Regional or Popular Force unit one echelon above their own. A Marine squad leader, for example, was the advisor to a Regional Force platoon and its

Marines from Company H, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines integrated with South Vietnamese Regional Forces (RF) in the Cam Lo Sector. In the photo, Marines of the company and RF troops ride on top of a Marine tank during a combined sweep in the sector.

Photo courtesy of Col Donald J. Myers USMC (Ret)



*Lieutenant Colonel Damewood recalled that the executive officer of the Navy Task Force was a Marine and that "extensive coordination was required between division units, especially the 1st AmTrac Bn and Clearwater to optimize safe transit of the river." LtCol Walter W. Damewood, Jr., Comments on draft, dtd 31Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).



Top photo is courtesy of LtCol Justin M. Martin USMC (Ret) and bottom photo is courtesy of Col Donald J. Myers USMC (Ret)

In Huong Hoa District, Marines try to integrate with South Vietnamese forces in Mai Loc Village. Top, Marines from Company F, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines stand by while the U.S. Army district advisor talks to the commander of the South Vietnamese 220th RF Company. Below, Marines of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines conduct a cordon and search of Mai Loc village with South Vietnamese RF troops. South Vietnamese officials are seen talking to the assembled villagers.



assistant commander. First Lieutenant Justin M. Martin's Company F adopted a similar force structure in Huong Hoa District.

While integrating at all levels, at the same time elements of the two battalions launched a series of major cordon and search operations throughout the area of operations. Their mission was to capture the local Viet Cong and disrupt his organization as well as conduct an accurate census of the population and civic action program. On 13 November, Companies E, F, and L, 3d Marines; Company I, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines; Company B, 3d Tank Battalion; and the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines joined the 5th Battalion, 2d ARVN Regiment in a cordon and search of the Xam Rao Vinh Valley in the northeast portion of the Mai Loc TAOR, east of Cam Lo. The rapid cordon and search of the valley, suspected to be populated by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong whose mission was to harass the civilian population and conduct guerrilla operations against Marine units in the area, yielded little and the operation ended four days later.[6]

While the 2d and 3d Battalions blanketed the Kentucky area with cordons and patrols, the remaining battalion of Colonel Michael M. Spark's 3d Marines, the 1st Battalion, remained in the Lancaster II area and provided security for Camp Carroll, Landing Zone Mack, the Dong Ha Mountain outpost, Thon Sam Lam, and Khe Gio Bridge. Lieutenant Colonel Richard B. Twohey's Marines also furnished escorts for Rough Rider truck convoys and details for the daily road sweep of Route 9. Although there was a marked increase in the use of mines and Camp Carroll received an occasional enemy mortar attack, the majority of attacks by fire and encounters with enemy forces took place around Landing Zone Mack and Landing Zone Sierra to the north. While on patrol near Sierra on the afternoon of 15 November, Company A's point element came under fire from an estimated enemy platoon, which initiated the contact by detonating several directional, or claymore mines, and grenades. Supported by 60mm mortars, the enemy platoon then opened fire with automatic weapons and small arms. Captain James L. Shaw's Marines countered with direct artillery fire and 106mm recoilless rifle and 81mm mortar fires, and reported as a result five enemy troops killed. During the firefight, Company A lost 7 Marines killed and 23 wounded in addition to a scout dog.

On 21 November, as the western boundary of the Lancaster area of operations again was shifted east, Twohey's battalion was helilifted from Landing Zone Sierra to Mack and then to C–1. The departure of 1st Battalion, 3d Marines from the jungle-covered mountains northwest of Camp Carroll coincided with the termination of the 10-month-long operation, codenamed Lancaster II, and the absorption of the area into that of Scotland II and Kentucky. According to Marine sources, Lancaster II, which began in late January, accounted for more than 1,800 enemy troops killed and 913 weapons captured. Allied losses were placed at 359 killed and a total of 2,101 wounded.

From C–1, on 22 November, Companies A, B, and C, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, and Company C, 3d Tank Battalion, in coordination with the 2d Battalion, 2d ARVN Regiment moved north along Route 1 and established a tank and infantry cordon near Gio Linh.[7] The three-day cordon resulted in more than 3,900 Vietnamese being processed, of which 188 were detained. Of the 188, 147 were later classified as Viet Cong suspects and 41 were found to be deserters or draft dodgers. Following the Gio Linh-Ha Thanh cordon, Lieutenant Colonel Richard B. Twohey's 1st Battalion, 3d Marines moved to the southern portion of the 2d ARVN Regiment's area of operation and began a cordon and search of the Thon Nghia An, Thon Thanh Luong, and Thon Truong Xa village complex, north and west of Dong Ha. Other than receiving a few sniper rounds, Twohey's Marines found little evidence of recent enemy activity.

The last days of November witnessed the beginning of one more cordon operation. On the 29th, Lieutenant Colonel Chen's 2d Battalion, 3d Marines moved into the rice-growing area around Thon Vinh Dai, east of Cam Lo and north of Route 9. In seven days, working with local Regional and Popular Forces, Chen's Marines, assisted in the screening of 1,604 civilians, 85 of whom were classified as Viet Cong suspects.

Although heavily committed to the pacification effort, two battalions of Colonel Sparks' 3d Marines were alerted for deployment to Quang Nam Province in early December. The III MAF commander, General Cushman, warned General Stilwell the commander of XXIV Corps that intelligence indicated that the enemy planned, "to press his attacks on major cities of Da Nang and Quang Ngai . . . to thwart our successes in the countryside." He told Stilwell:

> To counter his plans, III MAF will embark on an intensified campaign . . . to destroy his major means for carrying out his aggression. To do this will require the destruction of BA 112, which contains command and control headquarters and support facilities. It also requires destruction of the 2d and 3d NVA Divisions and prevention of their escape into Laos.

Since no additional forces were available to accomplish this mission, the existing forces in I Corps would have to be reallocated. Cushman asked the XXIV Corps commander to furnish two battalions to the 1st Marine Division "with proportionate share of division combat and combat service support for the accelerated effort against 2d NVA Div and BA 112."[8] The 3d Marines regimental headquarters, two infantry battalions, and normal combat support elements were designated to move south.*

As Spark's 1st and 3d Battalions left the field for Quang Tri Combat Base and rest and refitting before being airlifted to An Hoa, the 3d Marine Division activated, on 7 December, Task Force Bravo for planning. On 9 December, Colonel Clarke, the task force commander, assumed tactical responsibility for the Kentucky area of operations.

Following a short cordon encompassing a majority of the hamlets in Huong Hoa District, on 12 December, the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James J. McMonagle, moved into the area of operations formerly occupied by the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines. Stretching from the DMZ south to the Cua Valley, the 300-square kilometer area included the fixed installations of Con Thien, C–2 Bridge, C–2, and C–3, three of which previously were secured by a battalion each, now were the responsibility of two companies.

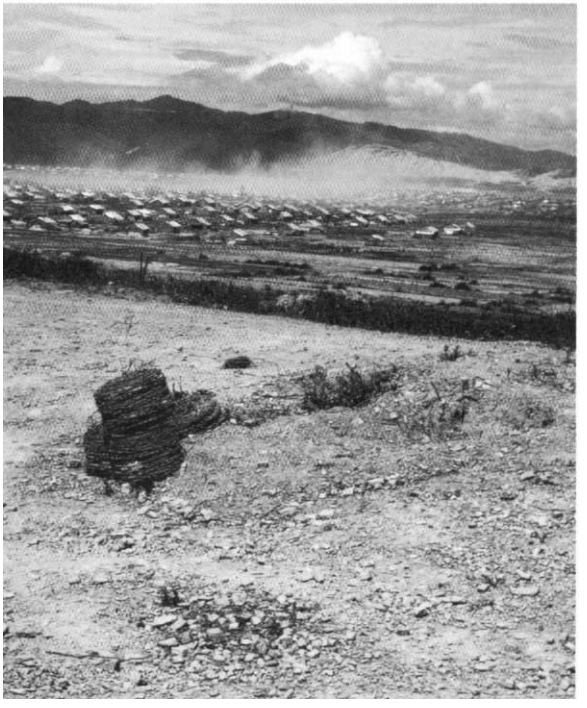
The last three weeks of December found McMonagle's battalion with two companies, Company F in Huong Hoa District and Company H in Cam Lo District, assisting in the pacification effort through integrated operations and training with Regional and Popular Forces. Company E provided security for Con Thien and C–2 Bridge, as well as patrolling and ambushing throughout its assigned 54-square kilometer area. McMonagle's remaining Company, G, secured C–2 and C–3, while likewise conducting patrols and ambushes in its area. Despite the lack of enemy activity and the insurmountable tasks assigned, the battalion was fully confident that the area of operations "was being denied to the enemy due to total effort on the part of all companies."[9]

While McMonagle's four companies blanketed their assigned areas with patrols and ambushes, Task Force Bravo conducted two large cordon and search operations targeted at the Cam Lo Resettlement Village and the village of Xuan Khanh, near Cua Viet. The first, involving two companies of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines and elements of the 1st and 2d ARVN Regiments, screened more than 10,000 villagers, 93 of whom were detained as Viet Cong suspects. The target of the second was the fishing village of Xuan Khanh, near the mouth of the Cua Viet. On the day after Christmas, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines was relieved of positions in the western mountains and helilifted into the area, where Companies F, G, and H cordoned the fishing village, permitting the 3d Battalion, 2d ARVN Regiment to search the area and process more than 9,000 inhabitants. Of the 174 who were detained, a majority later was determined to be draft evaders.

Due to the division's extensive commitment to the pacification effort during the last two months of 1968, the local Viet Cong, noted General Davis, had to "rewrite his book." According to Davis, the VC used to "strike and run to a hideaway, in a secure area. He doesn't have that now. Marines are on his trails, in his hideaway, in his secure areas not only in the hills but doing the same thing" in populated areas. The effect of the

A view of Cam Lo Resettlement Village includes the surrounding hills. The U.S. and South Vietnamese built new homes for Vietnamese refugees and resettled them here to keep the people away from the VC and also away from the combat areas.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371645



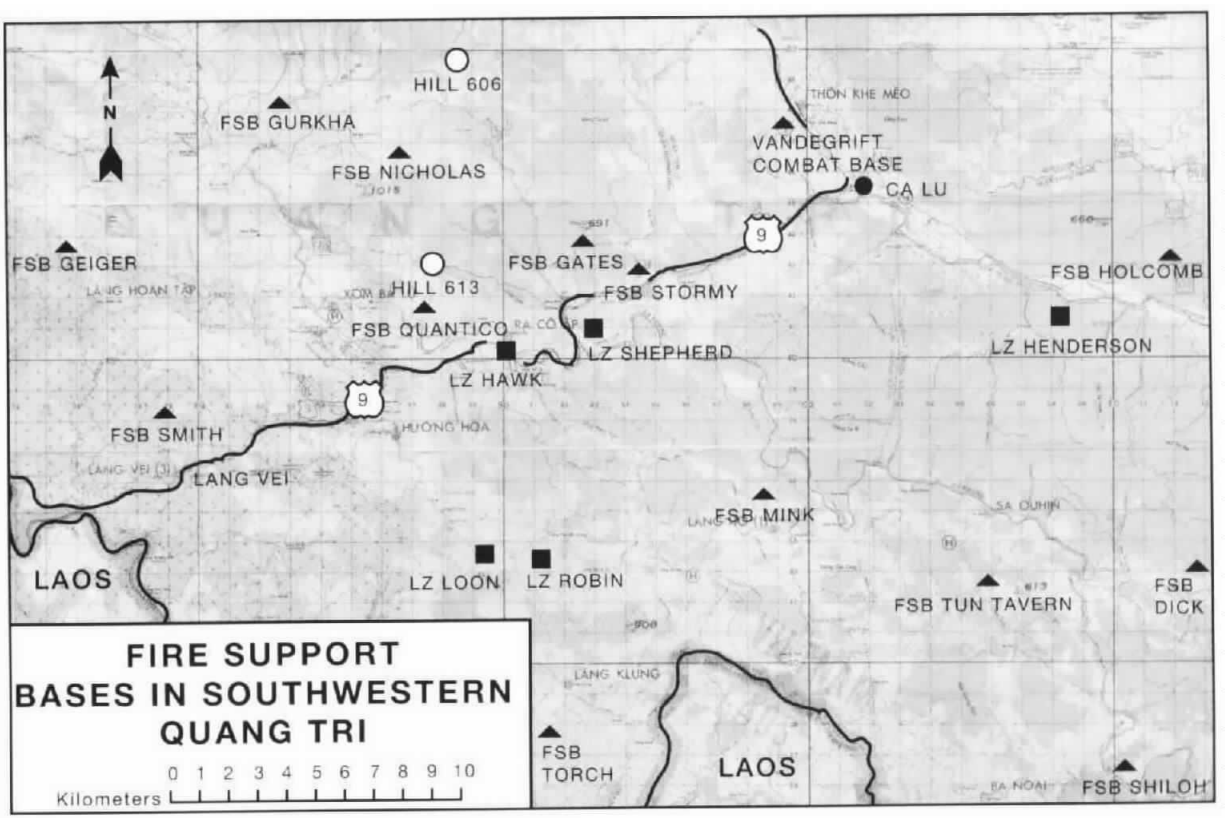
*See Chapter 21.

allied pacification on Quang Tri Province, Davis continued, was to make it "as secure internally as it's ever going to be. . . . It compares favorably with many places I know in the United States insofar as levels of violence and security are concerned."[10]

Rough Soldiering

As November began, Colonel Martin J. Sexton's 4th Marines and Colonel Robert H. Barrow's 9th Marines, under the overall command of Brigadier General Frank E. Garretson's Task Force Hotel, conducted offensive operations throughout the Scotland II area of operations. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas H. Galbraith's 1st Battalion, 4th Marines provided security for artillery units and radio relay sites located at Fire Support Bases Cates and Shepherd and Hills 691 and 950, and patrolled out from the four bases. At the same time, the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel James L. Fowler, continued the defense and development of Fire Support Base Gurkha and patrolled the Khe Xa Bai and the Song Rao Quan Valleys. To the northwest of her sister battalions, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, commanded by Major William L. Kent, completed its sweep west of Fire Support Base Alpine, finding several abandoned North Vietnamese positions, but no evidence of recent enemy activity. On 4 November, Company E was helilifted eight kilometers northwest to Hill 1308 and began construction of Fire Support Base Argonne. Positioned one-and-one-half kilometers from the Laotian border and the highest fire support base in South Vietnam, Argonne provided excellent observation of the vital enemy road net in Laos which funneled troops and supplies south. Although the Marines on the base made numerous sightings, higher headquarters repeatedly denied clearance for fire missions as the sighted enemy positions were well beyond the border.

By 11 November with construction of the fire support base completed, the 1st Battalion replaced the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines. The 2d Battalion, now under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Joseph E. Hopkins, displaced to Fire Support Bases Cates and Shepherd and Hills 691 and 950. It then began sweep operations north of Cates and west along Route 9 toward the village of Khe Sanh following the closure of Shepherd. With the departure of Hopkins' Marines, Galbraith's battalion conducted a two-company search north and east of Argonne, into an area of sharp-sloped mountains covered in triple-canopy jungle and cut by many small fast-rushing steams. The search yielded





Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A800541

Marines of Company B, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines cross a fast-rushing stream in Operation Scotland II, east of Vandegrift Combat Base. Drinking water appears to be at a premium, judging from the extra number of canteens that each Marine is carrying.

numerous unoccupied or hastily abandoned living areas, harbor sites, and natural caves containing a considerable number of supply, weapons, and ammunition caches. But, as Companies A and B progressed eastward, enemy forces in the region began a series of delaying actions which took the form of small but sharp engagements between point elements of the companies and small groups of enemy. When contact was broken, pursuit of the enemy inevitably led to the discovery of further caches.

On 21 November, Companies C and D, which had secured Argonne and Alpine, replaced Companies A and B in the search to the east. Thirteen days later and 14 kilometers further east, as the two companies crossed the Khe Ta Bong and moved toward higher ground, they began the process of developing a new fire support base, to be named Neville, atop Hill 1103. With the positioning of Battery G, 3d Battalion, 12th Marines at Neville on 14 December, Task Force Hotel ordered all search and destroy operations to the west halted and Fire Support Bases Argonne, Gurkha, and Alpine closed. With Neville in full operation, Companies C and D evacuated the area and subsequently were placed under the operational control of Task Force Bravo to assist in the Cam Lo Refugee Village cordon, while Companies A and B helilifted to Vandegrift Combat Base.

After a short stay at Vandegrift, where it secured the combat base and surrounding Marine positions following the search around Gurkha, Lieutenant Colonel Fowler's 3d Battalion moved by helicopter 14 kilometers to the north on 21 November to defend and further develop Fire Support Base Winchester and Landing Zones Mack and Sierra. Known as the Son Phan Cong Hoang Quoc Gia National Forest Reserve, the mountainous region surrounding the battalion's positions was characterized by steep slopes and long narrow ridgelines covered with dense forest and jungle consisting of a single, but thick, canopy. The battalion was joined on the 24th by Company E, 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, which assaulted into Winchester and then moved one kilometer east along the Dong Tien ridgeline and began construction of Fire Support Base Russell. Other than occasional sniper fire, battalion patrols

encountered little enemy resistance, but did discover a number of large, recently constructed enemy bunker complexes which yielded a modest amount of ammunition and equipment.

During the first week of December, as the 3d Battalion, now under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William A. Donald, began a several-week, two-company search north of Russell, Lieutenant Colonel Hopkins' 2d Battalion assaulted into four landing zones on two parallel ridgelines east of Mack and three kilometers north of Dong Ha Mountain. The landings were unopposed and Hopkins' four companies fanned out toward their first objectives, establishing perimeters while deploying listening posts and squad ambushes.

Moving toward new objectives on 8 December a squad patrol from First Lieutenant Jimmie G. Bearden's Company E, as it approached Hill 208, was taken under small arms fire from a tree- and trenchline. Moving to engage, the patrol observed approximately 10 armed enemy troops retreating into the heavy brush. Two squads were sent to reinforce the engaged unit and prevent the enemy's escape, but as the attacking Marine platoon maneuvered forward it found that the enemy had taken cover in a heavily fortified trench and bunker complex. The platoon entered the complex and immediately was caught in a crossfire of small arms, grenades, and white smoke or CS gas. With darkness approaching and casualties mounting, the platoon withdrew, carrying out nine wounded Marines, but leaving the bodies of three dead behind.

While air, artillery, and mortars pounded the complex throughout the night, Lieutenant Colonel Hopkins rapidly moved the battalion's other three companies into blocking positions around the complex with the hope of catching some of the estimated 50 North Vietnamese soldiers attempting to escape. But the enemy apparently "hit the ground running," and the sweep through the area the following day, during which the bodies of the three dead Marines were recov-

Smoldering fires and a denuded forest bear stark witness to the intensity of the combat for "Foxtrot Ridge," named after Company F, 2d Battalion, 4th Marines.

Photo from the Abel Collection



ered, went unchallenged.

Two days later, Hopkins ordered Captain Richard J. Murphy's Company F to cross the Song Ngan valley and assault the ridgeline extending along the southern boundary of the DMZ, the site of several suspected enemy mortar positions. After heavy air and artillery strikes, the company seized the western portion of the ridgeline under fire. As Murphy's Marines moved eastward, hidden NVA opened up with small arms and automatic weapons on the lead elements of the company. The enemy was well entrenched and dense vegetation made it difficult to spot the sources of enemy fire. Having fought its way into the middle of a large, well-laid out bunker complex, the company now found it hard to maneuver without taking additional casualties and leaving its wounded.

Despite overwhelming odds, Murphy's company extracted its casualties, reorganized, and following another heavy air and artillery strike, prepared to assault. Turning to his troops, platoon leader Second Lieutenant Steven P. Brodrick shouted: "All right Marines, take this hill and earn your pay!" Brodrick then led his platoon back into the enemy complex and maneuvered forward until he was killed by a direct burst of automatic weapons fire.[11]

Alerted earlier in the day to follow in trace of Company F, Hopkins quickly committed Company H to reinforce Murphy's Marines. Attempting to envelop the enemy complex from the north, it too ran into heavy enemy fire and a fierce firefight ensued. However, once Company H was able to bring its full firepower to bear, the enemy withdrew and by the time Company G moved in to reinforce its engaged sister companies, the battlefield had quieted. Enemy losses were unknown, but the battalion suffered 13 killed and 31 wounded. Lieutenant Colonel Hopkins remembered that the battle, "took place on a hill on which the southern boundary of the DMZ ran across the topographical crest." The NVA kept its forward defensive positions south of the DMZ, "while the bulk of his forces" remained in the so-called demilitarized area.[12]

Following air, artillery, and mortar missions, Captain Joseph M. Dwyer's Company G led out in the assault on 12 December. Those of the enemy, who could, had escaped, and the attacking companies searched the area without contact. One North Vietnamese soldier was found alive and unharmed in a bunker and he quickly was relieved of his loaded light machine gun and whisked off to the battalion command post. Under interrogation, he told his captors that the position had been occupied by the *1st Battalion, 27th NVA Regiment*, and that the battalion commander and his staff had died in the fighting. Lieutenant Colonel Hopkins later wrote about his frustration of not being permitted "to pursue the fleeing *27th NVA Regiment* . . . ." He recalled bitterly, "standing on the topographical crest . . . showing various media representatives the blood-stained trees on both sides of the trails leading into the DMZ . . . ." Hopkins was convinced "that a significant volume of enemy casualties and materiel could have been captured or uncovered before being moved back across the Ben Hai."[13]

During the next two weeks, Hopkins' battalion searched east and west along the ridgeline, dubbed "Foxtrot Ridge." Employing tactics to draw the enemy south of the DMZ, the battalion repeatedly maneuvered out of the area as if leaving, then quickly struck back. But, because of his losses, the enemy apparently had decided not to contest the terrain, and no further engagements occurred. On the day after Christmas, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines departed the area by helicopter for the Cua Viet sector where they participated with the 3d Battalion, 2d ARVN Regiment in cordoning the village of Xuan Thanh.*

The first days of November found Colonel Robert H. Barrow's 9th Marines scattered throughout the southern portion of the division's area of operations, where the Scotland area was expanded due to the departure of the 1st Cavalry Division. Lieutenant Colonel George W. Smith's 1st Battalion, which had relieved elements of the Cavalry division's 1st Brigade at Fire Support Base Anne, southwest of Quang Tri, continued to conduct company-sized patrols of the surrounding area in search of the enemy, his supplies, and base camps. Later in the month, the battalion participated in two combined cordon operations: the first with the 3d Marines in the Mai Loc area and the second with elements of the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division around the Thuong Xa and Mai Dang village complexes south of Quang Tri City.

The 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, under Major Frederick E. Sisley, which had been inserted into the eastern portion of the Vietnam Salient in late October, by

*Brigadier General Hopkins remembered that the week before Christmas, bad weather restricted helicopter resupply and then the weather cleared a few days before the holiday. When resupply resumed, the battalion faced the dilemma of either receiving C-rations or "the Christmas packages stacked up in the rear awaiting delivery." The Marines decided upon the "Christmas packages." Hopkins quoted one of his troops, "if we don't get enough food in the Christmas packages, we can always find a few more rice caches." BGen Joseph E. Hopkins, Comments on draft, dtd 6Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

early November had moved around the horn and was patrolling in the northern portion of the area between the Da Krong and the Laotian border. Lieutenant Colonel Elliott R. Laine's 3d Battalion, located at Vandegrift Combat Base, secured the base and surrounding Marine installations at Ca Lu and Signal Hill. On 8 November, Company L assaulted into landing zones near Hill 512, 15 kilometers southeast of Vandegrift and began construction of Fire Support Base Tun Tavern. Upon completion of Tun Tavern several days later, the remaining three companies of Laine's battalion moved into the area and began patrol operations in the Da Krong Valley and the ridgeline to the east, between the Da Krong and Ba Long Valleys.

Despite the rugged, mountainous terrain and the physical problems it caused the individual Marine, the two battalions conducted a methodical search of their assigned areas, as Colonel Barrow later described:

> Each battalion has four companies operating out of company operating bases, each separated from the other by about 2 to 3,000 meters. A company will spend, characteristically, two, three, or four days in one of these operating bases and conduct extensive patrolling by platoon or squads in all directions. So that after three or four days the area extending in a radius of a couple of thousand meters out from the operating base has been covered. The operating base represents a place of resupply and for a patrol that has been out perhaps for two days to rest for a day, preparatory for renewing its patrolling activities.[14]

According to Barrow, when the companies had worked over one area completely, Marine helicopters would then helilift the battalion into a new adjoining or nearby sector. In leapfrog fashion, the aircraft would bring the two companies of the battalion that were the farthest away into the new area. In turn, the remaining two companies would be "leapfrogged over them." Barrow explained there was, therefore "a constant heliborne move of companies to new areas, but no company passes overland, covering an area that has already been covered by another company." The methodical

Photocopy of Northern I Corps Briefing Map (Nov–Dec 1968) From Gen E. E. Anderson Collection



search produced large caches of rice and grain in addition to numerous bunkers and fighting positions which were destroyed. Operating in small groups, the enemy chose to avoid contact whenever possible, posing little or no threat to the maneuvering companies.[15]

On 14 November, Company A, 9th Marines was lifted by helicopter into Landing Zone Miami and assaulted, seized, and occupied Hill 618, beginning the construction of Fire Support Base Dick. Three days later, Company E took Hill 347, overlooking the horseshoe bend in the Da Krong and began construction of Fire Support Base Shiloh. With the completion of Shiloh, the remaining three companies of Major Sisley's battalion shifted their patrol operations west and south to the Laotian border, meeting little enemy resistance.

With a realignment of divisional boundaries between the 3d Marine and 101st Airborne Divisions in late October, the Marine division's area of operations was expanded southward presenting it an opportunity to conduct major offensive operations in and west of enemy *Base Area 101* and the Ba Long Valley.[16] The first of a series of offensive operations, codenamed Dawson River, began on 28 November, as Colonel Barrow's regiment moved deeper into the new area; an area, he noted, "which had never been entered before by any forces, other than enemy, of course."[17] Lieutenant Colonel Smith's 1st Battalion simultaneously relieved Major Sisley's 2d Battalion, which assumed the security for major Marine installations throughout the division's western area of operations.

Broken down into companies and platoons, Laine's and Smith's battalions thoroughly covered their assigned areas, finding numerous small caches of enemy equipment, supplies, and a large number of graves. Although they anticipated encounters with major elements of the *7th Front*, the only groups met in large numbers were Bru and other Montagnard tribesmen who voluntarily surrendered and subsequently were resettled to the east. In his assessment of the operation, which ended on 25 December, Colonel Barrow noted that while the number of enemy killed was low, the regiment provided a measure of security for the entire province:

> We have kept him on the move, which combined with the activity that has taken place in the piedmont area to the east and the lowlands still further east, keeps him entirely on the move in this area so that he has no place that he can withdraw to as a sanctuary when pressure becomes too great in one, in say the piedmont or the lowlands. We have . . . given a measure of reassurance to the people operating in the lowlands and piedmont that there are no large-scale enemy forces marshalling in these mountains, in these jungles, preparatory to coming down to harass or interdict their operations being conducted in those areas.[18]

Following a short, two-day stay at the division's in-country rest and recreation center at Cua Viet, Lieutenant Colonel Smith's 1st Battalion and the 2d Battalion, now under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George C. Fox, prepared to assault landing zones north of Route 9 and begin search operations west of Khe Sanh to the Laotian border.[19] Concerned about the possibility of a Tet offensive on the scale of 1968, Task Force Hotel and division staffs, as the year ended, began planning for a foray into the lower Da Krong Valley, north of the A Shau Valley, an area of increasing enemy activity and an area that had not been searched or explored since early April.

Thua Thien and the End of the Year

To the south of the 3d Marine Division, in Thua Thien Province, the 101st Airborne Division continued the division-level operation, Nevada Eagle. Targeted against local force units and the Viet Cong infrastructure in the lowlands, and main and North Vietnamese Army forces in the mountains, the operation's central objective was to maintain a favorable environment for the South Vietnamese Government's Accelerated Pacification Campaign in the heavily populated lowlands around Hue.

Working closely with local and Regional Force companies and elements of the 3d and 54th ARVN Regiments, the division again concentrated its efforts of elimination of Viet Cong forces from the districts of Phu Vang, Huong Thuy, and Phu Thu. Techniques such as cordons, intensive searches, saturation patrols, night ambushes, and the rapid exploitation of intelligence appeared to be successful in rooting out enemy forces and dissolving the existing lines of continuity within the local Viet Cong infrastructure.

In addition to uprooting the Viet Cong and his sympathizers in the populated lowlands, Major General Melvin Zais' airborne troops launched a series of mobile operations into the mountains southwest of Hue. Throughout the first, Nam Hoa I, Zais used combat assaults, flanking maneuvers, and massed firepower to trap and destroy elements of the *5th NVA Regiment*. During the second, Rawlins Valley, elements of the division employed similar techniques against the *6th NVA Regiment* with minimal results. However, both operations forced the enemy to withdraw deeper into the mountains thereby abandoning his forward

positions to allied destruction and at the same time losing the capacity to launch attacks into the lowlands in the immediate future.

Throughout the last seven months of 1968, Marine, Army, and ARVN troops continued the relentless and successful pursuit and destruction of enemy forces in northern I Corps. But as the year ended, the enemy avoided contact while maintaining widely dispersed elements of his main force units in the northern two provinces of South Vietnam and regrouping, resupplying, and retraining in his sanctuaries in Laos and North Vietnam.

For the 3d Marine Division, the tactical situation throughout Quang Tri Province during the latter half of 1968 dictated the maximum use of its combat elements in a highly mobile posture. This was a change from the relatively static posture during the early part of the year. Continually on the offensive with hard-hitting mobile operations, troops of the 3d, 4th, and 9th Marines in rapid succession drove North Vietnamese forces from the coastal plains, crushed the *320th NVA Division*, and penetrated and systematically destroyed the enemy's mountain bases, areas once considered inviolate. Still as one Marine veteran of the 3d Marine Division later commented that all he remembered was "the rain, the mud, the heat and the misery that were so much a part of our existence." The last two months of the year were a blur of "routine patrols marked by little or no contact with the enemy."[20]

In both Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces, nevertheless, a concerted campaign featuring the integration of American, South Vietnamese Army, and territorial forces disrupted the Viet Cong military and political structure in the population centers. The two allied offensives against the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong had, by year's end, rendered the enemy incapable of conducting an effective campaign in northern I Corps.

PART V
SUPPORTING THE TROOPS

CHAPTER 23

Marine Air at the Beginning of the Year and Air Support of Khe Sanh

Marine Air at the Beginning of the Year—Marine Control of Air
Proposed Changes in Command and Control over Marine Air; Operation Niagara, January 1968
Operation Niagara and Air Resupply in the Defense of Khe Sanh

Marine Air at the Beginning of the Year

In January 1968, like the other elements of III MAF, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing faced a daunting task. Supporting two reinforced Marine divisions as well as flying supplemental missions for the allied and U.S. ground forces in I Corps and the Seventh Air Force, the Marine aviators were stretched to the very limits of their capability in both aircraft and personnel. In addition to the difficult operational environment, doctrinal questions relative to control of both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters would arise that would further blur the entire picture of Marine aviation during 1968. Many of these problems would never be completely resolved, even after the conclusion of the Vietnam War.

As the year began, Major General Norman J. Anderson, a veteran naval aviator who served in the Guadalcanal campaign in World War II and in Korea in 1950, commanded the wing, having done so since June 1967. The 1st MAW now contained over 15,000 men and more than 400 aircraft. This latter figure included nearly 200 fixed-wing planes and more than 220 helicopters. The wing consisted of three Marine fixed-wing and two Marine helicopter aircraft groups plus supporting elements. The fixed-wing groups were at Da Nang and Chu Lai while the helicopter groups were based at Marble Mountain and Phu Bai. All told, in January, the Marine Corps had 10 out of its 27 attack or fighter/attack squadrons and 11 out of its 25 helicopter squadrons in Vietnam. This did not include the two attack and fighter/attack squadrons at Iwakuni, Japan, or the two helicopter squadrons of the Seventh Fleet Special Landing Force, which could readily reinforce the in-country squadrons.[1]

At the overcrowded Da Nang base where Anderson maintained his headquarters, the wing shared space with Seventh Air Force components, the South Vietnamese Air Force, an Army aviation company, and III MAF ground forces. Marine Wing Headquarters Group (MWHG) 1, Marine Wing Service Group (MWSG) 17, Marine Air Control Group (MACG) 18, and Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 11 were all at Da Nang. MWHG–1, under Colonel Tolbert T. Gentry, furnished general command and control and administrative support for the wing while MWSG–17, commanded by Colonel John E. Hansen, provided logistics, facilities, and intermediate and organizational maintenance on all aircraft and other equipment. Colonel Lyle V. Tope's



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A140843

MajGen Norman J. Anderson, here in an official portrait, commanded the 1st MAW in January 1968. Gen Anderson, a naval aviator, had commanded the wing since June 1967 and was a veteran of the Guadalcanal Campaign of 1942 and of Korea in 1950.



Photo from the Abel Collection

A Marine Chance-Vought F–8 Crusader from VMF(AW)–235 takes off from Da Nang Airbase in January 1968. Its landing gears are beginning to retract into the wing.

MACG–18 had the responsibility for all air control and air defense support in the wing.*

Colonel Leroy T. Frey commanded MAG–11, the Marine fixed-wing group at Da Nang. Under MAG–11 were a headquarters and maintenance (H&MS) squadron, an airbase (MABS) squadron, and four fixed-wing squadrons. These included: Marine Composite Reconnaissance Squadron (VMCJ) 1**; Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 122 flying 13 McDonnell Douglas F–4B Phantom IIs designed for both air superiority and ground support; Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron (VMF(AW)) 235, used in a close-air support role and equipped with 15 of the soon-to-be-phased-out F–8 Chance-Vought Crusader jet fighters; and a Marine all-weather attack squadron VMA(AW)–242 with the newest attack aircraft in the Marine inventory, 12 Grumman A–6A Intruders,*** equipped with the latest in electronic and radar navigational and target acquisition systems.2****

From the nearby Marble Mountain Air Facility, across

* In January 1968, the group consisted of Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron (H&HS) 18, Marine Air Support Squadron (MASS) 2, Marine Air Support Squadron (MASS) 3, Marine Air Control Squadron (MACS) 4 and the 1st and 2d LAAM Battalions. Until the activation of MACG–18 the previous September these units had belonged to MWHG–1. MASS–3 and the 2d LAAM Battalion were both located at the Chu Lai base.

** The VMCJ squadron flew photo reconnaissance missions in both North and South Vietnam and also electronic jamming missions to foil North Vietnamese radars and communications in support of both the Seventh Fleet and Air Force Rolling Thunder campaign in the north. In January 1968, the squadron had assigned to it 20 aircraft. These included eight Douglas EF–10B, a modified version of the Navy F3D Skynight, a two-engine jet night-fighter. The EF–10B, nicknamed "Willie the Whale," flew both electronic countermeasure (ECM) and electronic intelligence missions. In addition to the "Whales," the squadron inventory included four EA–6A, the electronic countermeasures version of the Intruder, and eight RF–4B, the photo-reconnaissance version of the Phantom II. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, p. 58a. Colonel Eric B. Parker, who assumed command of the squadron in March, observed that the Marines were the "pioneers of stand-off electronic jamming." He remembered that his pilots "were proud of the effectiveness of our equipment and personnel . . . Our call sign was 'cottonpicker' and to identify yourself as a 'cottonpicker' in an AF [Air Force] or Navy club where deep-strike pilots were, would almost always result in free drinks. We were appreciated." Col Eric B. Parker, Comments on draft, dtd 13Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

*** The two-man, twin-jet Intruders which could carry an 18,000 pound payload were equipped with a digital-integrated attack navigation system and an electronic-integrated display system which provided the pilot at night and in bad weather images of targets and geographical features on two viewing screens in the cockpit.

**** Attached to H&MS–11 was a three-plane detachment of TA–4Fs, two-seater trainer versions of the Douglas A–4 Skyhawk, used generally for forward air control missions. In Vietnam, both the Air Force and the Marine Corps employed forward air controllers (FAC) (airborne), who in a variety of aircraft like the TA–4F jets, UH–1E helicopters, and small light fixed-wing prop-driven aircraft controlled attack, fighter, and fighter/attack fixed-wing aircraft and armed helicopters in close air support missions. In addition, H&MS–11 owned one Douglas C–117D Skytrain fixed-wing transport (a military counterpart of the civilian DC–3) which the squadron employed for a multitude of purposes including night illumination. Three more of the relatively venerable transports belonged to MWSG–17 at Da Nang. All told, including the four C–117Ds, there were over 60 Marine fixed-wing aircraft based at Da Nang.

the Da Nang River and on the lower end of the Tiensha Peninsula, MAG–16, a helicopter group, conducted its operations. Under the command of Colonel Edwin O. Reed, MAG–16 consisted of Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron (H&MS) 16; Marine Air Base Squadron (MABS) 16; an observation squadron, VMO–2; and three medium (HMM–262, – 265, and –363) and one heavy (HMH–463) helicopter squadrons. VMO–2 had in its inventory 27 armed and unarmed Bell UH–1E (Hueys) single-engine light helicopters, used for a diverse number of missions including observation, forward air control (airborne), and ground support.* The 30 relatively new single-rotor Sikorsky CH–53A Sea Stallion heavy-lift helicopters in III MAF, each powered by two-shaft turbine engines and able to carry a payload of over six tons, were all in HMH–463. Two of the medium helicopter squadrons, HMM–262 and –265, flew the twin-turbine tandem rotor Boeing Vertol CH–46A Sea Knight aircraft that had replaced the older and smaller Sikorsky single rotor UH–34 Sea Horse. With the shortage of helicopters caused by the grounding and refitting of the CH–46s in 1967 because of rear pylon failures in flight, the third medium helicopter squadron, HMM–363, still retained the UH–34D.** In early January, HMMs –262 and –265 had 47 CH–46s between them while HMM–363 owned 24 of the UH–34s.[3]

In addition to the helicopters assigned to the flying squadrons, Colonel Reed retained a detachment of 14 Cessna light single-engine fixed-wing O–1C and O–1G bird dog aircraft in H&MS–16 for both air control and observation purposes. Like H&MS–11 at the main base, H&MS–16 at Marble Mountain also possessed one Douglas C–117D Skytrain transport. MAG–16 also had operational control of the U.S. Army 245th Surveillance Aircraft Company, equipped with 18 OV–1 Mohawk aircraft designed for tactical aerial reconnaissance. For the most part, MAG–16 supported the 1st Marine Division at Da Nang but also flew missions on behalf of the 3d Marine Division, Korean Marine Brigade, and Army Americal Division. It also performed a myriad of tasks for the South Vietnamese military units and the related Revolutionary Development pacification campaign.[4]

About 50 miles to the south of Da Nang, at Chu Lai, two Marine Aircraft Groups, MAGs–12 and –13, flew out of the airfield located there. MAG–12, under Colonel Dean Wilker, consisted of three Douglas A4E Skyhawk attack squadrons, VMAs–121, –211, and –311, and one A–6A Intruder all-weather squadron, VMA (AW)–533. All told the group possessed 12 of the Intruders and nearly 60 of the Skyhawks. The maneuverable Skyhawk was a formidable close support aircraft. An extremely accurate bomber, the single-seat A–4 belied its relative small size and could carry a variety of ordnance and a payload of nearly 8,000 pounds. Three F–4B Phantom II squadrons, VMFAs –115, –314, and –323, with a total of 33 aircraft, constituted MAG–13. The versatile Phantom, capable of a speed nearly equal to the fastest interceptors, could also carry a payload of nearly 16,000 pounds, second only to the A–6A. Two C–117D transports, five Douglas TA–4Fs, and three Korean War- vintage Grumman two-seater, single-engine TF–9J fighter trainers rounded out the Marine aircraft inventory at Chu Lai.[5*]

*The armed Hueys carried air-to-ground rocket packs and fuselage-mounted, electrically-fired machine guns and proved to be formidable close air support aircraft. The unarmed Hueys, nicknamed "slicks," were used for medical evacuation, reconnaissance, air control, and occasionally for insertion of reconnaissance teams. Later in the spring of 1968, there was a reduction of the number of Hueys in the VMO squadrons because of the introduction of the fixed-wing North American turbo-prop OV–10A Bronco into the Marine Corps inventory and to III MAF. See Chapter 25. Colonel Samuel J. Fulton, who assumed command of VMO–2 in May, remembered that his squadron then had only 14 Huey gunships and "the only 'slick' I recall is the one that was used for III MAF." Col Samuel J. Fulton, Comments on draft, n.d. [Nov94] (Vietnam Comment File).

**Designed to hold a four-man crew and 17 combat-loaded troops, the CH–46 carried approximately double the load of the UH–34 and with its cruising speed of 115 knots was approximately 25 knots faster than the older aircraft. For detailed discussion of the problems experienced with the CH–46 in 1967, see Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 210–11 and LtCol William R. Fails, *Marines and Helicopters, 1962–1973* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1978), pp. 101–02 and 121–24. Major General Anderson, the wing commander, commented that he believed that there was "only one instance of catastrophic failure [of the CH–46], the weakness was identified and grounding ensued immediately." According to Anderson, it was "fuselage and pylon cracks . . . [in several aircraft that] gave rise to this essential refit program." MajGen Norman J. Anderson, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File).

*Lieutenant General Richard E. Carey, who commanded VMFA–115 until 16 January 1968, commented in 1994 that the Phantom was the "fastest interceptor in the American inventory and its speed has not been equaled by any American interceptor to this date." He observed that in addition to its fighter escort and close air support role, it also had an air defense role. His squadron maintained a strip alert against possible MIG incursions into South Vietnam and that on two occasions, General Carey stated, he personally chased MIG aircraft near the North Vietnamese city of Vinh until "told to abort by my GCI [Ground Control Intercept] controller." According to Carey, the "Phantom was the primary reason our ground forces were never attacked by North Vietnamese Air." General Carey wrote that the Douglas TA–4Fs and the Grumman TF–9Js "were constantly used as TAC(A) [Tactical Air controller (Airborne)] when a FAC [Forward Air Controller] was not available." He mentioned that "throughout the war they also provided a fast FAC capability for strikes north of the DMZ and recovery of downed air crews when the slow moving FAC(A) could not survive." LtGen Richard E. Carey, Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Carey Comments.



Both photos are from the Abel Collection

Top, a Cessna O–1 Bird Dog light single-engine observation and air control aircraft from MAG–16 is seen in flight. The Bird Dog was in the Marine inventory from WW II and was to be phased out. Below, passengers are seen boarding a Marine Douglas C–117D Skytrain, a twin-engine transport aircraft. The C–117D was an improved version of the C–47, the military version of the DC–3.





Top is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A421997 and bottom photo is from the Abel Collection

Top, two Grumman A6A Intruders (only the wing tip can be seen of the second aircraft) from VMA(AW)–533 return to Chu Lai after a mission. Note that the bomb racks of the first aircraft are empty. Below, a fully loaded Douglas A–4A Skyhawk from VMA–211 is located at the Chu Lai airstrip. The small maneuverable Skyhawk could carry a variety of ordnance and a payload of nearly 8,000 pounds.





Photo from the Abel Collection

A Marine McDonnell Douglas F4B Phantom II from VMFA–323 lands at Chu Lai. The tail parachute slowed the speed of the aircraft and the arresting cable brought the Phantom to a complete stop.

Until October of 1967, Chu Lai had also been the home of the second Marine helicopter group, MAG–36. While supersonic Marine jets could cover the distance from Da Nang and Chu Lai to the DMZ in 18 and 27 minutes, respectively, it was quite another matter for the relatively plodding rotary aircraft. With the Americal Division having ample organic helicopter support, III MAF decided to upgrade and expand the small airfield at Phu Bai, build a new one near Quang Tri City out of range of the North Vietnamese artillery positions north of the Ben Hai, and move MAG–36 closer to the northern battlefront.[6]

By January 1968, with the focus of the war on the north, Colonel Frank E. Wilson, the MAG–36 commander, in addition to his H&S squadron, had six helicopter squadrons attached to his command. Four of them, HMMs–164, –362, and –364 and VMO–3, were with the group headquarters at Phu Bai. The remaining two squadrons, VMO–6 and HMM–163, were with the forward headquarters at the newly constructed Quang Tri Airfield, and joined on 10 January by HMM–262. Equipped with 23 UH–1Es each, both armed and "slick," VMOs–3 and –6 performed similar missions in their sectors as their sister squadron, VMO–2, at Marble Mountain. HMMs–163 and –362 were both UH–34 squadrons with 49 aircraft between them while the remaining squadrons flew the Boeing CH–46. HMM–164 had 19 of the older CH–46As while –364 had acquired 32 of the newer and improved D Models, which had fewer problems than the older craft. Finally, one C–117D and 18 UH–34s belonged to H&MS–36 for various logistic runs and other miscellaneous missions. While mainly supporting the 3d Marine Division along the DMZ and in Thua Thien Province and eventually the 1st Marine Division's Task Force X-Ray, MAG–36, like MAG–16, had a variety of missions to accomplish and several masters to service.[7]

Besides the main airbases, the wing maintained forward airfields at Dong Ha, An Hoa, Tam Ky, and Khe Sanh, large enough to land Marine Lockheed Hercules KC–130 transports which required about 3,000 feet of runway. While Marine Refueller Transport Squadron (VMGR) 152 remained based at Okinawa, it always kept a small detachment or detachments of approximately four aircraft in Vietnam at all times. With a 15–17 ton capacity, the KC–130s flew resupply and reinforcements throughout the Western Pacific from bases in Vietnam, Japan, Okinawa, and the Philippines. They played a large role in the resupply of Dong Ha in the eastern DMZ and especially of the 26th Marines at Khe Sanh with the land lines of communication closed to that isolated base. Configured for in-flight refueling missions, the KC–130s were an important ingredient in the air war as they serviced attack and fighter aircraft in the skies over both North and South Vietnam.[8*]

January 1968 proved to be an extremely busy month for the aviators of the 1st Wing. During the month, Marine attack and fighter aircraft flew 4,891

*Prior to the Vietnam War there had been some question whether the Marine Corps would be permitted to have the KC–130, the tanker configuration version of the C–130 Lockheed transport. Air Force officials claimed that the Hercules KC–130 was primarily a transport and should remain only in the Air Force. The Marines successfully argued that it was both and used it as such. See Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, 1982), p. 268.



Photo from Abel Collection

A Marine Lockheed KC–130 Hercules transport/refueler from VMGR–152 refuels two Douglas A–4 Skyhawks from MAG–12 at 10,000 feet over South Vietnam. VMGR–152, based on Okinawa, kept one detachment in Vietnam for both refuelling and transport missions.

combat sorties in South Vietnam, of which 1,174 were close air support missions. Of the remaining sorties, 3,651 were in direct support of ground forces, and 66 were helicopter support, armed reconnaissance, or air defense.* These aircraft dropped some 9,000 tons of bombs, which according to Marine statistics resulted in an estimated 400 dead. Marine fixed-wing aircraft also made 476 visual reconnaissance and 216 sensor reconnaissance flights in providing battlefield surveillance for ground commanders in South Vietnam.[9]

The record was about as impressive in the skies over North Vietnam and Laos. These numbers represented 1,434 combat and combat support sorties, 1,180 of which were strike sorties. The other "out of country" sorties included 226 reconnaissance sorties and 28 combat air patrols. Over North Vietnam, the Marine strike sorties, 739 out of 796, hit targets in Route Package 1, that area immediately north of the Ben Hai River. Marine participation in the bombing of the northernmost sector of North Vietnam, Route Package 4, required an especially integrated effort. The A–6As, EA–6As, F–4Bs, and the KC–130s had to meet precise time schedules "with fully operational systems" to carry out a successful mission. The two Marine A–6A squadrons, VMA (AW)s–242 and 533, struck more than 1,000 targets, most of them moving, in 350 sorties, 34 of them in the northern route packages over North Vietnam. Marine aviators also flew over 380 strikes against the lines of communication in Laos. All told, the Marine airmen, exclusive of the transports and the helicopters, completed a total of more than 7,000 sorties over South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and Laos, the largest number since July 1967.[10]

The helicopter and transport pilots also could boast of similar achievements during January. Marine C–117s and KC–130s carried nearly 30,000 passengers and more than 6,600,000 pounds of cargo during the month. Not to be outdone, the CH–53s of HMH–364 hauled slightly over 19,000 passengers and over 7,500,000 pounds of food, arms, and equipment in January. For the month, Marine helicopters from both III MAF and the SLF of the Seventh Fleet flew 34,957 sorties, lifting nearly 60,000 troops and 6,617 tons of cargo.[11]

These accomplishments had come at some cost to the Marine wing in both personnel and aircraft. Communist antiaircraft fire downed seven fixed-wing planes including three A4E Skyhawks, one F–4B Phantom II, one F–8 Crusader, one EF–10B Whale, and one A–6A Intruder. The enemy gunners also shot down six helicopters, three Ch–46s, one UH–34, one CH–53, and one UH–1E. Enemy rocket and mortar

*Close air support missions were conducted in such close vicinity of the ground force that they required detailed coordination and integration with the ground supporting fires. While coordination with the supported ground force remained important in direct air support missions, these sorties were conducted at a sufficient distance that the integration with the supporting ground fires was less involved.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190806

A completely destroyed Grumman A–6A Intruder is the victim of a rocket and mortar bombardment on the Da Nang Airfield.

men also destroyed six F–4Bs and one A–6A in their shelling of the Da Nang and Chu Lai airfields. In addition, enemy machine gun fire caused some impairment to 328 Marine aircraft, 38 of them sustaining serious damage. Communist mortar and rocket attacks on the airfields also hit another 104 aircraft, 13 of which required extensive repairs.* Even more costly were the losses of trained Marine airmen—enlisted crewmen and Marine aviators—adding to the already existing shortage of aviation personnel.[12]

The coming months would bring even more problems. For the entire III MAF staff and particularly for General Anderson, it would be a frustrating experience. It would be a period of conflicting responsibilities, in which Marine Corps doctrine relative to the mission and employment of fixed-wing air in support of ground forces would be called into question.

Marine Control of Air

By the end of the month, the siege of Khe Sanh, the insertion of the 1st Air Cavalry into northern I Corps, and the launching of the Communist Tet offensive would bring several Marine aviation issues to a head. Especially sensitive was the issue of control of Marine fixed-wing air in Vietnam. According to Marine Corps doctrine, the purpose of Marine air was to provide close and direct air support to the Marine infantry division on the ground. The Marine Corps had worked out, as noted by Major General Anderson, "detailed and effective procedures," particularly for amphibious operations, but applicable to extended ground operations, which closely integrated Marine aviation and infantry units into "air-ground task forces."[13] As Marine Major General Keith B. McCutcheon, serving in 1968 as Deputy Chief of Staff (Aviation) [DCS (Air)] at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps and one of the major architects of Marine aviation doctrine, later emphatically

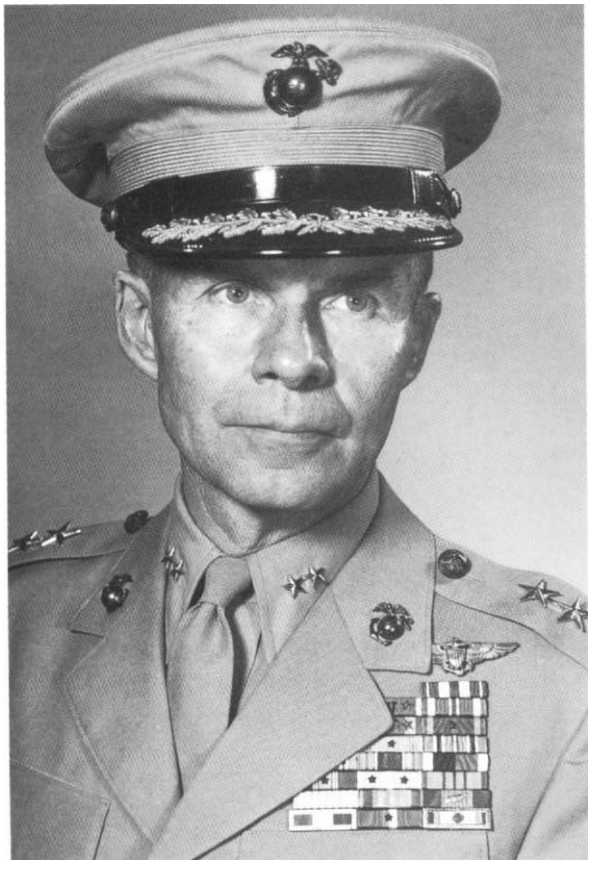
*The Communists rocketed Da Nang Air Base on 3 January and followed with rocket and mortar attacks at the Da Nang and Marble Mountain Airfields on 30 January, and hit the Marble Mountain facility once again on 31 January. They hit the new Quang Tri airstrip with both rockets and mortars on 24, 27, and 29 January. They also mortared and rocketed MAG–13 at Chu Lai on 31 January 1968. 1st MAW ComdC, Jan68, pp. 3–5—3–8. Colonel Robert Lewis, at the time the commander of VMCJ–1, photographed the Chu Lai Air Base from an RF–4B the day after the attack. He recalled that at Chu Lai, the rockets "hit the MAG–13 bomb dump. The ensuing explosion severely damaged two squadron hangars and absolutely flattened the VMA [AW]–533 hangar." Col Robert W. Lewis, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File). Colonel Dean Wilker, who commanded MAG–12 at Chu Lai, remembered the attack somewhat differently. According to Wilker, the rockets hit "the Navy bomb dump"—rather than the one belonging to MAG–13—located between the shoreline and the MAG–12 hangars. He stated that "bombs exploded and left a huge hole in the sand dune area. The blast caved in one of my hangars and damaged the others." Col Dean Wilker, Comments on draft, dtd 18Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

wrote, the Marine Corps "jealously guards the integrity of its air-ground team."[14]

From the very beginning of the Marine Corps involvement in Vietnam, Marine officers sought to avoid any repetition of the Korean War experience where for the last two years of that conflict the Marine ground force "worked for the 8th Army and the [Marine] air forces worked for the Fifth Air Force." In 1963, then Marine Brigadier General McCutcheon, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, CinCPac, headed a 12-man board with representatives from the Pacific Command staff and from all of the CinCPac Service component commands to "examine the full spectrum of tactical air support" in the theater and to come up with recommendations for its organization under a joint command. Without going into all of the ramifications, the "McCutcheon Board" proposed that a joint force commander under CinCPac should appoint a Service commander (in most instances the Air Force component commander) to be the "coordinating authority for tactical air operations." This distinction was important since under the then existing joint definitions, "coordinating authority" permitted a commander "to require consultation between the agencies involved, but does not have authority to compel agreement."[15]

MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon, Marine Deputy Chief of Staff (Air) in 1968, was a former commander of the 1st MAW. Gen McCutcheon was a pioneer Marine aviator who played a large role in the development of Marine close air support doctrine as well as in Marine employment of the helicopter.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A413010



Although Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp and his predecessor failed to approve the "McCutcheon report," the CinCPac commander used the "coordinating authority" solution as the basis for command of aviation resources in Vietnam. In fact, when in March 1965, General Westmoreland informed CinCPac that he planned to place Marine fixed-wing units under the overall operational control of his Air Force component commander, at that time the Commanding General, 2d Air Division, Admiral Sharp overruled him. In no uncertain terms, in a message probably drafted by General McCutcheon, Sharp told Westmoreland that he would exercise operational control of Marine aviation through III MAF and that authority could not be "delegated to the 2d Air Division."[16]

The resulting MACV Air Directive 95–4 on air support issued in July 1965 provided the 2d Air Division commander "coordinating authority," but retained operational control of all Marine air in III MAF. At the same time, however, the Marines were to notify the 2d Air Division on a daily basis of the number of aircraft in excess of III MAF needs and make them available as needed. While modified slightly in 1966, this basic directive remained in effect into 1968. As a member of the 1st MAW staff, Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Carey later observed that the Marines "were very careful to ensure we provided daily reports of the number of aircraft in excess of III MAF needs," but that by January 1968, "there were seldom excess sorties or aircraft available."[17]

Lieutenant General Krulak, the FMFPac commander, pointedly stated a few months earlier that the Marines had the air-ground team in Vietnam that they had wanted in Korea. According to Krulak, this was, "no accident. We have CinCPac to thank for putting his foot down and saying 'No . . . .' We have to thank him, plus the stubborn persuasion on him by a few Marines." Furthermore, the FMFPac commander correctly observed that notwithstanding all the talk about the Marine air-ground relationship the Vietnam arrangement provided the Marine Corps for

one of the first times in combat, the air-ground team "in its classic sense."[18]

Despite the operational control retained by III MAF and the 1st MAW of its fixed-wing assets, the Marines recognized the primacy of the Seventh Air Force commander as the MACV air coordinator. The air directive permitted ComUSMACV in the event of emergency to direct the Commander of the Seventh Air Force to assume operational control of Marine aircraft. Moreover, in August 1965 in an agreement between General McCutcheon, who commanded the 1st MAW from May 1965 through May 1966, and General Joseph H. Moore, the commander of the 2d Air Division, which later became the Seventh Air Force, the Marines acknowledged that the Air Force command had overall responsibility for air defense in the unlikely event of a North Vietnamese air attack.[19]

In accordance with this agreement, the Marines designated a certain number of aircraft for air defense purposes. The Air Force, through its control and reporting center (CRC)* in I Corps, codenamed Panama, located on Monkey Mountain on Tiensha Peninsula, had the authority to alert or scramble and assign air defense targets to these Marine fighters. Moreover, the CRC determined when and if the 1st and 2d Light Antiaircraft Missile (LAAM) Battalions "were free to engage a target presumed to be hostile" with its HAWK** surface-to-air guided missiles. Part of MACG–18, the two battalions, each with a basic load of 108 missiles, were responsible for ground antiair defense at Da Nang and Chu Lai. In January 1968, Lieutenant Colonel Marshall J. Treado, the commander of the 1st LAAM Battalion at Da Nang, had one battery near the Hai Van Pass, another on Monkey Mountain, and the third west of the airbase near the 1st Marine Division headquarters. The 2d LAAM Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Stanley A. Herman, disposed its batteries in similar fashion around Chu Lai to provide adequate protection. Lieutenant Colonel David S. Twining, who later commanded Marine Air Control Squadron (MACS) 4, credited the LAAM Battalions with "permitting the allocation of virtually all of the Marine fighter/attack resources to the attack role." He noted that by 1968, only two "Air Force F–4 aircraft maintained on strip alert for launch against unidentified inbounds were the only additional routine air defense measures required . . . ."[20***]

Outside of the specific air defense measures directed by the Seventh Air Force, the heart of the Marine air command and control system was the 1st MAW tactical air direction center (TADC).**** A component of MACG–18, the TADC oversaw the use of all Marine aircraft, both fixed-wing and rotary, and determined the requisite number for specific missions. The TADC consisted of two subordinate agencies, the tactical air operations center (TAOC), responsible for air defense, air surveillance, and air control, and the direct air support centers (DASCs) which maintained control of close and direct air support missions.[21]

The wing TAOC, manned by Marines from MACS–4, had the latest in technology to carry out its duties. When the squadron arrived in June 1967, it brought with it a "modern semi-automated, computer-oriented TAOC" to replace the older manual procedures. MACS–4 emplaced the TAOC on Monkey Mountain near the HAWK firing positions there and the Air Force "Panama" CRC. The squadron required ample space for its sundry radars and antennae. It took four huts to house the Tactical Data

*The Panama CRC was an element of the U.S. Air Force tactical air control system from which the Air Force directed radar control and warning operations within its sector. It was subordinate to the Seventh Air Force Tactical Air Control Center in Saigon which controlled all Air Force tactical air operations and air-warning functions in South Vietnam. The TACC in Saigon "did not have authority over operations in the northern route packages of North Vietnam; Air Force operations there were controlled by the Seventh Air Force Command Center. Until Mar 1968, the Seventh Air Force Command Center also controlled operations in Route Package One." Dr. Wayne Thompson, USAF Historical Office, Comments on draft, dtd 23Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**The acronym HAWK stands for Homing-All-the-Way-Killer. The HAWK air defense is a mobile, surface-to-air guided missile system designed to defend against enemy low-flying aircraft and short-range rocket missiles.

***While there was discussion of rotating the 2d LAAM Battalion out of Vietnam, the Tet offensive and the Khe Sanh crisis resulted in the battalion remaining at Chu Lai. Brigadier General Earl E. Anderson, the III MAF Chief of Staff, even proposed to move the battalion from Chu Lai to Quang Tri because of a postulated increased air threat. Anderson argued, "we all recognize that it is vital to intercept enemy aircraft as far from the troops installation as possible." BGen E. E. Anderson ltrs to MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon, dtd 19Feb and 14Mar68, Encl to Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). Later in the year, the possibility of the enemy air threat had diminished again and the 2d LAAM Battalion departed Vietnam on 12 October 1968. See also Chapter 21.

****Although the Marine Corps normally designated its senior air command and control organization the Tactical Air Control Center, it used the usually subordinate term, TADC, in Vietnam to avoid confusion with the Seventh Air Force TACC in Saigon.

Communications Central (TDCC) and another 16 huts for the TAOC proper. Part of the recently developed Marine Tactical Data System (MTDS), compatible with the Navy's Airborne Tactical Data System (ATDS), the new TAOC permitted the Marine controllers to monitor about 250 airborne aircraft at one time, both friendly and hostile, and to handle about 25 air intercepts at the same instance.[22]*

The new Marine system had a larger capacity and more sophisticated air control capability than the Air Force Panama station. More importantly, the Marines could electronically exchange air defense and air control data instantly with the ships of the Seventh Fleet operating both in the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea. For the time being, however, the only way that the Air Force CRC could communicate with either the fleet or the Marine TAOC was by voice relay.** Brigadier General Earl E. "Double E" Anderson, a Marine aviator who had previously worked on the DCS (Air) staff at HQMC and was now the III MAF chief of staff, wrote to General McCutcheon in Washington that the "Air Force colonel who now commands Panama finally swallowed his pride." According to Anderson, the Air Force commander had "asked MACS–4 if they would permit him to send Air Force controllers to work with the TAOC." The Marines agreed and "they have Air Force controllers working on the MTDS equipment and passing plots by phone to the Panama site."[23]***

The several DASCs made up the second component of the 1st Wing's Tactical Air Direction Center. Personnel from the two Marine air support squadrons, MASS–2 and –3, manned the five DASCs, usually collocated with the Marine fire support coordinating center (FSCC) of the supported unit. MASS–3 ran the DASC with the 1st Marine Division at Da Nang, a mini-DASC with the 26th Marines at Khe Sanh established there in mid-January, and the one at Chu Lai. The two remaining DASCs, manned by MASS–2, were both in early January with the 3d Marine Division, one at the division's main CP at Phu Bai and the other at the division's forward headquarters at Dong Ha. When the 3d Division turned its CP at Phu Bai over to the 1st Marine Division Task Force X-Ray in mid-month, the Phu Bai DASC remained behind and provided the same service to the new command.[24]

Supplementing the DASCs, the two MASS squadrons also maintained five air support radar

*Lieutenant Colonel William A. Cohn observed that "when the MTDS replaced the manual system, approximately 1700 a month missions were being handled . . . in a few months the MTDS system was handling over 17,000 missions a month." He declared this was a "quantum leap" and contrasted it with the Air Force system at Panama, "where all aircraft were put on punch cards and then introduced into the system, while MTDS acquired aircraft automatically as soon as they were airborne." LtCol William A. Cohn, Comments on draft, dtd 13Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Cohn Comments.

**Colonel David S. Twining, a commander of MACS–4 in 1968, recalled that "the TAOC/TDCC had the capability to similarly exchange digital target information with HAWK Missile Battalions and also with adjacent Air Force control agencies. As early as 1965 the JCS had agreed on joint technical standards for such information exchange. The Marine Corps and Air Force implemented these standards in both the MTDS and Air Force 407–L development programs but the Air Force equipment at the site 'Panama' CRC was the older Back-Up Intercept Computer (BUIC–2) which had only the Air Force unique SAGE/BUIC data link. Using the Marine Corps TDCC equipped with mission-specific modems a special data link translator was devised which eventually succeeded in automating the link between the two centers. Col David S. Twining, Comments on draft, dtd 15Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Twining Comments.

***General Anderson had more than a passing interest in the MTDS equipment. He recalled that as a colonel in 1963, he was told that "the MTDS program (which was the largest R&D Program the Marine Corps had ever undertaken) was in serious trouble and despite the Commandant's reluctance the Marine Corps decided to take the Program Manager route. Despite my protestations, I was assigned that billet and while physically located within DC/S Air, I reported directly to the Chief of Staff." Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). Lieutenant General Richard E. Carey, who after his stint as a squadron commander served on the 1st MAW staff, recalled that he "had numerous conversations with Panama in which they sang the praises of our MTDS capability." Carey Comments. Both Lieutenant Colonel Cohn who commanded MACS–4 until April 1968, and his successor, Colonel Twining, commented on their relations with the Air Force commander of the "Panama" station. Lieutenant Colonel Cohn wrote, "the Air Force colonel commanding Panama brought his VIP visitors to see 'his' Marine air control system in action. At this time MTDS was handling Army, Navy, and Air Force aircraft to such locations as Udorn, Piraz, and many other bases. This in addition to the normal day-to-day operations with 1st Wing AC." Cohn Comments. Colonel Twining observed that he had excellent working relations with local Air Force commanders at Da Nang, but contrasted this with the "political agenda" of the Seventh Air Force headquarters in Saigon. He cited as an example where he had worked out a particular working agreement with the Panama commander in which MACS–4 would control returning certain Air Force flights in bad weather when the Air Force equipment "was not up to the task." According to Twining the new procedures worked well until the Panama Commander "made the mistake of relating this to Saigon, whereupon he was summarily relieved and was not even allowed to return for his personal gear. His successor made one call on me upon his arrival and told me that he was under orders to break off all cooperative air control procedures and that he was furthermore prohibited from further meetings with his Marine counterparts." Twining Comments.

teams (ASRT) which used the TPQ–10 radar system to control air strikes in poor and marginal weather. Like the DASCs, each team was usually collocated with the supported unit. At the beginning of 1968, there were two ASRTs at Dong Ha with the 3d Division, one at Phu Bai, one with the 1st Marine Division at Da Nang, and one at Chu Lai, which later in the month moved to Khe Sanh and was operational there on 23 January. From these locations, with the 50-mile range of the TPQ–10 radar, the operators could cover most of I Corps. The Marine A–4s, A–6s, and F–4Bs all came equipped with beacons that the TPQ–10 could track for the entire 50 miles.[25*]

In January, the MASS–2 DASCs controlled nearly 5,000 missions, about 3,000 fixed-wing and 2,000 helicopter. MASS–3 directed only slightly fewer, about 3,000 missions equally divided between helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. The ASRTs belonging to the two squadrons ran about 3,400 radar-controlled missions between them.[26]

The Marine close and direct air support system called for an intimate relationship between the air and ground commands. With each Marine infantry battalion usually having its own forward air control (FAC) or air liaison party (ALP) attached to it, consisting usually of a Marine aviator and radio operators and equipment so as to be able to communicate with both aircraft and the DASC, ground commanders had their own aviation advisor on their staff. Although the ground FACs had the capability to control both fixed-wing and helicopter airstrikes, usually airborne controllers handled most of these missions because of limitations caused by terrain features and the elusiveness of the enemy. The ground FAC, nevertheless, contributed important assistance to the ground commander. He provided the infantry the ability to talk to the air and perhaps more important was able to advise the infantry commander just what type of air support and ordnance to use.**

Fixed-wing direct and close air support was of two kinds, preplanned and immediate. In the preplanned strikes, the infantry battalion commanders, usually with their air liaison officer, determined the day preceding the mission what targets he wanted to hit. The battalion then sent the list through channels to division headquarters where the collocated DASC and FSCC consolidated the air requests. The division then forwarded the complete package to III MAF which in turn relayed the information to the wing TADC.At the TADC, the wing prepared the preliminary or fragmentary order for the next day. In this order, usually called the "frag,"*** the TADC designated the number of missions, time on target, and the type of ordnance. The "frag" then went out to the various aircraft groups to carry out and to the Marine DASCs to control. Despite the complexity of the system, the process allowed for flexibility. Ground commanders could still call for modifications in the preplanned missions until 2000 of the night before. Normally, a battalion commander could expect the air strike within 20 hours of the initial request.[27****]

Marine fixed-wing immediate support was even more responsive. In the event of need, battalion commanders could send in their request at any time. If necessary, the TADC or DASCs, in an emergency, could divert aircraft from preplanned missions and brief the pilots in mid-flight to the new targets. Lieutenant Colonel Twining, a commander of MACS–4, later

*Colonel Twining provided the following description of TPQ–10 operations: "The TPQ–10 computer compared the aircraft radar track with the operator-entered target location, taking into account bomb ballistics and winds. The indicated aircraft track corrections and bomb release signal was relayed by the operator to the pilot. For the A–4 aircraft this information was designed to be sent automatically by data link to the aircraft autopilot but equipment problems on both ends of the link resulted in the almost exclusive use of the voice relay. The TPQ–10 operator and aircraft pilots became so skillful that all-weather bomb miss distances were typically less then 50 meters. The chief problem with TPQ–10 operations was the occasional entry of gross errors in target location resulting in 'bad drops' which in a number of instances caused casualties to friendly forces and civilians." Twining Comments.

**Ground units used VHF radio nets while aircraft employed UHF radios. All FACs, both airborne and on the ground, could employ either system. Otherwise, the air could not talk to the ground.

***Among both aviators and ground officers this process was called "fragging," not to be confused with the slang term later identified with the attempted killing or injuring of officers and senior noncommissioned officers by throwing fragmentation grenades at them.

****Colonel Joel E. Bonner, the 1st MAW G–3, related that in Vietnam, the wing modified somewhat the formal procedure described above: " . . . due to improved communications both encrypted and unencrypted most of the required info[ormation] was in the hands of the G–3 action officers long before the formal info arrived. Much of this info came from the Divisions Air Officer and the Ops officers running specific operations. Also, at Da Nang the Wing G–3 and the TADC . . . were collocated in the same building and the G–3 produced the frag order." Bonner noted that the TADC worked for the G–3 as its control center: "The TADC was the instrument that was used not only to carry out those control functions dictated by the Frag Order, but also by the Commanding General to redirect Tactical Air for higher priority missions and emergencies as the tides of battle changed." Col Joel E. Bonner, Comments on draft, dtd 25Oct92 and 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Bonner Comments.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A422857

Marines of the 1st LAAM (Light Antiaircraft Missile) Battalion talk on the radio next to their HAWK surface-to-air guided missiles at the missile site overlooking the Da Nang Airbase from the west.

observed that, "moreover, there were generally sufficient preplanned missions canceled after launch to provide a 'divert pool' from which aircraft could be assigned to immediate requests."[28] The TADC could also launch strikes from any of the three "hot pads." Each of the fixed-wing groups usually kept four aircraft on strip alert. Completely fueled and armed with an assortment of ordnance, these planes usually would be airborne under 10 minutes from receipt of the initial request. Other aircraft would immediately take their place on the hot pad. In the event of an intense combat situation, the wing would prebrief pilots and then send them aloft in aircraft on airborne alert. If circumstances dictated the wing could also call upon the Seventh Air Force and even Seventh Fleet fixed-wing attack aircraft for assistance.[29]

For the most part, Marine air flew about 80 percent of its missions in support of the two Marine divisions. The wing gave the remaining 20 percent to the Seventh Air Force. Up to this point, Marine air normally did not support Army units except upon request of the Seventh Air Force. The Korean Marines, however, came directly to the wing which in part was the reason for maintaining the Marine DASC at Chu Lai. Major General Norman Anderson remembered several years later that the Army's Task Force Oregon, later to become the Americal Division, when it arrived in I Corps in 1967, "provided their own communications into the TADC of the 1st MAW at Da Nang."* The Army division could then lodge requests for preplanned and emergency close air support with the Marines. Mostly, however, the "Americal relied . . . on the Seventh Air Force for preplanned support," although the Marine wing made supplementary sorties available. Anderson, nevertheless, insisted that the arrangement required that the supported unit provide "its own communications into the Marine system . . .

*Army General William B. Rosson, who commanded Task Force Oregon in the Spring of 1967, remembered that he was supported by both the Seventh Air Force and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing then and, "the support was timely and effective overall. Admittedly, the Task Force required duplicate Air Force and Marine liaison and control party assets, but this did not pose a difficult problem for III MAF. (We had deployed with normal Air Force liaison and control party elements; Marine elements joined us from Chu Lai.)" Gen William B. Rosson, USA, Comments on draft, dtd 27Feb96 (Vietnam Comment File).

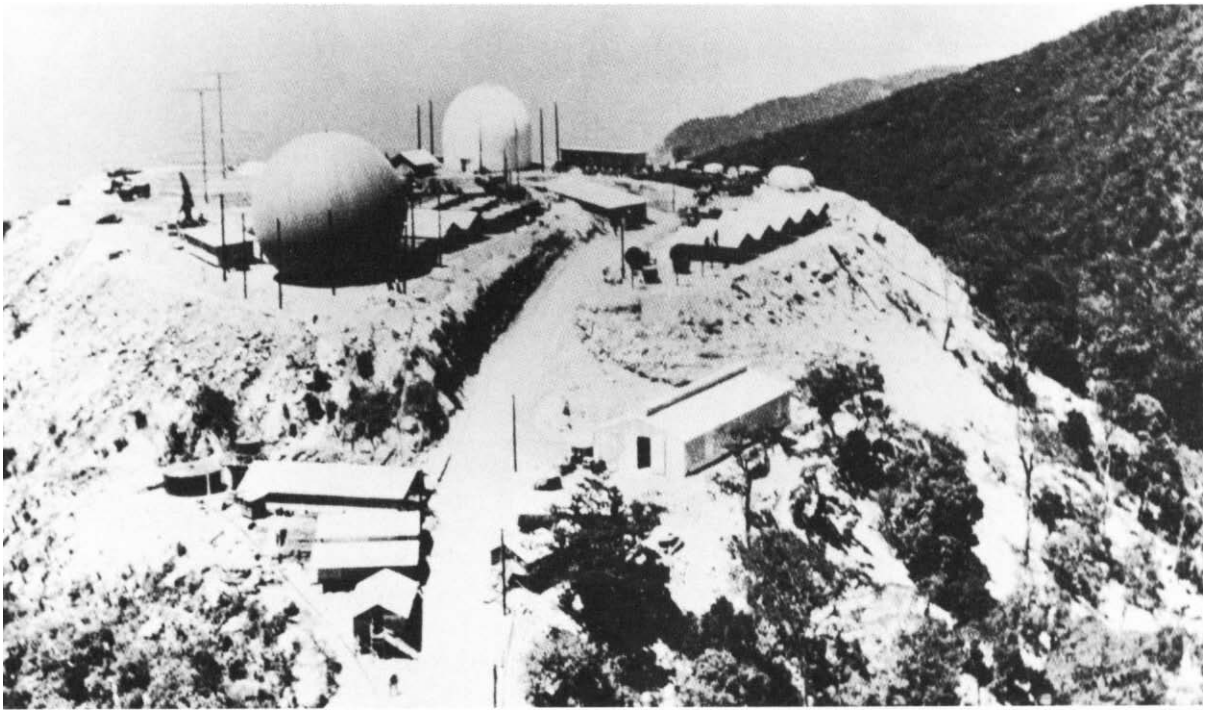


Photo courtesy of LtCol William A. Cohn, USMC (Ret)

The Marine Tactical Air Operations Center (TAOC), located on Monkey Mountain on the Tiensha Peninsula east of Da Nang, was equipped with the latest in computer technology. The TAOC, run by Marine Air Control Squadron (MACS) 4, required ample space for its sundry radars and antennae.

it being manifestly impossible for a Marine Air Wing to possess equipment and personnel to net with all possible supported units." By January 1968, with the situation at Khe Sanh drawing more attention and the planned deployment of more Army units north, General Westmoreland worried not only about whether Marine air could continue to operate independently, but whether he had to alter the entire fabric of command relations in I Corps.[30]

Proposed Changes in Command and Control over Marine Air; Operation Niagara, January 1968

Early in 1968, General Westmoreland planned to launch an air offensive in northwestern I Corps to protect the Marine base at Khe Sanh and to counter the North Vietnamese Army buildup there. Based on the previous late summer-early fall air effort, Operation Neutralize in support of Con Thien, the MACV air commander decided upon what he called another SLAM (seek, locate, annihilate, and monitor) campaign. Conceived in an imagery "of cascading bombs and shells," Westmoreland labeled the new endeavor Operation Niagara. According to the concept, U.S. Air Force Strategic Air Command's eight-engine Boeing B–52 Stratofortresses would fly massive carpetbombing "Arclight" missions in support of Khe Sanh from their bases in Guam and Thailand. In coordination, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Navy tactical aircraft would make precision air strikes against identifiable enemy forward positions. Marine and Army artillery from both firing positions at Khe Sanh and Camp Carroll in the DMZ sector would supplement the air bombardment. The idea was to surround the Marine base with both a "steel curtain" and a "ring of fire" to keep the North Vietnamese out.[31*]

On 5 January, General Westmoreland implemented the first phase of Operation Niagara, which was primarily an intelligence gathering effort employing air and ground reconnaissance resources. This included the use of sensors** and the monitoring of enemy communications. At the same time, the MACV comman-

*For discussion of the Khe Sanh campaign from January through June 1968, see Chapters 4, 14, and 16.

**Navy Captain Bernard D. Cole, who as a Navy lieutenant was attached to the 26th Marines as the assistant target intelligence officer, wrote that "air dropped sensors were a primary source of targeting data for us." Capt Bernard D. Cole, USN, Comments on draft, dtd 27Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Cole Comments.



Photo courtesy of Office of Air Force History

A USAF Boeing B–52 Stratofortress drops its bombs during an Arclight mission over Vietnam. Gen Westmoreland proposed during Operation Niagara to drop a cascade of bombs and shells on the NVA force around Khe Sanh.

der ordered his staff to come up with a plan for the second phase of the operation. Most importantly, Westmoreland placed his deputy for Air, Air Force General William W. "Spike" Momyer in charge.

General Momyer made no secret about his unhappiness with the air arrangements in Vietnam, especially with Marine aviation. As his nickname implied, Momyer, who had replaced General Moore as Commanding General, Seventh Air Force in the summer of 1967, was a strong, opinionated commander who argued his case forcefully. He bluntly shared his views even with Marine generals. Momyer told both Major General Louis B. Robertshaw, the previous commander of the 1st MAW, and Brigadier General John R. Chaisson, the director of the MACV combat operations center, that he wanted operational control of Marine air and "didn't think we should have two air forces supporting the battle in South Vietnam." While Marine commanders held up the Korean War aviation arrangement as the one precedent to avoid at all costs, Momyer frankly declared that it was his objective "to get the air responsibilities straightened out as we had them in Korea . . . ." He believed that the Marine system of air control failed to make priorities and, in effect, wasted valuable air assets in attempting to meet all of the needs of the ground commanders.[32*]

With the impetus now on Operation Niagara, Momyer used the opportunity to try to alter the air relationships at Khe Sanh. He convinced General

*General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., who was Marine Corps Commandant from 1964 through 1967, recalled that during one visit to Vietnam he had an "extremely angry exchange [with General Momyer] which culminated in 'Spike' and his staff following us to the curb on our departure! Verbal fists flying!" Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr., Comments on draft, dtd 11Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File). According to a still unpublished Air Force history, General Momyer was selected as commander of the Seventh Air Force because of "his convictions about the best way to employ fighter aircraft . . . No Army commander was apt to get the best of an argument with Momyer over air power." Wayne Thompson, "The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, From Rolling Thunder to Line Backer, The Air War over North Vietnam, 1966–1973," ms, Center of Air Force History, Chapter 1, pp. 21–22.

Westmoreland that changes had to be made. From a Marine Corps perspective, General Chaisson, who was very close to General Westmoreland, later related that the MACV commander "was weak as hell on his comprehension of tactical air support on a day-to-day basis. That's why I think he got hooked on that one." During these discussions, interestingly enough, General Chaisson was on home leave in Maine and did not return to Vietnam until later in the month. Also both Lieutenant General Cushman, the III MAF commander, and Major General Norman Anderson, the Marine wing commander, at this point, were unaware of the implications of the Niagara plan.[33]

While obviously influenced by General Momyer, General Westmoreland also had his own agenda.* The MACV commander already had other concerns with the Marine Corps command. Moreover, Westmoreland did not always acquiesce to Seventh Air Force desires. He had resisted previous attempts by the Air Force to have a larger representation on the MACV staff. Indeed, he kept most strike targeting authority for both B–52s and Air Force tactical air in the Army-dominated Tactical Air Support Element (TASE) of his own staff rather than delegating that function to the Seventh Air Force. Even General Chaisson admitted that Momyer and Westmoreland had a relationship based on mutual respect and trust and that the Air Force general was "a very competent component commander."[34]

For whatever his motivation, on 18 January, General Westmoreland proposed to Admiral Sharp that because of the "impending major battle," that he planned to give operational control of the 1st MAW aircraft "less the helicopters" to General Momyer, his deputy for air. He wanted "rapid decision making" and the ability to concentrate all air, which he did not believe existed under the present system. Westmoreland stated that he was considering the move a "temporary measure," but made no mention of the emergency provision available to him under his own air directive 95–4. In fact, the MACV commander several years later stated that he was unaware that he had that authority: "I didn't worry about things like that. I had a deputy [Momyer] and he never told me anything like this."[35]

At this point, Admiral Sharp denied Westmoreland's request. In a return message on the same day, he asked the MACV commander to consider all the ramifications including the probable inter-Service wrangle that would result in a change of the existing order. Before making a final decision, the CinCPac commander stated that he wanted to review the recommendations and viewpoints of both Generals Momyer and Cushman on the matter.[36]

After the shelling of the Khe Sanh base on 21 January and believing that the long-awaited battle may have started, Westmoreland decided against pursuing the subject of control over Marine air any further. Instead, he immediately implemented the second phase of the Niagara operation. In a message to Admiral Sharp explaining his actions and future plans, he stated that it had never been his "intention to in any way interfere with the close air sup-

Gen William W. Momyer, USAF, seen here as a lieutenant general, was commander of the Seventh Air Force and the MACV deputy for air. Momyer was a strong advocate of the Air Force position relative to controlling aviation assets in Vietnam.

Photo courtesy of Office of Air Force History



*Army historian Graham A. Cosmas observed that "this is a valid and necessary point." According to Cosmas, "the Marine command throughout the single management fight tended to view Westmoreland as little more than a 'useful idiot' for Momyer, whom they identified as their principal antagonist. This may have cost the Marines politically, since they failed to address the problem ComUSMACV thought he saw and instead concentrated on a hard-line doctrinal argument against the Air Force. This in turn exasperated Westmoreland, who became as a result more susceptible to Momyer's arguments." Dr. Graham A. Cosmas, CMH, Comments on draft, 23Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

port so essential to the Marines." Westmoreland radioed, however, that he still required the "authority to delegate to my deputy commander for air, the control that I deem appropriate." He declared that in Niagara II, he had charged Momyer, "with the overall responsibility for air operations for the execution of the plan." While the Seventh Air Force would coordinate and direct the employment of tactical air in Niagara II, General Westmoreland carefully added that the Marine wing would make only available those sorties not required for the "direct air support" of Marine units. The MACV commander observed that the Seventh Air Force commander and the Marine command would work out the details for the coordination of their effort. Interestingly, both III MAF and the Seventh Air Force received a copy of this message which was not the case of the earlier communications between Westmoreland and Sharp.[37]

III MAF and the Seventh Air Force quickly resolved the particulars between the two relative to Niagara II. Major General Norman Anderson, the 1st MAW commander, visited the Seventh Air Force headquarters at Tan Son Nhut in Saigon to complete the coordination between the two. During his stay at Saigon, General Anderson inspected the Seventh Air Force intelligence control center for the operation, which eventually produced some 300 targets during a given week. According to Anderson, the intelligence center was designating targets, but was not sure whether they were being hit. The 1st Wing commander and Momyer agreed "to exchange attack information on a 24-hour basis." About midnight, the Seventh Air Force would inform III MAF of the number of targets struck, their coordinates, and any available battle damage assessment (BDA). III MAF in turn would turn over its target data and BDA to the Air Force.[38*]

For the Khe Sanh sector, the Seventh Air Force established an airborne command and control center (ABCCC), an electronically equipped Lockheed C–130E transport. From its orbit over eastern Laos, the ABCCC controlled all aircraft in Niagara II, except Marine close air support fixed-wing planes and helicopters.[**] At Khe Sanh, on 22 January, the 1st MAW moved a mini-DASC from Chu Lai to Khe Sanh, backed by a Marine airborne DASC in a KC–130.[***] The Marine wing and the Seventh Air Force divided the air space over the Marine base into six concurrent zones. In the three closest to the base, aircraft reported into the Khe Sanh FSCC and DASC, which, of course, were collocated. The 1st Wing and 3d Marine Division Dong Ha DASC and FSCC controlled the easternmost zone. The Air Force ABCCC had complete authority over the two remaining zones.[39]

Although somewhat formalized, the aviation arrangements at Khe Sanh were at best ad hoc and sometimes confusing. As General Norman Anderson described it, at first, all sorties within the range of the Marine air support radar teams would be "directed by our forward air controllers" and would be a 1st Wing responsibility. With the beginning of the B–52 sorties, however, "this became a jumbled arrangement as well" and air control became a matter of "expediency" rather than "doctrine." Air Force controllers complained that Marine aircraft over Khe Sanh too often ignored the Seventh Air Force ABCCC. From an Air Force viewpoint, this duo-air-control relationship "perpetuated the existence of two air forces operating in a compressed area." General Momyer believed that the Niagara compromise placed "too much emphasis on geographical considerations." He believed that Marine air was fighting its "own private war at Khe Sanh" rather than fitting into the overall air campaign. As Air Force historian Bernard C. Nalty later

* According to General Carey, who at the time served on the 1st MAW staff, "the concept of intelligence center targeting proved to be ineffective principally because of its lack of timeliness. Targets for the most part were fleeting targets and required quick response. BDA for the most part was unrealistic. We looked upon the system as 'Big Thinking' strategic targeting but not very practical from a tactical standpoint." Carey Comments.

** Colonel Bonner, the 1st MAW G–3, commented that the lack of airbases in I Corps limited General Momyer in his ability "due to time, distance, and weather to place a 'Hallmark USAF stamp' on Air Support in I Corps. Therefore the C–130 Airborne Command and Control Center was invented for Khe Sanh and Niagara with B–52s was the Momyer way of getting the Air Force involved." Bonner Comments. General Carey, who at the time as a lieutenant colonel, worked for Colonel Bonner, recalled that "feedback from the Seventh Air Force ABCCC was non existent. On the other hand our communications with the Khe Sanh and Dong Ha DASC were excellent and as a result the TADC had a good picture of our sectors." Carey Comments.

*** Colonel Twining recalled that there was some thought to moving one of the two TPQ–10 ASRTs at Dong Ha to an area west of Camp Carroll, probably at Ca Lu, to support Khe Sanh. The NVA interdiction of Route 9 in that sector prevented the move. According to Twining the "most logical solution was an ASRT located at Khe Sanh itself, along with elements of a DASC. Accordingly, General Anderson moved one of the TPQ–10's and a mini-DASC from MASS–3 assets at Chu Lai to Khe Sanh . . . To provide interim control of air support operations while the Khe Sanh DASC was being moved into position and set up, MASS–2 provided an airborne DASC in a KC–130 which orbited Khe Sanh at 20,000 ft, out of range of the NVA antiaircraft guns." Twining Comments.

wrote: "Momyer thought in terms of using a limited number of aircraft to attack an increasing number of targets over a wide area; the Marines focused on providing the swiftest and deadliest support for the man with the rifle."[40*]

In contrast to Momyer, Marine Generals McCutcheon and Norman Anderson were relatively satisfied with the arrangements for Niagara II. While still uneasy about MACV and Seventh Air Force motivations, they believed that for the most part the questions about air control had been put to bed. On 23 January, in Washington, General McCutcheon informally wrote to Anderson, the wing commander, that Headquarters Marine Corps was "watching with great interest the OpCon command relationship game and the flurry of message traffic between the powers-to-be." McCutcheon acknowledged, however, that the Niagara implementing order was "simply a restatement of existing procedures." In reply, about two weeks later, the wing commander assured General McCutcheon that III MAF relations with the Seventh Air Force "have again normalized." According to Anderson, "the heat is temporarily off in doctrinal matters . . . We both can live and perform our jobs while respecting the others' doctrinal position. For the time being, it appears that Spike Momyer is willing to do this."[41]

*In 1996, Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Donaghy, who as a captain in 1968 was the 26th Marines regimental air officer, remembered that sometime in late February an "Air Force Jolly Green [helicopter] arrived at Khe Sanh unannounced. . . . Into the Regimental Command Bunker walked Gen Momyer complete with utiliries, flak jacket, and helmet." After a briefing, the Air Force general asked ro speak to the "senior Marine aviator on the regimental staff," which of course was Donaghy. According to Lieutenant Colonel Donaghy, "General Momyer gave me the impression that he wanted to help us get the job done at Khe Sanh, but only on his terms." General Momyer stated that "he could send us more air than I could control with the ground and airborne FACs I had available." Donaghy replied that the Air Force aircraft "were carrying the wrong ordnance and were dropping too high. They always carried 'slick' bombs and were dropping so high thar rhey rarely hit the point targets we so often were after (bunkers)." The Marine officer continued rhar what he needed were "snake and nape." ["Snake" pertained to 250- and 500-pound bombs configured with a special tail called "snake-eyes," while "nape" referred to napalm]. In Donaghy's account, General Momyer "smiled and told me to get the high drag ordnance from rhe Marines. His pilots would continue ro do as rhey had over the pasr months because he didn't wanr ro lose planes 'down in rhe weeds.'" Donaghy stared thar after Momyer left, he srarred to obrain Air Force aircraft and eventually worked out a system "where we would use the Air Force planes with their low drag ordnance for Marine TPQs on rargets well away from friendlies, with FACs that had 'area targets', or pass them . . . for use in Laos where the NVA big guns were always shooting at us from Co Roc. The Marine air we used in close because of their ordnance loads and their release altitudes—they could see who they were going after." LtCol Richard E. Donaghy ltr to Jack Shulimson, n.d. [Jul96] and 4Oct96 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Donaghy Comments.

Operation Niagara and Air Resupply in the Defense of Khe Sanh

While the issue of command and control over air operations still simmered below the surface, the allies unleashed their air offensive in Operation Niagara. From 22 January through the end of March, American airpower in a massive onslaught bombarded the North Vietnamese forces surrounding the Marine base at Khe Sanh with over 95,000 tons of ordnance.** Within the first week, Marine and Air Force fighter bombers flew about 3,000 sorties and the B–52 stratofortresses over 200. On 7 February, General Anderson, the 1st Wing commander, observed that "some fantastic amounts of ordnance are delivered daily, hopefully with a beneficial effect."[42]

A key element of the Niagara air offensive was the B–52 Arclight strikes. During the period 22 January–31 March, the stratofortresses, each plane able to hold 27 tons of ordnance, released nearly 60,000 tons of high explosive upon the enemy. To enhance the concussion effects, the big bombers carried mixed bombloads of 250–, 500–, and 750-pound bombs. Beginning at the end of February, employing van-mounted Combat Skyspot radar MSQ–77, Air Force ground radar operators directed some of the Arclight missions as close as 1,000 meters to the Marine lines. Thinking that they had a 3,000 meter comfort range, the North Vietnamese had stored some of their ammunition within those limits. The results were some spectacular explosions. Marine defenders at Khe Sanh came out of their bunkers to watch, calling the display of pyrotechnics from the sky, "Number One on the hit parade."[43***]

**The exact tonnage dropped varies from the figure of 95,430 mentioned by MACV in its history to 103,500 tons lisred by FMFPac. Air Force historians Bernard Nalty and John Schlight use the figures 98,000 and 100,000 tons, respectively. MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, p. 423; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 3; Nalty "Operation Niagara, Air Power, and the Siege of Khe Sanh," p. 39; Schlight, *Years of the Offensive, 1965–68*, p. 285.

***Colonel Bonner, the 1st MAW G–3, observed that the safety zone for the Arclight strikes were three kilometers, and "undoubtedly there were some missions conducted closer rhan three kilometers bur probably not many." According to Bonner, the Air Force briefers told the wing staff that "the Arclight targets would be made by map grid coordinates rather than geographical features and the targer would always be one kilometer square. Their rational was the dispersion of a full load of 250, 500, and 750 pound bombs would safely land in the one kilometer square, ie. Carpet bombing." Bonner Comments. Navy Captain Bernard D. Cole, who at the rank of lieutenant served as the assistant target intelligence officer with the 26th Marines, remembered rhat the B–52 strikes "were devastating, but their very effectiveness precluded accurate body counts: many enemy were undoubtedly buried by the detonations; there were also interesring POW accounts about the deafening and psychological effects of rhe strikes . . . ." Cole Comments.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191632

The Marine Air Traffic Control Unit (MATCU) 62 detachment area at Khe Sanh displays its radar equipment. Notice the fire truck in the revetment in the foreground.

While the 26th Marines FSCC at Khe Sanh provided the targeting data for 90 percent of the B–52 missions, General Westmoreland personally approved each of the Arclight strikes and occasionally diverted missions from his headquarters at Tan Son Nhut. The 26th Marines sent their requests for the massive air raids with specific targets to the 3d Marine Division air officer about 15 hours prior to the scheduled drop time. Up to three hours prior to the strike, the 26th Marines target intelligence officer could request an alternate target. After that time, no changes were permitted in the targeting process.[44]

The MACV timetable for the Arclights called for eight strikes every 24 hours. Later, the Strategic Air Command pared the response time of the big bombers even further, sending out three-plane cells every three hours from Guam and Thailand and eventually from Okinawa. Every 90 minutes, a Combat Skyspot unit would pick up the bombers and direct them to a particular target block or alternate target. To avoid predictable patterns and to keep the enemy off balance, the B–52 cells would vary their intervals over their targets from an hour to 90 minutes, or even two hours. In the last week of February, the Air Force changed the number and intervals of aircraft once more, dispatching six B–52s every three hours instead of three aircraft every 90 minutes.[45]

While allied intelligence attempted to assess the effectiveness of this heavy intensive bombardment, several factors impeded the collection effort. More than half of the B–52 strikes occurred at night and heavy cloud cover during the day often frustrated aerial photographic coverage. According to an Air Force historian, the aerial photographic experts could only interpret "accurately" about seven percent of the total of Southeast Asia Arclight missions. From the available sources, Air Force BDA officers concluded that for the period 15 January through 31 March, the stratofortresses destroyed over 270 defensive positions including bunkers and trenches and another 17 weapon positions. The raids damaged nearly 70 more of the enemy bunkers and trenches and another eight weapons. B–52 crewmen claimed "1,382 secondary explosions and 108 secondary fires."[46]

Any estimate of the number of enemy casualties as a result of the B–52 bombardment around Khe Sanh would only be a guess. Still, enough impressionistic evidence exists that the bombing created havoc with enemy morale and at the same time lifted that of the Marine defenders at Khe Sanh. In March 1968, a North Vietnamese noncommissioned officer from the *9th Regiment, 304th NVA Division,* near Khe Sanh, entered in his diary: "Here the war is fiercer than in all

other places. . . . All of us stay in underground trenches . . . . We are in the sixtieth day and B–52s continue to pour bombs . . . this is an area where it rains bombs and cartridges. Vegetation and animals, even those who live in deep caves or underground, have been destroyed." Another enemy diarist wrote, "the heavy bombing of the jets and B–52 explosions are so strong that our lungs hurt." Marine Captain William H. Dabney, the company commander of Company I, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines on the isolated outpost on Hill 881 South, observed that "B–52s make excellent CAS [close air support] birds." He then exclaimed: "Not much for bombing trails and base areas, but God! Give them a target and get them to it quickly and scratch one target."[47]

Despite the dramatic aspects of the Arclights, the 26th Marines relied heavily on the close air support missions flown by the tactical fighter-bomber aircraft, especially those controlled by Air Support Radar Team Bravo (ASRT–B) from MASS–3. For much of the period of Niagara, especially through February, the atmospheric conditions called by the French, *crachin*, consisting of low-lying clouds, morning fog, and intermittent rain showers, dominated the weather over Khe Sanh. With the resulting overcast skies and reduced visibility, the pilots flew a greater percentage of radar-controlled strikes. On 18 February, in a record-setting 24-hour period, Marine and Air Force aircraft, all under Marine ground radar control, dropped over 480 tons of ordnance on 105 separate targets. An indication of the confidence that both ground and air commanders had in the accuracy of the radar, TPQ strikes as close as 500 meters to friendly lines were routine. An Air Force liaison officer believed that the Marine radar operators could safely bring a bombing mission in as close as 50 meters while a Marine member of the Khe Sanh FSCC stated in an emergency, "he would have no qualms about calling in an ASRT–B . . . TPQ within 35 meters of his position." During Niagara, ASRT–B controlled nearly 5,000 missions.* All told, excluding the B–52 raids, Marine, Navy, and Air Force pilots exceeded 22,000 fixed-wing strikes in support of Khe Sanh, with the Marines flying more than 7,000 of those missions and dropping over 17,000 tons of high explosives upon the enemy.[48]

In their bombing campaign around Khe Sanh, the Marines experimented with several techniques. Two of the most unique were the "Mini" and "Micro" Arclights, which were used for area bombing and required close coordination with ground supporting fire. Devised by Captain Kent O. W. Steen, the 26th Marines assistant fire support coordinator, and Captain Mirza M. Baig, the regimental target intelligence officer, the concept behind the Mini Arclight was to act upon fast breaking intelligence when B–52 strikes were not available.** When the regiment received indications that North Vietnamese units were moving into a specific area, the Khe Sanh FSCC would plot a 500- by 1,000-meter zone in the center of the suspected enemy sector. The regiment then asked for Marine fixed-wing aircraft on station to conduct a TPQ mission and at the same time alerted artillery batteries at Khe Sanh, Camp Carroll and the Rockpile for fire missions. With the bombing runs, usually flown by two A–6 Intruders, carrying 28 500-pound bombs, and artillery batteries firing mixed caliber ranging from 4.2-inch mortars to 175mm guns, the FSCC and ASRT computed the data so that the initial shells and

*Marine TPQ ground controllers at Khe Sanh could handle as many as four aircraft on "the same pass as long as the pilots flew in a tight formation and radar did not break lock." The Khe Sanh FSCC generally used a rough rule of thumb relative to the weight of the ordnance and distance from friendly lines to determine targets for TPQ missions. Normally 500-pound bombs, because of their large fragmentation pattern, would not be dropped within 500 meters of friendly troops while 250-pound ordnance would not be dropped within 250 meters of Marine lines. Shore, *Battle for Khe Sanh,* p. 104. Lieutenant Colonel Donaghy, who served in 1968 as the 26th Marines regimental air officer, commented: "I cannot imagine what would have happened at Khe Sanh had we not had ASRT–B. They were always 'up', always 'on target and always innovative." He recalled that the Khe Sanh defenders wanted to use napalm against the ever expanding NVA trenches at night, which would have "had to be done under flares and were extremely difficult in mountainous terrain . . . We asked ASRT–B if they could control napalm drops using TPQ radar. At first they said no, because that weapon was not in their ballistic tables, but after some thought said they'd give it a try. We scheduled several flights of A–4 aircraft carrying napalm to arrive at Khe Sanh during daylight. We flew them at several thousand feet over a safe target area and let the ASRT–B folks develop their own ballistics for a napalm canister. They got accurate enough that we later did it at night against the trench lines." Donaghy Comments.

**Colonel Steen commented that the Marine "'culture' of fire support planning and coordination integrated with the infantry they support" played a large role in the defense of the base. He wrote that the "integration of the ASRT (ground support radar team) and Marine Corps fire support coordination apparatus was a brilliant but overlooked accomplishment which saved our bacon many times during low visibility . . . when other close air support couldn't be used." Col Kent O. W. Steen, Comments on draft, dtd 14Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). Navy Captain Cole who was Captain Baig's assistant related that the mini Arclights involved "several aircraft . . . [usually A–6As] timed for a simultaneous time on target with an artillery barrage (everything from 105s to 175s) . . . ." He stated the concept "was thought up by Harry Baig (as was the idea of flooding the NVA trenches with napalm; he was a real wild man)." Cole Comments.

bombs hit the target at the same time. Obviously the calculations of trajectory and flight information had to be carefully dovetailed to have the desired effect and yet avoid shooting down an aircraft. The "Micro Arclight" was a smaller version of the Mini Arclight using smaller targets and lighter ordnance.[49]

Even with the Arclights, the TPQ missions, and the Mini and Micro Arclights, a basic ingredient of Marine air at Khe Sanh remained the visual close air support missions.* Despite the *crachin*, the breaks in the weather permitted the Marines to provide their traditional support of the Marine ground forces. Upon arrival in the sector, the fixed-wing aircraft would report into the Khe Sanh DASC who in turn would assign the pilots to a Marine or Air Force airborne controller. These controllers were from the Air Force 20th Tactical Air Support Squadron or from Marine H&MS–36 and VMO–6. At least five pilots flying either Cessna O1E "Birddogs" or Huey "Slicks" remained overhead during the day in radio communication with both the ground and air. Once in visual and radio contact with the attack aircraft, the controller would make a "marking run" where he fired either a smoke rocket or dropped a colored smoke grenade upon the target. Given the correct headings by the airborne controller and possibly after a few "dummy" passes, the jets would then strike the enemy positions. In the meantime, the controller would be in contact with the ground and make any necessary adjustments in his instructions to the attack pilots. Once the attack aircraft released their ordnance, the air controller made an assessment of the strike and radioed the results to the fixed-wing pilots. A typical transmission would be:

> Your BDA follows: 5 KBA [killed by air]; 2 bunkers, 1 automatic weapons, and 50 meters of trenchline destroyed; one secondary explosion. You have been flying support of the 26th Marines; your controller has been SOUTHERN OSCAR. Good shooting and good afternoon, gentlemen.[50]

Air support involved more than dropping bombs. With Route 9 cut, Khe Sanh depended upon air-delivered supplies for its survival. Even with its 3,900-foot airstrip, this was not always a simple task. The first challenge faced by an aircrew inbound to Khe Sanh was to find the combat base. In addition to the *crachin* which for much of the morning made navigation difficult, the Khe Sanh airstrip was located hard by a "fog factory," which complicated the task even further. Just off the east end of the runway, the ground dropped away sharply into a gorge over 1,100 feet deep. The wind channelled warm, moist air from the coast into the gorge, producing the right conditions for thick, heavy banks of fog which spilled onto the plateau to obscure the combat base and the surrounding area. Before the siege began, the structures at Khe Sanh showed up vividly on aircraft radar, allowing pilots to "see" through the fog. But soon, heavy shelling forced the Marines further underground and leveled many bunkers and revetments, resulting in poor radar return. A detachment from Marine Air Traffic Control Unit–62, MAG–36, operated a ground control approach (GCA) radar from the airstrip to guide aircraft, but enemy fire knocked it out on 19 February. As an expedient, the ground air controllers pressed into service the ASRT TPQ–10 radar, normally used to control bombing, to direct landings, with some success.[51]**

If the weather was clear, as occasionally happened, or if a pilot had the skill or luck to find the airstrip despite the fog, he and his crew next had to brave North Vietnamese antiaircraft fire. The enemy cleverly concealed heavy machine guns and some 37mm antiaircraft guns along the approaches to the runway and invariably engaged aircraft on landing and takeoff. Even when the supply planes approached the field in dense fog under radar control, the NVA gunners fired away, "in the dark," so to speak, presumably firing at the sound of the engines. For an aircraft loaded with several tons of fuel or ammunition, a single hit could be disastrous.[52]***

*While the TPQ missions in many instances could be classified close support, Marine close air support usually refers to missions where the pilots under the direction of an airborne or ground controller visually obtain and attack the target.

**Lieutenant General Carey then on the wing staff commented that ASRT at Khe Sanh "proved to be invaluable in a multitude of roles. We utilized it in conjunction with aerial delivery on the tin foil strip, for supplementary positioning and control of A–6 . . . strikes which we conducted when the Arclights were not available, and we used them for Special Close Air Support on the hill positions surrounding Khe Sanh." Carey Comments.

***Colonel Twining observed that "one of the problems with the Khe Sanh defense was that the terrain overlooking the airfield was close enough for the NVA to cover the base with direct fire but too far to include within the Marine perimeter. The covering artillery was emplaced in caves with narrow embrasures, making it almost invulnerable to counter-battery or air strikes. According to a defector, the guns were aimed with an awkward but ingenious system of mirrors, moved by lines and pulleys. Once completed, it was possible to fire on aircraft that were in the process of landing or taking off, as well as those stationary and unloading." Twining Comments.



Photo from David Douglas Collection

An enemy mortar shell impacts below a just-landed Marine Lockheed KC–130 Hercules transport at the Khe Sanh airstrip. One of the Marine crew members can be seen on the ground under the wing.

The necessary sequence of landing, offloading cargo and replacements, loading wounded and evacuees, then taking off again created a precarious time for all concerned. When an aircraft touched down, the enemy immediately fired on the runway with a variety of weapons ranging from small arms to rockets, often damaging the aircraft or causing casualties among the exposed personnel gathered to service or board it. Every moment spent on the ground was fraught with hazard. Pilots soon developed the technique of "speed offloading" for cargo, in which the plane continued to taxi after landing and the cargo was simply rolled out the back. This reduced offloading time from the 10 minutes required with a forklift to less than 30 seconds. Fairchild C–123K Providers, equipped with auxiliary jet engines, could land, offload, take on passengers, turn around and lift off again in as little as one minute. Of course, when leaving the combat base, the planes were once again exposed to enemy antiaircraft guns.[53]

The workhorses of the fixed-wing air delivery effort were the Lockheed C–130 (or KC–130) Hercules, the Fairchild C–123 Provider, and the C–7 Buffalo, with cargo capacities of 15 tons, 5 tons, and 3 tons, respectively.* VMGR–152 provided the KC–130s while the Air Force flew all three types of transports into Khe Sanh. While the C–130 had the obvious advantage of greater carrying capacity, the smaller aircraft could land on shorter spaces of open runway, spend less time on the ground, and present a smaller target on the ground as well as in the air.[54]

Prior to 10 February, seven C–130s were hit and damaged on resupply missions to Khe Sanh. On the 10th, North Vietnamese heavy machine gun fire struck a 1st Marine Aircraft Wing KC–130, with a crew of six and five passengers, piloted by Chief Warrant Officer 3 Henry Wildfang and Major Robert E. White on the approach to the combat base. The plane was carrying flamethrowers and bulk fuel in bladders. According to Wildfang, the enemy fire "set the #3 engine ablaze, punctured the fuel cells in the cargo compartment, and ignited the fuel." He recalled that "two explosions rocked the . . . [aircraft] in-flight, with a third occurring at touchdown." Oily black smoke and flames entered the cockpit area and "limited visibility to near zero." Wildfang and White had contacted the base "to keep the approach area and landing zone clear of operating helicopters, and to alert the base fire equipment personnel." They were able to maneuver the aircraft clear of the runway upon landing so that the airstrip could remain in use. He and White escaped the aircraft through their respective "cockpit swing windows" although White had difficulty in extricating his foot, caught in the window. Warrant Officer Wildfang opened the crew door, but "a wall of fire and dense smoke" forced him back. At that point, the crash crews arrived and rescued another three men, two of whom

*The C–7, sometimes also called the "Caribou," is a turbo-engine version of the C–2. All the Marine Lockheed Hercules transports were configured as refuelers and were thus designated KC–130s rather than C–130s.



Photo is from the Abel Collection

An Air Force Fairchild C–123K Provider transport brings in supplies for the Marines at Khe Sanh. This version of the Provider was equipped with auxiliary jet engines and could land, unload, and take off in less than one minute.

later died of their wounds. All told, of the 11 persons on board the aircraft, 8 perished.[55]

The following day, a North Vietnamese 122mm rocket exploded 15 feet from an Air Force C–130 which was offloading troops, killing one and wounding four. Fragments damaged the tail section and the aircraft could not fly until repaired. On 12 February, enemy gunners once again hit the transport, which finally departed the next day, sporting 242 new holes. At this point, General Momyer, the Seventh Air Force commander, ordered the cessation of Air Force C–130 flights into Khe Sanh. Ten days later, General Cushman followed suit, issuing the same prohibition for Marine Corps KC–130s.[56]

The supply needs of the garrison were too great to be satisfied without the heavy lift capability of the C–130s. On the average, the defenders of Khe Sanh consumed or expended 125.6 tons of supplies per day, compared to Marine Corps planning figures for a force of that size which estimated a consumption of 131.4 tons per day. Initially, however, the need to replenish stocks consumed or destroyed, as in the explosion of ASP No. 1, drove the daily requirement up to 235 tons. The combination of weather and hostile fire prevented the smaller aircraft from flying a sufficient number of daily sorties to fulfill this requirement.[57]

To maintain the flow of supplies without landing C–130s, logisticians switched to other methods of employing these aircraft. The most familiar was the simple parachute drop, known officially as the Container Delivery System. The Marines established a drop zone to the west of the combat base, near the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines. C–130s parachuted bundles of supplies into this zone to be recovered by the Marines of Company A, 3d Shore Party Battalion, assisted by working parties from other units and trucks from the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines. The system was largely successful, but occasionally equipment suffered damage through improper packing or heavy bundles crashed into the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines perimeter, destroying bunkers. Some drops drifted into enemy territory, or could not be recovered from the drop zone because of enemy fire.

In these cases friendly artillery fire or air strikes destroyed the supplies to prevent them from falling into the hands of the enemy.[58*]

The Americans introduced two more exotic methods in the air resupply of Khe Sanh. These were the Ground Proximity Extraction System (GPES) and the Low Altitude Parachute Extraction System (LAPES), techniques tested by the Air Force just prior to the Vietnam War, but not in general use. With the GPES, loadmasters positioned palletized cargo on rollers inside the aircraft with a hook attached to the pallet in such a manner that it would hang down like the tailhook of a carrier plane. To drop his cargo, the pilot made a low pass over the drop zone trailing the hook and engaged an arresting cable, much like a plane making a carrier landing. The cargo slid out of the back hatch of the aircraft and onto the ground. GPES only had limited use at Khe Sanh, not for any fault with the system, but rather because of faulty installation of the arresting gear. The enemy took the Marines who attempted to install the arresting apparatus under mortar fire forcing them repeatedly to leave their work and take cover. As a result, they failed to anchor it properly. In the first attempt, the Air Force C–130 ripped the arresting cable out of the ground. After the Marines repaired the cable, other efforts were more successful. In one instance, the system extracted from a C–130 a pallet containing 30 dozen eggs, "without a single eggshell being cracked." Another source allowed that two of the eggs were broken.[59]

LAPES missions, on the other hand, were more numerous, 52 deliveries as compared to 15 GPES, if not more uneventful. For a LAPES delivery, the loadmasters prepared the cargo in much the same manner as for GPES, except that, instead of attaching a hook to the pallet, they attached a parachute. The pilot flew over the runway at an altitude of five feet and fired a small explosive charge which cut a restraining cable and allowed the parachute to deploy out of the rear cargo hatch. The parachute pulled the palletized cargo out of the aircraft to drop the few feet to the ground. LAPES was extremely accurate, with some crews able to place their cargo within a 25-meter square. One LAPES delivery malfunctioned, however, sending a nine-ton pallet careening a quarter of a mile off the runway at high speed, crashing into a messhall and killing a Marine. LAPES also caused some damage to the runway, the result of repeated pounding by nine-ton loads moving at over 100 knots, slamming down from five feet and skidding along the strip.[**]

Near the end of February, the Air Force resumed C–130 landings at Khe Sanh. A few days later, on 1 March, North Vietnamese fire hit and destroyed a C–123 attempting to take off, causing General Momyer to end the experiment and forbid C–130 landings once again. Enemy gunners continued to take a toll, however. On 5 March, they hit a C–123 caught on the ground while changing a flat tire, wrecking the transport completely. Only a day later, 49 died when another C–123 fell to antiaircraft fire while approaching Khe Sanh to land.[60]

Despite the many problems and risks encountered, both the Air Force and Marine transport aircraft kept the base supplied when they were the only means available to do so. The Air Force aircraft delivered over 12,000 tons of supplies to the garrison, with two thirds of that amount arriving by parachute, LAPES, or GPES. From the period 5 January through 10 April 1968, Marine fixed-wing transports, mostly KC–130s from VMGR–152, hauled 1,904 tons into Khe Sanh and carried 832 passengers.[61]

While fixed-wing aircraft largely provided for the needs of the units located within the Khe Sanh base itself, the Marines on the isolated hill posts depended upon Marine helicopters for everything from ammunition to water. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing mounted a monumental helicopter effort using aircraft from both helicopter groups, MAGs–16 and –36. This massive helicopter lift also resulted in new techniques involving close coordination between

*Colonel John F. Mitchell, who commanded the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines at Khe Sanh, recalled that the drop zone was a "'no-man's land' from the valley floor west of Khe Sanh and north/northwest of . . . [the combat base]." He assigned Company C the recovery mission, supported by Company A. He recalled that the Marines were frequently subjected to sniper fire and an occasional ambush. The North Vietnamese often competed in attempts to recover the supplies, but the Marines seldom lost. Mitchell believed his Marines recovered about 95 percent of the material dropped in their zone. Occasionally the dropped material landed in nearby minefields, which required extreme caution and his men took some casualties as a result. Col John F. Mitchell, Comments on draft, dtd 5Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Colonel Rex O. Dillow, who served as the G–4 or logistics officer for III MAF, described LAPES as an "experimental U.S. Air Force system, which was used effectively until all the equipment was torn up. Although not as efficient as air landed resupply, it was much more efficient than airdrop due to less dispersion. However, it required a large smooth surface; the aircraft came in at such a low altitude that they had the landing gear down in case of an inadvertent touch down. This limited its use." Col Rex O. Dillow, Comments on draft, dtd 10Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).



Both photos are from the David Douglas Duncan Collection

Top, Marines on the ground stand back and watch as the KC–130 piloted by CWO–3 Henry Wildfang and Maj Robert E. White burns on the Khe Sanh runway after enemy fire set ablaze the cargo of flame throwers and bulk fuel. A member of the ground rescue team can be seen at the tip of the wing. Below, a rescue team chief stands exhausted looking at the foam-covered wreckage of the aircraft. Eight of the 11 persons on board the aircraft died in the crash and resulting fire.



Marine fixed-wing and rotary aircraft as well as with supporting artillery fire.*

Helicopter flights to the hills were at least as dangerous as the C–130 runs to the combat base. The helicopters were exposed to small arms fire from hundreds of North Vietnamese positions in proximity to the Marines' lines as well as to mortar fire while in the landing zone or hovering above it. The enemy quickly learned that the Marines ignited smoke grenades to mark their landing zones when helicopters were inbound. As a result, mortar fire almost always greeted the resupply aircraft and harassed the Marines detailed to recover the supplies from the landing zone. Weather also was a factor. Using visual approach and landing techniques, helicopters were subject to the vagaries of the fog and of low-lying clouds which sometimes dipped down to enshroud the peaks of the higher hills, even when the combat base remained clear.**

The Marines on the outposts attempted to alleviate somewhat the problems for the aviators of resupplying the hills. On Hill 881 South, Captain William H. Dabney always tried to obtain needed fire support from external sources, rather than from the mortars and howitzers on his own hill. In this manner, he conserved his ammunition, thereby reducing the number of resupply helicopters. To confuse NVA mortar crews, Dabney would set off numerous smoke grenades of different colors when expecting helicopters, then he would tell the pilot by radio which color smoke marked the correct landing zone.[62]

The Marine helicopters brought supplies to the hill positions directly from Dong Ha, rather than from the combat base at Khe Sanh, itself. This reduced the number of times cargo handlers had to package and stage the supplies, as well as the amount of time the aircraft had to remain airborne in the hazardous environment around Khe Sanh. This system was not without problems of its own. One battalion commander complained that priority requests required up to five days for delivery, while routine resupply took 10 days. Further, carefully assembled loads, packaged to fulfill specific requests, sometimes arrived at the wrong position.[63]

By mid-February, with the enemy shooting down on a single day three helicopters attempting to reach the Khe Sanh hill outposts, Marine commanders realized that they had to take steps to remedy the situation. According to Major General Norman Anderson, Lieutenant Colonel William J. White, the commander of VMO–6, came to him and stated that the wing needed to work up a plan to keep the outposts resupplied. Anderson agreed and had White sit down with his operations staff to iron out the details. On 23 February, with the assistance of the assistant wing commander, Brigadier General Robert P. Keller, the small planning group, within a day drew up an operational resupply concept, later dubbed the "Super Gaggle."[64]***

The idea was to establish a small task force consisting of 8 to 16 resupply CH–46 helicopters, about a dozen A–4 Skyhawks and four Huey gunships to fly cover, a Marine KC–130 to refuel the aircraft, and a TA–4F with a TAC (A) in the backseat to orchestrate the entire affair. The Khe Sanh DASC and FSCC insured the coordination of the air and ground fires. In

*Lieutenant Colonel Walter H. Shauer, who as a major commanded HMM–362, a UH–34 squadron assigned to MAG–36, recalled that he kept several helicopters at Khe Sanh for three- or four-day periods during January and February, and would relieve them with replacement crews and aircraft: "During the siege there was of course no aircraft maintenance support, only fuel. The . . . [aircraft] were parked in Khe Sanh's revetments, and the crews bunkered underground in the 26th Marines CP. We primarily engaged in emergency medevac, and emergency resupply of ammo and water, to the various adjacent Marine hilltop positions." LtCol Walter H. Shauer, Comments on draft, dtd 1Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Shauer Comments.

**Lieutenant General Carey, then serving on the 1st MAW G–3 staff, observed that helicopters were not always able to use a "visual approach." According to Carey, the "skies were overcast more often than not." The helicopters flew on instruments to Khe Sanh and then "let down through the overcast under control of a TPQ or on a self-devised instrument approach on the Khe Sanh beacon. Once underneath they would pick up their fixed-wing escort. This operation required a great deal of coordination, generally conducted by an airborne TAC(A) in a TA4." Carey Comments.

***Gen Cushman, the III MAF commander, claimed to have conceived the idea for the "Super Gaggle." LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," dtd 23Mar69 (Vietnam Comment File). MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon, however, credited Colonel Joel E. Bonner, Lieutenant Colonel William J. White, and LtCol Richard E. Carey, with the further comment that Carey named the procedure. MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," n.d. (Vietnam Comment File). This latter version appears to be in conformity with MajGen Anderson's recollections. MajGen Norman Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81, pp. 225–6. Lieutenant General William J. White noted in his comments that the MAG–36 group commander, Colonel Frank E. Wilson, was the one who decided that White should see the wing commander and accompanied him to the meeting with General Anderson. LtGen William J. White, Comments on draft, dtd 1Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File). In his comments, General Carey wrote: "it became apparent that we had to do something fast. In discussion with Col Bonner and Gen Keller, Bill White and I suggested that we could come up with an answer. I was the considered authority on the fixed-wing participation and Bill provided the helicopter expertise. When all the details were sorted out I suggested the name supet gaggle as that is a favorite fighter pilot term meaning, 'perceived confusion of the first order.'" Carey Comments.



Both photos are from the Abel Collection

With the closing of the airfield to larger aircraft, aerial parachute drops were the most familiar method of resupplying the Marines at Khe Sanh. Top, an Air Force Lockheed C–130 transport drops supplies for the embattled Marines at the base. Below, Marines on the ground at Khe Sanh watch as the supplies come floating down. Several collapsed parachutes can be seen in the background.



the first "Super Gaggle" mission flown on 24 February, under cover of suppressive fixed-wing and artillery support, each of eight CH–46s successfully dropped off a 3,000-pound external load "covering less than five minutes when they could have been taken under fire." One helicopter took a hit, but landed safely at the Khe Sanh airstrip. All the rest of the aircraft returned to base safely. General Anderson, the 1st Wing commander, exulted "today, was a small victory." He then wrote, "the only way to beat the enemy is to bludgeon the hell out of him. . . . These coordinated resupply missions under marginal weather conditions undoubtedly will be required again and again in the next few weeks."[65]*

In a typical "Super Gaggle" mission, a TA–4 would fly to Khe Sanh on weather reconnaissance. When the TA–4 reported favorable conditions, the A–4s launched from Chu Lai, enroute to Khe Sanh, and the helicopters took off from Quang Tri, enroute to Dong Ha where prestaged supplies waited. After picking up their loads and carrying them externally underneath in especially designed cargo slings, the helicopters began the short trip to Khe Sanh flying on instruments and then letting down through a hole in the cloud cover. Just before they arrived, four A–4s struck enemy positions with napalm and two others saturated antiaircraft positions with CS gas carried in spray tanks. About 30 seconds prior to the helicopters' final approach to the designated hills, two A–4s laid a smoke screen on both sides of the planned flight path. As the helicopters flew in behind the smoke, four more Skyhawks carrying bombs, rockets, and 20mm cannons suppressed known and suspected North Vietnamese gun positions. The Hueys followed closely to pick up any downed crews, and a Lockheed KC–130 Hercules orbited high overhead to refuel any A–4s in need. At times, the entire "gaggle" operated in the hills where some peaks reached 3,000 feet with less than 1,500 feet ceilings and occasionally the helicopters took off and landed at Dong Ha with less than 400 feet clearances.[66]

Using the "Super Gaggle" technique, groups of helicopters could resupply the hills four times per day with little danger of losses. Indeed, only two CH–46s fell to enemy fire during "Super Gaggle" missions, and in both cases, the Hueys picked up the crews immediately. During the month of March, the helicopters in "Super Gaggles" delivered about 80,000 pounds of cargo per day to the hill outposts. Brigadier General Henry W. Hise,** one of two assistant wing commanders, observed, however, that without the fixed-wing support, "the 46s could no longer have supplied the hills." He noted that the Super Gaggle reduced the "hit rate" among the helicopters from 10 per 1,000 sorties to 5 per 1,000 sorties. According to Captain Dabney on Hill 881 South, with the suppression of the North Vietnamese antiaircraft batteries by the fixed-wing aircraft, "you could get in 10 helicopter loads on the hill in one minute and get the birds the Hell out of there and into smoke where the NVA couldn't see to shoot." With obvious Service pride, Dabney later praised the Super Gaggle: "It was a massive, complex, well rehearsed, gutsy and magnificent performance and only the Marines could have pulled it off."[67]***

On 31 March, with the coming of better weather and the beginning of the pullback of enemy forces from Khe Sanh, the allied command ended Operation Niagara. For the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing it had been an immense effort. In addition to the nearly 7,100 sorties contributed by Marine tactical air to Niagara, Marine helicopters flew over 9,000. Including the Super Gaggle flights, the Marine rotary aircraft carried more than 10,600 passengers and brought in over 3,300 tons of supplies to the Khe Sanh defenders. While the helicopters mostly delivered their cargo to the hill outposts, they also played a part in the resupply of the main base, especially after the enemy gunners curtailed the landings of the large transports. In support of the Niagara operations, 23 Marine fixed-wing aircraft and 123 helicopters sustained some combat damage.[68]

Little question remained that without air support, the entire defense of Khe Sanh would have been untenable. All the U.S. major aviation commands, including the Strategic Air Command, the Seventh Air Force, the

*General Carey observed that the coordination of the Super Gaggle originated at the TADC. The procedure required A4s from Chu Lai and "helos from Dong Ha/Quang Tri to take off at appropriate intervals so as to arrive at Khe Sanh at the same time. When the delivery was successfully completed and aircraft safely egressed [the area] the cycle [was] restarted for subsequent delivery." He observed that Marine ground crews were the unsung heroes: "Helos and strike fixed-wing aircraft were often reloaded in as little as 30 minutes time and sent again on their way to support their fellow Marines at Khe Sanh." Carey Comments.

**Because of the extended operations in the north, the 1st MAW in January 1968 like the two Marine divisions was authorized two assistant commanders.

***Lieutenant Colonel Walter H. Shauer, the commander of HMM–362, expressed a minority view about the effectiveness of the Super Gaggle. He wrote the "'Gaggle' turned out to be what its name connotates. Uncoordinated event waiting to crash." He believed that the reduction of the hit rate occurred because the NVA had begun to withdraw and just "weren't there." Shauer Comments.

Seventh Fleet, and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing demonstrated remarkable coordination over the skies of Khe Sanh. This coordination also was tied in very closely with both the Khe Sanh ground defenses and the Marine and Army artillery positions along the DMZ. While obviously the massive airlift and air bombardment permitted the Marines to hold the base and kept the enemy at bay, it still remained unclear how badly the enemy was hurt. The amount of ordnance dropped, as one historian observed, only measured the effort rather than the results.* Moreover, despite the inter-Service cooperation in the Khe Sanh operation, the Niagara Operation reopened the old dispute about the role of Marine air in the overall air campaign. Indeed, on 10 March, with the approval of Admiral Sharp, General Westmoreland issued his Single Manager directive placing Marine fixed-wing tactical and reconnaissance aircraft, at least as far as fragging purposes, under the operational control of General Momyer. While the Single Manager issue had little impact on the Niagara operations since it came out so late in the campaign, it would dominate, however, MACV, III MAF, and Seventh Air Force relations throughout the rest of the year and in reality throughout the remainder of the war.[69]

*Navy Chaplain Lieutenant Commander Ray W. Stubbe, who has researched and written extensively on Khe Sanh, commented "the US Air Force's count of 'secondary explosions' at Khe Sanh, by which MACV determined through their complex mathematical formulae just how many NVA were killed, is grossly faulted since many of the 'secondary explosions' they counted were actually conjointly-fired artillery missions: What they counted as a secondary explosion being, actually, a 'friendly explosion!" LCdr Ray W. Stubbe, USN, Comments on draft, 25Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Donaghy, who served as the 26th Marines air officer, also had his doubts, commenting that it was "nearly impossible to measure the real effectiveness of sorties in those days (BDAs were in the eyes of the beholder) . . . ." Donaghy, nevertheless, commended General Momyer, the Seventh Air Force commander, for visiting Khe Sanh and "coming to where the action was. . . . General Momyer obviously wanted to see where he was devoting so many of his assets." Donaghy Comments.

CHAPTER 24

A Matter of Doctrine: Marine Air and Single Manager

The Establishment of Single Manager—Point, Counterpoint—The Continuing Debate

The Establishment of Single Manager

While the Khe Sanh situation influenced the implementation of the "single manager" system at the time, General Westmoreland's doubts about the ability of III MAF and its limited staff provided an underlying motivation for his action. He especially worried about the capability and even willingness of Marine aviation to support the new Army divisions he was sending north. From a senior and joint commander's perspective, the MACV commander also sympathized with the desire of General Momyer, the Seventh Air Force commander, to centralize the air assets in Vietnam. All of these factors played a role in his final decision.[1]

Apparently accepting with relative good grace (at least outwardly) Admiral Sharp's initial denial of his effort to bring Marine fixed-wing air under the Seventh Air Force in Operation Niagara, General Westmoreland yet remained concerned about air support for the newly arrived 1st Air Cavalry Division in northern I Corps. With the establishment of the 1st Cavalry command post near Phu Bai on 20 January and its subsequent deployment to Camp Evans by the end of the month, Westmoreland became even more agitated on the subject. According to the MACV commander at a meeting with both Generals Cushman and Norman Anderson, the 1st MAW commander, he told them that with the new deployments and the impracticality of Seventh Air Force direct support for the division, he wanted the Marines to provide that air coverage. Westmoreland claimed that he received assurances from both Marine commanders that the Marine wing would establish liaison with the Army division and the necessary arrangements would be made.[2]

The three commanders had different impressions about the results of their meeting. While Generals Anderson and Cushman promised that III MAF would furnish air support, their understanding about the undertaking was at great variance from that of General Westmoreland. General Cushman later recalled that the Marines flew air support for the 1st Air Cavalry, but that the Army division did not know how to employ it. The 1st MAW commander, Major General Norman Anderson, related that the problem was one of communication. According to Anderson, he told General Westmoreland that the Marine wing would support the Air Cavalry, but that there would be need for the Army division to establish a communications network with the Marine air command and control system.[3*]

The upshot of the situation was that the 1st Air Cavalry still had not tied into the Marine Tactical Air Direction Center after it deployed to Camp Evans. According to General Westmoreland, about 24 hours to 48 hours after he had broached the subject to the Marine commanders, he visited Major General John J. Tolson, the 1st Air Cavalry Division commander at his CP and discovered that there had been no liaison with the wing. Until that juncture, Westmoreland claimed he had been content not to alter the air command system, but now "I blew my top . . . [this] was absolutely the last straw. . . . I go up there and nothing has happened and here I've got a division up there . . . and they [III MAF] just ignored me." The result, according to the MACV commander, was his decision to go ahead with the single manager directive.[4]

*General Earl E. Anderson, who at the time as a brigadier general was the III MAF Chief of Staff, recalled that he also attended this meeting, "and it became a little 'testy' at times. General Cushman stated that any excess sorties would be made available to Army units on request, but that the 7th AF had the primary responsibility to provide air support for the Army units." According to the former III MAF Chief of Staff, "the lack of communication between the 1st MAW commander and the CG of the 1st Air Cav at the outset, in my opinion exacerbated the problem and brought the matter to a 'boil' in Westmoreland's mind." Anderson further stated that "we should have taken the initiative. By not doing so, we got off on the wrong foot as MACV and 7th AF were looking for anything for which they could, rightly or wrongly, assess blame to III MAF or the 1st MAW." Gen Earl E. Anderson, USMC (Ret), Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter E. E. Anderson Comments. Colonel Joel E. Bonner, the 1st MAW G–3, also emphasized that for Westmoreland the support of the 1st Air Cavalry "was priority ONE!!" Col Joel E. Bonner, Comments on draft, dtd 18Jan93 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Bonner Comments. Brigadier General Henry W. Hise, who was one of the two assistant wing commanders, observed, nevertheless, that the Army units needed the appropriate "radios and frequencies to enter Marine nets . . . [and] this was clearly an Army responsibility." BGen Henry W. Hise, Comments on draft, dtd 22Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Hise Comments.

Much of the ensuing unhappiness between MACV and III MAF revolved around the expectations of the various commanders and their differing recollections of their various meetings. This was especially true about the debate over the communication net with the 1st Air Cavalry. While General Anderson remembered emphasizing this matter, General Westmoreland denied that the subject was ever brought up and fully anticipated that the Marines would have provided liaison parties with the 1st Air Cavalry Division. In a letter several years later, Major General Anderson recalled that General Cushman accompanied General Westmoreland during the latter's visit to General Tolson. According to Anderson, Cushman sensed the MACV commander's vexation about the situation and "directed my personal immediate attention to the issue." The wing commander then visited the 1st Air Cavalry with his communications officer. He discovered that the Army division lacked the technical ability to connect into the Marine aviation close-air-support radio net. Anderson remembered "that we had a problem finding within the wing assets" the necessary communication equipment to provide the link. He recalled that it took about 24 to 48 hours to make the connection and this was "unacceptable" to General Westmoreland. As far as the wing commander was concerned, however, this resolved the problem and that General Tolson told him a few days later that the Air Cavalry had no complaint about the quality of its air support. Apparently, however, the damage had been done. Westmoreland, obviously, had

Gen William C. Westmoreland, ComUSMACV, walks with LtGen Robert E. Cushman, CG, III MAF, on a formal visit to III MAF headquarters. The dispute over single manager of air complicated relations between MACV and III MAF during 1968.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A191509



expected the Marines to take the initiative while the wing commander believed that the Army division should have taken the first steps to ensure that it was in the Marine air radio net.[5*]

Despite General Westmoreland's later contention that it was the dispute over the air support to the 1st Air Cavalry Division that caused him to go ahead with the single manager issue, it would appear that it was only one of many contributing factors. The discussion over air support to the 1st Cavalry occurred over a two- or three-week span at a series of meetings where it was only one of several topics.** General Norman Anderson believed that it became a matter of concern sometime before Tet, but was not sure exactly when. On 28 January, Marine Brigadier General John R. Chaisson, the director of the MACV combat operations center, wrote home to his wife relative to deteriorating relations between III MAF and MACV. He mentioned that "Westy [Westmoreland] is a bit jumpy and is up to some major moves which [would] have an adverse impact on U.S. Marines." Chaisson claimed that he "worked on him [Westmoreland] considerably and got him to give a little, but not entirely." While aviation support may have been one of the disputed areas, the Marine brigadier made no reference to the 1st Air Cavalry Division and implied that his concern was over the general tenor of the MACV and III MAF relationship. In his own general entry in his historical summaries for this period, General Westmoreland made little reference to air control, but wrote of the limitations of the III MAF staff to handle the number of divisions in I Corps and the necessity of establishing the MACV Forward Headquarters. Finally, in his book, the MACV commander implied that it was the meeting on 7 February with General Cushman that resulted in his final disillusionment with the Marine command and forced his hand on single management.[6]

While Westmoreland's accounts of the 7 February meeting deal largely with his unhappiness concerning the fall of Lang Vei and the slowness of the Marine command at Da Nang to react to the NVA threat to Da Nang,*** the subject of air control must also have been a factor. Up to this point, at least at the III MAF and 1st Wing level, neither General Cushman nor General Anderson appeared to worry about the air control situation. Indeed, on 7 February, General Anderson wrote to Major General Keith B. McCutcheon in Washington that the "heat . . . [was] temporarily off" that subject. Less than a week later, however, Anderson informed McCutcheon that he had been "too optimistic" relative to the Seventh Air Force. According to

*Lieutenant General Richard E. Carey, who as a lieutenant colonel served on the 1st MAW staff in 1968, commented, "The major problem was that the Army divisions were not tied into our air control system and thus could not, by normally accepted means, submit requests for pre-planned missions. Of course the problem was one of communications. We did not have sufficient organic communications to provide them with communications capability. Our Wing was already supporting two Marine Divisions. Granted over time we had significantly augmented our communications capability to support our Divisions, but we were already stretched very thin with all the widespread communications supporting our Marines. I do recall however that the Comm O was directed to find a way." LtGen Richard E. Carey, Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Carey Comments. Colonel David S. Twining, who in January and February 1968 commanded the MASS–2 detachment at the Dong Ha DASC, recalled an investigation that he conducted concerning "a 'bad' TPQ–10 drop" in support of the 1st Air Cavalry Division. An Air Cavalry battalion had made a request for air support which had been "passed up to the 1st Air Cav TOC [Tactical Operations Center]." This agency had forwarded the request through the Seventh Air Force headquarters who then passed it to the Air Force Airborne DASC. There were no Air Force aircraft available and the request ended up at the Marine Corps Dong Ha DASC. Twining stated the "elapsed time was 72 hours and the initiating battalion had considered the request 'overtaken by events.'" The Dong Ha DASC, however, was not aware of this and sent the request to the collocated 3d Marine Division FSCC for clearance. The Marine FSCC observing that the target was in the "1st Air Cav area of responsibility, . . . called the Air Cav Division TOC for verification. This was given and the target cleared." The DASC assigned the TPQ–10 mission to a flight of Navy A–4s who struck the target about 30 minutes later. By this time the Army Air Cavalry battalion had "physically occupied" the target area. According to Twining, it was fortunate that "only unmanned helicopters were on the target when the bombs were dropped and no personnel were injured." Colonel Twining discovered in the course of his investigation at "Camp Evans that targets, air support requests and troop dispositions were not centralized at the senior TOC but rather at the battalion level. The air support coordination element was expected to query the supported battalion directly for clearance. The Army maintained a special net for this purpose but this was not known to the Marine Corps FSCC." Twining recommended that the FSCC should first check directly with requesting Army units down to battalion level and not clear any target area "for which the FSCC lacked direct and current information on friendly troops dispositions . . . ." His recommendations were not implemented. Col David S. Twining, Comments on draft, dtd 15Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**In his interview with Marine Corps historians, General Westmoreland insisted that the difficulty with air support related to the 101st Airborne Division. This apparently was incorrect as the headquarters of the 101st did not arrive in I Corps until the beginning of March. Major General Anderson is adamant that he had no problems with the 101st Division and moreover in his book, General Westmoreland mentions only the 1st Air Cavalry relative to this matter. Westmoreland intvw, 1983, p. 42; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 342–3; N. Anderson ltr, 8Sep83; Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81, pp. 192, 194–95.

***See Chapters 8 and 14 relative to the 7 February meeting.

the wing commander, his liaison officer to the Seventh Air Force had told him that General Westmoreland was about to approve a proposal for General Momyer to "take over all air operations in defense of Khe Sanh."[7]

Despite General Westmoreland's protestations about the support of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, he apparently was only waiting for an opportunity to centralize the air command in the north. Such a move fit in with the steps he had already initiated with the establishment of MACV (Forward) to assume more direct control of the northern battlefield. Admiral Sharp in his message of 18 January denying such centralized authority for Niagara had left room for the MACV commander to implement his request at a later date. On 28 January, Westmoreland implied in a message to Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, who had protested Westmoreland's earlier appeal to change the air command arrangements, that the matter was not settled. While denying that centralization of air control and resources meant an "abrogation of the traditional service roles and missions," the MACV commander observed that the new tactical situation required "careful planning and control of our air resources to assure maximum effective use of this valuable and limited resource in countering major enemy initiatives." Between 13 and 17 February, the Seventh Air Force "presumedly at the direction" of MACV issued several directives which in effect positioned General Momyer "to command and control air operations, including those of the . . . [Marine wing] in a wide area and encompassing most of Quang Tri Province."[8]

Worried about the ramifications of these messages, on 17 February 1968, Major General Anderson met at III MAF headquarters with Major General Gordon F. Blood, the Seventh Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. According to Anderson, Blood related that with the number of increasing Arclight strikes at Khe Sanh, the Seventh Air Force believed that "adequate coordination requires firm scheduling, firm targeting, and rigid control of airborne flights." Furthermore, General Momyer wanted "to establish now a control and coordination system which could handle *all* [italics in the original text] sorties that could be made available under emergency conditions." Anderson concurred with the necessity of scheduling and "indicated my willingness to proceed along these lines, to include the fixing of altitudes and orbit points as . . . means for preventing mutual interference." At that point, Blood stated that General Momyer planned to ask for the extension of the original Niagara operating area to include almost all of Quang Tri Province, including the sector east of Dong Ha, and to extend as far south as the city of Hue in Thua Thien Province. Anderson countered that was too large an area "to be directly associated with the defense of Khe Sanh."[9]

According to the 1st Wing commander, the meeting resulted "in no meeting of the minds." General Anderson fully expected the Seventh Air Force commander "to attempt to influence General Westmoreland to issue a flat order" for the 1st Wing to turn over its control and scheduling of Marine fixed-wing assets to the Air Force. While General Cushman would appeal any such order, Anderson predicted a troubled time ahead for the Marine air-ground team.[10*]

III MAF anticipated the worst. On 18 February, General Cushman sent a message to General Krulak warning that he expected continuing difficulty over air control and complained that "Momyer attacks us at every opportunity." In a private letter to General McCutcheon on the 19th, Brigadier General Earl E. Anderson, the III MAF Chief of Staff, observed that "some of our biggest battles are with the other Services, rather than with the VC and NVA." He accused Momyer of being more concerned with the "Air Force's party line," rather than "getting this job done within a reasonable period of time."[11]

The Marines did not have long to wait for the other shoe to drop. On 19 February, General Westmoreland radioed Admiral Sharp that with the reinforcement of the Army divisions in the north and the establishment of MACV (Forward) the situation required "a new and objective look at the control of tactical air." The MACV commander mentioned the added complication of the B–52 strikes further dictated "the creation of a single management arrangement." He wanted one man to bear the responsibility for this air effort and that man logically was General Momyer, who already commanded the Seventh Air Force and was his deputy for air. Westmoreland told Sharp that he had directed Momyer to develop a plan "that will give him [Momyer] control of the air assets" excluding helicopters and fixed-wing transport. The plan was to contain provisions that would permit "Marine aircraft to continue direct support to their deployed ground forces." Momyer was to coordinate his effort with III MAF.[12]

*General Earl E. Anderson remembered that he and other members of the III MAF staff attended the meeting with General Blood. He may have confused this meeting, however, with the one that occurred three days later. E. E. Anderson Comments.

On 20 February, General Momyer came to Da Nang to brief both Generals Cushman and Norman Anderson on his proposed plan to modify the air control situation. At the outset of the meeting, Momyer stated that he was there to discuss General Westmoreland's desire to have a single manager for air and to bring back to the MACV commander the III MAF perspective. In a sense, the conferees generally talked past one another.* The Marine generals emphasized responsiveness to the ground forces while General Momyer and his staff members stressed the need "to mass more of our efforts." In some frustration and obviously as a jab at the Air Force, General Cushman stated it made as much sense to centralize control of helicopters as that of fixed-wing aircraft. The Marine general knew very well that Momyer had no desire to take on the Army on this subject. The Seventh Air Force commander merely stated that helicopters were another matter and had "to be treated separately." According to the proposed outlines of the MACV plan, Momyer in his dual capacity as Commanding General, Seventh Air Force, and the MACV Deputy Commander for Air Operations, would have the responsibility for most Marine fixed-wing aviation.[13]

General Cushman immediately protested and forwarded his concerns to General Westmoreland. On 22 February, the MACV commander attempted to placate Cushman and told him that as the ground field commander in I Corps, the III MAF commander would still retain the "tactical air assets available to support your forces, subject to modifications that I might invoke as the situation dictates." At the same time, Westmoreland stated that his air deputy, Momyer, "would have general direction of all routine matters relating to the procedures for requesting, fragging and controlling air support." On the cover sheet of the message from Westmoreland, a Marine staff officer penned in green ink: "These two positions are in direct contradiction in my opinion." In Saigon, a week later, Brigadier General Chaisson jotted down in his diary: "AF [Air Force] is doing real job on III MAF. Will get op con [operational control] of wing. Very unprofessional work." The Marines had lost the fight in Saigon.[14]

The battle had shifted to Honolulu and Washington. In Washington, on 21 February, Marine Corps Commandant Leonard F. Chapman sent a memorandum to General Earle G. Wheeler, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, protesting General Westmoreland's proposed action as abrogating the Marine air-ground team and in violation of JCS directives establishing "III MAF as a separate uni-Service command directly subordinate to MACV." Wheeler in turn forwarded a copy of the memorandum to the MACV commander. As expected, Westmoreland denied that this was the case. He insisted that Marine air would support the Marine ground forces when "the tactical situation permitted." Westmoreland argued that he had now, including the Marine divisions, the equivalent of a field army in I Corps. He mentioned that the air support of these forces required large elements of the Seventh Air Force as well as the Marine aircraft wing. Because of the air campaign in support of both Khe Sanh and the allied forces in the northern two provinces, the MACV commander contended that "Marine air therefore, has become a junior air partner in the total air effort . . . ." According to Westmoreland the problem was one of "coordination and directing all of these diversified air elements so that the air support can be put where and when needed in the required quantity." This needed, the MACV commander asserted, "a single airman [obviously General Momyer] I can hold responsible for coordinating all the air effort that is made available to me." Westmoreland maintained that his proposed



Photo courtesy of Office of Air Force History

Adm U. S. Grant Sharp, CinCPac, nearly at end of his tour of duty, acquiesced to Gen Westmoreland's request for "single manager" control of air after rejecting previous proposals.

*Among the participants in the meeting were Air Force generals Momyer and Blood and Marine generals Cushman, Norman Anderson, and Earl E. Anderson.

modifications would result in "no change in Service doctrine or roles and mission."[15]

Such arguments apparently convinced Admiral Sharp at CinCPac headquarters in Honolulu to acquiesce to Westmoreland's request. On 28 February, General Westmoreland sent to Honolulu Major General Blood of the Seventh Air Force "to make sure Admiral Sharp understood the arrangement in detail." According to the MACV commander, he wanted to reassure Sharp that this was not an "Air Force maneuver," but rather his "initiative as a joint commander." This effort apparently counterbalanced any influence that the Marines may have had in Hawaii to reverse the decision. Lieutenant General Krulak, the FMFPac commander whose headquarters was in the same building as that of Admiral Sharp, admitted his failure to persuade the Navy admiral. According to Krulak, Sharp refused to listen to the Marine case, "telling me that he already knows our side, and anyhow, that Westy is a big commander, and should have what he wants." In a later interview, Admiral Sharp declared that he approved the single manager concept because with the arrival of large Army forces in I Corps, he "thought it a reasonable thing to do."[16]

On 4 March, MACV learned that Admiral Sharp had approved the single manager concept. Marine Brigadier General Chaisson at the MACV Combat Operations Center received the assignment to prepare the final directive. Two days later, Major General Anderson, the 1st Wing commander, sent his assistant commander, Brigadier General Robert P. Keller to Saigon to iron-out any remaining differences. According to General Anderson, the Marines proposed "slightly more palatable language" and some alterations in a couple "wiring diagrams," but no substantive changes. Although apparently acceptable to some of the MACV staff, Air Force Major General Blood, supported by Generals Momyer and Westmoreland, vetoed the III MAF proposed alterations. General Momyer and his staff planned to hold on to every advantage they had obtained and viewed the single manager issue as a "catalyst for change."[17]

With only minor revisions, Westmoreland's implementing order differed very little from the proposal that he had forwarded to CinCPac. Admiral Sharp had insisted that the senior DASC in I Corps retain "scramble" and "divert" authority in the event of emergency and that Lieutenant General Cushman be permitted to communicate directly with CinCPac on "proposed improvements in the system or in event of his dissatisfaction with the employment of Marine air assets." According to the directive, CinCPac would be an addressee on any message from Cushman to Westmoreland on this subject. Contrary to the assertion by the ComUSMACV commander that he had given due consideration to the Marine perspective, the III MAF staff denied that General Westmoreland in his forwarding letter provided any evidence of its "violent disagreement."[18]

Published on 7 March, to be implemented three days later, in the form of a letter from General Westmoreland to General Cushman with six enclosures, the single manager directive outlined the new aviation command arrangements. Westmoreland officially placed with General Momyer the "responsibility for coordinating and directing the air effort throughout Vietnam, to include I CTZ and the extended battle area." General Cushman was to make available to Momyer as the MACV Deputy Commander for Air Operations, all strike and reconnaissance aircraft and that part of the Marine air command and control system that related to the employment of these aircraft. Marine fixed-wing transports, observation aircraft, and helicopters were exempted from the directive. According to the order, the MACV and III MAF control systems were to be joined for fixed-wing jet operations, but retain the "integrity of the Marine tactical control system . . . ." Marine aviation officers were to augment the various Air Force/MACV control systems. These included the MACV Tactical Air Support Element (TASE) and Seventh Air Force Tactical Air Control Center (TACC), both located at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon; the I DASC that the Seventh Air Force maintained at I Corps headquarters in Da Nang; and DASC Victor that the Seventh Air Force maintained at Phu Bai for the MACV (Forward) headquarters, soon to become Provisional Corps, Vietnam.[19*]

The concept was that preplanned requests for fixed-wing air support from lower commands be consolidated at the I Corps tactical operations center, and then forwarded to the MACV TASE. In Saigon, the TASE would then determine the allocation of strikes to the various commands and send this list to the Seventh Air Force TACC. The TACC in turn would assign the targets to specific air units, establish ordnance loads, and time on target.

As much as the tactical situation permitted, "every effort would be made to have Marine aircraft support Marine units." At the end of his letter, General West-

*See Chapters 8 and 13 for the establishment of the MACV Forward and Provisional Corps headquarters.

moreland declared that these instructions "will be reviewed within thirty days to determine those technical and organizational changes which may prove necessary as a result of experience in this single management system."[20]

Despite the decision and the issuance of the order on single manager, there were still several rough edges to its implementation. Major General Anderson observed that III MAF did not receive a copy of the directive until 9 March and then only through the personal intervention of General Abrams, who was still at Phu Bai. On the morning of the 9th as well, III MAF received from the Seventh Air Force interim instructions for procedures relative to Marine fixed-wing strike sorties and the incorporation of these sorties into the Seventh Air Force daily "frag" or fragmentary order. According to the Marine wing commander, the Air Force wanted specific information on number of Marine aircraft, flight schedules, and sortie rates. At this point, the Marine fighter and fighter/attack aircraft remained exempt from the Air Force frag, but "were told to continue our operations and cross-tell with I DASC who in turn would keep the TACC informed."[21]

General Anderson, the wing commander, was especially unhappy about the employment of the Marine photo reconnaissance and electronic warfare aircraft of VMCJ–1. According to Anderson, the Air Force ignored the radar and electronic capability of the squadron but informed the Marine wing that it planned to reevaluate current photo reconnaissance missions. Future requests for planned photo missions were to go to the III MAF G–2 (Intelligence) (Air) section and then forwarded to the Seventh Air Force TACC. The TACC would then publish the missions and sorties in the frag order it issued to the wing. General Anderson related that the wing then reported daily by phone and by followup message the activities of the squadron. When the photo aircraft were airborne, they came under the control of the particular DASC in the target area. The MACV TASE had the authority to divert any of the aircraft from any of the DASCs.[22*]

On 11 March, the Seventh Air Force I DASC at I Corps headquarters and DASC Victor at Phu Bai announced that they were now functioning under the new system and had assumed control of air operations. I DASC stated that its mission was "to furnish more equitably distributed air support throughout I Corps." Major General Anderson, the wing commander remarked caustically that DASC Victor was more "modest." It merely stated that it had assumed "control for PCV [Provisional Corps Vietnam] area." On the 11th and the 16th, General Anderson met with the director of the Seventh Air Force TACC to discuss the eventual location of I DASC and the phasing in of the Marine Corps system with that of the Air Force. General Anderson wanted to collocate the I DASC with the 1st MAW Tactical Air Direction Center (TADC) in the wing compound and recommended a three-stage implementation. The first stage would consist of improving the information exchange between the TADC and I DASC so that the latter could transmit the necessary data back to Saigon. In the second stage, the U.S. sector of I DASC would be located in the 1st MAW G–3 building and then in the final stage would be the collocation of I DASC with the III MAF DASC and 1st MAW TADC. The Air Force agreed to the first two phases as a temporary measure, but recommended that the permanent location of the III MAF and I

*Colonel Robert W. Lewis, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded VMCJ–1 until mid March, remembered that he was "in the middle of the air control furor." He recalled that "in early March we started to get our photo recon taskings from Saigon. That meant that a Marine battalion commander who wanted imagery to his front had to wait 2–3 days for a response. When there was a hot operation on we carried the 7th Air Force missions with us in the airplane along with those slipped under the table to us by our int[elligence] briefers. Usually we had time to complete most of the Saigon missions. I, or one of my more experienced pilots, flew the 'weather hop' at first light every morning and it was a simple matter to call back to Da Nang and tell them to brief and launch the subsequent photo missions at the Marine hot spots, where we had observed the weather to be suitable for good picture taking." Lewis wrote that the Seventh Air Force TACC "did not understand that immediate photos were required if effective CAS [close air support] was to happen." According to Colonel Lewis, "during the early days of the battle for Khe Sanh we would make a low level run on the airfield perimeter and approaches once an hour, have the film to our photo interpreters 20 minutes later, and immediately advise the 26th Marines intel. section what the threat had been 30 minutes before. You can't do that with 2-day tasking." He stated that the squadron tried to make the system work "to the benefit of our Marines on the ground. During those periods when enemy contact was light we would aggressively execute the Saigon photo plan—it did have a strategic, theater intelligence benefit. However, when Marines were in heavy contact anywhere in I Corps TAOR they got all they requested from us. Often we would arrange for a courier helicopter to drop by Da Nang, pick up negatives which were exposed 20 minutes before and deliver them to III MAF intel. We didn't, however have to rely on III MAF to pass intel. to the ground units. We had photo interpreters assigned to VMCJ–1 and they would read wet negatives shortly after the RF–4B landed. Hot items would then be passed directly to the unit involved (in some cases). We would then deliver all the imagery to III MAF for further delivery to intelligence units in RVN, Hawaii and ConUS. What they ever did with all those pictures we never knew. No I Corps ground units ever saw them." Col Robert W. Lewis, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File).

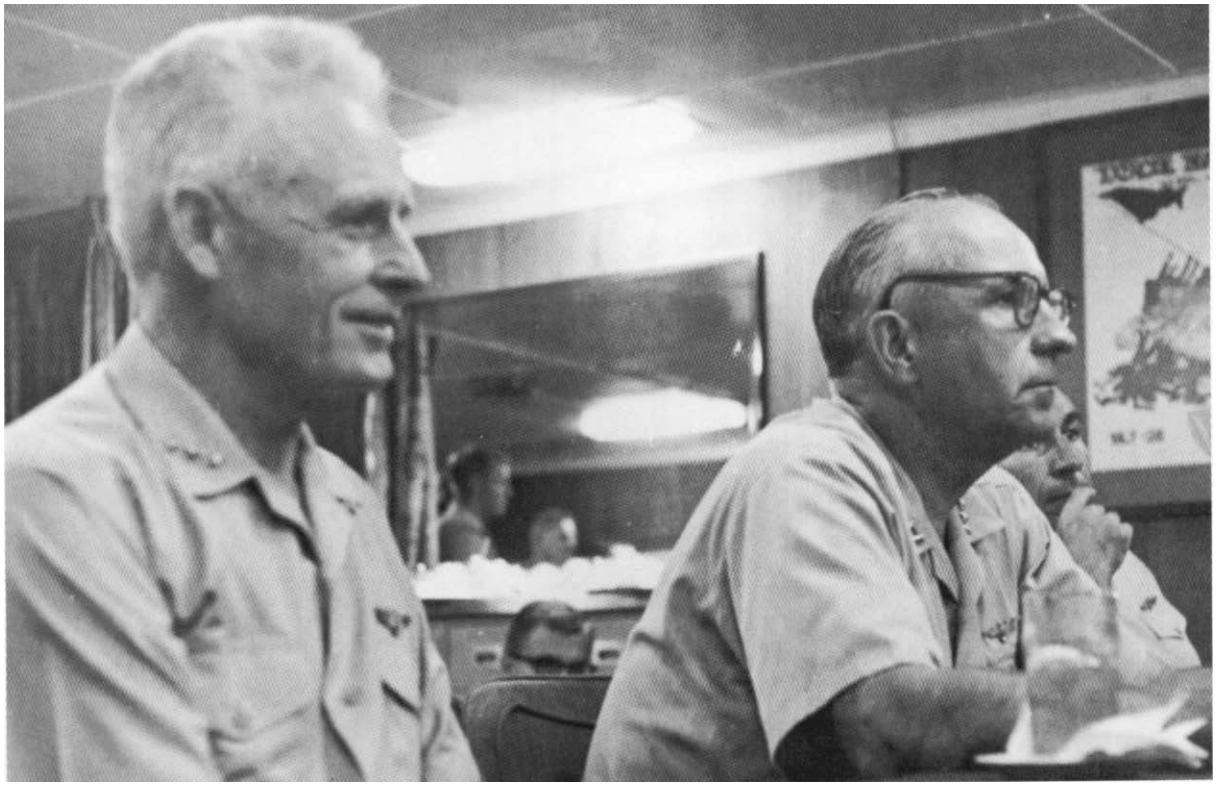
DASC air control agencies should be at III MAF headquarters rather than in the 1st Wing compound. General Cushman and his staff supported the Air Force rather than the wing commander relative to the location of the I Corps DASC at III MAF.[23]

While the question of the location of I DASC remained in abeyance, on 18 March 1968, Major General Anderson in a message to both Generals Cushman and General Krulak outlined what he considered the weakness of single manager to date. In fact, according to the 1st MAW commander, the system was not working. Anderson believed that MACV and the Seventh Air Force, "in the haste to implement the procedure," overlooked too many details and the necessary air control facilities were simply not prepared to take on their new tasks. Anderson admitted, however, that the Marine and Air Force agencies were identifying and sorting out many of the problems and that the wing was receiving "more cooperation than expected." The wing commander promised to "provide information, assistance, and assets as requested and required to make the actual transition as smooth as possible." At the same time, he declared "until such time as 7th AF/MACV can formulate, man, and put into being a modus operandi for I Corps, the wing will continue to do what is needed to operate and provide the necessary support." As he concluded, "I see no other way to go, without causing undue risk to our ground Marine currently in critical contact."[24]

The following day, in a personal note to General McCutcheon, Major General Anderson enclosed his report of the first week's operations under single manager that he had forwarded to General Cushman. The wing commander half humorously wrote: "If it reads in a disjointed fashion, and therefore gives the impression of describing a disjointed maneuver, it is a perfect piece of writing." He observed that for III MAF and the wing the subject of single manager was a "closed issue. We have to, always hoping that you will be more effective in Washington than anyone else has been up the line." In an earlier letter, Anderson had assured McCutcheon that "we will break our backs to

Adm Thomas H. Moorer, Chief of Naval Operations, center, visits with VAdm William F. Bringle, Seventh Fleet Commande, left. Adm Moorer, like the Commandant of the Marine Corps and Army Chief of Staff, supported the Marine position on single manager.

Unnumbered Department of Defense (USMC) Photo



provide you with both fact and fancy if you should decide to go this route."[25]

In many respects, the entire question of single manager had passed out of the hands of both the III MAF and Fleet Marine Force Pacific commands to influence. After Admiral Sharp approved the single manager directive, Lieutenant General Krulak advised General Cushman about future actions on the subject. Krulak told the III MAF commander to reassure General Westmoreland "that even a poor decision will have your energetic and unreserved support." At the same time, the FMFPac commander directed that Cushman assemble "an honest record of the Air Force stewardship of our assets." Krulak then mentioned that he put Admiral Sharp "on notice that he could be in for trouble," and that the latter had exceeded his authority in approving the single manager directive.[26]

In Washington, General Chapman and the HQMC staff had already begun its counterattack. On 4 March, upon learning of Admiral Sharp's decision, the Marine Corps Commandant officially placed the matter before the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In a memorandum to the Chairman, General Wheeler, the Commandant protested both the Westmoreland directive and its approval by Admiral Sharp. Chapman argued "irrespective of the various organizational formats and terms of reference, the net effect . . . is to remove Marine fighter/bomber/reconnaissance assets from being directly responsive to CG III MAF." The Commandant closed with the statement that he could not "concur in such an arrangement" and asked that the Joint Chiefs review the entire subject. Like General Krulak, the Commandant maintained that both General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp had exceeded their authority relative to Marine air in Vietnam.[27]

The Marines could expect some assistance in the "joint arena" from at least the Navy. Despite Admiral Sharp's approval of the directive, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, the Chief of Naval Operations, and Vice Admiral John J. Hyland, commander of the Seventh Fleet, both had doubts about the wisdom of the decision. Hyland feared that now that Westmoreland had obtained control over Marine air, that he might want to obtain similar authority over the Navy's carrier aircraft. He also worried about the MACV commander's intentions about Navy and Marine amphibious forces and Navy gunfire ships in Vietnamese waters. Moorer wondered why, if the Air Force was so dedicated to centralized control, it had not placed its B–52 SAC forces under the centralized command. In any event, Moorer remarked that he would support the Marine Corps position with the Joint Chiefs.[28]

While the single manager controversy never formally went beyond the Department of Defense, General Westmoreland remembered that shortly after the publication of the directive, he received a telephone call from President Johnson. According to the MACV commander, the President asked him bluntly, "Are you screwing the Marines?" Westmoreland claimed he explained the reasons for his decision and the President apparently accepted for the time being his rationale. In his book, the MACV commander wrote that the single manager was the one issue "to prompt me to consider resigning."[29*]

Although MACV made no public announcement about the new air command relations, the press soon had the news. According to one account, the Air Force released the story. The article included statements from both Marine aviators and ground commanders. One Marine air commander allegedly said, "Why, oh why, did they have to do this to us at this time? . . . [we]are nose deep in problems of fighting the Reds and now we have to take on the Air Force too." The reporter quoted a "mud-spattered" Marine battalion commander declaring, "now we are faced with the tragic aspect of having this Marine air-ground team broken asunder simply because of the ambitions of the Air Force brass." As would be expected, Air Force officers welcomed the change, one saying, "The Marines have different ways of doing things than we do . . . some may be better ways, others worse, but now all are under one system with increased efficiency and effectiveness."[30]

Senior Marine officers speculated about the reasons behind the news releases and what their reaction should be. According to Lieutenant General Krulak, Marine commanders should remain silent: "Now that the word is out, there are others who will take the Air Force to task." Krulak believed that the "Air Force erred in making a public announcement which could only be abrasive, and could have no beneficial effect." Brigadier General E. E. Anderson, the III MAF Chief of Staff, stated that he had not been able to locate any Air Force announcement. General Cushman observed that his bet was that there was no public statement: "Spike [Air Force General Momyer] is not that

*Army historian Graham A. Cosmas noted that by this time, March 1968, "Westmoreland's resignation was somewhat academic, since his departure from MACV was announced on the 22d [March 1968]." Dr. Graham A. Cosmas, Comments on draft, dtd 23Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Cosmas Comments.

gauche. Stupid, he ain't." In a later message, General Krulak remarked that HQMC learned from the Department of Defense Public Affairs office that it had no knowledge about an announcement relative to the single-manager issue. The FMFPac commander suspected that the reporter was trying to use the guise of a press statement, "to lend an official flavor to what appears to be a leak."[31]

While the story about the change in air control arrangements received some play in the press, it for the most part remained somewhat muted as did the single-manager issue for a time. Part of the reason may have been that the single-manager system remained in a somewhat grey zone until the later part of March. According to the MACV command history, that although the directive was issued on 7 March, the actual preplanning only began on 21 March and the first programmed missions did not occur until 22 March. MACV considered the entire period from 10 March, when the single manager system supposedly went into effect, until the end of the month, "a period for training and indoctrinating air crews and controller personnel."[32]

Major General Anderson, the wing commander, had a harsher judgement. On 23 March, Anderson reported to Generals Cushman and Krulak that the past week had been one of "initial confusion. This had to be expected in view of the urge to implement without proper and prior planning." The wing commander gave specific examples. On the night of 21–22 March, I DASC scrambled three flights of Marine attack and fighter/attack aircraft "for what was termed an immediate mission." A planned rendezvous with a flare and a forward control aircraft over Laos failed to occur and the Marine planes returned to base nearly out of fuel. According to Anderson, a ground radar TPQ team provided one of the Marine flight sections with a secondary mission, but the other two sections jettisoned their ordnance. On the following day, 22 March, I DASC told the Marine TADC that several sorties planned for the 1st Marine Division, "had been canceled by the 'user'." The 1st Division air officer, however, denied making any such request and declared the division "wanted all the air that it could get." Anderson also mentioned problems with obtaining clearance from the Air Force Khe Sanh airborne command and control center (ABCCC). On two occasions, the ABCCC diverted two A6As from missions in support of Khe Sanh because of bad weather. Apparently the Air Force controllers were unaware of the capability of the A6A to operate under all weather conditions.[33]

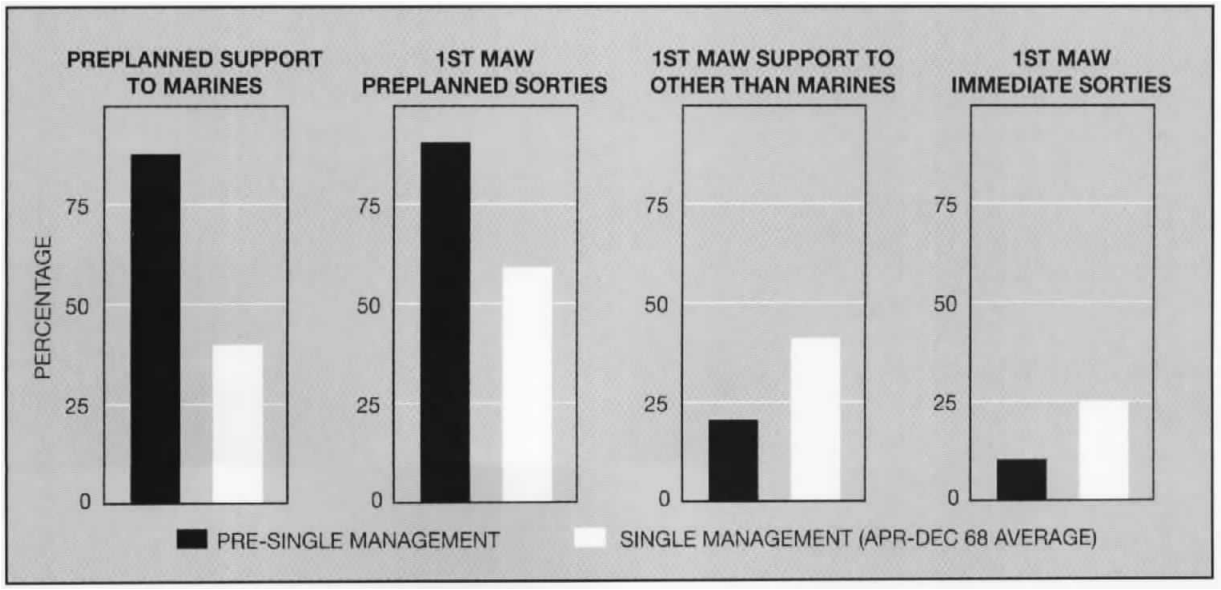
Anderson mentioned that the new system also began to place an added strain on Marine air control resources. Because of the necessity to send personnel to help man the Air Force control centers, the Marine wing decided to close its Chu Lai DASC.* The Americal Division immediately protested and asked the wing to reconsider or "to provide them some means to replace our control." General Anderson reactivated the DASC in the interim until the Air Force decided how it was going to take over. The wing commander also mentioned problems of overcrowding and air traffic control problems at the Phu Bai terminal. While the Army and Air Force helped with equipment and the assignment of additional personnel, Anderson suggested that the Marines might want to consider "a possible withdrawal of some of our air control assets from northern I CTZ." With the expansion of Army forces north of the Hai Van Pass, General Anderson argued that the Marines were not a major logistical and support organization and would be better off to realign to the south; "refurbish and reestablish a mount out capability; and reduce to some extent the stretch we have on our current personnel assets."[34]

These and many other questions about the implications of single manager remained largely unanswered during this initial period. On 25 March, at the weekly meeting of the Joint Chiefs, General Chapman** formally brought up the subject. Major General McCutcheon accompanied the Commandant and made the presentation before the Chiefs. Generals Wheeler, the Chairman, and Harold K. Johnson, the Army Chief of Staff, were both absent. Major General Haines, Army Deputy Chief of Staff, represented the Army; General John P. McConnell, the Air Force Chief of Staff, the Air Force; and Admiral Moorer, the Navy. According to both Generals Chapman and McCutcheon, the reception was much what they expected. Admiral Moorer openly supported the Marines. The two Marine generals believed that the Army's actual position was favor-

*According to the wing commander, he provided two additional naval aviators to the Seventh Air Force TACC in Saigon making for a total of four to assist with the daily frag order. He also provided seven personnel each to I DASC and DASC Victor: two lieutenant colonels, six captains or lieutenants, and six noncommissioned officers. CG1stMAW to CGFMFPac and CGIIIMAF, dtd 23Mar68, Doc No. 23, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 15–27 Mar68.

**While not a formal member of the Joint Chiefs at that time, the Marine Corps Commandant had a vote on all matters relating to the Marine Corps, which was usually interpreted in the broadest terms. For all practical purposes, the Commandant was a sitting member of the Joint Chiefs.

EFFECTS OF SINGLE MANAGEMENT ON MARINE FIXED-WING OPERATIONS IN ICTZ



Source: FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68.

able but that it had "probably made some sort of a deal with the Air Force and in all probability go 'agin' us." They had no doubt what General McConnell's stance would be. General McCutcheon also assumed that the chairman, General Wheeler, "was locked in concrete against us." Actually the meeting resolved little. General McConnell suggested that no vote on the subject be made until the return of General Wheeler. General Chapman agreed and observed that he would "get McCutcheon to pitch to him [Wheeler] as soon as I can corner him." According to General McCutcheon, the "die has been cast, we are on record in the JCS and the Commandant will continue the fight."[35]

Point, Counterpoint

Although touching upon several themes including legal and doctrinal aspects, the "strongest single factor" of the Marine Corps argument against the single manager system was responsiveness. According to Major General McCutcheon, "there isn't any doubt about it that when you add more layers to the system it is bound to take more time. We are making a big-to-do about this." On 26 March, he observed to both Generals E. E. and Norman Anderson that it "was absolutely necessary" that they record "in great detail what [air] you put in for, and when, and what you actually get and when." The Commandant reinforced this request in a formal message to General Krulak, remarking that Marine commanders needed to keep detailed records: "We need an audit trail that will stand up under any scrutiny."[36]

Major General Anderson needed little encouragement. On 27 March, he began a daily summary on a statistical and narrative account of the workings of the single manager system. This was in addition to the weekly reports that he already had submitted to both FMFPac and Headquarters, Marine Corps. In early April, General Anderson began to draft for General Cushman an evaluation of the single manager system. He reviewed the workings of the system for the last three weeks of March. The Marine general observed that neither I DASC nor DASC Victor was ready to operate when they claimed they were up and running. According to the Marine command, "Facilities were not ready, and personnel not assigned, and no chance to test communication and equipment."[37*]

*Different Marine aviation tactical commanders had different impressions about the single manager imbroglio at the time. Brigadier General Harry T. Hagaman, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded VMFA–323 from January into May 1968, recalled that he was, "acutely aware of the Air Force effort to single manage Marine air in I Corps." He stated that during this period, the first wing "directed MAG–12, MAG–13, and MAG–11 to document all delays and frequency changes that we were required to make when working with Air Force controllers." General Hagaman remembered that in the second part of March when single manager went into effect, "there were some delays in getting 'on target' because of the increased communication requirement." BGen Harry T.

Because of the existing tactical situation, the Marines continued until 21 March operating under their old procedures. Anderson then offered some comparisons between Marine air support during the first part of the month under its system and that since the 21st under single management. According to the wing commander, a reduction of Marine sorties occurred in support of Marine divisions from 212 for the period 1 through 11 March to 177 for the corresponding number of days from 21 through 31 March. At the same time, the 1st MAW's fixed-wing sorties in support of other forces increased from 135 for the first 20 days of the month to 154 for the last 10 days. Anderson observed that the Seventh Air Force under single management had established a rate of 1.2 sorties per aircraft per day. He remarked that he was considering asking for an exemption to this rate because of the need to increase air support for the ground forces.[38*]

The basic Marine complaint, however, revolved around the requirements for preplanned missions, especially in support of the Marine divisions. The Marine command believed the entire process too cumbersome and unresponsive. According to the procedures outlined by the Seventh Air Force, a preplanned mission required a submission by the ground unit anywhere from 38 hours to over 50 hours before the mission was to be flown. This contrasted with the old III MAF system, which permitted a ground commander to make his preplanned request as late as 2000 of the night before.[39]

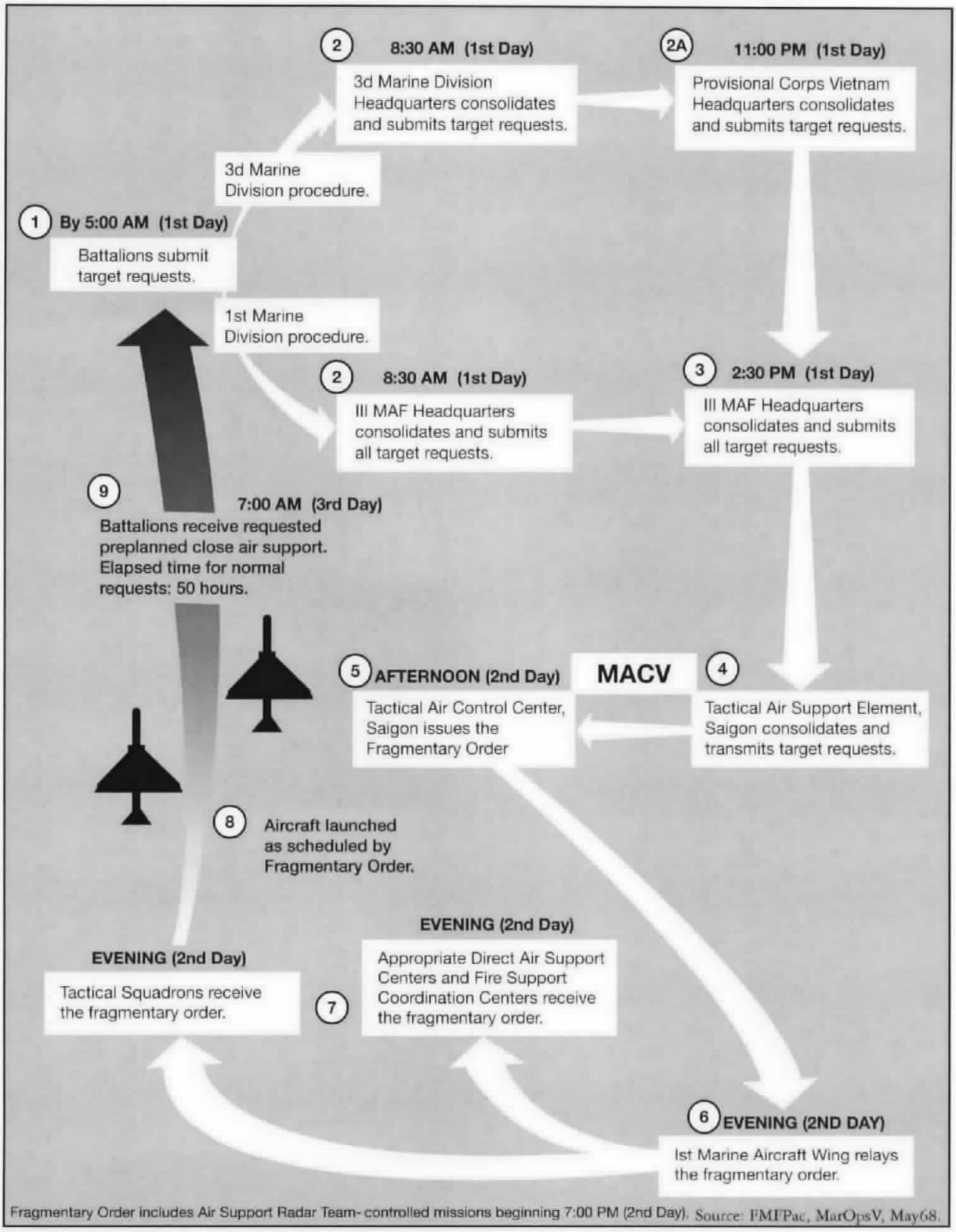
In a representative preplanned mission under the new system, a Marine battalion commander would submit his target list through his regiment to the division at 0500 on the first day. At 0830, the division would then consolidate all the requests and forward them to the next higher echelon. In the case of the 3d Marine Division it would send its requests on to Provisional Corps, Vietnam, who in turn at 1100 would route them to III MAF. The 1st Marine Division would transmit its requests directly to III MAF. III MAF would then combine them into one list and relay it about 1430 of the first day on to the MACV TASE. The TASE would in turn reroute the approved request list to the Seventh Air Force TACC to prepare the frag order which would not be issued until the afternoon of the second day. It would be evening of the second day before I DASC or the 1st MAW TADC would retransmit the frag order to the proper DASCs and fire support agencies as well as to the tactical air units. During this process, each of the higher headquarters had the authority to determine priorities or even eliminate requests with the possibility of the battalion commander not knowing whether his request had been approved or not. In any event, it would usually not be before 0700 of the third day before that battalion commander received his air strike.[40] (See Chart).

During April, the numbers appeared to confirm the Marine complaints. According to Marine compiled statistics for the month, the MACV TASE and Seventh Air Force TACC only scheduled 1,547 out of the 4,331 or 36 percent of the targets requested by III MAF ground commanders. Of the remaining targets, American aircraft carried out strikes on only 680 or 44 percent of them. Instead of the preplanned strikes, Marine ground commanders had to rely on 2,682 "diverts" or unscheduled strikes which made up 58 percent of the total tactical sorties flown in support of the Marine ground units.[41]

Hagaman, Comments on draft, dtd 30Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).On the other hand, Colonel Dean Wilker, who commanded MAG–12 at Chu Lai until early March just before the implementation of single manager, wrote: "While I knew the relations between MACV/USAF and Navy/USMC were not in accord, I did not know to what extent. We flew our missions as fragged and had few problems communicating with the Wing or the forces we supported. I credit the Wing & its control centers for making it simple for us." Col Dean Wilker, Comments on draft, dtd 18Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

*According to Colonel Joel E. Bonner, the 1st MAW G–3, "the 7th Air Force stated they were manned, supplied and funded to provide 1.2 sorties per available aircraft per day and were rigidly enforcing such a rate in order to sustain their effort over the long term." Bonner argued that "such a statement makes sense at the Air War College and to budget analysts but is not worth anything when there is a fight ongoing and Air Strikes will reduce casualties." He observed that the "1st MAW flew more than 2.0 sorties per available aircraft almost on a daily basis. 7th Air Force stated on more than one occasion that 1st MAW was wasting their resources—but 1st MAW never ran out!!!" Furthermore Colonel Bonner wrote, "the Air Force explained that the 1.2 sortie rate was to be computed on the expected available aircraft for the day. For example: 12 aircraft are expected to be available out of 24 assigned aircraft. A 1.2 sortie rate would provide 14.4 sorties for the frag order. If you change the sortie rate from available to assigned the number of sorties for the Frag Order is 28. This was a problem with the planners in the wing versus the planners at 7th Air Force." Bonner Comments. Lieutenant General Carey, who worked for Colonel Bonner in the G–3 section of the wing in 1968 as a lieutenant colonel, recalled that during the transition period into single management that he "received a call from Saigon, allegedly by direct instruction of Gen Momyer (as I recall at the time I thought the caller identified himself as Gen Momyer) that we were exceeding the desired sortie rate and that we should back off (in rather strong language). I informed him that I was taking my direction from Gen Anderson to give the Marines what they asked for and unless Gen Anderson instructed me otherwise, which I sincerely doubted he would, that was what I was going to do! I never heard from Saigon again and the Marine requests were all filled." Carey Comments.

USAF SYSTEM FOR PREPLANNED AIR REQUESTS AFTER 10 MARCH 1968



From Operations of US Marine Forces Vietnam 1968.

On 5 April 1968, Marine assistant wing commander, Brigadier General Henry W. Hise,* contrasted the difference between Marine responsiveness and that of the Air Force. According to Hise, the Air Force achieved "rapid response and flexibility by diverting sorties." He observed, however, that the air commander often did not consult the ground commander, "for whom the aircraft were originally scheduled . . . ." The Marine general called this depriving "one ground unit of vital support to aid another." He also declared this often resulted in an improper mix of ordnance to accomplish the mission. In comparison, the Marine system also permitted the diversion of airborne aircraft but only after receiving the acquiescence of the ground unit commander. For the most part, Marine aviation responded "to increased requirements by scrambles off the hot pad." According to Hise, the Marines had "the responsiveness of diverts without depriving a ground commander of possibly crucial support and . . . [provided] additional sorties over normal schedules to meet unforeseen needs." Furthermore, General Hise pointed out Marine aircraft on the "hot pad" could be fitted out with the proper ordnance to accomplish the mission.[42]

III MAF was not the only command unhappy with the progress of the single-manager system. On 5 April, Army Major General Willard Pearson, the Deputy Commander of Provisional Corps, indicated to General Anderson that the new system was not working well in the northern two provinces of I Corps. In response on this date as well to General Cushman's complaints about the workings of the system, General Westmoreland acknowledged that single manager was undergoing "technical and procedural difficulties . . . ." He understood, however, things were improving. The MACV commander observed that from his perspective that there was "not enough tactical air capability in the RVN to provide all commanders all the air support they would like to have." He concluded his message that he expected to receive from the III MAF commander an evaluation of the system at the end of the month as to whether single manager was meeting III MAF requirements and if the "I DASC operation falls short in any respect."[43]

In Washington, on 5 April, the full Joint Chiefs of Staff again took up the single-management issue, this time with both the Chairman, General Wheeler, and the Army Chief of Staff, General Johnson, in attendance. At the meeting, much to the surprise and delight of the Marine Corps, General Johnson reversed the Army position and supported the Marines. In the final vote, only General Wheeler and the Air Force Chief of Staff, General McConnell, favored single manager. At a second session of the JCS three days later, General McCutcheon, who attended both meetings, related that General Wheeler attempted "to float" a compromise position indicating that the Seventh Air Force operational control of Marine fixed-wing sorties was a "temporary expedient and when the emergency was over the status quo would be resumed." General Chapman argued if that were the case the emergency was over and that the Marines should resume control of their assets. Wheeler rejected that proposition. According to McCutcheon, "so as at the moment the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps are lined up against the Air Force and the Chairman has weakened the position to the temporary gimmick." The next step was to send the matter up to the Secretary of Defense. McCutcheon concluded: "I feel better about it [single-manager dispute] than I have in a long time."[44]

In Washington, General Chapman decided to outline formally the Marine Corps position on single manager and its status to senior Marine commanders. In a "green letter" (so named because of the color of the paper) to all Marine general officers, the Commandant reviewed the initiation of the single-manager system over the protests of all Marine commands and his actions in the JCS. He declared there was an "essential difference between the Marine and Air Force concepts of air control and air support . . . ." Chapman emphasized in most strong terms that for Marines, air is "a supporting arm" which was to be employed "directly responsive to the ground commander . . . ." He believed this basic Marine concept had been set aside and would result in "increased enemy success, increased friendly casualties, and decreased advancement of the war effort." The Commandant viewed that the "integrity" of the Marine air-ground team and "even our force structure" was at stake. While asking all Marine officers to "face this challenge resolutely to forestall any future inroads" on the Corps, he ordered them not to comment on the subject, "either officially or unofficially," and to refer all queries especially from the press to Headquarters, Marine Corps. With the JCS split on the subject and the possible requirement of a Secretary of Defense decision to settle the matter, Chapman mentioned, "we're preparing for that eventuality now."[45]

*Brigadier General Hise, one of the two assistant wing commanders, stated that because of his previous experience on the Joint Staff of the JCS, General Anderson, the wing commander, used him to argue the Marine case in the single manager dispute. Hise Comments.

In Honolulu, Lieutenant General Krulak was not sanguine about the probability of the Secretary of Defense overruling Westmoreland. As he told General Cushman, he expected the Secretary to hold a hearing on the subject, but "knowing how those things operate, I do not believe that General Wheeler would have permitted the matter to [go] forward to SecDef [Secretary of Defense] without first laying the groundwork for the decision he seeks." Krulak suggested to General Cushman another alternative means of attack. He recommended that the III MAF commander should avail himself of the "complaint channel to CinCPac," referring to the 30-day evaluation period called for in the initiating directive. Since all concerned agreed that the system had not really been implemented until 22 March, this would extend the original trial period until 22 April. General Krulak warned: "When we go down this track, we have to have the aces to a degree that will make it absolutely impossible for CinCPac to ignore us or brush us off."[46]

The FMFPac commander then proceeded to advise both Generals Cushman and Anderson about how to proceed. He counseled that General Anderson as the senior aviation commander for III MAF should begin his presentation with Marine concurrence to the proposition that within a joint force there should be "single management" in that the senior Air Force commander should be the joint commander's "coordinating authority for all air operations." As far as matters relating to air defense and to the interdiction air campaign over Laos and North Vietnam, there was no debate that there should be a single authority. Krulak then observed, however, that Anderson needed to stress that for the Marine commander, "his air support is as inseparable to his combat team as is his artillery, his tanks, or even his infantryman's M16." He then pointed out that the Marine commander made close air support a "cardinal element in his tactical plan, and, if it is diverted to meet a need elsewhere his operation is compromised."[47]

General Krulak then cautioned the III MAF commanders not to get into a pure numbers game of how many sorties were flown and ordnance dropped, but rather to provide the context for the statistics. For example, he declared that in the case of immediate requests for support, the single-manager system

LtGen Lewis W. Walt, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, talks to Marines during a visit to Vietnam. LtGen Walt made a strong presentation of the Marine position to Gen Westmoreland.

Photo from the Abel Collection



appeared to be working. For the period 3–12 April, the new air control agencies approved over 90 percent of them and that over 75 percent of the tactical air support aircraft arrived within 30 minutes of the request and usually with an acceptable bomb or ordnance load. Contrasting these figures to those relative to preplanned missions, Krulak contended that the "Marines were being shortchanged." For the same period in April, the Seventh Air Force TACC only scheduled 36 percent of the targets desired by ground commanders, and of the remaining targets, only 51 percent of the missions scheduled against them were carried out. According to the FMFPac commander, nearly 41 percent of the total sorties were extra and not requested by the ground commander, "who could neither preplan for this surge effort nor influence the selection of the ordnance available." Krulak then concluded with the observation that 42 percent of the preplanned sorties carried out were more than 15 minutes late: "This is unacceptable and compromises the basic principle of integrating totally all available fire power."[48]

Perhaps partially influenced by Krulak's message, but largely on their own initiative, III MAF and the 1st MAW had begun the process of evaluating the single-manager process and forwarding their conclusions to higher headquarters. On 22 April, General Cushman sent a preliminary message to General Westmoreland to go on record with his unhappiness with the system. At the same time, Major General Anderson, the wing commander, prepared a lengthy presentation for the III MAF commander with the possibility of giving it later to the MACV commander.[49]

Anderson stated the usual Marine arguments. After interviewing more than 70 Marine officers involved with the new procedures, he expanded upon his themes with specific case studies. While acknowledging that the Marine divisions by the beginning of April reported that air response to immediate requests had improved, Anderson maintained that even this part of the new system did not work as well as the statistics implied. He cited an air observer who spotted enemy troops "running across a bomb crater one at a time." The observer called the Marine DASC and asked for air strikes, stating that he had a "good target." Before he finished speaking, the DASC provided him with some A–4s. At about the time the A–4s were to reach the designated rendezvous point, the Marine DASC radioed the observer back and stated "they had to take the planes away because the new DASC said they had to go through them to get planes. It was 45 minutes after we asked for the air that we finally got it on target." In another case, Anderson quoted the Marine officer in charge of the Khe Sanh DASC recounting that "there was this Air Force Lieutenant Colonel at Ca Lu who said I had to get airplanes through him, that was very slow. Then there was Colonel Lownds who needed air and needed it bad. I just did what I had to do." General Anderson contended that the only reason there were no more problems with the immediate response procedures was because "people at the lower echelons, finding themselves faced with an unwieldy and unresponsive system, were simply forced to circumvent it."[50]

Anderson reserved his greatest criticism, however, for the single-manager preplanned missions and their long lead time. The wing commander quoted a battalion forward aircraft controller as saying, "They are telling us now that we have to turn in our CAS [close air support] request this afternoon for the day after tomorrow. We didn't know this morning what we were going to do this afternoon." An infantry battalion commander remarked, "When you are moving, your air has to be flexible, now I have to program myself so far ahead that the air mission doesn't fix anything." General Anderson contrasted the 80 percent of preplanned targets hit under the former Marine system with the slightly over 50 percent under single manager.[51]

Finally, the wing commander ended with three general criticisms. According to Anderson, single manager was "far less responsive to our tactical needs, it has small provision for coordination of air with the total effort, and it increases the administrative burden." As an example of the latter, he compared the 50-page frag order coming out of the Seventh Air Force TACC with that of the former nine-page frag order published by the wing. Anderson concluded that the new system accomplished little that the former Marine system did not do better, especially in support of ground Marines.[52]

In early May, General Cushman forwarded to General Westmoreland in message form many of the concerns that General Anderson had expressed in his formal presentation. Cushman basically stated that his analysis of the period 1–30 April drew him to the following conclusions. While response time may have improved, it occurred only because DASCs had diverted aircraft from preplanned targets. Marines had scrambled some aircraft in certain cases to cover the diverted missions. He again expressed dissatisfaction with the long lead time for preplanned missions. He protested the fact that while the number of Marine air-

craft "fragged" for Army units increased every day, the number of "Air Force sorties remained significantly below the programmed level established for Army battalions." Finally, the III MAF commander recommended "that management of Marine strike and reconnaissance aircraft . . . be returned to me and the workable procedures outlined in [MACV directive 95–4] be reinstituted."[53]

The Seventh Air Force evaluation of the system contrasted sharply with that of the Marines. General Momyer's command reported no significant problems "other than those associated with training and familiarity with a new system." It praised both the efforts and attitudes of Marine and Air Force officers in their attempts to link the two tactical air systems. While admitting that single manager was not perfect, the Air Force report asserted that "with better understanding by the Marine ground units and more experience on the part of all concerned . . . this system will work." The Air Force insisted that "in consideration of proposed large-scale ground offensive operations in being and planned . . . the air effort available must be concentrated, flexible and integrated to provide the tactical air support essential to all ground units."[54]

Bombarded by conflicting points of view, General Westmoreland held to the concept of centralized control, but began to look to the modification of some of the workings of the system. According to Marine Brigadier General Chaisson, the Director of the MACV Combat Operations Center, the visit to Saigon at the end of April by the Marine Corps Assistant Commandant and former III MAF commander, Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt, played some part in the MACV commander's changing perspective. Chaisson wrote to his wife that when Walt met with the MACV commander, "He scared the daylights out of Westy by telling him that it was the most dangerous decision he had made—and that it would backfire." Apparently General Westmoreland then asked Walt for his specific criticisms. The Marine general repeated what the Marines had been saying all along: too long a delay in the approval of preplanned missions; too many "diverts" which often resulted in the use of the wrong ordnance on the target; and that the 3d Marine Division was not obtaining the "desired level of support."[55]

Whether influenced by Walt's criticisms or not, General Westmoreland ordered General Momyer to meet with Army Lieutenant General William B. Rosson, the commander of Provisional Corps, relative to what constructive changes should be made in the air support of ground forces in northern I Corps. Because of the implications for the Marine Corps, General Cushman with the approval of General Westmoreland directed that General Anderson, the wing commander, also attend. Representatives from the MACV TASE, the Seventh Air Force TACC, and DASC Victor were also present. General Momyer presided and declared that the purpose was to determine what were the flaws in the system "and how to correct them." Anderson believed that the question should have been "whether or not we should continue with Single Management."[56]

The conference began with a discussion about the allocation of sorties in northern I Corps. General Momyer stated that he had told General Walt that the reason for the reduced number of sorties for the 3d Marine Division were the priorities established by Provisional Corps. General Rosson agreed, explaining that for a time in the Provisional Corps sector, the 1st Air Cavalry because of Operation Pegasus received about 50 percent of the fixed-wing air sorties. The 101st Airborne and the 3d Marine Division during that period divided equally the remaining available sorties. General Rosson's perception also was that "Marines, having always had more air support tend today to ask for more than the Army units." All of the participants agreed, however, that because the Marine units had less artillery and fewer helicopter gunships than the Army, there was a natural tendency for the Marines to rely on more fixed-wing support. This was especially true relative to the escort of troop transport helicopters into landing zones. General Momyer suggested that the commands should determine the number of sorties Marines needed "in connection with helicopter operations in order to offset the lack of gunship helicopters." The Air Force general then declared that the Seventh Air Force "Frag" order would reflect the "number of sorties daily reserved" for helicopter escort.[57]

Even more surprising, according to Anderson, there was general unanimity on the weakness of the preplanning missions and the system of diverts. All concurred that the present preplanning only resulted "in placing a certain amount of air effort airborne and available for any use a specific ground commander may wish." General Rosson complained that the procedures were "too ponderous," although every one was trying to make them work.* Momyer acknowledged that all concerned

*General Rosson later commented that after he assumed command of Prov Corps, "it soon became evident . . . that the system for preplanned fixed-wing support was too slow, and that too many requests for immediate support were being met by use of diverts. This in turn often meant different ordnance on target." Gen William B. Rosson, USA, Comments on draft, dtd 27Feb96 (Vietnam Comment File).

were doing the best they could and that he hoped to cut down on lead times and delays. In order to get the proper ordnance for a specific mission, the Seventh Air Force commander stated that he was giving some thought to permit modification to the daily frag order about six hours prior to time on target. General Anderson countered that the "downloading of ordnance and substituting another is much too wasteful of manpower" and recommended instead the strip alert of aircraft preloaded with a mix of bombs and ammunition. While General Momyer made no comment about the wing commander's suggestion, General Anderson observed that "the tenor of this discussion leads me to believe that the Air Force knows it is in some trouble on single management and is willing to modify the system, in major respects if necessary, to keep the system in force." The Marine commander concluded that, "in such an atmosphere of accommodation we will be hard pressed to obtain a reversal of the decision to implement single management."[58]

General Anderson was correct in his assumption that both Generals Westmoreland and Momyer were under some pressure from higher headquarters relative to the single-management issue. Upon receiving both the III MAF and MACV preliminary reports about the workings of the new system, Admiral Sharp decided to send his own evaluation team, headed by Marine Brigadier General Homer G. Hutchinson, Jr., the CinCPac Chief of Staff for Operations, to examine the situation. According to Lieutenant General Krulak, General Westmoreland protested the move and asked the CinCPac commander to defer the arrival of the team until he held his own hearings on the subject. Admiral Sharp apparently denied the request. At that point, as related by General Krulak, Westmoreland made the statement that the CinCPac team would "come back and recommend to you that the system be returned to the old status quo."[59]

The Hutchinson evaluation group arrived in Vietnam on 4 May and visited both MACV in Saigon and III MAF at Da Nang. Upon their return to Honolulu three days later, Brigadier General Hutchinson and his staff began to work on the report. After completion of the draft, he wrote to General McCutcheon at Marine headquarters in Washington that Admiral Sharp viewed single management "pretty well cracked." Hutchinson enclosed a copy of the draft report in his letter to McCutcheon and asked the latter to keep it "fairly well disguised." Despite his own viewpoint on

Defense Secretary Clark Clifford, who relieved Secretary Robert S. McNamara meets with LtGen William B. Rosson, CG Prov Corps. Gen Rosson complained during a conference that the new control provisions were "too ponderous . . . ."

Photo is from the Abel Collection



Marine BGen Homer G. Hutchinson, Jr., the CinCPac J–3 and a naval aviator, headed a CinCPac evaluation team on the new air control provisions.

Unnumbered Department of Defense (USMC) photo



the subject, General Hutchinson observed that the "report had to be written with some obvious restraint from [a] 'joint staff' standpoint."[60]

While not directly criticizing the decision for single management, the report discussed in detail what it considered several shortcomings in its implementation and operational procedures. Admitting that the Army units in I Corps received in April more air support than they had in the past, the report, nevertheless, pointed out that Marine ground units did not enjoy "as much or as responsive tactical air support" as under the old system. Like all the other evaluations of single manager, the report remarked upon the long lead time for preplanned sorties and the resulting large number of diversions. It observed, moreover, that the Marine wing met the most urgent "unfragged" requests from Marine ground units by overflying by 22 percent its aircraft "programmed sortie rate." At the same time, Air Force aircraft flew only at 96 percent of their "utilization index." According to the report, the Air Force wing at Da Nang conducted 1,404 missions over North Vietnam and Laos. The authors of the report commented that with the availability of Thailand-based Air Force aircraft and naval carrier aircraft in the Gulf of Tonkin that "it would not be necessary to use South Vietnam-based aircraft for this purpose when requests for sorties in I CTZ are not being filled." As Hutchinson mentioned in his personal letter to General McCutcheon, "we have pressed the point with Sharp that 7th AF has been flying too much out of country" with in-country-based aircraft, "thus alluding to the fact that if this were stopped, MACV should be relieved of his concern that the Army isn't getting needed support in I Corps."[61]

For his part, General Krulak, also in Honolulu, continued his efforts to convince Admiral Sharp to intervene in the single-management issue. According to the FMFPac commander, he persuaded Sharp to send a message to Westmoreland again noting that General Cushman remained unhappy with the present working arrangements of the single-manager system. The CinCPac commander stated that he wanted to hear the briefings that were to be presented at MACV headquarters by III MAF, the Seventh Air Force, and Westmoreland's own MACV evaluation team. These were scheduled for 8 May. In his reply, General Westmoreland agreed to have the concerned parties make the same presentations before Admiral Sharp a few days later in Honolulu. He observed, however, that many of the rough spots of the system had been worked out. General Krulak warned the Marine Corps leadership, "Westy is not going to let us get away with a presentation only of our gripes, but will include his own story too."[62]

At the conference in Saigon at MACV headquarters, both Generals Cushman and Norman Anderson represented III MAF. General Anderson presented the III MAF position on single management. Basically, Anderson argued that the new system for III MAF had few advantages, but several disadvantages. The Seventh Air Force briefer stated that all concerned including the Marines were doing their best to make single manager work and several modifications were in the works.[63]

After all the presentations, the senior commanders, including both Cushman and Anderson, met in a closed session. According to Cushman, General Westmoreland addressed the group and emphasized that the issue of single management involved Service conflicts revolving about "procedures, tactical arrangements, [differing] philosophies," and the desire of "commanders to allocate total resources in the most effective way." The deployment of the 1st Air Cavalry and 101st Airborne Divisions and the establishment of Provisional Corps headquarters in northern I Corps had irretrievably altered command relations including air arrangements. Westmoreland believed the briefings helped to clarify the points of contention. The MACV commander stated that the trial period for single management demonstrated "that the strong features of the Marine system are evident. The practical advantage of [the] commandwide area of the Air Force system is also evident." Westmoreland stated that he wanted to combine the best features of each: the responsiveness of Marine air together with the Air Force flexibility for concentrating air assets. He declared that the TASE and the Seventh Air Force procedures for fragging aircraft were too cumbersome and Marine practices were wasteful of bombs and aircraft. The MACV commander stated that it was his intention "to use our resources to meet the problem we face not on theory and not by ineffective practices."[64]

Following a desultory and inconclusive discussion about possible changes, Westmoreland turned to the upcoming briefing at CinCPac. He declared that his chief of staff, Major General Walter T. Kerwin, would represent him and provide the opening statement. III MAF, the Seventh Air Force, and the MACV evaluation team would make separate briefings based from their respective perspectives. General Kerwin, however, would field all questions. The MACV commander concluded the meeting by declaring, "it was fiction

that this thing [single manager] was generated by Air Force roles and mission. It was his idea—his decision and not a maneuver by the Air Force." General Westmoreland stressed that he wanted "this point included in the briefing."[65]

The Honolulu Conference for the most part proved to be a restatement of already established positions. As planned, on 10 May, the representatives from the respective services and commands of MACV made their standard briefings before Admiral Sharp. General Blood once more represented the Seventh Air Force. As General Anderson, who made the case for III MAF, remembered, the Seventh Air Force indicated its willingness to make adjustments "in accordance with any criticism that we might have, which had the effect of taking the rug right out from under us." As the wing commander recalled, Admiral Sharp "elected to not intervene." Anderson observed that Sharp was near the end of his tour and "must have felt that further protest would have to be at [a] higher level . . . ."[66]

Admiral Sharp may have been aware that the Department of Defense was about to act upon the referral of the single-management issue to the Secretary by the Joint Chiefs. Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford, who replaced Robert S. McNamara in February, delegated the decision to Deputy Secretary Paul H. Nitze. On 15 May, after listening to the formal presentations and reviewing the various position papers by the respective Services, Deputy Secretary Nitze generally supported the position of Generals Wheeler and Westmoreland. The secretary stated that he agreed with the Chairman that "the unified combat commander on the scene should be presumed to be the best judge of how the combat forces assigned to him are to be organized . . . ." Nitze added that he considered this a temporary measure and not a precedent and believed that MACV would return control of the Marine air to III MAF "when the tactical situation permits." He, nevertheless, expressed concern about the apparent weakness of the present single-manager system relative to responsiveness, but presumed that General Westmoreland was taking action to rectify the situation. Nitze directed General Wheeler "to review personally the single-management arrangement in I Corps to determine, in coordination with CinCPac and ComUSMACV such changes as he considers necessary to minimize delays between requests for air support and execution . . . ."[67*]

In reply to the Deputy Secretary, General Wheeler stated that he was also troubled about the lack of responsiveness to preplanned air requests. Although he argued that the Marines may have exaggerated the length of time required for such requests and that some of the deadlines were self-imposed, the Chairman admitted that the system needed modification. He mentioned that MACV was looking to a partial decentralization "based on resource considerations" which would permit "the majority of preplanned requests" to be coordinated between III MAF and the "collocated DASCs." Wheeler stated that General Westmoreland's basic interest was to "have the flexibility to employ the tactical air resources most effectively where and when support is required."[68]

By this time, all concerned with the issue were looking toward some settlement of the dispute. In one instance, General McCutcheon recommended to General Chapman, the Marine Corps Commandant, that the latter meet with the Air Force Chief of Staff, General McConnell. McCutcheon believed that a frank discussion between the Service chiefs might result in McConnell "to tell Momyer to back off a little." On 17 May, after learning about Deputy Secretary Nitze's decision, McCutcheon told Major General Anderson, the 1st MAW commander, about a new Marine Corps tack, "which is to get the opcon back, let them keep 'single management' and get on with the war."[69]

Lieutenant General Krulak outlined this Marine Corps proposal in a back-channel message to Admiral Sharp. Krulak conceded that MACV under the old system had some reason for dissatisfaction. He observed that while MACV had controlled about 75 percent of the fixed-wing sorties in South Vietnam which included those sorties that the 1st MAW made available, General Westmoreland "was never sure of what number of sorties the Marines would make available . . . ."

*General Chapman, the Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1968, remembered that about the time Deputy Secretary Nitze made his decision the House Armed Services Committee "held a hearing on the state of the War with JCS. Single management came up and was strongly criticized by [the chairman of the committee] for loss by Marines of *immediate* [emphasis in original], responsive close air support. Gen Wheeler presented the standard arguments to support S/M [single manager]. I . . . elected to remain silent, as did the other chiefs, because I believed Congress was no place to solve a war-time operational problem." Gen Leonard F. Chapman, Comments on draft, dtd 17Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Chapman Comments. Army historian Graham A. Cosmas noted the "very lukewarm nature of even Wheeler's and Nitze's support of Westmoreland. Both indicated grave doubts about the practical workings of single management, but were unwilling to overrule their theater commander on a question of organization of his forces. However, both emphasized this was a temporary tactical expedient and urged ComUSMACV to restore the former command arrangement as soon as he felt the situation warranted, which of course ComUSMACV never did." Cosmas Comments.

Moreover, even the MACV emergency authority did not permit "a day-in, day-out diversion of additional Marine sorties" to other missions. Krulak observed, however, that the single-manager system as instituted by General Westmoreland resulted in too severe a "surgery . . . that has left the patient extremely weak, with his Marine leg partially paralyzed." The FMFPac commander suggested instead return to III MAF operational control of Marine fixed-wing tactical and reconnaissance aircraft sorties. In turn, III MAF would make available to the Seventh Air Force "such sorties as ComUSMACV regards necessary to ensure a proper weight of tactical air effort." Krulak would not limit this MACV authority to preplanned sorties, but would permit the preemption of additional Marine air resources, when "in MACV's judgement, the overall tactical effort so requires." The III MAF TADC would provide the MACV TASE "with real time information on Marine air availability and status at all times." According to General Krulak this Marine solution "would legitimize single managership without question and would still leave essential operational direction of III MAF organic air resources in CG III MAF hands." In a memorandum to the Joint Chiefs on 18 May 1968, General Chapman presented much the same argument and concluded that the Marine proposal would provide a transition to normal command relations and also increase responsiveness.[70]

While the Marine Corps continued to present alternative policies, General Westmoreland's staff worked upon modifications relative to air control procedures. On 18 May, at a meeting with Admiral Sharp, General Westmoreland discussed his intention to make some changes in the working of the single-management system at the end of the month. The MACV commander wanted a 30-day trial period until the end of June and planned to ask "III MAF to withhold comments" until that time. Admiral Sharp indicated his general approval of Westmoreland's course of action. According to Marine Brigadier General Chaisson, the head of the MACV Combat Operations Center, General Westmoreland was well aware of both the Marine objections and suggested revisions and tried to accommodate them. On 20 May, Chaisson jotted in his notebook diary, "Got Gen West[moreland] to go along with our approach to single management. Momyer is next hurdle." General Westmoreland also received prodding from General Wheeler, who directed that MACV in conjunction with both III MAF and the Seventh Air Force, "continue to evaluate the effectiveness" of single manager. Westmoreland was to inform both CinCPac and the Chairman of JCS "each month of the results of his evaluation and of any modification he has made to the system."[71]

While neither General Westmoreland nor Momyer was willing to return to III MAF full authority over Marine fixed-wing sorties, they made a drastic change in the scheduling of preplanned ground support missions. On 21 May, General Westmoreland outlined the new procedures. MACV now divided preplanned strikes into two categories, one to be determined weekly and the other daily in two separate frag orders. According to the modified system, 70 percent of all preplanned sorties were to be contained in the Seventh Air Force TACC weekly frag order. While the frag order designated number of aircraft, time on target, and basic ordnance load, the supported ground commander could use these sorties any way he desired, "consistent with aircraft and control capabilities." The Seventh Air Force daily frag order designated the remaining preplanned missions to meet "justified requests for additional support and increased enemy threats as they occur." In essence, as General Krulak observed, III MAF made available all its air "attack and reconnaissance capability" to the Seventh Air Force, who in turn hands about 70 percent back "to the Marine command."[72]

The new procedures were to go into effect on 30 May for a 30-day test period. At the end of that time, the concerned commands were to provide constructive criticism. General Cushman observed that he was under orders not to forward any comments on the modifications to CinCPac until after completion of the evaluation period. The III MAF commander, nevertheless, stated that he would provide ComUSMACV with his views and would share them with CMC and CGFMFPac "to preclude any action that cross pending proposals to Dep Sec Def or JCS." At the same time, General Cushman looked favorably on the new MACV directive, remarking that it "appears to offer us a considerable opportunity to regain control of our assets."[73]

Admitting that the modification provided more flexibility, Marine commanders and staff officers still pointed to several continuing disadvantages. While prescribed ordnance loads and time on targets could be adjusted, III MAF still had to match the ground requirements of its subordinate Army and Marine units with the predetermined 70 percent sorties in the weekly frag order. As far as the remaining 30 percent preplanned sorties outlined in the Seventh Air Force daily frag report, with the exception of less required detailed information, III MAF was to follow the same procedures as before.

The Marines still considered the single-management system, even with the changes, more cumbersome than necessary. Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Carey in the Wing G–3 section later commented that while the 70–30 split "gave us more flexibility at the working level, matching available sorties to the requests of the units was time consuming, confusing, and error prone." He stated his staff "affectionately termed the system, 'Momyer's Chinese Fire Drill.'" In more earthy terms, General Anderson, the wing commander, described the entire procedure "an ass-backwards system." General Cushman concluded that "until Marine air assets are returned to full opcon of CG III MAF, command relationships will remain more complex."[74]

At the same time MACV was altering single manager, General Chapman and the Marine headquarters staff in Washington proposed their own modification to the air arrangements in South Vietnam. In mid-May, the Commandant circulated for comment to both Generals Krulak and Cushman a headquarters point paper on the subject. The idea was for MACV formally to return to III MAF operational control 70 percent of Marine fixed-wing assets, while retaining sortie control of the remaining 30 percent. General Chapman planned to give the point paper to the Secretary of the Navy to forward to the Secretary of Defense.[75]

While both Generals Cushman and Krulak had some reservations about some of the details contained in the point paper, they saw merit in the Commandant's course of action. General Cushman wanted return of 100 percent of the air assets to his control, remarking that the retention of the 30 percent by MACV would result in a "duplicative air request, control, and direction system." He, nevertheless, believed that the CMC proposal could be the basis for a further compromise on the single-management issue. While agreeing with Cushman and also taking exception to a few added minor details in the Commandant's proposal, Lieutenant General Krulak's reply was more positive. Krulak believed that the Marine headquarters recommended modification to the air control system "gets the camel's nose back into the tent—most advantageous, since the tent happens to be our own." The FMFPac commander then observed that he had not mentioned any of this to Admiral Sharp as he was of the opinion that "the impetus just has to come from the top down." Krulak stated that if Chapman wanted, he, Krulak, would "take him [Sharp] on immediately . . . but my recommendation is to give him a few thousand volts from above first."[76]

Incorporating many of the suggestions provided by both III MAF and FMFPac, General Chapman proceeded on two fronts to revise the air control policy in Vietnam. He met with the Secretary of the Navy and provided him the point paper and at the same time prepared a memorandum for the Joint Chiefs making the same points. As Chapman's chief air officer, General McCutcheon wrote, "at first blush this [the Marine recommendations] looks similar to the ComUSMACV proposal where 70 percent of the missions would be fragged on a weekly basis," but insisted "there are some vital differences." The basic difference, of course, would be that the Marine proposal would do away with the long weekly frag with its predetermined times on target and ordnance loads. In fact, McCutcheon, like both Cushman and Krulak, opposed any mention of 70 percent and favored "a 100 percent recapture" of Marine sorties.[77]

In his presentation to Secretary of the Navy Paul R. Ignatius, General Chapman argued his case. He provided Secretary Ignatius the statistical rationale for the Marine strong emphasis on fixed-wing support for its ground forces.* While appreciating the need for ComUSMACV, whether General Westmoreland or General Abrams, to have some form of "single manager" over tactical air, Chapman stressed that even the new MACV modification had not made the air support

*The level of air support required for Marine and Army divisions differed because of many factors. According to an analysis by FMFPac, a Marine division in Vietnam consisted of approximately 20,736 and an Army division of 17,116 men. [For further discussion of Marine division strength see Chapter 27 and Appendices of Marine T/Os.] The Marine wing supported the Marine division with 276 transport helicopters, 60 armed observation helicopters, and 159 fixed-wing attack aircraft. The Army division on the other hand contained 479 transport helicopters and 184 authorized gunships, and required 132 fixed-wing aircraft in support at a 1.1 sortie rate. Citing DOD SE Asia air planning criteria, FMFPac analysts figured that the 159 Marine aircraft were to provide each Marine battalion with 200 fixed-wing sorties per month. This came out to six sorties per battalion per day or 160 daily sorties to support the Marine units in I Corps. These were about one-third more sorties than the Air Force programmed for fixed-wing support of Army divisions. According to FMFPac, the Air Force was to provide the Army four fixed-wing sorties per battalion per day or 150 sorties per battalion monthly. The resulting difference in the fixed-wing support between the Army and Marine divisions was based on the following: the Marine battalion was about a third larger than that of the Army; the Marine division had about 20 percent less artillery support; and the Marines had fewer armed helicopters. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 30May68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68. In his comments, General Norman Anderson made the additional point that the 1st MAW supported two Marine Divisions and also Army and allied units when required. MajGen Norman J. Anderson, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File).

as responsive as it should be. According to the Marine Commandant, the "net effect is that ground operations become responsive to air operations rather than the converse." Chapman recommended, instead, that III MAF retain mission direction of 70 percent of his available sorties and would make available to MACV the other 30 percent based on a rate of 1.1 sorties per day. Such a solution, according to General Chapman, permitted III MAF to ensure "the immediate availability of aircraft for support of troops on the battlefield," while MACV would in effect still control 30 percent of Marine sorties and able to divert any Marine air mission when the situation demanded.[78]

The Commandant's efforts once more to have higher authorities in Washington reverse single manager by edict from above failed. While Secretaty Ignatius endorsed General Chapman's recommendations to him, Deputy Secretaty of Defense Nitze again refused to dictate air policy to MACV. Using much the same rationale as he had on 15 May, Nitze stressed that ComUSMACV was studying the responsiveness of the new procedures established at the end of May and the secretaty was sure that the field commander would make any changes that were necessary. At the same time, while General Wheeler, the Chairman, forwarded the Commandant's memorandum to CinCPac and ComUSMACV, the Joint Chiefs also declined to take any action on their own.[79]

Given Secretary's Nitze's two unfavorable decisions, General Chapman believed any further exertion on his part to influence action through DOD to be self-defeating. Instead, he planned to revert to pressure from below. As he advised Lieutenant General Henry W. Buse, Jr., his former chief of staff at HQMC and new Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, who relieved General Krulak at the end of May, "a move from Saigon may be our best bet at this time."[80]

The Continuing Debate

The Commandant's change of course was based in part on the actual or scheduled reshuffling of the key personalities both at CinCPac and at MACV. At CinCPac headquarters in Hawaii, in addition to General Buse replacing General Krulak, Admiral John C. McCain was to take over command from Admiral Sharp at the end of July. In Saigon, on 15 June, General Abrams became ComUSMACV in place of General Westmoreland, who returned to Washington to become the U.S. Army Chief of Staff. Both Generals Norman Anderson, the commander of the 1st MAW,



Photo courtesy of Center of Military History

Army Gen Creighton W. Abrams, ComUSMACV, right, talks to MajGen George I. Forsythe, CG, 1st Air Cav Div. Upon his relief of Gen Westmoreland in June 1968, one of the problems facing Gen Abrams was the question of single manager.

and also General Momyer, the commander of the Seventh Air Force, were scheduled for reassignment. The hope was that with a different cast of commanders in place in strategic command billets there would be more room for compromise. Both General Buse, the new FMFPac commander, and General George S. Brown, the new Seventh Air Force commander, had less prickly personalities than their predecessors, Lieutenant General Krulak and General Momyer. In his appraisal of the situation, however, General Chaisson, who also completed his tour at this time in Saigon, stated that he personally did not believe that General Momyer's departure would change much, "essentially . . . [Momyer] was playing an Air Force policy push here, and I don't see the Air Force falling off on their push."[81]

While not too much was known about General Abrams' position, except that he wanted to ensure adequate fixed-wing air support for Army units in I Corps, Marine commanders assumed that he was more flexible about the single-manager issue than Westmoreland. Colonel Edward L. Fossum, the III MAF liaison officer at MACV, upon his relief, related that the bickering between III MAF and MACV over air command relations disturbed both Westmoreland and Abrams. Fossum believed that Abrams' solution might be to reduce Marine strength in the north and bring the



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A422245

LtGen Henry W. Buse, CGFMFPac, in the foreground, arrives at the 1st MAW helicopter landing pad for a visit to the wing headquarters. As it was for Gen Abrams, the question of single manager was a major priority for the new FMFPac commander.

Marine divisions together and "solve this air business." Fossum admitted that he "could not really read General Abrams about the Marine Corps." General Chaisson, who also rotated at this time, observed that Abrams, while often critical* of the Marines and publicly supporting the single-management policy that he inherited, was not as adamant as Westmoreland and "has it [single manager] up for review."[82]

In one of his first actions, Lieutenant General Buse made arrangements to visit Vietnam to discuss the situation with General Abrams. On 16 June, the new FMFPac commander met with Abrams in Saigon. Buse described Abrams as "very cordial" and said that the two had a very frank discussion. According to General Buse, he told the MACV commander that he "wasn't down there to critique at what he [Abrams] was doing operationally, nor was I going to tell him what to do operationally." In turn, Abrams replied that he had no particular problems in I Corps, "unless air control could be so considered." Seeing an opportunity, Buse suggested that Abrams end the emergency in I Corps and return control of Marine air to III MAF. The MACV commander, however, was not prepared to take such drastic action. Abrams countered that the "Marines use more air support than anyone," and not only because of their lightness in artillery and helicopter support. Buse explained that "air support is part of our life and that we were structured, trained, and accustomed to use it to maximum benefit." General Buse then asked Abrams directly if he felt as strongly on the subject as General Westmoreland. The MACV commander answered "in a definite and strong negative." In assessing his meeting with Abrams and later that day with General Bruce Palmer, Deputy Commander, U.S. Army Vietnam, Buse considered Abrams still open on the subject and that "a tinkle has been heard from the bell of freedom."[83]

Fresh from his trip to Vietnam, Lieutenant General Buse reported to the Commandant on the favorable atmosphere he found in Saigon and the present situation relative to single management. He observed that from the MACV perspective there was general satisfaction with the new modified system and "with the quantity and timeliness of air support." Although the loss of overall air control authority over fixed-wing sorties for III MAF still caused several deficiencies, Buse maintained the "Marine air control system is intact and functioning . . . ." He stated that the weekly frag procedures caused less of an administrative burden for III MAF in that it did not require specific coordinates. Still the FMFPac commander related that the only reason that single-manager system still worked was the

*General Chaisson noted in his diary on 15 May that at dinner, "Abe [Abrams] took off on Marines, 'loners, small vision, won't play.'" Chaisson Diary, Jan–Jun68 (Chaisson Papers, Hoover Institute).

existing Marine Corps system and the "fact that the 1st MAW continually generates sorties in excess of the 1.2 [sortie] rate."[84*]

Despite the apparent happiness on the part of MACV with the new modified single-manager system, General Buse agreed with General Chapman that the best channel for reversal of the policy was through Saigon and possibly Honolulu. The FMFPac commander stated that there was possibly a means of compromise through reducing the span of control of III MAF in I Corps. He posed the possibility of dividing I Corps into two sectors, one Army and one Marine, possibly divided at the Hai Van Pass. If that occurred, Buse thought Abrams might be induced to "return control of Marine air." One disadvantage that he saw to this path might be a lopsided distribution of air support. The Marines in a reduced two-division sector might be receiving more support while "our Army neighbors, who now have no complaints, could starve." Buse preferred that General Cushman, the III MAF commander, in his June evaluation, present "a plan for restoring the integrity of the air-ground team." According to Buse, the III MAF commander "had a good feel of the pulse and have some local accommodations which can be digested at this point and still lead to full recovery." At that point, General Buse would then approach Admiral Sharp, still CinCPac, "in consonance with Cushman's efforts and rationale, adding to them the personal observation and staff data I found during my trip."[85]

On 29 June 1968, the III MAF commander provided both Generals Buse and Chapman his draft appraisal of the May modification to Single Management and proposed recommendations to MACV and asked for their comments. General Cushman acknowledged a definite improvement and reported a 54-percent increase during the month in Air Force sorties. For Marine air, however, he stated that the weekly and daily frags "has required an inordinately high number of scrambles and add-on sorties." He concluded that the present preplanned sortie level fell far short of the number of air missions required by the ground commanders.[86]

General Cushman's suggested revisions to single manager were much more moderate than earlier proposals he had made to MACV and those already being forwarded by the Commandant. He recommended that MACV retain the present system, but improve its coordination with supporting arms and basically refine the preplanned procedures. Cushman suggested that MACV give to III MAF, in a weekly block frag order, control over all Marine preplanned sorties, with the exception of those interdiction strikes against Laos and North Vietnam. III MAF would determine time on target and ordnance loads based on the needs of the respective Army and Marine divisions in I Corps. In turn, the Marine command would provide the Seventh Air Force control centers "real time reports" on Marine sorties.[87]

Both Generals Buse and Chapman were somewhat disappointed with the III MAF proposal and wanted a stronger statement from General Cushman. While agreeing with Cushman's evaluation and understanding his delicate position as a subordinate to MACV, they still desired the III MAF commander to preface his recommendations with a "positive statement reaffirming our collective position on the return of air assets" to Marine control. General Buse argued that this may be "our last shot" to reverse the situation because Abrams "and no one else will make this decision and once made we can expect it to last for the duration." According to Buse, the new MACV commander was "practical, apolitical, not necessarily bound by prior arrangements, and not intimidated by Seventh Air Force pressure." While Abrams possibly was impressed with the improvement in support of the Army divisions under the revised single-manager system, Buse believed the Army general susceptible to an appeal based on the relationship between infantry and supporting arms. The FMFPac commander thought that Cushman could make a convincing case that it was the Marine interface with the cumbersome Seventh Air Force mission control procedures that resulted in the enhanced air support for the Army divisions, not the centralization of air assets under the Seventh Air Force.[88]

In his revision of his reply to MACV, General Cushman made some minor cosmetic changes but decided against the direct approach suggested by General Buse. Cushman thanked the FMFPac commander for his advice, stating he incorporated "as many as possible under the circumstances prevailing." The III MAF commander declared that he had

*Lieutenant General Carey made the observation that "our salvation in operating under the single-management concept was that our Marine Air had more flexibility than Seventh Air Force in that we were able to generate and maintain a higher sortie rate, we could surge to as high as a 3.0 sortie rate if required. In many informal conversations with my Air Force counterparts they marveled at our endurance and questioned, 'How do you do it?'" Carey Comments.

advanced "much of the philosophy" recommended by Buse several times to Abrams and "to repeat it once again could be counterproductive." Moreover, according to Cushman, if Abrams accepted the III MAF proposals, "I will once again have control of all my air assets . . . ." General Cushman, nevertheless, expressed his doubts about a positive outcome for the Marine position, but that his present tactic was "more saleable than our past direct approaches."[89]

As General Cushman predicted, the MACV evaluation, despite the Marine arguments to the contrary, saw no need to alter the arrangements over air control in Vietnam. In fact, the author of a Marine Corps Headquarters memo on the subject wrote that the tenor of General Abrams most recent comments "seem to indicate the system may have reached a point of equilibrium unless some additional force is applied." In Washington, Major General McCutcheon expressed little surprise that General Abrams was relatively satisfied with the modified single-manager system. As McCutcheon* wrote to Major General Charles J. Quilter, the new 1st MAW commander who had relieved General Anderson on 22 June, "it is only us Marines who have noticed the diminution in effectiveness." McCutcheon even admitted that this so-called reduction in effectiveness "isn't very much now since they [the Air Force] incorporated all our suggested changes." The nub of the matter was, according to McCutcheon, "we still don't have the OpCon [operational control]."[90]

The Commandant and General McCutcheon were in hopes that the selection of Admiral John C. McCain to be the new CinCPac might provide another avenue to challenge single manager in Vietnam. As early as 23 May, just after his nomination for the command, the Marine headquarters staff in Washington briefed the admiral on its perspective of the single-manager dispute. The Marines continued to update McCain from time to time before he took over his new post. As General McCutcheon observed in his letter to Quilter, the new CinCPac would not be able "to jump in . . . right away and right the wrong that was done, but I think we have a solid friend in him."[91]

At the same time in Honolulu, Lieutenant General Buse tried to use his influence with Admiral Sharp to endorse the Marine proposal of giving General Cushman, as CG III MAF, the authority to frag directly the 70 percent of preplanned missions in the weekly frag order. According to Buse, Sharp had completed his own evaluation and basically supported General Cushman's recommended changes. Apparently, the admiral had discussed his recommendations with the new Seventh Air Force commander, General Brown. The Air Force general proposed that Admiral Sharp first clear his revisions with General Wheeler, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, before sending them on to General Abrams. General Buse believed that "Sharp will stick to his decision . . . But we now will encounter a day or so delay . . . ." Buse stated that he could see

MajGen Charles J. Quilter relieved MajGen Anderson as CG, 1st MAW in June 1968.

Unnumbered Defense Department (USMC) photo



*As Deputy Chief of Staff for Air at Headquarters Marine Corps, General McCutcheon was not in any chain of command relative to the administration or operations of Marine aviation in Vietnam. While fully aware of this, General McCutcheon kept himself fully informed about Marine aviation matters in the country through an informal correspondence. As he wrote earlier to General Quilter, he would write "from time to time as I did Norm [General Anderson] and Ben [Major General Louis B. Robertshaw, an earlier commander of the 1st MAW] and occasionally get on the phone . . . I think we both understand that FMFPac is sensitive to being passed over so in most cases the kind of information that will be passed personally will be of such a nature that it will not compromise FMFPac's command prerogatives." McCutcheon ltr to MajGen Charles J. Quilter, dtd 5Jul68 (Ltr No. 34, File Q, 1968 Correspondence, McCutcheon Papers).



Unnumbered Defense Department (USMC) photo

Adm John C. McCain, CinCPac (seated with cigar in his mouth), visits Marine Fire Support Base Lance in Operation Taylor Common. LtGen Cushman is seated just behind and to the right of Adm McCain. Both Gen Quilter and Adm McCain also had to wrestle with the single manager issue.

"no impact on anyone in Washington, if Sharp makes this decision with exception" of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force.[92]

With Sharp leaving his command, however, it was obvious that his recommendations would only have validity if they were endorsed by his successor. Obviously, the Marines believed that the chances were good that Admiral McCain would do so. Marine Brigadier General Hutchinson, the CinCPac J–3, wrote to General McCutcheon that "we had McCain as near fully locked in on a decision to return about 70 percent of our fixed-wing assets to Marine control as it was possible to be short of having the decision signed off."[93]

Again the Marine aspirations were to lead to frustration. After assuming command, in August, Admiral McCain together with Lieutenant General Buse visited General Abrams in Saigon. Their visit also coincided with one by General Chapman to Vietnam. General Hutchinson related that McCain had "withheld his final decision for the obvious protocol reasons of being able to say he had discussed the subject directly with Abe." In the meeting over single management that included the two Marine generals as well as McCain and Abrams, General Abrams apparently was willing to modify single manager in return for an alteration of command relations in I Corps. The Marine generals, at that point, decided not to push the issue. According to Brigadier General Hutchinson, this course of action made "it impossible for McCain to do anything but go along." Hutchinson stated that the admiral was not yet "in writing, but I would guess that after he sees Chapman . . . the issue will be closed out." In General Chapman's version, Admiral McCain, a close personal friend, told him, "that he was new on the scene, that such an order was vehemently opposed by his principal commander in the field . . . and that he just didn't feel persuaded that it was a good idea and that he ought to do it, and he never did."

Through the rest of 1968, the Marines would continue to bring up the single-manager issue, but with



Photo from the Abel Collection

U.S. Army BGen Howard H. Cooksey, an assistant division commander of the Americal Division, paints a "Happy Birthday" on a 500-pound bomb at the Chu Lai airstrip in honor of the 193d anniversary of the Marine Corps and in appreciation of Marine close air support for the division. Col Rex A. Deasy, commanding officer of MAG–12, looks on.

diminishing expectations.* On 9 September, General Cushman asked General Abrams for authorization to have "mission direction of in-country Marine strike assets on a 30-day trial period within the framework of single manager." The III MAF commander then provided Abrams with a detailed breakdown both of Air Force and Marine sorties in support of ground forces in I Corps covering the period from 30 May until 2 September. According to III MAF statistics, 61 percent of the total sorties were preplanned while 34 percent of this total were "add-ons" and scrambles" (See Table 1). Nearly 40 percent of the Marine sorties fell into this latter category as compared with only 29 percent of the Air Force sorties in I Corps. According to Cushman, such a high percentage of add-ons and scrambles "points up either a shortage of preplans or less than optimum utilization of available resources." He believed the 30-day trial period would demonstrate a marked improvement in these percentages.[94]

Despite discussion with Seventh Air Force officials and some optimism on the part of the 1st MAW staff that MACV might accept this trial period, General Abrams turned down the III MAF request. The MACV commander opposed what he considered double management, and hoped to end the dispute once and for all. Supported by General Wheeler, the JCS Chairman, Abrams ended the formal monthly evaluations of the system. As he stated in November 1968, "we do not wish to appear intransigent about this matter . . . but it is vital that ComUSMACV retain the centralized control and direction of TacAir [tactical air] in the hands of a single individual."[95]

*On the tactical level, Colonel Robert D. Slay, who commanded MAG–11 from June through the end of the year, wrote that he "insured that my FRAG orders from 1st MAW were carried out; I really didn't care where the FRAG orders to Wing came from. Politics and in-fighting for control of air assets was of little concern . . . where the flying and dying took place. The concept of the Marine Air-Ground Team was well understood, however, and my command was briefed to give first and highest priority to any Marine ground unit in trouble." Col Robert D. Slay, Comments on draft, dtd 25Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

Table 1

Attack Sorties Planned and Flown by Marine and Air Force Aircraft 30 May—2 Sept 1968

Type	USAF	USMC	Total	Percentage of Total Flown
Preplanned Flown	7,731	9,960	17,691	61
Immediate Diverts	468	573	1,059	5
Scrambles	1,505	3,235	4,740	16
Add Ons	1,807	3,696	5,503	18
Totals Flown	11,529	17,464	28,993	
Preplanned Fragged	9,473	11,980	21,453	83

While General Abrams remained firm in his support of single manager as modified in May, the Marine Corps continued the struggle in the following months and years, but in different forums. While the Commandant continued to raise the issue among the Joint Chiefs, only the Navy, since General Westmoreland became the Army Chief of Staff, now supported the Marine position. As General McCutcheon observed to General Quilter, the 1st MAW commander, in November, 1968, "I am working . . . on the philosophy that single management is here, and the way to beat it is to join it and out-manage them."[96]

Using this tactic, the Marines in a series of local arrangements and working agreements managed to obtain in 1969 and 1970 practical control of their aviation assets. In early 1969, III MAF had succeeded in vetoing an attempt by MACV to modify its air directive 95.4 to include the term "operational direction" to define the relationship between the Seventh Air Force and III MAF. Finally, in August 1970, Lieutenant General McCutcheon as CG III MAF, agreed to a new MACV air directive that gave "formal sanction" to the changes that the Marines had succeeded in obtaining from MACV and the Air Force. The Air Force accepted the Marine Corps interpretation of "mission" and "operational direction." Under the new directive, III MAF retained operational control of its aircraft and included a provision permitting the Marine wing to withhold "specialized Marine support sorties" from the Seventh Air Force. If the Marines obtained much of what they wanted, then as Bernard Nalty, an Air Force historian, asked, "Why the fuss?" Nalty answered his own question with the conclusion: "Tactically, the single manager meant nothing. Doctrinally, however, it affirmed a principle, centralized control, that the Army Air Corps and U.S. Air Force had consistently championed, and in doing so, it established a precedent for the future."[97*]

* The new directive defined Mission/Operational Direction as "The authority delegated to DepComUSMACV for Air Operations (Cdr, 7th AF) to assign specific fixed-wing air tasks to the CG, III MAF, on a periodic basis as implementation of a basic mission assigned by ComUSMACV." MACV Directive 95.4, dtd 15Aug70 as quoted in Cosmas and Murray, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1970–71*, p. 277. General Chapman summed up the outcome of the dispute in the following manner: "1. Marine system essentially restored—no gain or loss. 2. Army gained close air support from Air Force equivalent to Marine scope and type—a clear important winner. 3. Air Force lost accordingly." He emphasized that the precedent applied "only to joint land operations after the conclusion of [an] amphibious operation." Chapman Comments.

CHAPTER 25

A Question of Helicopters

Another Debate—The Need for Lighter Aircraft—To Keep the Mediums and Heavies Flying
Another Look at Helicopter Air-Ground Relations

Another Debate

As the debate with the Air Force and MACV continued through the second half of 1968 over the control of Marine fixed-wing aircraft, a second controversy festered in Marine Corps circles. This question involved the employment and control of another indispensable, but relatively short-supply Marine aircraft resource, helicopters. While ComUSMACV and the Army were on the fringes to the dispute, the principals were III MAF ground and aviation commanders. Ironically, the 1st MAW, which argued so vehemently against central control from Saigon of its fixed-wing assets, insisted on "single management" of its rotary aircraft.

Again it was the arrival of the Army divisions, especially the 1st Air Cavalry Division, into northern I Corps in early 1968 that provided the impetus to this discussion. Major General Raymond G. Davis, as Provisional Corps deputy commander in March and April 1968, was tremendously impressed with the Cavalry's mobile helicopter-borne tactics in the relief of Khe Sanh, Operation Pegasus, and later in the A Shau Valley in Operation Delaware. When he took over the 3d Marine Division in mid-May, while not abandoning the strongpoints along the DMZ, Davis wanted to break free of them and strike at the battered North Vietnamese units in a series of free-wheeling operations throughout the division sector. From the aviation perspective this created an insatiable demand on the wing's already overburdened and limited number of helicopters and crewmen. According to Major General Norman J. Anderson, the former wing commander, he just did not see how his successor, Major General Charles J. Quilter, could meet the desires of General Davis and at the same time "still take care of the 1st Division and provide logistic support elsewhere."[1]*

The Army and Marine Corps organization of their helicopters differed markedly. In one sense, the Marine Corps viewed the rotary aircraft as a boat and a means to land troops from ship to shore to exploit the situation beyond the beach in an amphibious landing.** On the other hand, the Army looked at the helicopter as a horse, as cavalry, and a means of outmaneuvering and outflanking an enemy. Because of the limitations of room on board ship, the Marine Corps depended on fewer, but larger helicopters, the UH–34 or CH–46, to carry the assault force ashore. With less concern about space restrictions and more about maneuverability, the Army relied on an assortment of helicopters, mostly smaller and more maneuverable than the Marine aircraft, to carry the assault forces into the rugged forested hinterlands. With the establishment of small artillery fire bases on key hills, the 1st Air Cavalry could launch fast-paced, leap-frog airmobile operations far from its base areas irrespective of terrain.[2]

Marine aviation officers were quick to respond that there should be no comparison between Marine and Army helicopter support, especially that available to the 1st Air Cavalry Division. In contrast to the 1st Air Cavalry which had more than 400 helicopters under its control, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing owned slightly more than 300 to support two and a third Marine divisions, ARVN units, and the Korean Marines in I Corps. Major General Norman Anderson, the wing commander, observed that the wing had inadequate numbers of helicopters because "the demand was limitless and was stimulated by the example of the

*See the discussion of the 3d Marine Division offensive operations during this period in Chapters 15, 16, 18, 20 and 22.

**One should not carry the analogy of the boat too far. As Major General John P. Condon, a veteran Marine aviator and commander of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in the early 1960s commented, "The boat could never envelop any unit in position on land. The Marine Corps pioneered vertical envelopment, beginning 'from the sea,' but never stopping just beyond the beach. The use of the helo in maneuver and envelopment, as well as in movements of heavy equipment and logistic support of follow-on actions was also visualized from the start." MajGen John P. Condon, Comments on draft, dtd 30Jan1993 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Condon Comments.

1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) in an adjacent area zipping about all over."[3]*

Despite the massive and even decisive role the Marine helicopters played in the resupplying of the Marine hill outposts at Khe Sanh, ground officers elsewhere had complaints about helicopter support. Immediately after the recapture of Hue, newspaper accounts circulated that Army helicopter pilots flew under more adverse conditions than Marines. In response to a criticism in one article about a 500-foot ceiling limitation during the battle, Major General Anderson wrote that the wing placed such restrictions on "all aircraft operations subject to the exigencies of the tactical situation." The wing commander remarked the reason for the 500-foot ceiling was "because of the extreme vulnerability to enemy fire of low flying helicopters . . . ." He then argued that the "Army UH–1 type aircraft has more capability for contour flying than the CH–46 and was therefore occasionally useable when the CH–46 was not . . . ."** Even with the deplorable flying conditions during much of the battle of Hue, Anderson pointed out that the Marine helicopters flew 823 regular sorties, transported 1,672 passengers, carried more than a million pounds of cargo, and conducted 270 medical evacuation sorties, lifting out 977 casualties. More to the point, he maintained provisions existed in the order to override the flying restrictions when the tactical situation demanded. General Anderson admitted, however, "that this proviso, in all honesty was little known or understood. The order is widely distributed, but little read."[4]***

By April 1968, Brigadier General Earl E. Anderson, the III MAF Chief of Staff and also an aviator,

*Colonel David S. Twining, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded Marine Air Control Squadron 4 in 1968 and earlier served in the Dong Ha DASC, agreed with General Anderson that to an extent the difference between Marine Corps concepts of helicopter usage and that of the Army was based on "Marine Corps conservatism as a result of having far fewer helicopter assets." Twining, nevertheless, claimed that Marine Corps "helicopter doctrine or practice in Vietnam was not only conservative but relatively unimaginative." While stating that the Marine Corps was the "first of the services to institute a program to work out helicopter combat techniques," he believed that internal divisions within the Marine aviation community between fixed-wing and helicopter pilots hampered Marine helicopter innovation. In Twining's opinion, "it was only due to the insistence of the ground community and the Commandant himself, that we entered the war with the helicopter inventory that we had and this proved to be insufficient for the innovative tactics that we might have otherwise developed." Col David S. Twining, Comments on draft, dtd 15 Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File). Lieutenant Colonel Thomas F. Miller, who served on the MAG–16 staff and commanded a helicopter squadron in 1968, was unimpressed with the Army helicopter organization and tactics. According to Miller, some Army helicopter operations "anticipated aircraft losses of up to 25% of the first assault wave. I don't believe the Marine Corps would ever consider accepting such losses." LtCol Thomas F. Miller, Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Miller Comments.

**One experienced CH–46 helicopter pilot suggested that the CH–46 has the same capability as the HU1 as far as contour flying, but that the Army helicopter was smaller and able to fit into tighter landing zones than the larger Marine craft. LtCol Dale Johnson comments to author.

***In a contemporary letter, Brigadier General Earl E. Anderson, the III MAF Chief of Staff, expressed the following opinion about the subject: "Regardless of what we said in our official response, the fact remains that if the weather isn't above 1,500 feet and two miles, the mission has to be declared a priority one before the Wing will fly. If the weather is 500 feet and a mile, the requesting organization must declare an emergency before the helicopters will fly. If the weather is less than 500 feet and one mile, and if helicopters are required, the mission must be declared as mandatory, and the only two individuals who can approve a mandatory mission are the Wing Commander and the Commanding General III MAF. I should say, they *were* [emphasis in the original] the only ones who could approve such a mission, because following my investigation of certain allegations made during the Hue battle, General Anderson, at General Cushman's insistence, expanded the individuals who could approve a mandatory mission to include the two Assistant Wing Commanders, and the Chief of Staff, III MAF." Anderson concluded that even this was "not adequate. The helicopter pilots will fly, and do fly, in almost any kind of weather, but to require a requesting unit to go to the Wing Commander or the III MAF Commander to have a mission flown, when the ceiling is 400 feet, does not seem to be justified." BGen E.E. Anderson ltr to MajGen McCutcheon, dtd 14Mar68, Encl, Gen. Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). Lieutenant General Richard E. Carey, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded a fixed-wing squadron in 1968 and also served on the 1st MAW staff, recalled that during the battle for Hue a "CH46 did not do a MedEvac because of an extremely low ceiling (allegedly on the ground). At wing we were notified that a Huey had done the Med Evac for us because of our 500-foot restriction. We reiterated the proviso about exigencies of the tactical situation but too late. Unfortunately, this incident gave an impression that the Army provided better helo support than us. The 1st Cav observation helos buzzed around at low altitudes further emphasizing the difference in equipment, numbers of birds, and methods of operations, which certainly didn't enhance our support image to Marine ground units." LtGen Richard E. Carey, Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). Several Marine helicopter commanders emphasized their willingness to fly under adverse conditions. For example, Lieutenant Colonel Walter H. Shauer, who commanded HMM–362, wrote, "We were mission oriented merely flying in whatever weather, terrain, or combat situation in a manner to accomplish the mission. In my briefings the only restriction was attempt no mission that you were not capable of performing, otherwise, attempt it later when you could get thru." LtCol Walter H. Shauer, Comments on draft, dtd 1Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Shauer Comments. See also Col Roger W. Peard, Comments on draft, dtd 9Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Peard Comments and LtCol Jack E. Schlarp Comments on draft, dtd 21Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Schlarp Comments.



Department of Defense (USMC) Unnumbered Photo

A Marine Boeing Vertol CH–46 Sea Knight helicopter from HMM–165 approaches the helicopter carrier USS Tripoli (LPH 10) for a landing. Because of concern for space on board amphibious ships, Marines depended on larger capacity helicopters to carry the assault force so as to require fewer helicopters on board ship.

related that "there has been considerable fuss and fury over the responsiveness of the helicopters, and both division commanders are complaining . . . ." It may have been a matter of perspective, but General Cushman even had some doubts about the dedication of Marine helicopter pilots. The III MAF commander remembered that "some of the helicopter pilots from Marble Mountain would go up to Phu Bai to provide some support and hell, they'd come all the way back to Marble Mountain to eat lunch, just . . . baloney as that." According to Cushman "we had a long battle to utilize helicopters efficiently and it took great overhaul on the part of the divisions and the way they ran their logistics and a great overhaul on the part of the wing and the way they ran their helicopters."[5*]

General Westmoreland also believed that the Marines had problems with their helicopter organization. While he accepted the Air Force argument about the need of centralized fixed-wing air control by the air commander, he disagreed with the Marine concept of keeping the helicopter assets under the wing rather than the division. He believed the Marine Corps system was too inflexible. While crediting the Marines as the originators of the air assault doctrine, he confided to Brigadier General Chaisson, "You've got yourself so wedded to this centralized control of all your air assets over in the wing and the air-ground team, that down at the working level, the battalion, the infantry battalion, he has to ask for helicopters like he normally would have to ask for tactical air support." He believed the Army had advanced "way ahead of you in the way we've married our helicopters right in with the tactical infantry command."[6]

Marine aviation commanders, on the other hand, believed that the Army system, especially that of the 1st Air Cavalry, provided very little control and endangered not only helicopters, but also fixed-wing aircraft that were in the sector.** The Marine Direct Air Sup-

*Observing that the Marine wing supported two and a third Marine divisions, plus ARVNs and Koreans, General Condon wrote that "with assigned missions of that scope for the helos, it seems reasonable to me to take a centralized C&C [command and control] stand." Condon went on to say, nevertheless, "*If full coordinated planning had been accomplished by both members of the Air-Ground Team as a meticulous doctrinal observance in all helicopterborne operations, I don't think there would ever have been any 'difficulty' to be discussed* [Emphasis in the original]." Condon Comments. Lieutenant General Carey, also remarked on the dilemma of the wing with the "total overcommitment" of its helicopter assets to support not only Marine units but also other forces. The wing then was "taken to task by our own Marines for not being able to respond to a commitment . . . ." Carey, nevertheless, wrote that the "argument of ground commanders that helo assets are designed for the direct support of the division and should consequently be assigned to them for operational control has merit." He believed that while valid, "the aviation argument . . . that with the Corps' limited assets, training, employment, and logistic support is optimized with central control," there was still room for compromise. He believed that by task organizing "we . . . would have been more effective in supporting our Marines in Vietnam by selective assignment of certain Helo assets to the Divisions for operational control." Carey Comments.

**Lieutenant General Carey, who at the time was in the G–3 section of the wing, wrote that the "Army employment of their organic helos was totally unorthodox to us. In the Marine system the HDC in the DASC controlled helo movement and coordination of fires. In those cases where large helo operations were scheduled we considered it absolutely essential to lift or shift fires as required to ensure safe passage of our helos. On the other hand, as we observed Army operations they appeared to ignore the requirement to monitor their helo flights to ensure safe passage through hot areas. They generally by-passed

port Centers (DASCs) controlled not only fixed-wing sorties, but also contained a Helicopter Direction Center (HDC) to oversee rotary-wing flights. Collocated with the divisions' FSCCs, the Marine DASCs were able to coordinate their helicopter assaults with both fixed-wing and artillery support. On the other hand, the Army had no similar system and their helicopter units, according to Marine commanders, "just didn't know what each other were doing." Major General Anderson observed that the Army Americal Division unit commanders were "delighted" with the Marine system "because they recognized the desirability of this kind of coordination." He noted that it was an entirely different situation with the 1st Cavalry since "they had such a mass of helicopters that the control became an utter impossibility, except in accordance with whatever control is the result of planning."[7]

The Need for Lighter Aircraft

In the spring of 1968, however, no matter whether the Marine Corps wanted to adopt more of the Army airmobile tactics, it was in no position to do so. Much of this was due to the type of aircraft. For much of its success, the 1st Air Cavalry depended on its fleet of light helicopters, both unarmed and armed, which it used to find, fix, and kill the enemy. As General McCutcheon expressed in Washington after a visit to Vietnam, the Marines could match the Army in helicopter lift, but "we are woefully short of small helos, both slick and gunships."[8*]

During March, in an exchange of messages with Headquarters, Marine Corps, FMFPac, and MACV, General Cushman discussed means of making Marine helicopter operations more effective, specifically through increasing helicopter reconnaissance and gunship assets. General Westmoreland had recommended to III MAF that the Marines adopt more of the Air Cavalry techniques relative to these as well as helicopter reaction missions. While the Marine hierarchy "appreciated" the MACV recommendations, General Krulak, then the FMFPac commander, observed that General Westmoreland "knows, moreover, that we cannot lay hands on any significant number of Hueys [UH–1Es] in a short time, any more than the Army can." The Commandant, General Chapman, commented that the Marines needed more light helicopters and "we need them now." Using phraseology recommended both from Washington and from Honolulu, General Cushman told the MACV commander that given the situation it was "difficult to see how current Marine Corps helicopter resources could be used to an advantage greater than now is achieved in conjunction with our fixed-wing aviation." He mentioned that he had requested more light helicopters, UH–1Es, and specifically more gunships. According to Cushman, Westmoreland agreed to a III MAF proposal for an exchange of Marine and Army helicopter pilots and reconnaissance personnel. Moreover, the MACV commander would support a Marine effort to expand its light helicopter assets. At the same time, Cushman allowed that he would continue to monitor III MAF reconnaissance and reaction capability.[9]

At the same time, III MAF was in the midst of reorganizing its UH–1E assets. With the planned introduction of the fixed-wing North American turbo-prop OV–10A Bronco into the Marine Corps inventory, these aircraft were to take over from the Hueys more of the observation and aircraft control missions. The "Broncos" were slated for the VMO squadrons and the original concept was to reduce the number of Hueys in-country by the number of the new aircraft. Given the increased demand for lighter helicopters, General McCutcheon instead proposed in mid-1967 that the Marines obtain permission to create new light helicopter squadrons that would be equipped entirely with Hueys. The VMOs would

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checking in with the DASC causing concern that they would fly through friendly artillery fire with its possible consequences. We frequently observed massive helo movement out of Camp Evans and did not know of their destination, their routes or mission until they would suddenly reappear back in the landing pattern of their home field. It was a standard question, 'Wonder how many they lost to friendly fire today?'" Carey Comments. Colonel Joel E. Bonner, who was the Wing G–3 in 1968, observed that the subject of helicopter usage "will be with both the Army and the Marines forever—like frontal assaults and flanking maneuvers." Col Joel E. Bonner, Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

*Major General Condon observed that the Marine Corps developed its helicopters under "the concept of the amphibious assault" and in effect, this concept drove all Marine helicopter design. According to Condon, until the Vietnam War, there was no need for the gunship. Fixed-wing would provide helicopter protection and prepare the landing zones. On the other hand, the Army was limited by legislation from developing fixed-wing aircraft and "to acquire some organic airborne firepower, it was a natural step for the army to pursue the helicopter gunship development with vigor." Condon stated that the Marine Corps had "no comparable developmental thrust for either the high performance light helo or the growing capabilities of the gunship models." In General Condon's opinion, that as early as 1962, when Marine helicopters first deployed to Vietnam, the Corps should have pursued the development "*of the best performing light helicopter, the helicopter gunship, and defensive armament for all helicopters . . . on a high priority basis* [emphasis in the original]." Condon Comments.



Photo courtesy of Col Warren A. Butcher

Crew members of a Bell Iroquois UH–1E helicopter (Huey) gunship pause in the field awaiting a new mission. By 1968, the Marines required more helicopter gunships to support operations.

retain half of the Huey inventory while the new HMLs would acquire the surplus number displaced by the Broncos. As McCutcheon observed, the chances for approval were good in that the UH–1Es were already on hand and the procurement needs were modest. The Secretary of Defense agreed to the changes but only on a temporary basis.[10]

On 8 March 1968, Headquarters Marine Corps issued its implementing bulletin to restructure the VMOs and to establish the light helicopter squadrons (HMLs). The three permanent Marine VMO squadrons were eventually to contain 12 UH–1Es and 18 OV–10A Broncos. According to the headquarters directive, the Marine Corps would transform both of its temporary VMOs into HMLs consisting of 24 UH–1Es. A third HML would be established at Camp Pendleton in California. The Marine Corps was to retain the three HML squadrons only through the duration of the war.[11]

In Vietnam, in early March, VMO–3 at Phu Bai, the one temporary observation squadron in-country, became HML–367 with a transfer of aircraft and personnel. On 15 March, HML–167 was established at Marble Mountain with 13 UH–1Es assigned to it. The first Bronco aircraft arrived in July and joined VMO–2 at Da Nang.* While the arrival of the Broncos may have eased the burden on UH–1Es somewhat, there were still too few of the new light fixed-wing aircraft in country at the end of 1968, 13 total, and all in VMO–2, to make much difference. In December, there were 74 Marine UH–1Es in Vietnam—12 attached to VMO–2, 14 with HML–167, 15 with HML–367, and 23 with VMO–6—only three more than were in-country in January. While there had been a change in designation, the HML squadrons through the year

*Colonel Tullis J. Woodham, Jr., who commanded the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, remembered that in July 1968, the enemy shot down one of the new aircraft "in our area of Go Noi. The spotter aircraft was probably lower in altitude than he safely should have been because he received a number of rounds through the bottom of the plane, causing it to go down." Woodham sent a company to retrieve any survivors and bring back what they could of the "sophisticated and classified equipment and manuals." With continuous air support, "that was about as close to an 'air show' as I'd seen in Vietnam," the company accompanied by tanks found the aircraft and recovered the bodies of the crew. Unidentified draft, Encl, Col Tullis J. Woodham, Jr., Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec1994 (Vietnam Comment File).

basically performed the same missions as the VMOs.* It would not be until 1969 with the introduction of the Bell AH1G Cobra helicopter gunship into the Marine inventory and the arrival of additional Broncos that the demands upon the overworked UH–1Es began to ease.[12]

While the Marines used the UH–1E both for observation and as a gunship, it had many disadvantages in comparison to the diverse light helicopter mix that the Army helicopter units had available to them. The 1st Air Cavalry already had the Cobra gunships in service. In addition, the Army division had available the bubble-topped Hughes OH–6A Cayuse or LOH (Light Observation Helicopter) for scouting missions and finally the UH–1H model of the Huey for command and control and trooplift purposes. The Army still used the UH–1B model in a gunship role.[13]

As early as March 1968, Brigadier General Henry W. Hise, one of the two assistant commanders of the 1st MAW, outlined the handicaps of the Marine UH–1E as a gunship. Equipped with the TAT–101 Turret, the UH–1E armament, according to Hise, did "not have enough range or punch."** Also in both the fight for Hue and in the environment around the DMZ and Khe Sanh, the Marine general argued that "the armed chopper is a point target to the man on the ground while in the great majority of cases the chopper pilot is firing at an area target." The result was that the helicopters were vulnerable to the enemy's 12.7mm machine guns while pilots had difficulty "in pin-pointing the guns firing at them." Hise believed "that chopper operations into 12.7[mm machine gun] defended areas is not good sense unless the weather allows fixed-wing support." The assistant wing commander observed that armed UH–1E pilots flying into these regions now "holler for longer range area weapons; specifically 20mm guns or at a minimum .50-caliber guns."[14]

In June, the new FMFPac commander, Lieutenant General Henry W. Buse, Jr., picked up on the refrain for more of a mix of light helicopters for the Marine Corps. After a visit to III MAF and especially the 3d Marine Division, he told the Commandant that the division's recent mobile operations in the interior and the western mountains "underscore the requirement for the relatively small, light, and powerful helicopter vis a vis the CH–46." While remarking that the latter aircraft was "worth its weight in gold," he stated it was "not the answer to the requirement for a troop carrier" in the rugged terrain in the central and western DMZ sector. According to Buse, the infantry and reconnaissance "insert and extraction problem in undeveloped LZ's, often under fire, dictates the employment of smaller, faster, more maneuverable helos." While recognizing the yeoman service performed by the Marine UH–1Es and the old Sikorsky UH–34s Sea Horses,*** he was especially impressed with the Army UH–1H "with its slightly greater capacity and increased power" for these purposes.[15]

Major General Davis, the 3d Marine Division commander, also had doubts about the Marine UH–1E as a command and control aircraft and compared it unfavorably to the Army UH–1H. While assistant Provisional Corps commander, prior to taking over the 3d Division, Davis recounted that the Army had provided him with his own Huey, an H model, and that he had been "spoiled." With the Army aircraft, with its increased power, he was able to get into "all of these out of way places and these hilltops, and through all this weather . . . ." When he assumed command of the 3d Division, the Marine wing provided him with a UH–1E "that couldn't hack it." The Marine aircraft with its comparative lack of lift would have difficulty in the mountains. Davis remembered that he "got

*Lieutenant Colonel Thomas F. Miller, who commanded HML–167 from August through the end of 1968, recalled that out of the 14 UH–1E aircraft that he had assigned to his squadron, he scheduled five of these aircraft each day as VIP aircraft for the commanding generals of the two Marine Divisions, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, III MAF, and the Korean Marine Corps. While stating that the number of these especially designated aircraft by themselves were not significant, they consisted of nearly six percent of all UH–1E assets. Miller Comments.

**According ro Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Miller, he did not recall that when he assumed command of HML–167 in August 1968 that any of his aircraft were equipped with the TAT 101. He stated that his UH–1E's "were armed with forward-firing 7.62 machine guns and 2.75 rocket pods attached to each landing skid. Two crew members operating 7.62 machine guns fired out the aircraft's side doors." Miller Comments.

***Both Lieutenant Colonels Jack E. Schlarp and Walter H. Shauer, who both commanded HMM–362, a UH–34 squadron, in 1968, praised the reliability and availability of the UH–34. Lieutenant Colonel Shauer observed rhat when he arrived in Vietnam in the last half of 1967, the "[UH–]34's were doing the bulk of the flying. . . . This was because the older H–34 [in comparison to the CH–46] was much simpler to maintain and [had a] reliable piston engine vs sophisticated jet turbine engines [of the CH–46] subjecr to FOD (foreign object damage) and temperature limitations." Shauer Comments. Lieutenant Colonel Schlarp wrote, "if the Corps had hung on to the H–34's and not tried to rely on the H–46s, and/or H–53s everyone might have been better served. The H–34 was a reliable helicopter that did not suffer from the lack of availability as did the newer helicopters." Schlarp Comments.



Photo from the Abel collection

A Marine North American OV–10A Bronco lands at the Marble Mountain airstrip at Da Nang. The Bronco was to take over more of the observation and aircraft control missions from the Hueys.

flopped down two or three times with those Hueys [UH–1Es]." According to the 3d Marine Division commander, the Army provided him with a backup helicopter because, "those Marine helicopters could not go where the H–model could go."[16]*

While the situation was not entirely bleak, General McCutcheon commented in mid-November that the improvement in the inventory of Marine gunships and other light helicopters would only be modest in the foreseeable future. As he wrote to Major General Quilter, the 1st Wing commander, "I must tell you in all honesty, that there just aren't any more helos or any more pilots to make available to III MAF in the foreseeable future." He mentioned a combination of both personnel ceilings and an attempt to reduce the budget as "tremendous constraints on any expansionist program at this stage of the game." McCutcheon, nevertheless, stated that he was working on "a final crack . . . to increase the number of light helos in our structure."[17]

To Keep the Mediums and Heavies Flying

While the Marine command remained concerned about its shortage of light helicopters during much of 1968, it continued to have difficulties with the availability of both its medium and heavy rotary aircraft. After taking the drastic measure in the latter part of 1967 of grounding all of the Boeing Vertol CH–46 Sea Knights because of several accidents involving the rear pylons of the aircraft, the Marine Corps and Boeing undertook an expensive and extensive repair program, including both structural and system modifications.** In the first phase of the solution, the Marines rotated the aircraft from Vietnam to Okinawa and Japan where structural modifications were carried out. By the end of

*Colonel Roger W. Peard, Jr., who commanded HMH–463, in 1968, observed that the greatest difference between the UH–1E and UH–1H models was engine power, otherwise the aircraft were very similar. Peard wrote that maneuverability "relates to a machine's ability to change direction, accelerate, and decelerate. These are important characteristics for fighter/intercepter aircraft, but not so crucial in a helicopter. Maneuverability in a helo may add to the exhilaration of flight, but most helos are flown to maintain the lift vector from the rotor disc close to vertical to maximize lift." Peard acknowledged that size considerations were another matter and that "laymen" speaking of maneuverability usually refer to ability to "get into a small LZ, which is a size consideration." In any event Colonel Peard did not believe there was enough size differentiation to quibble about between the E and H versions. He concluded, "I imagine that MGen Davis may just [have] liked flying in the newer H rather than in a well-used 'E'." Peard Comments.

**Lieutenant General Louis Metzger who in 1967 and early 1968 as a brigadier general served as the 3d Marine Division Assistant Division Commander, recalled that it took some time to identify the problem with the CH–46 as equipment failure. He remembered that it was sometime in the second half of 1967 that when the 3d Division assistant aviation officer, "was flying and observed the tail come off a CH–46. His report was the first indication of this equipment problem. This observation led to the 'expensive and extensive repair program'. . . ." LtGen Louis Metzger, Comments on draft, dtd 20Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

1967, Marine, Navy, and corporate technicians and mechanics had replaced the rear pylons on all but 16 of the 105 Sea Knight aircraft in the Western Pacific. They refitted the remaining aircraft with the structural modifications by February 1968.[18]

During the remaining months of 1968, the Marine Corps and Navy initiated the second phase during regularly scheduled maintenance overhaul of the 46s or those aircraft sent back because of extensive battle damage. Called Project Sigma, these modifications consisted of the installation of a new tail section, a new transmission mount, and a cruise guide indicating system.* While the second phase caused less of a drawdown of the CH–46 resources than the initial alterations, about 12 to 14 of the aircraft a month were either at Japan or Okinawa undergoing rework. In July, moreover, the 1st MAW reported two instances of the "structural failure of CH–46 rotor blades" manufactured prior to March 1967. This required the Marine Corps and Navy to undertake a new testing procedure of all the blades of that vintage. While this affected nearly half of the Sea Knights in the 1st MAW inventory, the wing accomplished most of the retesting in-country without impacting greatly on the tempo of operations.[19]**

While the Marine wing remained concerned about the continuing effectiveness of the CH–46,*** several minor problems with replacement parts plagued the large heavy-lift Sikorsky CH–53A Sea Stallion helicopter. General Anderson, the wing commander, later observed that strictly because of the lack of spare parts there were times in late 1967 and early 1968 when only three of the aircraft "would be available for flight." In January 1968, HMH–463, the CH–53A squadron, averaged only a 31 percent availability. During February, General McCutcheon in Washington raised "such a fuss" in Navy aviation logistic cir-

*These modifications resulted "in added structural strength, and give the pilot a means of monitoring the structural loads imposed on the airframe, reducing the likelihood of overstress." Because of the magnitude of these changes, they were accomplished as the aircraft underwent "Progressive Aircraft Rework" (PAR) or Battle Damage Repair (BDR). There still remained, however, significant differences about the extent of modifications needed between the Boeing Vertol Corporation and the Marine Corps. For example General McCutcheon in a letter to an official of the company insisted that the Phase II modifications be carried out "in order to meet the Marine Corps operational requirements." He also expressed his concerns that a "desynch" device [to avoid intermeshing of the rotors] be added to the list of modifications. While willing to soften his position to the extent that he believed "it is 'highly desirable' vice 'mandatory,'" McCutcheon wrote "No matter how you look at it, the pilots still ask the question, 'How do I get down safely if I have desynch and blade intermeshing?'" The device was never added. McCutcheon to Robert W. Tharrington, dtd 29Jan68, Ltr No. 28, File T, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68, p. 111.

**Another modification was added to the CH–46s in 1968 that had nothing to do with the structural problems. In February 1968, after much hesitation, General Krulak, at FMFPac, finally approved an experiment of General Anderson's, the wing commander, to replace the 7.62mm machine guns on board the CH–46 with the .50-caliber guns. Major General McCutcheon told Krulak after his visit to Vietnam in January 1968 that almost all commanders, including a division commander, were in favor of the replacement and willing to give up troop space to carry the heavier armament with its greater range. According to McCutcheon, the question was which weapon was "most effective in the air, not on the ground. . . . Perhaps if you had a .50 to start with you might not have been forced down." Faced with the almost unanimous opinion from Vietnam, General Krulak relented. He told both Generals Anderson and McCutcheon that while believing the issue was "completely emotional . . . [but] I am no fool where emotion is involved." With the final assent from FMFPac, General Anderson announced that he desired to arm all of the 46s with the .50-caliber guns, but would "leave it to the discretion of the group and squadron commanders, however, as to whether or not they actually mounted the 7.62mm or the .50-caliber." As General Anderson stated later, he did not want "to make a dogmatic rule" but wanted to permit his commanders to determine the best armament according to the particular circumstances. MajGen Norman Anderson ltrs to McCutcheon, dtd 2 and 7Feb68, and McCutcheon to Anderson, dtd 8Feb68, Letter No 50, File A and LtGen Victor H. Krulak to McCutcheon, dtd 2Feb68 and McCutcheon ltr to Krulak, dtd 8Feb68, Ltr No. 39, File K, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers; MajGen Norman J. Anderson, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Norman Anderson Comments.

***Besides the structural problems with the CH–46, Lieutenant Colonel Roy J. Edwards, who commanded HMM–265 which operated with SLF Bravo in the summer of 1968, related problems with fuel filters which were unable to prevent the "super fine sand in this littoral region . . . [from] being drawn into the fuel tanks as the helicopters . . . landed on or near the beaches." After extended use, the sand "worked its way into the fuel controls of the helicopter to prevent it from developing full power." According to Edwards, "this [was] happening to *all* [emphasis in the original] my helicopters even though they had all the routine prescribed maintenance." He recalled two near-accidents caused by the problem: "I had one a/c [aircraft] on a milk run take off from the carrier, climbed straight ahead, lost power and sagged back on the carrier as the carrier ran up under him! He was fully loaded with passengers, supplies, and mail. Not one got their feet wet!" In the second incident, a helicopter on the way to the beach from the carrier also lost power, "the pilot kept the engine running and just flew into the water and taxied the several miles to shore." Again there were no injuries nor damage. He then halted flights of all of his CH–46s until the squadron could determine a "fix". Eventually, they placed additional air filters on "the air intake to the fuel tanks of the helicopter plus judicious monitoring/cleaning of the fuel controls after each flight onto the beach where this 'superfine' sand was being ingested. This didn't prevent the contamination but we learned to live with it." According to Edwards, "it was a 'soul-searching' experience to have to 'ground' my helicopters in the middle of a war, while we found out . . . how to counteract." LtCol Roy J. Edwards, Comments on draft, dtd 10Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

cles that he "got a KC–130 load of CH–53 spares . . . under the nickname of Floodtide" sent out to the 1st Wing. Observing that the list of parts included clamps, tubes, gaskets, fasteners and other "mundane items", McCutcheon exclaimed, "I'll be damned if I can understand why this kind of stuff is not available in Da Nang or at least Subic [the Navy base in the Philippines at Subic Bay]."[20]

While appreciative of the effort upon receipt of the Floodtide supplies on 4 March, General Anderson complained, "One critical item follows another in the history of the CH–53." He stated that during the past week he only had nine of the large helicopters flying for a 33 percent availability rate. According to the wing commander, if only he had replacement windshields to install he could have another 10 of the large aircraft in the air. Adding to Anderson's woes, an enemy rocket attack on Marble Mountain the night before resulted in the loss of one of the CH–53s.[21]

During the following months, the situation improved, but only modestly.* For example, in April, General McCutcheon again had to arrange a special airlift for CH–53 spare parts with "no appreciable change in their operational readiness." Only a third of the large choppers were operationally ready as contrasted to the number on hand. While not overly concerned about those figures, McCutcheon observed that these statistics become "alarming" when the number of operationally ready aircraft were compared to the number of aircraft assigned. The availability for the CH–53s then dropped to about 25 percent. In August, the arrival of HMH–462 at Phu Bai with 10 additional aircraft bringing the total of the Sea Stallions in Vietnam to 43, provided some relief for the other 53 squadron, HMH–463.** According to FMFPac, this improved the lift capability of the wing by 34 percent.[22]

While the CH–53 recovered some 167 downed helicopters and one Cessna O–1B light fixed-wing observation aircraft during the year, the aircraft continued to have problems. Near the end of 1968, Brigadier General Homer Dan Hill, the assistant wing commander, provided General Quilter his assessment about the CH–53 limitations. According to Hill, while the helicopter could carry about 9,000 pounds total, even under normal circumstances it could lift no more than 8,000 pounds externally. This load was further curtailed in the heat and mountains of Vietnam. The Sea Stallion was not capable of bringing in heavy equipment for the building of firebases or lifting in the large 155mm guns to these sites. In order to carry out these missions, the 3d Marine Division relied upon nearby Army helicopter companies equipped with the CH–54 Tarhe Sky Crane that could carry an external load of approximately 20,000 pounds. The Army Sky Cranes recovered 41 of the Marine CH–46s. Hill pointed to the fact that the Marines very recently lost three CH–46s that could not be field stripped and "quickly lifted to safety by the CH–53A." He recommended that the Marine Corps try to procure a heavy-lift helicopter that could match the Army Sky Crane.[23]***

While design factors played a role as did a continuing pilot shortage**** in helicopter availability, the one constant problem was the lack of spare parts, especial-

*Colonel Roger W. Peard, who commanded HMH–463 in the second half of 1968, observed that he made some changes relative to spare parts procurement. He recalled that when he took over, four aircraft were being used to scavage parts for other aircraft, but that the MAG–16 maintenance officer did not believe in creating "hangar 'queens' for parts." Instead when an aircraft was scheduled for its annual inspection, good parts were removed to replace parts needed by other aircraft. The other aircraft was then sent back for rework. While this may have increased labor costs, no perennial "hangar queens" were created. According to Peard, "parts shortages persisted, but this system improved availability of the CH–53A in HMH–463." Peard Comments.

**Colonel Joseph L. Sadowski, who commanded HMH–463 early in 1968, recalled that during Tet there were insufficient airframes to send a second CH–53 squadron to Vietnam, "not to mention the training pipe line for pilots/mechanics and the required flight hours stateside to accomplish this task." Col Joseph L. Sadowski, Comments on draft, dtd 20Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

***General Carey, who in 1968 served on the wing staff, observed that through July the availability of the CH–53 was so low, "we frequently requested use of the CH–54 flying cranes for aircraft retrieval. At one time the situation was so bad we even considered requesting emergency procurement of our own flying crane capability." Carey Comments. Colonel Peard, a former CH–54 squadron commander, observed that relative to the external and internal lift capabilities of the CH–53A Sea Stallion, "weight is weight, wherever you put it in or on the aircraft." He stated, however, that the helicopter could carry an internal load at a higher airspeed, because of the limitations caused by "load motion, that is swinging." Colonel Peard acknowledged that the Army CH–54 Sky Crane was the "undisputed heavy-lift champion . . .," but noted that in contrast to the CH–53, it did not have a trooplift capability. According to Peard, General Quilter, the wing commander, "did not like going to the Army to use the Sky Crane . . . [and directed that] one of the CH–53s in HMH–463 be stripped of all possible equipment to lighten it as much as possible and thus maximize its lifting capability." Peard Comments.

****See Chapter 27 for a detailed discussion of pilot training and shortages. Relative to the helicopter pilot shortage, in October 1968, Major General McCutcheon at HQMC witnessed the first six Marine officers graduate from the Army helicopter school at Hunter Airfield near Savannah, Georgia. He believed that with the inauguration of this training program earlier in the year that "finally got the pilot problem whipped into shape so that from here on in we should be making progress." McCutcheon ltr to E.E. Anderson, dtd 10 Oct 68, Ltr No. 93, File A, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers, MCHC.



Top photo is from the Abel Collection and bottom photo is courtesy of Col Roger W. Peard, USMC (Ret)

Top, a Marine Sikorsky CH–53 Sea Stallion lifts a damaged Marine Sikorsky UH–34D Sea Horse from the landing strip at An Hoa. Below, a crashed CH–53 Sea Stallion, itself, is lifted by an Army Tarhe CH–54 Sky Crane back to MAG–16 at Marble Mountain. The Army helicopter could lift up to 20,000 pounds.



ly for the CH–53s, but also for the 46s, and to a lesser extent the UH–1Es. While noting the low 25 percent availability in April for the Sea Stallion helicopters, General McCutcheon also pointed to a 33 percent and 50 percent availability respectively for the CH–46s and Hueys.* Five months later, in August, the 1st MAW commander, Major General Quilter wrote, "we are in deep trouble on provisioning for engine and airframe spares in the helos—CH–46, CH–53, UH–1E." In October 1968, a senior naval aviation supply officer in a speech to his colleagues stated, "if aircraft are going to fly, we all are going to have to get off our collective butts and manage repairables. There is only one word to describe the job we're doing—lousy." Throughout 1968, the resupply rate for Marine Corps helicopter parts hovered around 70 percent.[24]

In an exhaustive examination of Marine helicopter support, a III MAF special board in the spring of 1969 blamed the lack of spare parts on unrealistic standard monthly hourly flight maximums set in Washington. It observed that the "CNO monthly hourly flight maximum is the key against which dollars are made available to DOD [Department of Defense] to buy spare parts . . . ." The problem was that these established norms had not taken into consideration the demands upon the limited number of Marine helicopter assets in Vietnam and the resulting scarcity. To meet the actual combat requirements, the Marine helicopters constantly overflew the set maximums.** As the board concluded, the Marines had less "total helicopters available for daily operations and as a result we fly those in commission far in excess of the hour rate required for good maintenance, safety of flight, and dependable availability."[25]

The statistics of helicopter sorties flown, passengers carried, and tonnage lifted during 1968 set a record pace. From February through July 1968, Marine helicopters flew at an ever-increasing rate, running up the number of sorties, passengers carried, and tonnage lifted. For example in March 1968, the rotary aircraft flew more than 44,000 sorties and lifted over 53,000 troops and nearly 7,000 tons of cargo. This was an increase of over 10,000 sorties for the previous month, and 3,000 over the monthly average of the previous year. In July, the total number of sorties reached 71,452, a new monthly high for the war.

While the Marine helicopter pilots would fly at a slightly slower tempo after July, they still maintained a monthly average of about 60,000 sorties, with the exception of a slight dip in the numbers for September. In December, the Marine helicopters carried out 59,838 sorties, ferried over 113,499 passengers, and lifted 13,835 tons of cargo. For the year, the totals were 597,000 sorties, 122,100 tons of cargo, and 935,000 passengers. These figures represented a 31 percent increase in sorties, a 39 percent increase in passengers carried, and a 39 percent increase in tonnage lifted over 1967.[26]

Notwithstanding that most of these helicopter missions were in support of Marine forces, a substantial number, 43,138 sorties for the year amounting to six percent of the total, were for other forces in Vietnam. These included 34,094 sorties for the Koreans, 3,840 for the ARVN, 3,508 for U.S. Special Forces, 1,666 for the U.S. Army, and 30 in support of the Seventh Air Force. While a lower percentage than the previous year, these flights in support of both allied and other Services still caused a drawdown on the scarce Marine helicopter resources.[27]

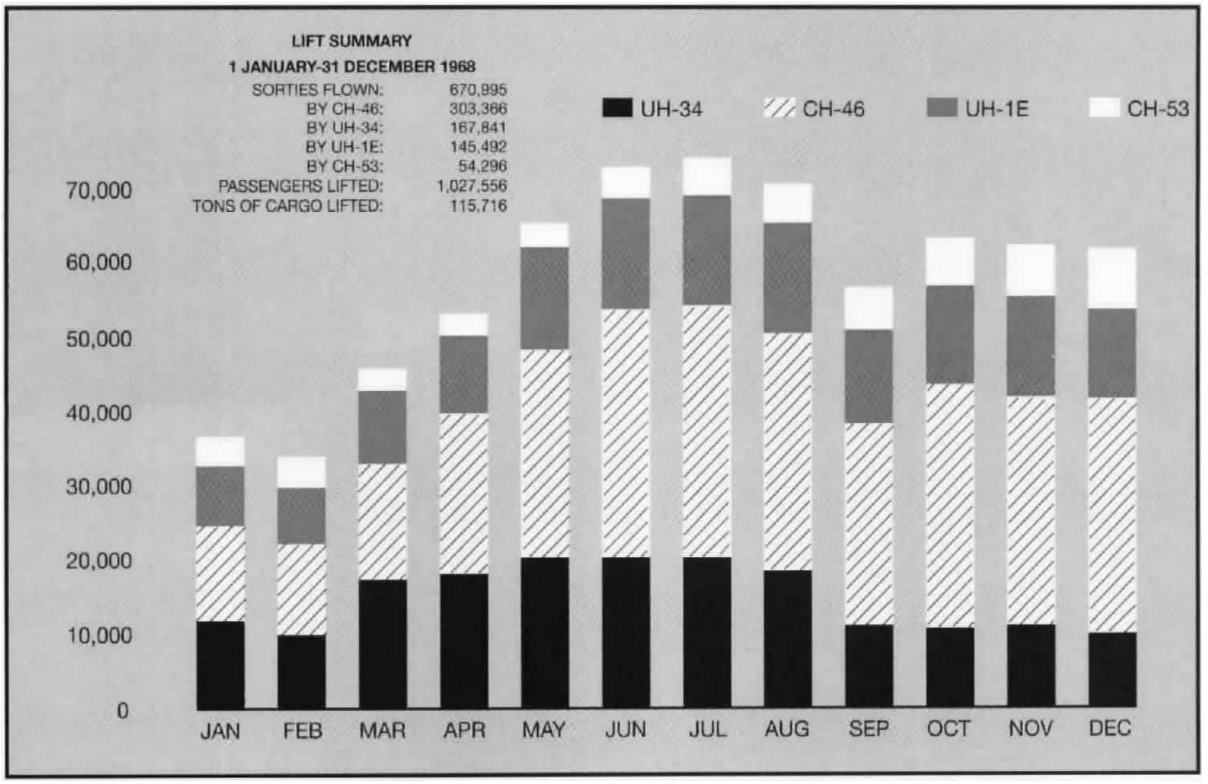
Another Look at Helicopter Air-Ground Relations

During the spring of 1968, in order to meet the increasing demands on its resources, especially in the north, the 1st Wing decided to alter some of its command arrangements. As early as 6 March, acting on a suggestion of his staff, General Norman Anderson recommended the establishment of a provisional MAG at Quang Tri Airfield with three squadrons to reduce the span of control for MAG–36. In the meantime, MAG–36 maintained a forward headquarters and three squadrons, VMO–6, HMM–163, and HMM–262 at Quang Tri Airfield under Colonel John E. Hansen, the group's deputy commander. Finally after securing approval from both FMFPac and Headquarters, Marine Corps, on 15 April, General Anderson ordered the establishment of the new helicopter aircraft group, appropriately designated Provisional (Prov) MAG–39. He detached the three squadrons already at Quang Tri from MAG–36 to form Prov MAG–39 and made Colonel Hansen the new MAG

*According to Lieutenant Colonel Thomas F. Miller, who assumed command of HML–167 in August 1968, the availability of UH–1Es, or at least for his squadron had improved in a few months. Miller stated his squadron "never suffered at a lowly 50 percent to my knowledge. During Sept–Dec68, with 14 aircraft assigned, average operational readiness was 84.7 percent . . . ." Miller Comments.

**Lieutenant Colonel Walter H. Shauer, Jr., of HMM–262, wrote that his pilots "continuously overflew the CNO programmed monthly flight hour maximums (both in aircraft and pilot hours.)" He mentioned that his personal log book revealed "in a ten month period 914 flight hours, . . . [averaging] 91 hours per month." Shauer Comments.

MARINE HELICOPTER SORTIES JANUARY-DECEMBER 1968



From Ooperations of US Marine Forces Vietnam 1968. Source: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68.

commander.* General Cushman, the III MAF commander, admitted that "splitting the helicopters was sort of against our philosophy," but observed that they needed the helicopters near the 3d Division in the DMZ sector: "We had to move them up there so they'd have them."[28]

Despite the establishment of Prov MAG–39, the new group was unable to meet the demands of the new 3d Marine Division commander, Major General Davis, who wanted to undertake more mobile operations. According to Davis, the way he wanted to use helicopters "was a whole new learning experience" for both the wing and the division. Davis declared, "instead of sitting down and looking around and saying, 'Where can we go? Where is it easier to put the helicopters?' We never said that." Instead, Davis insisted, "We said, we're going to put the helicopters here by making whatever effort is required to prepare the place for the helicopters." The idea was to be "totally flexible and responsive to the ground commander's needs." The new division commander contended that the Marine Corps had given some thought to high-mobility operations, "but we really hadn't done it." He stated that he was not advocating the Army Air Cavalry solution which had too many helicopters and not enough control, but a middle course in which his regimental and battalion commanders at least had their own helicopters.[29]

From the ground commander and especially the division commander's viewpoint, the main advantage of the Army system was that he owned the helicopter assets. The 1st Air Cavalry brigade and battalion commanders not only had their own personal helicopters, but also could depend on helicopter support almost on call. According to General Davis, in comparison, the Marine helicopter "system was so centralized that you have got to work out in detail the day before exactly

*In May, HMM–161 arrived directly from the United States equipped with the new redesigned CH–46D models and replaced HMM–163, a UH–34 squadron at Quang Tri. According to Colonel Hansen, "this represented a substantial increase in the lift capability of Prov MAG–39 when you consider that HMM–161 arrived with essentially 100 percent aircraft availability versus . . . older [and less lift capacity] H–34s with reduced availability." Col John E. Hansen, Comments on draft, dtd 17Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).



Photo courtesy of Col John E. Hansen, USMC (Ret)

MajGen Norman J. Anderson, CG, 1st MAW, hands colors of new Provisional MAG–39 to its commander, Col John E. Hansen. The new MAG was formed at Quang Tri to provide helicopter support for the 3d MarDiv.

what you want and schedule it." Davis declared: "There's no way a ground commander can work out a precise plan for the next day's operations unless the enemy is going to hold still . . . ."[30*]

As could be expected this attitude caused immediate problems with both the wing and III MAF. A then-junior member of the 3d Marine Division staff, Major William H. Dabney remembered General Davis telling III MAF: "Look, if I don't get this helicopter support that I'm asking for . . . from you, I'm going to get it from the Army. The devil take the hindmost." According to Dabney, Davis argued against dividing the helicopter support evenly between the two divisions. The support should depend on the actual situation and requirement, not an attempt to distribute the same number of sorties to each command: "Hey, we need 22 sorties, CH–46s because I got an enemy that I can use them against, not because I'm one division and he's another."[31]

In personal letters to Washington, the 1st MAW commander, General Anderson, described his perception of wing-division relations. He declared that he had "tried at every turn to get the Marine doctrine of air-ground command structure accepted in III MAF." Anderson believed that "many of our problems have resulted from failure to inject sound air thinking into ground plans in a timely fashion." The wing commander mentioned, however, that he had opened at the Quang Tri Airfield what he called the 1st MAW Aux-

*Major General Norman Anderson commented: "Twenty-five years later the crux of this disagreement still is numbers and types of helos, a fact of life exacerbated then by the proximity of helo-rich Army units. General Davis could not make a valid case at that time because a decision to let him have all the helo support he wanted had to be made at the III MAF level if not higher. At those levels the broader and deeper problems were dominant and they, of course, prevailed therefore at the Wing." He observed, "The Marine Corps remains structured primarily for assault from the sea, which is as it must be." Norman Anderson Comments.



Photo from the Abel Collection

BGen Homer D. Hill, one of the assistant wing commanders, poses at the Khe Sanh airstrip before the evacuation of the base. The wing opened an auxiliary command post at the Quang Tri Airfield under Gen Hill to coordinate helicopter operations with the 3d MarDiv.

iliary CP, under one of his assistant wing commanders, Brigadier General Homer D. Hill. Anderson directed Hill, "to interest himself in all aspects (not only helos . . .)" of the wing in northern I Corps.[32]

While Anderson still complained that "Davis is totally insatiable," the establishment of the forward headquarters improved the relations between the wing and the division.* Major General Davis later related that the assignment of Hill to Quang Tri "provided this division with . . . an air/ground team capability . . . ." He stated that Hill's presence made his mobile concept work, "so long as he was here we were solving problems." In October 1968, General Hill mentioned in a letter to General Anderson that the division and wing had conducted about 75 "highly successful helicopter heli-borne assaults in and around the DMZ" since he had been there. Hill's assistant participated in all "3d Division planning and Task Force operations." According to Hill, this was helpful to both the ground and air commanders: "We stay on top of all operational discrepancy reports—both ways moving fast to correct what is wrong from either side—Division or Wing." General Hill wrote that he attended all division briefings with General Davis and went with him "on many of his helo rides to his units talking to our FACs [forward air controllers] and ALOs [air liaison officers] as well as the regimental and battalion commanders." Hill praised Anderson for establishing the forward headquarters and that it had paid dividends in Marine air-ground relations.[33]

This short honeymoon between the 3d Marine Division and the wing soon came to an end. In October, the wing decided to close the forward headquarters and bring General Hill south to be part of a joint 1st Marine Division and wing task force to conduct Operation Meade River in the Da Nang area of operations. General Davis, the 3d Division commander, protested, but to no avail. According to Davis, when Hill departed, the situation immediately deteriorated. Davis complained that without Hill, he was left "to deal [with] agents of the wing and agents of III MAF who were not in a position to make any decision short of going to Da Nang. This was unworkable." In an attempt to placate the 3d Division commander, General Quilter would honor specific requests to send General Hill "to come up and stay awhile" until the particular problem was resolved. Davis stated, however, for the most part, "it has not been a good arrangement to attempt to conduct a air/ground team effort up here with the air part of the team having no authority."[34**]

*General Davis commented on the draft that he was, "amused at my 'insatiable' need for choppers . . . when I had more enemy than anybody else!" Gen Raymond G. Davis, Comments on draft, dtd 4Sep95 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Both Lieutenant Colonel Shauer and Lieutenant General Carey praised in their comments the efforts of General Hill in improving relations with the 3d Marine Division. In a letter to Shauer in June 1968, General Hill wrote, "I have noticed a great improvement in UH–34 ops over the last few days as a result of things you have done. I believe relationships have improved considerably between supporting and supported units. This is good. Keep up the fine work. Let me know of any problems we can help on." Shauer Comments and BGen H.D. Hill ltr to Maj Shauer, dtd 29Jun68, Encl, Shauer Comments. General Carey declared that while General Hill was with Davis the relationship with the division "was superior. Simply because he spoke for the wing and worked so closely with the Division commander." According to Carey, Hill "maintained a constant dialogue on both fixed-wing and helo support for the Division. It was not uncommon for him to be on the phone at all hours of the day and night working closely with us on the details of the required support. He certainly took the pressure off the Wing G–3 section. After he left, work had to be conducted through an intermediary, which really slowed down

While there were two assistant wing commanders, the second AWC, Brigadier General Henry F. Hise, served as the coordinator for air bases throughout I Corps and apparently was not available to take General Hill's place. From the III MAF perspective, Brigadier General E. E. Anderson, General Cushman's chief of staff, believed Hise's function could better have been accomplished by the 1st MAW chief of staff. General Anderson quoted Hise to the effect "that having a second AWC in the 1st Wing is like having tits on a bull."* Anderson supported a move to eliminate the position altogether and convinced both General Quilter, the wing commander, and General Cushman. According to Anderson, Quilter was of the opinion that unless given command of an air-ground task force, a second assistant wing commander was superfluous to his needs. On 19 December, the III MAF commander, General Cushman, officially asked FMFPac that a replacement for the second AWC not be sent. General Buse, the FMFPac commander, concurred. Apparently no thought was given to sending General Hise or his replacement to Quang Tri to replace General Hill.[35]

Even if an aviation general officer had been sent north, there remained some question whether the deteriorating relations between Marine air and ground officers would have improved measurably. As early as August, Major General McCutcheon in Washington wrote to Major General Quilter about disquieting reports from returning officers from Vietnam, varying "in rank from lieutenant colonel to major general that we do not have the communication and dialogue in existence between air and ground units that we should have." Even Brigadier General Hill commented that the wing would never "satisfy the [division's] helo appetites." He complained about lacking UH–1Es and being "plagued by the UH–1E gunships syndrome" as well as problems in helicopter availability. According to Hill, the only way the wing could meet the demands of both divisions was by overflying the maximum standards. As he later remarked: "This can only do one or two things; it can get you in trouble real fast, or sooner or later, it can drive you off the deep end."[36]

In October, at the III MAF staff level, Brigadier General Earl E. Anderson remarked that "Ray Davis has really been shot in the fanny with the Army helicopter system, although I frankly believe that it's more the result of the large numbers of helicopters available to the Army units, together with the fact that the ground officer has greater control over them than does the Marine commander." According to Anderson, the 3d Marine Division general had proposed to III MAF the establishment of an "air cavalry group, similar to the 1st Air Cav." General Cushman had taken the recommendation under advisement and asked for opinions from his staff and senior commanders.[37]

At about the same time, one of Davis' regimental commanders, Colonel Robert H. Barrow of the 9th Marines, forwarded a memorandum through command channels about modifying procedures on the use and control of helicopters. He wrote that while Marine doctrinal publications "do not clearly express the air ground command relations for helicopter operations," he believed they implied flexibility. He suggested that Prov MAG–39 be placed in direct support of the 3d Marine Division. According to Barrow, "essentially, the helicopter unit commander advises the helicopter-borne [ground] unit commander, participates in planning and, within his capability, provides the helicopter support and performs the tasks required by the helicopter-borne unit commander."[38]

Colonel Barrow then came to the crux of the matter. He urged that the ground commander be permitted to determine "type and adequacy of landing zone preparation, switching from primary to alternate landing zones, and landing in a high risk situation." Rejecting this idea, Major General Quilter, the wing commander, wrote across the memorandum: "This would overrule air judgment of pilot. Pilot has no authority to do *anything*," At this point, General Cushman decided against

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the decision process. We also lost the pulse of the dynamic, fast-moving General Davis." Carey Comments. In a dissenting opinion, Colonel Walter Sienko, who assumed command of Prov MAG–39 in July 1968, commented that "if we had a full-MAG–39 at Quang Tri instead of a Prov MAG with limited resources, we still would not have satisfied the needs of General Davis." He believed "the decision of not inserting a third general officer in the chain of command between air and ground at the MAG level was a correct one." Col Walter Sienko, Comments on draft, n.d. [Nov94] (Vietnam Comment File).

*Brigadier General Hise commented that "the West Texas saying, an area where I originated, is 'as useless as tits on a boar.' A boar has up to ten vestigial tits, a bull has only four. However, as with assistant wing commanders, an increase in their number does not add to their usefulness." BGen Henry W. Hise, Comments on draft, dtd 22Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

implementing either General Davis' or Colonel Barrow's recommendations.[39]*

The controversy between the air and ground commanders surfaced in February 1969 in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, the Corps' professional journal. In a letter to the editor, Major General Davis publically vented his frustrations about helicopter usage and control. He stated that he regularly used Army LOH and other light helicopters for scouting and reconnaissance missions. Countering claims by the wing that the helicopters were vulnerable to enemy heavy machine gun fire, the division commander argued that the Army aircraft "have not been hit by ground fire—although they have discovered a number of 12.7 AA [antiaircraft] machine guns near the LZ—nor any of our troop helicopters hit by ground fire." On the other hand, Davis declared that as many as nine Marine helicopters at one time sustained damage in a landing zone when not using scout helicopters. He contended that "these scouts are as important to security of helicopter operations as scouts on the trail are vital to the security of ground maneuver units."[40]

Davis then turned to the matter of command relations between the helicopter and ground commanders. He complained that for the most part, after the initial planning, the infantry commander played a secondary role "in most of the Marine helicopter assaults in Vietnam." The company, battalion, or even regimental commander found himself stranded at the pick-up zone, "while the helicopter leader with his captive load of troops decides where, when, and even if the troops will land." According to Davis, "this is more the rule rather than the exception." General Davis then asserted that if a greater effort was made to include the infantry commander in the process, "we would have less aborts, better preps, and fewer landings made in the wrong LZ."[41]

The entire subject came to a head in the spring of 1969. In April, Lieutenant General Herman Nickerson, who succeeded General Cushman as Commanding General, III MAF, ordered the formation of a board of senior officers, headed by his deputy, Major General Carl A. Youngdale, "to examine the use and command and control of Marine Corps helicopter assets . . . ." After holding extensive hearings, the Youngdale Board reported back to Nickerson. While recognizing that the root of the problem "lay in the shortage of helicopter assets in terms of numbers, types (particularly armed helicopters), mix, and lift," it identified several other problems. Chief among them was a lack of confidence between air and ground officers concerning the other's ability to carry out his part of the mission. Other shortcomings included the need for the development of more detailed planning and better coordination between the air and ground components in helicopter operations.[42]

While making several recommendations, the board realized that many of these questions required long-term solutions. This was especially true about building mutual trust between Marine ground and air officers. In part, the board concluded that there was a lack of common professional experience and socialization between the two groups.** The shortage

*According to Lieutenant Colonel Louis J. Bacher, from his experience as commander of the 2d Battalion, 27th Marines at Da Nang until June, 1968, "it was necessary to schedule a helicopter for aerial reconnaissance of an 80 grid square TAOR days in advance. MedEvac requests were assigned a priority category and were filled accordingly, usually hours later. In contrast, Army battalion commanders had light observation and command helicopters (LOACH) either organic or readily available. The KMC [Korean Marine Corps] Brigade had at least three cargo choppers and one Huey assigned daily." LtCol Louis J. Bacher, Comments on draft, dtd 7May95 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Lieutenant Colonel Thomas F. Miller described two programs that MAG–16 undertook to promote harmony between the helicopter and ground community. On large operations, the MAG operations officer and "the pre-selected helicopter flight leader to the ground commander's unit for the *initial* [emphasis in the original] planning sessions. These officers familiarized themselves with the ground unit's objectives. At this time they could offer their input to the OpPlan prior to it being 'etched in stone.' The officers returned to the ground unit as alterations or changes occurred." He believed this resulted in the following advantages: "1. . . . [The operations officer would] *thoroughly* [emphasis in the original] brief all helicopter flight crews participating in the assault. The crews were told exactly what the ground units were trying to achieve and where they in helicopters fit into the picture. (2) The selected flight leader knew exactly what the ground commander's objectives, time schedules, and general scheme of maneuver were; and planned his flight accordingly. On D–day the air and ground commanders were on the same page. If a change in landing zones became necessary, the flight leader made his recommendation based on the known ground commander's objectives. This program was very successful." In the second program, "on each Friday numerous company-grade officers were invited and flown 'out of the bush' to Marble Mountain. The officers were guests of the pilots at MAG–16. They were treated to hot showers, great meals, movies, and/or a socializing 'adult' beverage at the club. Saturday they could hit the PX; then toured the helicopter base and participated in a 'give & take' briefing session at the S–3 bunker. These 'give and take' sessions eliminated many of the misconceptions shared by both ground and the air officers who supported them. They made working together much, much easier." Miller Comments.

of pilots had exacerbated these differences. Because of the pressing need for aviators, especially helicopter pilots, many went to their duty stations without attending the Marine Corps Basic School at Quantico, let alone Marine Corps intermediate and senior schools.* The board recommended increased training in the coordination of air and ground and requiring all officers to attend the Amphibious Warfare School at Quantico.[43]

While rejecting the Army helicopter control system as not applicable to the Marine Corps, the Youngdale board proposed that the wing reestablish its forward headquarters with the 3d Marine Division. It also called for a reexamination of Marine Corps helicopter tactics with an increased emphasis on helicopter gunships. On the other hand, the board also exhorted ground officers to practice "economy in the employment of helicopters," to be used only "when essential as opposed [to] when they are nice to have."[44]

Even with the implementation of many of the Youngdale Board recommendations, the question of control and coordination of helicopters between Marine air and ground commanders remained to a certain extent unresolved. The departure of the 3d Marine Division from Vietnam in the fall of 1969, however, made the availability of helicopters more plentiful. This muted the debate over control.

Through the latter part of 1968, however, the differences over helicopters dominated the relations between Marine air and ground officers. Much of the tension resulted from the simple fact that there was not enough nor a sufficient variety of helicopters to go around. The Marine wing was supporting two and a third divisions and as one senior Marine aviator stated, "we didn't have two and a third's divisions worth of helicopters." Part of the problem, however, was organization. As another Marine aviation general observed, "we should *never* [italics in the original] try to support two divisions with a single Wing command, no matter how big the Wing is." The question of how much control or influence the ground commander should have over helicopter operations, nevertheless, is still a bone of contention between Marine air and infantry commanders.[45]

*See Chapter 27 for discussion of pilot shortages and Marine aviators attendance at Marine schools. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel M. Wilson, who commanded HMM–361 in Vietnam, related that prior to that assignment he had commanded HMM–162 at New River, North Carolina where, "we were primarily if not exclusively engaged in training Pensacola graduates for Vietnam—a pipeline of about three months." When he took over HMM–361 and commanded "these same pilots in combat it became ap[parent] that more operational training was desirable at least . . . so [far] as Quantico schooling." He stated, "there neither were sufficient pilots nor time [for that additional training]." LtCol Daniel W. Wilson, Comments on draft, dtd 2Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 26

Artillery and Reconnaissance Support in III MAF

Marine Artillery Reshuffles—The Guns in the North
Mini-Tet and the Fall of Ngog Tavak and Kham Duc—Operations Drumfire II and Thor:
Guns Across the Border—Fire Base Tactics—Marine Reconnaissance Operations

Marine Artillery Reshuffles

While not beset by the doctrinal debates and inter- and intra-Service differences that characterized air support in 1968, Marine artillery also went through a period of trial and tribulation. At the beginning of the year, two Marine reinforced artillery regiments, the 11th and 12th Marines, supported the 1st and 3d Marine Divisions, respectively. The 11th Marines provided the artillery support for the 1st Marine Division at Da Nang while the 12th Marines supported the far-flung 3d Division. The 12th had batteries spread from Dong Ha, near the coast, westward to Khe Sanh, and south to Phu Bai. In effect, Marine artillery extended from the DMZ to south of Da Nang in support of Marine and allied infantry.

Containing about 120 pieces, not as large nor as spread out as the 12th Marines, Lieutenant Colonel Clayton V. Hendricks' 11th Marines, the 1st Marine Division artillery regiment had an equally daunting task. The 11th Marines controlled an impressive amount of firepower, ranging from 175mm guns to 4.2-inch mortars.* Lieutenant Colonel Hendricks had a largely expanded force including two U.S. Army 175mm gun batteries. While his 1st Battalion was attached to the 12th Marines,** he retained command of his other three battalions and was reinforced by several general support FMF separate units. These included the 3d 8-inch Howitzer Battery and the 3d 155mm Gun Battery. He also had attached to his command the 1st Armored Amphibian Company with its LVTH-6s, amphibian tractors equipped with a turret-mounted 105mm howitzer.[1]

Lieutenant Colonel Hendricks had a two-fold mission, which included both artillery support of the Marine infantry operations and the defense of the Da Nang Vital Area from ground attack as the commander of the Northern Sector Defense Command. While not facing the array of North Vietnamese artillery that the 12th Marines did along the DMZ and at Khe Sanh, the 11th Marines was engaged in a counter-battery campaign of its own against the very real rocket threat to the crowded Da Nang Airbase. With the introduction by the Communist forces of long-range 122mm and 140mm rockets in 1967 against the Da Nang base, the Marines countered with what they termed the "rocket belt," extending some 8,000 to 12,000 meters, about the outside range of the enemy missiles. Employing a centralized control system, the 11th Marines erected a series of artillery observation posts and deployed its artillery so that each part of the rocket belt was covered by at least two firing batteries. By the beginning of 1968, the regiment had reduced the average response time from the launch of an enemy rocket to answering fire from the American guns to about three minutes.[2]***

*With the arrival of the 2d Battalion, 13th Marines with the 27th Marines at Da Nang in February, the 11th Marines also took operational control of this battalion. The 2d Battalion included 107mm howtars, a 4.2-inch mortar tube mounted on the frame of the 75mm pack howitzer of World War II vintage.

**Colonel Robert C. V. Hughes, who as a lieutenant colonel in 1968 commanded the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, noted that while the battalion was attached to the 12th Marines, it remained in direct support of the 1st Marines, a 1st Marine Division infantry regiment, also at the time undet the operational control of the 3d Marine Division. In January 1968 it was at Quang Tri and then moved with the 1st Marines to Camp Evans, and then to Phu Bai. See Chapters 5–6. Hughes wrote, "We were never in ground contact with our rear echelon/admin support unit during the entire period." He declared that "Our primary source of spare parts was quite often the damaged and abandoned equipment encountered on our line of march." The 1st Battalion during this period consisted of "Hq Btry, A and B Batteries, Prov 155mm how[itzer] Btry; and a reduced 4.2 Mortar Btry." Col Robert C. V. Hughes, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95?] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Hughes Comments.

***See Chapter 6 for discussion of the rocket threat at Da Nang. Colonel George T. Balzer, who as a lieutenant colonel commanded the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines in early 1968, recalled that he had his command post on Hill 55, Nui Dat Son, south of Da Nang, together with his fire direction center, Battery K, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines, and his 4.2-inch Mortar Battery. He observed that the amount of coordination "necessary to deliver artillery fire into areas where friendly forces [were] constantly dueling with enemy forces is tremendous." The Marines at Da Nang manned a network of observation towers equipped with azimuth measuring instruments and maintained a list of accurately identified coordinates throughout the TAOR. With constant alerts and testing of the system, Balzer claimed that "urmost proficiency was



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371188

At night, the 3d 8-inch Howitzer Battery at Da Nang fires one of its self-propelled M55 8-inch howitzers, which had a maximum range of nearly 17,000 meters.



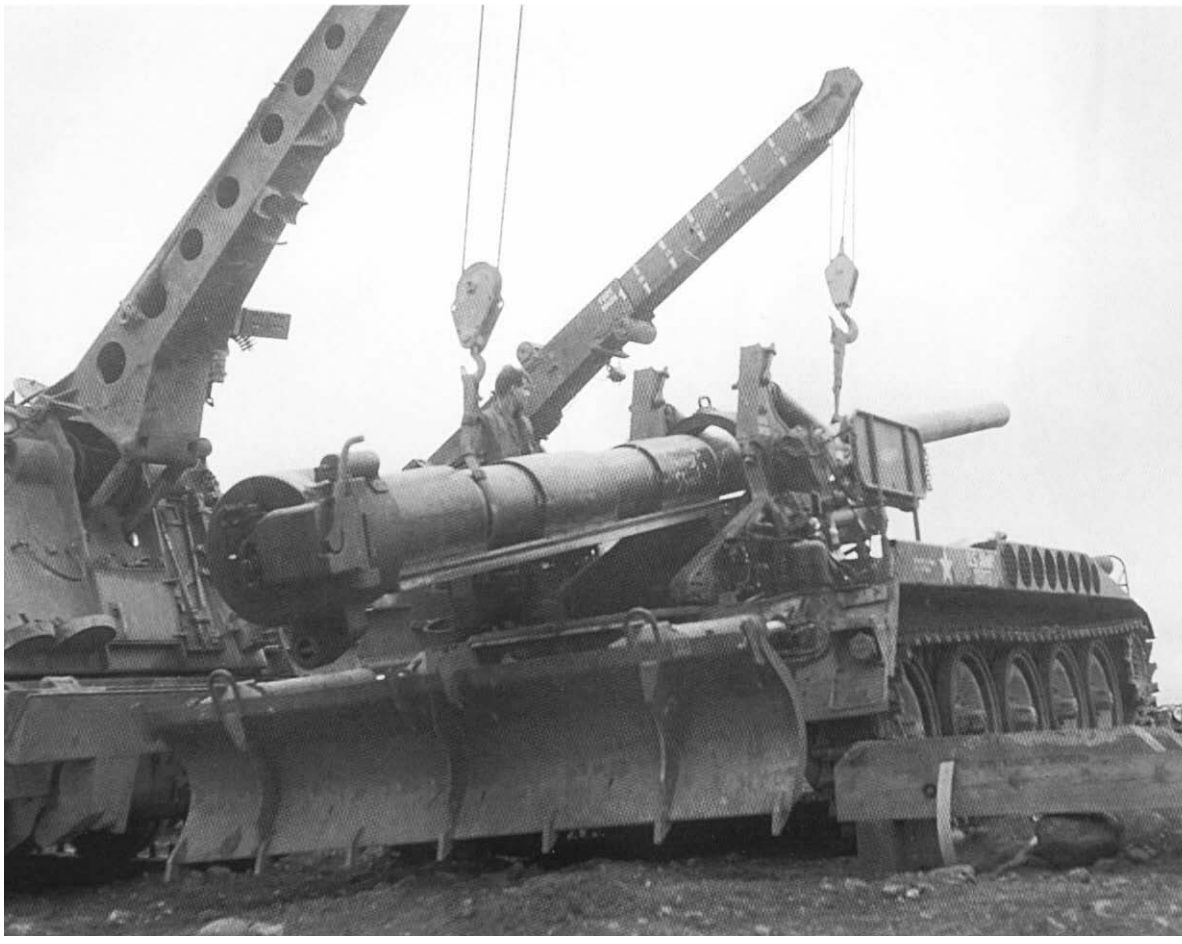
Photo from Abel Collection

Col Edwin S. Schick, the 12th Marines commander, pulls the lanyard of a Battery E, 2d Battalion, 12th Marines M101A1 105mm howitzer. This is the 200,000th round fired by the battery in Vietnam

By late 1967, the 12th Marines had become the largest artillery regiment in the history of the Marine Corps. If one included the artillery at Khe Sanh, the 12th Marines had some 180 field pieces of mixed caliber ranging from the 175mm gun to the 4.2-inch mortar. Colonel Edwin S. Schick, Jr., the regimental commander, had under his operational control his four organic battalions, the 1st Battalions of both the 11th and 13th Marines; the 1st 8-inch Howitzer Battery; the 5th 155mm Gun Battery; two provisional 155mm howitzer batteries, and the 2d Platoon, 1st Armored Amphibian Company with its six LVTH–6s. In addition, he also had subordinate to him the U.S. Army 108th Field Artillery Group and the Marine 1st Field Artillery Group (1st FAG). The Army group functioned as the administrative and tactical headquarters for the Army 175mm gun and 105mm howitzer batteries attached to the Marine regiment while the 1st FAG performed a similar role for the Marine units. All told, as the year began, the 12th Marines controlled about 35 firing units positioned at 12 different locations spread from Khe Sanh to Phu Bai.[3]*

achieved and maintained." Once the Marines manning the tower obtained "an intersection of two, preferably three . . . bearing[s] . . ., the critical coordination of friendly forces and potential enemy locations would precede the initiation of counter-rocket fire." He stated that the "authority to initiate fire was delegated to battery commanders." His "Golf Battery, 3/11 on Hill 10, held the response record of less than fifteen seconds . . . ." According to Balzer, the towers identified enemy rockets about to be launched "just as Golf was prepared to fire [a] Harassing and Interdiction mission . . . ." After being loaded with "high explosive projectiles and charge . . . [with] A minor adjustment to azimuth and quadrant, . . . the six howitzers were ready to fire in a direct fire mode." This incident resulted in the capture of the 122mm rocket launcher. Colonel Balzer observed that "the first rounds in a rocket attack are 'free' for the enemy. It is only for the subsequent rounds that counter-battery fire may be effective. Warning messages may be transmitted to potential target areas by the observers of rocket launches. The observets note the angle of the flame trail and thereby exclude target areas which are not involved." He concluded, "coordination of friendly patrol schedules, definite times for occupation of specific areas, and continuous monitoring of same are all critical to ensure that counter-battery fire may be initiated safely. Time lost in determining which areas are free of friendly forces after a rocket attack has been launched gives the enemy additional time to complete his mission with impunity." Col George T. Balzer, Comments on draft, dtd 10Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

*Colonel Schick, a veteran of both World War II and Korea, observed in his comments that his entire career "has been supporting arms." He had assumed command of the 12th Marines in May 1967 and remarked on the wide dispersion of the 12th Marines which until early 1968 had its main headquarters with that of the division at Phu Bai. According to Schick the infantry often was unaware of the firepower



Department of Defense (USMC) A190978

A crane replaces a barrel of one of the U.S. Army M107 175mm self-propelled guns stationed at Camp Carroll. The 175mm gun had a maximum range of more than 32,000 meters.

During January, with the perceived increasing threat in the north, the Marine artillery, like the infantry units, participated in Operation Checkers, the northward deployment of the Marine divisions. With the establishment of the 1st Marine Division Task Force X-Ray at Phu Bai and the relinquishment of units by the 3d Marine Division, there was a corresponding shuffling of Marine artillery between the two Marine divisions.* The idea was to concentrate the 12th Marines in northern Quang Tri and for the 11th Marines to cover both Quang Nam and Thua Thien Provinces.

In mid-January, Task Force X-Ray at Phu Bai and the 11th Marines assumed operational control of the 1st Field Artillery Group, now under Lieutenant Colonel John F. Barr. The 12th Marines also gave up operational control to Lieutenant Colonel Barr of the 1st 155mm Gun Battery and a provisional 155mm Howitzer Battery, both at Phu Bai. Lieutenant Colonel Hendricks also received the return of his 1st Battalion which remained in support of the 1st Marines at Phu Bai and deployed his 2d Battalion from An Hoa south of Da Nang to the Phu Loc sector northwest of the Hai Van Pass area in southern Thua Thien Province. To

available to them. He pushed his own officers to offer support: "Artillery does not do anything on its own. It's all in support of that infantry commander." He did not believe his weapons were employed to the best of their capabilities, but the situation improved in time as facilities were made available. He related that he was able to convince the Seventh Air Force to send Air Force personnel to become part of the 3d Marine Division Fire Support Coordination Center to provide for better coordination and to limit the number of artillery restrictive fires when Air Force aircraft were in artillery range. Col Edwin S. Schick, Jr., Comments on draft, n.d. [1994] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Schick Comments.

*See Chapter 6 also for the establishment of Task Force X-Ray.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A371665

A Marine M109 self-propelled 155mm howitzer at Phu Bai fires in support of Marine infantry. The 155mm howitzer had a range of slightly more than 15,000 meters.

take up the slack at An Hoa, Hendricks created a Provisional Battery Quebec which included a section of 8-inch howitzers and a section of 155mm guns to support the ARVN, Marine units, and Marine reconnaissance Stingray missions. He also moved five LVTH–6s from the 1st Armored Amphibian Company to Hoi An to cover the operations of the Republic of Korea Marines operating in that sector.[4]

With the implementation of Operation Checkers and the added reinforcement of Army units into I Corps through January, the 11th Marines controlled at the height of the Tet Offensive more than 190 artillery pieces. At Da Nang, the regiment played an important role in the disrupting of the *2d NVA Division* attack before it ever really started by the placement of accurate artillery fires upon enemy troops in the open.* Further north at Phu Bai, the 1st FAG supported the 1st Marines and ARVN in the defense and recapture of Hue city. According to the regiment's account, the Marine artillery during the month-long battle for the city fired 1,821 missions, expended 12,960 rounds, and reported 328 enemy dead.** Even with the expansion of the 11th Marines during Tet, the attention of both III MAF and MACV remained riveted upon the 3d Marine Division operations along the DMZ and at Khe Sanh.[5]

*See Chapter 8 for the attacks of the *2d NVA Division* at Da Nang.

**Nearly 800 of the missions and 5,000 of the rounds were fired during the last few days of the operation. According to the 11th Marines in its February report, the artillery in support of the Hue battle had fired during the month 1,049 missions and 7,357 rounds as contrasted to the much higher figures contained in the March report which covered the period 1 February–2 March 1968. Interestingly enough, the March report on the number of enemy dead was about 200 less than the February report. 11th Mar ComdCs, Feb and Mar68.

The Guns in the North

For the Marines at Khe Sanh, 21 January literally opened up with fireworks. While the Marine defenders repulsed several enemy assaults on hill outposts, enemy mortar and 122mm rocket bombardment exploded the main ammunition supply point on the base itself. About three or four rounds made a direct hit "and the ammunition cooked off for the next 48 hours." Despite the destruction of nearly 11,000 rounds of ordnance, the number of casualties was surprisingly low, 14 Marines dead and 43 wounded. Hundreds of "hot duds" fell near the firing positions of three guns of Battery C, 1st Battalion, 13th Marines. One of the enemy rounds knocked out the artillery battalion's generator for its field artillery digital automatic computer (FADAC), but the Marine artillerymen, relying on manually computed firing data, continued to return counter-battery fire at suspected NVA firing positions.[6***]

While the enemy bombardment resulted in a temporary shortage, resupply flights soon brought the Marine ammunition stockpile at Khe Sanh up to adequate levels. The American artillery, nevertheless, worked at some disadvantage. With some of the enemy's large guns at Co Roc in Laos, some 15 kilometers to the west, just outside of the maximum range of the 105mm and 155mm howitzers of the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines at Khe Sanh and the U.S. Army 175mm guns at Camp Carroll, the North Vietnamese 122mm, 130mm, and 152mm howitzers

***See Chapter 14 for the events of 21 January at Khe Sanh.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190292

Marines of Battery W, 1st Battalion, 13th Marines at Khe Sanh are seen preparing to load a M114A 155mm howitzer. The M114A in contrast to the M109 is towed rather than self-propelled, but has the same range.

continued to shell the Marine base, unmolested by artillery counterfire.*

Still the enemy was in no position to make a final assault on the Marine base. Complemented by a massive air effort in Operation Niagara** ranging from B–52s to helicopters, Marine artillery supplemented by the Army 175mm guns kept the enemy at bay. In one of the more climactic moments, American sensors on 3–5 February indicated the possibility of a North Vietnamese regiment moving into an attack position. In coordination with supporting B–52 Arclight strikes, the American artillery including both the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines and four batteries of 175mm guns blasted the suspected North Vietnamese positions. While unable to confirm the extent of enemy casualties, U.S. intelligence officers believed that the heavy and accurate artillery fire (almost 2,000 rounds from the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines alone) prevented these troops from reinforcing the North Vietnamese attack on Hill 861A that occurred at the same time.***

While U.S. supporting arms failed to prevent the overrunning of the Special Forces Camp at Lang Vei south of Khe Sanh a few days later, Marine gunners still made a valiant effort. In their attempt to keep back the North Vietnamese attackers, the 105mm howitzers of the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines employed, perhaps for the first time in Vietnam, the still-secret Controlled Fragmentation Munitions (CoFraM), otherwise known as "Firecracker Munitions." A CoFraM shell consisted of a number of small bomblets, which when ejected, spread over a wide area, with each bomblet exploding like a small grenade. It was considerably more lethal against troops in the open than the standard high explosive projectile. How effective the new munitions were at Lang Vei can only be a matter of conjecture.7****

*The 1st Battalion, 13th Marines at Khe Sanh consisted of three 105mm howitzer batteries, a provisional 155mm howitzer (towed) battery, and a 4.2-inch mortar battery. See Chapter 14 about the question of the location of the enemy artillery pieces in Laos.

**See Chapter 23 for Operation Niagara.

***See Chapter 14 for the account of the attack on Hill 861A.

****Lieutenant Colonel John A. Hennelly, who commanded the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines at Khe Sanh, stated that he fired only a few of the CoFraM rounds. He doubted very much their effectiveness. LtCol John A. Hennelly, Comments on draft, dtd 3Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File). Colonel Edwin S. Schick, Jr., the 12th Marines commander, also emphasized the judicial use of the new munitions. Schick Comments. See Chapter 14 for further discussion of the use of CoFraM at Lang Vei. The 11th Marines at Da Nang fired their first CoFraM mission on 15 March 1968. On that date, the 1st Platoon, 3d 8" Howitzer Battery fired two rounds in support of a reconnaissance mission. An observer reported that the "munitions . . . covered an area 200 x 300 meters with excellent target coverage." According to the report, it resulted in enemy killed and that the Communist troops "appeared to be surprised, shocked, and quite confused. Those who were not hit by fragments remained standing and immobile." 11th Mar ComdC, Mar68, pp. 2–3.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190802

Marines are seen stacking empty 105mm casings at Khe Sanh, indicative of the artillery support provided for the base. In the background, partially obscured by clouds, is Hill 950.

While Khe Sanh was the center of attention for MACV and the press, the war along the DMZ had not diminished. During January and February 1968, in addition to Khe Sanh, the 3d Marine Division had fought a series of heavy engagements ranging from the sector just north of Camp Carroll to the Cua Viet along the coast. During these two months, in support of all units, the 12th Marines fired a total of 411,644 rounds, 212,969 in January and 198,675 in February. The number in January represented a 12 percent increase over the previous month, and while February's total was six percent lower than January, it was still much higher than the December figure.* It was not until March that the 3d Marine Division artillery regiment reported a significant reduction in its fire support. In some 30,000 missions, only 20 percent of which were observed,** the 12th Marines expended nearly 190,000 rounds of all calibers as enemy activity exhibited a "reduction in aggressiveness." For this three-month period, the 12th Marines fired about 15 to 17 percent of its total rounds in support of the 26th Marines at Khe Sanh with the rest in support of the other regi-

*There are differences between the total rounds reported fired in the 12th Marines reports and those of the division. While the figures are higher in the regimental reports, the ratios between the sources remain roughly the same. The totals listed above are based upon the reports in the 12th Marines command chronologies as they contain a breakdown of missions. The 3d Division reports only give totals and it is assumed that these did not include some of the categories listed by the regiment. See 12th Mar ComdCs and 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Dec67–Feb68.

**Lieutenant Colonel John A. Hennelly, the commander of the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines, explained that at Khe Sanh with both the infantry and artillery forward observers locked into defensive positions at both the base and the hill outposts, "there weren't many 'eyes' to handle observed fire missions." He mentioned, however, that when Marine aerial observers (AOs) were "on station . . . we could get a lot done, counter-battery and otherwise. Without Marine AOs we were in a hurt locker." According to Hennelly, the Air Force AOs were less effective: "They kept insisting that they were flying at tree top level—but I never saw any 10,000-foot trees over there." Hennelly Comments.

ments of the 3d Marine Division and in counter-battery fire along the eastern DMZ.[8*]

By this period there had been a change in command relations in the north. MACV (Fwd) in early March became Provisional Corps Vietnam (Prov Corps) under Lieutenant General William B. Rosson and in a reversal of roles became a subordinate command of III MAF.** Under III MAF, Prov Corps was now responsible for the two northern provinces of I Corps and took under its operational control the two Army divisions there, the 1st Air Cavalry and the 101st Airborne, as well as the 3d Marine Division. With the concurrence of MACV and III MAF, General Rosson changed the designation for the Khe Sanh campaign from Operation Scotland to Operation Pegasus. In Pegasus, Rosson placed under the 1st Air Cavalry Division the 1st Marines, the 11th Engineers, and a Seabee battalion.*** This new operation resulted in the ending of the siege of Khe Sanh. On 8 April, Army cavalrymen linked up with elements of the 26th Marines and one week later Pegasus came to an end. The 1st Cavalry then deployed into the A Shau Valley in Operation Delaware, but left one brigade in the Khe Sanh sector under the operational control of the 3d Marine Division in Operation Scotland II.****

The change in command relations also affected the command structure of the artillery units in the north. Provisional Corps took over direct control of the U.S. Army 108th Field Artillery Group and the Marine 1st 8-inch Howitzer Battery and 5th 155mm Gun Battery, which all had been subordinate to the 12th Marines. These units were responsible for "general support" and "reinforcing" fires of the 12th Marines, which remained under the 3d Marine Division.[9*****]

The increasing deployment of both Marine and Army units to northern I Corps had already resulted in a much more complex coordination control of supporting arms. As early as the latter part of 1967, the 3d Marine Division had taken steps to automate further its fire support control systems. By March of 1968, the division had created in its fire support coordination center (FSCC), its staff agency for the coordination of all supporting arms, a fire support information center (FSIC). Using sophisticated computer techniques, the idea was to provide more realistic firing data that could be used in counter-battery fire and to refine the target list based upon previous fire missions and sightings. Limited computer memory and the use of a punch card stored data base, nevertheless, restricted "'real time' information retrieval in the FSIC."[10******]

General Cushman recalled several years later that the fire coordination and artillery support in the north during 1967 and early 1968 was not all that he wished that it was. While not mentioning any specific incidents such as the unusual number of "friendly fire"

*FMFPac reported that Marine and Army artillery under the operational control of the 12th Marines fired slightly over 102,000 rounds of mixed caliber in support of Operation Scotland at Khe Sanh from 1 November 1967 until its termination on 30 March 1968. Most of the artillery support for Scotland was provided in the period January through March, thus the rational for the percentage given in the text. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 3.

**See Chapter 13 for the discussion of command relations in the north.

***Colonel Robert C. V. Hughes, who commanded the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines in 1968, related that his battalion continued to support the 1st Marines throughout this period. He recalled that his battalion received a field artillery digital automatic computer (FADAC) just prior to the Hue City battle. This permitted his Fire Direction Center to control the "fires of the varied caliber batteries" assigned to him ranging from 4.2-inch mortars to 155mm howitzers (towed). According to Hughes, his battalion kept the FADAC "in continuous operation through all subsequent operations including Pegasus." When the 1st Marines relieved the 26th Marines at Khe Sanh, 1/11 relieved 1/13. Hughes wrote that "all of 1/11's rolling stock was turned over to 1/13 to permit their depature from Khe Sanh. All of 1/13's inoperative equipment had been pushed to the far side of the air strip along the cliff face. We were able to place all but one of the pieces back in service." Hughes Comments.

****See Chapters 13, 14, and 16 for Operations Pegasus, Delaware and Scotland II.

*****Colonel James Leon, an experienced ordnance and artillery officer who served on the III MAF staff, believed that there needed to be a further transformation of artillery command relations at the III MAF level. He stated there was in his opinion, "a serious deficiency in the management of Marine artillery at the III MAF level. The 3d MarDiv artillery operated under the opcon of Prov Corps at Phu Bai. 1st Mar Div artillery had opcon in its area." On the III MAF staff, however, there was only an assistant artillery operations officer "who was saddled with additional duties that allowed him little time to perform his primary duty." According to Leon, "There was a need for a Field Artillery Group headquarters at the III MAF headquarters level. The allocation of resources between the division and the performance of support services suffered as a consequence of this deficiency." Leon wrote that as the III MAF ordnance officer, he "worked closely with the artillery assistant ops officer and in effect from time to time functioned beyond my regular duties. In effect I acted as III MAF artillery officer." Col James Leon, Comments on dtaft, n.d. [1993] (Vietnam Comment File).

******Colonel Edwin S. Schick, Jr., the commander of the 12th Marines at the time, observed that the personnel for the FSIC came from the 1st Field Artillery Group at Phu Bai. Schick Comments. For initial developments and problems with the FSIC including its relationship with the FSCC and its computer limitations, see LtCol C. V. Hutcheson memo to Col Schick, dtd 4Feb68, Subj: The FSIC . . . Current Status, and 12th Marines, draft SOP for the 3d Div Fire Support Information Center, Jan68, Encls, Schick Comments.

incidents that occurred in the 3d Division during January 1968,* he related "a lot of Marines either weren't getting educated or had completely forgotten how . . . to set up a fire support coordination center and get it operating properly." He stated he "particularly noticed this up at Dong Ha. I noticed it, Westmoreland noticed it, gave me hell about Marines not knowing their business."[11]**

General Cushman was not alone in his criticism. Brigadier General Louis Metzger, the 3d Marine Division assistant division commander in January 1968, later faulted U.S. artillery doctrine which called for firing artillery "at selected unobserved targets at certain intervals with the hope of catching the enemy at the point of impact or denying him movement." According to Metzger, this "was not very effective . . ." and resulted only in the "expenditure of large amounts of ammunition." While admitting that "massive fires may be useful in certain combat situations," they were "of uncertain value in many others."[12]***

Still,by the end of March, the 12th Marines and the 3d Marine Division had taken several steps to improve artillery support. While acknowledging less enemy activity during the month, the author of the division's command chronology attributed a decrease of artillery ammunition expenditure more to "selective targeting and increased command emphasis on the judicious use of ammunition." In April, the division reported that it continued to place emphasis upon "the selection of the number of rounds and type fuze appropriate to the target under attack." Moreover, it claimed that the FSIC continued to "improve the accuracy and timeliness in reporting fire support information." During May, the 12th Marines drafted a new SOP (Standing Operational Procedure) for the 3d Division Fire Support Coordination Center that incorporated the changes in the combat situation and the establishment of the FSIC. By this time, the FSIC had largely expanded both the size and reliability of its data base.[13]

The month of May was a critical one for the 3d Division and its artillery. It marked the beginning of mobile operations in both western and eastern Quang Tri Province. In Operation Scotland II, the 3d Division Task Force Hotel would be moving into operational areas beyond the range of the guns at Khe Sanh and Ca Lu. The only solution was to build fire support bases for the artillery. In eastern Quang Tri, the month witnessed the successful repulse of a multi-battalion North Vietnamese force in the vicinity of Dong Ha, the main Marine base in the north. While the initial attack and fighting ended on 2 May in the Dai Do village sector, the North Vietnamese attempted a new offensive later in the month. Employing helicopter-borne cordon tactics, supplemented by artillery as well as close air support, Marine and attached Army infantry units drove the North Vietnamese troops back into the DMZ with heavy losses. In support of the May operations, the 12th Marines fired 330,000 rounds of mixed caliber, more than any previous month including the two months of Tet, January and February. In fact, the May total was only about 80,000 rounds short of the total of those two months.[14]****

Mini-Tet and the Fall of Ngog Tavak and Kham Duc

The enemy thrust in the north in May was part of a second phase "Tet" offensive, labeled as "Mini-Tet" by the American command. For the most part, this second offensive was hardly a replica of the first as far as the extent and breath of the enemy actions. Except for the fighting in the north, a new assault on Saigon, and renewed pressure in the Central Highlands and along the Laotian border in southwestern I Corps, the enemy limited itself to attacks by fire and minor ground assaults. In the large Da Nang TAOR, the 1st Marine Division launched Allen Brook***** as a spoiling operation to prevent any consolidation of enemy forces in that sector. Still May was the bloodiest month of 1968 and for those Marine units involved in the heavier May engagements, they equalled any of the fighting up to that date. In the one major reversal for the allied forces during the enemy onslaught, the fall of the U.S. Special Forces camps at Ngog Tavak and Kham Duc, an artillery detachment from the 11th Marines, Battery D, 2d Battalion, 13th Marines, played a heroic role.

*See Chapter 3.

**Colonel Schick, the 12th Marines commander, observed that while there were occasional problems with the artillery, General Cushman never indicated to him that the job was not being done and that he remained in his command slot for a full tour. Schick Comments.

***Colonel Peter J. Mulroney, who assumed command of the 12th Marines in July 1968, observed there are times when it is necessary to employ unobserved fires: "Harassing and Interdiction fires are an essential ingredient of a coordinated fire plan. While they don't have to be massive they [need to] be thorough." Col Peter J. Mulroney, Comments on draft, dtd 10Nov94 (Vietnam Comment Files).

****See Chapters 15 and 16 for the battle for Dong Ha and operations in Operation Scotland II.

*****See Chapter 17 for Operation Allen Brook.

From February through March, the 11th Marines with its 190 guns surpassed the size of the 12th Marines. Reinforced not only by the 1st Field Artillery Group and Army artillery in the Phu Bai sector, the regiment also obtained operational control of the 2d Battalion, 13th Marines. The latter battalion arrived with the 27th Marines as part of the February reinforcements approved by President Johnson.[15*]

As the enemy Tet attacks gradually subsided, the U.S. forces prepared to take the offensive. Towards the end of March, the 11th Marines lost operational control of several of the Army artillery units and the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines to the 1st Air Cavalry Division in preparation for that division's Pegasus operations. At the same time, the artillery regiment at Da Nang in its own way took more aggressive actions. It continued to support the reconnaissance Stingray patrols and began to employ "Firecracker Munitions". On 7 April, for example, the 1st Platoon, 3d 8-inch Howitzer Battery fired three CoFraM rounds on about 80 VC in the open and killed over 50 of them according to the reconnaissance Marines who called in the mission. In another "Firecracker" mission, three weeks later, the 4th Battalion, 11th Marines claimed to have killed more than 60 enemy troops attempting to cross a river. Of the total 1,100 reported enemy dead in the 1st Marine Division area of operations for the month of April, the 11th Marines maintained that nearly half were the result of its artillery fire.[16]

By the end of the month, the 1st Marine Division supported by the 11th Marines prepared for extensive offensive operations which would require more forward firing positions. The division planned to conduct two multi-battalion spoiling operations in May. In Operation Allen Brook, the 27th Marines planned to penetrate the Go Noi Island sector, while the 7th Marines and later the 26th Marines were to conduct Operation Mameluke Thrust in the Vu Gia River Valley near the U.S. Special Forces camp at Thuong Duc, about 25 miles southwest of Da Nang.**

At the same time, American intelligence reported that North Vietnamese troops posed a threat to two other Special Forces camps Ngog Tavak and Kham Duc, about another 35 miles southwest of Thuong Duc. Situated near Laos in Quang Tin Province, the two outposts provided the allies the ability to monitor the North Vietnamese infiltration through the Ho Chi Minh Trail network across the border into South Vietnam. With the fall of Lang Vei near Khe Sanh earlier in the year, they remained the only Special Forces camps in I Corps near the trail.

With the increased likelihood that the North Vietnamese might attack, General Cushman, the III MAF commander and the senior I Corps advisor, decided to reinforce the bases. Army engineers had already started in early April to upgrade the runway at Kham Duc and to construct a radio navigation facility there. On 16 April, the 11th Marines alerted the 2d Battalion, 13th Marines to be prepared to send a 105mm howitzer detachment of two guns from Da Nang to Kham Duc. Thirteen days later, a fixed-wing transport ferried a platoon-sized detachment from Battery D of the battalion consisting of one officer and 43 enlisted men with two 105mm howitzers to the Kham Duc airfield. On 4 May, a Marine helicopter lifted the detachment together with its guns and equipment from Kham Duc to the satellite camp at Ngog Tavak, a distance of some five miles to the south. Sited on Hill 738 and within 10 miles of the Laotian border, the Marine artillerymen were in position to disrupt the movement of North Vietnamese troops along the nearby trails and avenues of approach.[17]

Besides the Marines, Ngog Tavak, with its defenses dating back from the days of the French war against the Viet Minh, was home to a 113-man CIDG Mobile Strike Force Company. Serving with the Vietnamese irregulars were eight U.S. Army Special Forces advisors and three members of an Australian Army training team. For a brief period, even with the arrival of the Marines, the North Vietnamese left the camp relatively unmolested. This all changed in the early morning hours of 10 May. At 0240, the Marine detachment reported that Ngog Tavak was under attack from four directions. By 0330, under cover of B–40 rockets, grenades, mortars, and small arms, North Vietnamese regulars had breached the wire of the outside defenses. According to reports, some of the CIDG troops manning the outposts turned their weapons upon their compatriots and Americans in the compound. The Marine artillery gunners lowered their howitzers and fired directly into the onrushing North Vietnamese. Other members of the detachment grabbed whatever weapons were available and continued to fend off the attackers as best they could.[18]

One Marine, Corporal Henry M. Schunck, rushed from the protective cover of his position near the command bunker to a more exposed, abandoned 4.2-inch mortar emplacement in the center of the compound.

*See Chapters 13 and 27 for the arrival of the 27th Marines.

**See Chapter 17 as well for discussion of Operation Mameluke Thrust.

Although wounded, Schunck single-handedly attempted to man the weapon. Unable to do so, he moved to the assistance of a more seriously wounded Marine who had tried to join him. Dragging the injured man to cover, he and another Marine moved to an 81mm mortar, which they continued to fire at the advancing enemy troops until running out of ammunition. Schunck was later awarded the Navy Cross.[19]

Another Navy Cross recipient from the same action at Ngog Tavak was Marine Lance Corporal Richard F. Conklin. Once the enemy attack began, Conklin grabbed a machine gun and opened up on approaching NVA troops. Frustrated in their attempts to reach the compound, the North Vietnamese returned concentrated automatic weapons fire and tried to knock out the Marine machine gun position with grenades. Conklin threw back several of the grenades and continued to fire his weapon until he collapsed from his wounds.[20]

Despite such heroics, the defense of Ngog Tavak was a hopeless cause. Both Marine First Lieutenant Robert L. Adams, the commander of the Marine detachment, and Army Captain Christopher J. Silva, the Special Forces commander, had sustained severe wounds. About 0800, under cover of the Marine howitzers and automatic weapons, Marine and Army helicopters took out the most severely wounded. Among them were Lieutenant Adams, Corporal Schunck, Lance Corporal Conklin, and 15 other Marines from the artillery detachment. An attempt to bring in reinforcements proved futile and resulted in the loss of two of the helicopters. Out of 105mm ammunition, the Marine gunners "spiked" the guns with thermite grenades to render them inoperative.* Led by the senior Australian advisor, the remaining defenders of Ngog Tavak, including 13 Marines of the detachment, abandoned the camp to the enemy. After a trek through the jungle for six miles, American helicopters evacuated the survivors to Kham Duc. Of the 43 Marines and 1 Navy corpsman who made up the artillery detachment, 13 were dead and 20 were wounded. Only 11 men escaped relatively unscathed. In January 1969, the Secretary of the Navy awarded the detachment of Battery D, 2d Battalion, 13th Marines the Meritorious Unit Commendation for its part in the defense of Ngog Tavak.[21]

*An American air strike at noon on the then-abandoned camp insured that the guns were indeed destroyed. The 11th Marines operations journal on 10 May contained the notation: "D/2/13 dropped two 105mm how[itzers] as result of combat loss at Ngok Tavak." S–3 Jnl entry, dtd 10May68, Anx C, 11th Mar ComdC, May68. See also S–4 Jnl entry, dtd 10May68, Encl 1, 2/13 ComdC, May68.

The survivors of Ngog Tavak were not to find Kham Duc a safe haven. After overrunning the former, on the afternoon of 10 May, the North Vietnamese turned their attention to the latter camp. At first, after consultation with Generals Westmoreland and Abrams, General Cushman had decided to reinforce the camp and counter the North Vietnamese offensive there. Air Force fixed-wing transports and Marine and Army helicopters brought in the Americal Division's 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry from Chu Lai reinforced by an additional infantry company and supported by some Army artillery. By 11 May, Kham Duc had about a 1,500-man force, including both the U.S. Army and Vietnamese CIDG units in the camp itself and in the surrounding hill outposts. That night, however, the *2d NVA Division* began to pick off these outposts.[22]

With concern about the obvious enemy strength and not wanting to deplete the limited allied forces at Da Nang, General Cushman began to have second thoughts about engaging the North Vietnamese so far out of range of any concentrated artillery. After listening to General Cushman brief the situation, General Abrams also had little desire for a protracted battle and agreed to a withdrawal. General Westmoreland approved the decision. Under an umbrella of American air support, Air Force transports and Marine and Army helicopters lifted out the last of the defenders on 12 May, abandoning Kham Duc to the Communists. The following day, some 60 B–52s participated in an Arclight strike, dropping some 12,000 tons upon the former allied camp. General Abrams termed the abandonment of Ngog Tavak and Kham Duc "a minor disaster." According to a former III MAF staff officer, CIDG camps existed only for the purposes of intercepting and detecting infiltration and when enemy "organized forces move against them—you're going to lose it." Brigadier General Jacob E. Glick, who was the III MAF operations officer at the time, later recalled "that the reporters and the press gave us a bad time about this and called it a 'defeat.'" According to Glick, however, "We considered that we were making the best decision in a tough situation and were saving people and conserving resources." The forward deployment of the two Marine 105mm howitzers proved to have little deterrence upon the North Vietnamese.[23]

Operations Drumfire II and Thor— Guns Across the Border

Despite the loss of the two CIDG camps, the enemy offensive by the end of May had more or less faltered.

In northern I Corps, the allies prepared to take the fight to the enemy in some of his former sanctuaries with massive new concentrations of supporting arms including both air and artillery. While American artillery had employed counter-battery campaigns across the DMZ from time to time, the NVA gun and rocket emplacements in Laos at Co Roc and other positions west of the Khe Sanh base, had remained relatively free from retaliation by the American guns.*

In mid-May, in support of Task Force Hotel's expanding operations in western Quang Tri, Provisional Corps Vietnam authorized the 12th Marines to conduct what amounted to an artillery raid, codenamed Drumfire II, against NVA logistic centers, gun emplacements, and suspected troop rendezvous sites. From 29 through 30 May, the 12th Marines moved a total of seven large artillery pieces, four 175mm guns and three 8-inch howitzers, from Thon Son Lam, C–2, and Ca Lu to new firing positions inside or just outside the Khe Sanh fire base. Arriving first, the 8-inch howitzers opened up shortly after midnight on 30 May at the enemy guns at Co Roc across the border in Laos.[24]

From 30 May through 1 June in Drumfire II, the American artillery fired a total of 158 missions (59 8-inch and 99 175mm) amounting to 1,825 rounds (1002 8-inch and 823 175mm) at enemy targets in the Laotian-South Vietnamese border region with mixed results. Bad weather during this period hampered the aerial observation over the region. Of the number of missions, only seven of the 175mm and five of the 8-inch missions were observed. Of the 175mm missions, air observers reported a total of three bunkers and two structures destroyed, one secondary fire, four road craters, and "excellent target coverage" on an enemy storage area. The results of the observed 8-inch fires were not spectacular either, with the possible exception of the bombardment of a North Vietnamese bunker complex west of Khe Sanh just inside the South Vietnam border that destroyed two of the bunkers with "outstanding coverage."[25]**

Lieutenant Colonel Wilson A. Kluckman, who had just assumed command of the 12th Marines on 22 May and had moved a forward control headquarters to Khe Sanh for Drumfire II, recommended more such operations, but admitted to several shortcomings in the past instance. For one thing, he observed that proximity to nearby infantry security units determined the artillery firing locations rather than the best judgement of the artillery commander. Kluckman further suggested that weather forecasts "be a primary determining factor when selection of artillery raid time frames are established." He further complained that "observation potential was far from realized." Kluckman maintained that "despite detailed briefings and prior coordination, unfamiliarity with the terrain, poor weather, and lack of aggressiveness combined to significantly reduce the desired destruction." Other problems included a failure to pre-position all of the 8-inch ammunition prior to D-Day which resulted in traffic congestion and in a delay of the battery to occupy its position. Kluckman also wanted a simpler convoy system that would have permitted the guns to move from their former positions to Khe Sanh in "a single artillery convoy with its own security elements." He argued that the 3d Division system called for an exchange of infantry security at LZ Stud which resulted in a "five-hour delay for the transfer of responsibility." Moreover one of the 8-inch howitzers became stuck on a bridge and had to return to its former position at Ca Lu. Despite the difficulties, Lieutenant Colonel Kluckman praised the overall fire support coordination and observed that the enemy failed to bring any effective counter-fire on the Marine big guns. He concluded that Drumfire II "verified the

*Colonel Robert C. V. Hughes, whose 1st Battalion, 11th Marines had relieved the 2d battalion, 13th Marines at Khe Sanh during Pegasus, recalled that 105 and 155mm howitzers' range limitations "did not permit us to effectively attack the NVA gun positions on Co Roc." Hughes stated, however, that the Marines improvised a counter-battery technique by employing the platoon of M–48 tanks at Khe Sanh. According to Hughes, the tank's "90mm guns had a greater range than the howitzer [and] we could compute firing data for them in an indirect fire, artillery role. We pushed up inclined ramps with dozers to give the tank guns increased elevation and thus range." According to Hughes, although this return fire was "not particularly accurate, due in part to distance of observers from the target, we were able to cause the enemy guns to discontinue firing on several occasions." Hughes Comments.

**While Operation Drumfire II may have had only limited success, it did provide a moral boost to the Marines at Khe Sanh. Colonel Hughes observed that the 8-inch howitzers were placed inside the Khe Sanh base "along the airstrip with the primary direction of fire directly across the flight line. BGen Carl Hoffman [Commanding General, Task Force Hotel] . . . had a lasting impression of the first 8-inch mission (midnight 30 May), as it was fired directly over his bunker." Hughes Comments. General Hoffman, himself, remembered that he thought "Drumfire II was terrific! After being blasted daily by NVA long-range artillery positioned at Co Roc, we thoroughly enjoyed watching our own long-range artillery, most of which had slipped up to Khe Sanh under cover of darkness, hitting pre-selected targets on Co Roc. My own morale soared as did that of the entire Task Force Hotel." MajGen Carl W. Hoffman, Comments on draft, dtd 15Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Hoffman Comments. For further discussion of Drumfire II see Chapter 16 and for discussion of the enemy emplacements in Laos and the question of Co Roc, see Chapter 14.

feasibility and desirability of the employment of heavy artillery units in forward firing positions for limited periods of time."[26]

About a month later, the 3d Marine Division artillery participated in a combined arms "raid" to silence the enemy guns across the eastern DMZ, especially in the Cap Mui Lay sector. Enemy gun emplacements in and north of the DMZ posed a credible artillery threat to American and South Vietnamese bases and positions in northeastern Quang Tri Province. Although employing brief sporadic volleys rather than a continuous bombardment, the North Vietnamese guns occasionally could disrupt U.S. operations and logistic activities. At 1615 on 20 June, for example, North Vietnamese gunners hit Dong Ha with six 152mm rounds which resulted in the destruction of the ammunition supply point there. Secondary explosions and fires continued throughout that night and the next day. In all, the enemy artillery caused the loss of 10,500 tons of Marine ammunition, about 20 days worth of supply.[27]*

For more than a year, III MAF had undertaken several efforts to counter the enemy use of its relative sanctuary area in and north of the DMZ. Operations Highrise, Headshed, and Neutralize all involved variations of the same theme: air and artillery attacks on enemy firing positions in and north of the DMZ. These operations were frustrated by the enemy's formidable array of antiaircraft weapons north of the DMZ, which precluded both effective bombing and the air observation necessary for adjusting artillery fire and assessing its effects. In each of these operations, even concentrated efforts failed to produce any noticeable effect on the Communist gunners.

On 20 June, by coincidence, the same date of the enemy artillery attack on Dong Ha, General Westmoreland approved an earlier III MAF proposal for another major combined arms interdiction campaign against the DMZ sanctuary area. Codenamed Operation Thor after the Norse god of thunder, the plan called for a week-long supporting arms effort involving units of III MAF, Seventh Fleet, and Seventh Air Force in a joint attack on North Vietnamese artillery, air defense, and coastal batteries located in the Cap Mui Lay sector. This sector included the area extending north of the southern boundary of the DMZ about 15 kilometers to Cap Mui Lay and inland about 25 kilometers. The objectives were twofold: to destroy NVA antiaircraft and field and coastal artillery, and to facilitate further surveillance and continued attacks on targets in and north of the DMZ. The III MAF commander, Lieutenant General Cushman, hoped that success in this operation would preempt any NVA preparations for an autumn offensive, while at the same time ending the threat to forward III MAF bases and lines of communication.[28]

The concept of operations included four phases. In Phase I, the first two days, B–52s and attack aircraft would conduct heavy airstrikes to cover artillery units displacing forward to positions near the DMZ. Phases II and III, together lasting five days, were to include integrated attacks by air, artillery, and naval gunfire, first on targets in the coastal area, then expanding to the entire Cap Mui Lay sector. The events scheduled for Phase IV emphasized accomplishment of Operation Thor's second objective: the continued attack of targets in and north of the DMZ. In this last phase, most artillery units would withdraw to participate in other operations while observers would maintain surveillance of the area, directing the attack of reemerging targets. Phase IV, planned as an open-ended evolution, would continue indefinitely.[29]

The staggering firepower available for Operation Thor was commensurate with the magnitude of the task at hand. Thirteen batteries of artillery would participate, including the three 155mm batteries of Major Billy F. Stewart's 4th Battalion, 12th Marines, reinforced by Battery K, 4th Battalion, 13th Marines and the 1st 8-inch Battery. While these units temporarily came under the operational control of the U.S. Army's 108th Field Artillery Group for Operation Thor, all other 3dMarine Division artillery units stood ready to participate in the operation, if necessary.** The Seventh Fleet provided two cruisers and six destroyers, as well as 596 sorties of tactical air. The MACV planners allocated 861 Air Force sorties, including 210 B–52 strikes. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing scheduled 540 sorties, including 65 photo reconnaissance and electronic warfare missions to be flown by Lieutenant Colonel Eric B. Parker's Marine Composite Reconnaissance Squadron (VMCJ) 1, which would provide surveillance of the DMZ throughout the operation. All III MAF units participating in the operation were under the control of Brigadier General Lawrence H. Caruthers, Jr., USA, who commanded Provisional

*See Chapter 3 for discussion of the enemy gun positions in Cap Mui Lay.

**On 26 June, Prov Corps transferred counter-battery responsibility from the 12th Marines to the 108th Field Artillery Group. (12th Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. 1–III–7.)

Corps, Vietnam Artillery from his headquarters at Dong Ha.[30]

Provisional Corps, Vietnam published its order for Operation Thor on 24 June 1968, barely one week before D-Day. In order for the attack to proceed as planned, much remained to be done. While communications personnel from all participating organizations began establishing a network for command and control of the operation, engineers and surveyors began repair and construction efforts which would allow artillery units to displace forward to new firing positions along the Dyemarker line. Marine logistic units also had to stockpile at forward ammunition supply points the large quantities of artillery and air-delivered ordnance required for the operation. Complicating this task was the 20 June 1968 explosion of the Dong Ha ammunition supply point which closed the Dong Ha Logistic Support Area for six days. In the interim, the Quang Tri ammunition supply point provided ordnance for Operation Thor. The Provisional Corps commander, Army Lieutenant General Richard G. Stilwell, later stated that "the execution of Thor so shortly after the huge loss of ammunition seemed out of place with known facts . . . . " and therefore created an element of surprise.[31*]

On D–3, VMCJ–1, along with units of the Seventh Air Force, began photo reconnaissance missions of the Cap Mui Lay sector. Based on the intelligence these missions produced, the staff of Provisional Corps, Vietnam prepared a target list and completed the plan. Operating from their bases at Da Nang and Chu Lai, on 1 July, the fixed-wing squadrons of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing launched into clear skies for their first strikes of Operation Thor. Using intelligence assembled over the previous three days, Marine F–4s, A–4s, and A–6s rolled in on suspected and confirmed NVA positions in the Cap Mui Lay sector. At the same time, Air Force and Navy attack aircraft and Strategic Air Command B–52s pounded other targets while Seventh Fleet naval gunfire ships closed range along the North Vietnamese coast to engage Communist shore batteries. Apparently caught off guard by the large-scale attack, the enemy reacted sluggishly. U.S. aircraft encountered little opposition and the ships sailed to within 10 kilometers of the shoreline without being engaged by the normally active NVA coastal artillery.[32]

Meanwhile, the artillery units which were to play their part in the following phases of the operation moved swiftly into position. Five Marine self-propelled batteries, located in positions along Route 9 between Camp Carroll and Dong Ha, rapidly displaced closer to the DMZ. Some batteries moved north as far as 12 kilometers, greatly increasing their ability to reach targets in the Operation Thor area. The 30 howitzers provided by the 3d Marine Division represented about half of the total III MAF artillery effort committed to Operation Thor. An additional 31 heavy caliber weapons, including 20 long-range 175mm guns, came from U.S. Army units.[33]

Following the carefully planned phasing of the operation, air attacks dominated the first two days, although artillery units conducted a few fire missions. During this phase, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing crews flew 194 sorties in support of Operation Thor, contributing significantly to the total Phase I ordnance delivery of over 4,000 tons.[34]

On 3 July, with the number of attack sorties slightly reduced and the B–52 sorties cut to one-half of the Phase I level, III MAF artillery and Seventh Fleet naval gunfire ships joined the attack in earnest. Remarkably, the ships closed to within five kilometers of the North Vietnamese shore without a hint of NVA fire. Over 12,000 rounds of various calibers struck Communist positions in a single day.

In an effort to exploit the effects of the powerful combined arms attack, psychological operations personnel conducted an aerial drop of 28,000 leaflets over the Cap Mui Lay sector. The leaflets, intended to take advantage of the anticipated lowered morale of NVA troops subjected to continuous heavy bombardment in what had been considered a "safe" area, advised that "desertion, defection, dereliction offer the only alternative to certain death."[35]

The success of Operation Thor hinged on fire support coordination and target intelligence. The major challenge in fire support coordination was to engage

*Colonel William H. Dabney, who as a major served on the 3d Marine Division staff, recalled some of the extraordinary efforts taken to restock the artillery ammunition. He recalled that the road from Quang Tri to Dong Ha was not cleared of mines and that it required Marine engineers to sweep the road before it could be reopened. Each morning two Marine engineer minesweepers departed, one from Quang Tri and the other from Dong Ha, and when "they met in the middle about noon the road was open and the convoys could begin." According to Dabney, this meant that six hours of daylight was lost before Marine trucks could move the ammunition. At that point, drivers from the 3d Motor Transport Battalion "*volunteered* [emphasis in the original] to drive the road each morning at first light wearing 2–3 flak jackets and with the truck cab carpeted with sandbags, and if they made it, then the road was open. If not, push their blown-up truck off the road and roll another through till it hit something." From that point, Dabney claimed that as a result "the road was usually open by 0800, which almost doubled the time ammo could be hauled." Col William H. Dabney, Comments on draft, n.d. (Vietnam Comment File).

each target with the proper mix of accurately delivered ordnance, while maximizing the potential of the units and weapons systems available. Also, since this was a joint operation on a grand scale, scores of aviation, artillery, and naval surface units representing four different Services, had to deliver their firepower into the same areas at the same time without interfering with one another.

Although no accidents or serious incidents occurred, the operation was not without problems in fire support coordination. For example, the manual target list maintained by Provisional Corps, Vietnam and the automated list maintained by Seventh Air Force were not compatible, so, fire support coordinators found it necessary to use both lists. This proved difficult and time consuming. Also, the requirement for a three-day lead time for Arclight strikes was a burden which diminished the effectiveness of the powerful B–52s by preventing their use against targets of opportunity.

Target intelligence presented two problems: target identification and damage assessment. Target identification came initially from photo imagery interpretation and was supplemented, after the start of the operation, by pilot debriefings and air observer reports. Accurate battle damage assessments were a critical part of the targeting process. Without them, planners could not determine whether the attacks achieved the desired effects, and hence, could not know whether a target should be engaged further or struck from the target list as destroyed. Post-mission pilot debriefings and observer reports provided the initial battle damage assessment. The photo reconnaissance missions flown by VMCJ–1 and Seventh Air Force units provided additional information.* Covering the entire Cap Mui Lay sector each day, these sorties provided target intelligence personnel information which, in some cases, led to the engagement of new relatively stationary targets less than eight hours after the mission.[36]

On the ground, other target intelligence agencies were at work. Artillery forward observers, operating from positions along the DMZ, identified and engaged some targets visually, providing their own damage assessments. Another target acquisition system used during Operation Thor was the three-station sound-ranging base** installed in the northeastern portion of I Corps Tactical Zone. Modern technology also assisted the III MAF targeting effort. A system called "Firewatch," installed at Con Thien and manned by artillerymen of the 12th Marines, combined night observation devices, a laser range finder, and an acoustical system to determine accurate range and direction. During Operation Thor, "Firewatch" detected 41 enemy targets. The 12th Marines also used five counter-mortar radar units, capable of detecting projectiles in flight and computing their point of origin. In addition, Battery F, 26th Field Artillery, a U. S. Army target acquisition unit, manned another six counter-mortar radars.[37]

Despite this all-out surveillance effort, only about one-third of the artillery, naval gunfire, and air missions reported to the 3d Marine Division Fire Support Information Center during the month of July 1968, which included the period of Operation Thor, involved human observation and first-hand reports. Only one-fifth of these observed missions reported any damage to the targets.[38]

Still, those participating in Operation Thor realized that the weight of firepower was having immediate effects. By 5 July, antiaircraft fire over the Cap Mui Lay sector was so light that O–1 aircraft carrying

*Colonel Eric B. Parker, who commanded VMCJ–1 in 1968 at this time, recalled Thor later as an operation that "started and ended with a mosaic of the DMZ area covering several miles north of the DMZ. First for Target I.D., the last for BDA [bomb damage assessment]." He remembeted his "continuing frustration with never being told what our efforts produced or, in other words, did our flights contribute in any way to the prosecution of the war effort. We got routine 'attaboys' which everyone got, but never heard to my recollection of any specific target being identified and subsequently destroyed." Col Eric B. Parker, Comments on draft, dtd 13Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Sound-ranging bases employ a series of microphones spread over a known distance and wired to a central station. Each microphone,in turn, picks up the sound of an enemy gun firing and signals the central station. The sequence in which the microphones are activated and the time between activations are used to compute the direction to the enemy gun. A network of sound-ranging bases can provide intersecting directions to determine an enemy gun's location. Compared with some other systems that were available in III MAF at the time, the sound-ranging bases were crude, but when used as one part of a large, redundant target acquisition network encompassing a variety of systems, they could conceivably provide the final bit of information needed to locate a Communist firing unit. Lieutenant General Louis Metzger, who as a brigadier general served as 3d Marine Division assistant division commander in 1967 and early 1968, noted that the sound-ranging system "was brought to Vietnam in 1967 in an attempt to locate the enemy artillery firing from north of the Ben Hai River into our bases. It was basically a World War II system that was intended to be used in a broadly held front. It was unsuited for a battle in which only certain strong points were held, which did not allow for its positioning along a line so that the enemy firing position could be triangled." LtGen Louis Metzger, Comments on draft, dtd 17Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).

Marine and U. S. Army air observers ventured north of the DMZ—an area previously accessible to them only at grave risk—to assist in adjusting fire and providing battle damage assessments. The damage to the NVA defenses was so great that even the vulnerable O–1s operated over the area for the rest of Operation Thor without sustaining any casualties, or indeed, receiving any hits.

The air observers reported that the Cap Mui Lay sector was a fortified area. Most villages consisted of a group of dug-in huts, with only their roofs above ground, connected by a series of trenches. Although rice was visible in the open in many villages, there was no evidence of farming activity, indicating that the enemy shipped in rice from other areas. Few personnel sightings occurred, but light antiaircraft fire came from several of the fortified villages. Fire missions directed against these villages often caused secondary explosions, indicating the storage of ammunition or fuel. There was every sign that the Cap Mui Lay sector was a military garrison area and that its villages were actually supply dumps or troop staging points.

During the final days of Operation Thor, III MAF artillery continued to pump an average of about 4,000 rounds per day into the target area, while naval gunfire added another 3,300 rounds per day. Air strikes totaled a further 2,400 tons of bombs, with 1st Marine Aircraft Wing crews flying 256 attack sorties. On the afternoon of 7 July, VMCJ–1 flew the final photo reconnaissance mission of Operation Thor. The next morning, artillery units began withdrawing from the forward positions, while air and naval units resumed normal operations.

Operation Thor expended enormous quantities of ordnance. Attack aircraft delivered 3,207 tons of bombs, while B–52s dropped an additional 5,156 tons. III MAF artillery units fired 23,187 rounds of 155mm, 175mm, and 8-inch ammunition. Ships of the Seventh Fleet accounted for 19,022 rounds of 5-inch, 6-inch, and 8-inch naval gunfire. The human cost of this massive application of firepower was low. On the ground, one soldier was slightly wounded by NVA counterfire, while Marine, Navy, and Air Force aviation units flew more than 2,000 sorties with the loss of three aircraft destroyed and one crewman killed in action. Marine aviation units and artillery units sustained no losses.

In assessing the damage to the North Vietnamese in their former sanctuary area, the after-action report filed by XXIV Corps stated that "severe damage was inflicted upon the enemy." The report cited as evidence "the minimal and ineffective hostile fire from the Cap Mui Lay Sector in the thirty days subsequent to THOR and the continued ability of our observation aircraft to operate over that area."[39]

Damage assessments included the destruction of 789 antiaircraft positions containing 63 weapons; 179 artillery positions containing 19 guns; 143 bunkers; 9 surface-to-air missile sites; and numerous trucks, sampans, structures, storage areas, and other miscellaneous targets. Pilots and observers noted 624 secondary explosions and fires. Unconfirmed reports of North Vietnamese killed totaled 125, but without the opportunity to send ground troops to investigate the area, the actual figure could not be determined. MACV noted:

> Finally, there may well have been one contribution that could not then or perhaps at any later time be measured with assurance: If the enemy had intended using the CMLS [Cap Mui Lay Sector] as a staging point for staging a major infiltration program into the South, that possibility had been preempted. And preemption has always been one purpose of interdiction.[40]

Following the completion of Operation Thor, Lieutenant General Richard E. Stilwell, commanding the newly redesignated XXIV Corps, pressed for continued overflight of the Cap Mui Lay sector by air observers and forward air controllers to sustain the success of the operation by daily engagement of recovering NVA targets, but this was not done. On 1 November 1968, all questions of how best to exploit the gains of Operation Thor became academic when, by order of President Johnson, all offensive operations against North Vietnam and the DMZ, including air strikes, artillery missions, and naval gunfire missions, were discontinued, except as necessary to retaliate to Communist attacks. Thus, the sanctuary was restored.[41]

Fire Base Tactics

By July 1968 with the imminent abandonment of the Khe Sanh base, the 3d Marine Division had instituted a mobile concept of operations patterned to a large extent upon the 1st Air Cavalry. While not completely abandoning the Dyemarker strong points, Major General Raymond G. Davis, who assumed command of the 3d Marine Division in May, had each of them manned with as small a force as possible, usually not above company strength. Starting with the Task Force Hotel operations in western Quang Tri, the 3d Division began a series of wide-flung heli-

borne operations throughout the width and breath of the division area.*

A central component of the new tactical mode was the artillery fire base.** Where the infantry went, the artillery followed, thus always keeping the maneuver elements within a protective fire fan. Typically blasted out of jungle-covered hill tops, the new artillery fire bases were mutually supporting as well as providing supporting fires to the infantry units. By the end of the year, the 12th Marines artillery, with 13 fewer firing units, was operating out of 12 more "firebases" than in January. Of the 21 artillery sites, 7 contained 10 of the 22 firing units, and were accessible only by helicopter.[42]***

The dispersion of Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Scoppa, Jr.'s 2d Battalion, 12th Marines in December was typical of the deployment of the 3d Division's artillery. In support of the 9th Marines Operation Dawson River in and west of the Ba Long Valley, Scoppa established his battalion command post on Fire Base Dick, about 5,000 meters south of Ba Long. Collocated with the 9th Marines command post, the artillery battalion kept in addition to its headquarters at Dick, one of its 105mm howitzer batteries, Battery E. At Firebase Barnett, about 5,000 meters southeast of Dick was another 105mm battery, Battery F. Then to the southwest and about 8,000 meters south of Dick, was Firebase Shiloh with two artillery batteries, Battery D, a 105mm howitzer battery, and the 1st Provisional 155mm Howitzer Battery equipped with three 155mm towed howitzers.**** Scoppa's 4.2-inch mortar or Whiskey Battery was with the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines at the forward edge of the Battery D artillery fan. This in effect permitted the infantry battalion "to maneuver slightly further than the eight clicks [8,000 meters] that would normally govern the outer limits of its movement."[43]

In the selection of the fire bases, Lieutenant Colonel Scoppa explained that the site must be within a specified range from other artillery positions for mutual support and consistent with "the scheme of maneuver of the infantry unit . . . ." In addition, the battalion commander stated that there were three other prerequisites: "the piece of ground must be of adequate size" to accommodate a battery of artillery; "it must be defensible by a platoon [of infantry]" or at most a reinforced platoon; and finally "capable of construction within 24 to 36 hours." He observed that the Marines were now capable of placing a 105mm battery in an "area as narrow as 15–20 meters wide and 75 meters long." Other fire bases such as Shiloh were large enough to hold both a 105mm battery and three additional 155mm towed howitzers.[44]

The artillery battalion commander provided the following description of Fire Base Dick. He stated that the Marines in November carved the base out in 24 hours on the "very crest of a 618-meter-high

*See Chapters 16, 18, 20 and 22 for a description of the 3d Marine Division mobile operations during the latter part of 1968.

**Colonel Edwin S. Schick, Jr., the former 12th Marines commander, remembered that sometime in May before he relinquished command of the regiment, he made a reconnaissance and plans for an artillery fire base. He briefed Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins, then commanding the 3d Marine Division, who approved the concept as long as General Davis concurred. Schick Comments.

***The establishment of these fire bases was a learning process for both the infantry and artillery units involved. Captain Matthew G. McTiernan, commander of Company I, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, related some of the difficulties he encountered in late July 1968 when his company helped in the preparation of a landing zone for one of the bases. He recounted that the artillerymen were used to "large, well defended positions, [and] had some difficulty understanding why their infantry brothers were so exercised by their behavior. Their artillery SOP for establishing firing positions seemed, to the average Marine infantryman, to border on lunacy. It seemed the artillery lacked a certain appreciation for the fact that we were the middle of Indian country, on the outer edge of the Camp Carroll fire fan, with no nearby friendly units to call for assistance. The din was unnerving, shouts, loud banging, screaming, and other seemingly amplified noise carrying over the surrounding jungle in all directions. First the Company Gunnery Sergeant made contact with his counterpart, this effort lasting less than thirty minutes. Next the Company XO [executive officer] contacted his counterpart, again no relief from the din. Night was fast approaching, and India Company was convinced Ho himself knew of our location and strength. Finally, I called on the Battery Commander. This had the most promising, if not lasting effect. Not that the battery lacked discipline. Far from it, this was a proud, highly motivated unit. They simply did not appreciate the situation as we did. Night was almost upon us and it seemed evident that any NVA in the area probably knew we were up to something. It is my contention that if in fact there were NVA units in our area they were as astonished as we were about the unusual activity and probably thought it some kind of trick on our part. In any case, I instructed one of our LP's [listening post] to toss a couple of grenades. This action had an equally astonishing effect. It was as if someone had turned off a loud radio. Complete, and from our point of view, blessed silence. Silence which descended over the position as did the night." Capt Matthew G. McTiernan, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File).

****Major General Hoffman observed that in Task Force Hotel and 3d Marine Division offensive operations, "We favored the towed 155's over the self-propelled 155's because the former were helo-transportable and therefore could be employed in places and circumstances where the self-propelled models could not." Hoffman Comments.



hill." In building the base, Marine engineers blew off the top of the ridgeline and used bulldozers to dig the gun pits. The 105mm artillery battery there had a battery front of 75 meters. There were sheer drops to the rear and front, as well as to the left flank of the howitzers. For resupply, Dick depended entirely upon helicopters. The base was large enough to accommodate 2,000 rounds of 105mm ammunition. According to Scoppa, the Marines carefully monitored "the levels of units [of fire] on a fire base so that you can provide uninterrupted support to the infantry as required."[45]

This dependence upon air delivery of supplies required close coordination between the artillery and helicopters. First of all in establishing the landing zone on the fire base, the Marines attempted to place it on a piece of terrain "which is at perpendicular to the prevailing winds so that the helicopter can come in one smooth motion, drop his load, and proceed."

Above, Fire Support Base Dick near the Ba Long Valley is where Battery E, 2d Battalion, 12th Marines established a 105mm howitzer firing site. Below, a ground view of the Fire Support Base includes firing stakes and hootches made of empty ammunition boxes. An artillery tube can be faintly seen at the upper right of the fire base.

The top photo is from the 12th Mar ComdC, Dec68, and bottom is Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A801291



Another factor involved the use of check fires when the helicopters arrived for resupply. Usually the battalion checked its fire "in order to give the helicopter the priority that it requires to drop its load and proceed." On the other hand, when the artillery was "shooting on an active mission" in support of engaged infantry "the fires have priority and the helicopter must wait or return to base to resupply us at a later time." There were complications also when the helicopters were resupplying ground troops or carrying out medical evacuations. Since the fire bases were usually on the high ground, the artillerymen fired their guns exclusively at a high angle, thereby the artillery trajectory did "not interfere continuously with the helicopter traffic" and permitted the clearance of "helicopter lanes beneath or below the max ordinates of the battery."[46]

The helicopters were important also in bringing the artillery units into position. Marine CH–46s and CH–53As could easily bring the 105mm howitzers into the rapidly expanding fire bases. Furthermore, Army Sky Crane CH–54s could lift into position the towed 155mm howitzers. As Lieutenant Colonel Scoppa related, the Marines needed to provide only about 48 hours advance notice to obtain the Army "bird" which could transport the towed 155mm howitzers from fire base to fire base.[47]

A Marine Sikorsky CH–53 Sea Stallion helicopter carrying a M101A1 105mm howitzer as an external load is about to place the artillery piece at a fire support base southwest of An Hoa during Operation Taylor Common.

Photo is courtesy of Col Joseph L. Sadowski USMC (Ret)



In December 1968, the 2d Battalion, 12th Marines had three provisional 155mm batteries equipped with the towed howitzers attached to its command. While the 1st Provisional Battery was at Shiloh, the other two batteries were at Fire Base Cates and at Ca Lu. From these latter two bases, the 155mm howitzers provided protective fires for the northern and western edges of the 9th Marines area of operations.[48]

According to Lieutenant Colonel Scoppa, the new mobility of the artillery had transformed the war in the north. He observed that his units on the fire bases took relatively little incoming and attributed this "to the fact that we do move into them quickly, we occupy them for a relatively short period of time, . . . and then move elsewhere." Scoppa believed the enemy did not know how to cope with this rapid deployment: "We are now able to get into areas where he did not expect us to be able to come into, . . . in a matter of days span 16 clicks, sometimes 24 in three moves. Charlie [the Communist forces] cannot move out quite that fast. We get in with him where he is."[49]

Further south in the 1st Marine Division sector at the end of the year, the 11th Marines also began to experiment with the fire base concept. Since April, the Marine artillery had moved into forward artillery positions in support of the large operations such as Mameluke Thrust, Allen Brook, and Maui Peak. Yet for the most part, the 11th Marines did not have the assets and command arrangements to use the fire base concept on a large scale. With the departure of the 5th Marines from the Phu Loc sector and finally with the transfer of the 1st Field Artillery Group from Phu Bai to Da Nang, the 1st Marine Division was prepared to launch Operation Taylor Common in Base Area 112. Under 1st Marine Division Task Force Yankee in Taylor Common, Lieutenant Colonel Raymond B. Ingrando's 1st Field Artillery Group directed an artillery force of two direct support artillery battalions and elements of other units, including 8-inch howitzers, 155mm guns, and 175mm guns. The idea was to build a series of fire support bases between the Arizona territory and the Laotian border to interdict any Communist forces in the enemy base area. The operation continued into

1969. The fire support base became an integral part of Marine Corps artillery employment and deployment for the remainder of the war.[50*]

Marine Reconnaissance Operations

The more mobile Marine operations would also have an impact on the employment of Marine reconnaissance units. In 1968, the Marine reconnaissance units consisted of the 1st and 3d Reconnaissance Battalions and the 1st and 3d Force Reconnaissance Companies. The two reconnaissance battalions remained under the control of their respective parent divisions, the 1st with the 1st Marine Division and the 3d with the 3d Division. Each of the Force Reconnaissance companies were attached to one of the battalions, the 1st to the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion and the 3d to the 3d Battalion.

Since mid-1966, the two divisions employed their reconnaissance battalions in much the same way, basically as an extension of their supporting arms in "Stingray" patrols, thus bringing Marine firepower to bear deep in enemy territory. In Stingray operations, a small reconnaissance unit (usually a squad, although platoon-sized operations were not uncommon) moved to an objective area by helicopter and occupied a position on commanding terrain from which it could observe enemy activity. From their observation posts, the Marines watched for Viet Cong and North Vietnamese moving through the area. By maintaining a radio link to their headquarters, the Marines were able to engage lucrative targets with artillery fire and air strikes without revealing their position. This technique greatly extended the effectiveness of U.S. firepower by hitting the enemy in his own backyard. For example, the 1st Division credited its Stingray patrols in the Da Nang sector for disrupting the enemy main forces as they moved into attack positions just prior to Tet.[51**]

Although the Stingray concept called for the patrols to remain clandestine, they went to the field prepared for the worst. A squad, accompanied by a corpsman and occasionally by an artillery forward observer, would take a considerable amount of equipment for the defense of their position.[***] In addition to the squad's own rifles, the standard equipment included M60 machine guns (occasionally, Marines even took M2 .50-caliber heavy machine guns and 60mm mortars), grenade launchers, Claymore mines, sniper rifles, as well as binoculars, spotting scopes, night vision devices, and, of course, radios. Such heavy firepower was virtually a necessity because the observation posts used by the patrols were, for the most part, somewhat developed as defensive positions with concertina wire, lightly constructed bunkers, and fighting holes. There were only so many pieces of commanding terrain and the patrols returned to these again and again.

Most patrols remained in position about four to six days, although some teams were out for as long as 10 or 11 days. On the other hand, helicopters might extract them much sooner than planned if the enemy detected the patrol. One team which paid the price

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* See Chapter 21 for Operation Taylor Common.

**See Chapter 8. Lieutenant Colonel Broman C. Stinemetz, who commanded the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion during this period, provided the following description of the experience of one patrol in a harbor site on the nose of Charlie Ridge west of Da Nang that overlooked a well-known trail on 30 January: "Suddenly a major force of NVA regulars, heavily armed, came marching single file down the trail heading in an easterly direction towards the Da Nang area. At the 1st Recon Battalion's opcenter [operations center] came the whispered voice over the tacnet [tactical net] of the patrol's radio operator relaying his leaders observation. 'Ask them how far they are away,' the battalion's operations officer said. There was an agonizing wait as the operator relayed the request to his leader and waited for a response. Then in a barely audible whisper came: 'the six [patrol commander] says they are within farting distance.' The patrol leader stuck with his position for a good thirty minutes and then called artillery strikes on points further down the trail. The darkness and the dense vegetation prohibited any damage assessment, but in debriefings patrol members reported lots of screaming from the impact area." Colonel Stinemetz attributed the success of Stingray in the 1st Division sector for the growth of the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion in 1967. By the latter part of the year, the four reconnaissance companies of the battalion were joined by an enlarged Company E which had an additional fourth platoon. With the introduction of the 26th Marines into country in 1967, Company B, 5th Reconnaissance Battalion, was attached to the battalion. Together with the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company, which had been under battalion control for some time, there were a total of seven reconnaissance companies, more than doubling the 1st Marine Division's capability to field patrols. According to Stinemetz, "at this stage the Recon Battalion was the largest battalion in the division. It had more rolling stock than a motor transport battalion and more communications equipment than the Communications Battalion." Col Broman C. Stinemetz, Comments on draft, dtd 2Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Stinemetz Comments. Lieutenant Colonel Donald R. Berg, who commanded the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion from July until December 1968, observed that the Stingray patrols usually varied from 8–12 men. He noted that "patrols preferred going short rather than have a new man added to the patrol." In addition to the corpsman and depending up the situation, a doghandler and dog may be attached,as well as other specially skilled personnel such as a demolitions expert. According to Lieutenant Colonel Berg, one dog had two confirmed "KIAs" from Stingray actions. LtCol Donald R. Berg, Comments on draft, dtd 9Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).



Photo from the Abel Collection

His face covered with camouflage paint, Marine PFC Robert L. Scheidel looks out upon a landing zone for his Stingray team from inside a Boeing Vertol CH–46 Sea Knight helicopter. Note the smoke canisters strapped to his chest.

for detection by the enemy was known as "Cayenne".* On 30 May, Team "Cayenne" occupied a position on a narrow finger near the Song Thu Bon less than one kilometer north of the border between Quang Nam and Quang Tin provinces. The jungle surrounding the position had been burned away, revealing a gentle slope upwards to the north with steep drops to the south, east, and west. Five days and four nights passed without a single sighting of the enemy. At 2245, on 3 June, the Communists struck suddenly. A series of explosions rocked the observation post and, almost instantly, 40 Viet Cong overran the Marines' position. The 1st Reconnaissance Battalion lost contact with the team immediately following the initial report and called for help in the form of a Douglas AC–47 "Spooky".[52]**

"Spooky 11" arrived on station over Cayenne's position at 2340. At 2351, the patrol leader reestablished radio communications with the battalion headquarters and requested an emergency extraction for himself and his wounded corpsman. He reported that the other 13 Marines of Cayenne were either dead or missing. The 1st Reconnaissance Battalion called for the extraction as another AC–47 and a flareship responded to the call for help and arrived to support Cayenne.

Just over 50 minutes after the request, two Boeing Vertol CH–46 Sea Knight helicopters arrived, sup-

*The teams were distinguished from each other by their radio call signs, e.g. "Cayenne," "Elf Skin," "Auditor," and "Hanover Sue" to name but a few.

**The "Spooky," sometimes referred to as "Puff, the Magic Dragon," was an attack version of the venerable Douglas C–47 Skytrain cargo aircraft. Armed with Vulcan miniguns, "Spooky" was capable of placing 18,000 rounds of 7.62mm machine gun fire on a target in one minute.

ported by a pair of Bell UH–1E "Huey" gunships. With the flareship lighting the battlefield and the Hueys and AC–47s suppressing the enemy fire, the Sea Knights moved in to pick up the patrol leader and his corpsman, completing the extraction at 0209. Only a quarter of an hour later, Team Cayenne, thought to be destroyed by the enemy, suddenly came up on the radio. There were still six Marines alive, but wounded, on the hill. In the darkness and confusion of the sudden attack, the patrol leader had believed them lost. The rescue effort went back into motion, with two helicopter gunships arriving on station at 0254, closely followed by another pair of Sea Knights. By 0334, the six wounded men were on board the helicopters and on their way to Da Nang. One of these Marines later died of his wounds.

AC–47s remained on station over the abandoned position for the rest of the night, shooting at fleeting targets. As each gunship ran out of ammunition, another replaced it. At 0642, four CH–46s inserted a reaction force into the ruined position to search for additional survivors and to collect the remains of those who had died. The reaction force found seven dead Marines and one dead Viet Cong in and around the position.[53]

Fortunately, the experience of Team Cayenne was the exception to the rule. Most Stingray patrols occupied their positions, remained there for several days, and departed again without serious incident, sometimes without even sighting the enemy. There was even occasion for the grim humor that is prevalent in combat. First Lieutenant Philip D. Downey, leader of Team "Night Scholar" during an insert atop Loi Giang Mountain, three kilometers southwest of An Hoa, turned in this report of a sighting on 10 June:

> 20 VC with 10 bathing beauties. 10 women were bathing with 6 guards. Black PJs, khakis and towels; packs, rifles, and soap. Called F[ire] M[ission], resulting in 3 VC KIA conf[irmed] and 5 VC KIA prob[able]. Unable to observe women after this due to bushes, but patrol felt the water frolics were over.[54]

Stingray patrols were capable of inflicting enemy casualties far out of proportion to their own size. Team "Elf Skin," occupied a position on a narrow ridge overlooking the Arizona Territory and the Song Vu Gia from 10 June to 16 June.* In this Communist-infested area, it recorded 25 separate enemy sightings which totalled 341 Viet Cong. From its concealed position, the team fired 24 artillery missions, for a reported tally of over 40 enemy dead.[55]

Two weeks later, a team known as "Parallel Bars," took up a position at the peak of the dominant Hon Coc Mountain, six kilometers south of Go Noi Island. Just after noon on 25 June, it saw about 100 VC moving west along a narrow finger outside the hamlet of An Tam (1), just southwest of Go Noi Island. An artillery fire mission using "Firecracker" ammunition accounted for more than 30 reported enemy dead. A little over three hours later, another group of about 80 Communists moved west along the same finger, in the same direction. This group, too, appeared to be leaving Go Noi Island. The Marine patrol leader contacted an observation aircraft on station over the area and arranged for an airstrike, this time killing about another 30 of the enemy. At 1855 the same day, Parallel Bars spotted another group of 16 Viet Cong, also moving west, 100 meters west of the previous sighting. Another "Firecracker" mission fell upon the enemy, but it was too dark for the team to observe the results. Incredibly, at 0800 the next morning, the team sighted a fourth group of 27 Viet Cong moving along the same finger, but about 900 meters further southwest than the first three groups. Parallel Bars called for fire still again, and reported killing five or more VC.[56]

Stingray patrols supported all major operations. Teams occupied positions in or near the area of operations and coordinated their activities with the responsible infantry unit. As an operation ebbed and flowed according to intelligence reports of the enemy's activity, the Stingray patrols moved to new observation posts to maintain support of the infantry. Even while some teams were supporting major operations, others remained far beyond the TAOR of any friendly unit, directing artillery and airstrikes on Communist forces moving to and from their base areas. For 1968, III MAF claimed Stingray operations to have resulted in more than 3,800 enemy killed.[57**]

*The "Arizona Territory" was the name commonly used by the Marines to describe the area northwest of An Hoa bounded by the Song Thu Bon, the Song Vu Gia, and the mountains south of Thuong Duc.

**Colonel Stinemetz, who commanded the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion until July 1968, quoted the following reconnaissance statistics for the month of May: 149 patrols, 476 sightings, 59 contacts, 6,606 enemy sighted, 362 fire missions and 42 air strikes; 46 enemy KIA by small arms, 681 enemy by air and artillery. He stated that the Marines captured five weapons and took two prisoners. Marine casualties were 6 dead and 45 wounded. Stinemetz Comments. As with all statistics of enemy casualties and body counts, however, the historian and reader must take these as trends rather than absolutes. Colonel James W. Stemple, who commanded the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines in the latter half of 1968, recalled an incident in October when his battalion entered an area where reconnaissance teams had

3D RECONNAISSANCE BATTALION
11 JULY 1968-12 DECEMBER 1968

	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
No. of Patrols	133	147	143	165	158	105*	851
Average Duration	2.13	2.45	2.36	3.19	8.60	3.89	3.77
Average Size	6.09	6.61	6.72	7.22	7.10	6.50	6.72
No. of Sightings	45	54	78	71	55	20	323
No. of Enemy Sighted	288	778	508	289	314	114	2291
No. of Contacts	20	52	52	34	31	22	211
No. of Fire Missions	16	28	39	64	64	22	233
No. Rounds Fired	416	1203	914	1742	1363	249	5887
No. of Air Strikes	5	14	5	24	3	5	56
Enemy KIA (C)	22	63	102	25	23	13	248
Enemy Captured	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Weapons Captured	2	5	8	0	7	1	23
Friendly KIA	4	1	5	1	3	1	15
Friendly WIA	26	5	20	4	6	8	69

* Includes 31 teams deployed in the field as of 12 December 1968

Chart provided by LtCol Donald R. Berg USMC (Ret).

Still there remained some question among infantry and reconnaissance Marines whether III MAF was making the best use of its reconnaissance assets. This was especially true in the 3d Marine Division. Lieutenant Colonel William D. Kent, the commander of the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion until early July 1968, several years later expressed his concerns that the reconnaissance patrols were "fighten" the NVA rather than "watching them," thereby losing "a lot of long-range intelligence." He believed there was an overreliance on radio intercepts and that the North Vietnamese "were smart enough not to talk." Kent commented that this was especially true in the NVA offensive in the Dong Ha sector at the end of April and beginning of May. He believed the system awarded "pats on the back for KIAs," but not for obtaining the elements of combat information.[58]

Both Lieutenant Colonel Kent and Major General Davis, the former deputy commander Prov Corps and new 3d Marine Division commander, were influenced by the tactics of the 1st Air Cavalry Division. According to Lieutenant Colonel Kent, after the relief of Khe Sanh in mid-April, he began exchanging patrol leaders with the Army units and sending some of the reconnaissance Marines to the Army schools. According to its doctrine, the Air Cavalry employed rapid helicopter inserts of small reconnaissance teams of four to five men to explore a given terrain, often using decoy aircraft to keep any watching enemy forces off balance. Combining "Red" [usually gunships] and "White" [aero scout] teams, the Air Cavalry could make a rapid reconnaissance and either call in the "Blues" [the aero infantry] or move on elsewhere.[59]

Lieutenant Colonel Kent observed, however, that the reconnaissance Marines also had things to teach their Army counterparts. According to Kent, the Marines taught them how to call in supporting arms, especially fixed-wing airstrikes, and, surprisingly enough, map reading. He stated that his patrol leaders explained to him that for the Air Cavalry, "land navigation was not a big thing . . . ." They told him that the Air Cavalry reconnaissance troops "didn't have to read maps. They depended on the airplanes. There were airplanes up there all the time."[60]

In any event, encouraged by General Davis, the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion began, as Lieutenant Colonel Kent observed, to "loosen up" and do more "snoopen and poopen." While still using 10-man Stingray teams, the battalion also started deploying

reported extensive enemy casualties killed by supporting arms. When asked why his battalion had found so few enemy dead, he turned to his questioner and replied that he was "standing on top of what should have been 197 dead NVA." Col James W. Stemple, Comments on draft n.d. [1995] (Vietnam Comment File).

smaller teams, about four to five men, very often out of artillery range. Using both walking patrols and helicopter inserts, these patrols were out to obtain information rather than fight. According to Colonel Alexander L. Michaux, the 3d Marine Division operations officer, these teams were sent out and told "not to call in fire or anything. . . . Just find them and tell us where they [the NVA] are. We'll fix them with a battalion." Lieutenant Colonel Donald R. Berg, who relieved Lieutenant Colonel Kent in July as commander of the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, noted that when he took over the battalion three of his companies were attached to other units. By mid-September, he had these three companies returned to his command and carrying out reconnaissance missions. In December 1968, General Davis observed that he had anywhere from 58 to 60 active reconnaissance teams with about 40 to 45 out in the field at any given time. Within artillery range, he employed the Stingray patrols while the smaller patrols, designated "key hole" missions,* operated usually further out with the mission of watching and reporting on enemy troop activity. Like the artillery firebases, the 1st Marine Division also adapted the 3d Division reconnaissance techniques in Operation Taylor Common at the end of the year.[61]

*Chaplain Ray W. Stubbe, who has written extensively on Marine operations at Khe Sanh and on Marine reconnaissance forces, observed that the keyhole missions were "a return to the original concept of the Force Recon Company of having 4-man patrols, very lightly equipped, with the mission *only* [emphasis in original] of gathering information, operating very deep in enemy controlled territory far beyond the artillery fan for support. (The original Force Recon concept was for 4-man patrols operating up to 300 miles inland). This is a very historical development of recon in Vietnam." LCdr Ray W. Stubbe, Comments on draft, dtd 28Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 27

Manpower Policies and Realities

Personnel Turnover—The Quality Issue and Project 100,000—Training
The Search for Junior Leaders—Discipline—Morale—The Aviation Shortage
Filling the Ranks in Vietnam: Too Many Billets, Too Few Marines
The Deployment of Regimental Landing Team 27—Reserve Callup?
The Bloodiest Month, The Bloodiest Year—Foxhole Strength: Still Too Few Marines
The Return of RLT 27—The End of the Year—The Marine Corps and the Draft
The Marine Corps Transformed

In 1968, the Vietnam War dominated every aspect of Marine Corps manpower policy. Since the landing of the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (9th MEB) in 1965, the overall strength of the Marine Corps had increased over 60 percent. More than a quarter of all Marines were in Vietnam; almost a third were deployed west of Guam (*see* Table 1).[1] Marine Corps Commandant, General Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., later stated that by 1968, "there were just three kinds of Marines; there were those in Vietnam, those who had just come back from Vietnam, and those who were getting ready to go to Vietnam."[2*] Between March and September of 1968, 8 of the Marine Corps' 12 active infantry regiments were in Southeast Asia. In FMFPac only one regiment, the 28th Marines of the 5th Marine Division, remained uncommitted. This left three battalions in California, with none in Okinawa or Hawaii. On the east coast, most Marines in the 2d Marine Division were awaiting either their discharge or orders to Vietnam, while the individual battalions of the division's three regiments continued their customary deployments to the Mediterranean and Caribbean.

The dramatic growth of both its end strength and its overseas commitments compelled the Marine Corps to alter drastically many of its manpower policies. Between 1965 and 1969, the Marine Corps changed from an organization which encouraged long enlistments and stable units to one forced to rely on short-term Marines and high turnover within units. The Marine Corps Assistant Chief of Staff for Personnel (G-1), Brigadier General Jonas M. Platt, later related, "we had no choice with respect to short-term Marines and high turnover and both were a Hell of a necessary evil."[3]

Personnel Turnover

Before the Vietnam buildup, new recruits entered the Marine Corps on an enlistment of at least three years, with over four-fifths joining for four or more years.[4] The Vietnam buildup that began in the fall of 1965 required a large influx of new recruits, forcing the Marine Corps temporarily to begin accepting men on two-year enlistments. Between November 1965 and

*General Chapman was Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1 January 1968 to 31 December 1971.

Table 1
Percent of Total Strength in Vietnam

	U.S. Marine Corps			U.S. Army		
as of 30 June	Total	in VN	% in VN	Total	in VN	% in VN
1965	190,213	18,100	9.5	969,066	27,300	2.8
1966	261,716	53,700	20.5	1,199,784	160,000	13.3
1967	285,269	78,400	27.5	1,442,498	285,700	19.8
1968	307,252	83,600	27.2	1,570,343	354,300	22.6
1969	309,771	81,500	26.3	1,512,169	360,500	23.8
1970	259,737	50,500	19.4	1,322,548	298,600	22.6
1971	212,369	500	0.2	1,123,810	190,500	16.9



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A601734

Marine SSgt Robert D. Iverson, a drill sergeant at the Marine Corps Parris Island Recruit Training Depot in South Carolina addresses his platoon in a driving rain storm. Close order drill was not dependent upon the weather and training schedules were to be met.

May 1966 the Marine Corps also accepted 19,573 draftees.[5] After this initial surge ended in October 1966, the Marine Corps returned to three- and four-year enlistments. This did not last long. Still faced with a manpower shortage, on 2 May 1967, Headquarters Marine Corps once again authorized two-year enlistments. To keep personnel turbulence to a minimum, the Commandant decreed that two-year contracts would constitute no more than 20 percent of all new enlistments. Between 1 July 1966 and 30 June 1967, only 16.9 percent of all enlistments were for two years; over half were for four years.[6]

Manpower planners quickly found this high percentage of four-year enlistments a mixed blessing. The Marine Corps tried to ensure that no one would be involuntarily sent overseas for a second tour before spending at least 24 months in the United States. This meant that a Marine enlisted for four years would spend at least 4 months in initial training, normally followed by 13 months in Vietnam. After his required 24 months in the United States, he would have only 7 months left on his enlistment. Unless he reenlisted, this Marine would not have enough time left to serve a second Vietnam tour. This would not have been a problem if the Marine Corps' authorized strength had included enough billets in the United States to provide a sufficient rotation base. It did not.

In December 1965, the Marine Corps requested a strength increase of 85,169 Marines to support operations in Vietnam. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara approved this request in full. Between September 1966 and May 1968, the Marine Corps repeatedly requested further increases in its overall strength to provide a large enough rotation base for the rapidly growing forces in Vietnam (*see* Table 1). Under political pressure to keep military spending as low as possible, Secretary McNamara denied or drastically reduced every one of these requests.

By September 1966, the Marine Corps began to have difficulty sustaining its force level in Vietnam, and requested a further increase of 21,569 Marines to support operations in Southeast Asia and 12,827 Marines to improve the training flow of new recruits, for a total of 34,396. Secretary McNamara approved a strength increase of 14,464. In September 1967, the Marine Corps once again requested an increase in its end strength to support operations in Vietnam and to improve the readiness of units in the United States, this time for 19,293 Marines. The Defense Department approved an increase of 7,000 Marines.[7]

In July 1967, General Platt described to his fellow general officers how the Marine Corps was caught between large commitments in Vietnam and an insufficient rotation base in the United States. As a solution, he proposed increasing the percentage of two-year enlistments. A typical two-year enlistee would spend five months in the United States before going overseas, serve a 13-month tour in Vietnam, and then spend "a largely useless 3 months in the rotation base." General Platt suggested that the Marine Corps should let these two-year men leave the Marine Corps before their enlistment expired, and then recruit new men on two-year contracts to replace them. Thus, in a four-year period the Marine Corps would realize two Vietnam tours, instead of one, for a single place in its overall end strength authorization. While not proposing a set percentage, General Platt observed that the Marine Corps needed two-year enlistees "in sizeable numbers to maintain the flow overseas."[8]

By late 1967 there were only a few first-term Marines left, aside from new recruits, who had not already served in Vietnam. In the combat arms and combat support fields, junior officers and staff NCOs were barely getting their required 24 months in the United States before returning to Vietnam. The only way to maintain the flow of replacements to Southeast Asia was to increase the number of new Marines. In

Table 2
Male Enlisted Non-Prior Service Accessions as Percentage of Male Enlisted Strength†

Year	USMC	Army	Navy	USAF
1961-64	18	25	15	13
1965	30	40	20	16
1966	42	53	16	21
1967	28	31	15	12
1968	35	35	19	14
1969	33	33	18	12
1970	26	26	14	11
1971	27	26	15	16
1972	31	34	20	12

†Percentages derived by dividing male enlisted end strength as of 30 June (calculated from *Selected Manpower Statistics*) by total male non-prior service accessions for that calendar year (from Bernard D. Karpinos, *Male Chargeable Accessions: Evaluation by Mental Categories {1953-1973}* [SR-ED-75-18], [Alexandria, Virginia: Human Resources Research Organization, 1977]).

order to remain within the Marine Corps' authorized strength, for every extra man arriving at a recruit depot, someone else had to be discharged early. To accomplish this, the Marine Corps reluctantly allowed Vietnam returnees to leave the Corps up to six months before the end of their enlistments.[9]* On 1 October 1967, the Marine Corps increased the acceptable quota of 2-year enlistments to 35 percent.[10] In January 1968, the Marine Corps requested a strength increase of 10,300 to allow it to end the early release program. The Defense Department denied this request.[11]

Faced with Secretary McNamara's refusal to increase end strength, the Marine Corps turned to the alternative proposed by General Platt in July 1967. In January 1968, the Assistant Chief of Staff (G-1), Major General Raymond G. Davis, determined that "sizeable numbers" of two-year enlistments meant half of all enlistments. Through this and other measures, General Davis and his staff hoped to "increase personnel turnover in lower grades."[12] Between January 1968 and June 1969 just over half of all enlistments were for two years, excluding nearly 16,400 draftees who also served for two years.[13]

The increased use of two-year enlistments did indeed serve to "increase personnel turnover." In 1968, a third of enlisted Marines had less than one year service, as compared to less than a fifth for the period 1961-1964 (*see* Table 2). To compound the problem, in fiscal year 1968 over 280,000 Marines were ordered to a new duty station—almost one set of orders for every Marine.[14]

Before 1965, the Marine Corps consciously fostered personnel stability: Marines tended to serve comparatively lengthy enlistments; a fairly small proportion of Marines entered or left the Corps in any given year; and Marines tended to serve with the same unit for long periods.** By the beginning of 1968, the high level of personnel turnover generated by Vietnam made it unusual for any junior Marines to remain in the same unit for more than a year or in the Marine Corps for more than two years.

The Quality Issue and Project 100,000

Length of enlistment was not the only standard compromised in the Marine Corps' effort to find enough new recruits to support the Vietnam deployment. The Marine Corps was also forced to lower the mental scores required for enlistment and to accept fewer high school graduates. Project 100,000 has received much of the blame for this decline. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara launched this program in October 1966, directing the Services to take a set percentage of the new recruits from men scoring below the previous minimum acceptable scores on the entry tests. McNamara predicted that military training would provide these disadvantaged youths with skills that would greatly increase their opportunities in civilian life.[15]

Project 100,000 required the Marine Corps to accept between a fifth and a quarter of its new recruits from men scoring in Mental Group IV on the Armed Forces Qualification Test, the lowest category legally allowed to serve. Half of these mental Group IV's were "New Standards" men, men who would have been barred under the enlistment standards in effect in August 1966. From the start, the Marine Corps opposed Project 100,000 on the grounds that the quotas forced the Corps to turn away better qualified applicants.[16]

While Secretary McNamara heralded Project 100,000 as a new departure and part of the "Great Society" program, the Selective Service System had already lowered its minimum mental standards a few

*Colonel James W. Stemple, who served at Headquarters Marine Corps after his tour in Vietnam, recalled that manpower managers at headquarters referred to Marines who had returned from Vietnam with still time to serve in the Marine Corps as "throw away Marines." Col James W. Stemple, Comments on draft, n.d. [1995] (Vietnam Comment File).

**See Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam 1965*, p. 117, and Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam 1966*, *n*, p. 283, for a discussion of the change from unit to individual rotation policies.

months earlier in April 1966, in order to meet the demands of the Vietnam buildup.[17]* According to Thomas D. Morris, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower in 1966, the high rejection rate for men in Mental Group IV created a serious problem when draft calls increased to support the Vietnam buildup. In his opinion, Project 100,000 would not have been implemented if the need for increased manpower had not existed, nor would it have been launched if it had been solely a social welfare program.[18]

After Project 100,000 began, the Marine Corps undermined its contention that this program forced it to turn away better qualified recruits by consistently exceeding its quotas of both Mental Group IV's and New Standards men by considerable margins.[19] In fact, the Marine Corps had already lowered enlistment standards in November 1965, well before Project 100,000. Indeed, between November 1965 and October 1966 the Marine Corps, while barring some non-high school graduates who still met the minimum standards for induction from enlisting, accepted high school graduates who scored too low on the entry tests to be drafted.[20] This, combined with the fact that at the end of 1968 the Marine Corps was again forced to rely on the draft to fill its ranks,** suggests that the Marine Corps could not in fact attract enough higher quality volunteers.

While the proportion of Mental Group IV's among new Marines increased, the proportion of high school graduates decreased. From the summer of 1965 to the summer of 1967, 65 percent of all new Marines had high school diplomas, 10 percent more than male civilians aged 18-19. In late 1967, while the proportion of civilian males graduating from high school remained fairly stable, the proportion of Marine recruits with diplomas declined. From July 1967 to June 1968 only 57.4 percent of new recruits possessed a diploma. This decline continued until fiscal year 1973, when only 49.6 percent of new male recruits had high school diplomas.[21]

Project 100,000 and the pressing need for new recruits forced the Marine Corps to lower its entry standards, but these standards remained considerably higher than those in effect in either World War II or Korea. In World War II, men in Mental group IV were accepted without complaint or comment, and about 25-30 percent of enlisted Marines fell in this group. The Marine Corps did provide remedial instruction for the roughly 5-10 percent of Marines in Mental Group V*** Men in Mental Group IV constituted 40.5 percent of all Marine male recruits during the Korean War.[22] The Korean era Mental Group IVs included men who would have been excluded under Project 100,000. At the height of Project 100,000, between July 1968 and June 1969, 25.7 percent of all new Marines scored in Mental Group IV, with New Standards men comprising 13.8 percent of all recruits.[23]

From 1965 to 1968, the educational level and test scores of new Marines declined. This decline, however, did not necessarily translate into poor combat performance. Former Marine lieutenant Lewis B. Puller, Jr., related in his memoir that he had in his platoon one older man, called "Pappy" by his fellow Marines, who had entered the Marine Corps through Project 100,000. Puller noted that "Pappy" could keep up with the younger members of his machine gun team and they took care of him, although the Marine officer wondered how the man's skills with a machine gun "were going to help him earn a living after the Marine Corps."[24] The quality of the leadership and training a Marine received counted for a great deal. As Lieutenant Colonel Howard Lovingood, who saw combat in Vietnam as both a senior enlisted man and company grade officer, recalled, "I looked on it as any other Marine leader would . . . you take the Marines and train them to the best of your ability and get on with the job."[25] Unfortunately, the manpower demands of Vietnam forced the Marine Corps to devote less time to training its new recruits.

*President Johnson introduced the term "Great Society" in a speech given in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 22 May 1964. The phrase soon came to refer to the numerous social welfare programs created by the Johnson administration.

**During 1968, the Marine Corps made three draft calls: in April for 4,000 men, May for 1,900 men, and December for 2,500 men. Starting in February 1969, the Marine Corps made a draft call every month, with the exception of July and August 1969, until February 1970.

***Although records of the exact mental group distribution of Marines are sketchy at best, Selective Service distributed men to all of the Services in roughly the same proportions. Even after President Roosevelt ended all voluntary enlistments beginning in February 1943, the Marine Corps managed to ensure a source of quality recruits by enlisting 17-year-olds into the Reserve and encouraging promising young men to volunteer for induction into the Marine Corps. The Army Air Corps also used these techniques, which probably kept the Army and Marine Corps' overall mental distribution fairly close. In World War II approximately 9 percent of all enlisted soldiers were in Mental Group V and 29 percent in Mental Group IV. Mental Group Vs did not serve in Korea or Vietnam, having been barred from service by law in 1948. Mark J. Eitelberg et al., *Screening for Service: Aptitude and Education Criteria for Military Entry* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Manpower, Installations, and Logistics], 1984) pp. 24–25.

Training

Before the Vietnam War, male Marines spent 80 days in recruit training, and then received four weeks of Individual Combat Training before their first assignment. Marines who did not go to a formal school, a group that included most Marines assigned to the ground combat arms, required a further 90 days of on-the-job training (OJT) before the Marine Corps considered them to be fully trained in their specialty. A new recruit was not supposed to be sent overseas until he had completed his OJT, more than six months after his first day of boot camp.

The Vietnam buildup quickly forced the Marine Corps to shorten its training pipeline. In September 1965, the Marine Corps reduced the time a new recruit spent in training before going overseas to four months, the minimum time required by law. Boot camp was reduced from 80 to 60 days; for all Marines save infantrymen, Individual Combat Training was reduced from four to two weeks; and OJT was replaced by a short period of formal instruction, usually lasting four weeks, called Basic Specialist Training. Infantrymen continued to receive four weeks of Individual Combat Training, but almost all of them spent only two weeks at their Basic Specialist Training. Finally, all lance corporals and below received 15 days Southeast Asia Orientation Training over a three-week period at Camp Pendleton's Staging Battalion before leaving for Vietnam. In January 1968 recruit training was again reduced, to 56 days. This reduced total training time

A Marine recruit platoon at Parris Island starts the day with a morning run in formation complete with platoon guidon. Despite the shortening of the training cycle, Marine recruit training still emphasized physical fitness.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A602339



to exactly 17 weeks, more than 11 weeks shorter than the program in effect in August 1965.[26]

In many ways Basic Specialist Training proved to be a significant improvement over OJT. Not only was Basic Specialist Training faster than OJT, the Basic Specialist Training graduate was "as well trained or better trained than the Marine who previously spent 90 or more days in on-the-job training."[27]

Unfortunately, the efficiency of Basic Specialist Training came at a price. Before September 1965, a new Marine spent at least three months with his unit before deploying overseas, plenty of time for him and his squadmates to get to know each other and learn to work as a team. After that time, recruits rushed through a disorienting swirl of training programs and instructors, moving on before most of their superiors had time to learn much about them. Most new recruits joined their first permanent unit in Vietnam.

While Basic Specialist Training proved a mixed blessing, the reduced length of recruit training and Individual Combat Training remained a necessary evil. In April 1968, the Commandant of the Marine Corps regarded the ideal training program to be 10 weeks for recruit training, 4 weeks for Individual Combat Training, and 4 weeks for Basic Specialist Training, a full month more than the program in effect at that time. A policy statement noted that the shortened training course was a temporary measure, and that

> the Marine Corps intends to return to a longer training period as soon as the international situation permits. The present length of training is the minimum time possible in an emergency situation to meet the objectives of recruit training.[28]

In the meantime, the Marine Corps relied on the leadership of its captains, lieutenants, sergeants, and corporals to compensate for the lowered standards, high turnover, and reduced training period.

The Search for Junior Leaders

As the Marine Corps grew, the numbers of junior officers and noncommissioned officers increased proportionately. This expanded body of company-level leaders faced the challenges of dealing with declining recruit quality, increased personnel turbulence, and combat.

During the first years of the Vietnam War, the experience level of junior Marine officers actually increased. Following the practice of World War I, World War II, and Korea, the Marine Corps quickly expanded its junior officer corps by offering temporary commissions to senior noncommissioned officers.[29] Between July 1965 and June 1967, the Marine Corps commissioned 4,059 warrant officers and senior enlisted as temporary second lieutenants. In July 1967, these officers constituted two-thirds of all ground and aviation-ground assignable lieutenants. By the beginning of 1968, over four-fifths of the ground first lieutenants were temporary officers.[30*]

Between 1965 and 1968 the average length of commissioned service for Marine captains shrank from nine to six years, and for lieutenants from three to two years, but a large number of these officers had far more service than their pre-Vietnam peers. In fact, the temporary officers created an experience "hump" that slowly worked its way up in a bloc. On 31 December 1967, almost 60 percent of all first lieutenants had over 10 years of service, while the same was true for only 20 percent of captains. Only a quarter of captains were over 30 years old, while more than half of the first lieutenants were over 30 years old.

The temporary officers provided the Marine Corps with capable junior officers during the initial Vietnam build-up, but this program was intended as a stop-gap, providing lieutenants only until the normal commissioning programs could meet the demand for officers. Unfortunately, after the temporary commissioning ended in June 1967, officer recruiting did not meet expectations. Anti-war sentiments on college campuses made it difficult to recruit qualified young men.[31] As early as August 1967, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., expressed his concern over the large number of candidates who quit the Officer Candidate's and Platoon Leader's Courses.[32] Although the total numbers were small, the number of lieutenants commissioned from the NROTC program also declined dramatically in 1967. Only the introduction of the Enlisted Commissioning Program, which produced 410 lieutenants in fiscal year 1967 and 580 in fiscal year

*7Lieutenant Colonel Merrill L. Bartlett, who served in Vietnam as an intelligence officer, considered the temporary program "an unmitigated disaster! Certainly, we can all recall temporary officers who were successful. At the same time, I can recall that most were simply SNCOs [staff noncommissioned officers] wearing bars." He observed that his field "was fertile dumping ground for these types." He personally served with several and provided the following harsh generalization: "Hardly any of them could write, most had alcohol problems, and many worked mostly on figuring out ways to get their tours shortened or to find soft billets in the rear." LtCol Merrill L. Bartlett, Comments on draft, dtd 8Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Bartlett Comments.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A556673

New Marine second lieutenants receive realistic field training at the Marine Corps Basic School at Quantico, Virginia. Most new Marine officers after their commissioning attended the Basic School.

1968, enabled the Marine Corps to meet its officer goals.[33*]

The noncommissioned officers' ranks expanded faster than the officers' and the Marine Corps as a whole. Between 1965 and 1968 the number of sergeants increased 95 percent and the number of corporals increased 101 percent. The rapid promotions needed to fill these billets drastically reduced the average length of service for noncommissioned officers. In 1965, more than 60 percent of sergeants had more than 10 years service, while fewer than 8 percent had less than 6 years service. Almost 50 percent of corporals had more than four years of service and fewer than 15 percent had less than three years of service. In 1968, over 50 percent of all sergeants had less than four years service, and over 25 percent had less than three years. More than three-quarters of all corporals had less than three years of service, and over 95 percent had less than four. A large number of these young NCOs achieved their rank while on their first tour in Vietnam.

Despite their short service, the newly promoted NCOs of 1968 were not necessarily less qualified than their peers of 1965. While the earlier NCOs had more time in uniform, most had acquired all of their experience through peacetime service, whereas the young NCOs of the Vietnam era "gain[ed] a lot of experience at a very rapid rate and under combat conditions."[34]

The loss of experience in the face of wartime demands was hardly new for the Marine Corps. In 1945, lieutenants averaged only one year of commissioned service, captains, two, and majors, three. By 30 June 1945, the enlisted ranks had increased over eightfold since 30 June 1942 and almost 24 times above the Marine enlisted strength on 30 June 1939. By the end of the war, few enlisted Marines of any rank had more than four years of service, and one with more than six years service would have been a rarity. Unlike World

*In the Enlisted Commissioning Program, promising enlisted Marines attended a 10-week Officer Candidate's Course. Graduates were commissioned as second lieutenants, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve. Captain Matthew G. McTiernan, who commanded Company I, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, remembered that in July 1968 the 3d Marine Division had started a policy of sending non-infantry first and second lieutenants to infantry companies to serve 90 days. The intention was to make up for the shortage of infantry officers then existing in the division. He recalled that during Operation Thor in July, two of his platoon officers were a former motor transport officer and a former communications officer and that both men acquitted themselves well. Capt Matthew G. McTiernan, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec96] (Vietnam Comment File).

War II, however, during Vietnam the Marine Corps was unable to keep most of its junior officers and NCOs for more than one combat tour. Despite the Marine Corps' efforts to retain its newly promoted and combat-experienced leaders, as the war progressed a sizeable portion of the career enlisted force did not reenlist; only a tiny minority of first term Marines, both officer and enlisted, opted to remain in the Corps.

The retention of officers became a major problem by 1968. In 1964, 54 percent of Marine officers completing their obligated service remained on active duty at least one additional year. By 1967 this proportion had dropped to 42 percent.[35] While regular officer retention remained close to the established goals, every month roughly 3 regular majors and 36 regular captains resigned their commissions. Unfortunately, regulars (excluding temporary officers) constituted just over a third of the company-grade officer ranks, and less than a fifth of the lieutenants. To meet its officer goals, the Marine Corps needed a sizeable number of Reserve officers to augment into the regular Marine Corps every year.

Before Vietnam, more Reserve officers applied for augmentation than the Marine Corps had room for, and the Marine Corps enjoyed the luxury of simply selecting the best qualified applicants. In fiscal year 1965, of 3,431 officers eligible for augmentation, 714 applied, approximately one out of every five eligible officers. The Marine Corps had room for 70.4 percent of the applicants, and accepted 66.8 percent of them. In FY 1966, while the number of eligible officers dipped to 2,380, only 314 applied for augmentation, slightly more than one out of every seven officers. The Marine Corps had room for every applicant, but only 88.5 percent were selected to become regulars.

This trend worsened as the war progressed. For every fiscal year from 1966 to 1969, the Marine Corps had more spaces than applicants for augmentation. In fiscal year 1968, fewer than one out of 14 eligible officers applied for augmentation. The 1968 augmentation board had a quota of 412, but only 240 officers applied. Of those 240 applicants, the board selected only 202, less than half its quota, apparently finding a shortage of officers preferable to retaining the other 38 officers. In fiscal year 1969, fewer than one out of 15 eligible officers applied for augmentation. Again the augmentation board was authorized to retain every one of the 198 applicants, but only 115 were considered fit to become regular officers.

In July 1969, Major General Platt explained to his fellow generals that the low selection rate most likely reflected the low quality of the applicants. General Platt also concluded that one of the major reasons for the poor retention record was the unwillingness of junior officers "to commit themselves to the prospect of repeated tours in Vietnam."[36]

Table 3
Unadjusted reenlistment rates for Marine Regulars by Fiscal Year

	Marine Corps wide 1st term regular reenlistment rate	Inf, Gun Crews & Allied Specialists 1st Term regulars reenlistment rate	Marine Corps wide Career reenlistment rate	Inf, Gun Crews & Allied Specialists Career reenlistment rate
FY 65	16.3	15.7	84.5	88.3
FY 66	16.3	15.6	88.6	90.2
FY 67	10.6	9.2	77.9	76.1
FY 68	11.9	10.3	76.0	62.0
FY 69	7.4	6.2	74.5	59.8
FY 70	4.7	3.1	78.0	72.5

General Platt's assessment probably also applied to the noncommissioned officer ranks. The Marine Corps had great difficulty keeping its NCOs. The reenlistment rate for first-term regulars,* who provided the bulk of the corporals and sergeants in this period, dropped from 16.3 percent for fiscal years 1965 and 1966 to 11.9 percent in fiscal year 1968 (*see Table 3*). Headquarters Marine Corps tried to stem the exodus, creating the Career Advisory Branch on 1 April 1968. This branch's sole concern was the management of a career advisory program intended to persuade more Marines to reenlist.[37] Despite the efforts of the career advisors, reenlistments plummeted. In fiscal year 1969, only 7.4 percent of eligible first-term regulars reenlisted. Of every 100 first-term regulars leaving the Marine Corps, only 4.7 reenlisted or extended.

The situation was just as bad among the career regulars. Before 30 June 1966 almost 90 percent of all career Marines reenlisted. Between 1 July 1968 and 30 June 1969 this proportion dropped to less than 75 percent. The combat arms were hardest hit. In fiscal years 1965 and 1966, the reenlistment rate for career combat arms Marines was slightly higher than the average reenlistment rate for all career Marines. This trend ended in fiscal year 1967, when reenlistments for career combat arms Marines fell below the Marine Corps-wide average. By fiscal year 1969, combat arms career reenlistments ran almost 15 percentage points below the Marine Corps average; only 59.8 percent of eligible career combat arms Marines reenlisted.

*Regulars describes Marines who voluntarily enlisted in the Marine Corps, as opposed to draftees.

By relying on experienced NCOs with temporary commissions, rapidly trained lieutenants, and quickly promoted short-service NCOs to lead Marines in combat in Vietnam, the Marine Corps followed a familiar path. The same policies had been used in World War I, World War II, and Korea. Vietnam, however, differed from these conflicts in one crucial respect: during the Vietnam War, almost none of the newly trained and experienced officers and NCOs remained to lead Marines in combat for a second tour. By 1968, even the pre-war senior NCOs began to leave in alarming numbers. Rather than continually adding to its pool of combat-tested leaders, the Marine Corps had constantly to recreate it.

*Discipline**

The exodus of young officers and NCOs also meant that the older mustang officers [officers with prior enlisted service] and pre-war career NCOs provided most of the continuity, experience, and senior leadership at the company level. This tended to exacerbate the differences between short-service Marines of all ranks and "lifers," placing a further strain on the cohesion and discipline of small units.** At the beginning of 1968, men on four-year enlistments still comprised the bulk of the Marines in Vietnam.*** As short-service Marines with minimum training arrived and career Marines left in increasing numbers, signs of declining combat discipline began to appear.

In April 1968 Major General Donn J. Robertson, the commanding general of the 1st Marine Division, tartly informed his subordinate commanders that it was "almost unbelievable to receive reports of incidents in which Marines while on patrol, have gone off and left members of the patrol." General Robertson blamed leaders of all ranks for their failure to keep strict personnel accountability.[38]

In August, the new commanding general, Major General Carl A. Youngdale, again lectured the 1st Marine Division on basic discipline. This time the subject was accidental discharges. In all of 1967, the units of the 1st Division reported 200 accidental discharges, with 156 Marines wounded and 16 killed. By 18 August 1968, Marines in the division had already fired 218 accidental discharges, wounding 189 and killing 26. A division bulletin noted that every incident resulted from negligence.[39] In October, the 1st Marine Division issued another bulletin addressing the same problem, noting that in September, 4 Marines died from accidental discharges, and another 18 were wounded.[40] Yet another bulletin came out in March 1969. In 1968, Marines of the 1st Division committed 323 accidental discharges. These incidents killed 40 and wounded another 309 men, more than twice the number of casualties inflicted in 1967.[41]

As the year progressed offenses also increased, particularly drug offenses. In the first four months of 1968, military authorities investigated 160 Marines for marijuana use, compared to 142 for all of 1967. Marijuana use was heaviest in Vietnam and the West Coast.[42] Still, in July 1968, a Marine staff paper prepared for the annual General Officers' Symposium contained the observation that

> While the presence of marijuana and drug users in the Marine Corps is a problem—even the use of drugs by one Marine must be considered a problem—the number of drug users in the Marine Corps is not considered alarming or threatening to the combat efficiency or the public image of the Marine Corps.[43]

Shortly after this symposium, the drug problem increased markedly. In the first six months of 1968 the 1st Marine Division's Criminal Investigation Division opened a total of 17 investigations into the use of illegal drugs. In the last third of 1968 this divi-

*For a description of how the issues described in this section developed later in the war, see Cosmas and Murray, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1970–1971: Vietnamization and Redeployment*, Chapter 20, Morale and Discipline.

**"Lifers" refers to career Marines of all ranks. There are natural frictions between leaders and the ranks as the former require the latter to perform unpleasant but necessary tasks, such as digging-in or wearing hot, heavy body armor. See Charles R. Anderson, *The Grunts* (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1976), Chapter 13, hereafter, Anderson, *The Grunts*. In *Vietnam: The Other War* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1982), Anderson describes the difference between "lifers" and short-service Marines. He also notes that many of the Marines who actively sought rear area assignments were careerists, and many were on their second tour in Vietnam (pp. 17–21). Some of the "short-timer" versus lifer animosity transcended the officer-enlisted barrier. Both James Webb in *Fields of Fire* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978) and Philip Caputo in *A Rumor of War* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1977), portray reserve lieutenants who are close to the riflemen they lead and hold careerist officers in contempt. In Gustav Hasford, *The Short Timers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), all of the principal characters are on their first enlistment.

***As of 24 February 1968, 12.5 percent of all Marines in Vietnam were career Marines and 50.6 percent were on four-year enlistments. Only 13.1 percent had two-year obligations. AC/S G–1 memo to CMC, Subj: Replies to Questions, dtd 20Feb68, attachment, tab I–E, CMC Reference Notebook, 1968. The proportion of Marines with two-year obligations in Vietnam must have risen dramatically during the year as result of the large increase in two-year enlistments. Although the exact figures are not available, by December 1968, men with two-year contracts probably accounted for around half of all Marines in Vietnam.

sion opened an average of 24 investigations into drug offenses a month.*

By the end of 1968 Marine leaders realized that a problem even worse than illegal drug use had emerged: "fragging," the deliberate killing of officers and NCOs by their own men. Although small in absolute numbers, the knowledge that fraggings occurred often had a chilling effect on a leader's willingness to enforce discipline.**

More offenses naturally resulted in more prisoners, quickly overcrowding the limited brig space in Vietnam. Most Marine prisoners were confined at the III MAF brig in Da Nang, run by the 3d Military Police Battalion. This brig was built to house 200 prisoners.[44] In May 1968, it housed 175 prisoners, but by August it held 298. According to the officer who kept the prisoner's records, "[t]he most common offenses were smoking marijuana, refusing to get a haircut, or refusing to go on a second combat operation after surviving the hell of their first."[45] The prisoners tended to be poorly educated; about 30 percent were functional illiterates. At least a quarter had civilian judicial convictions.[46] Although the prisoners as a group lacked a particular ideology, they all shared a general resentment of and hostility toward authority. Major Donald E. Milone, who later commanded the 3d MP Battalion, observed that most of the "brig population did not have formal charges presented to them, and they had been confined for over 30 days awaiting charges."[47]

On 16 August a scuffle between prisoners and guards escalated into a riot. The prisoners controlled the brig for two days, holding kangaroo courts and beating prisoners accused of collaborating with the guards. Finally, on the 18th, the brig guards, using tear gas, reclaimed control of the prison.***

In addition to disciplinary problems, racial incidents also started to attract command attention in the latter half of 1968, and Headquarters Marine Corps began to make an effort systematically to track racial incidents.[48] In October, General Chapman asked Lieutenant General Buse, Commanding General FMFPac, to look into reports of racial trouble in III MAF, noting that this matter warranted "careful watching."[49] Shortly after this request, racial incidents led Commander Linus B. Wensman, USN, commander of Camp Tiensha at Da Nang, to put the China Beach recreation area off limits to casual users.[50] By July 1969, racial incidents had become serious enough to receive considerable attention at the annual General Officer's Symposium.****

While a growing problem, offenses and racial troubles tended to be confined to rear areas and did not have a serious impact on combat operations. Former corporal and squad leader Kenneth K. George recalled that:

> [I]n the rear you get a lot of flak from the guys because they think that you are picking on them. When you are in the field and the second there is any kind of problem . . . the minute you open your mouth, they react and they react very quickly.[51]

Morale

In contrast to the discipline problem, which took a few years of fighting to appear, Marine leaders worked hard from the beginning to keep up morale. The

*Colonel Poul F. Pederson, the III MAF G–1, noted that in 1968 the Marine command introduced "sniffing dogs . . . to catch drugs coming and going." According to Pederson, this program was put under the Provost Marshal, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph J. N. Gambardella, who also commanded the 3d MP Battalion. Col Poul F. Pederson, Comments on draft, n.d. [1994] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Pederson Comments.

**For further discussion of fragging, see LtCol Gary D. Solis, *Marines and Military Law in Vietnam: Trial By Fire* (Washington, D.C.: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1989), pp. 110–111, 133–138, 168–170, hereafter Solis, *Trial by Fire*; and Anderson, *The Grunts*, pp. 187–194. In *Platoon Leader* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), pp. 74–76, former U.S. Army lieutenant James R. McDonough recounts how a soldier attempted to intimidate him with the threat of fragging. Colonel William J. Davis, a Marine tank officer who served in Vietnam in 1968 as a lieutenant, agreed that the threat of fragging had an effect on Marine officers, but most still enforced the rules and discipline. Col William J. Davis, Comments on draft, n.d. (Vietnam Comment File).

***Two weeks later, a violent prison riot occurred at the U.S. Army's Long Binh brig. Prisoners controlled a portion of the brig for more than a month. For a more detailed description of the Da Nang brig riot, see Solis, *Trial By Fire*. Major Milone, who took over the 3d MP Battalion in September 1968, noted that during the three-day riot, "no prisoner or guard was seriously injured during this 3-day period. If the procedure for brig riots had been put into effect the Marine Corps would have had [as] violent a riot that occurred at the Army's Long Binh Brig. During the investigation [of the III MAF incident] the officer-in-charge was criticized for not shooting prisoners that did not obey guards commands and for not going by the SOP. The investigation was dropped after the Long Binh riot when the Army went by a SOP." Maj Donald E. Milone, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File).

****Colonel Maurice Rose, who relieved Colonel Pederson as III MAF G–1 in July 1968, noted that in the second half of 1968, "we set up a III MAF Watch Committee composed of G–1 Representatives which met monthly to discuss the situation in I Corps, report any problems, and recommend solutions if required." Col Maurice Rose, Comments on draft, dtd 25Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Rose Comments.

Marine Corps went to considerable trouble to make a Marine's time in Vietnam as tolerable as possible. Major General Carl W. Hoffman, who spent almost all of 1968 in Vietnam, recalled that "it was terribly important . . . that people had something to look forward to like a period of rest and recuperation."[52] About halfway through their tour, every Marine rated an out-of country Rest and Recuperation (R&R) trip. In every month of 1968, somewhere between 3,000 and 4,000 Marines flew to Hawaii, Australia, Japan, Thailand, or other Asian locales for a five-day respite. Marines could also enjoy shorter R&Rs in Vietnam, and every month a thousand or so spent extended liberties at the Navy's China Beach recreational facility near Da Nang.

The protracted nature of the Vietnam conflict led to the creation of large base camps. For troops in these areas, the biggest enemy was boredom.[53] To alleviate this problem, the Marine Corps tried to provide as many distractions as possible, and rear areas included numerous clubs, post exchanges, and air conditioning. Troops in the rear enjoyed many of the comforts of home, including "security, movies, free time, dry beds with clean sheets, mail and showers every day, radios and stereos, and plenty to eat and drink."[54] From January to September 1968, the China Beach recreation area received no fewer than 15,000 and often well beyond 30,000 daily visitors from the Da Nang area. After the local Navy commander restricted the use of the facility to authorized patrons in October, the number of daily visitors dropped to around 5,000 a month.[55]

Noted Comedian Bob Hope, with two members of his cast, entertains the troops during his annual Christmas show at Da Nang. The Marines and U.S. military in general tried to raise morale and relieve stress at the big base areas by providing such entertainment.

Photo from the Abel Collection



Between operations, front-line Marines often returned to these rear areas. During these sojourns these men undoubtedly enjoyed the security and amenities offered by these bases, but they could also plainly see the stark contrast between their lives in the field and the much safer and more comfortable lives of headquarters and support personnel. Many combat Marines resented the soft life of rear area troops, although this resentment was often tempered by the desire to enjoy these benefits themselves.[56*]

At times the effort to make life as comfortable as possible became an end in itself. Major General Hoffman observed that

> [A]lthough there's nothing wrong with getting yourself as comfortable as possible, there is something wrong with getting so preoccupied with the creature comforts that you don't get on with the prosecution of the job at hand.[57]

The Marine Corps also sought to increase esprit by following Napoleon's maxim that "a soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon."[58] Beginning in 1967, the Marine Corps began increasing the number of medals and ribbons awarded to Marines. At the General Officers Symposium in July 1968, Brigadier General Ronald R. Van Stockum, Retired, Deputy Senior Member, Navy Department Board of Decorations and Medals,

*The disdain of frontline troops for rear area personnel is almost a universal part of military life. Combat troops typically invent derogatory terms to refer to non-combat men. In Vietnam, Marines usually used the term "pogue" and even more explicit derogatory language. Often support troops accept this disdain, acknowledging that the greater hardships and risks endured by combat men entitle them to deference from non-combat men. For a discussion of the relations of combat men and non-combat men in World War II, see Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949) 2 vols, v. 2, Ch. 6.



Photo from the Abel Collection

The 13-month tour was an important element of troop morale as evidenced by the humorous inscription on the helmet of the Marine: "Stop!!! Don't Shoot, I'm Short." The Marines are from Company M, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines

informed his fellow generals that the Marine Corps presented proportionally far fewer decorations to its members than the other services. For instance, while the Marine Corps awarded 1 Bronze Star for every 20 Purple Hearts, the Army gave out equal numbers of each medal.

General Van Stockum felt that the Marine Corps needed to liberalize its standards. He argued that "a *combat* Marine . . . should return from Vietnam wearing some personal award."[59] He also advocated recognizing career officers and reserve officers likely to stay in the Marine Corps, and greater use of unit awards. General Van Stockum's views were in keeping with the trend towards the creation of new awards in this period, including the Meritorious Unit Citation, Navy Achievement Medal, and Combat Action Ribbon.[60*]

*The Navy Achievement Medal, intended to recognize meritorious performance by junior officers and enlisted Marines, was authorized on 17 July 1967. This award could be used to recognize meritorious service in combat (for which a "V" attachment was authorized), giving the Marine Corps an award junior to both the Bronze Star and the Navy Commendation Medal to award exceptional combat performance. This award replaced rhe Secretary of the Navy's Commendation for Achievement; persons awarded this commendation after 1 May 1961 were authorized to wear the Navy Achievement medal. The Meritorious Unit Citation was created on 17 July 1967, and was inrended ro recognize units for exceptional performance not involving direct combat. The Combat Acrion Ribbon was introduced on 17 February 1969, and was awarded to individuals who parricipated in direct combat with the enemy. This award was also retroactively awarded to Marines who had served in direct combat since 1 March 1961.

Awards, creature comforts, and rest and recuperation trips undoubtedly improved the spirits of many Marines, but none of these outweighed the most important policy influencing morale: the 13-month tour in Vietnam. While an R&R might be eagerly anticipated or an award appreciated, the most important thing to almost every Marine was his rotation date. This policy also ensured that every unit rotated around a tenth of its total strength every month.*

The individual replacement policy has been criticized by many, but the Marine Corps had little choice. The Marine Corps could not keep 80,000 Marines in Vietnam through unit rotation without tripling its overall strength. Nor was the policy an unmitigated evil. Predetermined tour lengths had a positive effect on morale. Unlike the soldier of World War II, who felt (with a great deal of justification) that his only hope of escape from combat lay in death, severe wounding, or the end of the war, the 13-month tour gave the Marine in Vietnam a realistic goal. The benefits generated by the set tour length probably outweighed the reluctance of "short-timers" to take risks.[61] In any case, it is unlikely that many men could have lasted much more than a year in combat zones.[62] Navy doctors concluded that the policy of set tours significantly reduced the number of psychiatric casualties among Marines in Vietnam.[63]**

The Aviation Shortage

As its Vietnam commitment increased, the Marine Corps could and did expand its ground forces fairly rapidly, albeit with growing pains. Unfortunately Marine aviation, which relied on a very long training pipeline, could not be expanded fast enough.

In fact, the Marine Corps suffered a shortage of pilots as early as the mid-1950s. Officers volunteering for flight training had to agree to remain on active duty well beyond the normal period of service, a daunting prospect for those not committed to a Marine Corps career. To alleviate this concern, the Marine Corps instituted a number of commissioning programs which allowed an officer to bypass the Basic School and go directly to flight school.[64]

Well before 1955, the Marine Corps accepted a number of graduates from the Navy's Naval Aviation Cadet (NavCad) pilot training program. These men went through flight training as cadets, and received their wings and commissions on the same day. After completion of flight training, they reported directly to a squadron.[65] In 1955, the Marine Corps instituted the Aviation Officer Candidate Course, and by 1957 the Platoon Leader's Class (Aviation) had been added.[66] Upon completing brief training periods at Quantico, men in these programs received their commissions and reported directly to flight school. In 1959, the Marine Corps stopped accepting NavCad graduates and created the Marine Aviation Cadet Program (MarCad), which operated in the same manner as NavCad.[67] As a result of these programs, by 1965 the majority of Marine naval aviators had not attended the Basic School.[68]

With these new sources of aviators, the Marine Corps barely managed to meet its requirements for naval aviators. The Marine Corps' expansion after the 9th MEB landed in Vietnam in March 1965 threatened these hard-won gains. In an effort to keep the disruption from rapid growth to a minimum, on 13 August 1965, the Commandant announced that the retirement and resignations of regular officers would be delayed for up to 12 months.[69] This helped to prevent an immediate shortage of pilots. In the summer of 1966, the number of qualified aviators fell just 45 short of the authorized total of 4,284.[70]

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*Colonel Poul F. Pederson, the III MAF G–1, observed that the 13-month tour "to the day was a single stable element." He noted that as a general policy, "about two weeks prior to rotation the Marine would be sent to the 'rear with the gear.' Some believed that as the rotation date approached the Marine got anxious. If he remained in combat, he might be too aggressive or overly reluctant. In either case he could be a detriment to the unit." Pederson Comments. General Chapman remarked that all manpower considerations were "driven by the 13-month tour decreed by DOD . . . ." Gen Leonard F. Chapman, Comments on draft, dtd 27Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). In late 1965 III MAF instituted Operation Mixmaster, which transferred Marines among units to ensure that all Marines in a given unit would not rotate at the same time. See Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1965*, p. 117.

**Lieutenant Colonel Merrill L. Bartlett, an intelligence officer who served with the 13th Interrogation and Translation Team in Vietnam, related that he "considered extending for purely professional reasons. By then, I couldn't imagine many officers who knew as much about the enemy order-of-battle or who could interrogate as well. I also realized that personally I had become calloused beyond belief; the death and destruction no longer bothered me. I recall spending the entire night in the intensive-care ward of the Naval hospital, interrogating a wounded NVA officer and seemingly oblivious to the horrible mutilation of the wounded Marines in the other beds. I can also remember interrogating POWs in the ARVN hospital in Da Nang amidst indescribable filth and suffering. By the end of my tour, sifting through the pockets of dead NVA or VC, searching for documents, no longer affected me. Perhaps it was time 'to return to the world.' Even so, the Marine Corps would have been better served and I would have served it better by remaining in-country rather than by protecting Camp Pendleton from a seaward invasion from whatever." Bartlett Comments.

This comparatively rosy situation proved short-lived, and by autumn the Marine Corps suffered a severe shortage of naval aviators, particularly helicopter pilots. To alleviate this shortage, the Marine Corps resorted to a number of expedient personnel actions, including again involuntarily retaining aviation officers, using ground officers to fill aviation billets, and sharply reducing the number of naval aviators attending professional schools.*

Despite the Marine Corps' efforts, the pilot shortage of 1966 persisted into 1968, making it impossible to man squadrons in Vietnam at their wartime strength; the Marine Corps could barely maintain the normal peacetime manning level.[71]** Helicopter pilots still constituted the most critical shortage. In addition to fighting a war at peacetime strength, the pilots of the 1st MAW found themselves tasked to support Army and allied units in I Corps. By January 1968, despite the fact that the Commandant was under the impression that the III MAF "had everything it rated," the 1st MAW found itself forced to standdown pilots, particularly helicopter pilots, to let them get some rest.[73]

June of 1968 found the Marine Corps still short roughly 850 naval aviators, a shortage that spilled over to Vietnam.[63] In July 1968, the 1st MAW calculated that it needed 703 helicopter pilots to meet its requirements. The manning level authorized 644 pilots; 606 were actually on board. Of these, only 552 were available for flight duty. In December 1968, the number of pilots in the 1st MAW finally reached the manning level, but only after the manning level was reduced to 581 pilots. The number of helicopter pilots in the 1st MAW available for flight duty remained at less than 80 percent of requirements into 1969.[74]

The Naval Air Training Command, located at Pensacola, Florida, could not train enough Marine helicopter pilots to bring the units in Vietnam up to strength. In June of 1967, Marine officers destined to become fixed-wing pilots began reporting to Air Force bases for flight training. This freed Marine quotas at Pensacola which could be used to train helicopter pilots.[75] The first 15 pilots graduated from this program in June 1968.

A similar program with the U.S. Army attacked the shortage of helicopter pilots directly. In January 1968, the first Marines arrived at Fort Rucker, Alabama, for rotary wing pilot training, with the first pilots graduating in October. Marine officers trained by the Army and the Air Force then reported to Marine training groups for further instruction, including shipboard landings, before qualifying as naval aviators.[76] By June of 1969, 155 Marine officers had completed Air Force flight training and 150 had completed Army flight training.[77]*** Even with these programs, in early 1969 the Marine Corps had to order a number of fixed-wing pilots to transition to helicopters to fill the cockpits in Vietnam.[78]

In addition to the pilots, the Marine Corps had difficulty finding enough enlisted Marines to maintain and repair the aircraft in Vietnam. It took a long time to train a Marine in the skills needed to maintain aircraft, so the Marine Corps only assigned men on four-year enlistments to these specialties. This policy created a shortage of aviation maintenance Marines in the Western Pacific and an overage in the United States.

As with most other occupational fields, the Marine Corps needed to train large numbers of first-term Marines in aviation specialties to maintain the flow of replacements to Southeast Asia. Most of these men spent a year in training, and then a year in the Western Pacific. Unlike most other specialties, however, upon returning from overseas aviation Marines still had two years left on their enlistments. These Vietnam returnees created overages in the United States and counted against total strength, reducing the number of new recruits that could be enlisted and sent overseas.[79]

Despite this problem, the Marine Corps managed to exceed the enlisted manning level for aviation units in Vietnam, although it still fell short of the adjusted table of organization (T/O). Unfortunately, aviation units had to detail many of their highly trained spe-

*For a discussion of the origins of the pilot shortage and the steps taken to correct this problem, see Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam 1966*, p. 262.

**Tables of Organization (T/O) laid out the exact composition of every unit, showing every billet, and the rank and military occupational specialty for that billet. Ideally, in combat, every unit should have been up to T/O strength. Since this was not possible, the Manpower Division of Headquarters, Marine Corps set "manning levels" for units based on unit type and location. A unit with a manning level of 94 percent would only receive enough replacements to keep it at 94 percent of its T/O strength. Manning levels were adjusted based on a unit's mission, the availability of Marines with the appropriate skills, and a unit's location. Units in Vietnam generally had a higher manning level than other units.

Although Headquarters, Marine Corps tried to send enough replacements to each major unit to keep its subordinates up to their manning level, the final distribution of replacements rested with the field commanders. For further explanation, See Appendix.

***For a complete discussion of helicopter pilot availability and training during the Vietnam war, see Fails, *Marines and Helicopters 1962–1973*, Chapters 4, 11, and 12.

cialists to provide local security forces and to operate "clubs, messes, special services, exchanges, laundries, etc."[80] Marines who were wounded, sick, or on R&R constituted a further drain. During the last half of 1968, these commitments and losses drove the flight-line strength of helicopter groups down to less than 80 percent of the provisional T/O.[81] In the opinion of a board of III MAF officers, the lack of men, particularly skilled helicopter maintenance Marines, put helicopter maintenance "behind the power curve."[82]

Filling the Ranks in Vietnam: Too Many Billets, Too Few Marines

In the summer of 1967 the Department of Defense's manning level for Vietnam, Program 4, called for 80,500 Marines. At the time, 79,000 Marines were actually in Vietnam or in a Special Landing Force (SLF)[83]* On 10 August 1967, the Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, tentatively approved Program 5, which set a goal of just over 82,000 Marines in Vietnam.[84] McNamara officially approved Program 5 in October.[85] If filled, this ceiling would still have left III MAF with over 6,000 unfilled billets.[86] This point became moot as the Marine Corps could not even meet its authorized strength. The number of Marines in country declined from 79,337 on 30 April 1967 to 73,430 on 31 October 1967. This decline in strength largely resulted from a replacement shortage, administrative losses at the end of the year (particularly holiday leaves), and conversion from a tour lasting at least 13 full months in Vietnam to one lasting no more than 395 days from the day a Marine left the United States to the day he returned to the United States.[87]

In order to correct this manpower shortage, the Commandant directed the commanding generals of Marine Corps Bases Camp Lejeune and Camp Pendleton to retrain 1,000 non-infantry Marines a month in August and September as infantry replacements for Vietnam. Since these Marines received seven weeks of training, the first of them did not arrive in Vietnam until early October 1967.[88] October also marked the beginning of the annual manpower surge. The Marine Corps normally experienced a recruit "surge" during the summer months, and the first of these summer recruits completed their mandatory four months initial training and became available for overseas assignment in early October.

On 10 November, Staging Battalion at Camp Pendleton went to a seven-day work week to handle the increased number of replacements. Five days later Headquarters, Marine Corps increased the normal replacement flow for the period from 23 November 1967 to 13 January 1968 by 3,135 Marines. This forced Staging Battalion to implement "Operation Kicker," shortening the number of training days from 15 to 12. On 6 January 1968, the last planeload of replacements trained under Operation Kicker left for Vietnam.[89] With these added inputs, overall strength in Vietnam rose by over 4,500 through November and December.

Changes to Program 5 reduced the number of Marines authorized to be deployed to Vietnam for December 1967 and January 1968 to 81,500. According to the MACV strength report, by 31 December 1967, the total number of Marines in country or assigned to SLFs amounted to only 78,013. Still, III MAF found itself in the unusual situation of having 74,058 Marines on board to fill 72,526 authorized billets.

Unfortunately for III MAF the formal tables of organization did not provide for a number of vital billets, including the 1,097 Marines involved in the Combined Action Program.** Despite the fact that III MAF was technically overstrength, the 23,778 Marines assigned to the 3d Division still left the division 62 Marines short of the number authorized. The 1st Marine Division, with 23,209 Marines, was 1,251 Marines short of its authorized strength. The average strength for infantry battalions in Vietnam was 1,188, only five Marines short of the T/O allowance of 1,193, but the infantry battalions of the 1st Marine Division averaged only 1,175 Marines. The two SLFs combined were 424 Marines short of their authorized strength of 3,900. Force Logistics Command contained 9,397 Marines, only 307 Marines short of its authorized strength. The 1st MAW had 15,308 Marines in Vietnam, 1,869 Marines more than its manning level, but still remained critically short of pilots and aircraft mechanics.[90]

Total Marine Corps strength in Vietnam grew slightly in January 1968, reaching 78,436 by 28 Jan-

*Throughout this chapter, III MAF strength includes the SLFs unless specified otherwise.

**Provisional T/Os covered the Combined Action Program, additional personnel for the III MAF headquarters, and other billets needed in Vietnam. Although technically these billets should have been filled, the Marine Corps' inability to man III MAF fully meant that these provisional billets were filled at the expense of other units. See Chapter 29 for further discussion about the manning of the Combined Action Program.

uary, with 74,313 Marines in III MAF. While the shortfall in the divisions continued, the average strength of infantry battalions remained relatively stable at 1,186 Marines. The shortage among the battalions of the 1st Marine Division disappeared, as their average strength rose to 1,193, exactly their authorized strength. Just before the beginning of the Tet offensive, infantry companies had an average of 207.5 Marines assigned, only 8.5 below their T/O allowance of 216. However, an average of 15.4 Marines were on R&R, in hospital, or otherwise absent, leaving just over 192 Marines present for duty. Since a number of Marines present on the unit diary were in fact occupied with a variety of tasks, the number of Marines available for operations was somewhat lower.

During January 1968, 539 Marines died or were missing in action and 2,126 wounded in action.[91] For the month, III MAF reported that another 60 Marines were hospitalized for injuries or illness. While these casualties were heavy, especially compared to the light casualties suffered during October, November, and December 1967,* they only foreshadowed what was to prove the costliest year of the war for the Marine Corps.

On the night of 30-31 January 1968 the Tet Offensive began. Marine counterattacks, particularly in Hue City, made February 1968 costlier for the Marine Corps than any previous month of the war. In February, 691 Marines were killed and 4,197 wounded in action. While some battalions suffered terribly in this month, the high flow of replacements ensured that the average strength of infantry battalions fell only slightly, to 1,157. One of the hardest hit battalions, the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, which suffered 65 killed and 421 wounded in the battle for Hue City, saw its average monthly strength drop only 111, from 1,152 in January to 1,041 in February. Many of the Marines carried on the rolls of this and other badly bloodied battalions, however, were recovering from wounds.

By the end of February, while the average number of Marines assigned to rifle companies had fallen by only 5.4 from late January to 202.1, the average number physically present dropped to 174.8. Again, some companies were particularly bad off; while most companies numbered somewhere between 190 and 210 total strength, Companies E and I of the 7th Marines had only 172 and 176 Marines, respectively, on their rolls. Still, all but 17 Company E Marines and 31 Company I Marines were with their company. At the end of February, the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, an SLF battalion, was still recovering from heavy fighting in the Cua Viet sector, and the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines was still feeling the effects of the battle for Hue. Company I, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines showed 202 Marines on its rolls, but only 150 were actually with the company. Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines carried a respectable 210 Marines on its rolls, only six shy of its T/O strength. However, about half, 109 Marines, were absent, most doubtless in hospitals.

*Monthly deaths for this period averaged 240.3, peaking in December 1967, when 273 Marines died in Vietnam.

The Deployment of Regimental Landing Team 27

The unexpected ferocity of the Tet offensive shook President Johnson. In the first days of February, while General Westmoreland felt that he had the situation in Vietnam under control, the President worried that a major reverse might still occur. President Johnson found the possibility of Khe Sanh falling particularly alarming. Although anxious to send additional troops to forestall the possibility of an embarrassing defeat, for political reasons Johnson could not send reinforcements to Vietnam without a clear request from Westmoreland. On 12 February, after repeated prompting from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler, General Westmoreland finally requested a brigade from the 82d Airborne Division and half a Marine division.

Immediately after the receipt of Westmoreland's request, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the 82d Airborne Division and two-thirds of a Marine division/wing team should be readied for movement, and proposed also that enough Reserve units should be called up to reconstitute the strategic reserve before these additional troops left for Vietnam. President Johnson welcomed the opportunity to send reinforcements to Vietnam, but he had no desire to call up the Reserves. At a meeting at the White House later on the 12th, the Joint Chiefs "unanimously" agreed to send one brigade of the 82d Airborne Division and a Marine regimental landing team immediately to Vietnam. The President, however, directed them to study the issue of the Reserve call-up further.[92]

That night, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a message to the Commandant directing the movement of a reinforced regiment from the 5th Marine Division to Vietnam, with one battalion moving by sea and the other two by air. Air transport would begin by 14 February, and the entire regiment was to be in Vietnam by 26 February.[93] The Commandant promptly directed Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, Commanding Gen-

eral, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, to prepare Regimental Landing Team (RLT) 27 for deployment to Vietnam by the afternoon of 14 February.[94]

Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 1/27, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John E. Greenwood, normally stationed in Hawaii, was already at sea, having embarked on board amphibious shipping for a four-month training deployment on 10 and 12 February. On 13 February, General Krulak simply canceled the training exercise and directed the battalion to steam directly to Da Nang. The change in destination caught the BLT unprepared. Not only was the BLT seriously understrength, with only an average of 119 Marines present in the rifle companies, but nearly 400 embarked Marines and sailors did not meet the criteria for assignment to Vietnam.

The first element of BLT 1/27, consisting of Companies C, D, and elements of Headquarters and Service Company, embarked on board the USS *Vancouver* (LPD 2), arrived in Da Nang on 23 February. Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed the entire regiment to be in Vietnam by 26 February, the rest of BLT 1/27 could only move as fast as its ships could steam. Companies A, B, and other portions of Headquarters and Service Company, on board the USS *Bexar* (APA 237), arrived a day late on 27 February, while the last of Headquarters and Service Company arrived the next day on board the USS *Washburn* (AKA 108).* Upon arrival, the battalion immediately had to transfer all non-deployable Marines and sailors out of Vietnam. On 28 February, after this transfer, the rifle companies averaged just 87 Marines. This situation quickly improved as 400 replacements flown out from Camp Pendleton with the rest of RLT 27 joined the battalion.

The rest of the 27th Marines also had a difficult time. Colonel Adolph G. Schwenk, the commanding officer of the 27th Marines, received a verbal warning order on 12 February, but the official message ordering the regiment to deploy did not arrive until the next day. After some initial confusion over the deployability criteria, the regiment learned that 17-year olds, sole surviving sons, Marines returned from Vietnam under the twice/thrice wounded policy, officers and corporals and below within four months of their discharge date, enlisted Marines already ordered to WestPac, and officers in receipt of transfer orders would not deploy to Vietnam. Marines with one year or more of duty in the United States since their last tour in Southeast Asia were deployable, a major departure from the policy mandating two years between Vietnam tours.[95]**

Even with the reduction of the time between tours from two years to one, only 33 officers and 660 enlisted men out of a regiment of 2,160 met the deployment criteria. After combing the 5th Marine Division for every deployable Marine, the regiment still had a shortfall of 900 infantrymen. Lieutenant General Krulak cut this shortfall to 600 by administratively reducing the regiment's personnel strength objective from fully combat ready to marginally combat ready. He then decided that some 400 infantry billets could be filled by Marines with other specialties. Nearly 100 infantrymen waived a disqualifying factor and volunteered to deploy with the regiment, while 100 infantry replacements from Staging Battalion rounded out the units leaving from California. Another 200 replacements from Staging Battalion and 200 Marines culled from FMFPac security forces, headquarters, and 9th MAB went to fill the 400-man shortfall in BLT 1/27. In just over a week, the regiment transferred out nearly 1,500 non-deployable Marines and sailors while simultaneously joining over 1,900 others to bring it up to strength. Units attached to the regiment to form an RLT added another 840 Marines and sailors.***

*During the Vietnam War, BLT Headquarters and Service Companies included Marines and sailors attached from other units.

**Colonel Thomas P. O'Callaghan, who was the 5th Marine Division assistant operations officer at the time, remembered that the initial request for the 27th Marines came "from FMFPac in the clear over the phone. I pointed out to go to secure line and I would get G–3 and CG when they called back! This was done." Colonel O'Callaghan related that the criteria for deployment created "a mess, but the 5th Div couldn't make the move in time if we sorted everyone out before they left." Col Thomas P. O'Callaghan, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File).

***Lieutenant Colonel Louis J. Bacher, who commanded the 2d Battalion, 27th Marines, remembered that on 12 February, Colonel Schwenk, the 27th Marines commander, called a conference and announced that the regiment was deploying to Vietnam with the 2d and 3d Battalions departing by air and with BLT 1/27 arriving by ship. Bacher recalled that the "first plane was scheduled to leave Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) El Toro at noon" on the 14th. He stated that the 5th Marine Division staff "did an incredible task of transferring out over 850 officers and men . . . not qualified for deployment and replacing them with those that were, in the two days prior to mount-out." Lieutenant Colonel Bacher had a new executive officer, S–1, S–2, S–3, and S–4 and three new company commanders. Lt Col Louis J. Bacher, Comments on draft, dtd 7May95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Bacher Comments. Colonel Tullis J. Woodham, Jr., who commanded the 3d Battalion, 27th Marines, recalled that the priority for transfers of infantrymen into the 27th Marines went to the 2d Battalion which was scheduled to depart first. According to Woodham, "by the time it came to filling out 3/27, . . . it became necessary to assign non-infantry MOS's [military occupational specialty] in large numbers. This resulted in a 'cooks, bakers, and candlestick makers' label to be tagged to the battalion. In reality this 'hardship' worked to the battalion's advantage and in Vietnam, the large numbers of cooks, mechanics, communicators, engineers, tankers, etc. with specialized skills other than infantry, paid off in tight places more than once. The old adage 'Every Marine a rifle man, first' never was more true." Col Tullis J. Woodham, Jr., Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

At 1335 local time, 14 February, less than 48 hours after the initial verbal warning had been given, the first planeload of men from RLT 27 left Marine Corps Air Station El Toro. The last planeload left just before midnight on 22 February. A total of 3,349 Marines and sailors from RLT 27 and supporting units flew from El Toro in those eight days. Another 1,956 men from units needed to support RLT 27 arrived in Vietnam by sea, with the last ship arriving on 12 March.[96] Of the Marines deployed with the RLT, 973 were involuntarily ordered to their second tour in Vietnam after less than two years out of Southeast Asia.[97] Most of the Marines went on their first orientation patrol the day after they arrived in Vietnam. By 1 March, every battalion of the 27th Marines had begun combat patrols around Da Nang.* Several years later then-Lieutenant General Schwenk remembered that the rapid deployment of the RLT "amazed General Westmoreland," who "just couldn't believe how we had gotten there."[98]**

The arrival of RLT 27 put 24 of the Marine Corps' 36 active infantry battalions in or off the shores of Vietnam. Before Tet, the Marine Corps had been barely able to sustain 21 battalions in country. The emergency deployment not only further strained the replacement system, but it also used up the next month's replacement pool to bring RLT 27 to a marginal strength level. On 3 May, as a result of Tet and the *Pueblo* incident, the Secretary of Defense authorized an increase in the Marine Corps' active strength of 9,700, bringing it to 311,600.[99]*** While helpful, this increase was not nearly large enough to sustain the level of Marine forces then currently in Vietnam.

Reserve Callup?

On 13 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the President immediately activate selected Reserve units, including one Marine RLT. They also recommended that other Reserve units, including the rest of the IV Marine Expeditionary Force, be prepared to be called up on short notice.[100] President Johnson rejected this proposal. On 27 February, General Wheeler relayed a request from General Westmoreland for an additional 206,000 troops.[101] The magnitude of his request prompted the President and his closest advisors to reexamine their policies concerning the war. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the President mobilize the Reserves to both meet General Westmoreland's request and reconstitute the strategic reserve. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Wheeler, eagerly sought to have the Reserves activated, while the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Chapman, reluctantly agreed with this recommendation.**** In retirement General Chapman recalled that no matter how short their period of service after callup, by law demobilized Reservists had fulfilled their obligated service. This made the Reserve "like a huge [piece] of artillery that has only one round," which "you can fire once, and then it will be 20 years, probably, before you can fire it again."[102]

The Marine Corps Reserve had been reorganized recently from a collection of independent companies and batteries into the 4th Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), "a 'mirror like' image of the regular establishment MEF."[103] Largely due to the influence of the draft, in January 1968, the personnel readiness of the Marine Corps Reserve had never been better. The quality of Reservists was outstanding. Between 1 July 1967 and 30 June 1969, 80 percent of enlisted Reserve recruits scored in Mental Groups I or II, compared to only 32 percent of active-duty recruits. Only one percent of new Reservists scored in Mental Group IV. Fewer than 8 percent of the new Reservists did not have high school diplomas, while 10 percent were college graduates and many of the rest had some college. Still, only 48,000 Reservists received drill pay, not enough Marines to fill IV MEF. The Marine Corps planned to

*For a discussion of operations by RLT 27 and subordinate units upon arrival in Vietnam, see Chapter 13.

**Lieutenant Colonel Louis J. Bacher related that his battalion the month before had conducted a mount-out exercise involving the USAF 63d Military Airlift Wing stationed at Norton Air Force Base, California. At that time, the Marine battalion staged at Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, California, where the troops boarded C–141 aircraft of the Air Force Wing which flew them to Naval Air Station (NAS), Fallon, Nevada. After a seven-day counterinsurgency exercise, the Air Force aircraft returned the Marine battalion to El Toro where it then motored back to its base at Camp Pendleton, California. According to Bacher, on 14 February, "the same C–141s and crews that had lifted us to NAS Fallon a short time ago were going to lift us to Da Nang. Fortunately we had loading plans and manifests which, with some minor and some major changes served us well." Bacher Comments.

***On 23 January 1968, the North Koreans seized the USS *Pueblo* (AGER 2).

****There are a number of excellent works on the impact of Tet and the debate it sparked within the Johnson Administration. The *Pentagon Papers*, IV. C. 6. c. is perhaps the most important source; perhaps the best treatment of the subject is Herbert Y. Schandler, *The Unmaking of a President: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977).

bring units to full strength by calling up Class III (non-drill pay) Reservists.[104]

Before Tet, the Marine Corps had only one plan in the event of a Reserve mobilization: to activate the entire IV MEF. On 4 March, the Secretary of Defense proposed to send 22,000 reinforcements to Vietnam by 15 June, including IV MEF (-), consisting of 18,100 men. The Secretary of Defense's proposal to activate less than the entire Reserve structure caught the Marine Corps unprepared, requiring frantic planning. Creating a composite Marine Aircraft Group would have undermined the readiness of the entire 4th MAW. Task organization plans envisioned calling up detachments of combat support and combat service support, a move which would have left the Marine Corps open to serious legal challenges. Political constraints ruled out the call up of Class III Reservists, upon whom the mobilization planners had relied to fill "gaping holes" in activated Reserve units.[105]

Up until the last minute, administration officials considered calling up 26,000 Marine Reservists.[106]* On 13 March, President Johnson decided to send an additional 30,000 troops to Vietnam, but his troop list did not include any Marine units. From 14 to 28 March, administration officials contemplated various proposals with even larger numbers of Reservists to be activated, but still none of them included Marines. When the President announced the callup of 62,000 Reservists on 31 March, no Marines were activated.[107]

The Bloodiest Month, The Bloodiest Year

Although not as bad as February, casualties remained high throughout March and April. In May 1968, 810 Marines died in Vietnam, making that month the bloodiest of the war for the Marine Corps. Another 3,812 Marines were wounded in action. The first six months of 1968 proved the costliest of the war for the Marine Corps, accounting for almost one quarter of all Marine deaths during the Vietnam War. In these months 3,339 Marines died, less than 500 short of the 3,803 Marines killed in all of 1967. During this period the 3d Marine Division averaged around 220 Marines killed and over 1,250 wounded a month, while the 1st Marine Division suffered about 190 Marines killed and 1,450 wounded each month. The casualty rate of the 3d Division remained fairly steady, with a bad month in March, while the 1st Division suffered almost half of its casualties in February and May.

The high casualty rate concerned General Cushman, who sent a message on 20 May, telling the commanders of the 1st and 3d Divisions that "we are suffering too many Marine casualties—particularly KIA." General Cushman attributed these excessive casualties to a misplaced reliance on "do or die assaults" more appropriate for amphibious attacks. He provided a list of tactical principles to reduce casualties, emphasizing firepower and supporting arms. Division commanders were directed to school their officers from the division to the company level in these principles. General Cushman concluded by saying:

> [I]t is hard to soft pedal a generation of training in the assault as required for establishment of a beachhead, but it must repeat must be done if we are to fight and win this war.[108]

Lieutenant General Krulak, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, quickly responded to this message. While agreeing that "there has been needless loss of Marine lives" during the war, and that "we need to do all we can to diminish the number of avoidable white crosses," General Krulak was troubled by the implication that the war in Vietnam required a set of tactical values different from those used in amphibious assaults. While agreeing with most of the principles espoused by General Cushman, he argued that "basic tactical principles are immutable," and that "there is no evidence that those basic principles should in any way be altered."[109]

General Cushman's message also drew criticism from General Chapman. The Commandant was "convinced that in the main the offensive principles taught to our Marines from Boot Camp to C&SC [Command and Staff College] are sound." Although endorsing most of the tactical techniques espoused by General Cushman, General Chapman worried that a "literal interpretation" of General Cushman's direction to assault only by firepower "could lead to a derogation and even the loss" of the Marine Corps' traditional "'can do' offensive spirit."[110]

Perhaps in response to General Cushman's concerns, Headquarters, Marine Corps directed that all majors and lieutenant colonels bound for Vietnam, except for recent graduates of professional schools, would receive instruction on the use of helicopters and supporting

*In mid-March 1968, Brigadier General Earl E. Anderson, the III MAF Chief of Staff, observed in a personal letter that the Marine command had hopes at that time of obtaining another Marine and division headquarters for Vietnam together with units associated with such an increase. BGen E. E. Anderson ltr to MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon, dtd 14Mar68, Encl, Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 14Mar68 (Vietnam Comment File).

Marine Casualties in Southeast Asia, 1968.

Month	*Killed*[†]	*Missing*[†]	*Wounded*[††]	*Total*
January	439	7	1,770	2,216
February	691	3	4,197	4,891
March	504	3	2,930	3,437
April	450	2	2,610	3,062
May	810	4	3,812	4,626
June	445	1	2,962	3,408
July	357	3	2,683	3,043
August	389	0	2,210	2,599
September	348	0	1,968	2,316
October	180	1	1,432	1,613
November	227	0	1,612	1,839
December	223	2	1,134	1,359
Total	5,063	26	29,320	34,409

[†] From MGySgt Lock file, compiled from records of the Vietnam War Memorial, May 1990. Killed includes all Marines who died in Southeast Asia or as a direct result of injuries suffered in Southeast Asia; Missing includes only those still officially considered missing as of May 1990.

[††] From CMC Reference Notebook 1968; includes serious wounds resulting from accidents.

arms.[111] The field grade officers course at Staging Battalion, which lasted only three days before 19 June, expanded to seven and a half days on 31 July. In October 1968, the Commanding General, Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton, recommended that infantry corporals and sergeants also receive two days of fire support training. This training began in January 1969.[112]

Shortly after this flurry of concern, the casualty picture improved markedly, due not to Marine Corps action, but to the inaction of the North Vietnamese Army. In June, July, and August, the reluctance of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units to engage in combat resulted in the casualty rate falling by a quarter.[113] Throughout the rest of the year casualties in the 1st Division remained fairly steady, averaging approximately 120 dead and 1,000 wounded a month. In the 3d Division, casualties dropped dramatically in July, August, and September, averaging around 80 killed and less than 700 wounded, and then fell to about 30 dead and 250 wounded in the last three months of 1968. Over the course of the year, the 1st Division suffered somewhat more casualties than the 3d Division.

The types of casualties in the two divisions also differed greatly. The 3d Division was tied to the DMZ, and faced North Vietnamese regulars supported by artillery. In contrast, the 1st Division fought a guerilla war in the heavily populated coastal areas around Da Nang. Between 1 January 1968 and 31 May 1969, mortars, artillery, and rockets caused 47 percent of the 3d Division's casualties, while mines and boobytraps inflicted only 18.2 percent. The 1st Division experienced exactly the reverse, suffering only 17.9 percent of its casualties from indirect fire while mines and boobytraps accounted for 50.8 percent.[114]

In 1968, the Marine Corps lost 5,063 killed or missing and 29,320 wounded, more than a third of all casualties during the entire war. Over half of all casualties had less than one year of service. Infantrymen accounted for over four-fifths of all casualties. While privates, privates first class, and lance corporals made up just above half of the total Marine Corps, they accounted for almost three-quarters of the casualties. Their average age was about 20 years and six months.[115]

Foxhole Strength: Still Too Few Marines

The total number of Marines in Vietnam reached its wartime peak of 85,996 on 30 April 1968, with 85,402 of these Marines assigned to III MAF. This increase largely resulted from the deployment of RLT 27. The average strength of line battalions actually declined. The Marine Corps had already resorted to extraordinary efforts to maintain numbers in Vietnam in late 1967. The deployment of RLT 27 not only increased the number of replacements needed, it had also used up much of the March replacement pool to bring the deploying units up to strength. Manpower planners at Headquarters Marine Corps reacted by moving 300

infantry replacements from April into March and adding another 400 men to the scheduled replacements for April.[116]

Despite these efforts, in the spring of 1968, the Marine Corps could not find enough replacements to keep up with the high rate of casualties and normal rotations. The Deputy Secretary of Defense approved a new manpower ceiling for Vietnam, Program 6, on 4 April, calling for the number of Marines in Vietnam to increase to 87,700 by 30 June 1968. Instead of rising to this goal, however, the number of Marines in Vietnam declined slowly, but steadily, through the spring of 1968.

Midsummer marked the nadir of manpower for the year. In June, infantry battalions averaged only 1,043 Marines. At the end of June, rifle companies averaged 179.6 Marines. An average of only 158.5 Marines was actually present, or 73.4 percent of the T/O strength. The 1st Marine Division continued to bear the brunt of the manpower shortage, averaging just 1,005 Marines in its infantry battalions in July.

Naturally, some companies were worse off than others. On any given day, sick call, working parties, and other routine requirements siphoned off a number of Marines counted as "present," exacerbating the problem. In the early summer of 1968, senior officers returning from Vietnam spoke of the fighting strength of rifle companies averaging 120 men, and sometimes falling as low as 80 or 90 men.[117]*

In contrast to the field units, the Marine Corps "got awfully heavy at [its] headquarters levels in Vietnam."[118] The personnel situation improved on each succeeding rung of the chain of command. Infantry battalion headquarters and service companies averaged 91.8 percent of the T/O allowance of 329 Marines; regimental headquarters companies, 94.9 percent of their authorized strength of 218; and division headquarters battalions, almost 150 percent of their T/O strength of 1,248 Marines. Taken together, the headquarters overages of III MAF and the two divisions amounted to 1,568 Marines, nearly half the shortfall among the infantry battalions in country.

Much of this overmanning could not be helped. The tables of organization for headquarters units did not provide for many crucial billets, such as instructors for sniper, NCO, engineer, and other vital in-country schools.[119] Task forces placed a further drain on headquarters assets, particularly the creation of Task Force X-Ray in January 1968.[120] Still, many Marines were assigned to headquarters units more as a matter of convenience than necessity.** Whether combat requirement or unnecessary luxury, since the Marine Corps could never reach its programmed strength in Vietnam, every extra Marine in a headquarters unit in effect came out of an infantry squad.

This situation concerned both Lieutenant General Henry W. Buse, General Krulak's replacement as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, and General Chapman, the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Between 15 and 18 July, General Buse held a manpower conference at his headquarters to address this and other problems. After the conference, General Buse reported to the Commandant that while he could not tell how much or how soon effective rifle company strength would improve, except for Marines with medical limitations and certain overriding requirements, all infantrymen were being assigned to infantry and reconnaissance units.[121]

According to the MACV strength report, on 31 July 1968, III MAF included 82,871 Marines, 2,069 fewer than its authorized strength of 84,940. The two divisions combined, however, fell 4,130 below their authorized strength, and the SLF's contained 164 Marines less than their manning levels called for. Much of the difference could be found in Combined Action groups, which included 1,951 Marines. As in January,

*There were questions among the different commands as to what amounted to effective strength of rifle companies. For example, Major General Raymond G. Davis, then commanding general of the 3d Marine Division, did not want to count as effective, personnel who were on light duty or awaiting transportation for TAD (Temporary Attached Duty) or R&R (Rest and Recreation)leave, but were still in the company sector. III MAF disagreed and was backed up by FMFPac. See BGen E.E. Anderson ltr to LtGen W. J. Van Ryzin, dtd 11Sep68, Encl, Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). Colonel Pederson, the III MAF G–1, remembered that the term "foxhole strength" caused "a stir at various levels. The media reported what . . . [they] saw and in an indicting fashion reported that many were absent from the battlefield. When the story hit the streets reporters milked it with questions posed at SecNav, CMC, CGFMFPac. These officials shot messages to CGIIIMAF for info[rmation]. By then several days had passed. The same unit observed in the first place was now up to strength (T/O manning level etc.) . . . [but now] further reduced by combat casualties, transfers, etc. Massaging numbers did not solve much. Commanders at all levels were aware of personnel shortages, some of which were caused by assigning 'trigger pullers' to base-type functions such as R&R and China Beach R&R, out of country R&R. Our Combined Action Platoons used up more trigger pullers. There seemed to be some variation in casualty reporting, some counted by operation and experienced difficulty in accuracy when reporting daily by unit." Pederson Comments.

**For instance, in the summer of 1967, in the midst of a critical shortage of combat engineers, the 3d Marine Division had five combat engineer NCOs building an officer's club at its base camp. Marsh intvw.

the divisions bore the brunt of the personnel shortage. The Force Logistic Command was only 227 Marines short of its authorized strength of 10,266, and the 1st MAW was only three Marines short of its authorized strength of 16,180.

Despite the large size of headquarters units, most Marines in Vietnam were "trigger-pullers." According to the MACV strength report for 31 July 1968, 44,522, or 53.7 percent, of the Marines in III MAF were assigned to infantry, artillery, tank, reconnaissance, amphibian tractor, or engineer battalions, battalion landing teams, or a Combined Action group.

At the end of July Lieutenant General Buse visited III MAF, devoting most of his time to the manpower problem. His visit convinced him that III MAF was taking vigorous steps to improve foxhole, flightline, and cockpit strength. Even so, he felt that III MAF needed more men, and recommended that Operation Kicker be reinstated at Staging Battalion to bring about an immediate improvement in the personnel readiness of III MAF.[122] On 1 August, Staging Battalion complied with this request, maintaining the seven-day work week of Operation Kicker from 1 to 31 August. Between 20 August and 13 September, the battalion also reduced the schedule from 15 to 12 training days.[123]

In August, the strength of infantry battalions increased somewhat, with the average strength rising to 1,072 Marines. The short-term steps taken by III MAF and Staging Battalion undoubtedly helped, but things were bound to improve around this time as the unusually large number of recruits joined from January through May, including over 5,000 draftees called in April and May, finally worked their way through the training pipeline and arrived in Vietnam.

The Return of RLT 27

RLT 27 left for Vietnam as an emergency measure, and was originally scheduled to spend only three months in country.[124] This was quickly lengthened to six months, but the Defense Department realized that the Marine Corps could not sustain this force level and that an Army unit had to replace the regiment as soon as possible. On 13 March, President Johnson and his advisors set 15 July as the date for RLT 27 to begin returning to the United States.[125] Twelve days later, the Army designated the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized), located at Fort Carson, Colorado, to relieve the 27th Marines. After a schedule which included 13 training weeks, on 22 July, the first elements of the Army brigade departed for Vietnam. The last of the brigade arriving in country on 31 July.[126] The brigade still needed a full month of in-country orientation training before it was ready to participate in major combat operations.

This meant that the 1st Brigade could not relieve the 27th Marines until the end of September, delaying the planned return of the regiment for over a month and creating serious manpower problems for the Marine Corps. On 15 June 1968, a key issue paper for the Commandant contained the estimate that if RLT 27 did not leave Vietnam by July, the Marine Corps could not sustain its forces in Vietnam without a Reserve call up, or a combination of shortening time between tours and increasing strength.[127] About a week later, MACV informally asked III MAF exactly when the 27th Marines would leave Vietnam. General Cushman recommended that the 27th Marines not redeploy until after a relief in place could be effected. The 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) would not be ready for combat until a month after its arrival in Vietnam. Since the proposed schedule actually involved having the brigade relieve the 1st Marines, which would in turn relieve the 27th Marines, General Cushman estimated that the earliest date the 27th Marines could leave Vietnam was 10 September.[128]

General Abrams, who had relieved General Westmoreland as Commander USMACV in June, concurred with this recommendation. The proposed two-month postponement for the return of the 27th Marines prompted Paul H. Nitze, Depury Secretary of Defense, to note on 19 July that "this delay will have adverse personnel implications for the Marine Corps." Secretary Nitze politely tasked General Wheeler to ask General Abrams to review his relief plan, stating that "[I]f feasible, the 27th RLT should be returned to the U.S. by 15 August."[129] General Cushman insisted that RLT 27 could not be withdrawn before the replacement Army brigade became combat ready without "unacceptable risk."[130] On 10 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the redeployment of RLT 27 between 10 and 15 September.[131*]

*Charles F. Baird, Under Secretary of the Navy, noted that the delay in RLT 27's return resulted from the Army brigade's need for 30 days' training after arrival in Vietnam before it began combat operations. He unfavorably contrasted this with the record of RLT 27, which "took its place in the Da Nang TAOR a day after it arrived" when it deployed to Vietnam in February. Charles F. Baird, Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of Defence (Systems Analyses), Subj: RLT 27; return of, dtd 16Jul68, tab JJ, RLT Redeployment File.

In August, the 27th Marines had an average strength of over 3,500 Marines and sailors. Only those Marines close to the end of their enlistments or those who had originally deployed with less than two years in the United States would actually leave Vietnam with the regiment. Of the over 5,000 Marines and sailors deployed with RLT 27 in February, some 1,500 had already reached the end of their enlistments or become casualties and returned to the United States.[132] Only 800 of the remaining men met the return criteria. Under Operation Mixmaster, the rest of the Marines and sailors in the 27th Marines and attached units transferred to other commands to complete their tours in Vietnam.* Public announcements by the Marine Corps made it clear that most of the Marines were staying in Vietnam and that the return of RLT 27 did not represent the beginning of a withdrawal from Vietnam.[133]

On 12 September, the first planeload of returning Marines left for Okinawa. On 16 September, the last of 699 Marines and sailors from RLT 27 arrived in California, and on 17 September the last group of the 101 returnees from BLT 1/27 arrived in Hawaii. Nearly 400 Marines from other units who had completed a full tour in Vietnam returned with the regiment.[134]

The End of the Year

The redistribution of men from the 27th Marines brought about a dramatic improvement in the manpower situation. In October, infantry battalions in Vietnam carried an average of 1,183 Marines on their rolls, only 10 Marines below their T/O strength.These gains proved shortlived, for the departure of the 27th Marines marked the beginning of a slow but steady reduction in the number of Marines in III MAF. The Defense Department Program 6 strength authorization set the total number of American servicemen in Vietnam at 549,500. Deputy Secretary of Defense Nitze made it clear that this number represented an upper limit not to be exceeded. To stay within this limit while adding Army and Air Force units, the Defense Department reduced the Marine Corps' Vietnam troop ceiling to 82,100 for September, falling to 81,600 by December.[135]

Both General Cushman and General Buse vigorously opposed the new Program 6 limits. To reduce Marine strength to the proposed level some Marine units would have to leave Vietnam, although the Defense Department had no plans to reduce the commitments of the remaining units. More importantly, the proposed Defense Department manning levels not only did not allow for the previously approved strength overages needed to support the extended operations in Vietnam, but they also failed to authorize enough Marines to man all units at their T/O strength.

In late September and early October the staffs of Headquarters, Marine Corps; III MAF; Fleet Marine Force Pacific; and the Defense Department debated exactly which units would be withdrawn or cut, with the attention focusing on amphibian tractor, aviation support, reconnaissance, and headquarters units. No units were actually withdrawn, and on 21 November the Deputy Secretary of Defense ruled out the redeployment of any units since this might have a negative impact on the Paris Peace talks. At the same time he denied any increases in the Marine Corps' Southeast Asia allowance.[136]

In early November, General Cushman complained that his efforts to stay within the Program 6 ceiling had already led to a shortage of experienced officers and decline in foxhole strength.[137] This problem was exacerbated by the lack of replacements. In contrast to the normal "summer surge" at the recruit depots, the number of new recruits joined between July and September fell well below the level of the previous summer, it did not even reach the level met during the first six months of 1968. The fall replacement flow was unable to keep the battalions up to strength. By December, the average strength of infantry battalions had fallen to 1,136 Marines. Rifle companies averaged 197.9 Marines on their rolls, of whom 178.5 were actually present. The division headquarters battalions were still relatively well off, with well over half again as many Marines as their tables of organization called for. The strength of III MAF's headquarters had grown by over 300 Marines since July. On 31 December there were 79,960 Marines in III

*See Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam 1965*, p. 117, and Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam 1966*, *n*, p. 283, for an explanation of Operation Mixmaster. Since most units in Vietnam had arrived before the end of 1966, in 1967 there was little need to "Mixmaster" units. RLT 27 was the first major Marine unit to return to the United States, and the personnel transfers it underwent foreshadowed the policies used when Marine Corps forces began to withdraw from Vietnam. See Cosmas and Murray, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam 1970–1971*, pp. 331–34.

Marine Corps Non-Prior Service Enlisted Accessions

Month	*1967*		*1968*		*1969*	
	Total Recruits	Draft Call†	Total Recruits	Draft Call†	Total Recruits	Draft Call†
January	3,968		8,646		7,620	
February	2,523		8,000		7,653	1,500
March	3,486		7,504		7,144	1,500
April	3,984		8,894	4,000	8,261	2,500
May	5,988		9,035	1,900	7,252	2,000
June	9,394		9,429		9,273	2,000
July	9,038		7,497		8,372	
August	8,342		7,573		7,643	
September	8,664		7,573		7,606	1,500
October	5,593		7,947		7,817	1,400
November	5,468		6,898		7,224	1,000
December	5,555		8,346	2,500	6,887	1,500
Total	73,970	0	99,310	8,400	94,721	14,900

† This is the number of draftees called for, *not* the number of draftees actually joined in a given month. Due to the workings of Selective Service, none of the calls were completely filled, while the Marine Corps received a few draftees in months in which it did not make a call. The Marine Corps accepted 145 draftees in 1967, 7,702 in 1968, and 12,872 in 1969.

Source: *Annual Report of Qualitative Distribution of Military Manpower*; *Selected Manpower Statistics*.

MAF and the SLFs, and another 468 other Marines in various assignments in Vietnam, over 1,000 short of the number authorized by Program 6.[138]*

The only way to maintain the flow of replacements to Vietnam was to further increase the number of new recruits. In December 1968, the Marine Corps made a draft call, and made further calls in 9 of the next 12 months.

The Marine Corps and the Draft.

Traditionally, the Marine Corps took great pride in the fact that every Marine had voluntarily enlisted. Well before the Vietnam War, senior Marine officers recognized that the Marine Corps indirectly benefitted from the draft by recruiting draft-motivated volunteers.[139] The rapid expansion of the Marine Corps in late 1965 and early 1966 forced the Marine Corps to turn to Selective Service to find enough recruits to fill the ranks. The Marine Corps made four draft calls between November 1965 and March 1966, accepting 19,636 draftees in fiscal year 1966. As soon as possible, however, the Marine Corps returned to its traditional reliance on voluntary enlistments. The Marine Corps did not make another draft call until April 1968, after the Tet offensive, followed by a second call in May. The next call came in December 1968, inaugurating a steady reliance on the draft until February 1970, well after Marine forces had begun withdrawing from Vietnam.**

Ostensibly, the increased reliance on the draft reflected in part a need to "smooth out" the traditionally large summer volunteer recruit cohorts to ensure an even flow of replacements for Vietnam.[140] For most of the months in 1969 in which draft calls were made, however, the total number of new recruits was actually lower than that for the same month in 1968 (see chart). To accommodate the large flow of replacements needed, the Marine Corps requested an end strength for fiscal year 1969 of 320,700. The Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis), Dr. Alain C. Enthoven, disagreed with Headquarters, Marine Corps' estimates, trimming over 10,000 spaces off the allowance for the

*The average strength of III MAF appeared to fluctuate from month to month. According to Colonel Maurice Rose, who became the III MAF G–1 in July 1968, he recalled receiving "almost daily calls from MACV telling me to get down to our authorized strength. It got to the point that I was making nightly calls to the G–1s of subordinate commands to determine strength." He remembered that sometime in September or October, III MAF sent a message to FMFPac "stating the urgency of the situation." Rose Comments.

**The withdrawal of Marine Forces from Vietnam began in July 1969, with the withdrawal of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines; the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion; and numerous supporting units. The 3d Marine Division departed Vietnam on 7 November 1969. For a discussion of the withdrawal of Marine Forces from Vietnam, see Smith, *The U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1969: High Mobility and Standdown.*

Southeast Asia surge and 4,500 off the transient allowance to come up with a figure of 304,500.[141] The Department of Defense eventually relented, but not by much: the active-duty strength of the Marine Corps reached its Vietnam War peak on 31 March 1969, at 314,917. Even two-year enlistments proved too long to maintain the flow of replacements within this end strength, and the Marine Corps embarked on another round of early releases. During 1969 almost 70,000 Marines accepted "early-outs," well over half of all enlisted separations.

The Marine Corps Transformed

By the end of 1968, the demands of the Vietnam War seemed to have pushed the Marine Corps manpower system as far as it could go. In 1965, The Marine Corps took only volunteers on long enlistments, invested in lengthy training, and fostered personnel stability in units. While these policies were "inefficient," in that they did not produce the maximum number of riflemen, they were effective, producing exceptionally combat-ready units. By the end of 1968 this had changed. As the need to fill foxholes in Vietnam grew, and with no hope of the oft-requested and much needed increases in end strength, the Marine Corps reluctantly became an "efficient" organization, concentrating on producing the maximum number of riflemen for duty in Southeast Asia. The Marine Corps turned to short enlistments (with early outs, often as little as 18 months), short training programs, high personnel turnover, and eventually draftees, to meet the needs of III MAF. Yet, even with these efforts, the Marine Corps still did not have the resources to meet its authorized strength in Vietnam.

CHAPTER 28

Backing Up The Troops

A Division of Responsibility—Naval Logistic Support—Marine Engineers—The FLC Continues to Cope

A Division of Responsibility

By the beginning of 1968, III MAF had hopes that its major logistical problems were over. The unexpected problems with the new M16 rifles during the past year not only delayed the conversion from the older M14 rifles, but also required the modification of all of the M16s. Compounding the difficulties for III MAF logisticians were the grounding of the CH–46s,* personnel shortages, combat losses, accidents, and continuing threat of enemy rocket and artillery bombardment of Marine supply and ammunition points. Still, by January 1968, Brigadier General Harry C. Olson, Commanding General, Force Logistic Command (FLC), had taken several steps to alleviate the situation. He had implemented an M16 repair program that was moving at an accelerating pace. Moreover, the FLC had realigned its command structure to meet new deployments, had created new facilities, and had attained a relatively full logistic pipeline.

At Da Nang, General Olson had established the headquarters of the FLC/1st Force Service Regiment together with a supply battalion and maintenance battalion. Additional elements of the FLC at Da Nang were the 1st and 3d Military Police Battalions, the 5th Communication Battalion,** and the 7th Motor Transport Battalion. The FLC complex at Da Nang provided the logistic support for both the 1st Marine Division and the Korean Marine Brigade.

Two reinforced service battalions, the 1st and 3d, made up the major field elements of the FLC. The 3d Service Battalion which was redesignated Force Logistic Support Group (FLSG) Alpha at Phu Bai maintained subunits at Khe Sanh and Camp Evans. In mid-January, with the arrival of U.S. Army units into Thua Thien, FLSG Alpha temporarily supported elements of the Army's 1st Cavalry Division and 101st Airborne Division. On 29 January, the Army assumed responsibility for its own logistic support at Camp Evans and the Marine logistic unit there then augmented the Marine subunit at Khe Sanh. FLSG Alpha retained responsibility for the 1st Marine Division Task Force X-Ray elements, newly arrived in the Phu Bai and Phu Loc areas. At Dong Ha, in the 3d Marine Division sector, FLSG Bravo, based upon the 1st Service Battalion, remained responsible for the logistic support of the division units along the DMZ and at Quang Tri.*** During January 1968, III MAF supported 49,000 troops north of the Hai Van Pass, requiring about 2,000 short tons of supplies per day.[1]

To support the fuel needs of the augmented forces arriving in northern I Corps, the FLC had completed construction in January of a 3,000-barrel capacity steel fuel tank near the Hue LCU ramp in the city.**** Unfortunately, on 2 February, during the enemy attack on Hue, rockets slammed into the fuel farm, destroying 110,000 gallons of JP–4 jet aviation gas. While the enemy offensive forced the allies to close the LCU ramp and the fuel farm temporarily, the FLC had the facility back in operation by mid-February.

Elsewhere during their Tet offensive, the Communist forces struck at other Marine logistic targets. At Da Nang, like all other III MAF units, the FLC Marines were on full alert. The two military police battalions, the 1st and 3d MP Battalions, assisted the Marine infantry and local ARVN units in turning back

*See Chapter 25 relative to the problem with helicopters.

**In addition to the 5th Communication Battalion in Vietnam there was the 7th Communication Battalion directly under the 1st Marine Division. The Wing had under its command Marine Wing Communications Squadron 1 (MWCS–1) and directly under III MAF was Sub–Unit 1, 1st Radio Battalion which at the beginning of the year was at Khe Sanh.

***FLSG Bravo also maintained a supply company at Chu Lai in Quang Tin Province to provide logistic support for the Marine aviation units that remained based there. Colonel Rex O. Dillow, the III MAF G–4 or logistics officer, noted that with the relocation of units there were constant requests for materials and engineers to build hospitals, headquarters buildings, and permanent structures at the new locations. He declared that the generators practically required armed guards because of their limited availability. Col Rex O. Dillow, Comments on draft, dtd 10Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Dillow Comments.

****The allies maintained LCU ramps at both Hue and at Dong Ha because LCUs were the largest craft which could negotiate the Perfume and Cua Viet Rivers, respectively, due to silting problems in both rivers.

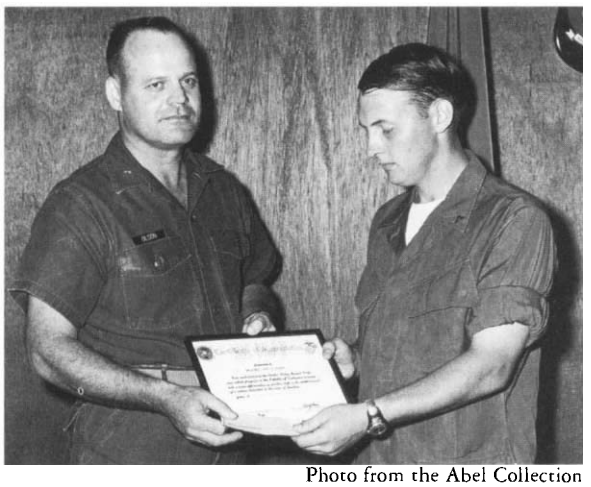


Photo from the Abel Collection

BGen Henry C. Olson, CG FLC, presents a letter of appreciation to LCpl Ralph Choate relative to donations by the FLC to a children's hospital near Da Nang.

the aborted enemy attack on the I Corps headquarters compound.* While a few rockets landed nearby during the offensive, the FLC complex at Red Beach remained relatively unscathed.

The Marine logistic facilities at Chu Lai did not fare as well. On 31 January, an enemy rocket struck the FLSG Bravo ammunition dump, causing the destruction of 649 tons of bombs and 26 tons of bulk explosives. Scattered unexploded ordnance proved to be troublesome for many weeks after the attack. According to the FLSG Bravo Supply Company monthly report: ". . . thousands of 500-pound bombs buried in the sand. These bombs have been blown from their pallets and are being excavated, palletized, and issued."[2] According to Marine accounting, the cost of the munitions destroyed by the attack amounted to $2,215,358.52.[3]

The greatest damage of the enemy offensive was to the Marine lines of communication.** Through January and February, the NVA and VC attacked river convoys on the Cua Viet and Perfume Rivers and successfully interdicted Route 1 at several points. In fact during February, the Marines halted all truck convoys north from Hue to the DMZ. Observing that "logistics was the key" to countering the NVA offensive in the north, General Westmoreland, the MACV commander, stressed in a message to Army General Earle G. Wheeler, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and Admiral Sharp, CinCPac, "this means opening Highway 1."[4]

It would not be until the beginning of March, however, that the roads would be open again in the north. Even then, as an Army historian noted, "interdiction continued—mining, demolition of bridges, road cratering, and ambushes."[5] Still on a typical day during this period, 14 LCUs would be either loading cargo or enroute from Da Nang to northern I Corps together with truck convoys from Da Nang to Phu Bai and from Phu Bai to Dong Ha. From its outset, the enemy offensive, as the Marine command noted in a mid-year report, was aimed "against our supply lines."[6]

During this interval, the FLC assumed the additional responsibility for the preponderance of support for the 1st Air Cavalry and 101st Airborne Divisions as they deployed into northern I Corps. With the tactical units arriving ahead of the Army support units, the FLC provided both divisions interim assistance with food, fuel, and ammunition. Within 10 weeks, both FLSG Alpha at Phu Bai and Bravo at Dong Ha became responsible for 90,000 U.S. personnel of all Services, nearly double the number in early January. On 19 February, Brigadier General Earl E. Anderson, the III MAF Chief of Staff, wrote in some exasperation, "Our logistic problems have become immense . . . Yet, in spite of our pleas to slow down the introduction of troops because of the tenuousness of our land, air, and water LOCs [lines of communication], the four stars in Saigon merely wave their hands and release dispatches directing the units to move."[7]***

Despite Anderson's misgivings, the FLC's central control of assets and its capability to move critical items to combat units rapidly enabled the Marine logisticians to cope with the situation under the most difficult of circumstances. To help the Marines, on 26 February 1968, the U.S. Army established the U.S. Army Support Command Da Nang (Provisional) to

*See Chapter 8.

**See Chapters 7–13. Colonel Rex O. Dillow, the III MAF G–4, recalled that his section created a Transportation Control Center (TCC) that operated similar to a tactical logistic group in an amphibious operation in order to determine priorities over limited resources. While headed by an officer in the G–4 section, the TCC included representatives from the III MAF G–3 section; the U.S. Seventh Air Force Tactical Air Liaison section; the U.S. Army 1st Logistical Command; the FLC, and the Naval Support Activity. Dillow Comments and Draft of III MAF report on Logistics for General Officers' Symposium, Jul68, n.d. [Jun68], Encl, Dillow Comments.

***According to Army historian Joel Meyerson, "The decision to shift troops north at a rate that exceeded the capability to create a supply base for their support . . . reflected the gravity of the situation." He went on to state: "To develop combat power quickly, the four-stars in Saigon chose manpower over logistics, taking a calculated risk. But time, they believed was of the essence." Joel D. Meyerson, Chief, Operational History Branch, CMH, Comments on draft, dtd 6Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Meyerson Comments.



Department of Defense (USMC) unnumbered photo

An overview of the FLC compound near Red Beach at Da Nang. The sprawling FLC now supported a III MAF command that numbered more than 100,000 soldiers, sailors, and Marines in January 1968 and would soon expand further.

provide both logistical support and direction for Army units. This command sent out subordinate logistic task forces to both the 101st Airborne and 1st Cavalry Divisions. The FLC logistic field units, FLSG A and FLSG B, at Phu Bai and Dong Ha, respectively, continued to provide rations to the Army units in the northern two provinces, however, until the Army logistic units became self-sustaining.[8*]

Through heroic efforts, III MAF was able to maintain a satisfactory logistic stock level. For example in February, Marine helicopters alone lifted 7,724 tons of cargo, attaining their highest monthly tonnage, despite low ceilings, rain, fog, and basically miserable flying conditions.[9] The following random statistics for the period January through April illustrate in part the massive effort by the Marine logisticians of the FLC:

> In January, FLSG Bravo issued 362,100 C-Rations, brought 1,747,504 pounds of ice, transported 11,213 tons of supplies over a total of 58,161 truck miles and issued 4,227.3 tons of ammunition.[10]
>
> During February, FLC processed 23,442 transients, processed 87,000 requisitions, baked 860,692 pounds of bread, and air delivered a daily average of 143 tons of supplies to Khe Sanh Combat Base.[11]
>
> During March, FLSG Alpha issued more than 1,743,000 gallons of various types of fuel.[12]
>
> The FLC laundry units processed 201,000 pounds of laundry in the month of April, and its ammunition company handled 55,415 tons of ammunition, a daily average of more than 1,800 tons.[13]

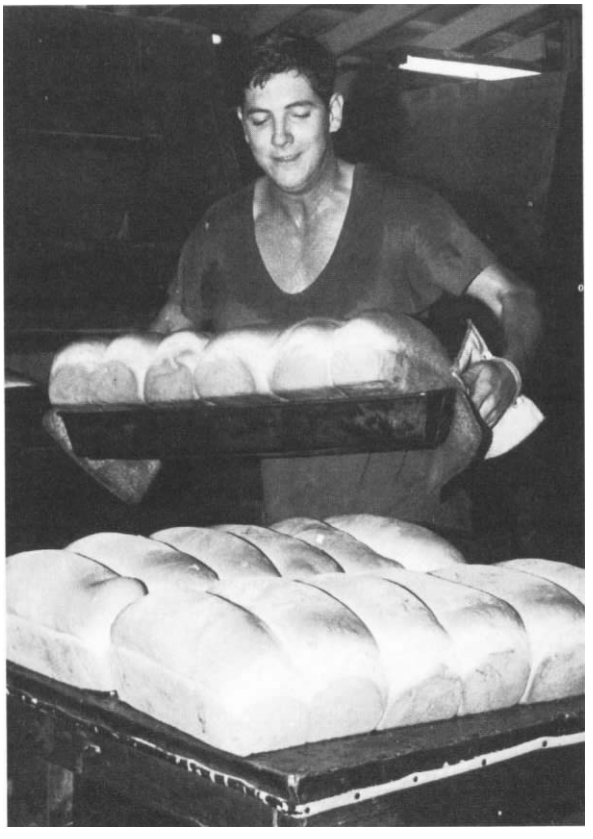
Specifically during this period, the Marine command arranged for the helicopter delivery under extreme weather conditions of 300 short tons daily from ships off the coast to U.S. shore facilities, as well as the air drop of 200 short tons daily to 1st Air Cavalry units in the Camp Evans sector. "Rough Rider" truck convoys from Da Nang north through the Hai Van Pass involved 10,471 Marine and U.S. Army vehicles.[14]

*Colonel Dillow, the III MAF G-4, praised the efforts of two Army generals in assisting the Marine logisticians to cope with the situation. These were Brigadier General Henry A. Rasmussen, USA, the USMACV J-4, and Brigadier General George H. McBride, USA, the Commanding General, U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang. According to Dillow, "here we had the largest field force ever commanded by a Marine Corps headquarters, with multi-division Army and Marine Corps forces depending upon support from U.S. Air Force, Navy, Marine and Army units. Despite the rapid buildup, difficulties from long and tenuous lines of communication and adverse weather, logistic support was steady throughout." Dillow Comments. In letters of appreciation to the two Army generals, General Cushman, the III MAF commander, recognized their efforts. He credited Rasmussen with providing "guidance and impetus" to logistic planning which made it "possible to promptly deploy support forces and commence operations in support of much larger reinforcements than had been expected, but which were moved to Northern I Corps on very short notice and committed to action immediately upon arrival." Copy of CGIIIMAF ltr to ComUSMACV, Subj: Contributions to III MAF by . . . BGen Henry A. Rasmussen, n.d. [Jul68], Encl, Dillow Comments. In his letter to General McBride, Cushman observed that the Army general directed the "phasing in" of some 52 U.S. Army logistical support units of about 7,000 total personnel. CGIIIMAF ltr to ComUSMACV, Subj: Performance of duty by BGen George H. McBride . .. [USA], n.d. [Jul68], Encl, Dillow Comments.

Once the heavy Army logistic units arrived they were able to ease the burden on the Marines. Representatives of III MAF; the FLC; MACV; U.S. Army Vietnam; 1st Logistical Command; U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang (Provisional); and Naval Support Activity, Da Nang, mutually agreed on the division of support. Marine Corps and Army dumps would provide common item support, Class I (Rations), Class III (Petroleum), and Class V (Ammunition) to both Army and Marine units. The respective Service logistic facility would furnish Class II (General Supply items) and Class IV (Special Items). With this understanding, FLSG Alpha became responsible for common item support for all III MAF units, both Marine and Army in the Phu Bai sector. The Army's new Prov Corps 26th General Support Group at Quang Tri assumed the same responsibility for those units located south of Quang Tri and north of Hue. FLSG Bravo continued to provide support for those units in the Dong Ha and DMZ sector. By March 1968, the supply requirements for U.S. forces in northern I Corps had reached 3,000 short tons per day. Colonel Rex O. Dillow, the III MAF G–4, later observed, "the rapid buildup in requirements, and the effects of enemy action and adverse weather, presented perhaps the biggest threat of curtailing tactical operations during the Tet offensive."[15]

LCpl John M. Martin pulls a pan of freshly baked loaves of bread from the oven. The FLC had the responsibility of providing III MAF everything from bread to ammunition.

Photo is from the Abel Collection



During this critical period, the Naval Support Activity, Da Nang; the Army's 1st Logistical Command; Army Support Command, Da Nang; and the FLC cooperated to move the supplies where they were most needed. In March, they opened a LOTS (Logistics Over the Shore) Facility at Thon My Thuy. The Army positioned a task force of over 1,000 men from its 159th Transportation Battalion, with six attached companies, at this site (Wunder Beach) to facilitate the movement of supplies.* A Seabee-built 8.6-mile road from Route 1 near Hai Lang, tied this installation into the major road network in northern I Corps. As an Army historian commented, "even then Wunder Beach was no rose garden: The Hai Lang Road remained subject to heavy mining, and was sometimes seeded with metal objects to impede clearance." The

*Colonel Dillow, the III MAF G–4, remembered that in February 1968, General Cushman directed him to ask the Seventh Fleet for a Navy pontoon causeway unit then stationed in Japan to "be brought to Da Nang Harbor. This required considerable effort by the Navy; several ships were required to move the causeway sections. They objected, pointing out that in all probability a causeway, if installed could not be kept in place for any appreciable time due to the winds and tides during the monsoon season. However, General Cushman insisted, stating that we may have to take a calculated risk and install it despite the odds. It was therefore available when the drawdown of supplies in NICTZ [Notthern I Corps Tactical Zone] necessitated its installation." Dillow Comments. Army historian Joel Meyerson quoted the following from a 1st Logistical Command Operational Report, Lessons Learned for the period: "The Navy was asked to find the best location for the establishment of a LOTS site. After studying the problem, the Navy concluded that it was impractical to establish such an operation and that the results would be minimal. . . . In spite of this conclusion, the Army, faced with the need to support two divisions, proceeded to establish Wunder Beach . . . ." Meyerson Comments. Colonel Dillow recalled that "installing the causeway in the high winds and heavy seas of the monsoon season was no small task, although it was kept in place once installed. Installation was often interrupted." According to Dillow, the Army unit operating the facility "had been commanded by an officer named Wunder. They referred to themselves as 'Wunder's Wonders.' They asked us if they could name the facility Wunder Beach, which was readily approved (although to the consternation of a few Marine Corps officers!)." Dillow Comments. The U.S. Army 159th Transportation Battalion was actually commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Charles H. Sunder. The men of the battalion called themselves Sunder's Wonders and with a slight play of words, the LOTS facility was named Wunder Beach. LtGen Willard Pearson, USA, *The War in the Northern Provinces, 1966–1968*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C. Dept of the Army, 1975), p. 61.

facility, nevertheless, remained open until the northeast monsoon would make operations there too dangerous.* From 6 March until its closing at the end of the summer, more than 100,000 short tons moved across Wunder Beach.[16]

At the end of March, General Creighton W. Abrams, Westmoreland's deputy, extolled the logistic efforts of all of the Services, with perhaps a left-handed compliment for the Navy:

> The Marines and the Army are working together realistically without any vestige of Service pride interfering with service to the common effort. The Navy shows positive signs of moving out as the others clearly have. I am encouraged and gratified at what has been done, with clearly more to come from these men who have thrown off the fetters of conventionality and gotten with the job.

He concluded: "The logisticians have thus far accomplished the impossible by supporting the reinforcements dumped into the northern area so precipitously."[17]

Naval Logistic Support

Despite Abram's rather lukewarm praise for the naval efforts, it was the Navy logistic system that provided the fundamental support for III MAF including the Army forces in I Corps. The Marine Corps traditionally had relied upon the Navy for medical support, for extensive and heavy construction efforts, and for the administrative and logistic tasks involved with an advanced naval base. Vietnam was not to be any different. In July 1965, the Navy had established the Naval Support Activity (NSA), Da Nang, which by January 1968 under Rear Admiral Paul L. Lacy, had become "the Navy's largest overseas logistic command," consisting of 10,000 officers and men.[18]

The Navy command structure made for some wrinkles in the U.S. I Corps organizational charts. Originally, NSA, Da Nang was under the commanding general, III MAF, who at the time was also the MACV Naval Component commander, but this changed in 1966 with the establishment of U.S. Naval Forces, Vietnam, directly under General Westmoreland. In its command history, the NSA, Da Nang reported that it came under the operational control of U.S. Naval Forces, Vietnam, under the command of Commander, Service Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, "less operational control," and finally under the "military control" of III MAF. For all practical purposes, however, the NSA in I Corps remained a component part of III MAF.[19]

From his headquarters building in downtown Da Nang, nicknamed the "White Elephant" after its white decor and decorative elephant friezes, Admiral Lacy controlled the beach and port logistic activities for U.S. forces throughout I Corps. By January 1968, he had a small fleet of over 100 lighterage craft including LCM 8s (landing craft, mechanized), LCM 6s, and LCU (landing craft, utility) to move cargo from sea-going vessels in the crowded harbors into the ports and onto the beaches. Ashore, Lacy's command warehoused supplies, established supply points, assembled amphibious fuel pipe lines, and provided fuel storage bladders in support of both the Marines and Army in I Corps.[20]

While Da Nang was the hub of port activity in I Corps, the NSA, Da Nang established smaller detachments to assist the offloading and to provide for immediate shore storage facilities elsewhere in I Corps. By 1968, NSA Da Nang had three main port detachments deployed outside of Da Nang: one at Chu Lai, south of Da Nang, the site of a Marine air base and headquarters of the U.S. Army Americal Division; the second at Tan My near the Cos Co causeway at the mouth of the Perfume River; and the third at the Cua Viet Port Facility, which supported allied forces in the DMZ sector. Later in the year, NSA, Da Nang relieved the Army for port logistic support of the 11th Light Infantry Brigade of the Americal Division at Sa Huyen, which then became the southernmost supply point in I Corps. Each of these port detachments became a microcosm of the larger NSA, Da Nang, and each commander had the authority to establish direct liaison with the commands he supported in his sector. At the height of the U.S. buildup in northern I Corps in mid-1968, NSA, Da Nang with its subordinate detachments were controlling on a monthly average more than 350,000 tons of cargo for approximately 200,000 troops in the corps area.[21]

The 1968 Tet offensive brought home the reliance that the allied forces placed upon their water-borne lines of communication. With most of the main roads cut, the only means of resupply was by air or by water. Given the relatively small amount of material and equipment that could be airlifted, the Army and Marine forces in northern I Corps were entirely depen-

*At a III MAF logistics conference in May 1968 chaired by Army Major General Richard G. Stilwell, then the Deputy CG III MAF, Army, the conferees estimated the continuing support that would be required in northern I Corps. At the meeting there was a general consensus that "Wunder Beach should be abandoned, since both the road and the area . . . [would] be impassable" during the upcoming monsoon season. III MAF, Memo for the Record, Subj: III MAF Logistics Conference, dtd 15May68, Encl Dillow Comments.

dent upon keeping open the vital waterways, especially the Cua Viet and the Perfume River. This necessitated the extensive convoying of the various river craft including LCUs, LCMs, and barges bringing supplies into the embattled city of Hue on the Perfume River and, further north, up the Cua Viet from the port facility to the 3d Marine Division's main base at Dong Ha in Quang Tri Province.

While the river clearing and convoy system was a closely coordinated effort employing both air and ground forces, the Navy's "brown water" fleet played an important role. Since the previous year, Task Force 116, the U.S. Navy, Vietnam's River Patrol Force, had kept River Section 521 at Tan My where the section had established its headquarters on a floating barge complex. Thus at the breakout of the Tet offensive and assault upon Hue, the section was in position to support the flow of water-borne supplies up the Perfume River. With its mainstay consisting of four-man crew PBRs (patrol river boats) powered by Jacuzzi jet pumps and capable of maneuvering at speeds of 25 to 29 knots and equipped with surface radar, four machine guns, and a grenade launcher, the Navy unit cleared the waterway to Hue. Smaller boat detachments operating on the Cua Viet also kept that passage open. For its participation in the Tet offensive, River Section 521 received the Presidential Unit Citation.[22]

Given the importance of these riverine operations in the fight for Hue and the Cua Viet, Rear Admiral Kenneth L. Veth, the commander of U.S. Naval Forces, Vietnam, together with General Cushman, decided to establish a separate Navy river task force directly under the operational control of III MAF in northern I Corps.* On 24 February, Veth assigned Navy Captain Gerald W. Smith as commander of the new task force, designated Task Force Clearwater. Smith originally established his headquarters at Tan My, but then on the 29th moved his mobile base to the Cua Viet Port Facility. Through the course of the year, Task Force Clearwater would consist of armored river "monitors," PBRs, PACV (Patrol Air Cushioned Vehicles), minesweeping craft, and other diverse watercraft. Among its attached personnel were Marines from the 3d Marine Division's 1st Searchlight Battery and soldiers from the U.S. Army's 63d Signal Battalion. Organized eventually into two river groups, the Hue River Security Group and the Dong Ha/Cua Viet Security Group, Task Force Clearwater protected and kept open the two major water routes in the north—the Cua Viet and the Perfume Rivers.[23]

One area in which the Navy retained prime responsibility was medical support for the Marine command. Navy doctors and medical personnel manned the battalion and squadron level aid stations. At an even lower echelon, Navy corpsman were assigned to Marine infantry units down to the platoon level. Navy doctors commanded the 1st and 3d Medical Battalions which supported respectively the 1st and 3d Marine Divisions. These battalions ran the intermediate medical facilities at Dong Ha, Phu Bai, and Da Nang, reinforced by the 1st Hospital Company and 1st, 3d, and 11th Dental companies.**

In addition to these medical organizations, NSA, Da Nang maintained a 750-bed hospital at Da Nang, the equivalent of a general hospital. Finally during 1968, two Navy hospital ships, the *Repose* (AH 16) and the *Sanctuary* (AH 17), remained off the coast each with a capacity of 350 beds that could be doubled if needed, and within a 30-minute helicopter flight from shore.[24] According to statistics maintained by the Marine Corps, out of 100 Marines that were wounded, 44 were treated in the field and returned to duty, while 56 were admitted to a hospital. Of those admitted to a hospital, only nine would remain in county and the rest would be evacuated. Approximately 7 percent would receive disability discharges, 5.5 percent would require long-term care, but a remarkably low percentage, 1.5, would die of their wounds.[25]

In one other area, heavy engineering and construction support, the Navy greatly supplemented Marine capabilities. Since the spring of 1965 when Navy mobile construction battalions (NMCB), popularly known as Seabees, helped to build the airfield at Chu Lai, the Navy augmented the Marine engineering effort in Vietnam. By January 1968, the Navy had established the 3d Naval Construction Brigade, under Rear Admiral Robert R. Wooding, which while under the operational control of Naval Forces, Vietnam, made its headquarters at Da Nang. Under his control, were two naval construction regiments in I Corps, the 30th at Da Nang, which directed the Seabee construction efforts there, and the 32d at Phu Bai, which coordinated those projects in the northern two

*III MAF eventually delegated operational control of Task Force Clearwater to Provisional Corps, Vietnam (later XXIV Corps), when that command was established in the northern two provinces of I Corps in March 1968. See Chapter 13.

**During the siege of Khe Sanh, a detachment from Company C, 3d Medical Battalion, better known as "Charlie Med," operated the dispensary there.



Photo from the David Douglas Duncan Collection

Navy doctors and corpsmen from Company C ("Charlie Med"), 3d Medical Battalion, wearing helmets and flak jackets, conduct an emergency operation on a wounded helicopter pilot at the Khe Sanh dispensary. Most wounded were evacuated out of Khe Sanh as soon as possible.

provinces. Throughout most of 1968, some 12 Seabee battalions remained assigned to I Corps and were involved in almost every major I Corps construction effort from reinforcing the defenses at Khe Sanh, building new roads and bridges, extending airfields, erecting new cantonment buildings, to operating stone quarries and drilling wells.[26]

Marine Engineers

Despite the supplementing efforts of the Seabees and Army engineering units, the Marine command depended upon its own resources for its basic engineering requirements. Throughout 1968, the Marines had five engineering battalions in-country to provide both combat engineering and general construction support. In the north, the 3d Marine Division had Lieutenant Colonel Jack W. Perrin's 3d Engineer Battalion in direct combat support, while the 1st Engineer Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Logan Cassedy, came under the 1st Marine Division at Da Nang. In addition, III MAF had three heavy engineering battalions to accomplish those tasks beyond the scope of the division engineers. Attached to the 1st Marine Division were both Lieutenant Colonel Ray Funderburk's 7th Engineering Battalion, which operated out of its cantonment, Camp Love at Da Nang, and Lieutenant Colonel Horacio E. Perea's 9th Engineer Battalion, which worked out of Chu Lai. The 11th Engineer Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Victor A. Perry, reinforced the 3d Engineer Battalion along the DMZ.

In the 3d Marine Division sector in early 1968, the 11th Engineer Battalion remained committed to the DMZ barrier project while the 3d Engineer Battalion was involved with the usual division engineering tasks. With its headquarters at Phu Bai, the 3d Battalion supported the division's regimental bases from Khe Sanh to Dong Ha with task-organized engineer detachments. In its January report, the battalion observed that the "primary work performed was mine sweeping, demolitions, and bunker construction." Much of the

3d Battalion's activity was involved in road sweeps, keeping open the main lines of communication among Camp Carroll, Dong Ha, Quang Tri, Camp Evans and Phu Bai. By the end of January, the battalion had conducted over 300 mine sweeps, averaging nearly 38,456 meters per day.[27]

At Da Nang, Lieutenant Colonel Cassedy's 1st Battalion performed much the same engineering role for the 1st Marine Division. Here, the mine-clearing mission took on even more importance given the VC emphasis on surprise explosive devices or boobytraps. In fact, in January, the engineers suffered almost all of their casualties in accomplishing this mission, seven out of the eight killed and 15 out of the 18 wounded. Like the 3d Battalion in the north, the 1st Battalion was spread out in support of its division's various regiments. At the beginning of the month, Cassedy's headquarters, Company C, and Company B were at Da Nang in support of the 7th Marines and 5th Marines respectively. With the formation of Task Force X-Ray in mid-January, Company B joined the 5th Marines at Phu Bai. The 1st Battalion's Company A stayed with the 1st Marines throughout the month, first at Quang Tri, then at Phu Bai.[28]

The enemy Tet offensive at the end of January and through most of February would impact on the engineers as much as on any of the III MAF units. In the struggle for Hue, engineer detachments from both Companies A and B, 1st Engineer Battalion accompanied the Marine infantry in the retaking of the city. The engineers built a pontoon bridge to replace the destroyed An Cuu Bridge over the Phu Cam Canal so that much-needed supplies could flow again into the city. Together with the reinforcing Army engineers and Seabees, the Marine engineer battalions worked to reconstruct the blown bridges, culverts, and highway cuts along the main lines of communication in I Corps, especially along Highway 1, the main north-south artery. Finally, by 2 March 1968, Route 1 was open from Da Nang to Dong Ha.[29]

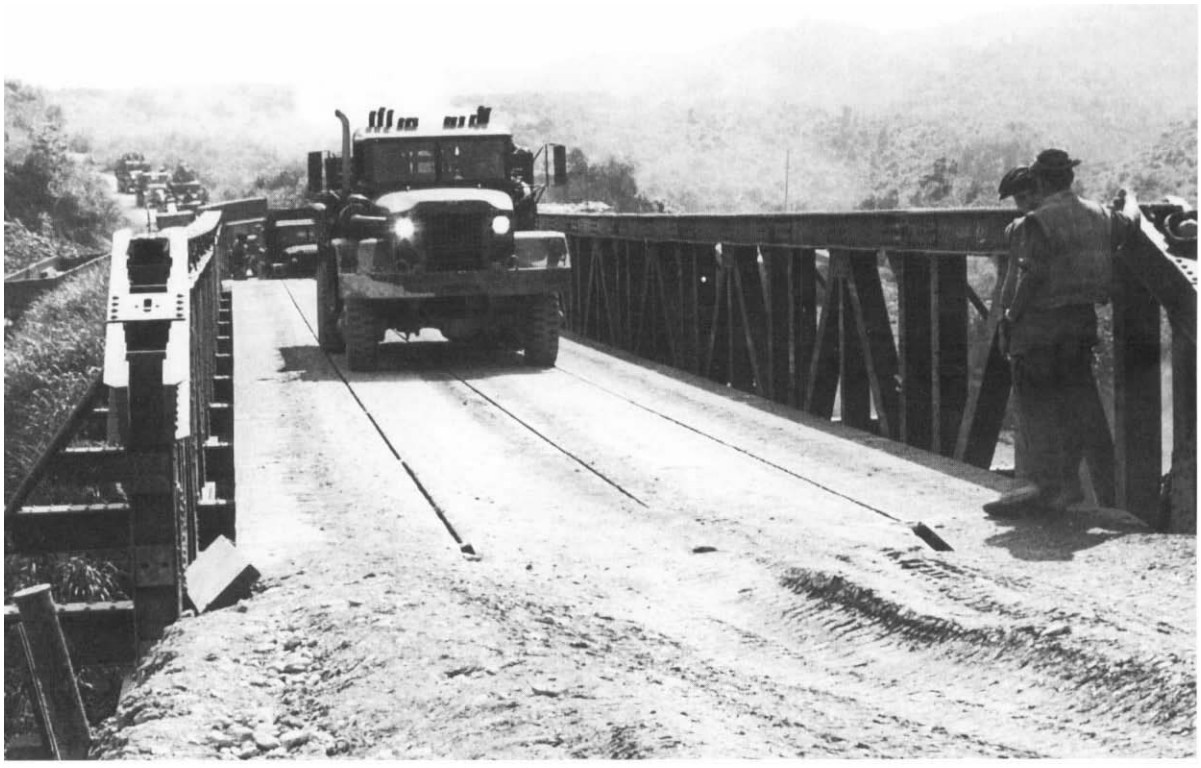
During the relief of Khe Sanh in Operation Pegasus, the Marine engineers again played a vital role. Beginning in mid-March, Lieutenant Colonel Perry's 11th Engineer Battalion, together with Seabees and Army engineers, began the building of Landing Zone Stud at Ca Lu, the jumping-off point for the 1st Air Cavalry Division. While the Air Cavalry leapfrogged towards Khe Sanh, the 1st Marines slogged forward along Route 9 with the 11th Engineers clearing the path for them. In the advance, the engineers constructed 11 bridges and made 18 culvert bypasses along the road.[30]

The engineers had as large a role in the abandonment of Khe Sanh as they had in its relief. Company A, 1st Engineer Battalion, which had accompanied the 1st Marines in the relief of Khe Sanh, reported that its most significant accomplishment was the closing of the base. Beginning on 18 June and ending in early July, the engineers destroyed or buried 95 bunkers and more than 2,770 meters of trenchline. Using over 2,100 pounds of TNT, the engineers exploded unexpended ammunition and caved in the former Marine defenses. What equipment they could not carry out, they demolished or buried so that it could not be used against allied forces in the future.[31]

In the north after the enemy Tet and Mini-Tet offensives and the closing of Khe Sanh, both the 11th Engineer Battalion and the 3d Engineer Battalion took on new missions as the 3d Marine Division took the offensive. While the 11th Engineer Battalion still continued to have a limited responsibility for the barrier, the battalion confined most of this effort to some minor road and bunker construction.* For the most part, the 11th Engineers took on the task of establishing the permanent fire bases for the division. By July, it had transformed LZ Stud near Ca Lu into Fire Support Base Vandegrift. Given the emphasis of the new commander of the 3d Marine Division, Major General Raymond G. Davis, upon mobile helicopter tactics, the construction of permanent and semi-permanent fire support bases became the major responsibilities of both engineer battalions in the north. In a remarkably short time, employing explosives, helicopter-transportable bulldozers, and chain saws, the engineers denuded and flattened entire mountain tops and transformed them into fortified gun positions so that Marine artillery could keep the fast-moving infantry within supporting range.

In the Da Nang area, the 1st Engineer Battalion inaugurated in the spring a series of clearing operations in support of the 1st Marine Division. Beginning in April, the engineers in support of the 7th Marines in the western sector began Operation Woodpecker, "designed to eliminate known or potential enemy rocket launching and ambush sites." After clearing

*After the initial enemy offensives in January and February, almost all construction of the barrier ended for all practical purposes. Planning for the barrier and some limited construction continued, however, under the Codename Duel Blade. On 22 October 1968, General Abrams, now the MACV commander, ordered the halt of all planning and construction for the project. Before all work came to a stop, the engineers had implanted three sensor fields in the eastern portion of the DMZ, south of the Ben Hai River. See Chapter 22.



Both photos are from the Abel Collection

Top, a truck convoy is about to roll across the new Khe Gio Bridge on Route 9 north of Camp Carroll just constructed by the 11th Engineer Battalion. Below, an 11th Engineer Battalion bulldozer pulls out a M48 tank stuck in a stream bed during Operation Pegasus on the road between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh.





Photo is from the Abel Collection

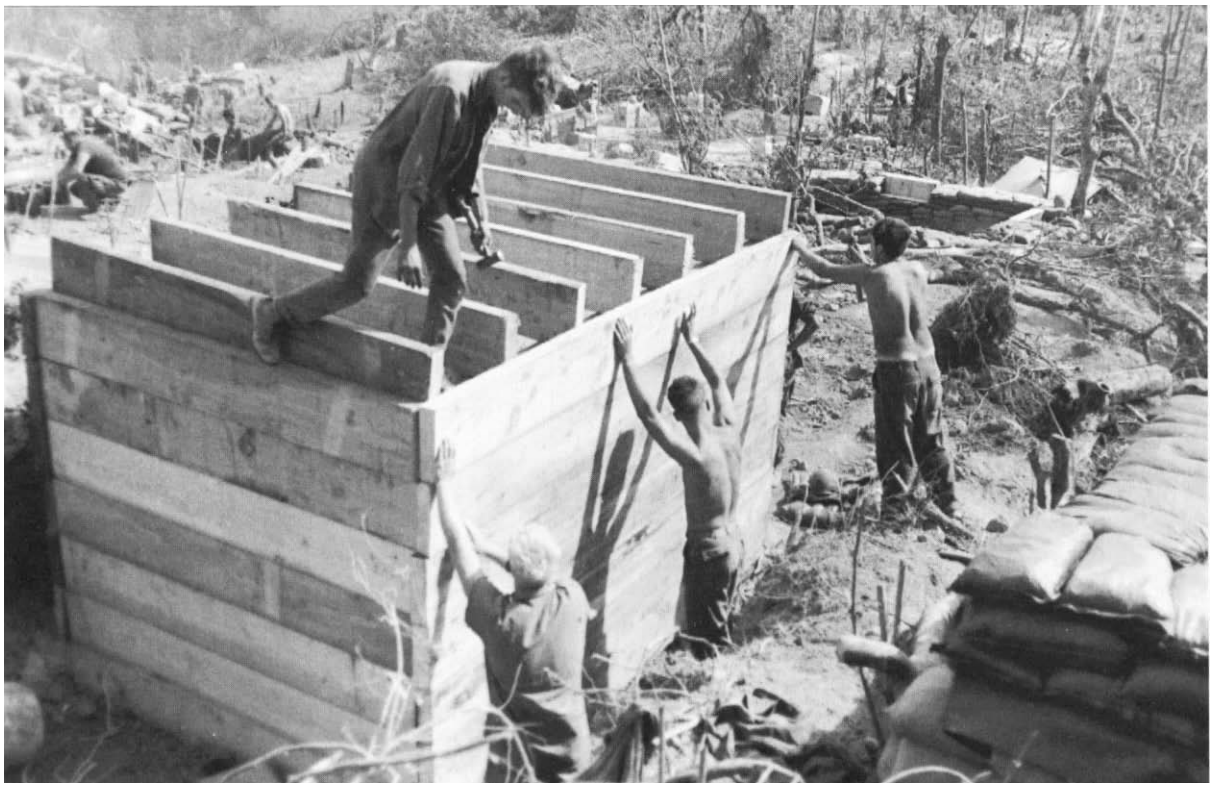
LCpl James L. Phillips, at the wheel of a M103 bulldozer and a member of the 1st Engineer Battalion, clears a treeline in the western sector of the Da Nang area of operations during Operation Woodpecker. The land clearing operation was designed to deny the enemy possible ambush and rocket sites.

over four million square meters in the 7th Marines sector, the 1st Battalion in June moved into the Go Noi Island area and joined the 27th Marines in Operation Allen Brook. Clearing over two million meters from June through August with bulldozers, tractors equipped with rome plows, and even tanks with dozer blades, the Marine engineers, once the civilian population was evacuated, literally razed the Go Noi.* With the completion of the Go Noi project, the battalion continued with further clearing operations, Operation Woodpecker II and III, in the area west of the Yen River, and after September, in the 1st Marines sector along the coast.[32]

The Marines at Da Nang also experimented with a barrier project aimed at keeping enemy rocketeers from bombarding the Marine base. Beginning in May, the 7th Engineer Battalion started putting down a single-apron barbed wire fence along the outer edges of the so-called Da Nang Rocket Belt, a semi-circle centering on the airfield and extending out to the extreme range of the enemy 122mm and 144mm rockets. By June, the 1st Marine Division completed the initial plans for the project. The original concept called for a 500-meter-wide cleared strip of land consisting of two parallel barbed wire fences, concertina wire entanglements, observation towers, and minefields. Beginning in earnest on 2 July, the 7th Engineers completed the initial phase of the project in the 7th Marines sector, clearing more than 15,000 meters by 23 August. The task involved more than 37,000 man-hours, including mine sweeps, security, equipment operators, and averaging two 25-man platoons from the engineers and an equal number of personnel from the supported units. Beginning in September, but hampered by flooding and heavy rains, the engineers continued with Phase II into December. Although the 7th Engineer Battalion would end on 12 December the laying of the two parallel barbed wire fences, the project would remain unfinished at the end of the year. It would not be until the following March that the Marines would renew their emphasis and begin anew the barrier effort.[33]

By the end of 1968, the Marine engineers together with the Navy Seabees and Army engineers had accomplished almost minor miracles in the restoration

*See Chapter 17.



Department of Defense (USMC) A192420

Marines from the 3d Engineer Battalion construct bunkers on LZ Cates, a new fire support base for the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines. The fire support bases were part of the new emphasis on helicopter-mobile operations by both Marine divisions at the end of the year.

of the I Corps lines of communications. They had not only helped in the restoration of the road network including both Routes 1 and 9, but were even involved in the completion of the railroad link between Da Nang and Hue.* By December 1968, both the 1st and 3d Engineer Battalions, supported by the three heavier battalions, the 7th, 9th, and 11th Engineer Battalions, had taken on new tasks in establishing fire bases in support of the helicopter mobile tactics adopted by both divisions. From the building of bunkers, mine sweeps, road building, improving the living cantonments of the troops, to supporting III MAF civic action engineering projects, all five engineer battalions contributed to the allied resumption of the offensive by the end of the year.

The FLC Continues to Cope

Even with the end of the initial Tet offensives enemy gunners continued to threaten III MAF stockpiles. While few attacks were as spectacular as the one on 21 January at Khe Sanh,** both conventional enemy artillery in the DMZ and Laos and large-caliber rockets struck at facilities at Khe Sanh, Dong Ha, and Cua Viet. In the rest of I Corps, enemy rockets throughout the year continued to fall upon Marine base areas with their large storage facilities. Despite the best efforts of Marine ground and air combat units to prevent them, these attacks by fire were relatively cost effective as the enemy with limited resources could cause extensive damage. One of the worst incidents occurred on 10 March, when enemy artillery hit the Cua Viet Facility, blowing up the ammunition dump. The resulting explosions destroyed the mess hall and 64 10,000-gallon fuel bladders, caused American casualties of 1 dead and 22 wounded, and knocked out communications for 30 hours. Even at the end of the month, more than 40 percent of the damaged equipment and buildings remained unrepaired.[34]

From mid-April through 14 May, the enemy gunners enjoyed a series of minor successes in the north

*See Chapter 29.

**See Chapter 14.

from Khe Sanh to the Cua Viet. On 11 April, they rocketed the Cua Viet fuel farm, destroying 40,000 gallons of gas. Five days later, rockets fell on the Khe Sanh base demolishing 300,000 rounds of small arms ammunition and 2,705 propellant charges for 155mm ammunition. Finally, on 14 May, Communist artillery shelling resulted in the blowing up of the Dong Ha ammunition supply point and the loss of 150 tons of munitions of all types.[35]

The Cua Viet and Dong Ha facilities remained favorite targets. Less than a month after the Dong Ha bombardment, 13 June, the NVA artillery fired 61 rounds into Camp Kistler at the mouth of the Cua Viet River. This time the shells hit the FLSG Bravo fuel dump and set fire to 16 10,000-gallon fuel bladders containing 104,000 gallons of petroleum. A week later, the North Vietnamese gunners turned their attention to Dong Ha, once more blowing up the Dong Ha ammunition dump with the loss this time of 8,500 tons of munitions. Five days later, they hit the Cua Viet fuel farm again. This time more than 187,000 gallons of gasoline and jet fuel went up in flames, resulting in the destruction of 17 of the 10,000-gallon fuel bladders and associated pumping equipment.[36]

While relatively quiet during July, the NVA struck the Dong Ha facility again in August. While missing the ammunition dump, some 55 enemy rounds damaged some 19 buildings, destroyed 6 vehicles, and killed 2 Marines and wounded 3 others. Finally on 30 October, just before the so-called neutralization of the DMZ agreed to at Paris, the enemy hit Dong Ha once more. Forty-eight 130mm rounds fell on the base, killing one Marine, wounding another, and causing damage to buildings and vehicles. This was to be the last major attack on Marine facilities in the north during the year.[37]

Marine logisticians also had to be concerned about the elements as well as enemy artillery capability. In many respects, weather patterns were more predictable and the FLC could make some preparations for the fall monsoon season. Still, monsoon storms could hit suddenly and create havoc. On 5 September, Typhoon Bess swept across the South China Sea with the center of its impact area just north of Da Nang. With 60-knot winds and 20 inches of rain, the storm caused landslides closing Route 1 in the Hai Van Pass sector and submerged Liberty Bridge in the An Hoa area south of the Marine base. Even as the storm abated the rain continued, resulting in more flooding and restricting movement of supplies and troops. By the end of September, almost all construction projects were at a standstill. Route 1 and the various secondary roads were in bad condition. The water and winds had damaged the LCU ramps at Tan My and Hue as well as the Tan-My-Quang Tri pipeline. The Marines estimated that Bess would cost them the equivalent of 7,000 man-hours to make the needed repairs to the various lines of communication and installations.

Although the worst of the damage was over, the weather provided little relief for the FLC in October. Twelve inches of rain fell at Dong Ha on the 14th and 15th, followed by 15 inches at Da Nang in the next two days. Route 1 south of Camp Evans was once more under water as was the Tan My causeway. Bridges on Route 1 required reinforcement. Still the Marine logisticians were able to cope with the situation. Based on past experience with the monsoons, they had stockpiled the most-needed supplies at forward positions. Operations throughout the period continued and the bad weather proved to be more of a nuisance than an impediment.

During this period, the FLC had resolved the M16 rifle situation. By mid-July, the FLC had obtained enough of the modified M16 rifles, known as the M16A1 to equip both the 1st and 3d Marine Divisions. As a result of extensive investigations of charges that the M16 was prone to jamming, the FLC had implemented in late 1967 a program designed to replace the original barrel/sight assembly of the rifles with a chromed chamber assembly. The new assembly reduced chamber friction and facilitated extraction of the 5.56mm ammunition with its "ball propellant"* which had caused most of the difficulty. By the end of September, the FLC had completed the retrofit and replacement of the old M16s for both Marine divisions and their attachments. In October, the new rifles were issued to the Marines of the FLC and the 1st MAW and the following month to the Korean Marines. By November, the FLC had about completed the conversion of the remaining 9,100 rifles and established a reserve. In all, under the retrofit program, the FLC had handled more than 61,100 rifles.[38]

Despite the occasional reduction in Marine stockpiles caused by such programs as the M16 retrofit pro-

*The ball propellant was a spherical grain powder in the 5.56 ammunition which speeded up the cyclic rate of the rifle beyond its design rate and also "fouled the chamber and bore." Moody, Donnelly, and Shore, "Backing Up the Troops," Chap 22, pp. 23–23A.



Photo is from the Abel Collection

A Marine truck convoy winds its way along Route 9, now open between Dong Ha and Vandegrift Combat Base. The Motor Transportation Coordination Center, located at Dong Ha and operated by FLSG Bravo, controlled Marine truck convoys in the north.

gram, enemy actions, and monsoon rains, they were relatively minor when compared to the sheer volume of supplies and services provided by the FLC. By mid-year, the FLC had grown to 490 officers and 9,908 enlisted men and had made several adjustments. In July, the FLC established a logistic support unit at Fire Support Base (FSB) Stud to support Task Force Hotel after the evacuation of the Khe Sanh base. Stud, later named FSB Vandergrift, became the main combat support base for operations in western Quang Tri. In the Da Nang sector, two logistic support units, LSU 1 at An Hoa and LSU 2 on Hill 55, provided the logistic support for the Go Noi Island campaigns south of the Ky Lam Rivers. In December 1968, the FLC was supporting 10 major operations as well as the day to day operations of III MAF units. For the year, the FLC had filled a staggering 420,976 requisitions, nearly 90,000 more than the previous year.[39]

At the end of the year, Brigadier General James A. Feeley, Jr., who on 26 October had relieved General Olson as commander of the FLC, had some reason for satisfaction. The road net in I Corps was in good condition and Marine truck convoys were moving with relative ease through most of I Corps. For the most part, the Marine supply "pipeline" was in relatively good order and the Army had taken over much of the logistic burden in northern I Corps. At Phu Bai, FLSG Alpha continued to transfer most of its activities to the Army's 26th General Support Group. The plan was to consolidate FLSG Alpha at Da Nang, which would permit more flexibility. While a difficult year for the Marine logisticians, they had persevered.

PART VI
OTHER PERSPECTIVES: PACIFICATOIN AND MARINES OUTSIDE OF III MAF

CHAPTER 29

Pacification

Prelude—The Tet Offensives and Operation Recovery—III MAF and Pacification
Homicide in the Countryside—Changing Attitudes
The Boys Next Door: The Combined Action Program—The Accelerated Pacification Plan

Prelude

From the beginning of the III MAF expansion of its base areas during the spring and summer of 1965, the Marine command was involved in a pacification campaign. Employing the "ink blot" or "spreading oil spot" theory, the Marine strategy was to build upon success in one area to reinforce that in another to provide momentum for the linking together of the Marine enclaves. During their first year in country, both through trial and error and possibly a residual institutional memory of their early 20th century Caribbean interventions, the Marines developed several pacification techniques that showed some promise.*

In one of its first efforts, III MAF established a civic action program which emphasized village and hamlet self-help projects and medical assistance. Marine units provided materials and equipment to local villagers in the building of schools and other local improvement facilities. Navy corpsmen and occasionally doctors visited nearby hamlets where they would dispense soap, hold sick call, treat minor injuries and diseases, and teach basic hygiene to the inhabitants. The idea was to win the good will of the local populace, gain intelligence, and hopefully enhance the prestige of local government officials, especially the village and district chiefs.

As the Marines expanded their area of operations into the populated area south of Da Nang, they soon realized that securiry from the Viet Cong guerrillas was a decisive factor if the South Vietnamese government were to retain or establish control of the countryside.** In this connection, the Marine units employed relatively innovative tactics that they called "Golden Fleece" and "County Fair." Golden Fleece operations were basically rice protection missions. A Marine battalion would provide a shield behind which the villagers harvested and kept their crops from the VC tax collectors. The County Fair operations were cordon and search affairs with psychological overtones. A Marine battalion would surround a hamlet, bring its population into a large clearing where the troops had erected large tents. While the division band and Vietnamese drama groups provided entertainment, the Marines would search the village and provide medical and dental assistance. Local officials would conduct an informal census and hold any suspicious persons for further questioning. By the end of 1967, however, while the Marine units continued to use County Fair and Golden Fleece tactics, III MAF no longer kept a statistical account of these rypes of operations.***

*See also the discussion in Chapter 1 on the "inkblot" concept. While the link to the Caribbean experience is rather indirect, General Lewis W. Walt, who commanded III MAF in 1965, observed that he was taught the fundamentals of his profession "from men who had fought Sandino in Nicaragua or Charlemagne in Haiti." Still, as others have pointed out, most Marine officers who served in Vietnam were much junior to Walt and obtained most of their training on counter-insurgency in U.S. Army Schools based on doctrine articulated by the British from their experience in Malaya and adopted by the Army. For the Walt quote and the development of III MAF pacification in 1965, see Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1965*, pp. 133–46. The quote is on p. 133.

**Lieutenant Colonel William R. Corson, who in 1967 headed the Marine Combined Action Program and helped to articulate Marine pacification concepts, commented that pacification was not the equivalent of giving the Vietnamese in the countryside "the Great Society War on Poverty" and hoping that they in return would give "their hearts and minds to those who provided them with the dole." Corson defined pacification as a condition rather than merely a series of processes: "In the case of the hamlets in South Vietnam, it was the belief and perception of the Vietnamese people that they were safe in their own homes. This idea, or feeling of safety was the sine qua non without which there was no 'pacification purpose' or potential gain simply from providing the humanitarian assistance that the indigenous government had never provided." The people needed to believe that they "at least would be protected." LtCol William R. Corson, Comments on draft, dtd 30Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Corson Comments.

***As in most aspects of the pacification campaign, there are varying views of its impact in the local hamlets and villages. William D. Ehrhart, a Marine veteran who served as an enlisted intelligence specialist with the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines in 1967 and early 1968 and participated in County Fairs, wrote, "my experience was that 'County Fairs' worked much better in the telling than in the doing; that is, the theory sounded good, but the reality fell far short of the theory."

Perhaps the most innovative and unique of the Marine pacification programs was Combined Action. Growing out of the security needs of the Marine battalion at Phu Bai in the summer of 1965, the Marines integrated the local Vietnamese militia units, the Popular Forces, with a 14-man Marine squad.* First called a Joint Action Company, then changed to Combined Action Company, and finally, to avoid unfavorable connotations in Vietnamese by the acronym CAC, the program became known as the Combined Action Program or CAP. CAP also stood for Combined Action Platoon, the basic tactical unit. By the end of 1967, the Marines had formed 79 platoons organized administratively into 14 companies and three Combined Action groups (CAGs). As Ambassador Robert W. Komer, who in 1967 was General Westmoreland's deputy for pacification, later wrote that the Combined Action Program was the "only sustained experiment with encadrement in our entire Vietnam experience."[1]

III MAF was also the first of the MACV commands to develop a systematic measurement of security and other aspects of pacification in its area of operations. Beginning in February 1966, it required subordinate units to submit a monthly analysis of the degree of pacification in each village in its area of operations. Based on supposedly objective quantitative elements, the report gave a numerical grade which could be roughly translated into a qualitative value and provide some basis for analysis. This program later served as the model for the MACV country-wide Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), which used letters rather than numerals for grading purposes. District advisors filled out the HES reports while the military unit completed the III MAF forms. At the end of 1967, both systems were in use in I Corps. Obviously, as one Army historian observed, all such reports and documents were prepared "by Americans for American eyes and ears . . . [and] we don't know really what the Vietnamese thought." Still, as a senior operations analyst concluded, these reports contained "critical patterns" that permitted analysis as long as one did not focus on any specific element.[2]**



Photo is from the Abel Collection

Marine LCpl Edward J. Byrne, part of a Marine civic action team from the Force Logistics Command, shares a soft drink with a small friend at a refugee orphanage near Da Nang. The team was on a visit to the orphanage to distribute clothing donated from the United States.

*William D. Ehrhart, Comments on draft, dtd 24Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Ehrhart Comments. In his somewhat fictionalized biographical account of his experience in Vietnam, Ehrhart describes a County Fair operation. See William D. Ehrhart, *Vietnam-Perkasie, A Combat Marine Memoir* (Jefferson & London: McFarland, 1983), pp. 31–38. Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, in early 1968 the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, (CGFMFPac), observed recently about Marine pacification accomplishments, "truthfully, our performance, although much the best, was spotty, because of ignorance, operational pressure, or shortage of means." LtGen Victor H. Krulak, Comments on draft, dtd 31Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Krulak Comments.

**While allowing that there was an element of ad hoc growth of the Combined Action Program due to local security needs, Lieutenant Colonel Corson argued that the basic drive behind the program was the perception of Marine leaders such as General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., the Marine Corps Commandant, and Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, and Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt, the III MAF commander, and their emphasis upon the population and pacification in contrast to the MACV large unit strategy. Corson Comments. Despite the refined statistical analysis, many would still agree with Lieutenant Colonel Corson who wrote that "anecdotal evidence" in the villages was "far more accurate than spurious statistics." According to Corson, pacification could not be "expressed as a linear function, nor could it be frozen in time . . . ." Corson Comments. Lieutenant General Krulak wrote that the Combined Action platoons knew what was going on in the villages in contrast to the various system evaluation processes. Krulak Comments.



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Navy Lt Runas Powers, Jr., battalion surgeon of BLT 2/4 (with the stethoscope), bandages a baby's head with the assistance of an unidentified Navy corpsman, as the mother holds the child. Medical assistance was an important factor in Marine civic action.



Photo is from the Abel Collection

During a County Fair operation, a Vietnamese elder watches enthralled at a magic presentation. County Fairs were cordon and search operations with psychological overtones.

III MAF also made extensive use of psychological warfare. By 1967, the Marine command had two specialized Army units attached to it, the 29th Civil Affairs Company and the 7th Psychological Warfare Battalion. With elements of these units, Marine line companies and battalions would employ both air and ground loudspeakers as well as leaflets to influence both the civilian population and the enemy. Specialized South Vietnamese units, such as Armed Propaganda Teams and drama teams, would present and act out themes in the countryside illustrating that the American forces were present to assist the government in making a better life for the individual Vietnamese villager.[3]

At the same time, both the Vietnamese and Marines addressed their message to the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese to surrender under a special "Chieu Hoi" (Open Arms) amnesty program, which had been in effect since the early 1960s. The enemy troops that turned themselves in were called Hoi Chanhs (ralliers). III MAF in early 1966 had started a pilot program using the Hoi Chanhs. Taking selected and carefully screened former VC, and providing both language and tactical training, the Marines then assigned them to Marine infantry battalions. The Marines employed these former enemy, nicknamed "Kit Carson Scouts," much as the cavalry units in the old American West used Indian scouts. They were to warn the American units against likely ambushes and to locate hidden enemy stores and marshaling areas. By the end of 1967, III MAF had 132 Kit Carson Scouts attached to Marine units. The 3d Marine Division had hopes of assigning at least one scout to every Marine infantry company in 1968.

By the summer of 1966, both Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt, then the III MAF commander, and Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, the FMFPac commander, became concerned about the cultural

shock caused by the sudden influx of large American combat forces upon both the Vietnamese peasant and the young American Marine. In order to recognize the extent of the problem, the Marine command undertook sample attitudinal surveys among both Marines and the South Vietnamese villagers. A Navy chaplain, Lieutenant Commander Richard McGonigal, who also held a master's degree in sociology, conducted the first opinion survey in September 1966, using two percent of the III MAF personnel and a much smaller percentage of the local civilian populace.[4]

The first findings among the American troops were not surprising. McGonigal discovered nearly 60 percent of the Marines held relatively low opinions about the South Vietnamese. Only 43 percent of the sample stated that they held a positive feeling toward the local populace. Still even the negative reactions among the Americans revealed an ambivalence rather than an intense dislike of the villagers. Among the CAP units, however, possibly as would be expected, the Marines tested much more affirmatively.

Perhaps more surprisingly, the South Vietnamese, if the survey were accurate, showed a relatively positive view toward the Marines. More than 70 percent indicated that they personally liked the Americans. On the other hand, over 40 percent perceived hostility towards them from the U.S. troops.

Chaplain McGonigal refined his testing procedures and conducted two more surveys, the last in June 1967, which more or less confirmed the earlier ones. With this impetus, III MAF initiated a "personal response" program down to the battalion level. Each command at either the G–5 or S–5 level appointed a Personal Response officer, very often the chaplain, whose responsibility was to teach the troops the local customs and culture, largely through group discussions and class instruction. As could be expected, the program met with mixed results. As the FMFPac chaplain, Navy Captain John H. Craven, later observed, he had to walk a "fine line between Marine officers on one hand, who questioned the need for any such project, and chaplains on the other hand, who felt that chaplains should have nothing to do with the project."*

With its large commitment to the pacification campaign, III MAF also implemented the first Corps-wide coordination effort involving not only III MAF and the Vietnamese authorities, but also the various U.S. civilian assistance programs. As early as August 1965, III MAF and the U.S. civilian operations mission for I Corps formed the I Corps Joint Coordinating Council (ICJCC), an interagency clearing committee to direct both the civilian and military civic action programs in the Corps area. With permanent representation, the council soon began meeting on a regular basis. Before long, General Hoang Xuan Lam, the I Corps commander, also assigned a representative to the committee. By the end of 1967, ICJCC had several subordinate subcommittees and had even extended down to the provincial and district level. General Cushman had made his deputy III MAF commander, Major General Raymond L. Murray, his personal representative to the council.[5]

Despite recognizing the initiatives of the Marines relative to pacification, General Westmoreland, the MACV commander, was unhappy about the emphasis of the Marine Corps. He believed that the Marines, with their concentration on the security of the hamlets, were ignoring the enemy regular forces operating outside of the Marine areas of operations. While supporting civic action on the part of American troops, the MACV commander was concerned about incidents with the civilian population. He desired to place the main responsibility for pacification upon the ARVN forces.[6]

In February 1966, at the Honolulu Conference, which included the leaders of the Vietnamese government and the United States, the emphasis was upon pacification. Still, the conference was not a repudiation of Westmoreland's large unit strategy. He won his point that the main responsibility for pacification and protection of the people would lie with the ARVN forces.[7]

While the Honolulu Conference called for a renewal and reemphasis upon pacification, the reality was largely rhetorical. The actual gains in pacification were fairly modest. The South Vietnamese did expand their Revolutionary Development (RD)

*Colonel James L. Black, Jr., who as a lieutenant colonel was the III MAF G–5 for Civil Affairs in 1968, commented that the 29th Civil Affairs Company should have had the responsibility for the Personal Response Program rather than the Chaplains. Col James L. Black, Jr., Comments on draft, n.d. [Nov94] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter James Black Comments. William D. Ehrhart, who served in Vietnam with the 1st Marines from mid-summer 1967 until February 1968 and has written extensively upon his experience in Vietnam and that of other enlisted Marines, observed that in the several months between the institution of the program and his departure that he "never heard of, let alone participated in, any such program." Ehrhart Comments.

Program* and increased the number of Revolutionary Development teams in targeted hamlets and villages. Actually, the government had hoped to place about 300 of these specially trained pacification teams in the countryside by the end of 1966. It succeeded in achieving only about a third of that goal. While by the end of 1967 the number of RD cadre numbered over 32,000, they had one of the largest attrition rates of all the forces in Vietnam. The overall attrition rate among the cadre was 32 percent per year with a desertion rate of 21 percent.[8]

Unsatisfied with the progress and coordination in Vietnam among the various component civilian agencies within the U.S. mission in Saigon, the Johnson administration initiated an entirely new approach. One of the chief architects was Presidential advisor Robert W. Komer. Nicknamed "the blowtorch" by former Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Komer had the support of the new Ambassador to Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker. An articulate and forceful man, Komer convinced President Johnson and General Westmoreland to place the formal American pacification effort under the U.S. military chain of command in Vietnam.[9]

In May 1967, the former Office of Civil Operations under the direct control of the American Embassy became Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) under MACV with Robert Komer as its head. With the rank of Ambassador, Komer was Westmoreland's deputy for pacification. According to the MACV commander, he assigned Army Major General George Forsythe to Komer as his assistant "to keep Komer out of my hair." Still, while describing Komer as "volatile" and "abrasive," Westmoreland agreed he "was the man for the job."[10**]

For his part, Komer had a clear idea what changes he wanted to make. He believed that for too long there had been no unified management structure concerned with pacification. He argued that the solution was "to require the U.S. and ARVN military to take on most of the pacification job." Up to this time, it was his opinion that when the U.S. entered the war in Vietnam, "we further 'Americanized' it—on an even grander scale—by playing out our military repertoire." He perceived Westmoreland's search and destroy and attrition strategy as a natural response of an American commander "against an elusive enemy who could not be brought to decisive battle in a classic military style." In so doing, however, Komer contended that both the Vietnamese and Americans had neglected the only means of attaining their goal—the establishment of local security and the extension of government administration into the countryside. He wanted to place more resources in civilian administration, the Revolutionary Development cadre and program, and to build up local defense forces, especially the Popular and Regional Forces. Under CORDS, Komer formed unified U.S. civilian-military teams that operated in all 250 districts and 44 provinces. Later, he would write that not until CORDS was formed, "did a major sustained pacification effort begin to take place."[11]

Still, in many respects, CORDS carried forward what was already in place. Beginning in 1966, the South Vietnamese and their American advisors had established the basis for a nation-wide pacification plan. While not developing an overall plan for 1967, they together with the Revolutionary Development Ministry designated four National Priority areas and developed the guidelines for Revolutionary Development. Each province was to develop its own plan. The 1967 pacification plan, then, if it could be called such, consisted of the aggregate of the 44 provincial plans.[12]

In reviewing the progress of Revolutionary Development during 1967, the CORDS planners determined that the so-called designated National Priority Areas and 26 priority provinces "did not produce demonstrable progress." According to the CORDS'

*Here too, much of the change was rhetorical. While changing the name of their pacification program from Rural Reconstruction to Revolutionary Development in English, they retained the old name for the program in Vietnamese. The Revolutionary Development Ministry was headed by Vietnamese General Nguyen Duc Thang. Later, he assumed the title, Commissioner General for Revolutionary Development, and additional responsibility as Assistant to the Chief, Joint General Staff for Territorial Affairs and Pacification. These additional duties provided him with authority in both civilian and military aspects of pacification and jurisdiction over the Popular and Regional Forces.

The heart of the Revolutionary Development Program was the so-called Revolutionary Development cadre or teams. Started under a pilot program by the CIA in late 1964, the U.S. had assisted the Vietnamese in training at Vung Tau some 16,000 Vietnamese pacification cadre by 1966, which were then formed into what were called Political Action Teams. These teams consisted of approximately 40 of these anti-Communist indoctrinated cadre, who like the Communist guerrillas dressed in black pajamas. After Honolulu, the teams were renamed Revolutionary Development Teams, but still retained their Vietnamese designation *Can Bo*. See Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, pp. 254–55, and Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie, John Paul Vann and America in South Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 608.

**Lieutenant General Krulak observed that from his perspective at FMFPac, "at bottom, Westy [Westmoreland] did not believe in pacification. He created CORDs to decentralize the worries. He didn't care for Komer, and vice versa." Krulak Comments.

point of view, blame for the slowness of RD largely lay in the "inefficiencies" of the respective South Vietnamese ministries. The Americans asserted that the "most serious—and telling—flaw was the conspicuous shortage of good Vietnamese leadership." In CORDS, the Americans began a systematic collection of dossiers on "incompetent or venal" province and district chiefs. Komer later claimed that the agency had a "respectable batting average" in placing pressure on the Vietnamese government to remove the worst offenders.[13]

The CORDS leadership convinced the South Vietnamese that a new tactic was necessary. They decided that there was a need to "concentrate resources in carefully chosen areas which met criteria for current progress plus the capacity to achieve greater results with more resources." Planners selected only a few priority provinces and priority areas based upon "their relative importance to the overall pacification effort." The emphasis was to be upon III and IV Corps. In fact, in I Corps, only Quang Ngai became a designated priority province where a 50 percent increase in pacification resources would be made. The authors of the MACV 1967 history claimed that the Combined Campaign Plan for 1968 contained "the first fully integrated treatment of pacification within the framework of a campaign plan."[14]

In Washington, Marine Corps leaders wondered about the new priorities and whether the III MAF pacification effort in Vietnam was to receive even less support. In October 1967, General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., then Commandant of the Marine Corps, voiced his concerns to Lieutenant General Krulak at FMFPac headquarters in Honolulu. He observed that the omission of I Corps provinces with the exception of Quang Ngai "has an ironic twist in view of the historic fact that only in the III MAF area of responsibility has the target of pacification, civic action, and Revolutionary Development been accorded primary emphasis from the outset of U.S. major involvement in Vietnam."[15]

General Krulak tried to assuage the Commandant's concerns. He observed that the reason for the change in priority was that I Corps had become "the battleground and that RD has the best chance for success in areas most remote from the battle." He mentioned that Ambassador Komer had conveyed this idea to him during recent discussions. Krulak then stated that, although I Corps was to have only one priority province, this was misleading. There was not to be any diminution of the pacification effort in the Corps area, and, in fact, there was to be an increase in Revolutionary Development resources for the coming year. He observed that under the 1968 plan, I Corps was to receive a 20 percent increase in the number of RD teams and the number of hamlets and villages to be developed. Moreover, the Corps would receive a 49 percent increase in funds over the previous year and could request additional monies if required.[16]

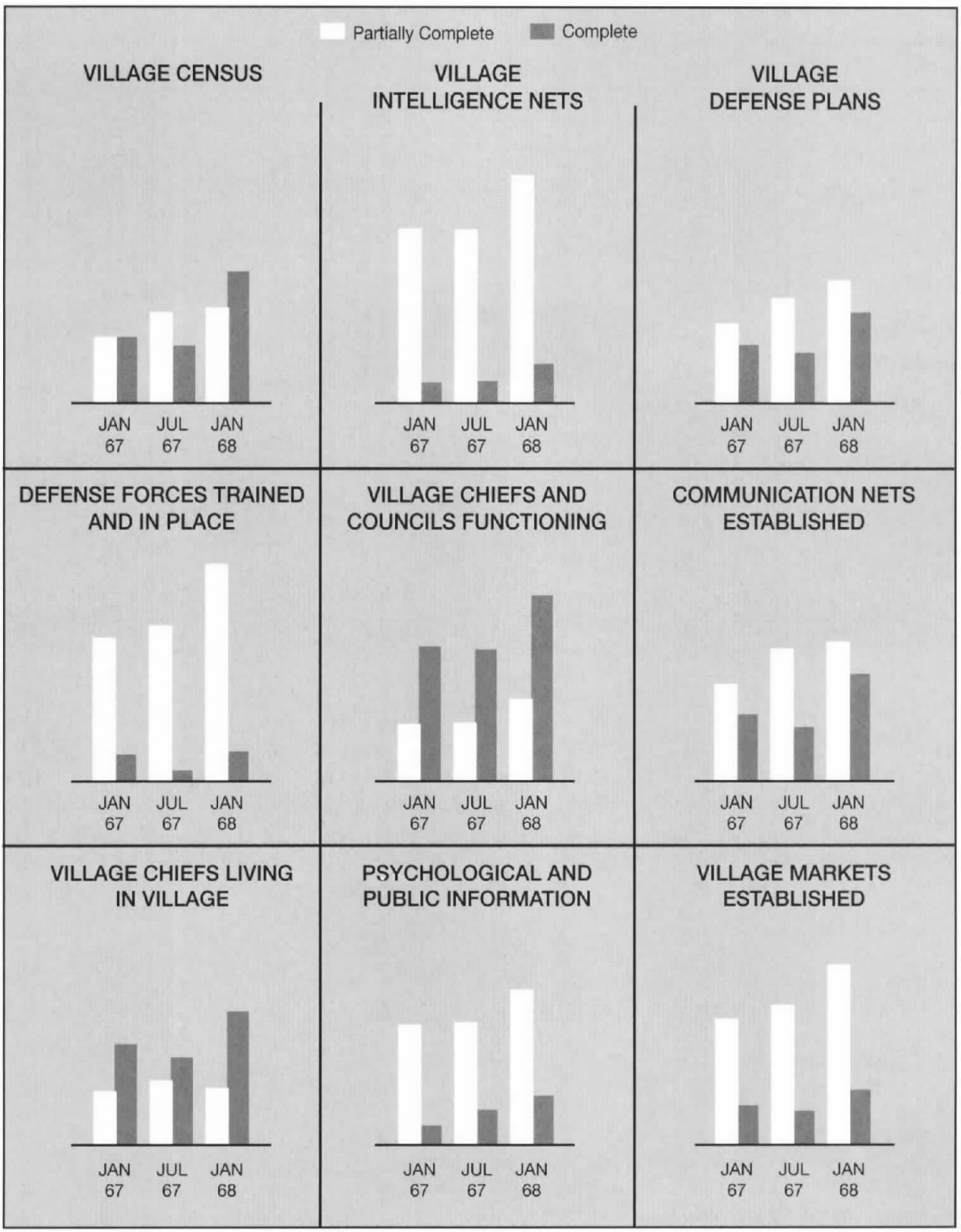
Krulak then compared the degree of pacification resources in I Corps, both presently available and those planned for 1968, with those for the other Corps areas. He noted that under the 1968 plan, I Corps was allotted an average of 33 Revolutionary Development teams per province, the highest number in all the Corps areas. The next closest, IV Corps, was to average only 19 teams per province. In actual funds, I Corps was to receive 100 million piasters, only slightly less than II and IV Corps, which were to get 104 million and 103 million piasters respectively, and more than III Corps.[17]

The FMFPac commander than discussed the actual Revolutionary Development plans for I Corps. General Lam, the I Corps commander, had just requested from the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff 31 additional Regional Forces companies, 21 of which would have specific pacification missions. Furthermore, Lam planned to assign two additional ARVN regular battalions to support the Revolutionary Development campaign. This would mean that 16 out of the 28 ARVN battalions assigned to the Corps sector would be in support of Revolutionary Development.[18]

He then detailed the reasons for the selection of Quang Ngai Province as the priority province: "relative population density, economic potential in terms of rice and salt production, remoteness of the NVA threat . . ., and because it is contiguous to the northernmost II Corps Priority Province of Binh Dinh." Krulak then speculated about the real reason for the choice of Quang Ngai. He believed that "the RD planners were mesmerized by the thought of a continuous line of priority provinces along the coast, without jeopardizing the stated concept that priorities rank from south to north."[19]

Despite all the verbiage, Krulak saw little difference between 1967 and 1968 for I Corps, relative to the emphasis upon pacification. He related, for example, that Quang Nam Province was authorized 38 Revolutionary Development teams, more than 23 of the 26 so-called priority provinces. It also received more pacification funds than another 16 priority provinces in other Corps sectors. He concluded: "In the final analysis, the priority listing will not result in degradation of the RD effort in I Corps." Instead, he believed that the "increased emphasis in RD in Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, and Thua Thien should enhance the chances of RD success

PACIFICATION PROGRESS IN III MAF AREAS JANUARY 1967-JANUARY 1968



From Operations of US Marine Forces Vietnam 1968.

in 1968 . . . ." This would occur "without the heat of the spotlight, absent because of the lack of priority status which exists only in a concept, not in practice."[20]

By the end of 1967, progress in pacification in both I Corps and country-wide was very much in the eye of the beholder. According to the latest HES ratings more than 60 percent of the population country-wide lived in relatively secure areas. In I Corps, III MAF reported that more than half of the people in that sector lived in "secure hamlets." Both of these figures, nevertheless, needed to be taken with several grains of salt. Thomas Thayer, a senior Defense Department analyst, later wrote that there were several factors that may have caused the increase. These included the fact that the secure population included urban regions, refugees, and not the least, "optimistic evaluation of programs." The statistics also underestimated the strength of the VC control in Communist-dominated hamlets. Given all that, Thayer believed that the extension of allied protection into the countryside accounted for most of the hamlet security gains.[21]

Other factors at the Saigon level reinforced this initial optimism. According to the MACV historians, the momentum of 1967 progress "gave hope to all concerned that a workable solution to the problem of pacification had at last evolved." CORDS officials spoke about "Project Takeoff, a management tool designed to bring maximum pacification assets to bear on the most important problems."[22]

The MACV intelligence estimate also gave impetus to the belief that the war was finally going the allies' way. In their analysis of enemy strength in the second half of 1967, MACV intelligence officers began to talk about enemy casualties reaching the "crossover point," where the gaps left in enemy strength could not be filled by new replacements and recruits. Westmoreland then approved a controversial decision to omit from the MACV order of battle two whole classes of so-called Communist irregulars: Self Defense Forces and the VC infrastructure. This reduced the estimated total number of guerrillas, irregulars, and cadre from 114,348 to 81,300. All of the 81,300 irregulars carried in the proposed new MACV estimate were under the category of guerrillas. Under the classification spaces for Self Defense Forces and VC infrastructure were two footnotes. According to the MACV rationale, "the self-defense forces provide a base for recruitment as well as for political and logistical support, but are not a fighting force comparable to the guerrilla." While acknowledging that local VC hamlet self-defenses "cause some casualties and damage, they do not represent a continual or dependable force and do not form a valid part of the enemy's military force." Relative to the enemy infrastructure, "the political cadre (infrastructure) has no military function."[23]

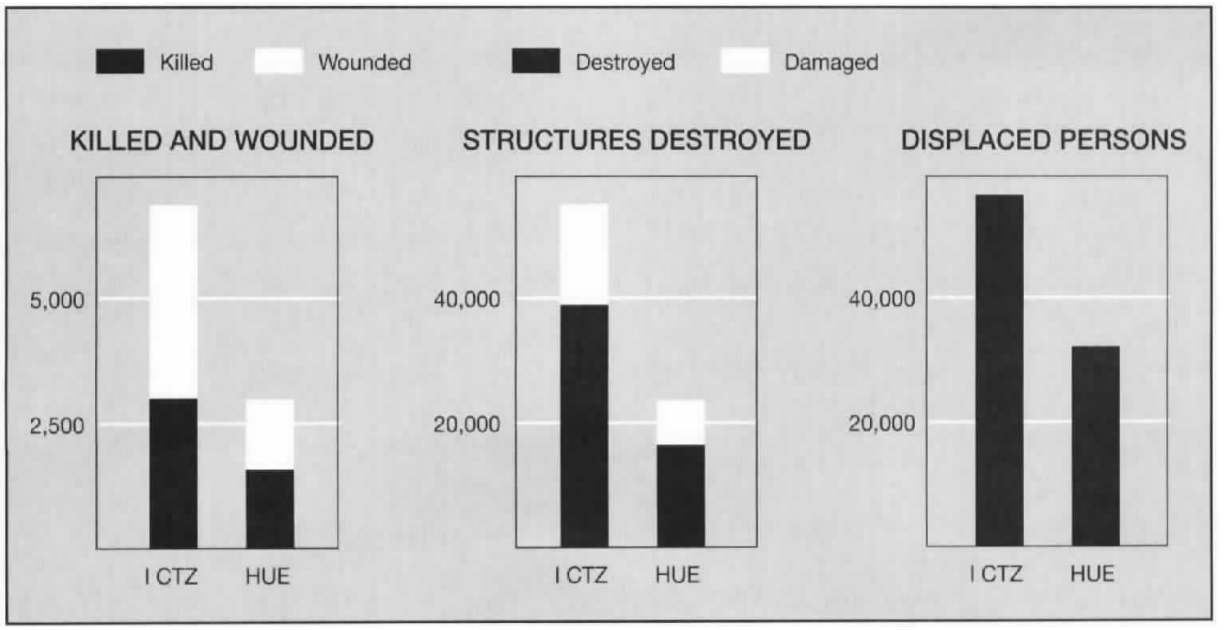
As could be expected, the proposed revised MACV order of battle caused a furor among the various intelligence agencies, especially the CIA. In an eventual compromise, essentially everyone agreed to disagree. The new estimates carried the MACV changes, but with the footnotes explaining that Self Defense Force and VC figures were not included in the new figures. MACV HES estimates, however, continued to show an enemy guerrilla force of about 155,000 rather than the 81,000 published by the MACV–J2 or intelligence section. Furthermore, MACV through CORDS supported the newly initiated CIA-sponsored Phung Hoang (All Seeing Bird) or "Phoenix" program as it was known in English, aimed at the elimination of high-ranking VC cadre.[24]*

At the end of 1967, despite some feeling of optimism, there were continuing doubts about progress in pacification both in I Corps and the country at large. From both American and South Vietnamese sources came indications of increased enemy offensive intentions. This was especially true in I Corps where the allies expected another large enemy push in the north. At Da Nang, also, there were reports of a major enemy attack on the base and the number of enemy small unit actions had increased.**

*Although later alleged to be an assassination campaign, the stated purpose of the Phung Hoang was "to enlist and coordinate the efforts of local leaders police and paramilitary groups to identify and dismantle the subversive apparatus." Based upon the newly created District Intelligence Operational Coordinating Committees, consisting of police and village and hamlet officials, the idea was to target by name and arrest the local enemy ranking cadre, employing force if necessary. Various Vietnamese agencies carried out the actual campaign, including the national police, military security teams, armed propaganda teams, Census Grievance cadre, RD cadre, and an especially CIA-trained group called Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU). Colonel Black, who was responsible for III MAF civil affairs, recalled that because of its classification, not even the III MAF staff was "in the know" on the program, but that the staff "thrived on rumor about Phoenix." James Black Comments. Major Donald E. Milone, who commanded the 3d MP Battalion in 1968, related that the program "failed to coordinate its activities" with Marine units, especially the Combined Action platoons: "No one knew what was happening in a certain village." Maj Donald E. Milone, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File). Lieutenant Colonel Corson, who headed the Combined Action Program in 1967, considered Phoenix "a bounty program . . . with little regard . . . for 'guilt' or 'innocence.'" He stated that he reached an understanding that the Phoenix teams would keep away from the Combined Action hamlets. Corson Comments.

**See Chapters 1 and 6.

CIVILIAN LOSSES DURING TET IN I CTZ AND HUE



From Operations of US Marine Forces Vietnam 1968.

The Tet Offensives and Operation Recovery

Initially, the enemy Tet offensive was a tremendous setback for both the Marine and country-wide pacification program. With the attacks on the major cities of Vietnam and especially the one-month battle for Hue, the enemy added an entire new dimension to the war. The enemy attacks during the holiday period resulted in an enormous increase of new refugees, ranging from estimates of 750,000 to over a million, with nearly 170,000 in I Corps and, of that number, about 75,000 from the city of Hue. In February 1968, III MAF reported that the number of enemy defectors was the lowest in five months. According to pacification reports, before Tet, the allies claimed 5,331 out of 12,000 hamlets under government control. The number cited after Tet was 4,472, a loss of 859. By April 1968, Ambassador Komer related that the total of hamlets then under government control had risen slightly, reaching 4,559, a gain of some 87 hamlets "back in the fold." Despite the tremendous onslaught of the enemy, the ARVN had not defected and the South Vietnamese government apparatus had not collapsed.[25]

After the first attacks and initial surprise, the South Vietnamese government launched Operation Recovery. At the urging of U.S. pacification officials, President Thieu created, with American participation and support, a high-level task force "to direct and coordinate" civilian relief activities. Thieu temporarily placed Vice President Ky in charge of the South Vietnamese government endeavor while Ambassador Komer directed the U.S. effort. Both men set up subordinate complementary organizations on the corps, province, and district levels, whose mission was four fold: to provide immediate assistance to the refugees, to get the cities functioning once more, to open lines of communication so the economy could function, and to reestablish order. According to MACV, the major innovation in the project was the "provision of cash and commodities to the people so that they themselves could rebuild." In actuality, III MAF had employed this same concept as the basis for its civic action program since 1965, but with fewer resources.[26]

In I Corps under Operation Recovery, the South Vietnamese apparatus authorized a 57 million piaster ($485,000.00) budget for a three-month period. The first aim was to provide for food, reconstruction of homes, and some compensation to survivors of those civilians killed and to the wounded as a result of the fighting. In Hue, each displaced person was entitled to 10,000 piasters ($85.00), 20 sheets of roofing, and 10 bags of cement to begin to rebuild. By the end of March, more than 830 families received reconstruction material and all the displaced received a temporary relief payment. For the most part, the initial phase of the rebuilding of the city had been completed. Relief workers brought in 4,100 tons of rice to feed the peo-

ple, work groups buried more than 6,000 bodies killed in the battle for the city, and other work gangs cleared the debris and rubble from the streets. Municipal employees had returned both water and electricity to "satisfactory operation condition." U.S. and South Vietnamese munitions disposal specialists had disarmed or otherwise disposed of unexploded ordnance. Work had started on the second and third phases, the repair of public buildings and the reconstruction of private homes.[27]

Elsewhere in I Corps, the South Vietnamese also had made some inroads on the damage caused by enemy assaults. Outside of Hue, displaced people were entitled to a somewhat lesser sum, 5,000 piasters ($42.00), but the same amount of roofing and cement to rebuild their homes. By the end of March, more than 1,400 families received all or part of their settlement. III MAF units had provided over 1,000,000 meals to civilians, nearly double the usual amount of foodstuffs provided under civic action programs. Relief workers distributed more than 21,000 tons of rice in the Corps' five provinces. Corps officials had also taken steps to eliminate abuses and some of the most ineffective leaders in local government. They had dismissed one province chief, two district chiefs, and two village chiefs.

Despite an impressive start, Operation Recovery soon bogged down upon the unusual demands put upon the overburdened and inefficient South Vietnamese administrative apparatus. While acknowledging that the government had begun reconstruction, resettlement, and economic revival programs, American observers reported that by April the strains were beginning to show. They charged: "There was a critical decline in effectiveness when the program should have been gathering even greater momentum." Local officials had overspent their budgets and projects came to a standstill.[28]

Under Operation Recovery, the country also made some starts on mobilization of the populace. Vice President Ky authorized the establishment of special Self-Defense Groups in urban areas so they could defend themselves against any further incursions by the Communists. The idea was to distribute arms to the people

South Vietnamese civilian refugees gather in a park near Hue University as the fighting continued in the city. In Operation Recovery, the South Vietnamese attempted to help the displaced residents to rebuild their homes.

Photo is from the Abel Collection



so that they would be able to provide some form of organized protection to their neighborhood or local community to supplement the territorial forces. The Self-Defense forces were divided into two groups: one combat and the other support. Further divided into three groups, the support forces consisted of youth, women, and elders. Membership was voluntary and open to all citizens seven years of age or above. The new mobilization law required all youths between 16 and 17 and men between 38–50 to serve in the combat Peoples Self Defense Corps. Within each of the combat forces were to be specially trained personnel, organized into 35-man teams, each man being armed.[29]

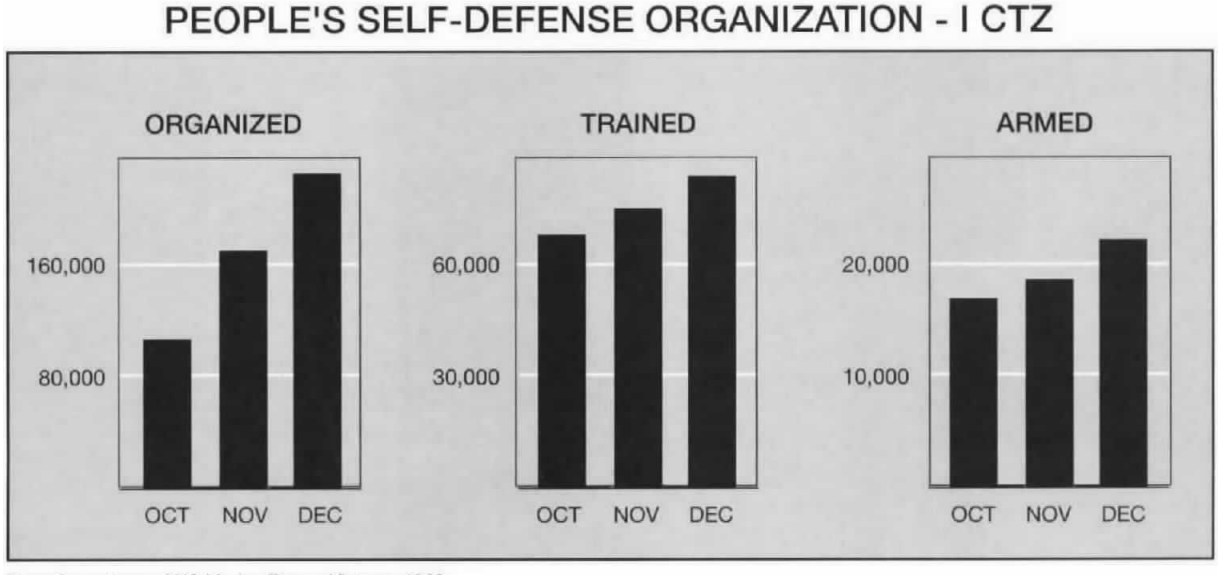
Like the rest of Operation Recovery, after much fanfare and formation and drilling of units, the program lacked cohesion. While a wide variety of units were organized, they received little direction, training, or weapons. American CORDS officials observed aimless drift and almost no coordination. By the end of June, according to the MACV history, "the population was, in effect, ahead of the government in terms of its willingness to participate actively in self-defense."[30]

The second wave of the Tet offensive in May gave a new impetus to Operation Recovery in both reconstruction and the mobilization of the population. As North Vietnamese officials met formally with the Americans in Paris for the first time, these negotiations reinforced the new sense of urgency. Ambassador Komer later wrote that the South Vietnamese government's "realization that a far greater effort on its part would be required to survive finally led to actual national manpower mobilization, extensive training programs for local officials, a major acceleration for pacification efforts, several economic reforms and the like."[31]

At this point President Thieu called a meeting of his Corps commanders and expressed his unhappiness. He told them in "no uncertain terms that whatever the anomaly involved in exercising authority, recovery was not to wither on the vine." By July, according to American officials, the reconstruction of the rural economy in I, II, and III Corps had reached pre-Tet levels.[32]

The South Vietnamese president also took the initiative relative to the Self-Defense Corps. In July, he placed the program directly under his prime minister, who formed a National Peoples Self Defense Committee chaired by himself. By the end of the year, some 1,000,000 people were members of such groups and nearly half of them had received training. The government had distributed some 173,000 weapons. In I Corps, for example, at the end of October, nearly 106,000 of the civilian population had joined the Self Defense Corps with 16 percent armed. At the end of the year, the number had increased to 225,162 with 10 percent of them armed.[33]

Operation Recovery itself came to an end in October with the claim of the government that it had accomplished its basic mission, the return of security and extension of public services to the level enjoyed prior to the offensives. The third enemy offensive by this time had petered out and wreaked far less damage than the earlier attacks. The October Hamlet Evalua-



From Operations of US Marine Forces Vietnam 1968.

tion figures showed 69.8 percent of the population country-wide living in generally secure areas, a record high exceeding that of the pre-Tet period. According to American observers, the improvement was country-wide and reflected in all four Corps areas. The general mobilization had not only created the Self Defense Corps, but had improved the caliber of the Regional and Popular Forces, most of whom were now equipped with American M16 rifles. In all Corps areas, pushed by the central government, provincial and district chiefs "slowly began to increase their pacification efforts."[34]

The results were equally impressive in I Corps. Although the enemy attacks near Da Nang in August had caused some diminishment in Revolutionary Development, according to the American statistics, both the security and the economy picked up in the following months. From the onset in mid-February of Operation Recovery until its end in October, the Corps provincial and local governments had spent in excess of $500,000.00 to reestablish "normalcy to the lives of victimized civilians in I CTZ." The government had resettled more than 152,000 or 98 percent of the temporary refugees. Through the funds provided for the purpose, local officials had given more than 131,000 bags of cement and 276,000 sheets of roofing tin for the rebuilding of homes. In addition, the relief groups had distributed nearly 50,000 tons of rice and grain to the devastated areas and medical workers inoculated approximately 500,000 civilians against contagious disease under the program. Yet, as one observer cautioned, these quantitative figures, which he referred to as a "wonderful futility," did not necessarily measure the qualitative aspects of the war.[35]

While not formally under Operation Recovery, one of the more notable accomplishments during the period was the effort to reopen the national railroad in I Corps from Da Nang to Hue. Part of a combined U.S.-South Vietnamese plan to have unhampered railroad traffic from the capital of Saigon in the south to Dong Ha in the north by the end of 1969, the idea was to work simultaneously on two important sections, the 103 kilometer Da Nang-Hue link and the 375 kilometer segment from Saigon to the I Corps/II Corps border. While the latter had priority, the planners called for the Da Nang-Hue portion to be completed by the end of February 1969.[36]

Despite rail communications between Da Nang and Hue having been cut by the VC in 1964, by 1967, the allies had three trains a week running, but requiring armed escort and subject to frequent delays and sabotage incidents. The enemy Tet offensive disrupted even this small traffic. In May 1968, MACV ordered III MAF in coordination with the Commanding General I Corps and the Vietnamese National Railroad System (VNRS) to "restore to operational condition the railroad from Da Nang to Hue when required security forces are available." On 19 June, General Cushman issued a combined plan to carry out the mission. Navy Seabees were to repair four long-span bridges in the rugged terrain north of Da Nang while Army engineers cleared debris and mines from a vital tunnel north of the Esso depot of Lien Chieu. Two South Vietnamese VNRS work crews would make the repairs of the roadbed and the track, one working south from Hue and the other north from Da Nang. They were to make their junction at Phu Loc in Thua Thien Province. The 101st Airborne Division and 1st Marine Division were responsible for general protection of the workers in their respective TAORs, while RF and PF troops reinforced by a VNRS security battalion provided close-in security.[37]

Starting work on 15 July, the work crews made rapid progress. By 10 October, they had completed repairs of track over half of the distance, 63 kilometers. In the 101st Airborne sector, the crew had reached the Truoi River Bridge while the southern crew had completed restoration in the 1st Marine Division area. As of 10 October, there had been no incidents of sabotage to hamper the work. By the end of November, the northern crew had reached a position about seven miles north of Phu Loc. While the VC blew a bridge just east of Phu Loc, the Seabees immediately started their repairs which were completed before Christmas. This left at the end of the year only 12 kilometers of track to be restored. The project was nearly two months ahead of schedule. As a III MAF report observed, completion of the railroad link would be "a tangible sign of return to normalcy." Thus, country-wide, a MACV historian concluded about Operation Recovery, "efficiency was often lacking but the overall GVN performance in reestablishing over a million refugees and renewing urban viability was one of the bright spots of 1968."[38]

III MAF and Pacification

During 1968, there was to be little of the debate between the MACV search and destroy strategy of attrition and the emphasis on pacification that marked the Marine stance toward the war. There were of course several reasons for this, not the least of which were the Tet offensive and the Mini-Tets in May and September.

At that time there was no difficulty in finding either the NVA or VC. As Ambassador Komer of CORDS later observed, the attrition strategy appeared to work during the offensives because the enemy "abandoned his hit and run strategy" and more or less met the allies on their own terms. Through at least the first nine months of 1968, pacification took a back seat until the Communists apparently reverted to their concept of protracted war at the end of the year.[39]

Still, there were other reasons for the lack of contention between MACV and III MAF over strategy and emphasis on pacification. With the establishment of the Marine base at Khe Sanh and the beginning of the building of the barrier along the DMZ in 1967, the depletion of Marine troop strength from the populated coastal areas, especially around Da Nang and Chu Lai, dashed any hopes that the Marines may have had to push a strong population control strategy. Even the commitment of the Army's Americal Division to I Corps in 1967 did not provide III MAF with the density of troop strength it required, especially in the Da Nang area. General Cushman, the III MAF commander, later commented that "the threat in the north . . . drained the resources from pacification. I would say it prevented us from doing more pacification."[40]

Personality also was a consideration. While General Cushman professed to support the pacification concepts of General Walt, he was less the crusader and evangelical believer than his predecessor. According to Major General Norman J. Anderson, the 1st MAW commander, from his perspective, "there was a lessening of emphasis upon the population during the period I was in the III MAF area. I think that General Cushman was very skeptical of that idea."* To be fair to the III MAF commander, in 1968, there were several issues that competed for his attention, not the least of which were Khe Sanh, the Tet Offensive including the battle for Hue, the insertion of Army units under his command, the establishment of MACV Forward later to become XXIV Corps, and Single Manager.[41]

*General Earl E. Anderson, who as a brigadier general served as the III MAF Chief of Staff, disagreed with Major General Norman Anderson, and contended that General Cushman supported Marine pacification efforts especially the Combined Action Program, "even though III MAF had to contribute quite a bit of infantry to the program, he thought that it was well worth the effort." Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter E. E. Anderson Comments. Lieutenant General Krulak on the other hand agreed with Major General Norman Anderson that General Cushman was "more skeptical" about the possibility of pacification than General Walt. Krulak Comments.

Another factor that played a role in lessening tension over pacification with MACV was the expanding role that CORDS began to play in pacification. With the advent of CORDS in May 1967, Henry Koren, an experienced foreign service officer and diplomat, became the CORDS chief in I Corps. With the CORDS organization now part of the military chain of command, Koren reported directly to Cushman as well as through the CORDS administrative network. According to the III MAF commander, Koren served as "my advisor so to speak—staff officer [on pacification] . . . he was always at briefings every morning and worked right in with us." Under Koren, there was a CORDS advisor in each of the five provinces who worked directly with the South Vietnamese province chief in support of the local Revolutionary Development program. Cushman described the I Corps CORDS organization as relatively effective: responsible for logistic and policy support of Revolutionary Development, "it went side by side" with the III MAF Combined Action program and "you could get down to province capitals with supplies and so on and advice."[42]

This cooperation in support of Revolutionary Development continued for the most part with Koren's successor, another civilian, C. T. Cross, through 1968, although questions remained about coordination on the local level, especially with the Combined Action Program. The CORDS organization in I Corps reflected the new intermixture of the military and U.S. civilians in the pacification program. For example, in October 1968, the New Life Development program, Revolutionary Development, Psychological Operations, Public Safety, and Refugees were all run by civilians. The Assistant Deputy for CORDS, L. D. Puckett, was also a civilian. U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel H. W. Naushuetz, the commanding officer of the 29th Civil Affairs Company, and U.S. Army Major R. D. Becker, who headed the Chieu Hoi advisory office, both came under the I Corps CORDS organization. Of the U.S. five province senior advisors, three were military and two were civilian.[43]

While the CORDS organization may have been a combination of both military and civilian personnel, the new structure actually enhanced General Cushman's authority in I Corps. As the I Corps Senior Advisor together with his responsibility as Commanding General, III MAF, Cushman already controlled all the U.S. military forces in the Corps sector. Now with the CORDS organization under him, he combined in his person both the U.S. military and pacification responsibilities for the northern five provinces.

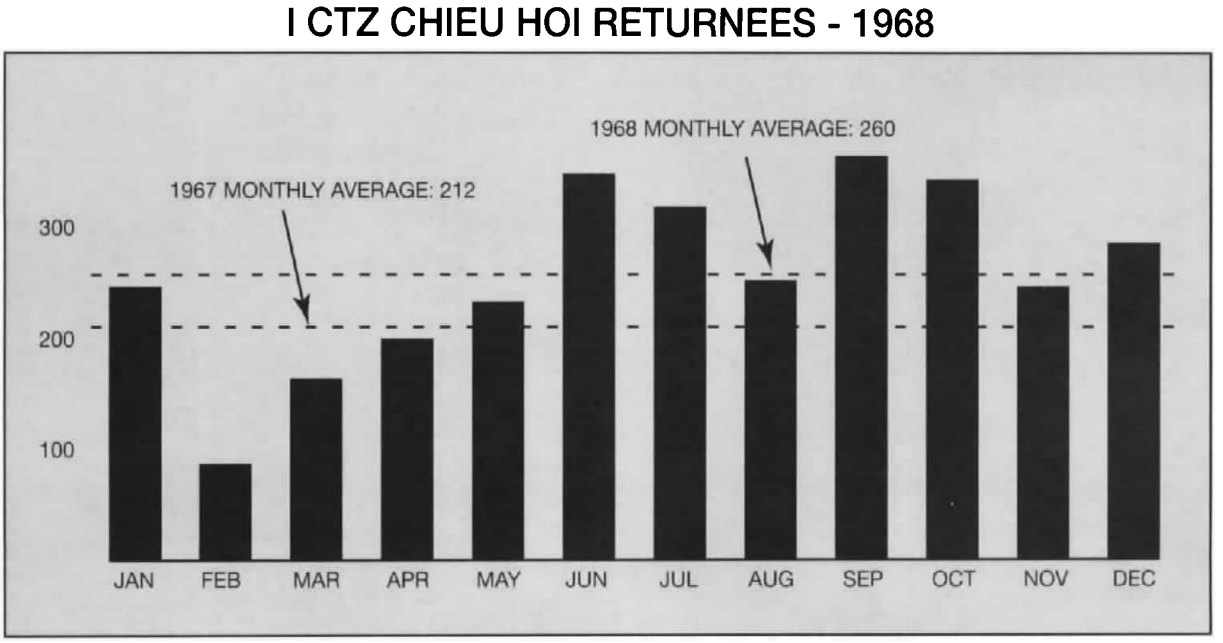
As a manifestation of this added stature, the III MAF commander ended some of the redundancies in the Marine pacification program. After the Tet offensive postponed the monthly meeting of the I Corps Joint Coordinating Council, he, together with General Lam, abolished the organization in March on the basis that its missions and functions "have basically been assumed by the committees and sub-committees of Project Recovery, under the chairmanship of the CG, I Corps." Finally at the end of the year, General Cushman terminated the FMFPac village evaluation system in I Corps as duplicative and not as accurate as the MACV hamlet evaluation system. As Colonel Ross R. Miner, 1st Marine Division G–5 officer, explained, the FMFPac system was only effective as long as the reporting unit remained in a specific area of operations. As far as the division was concerned, with "these [U.S.] units moving in and moving out . . . the whole report is fallacious." On the other hand, the CORDS district advisor, who was responsible for making the hamlet evaluation system, was in a much better position to give an accurate assessment.[44]

For the most part, outside of the Combined Action and Personal Response programs, the main focus of the III MAF Marine units relative to pacification was on civic action and psychological operations. As part of this latter effort, the Marine command, augmented by the Army's 7th Psychological Operations Battalion, placed a high priority on sophisticated and not so sophisticated communication techniques to get their message to the targeted audiences. For example, after Tet, III MAF made a special effort together with CORDS personnel to reestablish local radio, TV, and newspaper service in Hue. According to III MAF, "special efforts to reestablish these medias were immediately undertaken and the problem solved." Local officials appeared on both television and radio "to make the people aware of what the GVN was doing to allevi-

A member of the psychological operations team from SLF Bravo throws out leaflets explaining to the local population why the Marine units were operating in the sector. This was part of an overall psychological operation campaign aimed at various audiences, including the enemy.

Photo courtesy of Col Warren A. Butcher USMC (Ret)





From Operations of US Marine Forces Vietnam 1968.

ate the critical situation." In radio broadcasts and propaganda flyers, the command countered a prevailing VC rumor campaign that the U.S. would support a coalition government.[45]

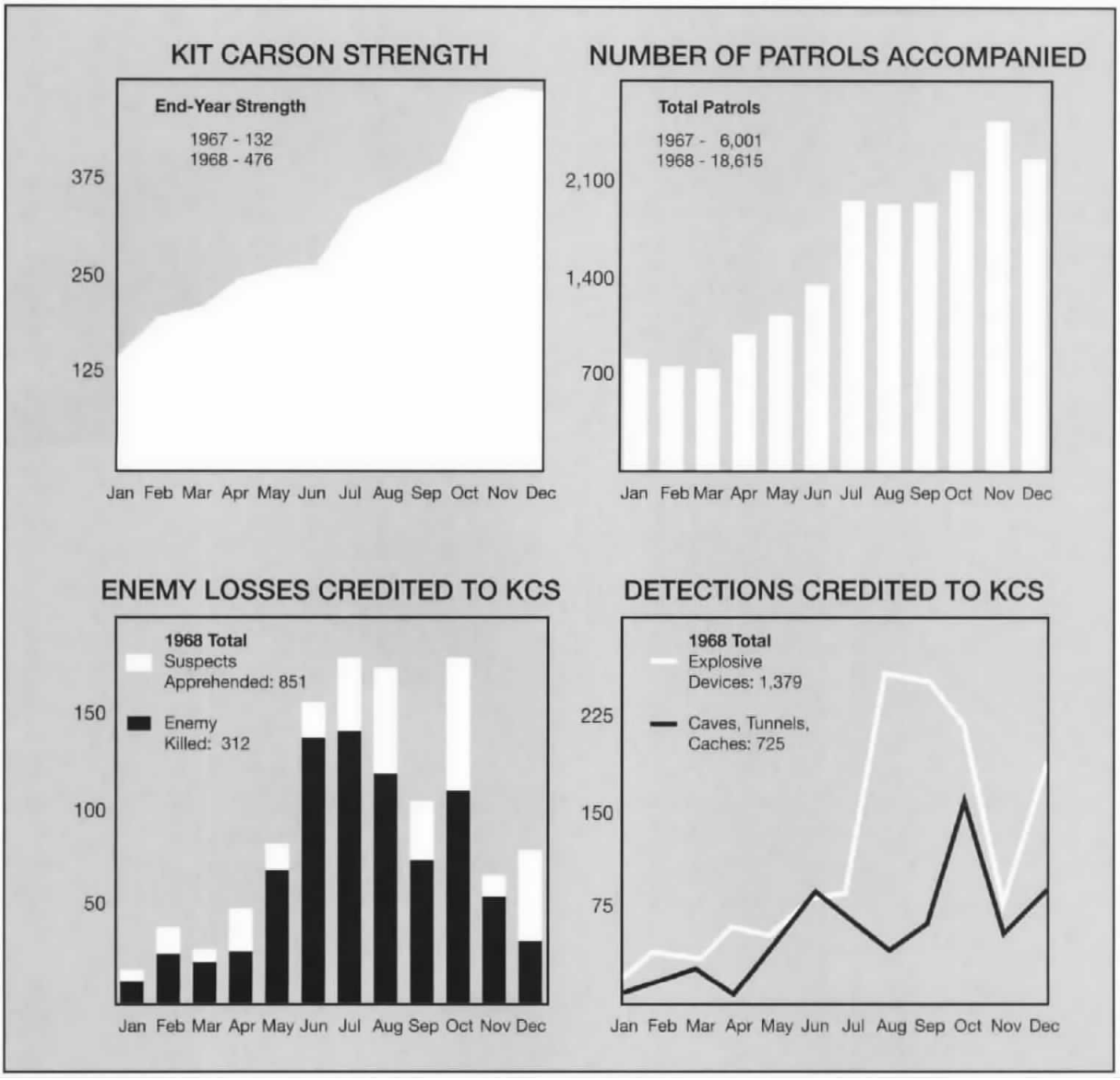
Through the year, the III MAF psychological warfare experts mounted a three-pronged campaign to exploit VC/NVA atrocities during Tet, to publicize to enemy soldiers and possible civilian sympathizers the Chieu Hoi or South Vietnamese amnesty program, and to "encourage nationalism" among the civilians throughout the Corps area. They accomplished this through aerial loudspeaker broadcasts and distribution of leaflets by both ground and air means. During March, the first month of the effort, they distributed over 268 million propaganda leaflets and made more than a 1,000 aerial and ground broadcasts. By the end of December, the number of leaflets distributed per month reached over 280 million and nearly 3,000 aerial loudspeaker broadcasts were made. At that time, the 3d Marine Division experimented with firing artillery "leaflet-loaded rounds" at known enemy positions which, after solving some initial fusing and packing problems, proved feasible.[46]

While impossible to measure directly the success of the psychological warfare campaign, the increasing numbers of Chieu Hoi and Kit Carson volunteers indicated that enemy troops were well aware that there were steps they could take to return or come over to the government side. Despite a dip from 250 defectors in January 1968 to only 66 in February, the number of Hoi Chanhs in I Corps at the end of the year reached 3,118, exceeding the total for 1967 by 759. The Kit Carson Scouts showed an even more impressive expansion, increasing from 132 in 1967 to 476 in 1968. In December 1968, 102 served with the 1st Marine Division, 106 with the 3d Marine Division, 153 with the 101st Airborne Division, and 115 with the Americal Division. Another 22 former VC or NVA were undergoing training in the various division Kit Carson schools.[47]

In February, after two of the scouts were identified as "suspected penetration agents for the VC," III MAF improved and augmented its initial screening and also provided "for continuous evaluation and observation of individual KCS." Still, by the end of the year, the Marines credited their Kit Carson Scouts with apprehending 851 suspects and killing 312 of the enemy. They also helped the American units uncover some 720 enemy caves, tunnels, and caches. More importantly, the scouts discovered more than 1,300 explosive devices, many set as boobytraps (surprise firing devices) to catch the unwary. As Major General Donn J. Robertson later stated about the entire program: "Every time you got a few Chieu Hois and could convert them into Kit Carson Scouts where they could give you some assistance that was a plus that could save the lives of Marines."[48]

For 1968, III MAF civic action had much the same gradations as the overall pacification effort.

KIT CARSON SCOUT (KCS) PROGRAM: 1968



From Operations of US Marine Forces Vietnam 1968.

The enemy Tet offensive hampered many civic action projects as the allies turned most of their effort into repulsing the Communist attacks. For example, in February 1968, the only increase in civic action was in two categories, the number of pounds of food distributed and number of persons fed, nearly double in both cases over the previous month. The obvious reason for that expansion was the pressing need to feed those displaced by the Communist onslaught. During the next two months there was a steady growth in all the civic action classifications. Again there were dips in May and September during the Mini-Tets and a final push in the last quarter of the year.[49*]

Most civic action largely consisted of programs that had a quick impact on the local populace such as the distribution of clothes, food, and soap to local vil-

*Colonel James R. Black, Jr., who was the III MAF G–5 officer and responsible for the coordination of civic action among his duties, recalled that when he first arrived in September 1967, "it was difficult to comprehend what the G–5 role really was, particularly after the III MAF had a Deputy for CORDS. It was difficult for me to find out who I was really working for, except [Brigadier General] E. E. Anderson [the III MAF Chief of Staff] made it quite clear, and that provided me with the impetus to overcome all personal and professional objections . . . ." James Black Comments.

lagers; medical assistance patrols; and assisting with various construction efforts. The Marines, nevertheless, also supported some long-term projects. In January 1968, the 3d Marine Division in Thua Thien Province near Phu Bai sponsored 15 experimental fields devoted to the cultivation of improved strains of rice. With the assistance of local CORDS officials and the South Vietnamese Ministry of Land Reform and Agriculture, the division civic action team had introduced a higher yield rice developed in the Philippines, called "IR–8," which the Ministry immediately relabeled Thon Nong 8 (literally meaning "God of Agriculture" in Vietnamese). According to the Marine division account, "the psychological impact of attaching a Vietnamese name to an improved rice variety may have considerable influence upon its acceptance by the farmers of Vietnam."[50]

The 1st Marine Division also had similar projects. In January, it sponsored four schools and two breeding farms, and assisted in the building of five wells, two dispensaries, two maternity hospitals, and one Buddhist temple. Just prior to Tet, the Marines at Da Nang had overseen the giving away of more than 16,000 toys to children in the area. The 7th Engineer Battalion at the Da Nang base had one of the most active civic action programs. It sponsored a soil brick factory in its cantonment which provided affordable building material for local civilian projects approved by the village, district, and provincial councils. Employing about 25 workers and eight simple hand block presses, the factory could produce 1,760 bricks daily. While somewhat curtailed by Tet, these enterprises continued through the rest of the year.[51]

From the beginning, the civic action effort was larger in the 1st Marine Division sector, which included in the Da Nang area one of the richest farming and heaviest populated regions in all of South Vietnam. This disparity between the two divisions grew during the year as the 1st Marine Division took over the responsibilities of the 3d Division in Thua Thien Province. In the last two months of the year, the 1st Marine Division had completed 56 civic action projects. In December, the division was working with local authorities and villagers in the building of 2 schools, a dispensary, a market place, and 2 wells, as well as sponsoring 15 agricultural plots and 2 pig projects. In the 7th Engineer Battalion, for example, the engineers had begun an agricultural education program on improved farming techniques for the local villagers and introduced stronger types of produce seeds to be used on an experimental basis.[52]

While assigned to the less populated Quang Tri Province, the 3d Marine Division made a significant contribution to the Marine civic action projects. The division rented some 50 rice threshing machines to local farmers in Quang Tri who had the option of purchasing them. To demonstrate the advantages of the machine, the civic action officer sponsored a threshing contest in one hamlet between a water buffalo and the machine. The machine threshed about twice the amount of rice as the animal. In May, 10 of the farmers bought threshers. Both the rental and purchase proceeds went into the 3d Marine Division civic action fund.[53]

While introducing mobile helicopter and firebase tactics into the 3d Marine Division, Major General Raymond G. Davis was proud of the civic action exploits of the division. After reviewing his accomplishments as division commander in the spring of 1969, Davis remarked on his efforts in Cam Lo and joint efforts with the 2d ARVN Regiment. The ARVN and Marines conducted a series of cordon and search "County Fair" operations which succeeded in identifying the local VC infrastructure in coastal Quang Tri Province. With the defeat of the NVA divisions in the north, according to Davis, the division could concentrate on pacification and civic action.[54]

Lieutenant Colonel Bryon T. Chen's 2d Battalion, 3d Marines with its Companies F and H played a large role in the Cam Lo Campaign. In Cam Lo District, Captain Donald R. Myers who commanded Company H remembered, "I had squads or platoons in nearly every hamlet along the Cam Lo River . . . [and that] we even had the RFs go on patrol with us across the . . . River. They hadn't done that in years." In nearby Huong Hoa District, First Lieutenant Justin M. Martin's Company F adopted similar tactics. Operating in the villages of Mai Loc and Doc Kin, the company supported a Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) operating with the U.S. Special Forces and the 220th Regional Forces Company. According to Martin, he had two bosses, "I not only have to report to my colonel but also an [U.S.] Army major," the District Advisor. While somewhat critical of his South Vietnamese Regional Force counterpart, who ran his operations from a small cafe in Mai Loc, he believed "we have given the Vietnamese some muscle that they have not had in this area." Both Myers and Martin viewed the pacification campaign as a welcome change of pace from the war of maneuver against the North Vietnamese regular units. Myers observed "we made an impact, but it was not noted in the number of body



Photo Courtesy of LtCol Justin M. Martin USMC (Ret)

Photograph presents a street view of the village of Mai Loc in Huong Hoa District, Quang Tri Province. Company F, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines operated in the village together with a Regional Force Company whose commander made his headquarters in a cafe on this street.

counts. What did not happen is a better indication of our success. Incidents dramatically went down while we operated and trained the RFs."[55]

Yet, one of the most ambitious of the division civic action projects, the establishment of a children's hospital in Quang Tri, proved how ephemeral such undertakings could be. With much fanfare and publicity, the division announced in August the scheduled opening of the 30-bed Dong Ha facility of what was planned eventually to be the "3d Marine Division Memorial Children's Hospital" dedicated as a "lasting memorial to 3d Marine Division Marines and Sailors killed in action in Vietnam." In addition to providing medical care for children, the hospital was to be a training center for Vietnamese medical personnel and serve as a symbol of American and Marine concern for the Vietnamese people. According to the division plans, the Marines were to finance the facility from troop donations, Marine Corps Reserve Civic Action funds, and by fund raising appeals to community and veterans organizations in the United States. The estimated cost of the finished modern hospital complex was $75,000 which was to be located in the Quang Tri Combat Base. Despite the high hopes and auspicious beginning, the hospital never expanded beyond the small Dong Ha facility. When the division left Quang Tri Province and Vietnam in 1969, the hospital remained largely on the drawing boards except for six unfinished buildings. With the assistance of III MAF, the South Vietnamese turned these into a combination of clinic, orphanage, and dormitory, a far cry from the initial ambitious plans. As Colonel Clifford J. Peabody, the III MAF civil affairs officer in 1970, later commented, "a project which was outstanding in its humanitarian ideal of providing help . . . has proved to be a real albatross in the long run."[56*]

Like much of the pacification effort, the effectiveness of the III MAF civic action program was difficult to determine. It often challenged the best in many

*Colonel William E. Kerrigan, who served as the G–5 of the 3d Marine Division in the latter part of 1968, observed that "although never operated as a Children's Hospital, one wing became an infirmary and several were used as youth hostels for high school students who lived in areas too remote to be able to commute to schools in Quang Tri City." Col William E. Kerrigan, Comments on draft, dtd 14Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

Marine enlisted men and officers, but also could bring out the worst. Captain Merrill L. Bartlett, a former Marine intelligence officer, remembered one regimental S–5 officer "already 'in his cups' by late afternoon," ordering the scores of Vietnamese civilians employed on the base, into a formation. According to Bartlett, the Marine officer "would then parade the lines with a club, looking for contraband. Finding something like a package of C-ration cigarettes, he would assault the luckless person with the club. My last memory of this officer is . . . seeing him passed out in a mud puddle in front of his hooch on New Year's Eve." On the other hand, Charles R. Anderson, a former Marine lieutenant assigned to the 3d MP Battalion at Da Nang during the latter part of 1968, described his battalion's S–5 officer as one who "wore his commission better than most who carried one" and who had volunteered for the S–5 job with the hopes of transferring into a combat unit. After a brief time in his new position, "he soon became seriously interested in the Vietnamese people and forgot about going into the bush." According to Anderson, despite cynicism on the part of other officers in the battalion, "those in S–5 labored on, determined to show the Vietnamese that America was trying to do things other than burning and killing."[57]

Homicide in the Countryside

In a sense, the civic action program was part of the larger effort to win the so-called "hearts and minds" of the local populace, but this called for a special interaction between different and often alien cultures. For example, the deployment of the Korean Marine Brigade from the relatively unpopulated Chu Lai area into the Da Nang sector in January 1968 caused a deterioration of relations with the local villagers. According to General Cushman, he never really had control of the Koreans. Cushman stated our relationship was "operational guidance . . . [and] they didn't do a damn thing unless they felt like it." Cushman's deputy, Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins,* observed that the Vietnamese feared the Koreans more than anyone else and Cushman later confirmed that the South Vietnamese "people don't like them." According to the III MAF commander, General Lam, the South Vietnamese I Corps commander "hates their guts . . . He smiles, he's polite, but he'd just as soon they'd go the hell home or some other Corps area." Tompkins later related that if the Korean Marines received fire "or think they'd get fired on from a village . . . they'd divert from their march and go over and completely level the village . . . . It would be a lesson to them." Cushman concurred with Tompkins, remarking several years afterwards, "we had a big problem with atrocities attributed to them which I sent on down to Saigon." According to the III MAF commander, "I don't know how that ever came out . . . I doubt if anything ever came out of it." He stated the Koreans "of course denied it, so I don't know exactly what went on. I had some heart to heart talks with them, but I didn't really get anywhere."[58]**

Of course, incidents with the local population were not confined only to Korean or to ARVN troops. In March 1968, in the hamlet of My Lai in Quang Ngai Province, a platoon from the Army's Company C, Task Force Barker, 11th Light Infantry Brigade, Americal Division, led by 1st Lieutenant William L. Calley, murdered over 120 villagers including old men, women, and children.*** It would be nearly a year later before the details of the massacre surfaced. A Department of the Army special board, headed by Army Lieutenant General William R. Peers, discovered that the 11th Brigade and Americal Division held only perfunctory investigations into the killings and failed to report any suspicions through the chain of command to either III MAF or U.S. Army, Vietnam. When asked about My Lai several years later, General Cushman answered, "the administrative chain to which these reports had to be made in no way went through III MAF. It went from [Major General Samuel] Koster [the Americal Division commander] to [Lieutenant General Bruce] Palmer, the Army [deputy] component

*MajGen Tompkins was the 3d Marine Division commander until 21 May when he relieved MajGen William J. Van Ryzin as Deputy Commander, III MAF. See Chapter 15.

**According to Igor Bobrowsky, who served with Combined Action Platoon Delta 2 in the Thanh Quit sector, this incident occurred in the nearby Phong Ni hamlets "when the Koreans made their way north from Dien Ban to relieve our units." He wrote it was "a very serious incident of that particular type (even *we* [italics in original] felt it was above & beyond acceptable bounds)." Igor Bobrowsky, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95] (Vietnam Comment Files). General E. E. Anderson, then the III MAF Chief of Staff, remembered that the incident occurred on 12 February 1968, "and a very close hold confidential investigation was held by a III MAF investigating officer. Since the ROK Marine brigade was not a subordinate of III MAF, the investigation was limited. It was completed and typed by my stenographer and hand carried to MACV in an "Eyes Only" sealed envelope on April 16, 1968. Rather revealing photographs were enclosed. A few weeks later, the package was returned to my office without any comment whatsoever." E.E. Anderson Comments.

***See also Chapter 13.

commander in Vietnam. It was an Army chain, and I had nothing to do with it."[59]*

While nothing as horrendous or on the scale of My Lai, the Marines had their own incidents with the local populace as well. Obviously, when the battlefield was the village or the rice paddy, civilian casualties occurred, wittingly or unwittingly. While cognizant of the difficult circumstances, the Marine command attempted to hold Marine units to the highest standard. General Cushman remembered that while there were a number of atrocities, "we tried them by court-martial." He related that, in most instances, they usually involved only a few victims and Marines and "we really came down on them . . . ."[60]

From 1965–1973, Marine or Navy court-martials convicted 27 Marines of the murder of noncombatant South Vietnamese. Additionally another 16 were convicted of rape and another 18 of assault "with intent to commit murder, rape, or indecent assault." Another 15 Marines were found guilty of manslaughter and one of attempted murder. The most notorious Marine court-martial of 1968 involved seven men from a squad of the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines. Accused of participating in the execution style murder of five Vietnamese men on 5 and 6 May, the seven were brought to trial and five of them convicted within five months of the incident.[61]**

Obviously, while convictions provide some basis for judging the effectiveness of the Marine discipline system, as one Marine lawyer/historian, Lieutenant Colonel Gary D. Solis, wrote: "Acquittals can be as revealing as sentences imposed, because acquittals may indicate the reluctance of a court to convict." In an analysis of the 43 Marines brought up on murder charges of South Vietnamese civilians, Solis observed that 16 Marines, or 37 percent, "were acquitted or had their charges judicially dismissed." He compared this favorably with the ratio of homicide case acquittals in U.S. District Courts, which for 1969 was 33 percent. Still, in examining the sentences served by the 27 Marines convicted of murdering South Vietnamese noncombatants, he observed that the average incarceration was less than five years.[62]***

Despite the best efforts of the Marine command to punish all individuals that may have been guilty of crimes against the local populace, there were deviations. As Lieutenant Colonel Solis would later maintain "there clearly were far fewer prosecutions than there were grave breaches of the law of war." Much depended upon individual unit leadership and command sensitivity to the needs and predicament of the local civilian population. While never condoned and often condemned by the senior Marine command, there emerged among some troops and perhaps some commanders what was called the "'mere gook' rule." For some Marines, this permitted the "killing of Vietnamese—regardless of age, sex, or combatant status—because 'after all they're only gooks,' a derogatory nickname for an Oriental which was carried over from the Korean War." As Major W. Hays Parks, in 1968 the 1st Marine Division Chief Trial Counsel, wrote eight years later, while describing the so-called rule as "an unfair distorted description of military attitudes and conduct . . . [but acknowledged that] it was not altogether false, and was a key factor in most of the serious incidents reported." Lieutenant Colonel Solis in his history of military justice in Vietnam observed that certain Marine defense counsels were aware of this attitude and often tried to use it to their advantage. He described the efforts of one counsel to include senior enlisted men on the court-martial panel, quoting the lawyer to the effect that they "would not be particularly disturbed about the death of another 'gook'. . . . my hypothesis proved correct."[63]

As Major Parks pointed out the "mere gook rule" was not original with U.S. troops in Vietnam nor for that matter Korea.**** He quotes the American writer Ambrose Bierce writing in the 1860s, "The soldier

*General E. E. Anderson observed that while true that III MAF was out of the administrative chain of command for the My Lai investigation, he was "later questioned by members of the Peers Commission about the subject as I had the responsibility, as Chief of Staff of III MAF, of releasing our nightly operations reports. I pointed out to the questioners that the operations report by the Americal Division for the period when the My Lai incident occurred contained nothing that would trigger any suspicion." E. E. Anderson Comments.

**The Marines later established a Combined Action Platoon in the hamlet where the incident took place. Andrew Lewandowski, who commanded this platoon, recalled that he took over this platoon in November 1968, but "did not learn of this incident until I sat in a doctor's office in Mt. Penn, Pa" the following year and read an account of the atrocity in *Look Magazine*. According to Lewandowski, if he had known about the situation at the time, he would have altered somewhat his civic action program in the hamlet. Andrew Lewandowski, Comments on draft, dtd 30Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

***Colonel W. Hays Parks, a former Marine lawyer and who has written extensively on the subject, denied, however, "that time served for murder of a Vietnamese was less than time served for a similar crime in the U.S. against a non-Vietnamese victim . . . ." Col W. Hays Parks, Comments on draft, dtd 6Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

****According to LtCol Solis, Marines used the term gook in reference to Nicaraguans during the Marine intervention there in the 1920s. Solis, *Trial by Fire*, p. 138.

never becomes wholly familiar with the conception of his foes as men like himself; he cannot divest himself of the feeling that they are another order of beings, differently conditioned, in an environment not altogether of the earth." This obviously reinforced Chaplain McGonigal's observation that it was important that the individual Marine view the individual South Vietnamese peasant as a *"full-fledged human being."*[64*]

This, of course, was much easier said than done. As strong a supporter of the Marine pacification program as Major General Murray, the III MAF deputy commander, remarked, "I'd visit villages where the village chiefs and the villagers themselves would give every appearance . . . that we were just the greatest people in the world," but there also remained in the back of his mind the fugitive thought "who in this crowd of people would lead us to believe that they love us . . . [but] actually were ready to slit our throats, the first chance they would get." Obviously, the young Marine who took sniper fire from a village or witnessed a comrade either killed or horrendously wounded by an enemy boobytrap or mine set by these same villagers had his doubts about the friendliness of the local population. The attempt to convince him otherwise would take some doing.[65**]

Changing Attitudes

Such attitudes were a disturbing factor to the Marine command and lay behind the continuing efforts of the Marine Corps Personal Response Program. The Marine Corps pacification program depended upon the troops understanding the complexity of the situation they faced. While it might be too much to expect all Marines to like the Vietnamese, the command undertook extensive efforts to ensure that the Marines respected the rights and lives of the villagers who depended upon their protection.

Working against the perception on the part of some Marines and even some commanders that it was a "chaplain's program" or a "do-gooder concept," Personal Response officers tried to bring relevance to their message. Each Marine infantry platoon commander received a Personal Response notebook, a 53-page booklet, with examples and suggestions for further discussion with the Marines under him. For example, it offered the case where a CAP Marine by holding hands with a local girl destroyed the existing good relationship within the hamlet between the Marines and the villagers. In a graphic paragraph, the pamphlet observed:

> Put it this way. If a foreigner squatted down on a street corner in Chicago and crapped in the gutter we would be offended. Most of us would hardly notice it, however, if a Vietnamese man walked down the street holding hands with an American girl. Here it is just the other way around—only worse. Holding hands with a Vietnamese girl in public is labeling all their women as prostitutes.[66]

Of course, the effectiveness of the pamphlet depended upon the initiative of the individual platoon commander and the command interest of his seniors. Each division, the wing, the Force Logistic Command, and Naval Support Activity had Personal Response contact teams. Each team consisted of a commissioned officer and a senior noncommissioned officer who were responsible for the conduct of schools and orientation in their respective commands.

The emphasis was upon formal and informal instruction. For example, in January 1968, the 3d Marine Division contact team held a two-day division Personal Response course for Personal Response officers at lower echelons. Personal contact teams gave field lectures and held discussion groups with seven infantry battalions which numbered over 970 Marines in attendance. The division teams provided instruction at the Combined Action Group school, the 3d Recon-

*Michael E. Peterson, a former Combined Action Marine and who has published a book on the Combined Action Program, questioned "how could any Marine view the South Vietnamese peasant as a *full-fledged human being* . . . when, from the very beginning . . . we were fed "Luke the Gook" from Boot Camp onward? The enlightenment of the writers of the *Small Wars Manual*, Lew Walt, Victor Krulak, and other pacification commanders simply could not offset the condescension, at best, or vicious . . . racism, at worst—of American commanders and soldiers toward the Vietnamese. And, given the Vietnamese tradition of xenophobia, a single negative act was multiplied manyfold in their eyes; and across the country by many thousands of Americans." Michael E. Peterson, Comments on draft, dtd 10Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**In a letter to his parents in 1968, William R. Black, Jr., then a second lieutenant, wrote about some of the contradictory emotions pulling at the Marines as they fought the war in the villages. He wrote about his platoon taking heavy sniper fire in a hamlet. Black permitted some of the men to throw hand grenades into family bunkers before entering them because he "felt the whole place was unfriendly and that enemy were probably hiding in the family bomb shelters." The troops saw "very few civilians," but suddenly they heard a child cry. A family had been in one of the shelters. While sniper fire continued against his forward platoons, he directed his Navy Corpsman, "Doc, do what you can for them *immediately*, [emphasis in original] we can't leave you here." According to Black, this was a "sore spot among many of our troops that the corpsmen spend their medicine and energy helping the VN civilians." He quoted one of his men saying "Damn, man! This is a *war*! [emphasis in the original] We can't go hold'n up for no gook civilians!" The corpsman reported that the civilian wounds were superficial and the troops moved on. 2dLt William R. Black, Jr., ltr to parents, dtd 20–1Apr68, Encl, William R. Black, Jr., Comments on draft, dtd 4Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File).

naissance Battalion indoctrination Course, and the Division staff NCO leadership course. For the month, the division reported that 104 officers, 139 staff NCOs, and 931 other enlisted men (a total of 1174 personnel) listened to 37 hours of formal school presentations and 24 hours of field lectures relative to Personal Response.[67]

All of the commands would accumulate similar statistics through the rest of the year. Furthermore, the III MAF Personal Response office issued a monthly flyer called "Spice," which was to add "seasoning to presentations," while another periodical called "Viewpoints" was to depict a "'happening' in American-Vietnamese Relations." At the end of September, III MAF placed its Personal Response program under the III MAF Assistant Chief of Staff (Plans) rather than the G–5 Division, Civic Action. This, however, made little difference for the program since all the subordinate commands retained their Personal Response officers and teams in their G–5 or S–5 civic action sections.[68]

Again the question remains, how much difference did the entire effort make? While any conclusion would be conjecture, the evidence implies the effect was positive. In a presentation for General Walt in October 1968, who was then the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, the briefer stated that the 3d Marine Division credited the Personal Response training "as a major factor in the reduction of that command's serious incident rate by more than one-fourth over the past 12 months." He observed that the 1st Marine Division reported an 11 percent decrease in non-operational serious incidents in the past year and also attributed this to its Personal Response efforts. Later in a debriefing at FMFPac, Major General Tompkins, the former 3d Marine Division commander and Deputy CG III MAF, commented that while difficult to assess the effectiveness of Personal Response, he believed the entire effort worthwhile and brought forth unexpected benefits in the form of intelligence about enemy units and infrastructure in the local communities.[69]

Despite the promulgation of all the various directives and the distribution of materials, their impact was uneven. Major Parks later concluded that most serious incidents involved men from units in which:

> those directives had not been re-promulgated or implemented. . . . A command which implemented these directives, in which the commander knew what his subordinate units were doing and in which an intolerance of misconduct was manifest, seldom suffered either in the accomplishment of its mission or from serious incidents. Fortunately this was the rule rather than the exception.[70]

In the final analysis, while the Personal Response officer provided assistance and direction, the program's success depended upon the effectiveness of the individual commander, down to the platoon level, to support the policy. As one Marine historian wrote, the best that could be said about the Personal Response program was that the Marines "never gave up the effort to maintain a measure of humanity and compassion in the conduct of an often savage war . . . [but] probably dislike and distrust, tempered by a wary tolerance dictated by self-interest, were the dominant sentiments" on the part of both the Marines and the local populace.[71]

The Boys Next Door: The Combined Action Program

Relationships between Marines and the villagers were most important in the Marine Corps Combined Action Program. While Chaplain McGonigal found attitudes among Combined Action (CAP) Marines more positive than troops in line units, still there was reason for concern even in this supposedly show-case pacification program. As McGonigal later stated, one of the problems of the CAPs was that you had "people with little maturity" and "we got a lot of shitbirds."[72]

During 1967, the program had expanded, but not without difficulty. One matter of concern was the lack of support from some infantry regimental or battalion commanders, who still retained operational control of the individual Combined Action Marines in their sectors. In February 1967, to provide more direct command influence over the program, Lieutenant General Walt, then the III MAF commander, assigned Lieutenant Colonel William R. Corson as the Combined Action Company officer in a newly created billet in the G–3 section. Colorful and charismatic, but lacking formal command over the Combined Action Marines, Corson gave structure to the program. He established guidelines, formed a school at Da Nang, provided some initial screening of applicants, and obtained approval of a table of organization for the CAPs. By the end of May, Corson had formed a Combined Action Group headquarters at Da Nang with administrative responsibility over the various Combined Action Companies.[73]

In June 1967, after succeeding General Walt as Commanding General III MAF, General Cushman placed the Combined Action Program under his deputy, Major General Herman Nickerson, the former commander of the 1st Marine Division. As 1st Division commander at Da Nang, Nickerson was an enthu-



Department of Defense (USMC) A192361

LtGen Herman Nickerson, Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower at HQMC, on a visit to Vietnam, talks with South Vietnam Popular Force troops, part of CAP 1–3–5. The Combined Action Program was placed under Gen Nickerson when he was Deputy Commander, III MAF. Col Edward F. Danowitz, the Director, CAP (wearing glasses), is to the left and behind Gen Nickerson.

siastic supporter of the Marine pacification program, including Combined Action. General Nickerson also knew Corson in that the latter "was my tank battalion commander . . .and did a magnificent job of relating to the people . . . ." With confidence in Corson, Nickerson gave him a new title, III MAF Deputy Director for Combined Action, and delegated authority over the program to him. By July, Corson formed two new Combined Action Groups and III MAF distributed a formal standard operating procedure (SOP) that defined the structure, mission, and command relations of the program.* Once and for all, III MAF assumed direct operational control of the CAPs with line units out of the chain of command, except for occasional combat support and coordination. The 1st CAG, based at Chu Lai, was responsible for Marine Combined Action operations in the southern two provinces, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai. Similarly, the 2d CAG at Da Nang controlled the CAPs in Quang Nam Province, and the 3d CAG at Phu Bai, the CAPs in the two northern provinces, Quang Tri and Thua Thien.[74]

Command relations with the Vietnamese were a little more blurred. The Combined Action Marines did not have operational control of the Popular Force platoons with whom they worked. Instead the relationship was one of coordination and advice. Supposedly the South Vietnamese platoon leader answered to the local district chief, and it was the responsibility of the commanders of the CAGs and CACOs to coordinate with the South Vietnamese provincial and district officials relative to the CAPs. The Marine Combined Action platoon squad leader, in effect, was an advisor to the platoon leader. He could not command the South Vietnamese, but only offer suggestions and advice. Obviously, much depended upon the personal relationship between the individual Marines and the South Vietnamese Popular Force troops for the effectiveness of the program.

The finding of the ideal and idealistic Marines to run such a program would take some doing and by

*Lieutenant Colonel Corson wrote that "the SOP was totally illegal in that only the CMC can create a new organization. However, with General Nickerson's support we did it, no matter the legality." He mentioned that the changes took off very quickly despite the protests of several regimental commanders. Corson Comments.

November, the program had floundered. Generals Walt and Nickerson, who had both strongly pushed the program, had left. In August, Corson also had departed and a few months later, very much disillusioned, wrote a bitter and biting indictment of American strategy in the war.* His handpicked successor, Lieutenant Colonel Francis R. Hittinger, Jr., was killed by a mine explosion in the Da Nang area of operations. Instead of the 114 Cap units that were supposed to be in place at the end of the year, the Marines only had 79.[75]

According to Lieutenant Colonel Byron F. Brady, he met on Thanksgiving Day 1967 with Major General Raymond L. Murray, the new III MAF deputy commander, who offered him the position of III MAF Deputy Director for Combined Action.** In contrast to the flamboyant Corson, the relatively staid Brady was more traditional in his approach. Joining the Marine Corps in 1938 as a private, he received a commission during World War II. Called back to active duty during Korea, Brady remained in the Corps as a career officer. While knowing very little about the Combined Action Program, Brady immediately began to read what was available about the concept. He was particularly impressed with Commander McGonigal's evaluation of the program and the importance of the relationship between the Marines and the Vietnamese Popular Force troops and the villagers. Concerned about what he considered the degradation of the quality in the training of Marines now coming to Vietnam, Brady established as his first priority the recruiting of good men for the program.[76]

By this time the growing demands and limitations on Marine manpower would have its effect upon the Combined Action Program. An exchange of messages among the Commandant, General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., Lieutenant General Krulak at FMFPac, and General Cushman at III MAF highlighted this concern. As early as August 1967, General Krulak observed to the Commandant that he had directed General Cushman "to proceed with CAP activations out of his present resources to the extent possible, although realism prompts the conclusion that he may not be able to do much." As the year came to a close these manpower constraints became even tighter.[77]

Even more disconcerting for the Marine Corps was the possible loss of CORDS support for the program, specifically by Ambassador Komer. General Westmoreland always had some skepticism about the Combined Action Program. Although calling the concept "ingenious," he also wrote, "I simply had not enough numbers to put a squad of Americans in every village and hamlet . . . ." Apparently Komer had come to much the same opinion. While asking for an evaluation of the program by CORDS personnel at Da Nang, in early December 1967, Komer canceled a Combined Action briefing by Lieutenant Colonel Brady at an orientation course for Joint U.S. Public Affairs Officers. According to a MACV official at the session, CORDS had concluded that "the Combined Action Program is too expensive to continue." On 5 December, in a message to the Commandant, General Krulak recalled that in a conversation that he had with Komer "some time ago," the latter "spoke with enthusiasm about the idea but said because of its broad interface with civilian affairs, that the program probably ought to be under CORDS." The FMFPac commander believed that the whole matter was one of turf: "It could be, having met no success in the endeavor to take it over, that he [Komer] is now committed to abolishing the program."[78]

As would be expected, Ambassador Komer had a completely different recollection of the events than General Krulak. According to Komer several years later, he remembered that when he asked "Wally Greene and Krulak for more people for the CAPs, their answer was,

*Corson's book *The Betrayal* was published in July 1968, although the draft was completed by April. Corson in his comments stated that he did not start writing until mid-March 1968. In the book, he condemned both the Johnson Administration and MACV, including Ambassador Komer and General Westmoreland, for their direction of the war and in particular for neglecting the "other war" or pacification. He praised, however, both Marine Generals Walt and Krulak for their efforts, and in particular, the Combined Action Program, although presenting an exaggerated and idealized version of the successes of the program. There was some talk about official reprimands and possible court-martial of Corson because he failed to submit the manuscript for review, according to Department of Defense regulations, prior to publication. It was decided that such a course of action would only give undue publicity to the book. In his comments, Corson stated that a copy of his unedited galley proofs was stolen from a safe in his office. He claimed that his application for retirement to the Secretary of the Navy was first approved then rescinded upon basis that he had violated some Department of Defense administrative rule. According to Corson, his lawyer obtained a writ for the Secretaries of the Navy and of Defense to show cause for the revocation of his retirement, and only after the matter had reached the President was the decision made in his favor. See LtCol William R. Corson file, Biog Files, RefSec, MCHC and Corson Comments. Corson dedicated the book "To the hearts and minds of the CAP Marines, both living and dead." See also LtCol William R. Corson, *The Betrayal* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1968).

**Lieutenant Colonel Brady noted that when he first took over the billet, he only loosely controlled the Combined Action Groups, but that it was "later established as a command billet . . . ." LtCol Byron F. Brady, Comments on draft, dtd 30Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A422186

Marine Cpl Gilbert J. Davis, a member of the CAP Mobile Training Team, trains two South Vietnamese Popular Force troops. MACV pressed III MAF to form Mobile Assistance Teams to supplement the Combined Action platoons.

Bob we haven't enough people to keep our . . . Marine forces going—we are really people poor." The CORDS chief explained that the CAPs performed well, but the program demanded an "enormous requirement for American infantry which we did not have."[79]

In any event, on 7 January 1968, Ambassador Komer met with the new Marine Corps Commandant, General Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., who was in Saigon on an information gathering visit. In the meeting, Komer acknowledged that the Combined Action program had value and was proving effective, but that "it was very expensive in manpower . . . [and] is too slow a program to accomplish the pacification ends at an early date." He believed that the Marines should reduce the size of their squads in the hamlets to eight-man teams and experiment with more mobile techniques. Komer especially pushed the newly created MACV program of Mobile Assistance Teams consisting of a five-man team including an ARVN officer, an American officer, and three American veteran combat enlisted men that would move from one Popular Force platoon in a province to another, to teach basic infantry tactics to the Vietnamese militia. General Chapman remained noncommittal, but promised "to monitor the program and insure that the maximum value is gained from the personnel committed."[80]

From a III MAF perspective, the Marines remained skeptical about the motives of MACV. Although the only true similarity between the MACV Mobile Assistance Teams and that of the CAPs was that they both worked with the Popular Forces, General Westmoreland would later insist that the MACV teams were an adaptation of the CAP concept.* In April 1968, to ward off possible Saigon tampering with the program, General Cushman and Lieutenant Colonel Brady eventually established Mobile Training Teams (MTT) in the CAP program. These teams, which consisted of regular Combined Action Marine squads, were assigned to a non-CAP Popular Forces platoon for about a two-week period, and would provide a crash-training course in infantry tactics. The teams would then move on to another such Popular Force platoon in the same province and repeat the process. Brigadier General Earl E. Anderson, the III MAF Chief of Staff, would later state that it was the III MAF belief that Komer wanted to "absorb the CAPs into the RF/PF structure . . . controlled by CORDS," but that General Cushman "resisted this, and he felt that by coming up with some new idea . . . he would get more mileage out of the CAP program and forestall any attempt on the part of Komer and other people at MACV to destroy the CAP program." Ambassador Komer, nevertheless, would later contend, "I was a big fan of the CAPs."[81]

On 30 January 1968, just before Tet, III MAF submitted a revised Table of Organization for the Combined Action Program to reflect the actual command structure. The old tables still retained the authority of the individual battalion and division commanders over the Combined Action Companies. General Cushman objected and declared that since June 1967, control resided with the respective Combined Action Groups. With the redeployment of 1st Marine Division infantry battalions to Phu Bai from Da Nang, the situation in both sectors had become fluid. New units in new TAORs were unfamiliar with the Combined Action Marines, and III MAF worried that the CAPs were vulnerable to enemy attack. Cushman wrote in a letter to General Chapman that, because of the need for close coordination and liaison with the South Vietnamese authorities relative to the CAPs, there was a

*In his comments, Lieutenant General Krulak called the Mobile Assistance Team concept "worthless." Krulak Comments.



Photo courtesy of Igor Bobrowsky

Members of CAP Delta–1 are on patrol near the hamlet of Thanh Quit south of Da Nang. One CAP member, Igor Bobrowsky, remembered that prior to Tet the local populace began "making coffins."

need for "unity of command" on the Marine side. He continued that, with the "increased mobility of infantry units, it is impractical for the infantry unit commander to effect continued and close liaison with Vietnamese officials." This had to be handled through the Combined Action structure itself, pointing out for example, that the 3d CAG at Phu Bai had units in both the 1st and 3d Marine Division area of operations. Earlier, in a telephone conversation with FMFPac, General Cushman observed that he was conducting a study to find the best way to use the CAPs.[82]

The Tet offensive, however, in January and February 1968, would have more effect upon the changes made in the Combined Action program than the jurisdictional battles with CORDS and MACV and out of date tables of organization. Even before Tet, there were strong indications that things were different. Combined Action Platoons, both near Da Nang and Phu Loc, increasingly came under attack.* One CAP Marine, Igor Bobrowsky, assigned to one of the hamlets of Thanh Quit below Da Nang, remembered, "it was just that the intensity of what was going on kept on increasing, increasing, increasing." He observed the contacts with the VC became "increasingly more frequent and stronger ripples turning into waves around us . . . ." Sources of intelligence had dried up but in a macabre way villagers provided an indication that something big was about to occur: "As we'd walk through some place, people were making coffins." Bobrowsky recalled thinking: "Who died? Was . . . there a plague?" The people "were just getting a jump start on the burials to come . . .," but before the Marines realized the import of the situation, "the shit hit the fan, but it wasn't . . . all at once. It was just that suddenly we found ourselves totally isolated . . . ."[83]

In any event according to a Department of Defense analysis, from 1 November 1967 through 31 January 1968, nearly half or 49 percent of enemy initiated attacks in I Corps occurred against the CAPs. In February the percentage dropped to 38 percent. According to the report, "It is significant that this period of high activity against the CAPs coincides with the buildup and attack phases of the Tet offensive."[84]

*See Chapters 6, 7, and 8 for description of the attacks on the CAPs during this period and during Tet.

After the heavy fighting during and after Tet had died down, III MAF reexamined the entire Combined Action structure. Colonel Harold L. Oppenheimer, a Marine reservist on active duty, who was on special assignment to III MAF, prepared a study on the program for General Cushman. Oppenheimer basically called for more centralization of the Combined Action command organization and the consolidation of units into more defensible units.[85]

More importantly, however, Lieutenant Colonel Brady, the III MAF Deputy Director for Combined Action, completed his own report on the program. While aware of Oppenheimer's study, he depended more upon the initiatives of his CAG commanders, especially the 3d CAG commander at Phu Bai, Lieutenant Colonel Robert J. Keller. Since the fall of 1967, Keller had advocated less of a "fortified village" concept for the CAP defenses and more of a combat capability based upon night patrols and ambushes. After the overrunning of CAPs Hotel 5, 6, and 7* in the Phu Loc sector in January, Keller decided to reform these units into mobile CAPs. While assigned to a general village sector consisting of several hamlets, the mobile CAP had no specific base, but moved from hamlet to hamlet. According to Brady, the restructured CAPs had some success "in combat situations." He talked the concept over with Keller and then made a personal staff study.[86]

From his analysis of the situation, Lieutenant Colonel Brady noted that the preliminary evidence would indicate that the mobile CAPs sustained fewer casualties in relation to VC KIA than the CAPs in fixed positions. Still Brady noted that both types of Combined Action units had their advantages. The Compound CAPs were better geared to provide civic action and to obtain intelligence from the villagers. On the other hand, the mobile CAPs formed better relations with their Vietnamese Regional Force and Popular Force counterparts since they were "both living at the same level." At this point, Brady suggested that when III MAF form new Mobile CAPs that they be in the same vicinity of a compound CAP. According to Brady, this would insure that there would be a safe haven for the mobile units. In June, General Cushman concurred with Brady's recommendations.[87]

Following Tet, there were other changes in the Combined Action Program besides the establishment of the Mobile CAPs and the Mobile Training Teams. In April, III MAF changed the designations of all of the CAPs to numbers. Until that time, the Combined Action Platoons had been identified by a combination of letters and numbers. All of the Combined Action Companies carried letter identifiers, similar to infantry and artillery companies and batteries. The platoons then carried the letter plus a number. For example, the Combined Action Company at Phu Loc was CACO H or Hotel and the individual platoons under the control of CACO H were known as H or Hotel 1 through 8. This made for some confusion as there was no systematic way to identify which platoon or company belonged to a specific Combined Action Group. Under the new system, the Combined Action Companies took the number of the CAG they belonged to while the platoons in turn took the numbers of both the CAG and CACO plus an additional number. For example, CAP 3–2–1 would stand for the 1st Combined Action platoon, of the 2d Combined Action Company, of the 3d Combined Action Group.[88]

Concerned about the results of a survey of CAP Marines following Tet by Lieutenant Commander McGonigal that several experienced a sense of betrayal on the part of the PFs and some of the villagers for not warning them, Lieutenant Colonel Brady continued with both the efforts to systemize the program and to raise the standards for Marines to enter the Combined Action platoons. On 18 April, III MAF issued a Force Bulletin outlining the Combined Action Program and urging "commanders to actively recruit highly qualified personnel as volunteers for duty with the Combined Action Program." It remarked upon the need that every member of a CAP "must be a potential leader, who through professional capability, personal example, courage and dedication can foster the respect of Vietnamese Nationals and lead small unit combined forces in combat." Signed by Major General William J. Van Ryzin, who had relieved General Murray as III MAF deputy commander, the bulletin "requested that command interest be directed towards the recruiting of volunteers and the final selection of personnel . . . ." It ended on the high note that the "recruiting of one highly qualified individual is repaid at least three fold in terms of military combat potential alone . . . ."[89]

In June, III MAF followed up the bulletin with a new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Combined Action Program. While canceling the SOP of the previous year, it reconfirmed many of the basic tenets of the Combined Action Program. It continued the integration of a Marine squad plus a corpsman with the Popular Forces platoon and the command structure through III MAF exercised by the Director, Combined

*See Chapter 6 for a description of the fighting in Hotel 6.

Action Program, and the Combined Action Groups. Again, the new SOP emphasized that the command relationship between the Marines and the PFs was on a "coordination and cooperation basis. The USMC squad leader does not command the PF element of the platoon, nor does the PF platoon leader command the Marines." While the new SOP did not stipulate that new Combined Action platoons should be mobile, it emphasized that the "CAP compound is to be an administrative and logistical headquarters for the platoon and is not meant to be a citadel."[90]

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the new order was the codification of the standards for CAP volunteers. These were divided into two groups—one for lance corporals and below and the other for noncommissioned officers. For regular enlisted men, the criteria included a minimum of six months remaining on their current tour in Vietnam; to be true volunteers "and motivated to live and work with the Vietnamese people"; to be recommended by their commanding officer and to be a "mature, motivated Marine"; to have had "no non-judicial punishment within the past three months"; and to have had no court-martials during the past year. The selection process preferred high school graduates and those with an infantry military occupational specialty. It limited volunteers to those Marines who had less than two Purple Hearts on their current Vietnam tour. Noncommissioned officers were not only to meet the above standards but in addition were to have had combat experience, "demonstrated a high quality of leadership," and to be deemed "highly qualified for promotion." While waivers were permitted for "highly motivated" personnel recommended "with enthusiasm," these personnel still had to appear before the CAP screening board before any waiver would be granted. All commanders were to maintain rosters of qualified personnel for Combined Action and were to fill quotas for the program from that list. Although not specifically specified in the SOP, it would be assumed that all volunteers had to be approved by the Screening Board.[91]

With the restructuring of the Combined Action Program, there was also a growth in the number of Combined Action platoons and groups. From 79 platoons in January, the number increased to 85 in May, and reached 93 in July. On 20 July, III MAF activated the 4th Combined Action Group in Quang Tri Province. By the end of the month with four CAGs, the Marines assigned to the program totaled 38 officers and 1,913 enlisted men, not including 104 Navy corpsmen with the platoons.[92]

The establishment of the 4th CAG in Quang Tri was not a unanimous decision. Colonel Richard B. Smith, who commanded the 9th Marines until 13 July, objected to the establishment of CAP units in the DMZ sector. Colonel Alexander L. Michaux, who had also just completed his tour as the 3d Marine Division G–3, had his doubts, declaring "we don't have too much use for the CAPs."* Despite these reservations, the 3d Marine Division commander, Major General Davis, believed the Combined Action concept could contribute to the pacification effort in his sector.[93]

With the support of the 3d Division commander, III MAF transferred Lieutenant Colonel John E. Greenwood, Jr., from command of the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines, to take over the new CAG. On 9 August, the 4th CAG commander submitted a plan that called for the establishment of one new Combined Action Company and six new Combined Action platoons. While III MAF approved the request except for one platoon, there was a delay of several weeks until the South Vietnamese gave their consent. Finally on 30 September, Lieutenant Colonel Brady informed Greenwood that General Lam concurred. In the interim, the 4th CAG commander took advantage of this interval to organize the new volunteers into platoons and provide them with training. While the delay caused some inconvenience, it resulted, according to Greenwood, in the Marines being better prepared for their assignment. By the end of October, with the activation of the new units, the 4th CAG consisted of three companies, 12 Combined Action platoons, and 2 mobile training platoons. Of the 12 CAPS in Quang Tri, 8 were mobile.[94]

*Colonel Robert J. Keller, who commanded the 3d CAG in 1968, recalled that he earlier briefed General Krulak, CGFMFPac, and recommended that a 4th CAG be formed which would take over responsibility for the area north of Hue including those CAPs in Quang Tri Province. While General Krulak, according to Keller, appeared enthusiastic, the Army's 1st Air Cavalry Division "did not agree and preferred that Marines not operate in their TAOR." Keller also remembered that Colonels Michaux' and Smith's objections were "longstanding" and that he was well aware of them. He believed the two officers failed "to recognize the fighting [qualities] as well as pacification aspects of the CAPs." Col Robert J. Keller, Comments on draft, dtd 2Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). Both Colonel Smith and Michaux reiterated their doubts about the Combined Action Program in their comments. Colonel Michaux wrote, "I can empathize with those Marines involved in the Pacification Program. However, from the standpoint of the one with the combat units, the two programs [the war against the regular NVA units in the DMZ sector and CAP] appear contradictory." Col Alexander L. Michaux, Comments on draft, dtd 4Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File). See Chapter 7 for Smith's objections to the CAPs.

COMBINED ACTION PROGRAM EXPANSION–1967-1968

1ST CAG

UNITS	1967	1968
Group HQ	1	1
Company HQ	3	3
Platoons	15	21
Mobile Training Teams	-	2
STRENGTHS		
USMC	213	364
USN	19	34
RVN	334	664

2D CAG

UNITS	1967	1968
Group HQ	1	1
Company HQ	7	8
Platoons	40	38
Mobile Training Teams	-	1
STRENGTHS		
USMC	633	571
USN	42	41
RVN	1,070	1,043

3D CAG

UNITS	1967	1968
Group HQ	1	1
Company HQ	2	5
Platoons	15	31
Mobile Training Teams	-	2
STRENGTHS		
USMC	296	546
USN	18	28
RVN	378	809

4TH CAG

UNITS	1967	1968
Group HQ	-	1
Company HQ	2*	3
Platoons	9*	12
Mobile Training Teams	-	2
STRENGTHS		
USMC	123	282
USN	9	19
RVN	229	540

* Includes three CAPs and one company headquarters deactivated at Khe Sanh.

From Operations of US Marine Forces Vietnam 1968.

By December, the four Combined Action Groups together totaled 19 Combined Action Companies, 102 Combined Action Platoons, and 7 Mobile Training Teams. During the course of the year, III MAF had activated one Combined Action Group, six companies, 28 Combined Action platoons, and all seven of the Mobile Training Teams. At the same time, one company and five CAPs had been deactivated. According to FMFPac, the number of Marines assigned to the program had increased by nearly 500 over 1967, from 1,265 in December 1967 to 1,763 in December 1968. Almost all of the 28 new CAPs were mobile rather than fixed and a large percentage of the compound CAPs were to be transformed into mobile ones. For example, according to the 2d CAG at Da Nang, 75 percent of its CAPs were eventually to become mobile. By the end of December, 13 of its 39 CAPs, or about 37 percent, were already in the mobile status.[95]

Despite the growth and expansion of the Combined Action Program, many questions remained unresolved. MACV, CORDS, and even some of the Army units in I Corps still kept the Combined Action Program at arm's length. While individual CORDS provincial and district officials looked sympathetically on the program, a III MAF staff officer in a briefing for General Walt, the Assistant Commandant, referred to the CAP concept as an "I Corps exclusive." In personal letters, Brigadier General Anderson, the III MAF Chief of Staff, wrote that U.S. Army Lieutenant General Richard G. Stilwell, the XXIV Commander in northern I Corps, had been "very vociferous to his staff with respect to the CAP Program . . . [and later] voiced strong objections to having them [Combined Action Platoons] placed along the LOCs [lines of communication]." Because of that attitude, III MAF decided not to activate several CAP units between Hue and Quang Tri. According to Anderson, General Cushman agreed since he believed "to put them in an area where they're not wanted, especially when you have to rely on the U.S. unit in the area for supporting fires and reinforcement when under ground attack, would not be wise and that we can better use them elsewhere." The III MAF commander several years later observed, "we had a basic philosophical difference with the Army on it [Combined Action]. We kept on with it."[96*]

Lieutenant Colonel Brady, the Combined Action Director, declared that as far as he was concerned, the relationship with both MACV and CORDS was "very poor." He later related the frustration that he experienced in attempting to ensure a coordinated U.S. pacification effort in the countryside. Brady had convinced General Cushman in July, as the Senior U.S. Advisor to I Corps and General Lam, to issue an order that called upon each of the Corps province senior advisors to chair a monthly conference for that purpose. At the conference would be representatives of CORDs, military advisors, and III MAF units including Army units attached to the Marine command, and the Combined Action Group commander. The province senior advisor would then forward through all three channels—CORDS, advisory, and III MAF—a "conference report (to include minority opinions on items of controversy) to CG III MAF." Upon the strong objection, however, of the senior CORDS official, III MAF canceled the order and issued a new one. The new order only stipulated that "province senior advisors may at their discretion convene combined meetings of appropriate military and civilian personnel to discuss and coordinate pacification within their respective provinces." No specific mention was made of the Combined Action Group commander.[97**]

Even in I Corps, the effectiveness of many of the reforms, especially that of screening and training of new volunteers, remains a matter of conjecture. Despite questionnaires, Combined Action Schools, and screening boards, much depended upon circumstances and events. The questionnaires consisted of little more than 20 questions which largely dealt with the volunteer's attitudes. While statistical data remains elusive, anecdotal evidence in the form of oral history interviews would imply that both the initial screening and training of Marines for the program was often haphazard. Lieutenant Colonel Brady, for example, remembered that the school at Da Nang could last anywhere from two weeks to two months, "depending on personnel requirements in the field." Igor Bobrowsky recalled only very vaguely receiving any indoctrination training, but later wrote "there *was* a 'school' at 2d

*According to General Anderson, there was a difference of attitude among Army units in I Corps towards the Combined Action Program. For example, he wrote that the 1st Air Cavalry Division had "no use for the CAPs" while he had heard that the "101st Airborne Division thinks quite highly of the CAPs and will take any that they can get." BGen E. E. Anderson ltr to LtGen W. J. Van Ryzin, dtd 11Sep68, Encl, E. E. Anderson Comments. Throughout this period, Combined Action Platoons remained assigned in the U.S. Army Americal Division area of operations.

**General Earl E. Anderson, who as the III MAF chief of staff, believed that the problem with CORDS extended beyond I Corps. In a contemporary letter, he wrote: "We still have problems with Komer in Saigon. He is adamant about the CAP Program and wants it placed under the CORDS advisory effort." BGen E. E. Anderson to LtGen W. J. Van Ryzin, dtd 16Oct68, Encl, E. E. Anderson Comments.

CAG. It *did* give instructions on everything from Vietnamese culture to small unit tactics, ambushes, recon, artillery, communications . . . I did not participate in any of it to any extent."[98]

The selection process was also different for various Marines. Bobrowsky, for example, stated he had little choice and was selected for the program by his company commander. He recollected that his captain told him that it would only be a 30-day assignment, and perhaps was the reason he did not go to the CAG school. It was, however, a permanent transfer. The captain later wrote Bobrowsky, explaining, "I had to pick someone who I felt was . . . a responsible person who knew how to . . . work a small unit . . . ." Bobrowsky's commanding officer, at least, made an attempt to send good men to the CAPs rather than "stick em with anybody."[99]

This was not always the case. Eugene H. Ferguson, an 18-year old corporal and high school dropout, after completing a Vietnamese language course in the United States, arrived in Vietnam in early 1968. Despite his language capability, Ferguson was assigned directly to a Marine infantry line battalion. Outside of being used to check on the veracity of the Kit Carson Scout with his unit, Ferguson functioned like any newly assigned Marine squad leader. About a month after Ferguson was in-country, the North Vietnamese ambushed his squad which was on a "Sparrow Hawk" mission to assist another Marine unit. Except for his radioman, Ferguson lost all of his squad, either dead or wounded, in the clash. Although physically unscathed, Ferguson went into a deep depression: "I just couldn't seem to get into the hang of what everybody else was doing." At that point, Ferguson recalled his company commander called him in and asked, "If I wanted to go into CAG. I didn't know what it was or where it was or who was doing what and I said 'sure.' I need to get out of here." Ferguson suspected "they [his unit leaders] were anticipating trouble from me and shipped me out to CAG." After a two-week familiarization course at the 3d CAG School at Phu Bai in April, the young corporal became a member of a Combined Action platoon.[100]

The only thing that can be said of both the Bobrowsky and Ferguson cases were that they illustrated the variegated backgrounds and motives for entering the CAP Marines. Bobrowsky was the son of immigrant Ukrainian parents and was born in a repatriation camp in Europe after World War II with ambitions to attain a commission. Ferguson was the son of a retired 20-year Navy veteran and enlisted in the Marine Corps because his father hated Marines.

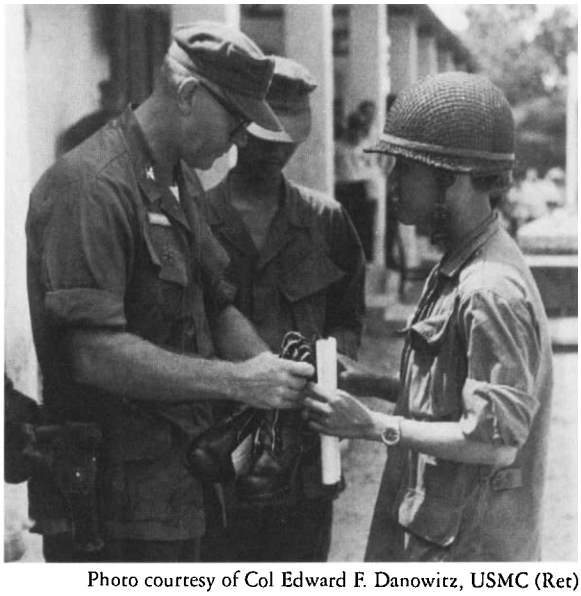


Photo courtesy of Col Edward F. Danowitz, USMC (Ret)

Col Edward F. Danowitz, Director, III MAF Combined Action Program, presents a certificate and an award (a pair of Marine combat boots) to the outstanding Popular Force graduate of the Combined Action school at the Combined Action Group headquarters. Col Danowitz assumed command of the program in October 1968.

Sergeant Andrew Lewandowski, a career Marine with a Japanese wife and a veteran of the Khe Sanh siege, volunteered for the CAPs in October, 1968, because he claimed he wanted to help the people. At the same time, he admitted he was having difficulties with both his platoon lieutenant and sergeant. If there was one common factor that all three commented upon in their initial screening process was their attitude towards the Vietnamese people. Lewandowski remembered appearing before a CAP screening board headed by Colonel Edward F. Danowitz, who, in October, had replaced Lieutenant Colonel Brady as Director of the Combined Action program.* To put the Marine sergeant at ease, Danowitz spoke a few phrases in Polish to Lewandows-

*Colonel Danowitz commented that upon his arrival at III MAF on 1 October, General Cushman assigned him as the Director of the Combined Action Program, stating "he wished to have a senior colonel at that post, citing his support for the program and wishing to get better cooperation from the Vietnamese, particularly General Lam." According to Danowitz, Cushman and Lam agreed to weekly meetings "to coordinate the program." Colonel Danowitz believed this was a good idea, "but was never fully implemented. My counterpart seldom appeared for scheduled meetings and passed on problems to other officers for resolution. . . . [where there should have been] cooperation and coordination there was little or none." Danowitz remained as the CAP Director until April 1969, when he assumed command of a Marine regiment. Col Edward F. Danowitz, Comments on draft, dtd 27Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Danowitz Comments.

ki after he learned that the latter understood the language. The concern, however, of the board, according to Lewandowski was his feeling toward Orientals in general and the Vietnamese in particular.[101]

A former CAP Marine, Edward F. Palm, who retained serious reservations about the entire program, observed that in his perfunctory interview in July 1967, the concern of the interviewer was his attitude towards the Vietnamese. Unlike the three previous CAP members listed above, Palm had no combat experience. He had served his first six months in Vietnam as a supply clerk in what he described as a "prosaic, humdrum routine." To break loose from this stultifying job, Palm volunteered for the Combined Action Program. The only qualification for the program, according to Palm, "was the enthusiastic recommendation of my commanding officer, who was probably only too glad to get a disaffected and unmotivated supply clerk off his roles." Like Ferguson, Palm attended the 3d CAG School for a brief two-week period and learned some fundamentals of squad tactics and how to call in artillery. The exposure to both the Vietnamese language and the society's mores was rudimentary at best.[102]

The Combined Action mission was a daunting one for even the most motivated of Marines, and especially for young Marines. With the best of intentions, the Combined Action schools could only provide a modicum of knowledge about South Vietnamese customs, let alone language training. Even ideal CAPs outlined by Chaplain McGonigal in his interim report would have had difficulties adjusting to the conditions of an alien society at war with itself in the countryside. Lieutenant Colonel Brady half seriously stated that the qualification for a good CAP leader was a "tough Marine sergeant, who has a PhD in social anthropology." Obviously the young Marine lance corporals, corporals, and sergeants hardly met that criteria.[103*]

How well did these young Marines do then in bridging the gap between them and the villagers and the PFs? Again there is no hard evidence except for the anecdotal. Citing the example in his own CAP, Edward Palm later wrote: "The cultural gulf was just unbridgeable out in the countryside." He observed "our PFs eventually refused to patrol with us [and] I never really knew any of the PFs I worked and lived with." On the other hand, another young CAP, James DuGuid, recalled that when, in December 1967, told that he was going home, he replied "but I am home." According to DuGuid, "I felt more love from those people in my village than I had ever prior to Vietnam. I took that back with me."[104**]

Other Marines had different experiences. According to Bobrowsky, his exposure to the village helped him to understand the complexity of the Vietnamese countryside. As a Marine in a line unit, he was only interested if the villagers were hostile or not, otherwise they were neutral. As a CAP Marine, he came to understand that there were all kinds of interrelationships that extended from family to village. While on relatively friendly terms with the villagers, the members of his CAP knew they were outsiders. Bobrowsky tells about his patrol sometime after Tet 1968 coming upon an old woman burying two North Vietnamese soldiers. Half-jokingly, Bobrowsky asked the woman if she would do the same for them. The woman laughed and pointed to the PFs with the Marines and said she would bury them, but "No, the Americans I'd just have to throw them in the river."[105]

*As a former Marine officer, now an Army historian, Charles R. Anderson, observed, "all Marines in the infantry were ill-prepared to serve in CAP, since their training before arrival in Vietnam was combat-oriented." Charles R. Anderson, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec 1994] (Vietnam Comment File). Colonel Danowitz stated that he insisted on obtaining the best available men. He noted that when he took over in October 1968, that he was unimpressed with the "volunteers" being sent from both the 1st and 3d Marine Divisions. He stated that he had good relations with both division commanders and "immediately, the word went out to the regiments and a board was formed at each headquarters where the G–1 'culled' men sent in from the field and only the better ones came to our final selection board." While acknowledging that some "misfits" slipped through the selection process, he noted a decided improvement in the quality of the Marines in the program. Danowitz Comments.

**Arliss Willhite, who served in the same CAP unit as DuGuid, wrote that he "felt a real kinship to the people and a loyalty to my ville. I lived in Ngoc Ngot for 15 months. Longer than I had lived at a single location in my life. . . . To me CAP was Vietnamization in reverse. . . . I didn't let anybody mess with the people, steal chickens, burn hootches or shoot at Buffalo. I'm still more Vietnamese than American. I was watching out for the people on my block." Willhite stated that he was not typical of most of the Marines in his hamlet. He recalled that he was teased by some of his comrades, asking him if he was "going to start voting?" Arliss Willhite, Comments on draft, dtd 28Sep94 (Vietnam Comment File). Former Sergeant John J. Balanco was another CAP Marine who identified very closely with the local population, in his case the Bru tribesmen that he served with in CAP Oscar in Khe Sanh village. Recalling in his memoirs the fate of the Bru refugees including the CAP members who were denied entry into the American base at Khe Sanh, Balanco wrote: "These were the people we were fighting with and for. Now we were abandoning them? It gave me an outraged and hopeless feeling that has never left my heart or soul." John J. Balanco, "Abandoned, Reflections of a Khe Sanh Vet," ms, Encl, Balanco, Comments on draft, dtd 15Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File). See Chapter 14 for the description of the overrunning of Khe Sanh village and the aftermath.

In remarking about the quality of the Marines in his CAP and their qualifications, Bobrowsky remarked that about half had probably been "pressganged" into the unit much the same way he had. At the same time, they worked well together and "I saw them as being guys who knew what they were doing." Most of the Marines had little language training, but had picked up "rudimentary Vietnamese and fortunately, the Vietnamese picked up a lot more rudimentary English." Ferguson, who was fluent in Vietnamese, stated that the situation was similar in the CAP platoons that he served in. He estimated that about 50 percent of the Marines in his first platoon were qualified for their role, while the other "fifty percent were just trying to get away from a bad situation they were in before." One of the Marines in Bobrowsky's platoon, Lance Corporal Tom Harvey, was an exception to the above. Somewhat older than the other CAP Marines, a college graduate and a civil engineer, Harvey had enlisted in the Marines rather than be drafted into the Army. After serving in an engineer battalion, he volunteered for the CAPs. Having some facility with languages, Harvey had taught himself rudimentary Vietnamese.[106]

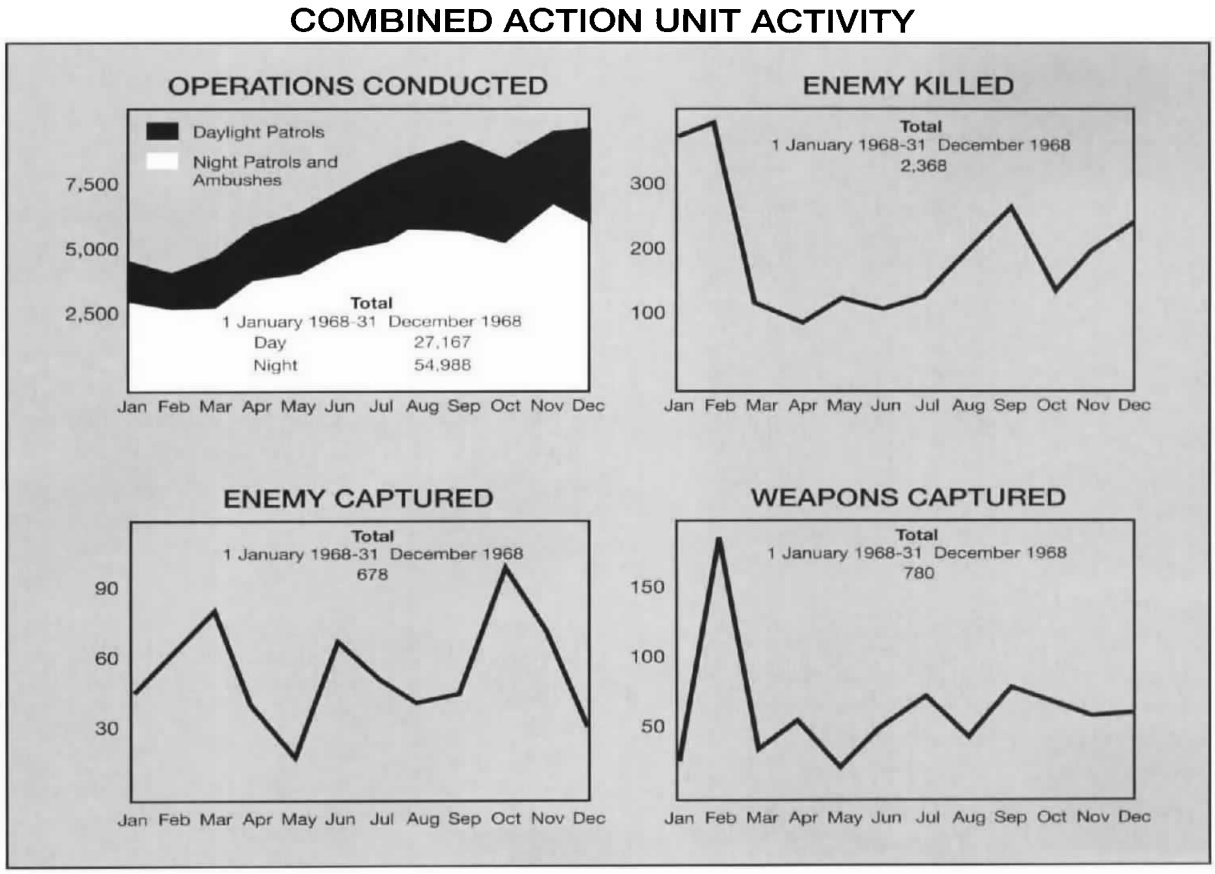
Despite anomalies like Harvey, Ferguson, and DuGuid, who had some degree of fluency, most CAP Marines had relatively little Vietnamese language skills. As a former South Vietnamese officer, Lam Ha, who served as a liaison officer with the CAPs, later wrote, the "language barrier was a vital problem" with the program. Without being able to converse with the people or the PFs, it was almost next to impossible for the Marines to have anything but a superficial knowledge of the people they were to protect.[107*]

Notwithstanding all of these obstacles, there was some statistical evidence that the CAPs were effective. Although based upon American military reports and the hamlet evaluation system, these analyses were completed at the MACV and at the DOD levels, two agencies which at best had shown only lukewarm support for the program. According to periodic reports from January through November 1968, prepared by the Southeast Asia Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for System Analysis, hamlets with Combined Action platoons assigned to them showed that they fared markedly better during and after the enemy's Tet offensive than hamlets without them. According to the HES ratings, there was about a 30 percent difference between the security ratings of the CAP hamlets and those without the platoons after Tet. In their November report, the DOD analysts concluded that "the CAP concept may provide a useful way to upgrade security in the short run and to ensure that application of massive allied firepower does not hurt pacification efforts."[108]

Still, many questions remained. One was the transformation from the stationary or compound CAP to the mobile CAPs. Some former Combined Action Marines including Lieutenant Colonel Corson criticized the change as altering the entire concept of the program. They suggested that instead of providing protection for the hamlets, the CAPs in effect became guerrillas themselves. In their view, the CAPs "had to maintain a demonstrably visible presence in commitment to the hamlet. It had to be an *alternative* to the guerrilla, as well as a tactic *against* the guerrilla." Others rejected that argument, stating that the compounds were usually outside of the hamlets and, moreover, they were sitting targets for the VC and NVA. Almost all of the Marines agreed that going to the mobile concept probably resulted in fewer casualties. Tom Harvey, who served in both, later wrote: "I think nearly everyone interested in the matter now recognized the advantages of the mobile CAP as opposed to those bound to fixed bases or compounds." Taking a middle ground, Michael Peterson argued that there was room for the two different approaches depending on the area. During 1968, both continued to coexist.[109]

In their November 1968 report, while in general praising the Combined Action Program, the DOD analysts also pointed out some of the basic weaknesses of the program. Although not accepting the Komer and Westmoreland argument that one needed to place a Combined Action platoon in every hamlet in Vietnam, the analysts showed that the Marines had not met even their more modest goals. Two of the original objectives of the Combined Action program in 1968 were to obtain three effective Popular Force members for every Marine and to improve the PFs to the extent where the Marines could begin to phase out of the program. According to the DOD report, in November 1968 there was a ratio of 1.4 PFs per Marine and that the prevailing trend was downwards. Even more to the point, the Marines were taking about twice the num-

* Lieutenant Colonel Brady, the CAP Director until October 1968 wrote that "Because of the importance of cross cultural communication an ongoing language program was instituted in mid-1968." Brady Comments. Each CAP Marine was also provided with a phrase book "designed primarily for use in the Combined Action Program." It contained such phrases such as "100% alert tonight . . . " to make immediate contact with the PF members of the CAP. The book was also designed for independent study of both English and Vietnamese by the Marines and the Vietnamese. *Vietnamese/English Phrase Book*, n.d., Encl, Brady Comments.



From Operations of US Marine Forces Vietnam 1968.

ber of casualties as the PFs. Moreover, the report concluded, "in over three years of operations no evidence exists that U.S. Marines have been able to withdraw from a CAP solely because their Vietnamese counterparts were able to take over."[110*]

How successful were the CAPs? Much depended on the effectiveness of the individual CAP. To a large extent, most improved the security within the hamlets and the village. Some even won the begrudging loyalty and perhaps even affection of the villagers. But few were able to attain the loyalty of the people to the Government of South Vietnam. When asked about the relationship between his Combined Action unit and villagers, on one hand, and with the South Vietnamese authorities, on the other, Igor Bobrowsky answered, "the fewer the better." Michael Peterson remarked upon the unique elan of the CAPs "although it was a maverick, gone-bamboo, anti-brass, kind of spirit." Lawrence A. Yates wrote in his analysis of the program: "There were good and bad, successful and unsuccessful CAP platoons. Accomplishments varied depending on such factors as time, place and personnel, not to mention a host of other variables that were beyond the control of the CAP Marines."[111]

One former Defense Analyst, Francis J. "Bing" West, the author of several studies on CAP, wrote that in his opinion the "essential problem" with the program was the "lack of a warfighting strategy" at both MACV and III MAF:

> Without a strategy, there was no yardstick for measuring the amount of resources dedicated to Mission X vs Mission Y. So the CAP was seen as a drain of Marine manpower. It, in fact, saved manpower.

He believed that the Marine TAORs should have consisted of "overlapping CAP patrol areas" with the Marine regular battalions making up a central reserve. Instead, according to West, "the CAP was treated as an interesting tactical study in sociology; its strategic cost-effectiveness was overlooked both by III MAF and by MACV."[112]

*Lieutenant Colonel Brady took exception to the assertion that the CAPs had not succeeded in turning over any hamlets to the RFs. He stated that in the five CAP units that were deactivated during the year, the Marines were "reassigned to other CAPs leaving trained PFs on their own." Brady Comments.

The Accelerated Pacification Plan

With the petering out of the last phase of the enemy "Tet" offensive from August into October, the allies began to take the offensive in pacification operations. Claiming that they had reached the goals of Operation Recovery, MACV, CORDS, and the South Vietnamese inaugurated a new campaign, called *Le Loi* in Vietnamese and the Acceleration Pacification Campaign in English. The campaign was to last from November through January 1969. Country-wide it had five objectives: to upgrade at least 1,000 contested villages to relatively secure ratings on the Hamlet Evaluation Scale; to disrupt the Viet Cong command and control system by identifying and capturing if possible 3,000 members of the infrastructure for the next three months; to set a goal of 5,000 Hoi Chanhs a month under the Chieu Hoi Program; to continue the organization and arming of the South Vietnamese Self Defense units; and finally to mount a propaganda campaign to the effect that the Government of Vietnam "has seized the initiative and is moving rapidly toward the end of the war." Each Corps area was given its quota in this multi-faceted effort.[113]

By the end of the year, the Accelerated Pacification Campaign was in high gear in I Corps. Both the 1st Marine and 3d Marine Divisions as well as the Army and ARVN regular units had launched supporting operations using cordon and County Fair techniques to eradicate both enemy regular units and the guerrilla infrastructure in their assigned areas.* In each of the categories of the campaign, the allies had made substantial progress. During November and December, the allied forces had entered all of the 140 hamlets targeted in I Corps. According to Marine Corps measurements the number of government controlled hamlets had risen from 47 on 31 October to 116 on 31 December. A corresponding decrease had occurred both in contested and Viet Cong-controlled hamlets. By 31 December, the number of contested hamlets fell from 73 on 31 October to 46 on 31 December while Viet Cong-controlled hamlets fell from 48 on 31 October to six on 31 December. In other categories of the campaign in I Corps similar progress was shown. For the year, 3,118 former VC had come over to the government side as Hoi Chanhs, 4,000 VC infrastructure were "neutralized" under the Phoenix program, close to 225,000 civilians were organized in Peoples Self Defense Organization, and nearly 70 percent of the population of I Corps lived in what was considered secure areas. Enemy-initiated attacks in December fell to the lowest level in over two years. In an obvious change of strategy, probably because of the heavy casualty rate suffered in their various offensives, the Communists reverted to a low-level war. Despite this seeming progress and some guarded optimism on the part of the allies, the enemy remained a formidable foe.[114]

*See Chapters 21 and 22 and especially the description of Operation Meade River in Chapter 21.

CHAPTER 30

Outside of III MAF: The Special Landing Forces, Marine Advisors, and Others

The 9th MAB and the SLFs—Sub-Unit 1, 1st Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (ANGLICO) Embassy Marines—Individual Marines in Saigon and Elsewhere in Vietnam—Advisors to the Vietnamese Marine Corps

The 9th MAB and the SLFs

In January 1968, Brigadier General Jacob E. Glick commanded the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade, the Fleet Marine Force component of the Seventh Fleet, with its headquarters on Okinawa which controlled all Marine forces in the Western Pacific outside of Hawaii and Vietnam. At this time, the MAB contained nearly 8,000 men with nearly half assigned to the two Seventh Fleet Special Landing Forces (SLF) Alpha and Bravo.* The two SLFS each consisted of a Marine infantry battalion, supported by a helicopter squadron and reinforced by small detachments of artillery, tanks, engineers, and other specialized units, totaling about 2,000 men embarked upon the ships of a Navy amphibious ready group (ARG).[1]

At the beginning of the year, SLF Alpha, commanded by Colonel John A. Conway, had just returned control of BLT 1/3, its infantry battalion, to III MAF. The former SLF battalion had come ashore during November, operated with the 9th Marines in Operation Kentucky, and was about to take over part of the Operation Osceola sector near Quang Tri from the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines. On 4 January, the latter battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Weise, in turn, embarked in the ships of the amphibious ready group, Seventh Fleet Task Group 76.4, which included the USS *Cleveland* (LSD 7), USS *Comstock* (LSD 19), and USS *Wexford County* (LST 1168), and the helicopter aircraft carrier the *Iwo Jima* (LPH 2) with HMM–361, under Lieutenant Colonel Daniel M. Wilson, on board as the SLF aircraft contingent. Two days later the entire SLF in its amphibious shipping set sail for the Philippines. About a week later, 14 January, Colonel Bruce F. Meyers assumed command of the reconstituted SLF Alpha.[2]

SLF Bravo, commanded by Colonel Maynard W. Schmidt, in the meantime, consisting of BLT 3/1 (Lieutenant Colonel Max McQuown) and HMM–262** (Lieutenant Colonel Melvin J. Steinberg), had just completed Operation Badger Tooth. Reembarking on board its amphibious shipping of Navy Task Group 76.5 on 3 January, the SLF deployed to Da Nang where both the battalion and squadron underwent a one week rehabilitation period. On 10 January, HMM–165, under Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Romine, replaced HMM–262 on board the *Valley Forge* (LPH 8) and the ARG/SLF once more put to sea, remaining off the coast of Quang Tri Province for possible insertion into the Cua Viet sector.[3***]

Operation Badger Tooth had been a bloody experience for BLT 3/1 and raised some questions about the effectiveness of the SLF and the future employment of Seventh Fleet Marine amphibious forces. In Badger Tooth, BLT 3/1 had operated in the "Street Without Joy" coastal region east of Route 1 in southern Quang Tri Province for about a week from 26 December 1967 until 2 January 1968. After moving through the hamlet of Thom Tham Khe on the 26th, the battalion made another sweep of the area the following day. This time the Marines ran into a well-sprung ambush. Calling the coastal hamlet "literally a defensive bastion," Lieutenant Colonel McQuown in 24 hours sustained 48 Marines killed and 86 wounded. According to their body count, the Marines accounted for 31 enemy dead. By 28 December, the NVA had slipped away and Marines of the SLF began to close out the operation.[4****]

*The other components of the 9th MAB were the 26th Marines (Rear) headquarters, a communications support company, and a provisional service battalion on Okinawa as well as MAG–15 with squadrons at both Iwakuni, Japan and on Okinawa. Although the 26th Marines (Forward) and its three infantry battalions together with its attached artillery, the 1st Battalion, 13th Marines, were in Vietnam under the operational control of III MAF, these units remained under the administrative control of the 9th MAB.

**Because of the shortage of CH–46 aircraft, a small detachment of HMM–262, HMM–262 Alpha, under Major David I. Althoff, remained embarked on board the *Valley Forge* LPH 8, from 24 November until 4 January, when the detachment was deactivated.

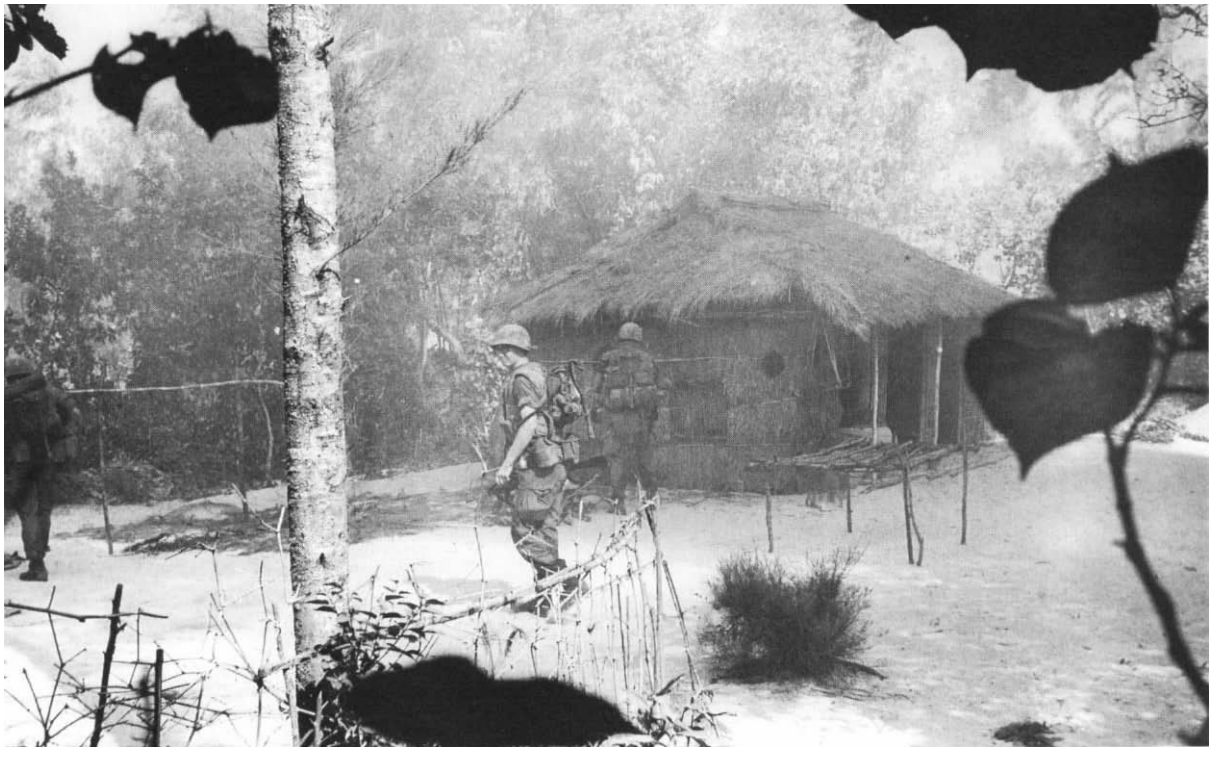
***The other ships of the amphibious task group included the USS *Navarro* (APA 215), USS *Alamo* (LSD 33), USS *Whetstone* (LSD 27), and *Vernon County* (LST 1161).

****In his comments, Colonel McQuown wrote that ARVN forces later found in a draw north and west of Thom Tham Ke the bodies of over 100 North Vietnamese from the *166th NVA Battalion*. This count was not included in the report of the action nor in the investigation that followed. Col Max McQuown, Comments on draft, dtd 22Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter McQuown Comments.



Both photos are from the Abel Collection

Top, a Navy corpsman from Company K, BLT 3/1 runs across an open paddy carrying a litter to assist a wounded Marine during Operation Badger Tooth. Below, Marines from BLT 3/1 search a hamlet in the same operation. During Badger Tooth, the BLT suffered 48 dead and 86 wounded, which resulted in an investigation.



Following the end of the operation, higher headquarters wanted to know the reasons for the Marine battalion suffering such heavy casualties. As Brigadier General Glick later stated, "any time that something like that happened, there was a lot of pressure all the way from the White House down of 'what happened.'" On 30 December, General Glick ordered a full investigation of the matter. The investigating officer, Lieutenant Colonel George H. Benskin, Jr., visited the village the next day and began taking testimony from various commanders and staff officers, including Lieutenant Colonel McQuown, the BLT 3/1 company commanders, and the SLF Bravo intelligence officer or S–2. Completing his fact-finding mission on 2 January, Lieutenant Colonel Benskin sent his preliminary findings three days later to General Glick. In this initial report, Benskin emphasized the strength of the enemy positions with "fields of fire" permitting them to "neutralize efforts of all attacking units except Company K when supported by tanks." The enemy had withheld its fire "on all fronts until attacking units were drawn into the killing zones." According to all accounts, the terrain together with the village defenses combined in the favor of the enemy "in every respect."[5*]

On 15 January, General Glick forwarded the complete report to Lieutenant General Krulak, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific. In his covering message, General Glick observed: "I purposely did not make a recommendation in the investigation report concerning replacement of the BLT commander because of the channels which the report may go through and the possible political implications of relief of commanders concerned." In that message and in a interview over 20 years after the incident, he insisted that Lieutenant Colonel McQuown "was an exceptionally good battalion commander." He also observed in the interview that BLT 3/1 "was not the first unit that ran into trouble in that 'Street Without Joy.'" Glick's main concern was that MACV would use the casualties sustained by BLT 3/1 as "justification for reopening the entire question of command relations for SLF/ARG operations." He believed that "any relief of the BLT commander at this time might add weight to any implications that serious deficiencies do exist in present arrangement." According to Glick, "the tactical decisions made in Badger Tooth were in no way dictated by the command arrangements in effect."[6**]

Despite the 9th MAB commander's attempt to separate the investigation of Badger Tooth from the subject of general amphibious command relations, there was to be a reexamination of the entire subject. While representatives of MACV, III MAF, FMFPac, PacFlt, and Seventh Fleet had worked out an agreement to streamline the procedures for SLF operations in Vietnam during the spring of 1966, some friction between the in-country and the amphibious commands, especially the 9th MAB, continued to exist. Lieutenant General Krulak the FMFPac commander in October 1967 outlined the various perspectives on the SLF in a long extended message. According to the FMFPac commander, "MACV would like to see Ninth MAB units in-country continually . . . he pretty much sees them as so many battalions, helo squadrons . . . etc." From what Krulak called a "parochial Marine Corps view" the best system would be to maintain the SLFs as a separate organization, but "employed in a manner completely responsive to the will of CG III MAF . . . ." While sympathizing and identifying himself with this latter viewpoint, Krulak believed in the necessity of intra-theater rotation of Vietnam-based units between the SLF and rehabilitation for a brief period on Okinawa. He also insisted that "some accommodation with the Navy as essential to preserve our use of the amphibious shipping. . . ." According to the FMFPac commander, unless the Marines worked "hand and glove with them, the Navy

*Colonel McQuown stated that he reported to General Glick after he reembarked upon the Seventh Fleet Amphibious Ready Group shipping and made several observations. He pointed out that the AOA [amphibious objective area] was not a free fire zone and that Company L followed the rules of engagement "to the letter." He noted that when the company was 25 meters from the village, "the lead elements of Lima Company were blown away. This was, in part, a major cause of the heavy casualties of this fight." McQuown related that he had "opposed Operation Badger Tooth from the onset because it was ill conceived and tactically unsound. It failed to use any of BLT 3/1's Task Organization, except the LVT's that would have enabled the BLT to conduct a sustained operation ashore." Furthermore the village was "occupied and defended by a major NVA force. The village had been turned into a well concealed, skillfully constructed—almost impregnable defensive position that withstood heavy air strikes and naval gunfire. To conquer the defenders was an extremely difficult task made more difficult because the BLT landed without its key supporting elements—the tanks, Ontos, artillery, and heavy mortars." According to McQuown, "Badger Tooth was an SLF operation in name only because SLF Marines were involved. In reality it was a water-borne/helicopter landing of a 'bare bones' *unsupported* [emphasis in the original] Marine infantry battalion moving 8 to 10 miles from the waters edge to objectives that lacked even a shred of intelligence to justify the operation." McQuown Comments.

**Colonel Maynard W. Schmidt, the SLF Bravo commander through February 1968, wrote that at the time he did "not realize that Operation Badger Tooth caused that much attention at the higher echelons." Colonel Maynard W. Schmidt, Comments on draft, n.d. [1994] (Vietnam Comment File).

is going to take the amphibious shipping away, and either move it out of the theater or join forces with the Army . . . ." Krulak, nevertheless, recognized that there were circumstances where either one or both of the SLFs would have to be committed to an in-country operation for an extended period of time.[7]

In a sense, General Cushman, the III MAF commander, found himself betwixt and between. He answered to both Generals Krulak, the FMFPac commander, and to Westmoreland, the MACV commander. Both of these commanders had differing but equally valid concerns about the SLF. In answer to Krulak's message, Cushman attempted to explain his predicament. While agreeing in principle with the FMFPac commander's desire to retain the rotation between in-country forces and Okinawa via the SLF, Cushman declared that at that time the situation in Vietnam was so "fluid and dynamic that I cannot at present in good conscience recommend to Westy [Westmoreland] the resumption of intra-theater BLT rotation to and from Okinawa." He then suggested an alternative that Krulak had suggested in his message—namely that the SLFs refit out of the U.S. naval base at Subic Bay in the Philippines. According to the III MAF commander, he would hope that "the issue and turn-in at Subic could be so expedited as to permit a short but concentrated amphib[ious] training period . . . ." Both Westmoreland and Krulak eventually concurred in this policy.[8*]

The matter of amphibious command relations was not only a dispute between Marines and Navy on one side and MACV and the Army on the other, but also caused division within Marine Corps circles. Marine commanders in III MAF shared to a certain extent some of the same opinions as their Army counterparts and MACV about the SLF. They saw the Seventh Fleet forces largely as a reinforcement for their own forces in Vietnam. With control of the air and landing areas, in-country commanders believed there was little need for many of the amphibious doctrinal procedures relative to amphibious operational area and command.[**] The Navy and the Marine amphibious commanders, on the other hand, regarded the SLFs as the Seventh Fleet or Western Pacific reserve force. While ready to reinforce the forces in Vietnam when needed, they also looked to other possible crises areas in the Pacific. They feared any dilution of their authority might result in the loss of the amphibious forces to the Seventh Fleet for other Pacific contingencies.[9]

Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins, the 3d Marine Division commander, later recalled when General Westmoreland, the MACV commander, "was screaming his head off for more troops, there were at least two battalions of well-trained Marines who were floating around on the ships." According to Tompkins "simply from an operational point of view . . . . Better to have two battalions ashore than two battalions floating around, looking at each other." One of Tompkin's staff officers, Colonel Alexander L. Michaux carped that the SLF landings were largely administrative and designating them as amphibious was "a joke." According to Michaux, its only purpose was to give the Navy amphibious commander control of the operation for a day.[10***]

Even while critical of the employment of the SLF, General Tompkins maintained that if one looked beyond Vietnam, the Navy was "well advised to have the two battalions not under the operational control [of MACV]." Both Generals Cushman, the III MAF commander, and Major General Donn J. Robertson, the 1st Marine Division commander, viewed the SLF capability positively. Robertson declared that the "SLF gave us

*Colonel Warren A. Butcher, who relieved Col Schmidt in command of SLF Bravo, wrote that the Marines had anticipated the decision to make Subic Bay the main base for the refitting of the SLF. He noted that "sections of 9th MAB under G–4 cognizance were sent to Subic to contact opposite numbers early on. When the directive came out of FMFPac, we had a completed plan. I had never seen Service troops in operation before, at least to the extent they were used in the rehabs at Subic." He noted that the first group there did a "masterful job." According to Butcher, General Krulak complimented the group "for doing in 10 days at Subic, what it had taken 6 weeks to do on Okinawa." Butcher stated that the Service troops accomplished their technical inspections by first identifying units to be "retrograded. They started in country, continued aboard ship enroute to Subic, and finished at Subic Bay. Flood lights were set up for around the clock operations. Even though the first BLT was pulled out earlier than expected, the completion percentage was in the high nineties, and the BLT reembarked with all equipment in near new condition." Col Warren A. Butcher, Comments on draft, dtd 5Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

**Colonel George F. Warren, who served in 1968 as the executive officer of BLT 2/4, wrote, "in-country commanders had a propensity for breaking up the SLF into its component parts (air/ground) and then further breaking up the BLT into its component parts (combat, combat support and combat service support units). Ultimately the SLF was reconstituted into a single entity and loaded back aboard . . . [Navy] shipping. One can imagine the movement of operational control between commanders in such a situation and the administrative time and effort that was consumed during SLF operations, to say nothing about the confusion such movement generated." Col George F. Warren, Comments on draft, dtd 28Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

***Colonel Butcher, the former SLF Bravo commander, conceded the point that most SLF landings were administrative but denies the assertion that the purpose of the landings was to give the Navy amphibious commander control of the operation for a day. Butcher Comments.

a flexibility . . . It added that extra punch that we often needed." Cushman agreed, professing that "It was just like having another couple of battalions."[11]

In mid-December 1967, Cushman reemphasized to his division commanders that "first and foremost" he wanted the "ARG/SLF used in an amphibious role in accordance with current doctrine for amphibious operations." He reminded both commanders that the SLFs were available to III MAF "for employment against time sensitive targets." Not only did he want the SLF operations to be "in consonance with our amphibious doctrine," but that they "be based on best III MAF intelligence estimates."[12]

Concurrent with this Marine emphasis about the employment of the SLF, General Westmoreland's MACV staff was involved in contingency planning for a possible amphibious landing north of the DMZ. With a possible 30,000 enemy in the objective area, the planning for Operation Durango City, the codename for the proposed amphibious assault, by necessity involved both Army and Marine ground forces as well as support from the Seventh Air Force. In this planning effort, General William W. Momyer, the Seventh Air Force commander, raised the subject of air control in the objective area. While the chances of approval of the Operation Durango City plan or any amphibious operation in the north was dubious at best, any discussion over command relations was serious business, especially at a time when the whole question of single manager of air in South Vietnam was about to surface.[13]*

Thus, in this general context, General Westmoreland wanted another look at the entire subject of the SLF and the results of the Badger Tooth operation only added fuel to this desire. In mid-January, the MACV commander expressed his doubts to Admiral Sharp, CinCPac, and proposed that changes be made. The Pacific commander agreed with Westmoreland that there was justifiable concern over Badger Tooth and was willing to consider transfer of operational control of the ashore forces from the amphibious task force commander at an earlier time in an SLF amphibious operation. Sharp also mentioned that he was thinking about the possibility of basing one of the SLFs ashore as a permanent element of III MAF. While maintaining "that present command relations for the conduct of amphibious operations in South Vietnam are valid," he stated that he had asked Vice Admiral John J. Hyland, Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, to conduct a broad-based study of SLF operations in Vietnam.[14]

While CinCPacFlt established a study group with representatives from both the Marine and Navy amphibious forces, the whole question about the SLF would be overtaken by events. While the study group reasserted the validity of the basic command and control system for the SLF then in effect, it would, essentially permit ComUSMACV "to prescribe virtually every important aspect of the employment of amphibious forces, from specifying the mission to delineating the characteristics of the amphibious objective area." By the time, the study came out both SLF BLTs were ashore.[15]

With the massing of enemy forces in the north followed by the Tet offensive, the SLF battalions, for all intents and purposes, became part of III MAF for the next few months. In mid-January, both SLFs were in an alert status off the coast of northern I Corps. On 22 January, SLF Alpha's BLT 2/4 initiated Operation Ballistic Armor in which the unit relieved the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines at Camp Evans which in turn deployed to Khe Sanh. Upon itself being relieved by elements of the 1st Air Cavalry Division four days later, the BLT reembarked upon its amphibious shipping. The following day in Operation Fortress Attack, the BLT went ashore near the C–2 combat base, coming under the operational control of the 9th Marines.** In the meantime, the SLF Bravo battalion conducted

*General Cushman stated that the planning for an amphibious operation "never went anywhere . . . . it was just another plan sticking up. . . . They wanted to have one up to date, just in case, you know, got lucky or somebody else got to be President or some damn thing." (Cushman intvw, 1982, p. 46.) See Chapters 23 and 24 for discussion of the Single Manager controversy.

**Colonel Bruce F. Meyers, the commander of SLF Alpha, recalled his concerns about the irregularity and departure from normal amphibious doctrine during this period. He wrote that on 26 Jan "op con was passed back to me (CTG 79.4) at noon and we had all elements of BLT 2/4 back aboard our shipping in five hours and 15 minutes (261830)." He was then directed to land his tank and amtrac platoons at the mouth of the Cua Viet at the request of III MAF. On 27 Januaty, BLT 2/4 began Operation Fortress Attack in the 9th Marines operational area and he passed operational control to the 9th Marines at 1500. Meyers declared that he "recognized the exigency of the threat in the Tet offensive, and our immediate response and accommodation to that threat . . . ." As the SLF commander, he "was worried that Gen. Westmoreland would pick up on this usage out of our traditional 'amphibious' role . . . It was obvious to both my [Navy] ARG [Amphibious Ready Group] counterpart . . . [and to Meyers] that both Adm. Sharp and Gen. Krulak were both worried about this same aspect of the use of the ARG/SLF . . . ." At his debriefing at FMFPac, Meyers referred to "grave reservations and possible implications for the future of the Marine Corps role as a result of what I believed at the time to be bordering on a misuse of the ARG/SLF. In the end, we accomplished what the ground commanders needed—an immediate 'fire brigade' response to a perceived serious threat. In retrospect, it was probably the wisest response to the situation that we could have achieved." Col Bruce F. Meyers, Comments on draft dtd 20Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File).

Operation Badger Catch in the Cua Viet sector from 23–26 January. Badger Catch became Operation Saline and then Operation Napoleon/Saline. Until June, both SLF battalions remained ashore in the DMZ sector, often transferring from one operational area to another. In effect, both BLTs functioned as any other infantry battalion of the 3d Marine Division in the north.*

By June, the situation in the DMZ had clarified to the extent that both ComUSMACV, now General Abrams, and General Cushman believed that it was time for the SLFs to be reconstituted. A member of General Cushman's staff, Colonel Franklin L. Smith related that III MAF wanted them back on ship: "Once you get people . . . Nobody wants to leave them go." Complicating the situation was the attitude of the Seventh Fleet amphibious commander, Commander Task Force 76, whom Smith believed had been intimidated by the Operation Badger Tooth experience. According to Smith, "Badger Tooth scared the hell out of the guy. . . . As soon as the battalion goes ashore, he wants to dump it."[16]**

Despite the various reservations, in early June 1968, BLT 3/1, now under Lieutenant Colonel Daniel J. Quick, and HMM–164, under Lieutenant Colonel Robert F. Rick, reconstituted SLF Bravo, under Colonel Warren A. Butcher, and reembarked upon the TG 76.5 (ARG) amphibious shipping.*** From 7–14 June, BLT 3/1 conducted Operation Swift Saber in Elephant Valley, a known VC infiltration route just northwest of Da Nang, under the operational control of the 1st Marine Division. At the end of the operation, in which the Marines encountered only slight resistance, the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Charles E. Mueller, and HMM–265, under Lieutenant Colonel Roy J. Edwards, relieved BLT 3/1 and HMM–164 respectively as the infantry and helicopter components of SLF Bravo.[17]****

Taking a respite, the newly reconstituted SLF Bravo departed for the new SLF training and rehabilitation encampment at Subic Bay in the Philippines. After a brief stay at Subic, the SLF Bravo units returned to Vietnam for a one-week operation, Eager Yankee, lasting from 9–16 July, in Thua Thien Province near Phu Loc. Operating in support of Task Force X-Ray's Operation Houston, the SLF Marines reported killing 9 of the enemy and captured 6 prisoners while sustaining casualties of 8 dead and 34 wounded. On 16 July, BLT 2/7 joined the 5th Marines in Operation Houston and on 22 July reembarked on its amphibious shipping. After reembarking, BLT 2/7 landed the following day at Da Nang in Operation Swift Play which lasted from 23–24 July in the Go Noi Island area.***** On the 25th, the 27th Marines assumed operational control of the BLT which would remain in the Hoi An sector through October.[18]

In the meantime, BLT 2/4, the SLF Alpha battalion, remained in the DMZ sector as part of Operation Lancaster II.****** On 13 August, BLT 2/26 relieved the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines as the SLF Alpha infantry component. This was largely a paper transfer. The SLF BLT

*See Chapters 7, 13, and 15 for the description of the fighting and the activities of the SLF BLTs in the north during this period. Colonel McQuown, the former commander of BLT 3/1, wrote that the two "SLF's should have been tremendous assets for III MAF. However, in order to realize their full potential the III MAF Command would have had to insist that the using command select objectives based on hard intelligence, and just as important, follow the Marine Corps Amphibious Doctrine. Properly employed, the SLF's could have responded rapidly to requests from the 1st and 3d Divisions and would have been the '911' forces during the Vietnam War." He believed, however, they were "seldom employed with sound tactics . . ." and that the 3d Marine Division in particular "had a myopic view of the use of the SLF's." He, nevertheless, granted that his BLT's operations in the Cua Viet sector in January and February were a "profitable use of a potent fighting force." McQuown Comments.

**Colonel Butcher, the SLF Bravo Commander, agreed with Colonel Smith about the attitude of the amphibious task force commander. Butcher wrote that while in the "sea cabin of CTF 76 (who was a deep-selected, 'frocked' rear admiral with expertise in the nuclear field), . . . [Butcher] was told the conditions under which the landing force would 'chop' ashore . . . Basically, the Admiral's idea was to toss the ball ashore as soon as the helicopters went 'feet dry.'" Butcher Comments.

***The ships of TG 76.5 now consisted of the USS *Valley Forge* (LPH 8), *Vancouver* (LPD 2), *Thomaston* (LSD 28), and *Washburn* (AKA 108).

****In July, USS *Tripoli* (LPH 10) replaced the *Valley Forge* as the helicopter carrier of TG 76.5. On 1 September 1968, HMM–165, under Lieutenant Colonel George L. Patrick, relieved HMM–265 as the SLF Bravo helicopter squadron. On 28 December 1968, HMM–164, now under Lieutenant Colonel Richard T. Trundy, once again became the SLF squadron in place of HMM–165.

*****See Chapter 17.

******HMM–363, commanded by Major James L. Harrison, relieved HMM–362 on 6 September 1968 as the helicopter squadron for SLF Alpha. Lieutenant Colonel Walter H. Shauer, Jr., who commanded HMM–362 during this period, noted that "we were fragged to support our BLT 2/4 ashore, and other division units . . . ." With its maintenance support on board ship, the squadron was "able to achieve maximum aircraft availability each day averaging over 20 H–34s available for Frags. During our SLF A tenure we flew over 46,000 sorties, and set the record on board the LPH 5 *Princeton* for the most shipboard carrier landings, 285 in a 24-hour period and supported 25 major operations." LtCol Walter H. Shauer, Jr., Comments on draft, dtd 1Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File). Colonel Warren A. Butcher, the SLF Bravo commander, wrote about the advantages for the Marine Corps to have the helicopters on board ship as the SLF squadrons "benefitted from the more sterile conditions on board the LPH and, from, what the squadron commanders told me, a more responsive supply system." Butcher Comments.



Both photos ate from the Abel Collection

Above, Boeing Vertol CH–46 Sea Knight helicopters from HMM–165 take off from the Phu Bai Airstrip to relieve HMM–265 on board the USS Tripoli *(LPH 10). HMM–165 became the SLF Bravo helicopter squadron. In bottom photo, a Sikorsky UH–34D Sea Horse from HMM–362, the SLF Alpha helicopter squadron on board the USS* Princeton *(LPH 5), lands Marines from BLT 2/4 in a LZ near Camp Carroll.*



had been assigned to the 1st Marines in the Cua Viet sector and returned there in Operation Proud Hunter after a brief period of amphibious training. On the 28th, in Operation Swift Pursuit, the BLT established a new area of operations in the Mai Loc sector in the Operation Lancaster II TAOR. Into October, the battalion essentially operated under the 3d Marines as another infantry battalion in the Lancaster II sector.[19]

Thus by mid-October, the situation with the SLFs had almost reverted to the situation that existed until June. Both SLF infantry battalions had been operating for an extended period with III MAF units ashore. The main difference was that one was attached to the 3d Division and the other to the 1st Marine Division. BLT 2/26, which was still operating in the 3d Marine Division sector, was slated for rehabilitation training in the SLF base at Subic Bay. Concurrently, MACV had directed III MAF to undertake an expanded pacification campaign while at the same time increasing operations against the enemy base areas and main force units. III MAF wanted to use the SLFs in this campaign in "swift short duration operations . . . principally in cordon and search operations to root out and eliminate the VC infrastructure." The principle target areas were to be the Batangan Peninsula just south of Chu Lai and the Barrier Island sector south of Hoi An. At this point, III MAF consulted with the commander of the 9th MAB, Brigadier General John E. Williams,* who on the basis of these proposed new operations decided to cancel the BLT 2/26 rehabilitation trip to the Philippines.[20]

The SLF Alpha ARG which had embarked BLT 2/26 on 19 October at Quang Tri began to steam for Da Nang.** On 25 October, the BLT landed at Da Nang in Operation Eager Hunter. The following day, the BLT came under the operational control of the 1st Marines and conducted Operation Garrard Bay until mid-November in the coastal hamlets between Marble Mountain and Dien Ban. On 20 November, the BLT joined the 1st Marines Operation Meade River in the "Dodge City" sector north of the Go Noi Island area in the Da Nang TAOR.[21]***



Photo is from the Abel Collection

Marines of BLT 2/26 wade through streams in the Barrier Island area southeast of Hoi An. The BLT, the SLF Alpha battalion, is conducting Operation Valiant Hunt.

In the meantime the SLF Bravo battalion, BLT 2/7 remained also under the operational control of the 1st Marines until early November when it embarked upon its amphibious shipping.**** III MAF and the ARG/SLF Bravo commanders had planned to mount their first of the new amphibious cordon and search operations on the Batangan Peninsula. While liaison officers from the amphibious task group met with the Americal Division at Chu Lai, General Cushman and his staff decided that a similar operation on the Barrier Island would prove more lucrative. Landing on the coast southeast of Hoi An, just below the Cua Dai River, on 10 November, BLT 2/7 carried out the new operation, called Daring Endeavor, for the next seven days. Although supposed to extend the operation to the south, the battalion encountered significant opposition in the original area. Using cordon and search techniques, the Marines reported killing 39 of the

*Brigadier General Williams relieved Brigadier General William C. Chip as CG 9th MAB on 12 August 1968. Brigadier General Chip had relieved Brigadier General Glick on 20 January 1968 when the latter became 3d Marine Division assistant division commander.

**Amphibious Ready Group Alpha (TG 76.4) now consisted of the USS *Princeton* (LPH 5), USS *Dubuque* (LPD 8), USS *Oak Hill* (LSD 7), and USS *Windham County* (LST 1170).

***See Chapter 21 for discussion of the *Le Loi* campaign and Operation Meade River.

****The 1st Marines relieved the 27th Marines in the Da Nang area of operations when the latter regiment redeployed to the United States. See Chapter 21. Amphibious Ready Group Bravo (TG 76.5) now consisted of the USS *Merrick* (AKA 97), USS *Monticello* (LSD 35), USS *Ogden* (LPD 5), USS *Tripoli* (LPH 10), and *Seminole* (AKA 104).

enemy and captured 30 POWs, at a cost of 1 Marine dead and 36 wounded. The BLT conducted no civic action because the population in the area was "considered to be hostile and hard line psy ops [psychological operations] was used." According to the amphibious task group commander, the operation demonstrated the SLF ability "to temporarily deny enemy forces the use of their territory, while destroying their fortification and supplies, was fully realized." On 20 November, BLT 2/7 returned to the operational control of the 1st Marines and prepared to relieve the SLF Bravo battalion, BLT 2/26, in Operation Meade River.[22]

On 8 December, BLT 2/26 reembarked upon ARG/SLF Alpha shipping "conducting rehabilitation and training for future operations."* One week later, on 15 December, the BLT initiated SLF Alpha Operation Valiant Hunt. Remaining under the operational control of the SLF Alpha commander, now Colonel John F. McMahon, the BLT conducted a cordon and search in the southern Barrier Island sector just south of the earlier Daring Endeavor area of operations. Operation Valiant Hunt lasted until 5 January 1969. Lieutenant Colonel William F. Sparks, the battalion commander, observed that "Operation Valiant Hunt was the first time the BLT was responsible for conducting a total cordon operation. In this respect, the operation was a good 'training exercise' . . . However, there were no significant problems or enemy techniques encountered."[23]

As the year ended, the SLF battalions were in much the same situation as the year had begun. One battalion was bringing a separate operation to a close while the other was ashore attached to a Marine division. In fact the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines was about to relieve BLT 2/7 as the infantry component of SLF Bravo. Even more important, many of the issues over the use of the SLF had not fully been settled. Even as late as July 1969, the 9th MAB operations officer, Colonel Clyde W. Hunter, would remark that the MAB staff believed that the "divisions were using the SLFs improperly, actually ginning up operations just to get them ashore and tie them down to a TAOR, or into some kind of operation, that had no connection to their mission as an SLF."[24]

Still, as 1969 was about to begin, Brigadier General Williams, the 9th MAB commander, was about to embark on board amphibious shipping as Commanding General, Task Force 79, to help oversee one of the largest amphibious operations of the Vietnam War. In Operation Bold Mariner, both SLFs of the 9th MAB would land on the Batangan Peninsula under the command of Brigadier General Wilson. While beginning in this spectacular fashion, the SLFs for the remainder of 1969 would follow much the same pattern as that of 1968. For 1969, there would be 14 SLF operations as compared to 13 in 1968, and 25 in 1967. By the end of 1969, the SLFs had become a moot question for operations in South Vietnam. With the reduction of forces in Vietnam, the SLF could only be committed with the specific permission of the JCS.[25]

Sub-Unit 1, 1st Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (ANGLICO)

In Vietnam, there was another Marine-Navy connection with both the Seventh Fleet and the in-country forces. Sub-Unit 1, 1st ANGLICO was a Fleet Marine Force, Pacific separate organization whose primary mission was to call in U.S. naval gunfire from ships offshore or Marine and Navy air in support of allied or other U.S. Service forces. In Vietnam, Sub-Unit 1 remained outside of the regular Marine chain of command and under the direct operational control of MACV in Saigon. At the beginning of 1968, Lieutenant Colonel Carlton D. Goodiel, Jr., the unit commander, maintained his headquarters in Saigon, but kept detachments in each of the Corps areas with the largest in I Corps.

In January 1968, the I Corps Liaison Naval Gunfire Team, headed by Navy Lieutenant Commander Philip B. Hatch, Jr., was at Da Nang and provided direct liaison with the South Vietnamese I Corps military establishment.** Under his control were two shore fire parties, one at Hue with the 1st ARVN Division and a smaller one at Quang Ngai with the 2d ARVN Division. Navy Lieutenant Robert A. Keeling headed the naval gunfire liaison team with the U.S. Army Americal Division with four shore fire parties attached to Army units at both Chu Lai and Duc Pho. At this time, the largest ANGLICO detachment in I Corps, and for that fact in the country, commanded by Marine Major Enos S. Olin, was

*On 7 December, HMM–362, now under Lieutenant Colonel Jack E. Schlarp, embarked upon the USS *Okinawa* (LPH 3) relieved HMM–363, as the SLF Alpha helicopter squadron. Lieutenant Colonel Schlarp recalled that while embarked "we conducted assault landings, put our BLT ashore, supported them completely, evacuated the wounded and extracted them at the completion of the operation." LtCol Jack E. Schlarp, Comments on draft, dtd 21Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File). The other ships of ARG Alpha (TG 76.4) were the USS *Duluth* (LPD 6), USS *Fort Marion* (LSD 22), USS *Winslow* (AKA 94).

**No ANGLICO detachments or teams were assigned to Marine units of III MAF since Marine units maintained in their FSCC and DASC organizations the ability to call in their own naval gunfire and air support.

with the 2d ROK Marine Brigade at Hoi An. One of the few detachments in Vietnam with an air control party, Olin had under him over 70 enlisted Marines and usually nine officers, eight Marines and one Navy lieutenant (j.g.).[26]

While smaller and more scattered, Lieutenant Colonel Goodiel's command maintained similar naval gunfire liaison teams in the other corps areas of South Vietnam. In II Corps, Navy Lieutenant William L. Vandiver maintained the headquarters of his naval gunfire liaison team at Nha Trang with five shore fire control parties under his control. Further south, from the III Corps Naval Gunfire Liaison Team headquarters at Bien Hoa, Navy Lieutenant Dale W. Lucas controlled three shore fire control parties in the Corps area. In IV Corps, Marine Captain Ronald K. Roth, commander of the naval gunfire liaison team headquartered at Can Tho in the Mekong Delta, had two fire control parties, one at Ben Tre and the other at Tra Vinh. All told in January, ANGLICO Sub-Unit 1 numbered more than 230 personnel, both Marine and Navy, including about 35 at the Saigon headquarters.[27]

During Tet, one of the most significant contributions of the ANGLICO teams was in the battle for Hue. At the outbreak of the attack on Hue on 31 January, the naval gunfire spot team attached to the 1st ARVN Division under Navy Lieutenant (j.g.) Marvin L. Warkentin, like the rest of the U.S. advisors, remained isolated from their units at the MACV compound in the southern sector of the city and had all they could do to repel the enemy attack on the compound itself. In a short time, however, with the arrival of the reinforcing Marine forces in the city, the team resumed its primary mission.[28]

Through 13 February, all of the naval gunfire was employed against suspected enemy lines of communications outside of the city. Beginning on 14 February, with the initial onslaught of the enemy forces in the city contained north of the Perfume River and the NVA units cleared out south of the river, the naval gunfire support then shifted to targets in the Citadel north of the river with the exception of the former Imperial palace and its grounds. Because of the heavy cloud cover and other hampering weather conditions, the ships depended upon Warkentin's team for ground spotting. On the basis of military necessity and with the permission of the 1st Marines' commander, Colonel Stanley S. Hughes, who had operational control of the Marine forces in the city, the spotting team occupied a hotel which had been the headquarters in Hue of the International Control Commission* and supposedly neutral ground. The building, however, provided the best view of the targets. For the first two days, the team directed the fires of the cruiser USS *Providence* (CLG 6) and the destroyer *Manley* (DD 940) against first the Citadel walls, and then on the 17th, against specific enemy strongholds in the old city. After the 17th, the Seventh Fleet gunships during the remainder of Operation Hue City turned their attention once more to harassing and interdiction fires.** According to interrogations of captured enemy troops in the Hue fighting, the naval gunfire inflicted many casualties "and had an extremely demoralizing effect."[29]

Elsewhere in Vietnam during Tet, in II Corps, naval gunfire contributed to the defeat of the VC attacks against the cities. According to ANGLICO reports at Nha Trang, prior coordination planning with the installation defense command there permitted Navy Lieutenant Vandiver to call upon the destroyer USS *Mansfield* (DD 728), which was in the harbor, to provide counter-rocket and counter-mortar fires and to interdict avenues of approach to the city. Further south in the II Corps sector at Phan Thiet on 3 February, the naval gunfire liaison spot team there attached to the U.S. Army's 3d Battalion, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne Division directed defensive fires from the destroyer USS *Frank E. Evans* (DD 754) into the city against the attacking *840th VC Battalion*. The following day, the ANGLICO team adjusted the fires within 100 meters of friendly troops. In its after-action report, the team observed that the enemy troops "became disorganized, fled the area, and was soon driven out of the city by ARVN forces." Later in the month, the team once more called upon the *Evans* and another destroyer, the USS *Pritchett* (DD 561), to frustrate a renewed VC assault on Phan Thiet.[30]

Following Tet, naval gunfire continued to play a large role especially in I Corps with its large buildup of forces especially in the north beginning even before Tet. By mid-March 1968, III MAF contained in the northern two provinces of I Corps one Marine division,

*The International Control Commission was created by the Geneva Agreement of 1954 to ensure the provisions of that treaty. It consisted of Polish, Indian, and Canadian members. Although by this time, the Commission was unable to enforce anything, it still retained facilities and personnel in both North and South Vietnam. See also Chapter 10.

**Two other destroyers and the cruisers *Canberra* (CAG 2) and the *Newport News* (CA 148) supported Operation Hue City. See CinCPacFlt, "Pacific Area Naval Operations Review," Feb68 p. 29, (OAB, NHD).

elements of a second, and two Army divisions, and in addition a new command structure. Although subordinate to III MAF, Provisional Corps, Vietnam, commanded by Army Lieutenant General William B. Rosson, had operational control of U.S. forces in Quang Tri Province and Thua Thien Provinces including the 3d Marine Division, the 1st Air Cavalry Division, and the 101st Airborne Division.*

These changes in command relationships and the arrival of the new Army divisions in northern I Corps had an effect upon the ANGLICO organization in the corps sector. Since 26 January, Marine First Lieutenant Pasquale J. Morocco headed the ANGLICO fire control party with the 1st Air Cavalry Division at Camp Evans. Prior to the establishment of Provisional Corps, Lieutenant Hatch, the I Corps Naval Gunfire Liaison officer, also doubled as the MACV (Forward) Liaison officer when that command was temporarily installed at Phu Bai under General Creighton W. Abrams in early February. He remained in that dual capacity until 10 March when Provisional (Prov) Corps came into existence and General Abrams returned to Saigon. On 16 March, Navy Lieutenant Dale W. Lucas became the Provisional Corps Naval Gunfire Liaison officer. At about the same time, Navy Lieutenant Warkentin transferred from Hue to Camp Eagle outside of Phu Bai to head the shore fire control party attached to the 101st Airborne Division. On 23 April, ANGLICO spotters called in a Marine close air strike in support of the 101st marking "the first time" during the war that non-Air Force personnel controlled a close air support mission for the division.[31]

Throughout the period from February through June 1968, the tempo of naval gunfire support increased throughout Vietnam with the bulk going to support U.S. and allied forces in I Corps. For example, in February, Navy ships off the coast of South Vietnam fired more than 94,000 rounds. Of this total, ANGLICO teams in I Corps controlled missions firing nearly 18,000 of those rounds, which did not include the missions fired in support of the 3d Marine Division along the DMZ. By June, while somewhat reduced from February, the U.S. Seventh Fleet fired more than 79,000 rounds in support of all forces, with ANGLICO in I Corps controlling missions which provided over 18,000 of those rounds. Again, the figures for I Corps did not include the missions fired in support of the two Marine Divisions in the corps sector. For the first half of 1968, Navy gunfire support exceeded that of the entire previous year.[32]

In perhaps the largest demonstration of joint supporting arms of the war, Operation Thor in July 1968, naval gunfire ships and naval air played a large role in the aerial, ground, and ship bombardment of the North Vietnamese batteries in the Cap Mui Lay sector of the DMZ. Although Provisional Corps exercised command and coordination, Navy Lieutenant Dale W. Lucas, the Prov Corps ANGLICO naval gunfire liaison officer, and his team at the Dong Ha forward headquarters, processed all naval gunfire and then passed the direction to the 3d Marine Division naval gunfire section for action. All told, for the first seven days of July, nine gunships (three cruisers and six destroyers) fired over 19,000 rounds of 5-inch, 6-inch, and 8-inch ammunition against the enemy gun positions. In addition, Navy aircraft from four carriers flew 512 sorties and dropped 812 tons of ordnance upon the NVA positions. According to aerial photography and observation, the joint bombardment created extensive damage and hampered for the time being the NVA artillery support and coastal defense ability in the Cap Mui Lay area.[33]**

About this time, the Navy prepared to add a powerful new arsenal to its naval gunfire capability, the recently refurbished battleship *New Jersey* (BB 62) with its 16-inch guns. On 16 July, I Corps and Prov Corps ANGLICO liaison teams participated in a targeting planning conference for the ship which was to arrive off the waters of Vietnam at the end of September. On 30 September, the battleship fired its first observed mission against NVA positions in the DMZ which "was spotted by an ANGLICO spotter flying in a Marine TA–4F from MAG 11 . . . ." According to the ground data assessment (GDA), the *New Jersey*'s big guns silenced 1 antiaircraft site, destroyed 1 truck and 4 bunkers, and caused 11 secondary explosions. During her first month off the coast of Vietnam, the warship steamed back and forth between I and II Corps and off the coast of the DMZ. Through the end

*The Prov Corps command did not include the 1st Marine Division Task Force X-Ray which operated in Phu Loc District and the Hai Van area of Thua Thien Province. In August 1968, Provisional Corps became XXIV Corps. For the changes in the military structure in I Corps, see Chapter 13.

**See Chapter 26 for a detailed account for Operation Thor. The Navy ships that took part in the operation were the cruisers *Boston* (CAG 1), *Providence* (CLG 6), and *St. Paul* (CA 73); the destroyers *Benner* (DD 807), *Boyd* (DD 544), *Cochrane* (DDG 21), *Turner Joy* (DD 951), *O'Brien* (DD 725), and *Henry B. Wilson* (DDG 7); and the carriers *Bon Homme Richard* (CVA 31), *Constellation* (CVA 64), *Ticonderoga* (CVA 14), and *America* (CVA 66).

of the year, the *New Jersey*, in the words of one Navy report, moved from one offshore position to another, "wreaking havoc on the enemy wherever she employed her might." For ANGLICO and Lieutenant Colonel Frederick K. Purdum, who relieved Lieutenant Colonel Goodiel as the commander of the Sub-Unit in August, the battleship provided a convincing argument to allied and Army commands of the capabilities and uses of naval gunfire and the services of ANGLICO naval gunfire liaison teams.[34]

By the end of the year, the ANGLICO Sub-Unit 1 in Vietnam was somewhat smaller than in January, but it had become more self-sufficient. Until November, although its headquarters was in Saigon, it drew its supplies from III MAF at Da Nang. With approval of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, the Sub-Unit obtained its own supply account and more importantly through an inter-Service agreement, it was now able to obtain common item supplies from the U.S. Army 1st Logistic Command in South Vietnam. By the end of the year, the Sub-Unit contained 217 personnel, but had expanded its operations in IV Corps. While the final six months did not require the extensive naval gunfire support of the first half, this support was more dispersed and employed more evenly in all four Corps areas.

Embassy Marines

Another special Marine detachment in Vietnam was the Marine Embassy guard. In 1968, although somewhat larger than the usual Embassy security guard, the Saigon detachment performed much the same missions as their counterparts elsewhere: protected classified material and U.S. government officials and property, especially the Ambassador and the Embassy. From 1965 through 1967, the detachment in Saigon had shown only sporadic growth. While more than doubling in 1966, it had remained the same size for over a year and was subordinate to Company C, Security Guard Battalion (State Department) headquartered in the Philippines capital, Manila. In January 1968, the detachment consisted of one officer, Captain Robert J. O'Brien, and 67 enlisted men.[35]

Until the Tet offensive in January 1968, except for increased security watch, the war had largely bypassed the Marines assigned to the Saigon Embassy. On the afternoon of 30 January, however, a State Department security officer met with Captain O'Brien and informed him about the possibility of a VC attack that evening or sometime during Tet in the Saigon area. The Marine captain immediately increased the alert status and put a second man on all one-man posts. He also placed a rooftop watch on the Embassy's chancery building and assigned two men to the Norodom compound next to the Embassy compound. That night he and one of his sergeants visited all of the posts, finding nothing out of the ordinary, and about 0130 on the 31st, returned to Marine House, which doubled as the headquarters and barracks for the guard. O'Brien then stretched out on a sofa and gave orders to wake him in time so he could make another tour at 0300.[36]

The Viet Cong disrupted the captain's schedule. At 0245, a group of approximately 20 members of the VC *C–10 Battalion* armed with satchel charges, automatic weapons, and grenades, blew a hole in the wall surrounding the Embassy compound near the northeast gate. The two U.S. Army Military Police (MPs) from the 716th Military Police Battalion raised the alarm, but were gunned down by the intruders. Two more MPs in a jeep patrol tried to come to the assistance of their comrades, but also died in a burst of machine gun fire.[37]

At the time this occurred, Sergeant Ronald W. Harper, one of the three Marines posted in the Embassy Chancery building, was visiting and drinking coffee with the Marines in the guard shack by the Norodom compound. He suddenly looked up and saw a strange Vietnamese and then heard rocket and machine gun fire. Harper made a dash back to the chancery, finding the main entrance door still unlocked. He found Corporal George B. Zahuranic at the front receptionist desk on the telephone calling for help. Sergeant Harper immediately locked the door and then ran to the armory inside the building to obtain additional weapons.[38]

At that point, the VC fired several B–40 rockets at the front entrance. The rockets knocked out the windows behind the steel bars and penetrated the door, but failed to unlock it or force it open. Although knocked to the ground by the initial blast, Harper was unhurt. Corporal Zahuranic was not as fortunate—he was hit by a piece of metal and was bleeding profusely from the right side of his head and ear. Sergeant Harper provided what first aid he could for Zahuranic and then answered the phone from another post. He relayed the information about the wounded Zahuranic and pressed upon his caller the urgency of the situation.

On the roof of the Chancery was Sergeant Rudy A. Soto, armed with a shotgun. Like Harper, Soto witnessed the VC blasting their way into the Embassy courtyard. He tried to take the VC troops under fire, but his weapon jammed. Sergeant Soto had a radio

with him, but was unable to contact either Harper or Zahuranic and presumed that the VC had entered the building. He then radioed Marine House and informed them of the situation as he knew it.

By this time, Captain O'Brien was on his way. The duty noncommissioned officer at Marine House had awakened him with the news about the attack almost as soon as it had occurred. The Marine captain with Sergeant Richard G. Frattarelli, his driver, jumped into the sedan that had a radio and departed for the Embassy, some five blocks away. Three other Marines, two sergeants and a corporal, followed in a jeep. Reaching a South Vietnamese police check point about a block away from the Embassy and hearing that the VC were still there, O'Brien decided that the Marines should leave the two vehicles at the police station.[39]

Covering the rest of the distance to the Embassy compound by foot, O'Brien and his small entourage arrived at the northeast gate unseen by any of the VC attackers. He called out to the MPs who were supposed to be there, but instead of the Americans, he saw five or six of the VC who still had their backs to the Marines. Captain O'Brien remembered being, "momentarily stunned by the abrupt . . . confrontation with the VC," but quickly recovered, ordering the one Marine with the Beretta submachine gun to open fire. As the Berretta gave a long burst, the other Marines shot their .38-caliber pistols at the enemy inside the gate. A sudden automatic weapons fusillade forced O'Brien and his men to take cover behind the compound wall and some nearby trees.

At this point, Captain O'Brien directed Sergeant Frattarelli to return to the sedan and radio Marine House for reinforcements. Frattarelli ran down the street about a half a block, when some frightened South Vietnamese police opened up upon him. The Marine sergeant took cover in an entrance way and "called out American" and the police let him through. Reaching the radio, he requested the additional men and ammunition and then retraced his route back to O'Brien.[40]

Back at Marine House, Gunnery Sergeant Allen Morrison had taken charge of the situation there. Although not in contact with Captain O'Brien until Frattarelli had radioed him, Morrison had communicated with both Sergeant Soto and the Marine sergeant with the Ambassador. The Ambassador was safe and had moved from his residence to the house of one of the Embassy security officers. According to Morrison, the Ambassador had delegated the defense of the Embassy to him in that he not been able to reach anyone else. Even before hearing from Sergeant Frattarelli, Gunnery Sergeant Morrison had sent a reaction team consisting of Staff Sergeant Leroy J. Banks and five other Marines in a vehicle to the Embassy.[41]

On the way, U.S. Army MPs stopped the Marines about 300 yards from the Embassy compound and told Staff Sergeant Banks to take his men out of the area as the VC were attacking. Banks told the MPs that they were Embassy Marines and "our job and orders were to get to the Embassy and save it." The Marine staff sergeant then directed his men to leave their vehicle and the team went the rest of the way on foot reaching the Norodom building, housing the Consulate and other U.S. government offices, on the southwest side of the Embassy. Banks' Marines then tried to maneuver north using the compound wall to find an entrance into the Embassy compound itself. They almost reached the police station where the first group had left their vehicles, but like Sergeant Frattarelli, came under fire from the edgy Vietnamese policemen. Unable to advance any further, Banks led his men back to the Norodom Building and joined the Marine guards already there.[42]

In the meantime, at the northeast end of the Embassy, Captain O'Brien and his group placed as much fire upon the VC inside the compound as best they could. They tried unsuccessfully to shoot off the locks of one of the gates. Joined by six MPs about 0330, the Marines continued to lay down a base of fire and two of the MPs took positions in a nearby building. The Marine captain also told Sergeant Frattarelli to return to the sedan and radio for more assistance and weapons. The Vietnamese police again shot at Frattarelli, who once more yelled out that he was an American, but "this time it didn't work, they just kept firing." While taking up new positions, O'Brien and his Marines would remain out of radio contact until daylight.[43]

At the Norodom, Staff Sergeant Banks positioned his men in defensive positions and placed several on the roof where they could fire down on the VC in the compound. Banks and a small group made an unsuccessful attempt to enter the Embassy compound through the Norodom gate, but were forced to fall back as the VC had all the gates covered with automatic weapons. Although reinforced by an Army MP lieutenant with seven MPs under him, the Americans with a few M16s, three Beretta submachine guns, and .38 caliber pistols, were badly outgunned by the VC armed with machine guns, rocket launchers, and

grenades. Unlike Captain O'Brien, however, Sergeant Banks was able to maintain radio contact with Gunnery Sergeant Morrison in Marine House and remain in telephone communication with Sergeant Harper inside the Embassy. After consulting with Gunnery Sergeant Morrison and Harper, Banks and the Army lieutenant thought it best to wait until daylight and more reinforcements before making any further moves. With American MPs and Marines surrounding the Embassy and the continuing harassing fire, the VC had little chance to escape and no prospect of reaching the Chancery itself.[44]

The waiting until daylight proved to be a sound tactic. At about 0630, a U.S. Army helicopter alighted on the Chancery roof and evacuated both Sergeant Soto and the wounded Corporal Zahuranic. Shortly afterward, Captain O'Brien was able to reach his radio and radioed Gunnery Sergeant Morrison for additional weapons and a few more men, both of which were forthcoming. With the additional reinforcements and with strong covering fires, the Marines and MPs by 0730 finally forced their way into the compound from both over the northeast wall and through the Norodom compound gate. The VC only offered a desultory resistance and took what refuge they could. At 0800, another Army helicopter landed troops from Company C, 502d Infantry, 101st Airborne Division on the roof of the Chancery. All that was left was the moping up. At 0900, Captain O'Brien grouped his Marines together and made a floor to floor sweep of the Chancery to make sure none of the attackers had somehow taken refuge there. It would be another two hours before the building would be clear. The Marine captain estimated that there were about 200 people swarming around the Embassy grounds and the building itself including "reporters, writers, cameramen, MPs, 101st Airborne troops, and civilians." People were "taking pictures, asking questions, and picking up anything in sight, everything was up for grabs." Finally by late morning, the crowd had thinned out and the Marines had effected some "semblance of order." From the onset of the attack until the last Viet Cong was killed by retired Army Colonel George Jacobsen, the Mission Coordinator for the Embassy, in his house on the grounds, was about seven hours. Most of the VC attackers were dead except for two prisoners and the Americans suffered casualties of five dead and five wounded. One of the dead, Corporal James C. Marshall who had been killed by a sniper bullet while on the roof of the Norodom Building, and five of the wounded were Marines.

While one of the most dramatic events of the Communist Tet offensive, especially considering the play it received upon American television, the attack on the Embassy was in reality a sideshow. The attack had failed miserably, and the attackers never reached the Chancery building, but largely milled about in the compound until finally killed or taken prisoner. Despite its futility, the assault on the Embassy compound provided a propaganda coup for the enemy and pointed out the need for further security at the Embassy. By the end of the year, the Marine Security Guard had expanded by 39 men with plans to form the detachment into a separate company. On 1 February 1969, the Saigon detachment became Company E, Marine Security Guard Battalion (State Dept).[45]

Individual Marines in Saigon and Elsewhere in Vietnam

At the beginning of the year, outside of I Corps and mostly stationed in Saigon were some 200 individual Marines almost evenly divided between officers and enlisted men. Most were assigned to the MACV headquarters staff, but others served on the MACV radio and television staff, with the Studies and Observation Group (SOG), and other special groups. On the MACV staff, the senior officer was Brigadier General John R. Chaisson, who as MACV Deputy J–3 for Operations, ran the MACV Combat Operations Center, and developed a very close relationship with General Westmoreland, the MACV commander. To a certain extent, Chaisson became Westmoreland's informal advisor on Marine matters. A frank, outspoken officer, Chaisson was perhaps best remembered for his press conference on 3 February 1968, when he admitted that the Viet Cong had surprised the MACV command with the intensity and coordination of the Tet offensive.[46]

In mid-1968, Marine Brigadier John N. McLaughlin relieved Chaisson in the same capacity. By the end of November, for whatever reason, there was some reduction in the Marines assigned to MACV, now consisting of 77 officers and 53 enlisted men.[47]

In I Corps, there was another group of Marines who served individually as advisors under MACV to South Vietnamese Army units. In late 1967, 20 Marine officers and 23 enlisted men served in that capacity. Another 129 Marine enlisted men provided security to the I Corps Advisory Group at Da Nang. By the end of 1968, the total number of Marine advisors was 27, 15 officers and 12 enlisted men. The enlisted Marines for security were no longer needed.[48]

Advisors to the Vietnamese Marine Corps

The largest Marine advisory effort was with the South Vietnamese Marine Corps. Beginning with one U.S. Marine advisor in early 1955, the U.S. Marine Advisory Unit (MAU) to the South Vietnamese Marine Corps had by January 1968 grown to an authorized strength of 33 personnel consisting of 27 Marine officers, a Navy doctor, four enlisted Marines and a Navy corpsman. Commanded by Colonel Richard L. Michael, Jr., who held the title, Senior Marine Advisor, the MAU was part of the Naval Advisory Group in the U.S. MACV advisory organization. In Saigon, Michael maintained a small headquarters which consisted of the Assistant Senior Marine Advisor, Lieutenant Colonel Glenn W. Rodney, and a small administrative staff. The rest served in the field with the deployed units of the Vietnamese Marine Corps.[49]

Outside of the supply, ordnance, artillery, and amphibious specialist officers, the remaining 16 U.S. Marine advisors served with the two South Vietnamese Marine task force headquarters or the six infantry battalions. Each task force was allotted a U.S. Marine major and captain as an advisor and assistant advisor. A U.S. Marine captain and first lieutenant were assigned to each of the battalions as the advisor and assistant advisor to the commander. For the individual Marine infantry individual advisor, it meant a continued "nomadic lonely life." As one Marine officer wrote it was not "unusual for a Marine advisor to report aboard; undergo in-processing of two or three days; and join a deployed unit not to return to the Advisory Unit for months at a time." A senior advisor to one of the Vietnamese battalions, Captain Jerry I. Simpson, commented that while serving with the Vietnamese he subsisted "on the same rations" as the Vietnamese Marines and would not see any Americans, including his assistant advisor, "for several days at a time."[50]

As could be expected, the South Vietnamese Marine Corps attempted to pattern itself after the U.S. Marine Corps model. It consisted of a Lieutenant General Commandant and a small central headquarters in Saigon, two combat task forces, Task Force Alpha and Task Force Bravo, six infantry battalions, an artillery battalion, an Amphibious Support Battalion, and a training center. Most of the Vietnamese Marine field officers and many of the company grade officers had attended at least the U.S. Marine Corps Basic School at Quantico, Virginia. A few of the more senior officers also graduated from the more advanced U.S. Amphibious Warfare School at the U.S. Marine base. By January 1968, the Vietnamese Marines numbered over 7,300 men and prided itself like its sister service in the United States on its elan and its reputation as one of the country's elite fighting force.[51]

Despite the similarities between the two Marine Corps, there were important differences. While its officers and some of its enlisted men had received amphibious warfare training, the South Vietnamese Marine Corps actually participated in very few amphibious operations. Having its origins in the Vietnamese commando and riverine companies under the French, the Vietnamese Marine Corps at first operated much in the French tradition after its establishment in 1954. In fact until May 1955, a French officer remained in command of the Vietnamese Marines. With the growing American influence, the Vietnamese Marine organization tended to reflect the U.S. Marine Corps with a growing emphasis upon the amphibious mission. Still, from the very beginning of their existence, the Vietnamese Marines were committed to campaigns against the Viet Cong. While still continuing riverine operations, especially in the MeKong Delta and in the Rung Sat sector south of Saigon, there was little call for assaults across a defended beach.[52]

The basic advantage that the Vietnamese Marines offered was their national character. Recruited from the nation at large, rather than from any one region as most of the South Vietnamese Army divisions were, they could be deployed anywhere in Vietnam when the situation demanded. Together with other specialist units such as the South Vietnamese rangers and airborne, the Vietnamese Marines formed the National General Reserve. Operating directly under the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS), these units became in effect fire brigades to rush to the most urgent hot spots and put out the flames. In one sense, the most important quality of the Vietnamese Marines was their demonstrated loyalty over time to the central government and the Joint General Staff.[53]

Given the dominance of the Vietnamese military in the central government, no South Vietnamese military organization could be entirely divorced from internal politics. In the coup against then-President Diem in 1963, Vietnamese Marines played a decisive role in toppling the regime. While the Vietnamese Commandant, Le Nguyen Khang, did not take an active part in bringing down the government, he was aware of the plot and took no action to prevent it. Following the coup, Khang became the South Vietnamese military attache in the Philippines, but in three months he once more resumed his duties as Commandant of the Viet-



Both photos are courtesy of Col Talman C. Budd, USMC (Ret)

Above, U.S. Marine advisors to Vietnamese Marine Task Force Alpha in 1968 are from left: Capt Thomas B. Bagley, Jr., Assistant Advisor, TF Alpha; 1stLt Larry S. MacFarlane, Assistant Advisor, 1st Bn, VNMC; Capt Ronald D. Ray, Assistant Advisor, TF Alpha; 1stLt Louis Garcia, Senior Advisor, 1st Bn, VNMC; an unidentified U.S. Marine warrent officer; and Maj Talman C. Budd, Senior Advisor, TF Alpha. Below is the main gate to the South Vietnamese Marine headquarters in Saigon. The Vietnamese Marine Corps symbol is clearly visible on the sign above the gate.



namese Marine Corps. In 1966, Khang and his Marines sided with the central government against the "Struggle Movement" in I Corps and helped to subdue those ARVN units loyal to the former I Corps commander, Lieutenant General Nguyen Chanh Thi.[54]

By January 1968, Khang, now a lieutenant general, not only was Commandant of the Vietnamese Marine Corps, but according to his count, wore as many as six different "hats." In addition to his Marine Corps command, he was the Commander of the Capital Military District which included the city of Saigon and its immediate vicinity; he was the commanding general of the South Vietnamese III Corps Military Tactical Zone; and also was a member of the National Leadership Council, which "in effect ruled the country." Moreover, as III Corps commander, he was the "governor-delegate for administration" or III Corps administrator, and as commander of the Capital Military District, he was the military governor of Saigon. Despite these various responsibilities, Khang considered that his "main job was still command of the Marines."[55]

While Khang still held overall control of the Vietnamese Marine Corps, he relied on his assistant and chief of staff, Colonel Bui Thi Lan for the day to day running of the headquarters. The two task force commanders, for the most part, had direct operational control of the infantry battalions. In January 1968 prior to Tet, Task Force Alpha consisting of two infantry battalions and an artillery battalion was committed to the Bong Son area in II Corps, encountering only light and sporadic resistance. The other task Force, TF Bravo, also with two battalions, was attached to the 7th ARVN Division in the IV Corps sector. Of the remaining two Marine infantry battalions, one remained under the direct control of the Capital Military District just outside of Saigon and the other had retired to its base camp at Vung Tau.[56*]

This all changed in the early morning hours of 31 January, when the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army launched their country-wide Tet offensive. In Saigon, Viet Cong sappers had entered the Embassy compound while other Communist units struck the Vietnamese Joint General Staff headquarters, the adjoining Tan Son Nhut airbase, and other military bases on the outskirts of the city. After the initial surprise, mixed U.S. and South Vietnamese forces in and around the city regrouped and began the counterattack.[57]

The Vietnamese Marines quickly became enmeshed in the fighting. At the outset of the enemy offensive the only Marine unit anywhere near Saigon was the 3d Battalion, attached to the Capital Military Command, but committed to an operation several thousand meters west of the city. When the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff began to realize the intensity of the enemy effort, they immediately called upon the Marine units to reinforce the ARVN units already in Saigon. At 0430 on the 31st, the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff alerted the 4th Battalion, which was "more or less [in] a standdown" at its base camp at Vung Tau for air movement into Tan Son Nhut Airport on the outskirts of the city.[58] Because of ground fog and enemy ground fire near Tan Son Nhut, the aircraft carrying the Marines did not land until 0930. After an initial briefing, the battalion then moved to reinforce the Joint General headquarters south of the airbase. Although killing a reported 20 Viet Cong but sustaining 9 wounded, the battalion was unable to close with the enemy out of concern of "inflicting excessive civilian casualties." Engaging in a desultory fire fight until 1430 with Communist troops who had penetrated the JGS compound, the battalion received orders to move north in the Gia Dinh sector of Saigon to relieve the ARVN Phu Dong armored base that was under attack.[59]

The battalion arrived at its destination, 4,000 meters north of its previous position, about 1630. It immediately mounted a two-company assault, supported by ARVN tanks, and two U.S. helicopter gunships providing limited air support against the ARVN compound, now held by an estimated NVA battalion. The enemy commander warned the Marines that his troops would kill the South Vietnamese civilian dependents, being held as hostage. After the supporting tanks in the lead "blew a large opening" in the surrounding wall, the Vietnamese Marines entered the armored compound headquarters "with machine guns blazing" and found the charred bodies of the dependents heaped in a large pile. Among the dead were the wife and eight children of the base commander, an ARVN lieutenant colonel, who also had been murdered. With enemy forces still in strength in the sector, darkness coming on, and the inability to provide continuing air support, the South Vietnamese JGS ordered the battalion commander to withdraw to more defensible positions. For the day, the battalion had sustained

*Lieutenant Colonel John J. Hainsworth, who as a captain served as an assistant battalion advisor to the Vietnamese Marines, noted that "many of these VNMC Battalion assignments were politically sensitive and motivated within the VNMC hierarchy and the Joint General Staff." LtCol John J. Hainsworth, Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Hainsworth Comments.

casualties of 7 dead and 52 wounded and claimed to have killed 100 of the enemy.[60]

In the meantime, the JGS had brought Task Force Bravo headquarters and the 1st and 2d Battalions into Saigon. At 1500, the 1st Battalion began arriving in an improvised helicopter landing zone inside the Joint General Staff headquarters compound from Cai Lay in IV Corps. With the completion of the helilift a half-hour later, the battalion occupied the positions vacated by the 4th Battalion when it deployed north to relieve the armored base. U.S. C–130 transport aircraft brought the task force headquarters and the 2d Battalion into Tan Son Nhut Airport with the last elements landing at 1930. The task force headquarters and the 2d Battalion then joined the 1st Battalion near the Joint General Staff compound.[61]

While making his overnight command post outside of the JGS compound, the Marine task force commander received new orders for the next day. He was to turn over operational control of his 2d Battalion to a nearby South Vietnamese airborne commander and then move with the 1st Battalion to the positions of the 4th Battalion near the armor base. After taking command of the 4th Battalion, the task force, once more, was to reassume the attack.[62]

On the morning of 1 February, however, the North Vietnamese launched a counterattack on the Vietnamese forces near the armored compound. The NVA overran a neighboring ARVN artillery base, but the Vietnamese Marine forces in defensive positions, supported by air repulsed the enemy in fighting which even involved "some hand to hand combat." The two battalions of Task Force Bravo then mounted their own offensive. In heavy seesaw fighting that lasted until 3 February, the Vietnamese Marines finally cleared the sector. The costs, however, had been heavy on both sides. For the three days, the Vietnamese

Vietnamese Marines are seen with a Viet Cong prisoner in the streets of Saigon during the Tet offensive. In one of the most memorable scenes of the war, captured by Associated Press photographer Eddie Adams, a few minutes after this scene South Vietnamese National Police Chief BGen Nguyen Ngoc Loan, would personally execute the prisoner.

Photo courtesy of Col John W. Ripley, USMC (Ret)



Marines suffered casualties of 17 dead and 88 wounded and reported over 220 enemy dead. In the fighting, three of the U.S. Marine advisors were among the wounded. These included both the senior and assistant advisors of the 4th Battalion, Major William P. Eshelman and Captain John J. Hainsworth, and the senior advisor to the 1st Battalion, Captain Jerry I. Simpson. All three of the Americans recovered from their wounds although only Major Eshelman returned to his battalion.[63*]

Beginning on 3 February, the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff began its official counteroffensive in Saigon, codenamed Operation *Tran Hung Dao*, and General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff, took personal command. According to the plan, Vien divided Saigon into five zones and gave them letter designations A through E. He later added a sixth zone, Zone F, in the outlying southern suburbs that became the responsibility of U.S. forces. South Vietnamese Airborne, Army, police, and Ranger units were given Zones A, C, D, and E to clear. Task Force Bravo assumed control of Zone B, containing the Gia Dinh sector which included the northeastern part of the city and its suburbs. The 2d Battalion remained under the operational control of the Capital Military Command going wherever it was needed until 18 February when it rejoined Task Force Bravo.[64]

Task Force Bravo remained committed to Operation *Tran Hung Do* in the Gia Dinh sector until the operation came to an end on 11 March. While action flared up occasionally during this period, by 7 February, the Vietnamese forces supported by U.S. forces had broken the back of the enemy offensive. Never fewer than two battalions, more often with three, Task Force Bravo and the individual Marine battalions in the operation reported over 700 of the enemy dead, captured 54, and detained over 2,000 suspects. They recovered 44 crew-served and 241 individual Communist weapons. The cost to the Marines was also high, 49 dead and 227 wounded.[65]

While Task Force Bravo and at least one other Vietnamese Marine infantry battalion attached to the Capital Military Command remained in Saigon, Task Force Alpha deployed to Hue and took part in the retaking of the Citadel in that city. From its initial commitment to II Corps, at the start of Tet, Task Force Alpha and its battalions had returned to Saigon to be in position to reinforce Task Force Bravo if needed. After losing operational control of two of its battalions, on 9 February, the task force headquarters and the 1st Battalion departed Tan Son Nhut Airport by air for Phu Bai. By 14 February, the initial units were reinforced by two more battalions, the 4th and 5th. After some initial misunderstandings, the commander of the 1st ARVN Division, General Ngo Quang Truong, assigned Task Force Alpha to clearing the western Citadel. Taking part in some of the heaviest fighting in the war, Task Force A remained under the operational control of the 1st ARVN Division and in Hue or its environs until 27 March when it relieved Task Force Bravo in Saigon. In the fighting for Hue, the Vietnamese Marine task force sustained casualties of nearly 90 dead and 350 wounded.** All told, for the period 30 January through 27 March which included the battles for both Saigon and Hue, Vietnamese Marines reported killing over 1,300 of the Communists and captured another 82 while detaining nearly 2,000 suspects. The entire VNMC suffered 128 killed, 588 wounded, and 1 missing in action.[66]

For the rest of the year, the two Vietnamese Marine task forces and individual battalions would be committed to combat situations without hardly any reprieve. While encountering little of the ferocity of Tet during most of the remaining months, the intensity of the fighting that flared up in Saigon again in May and June for the Vietnamese Marines almost matched that for the earlier period. For the entire year, including Tet, the Vietnamese Marine Corps conducted 196 battalion-size operations or larger which resulted in 2,761 reported enemy killed, 352 prisoners, and 1,150 captured weapons. While on operations 98 percent of the time, the Marines sustained losses of 369 killed, 1,651 wounded, and 4 missing in action. According to Lieutenant Colonel James T. Breckinridge, who relieved Lieutenant Colonel Rodney in April, "the Vietnamese Marine Corps is the best unit in RVN for the amount of money spent to support it. If these Marines are

*Lieutenant Colonel Simpson remembered that the enemy could have used "the 105mm howitzers in the artillery compound ... to shell the entire Ton Son Nhut area." He recalled that in the enemy attack on the artillery compound, the Vietnamese Marine 1st Battalion closely coordinated fires with the only American in the artillery compound, a U.S. Army major. The ARVN artillerymen lowered their howitzers "to 0 elevation and were firing point blank at the VC." The resulting shelling hit a gasoline station north of the 1st Battalion and provided "excellent illumination of the entire area." LtCol Jerry I. Simpson, Comments on draft, dtd 10Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File). Lieutenant Colonel Hainsworth noted that he had just joined the 4th Battalion. Hainsworth Comments.

**For description of the battle for Hue City see Chapters 9–12.

properly employed and supported and given a target, they can and have outperformed other RVNAF ground units."[67]

Despite such praise, the Vietnamese Marines had come under significant criticism during the course of the year. Frustrated at what he considered the slow progress of Task Force Alpha in the Hue Citadel, General Creighten W. Abrams, then Deputy ComUSMACV, radioed General Westmoreland that he was considering recommending to the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff the dissolution of the Vietnamese Marine Corps. In perhaps an even more delicate political situation for the Vietnamese Marines Corps, General Khang, the Vietnamese Marine Commandant, resigned all of his positions in June except his command of the Marine Corps after an American helicopter gunship accidentally hit a friendly position, killing several supporters of Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky. While Khang had been identified as a supporter of Ky, he claimed that Ky and his supporters blamed him for the incident.



Above, a Vietnamese Marine lieutenant artillery forward observer calls for a fire mission during street fighting in Saigon during the Tet offensive. Below, Marine infantrymen supported by armor advance in Saigon fighting. Note that the lead Marine has his gas mask open and ready to put on.

Both Photos are courtesy of Col John W. Ripley, USMC (Ret)





Photo courtesy of Col Talman C. Budd, USMC (Ret)

A Vietnamese tank protects the Vietnamese TF Alpha command post in Gia Dinh in renewed fighting in Saigon during May 1968.

According to Khang, to avoid all suspicion, he retained only his post as Marine Corps Commandant. Lieutenant Colonel Breckinridge observed that there apparently was a rumor campaign to discredit Khang in October, claiming that he was about to bring in Marine battalions into Saigon to topple the government. By the end of the year, however, Khang accompanied President Thieu on a ceremonial trip to IV Corps. Breckinridge interpreted this fact to show that Khang was not in disfavor.[68]

While the U.S. Marine advisors for the most part respected their Vietnamese counterparts and the fighting qualities of the Vietnamese Marine, they also recognized several of the shortcomings of the Vietnamese organization. According to Breckinridge, who reviewed all of the American advisor after action and monthly reports, there was a constant theme of lack of staff work and refusal of commanders to delegate authority, lack of tactical coordination, poor employment of mortars, and poor caliber of the noncommissioned officers. During the battle for Hue, for example, the 1st Battalion was heavily engaged for two days while the "two other battalions of the task force watched the fighting from a distance of about one kilometer." The Marine advisor to the battalion attributed some of the heavy losses of the Marines during the fighting on the failure of the task force commander "to commit all or part of his watching idle battalions."[69*]

Despite such obvious weakness on the part of the Vietnamese Marines, Breckinridge, who was serving his second tour in Vietnam, the first being in 1955 with the first advisory group, also saw much improvement. The Vietnamese took several steps to improve both tactics and leadership. The Marines opened up a school for noncommissioned officers and a school for the use of mortars. In March 1968, after a review of the entire organization with the Joint General Staff, MACV agreed to support the transformation of the Marine Corps into a Marine light division. In October the Vietnamese Marine Brigade officially became the Vietnamese Marine Corps division consisting of two brigades. With the potential of continued growth and an earned combat reputation, the Vietnamese Marine Corps had become an even more integral part of the Vietnamese General Reserve.[70]

*Colonel Breckinridge noted in his comments that his "after-tour report was a compilation of many such reports submitted by previous advisors and was an attempt to assist both advisors and Vietnamese. Areas wherein . . . [it] was reported that the VNMC made mistakes, in many cases, are the same areas that Americans would also have fallen short." Col James T. Breckinridge, Comments on draft, dtd 1Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 31

1968: An Overview

The year 1968 had been a momentous one in the Vietnam War, possibly the defining year, for the U.S. effort in that conflict, including the Marine Corps role. As the year began, III MAF, the Marine Corps command in Vietnam, had one of its two Marine divisions, the 3d, strung out along the eastern DMZ in largely fixed positions tied to the strong point obstacle system (SPOS) or barrier. While pressing the 3d Marine Division forces in eastern Quang Tri, the North Vietnamese succeeded in isolating the Marine regiment, the 26th Marines, at Khe Sanh in northwestern I CTZ, near the Laotian border. The enemy had cut Route 9, the main east-west land artery, and forced the Marines to rely entirely upon air for resupply. Even in southern I Corps, there were portents of growing enemy strength. The newly formed U.S. Army 23d or Americal Division continued to engage NVA and VC forces. Furthermore, U.S. commanders obtained intelligence that the *2d NVA Division* planned attacks aimed at both the fire support bases of the 3d Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry Division in the Que Son Valley and the 1st Marine Division positions in the Da Nang sector.

As with most aspects of the Vietnam War, the message was mixed. Together with the intelligence about the expansion of the war, there were continuing rumors about new peace initiatives by the North Vietnamese. Earlier, MACV published intelligence estimates that claimed enemy total strength had declined. Moreover, General William C. Westmoreland, the MACV commander, in November 1967, had proclaimed that the end of the war was in sight and issued directives calling for a full offensive by allied forces on all fronts. According to American pacification measurements, more and more villages were supposedly under allied control. In I Corps, for example, at the end of December, III MAF reported about 55 percent of the population living in so-called secure areas.*

Yet as January progressed, MACV and III MAF focused more and more upon the north. The buildup of enemy forces around Khe Sanh could no longer be denied. Originally planning deep penetration operations into enemy base areas in the Do Xa and A Shau areas in I Corps, General Westmoreland decided instead to reinforce the Marine forces in the north with two more Army divisions, the 1st Air Cavalry and 101st Airborne. The MACV commander expected the enemy major thrust either to be directly across the DMZ, or more likely at Khe Sanh, while launching diversionary attacks throughout South Vietnam.

III MAF also prepared for the onslaught, with its focus also on the north. Beginning in December 1967, Lieutenant General Robert E. Cushman, the MAF commander, directed the 1st Marine Division at Da Nang to take over the 3d Marine Division area of operations in Thua Thien Province. In a massive relocation of units between the two Marine Divisions during December and January, appropriately called Operation Checkers, the 1st Marine Division assumed responsibility for the Phu Loc area and established its Task Force X-Ray at Phu Bai, as well. The increasing enemy strength around Khe Sanh in mid-January forced the 3d Marine Division to reinforce the garrison with yet another battalion. With the arrival of the 1st Air Cavalry Division in northern I Corps and the establishment of its base area at Camp Evans, about the same time, made the original Checkers plans obsolete. All eyes were now on Khe Sanh.

As General Westmoreland prepared for what he thought would be the decisive battle of the war, his relationship with the Marine command had grown rather tenuous. From the beginning of the commitment of Marine forces to Vietnam, there had been differences between the MACV approach and that of the Marine. From the start, the Marines emphasized pacification and population control while the MACV commander had stressed the large unit war against the VC and NVA regular units. The commitment of large Marine forces to the barrier project along the DMZ also had placed a strain upon the relationship. Although irreverently referred to as the "McNamara Wall," Westmoreland fully backed the venture and believed the Marines to be dragging their feet. Finally there was the subject of Khe Sanh, itself. Only under MACV pressure did III MAF garrison the isolated outpost in the first place and Westmoreland was concerned that the Marines tended to underestimate the threat to the base. Given these circumstances and what he considered Marine inflexibility about control of its own avia-

*See Chapter 1.

tion, the MACV commander gave some consideration about a change in command relations in the north. He finally decided, as a half measure, to establish a MACV (Forward) headquarters at Phu Bai under his deputy, General Creighton W. Abrams, and prepared the way for single management of Marine air under his deputy for air, Air Force General William Momyer.

While, on 21 January 1968, the Communists initiated a massive bombardment on Khe Sanh, their main offensive thrust was not the Marine base nor the DMZ forces, but the cities and lines of communication throughout South Vietnam from the MeKong Delta in the south to Quang Tri City in the north. Khe Sanh would remain under siege from 21 January until early April. Although making several strong probes, overrunning the Special Forces at Lang Vei, and maintaining large troop formations around the base, the North Vietnamese never launched a full-fledged ground assault against Khe Sanh. Speculation and controversy still dominate the discussion about the siege and the motivation of the North Vietnamese. Did the enemy hope for a replay of Dien Bien Phu, its successful campaign against the French in 1954, or merely use Khe Sanh as a feint for his Tet offensive? Given the number of troop resources that the enemy placed around Khe Sanh and the pounding they absorbed from artillery and air, there can be no doubt that the North Vietnamese would have taken the base, if they could have done so. On the other hand, there was a limit on the price they were willing to pay, and in all probability, Khe Sanh was only one objective among many. The Communists hoped and possibly believed that their Tet offensive would bring about a true people's revolution against the South Vietnamese regime, resulting in the defection of the ARVN and the fall of the government.

Arguably, however, the Communists may never have realistically expected their Tet offensive to cause an uprising throughout South Vietnam and probably had in mind a more limited and attainable goal. A case could be made that at least in I Corps, their main objective was not Khe Sanh, but Hue. They perhaps hoped that the capture of Hue would result in the defection of the South Vietnamese forces and the loss of other population centers in the two northern provinces of South Vietnam. Such a result would have cut the allied lines of communication and left the 3d Marine Division suspended without support in the northern regions bordering the DMZ and Laos. This would have left the Communists in a strong position for obtaining their own terms. Given both the resources that the North Vietnamese put into the battle and the tenacity with which they fought, it was obvious that the Hue campaign was a major component of the entire Tet offensive. According to an enemy account, the North Vietnamese military command in planning the offensive took into consideration that the U.S. and South Vietnamese had concentrated their forces in the north, expecting an attack along Route 9. It viewed Hue as the weak link in the allied defenses in the northern two provinces.

The battle for Hue was a relatively near thing. Only the failure of the North Vietnamese to overrun the *Mang Ca* and MACV compounds permitted the allies to retain a toehold in both the Citadel and the new city. With the holding of these two positions, the Americans and South Vietnamese were able to bring in reinforcements to mount a counteroffensive. Even then, if the enemy had blown the An Cuu Bridge across Route 1 on the first day, the Marines would not have been able to send in their initial battalions and supplies into the city. If the enemy had made a stronger effort to cut both the water and land lines of communications, the outcome of the struggle for Hue would have been less predictable. The Marine rapid response and quick adaptability to street fighting together with the fact that the South Vietnamese forces did not defect permitted the allied forces to attain the upper hand. Fortuitously, the 1st Air Cavalry Division had arrived in northern I Corps prior to Tet and was eventually able to commit four battalions to the battle. By the end of February, the allies controlled Hue.

With the securing of the city of Hue, the enemy's countrywide Tet offensive had about spent itself. While the enemy offensive failed, public opinion polls in the United States revealed a continuing disillusionment upon the part of the American public. President Johnson also decided upon a change of course. On 31 March, he announced his decision not to stand for reelection, to restrict the bombing campaign over North Vietnam, and to authorize only a limited reinforcement of American troops to Vietnam.

Notwithstanding the mood in Washington and ready to begin his counter-offensive, General Westmoreland altered again his command arrangements in I Corps. On 10 March, he disestablished his MACV (Forward) Headquarters. He replaced it with Provisional Corps, later XXIV Corps, whose commander, an Army lieutenant general, was directly subordinate to III MAF. At the same time, however, General Westmoreland designated the Seventh Air Force commander, as "single manager for air" and gave him "mission

direction" over Marine fixed-wing aircraft. Despite Marine Corps protests, Westmoreland's order prevailed. While obtaining major modifications to the ruling, Marine air in Vietnam would operate under the single manager system to the end of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

With the end of the enemy offensive, the allies planned to breakout from Khe Sanh. While North Vietnamese ground forces did not follow up on their Lang Vei attack, they incessantly probed the hill outposts and perimeter. Employing innovative air tactics, Marine and Air Force transport and helicopter pilots kept the base supplied. Finally on 14 April, the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division reinforced by a Marine regiment relieved the base. On 14 April, the 77-day "siege" of Khe Sanh was over.

The North Vietnamese were far from defeated, however, and in early May launched their "mini-Tet offensive." Except for increased fighting in the capital city of Saigon and the heavy fighting in the eastern DMZ sector, the North Vietnamese May offensive was largely limited to attacks by fire at allied bases and acts of terrorism in the hamlets and villages. In I Corps, the major attempt was to cut the supply lines in the DMZ sector which led to the very bloody fighting at Dai Do and around Dong Ha. The result again, however, was the defeat of the North Vietnamese forces.

By mid-1968, the allied forces were on the offensive throughout I Corps. General Abrams had succeeded General Westmoreland as Commander, USMACV. Unlike Westmoreland, Abrams had little or no commitment to either keeping a garrison at Khe Sanh or to the barrier. The closing out of the base at Khe Sanh in July 1968 permitted the 3d Marine Division under Major General Raymond G. Davis to launch a series of mobile firebase operations ranging the length and breadth of the northern border area. Long neglected, the barrier concept was officially abandoned in October.

In the late summer of 1968, the Communists launched another "mini-Tet" offensive, but were again bloodily repulsed. By the end of 1968, both the 3d Marine and 1st Marine Divisions were conducting large mobile operations. After a standstill for most of the year, Marine measurements of pacification showed progress in regaining the countryside. In December, enemy-initiated attacks fell to the lowest level in over two years.

Still, no one was about to predict victory and the Communists were far from defeated. The various "Tet" offensives had provided a benchmark for both sides, forcing both to reassess their strategies. After the last "mini-Tet," the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong scaled down their large-unit war, probably out of both weakness and the expectation that the Americans would eventually withdraw. While Tet was a military setback for the Communist forces with the decimation of the Viet Cong and many of their political cadre in the South, the American government, people, and military establishment also realized that there was a limit to American participation in the war. As Marine Lieutenant General John R. Chaisson, later stated, the Marine Corps "had adopted from 1969 on, the idea that we were in the postwar period."[1]

Notes

PART I
Pre-Tet 1968

CHAPTER 1
A PUZZLING WAR

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from MilHistBr, Office of the Secretary, Joint Staff MACV, Command History, 1967, hereafter MACV ComdHist, 1967; MilHistBr, Office of the Secretary, Joint Staff MACV, Command History, 1968, hereafter MACV ComdHist, 1968; HQMC, Status of Forces, Dec67–Jan68; FMFPac, Marine Operations in the Republic of Vietnam, hereafter FMFPac, MarOpsV with specific month; CGFMFPac, Pacific Operations, tab F, General Officers Symposium Book, 1967, hereafter CGFMFPac, Pacific Opns; III MAF ComdCs, Dec67–Jan68; LtGen John R. Chaisson Papers (Hoover Institution on War, Peace and Revolution, Stanford University), hereafter Chaisson Papers; Assessment and Strategy Files (Indochina Archives, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley), hereafter A&S Files, Indochina Archives; LtGen Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight, An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1984), hereafter Krulak, *First to Fight;* Adm Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, USN, CinCPac, and Gen William C. Westmoreland, USA, ComUSMACV, *Report on the War in Vietnam (As of 30 Jun 1968)* (Washington: GPO, 1968), hereafter Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War;* Gen William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co, Inc., 1976), hereafter Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports;* Edward J. Marolda, *By Sea, Air, and Land, An Illustrated History of the U.S. Navy and the War in Southeast Asia* (Washington: Naval Historical Center, 1994), hereafter Marolda, *By Sea, Air, and Land;* Jack Shulimson and Maj Charles M. Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, The Landing and the Buildup,* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1978), hereafter Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1965;* Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC 1982), hereafter, Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966;* Maj Gary F. Telfer, LtCol Lane Rogers, and Victor K. Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, Fighting the North Vietnamese Army, 1967* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1984), hereafter Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in 1967;* BGen Edwin H. Simmons, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam,1968," *Naval Review, 1970* (Annapolis, Maryland: U.S. Naval Institute, 1970), pp. 290–320, hereafter Simmons, "Marine Operations, 1968."

III MAF in January 1968

1. HQMC, Status of Forces, Dec67–Jan68. See also III MAF ComdC, Jan68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec67–Jan68; and MACV ComdHist, 1967, pp. 127–8.

2. III MAF ComdC, Jan68; MACV ComdHist, 1967, pp. 127–8.

3. Gen Robert E. Cushman, Jr. Biographical File (Ref Sec, MCHC).

MACV and Command Relations

4. MACV ComdHist, 1967, p. 124; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War,* pp. ii–iii, 79, 156, 291–4; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* passim.

5. MACV ComdHist, 1968, p. 248.

6. Ibid., pp. 238, 345; MACV ComdHist, 1967, pp. 156–7; HQMC, Status of Forces, Dec67–Jan68.

7. Gen William C. Westmoreland USA (Ret.) intvw, dtd 4Apr83, p. 11 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); MACV ComdHist, 1968, pp. 248, 443, 475–77; MACV ComdHist, 1967, p. 9.

8. MACV ComdHist, 1967, p. 124. For relations between FMFPac and III MAF, and between III MAF and Seventh Air Force, see the previous volumes in this series, Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1965;* Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966;* and Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967,* passim. See also BGen John R. Chaisson ltrs to his wife, dtd 6Sep67, 30Sep67, and 14Nov67 (Chaisson Papers).

9. MACV ComdHist, 1967, p. 167; For command relations between Army and Navy Flotilla Group see MajGen William B. Fulton, *Riverine Operations 1966–69,* Vietnam Studies (Washington: Dept of the Army, 1973), pp 85–8.

10. MACV ComdHist 1967, p. 6; MACV ComdHist 1968, pp. 217, 222–23.

11. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* p. 127. See also MACV ComdHist 1968, pp. 7 and 22–3.

12. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* p. 240.

13. Gen William C. Westmoreland, USA, Comments on Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966,* dtd 28Jul78 (Vietnam Comment File).

14. Willard Webb, JCS Historical Office, in *Vietnam Historians Workshop, Plenary Session, 9 May 1983* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, n.d.[1984]), p. 12.

South Vietnam and I Corps

15. The preceding paragraphs of this section were largely drawn from Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam, A History* (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), pp. 213–311, 386, 444–452, hereafter Karnow, *Vietnam;* Col Dave R. Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet,* (San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1978), pp. 1–48, hereafter Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet;* and the previous volumes in this series: Capt Robert H. Whitlow, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1954–64, The Advisory and Combat Assistance Era* (Washington, D.C.: Hist&Mus Div, HQMC, 1977); Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1965;* Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966;* Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967,* passim.

16. MACV ComdHist, 1968, pp. 142–3, 270, 300–01, 335, 341; HQMC, Status of Forces, Dec67–Jan68. There is a slight discrepancy between the figures in the command history and the Status of Forces. The text uses the figures in the Status of Forces as more representative of the period at the beginning of 1968. For the strength of the Navy, see Marolda, *By Sea, Air, and Land,* p. 216. For the powers of the Military Council, See Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* p. 219.

17. MACV ComdHist, 1968, pp. 275, 300–01.

18. CGFMFPac, Pacific Opns, pp. 10–11.

19. MACV ComdHist 1968, p. 376; HQMC, Status of Forces, Dec67–Jan68.

20. Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966,* pp. 73–91.

21. MACV ComdHist, 1968, pp 378–80; HQMC, Status of Forces, Dec67; Simmons, "Marine Operations, 1968," p. 293.

22. Ibid.; III MAF msg to CG1stMarDiv, dtd 26Dec67, Encl 27, 1st MarDiv, ComdC, Dec67.

23. Gen Robert E. Cushman intvw, Nov 1, 1982, (OralHist Coll, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), pp. 8–9, hereafter Cushman Intvw, 1982.

24. 3d MarDiv, III MAF Campaign Plan Review, Working Paper, n.d., Subj: Command Relations with 1st ARVN Division, Encl 78, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Pt II, Supporting Documents, Dec67.

The Enemy

Additional Sources for this section are: Douglas Pike, "The Other Side," in Peter Braestrup, ed., *Vietnam as History, Ten Years After the Paris Peace Accords* (Washington; D.C.: University Press of America, 1984), pp. 71–7, hereafter Pike, "The Other Side;" Robert Pringle, "NVA Order of Battle" ms, hereafter Pringle, Order of Battle;" David Fulgham, "If MACV Hasn't Said It, DIA Won't Say It;" ms; hereafter Fulgham, "If MACV Hasn't Said It"; Gen William C. Westmoreland, News Conference Folder, dtd 26Jan1982.

25. Pike, "The Other Side," p. 73; Television France, Transcript of Intvw with General Giap, "La Peste Ho Chi Minh" [The Ho Chi Minh Trail], 18Feb83, "The 10,000 Day Lie," *The Washington Times,* dtd 16Mar83, p. 11. See also Karnow, *Vietnam,* pp. 257–9.

26. MACV ComdHist 1967, pp. 15–7; MACV ComdHist, 1968, pp. 60–7, 96, 103–4, 108; Pike, "The Other Side," pp. 73–4; Pringle, "NVA Order of Battle."

27. Ibid.

28. MACV, Briefing on Enemy Order of Battle, dtd 23Nov67 (A&S Files, Indochina Archives), MACV ComdHist, 1967, pp.27–8; CIA, Special National Intelligence Estimate, "Capabilities of the Vietnamese Communists for Fighting in South Vietnam," dtd 13Nov67 (Westmoreland News Conference Folder, 1982); Pringle, "NVA Order of Battle;" Fulgham, "If MACV Didn't Say It."

29. Gen William C. Westmoreland, Press Statement, dtd 26Jan1982 (Westmoreland News Conference Folder, 1982).

30. MACV Briefing, Nov67; MACV ComdHist, 1967, pp. 2 and 11; Pringle, "NVA Order of Battle"; Fulgham, "If MACV Didn't Say It."

31. MACV ComdHist, 1967, pp. 2 and 11.

32. Vo Nguyen Giap, *Big Victory, Great Task* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), pp. 18–19.

33. War Experiences Recapitulation Committee of the High-Level Military Institute, *The Anti-U.S. Resistance War for National Salvation,* trans by Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing Houses, 1980) [Joint Publications Research Service No. 80968, dtd 3Jun82], pp. 100–01. For speculation about North Vietnamese internal differences, see Pike, "The Other Side"; P.J. Honey, "The Offensive, Hanoi's Change of Strategy," clipping from *China News Analysis,* dtd 22Mar68 and V. Zorza, "Hints from Hanoi," Clipping *Washington Post,* dtd 10Oct68 (A&S Files, Indochina Archives); Donald Oberdorfer, *Tet!* (Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1971), pp. 42–46, hereafter Oberdorfer, *Tet!;* Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet,* 163–7; MACV ComdHist 1967, p. 74.

34. MACV ComdHist, 1967, pp. 75, 98; Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967,* pp. 132–39; Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet,* pp. 167–9; Oberdorfer, *Tet!,* pp. 107–8; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* pp. 236–9.

35. Capt Moyers S. Shore III, *The Battle for Khe Sanh* (Washington: Hist&Mus Div, HQMC, 1969), pp. 26–7, hereafter Shore, *Khe Sanh.*

36. MACV ComdHist, 1968, pp. 128–9.

37. Krulak, *First to Fight,* p. 217.

Focus on the North

38. Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966,* pp. 139–98; Telfer, Rogers, Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967,* passim.

39. Shulimson, op. cit., pp. 314–18; Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, op. cit., pp. 86–94; LtGen Louis Metzger, "Memoir," ms, pp. 57–114.

40. This and the following paragraph are derived from: *The Pentagon Papers, The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam, The Senator Gravel Edition,* 4 vols (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), vol 4., pp. 285–89 hereafter, *The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition;* MACV ComdHist, 1967, pp. 143–49; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* pp. 227–230; Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point, Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963–1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1971), pp. 369–71, hereafter Johnson, *The Vantage Point.*

41. Additional source for this paragraph is III MAF ComdC, Dec67.

MACV vis à vis Marines

Additional sources for this section are: Gen Wallace M. Greene, Personal Notes and Related material Pertaining to United States and Marine Corps Participation in Operations in Vietnam Binder, Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr., Personal Papers Collection, MCHC, hereafter Operations in Vietnam Binder, Greene Papers; Victor H. Krulak Papers, hereafter Krulak Papers; Cushman intvw, 1982; MajGen Raymond L. Murray Intvw, 27Jun75 (OralHist Coll, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Murray intvw; Senior Officers Debriefing Program, U.S. Army, Military Institute, Carlisle Bks, Pa., hereafter Senior Officers Debriefing, Carlisle.

42. For examples of General Greene's views see: CMC, Memorandum For the Record, dtd 22Jul65, Subj: Record of Conference on Southeast Asia held at White House and CMC, Memorandum for the Record, dtd 7Nov66, Subj: I Corps Estimate "Force Requirements and Long Range Estimates for I Corps, RVN" in Operations in Vietnam Binder, Greene Papers. For examples of General Krulak's views see: "A Strategic Appraisal" Dec65, Box 4, Krulak Papers; CGFMFPac, Pacific Opns; Krulak, *The First to Fight,* pp. 186 and 197–203. See also Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966,* pp. 11–14; Jack Shulimson and Maj Edward F. Wells, "First In, First Out, The Marine Experience in Vietnam, 1965–1971," *Marine Corps Gazette,* Jan 84, pp. 36–46.

43. General Greene is quoted in Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966,* p. 14. See various CMC, Memorandum for the Record in Operations in Vietnam Binder, Greene Papers relative to his efforts via the Joint Chiefs and even the President to present the Marine Corps perspective. For General Krulak, see Krulak ltr to Hon Robert S. McNamara, dtd 11Nov65, Box 4, Krulak Papers and Krulak, *First to Fight,* p. 186. Interestingly enough, former Secretary McNamara makes no mention of this letter or these conversations with Krulak in his memoir, Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect, The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Time Books, Random House, Inc., 1995), passim.

44. Cushman Intvw, 1982, p. 63.

45. CGFMFPac, Pacific Opns, pp. 5–7; MACV ComdHist, 1967, pp. 319–20.

46. LtGen Victor H. Krulak, Comments on draft, dtd 31Oct1994 (Vietnam comment File), hereafter Krulak Comments.

47. MACV ComdHist, 1967, pp. 319–20.

48. Quoted in Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966,* p. 75; III MAF ComdC, Jan68.

49. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* p. 166.

50. Cushman Intvw, 1982, pp. 43–44.

51. Ibid., pp. 13–16.

52. MajGen Rathvon McC Tompkins intvw, 1973, pp. 50–1 (OralHist Coll, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Tompkins Intvw.

53. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* p. 342.

54. Murray Intvw, pp. 32, 45. See also MajGen Raymond L. Murray, Comments on draft, dtd 10Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

55. Ibid., pp. 48–9. See also Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam,* 1967, pp. 229–31; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Dec67; III MAF ComdC, Dec67.

56. Tompkins Intvw, p. 88.

57. Conversations between LtGen William R. Peers, USA, and LtCol Jim Breen, USA, and LtCol Charlie Moore, USA, 13Apr77, pp. 77–8, 81, and Conversations between Gen Harold K. Johnson, USA, and LtCol Rupert F. Glover, USA, v. 2, intvw No. 9, p. 16 (Senior Officers Debriefing, Carlisle).

58. Cushman Intvw, 1982, pp. 38–9.

59. CGFMFPac, Pacific Opns, p. 12.

60. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* pp. 166–7. See also BGen John R. Chaisson ltrs to wife, dtd 29–30 Nov67 (Chaisson Papers).

61. Cushman Intvw, 1982 pp. 64–5.

62. BGen John R. Chaisson, Diary, entries for 26–28 Jan68 (Chaisson Papers). For relationship between Cushman and Westmoreland, see Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* p. 342; Cushman Intvw, 1982, passim. For description of III MAF staff see Tompkins Intvw, pp. 71–3, 77, 87; Murray Intvw, pp. 15–16.

An Ambivalent Outlook

63. Quoted in Karnow, *Vietnam,* p. 514. See also Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* pp. 230–2; Johnson, *The Vantage Point,* p. 376.

64. MACV ComdHist, 1967, pp. 340–5.

65. Ibid.; MACV ComdHist 1968, pp. 13–7, 20–3, 781–2, 788.

66. Ibid., 1968, pp. 23–4.

67. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* p. 314. See also MACV ComdHist, 1968, 773–4; Murray Intvw, pp. 55–6.

68. MACV ComdHist, 1967, pp. 152–3, Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967,* pp. 120 and 139; 3d MarDiv FragO 62–67, dtd 29Dec67, Encl 13, Plans and Orders, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Dec67; 1st MarDiv, ComdC, Dec67; Simmons, "Marine Operations, 1968," p. 292.

69. 3d MarDiv and 1st MarDiv, ComdCs, Dec67.

70. III MAF ComdC, Dec67.

71. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, p. 46; Status of Forces, Dec67.

72. MACV ComdHist, 1968, p. 375. See also III MAF Cease Fire Msg Folder.

73. Johnson, *Vantage Point,* p. 379.

74. MACV ComdHist, 1968, pp 881–3. See also 1st MarDiv, PerIntRpt No. 1–68, dtd 8Jan68, tab A, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

75. III MAF ComdC, Dec67.

76. "Dissemination of Order for the General Offensive and the General Uprising," Trans of enemy document, dtd 12Nov67 (A&S Files, Indochina Archives). See also MACV ComdHist, 1968, pp. 881–3.

77. Gen Harold K. Johnson, USA, ltr to LtGen Fred C. Weyand, USA, dtd 17Jan68 (19Dec–4Jan68 SEA Trip Folder, Box 45, H. K. Johnson Papers, U.S. Army, Military History Institute, Carlisle Bks, Pa), hereafter Johnson Papers, Carlisle.

78. Gen Harold K. Johnson, USA, to MajGen R. G. Fergusson, USA, dtd 11Jan68 (Personal Correspondence File, 1968, Johnson Papers, Carlisle).

79. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* p. 316.

CHAPTER 2
THE 3D MARINE DIVISION AND THE BARRIER

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from MACV ComdHist, 1967; MACV ComdHist 1968; HQMC Msg Files; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan1967–Feb 68; CGFMFPac, Pacific Opns; III MAF ComdCs, Dec67–Jan68; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Nov67–Jan68; Vietnam Comment Files, MCHC; Tompkins Intvw; Murray Intvw; Gen William C. Westmoreland Papers, Center of Military History, hereafter Westmoreland Papers; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*; Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*; Simmons,"Marine Operations, 1968."

The 3d Marine Division in the DMZ

1. CGFMFPac msgs to CGIIIMAF, dtd 23 and 27Sep67 (HQMC Msg File).

2. CGFMFPac, Pacific Opns, Tab F, p. 15.

3. CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 23Sep67 (HQMC Msg File).

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44. ComUSMACV msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 29Dec67 (HQMC Msg File).

45. Tompkins Intvw, p. 44.

46. Murray Intvw, pp. 58–9. See also Historical Summary, Entry for 14Jan68, vol. 28 (Westmoreland Papers).

47. Metzger Observations and Metzger Comments.

48. 3d MarDiv OpO 61–67, dtd 31Dec67, Encl 10, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Dec67.

49. 9th Mar OpO 2–68, dtd 22Jan68, Tab E, 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68.

50. See Maj Justice M. Chambers intvw, 25Apr85 (OralHistColl, MCHC). Major Chambers as a first lieutenant was the 9th Marines Dyemarker officer.

51. Metzger Observations.

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53. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68, p. 16.

54. CGIIIMAF msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 20Jan68 (HQMC Msg File).

55. Cushman Intvw, pp. 13–16.

56. Tompkins Intvw, pp. 12–14.

CHAPTER 3
THE WAR IN THE DMZ SECTOR

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from MACV ComdHist, 1967; MACV ComdHist, 1968; HQMC Msg Files; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec1967–Feb 68; CGFMFPac, Pacific Opns; III MAF ComdCs, Dec67–Jan68; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Nov67–Jan68; Vietnam Comment Files, (MCHC); Tompkins Intvw; Murray Intvw; Westmoreland Papers; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*; Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*; Simmons,"Marine Operations, 1968."

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3. Ibid.

4. Ibid. See also III MAF G–2, Periodic Intelligence Report No. 2–68, dtd 15Jan68 (III MAF PerInt Rpts) and 9th Mar IntSum No. 61, dtd 2Jan68, tab b, 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68.

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15. FMFPac, "Enemy Estimate, DMZ," pp. 55, 66–7; Gen William C. Westmoreland, General Entry, 27 Dec67–31Jan68, Historical Summary (Westmoreland Papers, CMH); Gen William C. Westmoreland intvw, 4Apr83, p. 14 (OralHist Coll, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Westmoreland Intvw.

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20. Ibid., pp. 66–68; CGIIIMAF msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 13Jan68 (HQMC Msg File, III MAF Outgoing, Dec67–Feb68); G–2 III MAF PerIntRpt No. 2–68, dtd 15Jan68 (III MAF PerIntRpts, 1968); Westmoreland msg to Sharp and Wheeler, dtd 15Jan68 (v. 28, Historical File, 27Dec67–31Jan68, Westmoreland Papers).

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34. Smith, "Leatherneck Square," p. 36; 2/1 ComdC, Jan68.

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36. Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, p. 94; Smith, "Leatherneck Square," p.39.

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38. 2/1 ComdC, Jan68, p. II–4.

39. 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68, p. III–1; 9th Mar SitRep No. 260b, dtd 5Jan68, in Ibid; 2/1 ComdC, Jan68, p. II–4 and attached S–3 Jnl.

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47. In addition to the sources listed in the preceding note, some reviewers of the draft manuscript remarked on the difficulties and shortcomings of the Marine fortification effort. See Metzger Comments; Col John C. Studt, Comments on draft, dtd 22Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File); Maj Gary E. Todd, Comments on draft, dtd 28Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File) as cited in Chapter 1.

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66. 3/4 ComdC, Jan68; 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68, p. III–1 and 9th Mar SitReps No. 269 and 270, Opn Kentucky, drd 7Jan68, tab A, 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 3d MarDiv SitRep No. 272 and SpotRep No. 5, dtd 8Jan68 (Kentucky Msg File); Bendell intvw.

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75. 3/4 ComdC, Jan68, 9th Mar SitReps, Operation Kentucky, tab A, 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68.

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77. 3/4 ComdC, Jan68 and Bendell Comments.

Operation Lancaster and Heavy Fighting in Mid-January

78. 3d Mar, AAR, Operation Lancaster, dtd 18Feb68, Encl 3d Mar ComdC, Feb68, hereafter 3d Mar, AAR, Opn Lancaster; 3/9 *Gazette*, Battalion Newsletter, n.d. [Dec67–Jan68], Encl, Col Gorton C. Cook, Comments on draft, dtd 30Nov68, hereafter Cook Comments. See also III MAF msg to MACV, dtd 2Jan68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File, Operation Lancaster).

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83. 3d Mar AAR, Opn Lancaster; 3d MarDiv msgs to III MAF and III MAF msgs to MACV, dtd 16–17 Feb68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File, Operation Lancaster); 3d Mar, Staff Jnl, Pt IV, 3d Mar ComdC, Jan68.

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85. Christy ltr to Michael Madden, dtd 4Dec88, Encl to Christy Comments, hereafter Christy ltr, Dec88.

86. The description of the ambush of Company L in this and the following paragraphs is derived largely from 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 9th Mar IntSum No. 80, dtd 21 Jan68, tab B, 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 9th Mar SitRep No. 313, Operation Kentucky, tab A, 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 3/4 ComdC, Jan68; 3d MarDiv msgs and spot repts to III MAF, dtd 18 Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File, Operation Kentucky). See also Michael John Madden Statement, dtd 19Jun90, Encl, Bendell Comments, hereafter Madden Statement, Jun90 and Christy ltr, Dec88.

87. Christy ltr, Dec88.

88. Christy ltr, Dec88; Madden Statement, Jun90

89. Christy ltr, Dec88.

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CHAPTER 4
KHE SANH: BUILDING UP

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jul67–Jan68; III MAF ComdCs, Jul67–Jan68; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Jul67–Jan68; 26th Marines ComdCs, Jul67–Jan68; Khe Sanh Monograph Comment File; Khe Sanh Correspondence File; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Ray W. Stubbe, "Khe Sanh: Valley of Decision" ms, 1987 (Copy in Personal Papers Collection, MCHC), hereafter Stubbe, "Khe Sanh"; John Prados and Ray W. Stubbe, *Valley of Decision, The Siege of Khe Sanh* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1991), hereafter Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*; Shore, *Khe Sanh*. Paul D. Stevens, ed., *The Navy Cross, Vietnam, Citations of Awards to Men of the United States Navy and the United States Marine Corps, 1964–1973*, (Forest Ranch, CA: Sharp and Dunnigan, 1987).

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The Isolation of Khe Sanh

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27. For discussion relative to the XM–3 and other intelligence efforts see Maj Gary E. Todd, Comments on draft, dtd 28Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File) and Stubbe Comments.

The Decision to Hold

28. CG FMFPac msg to CG III MAF, dtd 8Jan68 (Reel No. 1, HQMC Msg File); Gen Westmoreland msg to Adm Sharp, dtd 21Jan68 (File No. MAC 00992, Westmoreland Papers).

29. W. Scott Thompson and Col Donaldson D. Frizzell, USAF, eds., *The Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Crane, Russak and Co., 1977), pp. 137–138, 183.

30.CG FMFPac msg to CG III MAF, dtd 11Jan68 (Reel No. 6, HQMC Msg File). Note: This source is a message which contains a verbatim quote of the Wheeler to Westmoreland message mentioned in the text. See also LtGen Victor H. Krulak, Comments on draft, dtd 31Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File) and Krulak, *First to Fight*, pp. 215–16, and Westmoreland, *A Soldier's Report*, p. 336 which note the Washington obsession with Khe Sanh.

31. Khe Sanh Area Report, n.d., Encl, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan67.

32. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 337–338; Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, pp. 350–51. Westmoreland journal entry of 11Feb68 is quoted in Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, p. 351.

33. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 337–338. It is interesting that General Krulak makes almost the identical case in his book. See Krulak, *The First to Fight*, pp. 215–16. For the account of Dien Bien Phu, see: Bernard B. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1966), pp. 101–102; Jules Roy, *The Battle of Dienbienphu* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 149, 162.

34. LtGen Robert E. Cushman intvw, 1Nov82, p. 89 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Cushman Intvw; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 335. For Gen Westmoreland's and the MACV staff's concerns about Marine defenses at Khe Sanh, see LtGen Philip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War, The History: 1946–1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), pp. 555–556, hereafter Davidson, *Vietnam at War*.

35. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 336.

36. Gen Westmoreland msg to Adm Sharp, dtd 15Jan68 (File No. MAC 00686, in Westmoreland Papers); Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 171–2; MacGarrigle Comments.

37. Gen William C. Westmoreland ltr to Gen Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., dtd 21Apr69 (Khe Sanh Correspondence File, MCHC).

38. LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," 26Dec68 (Khe Sanh Monograph Comment File); Cushman Intvw, pp. 22–23.

39. CG FMFPac msg to CINCPAC, dtd 13Jan68 (Reel No. 4, HQMC Msg File, MCHC).

40. Krulak, *First to Fight*, p. 218.

41.LtGen Victor H. Krulak intvw, 22Jun70, p. 8 (Oral HistColl, MCHC). See also Krulak, *First to Fight*, pp. 218–19.

42. Davidson, *Vietnam at War*, pp. 553–54.

43. "Recapitulation of the Spring-Summer 1968—Khe Sanh-Route 9 Campaign Rear Service Operations," compiled by the General Directorate for Rear Services in February 1969, in People's Army of Vietnam, General Directorate for Rear Services, *Rear Service Operations-Khe Sanh-Route 9 Campaign, Spring Summer 1968* (Hanoi, 1988). Copy and translation provided by Mr. Robert DeStatte.

The Stage is Set

44. Stubbe, "Khe Sanh," p. 469.

45. CG III MAF msg to CG 3d MarDiv, dtd 13Jan68 (Reel No. 4, HQMC Msg File).

46. Stubbe, "Khe Sanh," p. 475; Lt Ray W. Stubbe, USN, Diary, 13Jan68 (Personal Papers Coll, MCHC).

47. 3d MarDiv SitRep No. 299 for Opn Scotland in 3d MarDiv SitReps, Jan68; 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt. III.

48. 2/26 ComdC, Jan68, p. 2; Tompkins Intvw; 2/26 Journal for 14–15Jan68, Ser. Nos. 404 and 404A, in 2/26 ComdC, Jan68.

49. 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, p. 3.

50. CG III MAF msg to CG 3d MarDiv, dtd 16Jan68 (HQMC Message Files, III MAF Outgoing, Dec67–Feb68).

51. LtCol Frederick J. McEwan, Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

52. Ibid.; William J. O'Connor, Comments on draft, dtd 29Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

53. Harry F. Fromme, Comments on draft, dtd 27Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

54. PFC Leonard E. Newton award citation, n.d. (Decorations and Medals Branch, HQMC, Washington, D.C.).

55. 26th Mar SitRep Nos. 319 and 320 for Opn Scotland, dtd 19Jan68, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68.

56. Col William H. Dabney intvw, 20May82, p. 63 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Dabney Intvw. See also Col William H. Dabney, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Dabney Comments.

57. 26th Mar SitRep No. 320 for Operation Scotland, dtd 19Jan68, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68; Items of Significant Interest (ISI), dtd 21Jan68 (HQMC Command Center File (MCCC), MCHC).

Sortie to Hill 881 North

58. Maj Matthew P. Caulfield Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," 4Jan69, p. 8, in "Khe Sanh: Transcriptions of Oral History" (Archives Section, MCHC), hereafter Caulfield Comments. [Maj Caulfield's comments were taped and are available on Tape 6157, Oral HistColl, MCHC]; Col William H. Dabney intvw, 20May82, p. 63 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Dabney Intvw.

59. 26th Mar SitRep Nos. 322 and 323 for Opn Scotland, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV. See also Dabney Comments.

60. Caulfield Comments, pp. 8–9; 26th Mar SitRep No. 322 for Opn Scotland, op. cit.; Dabney Comments.

61. Caulfield Comments, p. 8; Stevens, ed., *The Navy Cross*, pp. 319–320.

62. Dabney intvw, p. 63; Shore, *The Battle for Khe Sanh*, p. 39.

The Enemy Plan Unfolds

63. LtCol James B. Wilkinson, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," 19Dec68 and Maj Kenneth W. Pipes, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," n.d. (Khe Sanh Monograph Comment File).

64. Tompkins Intvw.

CHAPTER 5
THE 3D DIVISION WAR IN SOUTHERN QUANG TRI AND NORTHERN THUA THIEN, OPERATIONS OSCEOLA AND NEOSHO

Protecting The Quang Tri Base, Operation Osceola, 1–20 January 1968

1. Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 139–42.

2. Ibid. pp. 94, 119–20, 139–42.

3. Biographical Files (Ref Sec, MCHC); 1st Mar, CAAR, Operation Osceola,, n.d., Tab K, 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68, hereafter 1st Mar CAAR, Opn Osceola.

4. 1st Mar CAAR, Opn Osceola.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.; 2/4 ComdC, Dec67.

7. "Youth Alerts Marines," *Sea Tiger*, 12Jan68.

8. 1st MAR CAAR, Opn Osceola; 1st Mar SitReps 286–291, 31Dec67–1Jan68, tab H, 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68.

9. 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68, p. II–C–4 and 1st Mar SitRep Osceola, No. 305, dtd 5Jan, tab H, 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68.

10. 1st Mar CAAR, Opn Osceola; MCCC, Items of Significant Interest, dtd 6Jan68.

11. 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68, p. II–C–4.

12. 1st Mar SitReps No. 326 and 328, dtd 11Jan68, tab H, 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68.

13. 1st Mar SitRep No. 339, dtd 14Jan68 and 1st Mar CAAR, Opn Osceola.

14. 1/1 ComdC, Jan 68, p. 1–II–3; 1st Mar CAAR, Opn Osceola.

15. III MAF ComdC, Jan68, p. 10; 1st Mar CAAR, Opn Osceola.

16. 1st Mar SitRep No. 340, dtd 14Jan68, tab H, 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68.

17. 1/1 ComdC, Jan68, p. 1–II–3.

18. Ibid., pp. 1–II–3—I–II–4.

19. 1st Mar CAAR, Opn Osceola, pp. 40–1.

20. 1st Mar FragO 1–68, dtd 6Jan68, tab d, 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68; 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68, pp. II–C–2 and II–C–5—II–C–6; 1st Mar CAAR, Opn Osceola.

21. 1st Mar CAAR, Opn Osceola; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Dec67, pp. 20–1; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68, p. 18.

Operation Neosho and Operations in the CoBi–Thanh Tan, 1–20 January 1968

22. Shulimson, *An Expanding War, 1966*, pp. 69, 143–44, 150–56, 198, 224–26; Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967*, pp. 142 and 168.

23. 4th Mar ComdC, Nov 67; 4th Mar, CAAR, Opn Neosho, 1Nov67–20Jan68, dtd 7Apr68, Encl 4th Mar ComdC, Jan68, hereafter 4th Mar CAAR, Opn Neosho; 4th Mar, CAAR, Opn Granite, 25 Oct–6 Nov 67, dtd 17Dec67, tab K, 4th Mar ComdC, Nov 67, hereafter 4th Mar CAAR, Opn Granite.

24. Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967*, pp. 173–74; 4th Mar CAAR, Opn Granite; Ron Asher, Comments on draft, dtd 10Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

25. 4th Mar ComdCs, Nov–Dec 67; 4th Mar CAAR, Opn Neosho; 4th Mar Sit Reps, Opn Neosho, Nov–Dec67, III MAF Jnl&Msg File, Opn Neosho.

26. 4th Mar ComdCs, Nov–Dec 67; 4th Mar CAAR, Opn Neosho; CG 3dMarDiv msg to CG III MAF, dtd 29Dec67, Encl 79, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Dec67; Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967*, pp. 176–79.

27. CG 3dMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 29Dec67.

28. Col William L. Dick, Comments on draft, dtd 1Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Dick Comments.

29. 4th Mar CAAR, Opn Neosho; 1/9 ComdC, Jan68; Col John F. Mitchell, Comments on draft, dtd 5Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Mitchell Comments.

30. 3d Recon Bn, Patrol Report, 550–67, dtd 4Jan68, encl 3, 3d Recon Bn ComdC, Jan68, hereafter 3d Recon Bn, Patrol Report, 550–67, dtd 4Jan68.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Sgt Ray Wilkinson, "Ambush Survivors Journey to Safety," *Sea Tiger*, Jan 19, 1968, p. 1, hereafter Wilkinson, "Ambush Survivors"; 3d MarDiv COC telecon to III MAF COC, dtd 2Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

34. 3d Recon Bn, Patrol Report, 550–67, dtd 4Jan68 and Wilkinson, "Ambush Survivors," p.1.

35. Ibid. and III MAF SitRep, No. 254, Opn Neosho, dtd 3Jan68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File).

36. 1/9 AAR, Opn Neosho, dtd 4Mar68, 1/9 ComdC, Jan68, hereafter 1/9 AAR Opn Neosho; Mitchell Comments; Dick Comments.

37. 1/9 AAR Opn Neosho; 3d Recon Bn, Patrol Report, 550–67, dtd 4Jan68.

38. 1/9 AAR, Opn Neosho.

39. 4th Mar CAAR, Opn Neosho; 1/9 ComdC, Jan68; III MAF ComdC, Jan68.

40. 4th Mar CAAR, Opn Neosho; Col William Dick debriefing at FMFPac, 21Jul68, Tape 3036 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.). For enemy casualties in the 4th Marines sector, see also MSgt Dennis R. Johnson memo to Col William Dick, dtd 17Nov94, Encl, Dick Comments. Sgt Johnson served with the Marine 15th Interrogation Translation Team (ITT) assigned to Camp Evans and gives the number of confirmed enemy dead in Neosho as 78 rather than 77, and lists enemy casualties in Operations Cove and Foster.

Operation Checkers

41. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

42. 1st Mar, 3d Mar, and 4th Mar ComdCs, Jan68.

CHAPTER 6
HEAVY FIGHTING AND REDEPLOYMENT, THE WAR IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN I CORPS

Unless otherwise noted the sources in this chapter are derived from MACV ComdHist, 1968; HQMC Msg File; HQMC, Status of Forces, 1967–68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, 1967–68; III MAF ComdCs, Dec67–Jan68; 1st MarDiv ComdCs, Dec67–Jan68; Westmoreland Papers, CMH; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*.

A Time of Transition

1. CMH Intvw Notes with BGen Samuel W. Koster, USA (Ret), dtd 26Aug88 (Working Folder, Americal Division), hereafter Koster Intvw notes; Gen Robert E. Cushman intvw, 1 Nov 82 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), pp. 29 and 37, hereafter Cushman Intvw, Nov82.

2. Cushman Intvw, Nov82, pp. 10–11; Koster Intvw notes; III MAF msg to 1st MarDiv, dtd 24Dec67, Encl 22, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec67; LtGen Donn J. Robertson intvw, 1973–76 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), pp. 14–6, hereafter Robertson Intvw; LtGen Robert E. Cushman debriefing at FMFPac, 31Mar69, Tape 4058 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), pp. 465–66, hereafter Cushman Intvw, Mar69.

3. Cushman Intvw, Nov82, p. 8.

4. CG III MAF msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 21Oct67 (HQMC Msg File, III MAF Outgoing); HQMC, Status of Forces, Dec 67, p. 35–1. Lieutenant Colonel Bradley is quoted in Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965–1973* (Washington, D.C.: CMH, 1988), pp. 334–35, hereafter Clarke, *The Final Years*.

5. HQMC, Status of Forces, Dec 67, p. 35–1; Koster Intvw notes; Cushman Intvw, Nov 82, p. 8

6. LtCol Byron F. Brady intvw, 12Oct86 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), pp. 1–5; III MAF ComdC, Dec67, p. 6; Resume of Telecon, dtd 10Jan68, Subj: opcon CAP ((III MAF Special Rpt to FMFPac Folder); FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, p. 47; Michael E. Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons, The U.S. Marines' Other War in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 47, 50, and 56; Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, p. 191; Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, p. 240.

7. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Nov67, pp. 30–1.

8. FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 32; 1st Mar Div, Commanders AAR, Tet Offensive, 29 Jan–14 Feb68, dtd 25May68 (1st MarDiv Admin Files), p. 14, hereafter 1st MarDiv AAR Tet Offensive.

9. 1st MarDiv AAR, Tet Offensive, p. 14; George MacGarrigle, "The *2d North Vietnamese Division*," ms, pp. 32–4 (Working Papers, Americal Division), hereafter MacGarrigle, "The *2d North Vietnamese Division*."

10. MacGarrigle, "The *2d North Vietnamese Division*," ms, pp. 32–4; III MAF ComdC, Dec67, p. 22.

11. LtCol John F. J. Kelly intvw, 23 May 1968, Tape 2760 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); III MAF ComdC, Dec67, p. 22.

The Da Nang TAOR

12. LtGen Donn J. Robertson, USMC, Biographical File (RefSec, MCHC).

13. Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 109, 222–23.

14. Ibid.; MajGen Raymond L. Murray intvw, 1975 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), pp. 46–7, hereafter, Murray Intvw.

15. Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, p. 109; Cushman Intvw, Nov82, pp. 50–60; Robertson Intvw, pp. 9–11.

16. 1st MarDiv Periodic IntRpt No. 1–68, dtd 8Jan68, tab A, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

Operation Auburn: Searching the Go Noi

17. Ibid.; 1st MarDiv Periodic IntRpt No. 3–68, dtd 22Jan68, tab A, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; III MAF ComdC, Dec67, p. 23; 1st Mar Div ComdC, Jan68, p. 15; Robertson Intvw, p. 29.

18. 1st MarDiv Periodic IntRpt No. 1–68, dtd 8Jan68, tab A, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68. For the 1965 activities of the *R–20*, see Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1965*, p. 129.

19. Col William K. Rockey, Comments on draft, dtd 10Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

20. 5th Mar Frag O 74–67, Opn Auburn, dtd 25 Dec 67, in App B, 5th Mar ComdC, Dec67.

21. Ibid. and 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 26Dec67 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File, Opn Auburn).

22. 3d Bn, 5th Mar CAAR, Opn Auburn, dtd 5Jan68, Encl, 3/5 ComdC, Jan68, hereafter 3/5 CAAR Auburn; "Australian Captain Heads Marine Company," *Sea Tiger*, 5Jan68, pp. 1 and 9; Isherwood COC telecon to III MAF COC, dtd 28Dec67 and 1st MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 29Dec67 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File, Opn Auburn).

23. 3/5 CAAR, Opn Auburn; 1st MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 29Dec67 and III MAF Spot Rpt to MACV, dtd 28Dec67 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File, Opn Auburn).

24. 3/5 CAAR, Opn Auburn; 1st MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC (III MAF Jnl and Msg File).

25. Ibid. and "Being First Hurts," *Sea Tiger*, 26Jan68, p. 9.

26. 3/5 CAAR, Opn Auburn; 1st MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC (III MAF Jnl and Msg File); "Sure Shot Marine Logs 'Lucky Run,'" *Sea Tiger*, 19Jan68, p. 5.

27. 3/5 CAAR, Opn Auburn; 1st MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, 29Dec67 (III MAF Jnl and Msg File); 2/5 CAAR, Opn Auburn, dtd 5Jan68, App B, 2/5 ComdC, Jan68, hereafter 2/5 CAAR, Opn Auburn. The 3/5 AAR and 1st MarDiv msg do not break down Marine casualties by company for 28 December 1967; the 2/5 CAAR, on the other hand, mentions the bodies of nine Marines from the action on the 28th recovered in the objective area the following day. Those bodies could only have been from Company E, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines.

28. 5th Mar FragO No. 75–67, Opn Auburn, dtd 28Dec67 in App B, 5th Mar ComdC, Dec67.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. 3/5 CAAR, Opn Auburn and 2/5 CAAR, Opn Auburn.

32. 2/5 CAAR, Opn Auburn.

33. 1st MarDiv to III MAF and info to 5th Mar, dtd 29Dec67 and 1st MarDiv to 5th Mar, dtd 30Dec67 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File, Opn Auburn); 5th Mar FragO No. 76–67, Opn Auburn, dtd 30Dec67 in App B, 5th Mar ComdC, Dec67.

34. 3/5 CAAR, Opn Auburn.

35. Ibid. and 2/5 CAAR, Opn Auburn.

36. 3/5 CAAR, Opn Auburn; 1st MarDiv PerIntRpts, tab A, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; 1st MarDiv AAR, Tet Offensive, p. 16; MajGen Robert D. Bohn intvw, Apr–Jun, 89 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), p. 213, hereafter Bohn Intvw.

A Busy Night at Da Nang

37. The following sources pertain to this and the following three paragraphs: 1st MarDiv PerIntRpt, dtd 8Jan68, tab A, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68 and 7th Mar SitRep No. 265, dtd 3Jan68, tab C, 7th Mar ComdC, Jan68.

38. Additional source for this and the following two paragraphs are: 7th Mar Jnl, tab A, 7th Mar ComdC, Jan68.

39. Col W. J. Davis, *Tet Marine, An Autobiography* (San Diego, CA, 1987), p. 103, Encl to Col William J. Davis, Comments on draft, dtd 2Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Davis, *Tet Marine.*

40. Additional sources for this and the following paragraph are: 1st Tank Bn SitRep No. 3, dtd 3Jan68, 1st Tank Bn, ComdC, Jan68; 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 2Jan68 in III MAF Folder, Rocket Attack, 2–3 Jan 1968.

41. Additional sources for this paragraph are: 1st MarDiv, ComdC, Jan68, p. 25; 2/5 ComdC, Jan68; I Corps TOC telecon to III MAF COC, dtd 3Jan68 in III MAF Folder, Rocket Attack 2–3 Jan68.

42. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: 7th Mar SitRep No. 265, dtd 3Jan68, tab C, 7th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 7th Mar Jnl, 2–3 Jan68, tab A, 7th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 11th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 1st Tank Bn ComdC, Jan68; III MAF to FMFPac, dtd 4Jan68 in III MAF Special Report to FMFPac Folder; 1st MarDiv to III MAF, Narrative Summary of Events of Rocket Attack, [3]Jan68 and miscellaneous handwritten notes in III MAF Folder, Rocket Attack 2–3 Jan68; 1st MarDiv PerIntRpt, dtd 8Jan68, tab A, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

43. Additional source for this paragraph is MacGarrigle, "The *2d North Vietnamese Division*," ms, p. 37.

Continuing Heavy Fighting and Increasing Uncertainty

44. MacGarrigle, "The *2d North Vietnamese Division*," ms, p. 43 and III MAF ComdC, Jan68.

45. MacGarrigle, "The *2d North Vietnamese Division*," ms, pp. 34–6.

46. Additional sources for this and the following paragraph are: Ibid.; III MAF msg to subordinate units, dtd 2Jan68, Encl 2, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; III MAF ComdC, Jan68.

47. Additional sources for this paragraph are: CGIIIMAF msg to FMFPac, dtd 4Jan68 (III MAF Special Rpt to FMFPac Folder); F. Clifton Berry, Jr., *Air Cav*, The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War (Bantam Books: New York, New York, 1988), pp. 100–02.

48. MacGarrigle, "The *2d North Vietnamese Division*," ms, pp. 38, 41–2.

49. Ibid., pp. 40–1.

50. Ibid.; [Major General Samuel B. Koster, USA,], "Americal Division, 1967–1968," n.d. (Working Folder, Americal Division); III MAF to FMFPac msgs, 4–13Jan 68 (III MAF Special Rpt to FMFPac Folder); and III MAF Sit Reps, 4–13Jan68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File, Opn Wheeler/Wallowa).

Phu Loc Operations

51. 1/5 ComdCs, Dec67 and Jan 68.

52. 1st MarDiv Periodic IntRpt No. 1–68, dtd 8Jan68, tab A, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; Intelligence Annex, 5th Mar OPlan 3–67, dtd 14Dec67, App 1, tab I, 1/5 ComdC, Dec67; III MAF ComdC, Dec67, p. 22.

53. James Duguid intvw, 14 Oct 1984 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Duguid Intvw; 1st MarDiv Periodic IntRpt No. 1–68, dtd 8Jan68; III MAF ComdC, Dec67, p. 22.

54. 1/5 ComdC, Jan68, p. 3–2.

55. Ibid., p. 3–3.

56. Ibid., pp. 3–2—3–4.

57. 1st MarDiv PerIntRpt No. 1–68, dtd 8Jan68, tab A, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; Arliss Willhite and Thomas Krusewski intvw, 13Oct84 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Willhite and Krusewski Intvw, Oct84.

58. 1/5 ComdC, Jan68, pp. 3–4, 3–5; 5th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pp. 3–2, 3–3; 1st MarDiv PerIntRpt No. 1–68, 8Jan68; IIIMAF to FMFPac, dtd 7Jan68 (III MAF Special Rpt to FMFPac Folder); III MAF PerIntRpt No. 2–68, dtd 15Jan68 (III MAF PerIntRpts, 1968).

59. Cpl Arliss Willhite et al., intvw, 15Aug68, Tape 2276 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Willhite Intvw, Aug68; Willhite and Krusewski Intvw, Oct84.

60. Willhite Intvw, Aug68; Willhite and Krusewski Intvw, Oct84.

61. Willhite Intvw, Aug68; Willhite and Krusewski Intvw, Oct84; 1st MarDiv Periodic IntRpt No. 1–68, dtd 8Jan68.

62. Willhite Intvw, Aug68; Willhite and Krusewski Intvw, Oct84; 1st MarDiv Periodic IntRpt No. 1–68, dtd 8Jan68; IIIMAF to FMFPac, dtd 7Jan68 (III MAF Special Rpt to FMFPac Folder).

63. 1/5 ComdC, Jan68.

64. Ibid.; III MAF PerIntRpt No. 2–68, 15Jan68; 1st MarDiv PerIntRpt No. 1–68, 8Jan68; IIIMAF to FMFPac, dtd 7Jan68 (III MAF Special Rpt to FMFPac Folder).

65. 1/5 ComdC, Jan68; IIIMAF msgs to FMFPac, dtd 11–15Jan68 (III MAF Special Rpt to FMFPac Folder).

The Formation and Deployment of Task Force X-Ray

66. "History of Task Force X-Ray," n.d., Attachment to Col A. J. Poillon, comments on Maj Thomas Donnelly and Capt Moyers S. Shore II, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble," in LtCol Ralph F. Moody, et al., "Marines in Vietnam, 1954–68," 8 pts (ms, MCHC, 1971), pt VI, dtd 30Oct69 (Vietnam Comment Files), hereafter "History of Task Force X-Ray," Poillon Comments; CG 1st MarDiv msg to CG TF X-Ray, dtd 3Dec67, Encl 57 and 1st MarDiv OpO 309–68, 18Dec67, Encl 45, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec67, hereafter 1st MarDiv OpO 309–68, 18Dec67.

67. 1st MarDiv OpO 309–68, 18Dec67.

68. Ibid; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec67, p. 18; CG 1st MarDiv msgs to CG 3d MarDiv, dtd 15Dec 67, Encl 58, and dtd 23Dec67, Encl 63, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec67; CG3d MarDiv msg to CG 1st MarDiv, n.d., Encl 44, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Dec67; LtCol A. Van Winkle et al. intvw, 25Jan68, Tape 2478 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Van Winkle Intvw; 1/5 ComdC, Dec67.

69. 1st MarDiv FragO 4–68, 11Jan68, 3d MarDiv Messages, Jan 1968.

70. III MAF COC, Resume of telecon, 15Jan68 in III MAF Special Report to FMFPac, Jan68; 5th Mar ComdC, Jan68; TF X-Ray ComdC, 13–31Jan68.

71. Bohn Intvw, Apr89 and May89, pp. 272–3, 278.

72. Bohn Intvw, pp. 274–78; SSgt Donald O. Taylor in LtCol A. Van Winkle et al. Intvw.

73. Bohn Intvw, pp. 274–8, 308; LtCol Joseph W. Malcolm debriefing at FMFPac, 28Oct68, Tape 3453, (Oral HistColl, MCHC); LtCol James C. Hecker in LtCol A. Van Winkle et al. Intvw.

74. Task Force X-Ray OpO 301–68, 12Jan68, Encl 36, 1st MarDiv, ComdC, Jan68.

75. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 4Oct67, HQMC Msg File, III MAF, Incoming; Cushman intvw, Nov 82, p. 8; HQMC, Status of Forces, Dec 1967–Jan68, pp. 31–1; Clarke, *The Final Years*, p. 334; Col Hoang Ngoc Lung, *The General Offensives of 1968–69*, Indochina Monographs, (Washington. D.C.: CMH, 1981), p. 78.

The Cavalry Arrives

76. MACV ComdHist, 1968, v. 1, pp. 23–4; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Dec67, p. 16; 4th Marines, CAAR, Opn Cumberland, dtd 11Oct67 (4th Marines Miscellaneous Reports); Cushman Intvws, Nov82 and Mar68, pp. 25 and 490; Murray Intvw, pp. 55–6; CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 8Dec67, HQMC Msg File.

77. MACV ComdHist, 1968, v. 1, pp. 23–4; Entry for 16Dec67, Historical Summary, 29Nov67–16Dec67, and HQMACV C/S Action Memo, No 67–178, subj: CIIB Meeting, 16 Dec 67, dtd 17 Dec 67, v. 22, History File, Westmoreland Papers, CMH; CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 16Dec67, HQMC Msg File; MajGen John J. Tolson intvw, 24Jun68, 14th MHD (Copy in CMH), hereafter Tolson Intvw.

78. Tolson Intvw; Westmoreland msgs to Sharp and Wheeler, dtd 12 and 15Jan68, Backchannel Messages and C/S Memo No. 68, dtd 14Jan68, v.28, History File, 22Dec67–31Jan68, Westmoreland Papers.

79. Westmoreland msg to Sharp and Wheeler, 15Jan68 and Entry for 17Jan68, Historical Summary, v. 28, History File, Westmoreland Papers.

80. See for the York II planing CGIIIMAF msgs to CGFMFPac, dtd 26 and 28Dec67, 3 and 12Jan68, and CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 6Jan68 (HQMC Msg File). For the Niagara planning and General Westmoreland's concerns see ComUSMACV msg to CinCPac dtd 21Jan68 and Entry for 19Jan68, Summary, v. 28, History File, 27Dec67–31Jan68, Westmoreland Papers.

81. Westmoreland entry for 19Jan68, Historical Summary; CinCPac msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 19Jan68, Back Channel Messages, Westmoreland Papers.

82. Tolson Intvw; III MAF to FMFPac, 23Jan68 (Special FMFPac Rpt Folder).

83. Tolson Intvw.

84. Ibid.; III MAF ComdC, Jan68; BGen Herbert L. Beckington, Comments, dtd 25Oct69 in BGen Edwin H. Simmons, Comment Files on May 1970 *Naval Review* article.

The Changed Situation in the North

85. 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68; 1st Mar, CAAR Opn Neosho II, dtd 22Feb68, tab J, 1st Mar ComdC, Jan 68; CGIIIMAF, CG3dMarDiv, CTF76.4, CTF 79.4, and BLT 2/4, exchange of msgs, 3d MarDiv, Messages, Jan68.

86. 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68; 1st Mar, CAAR Opn Neosho II, dtd 22Feb68, tab J, 1st Mar ComdC, Jan 68; 1st Mar OpO 3–68, dtd 26Jan68, tab G, 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68.

87. 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68; 1st Mar OpO 3–68, dtd 26Jan68, tab g, 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68; CG1stMarDiv msg to CGTFX-Ray, dtd 24Jan68, Encl 20, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; Bohn Intvw, pp. 279–80.

88. 5th Mar ComdC, Jan68 and 1/5 ComdC, Jan68.

89. 5th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 5th Mar OpO 301–68, dtd 18 Jan68, Encl 17 and 5th Mar FragO 7–68, dtd 25Jan68, Encl 52, 5th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 2/5 ComdC, Jan68.

90. TF X-Ray ComdC, Jan68; "History of Task Force X-Ray," Poillon Comments.

91. Historical Summary, General Entry, 27Dec67–31Jan68, Entry for 22Jan68, History File, v. 28, Westmoreland Papers; Westmoreland msg to Wheeler, dtd 22Jan68 and Westmoreland msg to Sharp and Wheeler, dtd 26Jan68, Westmoreland Messages, Westmoreland Papers; John R. Chaisson, entries for 26–28 Jan68, Diary, Chaisson Papers; Cushman Intvw, Mar69, pp. 459–60 and 465–66.

92. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 27Jan68 and CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 27Jan68 (HQMC Msg File); Abrams msg to Cushman, dtd 31Jan68, Creighton B. Abrams Papers, CMH; MACV msg to III MAF, dtd 3Feb68 (III MAF Incoming Msgs); Cushman FMFPac debriefing; Maj Miles D. Waldron and Spec 5 Richard W. Beavers, XXIV Corps, "The Critical Year, 1968," pp. 4–5 (CMH); LtGen Willard Pearson, USA, *The War in the Northern Provinces, 1966–1968*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C. Dept of the Army, 1975); Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 345.

PART II
The Tet Offensive

CHAPTER 7
THE ENEMY OFFENSIVE IN THE DMZ AND SOUTHERN QUANG TRI, 20 JANUARY–8 FEBRUARY

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan and Feb68; Maj Thomas Donnelly and Capt Moyers S. Shore II, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble," in LtCol Ralph F. Moody, et al., "Marines in Vietnam, 1954–68," 8 pts (ms, MCHC, Washington, D.C., 1971), pt VI, hereafter Donnelly and Shore, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble"; III MAF ComdCs, Jan and Feb68; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Jan and Feb68; HQMC Msg File; III MAF Jnl & Msg File; Vietnam Comment Files; A&S Files, Indochina Archives; *Sea Tiger*, Jan–Feb68; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; LtGen Willard Pearson, USA, *The War in the Northern Provinces, 1966–1968*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C. Dept of the Army, 1975), hereafter Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*; Col Hoang Ngoc Lung, ARVN, *The General Offensives of 1968–69*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, D.C., CMH, 1981), hereafter Lung, *The General Offensives*; LtCol Pham Van Son, ARVN, et al., *The Viet Cong Tet Offensive, 1968* (Saigon, RVN: Joint General Staff, RVNAF, 1968), hereafter Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*.

The Cua Viet is Threatened

Other sources for this section are: 1st AmTrac Bn ComdC, Jan68; 3/1 ComdC, Jan68; BLT 3/1 CAAR, Operation Badger Catch, dtd 14Mar68, Encl, 3/1 ComdC, Feb68, hereafter 3/1 CAAR, Operation Badger Catch.

1. 1st AmTrac Bn ComdC, Jan68.

2. Ronald R. Asher, Comments on draft, dtd 10Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

3. This and the following paragraph are based on the following sources: 1st AmTrac Bn ComdC, Jan68; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; III MAF ComdC, Jan68.

4. See also MCCC, Items of Significant Interest, dtd 22Jan68 and HQMC, G–3, Point Paper, Status of WestPac Units, dtd 23Jan68, HQMC Point Papers, Jan–Jun68.

5. 1st AmTrac Bn ComdC, Jan68.

6. Ibid.

7. CGIIIMAF msg to CG3dMarDiv, dtd 22Jan68 and also CGIIIMAF msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 22Jan68 (HQMC Msg File, III MAF Outgoing, Dec67–Feb68).

8. CGIIIMAF msg to CG3dMarDiv, dtd 5Jan68 and ComSeventhFlt to CTG 76.5, dtd 15Jan68, Encls 5 and 7, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

9. CGIIIMAF msg to CG3dMarDiv, dtd 17Jan68 and CGIIIMAF msgs to CG3dMarDiv and ComUSMACV, dtd 22Jan68 (HQMC Msg Files, III MAF Outgoing, Dec67–Jan68).

10. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 23Jan68, Encl, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; 1st AmTrac Bn ComdC, Jan68; 3/1 CAAR, Operation Badger Catch; "Operation: Badger Catch/Saline/Napoleon-Saline," *BLT 3/1, Newsletter Battalion Landing Team 3/1 RVN, Dec 67–Jun68*, Apr 1988, p. 6.

11. 3dMarDiv COC msg to IIIMAFCOC, dtd 23Jan68, Encl 29, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

12. CGIIIMAF msg to CTG 76.5, dtd 24Jan68, Encl 42, and CTG 79.5, SitRep, Opn Badger Tooth, dtd 2Jan68, Encl 87, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

Adjustment of Forces in Southern Quang Tri Province

Other sources for this section are: 3d Mar ComdC, Jan68; 3d Mar AAR, Opn Osceola II, dtd 20Mar68, 3d Mar Miscellaneous File, hereafter 3d Mar AAR, Opn Osceola II; 1st AirCavDiv, Operational Report Lessons Learned, for period ending 31Jan68, dtd 17Mar68 (CMH Working Papers), hereafter 1st AirCavDiv, ORLL, 31Jan68.

13. 3d Mar ComdC, Jan68; 1st Mar Operation Osceola SitRep No. 363, dtd 20Jan68, tab H, 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68.

14. 3d Mar ComdC, Jan68; 3d Mar AAR, Opn Osceola II.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid. and III MAF ComdC, Jan68.

17. CGIIIMAF msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 22Jan68 (HQMC Msg File, III MAF Outgoing, Dec67–Feb68).

18. 1st AirCavDiv, ORLL, 31Jan68; William Ehrhart, ltr to Shulimson, dtd 2Jul91 (Vietnam Comment File).

19. 3d Mar ComdC, Jan68; 3d Mar AAR, Opn Osceola II.

Heavy Fighting Along the DMZ

Other sources for this section are: 3d MarDiv, AAR, Operation Lancaster II, dtd 9Sep69[?], Encl, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Nov68, hereafter 3d MarDiv AAR, Operation Lancaster II; 4th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 3/4 ComdC, Mar68.

20. 4th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 3d MarDiv AAR, Operation Lancaster II.

21. 4th Mar ComdC, Jan68.

22. This and the following paragraph are based on the following sources: 4th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 3/4 ComdC, Jan68; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; III MAF ComdC, Jan68; 3d MarDiv AAR, Operation Lancaster II; MCCC, Items of Significant Interest, dtd 26Jan68; G–3, HQMC, Point Paper, Status of Forces in WestPac, dtd 31Jan68 (HQMC Point Papers, Jan–Jun68). For reference to Dien Bien Phu and the *320th NVA Division*, see George L. MacGarrigle, Comments on draft, dtd 5Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

23. This and the next two paragraphs are based on the following sources: 3d MarDiv AAR, Operation Lancaster II; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

24. Col Lee R. Bendell, Comments on draft, n.d. (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Bendell Comments.

25. Additional sources for this and the following paragraph are: 3/4 ComdC Jan68; 4th Mar ComdC, Jan68.

26. Additional source for this paragraph is: "Marines Blast 'Wall to Wall,' NVA After Ambush," *Sea Tiger*, 1Mar1968, p. 4. See also Bendell Comments.

27. 3/4 ComdC, Jan68; 3d MarDiv AAR, Operation Lancaster II.

28. 3/4 ComdC, Jan68.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid. See also Bendell Comments.

31. Sources for this and the following three paragraphs are: 3/4 ComdC, Jan68; "Marines Blast 'Wall to Wall,' NVA After Ambush," *Sea Tiger*, 1Mar1968, p. 4. See also Maj John S. Leffen, Jr., Comments on draft, n.d. (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Leffen Comments.

32. Additional sources for this and the following two paragraphs are: 3d MarDiv AAR, Operation Lancaster II; Abdullah Hassan (Frank Craven) intvw, 2Oct86 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Hassan Tape.

33. Leffen Comments.

34. Hassan Tape.

35. 3/4 ComdC, Jan68; Bendell Comments.

36. Bendell Comments.

37. 3/4 ComdC, Jan68.

38. Ibid.

39. Sources for this and the following paragraph are: 3/4 ComdC, Jan68; 3d MarDiv AAR, Operation Lancaster II.

40. Messages quoted in 3/4 ComdC, Jan68.

41. III MAF ComdC, Jan68; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; 4th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 9th Mar Int Sum, Opn Kentucky, No. 87, dtd 28Jan68, tab B 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 3/4 ComdC, Jan68; 3d MarDiv AAR, Operation Lancaster II.

A Lull in Leatherneck Square

Additional sources for this section are: 9th Mar ComdC, Jan–Feb68; 2/1 ComdC, Jan68; 3/4 ComdC, Jan68; 3d MarDiv Messages, Jan 1968.

42. CGIIIMAF msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 20Jan68 (HQMC Msg File); 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 3/4 ComdC, Jan68; MCCC, Items of Significant Interest, dtd 22Jan68.

43. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 17Jan68, 3d MarDiv Messages, Jan 1968.

44. 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 2/1 ComdC, Jan68; MCCC, Items of Significant Interest, 23–25Jan68.

45. 9th Mar SitRep No. 354, Operation Kentucky, dtd 29Jan68, tab A, 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68.

46. 9th Mar Int Sum, Opn Kentucky, No. 87, dtd 28 Jan68, tab B, 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68.

47. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 27Jan68 (HQMC Msg File); exchange of messages between CG3dMarDiv and CTG 76.4, dtd 26Jan68, Encl 116–18, 3d MarDiv Messages, Jan68.

48. Exchange of messages between CG3dMarDiv and CTG 76.4, dtd 27Jan68, Encl 126–29, 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Jan68; 9th Mar SitReps, Operation Kentucky, Nos. 347–64, dtd 27–31Jan68, tab A, 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68.

49. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; 9th Mar SitRep, Operation Kentucky, No. 364, dtd 31Jan68, tab A, 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68; CG3dMarDiv to CGIIIMAF, dtd 3Feb68, HQMC Message File, III MAF Incoming, Dec67–Feb68.

The Cua Viet Continues to Heat Up

Other sources for this section are: 1st AmTrac Bn ComdC, Jan–Feb68; 3/1 ComdCs, Jan–Feb68; 3/1 CAAR, Operation Badger Catch.

50. 1st AmTrac Bn, ComdC, Jan68; CG3dMarDiv msg to CGIII MAF, dtd 30Jan68, 3d MarDiv Messages, Jan68.

51. BLT 3/1 AAR, Badger Catch; 1st AmTrac Bn msg to CO 9th Mar and CO 12th Mar n.d., attached to S–2/3 Jnl, 1st AmTrac Bn ComdC, Jan68.

52. BLT 3/1 AAR, Badger Catch.

53. Ibid.

54. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 30Jan68, 3d MarDiv Messages, Jan68.

55. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; Enemy Order of Battle, 9th Mar ComdC, Feb68; BLT 3/1 AAR, Badger Catch.

56. BLT 3/1 AAR, Badger Tooth.

57. Sources for this and the following three paragraphs are: BLT 3/1 AAR, Badger Tooth; 1st AmTrac Bn ComdC, Jan68.

58. Additional source for this and the following paragraph is 3d Mar Div ComdC, Jan68.

59. BLT 3/1 AAR, Badger Tooth.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid; ComUSMACV msgs to III MAF, 27–29Jan68 (III MAF Ceasefire Policy Folder); Maj Gen Rathvon McC. Tompkins, Comments on BGen Edwin H. Simmons *Naval Review* Article, dtd 19Nov69, Simmons Comment Notebook, Personal Papers, MCHC; Maj John Regal, "Surprise for the *803d*," reprinted from *Marine Corps Gazette*, Apr70 in *BLT 3/1, Newsletter Battalion Landing Team 3/1, RVN, Dec 67–Jun68*, Apr88, pp. 3–5, p. 3, hereafter Regal, "Surprise for the *803d*."

62. BLT 3/1 AAR, Badger Catch.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

The Battle For Quang Tri City

Other sources for this section are: 14th Mil Hist Det, 1st Air Cav Div, "Battle of Quang Tri, 31Jan–6Feb68," dtd 1Apr68, CMH Working Papers, hereafter 14th MilHist, "Battle of Quang Tri"; 3d Mar AAR, Opn Osceola II; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 298–300; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 55–6.

67. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 4Oct67, HQMC Msg File, III MAF Incoming.

68. Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive, 1968*, pp. 298–99 and 302.

69. Ibid.

70. The sources for this and the follnwing paragraph are: Pham Van Son, *The Tet Offensive*, pp. 298–99, 302; 14th MilHist, "Battle of Quang Tri."

71. 14th MilHist, "Battle of Quang Tri". See also, Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, p. 55.

72. 3d Mar AAR, Opn Osceola II.

73. 14th MilHist, "Battle of Quang Tri".

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, p. 55.

76. Oral History intvw with Capt Michael Nawrosky (USA) and 1stSgt Robert B. Fowler (USA), n.d. [Feb68] (CMH Working Papers), hereafter Nawrosky Intvw (CMH Working Papers).

77. This and the following paragraph are based on the following sources: 14th MilHist, "Battle of Quang Tri"; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 55–6.

78. Additional sources for this paragraph are: Nawrosky Intvw (CMH Working Papers); Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, p. 300.

79. 14th MilHist, "Battle of Quang Tri"; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 55–6.

Tet Aftermath Along the DMZ

Additional sources for this section are: Regal, "Surprise for the *803d*;" BLT 3/1 AAR, Badger Catch; 3/3 draft AAR, n.d., Anx B, 3/3 ComdC, Jan68, hereafter 3/3 draft AAR; Jeff Kelly, *DMZ Diary, A Combat Marine's Vietnam Memoir* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1991), hereafter Kelly, *DMZ Diary*.

80. The sources for this and the following three paragraphs are: BLT 3/1 AAR, Badger Catch; Regal, "Surprise for the *803d*;" "'Missing' Kilo Co Kills 144 Enemy," *Sea Tiger*, dtd 23Feb68.

81. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: Regal, "Surprise for the *803d*;" "'Missing' Kilo Co Kills 144 Enemy," *Sea Tiger*, dtd 23Feb68.

82. Additional source for this paragraph is BLT 3/1 AAR, Badger Catch. See also LtCol Max McQuown, Comments on draft, dtd 22Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter McQuown Comments.

83. BLT 3/1 AAR, Badger Catch; McQuown Comments; Regal, "Surprise for the *803d*," p. 5.

84. Sources for this and the following two paragraphs are: 9th Mar IntSum No. 90, Operation Kentucky, dtd 31Jan68, tab B, 9th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 9th Mar ComdC, Feb68; 9th Mar SitReps and IntReps, Operation Kentucky, dtd 2–3 Feb68, tabs A and B, 9th Mar ComdC, Feb68; FMFPac, MarOpV, Jan68, p. 49.

85. Additional sources for this and the following paragraph are: "Leatherneck Unit Clobbers Enemy in Fierce Battle," *Sea Tiger*, dtd 23Feb68, p. 1 and Clipping "Cam Lo—Hub of the DMZ," *Sea Tiger*, n.d. [Feb68], Encl, Bendell Comments.

86. Col Franklin L. Smith debriefing at FMFPac [May 1968] Tape 2904 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); Col Richard B. Smith intvw, Jul68, Tape 3041 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

87. Sources for this and the following four paragraphs are: 9th Mar ComdC, Feb68; 3/3 ComdC, Feb68; 3/3 draft AAR.

88. Additional source for this and the following two paragraphs is: Kelly, *DMZ Diary*, pp. 27–36. Quotes are from pp. 27–28.

89. Kelly, *DMZ Diary*, p. 33.

90. LtCol Otto Lehrack, Comments on draft, dtd 29Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File). See also LtCol Otto J. Lehrack, *No Shining Armor, The Marines at War in Vietnam, An Oral History* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992), pp. 228–29, hereafter Lehrack, *No Shining Armor*.

91. The quote is from Kelly, *DMZ Diary*, pp. 35–6. See also Lehrack, *No Shining Armor*, pp. 215–33 and 3/3 draft AAR.

92. 3d MarDiv, Lancaster II, AAR; 3d MarDiv Periodic Intelligence Rpt, dtd 18Feb68, Encl, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68.

CHAPTER 8
THE TET OFFENSIVE AT DA NANG

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from: MACV ComdHist, 1968; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan and Feb68; Maj Thomas Donnelly and Capt Moyers S. Shore II, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble," in LtCol Ralph F. Moody, et al., "Marines in Vietnam, 1954-68," 8 pts (ms, MCHC, Washington, D.C., 1971), pt VI, hereafter Donnelly and Shore, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble;" 1st Mar Div, Commanders AAR, Tet Offensive, 29 Jan-14 Feb68, dtd 25May68 (1st MarDiv Admin Files), hereafter 1st MarDiv AAR Tet; TF X-Ray ComdC, Jan68; III MAF Jnl & Msg File; Vietnam Comment Files; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co, 1971), hereafter Oberdorfer, *Tet!*; LtGen Willard Pearson, USA, *The War in the Northern Provinces, 1966-1968*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C. Dept of the Army, 1975), hereafter Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*; Col Hoang Ngoc Lung, ARVN, *The General Offensives of 1968-69*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, D.C., CMH, 1981), hereafter Lung, *The General Offensives*; LtCol Pham Van Son, ARVN, et al., *The Viet Cong Tet Offensive, 1968* (Saigon, RVN: Joint General Staff, RVNAF, 1968), hereafter Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*.

Allied Dispositions

1. 7th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 14.

2. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 5 and 17; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68, p. 35; LtGen Donn J. Robertson intvw, p. 29, 1973-76 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Robertson Intvw.

3. Col William K. Rockey, Comments on draft, dtd 10Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Rockey Comments; Igor Bobrowsky intvw, 3Dec1982, Tape Three, p. 2 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Bobrowsky Intvw, Tape Three; 2d ROK Bde SitRep No. 29, dtd 29Jan68 and 1 CorpsAdvGp, Da Nang msg to III MAF, dtd 29Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File); 7th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 3/5 ComdC, Jan68.

4. ComUSMACV msgs to III MAF, dtd 27-29Jan68 (III MAF Cease-fire Policy Folder).

5. Robertson Intvw, p.32.

The Enemy Plans His Offensive

6. General Entry, Historical Summary, Jan68, p. 24, v. 28, History File, 27Dec62-31Jan68 (Westmoreland Papers); 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 19; 1st MarDiv PerIntRpt 3-68, dtd 22Jan68, tab A, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68, pp. 12 and 31; Col W. J. Davis, *Tet Marine, An Autobiography* (San Diego, CA, 1987), pp. 116-18, Encl to Col William J. Davis, Comments on draft, dtd 2Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Davis, *Tet Marine*.

7. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 19; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68, pp. 12 and 31; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, pp. 25-6; Davis, *Tet Marine*, pp. 117-18.

8. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 19; CWO Stuart N. Duncan intvw, n.d. [1968], Tape 2978 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

9. 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 29Jan68 and NSA to III MAF, Resume of telecon, dtd 29Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File); 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 19.

10. Rand Corporation, Tet Quang Ngai Interview, dtd 18Apr68, No. 20, Folder No. 2, Tet (A&S Files, Indochina Archives), hereafter, Quang Ngai intvw, 18Apr68, 20 (A&S Files); III MAF msg to MACV, dtd 29Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

11. Quang Ngai Interview, 18Apr68, 20 (A&S Files); 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 30Jan68 and III MAF msg to I Corps TOC, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File); FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, pp. 25-6.

12. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 19-20; ICorpsAdvGp, Da Nang msg to III MAF, dtd 30Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

13. Hq, South Vietnam Liberation Army, Order of the Day of the Headquarters, All South Vietnam Liberation Armed Forces, n.d., trans (Tet 68, Folder 2, Indochina Archives).

The Attack

14. 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68, pp. 31-33; 1st MarDiv to III MAF, resume of telecon, dtd 29Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

15. Jack W. Jaunal, *Vietnam '68, Jack's Journal*, (San Francisco, CA: Denson Press, 1981) p. 39, hereafter Jaunal, *Vietnam '68*.

16. Maj Gen Raymond L. Murray intvw, 27Jun75, pp. 42-3 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

17. Robertson Intvw, pp. 32-3; 1st MP Bn to III MAF, Resume of telecon, dtd 30Jan68, 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 30Jan68, and CO ICorpsAdvGp to III MAF, dtd 30Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File); 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68, pp. 31-3; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 23-5.

18. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 30Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File); 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 25-6.

19. An additional source for this paragraph is: CG1stMarDiv msg to HqBn, 1st MarDiv, dtd 30Jan68, Encl 25, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

20. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 25-6; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 303-04; CO ICorpsAdvGp to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

21. Lung, *The General Offensives of 1968-69*, pp. 47-9.

22. Ibid.; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 303-04; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 25-6; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, pp. 21-5; 1st MarDiv COC, Summary of Events of Attack, dtd 30Jan68 and ICorpsAdvGp msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

23. Col Twyman R. Hill, Comments on draft, dtd 29Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Hill Comments; 1st MP Bn ComdC, Jan68; 1st MarDiv COC, Summary of Events of Attack, dtd 30Jan68 and ICorpsAdvGp msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

24. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 25-6; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, pp. 21-5; 1st MarDiv COC, Summary of Events of Attack, dtd 30Jan68 and ICorpsAdvGp msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File); Donald Oberdorfer, *Tet!*, pp. 125-26.

25. Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 303-04; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 25-6; 1st MP Bn ComdC, Jan68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, pp. 21-5; 1st MarDiv COC, Summary of Events of Attack, dtd 30Jan68 and ICorpsAdvGp msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File); Hill Comments.

26. The sources for this and the following two paragraphs are: 1st MarDiv COC, Summary of Events of Attack, dtd 30Jan68, and 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 30Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File); 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 23-5; 11th Marines ComdC, Jan68; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

27. An additional source for this paragraph is Rockey Comments.

28. Col Franklin L. Smith intvw, 10Jun68, Tape 2878 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Smith Tape; CO ICorpsAdvGp msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

29. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, p. 305; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 26-7. See also CO ICorpsAdvGp msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 31Jan68; 2d ROKBde to CGIIIMAF, Resume of telecon, 30Jan68; ROKAdv to III MAF, Resume of Telecon, dtd 30Jan68; 1st MarDiv to III MAF, Resume of Telecon, dtd 30Jan68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File).

30. Lung, *The General Offensives of 1968-69*, p. 46; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 322-23; LtGen Philip B. Davidson, USA, *Vietnam at War, The History: 1946-1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), p. 474.

The Fighting Continues

31. CO ICorpsAdvGp msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 and Americal Div to III MAF, Resume of Telecon, dtd 30Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

32. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 24-26; CAP Hq to III MAF, resume of telecon, dtd 30Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

33. Jaunal, *Vietnam '8*, p. 40.

34. CAP Hq to III MAF, resume of telecon, dtd 30Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File);1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 24-26; LtCol Gene W. Bowers, Comments on draft, dtd 30May95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Bowers Comments; Rockey Comments; John L. Gundersen, Comments on draft, dtd 9Dec94 and 11Sep96 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Gundersen Comments; Extract of 1st MarDiv COC [Combat Operations Center], 30Jan68, Encl, Gundersen Comments, hereafter Extract of 1st MarDiv COC, 30Jan68.

35. Gundersen Comments; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 24-6; 3/5 ComdC Jan68; ITOC to III MAF, Resume of Telecon, dtd 30Jan68, 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File).

36. Gundersen Comments; Extract of 1st MarDiv COC, 30Jan68; Bowers Comments; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 24-6; 3/5 ComdC Jan68.

37. Gundersen Comments.

38. Bowers Comments; Gundersen Comments.

39. Bowers Comments; Rockey Comments.

40. Bowers Comments.

41. Ibid. and Rockey Comments.

42. Gundersen Comments; Bowers Comments; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 24-6; 3dAmTrac to III MAF, Resume of Telecon, dtd 30Jan68, 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File).

43. Gundersen Comments; Bowers Comments; Rockey Comments; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 24-6; 3/5 ComdC Jan68; ITOC to III MAF, Resume of Telecon, dtd 30Jan68, 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File).

44. FLC to III MAF, resume of telecon, dtd 30Jan68 and 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 30Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

45. This and the following paragraph are derived from the following sources: 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 26-8, 31; 1st MarDiv to III MAF, Resumes of Telecons, dtd 30-31Jan68, and 1st MarDiv msgs to III MAF, dtd 30-31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

46. 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg file).

47. ICorpsAdvGp, Da Nang msg to III MAF, dtd 30Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File); Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 303-04.

48. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 28; 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 30 Jan68; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68, p. 40.

49. Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 303-04.

50. This and the following paragraph are derived from the following sources: Ibid.; COC ICorpsAdvGp msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68; 1st MarDiv resume of telecon to III MAF, dtd 30Jan68; ROK Lia Off, Resume of telecon to III MAF, dtd 30Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

51. 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File); 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 29.

52. This and the next two paragraphs are based on the following sources: 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 29; 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 30Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

53. 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68; Resume of telecon from Phu Bai to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68; 1st MarDiv COC Notes, dtd 31Jan68; I TOC to III MAF, Resume of Telecon, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File). See also 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 19, 45-47; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, p. 306.

54. Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 339-58.

55. Col Dean Wilker, Comments on draft, dtd 18Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

56. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, p. 56; 1st MAW to III MAF, Resumes of telecon, 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

57. 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File); 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 29-30; FMF, MarOpsV, Jan68, p. 56.

58. This and the next paragraph are based on the following sources: 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 30; 1st MarDiv to III MAF, Resume of Telecon, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

59. An additional source for this paragraph is 1st FSR/FLC msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

60. Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 303-04.

61. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 30-32; III MAF Jnl&Msg File; 1st MP Bn ComdC, Jan68.

62. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 31-2; 1st MarDiv msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

63. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 31; 1st MarDiv to III MAF, Resume of Telecon, dtd 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

64. I Corps to III MAF, Resumes of Telecon, dtd 31Jan68; CAG-2 to III MAF, Resume of Telecon, dtd 31Jan68; 2d ROK MarBde msg to III MAF, dtd 31Jan68; Americal Div to III MAF, Resume of Telecon, dtd 31Jan68; III MAF msg to MACV COC, dtd 31Jan68; (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

65. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, Jan68, p. 32.

66. Ibid.

A Brief Lull and Renewed Fighting

67. The sources for this and the next paragraph are: 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 24; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, p. 17.

68. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 33.

69. Ibid., p. 20; LtCol John F. J. Kelly intvw, 23May68, Tape 2760 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

70. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 34-5.

71. Ibid.

72. Bobrowsky intvw, Tape Three, p. 6.

73. This and the next two paragraphs are based on the following sources: 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 35-6; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Feb68.

74. An additional source for this and the next paragraph is 3/5 ComdC, Feb68.

75. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 36-7; Robertson Intvw., pp. 32-33.

76. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 341-2; General Entry, Historical Summary, 1-29Feb68, Folder 29 (Westmoreland Papers, CMH).

77. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 341.

78. Robertson Intvw, pp. 30-1; Cushman Intvw, Nov82, p. 29; Smith Tape.

79. Smith Tape.

80. CGIIIMAF msg to CGAmericalDiv, CG1stMarDiv, CG1stMAW, and CG2dROKMC, dtd 7Feb68, Encl 7, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

81. The sources for this and the following six paragraphs are: 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 37; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Feb68.

82. An additional source for this and the following paragraph is III MAF ComdC, Jan68.

83. An additional source for this paragraph is FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, pp. 28-30.

84. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet 68; III MAF ComdC, Feb68, pp. 19-20; CGIIIMAF msg to CG1stMarDiv [and other subordinate commands], dtd 11Feb68, Encl 10, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Feb68.

85. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 64; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, pp. 21-25; Smith Tape.

86. Document Relating to Action and Mission South of Da Nang, dtd 31Jan68, CDEC Log No. 03-1127-68 (Tet 68, Folder No. 1, Indochina Archives); 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 70; Robertson Intvw., pp. 32-3.

CHAPTER 9
THE STRUGGLE FOR HUE—THE BATTLE BEGINS

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from: MACV ComdHist, 1968; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan and Feb68; Maj Thomas Donnelly and Capt Moyers S. Shore II, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble," in LtCol Ralph F. Moody, et al., "Marines in Vietnam, 1954–68," 8 pts (ms, MCHC, Washington, D.C., 1971), pt VI, hereafter Donnelly and Shore, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble"; Maj Miles D. Waldron, USA, and Specialist 5 Richard W. Beavers, USA, "Operation Hue City," 31st Mil Hist Det, Hq Prov Corps, Vietnam, Hist Study, 2–68, hereafter Waldron and Beavers, "Operation Hue City"; 1st MarDiv, Commanders AAR, Tet Offensive, 29 Jan–14 Feb68, dtd 25May68 (1st MarDiv Admin Files), hereafter 1st MarDiv AAR Tet; TF X-Ray ComdC, Jan68; TF X-Ray AAR, Opn Hue City, dtd 14Apr68, with enclosures, hereafter TF X-Ray AAR Hue City; 1st Mar CAAR, Opn Hue City, dtd 20Mar68 in TF X-Ray AAR Hue City, hereafter 1st Mar AAR Hue City; 1/1 ComdC, Jan68; III MAF Jnl & Msg File; Hue City Jnl & Msg File in III MAF Jnl & Msg File, hereafter Hue City Jnl & Msg File; Vietnam Comment Files; BGen Foster C. LaHue debriefing at FMFPac, Apr68, Tape 2932 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter LaHue debriefing; LtCol Marcus J. Gravel intvw, 17Jul73 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Gravel intvw; Lt Col Ernest C. Cheatham, Maj G. Ron Christmas, Maj Mike P. Downs, and Maj Charles L. Meadows presentation, 23Jul73 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Cheatham et al. presentation; A&S Files, Indochina Archives; Truong Sinh, "The Fight to Liberate the City of Hue During *Mau Than Tet* (1968)," translated from *Hoc Tap*, Dec 1974 in Hue Folder, Tet Box, A&S Files, Indochina Archives, hereafter Truong Sinh, "The Fight to Liberate the City of Hue"; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Keith William Nolan, *Battle for Hue, Tet, 1968* (Novaro, CA: Presidio Press, 1983), hereafter Nolan, *Battle for Hue*; Eric Hammel, *Fire in the Streets, The Battle for Hue, Tet 1968* (Chicago, Ill: Contemporary Books, 1991), hereafter Hammel, *Fire in the Streets*; Don Oberdorfer, *TET!* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co, 1971), hereafter Oberdorfer, *TET!*; LtGen Willard Pearson, USA, *The War in the Northern Provinces, 1966–1968*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C. Dept of the Army, 1975), hereafter Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*; Col Hoang Ngoc Lung, ARVN, *The General Offensives of 1968–69*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, D.C., CMH, 1981), hereafter Lung, *The General Offensives*; LtCol Pham Van Son, ARVN, et al., *The Viet Cong Tet Offensive, 1968* (Saigon, RVN: Joint General Staff, RVNAF, 1968), hereafter Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*.

The Two Faces of Hue

1. "The Battle for Hue," n.p., n.d., Encl 1, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 39–40; Lung, *The General Offensives*, pp. 75–77; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 248–9; Peter Braestrup, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File).

The NVA Attack

2. Enemy OOB, Anx A, III MAF Periodic Intel Rpt, No. 2, dtd 13Jan68 (III MAF Periodic Intel Rpts); MACV ComdHist, 1968, pp. 881–3; 1st Mar AAR Hue City; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, pp. 49–50; Waldron and Beaver, "Operation Hue City," p. 6.

3. People's Liberation Army Forces List of Military Objectives in Hue, Jan 68, trans (Hue Folder, Tet Box, A&S Files, Indochina Archives).

4. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, pp. 18–20 and Feb68, pp. 8–10; Cushman Intvw, Nov1982; Truong Sinh, "The Fight to Liberate rhe City of Hue," p. 95.

5. Truong Sinh, "The Fight to Liberate the City of Hue," p. 90.

6. Ibid. and Waldron and Beavers, "Operation Hue City," p. 6.

7. Truong Sinh, "The Fight to Liberate the City of Hue," pp. 93–4.

8. Ibid., pp. 96–7.

9. Ibid. p. 97; Lung, *The General Offensives*, p. 79; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, p. 249.

10. Ibid.; Waldron and Beaver, "Operation Hue City," pp. 7–8; 1st ARVN Div Advisory Detach, "The Battle of Hue," n.d., n.p., pp. 2–3, Encl 1, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, hereafter "The Battle of Hue" (3d MarDiv ComdC).

11. This paragraph is based on the sources listed above and Nolan, *Battle for Hue*, pp. 6–8.

12. Truong Sinh, "The Fight to Liberate the City of Hue," p. 101; 1st Mar AAR Hue City.

13. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: Waldron and Beaver, "Operation Hue City," pp. 13–4; "The Battle of Hue," pp. 3–4, (3d MarDiv ComdC); Lung, *The General Offensives,* p. 79; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, p. 249.

14. Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, p. 250.

Redeployment at Phu Bai and the Marines Go to Hue

15. 1/1 ComdC, Jan68; 1st Mar Div Sit Rep No. 1, Hue City, dtd 3Feb68, Hue City Jnl & Msg File.

16. TF X-Ray ComdC, Jan68; TF X-Ray AAR Hue City; 1st Mar AAR Hue City; LaHue debriefing; "History of Task Force X-Ray," n.d., Attachment to Col A. J. Poillon, Comments on draft ms, dtd 30Oct69, Donnelly and Shore, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble" (Vietnam Comment File).

17. 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68; 5th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 1/1 ComdC, Jan68; Col Gordon D. Batcheller, Comments on draft, dtd 10Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Batcheller Comments.

18. 5th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 2/5 ComdC, Jan68; Batcheller Comments.

19. 5th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 2/5 ComdC, Jan68.

20. 5th Mar ComdC, Jan68, and attached Jnl and SitRep files.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.; 2/5 ComdC, Jan68; BGen Michael P. Downs, Comments on draft, dtd 19Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Downs Comments.

23. 5th Mar ComdC, Jan68, and attached Jnl and SitRep files.

24. This and the following paragraph are based upon Ibid. and 2/5 ComdC, Jan68.

25. Additional sources for this paragraph are Downs Comments, Dec94 and BGen Michael P. Downs, Taped Comments on draft, dtd 11Dec92 (Vietnam Comment File).

26. 1st MarDiv AAR Tet; 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68; 1/1 ComdC, Jan68; Batcheller Comments.

27. Batcheller Comments; 1st Mar ComdC, Jan68, p. III–A–4.

28. TF X-Ray AAR, pp. 9–10; III MAF Jnl and Msg File, passim., 30–31 Jan68.

29. Batcheller Comments.

30. This and the following two paragraphs are based upon: Nolan, *Battle for Hue*, pp. 12–3; Hammel, *Fire in the Streets*, 62–68; Gravel intvw; Batcheller Comments; Medal of Honor Recommendations, dtd 25May68, in Sgt Alfredo Gonzalez Biographical File (RefSec, MCHC); Paul Drew Stevens, ed., *The Navy Cross, Vietnam, Citations of Awards to Men of The United States Navy and The United States Marine Corps, 1964–1973*, (Forest Ranch, CA: Sharp & Dunnigan, 1987) pp. 27–8, 54., hereafter Stevens, ed., *The Navy Cross.*

31. Maj Ernest Cook, Comments on draft ms, dtd 20Oct69, Donnelly and Shore, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble," (Comment File); Gravel intvw, pp. 22, 49; Cheatham et al. presentation, p. 23.

32. Gravel intvw, pp. 51–2.

33. Ibid. pp. 5–6; 1st Mar AAR Hue City; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet, p. 56.

34. 1st MarDiv COC Notes, 31Jan68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File); LaHue debriefing; Gravel intvw, p. 5.

35. Gravel intvw, pp. 5–6.

36. Ibid., pp. 6–7; Nolan, *Battle for Hue*, p. 20.

37. 1st Mar AAR Hue City; Gravel intvw, pp. 7–8; Cheatham et al., presentation, p. 23.

38. 1st Mar AAR Hue City; 1st MarDiv COC Notes, 0001–0900, 1Feb68, III MAF Jnl & Msg File; Gravel intvw, p. 53.

39. LaHue debriefing; Westmoreland msg to Wheeler, dtd 31Jan68, Westmoreland Messages, Westmoreland Papers, CMH.

CHAPTER 10
THE STRUGGLE FOR HUE, THE SECOND PHASE

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from: MACV ComdHist, 1968; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan and Feb68; Donnelly and Shore, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble"; Maj Miles D. Waldron, USA, and Spec 5 Richard W. Beavers, USA, "The Critical Year, 1968, The XXIV Corps Team," 31st Mil Hist Det, HQ, XXIV Corps, Jan69, hereafter Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year"; Waldron and Beavers, "Operation Hue City"; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet; TF X-Ray AAR Hue City; 1st Mar AAR Hue City; 1/1 ComdCs, Jan–Feb 68; 2/5 draft CAAR, Operation Hue City, dtd 5Mar68, hereafter 2/5 AAR Hue City; III MAF Jnl & Msg File; Hue City Jnl & Msg File; Vietnam Comment Files; Cushman Intvw, Nov82; LaHue debriefing; Gravel intvw; Cheatham et al. presentation; LtCol Ernest C. Cheatham, Jr., et al. intvw, 28Feb–4Mar68, Tape 2511, (Oral HistColl MCHC), hereafter Cheatham et al. intvw Tape 2511; A&S Files, Indochina Archives; Truong Sinh, "The Fight to Liberate the City of Hue"; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*, Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Nolan, *Battle for Hue*; Hammel, *Fire in the Streets*; Oberdorfer, *TET!*; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*; Lung, *The General Offensives*; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*; Peter Braestrup, *Big Story: How the Amer-*

ican Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington, 2 vols. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977), hereafter Braestrup, *Big Story*.

More Reinforcements

1. Quoted in Braestrup, *Big Story*, vol. 1, pp. 294–5.

2. 1st Lt Philip M. Scherer et al. intvw, 30Apr68, Tape 2772 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); TF X-Ray AAR Hue City, p. 10.

3. 1st Mar AAR Hue City, p. 11.

4. 1st ARVN Div Advisory Det, "The Battle of Hue," n.d., n.p., Encl 1, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68; Waldron and Beavers, "Operation Hue City," p. 15; Capt Denis M. Dunagan intvw, 5Mar68, Tape 2560 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

5. Cheatham et al. presentation, pp. 14 and 21 and BGen Michael P. Downs, Taped Comments on draft, dtd 11Dec92 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Downs, Taped Comments, Dec92. See also 1st Mar ComdC, Feb68 and 1st Mar AAR Hue City.

6. 1st Mar AAR Hue City, p. 12; 1st Mar ComdC, Feb68.

7. Cushman Intvw, Nov82, pp. 19–20.

8. Waldron and Beaver, "The Critical Year," pp. 14–5; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 44, 55–7; CG1stAirCav msg to CGTFX-Ray, dtd 1Feb68, and III MAF msg to 1st AirCav, dtd 2Feb68 (III MAF Jnl and Msg File).

9. 1st AirCav SitRep No. 33, dtd 2Feb68, hereafter 1st AirCav SitRep 33, 2Feb68, and III MAF msg to I Corps TOC, dtd 2Feb68 (III MAF Msg and Jnl File).

10. Braestrup, *Big Story*, vol. 1, p. 314. See also Peter Braestrup, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94–Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File).

11. Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, p. 44; 1st AirCav, SitRep 33, 2Feb68.

12. 1st Mar AAR Hue City, p. 13; 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 1, dtd 3Feb68 (Hue City Jnl and Msg File).

13. 1st Mar AAR Hue, p. 13; LCpl M. Vernon Jr. in Cheatham et al. intvw Tape 2511.

14. TF X-Ray SitRep, Operation Hue City, dtd 2Feb68, Encl, 1st Mar ComdC, Feb68.

15. 1st Mar AAR Hue City, p. 13; Cpl George E. Minor intvw in Cheatham et al. intvw Tape 2511.

16. Cheatham et al. presentation, p. 24.

17. 1st Mar AAR Hue City, p. 14; 2/5 AAR Hue City.

18. Cheatham et al. presentation, p. 51.

The Beginning of the Advance

19. Cheatham et al. presentation, pp. 19–20.

20. 2/5 AAR Hue City; 1st Mar AAR Hue City, p. 14; Cheatham et al. presentation, pp. 19–20.

21. III MAF SitRep No. 5, Hue City, dtd 4Feb68 (Hue City Jnl & Msg File) and 1st Mar AAR Hue, p. 15.

22. Gravel intvw, pp. 18–9.

23. Ibid., p. 30; 1stLt Ray L. Smith ltr to Capt Gordon D. Batcheller, dtd 25Mar68, Encl to Col Gordon D. Batcheller, Comments on draft, dtd 10Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Smith ltr, Mar68.

24. Gravel intvw, p. 31; Medal of Honor Recommendations, dtd 25May1968, in Sgt Alfredo Gonzalez Biographical File (RefSec, MCHC); Smith ltr, Mar68.

25. Gravel intvw, p. 41.

26. Cheatham et al. presentation, p. 31.

27. SSgt James R. Long and Sgt Terry Cochrane in Cheatham et al. intvw Tape 2511.

28. Nolan, *Battle for Hue*, p. 50; LtCol Ralph J. Salvati, Comments on draft, n.d. [1994] (Vietnam Comment File).

29. Nolan, *Battle for Hue*, pp. 50–1; BGen Michael P. Downs, Taped Comments on draft, dtd 11Dec92 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Downs Taped Comments, Dec92; 2/5 AAR Hue City.

30. TF X-Ray AAR Hue City, p. 11; 1st Mar AAR Hue City, pp. 15 and 18; 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 7, Hue City, dtd 4Feb68 (Hue City Jnl & Msg File).

31. 1st Mar AAR Hue City, pp. 74–75.

Block by Block

32. *Sea Tiger*, 8Mar68, p. 8.

33. Cheatham et al. presentation, p. 12; Gravel intvw, p. 10.

34. Cheatham et al. presentation, p. 37.

35. Ibid., pp. 16, 20.

36. Ibid. p. 17.

37. Gravel intvw, p. 28.

38. Cheatham et al. presentation, p. 42; TF X-Ray AAR Hue City; 3d Tank Bn ComdC, Feb68; 1st Tank Bn ComdC, Feb68.

39. 1st Mar AAR Hue City, pp. 80–1; Cheatham et al. presentation, p. 43.

40. Cheatham et al. presentation, p. 44 and LtCol Cheatham in LtCol Cheatham et al. intvw Tape 2511.

41. Cheatham et al. presentation, pp. 39 and 42; Downs Taped Comments, Dec92.

42. Gravel intvw, pp. 15, 19; Smith ltr, Mar68; 1st Mar AAR Hue City, p. 18.

43. 1st Mar AAR Hue City, p. 20; 2/5 AAR Hue City.

44. 2/5 AAR Hue City.

45. Ibid. and Cpl Riley in Cheatham et al. intvw Tape 2511.

46. 2/5 AAR Hue City; Sgt G. B. Zachary and 2dLt Michael A. McNiel in LCpl Charles D. Bedford et al., intvw, 10 May 68, Tape 2673 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Bedford et al. intvw Tape 2673.

47. 2/5 AAR Hue City; PFC George Ciprio? in LtCol Cheatham et al. intvw Tape 2511.

48. "Old Glory Replaces Viet Cong Flag," *Sea Tiger*, 1 Mar 68, p. 1; Nolan, *Battle for Hue*, pp. 77–9.

49. Cheatham et al. presentation, p. 56; Gravel intvw, p. 18; Smith ltr, Mar68.

50. 2/5 AAR Hue City; 1st Mar AAR Hue City, p. 25.

51. 2/5 AAR Hue City; 1st Mar AAR Hue City, pp. 24–34.

52. 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 33, dtd 11Feb68 (Hue City Jnl and Msg File); Bedford et al. intvw Tape 2673.

53. 1st Mar AAR Hue City.

CHAPTER 11
STALEMATE IN THE OLD CITY

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from: MACV ComdHist, 1968; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan and Feb68; 1st ARVN Div Advisory Det, "The Battle of Hue," n.d., n.p., Encl 1, 3d MarDiv, ComdC, Feb68, hereafter, 1st ARVN Adv Det, "The Battle of Hue"; Waldron and Beavers, "Operation Hue City"; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet; TF X-Ray AAR Hue City; 1st Mar AAR Hue City; 1/5 AAR Hue City, dtd 15Mar68, hereafter 1/5 AAR Hue City; III MAF Jnl & Msg File; Hue City Jnl & Msg File; Vietnam Comment Files; A&S Files, Indochina Archives; Truong Sinh, "The Fight to Liberate the City of Hue"; Keith B. Nolan Papers, Personal Papers Collection, MCHC, hereafter Nolan Papers; U.S. Army, 14th Mil Hist Det, 1st Cav Div (AM), "The Battle of Hue, 2–26 February 1968," dtd 10Mar68 (Copy in Nolan Papers), hereafter 14th MHD, "The Battle of Hue," Mar68; MajGen John J. Tolson (USA) intvw, 24Jun68 (CMH, Washington), hereafter Tolson Intvw, Jun68; Alexander W. Wells, Jr. Papers, Personal Papers Collection, MCHC, hereafter Wells Papers, MCHC; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Nolan, *Battle for Hue*; Oberdorfer, *TET!*; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*; Lung, *The General Offensives*; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*; Peter Braestrup, *Big Story*.

A Faltering Campaign

1. 1st ARVN Adv Det, "The Battle of Hue," p. 5.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 7.

4. Ibid. pp. 6–7.

5. Ibid.; 1st Mar AAR Hue City.

6. Tolson Intvw, Jun 68, pp. 3–4.

7. 14th MHD, "The Battle of Hue," Mar68, pp. 1–2; Waldron and Beavers, "Operation Hue City," pp. 23–4.

8. In addition to the sources listed above, see also III MAF msg to MACV, dtd 4Feb68 (III MAF Msg & Jnl File, Hue City).

9. Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, p. 44; F. Clinton Berry, Jr., *The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War—Air Cav*, (New York and Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988), pp. 110–12; 14th MHD, "The Battle of Hue," Mar68, pp. 1–2; Waldron and Beavers, "Operation Hue City," pp. 23–4.

10. 14th MHD, "The Battle of Hue," Mar68, p. 3; 1st AirCav Div SitRep No. 38, dtd 7 Feb68 (IIIMAF Msg & Jnl File); Tolson Intvw., p. 4.

11. 14th MHD, "The Battle of Hue," Mar68, p. 3; 1st AirCav, SitSum No. 38, dtd 8Feb68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File).

12. 14th MHD, "The Battle of Hue," Mar68, p. 3.

13. 1st Mar AAR Hue City; Braestrup, *Big Story*, I, pp. 316–7.

14. CGIIIMAF msg to 1st ACD, dtd 13Feb68 (III MAF Outgoing Messages).

15. Waldron and Beaver, "The Critical Year," pp. 14–5; TF X-Ray AAR Hue City; Maj Talman C. Budd II, USMC, OSMA, NAG, AAR, Opn Hue City (Song Than 739–68), dtd 25Jul68 in SMA, MACV, AARs, 1968–69, hereafter Maj Talman C. Budd II, MAU, NAG, CAAR, Hue City, dtd 25Jul68; 1/5 FragO 6–68, dtd 9Feb68, Encl 1, 1/5 AAR Hue City.

Going into the Walled City

16. 1/5 AAR Opn Hue City; 1st Mar AAR Hue City; 1st MarDiv Hue City Sitrep No. 32, dtd 10Feb68, TF X-Ray to IIIMAF COC, Resume of Telephone Call, dtd 10Feb68, and III MAF Hue City Sitrep No. 33, dtd 10Feb68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File). Although the 1/5 AAR does not show Company A going into Hue until 11 February, all the other sources reflect that the company was in Hue city on the afternoon of 10 February 1968.

17. 1st FAG ComdC, Feb68, p. 5; Col Robert C. V. Hughes, Comments on draft, n.d. [1995] (Vietnam Comment File).

18. 1st FAG ComdC, Feb68, p. 5; Alexander W. Wells, Jr., "Synopsis From Combat Report: February 1968—Vietnam," in Alexander W. Wells, Jr. Papers, MCHC, hereafter Wells, "Excerpts from Combat Report"; Alexander W. Wells, Jr., Comments on draft, dtd 3Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Wells Comments, Dec94.

19. Wells, "Excerpts from Combat Report"; Wells Comments, Dec94.

20. Wells Comments, Dec94.

21. Ibid. and Wells, "Excerpts from Combat Report".

22. Although there was no specific plan, General Truong's intentions can be inferred from the following sources: 1st Infantry Division Advisory Detachment, Advisory Team 3, CAAR, Opn NVA/VC Tet Offensive: Hue, dtd 30Mar68 (copy in Nolan Papers), hereafter 1st InfDiv, Adv Tm 3, CAAR, Hue; TF X-Ray AAR Hue City; 1st Mar AAR Hue City; Maj Talman C., Budd II, MAU, NAG, CAAR, Hue City, dtd 25Jul68; 1/5 AAR Hue City; Col Richard H. Thompson ltr to Keith B. Nolan, 16Sep80 with attached copy of briefing map (Nolan Papers), hereafter Thompson ltr, 16Sep80; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 256–59.

23. Maj Talman C. Budd II, MAU, NAG, CAAR, Hue City, dtd 25Jul68 and SMA, MAU, NAG, 1st Endorsement on Hue City CAAR, 12Aug68.

24. Maj Talman C. Budd II, MAU, NAG, CAAR, Hue City, dtd 25Jul68.

25. 1/5 AAR Hue City.

26. Thompson ltr, 16Sep80.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. The basis of this and the following two paragraphs are: Thompson ltr, 16Sep80 and 1/5 AAR, Opn Hue City.

The Fight For the Tower

31. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: Thompson ltr, 16Sep80 and 1/5 AAR, Opn Hue City.

32. For this paragraph, see also unattributed account, "The Citadel," ms, n.d., in Harrington Folder, Nolan Papers, hereafter "The Citadel," ms.

33. Thompson ltr, 16 Sep 80.

34. Ibid.; 1/5 AAR, Opn Hue City; "The Citadel," ms; 1st Lt Andrew C. Delaurier, 19Apr68, Tape 2667 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

35. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: Thompson ltr, 16Sep80; Citadel ms; 1/5 AAR, Opn Hue City.

36. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: Nolan notes, n.d. Harrington File (Nolan Papers); Nolan, *Battle for Hue*, pp. 124–27.

37. Col Myron C. Harrington, Comments on Nolan ms, dtd 24May83, Harrington Folder, Nolan Papers.

38. Ibid.; 1/5 AAR, Opn Hue City; "Like John Wayne," *Sea Tiger*, dtd 22Mar68.

39. 1/5 AAR, Opn Hue City; Nolan notes, n.d. Harrington File (Nolan Papers).

Continuing the Advance

40. The sources for this and the following three paragraphs are: 1/5 AAR, Opn Hue City; "The Citadel," ms; 1st Mar AAR, Hue City.

41. An additional source for this and the following two paragraphs is: Thompson ltr, 16Sep80.

42. An additional source for this paragraph is: PFC Thomas L. Foster in Cheatham et al. intvw, Tape 2511 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

43. Edward M. Landry ltr to author, dtd 7Dec86 and entry for 17 Feb 1968 in excerpts from diary, Edward M. Landry Papers, Personal Papers Collection, MCHC. See also TF X-Ray AAR Hue City; 1st Mar AAR Hue City; 1/5 AAR, Opn Hue City.

44. Thompson ltr, 16Sep80; "The Citadel," ms. See also 1/5 AAR, Opn Hue City.

CHAPTER 12
THE TAKING OF THE CITADEL AND AFTERMATH

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from: MACV ComdHist, 1968; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan and Feb68; 1st ARVN Adv Det, "The Battle of Hue"; 1st InfDiv, Adv Tm 3, CAAR, Hue; Waldron and Beavers, "Operation Hue City"; 1st MarDiv AAR Tet; TF X-Ray AAR Hue City; 1st Mar AAR Hue City; 1/5 AAR Hue City; 2/5 AAR Hue City; III MAF Jnl & Msg File; III MAF Outgoing Msgs; III MAF Incoming Msgs; Hue City Jnl & Msg File; Maj Talman C. Budd II, MAU, NAG, CAAR, Hue City, dtd 25Jul68, hereafter Budd, AAR; Vietnam Comment Files; Gravel intvw; Cheatham et al. presentation; Cheatham et al. intvw Tape 2511; A&S Files, Indochina Archives; Truong Sinh, "The Fight to Liberate the City of Hue"; Thompson ltr, 16Sep80, Nolan Papers; 14th MHD, "The Battle of Hue," Mar68; Tolson Intvw, Jun68; Wells, "Excerpts from Combat Report"; Peter Braestrup Papers, Personal Papers Collection, MCHC, hereafter Braestrup Papers; Westmoreland Papers, CMH; Gen Creighton W. Abrams Papers, CMH, hereafter Abrams Papers, CMH; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Nolan, *Battle for Hue*; Oberdorfer, *TET!*; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*; Lung, *The General Offensives*; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*; Peter Braestrup, *Big Story*.

The Struggle in the Western Citadel

1. Budd, AAR and Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, 257–259.

2. Budd, AAR.

3. Ibid.; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 262–66.

4. 1st ARVN Adv Det, "The Battle of Hue," p. 8; Waldron and Beavers, "Operation Hue City," p. 38.

5. Wells, "Excerpts from Combat Report".

6. III MAF COC msg to MACV(J2), dtd 17Feb68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg File). See also Hallmark 62 msg to Hallmark 6, Hue City SitRep, dtd 17Feb68, App 5, tab C, 1st FAG ComdC, Feb 68 and Wells, "Excerpts from Combat Report."

An Estimate of the Situation and Mounting the Offensive

7. Abrams msg to Cushman (Information to Westmoreland), dtd 16Feb68 (Abrams Papers, CMH).

8. Ibid.

9. Historical Summary and Summary of CIIB Meeting, 18Feb68, vol. 29, p. 12 and Encl 62 (Westmoreland Papers, CMH); TF X-Ray AAR Hue City.

10. Waldron and Beavers, "Operation Hue City," pp. 42–3.

11. Pham Van Son, *The Viet Cong Tet Offensive*, p. 267; Budd, AAR; Lung, *The General Offensives*, p.83.

12. Thompson ltr, 16Sep80, Nolan Papers; 1/5 AAR Hue City.

13. Clark Dougan, Stephen Weiss, and the editors of Boston Publishing Company, *The Vietnam Experience: Nineteen Sixty-Eight* (Boston, Ma: Boston Publishing Company, 1983), p. 30; Clipping, *Washington Post*, dtd 19Feb68, Braestrup Papers.

14. Abrams msg to Cushman, info: Westmoreland, dtd 20Feb68 (Abrams Papers, CMH).

15. Abrams msg to Tolson, dtd 20Feb68 (Abrams Papers, CMH).

16. 14th MHD, "The Battle of Hue," Mar68, pp. 5–6; Waldron and Beavers, "Operation Hue City," pp. 43–7.

17. Thompson ltr, 16Sep80, Nolan Papers.

18. Ibid.; AP despatch, dtd 22Feb68, Clipping in Polk Folder (Nolan Papers, MCHC); 1/5 AAR Hue City. These sources are also the basis for the next two paragraphs.

19. See also Maj Denis J. Kiely and Capt Gary L. Post intvws, 19Apr68, Tape 2551 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

20. Budd, AAR; Abrams msg to Westmoreland, dtd 23Feb68 (Abrams Papers, CMH)

21. Budd, AAR; 1st InfDiv, Adv Tm 3, CAAR, Hue.

22. 1/5 AAR Hue City; Thompson ltr, 16Sep80, Nolan Papers.

Closing Out Operation Hue City

23. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: 2/5 AAR Hue City; 1st MarDiv SitRep, Hue City, No. 86, dtd 24Feb68 (Hue City III MAF Jnl & Msg File).

24. See also 2/5 S–3 Jnl, 2/5 ComdC, Feb68, hereafter 2/5 S–3 Jnl, Feb68.

25. 2/5 AAR Hue City; 2/5 S–3 Jnl, Feb 68; LtCol Ernest C. Cheatham in Cheatham et al. intvw, Tape 2511.

26. 2/5 AAR Hue City; 2/5 S–3 Jnl, Feb 68; Robert A. Sutlack in 1stLt P. M. Scherer intvw, 31 Apr 68, Tape 2722 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

27. The sources for this and the following two paragraphs are: 2/5 AAR Hue City; 2/5 S–3, Feb 68.

28. 1st Marines AAR Hue City; 2/5 AAR Hue City; 1/5 AAR Hue City; Cheatham et al. presentation, pp. 11–12 and 28–29.

A Summing Up

29. The sources for this and the following three paragraphs are: TF X-Ray AAR Hue City; 1st InfDiv, Adv Tm 3, CAAR, Hue; Budd, AAR; 14th MHD, "The Battle of Hue," Mar68; 1st Bde, 101st Airborne Div, CAAR, Opn Hue City, dtd 23Mar68, Encl 5, TF X-Ray AAR Hue City; Pham Van Son, *The Tet Offensive*, p. 271.

30. Additional source for this and the following two paragraphs are:

1stLt John R. Morse, USA, Thua Thien Sector, S–2 Order of Battle Advisor in Hue, RVN, intvw, 8Mar68 (U.S. Army, 45th Military History Detachment, Interview Enclosures Folder, Nolan Papers, MCHC).

31. Additional source for this and the following paragraph is: Rand Interview No. 28 in Interviews concerning the NLF, May 1968, Folder 2, Tet Box, A&S Files, Indochina Archives.

32. Additional source for this paragraph is: I Corps, Tactical Opns Center to III MAF, Resume of Telecon, dtd 6Feb68 (Hue City III MAF Jnl & Msg File).

33. Truong Sinh, "The Fight to Liberate the City of Hue," p. 90.

34. Truong Sinh, "The Fight to Liberate the City of Hue," pp. 105–7; Pham Van Son, *The Tet Offensive*, pp. 271–84; Westmoreland and Sharp, *Report on the War*, p. 160; Lung, *The General Offensives* p. 85; Oberdorfer, *Tet!*, pp. 232–33; Braestrup, *Big Story*, vol. I, pp. 201–16.

35. Gravel intvw, pp. 2–3.

36. 14th MHD, "The Battle of Hue," Mar68; Tolson Intvw, Jun68, p. 5; Col Talman C. Budd II, Comments on draft, dtd 30Mar95 (Vietnam Comment File).

37. 1/5 AAR Hue City; Thompson ltr, 16Sep80, Nolan Papers.

38. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: TF X-Ray AAR Hue City; 1st Mar AAR Hue City.

39. TF X-Ray AAR Hue City.

40. 1st Mar AAR Hue City; LtCol Ernest C. Cheatham in Cheatham et al. intvw, Tape 2511.

41. 1st Marines AAR Hue City.

42. Ibid. and TF X-Ray AAR Hue City.

43. 1st Marines AAR Hue City; Maj Jack E. Walker intvw, 9 Mar 68 (U.S. Army, 45th Military History Detachment, Interview Enclosures Folder, Nolan Papers, MCHC).

44. Pham Van Son, *The Tet Offensive*, p. 281; Gravel intvw, p. 42.

45. MajGen Kerwin C/S MACV msg to BGen Anderson, C/S III MAF, dtd 27Feb68 and Gen Westmoreland ComUSMACV, msg to LtGen Cushman CGIIIMAF, dtd 28Feb68 (III MAF Incoming Messages)

46. CGIIIMAF msg to CG1stMarDiv and CGTFX-Ray, dtd 26Feb68 (III MAF Outgoing Msgs); Gen Abrams msg to Gen Westmoreland, dtd 2Mar68 (EO Files, Abrams Papers, CMH), hereafter Abrams msg to Westmoreland, 2Mar68.

47. Abrams msg to Westmoreland, 2Mar68.

48. Ibid.

49. LCpl M. Vernon Jr. in Cheatham et al. intvw, Tape 2511; W. Roger Lansbury with Daniel F. Ring, editor, "Notes Between Two Worlds: The Diary of Roger Lansbury, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Summer 1985, pp. 257–97, p. 296.

50. Gravel intvw, p. 42; Cheatham et al. presentation, pp. 57–59.

51. Clipping "18 Days Under the Bed," *Washington Post*, n.d. and clipping, "Hue Marines: Bitter as They Are Brave," *Washington Post*, dtd 20Feb68 (*Washington Post* Clipping File, Peter Braestrup Papers).

52. Budd, AAR and LtCol Joseph W. Malcolm, Jr., debriefing at FMFPac, 28Oct68, Tape 3453 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

53. Abrams msg to Westmoreland, dtd 5Mar68 (Abrams Papers, CMH); Westmoreland msg to Abrams, dtd 26Feb68 (EO File, Abrams Papers, CMH); CG III MAF to subordinate commands, dtd 28Feb68 (III MAF Outgoing Files).

PART III
After Tet, Khe Sanh, and Mini-Tet

CHAPTER 13
POST-TET IN I CORPS

Unless otherwise noted the sources in this chapter are derived from MACV ComdHist, 1968; HQMC Msg File; HQMC, Status of Forces, 1968; FMFPac, MarOpsV, 1967–1968; III MAF ComdCs, Feb–Apr68; III MAF Jnl & Msg Files; III MAF Provisional Corps Folder, hereafter PCV Folder; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year"; 1st MarDiv ComdCs, Feb–Apr68; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Feb–Apr68; Westmoreland Papers, CMH; A&S Files, Indochina Archives; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; Lung, *The General Offensives*; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*.

The Immediate Ramifications of the Tet Offensive

1. Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*, p. 161; MACV ComdHist, 1968, pp. 161–62; LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr., III MAF Presentation, General Officers Symposium Book, July 1968, tab F, pp. 1–8, hereafter Cushman Presentation. See also FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 5.

2. Circular from COSVN, trans., dtd 31Jan68, in U.S. Mission, Press Release, dtd 29Mar68, A&S Files, Indochina Archives, hereafter COSVN Circular, 31Jan68; War Experiences Recapitulation Committee of the High-Level Military Institute, *The Anti-U.S. Resistance War for National Salvation*, trans by Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing Houses, 1980) [Joint Publications Research Service No. 80968, dtd 3Jun82], p. 110; Pham Van Son, *Tet Offensive*, pp. 475–6.

3. COSVN Circular, 31Jan68; CT/AB (Unknown provincial headquarters), Directive No. 1, dtd 10Feb68; COSVN Communique, dtd 13Feb68; PLAF, 3d Special Communique, dtd 26Feb68. All in A&S Files, Indochina Archives.

4. Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*, p. 235; Lung, *The General Offensives*, pp. 39–41; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, pp 3–4; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 322–23; LtGen Philip B. Davidson, USA, *Vietnam at War, The History: 1946–1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), p. 474; Cushman Presentation, tab F, pp. 1–8; 58–9; BGen John R. Chaisson, ltr to wife, dtd 11Feb68 (Chaisson Papers).

5. Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963–1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968), pp. 384–5.

6. Messages quoted in Herbert Y. Schandler, *The Unmaking of a President, Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 92–93, 95.

7. Ibid., pp. 94–5.

Readjustment in I Corps

8. FMFPac MarOpsV, Feb68, pp. 89–90, 103; 5th MarDiv, RLT 27 Deployment AAR, dtd 8May68; 27th Mar ComdC, Feb68; Cushman Intvw, Nov82, p. 80; BGen Foster C. LaHue debriefing at FMFPac, Apr68, Tape 2932 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter LaHue debriefing.

9. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Feb68, p. 104; III MAF ComdC, Feb68; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 58–9, 68; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year," p. 19; TF X-Ray ComdC, Feb68, pt 2. Pearson states that nearly 45,000 Army reinforcements arrived in I Corps during January and February, but it is obvious that the author confused the total number of Army troops in I Corps with the number of reinforcements.

10. III MAF ComdC, Feb68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Feb68, p. 33.

11. See charts of enemy attacks in I Corps from 1 May 1967–31 May 1968 in FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, pp. 30–1.

12. III MAF ComdC, Feb68, pp. 13–4.

13. Ibid., p. 13.

14. 1st MarDiv ComdC, Feb68 and LtCol Louis J. Bacher, Comments on draft, dtd 7May95 (Vietnam Comment File); Col Tullis T. Woodham, Jr. Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Woodham Comments.

15. 1st MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, p. 16; Col Ross R. Miner, Debriefing by FMFPac, dtd 5Sep68 (Tape No. 3068, Oral HistColl, MCHC).

16. 1st MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, p. 7; Woodham Comments.

17. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, pp. 22–3; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, p. 17–A; TF X-Ray ComdC, Feb68, pt 2.

18. III MAF ComdC, Feb68, pp. 23–4; TF X-Ray ComdC, Feb68, pt 2; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, p. 22; Col Harold L. Oppenheimer, debriefing at FMFPac [May 1968] Tape 6379 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

19. TF X-Ray ComdC, Feb68, pt 2; VAdm Edwin B. Hooper, *Mobility, Support, Endurance, A Story of Naval Operational Logistics in the Vietnam War, 1965–1968* (Washington: Naval Historical Division, 1972), pp. 117–18, hereafter Hooper, *Mobility, Support, Endurance.*

20. Col Edward L. Fossum, debriefing at FMFPac, 11Jul68, Tape 2911 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); Gen William C. Westmoreland, Historical Summary, General Entry, v. 28, Historical File, 27Dec67–31Jan68, Westmoreland Papers, CMH; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 58–9; Col Rex O. Dillow, Comments on draft, dtd 10Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

21. III MAF ComdC, Feb68, pp. 11–2; 3d MarDiv ComdC, 16–7; 3d Mar AAR Osceola II, dtd 20Mar68, Encl, 3d Mar ComdC, Mar68.

22. III MAF ComdC, Feb68, p. 22; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, pp. 15, 22, 30–31; Tompkins Intvw, p. 72.

23. Hooper, *Mobility, Support, Endurance*, p. 126; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 62–65.

24. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, pp. 17–8, 54; III MAF ComdC, Feb68, pp. 10–1.

25. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, pp. 17–8.

26. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, p. 18; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Feb68, p. 31;

27. Col Alexander L. Michaux debriefing at FMFPac, 18Jul68, Tape 2915 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, p. 17; 3d MarDiv, AAR, Lancaster II, dtd 9Sep69?, Encl, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Nov68.

28. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, p. 16; 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 16Feb68, 3d MarDiv PerIntRpt No. 5–68, dtd 18Feb68, and 3d MarDiv Oplan 4–68, dtd 17Feb68, Encls, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68.

29. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Feb68, pp. 29 and 65; III MAF ComdC, Feb68, p. 10; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, p. 16; 3d MarDiv PerIntRpt No. 6–68, dtd 23Feb68, Encl, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68. For a detailed account of the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines action see LtCol Otto J. Lehrack, *No Shining Armor, The Marines at War in Vietnam, An Oral History* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992), pp. 238–40.

30. III MAF ComdC, Feb68, p. 22; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, pp. 31 and 33; Hooper, *Mobility, Support, Endurance*, p. 126; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 62–65; Cushman Presentation, tab F, p. 35.

Readjustments in the U.S. I Corps Command Structure

31. CMC Notebook, Visit to Vietnam, Jan68; Chaisson Diary, Jan68, Chaisson Papers; ComUSMACV msg to CinCPac, dtd 18Jan68, and CMC msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 19Jan68 (HQMC Msg File).

32. CMC msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 19Jan68 (HQMC Msg File).

33. 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Jan–Feb68; BGen Jacob Glick intvw, 20 Jun and 11Jul89, pp. 65–71 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

34. CGFMFPac msg to CG3dMarDiv, dtd 20Jan68 (HQMC Msg File); 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Jan–Feb68; 1st MarDiv ComdCs, Jan–Feb68; CGIII MAF msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 24Jan68 (HQMC Msg Files, III MAF Outgoing); MajGen Carl W. Hoffman intvw, 14Nov68, pp. 129–30 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Hoffman intvw.

35. Hoffman intvw, p. 130; CG1stBde, 101st Abn Div msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 22Jan68 and ComUSMACV msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 27Jan68 (HQMC Msg File, III MAF Incoming); CGIIIMAF msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 25Jan68 (HQMC Msg File, III MAF Outgoing).

36. LtGen Robert E. Cushman debriefing at FMFPac, 31Mar69, pp. 465–66 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); Col Franklin L. Smith debriefing at FMFPac [May 1968] Tape 2904 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); Cushman Presentation, tab F, pp. 18–9.

37. Murray Intvw., p. 58; Tompkins Intvw, pp. 82–4.

38. III MAF ComdC, Feb68; Entry for 12Feb68, Chaisson Diary and Chaisson ltrs to wife, dtd 14 and 15Feb68, (Chaisson Papers); LtGen William J. Van Ryzin intvw, 2Apr75, pp. 214–15 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); Tompkins intvw, p. 74.

39. CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 18Feb68 (III MAF Outgoing Msgs).

40. DepComUSMACV (Fwd) msg to III MAF and other commands, dtd 20Feb68 (PCV Folder).

41. ComNavForceV msg to DepComUSMACV, dtd 23 Feb68 and CGIIIMAF msg to DepComUSMACV (Fwd), dtd 23Feb68 (PCV Folder).

42. CGIIIMAF msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 28Feb68 (PCV Folder).

43. USMACV Letter of Instruction, Subj: Role and Missions of Provisional Corps, Vietnam, dtd 3Mar68 (PCV Folder); FMFPac MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 59.

44. Hoffman intvw, p. 130; MajGen Carl W. Hoffman, Comments on draft, dtd 15Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File); Smith debriefing; Cushman intvw, Mar69, pp. 465–66.

Planning for the Future

45. Cushman Presentation, tab F, pp. 35–50; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year, 1968," p. 20.

46. Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, p. 69.

47. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: III MAF Staff Study, Subj: Military Posture, Northern I Corps, 1 Sep 1968, dtd 31Mar68, p. 1 (III MAF Miscellaneous Documents). See also ComUSMACV msg to CMC, dtd 13Mar68 (III MAF Incoming Msgs, 5–14Mar68).

March Operations in the DMZ Sector

48. Sources for this and the following two paragraphs are: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar 68, p. 17; III MAF ComdC, p. 20; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, pp. 11–2; *BLT 3/1, Newsletter Battalion Landing Team 3/1,*

RVN, Dec 67–Jun68, Apr 1988, p. 10; Col Max McQuown, Comments on draft, dtd 22Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

49. Additional sources for this paragraph are: 7th ITT, III MAF, ITT Rpts, 64– and 65–68, dtd 2 and 4Mar68 (III MAF Jnl & Msg Files), hereafter ITT Rpts, 64– and 65–68.

50. ITT Rpts, 64– and 65–68.

51. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68 p. 16; III MAF ComdC, Mar68, pp. 11–2; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 20.

52. III MAF ComdC, Mar68, pp. 11–2, and 22; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 20.

53. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 80.

54. Ibid., pp. 16–8; III MAF ComdC, Mar68, pp. 11–2; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 20; BGen William Weise intvw, 21Feb83 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

55. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar 68, pp. 16–18; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 49.

56. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, pp. 13–6; III MAF ComdC, Mar68, p. 13; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 19; 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 4Mar68, Encl 1, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68; Lt Col Roger Zensen, Comments on draft, dtd 4Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

57. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, pp. 13–6; III MAF ComdC, Mar68, p. 13; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 19.

58. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 19; 1st Lt Daniel J. Razaluek and Sgt Ronald C. Trawick in Sgt R. C. Trawick et al. intvw, 21Mar68, Tape 2762 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

59. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 80; III MAF ComdC, Mar68, pp. 22–4; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, pp. 6, 17, 30–2, 34–6; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, p. 70.

60. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, pp. 17, 19–20; 3d MarDiv FragO 7–68, dtd 25Mar68, Encl 4, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68.

March Operations in the Rest of I Corps

61. III MAF ComdC, Mar68, pp. 10–11 and 13; Cushman Presentation, tab F, pp. 58–9.

62. Copy of UPI News Release, dtd 16Mar68 (Courtesy of Lawrence Lichty).

63. 27th Mar ComdC, Mar68; Capt William R. Black intvw, 9Nov85 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Black intvw.

64. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 51; Col William S. Fagan, Comments on draft, dtd 31Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).

65. 1st MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 18; HQMC, G–3 Point Papers, Mar68; 7th Mar ComdC, Mar68.

66. Task Force X-Ray ComdC, Mar68, pt 2.

67. Ibid.; 1st MarDiv ComdC, p. 18.

68. TF X-Ray ComdC, Mar68, pt 2; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year," p. 22.

69. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, pp. 19–20; III MAF ComdC, Mar68, p. 11; TF X-Ray ComdC, Mar68, pt 2.

70. TF X-Ray ComdC, Mar68, pt 2; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year, 1968," pp. 25–35; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 69–71.

71. 1st MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, pt 2; TF X-Ray ComdC, Mar68; Black intvw.

72. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 52; TFX-Ray ComdC, Mar68, pt 2; HQMC A03H15, Point Paper, Subj: Attack on Phu Bai, 26Mar68, dtd 27Mar68 (HQMC, G–3 Point Papers).

73. TF X-Ray ComdC, Mar68, pt 2; 5th Mar Spot Rpt, dtd 31Mar68, tab N, TF X-Ray ComdC, Mar68.

74. TF X-Ray ComdC, Mar68, pt. 2.

Regaining the Initiative

75. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, pp. 6, 31, 40, 49–50; III MAF ComdC, Apr68, pp. 18–20.

76. III MAF ComdC, Apr68, p. 11; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, p. 18.

77. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, pp. 28–9 and 74–5; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, pp. 35–6.

78. LtCol John F. J. Kelly, Comments on draft, dtd 13Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Kelly Comments; TF Kelly, AAR, Opn Quick Track, dtd 16May68, Encl to Kelly Comments.

79. FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, pp. 20–1; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, pp. 14, 18, 40; 1st MarDiv ComdC, May68, p. 40; BGen Robert D. Bohn, Comments on Simmons, "Marine Opns, Vietnam, 1968" (Simmons Comment Notebook).

80. Lahue debriefing; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, p. 4.

81. TF X-Ray ComdC, Apr68, pt. 2, p. 6; 1/27 ComdC, Apr68, pt. 2, p. 5; Black intvw; William R. Black, Jr., Comments on draft, dtd 4Jan95 and attached ltr to parents, dtd 20–21Apr68 (Vietnam Comment File).

82. TF X-Ray ComdC, Apr68, pt. 2, pp. 7–8.

83. Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year, 1968," pp. 40–2, 45–6; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 89–90; 1st MarDiv, Anx A (Intelligence), 1st MarDiv Oplan 108–68, dtd 26Apr68, pp. A–1—A–2, Encl 9, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Apr68.

84. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, pp. 21–2, May68, pp. 3 and 20; III MAF ComdC, Apr68, p. 19; LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr., debriefing on A Shau Valley Operation, Da Nang, 2May68, in Cushman Transcript Book, p. 480; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year, 1968," pp. 45–53, 65–6; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 89–92.

85. Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year, 1968," p. 48; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, pp. 4, 19; 3d MarDiv SitRep No. 1, Opn Rice, dtd 21Apr68, Encl 22, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Apr68.

86. III MAF ComdC, Apr68, p. 10; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, pp. 18 and 20; III MAF Opn Charlton SitRep, No. 17, dtd 16Apr68, Encl 21, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Apr68.

87. Maj William Dabney, "The Battle of Dong Ha," ms, pp. 5–8; III MAF ComdC, Apr68, p. 22; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, p. 73, May, 68, pp. 8–9; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, p. 18.

88. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam, A History* (New York, New York: Viking Press, 1983, pp. 564–66.

CHAPTER 14
THE SIEGE OF KHE SANH

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from: HQMC Msg Files; FMFPac, MarOpsV, May67–Apr68; III MAF

ComdC, Sep67–Apr68; 3d MarDiv ComdC, May67–Apr68; 26th Mar ComdC, Sep67–Apr68; III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File; Khe Sanh Comment File; John Prados and Ray W. Stubbe, *Valley of Decision, The Siege of Khe Sanh* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1991), hereafter Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*; Capt Moyers S. Shore III, *The Battle for Khe Sanh* (Washington: Hist&Mus Div, HQMC, 1969), hereafter Shore, *Khe Sanh.*

Digging In

1. Gen Westmoreland msg to Gen Wheeler, dtd 12Jan68 (File No. 091/VN Jan68, CJCS Historical Files, HistDiv, JCS, Washington, D.C.); Adm Sharp msg to Gen Wheeler, dtd 14Jan68 (File No. 091/VN Jan68, CJCS Historical Files, HistDiv, JCS, Washington, D.C.).

2. CGIIIMAF msg to CG3dMarDiv, dtd 13Jan68 (Reel No. 4, HQMC Msg Files); CGIIIMAF msg to CG3dMarDiv, dtd 16Jan68 (HQMC Msg Files, III MAF Outgoing, Dec67–Feb68).

3. 1/26 ComdC, Jan68, p. 6; Peter Braestrup, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94–Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File).

4. CGIIIMAF msg to CG3dMarDiv, dtd 13Jan68 (Reel No. 4, HQMC Msg Files).

5. CGIIIMAF msg to DepCOMUSMACV, dtd 19Jan68 (HQMC Message File, III MAF Outgoing, Dec67–Feb68).

6. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 21Jan68 (3d MarDiv Messages)

7. CG3dMarDiv msg to 26th Mar, dtd 21Jan68 (3d MarDiv Messages); U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearings Before the Electronic Battlefield Subcommittee of the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee*, 91st Cong., 2d Sess., 18, 19, and 24 Nov 1970, p. 82, hereafter *Hearings Electronic Battlefield.*

Opening Moves

8. 26th Mar SitRep Opn Scotland No. 24, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68; 26th Mar AAR, Opn Scotland, dtd 31May68, p. 3, Encl 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68; 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt. III.

9. 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt. III; Col William H. Dabney intvw, 20May82, p. 64 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); 26th Mar SitRep No. 326, in 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV.

10. Maj Matthew P. Caulfield intvw, 4Jan69, p. 10, in Khe Sanh: Transcriptions of Oral History Tapes, MCHC, hereafter Caulfield intvw.

11. Stevens, ed., *The Navy Cross.*

12. Caulfield intvw, p. 11.

13. 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt. III; 3/26 ComdC, Jan68, p. 10; LtCol Harry L. Alderman intvw, 10–24Feb68, p. 21, in Khe Sanh: Transcriptions of Oral History Tapes, MCHC.

"Incoming!"

14. Maj Jerry E. Hudson, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," 2Jan69 (Khe Sanh Comment File, MCHC).

15. LtCol James B. Wilkinson, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," 19Dec68 (Khe Sanh Comment File); Bernard Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1973) pp. 24–25, hereafter Nalty, *Air Power*; LtCol Kenneth W. Pipes, Comments on draft, dtd 10Mar95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Pipes Comments, 1995.

16. BGen Marshall B. Garth, Memorandum for the Record, Subj: Attack on the Khe Sanh Air Base, dtd 21Jan68 (File No. 091/VN Jan68, JCS HistOff, Washington,D.C.); 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68, p. 6; 1/26 ComdC, Jan68, p. 7; Ray W. Stubbe, "Khe Sanh: Valley of Decision" (ms., Wauwatosa, WI, 1987), p. 540, hereafter Stubbe, "Khe Sanh."

17. 1stLt William L. Eberhardtt intvw, 10Feb68, Tape 2535 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); William J. O'Connor, Comments on draft, dtd 29Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

18. LtCol James B. Wilkinson Comments, "The Battle for Khe Sanh," 19Dec68 (Khe Sanh Comment File).

19. 26th Mar SitRep Opn Scotland No. 328, Encl 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV.

20. 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, Pt. III; 3/26 ComdC, Jan68, p. 4; 26th Mar SitRep Opn Scotland No. 329, Encl 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV.

21. MCCC Status of Forces, WestPac, 23Jan68; Stubbe, "Khe Sanh," pp. 560–561.

22. Nalty, *Air Power*, pp. 24–25; TSgt Bruce W. Pollica and TSgt Joe R. Rickey, *834th Air Division Tactical Airlift Support for Khe Sanh, 21Jan–8Apr68*, quoted in Stubbe, "Khe Sanh," pp. 567–568.

The Fall of Khe Sanh Village

This section is based on the following sources: Col Bruce B. G. Clarke, USA, Comments on draft, n.d. [Apr95] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Clarke Comments; Capt Bruce Clarke, untitled account, dtd Apr68, attached to Clarke Comments, hereafter Clarke Account, Apr68; John J. Balanco, Comments on draft, dtd 15Nov94 and 5Apr95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Balanco Comments; John J. Balanco, "Abandoned, Reflections of a Khe Sanh Vet," ms, dtd 14Nov94 and 5Apr95, attached to Balanco Comments, hereafter Balanco, "Abandoned"; 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt. III; Stubbe, "Khe Sanh," p. 573; Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, pp. 255–265.

23. Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, p. 263.

24. Balanco, "Abandoned," p. 182.

25. Col David E. Lownds intvw, 13Mar68, pp. 22–23, in Khe Sanh: Transcriptions of Oral History, MCHC.

26. Balanco, "Abandoned," p. 184. See also Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, p. 264.

27. Clarke Comments and Clarke Account, Apr68.

28. Balanco, "Abandoned," pp. 184–85.

Reinforcement and Fighting Back

29. Nalty, *Air Power*, pp. 25–26; HMM–362 ComdC, Jan68, pt.II; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68, p. 43; 26th Mar SitRep Opn Scotland No. 331, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt.IV.

30. For this and the following paragraph see Col John F. Mitchell, Comments on draft, dtd 5Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Mitchell Comments. See also FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, p. 10; 1/9 ComdC, Jan68, pt. II.

31. 26th Mar SitRep Opn Scotland No. 335, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt.IV.

32. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68, p. 7.

33. 26th Mar AAR, Opn Scotland, dtd 31May68, p. 5, Encl 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68.

34. Maj Gary E. Todd, Comments on draft, dtd 28Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File) and Capt Bernard D. Cole, USN, Comments on draft, dtd 27Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).

35. Col William H. Dabney, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Dabney Comments.

36. Ibid. See also Shore, *Khe Sanh*, pp. 58–9, 97–8.

37. Dabney Comments; Shore, *Khe Sanh*, p. 59.

38. 26th Mar SitReps Opn Scotland, Nos. 338, 339, Encl 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV; 2/26 ComdC, Jan68, pp. 7–8; S–2 Officer, 2/26 ltr to S–2 Officer, 26th Mar, no subject, dtd 25Jan68, Encl 2/26 ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV; S–2 Officer, 2/26 ltr to S–2 Officer, 26th Mar, Subj: Enemy Activity Vicinity of XD803457, dtd 26Jan68, in 2/26 ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV.

39. Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, p. 282.

40. 26th Mar SitRep Opn Scotland No. 351, Encl 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, p. 10; Gen Westmoreland msg to Adm Sharp, dtd 23Jan68 (Westmoreland Papers, CMH, Washington, D.C.); MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," dtd 19Nov69 (Khe Sanh Comment File); LtCol James B. Wilkinson, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," dtd 19Dec68 (Khe Sanh Comment File).

41. 1/26 Journal for 28Jan68, Ser. No. 52, in 1/26 ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV; 1/26 Journal for 24Jan68, Ser. No. 21, in ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV.

42. 1/26 Journal for 30Jan68, Ser. No. 12, in 1/26 ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV; 1/26 Journal for 29Jan68, Ser. No. 21, in 1/26 ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV.

43. Statement of MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins, *Hearings Electronic Battlefield*, pp. 84–85; ComUSMACV msg to CinCPAC, dtd 23Jan68 (File No. 091/Vietnam, Jan68, pt. II, JCS HistOff).

Round Two

44. Jack Shulimson and LtCol Lane Rogers, Memorandum for the Record, Subj: Conversation With MajGen Tompkins, dtd 7Sep76 (MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins intvw transcript, Oral HistColl, MCHC).

45. 1/26 Journal for 29Jan68, Ser. No. 24, in 1/26 ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV.

46. 26th Mar SitRep Opn Scotland, No. 360, Encl 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, pt. IV; 26th Mar ComdC, Jan68, p. 4.

47. Nalty, *Air Power*, p. 82.

48. Addresses by Gen Earle G. Wheeler, USA, 7Jul64 to 2Jul70, pt. II (JCS HistOff, Washington, D.C.).

49. Gen William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1976), p. 337, hereafter Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Adm Sharp msg to Gen Wheeler, dtd 2Feb68 (File No. 091/Vietnam, JCS HistOff, Washington, D.C.)

50. This and the following paragraph are based upon: Maj Mirza M. Baig Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," dtd 23Dec68 (Khe Sanh Comment File), hereafter Baig Comments.

51. Ibid.; Capt Earle G. Breeding intvw, 8Mar68, in Khe Sanh: Transcriptions of Oral History, MCHC, hereafter Breeding intvw.

52. 26th Mar ComdC, Feb68, p.8.

53. Ibid.; Breeding intvw; 26th Mar SitRep Opn Scotland, No. 385, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Feb68, pt. IV.

54. Breeding intvw.

55. 26th Mar AAR, Opn Scotland, dtd 31May68, p. 3, Encl 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68; Baig Comments; 3/26 ComdC, Feb68, p. 3; 3/26 AAR Opn Scotland, dtd 15Apr68, p. 9, Encl, 3/26 ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV.

The Fall of Lang Vei

56. Gen Westmoreland msg to Adm Sharp, dtd 24Jan68, in Westmoreland Papers (CMH, Washington, D.C.).

57. 1/13 ComdC, Jan68, p. 6; Col David E. Lownds intvw, 13Mar68, in Khe Sanh: Transcriptions of Oral History, MCHC.

58. 2/26 OpO 5–68, dtd 15Mar68, Anx D (Antimechanized Plan), Encl, 2/26 ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV; Co C, 5th SFGA AAR for Battle of Lang Vei, 22Feb68, in 3d MarDiv, U.S.A. AARs, hereafter Co C, 5th SFGA AAR, Feb68; III MAF COC msg to MACV COC, dtd 7Feb68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File.

59. 26th Mar AAR, Opn Scotland, dtd 31May68, p. 4, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV.

60. Maj Matthew B. Caulfield intvw, 2Jan69, pp. 26–27, in Khe Sanh: Transcriptions of Oral History, MCHC; Col Franklin L. Smith intvw, 10Jun68, Tape 2878 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

61. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 341–2; Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, pp. 331–33; Col Jonathan F. Ladd, USA (ret) intvw, n.d. [1977?] (U.S. Army, Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA), pp. 25–30, attached to Clarke Comments; BGen John R. Chaisson ltr to his wife, dtd 8Feb68 (Chaisson Papers, Hoover Institute).

62. Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, pp. 331–33; Co C, 5th SFGA AAR, Feb68, p. 5.

63. Gen Robert E. Cushman, Jr., intvw, 1Nov82, p. 30 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

64. LtCol Edward J. A. Castagna intvw, 13Mar68, p. 29, hereafter Castagna intvw and LtCol Harvey M. Harper intvw, 10–24Feb68, p. 6, in Khe Sanh: Transcriptions of Oral History, MCHC.

The Intensifying Battle

65. L. J. Seavy-Cioffi, "Our Victory for Alpha One," (ms., 1986, MCHC), hereafter Seavy-Cioffi, "Alpha One."

66. Col John F. Mitchell, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," dtd 31Jan69 (Khe Sanh Comment File); Seavy-Cioffi, "Alpha One," p. 23. See also Larry J. Seavy-Cioffi, Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Seavy-Cioffi Comments.

67. Seavy-Cioffi, "Alpha One," p. 49.

68. 1/9 ComdC, Feb68, pt. III; 26th Mar ComdC, Feb68, pp. 48–49; 26th Mar SitReps Opn Scotland, Nos. 397, 398, 399, Encl 26th Mar ComdC, Feb68, pt. IV.

69. Casualty figures for this engagement vary among sources. Three Marines were initially declared missing in action, but were later added to the list of those killed. Counts of enemy dead range from 124 to "over 150." 1/9 AAR, Opn Scotland, n.d., p. 7, Encl, 1/9 ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV; 1/9 ComdC, Feb68, p. 13; 26th Mar SitRep Opn Scotland, No. 399, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Feb68, pt. IV; 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 9Feb68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, p. 15.

70. 1/26 ComdC, Feb68, p. 7.

71. BGen Robert P. Keller, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh,"

dtd 17Dec68 (Khe Sanh Comment File), hereafter Keller Comments, Dec68.

72. Castagna intvw, p. 29.

73. Keller Comments, Dec68.

74. 1/26 ComdC, Feb68, p. 8.

75. MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins intvw, 26Aug68, p. 9, in Khe Sanh: Transcriptions of Oral History, MCHC.

76. Baig Comments.

77. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Feb68, p. 23; 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 24Feb68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File; 3/26 ComdC, Feb68, p. 11; Transcript, Hanoi VNA International Service English Broadcast, 24Feb68.

78. 1/26 Journal for 25Feb68, Ser. No. 47, in 1/26 ComdC, Feb68, pt. IV.

79. 1/26 Journal for 25Feb68, Ser. Nos. 49 and 51, in 1/26 ComdC, Feb68, pt. IV.

80. Author conversation with Mr. George W. Jayne, dtd 22Sep88.

81. Maj Kenneth W. Pipes, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," n.d. [1968?] (Khe Sanh Comment File), hereafter Pipes Comments, [1968?].

82. Casualty figures recorded for this action also vary, especially concerning the numbers of dead and missing. While many sources show 24 missing from the 3d Platoon, they fail to note one Marine missing from the 1st Platoon. Also, early reports which indicated only one Marine killed are often cited. 1/26 ComdC, Feb68, p. 8; Author conversation with Mr. George W. Jayne, dtd 22Sep88; Pipes Comments, [1968?]; 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 26Feb68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File. According to Prados and Stubbe, a corrected version was issued two weeks later giving the casualties as 9 dead, 25 wounded, and 19 missing. *Valley of Decision*, p. 405.

83. 1/26 Journal for 27Feb68, Ser. No. 45, in 1/26 ComdC, Feb68, pt. IV.

84. 26th Mar SitRep Opn Scotland, No. 484, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Feb68, pt. IV.

85. Baig Comments.

86. 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, p. 3; 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 2Mar68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File.

87. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, pp. 18, 48. See also the following messages in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File: 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 2Mar68; 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 3Mar68; 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 4Mar68; 3d MarDiv msg to PCV, dtd 14Mar68; 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 18Mar68; 3d MarDiv COC msg to PCV COC, dtd 19Mar68.

88. 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, p. 7.

89. 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, p. 11; 1/9 ComdC, Mar68, pt. III.

90. 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 2Mar68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File.

91. 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 7Mar68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File.

92. 3d MarDiv COC msg to PCV COC, dtd 15Mar68, and 3d MarDiv COC msg to PCV TOC, dtd 25Mar68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File.

93. 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, p. 6.

94. Ibid. p. 7.

95. CGProvCorpsV msg to CGIII MAF, dtd 23Mar68, and CGProvCorpsV msg to CGIII MAF, dtd 25Mar68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File.

96. 3d MarDiv COC msg to PCV TOC, dtd 25Mar68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File.

97. Seavy-Cioffi Comments, Mitchell Comments, 1995, and Mullins Comments. See also 1/9 ComdC, Mar68, pt. II; 3d MarDiv COC msg to PCV TOC, dtd 27Mar68, and CGPCV msg to CGIII MAF, dtd 27Mar68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File.

Settling the Score

98. 1/26 AAR Opn Scotland, dtd 11May68, p. 8, Encl, 1/26 ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV; LtCol Frederick J. McEwan, Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

99. 1/13 ComdC, Mar68, p. 6.

100. 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, pp. 9–10; 1/26 Journal for 30Mar68, Ser. No. 20, in 1/26 ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV; 26th Mar SitReps Opn Scotland, Nos. 602 and 603, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV; 1/26 ComdC, Mar68, pp. 4–5; 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, pp. 9–10; Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, p. 424; Charles E. Davis III, ltr to Ray W. Stubbe, dtd 22Dec91, Encl to Pipes Comments, 1995, hereafter Davis Ltr, Dec91.

101. 1/26 ComdC, Mar68, pp. 4–5.

102. Davis ltr; Wayne Morrison ltr to LtCol Pipes, n.d. [1980's], Encl, Pipes Comments, 1995.

103. Pipes Comments, 1995; CO, 1/26 ltr to CG, 3d MarDiv, Subj: Meritorious Unit Commendation, recommendation for, case of Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, dtd 5Jun68, in Pipes Comments [1968?]; 1stLt John W. Dillon intvw, 3Jan69, Tape 3716 (Oral HistColl, MCHC)..

104. Casualty figures for the raid vary among reports, with some claiming 3 Marines missing, and others showing 9 dead and either 42 or 71 wounded. The figures in the text are from 1/26 AAR Opn Scotland, dtd 11May68, p. 8, in 1/26 ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV. Other sources include: 26th Mar SitReps Opn Scotland, Nos. 602 and 603, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV; 1/26 ComdC, Mar68, pp. 4–5; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 54; CGPCV msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 31Mar68, in III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File. The Marine artillery officer is quoted in Prados and Stubbe, *Valley of Decision*, p. 424. For General Krulak's observations, see LtGen Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight, An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Naval Institute Press: Annapolis, Md., 1984), p. 220.

105. 26th Mar AAR, Opn Scotland, dtd 31May68, p. 4, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 347.

106. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 3.

107. 26th Mar AAR Opn Scotland, dtd 31May68, Encl, 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV.

Operation Pegasus

108. 3d MarDiv PerIntRep, dtd 15Feb68, in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV.

109. For this and the following paragraph see: MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins intvw, 26Aug68, Tape 3088 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); Gen William B. Rosson, Comments on draft, dtd 27Feb95 (Vietnam Com-

ment File); LtGen John J. Tolson, *Vietnam Studies: Airmobility, 1961–1971* (Washington: Dept of the Army, 1973), p. 169, hereafter, Tolson, *Airmobility*; John R. Galvin, *Air Assault: The Development of Airmobile Warfare* (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1969), p. 307, hereafter, Galvin, *Air Assault*.

110. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 17; Tolson, *Airmobility*, pp. 170–171; III MAF ComdC, Mar68, p. 25; 1st Mar ComdC, Mar68, p. II–D–2; 1st Mar AAR Opn Pegasus, dtd 3May68, p. 11, in 1st Mar ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV.

111. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 53; LtGen John J. Tolson, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," dtd 2Jan69 (Khe Sanh Comment File); Tolson, *Airmobility*, pp. 171–172.

112. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, pp. 17–18, 20; LtGen Willard Pearson, *Vietnam Studies: The War in the Northern Provinces, 1966–1968* (Washington: Dept of the Army, 1975), p. 81, hereafter, Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*; CGPCV msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 30Mar68 (III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File).

113. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 55; 1/26 AAR Opn Scotland, dtd 11May68, p. 2, in 1/26 ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV; 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, p. 10.

114. 1/26 AAR Opn Scotland, dtd 11May68, p. 3, in 1/26 ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV.

115. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, p. 7. Some sources report that Operation Pegasus numbered 18 infantry battalions, apparently overlooking the ARVN 37th Ranger Battalion at Khe Sanh.

116. 1st Mar ComdC, Apr68, p. II–C–2; Pearson, *War in the Northern Provinces*, p. 81; Tolson, *Airmobility*, p. 173; Galvin, *Air Assault*, p. 307; CGPCV msg to III MAF COC, dtd 2Apr68 (III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File); Gen Westmoreland msg to Gen Wheeler and Adm Sharp, dtd 1Apr68 (File No. MAC 04395, Westmoreland Papers, CMH, Washington, D.C.).

117. CGPCV msg to III MAF COC, dtd 2Apr68 (III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File); Galvin, *Air Assault*, p. 307; Tolson, *Airmobility*, p. 173; Pearson, *War in the Northern Provinces*, p. 81; 26th Mar ComdC, Apr68, pp. 7–9; 1st AirCavDiv AAR Opn Pegasus, dtd 11Jul68, p. 6, in 3d MarDiv U.S.A. AARs, hereafter 1st ACD AAR Opn Pegasus.

118. Friendly casualty figures for this action vary. Figures in the text are from 1/9 AAR Opn Pegasus, dtd 22May68, p. 4, in 1/9 ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV and 1/9 ComdC, Apr68, pp. 4–5. Other sources include 26th Mar ComdC, Apr68, p. 9; 26th Mar PerOpsSum Opn Pegasus, No. 5 in 26th Mar ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV; 26th Mar AAR Opn Pegasus, dtd 10May68, in 26th Mar ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV; III MAF ComdC, Apr68, pp. 11–12; Tolson, *Airmobility*, p. 175.

119. 1/9 ComdC, Apr68, p. 5; 1/9 AAR Opn Pegasus, dtd 22May68, p. 5, in 1/9 ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV, hereafter 1/9 AAR Opn Pegasus; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, p. 9. Again, casualty figures vary. One source even provides conflicting numbers on two different pages of the same document. For other reports, see 1/9 AAR Opn Pegasus, p. 3; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 12; III MAF ComdC, Apr68, p. 12; CGPCV msg to III MAF COC, dtd 6Apr68 (III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File); 26th Mar AAR Opn Pegasus, dtd 10May68, p. 3, in 26th Mar ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV, hereafter 26th Mar AAR Opn Pegasus; 26th Mar ComdC, Apr68, p. 10; 26th Mar PerOpsSum Opn Pegasus, No. 6 in 26th Mar ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV.

120. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: 2/26 ComdC, Apr68, p. 3; 2/26 AAR Opn Pegasus, dtd 5May68, p. 4, in 2/26 ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV.

121. An additional source for this paragraph is: 26th Mar Opn Pegasus PerOpsSum, No. 7 in 26th Mar ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV.

122. Ibid.

123. 1st ACD AAR Opn Pegasus, p. 7.

124. CGPCV msg to III MAF COC, dtd 7Apr68 (III MAF Khe Sanh File); Tolson, *Airmobility*, p. 176.

125. 1st ACD AAR Opn Pegasus, p. 7.

126. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, p. 10; 1/9 ComdC, Apr68, p. 6; 1st ACD AAR Opn Pegasus, p. 3; 2/26 ComdC, Apr68, pp. 3–8; Pearson, *War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 85–86; Tolson, *Airmobility*, pp. 85–87.

127. CGPCV msg to CGIII MAF, dtd 8Apr68, and CGPCV msg to III MAF COC, dtd 9Apr68 (III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File).

128. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 12; Tolson, *Airmobility*, p. 177.

129. 1/9 ComdC, Apr68, p. 6.

130. CGPCV msg to CGIII MAF, dtd 10Apr68 (III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File).

131. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 7; Pearson, *War in the Northern Provinces*, p. 88; Tolson, *Airmobility*, p. 178.

132. CGPCV msg to III MAF COC, dtd 12Apr68 (III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File).

133. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, p. 10.

134. LtCol John C. Studt, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," dtd 24Dec68, in Khe Sanh Comment File, hereafter Studt Comments, Dec68; Col Bruce F. Meyers, Comments on draft, dtd 20Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Meyers Comments, Feb95.

135. LtCol John C. Studt, "Battalion in the Attack," *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 1970, pp. 39–44; Meyers Comments, Feb95.

136. Meyers Comments, Feb95.

137. Studt Comments, Dec68; 26th Mar ComdC, Apr68, pp. 11–12; Col Bruce F. Meyers, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," dtd 16Dec68, in Khe Sanh Comment File; III MAF ComdC, Apr68, p. 12; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, p. 10; 26th Mar AAR Opn Pegasus; CGPCV msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 15Apr68 (III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File); Pearson, *War in the Northern Provinces*, p. 87. Quote is from Meyers Comments, Feb95.

138. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: Gen Westmoreland msg to Adm Sharp, dtd 15Apr68 (File No. MAC 05008, Westmoreland Papers, CMH, Washington, D.C.); CGPCV msg to III MAF COC, dtd 14Apr68, and CG, PCV msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 15Apr68 (III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File); Pearson, *War in the Northern Provinces*, p. 88; Tolson, *Airmobility*, p. 178; Dabney Comments. Quotes in this paragraph are from Col John C. Studt, Comments on draft, dtd 22Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 15
THE BATTLE FOR DONG HA

The major sources for this chapter are: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr–Jun68; III MAF ComdCs, Apr–Jun68; III MAF Jnl & Msg Files; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Apr–Jun68; 9th Mar ComdCs, Apr–Jun68; 3d Mar ComdCs, Apr–Jun68; Maj Thomas Donnelly and Capt Moyers S. Shore II, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble," in LtCol Ralph F. Moody, et al., "Marines in Vietnam, 1954–68," 8 pts (ms, MCHC, Washington, D.C., 1971), pt VI, hereafter Donnelly and Shore, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble"; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year"; Maj William H.

Dabney, "The Battle of Dong Ha," ms, Apr75, hereafter Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha"; BGen William Weise intvw, 21Feb83 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Weise intvw, 21Feb83; BGen William Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," ms, 7Feb87, hereafter Weise, "Memories of Dai Do"; BGen William Weise Folder on Dai Do, hereafter Weise Folder, Dai Do; BGen Edwin H. Simmons, USMC, Comment Notebook, May 1970, *Naval Review* article, MCHC, hereafter Simmons Comment Notebook, May 1970, *Naval Review* article.

Why Dong Ha?

1. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, p. 31; Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," passim.

2. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: CG3dMarDiv msg to CGProvCorps, dtd 19May68, Encl 5, and 3d MarDiv, Summary Report and notes, Battle of Dong Ha, n.d., Encls 6–10, 3d MarDiv ComdC, May68, hereafter 3d MarDiv, Summary Report; Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 2–5. For organization of Task Force Robbie, see LtCol Karl J. Fontenot, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File).

3. 3d Mar ComdC, Apr68, p. 27; BLT 2/4 CAAR, Operation Napoleon/Saline, dtd 4Jul68, tab H, 3d Mar ComdC, Jul68, hereafter BLT 2/4 CAAR Napoleon; Weise, "Memories of Dai Do."

4. Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 5–6; 3d MarDiv, Summary Report.

5. The sources for this and the following two paragraphs are: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, pp. 12–4; Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 5–6; 3d MarDiv, Summary Report; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, p. 19; John Randolph, "Viet Battle Pits Huge Field Units," *Los Angeles Times*, 8May68, pp. 1–2 (Clipping in Weise Folder, Dai Do), hereafter Randolph, "Viet Battle Pits Huge Field Units".

6. Additional sources for this paragraph are: Weise intvw, 21Feb83; BLT 2/4 CAAR Napoleon.

7. Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 12–5; 3d MarDiv, Summary Report.

The Fight For Dai Do, The First Day

8. Weise intvw, 21Feb83; BLT 2/4 CAAR Napoleon; 3d Mar ComdC, May68.

9. The sources for this and the following two paragraphs are: Weise intvw, 21Feb83; BLT 2/4 CAAR Napoleon.

10. Additional source for this and the following paragraph is: 3d MarDiv, Summary Report.

11. Additional sources for this paragraph are: 3d MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, p. 18; Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 2.

12. BGen William Weise, "Sequence of Events—Battle of Dai Do," dtd 11Mar83 (Weise Folder, Dai Do); Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 3; BLT 2/4 CAAR Napoleon, p. 32; 3d Mar ComdC, May68, p. 26; Weise intvw, Feb83.

13. BGen William Weise, "Sequence of Events—Battle of Dai Do," dtd 11Mar83 (Weise Folder, Dai Do); Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 3; BLT 2/4 CAAR Napoleon, p. 6; Weise intvw, Feb83.

14. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: BGen William Weise, "Sequence of Events—Battle of Dai Do," dtd 11Mar83 (Weise Folder, Dai Do); Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," pp. 5–6; BLT 2/4 CAAR Napoleon, p. 32; 3d Mar ComdC, May 68, p. 26; Weise intvw, Feb83.

15. An additional source for this paragraph is: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," pp. 6–7.

16. The sources for this and the following three paragraphs are: BGen William Weise, "Sequence of Events—Battle of Dai Do," dtd 11Mar83 (Weise Folder, Dai Do); Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," pp. 6–8; BLT 2/4 CAAR Napoleon, p. 32.

17. Additional sources for this and the following two paragraphs are: 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 26–7; Weise intvw, Feb83.

18. Additional sources for this and the following paragraph are: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," pp. 8–10; LtCol William Weise, Comments on draft ms., dtd 1Oct69, Donnelly and Shore, "Ho Chi Minh's Gamble" (Comment File), hereafter Weise Comments, 1Oct69.

19. The quote is from Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," ms., 7Feb87.

20. Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," pp. 9–10; BLT 2/4 CAAR Napoleon, p. 32.

21. The sources for this and the following three paragraphs are: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," pp. 10–11; Weise, "Sequence of Events"; Weise Comments, 1Oct69.

22. Additional sources for this and the following two paragraphs are: 3d Mar ComdC, May68, p. 27; BLT 2/4 CAAR Napoleon, p. 32.

23. Additional sources for this and the following paragraph are: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 12; Weise intvw, Feb83.

24. 3d Mar ComdC, May68, p. 27; BLT 2/4 CAAR Napoleon, p. 32.

25. Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p.13; Weise Comments, 1Oct69.

26. Col William H. Dabney intvw, 20May82, p. 34 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 12–5; 3d MarDiv, Summary Report; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year," pp. 57–8.

27. Randolph, "Viet Battle Pits Huge Field Units," pp. 1–2.

28. Gen William B. Rosson, USA, Comments on draft, dtd 27Feb95 (Vietnam Comment File).

29. Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 12–5; 3d MarDiv, Summary Report; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year," p. 59; MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins, Comments on Simmons, "Marine Opns, Vietnam, 1968," dtd 19Nov69 (Simmons Comment Notebook, May 1970, *Naval Review* article).

The Continuing Fight For Dai Do

30. The sources for this and the following four paragraphs are: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 13–4; Weise intvw, Feb83; Weise, "Sequence of Events."

31. Additional sources for this and the following three paragraphs are: 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 27–8; BLT 2/4 CAAR, Operation Napoleon, p. 33.

32. Additional sources for this and the following paragraph are: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 15; Peter Braestrup, "Daido: Marines Open Supply Line," *The Washington Post*, 8May68, pp. D–1—D–3, p. D–2 (Clipping in Weise Folder, Dai Do).

33. Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," pp. 15–6; FMFPac MarOpsV, May68, p. 64.

34. Sources for this and the following two paragraphs are: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," pp. 17–18; Weise intvw, Feb83; BLT 2/4 CAAR, Operation Napoleon, pp. 33–4; 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 28–9.

35. An additional source for this and the following paragraph is: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," Insert 5.

36. An additional source for this paragraph is: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," pp. 19–21.

37. Sources for this and the following paragraph are: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 13–4; Weise intvw, Feb83; Weise, "Sequence of Events;" 2/4 CAAR, Operation Napoleon, pp. 33–4.

38. MGySgt James W. Rogers, Comments on draft, dtd 21Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Rogers Comments, Nov94.

39. An additional source for this paragraph is: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," pp. 21–2.

40. The sources for this and the following 12 paragraphs are: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 23; Weise intvw, Feb83; Weise, "Sequence of Events."

41. Additional sources for this and the following 10 paragraphs are: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 24; BLT 2/4 CAAR, Operation Napoleon, pp. 34–5.

42. Prescott is quoted in Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," Insert 2.

43. Lieutenant Taylor is quoted in Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 25.

44. Rogers is quoted in Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 26. See also Rogers Comments, Nov94.

45. Additional source for this paragraph is Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," p. 27.

46. Additional sources for this and the following four paragraphs are: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," pp. 28–30; Weise Comments, 1Oct69.

47. Additional source for this and the following three paragraphs are: 3d Mar ComdC, May68, p. 30. Quote is from Weise intvw, Feb83.

48. Quotes are again from Weise intvw, Feb83.

49. An additional source for this and the following paragraph is: Weise, "Memories of Dai Do," pp. 30–33. The quotes again are from Weise intvw, Feb83.

50. 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 30–1; BLT 2/4 CAAR, Operation Napoleon, pp. 35–6; 1/3 ComdC, May68; Weise Comments, 1Oct69.

51. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, p. 20; III MAF ComdC, May68, p. 11; 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 27–30. The Weise quotes are from Weise intvw, Feb83.

The End of the First Offensive

52. The sources for this and the following two paragraphs are: Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 17–8; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, pp. 18–9, May68, p. 9; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year," p. 63.

53. An additional source for this and the following paragraph is: 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 3–5.

54. 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 5–7, and Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year," pp. 63–4.

55. 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 5–7.

56. The sources for this and the following two paragraphs are: Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 19–21; 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 32–3; 1/3 ComdC, May68.

57. LtCol Charles V. Jarman ltr to wife, dtd 5May68, Encl Col Charles V. Jarman, Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

58. Ibid.

59. 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 8–9.

60. 3d MarDiv, Summary Report; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year," p. 64; Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 23–4. The quote is from Dabney's account. Major Dabney during this period served on the 3d Marine Division staff as the Assistant G–3 officer at Dong Ha.

61. 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 8–9 and 32–33.

62. III MAF ComdC, May68, p. 14; 3d MarDiv SitReps 2–4, Operation Concordia Square, dtd 9–11 May68, Encl 17–19, 3d MarDiv ComdC, May68; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year," p. 64; Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 23–4.

63. 3d Mar ComdC, May68, p. 10.

64. 3d MarDiv SitRep No. 32, Opn Concordia Square, dtd 18May68, Encl 46, 3d MarDiv ComdC, May68; III MAF ComdC, May68, p. 14; Waldron and Beavers, "The Critical Year," p. 64; Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 25–8.

65. 3d MarDiv, Summary Report; Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 25–8. The quotes are from Dabney's account.

The Second Offensive

66. III MAF ComdC, May68, pp. 11–2; 3d MarDiv ComdC, May68, pp. 17–8; Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 25–8.

67. BGen Lawrence H. Caruthers, Jr., intvw with Dr. Lewis Sorley, Washington, 15Sep89 (quote courtesy of Dr. Lewis Sorley); Gen Raymond G. Davis intvw, 2Feb77, pp. 11–12 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Davis intvw, 2Feb77; BGen John R. Chaisson ltr to wife, dtd 16May68 and diary entry, 16May68 (Chaisson Papers).

68. MajGen Raymond G. Davis debriefing at FMFPac, 15Apr69, pp. 329–30 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Davis FMFPac debriefing.

69. For detailed accounts of the 8 May action see: Otto J. Lehrack, *No Shining Armor, The Marines at War in Vietnam, An Oral History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), pp. 269–75; Jeff Kelly, *DMZ Diary, A Combat Marine's Vietnam Memoir* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1991), pp. 80–92.

70. The general sources for this and the following four paragraphs are: CG3dMarDiv msg to CGPCV, dtd 4Jun68, Encl 7, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, hereafter 3d MarDiv msg, 4Jun68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, pp. 11–2; 9th Mar ComdC, May68, p. 9; Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 28–9. The quotes in this paragraph are from Capt Matthew G. McTiernan, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan 1995] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter McTiernan Comments.

71. The quote is from 9th Mar ComdC, May68, p. 9.

72. An additional source for this paragraph is: 3d Mar ComdC, May68, p. 18.

73. Additional sources for this paragraph are: 3d Mar ComdC, May68, p. 19; MajGen Raymond G. Davis intvw, 1Jan69, p. 276 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

74. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: 9th Mar ComdC, May68, p. 9; 3d MarDiv msg, 4Jun68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, pp. 13–4; Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 30–3.

75. An additional source for this paragraph is: McTiernan Comments.

76. 9th Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 9–10; 3d MarDiv msg, 4Jun68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 15.

77. 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 19–22; 3d MarDiv msg, 4Jun68; Dabney, "Battle of Dong Ha," pp. 30–3.

78. 3d MarDiv msg, 4Jun68.

79. Ibid; 3d Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 21, 43–4; Davis FMFPac debriefing, p. 300.

80. CG3dMarDiv msg to 3d MarDiv, dtd 22May68, tab A, 9th Mar ComdC, Jun68; Davis intvw, 2Feb77; 9th Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 3–4, 12.

81. Quote is from Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington: Hist&Mus Div, HQMC, 1982), p. 319.

CHAPTER 16
KHE SANH: FINAL OPERATIONS AND EVACUATION, 16 APRIL–11 JULY 1968

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr–Jul68; III MAF ComdCs, Apr–Jul68; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Apr–Jul68; 1st Mar ComdCs, Apr–Jul68; 4th Mar ComdCs, May–Jul68; 26th Mar ComdCs, Apr–Jun68; Khe Sanh Comment File.

To Stay or Not to Stay

1. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 336.

2. Gen William C. Westmoreland, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," dtd 29Mar69, in Khe Sanh Comment File.

3. Gen William B. Rosson, USA, Comments on draft, dtd 29May95 (Vietnam Comment File).

4. Ibid.; Gen William C. Westmoreland msg to Adm Ulysses S. G. Sharp, dtd 15Apr68 (File No. MAC 05008, Westmoreland Papers, CMH, Washington, D.C.); Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 348; Westmoreland, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," dtd 29Mar69, in Khe Sanh Comment File.

The 'Walking Dead'

5. 1st Mar ComdC, Apr68, p. II–C–6; BGen Jacob E. Glick intvw, 20 Jun and 11Jul89, pp. 2–3 and 70 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); BGen Jacob E. Glick, Comments on draft, dtd 25Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Glick Comments.

6. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, p. 20A; 1/26 ComdC, Apr68, p. 2; 2/26 ComdC, Apr68, p. 5; 3/26 ComdC, Apr68, p. 3; 2/1 ComdC, Apr68, pt. II; Copy of Statement of Col Bruce F. Meyers to Board for Correction of Naval and Military Records, n.d. [1968], Copy attached to Col Bruce F. Meyers, Comments on draft, dtd 20Feb95 (Vietnam Comment Files).

7. Col Walter H. Cuenin ltr to CG3dMarDiv, Subj: Informal investigation into the circumstances of a night operation conducted by the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, 3d Marine Division, in the vicinity of Khe Sanh, Republic of Vietnam, on the night of 16–17 April 1968, including the methods used in the recovery and accounting for, casualties incurred therein, dtd 3May68, pp. 5–6, in "Informal investigation of an Opn conducted by 1/9 in the vicinity of Khe Sanh, RVN, 16–18 Apr 68," hereafter Investigation; Statement of Captain Henry D. Banks, dtd 21Apr68, in Investigation, hereafter Banks Statement.

8. Banks Statement; Testimony of LtCol John J. H. Cahill, p. 5, in Investigation, hereafter Cahill Testimony; Statement of Col Bruce F. Meyers, p. 2, in Investigation, hereafter Meyers Statement; Statement of Maj Joseph A. Donnelly, in Investigation, hereafter Donnelly Statement.

9. Investigation, pp. 6–7; Statement of LtCol John J. H. Cahill, p. 1, in Investigation, hereafter Cahill Statement.

10. Investigation, pp. 7–8; Cahill Statement, p. 1; Cahill Testimony, p. 5; Meyers Statement, p. 2.

11. Investigation, pp. 9–10; Cahill Statement, pp. 1–2; Cahill Testimony, pp. 8–9; Statement of 1stLt John K. Leblond, p. 2, in Investigation; Statement of 1stLt William C. Connelly, p. 2, in Investigation, hereafter Connelly Statement.

12. Investigation, p. 10; Cahill Statement, p. 2; Cahill Testimony, pp. 9–10; Donnelly Statement, pp. 2–3; Statement of Capt Charles B. Hartzell, in Investigation, hereafter Hartzell Statement; Statement of Capt John W. Cargile, p. 2, in Investigation, hereafter Cargile Statement.

13. Investigation, pp. 10–11; Cahill Statement, p. 2; Cahill Testimony, p. 10; Donnelly Statement, p. 3; Testimony of Maj Joseph A. Donnelly, in Investigation, p. 5, hereafter Donnelly Testimony; Banks Statement, p. 2; Hartzell Statement, p. 4, 6; Cargile Statement, p. 2.

14. Cahill Statement, p. 2; Cahill Testimony; Meyers Testimony; Donnelly Statement, p. 3; Donnelly Testimony; Hartzell Testimony; Cargile Testimony; Connelly Testimony; Statement of 2dLt Francis B. Lovely, Jr., p. 2, in Investigation, hereafter Lovely Statement; Testimony of 2dLt Francis B. Lovely, Jr., in Investigation, hereafter Lovely Testimony. The recounting of this engagement in 1/9 ComdC, Apr68, pp. 8–9, indicates that Company D "swept up and over the ridge." As far as this statement implies that Company D overran the enemy, it cannot be supported by any participant's statement or testimony included in the investigation report.

15. Investigation, pp. 13–14; Cahill Statement, p. 2; Cahill Testimony; Meyers Statement, p. 5; Meyers Testimony.

16. Investigation, p. 14; Cahill Testimony; Donnelly Testimony; Connelly Statement, p. 3; Connelly Testimony; Statement of Corporal Hubert H. Hunnicutt III, p. 5, in Investigation, hereafter Hunnicutt Statement.

17. Investigation, p. 15; Hartzell Testimony; Capt Donald F. Engel Testimony, in Investigation, hereafter Engel Testimony.

18. Investigation, p. 16; Cahill Testimony.

19. Investigation, pp. 16–17; Cahill Testimony; Meyers Statement, pp. 10–11; Meyers Supplementary Statement; Meyers Testimony; Statement of BGen Jacob E. Glick, pp. 1–2, in Investigation, hereafter Glick Statement; Donnelly Testimony; Hartzell Testimony; Connelly Statement; Connelly Testimony.

20. Hunnicutt Statement.

21. Investigation, p. 18; Hunnicutt Statement.

22. 1st Mar ComdC, Apr68, p. II–C–7; CG3dMarDiv ltr to CGIIIMAF, Subj: Informal investigation of an operation conducted by 1st Battalion, 9th Marines . . ., dtd 20May68, in "Informal investigation of an Opn conducted by 1/9 in the vicinity of Khe Sanh, RVN, 16–18 Apr 1968".

Operation Scotland II

23. BGen Jacob E. Glick intvw, 20 Jun and 11Jul89, p. 12 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

24. 3d MarDiv OPlan 10–68, dtd 15Apr68, Opn Scotland II, in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV; 3d MarDiv OPlan 11–68, Opn Scotland II, in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Apr68, p. 50; 26th Mar Opn Scotland II SitRep No. 6, in 26th Mar ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV; 1st Mar ComdC, Apr68, p. II–C–6–9; 1/1 Journal for 16Apr68, in 1/1 ComdC, Apr68, pt. IV; 1/1 ComdC, Apr68, p. 1–II–3; 3/4 ComdC, Apr68, p. III–3; 1/9 ComdC, Apr68, p. 3.

25. Col Robert C. V. Hughes, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95?] (Vietnam Comment File).

26. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, pp. 11–12; 1st Mar ComdC, Apr68, p. II–C–7, 9; 1/1 ComdC, Apr68, p. 1–II–5; 1/11 ComdC, Apr68, p. 5; 3/4 ComdC, Apr68, p. IV–5; BGen Edwin H. Simmons, "Marine Corps Operations in Vietnam, 1968," *The Marines in Vietnam, 1954–1973* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1985), hereafter Simmons, "1968."

27. MajGen Carl W. Hoffman, Comments on draft, dtd 15Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File); MajGen Carl W. Hoffman intvw, 14Nov68, pp. 144–45 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

28. 1st Mar ComdC, May68, p. II–E–1.

29. FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 16; 3d MarDiv ComdC, May68, pp. 56–57; 1st Mar ComdC, May68, p. II–C–3; 1st Mar SitReps Opn Scotland II, Nos. 114, 118, 119, in 1st Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 2/3 ComdC, May68, pt. III.

30. FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 17; III MAF ComdC, May68, p. 10; 3d MarDiv ComdC, May68, p. 19; 1st Mar SitReps Opn Scotland, Nos. 126, 128, 131, in 1st Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 1st Mar ComdC, May68, p. II–C–5; 2/1 ComdC, May68, pt. III.

31. FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 17; 1st Mar ComdC, May68, p. II–C–4.

32. 3d MarDiv ComdC, May68, p. 19; 1st Mar ComdC, May68, p. II–C–4; 1st Mar SitReps Opn Scotland II, Nos. 132, 133 in 1st Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 2/3 ComdC, May68, pt. III.

33. This and the following paragraph are derived from: FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 17; III ComdC, May68, p. 10; 3d MarDiv ComdC, May68, pp. 58–59; 1st Mar ComdC, May68, p. II–C–5; 2/1 ComdC, May68, pt. II, III; 2/1 S–3 Journal for 19May68, in 2/1 ComdC, May68, pt. IV; Col Billy R. Duncan, Comments on draft, dtd 15Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Duncan Comments.

34. Duncan Comments.

35. Some sources cite initial body counts of 66 enemy killed in the ambush battle. A follow up report, however, contained in 2/1 S–3 Journal for 20May68, in 2/1 ComdC, May68, pt. IV, shows that the battalion found three additional enemy bodies the day following the ambush.

36. 2/1 S–2 Journal for 19May68, in 2/1 ComdC, May68, pt. IV.

37. Duncan Comments.

38. 1/11 ComdC, May68, p. 34.

39. III MAF PerIntRep 24–68, dtd 17Jun68, p. B–1, in III MAF PerIntReps; 1st Mar SitReps Opn Scotland II, Nos. 137, 147, in 1st Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 3/9 ComdC, May68, p. 6; Simmons, "1968," p. 118.

40. III MAF ComdC, May68, p. 10; 1st Mar SitReps Opn Scotland II, Nos. 154, 156, 159, in 1st Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 2/3 Comd C, May68, pt. III.

41. 1st Mar ComdC, May68, p. II–B–2; 1st Mar SitReps Opn Scotland II, No. 168, in 1st Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 2/3 ComdC, May68, pt. III.

42. 1st Mar ComdC, May68, p. II–C–5.

43. 1st Mar SitRep Opn Scotland II, No. 171 in 1st Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV.

44. 1st Mar ComdC, May68, p. II–C–5.

45. 2/3 ComdC, May68, pt. III.

46. 2/3 ComdC, May68, pt. III. Casualty figures vary slightly for both sides among various sources. Other counts are given in FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 18; III MAF ComdC, May68, p. 10; 3d MarDiv ComdC, May68, pp. 19–20; 1st Mar ComdC, May68, pp. II–B–2, II–C–5.

47. Glick Comments.

48. 3d MarDiv FragO 19–68, in 3d MarDiv ComdC, May68, pt. IV.

49. III MAF ComdC, May68, p. 10; 1st Mar SitReps Opn Scotland II, Nos. 181, 183, in 1st Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 2/3 ComdC, May68, pt. III.

50. 1st Mar ComdC, May68, p. II–C–6; 1st Mar SitReps Operation Scotland II, Nos. 181, 182, 183, in 1st Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 1/1 ComdC, May68, p. 1–II–5; 2/3 ComdC, May68, pt. III. Casualties figures vary. FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 19 shows 14 Marines killed and 88 wounded, 141 NVA dead.

Operation Robin

51. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 7; III MAF PerIntRep 23–68, dtd 11Jun68, p. 1, in III MAF PerIntReps; III MAF PerIntRep 25–68, dtd 25Jun68, p. 2, in III MAF PerIntReps; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, pp. 24–27; 1st Mar ComdC, Jun68, pt. II–B–1; 4th Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. 11.

52. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, pp. 24–27.

53. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, pp. 8, 64, and 73; 1st Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. II–C–2.

54. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 8; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, p. 26; 1st Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. II–C–2; 1/1 ComdC, Jun68, p. 1–II–3.

55. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 8; 1st Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. II–C–2; 1/1 ComdC, Jun68, p. 1–II–5.

56. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 9; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, pp. 26–27; 1st Mar SitRep Opn Scotland, No. 197, in 1st Mar ComdC, Jun68, pt. IV; 1st Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. II–B–1, II–C–3; 1/11 ComdC, Jun68, p. 5.

57. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, pp. 24–27; 1/1 ComdC, Jun68, p. 1–II–5; 1/12 ComdC, Jun68, p. 4.

58. 1/4 ComdC, Jun68, p. 3; 2/4 ComdC, Jun68, p. 7.

59. 1st Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. II–C–4; 1/1 ComdC, Jun68, p. 1–II–3.

60. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, p. 27; Some sources say "approximately 150" enemy troops. Considering the outcome of the engagement, the estimate of a battalion is probably correct.

61. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 6, 10; 4th Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. 6.

62. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 9; III MAF PerIntRep 23–68, dtd 11Jun68, p. 1, in III MAF PerIntReps; III MAF ComdC, Jun68, p. 10; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, p. 27; 1/4 ComdC, Jun68, p. 3.

63. Maj Gary E. Todd, Comments on draft, dtd 28Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).

64. III MAF PerIntRep 24–68, 17Jun68, p. 2, in III MAF PerIntReps; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, p. 27; 3/9 ComdC, Jun68, p. 3; 3/9 Journal for 9–16Jun68, in 3/9 ComdC, Jun68, pt. IV; Co A, 3d Engr Bn AAR for Opn Scotland II, n.d., in 3d Engr Bn ComdC, Jun68, pt. IV.

65. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 10; 4th Mar OpO 5–68, in 4th Mar ComdC, Jun68, pt. IV.

66. 3/4 ComdC, Jun68, p. IV–6.

67. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, pp. 11–12; 2/4 ComdC, Jun68, pp. 5, 8.

68. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 12; III MAF ComdC, Jun68, p. 10; III MAF PerIntRep 24–68 and 25–68, in III MAF PerIntReps; Interrogation Report of PWs Do Van Huan, Linh Xuan Duc, Trinh Van Chien, Nguyen Duc Huong and Dang Truong Vien, in III MAF PerIntRep 25–68, p. B–1, in III MAF PerIntReps; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, p. 27; 4th Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. 6; 3/4 ComdC, Jun68, p. IV–8.

69. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 11; III MAF ComdC, Jun68, p. 10; 4th Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. 6; 1/4 ComdC, Jun68, p. 3; 1/4 Journal for 11Jun68, in 1/4 ComdC, Jun68, pt. IV; 1/12 ComdC, Jun68, p. 5; 1/12 S–3 Journal for 11Jun68, in 1/12 ComdC, Jun68, pt. IV.

70. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 12; III MAF ComdC, Jun68, p. 10; III MAF PerIntRep 25–68, dtd 25Jun68, p. 1, in III MAF PerIntReps; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, p. 27; 4th Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. 6; 3/4 ComdC, Jun68, p. IV–9.

71. 4th Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. 6; Other sources show different numbers of NVA dead. See also 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, p. 27.

72. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, p. 26.

73. 2/4 ComdC, Jun68, p. 5.

74. 4th Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. 7.

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75. 3d MarDiv OPlan 21–68, dtd 8Jun68, in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, pt. IV; 1st Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. II–C–6.

76. 1st Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. II–C–1, II–C–6; 1/11 ComdC, Jun68, p. 6.

77. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68, p. 106; 1st Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. II–E–2.

78. III MAF PerIntRep 27–68, pp. 4–5, in III MAF PerIntReps.

79. 1st Mar ComdC, Jul68, p. II–B–1; Conflicting enemy casualty figures are contained in FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, pp. 15–16; III MAF ComdC, Jul68, pt. III; III MAF PerIntRep 27–68, dtd 9Jul68, p. 1, in III MAF PerIntReps.

80. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jul68, p. 18; 2/1 ComdC, Jul68, pt. III.

81. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 16.

82. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68 Summary, p. 106; 1/11 ComdC, Jul68, p. 5.

83. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jul68, p. 19; III MAF ComdC, Jul68, pt. III; 1/1 ComdC, Jul68, p. 1–II–3, 1–II–5, 1–II–6, 1–II–9; 1/11 ComdC, Jul68, p. 5.

84. Laura Palmer, "The General, At Ease: An Interview with Westmoreland," *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, Autumn88, p. 33.

CHAPTER 17
MINI-TET AND ITS AFTERMATH IN SOUTHERN I CORPS

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: FMFPac, MarOpsV, May–Aug68; III MAF ComdCs, May–Aug68; 1st MarDiv ComdCs, May–Aug68; 1st MarDiv Admin Files; 1st MarDiv Journal and File, May–Aug68; 1st MarDiv SitReps, May–Aug68; TF X-Ray ComdCs, May–Aug68; 5th Mar ComdCs, May–Aug68; 7th Mar ComdCs, May–Aug68; 26th Mar ComdCs, May–Aug68; and 27th Mar ComdCs, May–Aug68.

Going into the Go Noi

1. 3/7 ComdCs Apr–May68; 7th Mar AAR, Allen Brook, dtd 27Jun68, in 1st MarDiv Admin Files, hereafter 7th Mar AAR, Allen Brook.

2. 7th Mar AAR, Allen Brook.

3. Ibid. and FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 21.

4. 7th Mar AAR, Opn Allen Brook and FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 22.

5. 7th Mar AAR, Allen Brook.

6. Ibid. and FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 22. The quote is from cover ltr CG1stMarDiv to ComUSMACV, dtd 17Jul68, 7th Mar AAR, Opn Allen Brook.

7. 7th Mar AAR, Allen Brook; Col Roger H. Barnard, Comments on draft, dtd 13Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Barnard Comments.

8. Barnard Comments; 7th Mar AAR, Allen Brook; FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 22.

9. 7th Mar AAR, Allen Brook; Barnard Comments.

10. Barnard Comments.

11. Ibid.

12. Col Tullis J. Woodham, Jr., Comments on draft, dtd 7Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Woodham Comments; "Eleven Days in May," ms, Encl, Woodham Comments, hereafter "Eleven Days in May"; 27th Mar ComdC, May68; 3/27 ComdC, May68; 3/27 CAAR, Operation Allen Brook, dtd 11Jun68, Encl 3/27 ComdC, May68, hereafter 3/27 CAAR, Allen Brook, Jun68.

13. Woodham Comments; 3/27 CAAR, Allen Brook, Jun68.

14. CG1stMarDiv SitRep No. 42 [misnumbered], Opn Allen Brook, in 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 7th Mar SitRep No. 42, Opn Allen Brook, in 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV [The 7th Mar report is in the 27th Mar ComdC]; 27th Mar SitRep for Period 170001H to 172400H May68, in 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 3/7 ComdC, May68, pt. II; Woodham Comments; 3/27 CAAR, Allen Brook, Jun68. NVA casualty figures are from 7th Mar SitRep No. 42 and CG1stMarDiv SitReps Nos. 48 and 49, Opn Allen Brook, in 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; See also 7th Mar AAR, Opn Allen Brook and FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 22.

15. Barnard Comments; 7th Mar AAR, Allen Brook; 3/27 CAAR, Allen Brook, Jun68.

16. This and the following paragraph are derived from these sources: Woodham Comments; 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. III; CG1stMarDiv SitRep No. 45, Opn Allen Brook, in 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV.; 27th Mar AAR for Opn Allen Brook, dtd 18Jul68, in 1st MarDiv Admin Files, hereafter 27th Mar AAR, Allen Brook; 3/27 CAAR, Allen Brook, Jun68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 23.

17. This and the following paragraph are derived from: 27th Mar AAR, Allen Brook; 3/27 CAAR, Allen Brook, Jun68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 24.

18. An additional source for this paragraph is: LtCol Donald N. Rexroad, Comments on draft, dtd 20Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

19. FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, pp. 23–24; 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. III; CG1stMarDiv SitReps Nos. 44 and 45, Opn Allen Brook, in 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 27th Mar SitReps for 180001H to 182400H May68 and 240001 to 242400H May68, in 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 27th Mar SitRep No. 77, Opn Allen Brook, in 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV.

20. Sources for this and the following paragraph are: 7th Mar AAR, Opn Allen Brook; FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, pp. 23–24; 27th Mar AAR, Allen Brook.

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21. FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, pp. 56–58; 7th Mar ComdC, May68, p. 6.

22. CG1stMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 9May68 (File No. 28, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 10May68); 1st MarDiv FragO 116–68, in 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 18May68.

23. 1st MarDiv FragO 116–68, in 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 18May68.

Operation Allen Brook Continues

24. 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. III; 27th Mar SitReps Nos. 85 and 93 for Opn Allen Brook, in 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 27th Mar SitReps for periods 280001H to 282400H May68 and 300001H to 302400H May68, in 27th Mar ComdC, May68, pt. IV; 1/26 ComdC, May68, pt. II; 1/27 ComdC, May68, p. 5; 3/5 ComdC, May68, p. 8.

25. 27th Mar AAR, Allen Brook, p. 18.

26. LCpl Jackie L. Bibbs intvw, 6Jul68, Tape 3048 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

27. 1st MarDiv FragO 151–68, in 1st MarDiv Journal and File 1–7Jun68.

28. 1/27 ComdC, Jun68, p.6.

29. PFC Michael W. Orr (?) intvw, 30Jun68, Tape 3053 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

30. 1st MarDiv FragO 151–68, pp. 1–2, in 1st MarDiv Journal & File, 1–7Jun68.

31. LtCol Albert W. Keller intvw, 19Jul68, Tape 3043 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter, Keller intvw.

32. Cpl Mark A. Guarinello intvw, 19Jul68, Tape 3043 (Oral Hist Coll, MCHC).

33. 1/27 ComdC, Jun68, p.7.

34. Keller intvw.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. 2/27 AAR for Opn Allen Brook, p.8.

38. CG1stMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 17Jul68 (File No. 34, 1st MarDiv Journal File for 17Jul68).

Mameluke Thrust Also Continues

39. 1st MarDiv FragO 151–68, in 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 3Jun68.

40. Ibid.

41. Sgt Randle C. Dixon intvw, 8Jul68, Tape 3054 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter, Dixon intvw; and 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jun68, p.30.

42. 1st MarDiv Special SitRep No. 99 for Opn Mameluke Thrust, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Jun68.

43. Special SitRep No. 102 for Opn Mameluke Thrust, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Jun68.

44. CO 7th Mar msg to CG1stMarDiv, dtd 15Jun68 (File No. 15, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 16Jun68).

45. Stevens, ed., *The Navy Cross,* p. 53.

46. Corporal David M. Sivak intvw, 8Jul68, Tape 3054 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

47. Dixon intvw.

48. 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 829, in 1st MarDiv Daily SitReps, Jul68.

49. 1/5 AAR for Opn Mameluke Thrust, dtd 20Jul68, p. 4, in 1/5 ComdC, Jul68, pt. IV.

50. 7th Mar ComdC, Jul68, p. 6.

51. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jul68, pp. 54, 57–8. See also C. A. Rocco, memo to CO 7th Engr Bn, dtd 23Aug68, Subj: Completion of Barrier Project, encl to LtCol Themistocles T. Annas, Comments on draft, dtd 6Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

52. 7th Mar ComdC, Jul68, p. 6.

53. 1st Recon Bn PatRep, dtd 31Jul68, in 1st Recon Bn ComdC, Jul68, pt. IV, tab B–185.

54. 5th Mar FragO 72–68, in 5th Mar ComdC, Jul68, pt. IV.

55. 1st Recon Bn SitRep No. 214–68, in 1st Recon Bn ComdC, Aug68.

56. 1st MarDiv SitReps Nos. 297–299 for Opn Mameluke Thrust, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Aug68.

57. Col James W. Stemple, Comments on draft, n.d. [1995] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Stemple Comments.

58. Stevens, ed., *The Navy Cross*, pp. 112–113.

59. 2/5 ComdC, Aug68, pp. 4, 9.

60. 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 317 for Opn Mameluke Thrust, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Aug68; Stemple Comments.

61. 1st MarDiv FragO 300–68, in 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 10Aug68.

62. 1st MarDiv FragO 312–68, in 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 16Aug68; and 5th Mar FragO 79–68, in 5th Mar ComdC, Aug68, pt.IV.

63. 5th Mar FragOs and SitReps, Operation Mameluke Thrust, 16–17Aug68, 5th Mar ComdC, Aug68.

64. 5th Mar ComdC, Aug68, p. 2–1; Stemple Comments. See also 5th Marines FragOs and SitReps, Operation Mameluke Thrust, 5th Mar ComdC, Aug68.

65. BLT 2/7 AAR for Opn Swift Play/Allen Brook/Mameluke Thrust, in BLT 2/7 ComdC, Aug68, pt. IV, hereafter BLT 2/7 AAR.

66. Ibid., p. 7.

67. 5th Mar SpecSitRep Nos. 86, 88, and 90 for Opn Mameluke Thrust, in 5th Mar ComdC, Aug68, pt. IV.

PART IV
The War Continues: Offensive and Counter-Offensive

CHAPTER 18
3D DIVISION TAKES THE OFFENSIVE

Unless otherwise noted material in this chapter is derived from: MACV ComdHist, 1968; FMFPac, MarOpsV, May–Jul68; III MAF ComdCs, May–Jul68; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Jun–Jul68; 1st Mar ComdCs, Jun–Jul68; 3d Mar ComdCs, Jun–Jul68; 4th Mar ComdCs, Jun–Jul68; 9th Mar ComdCs, Jun–Jul68; and 2/26 Mar ComdCs, Jun–Jul68.

The Enemy Situation

1. FMFPac, MarOpsV, May–Jun68; III MAF G–2, Periodic Intelligence Report 22–68, dtd 4Jun68; III MAF G–2, Periodic Intelligence Report 23–68, dtd 9Jun68; and 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68.

The Offensive Takes Shape

2. MajGen Raymond G. Davis intvw, 2Feb77, p. 17 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Davis intvw, 2Feb77.

3. Ibid.

4. Col Marion C. Dalby intvw, Jan69, Tape 3770 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

5. Davis intvw, 2Feb77, pp. 20–21.

6. Ibid., p. 23.

7. HQMC, Revision 2 to Table of Organization, M–1099, Infantry Regiment, Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, dtd 6Jun67.

8. Col Robert H. Barrow intvw, 12Dec68, Tape 3772 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Barrow intvw, 12Dec68.

9. Gen Robert H. Barrow intvw, 30Jan87 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

10. Barrow intvw, 12Dec68.

11. Gen Raymond G. Davis, Comments on draft ms, "U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1969," Aug86 (Vietnam 1969 Comment File, MCHC).

12. LtCol Joseph J. Scoppa, Jr. intvw, 9–12Dec68, Tape 3372 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

13. MajGen Raymond G. Davis intvw, 1Jan69, Tape 3768 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Davis intvw, 1Jan69; LtCol William J. Spangler, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File).

14. Ibid.

15. "Khe Sanh Inactivated . . . New 'Mobility' Emphasized," *Sea Tiger*, 12Jul68.

The Eastern DMZ

Additional sources for this section are drawn from: 3d Mar ComdC, Jun68; 1/3 ComdC, Jun68; 2/3 ComdC, Jun68; 3/3 ComdC, Jun68; 9th Mar ComdC, Jun68; 1/9 ComdC, Jun68; and 2/26 ComdC, Jun68.

16. Col R. B. Smith, "Leatherneck Square," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Aug69, p. 41, hereafter Smith, "Leatherneck Square."

The Pressure Continues

Additional sources for this section are drawn from: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jul68; 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jul68; 1stMar ComdC, Jul68, 3d Mar ComdC, 4th Mar ComdC, Jul68; 9th Mar ComdC, Jul68; and 2/26 ComdC, Jul68.

17. Col Vaughn R. Stuart, Comments on draft, dtd 20Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File) and Col William H. Dabney, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File).

18. HQ, XXIV Corps CAAR, Operation Thor, 16Aug68, in U.S. Army After Action Reports, 1968.

19. 1/3 ComdC, Jul68.

20. "Marines Smash NVA Near DMZ," *Sea Tiger*, 2 Aug 68.

21. 3d Mar AAR, Operation Napoleon/Saline, dtd 26Jul68 in 3d Mar ComdC, Jul68.

22. Ibid. and Capt Matthew B. McTiernan, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter McTiernan Comments.

23. 2/1 ComdC, Jul68.

24. Smith, "Leatherneck Square," pp. 41–42.

25. 9th Mar ComdC, July68.

26. 2/26Mar ComdCs, Jul–Aug68.

Into the Western Mountains

Additional sources for this section are drawn from: 3d Mar ComdC, Jul68; 1/3 ComdC, Jul68; 2/3 ComdC, Jul68; 3/3 ComdC, Jul68; 4th Mar ComdC, Jul68; 1/4 ComdC, Jul68; 2/4 ComdC, Jul68; 3/4 ComdC, Jul68; 9th Mar ComdC, Jul68; 1/9 ComdC, Jul68; 2/9 ComdC, Jul68; and, 3/9 ComdC, Jul68.

27. Task Force Hotel OpO 10–68, dtd 14Jul68 in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jul68; 3d Recon Bn ComdC, Jun68.

28. CG, Task Force Hotel, Critique of Lancaster II "July Action," n.d., in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Aug68, p. i, hereafter TF Hotel Critique.

29. Ibid.

30. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGProvCorpsV, dtd 26Jul68, in III MAF Message File.

31. TF Hotel Critique, pp. 6–7; 9th Mar AAR, "Lancaster II July Action," dtd 29Aug68, p. 10, in 9th Mar ComdC, Jul68.

32. Barrow intvw, 12Dec68.

33. Ibid.

34. BGen Carl W. Hoffman intvw, 12Aug68, Tape 3482 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

35. CG, Task Force Hotel "Final Comments," in TF Hotel Critique.

36. CG, Task Force Hotel, Critique "Canton II Action," n.d., in 4th Mar ComdC, Jul68.

37. Ibid., pp. 6–14.

Southern Quang Tri and Thua Thien

38. Additional sources for this section are drawn from: 1st Air CavDiv, Operational Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 July 1968, dtd 20Aug68; 101st Air CavDiv, Operational Report of 101st Air Cavalry Division for Period Ending 31 July 1968, dtd 15Aug68; 3dBde, 82d AbnDiv, Operational Report of 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division for

period ending 31 July 1968, 15Aug68; Task Force X-Ray ComdCs, Jun–Jul68.

CHAPTER 19
THE THIRD OFFENSIVE: DA NANG

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jul–Sep68; III MAF Comd, Jul–Sep68; III MAF PerIntRep Nos. 29–35, 14Jul–31Aug68; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jul–Sep68; 1st MarDiv Journal and File, Jul–Sep68.

Indicators

1. *Facts on File*, vol. XXVIII, No. 1447, 18–24Jul68, p. 289.

2. Quoted in FMFPac, MarOpsV, Aug68, p. 25.

3. III MAF PerIntRep No. 32–68, dtd 11Aug68, p. B–5; III MAF PerIntRep No. 34–68, dtd 27Aug68 in III MAF PerIntReps, 14Jul–31Aug68.

4. III MAF PerIntRep No. 36–68, dtd 10Sep68, p. C–2, in III MAF PerIntReps, 1Sep–12Oct68.

5. III MAF PerIntRep No. 33–68, dtd 20Aug68, pp. 7–8, in III MAF PerIntReps, 14Jul–31Aug68.

6. III MAF PerIntRep No.35–68, dtd 3Sep68, p. B–1, in III MAF PerIntReps, 14Jul–31Aug68.

7. III MAF PerIntRep No. 29–68, dtd 23Jul68, p.1, in III MAF PerIntReps, 14Jul–31Aug68.

8. Ibid.

9. CG1st MarDiv msg to 1st MarDiv, dtd 20Aug68 (File No. 37, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 20Aug68); CG1stMarDiv msg to 1st MarDiv, dtd 10Aug68 (File No. 6, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 11Aug68).

10. 1st MarDiv FragO 300–68, dtd 10Aug68 (File No. 64, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 10Aug68).

11. 1st MP Bn ComdC, Aug68, p. 8; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Aug68, p. 32.

12. CG1stMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 18Aug68 (File No. 43, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 18Aug68).

13. 1st MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 20Aug68 (File No. 38, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 20Aug68).

14. 1st MarDiv FragO 322–68, dtd 21Aug68 (File No. 54, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 21Aug68).

15. 1st MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 21Aug68 (File No. 30, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 21Aug68).

The Storm Breaks

16. 1st MP Bn Unit Diaries (UDs), 22Aug68 and 28Aug68.

17. Statement of PW 2dLt Nguyen Dinh Bon, NVA in III MAF PerIntRep No. 36–68, dtd 10Sep68, p. B–7 in III MAF PerIntReps, 1Sep–12Oct68.

18. 1st Tk Bn ComdC, Aug68, pt. II.

19. Sgt Larry K. Bucklew intvw, 7Sep68, Tape 3234, (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Bucklew intvw.

20. Crane Davis, "The Bridge at Cam Le," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Feb70, pp. 35–36, hereafter Davis, "The Bridge."

21. LCpl Stephen D. Hott intvw, 7Sep68, Tape 3234, (Oral HistColl, MCHC) and Davis, "The Bridge," pp. 35–36.

22. Cpl Wayne D. Brown intvw, 7Sep68, Tape 3234, (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Brown intvw.

23. SSgt Gary C. Sanders intvw, 7Sep68, Tape 3234, (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

24. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Aug68, p. 35.

25. Davis, "The Bridge," p. 36.

26. Ibid., pp. 36–37.

27. Ibid. and Col Joseph J. N. Gambardella, Comments on draft, dtd 16Jan95 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Gambardella Comments.

28. LCpl Henry Lowery and PFC Andrew Matlock, Jr., intvw, 7Sep68, Tape 3234, (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

29. Bucklew intvw and PFC David S. Levalley intvw, 7Sep68, Tape 3234, (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

Counterattack

30. Capt William O. Moore intvw, 6Sep68, Tape 3233, (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Moore intvw.

31. 1st Tk Bn Operational SpotRep, dtd 23Aug68 in 1st Tk Bn Journal for 23Aug68, Serial No. 11, 1st Tk Bn ComdC, Aug68, pt. IV.

32. Moore intvw.

33. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Aug68, pp. 33–34; Moore intvw.; Gambardella Comments; Stevens, ed., *The Navy Cross*, p. 126.

34. 1st Tk Bn ComdC, Aug68, pt. II.

35. 5th Mar msg to 1st MarDiv COC, dtd 24Aug68 (File No. 42, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 24Aug68) and 7th Mar msgs to 1st MarDiv COC, dtd 24Aug68 (File Nos. 44 and 45, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 24Aug68).

Pursuit

36. Davis, "The Bridge," p. 38; 1/27 ComdC, Aug68, p. 9a.

37. 1st MP Bn ComdC, Aug68, p. 9.

38. 3d AmTrac Bn msg to 1st MarDiv COC, dtd 24Aug68 (File No. 89, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 24Aug68).

39. 1st MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 24Aug68 (File No. 62, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 24Aug68).

40. Davis, "The Bridge," p. 38; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Aug68, p. 34.

41. 1st MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 25Aug68, (File No. 60, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 25Aug68).

42. 1st MarDiv FragO 333–68 in 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 26Aug68.

43. Stevens, ed., *The Navy Cross*, pp. 262–63.

44. 7th Mar msg to 1st MarDiv COC dtd 30Aug68 (1st MarDiv Journal and File for 30Aug68); 3/7 ComdC, Aug68, p. 4.

45. 5th Mar msg to 1st MarDiv COC, dtd 29Aug68 (File No. 13, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 30Aug68).

46. 1/5 AAR for Opn Mameluke Thrust, dtd 31Oct68, p. 22, in 1/5 ComdC, Oct68, pt. IV.

47. 1st MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 29Aug68 (File No. 55, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 29Aug68).

48. CG1stMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 30Aug68, (File No. 25, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 30Aug68).

49. 2/5 ComdC, Aug68, p. 12.

50. 5th Mar msg to 1st MarDiv COC, dtd 30Aug68 (File No. 89, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 30Aug68).

51. 1st MarDiv Special SitReps, Nos. 10 and 11 for Opn Sussex Bay in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Aug68.

52. 2/5 ComdC, Aug68, p. 13.

53. 3d AmTrac Bn ComdC, Sep68, p. 3.

54. 1st MarDiv Special SitReps for Opn Sussex Bay, Nos. 17–29, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Sep68; Col James W. Stemple, Comments on draft, n.d. [1995] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Stemple Comments.

Typhoon Bess

55. 1st MAW ComdC, Sep68, p. 20.

56. Stemple Comments.

57. 7th Mar msg to 1st MarDiv COC, dtd 5Sep68 (File No. 33,

1st MarDiv Journal and File for 5Sep68).

58. 7th Mar msg to 1st MarDiv COC, dtd 5Sep68 (File No. 17, 1st MarDiv Journal and File for 5Sep68).

59. III MAF PerIntRep No. 37–68, dtd 17Sep68, p. 1 in III MAF PerIntReps, 1Sep–12Oct68.

60. 5th Mar Special SitRep No. 41–68 for Opn Sussex Bay, in 5th Mar ComdC, Sep68.

61. 5th Mar Special SitRep No. 172 for Opn Mameluke Thrust, in 5th Mar ComdC, Sep68.

62. 5th Mar ComdC, Sep68, p. 3–2.

63. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Aug68, p. 35.

64. Moore intvw.

CHAPTER 20
AUTUMN OFFENSIVE HALTED

A New Orientation

Unless otherwise noted, material in this chapter is derived from: MACV ComdHist, 1968; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jul–Oct68; III MAF ComdCs, Jul–Oct68; 3d Mar ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 4th Mar Comd Cs, Aug–Oct68; 9th Mar ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; and 2/26 Mar Comd Cs, Aug–Oct68; and 31st MilHistDet, "The Critical Year, 1968: The XXIV Corps Team," Jan69.

1. CG, 3d MarDiv memo to AC/S, G–3, 20Jul68, in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Aug68.

2. HQ, 3d MarDiv, Infantry Company Operations in northern Quang Tri Province (Draft), 4Aug68, in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Aug68.

3. HQ, 3d MarDiv, Infantry Company Operations in Northern Quang Tri Province, 26Aug68, p. 2, in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Aug68.

4. Ibid., p. 9.

5. Ibid., p. 2.

6. MajGen Raymond G. Davis intvw, 1Jan69, Tape 3768 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Davis intvw, 1Jan68.

7. Ibid.

8. Gen Raymond G. Davis, Comments on draft ms, Aug86 (Vietnam 69 Comment File, MCHC).

9. III MAF ComdCs, Jul–Aug68; III MAF G–2, Periodic Intelligence Report 30–68, dtd 28Jul68; III MAF G–2, Periodic Intelligence Report 31–68, dtd 4Aug68.

The Eastern DMZ

Additional sources for this section are drawn from: 1st InfBde, 5th InfDiv(M), Operational Report-Lessons Learned, Period Ending 31 October 1968, 7Mar69; 1/1 ComdC, Aug68; 2/1 ComdC, Aug68; 3/1 ComdC, Jul68; 1/3 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 2/3 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 3/3 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 1/9 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 2/9 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 3/9 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 1st AmTrac Bn ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 3d Recon Bn ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; and 3d Tank Bn ComdCs, Aug–Oct68.

10. 3d Tank Bn ComdC, Aug68, p. 8.

11. CGXXIVCorps msg to COMUSMACV, dtd 16Aug68, in III MAF Message File.

12. Ibid.

13. *New York Times*, 21Aug68.

14. CG3dMarDiv Warning Order, 15Aug68, in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Aug68.

15. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGXXIV Corps, dtd 18Aug68, in III MAF Message Files.

16. CGXXIVCorps msg to CG3dMarDiv, 20Aug68, in III MAF Message File.

17. BLT 2/26 ComdC, Aug68.

18. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGXXIVCorps, dtd 19Aug68, in 3d Mar Div ComdC, Aug68.

19. CO 3d Recon Bn msg to CG3dMarDiv, dtd 26Aug68, in 3d Recon Bn ComdC, Aug68.

20. Ibid.

21. CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 21Jun68, in III MAF Message File.

22. CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 29Jun68, in III MAF Message File.

23. CMC msg to FMFPac, dtd 29Jun68, in III MAF Message File.

24. Hq, 3dBde, 82dAbnDiv, Operational Report-Lessons Learned, Period Ending 31 July 1968, 15Aug68, pp 3–4.

25. 1st AmTrac Bn ComdC, Sep68.

26. HQ, 1stBde, 5thInfDiv(M), Operational Report-Lessons Learned, Period Ending 31 October 1968, pp. 2–3.

27. 3d Tank Bn, ComdC, Sep68.

28. HQ, 1stBde, 5thInfDiv(M), Operational Report-Lessons Learned, Period Ending 31 October 1968, dtd 13Dec68, p. 3; HQ, 1/77Armor, AAR Operation Sullivan, dtd 1Nov68.

29. III MAF ComdC, Sep68.

30. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGXXIV Corps, dtd 19Sep68; CG3dMarDiv msg to CGXXIV Corps, dtd 20Sep68.

31. HQ, 1stBn, 11thInf AAR, Pioneer I, dtd 1Nov68.

32. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGXXIV Corps, dtd 11Oct68; CG3dMar

Div msg to CGXXIV Corps, dtd 11Oct68; CGXXIV Corps telcon to III MAF, dtd 12Oct68.

33. 1st AmTrac Bn ComdC, Oct68.

34. CG3d MarDiv msg to CGXXIV Corps, dtd 15Oct68, in III MAF Message File.

35. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGXXIV Corps, dtd 16Oct68, IIIMAF Message File.

36. 1st AmTrac Bn ComdC, Oct68.

37. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGXXIV Corps, dtd 23Oct68, in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Oct68.

38. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGXXIV Corps, dtd 25Oct68, in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Oct68.

39. MajGen Townsend msg to LtGen Cushman, dtd 21Nov68, in III MAF Message File.

40. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGXXIV Corps, dtd 29Dec68, in III MAF Message File.

Defeat of the *320th Division*

Additional sources for this section are drawn from: 1/3 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68, 2/3 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 3/3 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 1/4 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 2/4 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 3/4 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 1/9 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 2/9 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 3/9 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 1/12 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68, 2/12 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 3/12 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; 4/12 ComdCs, Aug–Oct68; MajGen R. C. Davis and 1stLt H. W. Brazier, "Defeat of the 320th," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Mar69, pp. 22–30; and 3d MarDiv AAR, Lancaster II, dtd 9Sep69.

41. Maj Gary E. Todd, Comments on draft, dtd 19Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Todd Comments.

42. Col Robert H. Barrow intvw, 12Dec68, Tape 3772 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Barrow intvw, 12Dec68.

43. Todd Comments.

44. Barrow intvw, 12Dec68.

45. 3d Recon Bn ComdC, Aug68.

46. Davis intvw, 1Jan69.

47. III MAF G–2, Periodic Intelligence Report 33–68, dtd 18Aug68, p. B–1.

48. 9th Mar AAR, Operation Lancaster II Jupiter, dtd 12Nov68, in 9th Mar ComdC, Aug68.

49. Barrow intvw, 12Dec68.

50. 3d Recon Bn ComdCs, Aug–Sep68.

51. Barrow intvw, 12Dec68.

52. 9th Mar AAR, Operation Lancaster Trousdale/Trousdale North, dtd 26Oct68, in 9th Mar ComdC, Oct68.

53. Barrow intvw, 12Dec68.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. MajGen R. C. Davis and 1stLt H. W. Brazier, "Defeat of the 320th," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Mar69, p. 28.

57. Barrow intvw, 12Dec68.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. HQ, 4th Mar, Anx B (Intelligence) to OpO 8–68, dtd 1Sep68, in 4th Mar ComdC, Sep68.

65. Barrow intvw, 12Dec68.

Coastal Quang Tri and Thua Thien: A Shift

Additional sources for this section are: HQ, XXIV Corps, Operational Report-Lessons Learned, Period Ending 31 October 1968, dtd 10Feb69; HQ, 1st CavDiv(AM), Operational Report-Lessons Learned, Period Ending 31 October 1968, dtd 7Mar69; and HQ, 101stAbnDiv, Operational Report-Lessons Learned, Period Ending 31 October 1968, dtd 11Mar69.

66. Gen Abrams msg to Gen Cushman, dtd 28Oct68, in III MAF Message File.

67. HQ, 1st CavDiv(AM), Operational Report-Lessons Learned, Period Ending 31 January 1969, dtd 6Jun69.

68. CGIIIMAF msg to CGXXIV Corps, dtd 4Oct68, in III MAF Message File.

69. Col Thomas H. Galbraith, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File).

CHAPTER 21
COUNTEROFFENSIVE OPERATIONS IN SOUTHERN ICTZ

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this chapter is derived from: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Sep–Dec68; III MAF ComdCs, Sep–Dec68; 1st MarDiv ComdCs, Sep–Dec68; 1st MarDiv Journal and File, Sep–Dec68.

The Situation in September

1. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Sep68, pp. 3–4, 61; 1st Mar ComdC, Sep68, p. II–B–2, III–B–1; 5th Mar ComdC, Sep68, p. 3–3; 3/26 ComdC, Sep68, p. 5.

2. Major Gary L. Telfer, Lieutenant Colonel Lane Rogers, and V. Keith Fleming, Jr., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1984), p. 139; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Oct68, p. 66; Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966* (Washington, DC: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1982), p. 270; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Sep68, pp. 14–15; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Sep68, p. 17; 1st MarDiv FragO 349–68 (File No. 18, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 3Sep68); 1st MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, dtd 5Sep68 (File No. 41, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 5Sep68); 1st Mar ComdC, Sep68, p. II–G–1; 2/27 ComdC, Sep–Dec68, p. 3.

3. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Sep68, p. 48; CG1stMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 15Sep68 (File No. 33, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 15Sep68); 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 891, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Sep68; 1st Mar ComdC, Sep68, p. II–B–1, II–C–4, III–C–1; 1/1 ComdC, Sep68, pt. III.

4. 3/7 ComdC, Sep68; 7th Mar S–3 Jnl entries for 14Sep68 and 7th Mar

SitRep No. 490, dtd 15Sep68 in Jnl and SitReps, Encl, 7th Mar ComdC, Sep68, hereafter 7th Mar S–3 Jnl entries and 7th Mar SitRep 490.

5. 3/7 ComdC, Sep68; BLT 2/7 ComdC, Sep68.

6. 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 898, 1st MarDiv SitReps, Sep68; BLT 2/7 AAR, Opn Dodge City, in 2/7 ComdC, Sep68, pt. IV, hereafter BLT 2/7 AAR, Dodge City; 2/7 ComdC, Sep68, pt. III; 3/7 ComdC, Sep68, pp. 5, 10; 7th Mar S–3 Jnl entries for 15Sep68 and 7th Mar SitRep 490.

7. BLT 2/7 AAR, Dodge City.

8. Ibid.

9. This and the following six paragraphs are derived from these sources: BLT 2/7 AAR, Dodge City, pp. 5, 7; 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 902, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Sep68; 7th Mar msg to 1st MarDiv COC, dtd 19Sep68 (File No. 28, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 19Sep68).

10. Additional sources for this and the next four paragraphs are: 7th Mar msg to 1st MarDiv, dtd 19Sep68 (File No. 205, 7th Mar Journal and File, 19Sep68, 7th Mar ComdC, Sep68, pt. IV); 7th Mar msg to 1st MarDiv COC, dtd 20Sep68 (File No. 6, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 20Sep68).

11. An additional source for this and the next three paragraphs is: 7th Mar msg to 1st MarDiv, dtd 20Sep68 (File No. 208, 7th Mar Journal and File, 20Sep68, 7th Mar ComdC, Sep68, pt. IV).

12. 7th Mar msg to 1st MarDiv COC, dtd 21Sep68 (File No. 50, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 21Sep68); 2/7 AAR, Dodge City, pp. 6, 8.

13. 2/7 ComdC, Sep68, pt. III; 2/7 AAR, Dodge City, pp. 6, 9, 12.

14. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: III MAF ComdC, Sep68, pt. III; PerIntRep No. 39–68 (III MAF PerIntReps), p. 3;. 1/26 SpotReps (File Nos. 1, 2, and 7, 1/26 Journal and File, 21Sep68, in 1/26 ComdC, Sep68, pt. IV).

15. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Sep68, p. 17; 5th Mar ComdC, Sep68, p. 3–2.

Operation Maui Peak

16. 1st MarDiv FragO 397–68 (File No. 7, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 1Oct68), p. 1; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Oct68, p. 7; III MAF ComdC, Oct68, p. 21; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Sep68, pp. 4, 57; III MAF PerIntRep No. 39–68 (III MAF PerIntReps), p. 3.

17. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Oct68, p. 7; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Oct68, p. 21; 1st MarDiv FragO 405–68 (1st MarDiv Journal and File, 5Oct68), p. 1; 2/7 AAR, Opn Maui Peak, in 2/7 ComdC, Oct68, pt. IV.

18. Col James W. Stemple, Comments on draft, n.d. [1995], hereafter Stemple Comments.

19. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: Ibid.; 5th Mar ComdC, Oct68; 7th Mar AAR, Opn Maui Peak, pp. 7–8, in 7th Mar ComdC, Nov68, pt. IV, hereafter 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak; 3/7 ComdC, Oct68, p. 5.

20. III MAF PerIntRep No. 41–68 (III MAF PerIntReps), p. 3; 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak; 2/5 AAR, Opn Maui Peak, pp. 2, 8, in 2/5 ComdC, Nov68, pt. IV, hereafter 2/5 AAR, Maui Peak.

21. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Oct68, p. 7; III MAF PerIntRep No. 41–68 (III MAF PerIntReps), p. 3; 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 1, Opn Maui Peak, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Oct68; 5th Mar ComdC, Oct68, p. 2–1; 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, pp. 6, 8; 3/5 ComdC, Oct68, pp. 3, 7.

22. 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, pp. 8–9; 2/7 AAR, Opn Maui Peak, p. 3, in 2/7 ComdC, Oct68, pt. IV, hereafter 2/7 AAR, Maui Peak.

23. 2/5 AAR, Maui Peak, p. 4.

24. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Oct68, pp. 7–11; 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, pp. 8–9; 2/5 AAR, Maui Peak, p. 4

25. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, p. 9; 2/5 AAR, Maui Peak, p. 4.

26. Additional sources for this paragraph are: III MAF PerIntRep No. 41–68 (III MAF PerIntReps), p. 3; 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 5, Opn Maui Peak (1st MarDiv SitReps, Oct68); 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, pp. 6, 10.

27. 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, p. 9; 2/5 AAR, Maui Peak, p. 3. Another source claims the Marines suffered 19 wounded. See 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 6, Opn Maui Peak, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Oct68.

28. 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, p. 10; 2/5 AAR, Maui Peak, p. 5.

29. 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 7, Opn Maui Peak, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Oct68; 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, pp. 10, 12.

30. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Oct68, pp. 11–12; III MAF ComdC, Oct68, p. 10; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Oct68, p. 34; 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 25, Opn Maui Peak, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Oct68; 7th Mar msg to 1st MarDiv COC, dtd 12Oct68 (File No. 28, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 12Oct68); 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, p. 15; 2/5 AAR, Maui Peak, p. 6; Stemple Comments. Enemy casualty claims for this engagement vary from 31 to 61. Figures in the text are from FMFPac, MarOpsV, Oct68, pp. 11–12; 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, p. 15; 2/5 AAR, Maui Peak, p. 6. The quotation is from Stemple Comments.

31. 1st MarDiv SitRep Nos. 23–34, Opn Maui Peak, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Oct68; 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, pp. 16–17.

32. 1st Mar ComdC, Oct68, p. II–B–2; 1/1 ComdC, Oct68, p. 1–II–3; 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, pp. 6, 18–19, 23–24; 11th Mar ComdC, Oct68, pp. 8–9; 2/7 AAR, Maui Peak, pp. 5, 8.

33. III MAF PerIntRep No. 42–68 (III MAF PerIntReps); 1st MarDiv SitRep Nos. 43, 45–47, 49, 52–54, Opn Maui Peak, in 1st MarDiv SitReps, Oct68; 1st MarDiv FragO 420–68 (File No. 2, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 20Oct68); 7th Mar AAR, Maui Peak, pp. 19–21; 2/7 AAR, Maui Peak, p. 5; 3/7 ComdC, Oct68, p. 5.

The End of Mameluke Thrust and Renewed Attacks on Da Nang

34. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Oct68, p. 14; III MAF ComdC, Oct68, p. 10, 22; III MAF PerIntRep No. 43–68 (III MAF PerIntReps); 1st MarDiv ComdC, Oct68, pp. 14, 18–19; 1st Mar ComdC, Oct68, p. II–B–1; 5th Mar ComdC, Oct68, p. 2–1, 3–1, 3–3; 5th Mar AAR, Opn Mameluke Thrust, p. 4, in 5th Mar ComdC, Nov68, pt. IV; 5th Mar AAR, Opn Henderson Hill, pp. 5–6, in 5th Mar ComdC, Dec68, pt. IV; 2/5 ComdC, Oct68, p. 2; 2/5 AAR, Opn Henderson Hill, p. 2, in 2/5 ComdC, Dec68, pt. IV; 3/5 ComdC, Oct68, p. 3; 3/5 AAR, Opn Henderson Hill, p. 4, in 3/5 ComdC, Nov68, pt. IV; Stemple Comments.

35. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Oct68, pp. 4, 48; III MAF PerIntRep Nos. 41–44 (III MAF PerIntReps).

36. Peter Grose, "22 Days of Tension Led to Turning Point in Talks," *The New York Times*, 1Nov68, p. 1; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Nov68, pp. 4 and 47; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68 and Summary, p. 78.

37. III MAF ComdC, Oct68, p. 37.

38. 5th Mar ComdC, Nov68, p. 2–1; 5th Mar FragO 112–68 (File No. 10, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 13Nov68); 2/5 ComdC, Nov68, p. 3.

39. III MAF ComdC, Nov68, p. 20; III MAF PerIntRep No. 46–68,

p. 5; III MAF PerIntRep No. 47–68, p. 4 (III MAF PerIntReps); 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 961, in 1st MarDiv Daily SitReps, Nov68; 1/26 ComdC, Nov68, pp. 7, 13; 1/26 SpotRep, 17Nov68 (File No. 1, 1/26 Journal and File, 17Nov68).

40. III MAF PerIntRep No. 47–68, p. 4 (III MAF PerIntReps); 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 965, in 1st MarDiv Daily SitReps, Nov68.

41. 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 119 for Opn Henderson Hill (1st MarDiv SitReps of Operations, Nov68); 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 136, Opn Henderson Hill, in 1st MarDiv SitReps for Operations, Nov68; 5th Mar ComdC, Nov68, p. 2–1; 5th Mar SpotRep, 22Nov68 (File No. 4, 5th Mar Journal and File, 22Nov68), in 5th Mar ComdC, Nov68, pt. IV; 5th Mar SpecSitRep No. 119 fot Opn Henderson Hill, 5th Mar ComdC, Nov68, pt. IV.

42. III MAF PerIntRep No. 48–68, pp. 4–5 (III MAF PerIntReps).

Operation Meade River

43. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Nov68, pp. 3, 28; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68 and Summary, p. 55; III MAF ComdC, Dec68, p. 21; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Oct68, p. 21; 1st Mar ComdC, Nov68, p. II–F–1.

44. 1st Mar AAR, Opn Meade River, dtd 10Jan69, Encl Col Robert G. Lauffer, Comments on draft, dtd 29Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter 1st Mar AAR, Meade River.

45. Col Robert G. Lauffer, Comments on draft, dtd 29Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Lauffer Comments; 1st Mar AAR, Meade River.

46. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Nov68, pp. 6–7; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Nov68, pp. 18–19; 1st Mar ComdC, Nov68, pp. II–C–5, II–E–1, III–A–4; 1st Mar AAR, Opn Meade River; 1/1 ComdC, Nov68, p. 1–III–4; 2/5 AAR, Opn Meade River (2/5 ComdC, Dec68, pt. IV), p. 3; 3/5 ComdC, Nov68, p. 7; 2/7 AAR, Opn Meade River (2/7 ComdC, Nov68, pt. IV), p. 4, hereafter 2/7 AAR, Meade River; 2/26 ComdC, Nov68, p. 5; 2/26 AAR, Opn Meade River (2/26 ComdC, Dec68, pt. IV), p. 4; Lauffer Comments.

47. 1st Mar ComdC, Nov68, p. II–C–1; 2/26 ComdC, Nov68, pp. 7, 13.

48. 1/1 ComdC, Nov68, p. 1–II–7; 1/1 SpotReps, dtd 20Nov68 (File Nos. 19, 27, 1/1 Journal and File, 20Nov68, in 1/1 ComdC, Nov68, pt. IV).

49. 2/7 AAR, Meade River, p. 6.

50. III MAF ComdC, Nov68, p. 9; 2/26 ComdC, Dec68, pp. 9–10.

51. 2/7 AAR, Meade River, p. 7.

52. LtCol Ronald R. Welpott, Comments on draft, dtd 19Mar95 (Vietnam Comment File).

53. 2/7 AAR, Meade River, p. 7; 2/5 AAR, Opn Meade River, in 2/5 ComdC, Dec68, p. 9.

54. 2/7 AAR, Meade River, pp. 7–8; 3/26 ComdC, Dec68, p. 5.

55. 2/7 AAR, Meade River, pp. 8–9; Col Neil A. Nelson, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec 1994] (Vietnam Comment File).

56. 1st Mar AAR, Meade River.

57. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Nov68, pp. 8–9; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Nov68, p. 23; 1st Mar ComdC, Nov68, p. II–C–2; 2/26 ComdC, Dec68, p. 6; LtCol James F. Foster, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Foster Comments.

58. 2/7 AAR, Meade River, pp. 9–10.

59. 1st Mar AAR, Meade River and LtCol John W. P. Robertson, "Operation Meade River," Taped Comments, n.d. [Dec68–Jan69], Encl Col John W. P. Robertson, Comments on draft, dtd 10Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Robertson Taped Comments.

60. 2/7 AAR, Meade River, p. 5; 3/26 ComdC, Nov68, p. 15.

61. 1st Mar ComdC, Dec68, p. II–C–1.

62. 1st Mar AAR, Meade River.

63. Ibid.; 1st Mar ComdC, Nov68, p. II–C–3; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Nov68, p. 8; Stemple Comments.

64. 1st Mar AAR, Meade River.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.; Robertson Taped Comments; Stemple Comments.

67. 1st Mar AAR Meade River; Robertson Taped Comments; III MAF ComdC, Dec68, p. 9; III MAF PerIntRep No. 49–68, in III MAF PerIntReps; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec68, p. 29; 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 62, Opn Meade River, in 1st MarDiv Operations SitReps, Dec68; 1st Mar ComdC, Dec68, p. II–C–2; 1st Mar SitRep Nos. 62, 63, Opn Meade River, in 1st Mar ComdC, Dec68, pt. IV; 26th Mar SpotRep, 5Dec68 (File No. 24, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 5Dec68). Most of the reports give differing enemy casualty figures, the lowest in Robertson Taped Comments and the largest in the 1st Mar AAR Meade River.

68. 1st Mar AAR Meade River.

69. Mr. Ronald J. Drez intvw, 29Mar89, Tape 6512 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Drez intvw; Stemple Comments.

70. Drez intvw.

71. Foster Comments.

72. 1st Mar AAR, Meade River.

73. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Nov68, p. 10; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec68, p. 29; 1st Mar SpotReps, 7Dec68 (File Nos. 34, 55, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 7Dec68); 3/26 ComdC, Dec68, p. 6; Foster Comments.

74. Drez intvw.

75. 1st Mar SpotRep, 8Dec68 (File No. 47, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 8 Dec68); Drez intvw.

76. Capt George B. Meegan, Comments on draft, dtd 2Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Meegan Comments.

77. 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 75, Opn Meade River, in 1st MarDiv Operation SitReps, Dec68; Drez intvw.

78. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Nov68, pp. 10–11; III MAF ComdC, Dec68, p. 9; 1st Mar ComdC, Dec68, p. II–C–4; 1st Mar SpotRep, 8Dec68 (File Nos. 11, 12, 13, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 9Dec68); 1st MarDiv SitRep Nos. 74, 76, Opn Meade River, in 1st MarDiv Operation SitReps, Dec68; 3/26 ComdC, Dec68, pp. 17–18.

79. 3/26 ComdC, Dec68, p. 6.

80. Medal of Honor Citation, SSgt Karl Gorman Taylor, Sr., 1971.

81. Robertson Taped Comments and Col JWP Robertson, Recommendation for Army Capt Luigi Lombardi, n.d. Apr93, Encl Col John W. P. Robertson, Comments on draft, dtd 10Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

82. Robertson Taped Comments; Drez intvw.

83. Foster Comments.

84. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Nov68, pp. 10–11; III MAF PerIntRep No.

50–68 (III MAF PerIntReps); 1st MarDiv SitRep No. 78, Opn Meade River, in 1st MarDiv Operation SitReps, Dec68; 1st Mar SpotReps, 9Dec68 (File Nos. 63, 64, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 9Dec68); 3/26 ComdC, Dec68, p. 18; Meegan Comments.

85. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Nov68, p. 3; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec68, p. 17; 1st Mar ComdC, Dec68, p. II–C–4, 5; 1st MAR AAR Meade River; CG1stMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 6Dec68 (File No. 25, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 7Dec68); III MAF PerIntRep No. 48–68 (III MAF PerIntReps), p. 5.

86. 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec68, p. 15; 1/1 ComdC, Dec68, p. 1–II–3.

Operation Taylor Common

87. CG1stMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 4Dec68 (File No. 30, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 4Dec68); MajGen Ross T. Dwyer intvw, 17Oct77, p. 35 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Dwyer intvw.

88. TF Yankee AAR, Opn Taylor Common (TF Yankee AAR, Opn Taylor, pt. 1), hereafter, TF Yankee AAR; TF Yankee FragO 1–68 (File No. 13, 1st MarDiv Journal and File, 7Dec68).

89. TF Yankee FragO 1–68 (File No. 18, TF Yankee Journal and File, 7Dec68).

90. III MAF PerIntRep No. 49–68 (III MAF PerIntReps), p. 5; 1st MarDiv ComdC, Dec68, p. 17; 5th Mar ComdC, Dec68, p. 3–2; 1/5 ComdC, Dec68, p. 2–1.

91. III MAF ComdC, Dec68, p. 10; 5th Mar ComdC, Dec68, p. 2–1; 2/7 ComdC, Dec68, p. 1–5; 2/7 AAR, Opn Taylor Common, in 2/7 ComdC, Dec68, pt. IV, hereafter 2/7 AAR, Taylor Common; Stemple Comments.

92. Dwyer intvw, pp. 45–46.

93. TF Yankee AAR, p. 39; 3d Mar ComdC, Dec68, p. 2–1; CG TF Yankee msg to CG1stMarDiv, 12Dec68 (File No. 9, TF Yankee Journal and File, 12Dec68); CG TF Yankee msg to 3d Mar and 5th Mar, 10Dec68 (File No. 3, TF Yankee Journal and File, 13Dec68); 5th Mar SpotRep to TF Yankee COC, 11Dec68 (File No. 4, TF Yankee Journal and File, 11Dec68).

94. 5th Mar SpotRep to TF Yankee COC, 11Dec68 (File No. 4, TF Yankee Journal and File, 11Dec68); TF Yankee AAR, p. 7; 3d Mar ComdC, Dec68, p. 5.

95. TF Yankee AAR, Encl 41, pp. 7–8; Stemple Comments.

96. 3d Mar ComdC, Dec68, p. 5.

97. Dwyer intvw, p. 44.

98. Ibid., p. 45; LtGen John H. Hay, Jr., *Vietnam Studies: Tactical and Materiel Innovations* (Washington, D.C.: Dept of the Army, 1974), p. 39.

99. TF Yankee AAR, Encl 41, p. 9; 3d Mar ComdC, Dec68, p. 5.

100. TF Yankee AAR, Encl 41, p. 11;

101. Dwyer intvw, pp. 31, 33.

102. Stemple Comments.

CHAPTER 22
THE DIVISION'S LABORS BEAR FRUIT

Unless otherwise noted, material in this chapter is derived from: MACV ComdHist, 1968; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Nov–Dec68; III MAF ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; 3d Mar ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; 4th Mar ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; and 9th Mar ComdCs, Nov–Dec68.

Elimination of the Infrastructure

Additional sources for this section are drawn from: 1st InfBde, 5th InfDiv(M), Operational Report-Lessons Learned for the Period Ending 31 January 1969, dtd 17Feb69; TF Bravo ComdC, 9–31Dec68; 1/3 ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; 2/3 ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; 3/3 ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; 3d Tk Bn ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; 1st AmTrac Bn ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; 3d MarDiv AAR, Napoleon Saline (Draft), n.d.; 1st InfBde, 5th InfDiv(M) AAR, Napoleon Saline II/Marshall Mountain, dtd 8Apr69.

1. CGIIIMAF msg to COMUSMACV, dtd 30Oct68; COMUSMACV msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 3Nov68, in IIIMAF msg file.

2. CGIIIMAF msg to CMC, dtd 17Jul68, in III MAF Message File.

3. COMUSMACV msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 22Oct68.

4. 1/9 ComdC, Nov68.

5. LtCol Walter W. Damewood, Jr. Comments on draft, dtd 31Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

6. 3d Mar OpO 8–68, dtd 12Nov68, in 3d Mar ComdC, Nov68.

7. 3d Mar OpO 9–68, dtd 21Nov68, in 3d Mar ComdC, Nov68.

8. CGIIIMAF msg to CGXXIVCorps, dtd 28Nov68, in 3d MarDiv Message File, Nov68.

9. 2/3 ComdC, Dec68.

10. MajGen Raymond G. Davis, FMFPac debrief, 15Apr69, Tape (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

Rough Soldiering

Additional sources for this section are drawn from: 1/4 ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; 2/4 ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; 3/4 ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; 1/9 ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; 2/9 ComdCs, Nov–Dec68; and 3/9 ComdCs, Nov–Dec68.

11. 2/4 ComdC, Dec68.

12. BGen Joseph E. Hopkins, Comments on draft, dtd 6Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

13. Ibid.

14. Col Robert H. Barrow intvw, 12Dec68, Tape 3772 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Barrow intvw, 12Dec68.

15. Ibid.

16. CG3dMarDiv msg to CGXXIVCorps, dtd 26Nov68, in 3d MarDiv Message File, Nov68.

17. Barrow intvw, 12Dec68.

18. Ibid.

19. 9th Mar OpO 1–69, dtd 30Dec68, in 9th Mar ComdC, Dec68.

Thua Thien

Additional sources for this section are drawn from: HQ, 101stAbn Div(AM), Operational Report-Lessons Learned, Period Ending 31 January 1969, dtd 24Feb69.

20. James Walters, Comments on draft, dtd 7Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

PART V
Supporting the Troops

CHAPTER 23
MARINE AIR AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR AND AIR SUPPORT OF KHE SANH

Unless otherwise noted the sources in this chapter are derived from MACV ComdHist, 1968; HQMC Msg File; HQMC, Status of Forces, 1968; FMFPac, MarOpsV, 1967–1968; III MAF ComdCs, Jan–Apr68; III MAF Jnl & Msg Files; 1st MAW ComdCs, Jan–Apr68; Westmoreland Papers, CMH; A&S Files, Indochina Archives; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; LtGen Willard Pearson, USA, *The War in the Northern Provinces, 1966–1968*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: Dept of the Army, 1975), hereafter Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*; Capt Moyers S. Shore II, *The Battle for Khe Sanh* (Washington, D.C.: HistBr, G-3Div, HQMC, 1969), hereafter Shore, *The Battle for Khe Sanh*; Bernard C. Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh* (Washington: Office of Air Force History, 1969), hereafter Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*; Naval Historical Center, *Command and Control of Air Operations in the Vietnam War*, Colloquium on Contemporary History, January 23, 1991, No. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Naval Hist Center, 1991), hereafter *Command and Control of Air Operations in the Vietnam War*; LtGen Keith B. McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," *Naval Review* 1971 (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1971), pp. 122–55, hereafter McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70."

Marine Air at the Beginning of the Year

1. McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," pp. 134 and 155; 1st MAW ComdC, Jan68, p. 1–4; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, p. 58a. See also "Distribution of Personnel, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, 31Dec67," in Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, App G, pp. 319–23.

2. 1st MAW ComdC, Jan68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, p. 58a; HQMC, Status of Forces, dtd 10Jan68, "Distribution of Aircraft, Fleet, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific," p. 10–1, hereafter "Distribution of Aircraft," 10Jan68. Because of the fluctuation of the number of aircraft from time to time, the figures are taken from the "Distribution of Aircraft," 10Jan68 as reflecting the figures as of that date.

3. MAG–16 ComdC, Jan68; "Distribution of Aircraft," 10Jan68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec67, p. 74.

4. MAG–16 ComdC, Jan68.

5. MAG–12 and MAG–13 ComdCs, Jan68; "Distribution of Aircraft," 10Jan68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec67, p. 74.

6. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, p. 63; McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," p. 131.

7. 1st MAW ComdC, Jan68, pp. 1–4; MAG–36 ComdC, Jan68; "Distribution of Aircraft," 10Jan68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec67, p. 74.

8. VMGR–152 ComdC, Jan68; "Distribution of Aircraft," 10Jan68; Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, p. 205; McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," p. 132.

9. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, pp. 59–60.

10. Ibid., pp. 59–60 and 65–66; MajGen Norman J. Anderson to MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon, dtd 17Jan68, McCutcheon Papers, PC464, 1968 Correspondence, File A.

11. III MAF ComdC, Jan68, p. 27; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, pp. 5, 59–60.

12. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan68, p. 68; 1st MAW ComdC, Jan68.

Marine Control of Air

13. MajGen Norman J. Anderson, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File).

14. McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," p. 132.

15. CGFMFPac, "Pacific Operations," General Officers Symposium Book, July 1967, Tab F, p. 21, hereafter CGFMFPac, "Pacific Operations;" McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," pp. 134–36; Gen Keith B. McCutcheon intvw, 22Apr71, pp. 1–4, 6 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter McCutcheon intvw, 22Apr71.

16. McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," pp. 134–36; McCutcheon intvw, 22Apr71, pp. 1–4, 6; Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1965*, pp. 151–2; Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, 268–9.

17. Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1965*, pp. 151–2; Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, pp. 268–9. For the Carey quote, see LtGen Richard E. Carey, Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

18. CGFMFPac, "Pacific Operations," p. 21

19. This and the following paragraph are derived from: Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1965*, pp. 151–2; Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, pp. 268–70; Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, p. 200; McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," pp. 134–36.

20. Col David S. Twining, Comments on draft, dtd 15Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

21. Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, p. 200; MACG–18 ComdC, Oct67 and Jan68.

22. Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, p. 200; McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," p. 138.

23. Ibid. and BGen Earl E. Anderson ltr to MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon, dtd 14Mar68 (McCutcheon Papers PC464, 1968 Correspondence, File A).

24. McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," p. 138; 1st MAW ComdC, Jan68, pp. 2–3—2–4.

25. McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," p. 138; 1st MAW ComdC, Jan68, pp. 2–3—2–4; Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, p. 200.

26. 1st MAW ComdC, Jan68, pp. 2–3—2–4.

27. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, pp. 66–7.

28. Twining Comments.

29. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, pp. 70–1.

30. CG1stMAW ltr to CMC, dtd 24Apr68, Subj: Single Management, Encl 16, HQMC, DCS (Air) Single Manager Fldr, Jan68–15Aug70; MajGen Norman J. Anderson intvw, 17Mar81, pp. 189–90 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81, and MajGen Norman J. Anderson ltr to BGen Edwin H. Simmons, dtd 8Sep1983 (Norman Anderson Papers, PC1263, MCHC).

Proposed Changes in Command and Control over Marine Air-Operation Niagara, January 1968

31. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, pp. 423–4; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 344; Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight For Khe Sanh*, pp. 14–5; Bernard C. Nalty, "Operation Niagara, Air Power, and the Siege of Khe Sanh," *Command and Control of Air Operations in the Vietnam War*, pp. 39–46, hereafter Nalty, "Operation Niagara, Air Power, and the Siege of Khe Sanh."

32. McCutcheon intvw, Apr 1971, p. 6; Chaisson intvw, 19Mar69, pp. 235–6; Nalty, "Operation Niagara, Air Power, and the Siege of Khe Sanh," pp. 39–46; Gen William W. Momyer, *Air Power in Three Wars, (WWII, Korea, Vietnam)* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1978), pp. 285–7.

33. MajGen John R. Chaisson intvw, Mar69, pp. 229–30 and 236–7 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

34. Ibid.; Graham A. Cosmas, "General Westmoreland and Control of the Air War," in *Command and Control of Air Operations in the Vietnam War*, pp. 29–36.

35. Westmoreland msg to Sharp, dtd 18Jan68, Doc no. 2, HQMC, DCS Air Folder, Single Manager, Jan68–15Aug70; Gen William C. Westmoreland, USA, intvw, dtd 4Apr83, p. 47 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

36. Sharp msg to Westmoreland, dtd 18Jan68, Doc No. 3, HQMC, DCS Air Folder, Single Manager, Jan68–15Aug70.

37. Westmoreland msg to Sharp, dtd 21Jan68, Doc No. 4, HQMC, DCS Air Folder, Single Manager, Jan68–15Aug70; ComUSMACV msg to CG III MAF and CG Seventh Air Force, dtd 22Jan68 (Doc No. 58, III MAF Incoming Msgs, Dec67–1Feb68); MACV ComdHist, pp. 423–4.

38. Norman Anderson, Memo For the Record, dtd 29Jan68 (Norman Anderson Papers, PC 1263, MCHC).

39. John Schlight, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, The War in South Vietnam, the Years of the Offensive, 1965–68* (Washington: Office of Air Force History, 1988), pp. 277–85, hereafter Schlight, *Years of the Offensive, 1965–68*; CGIIIMAF msg to Cdr, Seventh Air Force, dtd 24Jan68 (3d MarDiv, Messages, Jan68).

40. Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81, pp. 199–201; Schlight, *Years of the Offensive, 1965–68*, pp. 277–78; Nalty, "Operation Niagara, Air Power, and the Siege of Khe Sanh," p. 44; Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight For Khe Sanh*, pp. 72–4.

41. McCutcheon ltr to Norman Anderson, dtd 23Jan68, Letter No. 45 and Anderson ltr to McCutcheon, dtd 7Feb68, Letter No. 50, File A, 1968 Correspondence, Box 20 (McCutcheon Papers, PC464), hereafter Anderson ltr to McCutcheon, 7Feb68.

Operation Niagara and Air Resupply in the Defense of Khe Sanh

42. MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, pp. 423–24; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 3; Nalty "Operation Niagara, Air Power, and the Siege of Khe Sanh," pp. 39–46; Schlight, *Years of the Offensive, 1965–68*, pp. 277–85; Anderson ltr to McCutcheon, 7Feb68.

43. MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, pp. 423–24; Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*, pp. 83–6; Shore, *The Battle for Khe Sanh,* pp. 101–2.

44. Shore, *Battle for Khe Sanh,* pp. 102–3.

45. Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*, pp. 82–3.

46. Ibid., pp. 86–8.

47. MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, p. 423; Shore, *Battle for Khe Sanh*, p. 101; Col William H. Dabney intvw, 20May82, p. 65 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), pp. 21–2. hereafter, Dabney intvw, 20May82.

48. Shore, *Battle for Khe Sanh*, pp. 103–4; Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*, p. 66; 1st MAW ComdC, Mar68, p. 2–2; Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces*, pp. 71–2.

49. Shore, *Battle For Khe Sanh*, pp. 109–11

50. Quoted in Ibid., p. 97.

51. Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*, pp. 43–50.

52. Ibid. p. 62; Shore, *The Battle for Khe Sanh*, 72–4.

53. Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*, pp. 44–46; Shore, *The Battle for Khe Sanh*, 74–6.

54. LtGen John H. Hay, Jr., USA, *Vietnam Studies: Tactical and Materiel Innovations* (Washington, D.C.: Dept of the Army, 1974), pp. 22–23.

55. III MAF COC msg to MACV COC, 10Feb68 (III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File); 1/26 Journal for 10Feb68, Ser No 19 in 1/26 ComdC, Feb68, pt. IV.; LtCol Johnny O. Gregerson, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," 3Jan69 (Comment File, MCHC); Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*, p. 35; Shore, *Battle for Khe Sanh*, p. 76; CWO-4 Henry Wildfang, Comments on draft, dtd 26Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

56. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Feb68, p. 30; Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*, p. 45; III MAF Jnl & Msg File, 11–12Feb68, Ser. No. 100; 3d MarDiv COC msg to III MAF COC, 12Feb68 (III MAF Khe Sanh Ops File).

57. LtCol Robert Guay, "The Khe Sanh Airlift," 31Jan69 (1968 Background File, MCHC), p.4, hereafter, Guay, "The Khe Sanh Airlift;" Ray W. Stubbe, "Khe Sanh: Valley of Decision," ms, 1987 (Copy in Personal Papers Collection, MCHC), p. 895.

58. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 30; Shore, *Battle for Khe Sanh*, pp. 78–9.

59. This and the next paragraph are derived from the following sources: FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, pp. 83–4; Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*, pp. 51–52; Shore, *Battle for Khe Sanh*, pp. 78–9. The quote is from Shore, p. 78. The FMFPac account mentions only a crate of eggs being included with two of the eggs broken.

60. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 30.

61. Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*, p. 58; Asst C/S G–3, 1st MAW memo to CG1stMAW, dtd 12Aug68, Subj: Airlift Support of Khe Sanh in Meeting Notes Fldr (1968), MajGen Charles J. Quilter Papers MCHC, hereafter 1st MAW memo, 12Aug68, "Airlift Support of Khe Sanh" (Quilter Papers). Both Nalty and the author of the memo note the fragmentary nature of the statistics cited in the text. As the 1st MAW G–3 wrote, "we have sorted through our many reports—which contain some conflicting info and have arrived at the following as our best effort."

62. Dabney intvw, 20May82, p. 65; LtCol Harry L. Alderman, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," n.d. (Comment File, MCHC).

63. 3/26 ComdC, Feb68, p. 12.

64. This and the next two paragraphs are based on the following sources: MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," not dated (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter McCutcheon Comments, Khe Sanh; BGen Robert P. Keller, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," 17Dec68 (Comment File MCHC); Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81, pp. 225–6; MajGen Norman J. Anderson to McCutcheon, dtd 25Feb68, ltr no. 60, 1968 cor, File A (McCutcheon Papers), hereafter Anderson to McCutcheon, 25Feb68.

65. Additional sources for this paragraph are: 1st MAW OPlan 3–68, dtd 23Feb68, Encl Anderson to McCutcheon, 25Feb68; 1st MAW ComdC, Feb68, p. 2–3.

66. An additional source for this paragraph is: BGen Henry W. Hise to BGen Alan J. Armstrong, dtd 13Mar68, File A, 1968 Cor (McCutcheon Papers, PC464, MCHC), hereafter Hise to Armstrong ltr, Mar68 (McCutcheon Papers).

67. McCutcheon Comments, Khe Sanh; Dabney intvw, 20May82, pp. 25–6, 69; Hise to Armstrong ltr, Mar68 (McCutcheon Papers); 1st MAW ComdC, Mar68, p. 2–2.

68. 1st MAW ComdC, Mar68, p. 2–2; 1st MAW memo, 12Aug68, "Airlift Support of Khe Sanh" (Quilter Papers); Guay, "The Khe Sanh Airlift," pp. 7–8. Again there is some difference between the 1st MAW ComdC and the memo in the Quilter papers over the figures on the tonnage and passengers lifted out by the helicopters. According to the memo, the helicopters lifted 10,677 passengers and 3,379 tons of cargo. On the other hand, according to the command chronology, the choppers lifted 14,562 passengers and 4,661 tons. The figures in the memo are used in the text, as the authors of the memo made some attempt to resolve conflicting information.

69. Nalty, "Operation Niagara, Air Power, and the Siege of Khe Sanh," pp 39–46.

CHAPTER 24
A MATTER OF DOCTRINE: MARINE AIR AND SINGLE MANAGER

Unless otherwise noted the sources in this chapter are derived from MACV ComdHist, 1968; HQMC Msg File; HQMC, Status of Forces, 1968; HQMC DCS (Air) Single Manager Fldr, Jan68–15Aug70; FMFPac, MarOpsV, 1967–1968; III MAF ComdCs, Jan–Dec 1968; 1st MAW ComdCs, Jan–Dec68; Cushman intvw, Nov 82; MajGen Charles J. Quilter Papers, MCHC; Norman Anderson Papers; Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81; McCutcheon Papers, MCHC; Westmoreland Papers, CMH; Westmoreland intvw, 1983; Chaisson Papers, Hoover Institute; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; Bernard C. Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh* (Washington: Office of Air Force History, 1969), hereafter Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*; *Command and Control of Air Operations in the Vietnam War*; McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70."

The Establishment of Single Manager

1. Historical Summary, General Entry, 27Dec67–31Jan68, v.28, History File, Westmoreland Papers, CMH, hereafter Westmoreland, General Entry, 27Dec67–31Jan68; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 344; Graham A. Cosmas, "General Westmoreland and Control of the Air War," *Command and Control of Air Operations in the Vietnam War*, pp. 29–38.

2. Westmoreland intvw, dtd 4Apr83, p. 47. General Westmoreland did not recall the date of this meeting but he did meet with Cushman and General Norman Anderson about aviation arrangements on 19 January 1968. See Westmoreland entry for 19Jan68, Historical Summary, Westmoreland Papers, CMH.

3. Cushman Intvw, Nov82, pp. 33–4; Westmoreland intvw, 1983, p. 38; Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81, pp. 192, 194–5; MajGen Norman J. Anderson ltr to BGen Edwin H. Simmons, dtd 8Sep83, Norman Anderson Papers, PC1263 (MCHC), hereafter N. Anderson ltr, 8Sep83.

4. Westmoreland intvw, 1983, pp. 38–50, quote is on p. 39.

5. Ibid. p. 42; N. Anderson ltr, 8Sep83; Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81, pp. 192, 194–5.

6. BGen John R. Chaisson ltr to wife, dtd 28Jan68, Chaisson Papers, Hoover Institute; Westmoreland, General Entry, 27Dec67–31Jan68; Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81, pp. 194–5; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 342–3.

7. Gen William C. Westmoreland, Historical Summary, 1–29Feb68, pp. 4–5, Fldr 29, Westmoreland Papers (CMH); Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 342–3; N. Anderson ltrs to MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon, dtd 7 and 13 Feb68, Letters Nos. 50 and 58, File A, 1968 Correspondence, Box 20 (McCutcheon Papers, PC464)

8. Sharp msg to Westmoreland, dtd 18Jan68, Doc No. 3, HQMC, DCS Air Folder, Single Manager, Jan68–15Aug70; Gen Westmoreland to LtGen Krulak, dtd 28Jan68, Doc 68, III MAF Incoming Msgs, Dec67–1Feb68; MajGen Norman Anderson, Memorandum for the Record, dtd 17Feb68, Subj: Control of Air in the Defense of Khe Sanh (Norman Anderson Papers, PC1263), hereafter Anderson memo, Control of Air, 17Feb68.

9. Anderson memo, Control of Air, 17Feb68.

10. Ibid.

11. CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 18Feb68 (III MAF Provisional Corps, Vietnam Folder); BGen E. E. Anderson ltr to MajGen K. B. McCutcheon, dtd 19Feb68, Ltr No. 56, File A, 1968 Correspondence, Box 20 (McCutcheon Papers, PC464).

12. Westmoreland msg to Sharp, dtd 19Feb68, Doc 7, HQMC, DCS Air Folder, Single Manager, Jan68–15Aug70.

13. Transcript of III MAF Meeting with General Momyer, n.d. [20Feb68], Encl, Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

14. MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, p. 437; ComUSMACV ltr to CGIIIMAF, dtd 7Mar68, Subj: Single Management, Doc 14, HQMC, DCS Air Folder, Single Manager, Jan68–15Aug70; ComUSMACV msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 22Feb68, Doc No. 13, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 20Feb68–1Mar68; BGen John R. Chaisson, entry 29Feb68, Diary, Jan–Jun68, Chaisson Papers, Hoover Institute.

15. CMC, Memo for the Chairman, JCS, Subj: Single Management, dtd, 21Feb68, Doc 9, and MACV, Memo for the Chairman, JCS, Subj: Single Management, dtd 24Feb68, Doc 11, HQMC, DCS Air Folder, Single Manager, Jan68–15Aug70.

16. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 344; "Chronology of Events and Briefing for new CinCPac at HQMC . . ." in Command Relations and Air Control in ICTZ, n.d. [May68] Doc 20, HQMC DCS (Air) Single Manager, Fldr, Jan68–15Aug70, hereafter Chronology of Events, Doc 20; CGFMFPac msg to CG III MAF, dtd 6Mar68, Doc 2, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 4–14Mar68, hereafter CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 6Mar68; intvw with Sharp quoted in Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh*, p. 77.

17. CG1stMAW msg to Krulak and Cushman, dtd 18Mar68, Doc No. 8, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 15–27Mar68; Schlight, *The Years of the Offensive, 1965–68*, p. 285.

18. Quoted in CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 5Mar68, and cover sheet, Doc No. 1, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 5–14Mar68. See also ComUSMACV ltr to CG III MAF, dtd 7Mar68, Subj: Single Management, Doc No. 14, HQMC DCS (Air) Single Manager Fldr, Jan68–15Aug70, hereafter ComUSMACV ltr, 7Mar68 Single Management; Schlight, *The Years of the Offensive, 1965–68*, p. 285.

19. ComUSMACV ltr, 7Mar68, Single Management.

20. Ibid.

21. CG1stMAW msg to CGIIIMAF and CGFMFPac, dtd 18Mar68, Doc No. 8, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 15–27Mar68, hereafter CG1stMAW msg to CGIIIMAF and CGFMFPac, 18Mar68.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.; see also CG7thAF to CGIIIMAF, dtd 14Mar68, Doc No. 38, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 5–14Mar68.

24. CG1stMAW msg to CGIIIMAF and CGFMFPac, 18Mar68.

25. MajGen Norman Anderson ltrs to McCutcheon, dtd 19Mar68, Ltr No. 67, and dtd 4Mar68, Ltr No. 61, File A, McCutcheon Papers, PC464.

26. CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 6Mar68.

27. CMC memo to Joint Chiefs, Subj: Single Management, dtd 4Mar68, Doc No. 13, and Chronology of Events, Doc 20, HQMC DCS (Air) Single Manager Fldr, Jan68–15Aug70.

28. Admirals Hyland and Moorer are quoted in CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 15Mar68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

29. Westmoreland intvw, May 1983, p. 39; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 344–5. There is some contradiction between the interview and the book. In his book, he makes no mention of a telephone conversation with the President, but does mention discussing the subject with the President in April when on a visit to Washington.

30. Newspaper article quoted in CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 9Mar68, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 5–14Mar68.

31. Ibid. For Cushman and Anderson quotes see cover sheet to the FMFPac message. See also CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 11Mar68, Doc No. 27, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 5–14Mar68.

32. MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, p. 437.

33. CG1stMAW to CGFMFPac and CGIIIMAF, dtd 23Mar68, Doc No. 23, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 15–27Mar68.

34. Ibid.

35. CMC msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 26Mar68, in Folder, Memos for the Record, 1966–68, hereafter CMC msg 26Mar68, and McCutcheon ltr to MajGen Norman and BGen E. E. Anderson, dtd 26Mar68, Ltr No. 64, File A, 1968 Correspondence, (McCutcheon Papers, PC464), hereafter McCutcheon ltr, 26Mar68.

Point, Counterpoint

36. CMC msg 26Mar68 and McCutcheon ltr 26Mar68.

37. CG1stMAW msg to CG1stMarDiv and CG3dMarDiv, dtd 27Mar68, Doc. No. 33, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 15–27Mar68; Anderson draft of msg for Cushman to Westmoreland, n.d. [Apr68] [Info to CinCPac], MajGen Norman Anderson Papers, PC1263, hereafter Norman Anderson draft msg for Cushman [Apr68].

38. Norman Anderson draft msg for Cushman [Apr68].

39. CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 10Apr68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68; FMFPac, III MAF Ops, V, Mar68, pp. 66–7.

40. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 68.

41. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, p. 58.

42. BGen H. W. Hise personal ltr to MajGen Charles Quilter, dtd 5Apr68, Miscellaneous Fldr, 1950–May68, Charles J. Quilter Papers, MCHC.

43. CG1stMAW msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 5Apr68, Doc No. 36, and ComUSMACV msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 5Apr68, Doc No. 24, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 29Mar–11Apr68.

44. McCutcheon ltr to BGen E. E. and MajGen Norman Anderson, dtd 9Apr68, Ltr No. 68, File A, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers, PC464. See also Gen Leonard F. Chapman intvw, 28 Mar 1979, (Oral HistColl, MCHC), pp. 70–6.

45. CMC Green Ltr, 4–68, to all general officers, dtd 9Apr68, Subj: Air Control in I Corps, Green Ltr Book, 1968.

46. CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 14Apr68, Doc No. 19, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 7Mar–13Aug68.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. CGIIIMAF msg to CMC, dtd 4 May68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68; CG1stMAW ltr to CMC, dtd 24Apr68, Subj: Single Management, dtd 24Apr68, Encl 16, H6, HQMC DCS (Air) Single Manager Fldr Jan68–15Aug70, hereafter CG1stMAW ltr to CMC, 24Apr68.

50. CG1stMAW ltr to CMC, 24Apr68.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. CGIIIMAF msg to CMC, dtd 4May68, HQMC Msgs Mar–Jun68.

54. MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, pp. 437–9.

55. BGen John R. Chaisson ltr to wife, dtd 2May68, Chaisson Papers, Hoover Institute; MajGen Norman Anderson, draft of Memo for the Record, n.d. [2 or 4May68], Subj: Single Management, Norman Anderson Papers, PC1263, hereafter Norman Anderson draft memo, Single Management; CGIIIMAF msg to CMC, dtd 4May68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

56. Norman Anderson draft memo, Single Management.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid. and CGIIIMAF msg to CMC, dtd 4May68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

59. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 3May68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

60. BGen Homer E. Hutchinson ltr to McCutcheon, n.d. [May68], Doc No. 21, HQMC DCS (Air) Single Manager Fldr Jan68–15Aug70.

61. Ibid., and attached CinCPac Evaluation Team, draft rpt, n.d. [May 1968], Subject: Single Management of Air Support.

62. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 7May1968, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

63. MarOpsV, May68, p. 68; CGIIIMAF and CGFMFPac msgs to CMC, dtd 10May68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

64. CGIIIMAF msg to CMC, dtd 10May68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

65. Ibid.

66. Norman Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81, pp. 202–04; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, p. 60, May68, p. 68.

67. DepSecDef, Paul H. Nitze memo to Chairman, JCS, dtd 15May68, Subject: OpCon of III MAF Aviation, Assets, Doc No. 17, HQMC DCS (Air) Single Manager Fldr Jan68–15Aug70. Relative to HQMC presentations to DepSec Nitze, see HQMC, Briefing, Apr68, Doc No. 31, HQMC DCS (Air) Single Manager Fldr Jan68–15Aug70 and

McCutcheon ltr to MajGen Frank C. Tharin, dtd 24Apr68, Ltr No 37, File T, 1968 Correspondence, McCutcheon Papers, MCHC.

68. Chairman, JCS memo to DepSecDef, dtd 15May68, Subj: Single Management . . ., Doc No. 17, HQMC DCS (Air) Single Manager Fldr Jan68–15Aug70.

69. MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon memo to Gen Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., dtd 1May68, Subj: Air Control, in Fldr, Memos for the Record, 1966–68 and McCutcheon to MajGen Norman Anderson, dtd 17 May 68, Ltr No. 73, File A, McCutcheon Papers.

70. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 16May68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68; CMC Memorandum for the JCS, CMCM 29–68, dtd 18May68, Subj: Op Con of III MAF Aviation Assets, Doc No. 18, HQMC DCS (Air) Single Manager Fldr Jan68–15Aug70.

71. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 25May68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68; BGen John R. Chaisson, diary entry, 20May68, Chaisson Papers, Hoover Institute; JCS msg to CinCPac and ComUSMACV, dtd 20May68, Doc No. 19, HQMC DCS (Air) Single Manager Fldr Jan68–15Aug70.

72. CGFMFPac msgs to CMC, dtd 21 and 26 May68, and HQMC, ATA21 Point Paper, dtd 28May68, Subj: Change to the Single Management . . ., HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68 and MarOpsV, May68, pp. 68–9.

73. CGIIIMAF msg to CMC, dtd 26May68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

74. Ibid; LtGen Richard E. Carey, Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94, (Vietnam Comment File); MajGen Norman J. Anderson, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jan95] (Vietnam Comment File); CGIIIMAF msg to CMC, dtd 30May68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

75. ATA21, Point Paper, dtd 28May68, Subj: Change to the Single Management . . .; CGFMFPac msgs to CMC, dtd 26May68 and 30May68; CGIIIMAF msgs to CMC, dtd 26May68 and 30May68. All in HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

76. CGIIIMAF msgs to CMC, dtd 26 and 30 May 68 and CGFMFPac msgs to CMC, dtd 26May68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

77. HQMC AAM–7, Talking Paper, dtd 8Jul68, Subj: Air Control in Vietnam, in HQMC, General Officers Symposium Book, July 68, hereafter HQMC Talking Paper, Air Control in Vietnam; ATA21, Point Paper, dtd 28May68, Subj: Change to the Single Management . . ., HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68; McCutcheon to Norman Anderson, dtd 3Jun68, Ltr No. 76, File A, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers.

78. CMC msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 7 Jun 68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

79. HQMC Talking Paper, Air Control in Vietnam; CMC to CGFMFPac, dtd 19Jun68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68, hereafter CMC to CGFMFPac, 19Jun68.

80. CGFMFPac, 19Jun68.

The Continuing Debate

81. BGen John R. Chaisson, debriefing at FMFPac, May68, Chaisson Transcripts, pp. 147–73, p. 164.

82. Ibid. and Col Edward L. Fossum, debrief at FMFPac, 11Jul68, Tape No. 2911 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

83. CGFMFPac to CMC, dtd 16Jun68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68; Buse intvw, p. 191.

84. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 20Jun68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

85. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 22Jun68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

86. CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac and CMC, dtd 29Jun68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

87. Ibid.

88. CGFMFPac msg to III MAF, dtd 29Jun68 and CMC to CGFMFPac, dtd 29Jun68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

89. CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 30Jun68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

90. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jun68, p. 62; HQMC Talking Paper, Air Control in Vietnam; McCutcheon to MajGen C. J. Quilter, dtd 15Jul68, Ltr No. 35, File Q, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers, hereafter McCutcheon to Quilter, 15Jul68.

91. Chronology of Events, Doc 20, HQMC DCS (Air) Single Manager Fldr, Jan68–15Aug70; McCutcheon to Quilter, 15Jul68.

92. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 27Jul68, HQMC Msgs, Jul–15Oct68.

93. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: Hutch [BGen Homer G. Hutchinson] to McCutcheon, n.d. [Aug68], Ltr No. 48, File H, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers. See also Chapman intvw, p. 76.

94. CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 10Sep68, HQMC Msgs, Jul–15Oct68.

95. For the wing's initial optimism see A/CS, G–3, 1st MAW memo to CG1stMAW, dtd 10Sep68 (Rpts and Letters, Jun–Dec68, Quilter Papers). For General Wheeler's support see CMC msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 26Sep68 (HQMC Msgs, Jul–15Oct68). General Abrams is quoted in CGIIIMAF msg to CMC and CGFMFPac and CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 8Nov66 (HQMC Msgs, Jul–Dec68).

96. McCutcheon ltr to MajGen Charles Quilter, dtd 19Nov68, Ltr No. 39, File Q, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers.

97. Charles R. Smith, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1969, High Mobility and Standdown* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1988), pp. 225–6; Graham A. Cosmas and LtCol Terrence P. Murray, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1970–71* (Washington: Hist&Mus Div, HQMC, 1986), pp. 273–77; Bernard C. Nalty, "Operation Niagara, Air Power, and the Siege of Khe Sanh," in *Command and Control of Air Operations in the Vietnam War* (Washington: NHC, 1991), p. 46.

CHAPTER 25
A QUESTION OF HELICOPTERS

Unless otherwise noted the sources in this chapter are derived from MACV ComdHist, 1968; HQMC Msg File; HQMC, Status of Forces, 1968; FMFPac, MarOpsV, 1967–1968; III MAF ComdCs, Jan–Dec 1968; 1st MAW ComdCs, Jan–Dec68; Cushman intvw, Nov 82; MajGen Charles J. Quilter Papers, MCHC; Norman Anderson Papers; Norman Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81; McCutcheon Papers, MCHC; Westmoreland Papers, CMH; Gen Raymond G. Davis intvw, 2Feb77 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Davis intvw, 2Feb77; Westmoreland intvw, 1983; Chaisson Papers, Hoover Institute; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*; McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70;" LtCol William R. Fails, *Marines and Helicopters, 1962–1973* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1978), hereafter Fails, *Marines and Helicopters*.

Another Debate

1. Davis intvw, 2Feb77, pp. 45–7; Norman Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81, pp. 248–49, 259.

2. F. Clifton Berry, Jr., *Air Cav, The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1988), p. 85; LtGen Willard Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces, 1966–68* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1975), pp. 78–92; Charles R. Smith, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, High Mobility and Standdown, 1969* (Washington, D.C.: Hist&Mus Div, HQMC, 1988), pp. 239–41, hereafter Smith, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1969*.

3. Norman Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17 Mar 1981, pp. 250–51.

4. Norman Anderson ltr to McCutcheon, dtd 9Mar68, Ltr No. 62, File A, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers.

5. BGen E. E. Anderson ltr to MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon, dtd 16Apr68, Ltr No. 70, McCutcheon Papers, File A, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers; Gen Robert E. Cushman, debriefing at FMFPac, Mar69, pp. 470–71 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

6. Westmoreland quoted in MajGen John R. Chaisson intvw, 19Mar69, pp. 223–25 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

7. MajGen Alan J. Armstrong intvw, 25Sep1973, pp. 15–21 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Armstrong intvw; Norman Anderson intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar81, pp. 198–99.

The Need for Lighter Aircraft

8. MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon, Memorandum for the Record, dtd 18Jan68, Subj: Trip Report visit to West Pac with CMC, Jan68, Memos for the Record, 1966–8, McCutcheon Papers.

9. CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 1Mar68, Doc no. 50, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 20Feb68–1Mar68; CMC msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 12 Mar 68, Doc No. 30, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 5–14 Mar68, and CGIIIMAF msg to CMC, dtd 30 Mar68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

10. Fails, *Marines and Helicopters*, pp. 112–13.

11. Marine Corps Bulletin 05400, dtd 8Mar68, Subj: Activation of Fleet Marine Force Aviation Units, Accession No. 127–74–63, Central Files Records, 1968, Box No. 13, File No. 5400 (1Jan–30Apr68).

12. HML–367 ComdCs, Mar–Dec68; HML–167 ComdCs, Apr–Dec68; VMO–2 ComdCs, Jan–Dec68; VMO–6 ComdCs, Jan–Dec68; VMO–3 ComdC, Mar68; HQMC, Status of Forces, "Distribution of Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific," p. 10–1, dtd 25Jan68 and 5Dec68; Smith, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1969*, p. 238.

13. LtGen John J. Tolson, *Airmobility, 1961–71* (Washington: Dept of the Army, 1973), passim.

14. BGen Henry Hise ltr to BGen A. J. Armstrong, dtd 13Mar68, Ltr No. 66, File A, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers.

15. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 20Jun68, HQMC Msgs, Mar–Jun68.

16. Davis intvw, 2Feb77, pp. 49–51.

17. McCutcheon ltr to MajGen Charles Quilter, dtd 19Nov68, Ltr No. 39, File Q, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers.

To Keep the Mediums and Heavies Flying

18. Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 210–11 and Fails, *Marines and Helicopters*, pp. 101–02, 121–24; McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," p. 145. See also McCutcheon, Memorandum for the Record, dtd 9Feb68, Subj: Meeting with Mr. William Allen, President, The Boeing Company, Memos For the Record, 1966–68, McCutcheon Papers.

19. McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–70," p. 145; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jul68, p. 71 and Dec68, p. 111.

20. McCutcheon to Norman Anderson dtd 27Feb68, Ltr No. 57 and Norman Anderson to McCutcheon, dtd 4Mar68 Ltr No. 61, File A, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers.

21. Norman Anderson ltr to McCutcheon, dtd 4Mar68, Ltr No. 61, File A, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers.

22. McCutcheon to LtGen V. H. Krulak, dtd 30Apr68, Ltr No. 42, File K, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers, hereafter McCutcheon to Krulak, 30Apr68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Aug68, p. 61.

23. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68, p. 87; H. D. Hill draft ltr for MajGen Quilter to McCutcheon, n.d. [Nov–Dec68?], Reports and Letters, Jun–Dec68, Quilter Papers.

24. McCutcheon to Krulak, 30Apr68; MajGen C. J. Quilter to McCutcheon, dtd 10Aug68, Ltr No. 31, File Q, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers; Helicopter Spare Parts Support, Tab A, Item 7, III MAF, Board Report for Utilization, Command and Control of III MAF Helicopter Assets (Youngdale Report), dtd 11 and 27Apr69 and 17May69, hereafter the entire report will be referred to as the Youngdale Report.

25. Helicopter Spare Parts Support, Tab A, Item 7, Youngdale Report.

26. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan–Dec68 and 1st MAW ComdCs, Jan–Dec68. See especially FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 4 and 56–7; Jul68, p. 66; Dec68, pp. 74 and 86–8; 1st MAW ComdC, Dec68, p. 10.

27 FMFPac, MarOpsV, Feb68, p. 76; Dec68, pp. 86–7.

Another Look at Helicopter Air-Ground Relations

28. CG1stMAW msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 6Mar68, Doc No. 3, III MAF Incoming Msgs, 5–14Mar68; 1st MAW ComdC, Apr68, pp. 1–4 and 2–4; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Apr68, p. 62; Cushman intvw, Nov82, pp. 48–9; Col John E. Hansen, Comments on draft, dtd 17Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

29. Davis intvw, 2Feb77, pp. 72, 75–6.

30. Ibid., pp. 45–7.

31. Col William H. Dabney intvw, 20May1982, pp. 43–4 (Oral HistColl, MCHC). See also Col William H. Dabney, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File).

32. MajGen Norman J. Anderson ltrs to McCutcheon, 12 and 19Jun68, Ltrs Nos. 79 and 83, File A, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers.

33. MajGen Raymond G. Davis intvws, dtd 1Jan69 and 7Apr69, pp. 294–5, 307–8 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); BGen Homer Dan Hill to MajGen Norman Anderson, dtd 2Oct68, Ltr No. 51, File H, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers, hereafter Hill ltr, 2Oct68.

34. MajGen Raymond G. Davis intvw, dtd 7Apr69, pp. 308–09 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

35. E. E. Anderson to McCutcheon, dtd 30Nov68, Ltr No. 104, File A, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers; CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 19Dec68 and CGFMFPac msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 21Dec68 (HQMC Msgs, 16Oct–Dec68).

36. McCutcheon to MajGen C. J. Quilter, dtd 27Aug68, Ltr No. 32, File Q, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers; Hill ltr, 2Oct68. Last quote

from Hill is from Smith, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1969*, p. 238.

37. BGen E. E. Anderson to McCutcheon, dtd 17 Oct 68 [No number on ltr], File A, 1968 Cor, McCutcheon Papers and BGen E. E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

38. "Command Relationship," (Col Barrow's submission for broader consideration), n.d. [Oct–Dec68?] Undated Notes, Quilter Papers.

39. Ibid.

40. MajGen Raymond G. Davis, Letter to editor, clipping from *Marine Corps Gazette*, Feb 1969, Quilter Papers.

41. Ibid.

42. Youngdale Report. For detailed discussion of the Youngdale Report see Smith, *Marines in Vietnam, 1969*, pp. 239–40.

43. Youngdale Report.

44. Ibid.

45. Armstrong intvw, pp. 14–5; LtGen Thomas H. Miller, Jr., Comments on draft ms, Smith, *Marines in Vietnam, 1969*, dtd 5Sep88 (Vietnam Comment File).3.

CHAPTER 26
ARTILLERY AND RECONNAISSANCE

Unless otherwise noted the sources for this chapter are the FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jan–Dec68; III MAF ComdCs, Jan–Dec68; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Jan–Dec68; 1st MarDiv ComdCs, Jan–Dec68; 11th Mar ComdCs, Jan–Dec68; 12th Mar ComdCs, Jan–Dec68; Charles R. Smith, *The History of the 12th Marines*, (MCHC, Washington, D.C., 1972), hereafter Smith, *12th Marines*.

Marine Artillery Reshuffles

1. 11th Mar ComdC, Jan68.

2. Ibid.

3. The sources for this and the following paragraph are: CG3dMarDiv msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 7Jan68, Encl 13, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68; 12th Mar ComdC, Dec68, p. 1–II–2; Smith, *12th Marines*, p. 57.

4. Additional sources for this paragraph are: 12th Mar ComdC, Jan68; CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 11Jan68, Encl 12, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

5. LtCol Ralph Moody, "Artillery and Naval Gunfire," Chapter 21, in LtCol Ralph F. Moody, et al., "Marines in Vietnam, 1954–68," 8 pts (MS, MCHC, Washington, D.C., 1971), p. 34; 11th Mar, Opn Hue City Resume, 1–29 Feb68, App 2, Tab C, 11th Mar ComdC, Feb68; 11th Mar, Hue City Resume, 1Feb–2Mar68, App 2, Tab c, 11th Mar ComdC, Mar68.

The Guns in the North

6. Capt Moyers S. Shore, III, *The Battle for Khe Sanh* (Washington: Hist&Mus Div, HQMC, 1969), pp. 42–3; Maj Jerry E. Hudson, Comments on "The Battle for Khe Sanh," 2Jan69 (Khe Sanh Comment File, MCHC).

7. 26th Mar AAR for Opn Scotland, 31May68, p. 4, in 26th Mar ComdC, Mar68, pt. IV.

8. 12th Mar ComdCs, Jan–Mar68; 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Jan–Mar68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Mar68, p. 3.

9. 12th Mar, ComdC, Pt III, Apr68, p. 1–III–1.

10. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Mar68, p. 23–4, Apr68, pp. 23–4; 12th Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 1–II–2—I–II–4.

11. Gen Robert E. Cushman intvw, 1Nov82, p. 74 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

12. LtGen Louis Metzger, unpublished manuscript, n.p., n.d., pp 99–100.

13. 3d MarDiv ComdCs, Mar–Apr68; 12th Mar ComdCs, Mar–May68.

14. 12th Mar ComdC, May68, pp. 1–III–6—1–III–8.

Mini-Tet and the Fall of Ngog Tavak and Kham Duc

15. 11th Mar ComdC, Feb–Mar68; 2/13 ComdC, Jan–Feb68, p. 6.

16. 11th Mar ComdC, Apr68, p. 2.

17. 11th Mar ComdCs, Apr–May68; 2/13 ComdCs, Apr–May68; Ronald H. Spector, *After Tet, The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (The Free Press, New York, New York, 1993), pp. 166–67, hereafter Spector, *After Tet*.

18. S–4Jnl, 10May68, Encl 1, and CO, 2/13 ltr to CMC, dtd 25May68, Subj: Meritorious Unit Commendation; recommendation for, and Encl, App 1, S–1 Jnl, 2/13 ComdC, May68, hereafter 2/13 ltr to CMC, 25May68; Spector, *After Tet*, p. 167.

19. Paul Drew Stevens, ed., *The Navy Cross, Vietnam, Citations of Awards to Men of the United States Navy and the United States Marine Corps, 1964–1973* (Forest Ranch, CA: Sharp & Dunnigan Publications Inc., 1987), pp. 291–2.

20. Ibid., pp. 72–3.

21. 2/13 ltr to CMC, 25May68 with enclosures; Spector, *After Tet*, pp. 168–9.

22. FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 72; Spector, *After Tet*, pp. 169–71.

23. Col Franklin L. Smith debriefing at FMFPac [May 1968], Tape 2904 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); BGen Jacob E. Glick, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94?] (Vietnam Comment File); Spector, *After Tet*, pp. 169–75. For Abrams quote, see Spector, *After Tet*, p. 175.

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26. Ibid. and CO 12th Marines memo to CG3d MarDiv, dtd 4Jun68, Subj: Addendum to Opn Drumfire II AAR, Tab A, 12th Mar ComdC, Jun68.

27. 12th Mar ComdC, Jun68, p. 1–III–7.

28. CGProvCorpsV msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 22Jun68, Encl 16, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68.

29. ProvCorpsV OpO 15–68, dtd 24Jun68, Encl 18, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jun68.

30. XXIV Corps AAR, Opn Thor, dtd 16Aug68 in 3d MarDiv, USA After Action Reports, hereafter XXIV Corps AAR; PCV Preliminary AAR, Opn Thor, dtd 12Jul68 in 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jul68; VMCJ–1 ComdC, Jul68.

31. XXIV Corps AAR.

32. 1st MAW ComdC, Jun68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jul68, pp. 7–10.

33. 12th Mar ComdC, Jun68.

34. 1st MAW ComdC, Jul68.

35. III MAF ComdC, Jul68.

36. XXIV Corps AAR.

37. 12th Mar ComdC, Jun68.

38. 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jul68, p. 38.

39. XXIV Corps AAR.

40. MACV Comd Hist, 1968, p. 409.

41. Ibid., p. 374.

Fire Base Tactics

42.12th Mar ComdC, Dec68, 1–II–3.

43. LtCol Joseph Scoppa, III MAF intvw at Fire Base Dice, Dec 1968, Tape 3372 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Scoppa intvw; 12th Mar ComdC, Dec68.

44. Scoppa intvw.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid. and 12th Mar ComdC, Dec68.

49. Scoppa intvw.

50. 11th Mar ComdCs, Jul–Dec68.

Marine Reconnaissance Operations

51. 1st MarDiv ComdC, Jan68, pp. 31–33; 1st MarDiv to III MAF, resume of telecon, dtd 29Jan68 (III MAF Jnl&Msg File).

52. Patrol Report, Cayenne B–2–2, dtd 4Jun68, in 1st Recon Bn ComdC, Jun68, pt IV, Tab B–24.

53. 1st Recon Bn SitRep No. 156–68, p. 3, in 1st Recon Bn ComdC, Jun68, [SitReps] [pt 2 of 2 pts].

54. 1st Recon Bn PatRep, dtd 12Jun68, in 1st Recon Bn ComdC, Jun68, pt IV, Tab B–52.

55. 1st Recon Bn PatRep, dtd 16Jun68, in 1st Recon Bn ComdC, Jun68, pt IV, Tab B–80.

56. 1st Recon Bn SitRep No. 176–68, in 1st Recon Bn ComdC, Jun68, [SitReps] [2 of 2 pts] and 1st Recon Bn PatRep, dtd 1Jul68 in 1st Recon Bn ComdC, Jul68, pt IV, Tab B–6.

57. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68, pp. 49–50.

58. Col William D. Kent, intvw by Hist&Mus Div, dtd 27Aug91 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Kent Tape.

59. Ibid.; F. Clinton Berry, Jr., *The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War—Air Cav*, (New York and Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988), pp. 86–9.

60. Kent intvw.

61. Ibid.; Col Alexander L. Michaux, debriefing at FMFPac, 18Jul68, Tape No. 2915 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); LtCol Donald R. Berg, Comments on draft, dtd 9Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File); MajGen Raymond G. Davis, intvw by III MAF, Dec68–Jan69, pp. 284–6 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

CHAPTER 27
MANPOWER POLICIES AND REALITIES

Unless otherwise noted the material in this chapter is derived from: HQMC Msg File; Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1956–1967*, 12 bks (Washington: GPO, 1971), hereafter *Pentagon Papers* with appropriate section title and book, and section, volume or tab, and page number; Commandant's Reference Notebook, hereafter CMC Reference Notebook with appropriate year and tab; Col James W. Marsh, USMC (Ret) intvw with Capt David A. Dawson, 26Feb92, hereafter Marsh intvw; Headquarters, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Subj: Strength Report—Vietnam, hereafter MACV Strength Report; III MAF ComdCs; Department of Defense, OASD (Comptroller), Directorate for Information Operation and Control, *Selected Manpower Statistics*, (Washington, D.C.) 1968–1975, hereafter *Selected Manpower Statistics* with appropriate years; Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Navy and Marine Corps Military Personnel Statistics*, hereafter *M.C. Personnel Statistics*; Marine Corps Personnel Data Bases held by the Center for Naval Analyses, hereafter CNA Database; Headquarters Marine Corps Central Files, hereafter CF with appropriate year.

The average strength of line battalions was derived by taking the "average monthly strength" as reported in the command chronology of every infantry battalion not configured as a BLT in Vietnam for which this information was available. Average rifle company strength was derived from the unit diary report closest to the date in question for the first letter company of every battalion in Vietnam, with the exception of battalions for which this information was not available. The average strength of infantry battalion headquarters and service companies was derived in the same manner, using all H&S companies for which information was available save those in BLTs. The average strength of regimental headquarters companies was derived from the unit diary reports of the headquarters company for every regiment in Vietnam for the date in question.

1. Marsh intvw. See also DAC/S G–1, Presentation, 14 July 1967, General Officers Symposium Book, 1967, sec G, p. 2.

2. Gen Leonard F. Chapman intvw, 17Jan79, 28Mar79, p. 66 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Chapman intvw.

3. MajGen Jonas M. Platt, Comments on draft, dtd 6Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File).

Personnel Turnover

4. Vietnam Manpower Statistics File, RefSec, MCHC.

5. *Selected Manpower Statistics*, 1975, p. 52.

6. CMC Reference Notebook 1966–67, Subj: Terms of enlistment.

7. CMC Reference Notebook 1968, tab I–F, Senate Armed Services Committee insert for the record.

8. AC/S G–1, Presentation, 14 July 1967, General Officers Symposium Book, 1967, sec G, pp. 6–8.

9. AC/S G–1 Memo to DirPers, Subj: CONUS Divisions Personnel and Readiness Status FY68–FY69, dtd 2Jan68, CF 68; AC/S G–1, Presentation, General Officers Symposium Book, 8–12 July 1968, sec I, pp. 9–10.

10. Dep Dir Personnel Memo to CMC, Subj: Status of Military Personnel Procurement Results for FY68 (as of 30 June 1968), dtd 17Jul68, Encl 1, CMC Reference Notebook 1968.

11. Insert for the Record, Senate Armed Services Committee, 20Feb68, tab I–F, CMC Reference Notebook 1968,

12. AC/S G–1 memo to DirPers, Subj: CONUS Divisions Personnel and Readiness Status FY68–FY69, 2Jan68, CF 68.

13. CMC Reference Notebook 1970, Personnel, Subj: Enlistment Standards and Periods of Enlistment, 17Nov70; *Selected Manpower Statistics*, 1975.

14. DepDirPers Presentation, General Officers Symposium 1968, tab J, p. 2.

The Quality Issue and Project 100,000

15. Homer Bigart, "McNamara Plans to 'Salvage' 40,000 Rejected in Draft," *The New York Times*, 24Aug66, pp. 1, 18.

16. Memo, Subj: Enlistment of Marginal Personnel, n.d., p. 2, File 1100, CF 67.

17. Janice H. Laurence and Peter F. Ramsberger, *Low-Aptitude Men in the Military: Who Profits, Who Pays?* (New York: Praeger, 1991), p. 23.

18. Telephone intvw between Thomas D. Morris and Capt David A. Dawson, 24May91.

19. CMC Reference Notebook 1969, Subj: Enlistment of Marginal Personnel—Project 100,000; AC/S G–1 Presentation, General Officers Symposium Book, 1969, sec E, p 20.

20. Mark J. Eitelberg et al., *Screening for Service: Aptitude and Education Criteria for Military Entry* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Manpower, Installations, and Logistics], 1984), pp. 138, 147.

21. CMC Reference Notebook 1966–67, 1970, 1974.

22. Office of the Adjutant General, U. S. Army, *Annual Report of the Qualitative Distribution of Military Manpower Program* for 1951–1952 and FY 1953.

23. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Reserve Affairs), *Characteristics and Performance of New Standards Men: Final Report*, June 1971, Table A–3, A–6 (HumRRO Collection).

24. Lewis B. Puller, Jr., *Fortunate Son, The Autobiography of Lewis B. Puller, Jr.* (New York, New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), pp. 77–8.

25. LtCol Howard Lovingood intvw with Capt David A. Dawson, 17May91.

Training

26. CMC Reference Notebook, 1965–1968.

27. CMC Reference Notebook 1968, Subj: Basic Specialist Training, 8Jan68.

28. CMC Reference Notebook 1968, Subj: Recruit Training (Including Changes to Accommodate SEAsia), 26Apr68.

The Search for Junior Leaders

29. See Bernard C. Nalty and LtCol Ralph F. Moody, *A Brief History of U. S. Marine Corps Officer Procurement* (Washington, D.C.: Hist Div, HQMC, 1970, rev ed), hereafter Nalty and Moody, *Officer Procurement*, for a description of the commissioning of senior NCO's as temporary officers during these conflicts.

30. Based on data from *M.C. Personnel Statistics*. On 31 December 1967, the Marine Corps had 6,326 first lieutenants on active duty. Of these, 3,800 were ground officers, and 3,493 had more than four years enlisted service. Since almost all of the 4,059 temporary officers should have been first lieutenants by this time, almost all of the first lieutenants with more than four years enlisted service must have been temporary officers. This is further supported by the fact that only 453 captains and 133 second lieutenants had more than four years enlisted service at this time, for a total of 4,079 company grade officers. Even allowing for casualties, other attrition, and the possibility of promotion from second lieutenant to major in less than three years, temporary officers accounted for somewhere on the order of 3,200–3,350 first lieutenants. Since all temporary officers were ground officers, the bulk of ground-assignable first lieutenants must have been temporary officers.

31. Nalty and Moody, *Officer Procurement*, pp. 23–24.

32. Gen Wallace M. Greene ltr to LtGen James M. Masters, Sr., dtd 31 Aug67, CF67 File 5000/5.

33. Nalty and Moody, *Officer Procurement*, p. 22.

34. DAC/S G–1 Presentation, General Officers Symposium Book, 1967, tab G, p. 3.

35. Director, Policy Analyses Division memo to Chief of Staff, Subj: Questions Asked by CMC in a Review of Second Draft of SecNav Posture Statement, dtd 22Jan68, CF 68.

36. AC/S G–1 Presentation, General Officers Symposium Book, 1969, tab E, p. 16.

37. MCBul 5430, Subj: Activation of Career Advisory Branch, 8Apr68 and HQBul 5400, Subj: Activation of Career Advisory Branch, 12Apr68, both in CF 68

Discipline

38. CG1stMarDiv msg to 1st MarDiv, dtd 8Apr68, Encl 4, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Apr68.

39. DivBul 5100, Subj: Accidental discharges, 24Aug68, Encl 15, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Aug68.

40. DivBul 5100, Subj: Careless Discharge of Weapons, 24Oct68, Encl 19, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Oct68.

41. 1st MarDivO 5101.2A, Subj: Weapons Safety, 4Mar69, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Mar69.

42. CMC Reference Notebook 1968, tab I–K, Subj: Marijuana involvement on the part of Marines, 21May68.

43. Talking Paper: Narcotics, Dangerous Drugs and Marijuana, p. 5, tab Y, General Officers Symposium Book, 1968.

44. Charles R. Anderson, *Vietnam: The Other War* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1982), p. 45, hereafter Anderson, *Vietnam: The Other War*.

45. Ibid., p. 22

46. Ibid, p. 21–22.

47. Ibid., p. 23; LtCol Gary D. Solis, *Marines and Military Law in Vietnam: Trial By Fire*, (Washington, D.C.: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1989), p. 114; Maj Donald E. Milone, Comments on draft, n.d. [Dec94] (Vietnam Comment File).

48. The earliest racial incident recorded in HQMC files occurred in August 1968. Presumably there were racial incidents before this date, but this appears to be when HQMC began trying to keep track of racial incidents. CMC Reference Notebook 1972, Key Issue Paper, Subj: Equal Opportunity and Racial Unrest/Violence, n.d.

49. CMC msg to CGFMFPac, personal for LtGen Buse from Gen Chapman, dtd 17Oct68, HQMC Msg File.

50. CMC msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 22Oct68, HQMC Msg File.

51. Quoted in Otto J. Lehrack, *No Shining Armor* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992), p. 326.

Morale

52. MajGen Carl W. Hoffman intvw, 14Nov84 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Hoffman intvw, p. 160.

53. See Anderson, *Vietnam: The Other War*, Chapter 3.

54. Ibid., p. 2.

55. R&R figures from III MAF ComdCs, 1968.

56. Most Vietnam autobiographies and novels mention the disdain held by front line men for those in the rear. Examples include James Webb's *Fields of Fire* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978), Gustav Hasford's *The Short Timers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), and Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1977). Charles R. Anderson, in *Vietnam: The Other War*, discusses the guilt felt by rear area troops (pp. 20–21) and also the desire of men who have been in combat to find and keep these comfortable jobs (pp. 19–20).

57. Hoffman intvw, p. 138.

58. Col Robert D Heinl, USMC (Ret), *Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations* (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 1966), p. 22.

59. BGen R. R. Van Stockum, DepSrMbr, Navy Dept Board of Decorations and Medals Presentation, tab W, p. 2, General Officers Symposium Book, 1968.

60. Ibid.

61. For a discussion of the problems associated with men in combat without a realistic rotation plan, and the benefits of such a plan, see Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949), 2 vols, v. 2, Chapters 2 and 8.

62. For a discussion of how long men can stand sustained combat, see Anthony Kellet, *Combat Motivation* (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, 1982), pp. 276–277. Lord Moran, in *The Anatomy of Courage* (London: Constable & Company, 1945) also argues that the effects of combat are cumulative, and that every man has a breaking point.

63. Lt Ted D. Kilpatrick, MSC, USNR, and Harry A. Grater, Jr., "Field Report on Marine Psychiatric Casualties in Vietnam," *Military Medicine*, October 1971, p. 809.

The Aviation Shortage

64. LtCol William R. Fails, USMC, *Marines and Helicopters 1962–1973* (Washington, D.C.: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1978), p. 61, hereafter Fails, *Marines and Helicopters*.

65. News Release No. 923–57, DoD Office of Public Information, "NavCads Will No Longer Be Commissioned Early; Must Complete 18-Month Flight Training Course," 17Sep57, in Aviation: Pilot Training file, RefSec, MCHC.

66. News Release No. 414–55, DoD Office of Public Information, "Marine Corps Announces New Aviation Officer Candidate Course," 1May55 and "Marine Aviation Flight Training," July 1957, in Aviation: Pilot Training file, RefSec, MCHC.

67. Fails, *Marines and Helicopters*, p. 65; News Release No. 786–59, DoD Office of Public Information, "Marine Aviation Cadets Begin Training at Pensacola," 11Jul59, in Aviation: Pilot Training file, RefSec, MCHC.

68. Commandant, Marine Corps Schools, Presentation, p. 6, tab VI.A, General Officers Symposium Book, 1965.

69. Fails, *Marines and Helicopters*, p. 138; note 9.

70. Ibid., pp. 129–130.

71. Ibid., p. 139.

72. BGen E. E. Anderson, Memo for the Record, Subj: Telecon with LtGen V. Krulak, dtd 6Jan68, Norman J. Anderson Papers; CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 10Jan68, III MAF Incoming Msgs; MajGen Norman J. Anderson intvw, 17Mar81, pp. 254–56 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

73. DepDir Pers, Presentation, tab J, pp. 3–4, General Officers Symposium Book, 1968.

74. MajGen Carl A. Youngdale ltr to Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force, Subj: Board to Consider the Utilization, Command and Control of Marine Corps Helicopter Assets in III MAF, dtd 27Apr69, Encl (2), pp. 20–22, hereafter Youngdale Board.

75. Fails, *Marines and Helicopters*, p. 141.

76. MajGen Keith B. McCutcheon ltr to MajGen William G. Thrash et al., Subj: Graduation of Marine Officers from U.S. Air Force Flight Schools, dtd 14Feb68, and MajGen McCutcheon ltr to BGen E. E. Anderson, dtd 10Oct68, ltr No. 93, both in McCutcheon Papers, Box 20, PC464, MCHC; DCS Air Presentation, pp. 11–13, tab G, General Officers Symposium Book, 1968.

77. DCS Air Presentation, p. 24, tab I, General Officers Symposium Book, 1969.

78. Fails, *Marines and Helicopters*, p. 140.

79. DC/S Air memo to ACS, G–1, Subj: Manpower Overage for Occupational Field (OF) 63, dtd 12Apr68 (CF 68 file 5310).

80. Youngdale Board, p. 20.

81. Ibid., pp. 20, 22.

82. Ibid, p. 20.

Filling the Ranks in Vietnam

83. Unless otherwise noted, the number of Marines in Vietnam is taken from page 14–1 of the HQMC Command Center, Status of Forces.

84. "U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments," Dept of Defense, *Pentagon Papers*, bk 5, sec IV–C–6, vol. 2, pp. 213–214.

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87. CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 27Oct67, and CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 9Mar68; in HQMC Msg Files. MCBul 1300, Subj: Tour Lengths for Personnel Attached to Fleet Marine Force Units in the Far East, dtd 24Oct68, CF 1968, File 1300.

88. CMC ltr to CG MCB Camp Pendleton and CG MCB Camp Lejeune, Subj: Retraining of Personnel into Occupational Field 03, dtd 5Jun67, CF 1967, file 1500.

89. Staging Battalion ComdC, Jul–Dec 1967, pp. 3–4, Jan–Jun 1968, p. 3, in Camp Pendleton ComdC, Jul–Dec67.

90. MACV Strength Report for 31 Dec 1967, dtd 24 Jan 68, pp. 1–3, 104–119.

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94. CMC msg to CG FMFPac, dtd 13Feb68, in G–3 HQMC, 27th Marines Deployment file.

95. CMC msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 13Feb68, in HQMC G–3 file, 27th Marines Deployment; 5th Mar Div, RLT 27 Deployment AAR, dtd 8May68, hereafter RLT 27 Deployment AAR.

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97. The section on the deployment of RLT 27 has been drawn from the 27th Mar ComdCs and 1/27 ComdCs; the HQMC, G–3, 27th Marines Deployment folder; RLT 27 Deployment AAR; the General Officers Symposium Book, 1968; and the unit diaries of the appropriate units.

98. LtGen Adolph G. Schwenk intvw 23Jun82, p. 19 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

99. General Officers Symposium Book, 1968, tab I, p. 4.

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100. "U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments," *Pentagon Papers*, bk 5, sec IV–6–C, vol. 3, p. 11.

101. Ibid., p. 15.

102. Chapman intvw, p. 26.

103. General Officers Symposium Book, 1968, tab H, p. 2–3; CMC Reference Notebook 1968 tab VI–B–3–a, Subj: Marine Corps Reserve Units to be Activated upon Mobilization, 24Jan68.

104. CMC Reference Notebook 1968, tab VI–B–3–c, Subj: Readiness of 4th Division/Wing Team, 24Jan68; General Officers Symposium Book, 1969, tab E, p. 26.

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111. AC/S G–3, Presentation, tab D, p. 8, General Officers Symposium Book, 1968.

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114. LtGen Henry W. Buse, CGFMFPac, Presentation, tab M, pp. 14–15, General Officers Symposium Book, 1969.

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117. Col C. J. Robichaud debrief by FMFPac, 3Jun68, Tape 2813 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); Col William L. Dick debrief FMFPac, 21Jul68, tape 3036, Oral HistColl, MCHC). Both officers had recently returned from tours with the 3d Marine Division; Col Robichaud served as Commanding Officer, Task Force Robbie, and Col Dick as DC/S, Plans.

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119. Marsh intvw.

120. McLaughlin intvw, pp. 13–14.

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123. Staging Battalion ComdC, Jul–Dec 68, p. 4.

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126. HQ, 1st Bde, 5th InfDiv(M), Operational Report-Lessons Learned, Period Ending 31 October 1968, pp. 1–2.

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129. JCS msg to CinCPac, dtd 23Jul68, tab N, G–3, HQMC, RLT 27 Redeployment file, hereafter RLT 27 Redeployment File.

130. CGIIIMAF msg to ComUSMACV dtd 26Jul68, tab N, RLT 27 Redeployment File.

131. ComUSMACV msg to CinCPac, dtd 28Jul68 and JCS msg to CMC and CinCPac, dtd 10Aug68, tab N, RLT 27 Redeployment File.

132. CMC msg to CGMarCRecruitDep San Diego, dtd 6Sep68, tab HH, RLT 27 Redeployment File.

133. See all public announcements, speeches, and press guidance included in G–3, HQMC, RLT 27 return to Conus File, hereafter RLT 27 return to Conus File.

134. The number of returnees is based on AAR, Chronological Sequence of Events of the Return and Recognition of Regimental Landing Team 27, n.d., p. 7, tab A; Memo for Record, Subj: RLT–27 Return, 20Sep68, tab JJ; Encl 2, p. 2, no cover document, tab EE; all in RLT 27 return to Conus File.

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140. Marsh intvw; LtCol Richard J. Alger, intvw with Capt David A. Dawson, 16Jan92.

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CHAPTER 28
BACKING UP THE TROOPS

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15. Moody, Donnelly and Shore, "Backing Up the Troops," p. 22–15; III MAF Report on Logistics; Dillow Comments.

16. Moody, Donnelly and Shore, "Backing Up the Troops," p. 22–16; CG III MAF ltr to ComUSMACV, Subj: Performance of Duty by BGen George H. McBride . .. [USA], n.d. [Jul68], Encl, Dillow Comments; Meyerson Comments; Army Support Comd, Da Nang, Opn Rpt, dtd 18May68, Meyerson Comments.

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20. NSA, Da Nang, ComdHist 68; Hooper, *Mobility, Support, Endurance*, p. 74.

21. NSA, Da Nang, ComdHist 68; Marolda, *By Sea, Air, and Land*, p. 251.

22. TF Clearwater, ComdHist, 68–70, pp. 1–2; Marolda, *By Sea, Air, and Land*, pp. 186–8.

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25. "Typical Disposition of 100 Wounded," HQMC, Status of Forces, dtd 30Dec68, p. 20–2.

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29. Company A, 1st Engr Bn, CAAR, Opn Hue City, dtd 24Mar68, tab A, and Company B, 1st Engr Bn, CAAR, Opn Hue City, dtd 15Mar68, tab B, 1st Engr Bn, ComdC, Mar68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68, pp. 105–6.

30. 11th Engr Bn ComdCs, Mar–Apr68.

31. 1st Engr Bn ComdC, Jul68.

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34. FLC ComdC, Mar68, tab E, Encl 2, p. 6.

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36. FLC ComdC, Jun68, tab E, Encl 2, pp. 6–8.

37. FLC ComdCs, Aug68, tab E, pp. 6–7, and Oct68, p. 7.

38. FLC ComdC, Nov68, Encl 1, p. 8.

39. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68, p. 90.

PART VI
Other Perspectives: Pacification and Marines Outside of III MAF

CHAPTER 29
PACIFICATION

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Prelude

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2. For the Marine system, see Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, pp. 256–58; for the first quote see Richard Hunt, "Pacification and Counter-Insurgency," in *Vietnam Historians Workshop*, Plenary Session (Washington: Hist&Mus Div, HQMC, 9 May 1983), p. 4; fot the second quote see Thomas C. Thayer, *War Without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1985), pp 4–5, hereafter Thayer, *War Without Fronts*.

3. For this and the following paragraph, see FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec67, p. 49; 3d MarDiv, Topic No. 6, Psychological Operations, 3d MarDiv Working Papers, Input to III MAF Campaign Plan Quarterly Review, n.d [Dec67], Encl 78, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Dec67.

4. This and the following four paragraphs are drawn from Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*. pp. 243–45.

5. Ibid., pp. 249–50; Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, p. 184; MajGen Raymond L. Murray intvw, 1975, pp. 18–9 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Murray intvw.

6. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 165–6.

7. Ibid., 159–61; Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, pp. 44–5.

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11. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War*, pp. 41 and 117–19.

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13. MACV ComdHist, 1967, p. 320; MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, pp. 561–2; Komer, *Bureaucracy at War*, pp. 33–5.

14. MACV ComdHist, 1967, p. 320; MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, pp. 13–7.

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16. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 21Oct67, HQMC Msg File.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

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21. MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, p. 519; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec67, p. 53; Thayer, *War Without Fronts*, pp. 142–3.

22. MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, p. 519.

23. For an official opinion that the "crossover point" had been reached, see MACV J–2 estimate cited in CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 24Aug67, HQMC Msg File. Relative to the removal of the two categories, see MACV Briefing on Enemy Order of Battle, 24Nov67, quoted in Thayer, *War Without Fronts*, p. 31 and the discussion in Chapter 1.

24. Thayer, *War Without Fronts*, pp. 30, 33, and 208–09; MACV ComdHist, I, p. 544.

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25. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Feb68, p. 52 and Dec68, p. 53; MACV ComdHist, I, pp. 520, 536, 539, 541; Patrick J. McGarvey, untitled ms, Hoover Institution on War, Peace and Revolution, Stanford University, Chapter 6, p. 41.

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29. Ibid., pp. 554–55; Thayer, *War Without Fronts*, p. 169.

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34. MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, pp. 521, 525–6.

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37. Ibid; 1st MarDiv ltr to dist list, Subj: Restoration of Vietnam RR, dtd 1Aug68, and attachments, Encl 1, 1st MarDiv ComdC, Aug68; III MAF Fact Sheet, Subj: Da Nang-Hue Railroad, dtd 15Oct68, in III MAF Fact Sheets, Asst CMC Visit, 28 Oct–4Nov68, hereafter III MAF Da Nang-Hue Railroad Fact Sheet, 15Oct68.

38. III MAF Da Nang-Hue Railroad Fact Sheet, 15Oct68; III MAF ComdC, Nov68, p. 30; III MAF ComdC, Dec68, pp. 31–2; MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, p. 544.

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41. MajGen Norman J. Anderson, intvw, 3d Session, 17Mar1981, p. 231 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

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47. III MAF ComdC, Dec68, pp. 25–6 and 39–40; Chart of Chieu Hoi Returnees, Jan–Sep68, attached to III MAF Fact Sheet, Subj: Status of Pacification in I Corps, dtd 18 Oct68, in III MAF Fact Sheets, Asst CMC Visit, 28 Oct–4Nov68; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Feb68, p. 52, Dec68, p. 51.

48. III MAF ComdC, Feb68, p. 31; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68, p. 51; LtGen Donn J. Robertson intvw, 1973–76, p. 12 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

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55. Col Donald R. Myers, Comments on draft, dtd 27Oct94 (Vietnam Comment File); 1stLt Justin M. Martin ltr to wife, dtd 24Nov68, Encl to LtCol Justin M. Martin, Comments on draft, n.d. [Jul96] (Vietnam Comment File)

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57. LtCol Merrill L. Bartlett, Comments on draft, dtd 8Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File); Charles R. Anderson, *Vietnam, The Other War* (Novato, Cal: Presidio Press, 1982), pp. 71 and 75.

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76. LtCol Bryon F. Brady, intvw, Oct, 1984 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Brady intvw.

77. CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 19Aug67; CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 1Nov67; CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 2 Dec67 (Reel 4, HQMC Msg File);

78. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* p. 166; CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 2Dec67 and CGFMFPac msg to CMC, dtd 5Dec67 (Reel 4, HQMC Msg File).

79. Robert J. Komer, intvw with Martin Russ, 29 July 1976 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

80. "Discussions with Ambassador Komer, 7Jan68" in CMC, Trip Visit to Vietnam, Jan68.

81. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 216; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68, p. 656; Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons*, pp. 62–3; MajGen E. E. Anderson intvw, Dec68, Tape 3578 (Oral HistColl, MCHC) as quoted in Klyman, "The Combined Action Program," p. 34; Telephone conversation with Ambassador Robert Komer, dtd 29Jul85 as quoted in Klyman, "The Combined Action Program" footnote 19, p. 82.

82. CGIIIMAF ltr to CMC, Subj: Change to T/O for Combined Action Group etc., dtd 30Jan68, attached to III MAF Fact Sheet, dtd 12 Oct68, Subj: Combined Action Program, in III MAF Fact Sheets, Asst CMC Visit, 28 Oct–4Nov68, dtd 31Oct68; Resume of telecon, III MAF to FMFPac, dtd 10Jan68 in III MAF Special Report to FMFPac Fldr.

83. Igor Bobrowsky intvw, 3Dec1982, Tape Three, pp. 2–3 (Oral HistColl, MCHC). See also Igor Bobrowsky, Comments on draft, dtd 26Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File).

84. Thayer, "Pacification and Civil Affairs," v. 10, pp. 37–8.

85. Col Harold L. Oppenheimer, FMFPac debrief, n.d. [1968] (Oral HistColl, MCHC) and Col H. L. Oppenheimer, Deputy Special Projects, III MAF, memo, n.d. [May68?], Subj: Analysis Combined Action Program, Encl Brady Comments.

86. Brady intvw; LtCol Bryon F. Brady Presentation and Round Table Discussion, CAP Reunion, Oct84 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Brady Round Table; Brady Comments; Dir, CAP memo to DepCG, III MAF, Subj: Mobile CAPs, dtd 2Jun68, Encl, Brady Comments, hereafter Mobile CAP Memo, 2Jun68; Col Robert J. Keller, Comments on draft, dtd 2Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File).

87. Mobile CAP Memo, 2Jun68 and Brady Round Table.

88. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Feb–May68.

89. McGonigal intvw; Brady intvw; III MAF Force Bulletin 1306, Subj: Combined Action Program Personnel Assignment, dtd 18Apr68, in III MAF Combined Action Program Personnel Assignment Folder, Apr–Jul68.

90. III MAF Force O 3121.4B, Subj: Standing Operating Procedure for the Combined Action Program, dtd 22Jun68, in III MAF Combined Action Program Personnel Assignment Folder, Apr–Jul68.

91. Ibid.

92. FMFPac, MarOpsV, May68, p. 36; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Jul68, p. 33; III MAF ComdC, Jul68. There is some discrepancy in the number of Marines assigned to the program between FMFPac and III MAF. The FMFPac report for July reported only 1,773 Marines in the program.

93. Col Richard B. Smith, debrief at FMFPac, Jul68, Tape 3041 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); Col Alexander L. Michaux, debrief at FMFPac, 18Jul68 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); MajGen Raymond G. Davis, debrief at FMFPac, 15Apr69, p. 338 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

94. III MAF ComdC, Jul68; 4th CAG ComdC, Oct68; CO 4th CAG ltr to Director, Combined Action Program, Subj: 4th CAG proposed expansion plan . . ., dtd 9Aug68, tab 3, 4th CAG ComdC, Oct68.

95. FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68, p. 67; 2d CAG ComdCs, Oct–Dec68. There is again a discrepancy in numbers relative to the strength of the CAPs between the FMFPac report and the III MAF command chronology. The chronology showed a Combined Action strength for December as 38 officers and 1,871 Marine enlisted men as compared to 32 officers and 1,275 Marine enlisted men for January 1968, an increase of about 600 men. III MAF ComdCs Jan and Dec68. One explanation for the difference between the FMFPac figures and that of III MAF is that the III MAF figures represent an average over the month. It is also possible that the FMFPac report is not including the administrative personnel assigned to the Combined Action Groups and companies.

96. III MAF Fact Sheet, Subj: Status of Pacification in I Corps, dtd 18 Oct68, in III MAF Fact Sheets, Asst CMC Visit, 28 Oct–4Nov68; BGen E.E. Anderson ltrs to LtGen W. J. Van Ryzin, dtd 11 Sep68, and 16Oct68, Encls, Gen Earl E. Anderson, Comments on draft, dtd 18Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File); Cushman intvw, 1982, pp. 52–3.

97. Brady intvw and Brady Round Table; III MAF, Force/Senior Advisor I Corps Order 5080.10, Subj: Pacification Coordination, n.d. [Jul68], and III MAF, Force/Senior Advisor I Corps Order 508010A, Subj: Pacification Coordination, n.d. [Jul68], in III MAF Combined Action Program Personnel Assignment Fldr, Apr–Jul68; Background File on Proposed III MAF Order on Pacification Coordination, Jun–Aug?68, Encl, Brady Comments.

98. Questionnaire for Personnel Nominated for the Combined Action Program, n.d.; Brady intvw; Brady Comments; Igor Bobrowsky intvw, 3Dec1982, Tape One, p. 21 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Bobrowsky Tape One; Igor Bobrowsky, Corrections and Clarifications (Tape One), dtd 7 Dec1983.

99. Bobrowsky Tape One, pp. 17–8.

100. Eugene H. Ferguson intvw, 13Oct1984 (Oral HistColl MCHC), hereafter Ferguson intvw.

101. Ibid. and Bobrowsky Tape One, p. 1; Andrew Lewandowski, "I Feel Like I'm Fixin to Die . . ." Letters and Transcriptions of Vietnam Marine Sergeant Andrew Lewandowski, Mar 1968–Jun1969, compiled and edited by Dr. Eugene R. Slaski (ms, Andrew Lewandowski Papers, MCHC), pp. 451–2.

102. Maj Edward F. Palm, "Tiger Papa Three: A Memoir of the Combined Action Program," Special preview supplement, *Marine Corps Gazette*, February, 1988, pp. 1–3, hereafter Palm, "Tiger Papa Three."

103. Brady Round Table.

104. Palm, "Tiger Papa Three," Part Two, "The Fire Next Time," p. 20, and Palm Comments. James DuGuid intvw 14Oct1984 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter DuGuid intvw.

105. Igor Bobrowsky intvw, 3Dec1982, Tape Two, pp. 2–3, and 12 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Bobrowsky intvw, Tape Two.

106. Ibid., pp. 8–9; Thomas Harvey, Comments on draft, dtd 13Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File); Ferguson intvw, p. 14.

107. Lam Ha ltr to Robert Klyman, dtd 31Jan86, Robert Klyman Papers, Personal Papers Collection, MCHC.

108. Thayer, "Pacification and Civil Affairs," v. 10, pp. 28–38, quote is from p. 38.

109. Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons*, pp. 60–3. Harvey is quoted by Peterson, p. 61. See also Ferguson and DuGuid intvws.

110. Thayer, "Pacification and Civil Affairs," v. 10, pp. 36–7.

111. Bobrowsky intvw, Tape Two, p. 21; Michael E. Peterson, Comments on draft, dtd 10Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File); Lawrence A. Yates, "A Feather in Their Cap? The Marines' Combined Action Program in Vietnam" in William R. Roberts and Jack Sweetman, *New Interpretations in Naval History, Selected Papers from the Ninth Naval History Symposium, Held at the United States Naval Academy, 18–20 October 1989* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute Press, 1991), pp. 309–22, p. 320.

112. Francis J. West, Comments on draft, dtd 2Dec1994 (Vietnam Comment File). West's best known work on Combined Action is *The Village* (New York, Harper & Row, 1972).

The Accelerated Pacification Plan

113. MACV ComdHist, 1968, I, pp. 521–2.

114. Ibid. 521–2 and 532–3; FMFPac, MarOpsV, Dec68, pp. 5, 9, 42, 47, 57–8, 60, 62–3, 71–2. For continued progress in the Accelerated Pacification Campaign, see Smith, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1969*, pp. 280–83.

CHAPTER 30
OUTSIDE OF III MAF: THE SPECIAL LANDING FORCES, MARINE ADVISORS, AND OTHERS

The 9th MAB and the SLFs

Additional sources for this section are 9th MAB ComdCs, Jan-Dec68; LtCol Ralph F. Moody and Benis M. Frank, "Special Landing Force," draft ms, 1972 (MCHC), hereafter Moody and Frank, "Special Landing Force," ms.

1. 9th MAB ComdC, Jan68.

2. Ibid.; MarOpsV, Jan68, p. 91.

3. TG 79.5 ComdC, Jan68.

4. Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *Marines in Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 176–79. LtCol McQuown is quoted on p. 176.

5. BGen Jacob Glick intvw, 20 Jun and 11Jul89, p. 62 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Glick intvw; CG9thMAB msgs to CGFMFPac, dtd 3 and 5Jan68, Encl 3 and 4, 3d MarDiv ComdC, Jan68.

6. CG9thMAB msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 15Jan68, HQMC Msg File, Reel No. 4; Glick intvw, pp. 62–5.

7. Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, pp. 299–305; CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 11Oct67 (HQMC Msg File, Reel 7).

8. CGIIIMAF msg to CGFMFPac, dtd 16Oct67 (HQMC Msg File, Reel 7).

9. Moody and Frank, "Special Landing Force," ms, Chapter 8.

10. MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins intvw, 1973, pp. 60–1 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Tompkins intvw; Col Alexander L. Michaux debriefing at FMFPac, 18Jul68, Tape 2915 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

11. Tompkins intvw, pp. 60–1; LtGen Donn J. Robertson intvw, 1973–76, p. 14 (Oral HistColl, MCHC); Gen Robert E. Cushman intvw, 1 Nov 1982, p. 45 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Cushman intvw, 1982.

12. CGIIIMAF to CGs 1st and 3d MarDivs, dtd 19Dec67 (III MAF Outgoing Msgs, Oct–Dec67).

13. For discussion of the MACV contingency plan, see CGIIIMAF msgs to CGFMFPac, dtd 12 and 13Jan68 and CGFMFPac msg to CGIIIMAF, dtd 6Jan68 and to CMC, dtd 18Jan68 (HQMC Msg File, Reels 4 and 6).

14. CinCPac msg to ComUSMACV, dtd 19Jan68 (Westmoreland Papers, MACV msgs, Jan68); CinCPacFlt msg to CinCPac, dtd 20Jan68 (HQMC Msg Files, Reel 6).

15. LtCol Peter L. Hilgartner, "Amphibious Doctrine in Vietnam," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 53, no. 1 (Jan 1969), pp. 28–31. Quote is from p. 31.

16. Col Franklin L. Smith debriefing at FMFPac [May 1968] Tape 2904 (Oral HistColl, MCHC).

17. TG 79.5 ComdC, Jun68.

18. TG 79.5 ComdCs, Jul–Oct68.

19. BLT 2/26 ComdCs, Aug–Sep68. See also Com, Seventh Flt, Monthly Summary, Aug68 (OAB, NHD), pp. 36–7.

20. III MAF Fact Sheet, Subj: SLF Employment, dtd Oct 1968, Encl 24, to CGIIIMAF ltr to distribution list, dtd 31Oct68, Subj: III MAF Fact Sheets, Asst CMC Visit, 28 Oct–4Nov68, hereafter III MAF Fact Sheet, SLF Deployment; 9th MAB ComdC, Oct68.

21. III MAF Fact Sheet, SLF Deployment; BLT 2/26 ComdCs, Oct–Nov68.

22. CARG Bravo, Operation Daring Endeavor, Post Operation Rpt, dtd 13Dec68 in TG 76.5 Opn Rpts, 1967–69; TG 79.5 ComdC, Nov68.

23. Blt 2/26 ComdC, Dec68. Quotes are from entry dtd 8Dec68, p. 9 and BLT 2/26 CAAR, Opn Valiant Hunt, 15Dec68–5Jan69, dtd 1Jan69, tab A. Although Valiant Hunt AAR is dated 1 January 1968, it is obviously an error, as it contains entries through 5 January 1969, and is attached to the December 1968 ComdC.

24. TG 79.5 ComdC, Dec68; Col Clyde W. Hunter intvw, 10Jul69, Tape 4363 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), as quoted in Smith, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1969*, p. 297.

25. Smith, *U.S Marines in Vietnam, 1969*, pp. 300–310.

Sub-Unit 1, 1st Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (ANGLICO)

26. Sub-Unit 1, 1st ANGLICO, FMF, ComdC, 1Jan–31Mar68, dtd 15Apr68, hereafter SU–1 ComdC, Jan–Mar68. While the number of ANGLICO personnel with the Koreans probably relates to the number at the end of March, it is assumed that this did not differ greatly from the number assigned in January.

27. Ibid. and MCCC, Status of Forces, dtd 29Feb68. Although the Status of Forces report is dated 29Feb68, the strength figure for ANGLICO Sub-Unit 1 is for 18Jan68. The Status of Forces report does not give the strength of the various detachments of the sub unit.

28. SU–1 ComdC, Jan–Mar68 and attached AAR, OpnHue City, 31Jan–20Feb68.

29. Ibid.

30. SU–1 ComdC, Jan–Mar68, p. 2–2 and Anx D, AAR, Battle of Phan Thiet.

31. SU–1 ComdC, Jan–Mar68; Sub-Unit 1, 1st ANGLICO FMF, ComdC, 1Apr–30Jun68, dtd 19Jul68, hereafter SU–1 ComdC, Apr–Jun68.

32. SU–1 ComdC, Jan–Mar68; SU–1 ComdC, Apr–Jun68; Com Seventh Fleet, Monthly Historical Summaries, Jan–Jun68 (OAB, NHD); CinCPac Flt, Pacific Area Opns, Jun68 (OAB, NHD), p. 2.

33. Sub-Unit 1, 1st ANGLICO, ComdC 1Jul68–30Sep68, dtd 25Oct68, p. 2–1, hereafter SU–1 ComdC, Jul–Sep68; Seventh Fleet, Monthly Historical Summary, Jul68, pp. 2 and 23 (OAB, NHD); CinCPacFlt, Pacific Area Naval Operations Review, Jul68, (OAB, NHD), pp. 36–7.

34. SU–1 ComdC, Jul–Sep68, p. 2–1; Com Seventh Flt, Monthly Summary, Oct 68 (OAB, NHD), p. 35.

Embassy Marines

35. MCCC, Status of Forces, p. 14–1, dtd 10Jan68 and 20Mar68; Marine Security Guard Bn (StateDept) ComdCs, 10Feb67–1969; Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, p. 318.

36. OIC, Marine Security Guard Detachment, American Embassy, Saigon, Incident Report, No. 1–68, Subj: Viet Cong Attack on American Embassy, 31Jan68, dtd 23Feb68 (Marine Security Guard Bn (StateDept) ComdCs, 10Feb67–69, hereafter Incident Report, Viet Cong Attack; Statement of Capt Robert J. O'Brien, n.d. [31Jan–Feb68], Encl, Incident Report, Viet Cong Attack, hereafter O'Brien Statement.

37. The following paragraphs are based upon Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1971), pp. 2–40; Jack Shulimson, *Tet–1968, The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), pp. 17–18; Incident Report, Viet Cong Attack.

38. An additional source for this and the following paragraph is Statement of Sgt Ronald W. Harper, n.d. [31Jan–Feb68] in Incident Report, Viet Cong Attack, hereafter Harper Statement.

39. Additional source for this and the following paragraphs is O'Brien Statement.

40. Additional source for this paragraph is Statement of Sgt Richard G. Frattarelli, n.d. [31Jan–Feb68], in Incident Report, Viet Cong Attack, hereafter Frattarelli Statement.

41. Statement of GySgt Allen Morrison n.d. [31Jan–Feb68], in Incident Report, Viet Cong Attack.

42. Another source for this paragraph is Statement of SSgt Leroy J. Banks, n.d. [31Jan–Feb68], in Incident Report, Viet Cong Attack, hereafter Banks Statement.

43. Another source for this paragraph is Frattarelli Statement.

44. Additional source for this paragraph is Banks Statement.

45. Marine Security Guard Bn (State Dept) ComdC, 1Feb69–30Jun69 in Marine Security Guard Bn (State Dept) ComdCs, 10Feb67–1969.

Individual Marines in Saigon and Elsewhere in Vietnam

46. MCCC, Status of Forces, dtd 20Mar68, p. 14–1. For Chaisson's relationship to Westmoreland, see Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 343. For Chaisson's comments on 3Feb68, see Peter Braestrup, *Big Story, How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*, abridged ed. (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1983), p. 124.

47. MCCC, Status of Forces, dtd 29Mar69, p. 14–1.

48. MCCC, Status of Forces, dtd 10Jan68 and 29Mar69, p. 14–1.

Advisors to the Vietnamese Marine Corps

Additional sources for this section are: SMA, Vietnamese Marine Corps/Marine Advisory Unit Historical Summary 1954–1973, hereafter SMA, MACV Hist Summary, 1954–73; SMA, MACV Monthly Historical Reports, Jan–Dec68, hereafter SMA Monthly Rpts and month; SMA After-Action Reports, 1968; Col James T. Breckinridge, After Tour Report, dtd 18Apr69 in SMA, MACV After Tour Rpts, 1965–69, hereafter Breckinridge Rpt; LtGen Le Nguyen Khang intvw, 30Sep75 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), hereafter Khang intvw.

49. SMA Monthly Rpt, Jan68; Marine Advisory Unit Table of Organization Chart 1968, tab A, SMA, MACV Hist Summary, 1954–73, hereafter, Table of Organization Chart.

50. Table of Organization Chart; Breckinridge Rpt; LtCol Jerry I. Simpson, Comments on draft, dtd 10Nov94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Simpson Comments.

51. SMA, MACV Hist Summary, 1954–73.

52. SMA, MACV Hist Summary, 1954–73.

53. Ibid. and Breckinridge Rpt.

54. SMA, MACV Hist Summary, 1954–73; Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1965*, p. 204; Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, pp. 84–91.

55. Khang intvw., p. 23.

56. SMA, MACV Monthly Rpt, Jan68.

57. LtCol Pham Van Son et al., *The Viet Cong Tet Offensive (1968)* (Saigon: Republic of Vietnam, Joint General Staff, 1969), pp. 71–75, hereafter Pham Van Son, *The Viet Cong Tet Offensive*; Col Hoang Ngoc Lung, *The General Offensives of 1968–69*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1981), pp. 53–63, hereafter Lung, *The General Offensives*.

58. LtCol John J. Hainsworth, Comments on draft, dtd 12Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Hainsworth Comments.

59. SMA SitRep for period 28Jan–3Feb68, dtd 10Feb68 in SMA,

MACV SitReps, 1965–68, hereafter SMA SitRep, 10Feb68; Capt Harry J. Shane, MAU, NAG, CAAR, Tran Huong Dao, dtd 7Jun68, in SMA, MACV, AARs, 1968–69, hereafter SMA, CAAR, Tran Huong Dao.

60. SMA SitRep, 10Feb68; Hainsworth Comments; Newspaper Clippings, Encl, Hainsworth Comments.

61. SMA SitRep, 10Feb68; Simpson Comments.

62. SMA SitRep, 10Feb68; SMA, CAAR, Tran Huong Dao.

63. SMA SitRep, 10Feb68; SMA, CAAR, Tran Huong Dao; SMA, Monthly Rpt, Feb68.

64. SMA, CAAR, Tran Huong Dao; Lung, *The General Offensives*, p. 71.

65. SMA, CAAR, Tran Huong Dao.

66. SMA Monthly Rpts, Feb and Mar68; Maj Talman C. Budd II, MAU, NAG, CAAR, Hue City dtd 25Jul68, AAR in SMA, MACV, AARs, 1968–69; Tet Offensive statistical chart in Breckinridge Rpt.

67. Major Operations, Jan–Dec68 Statistical Chart and Col James T. Breckinridge, debriefing, dtd 2May69, hereafter Breckinridge debriefing, in Breckinridge Rpt.

68. Abrams msg to Westmoreland, dtd 23Feb68 (Abrams Papers, CMH); Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years*, The U.S. Army in Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1988), p. 312; Khang intvw, pp. 45–48; Breckinridge debriefing.

69. Breckinridge Rpt.

70. Breckinridge Rpt.

CHAPTER 31
1968: AN OVERVIEW

1. LtGen John R. Chaisson presentation to the Commandant's Advisory Committee on Marine Corps History, 27Jul92 (Oral HistColl, MCHC), p. 412.

Appendix A
Marine Command and Staff List
1 January–31 December 1968

III MAF Headquarters 1Jan–31Dec68

CG	LtGen Robert E. Cushman, Jr.	1Jan–31Dec68
DepCG	MajGen Raymond L. Murray	1Jan–14Feb68
	MajGen William J. Van Ryzin	15Feb–25May68
	MajGen Rathvon McC. Tompkins	26May–20Dec68
	MajGen Carl A. Youngdale	21Dec–31Dec68
DepCG Air	MajGen Norman J. Anderson	1Jan–21Jun68
	MajGen Charles J. Quilter	22Jun–31Dec68
DepCG Army	MajGen Richard G. Stilwell	12Apt–30Jun68
C/S	BGen Earl E. Anderson	1Jan–31Dec68
G–1	Col Poul F. Pedersen	1Jan–11Jul68
	Col Maurice Rose	12Jul–31Dec68
G–2	Col Kenneth J. Houghton	1Jan–28Feb68
	Col Herbert L. Beckington	29Feb–28Jul68
	Col Ray N. Joens	29Jul–31Dec68
G–3	Col Thomas L. Randall	1Jan–29Feb68
	BGen Carl W. Hoffman	1Mar–20May68
	BGen Jacob E. Glick	21May–14Aug68
	BGen Carl W. Hoffman	15Aug–31Dec68
G–4	Col Rex O. Dillow	1Jan–3Jul68
	Col Lawrence C. Norton	4Jul68–31Dec68
G–5	LtCol James L. Black, Jr.	1Jan–5Apr68
	LtCol Elmer J. Zorn	6Apr–31Oct68
	LtCol Howard A. Westphall	1Nov–31Dec68

Attached Units, III MAF Headquarters

SubUnit–1, 1st Radio Battalion

CO	LtCol Alfred M. Gray, Jr.	1Jan68–31May68
	LtCol James R. Quisenberry	1Jun–16Oct68
	LtCol Patrick J. Fennell, Jr.	17Oct–31Dec68

1st Marine Division Headquarters 1Jan–31Dec68

CG	MajGen Donn J. Robertson	1Jan–26Jun68
	MajGen Carl A. Youngdale	27Jun–20Dec68
	MajGen Ormond R. Simpson	21Dec–31Dec68
ADC	BGen Foster C. Lahue	1Jan–14Apr68
	BGen John N. McLaughlin	19Feb–25May68*
	BGen George D. Webster	15Apr–30Jun68
	BGen John E. Williams	23May–9Aug68
	BGen George D. Webster	10Aug–18Aug68
	BGen Ross T. Dwyer, Jr.	15Aug–31Dec68
	BGen Carl W. Hoffman	18Aug–31Dec68
C/S	Col Henry J. Woessner, II	1Jan–2Feb68
	Col James C. Short	3Feb–2Aug68
	Col Samuel A. Hannah	3Aug–31Dec68
G–1	Col William R. Earney	1Jan68
	Col Ernest W. Payne	2Jan–1Aug68
	LtCol Thomas L. Cobb	2Aug–31Aug68
	Col George E. Lawrence	1Sep–31Dec68
G–2	Col Russell E. Corey	1Jan–14Jan68
	LtCol Jack H. Butler	15Jan–21Jan68
	Col Herbert E. Ing, Jr.	22Jan–23May68
	LtCol Jack H. Butler	24May–26Oct68
	Col Anthony J. Skotnicki	27Oct–31Dec68
G–3	Col James C. Short	1Jan–30Jan68
	Col Paul G. Graham	31Jan–25Apr68
	Col Herbert Preston, Jr.	26Apr–1May68
	Col Robert D. Bohn	2May–13Jul68
	Col Herbert Preston, Jr.	14Jul–6Aug68
	Col Harry F. Painter	7Aug–30Sep68
	Col Adolph G. Schwenk	1Oct–31Dec68
G–4	Col Earl K. Vickers, Jr.	1Jan–4Jul68
	Col James E. Wilson, Jr.	5Jul–31Dec68
G–5	Col Herbert L. Beckington	1Jan–18Feb68
	Col Ross R. Miner	21Feb–4Sep68
	Maj Ronald L. Payne	5Sep–23Sep68
	Maj William T. Macy	24Sep–30Sep68
	Col Harry F. Painter	1Oct–31Dec68

Beginning on 19Feb68 there were two ADCs for the 1st Marine Division.

Task Force X-Ray

	BGen Foster C. Lahue	5Jan–6Apr68
	BGen John N. McLaughlin	7Apr–21May68
	BGen George D. Webster	22May–9Aug68*

**TF X-Ray was deactivated on 9Aug68.*

Headquarters Battalion

CO	Col Joseph F. Donahoe, Jr.	1Jan–6Jan68
	Col William R. Earney	7Jan–15May68
	Col Robert G. Lauffer	16May–9Aug68
	LtCol Charles F. Bunnell, Jr.	10Aug–17Sep68
	LtCol William S. Fagan	18Sep–31Dec68

1st Marines

CO	Col Herbert E. Ing, Jr.	1Jan–20Jan68
	Col Stanley S. Hughes	21Jan–16Jun68
	Col Ross T. Dwyer, Jr.	17Jun–14Aug68
	Col Robert G. Lauffer	15Aug–31Dec68
CO 1/1	LtCol Marcus J. Gravel	1Jan–8Jun68
	LtCol Archie Van Winkle	9Jun–7Sep68
	LtCol Albert W. Keller	8Sep–14Oct68
	LtCol Alphonse A. Laporte, Jr.	15Oct–31Dec68
CO 2/1	LtCol Evan L. Parker, Jr.	1Jan–8Jan68
	LtCol Billy R. Duncan	9Jan–9Aug68
	LtCol John E. Poindexter	10Aug–31Dec68
CO 3/1	LtCol Max McQuown	1Jan–31May68
	LtCol Daniel J. Quick	1Jun–25Oct68
	Maj Robert B. Ranck	26Oct–22Nov68
	LtCol Thomas E. Bulger	23Nov–31Dec68

5th Marines

CO	Col Robert D. Bohn	1Jan–30Apr68

	Col Paul G. Graham	1May–13Oct68
	Col James B. Ord, Jr.	14Oct–31Dec68
CO 1/5	LtCol Oliver W. van den Berg, Jr.	1Jan–7Jan68
	LtCol Robert P. Whalen	8Jan–1Feb68
	LtCol Robert H. Thompson	2Feb–7Aug68
	LtCol Richard F. Daley	8Aug–31Dec68
CO 2/5	LtCol George C. McNaughton	1Jan–2Jan68
	LtCol Ernest C. Cheatham, Jr.	3Jan–24Jul68
	Maj Orlo K. Steele	25Jul–31Jul68
	LtCol James W. Stemple	1Aug–31Dec68
CO 3/5	LtCol William K. Rockey	1Jan–27Mar68
	LtCol Donald N. Rexroad	28Mar–18Jul68
	LtCol Rufus A. Seymour	19Jul–15Oct68
	LtCol Harry E. Atkinson	16Oct–31Dec68

7th Marines

CO	Col Ross R. Miner	1Jan–20Feb68
	Col Reverdy M. Hall	21Feb–15Aug68
	Col Herbert L. Beckington	16Aug–31Dec68
CO 1/7	LtCol William J. Davis	1Jan–16Mar68
	LtCol William S. Fagan	17Mar–12Sep68
	Maj Denton Carter	13Sep–22Sep68
	LtCol William F. Bethel	23Sep–31Dec68
CO 2/7	LtCol John R. Love	1Jan–24Feb68
	LtCol Charles E. Mueller	25Feb–29Jul68
	LtCol Leroy E. Watson	30Jul–19Sep68
	LtCol Charles F. Bunnell, Jr.	20Sep–23Sep68
	LtCol Neil A. Nelson	24Sep–31Dec68
CO 3/7	LtCol Roger H. Barnard	1Jan–1Aug68
	LtCol Francis X. Quinn	2Aug–31Dec68

11th Marines

CO	LtCol Clayton V. Hendricks	1Jan–8Jul68
	LtCol John F. Barr, Jr.	9Jul–31Jul68
	Col Harry E. Dickinson	1Aug–31Dec68

1st Field Artillery Group

CO	LtCol Spencer F. Thomas	1Jan–15Jan68
	LtCol John F. Barr, Jr.	16Jan–4Jul68
	LtCol Reuel W. Stephens, Jr.	5Jul–29Aug68
	LtCol Richard P. Johnson	30Aug–26Nov68
	LtCol Raymond B. Ingrando	27Nov–31Dec68
CO 1/11	LtCol Robert C. V. Hughes	1Jan–30Jun68
	Maj John A. Hamilton	1Jul–9Jul68
	LtCol Spencer F. Thomas	10Jul–6Oct68
	Maj John A. Hamilton	7Oct–31Dec68
CO 2/11	LtCol David A. Clark	1Jan–9Feb68
	LtCol Ben A. Moore, Jr.	10Feb–6Sep68
	LtCol Robert D. Jameson	7Sep–31Dec68
CO 3/11	LtCol George T. Balzer	1Jan–14Feb68
	LtCol Harlan C. Chase	15Feb–21Aug68
	Maj Andrew F. Bauer	22Aug–26Oct68
	LtCol Frederick M. Woeller	27Oct–19Nov68
	Maj Andrew F. Bauer	20Nov–26Nov68
	LtCol Richard P. Johnson	27Nov–31Dec68
CO 4/11	LtCol John S. Hollingshead	1Jan–3Jan68
	Maj Frank B. Wolcott III	4Jan–14Aug68
	LtCol John M. Cockey	15Aug–13Dec68
	Maj Bobby J. Ready	14Dec–31Dec68

1st Reconnaissance Battalion

CO	LtCol Broman C. Stinemetz	1Jan–25Jul68
	LtCol Larry P. Charon	26Jul–31Dec68

1st Tank Battalion

CO	LtCol Vincent J. Gentile	1Jan–8Apr68
	LtCol Harry W. Hite	9April–27Aug68
	LtCol Maurice C. Ashley, Jr.	28Aug–31Dec68

1st Motor Transport Battalion

CO	Maj Charles F. Cresswell	1Jan–12Jan68
	LtCol Casimir C. Ksycewski	13Jan–19Sep68
	Maj Robert G. Reilly	20Sep–31Dec68

1st Engineer Battalion

CO	LtCol Logan Cassedy	1Jan–30Apr68
	Maj Sven A. Johnson	1May–30Jul68
	LtCol Donald H. Hildebrand	31Jul–31Dec68

1st Medical Battalion

CO	Cdr Clinton H. Lowery, MC, USN	1Jan–27Feb68
	Cdr James V. Sharp, MC, USN	28Feb–31Dec68

1st Shore Party Battalion

	LtCol Nicholas Kavakich	1Jan–15Oct68
	LtCol Donald L. Anderson	16Oct–31Dec68

3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion

CO	LtCol Robert L. Shuford	1Jan–5Jan68
	LtCol Robert E. Haebel	6Jan–30Jul68
	Maj Frank C. Chace, Jr.	31Jul–16Oct68
	Maj John H. Keegan, Jr.	17Oct–4Nov68
	LtCol Joseph E. Hennegan	5Nov–31Dec68

11th Motor Transport Battalion

CO	LtCol Joseph B. Brown, Jr.	1Jan–14Jul68
	Maj Billy M. Floyd	15Jul–6Sep68
	LtCol John A. Kinniburgh	7Sep–31Dec68

7th Communication Battalion

CO	LtCol Harry O. Cowing, Jr.	1Jan–30Jun68
	Maj Theodore F. Benner, Jr.	1Jul–1Oct68
	LtCol Charles L. Brady	2Oct–31Dec68

7th Engineer Battalion

CO	LtCol Ray Funderburk	1Jan–9Aug68
	LtCol Themistocles T. Annas	10Aug–31Dec68

9th Engineer Battalion

CO	LtCol Horacio E. Perea	1Jan–14Sep68
	LtCol Darrell U. Davidson	15Sep–31Dec68

3d Marine Division Headquarters

CG	MajGen Raymond G. Davis	21May–31Dec68
ADC	MajGen Louis Metzger	1Jan–31Jan68
	BGen Jacob E. Glick	1Feb–31May68
	BGen Carl W. Hoffman	22Jan–21Aug68*
	BGen William C. Chip	22Aug–31Aug68
	BGen Frank E. Garretson	26Aug–31Dec68
	BGen George D. Webster	26Sep–7Nov68
	BGen Robert B. Carney, Jr.	8Nov–31Dec68

* *With the assignment of BGen Hoffman, the 3d Division was authorized two ADCs.*

C/S	Col Walter H. Cuenin	1Jan–13Jul68
	Col Joseph E. Lo Prete	14Jul–31Aug68
	Col Joseph R. Motelewski	1Sep–31Dec68
G–1	LtCol James W. Marsh	1Jan–31Jan68
	Col George E. Jerue	1Feb–11Jun68
	Col Louis R. Daze	12Jun–31Dec68
G–2	Col Edward J. Miller	1Jan–24Feb68
	LtCol Frederic S. Knight	25Feb–13May68
	LtCol Michael M. Spark	14May–8Nov68
	LtCol Thomas P. O'Callaghan	9Nov–31Dec68
G–3	Col James R. Stockman	1Jan–10Jan68
	Col Alexander L. Michaux, Jr.	11Jan–15Jul68
	LtCol Paul D. LaFond	16Jul–31Dec68
G–4	Col Francis I. Fenton, Jr.	1Jan–31Jan68
	Col Edward E. Camporini	1Feb–31Aug68
	Col William F. Goggin	1Sep–31Dec68
G–5	Col Milton A. Hull	1Jan–17Feb68
	Col Joseph E. Lo Prete	18Feb–31May68
	LtCol Robert B. Thompson	1Jun–5Oct68
	LtCol William E. Kerrigan	6Oct–31Dec68

Headquarters Battalion

CO	Col George E. Jerue	1Jan–17Jan68
	Maj Will D. Isbell	18Jan–20Jan68
	Col Alfred I. Thomas	21Jan–3May68
	Maj Edwin F. Vozella	4May–12May68
	LtCol Edwin A. Deptula	13May–14Aug68
	Maj Gerald F. Kurth	15Aug–18Sep68
	Maj Raymond D. Walters	19Sep–27Sep68
	LtCol Marshall A. Webb, Jr.	28Sep–31Dec68

Task Force Robbie

CO	Col Clifford J. Robichaud, Jr.	16Feb–2Jun68

3d Marines

CO	Col Joseph E. Lo Prete	1Jan–17Feb68
	Col Milton A. Hull	18Feb–14Jul68
	LtCol Vaughn R. Stuart	15Jul–31Jul68
	Col Richard L. Michael, Jr.	1Aug–8Nov68
	LtCol Michael M. Spark	9Nov–31Dec68
CO 1/3	LtCol Richard W. Goodale	1Jan–15Apr68
	LtCol Charles V. Jarman	16Apr–16Jun68
	Maj Edward J. Rochford, Jr.	17Jun–30Jun68
	LtCol Charles V. Jarman	1Jul–9Aug68
	LtCol Richard B. Twohey	10Aug–31Dec68
CO 2/3	LtCol Henry Englisch	1Jan–25Jan68
	LtCol Jack W. Davis	26Jan–19Sep68
	LtCol Byron T. Chen	20Sep–7Dec68
	LtCol James J. McMonagle	8Dec–31Dec68
CO 3/3	LtCol Robert C. Needham	1Jan–20Jan68
	LtCol James W. Marsh	21Jan–28Jul68
	LtCol William H. Bates	29Jul–13Dec68
	LtCol Richard C. Schulze	14Dec–31Dec68

4th Marines

CO	Col William L. Dick	1Jan–24Feb68
	Col Edward J. Miller	25Feb–14Sep68
	Col Martin J. Sexton	15Sep–31Dec68
CO 1/4	LtCol Edwin A. Deptula	1Jan–27Apr68
	LtCol James H. MacLean	28Apr–25Jun68
	LtCol Thomas H. Galbraith	26Jun–15Nov68
	LtCol George T. Sargent, Jr.	16Nov–31Dec68
CO 2/4	LtCol William Weise	1Jan–2May68
	Maj Charles W. Knapp	3May–5May68
	LtCol Louis A. Rann	6May–30Sep68
	Maj John E. O'Neill	1Oct–14Oct68
	LtCol William L. Kent	15Oct–11Nov68
	Maj Joseph E. Hopkins	12Nov–31Dec68
CO 3/4	LtCol Lee R. Bendell	1Jan–26Apr68
	LtCol Frank L. Bourne, Jr.	27Apr–24Oct68
	Maj James L. Fowler	25Oct–23Nov68
	LtCol William A. Donald	24Nov–31Dec68

9th Marines

CO	Col Richard B. Smith	1Jan–13Jul68
	Col Robert H. Barrow	14Jul–31Dec68
CO 1/9	LtCol John F. Mitchell	1Jan–31Mar68
	LtCol John J.H. Cahill	1Apr–12May68
	LtCol James W. Quinn	13May–26May68
	LtCol Michael V. Palatas	27May–14Jul68
	LtCol Francis X. Colleton	15Jul–28Sep68
	Maj Wilbur W. Dinegar	29Sep–30Sep68
	LtCol Francis X. Colleton	1Oct–3Oct68
	LtCol George W. Smith	4Oct–31Dec68
CO 2/9	LtCol William M. Cryan	1Jan–13May68
	LtCol Frederic S. Knight	14May–15Sep68
	Maj Frederick E. Sisley	16Sep–9Dec68
	Maj Patrick G. Collins	10Dec–28Dec68
	LtCol George C. Fox	29Dec–31Dec68
CO 3/9	LtCol Gorton C. Cook	1Jan–22Feb68
	LtCol Edward J. Lamontagne	23Feb–24Oct68
	LtCol Elliott R. Laine, Jr.	25Oct–31Dec68

12th Marines

CO	Col Edwin S. Schick, Jr.	1Jan–21May68
	LtCol Wilson A. Kluckman	22May–4Jul68
	Col Peter J. Mulroney	5Jul–31Dec68
CO 1/12	LtCol Charles H. Opfar, Jr.	1Jan68–6Apr68
	Maj Raymond R. Powell	7Apr–19Jul68
	Maj Donald J. Capinas	20Jul–10Aug68
	LtCol Ermil L. Whisman	11Aug–31Dec68
CO 2/12	LtCol Ronald P. Dunwell	1Jan–5Aug68
	LtCol Joseph Scoppa, Jr.	6Aug–31Dec68
CO 3/12	LtCol Roger W. Greer	1Jan–29Feb68
	LtCol Joseph A. Como	1Mar–31Jul68
	LtCol Eugene D. Foxworth, Jr.	1Aug–31Dec68
CO 4/12	Maj Rudolph W. Bolves	1Jan–12Mar68
	LtCol Thomas A. McPheeters	14Mar–19Mar68
	Maj Billy F. Stewart	20Mar–15Oct68
	LtCol Earl W. Bailey	16Oct–31Dec68

3d Reconnaissance Battalion

CO	LtCol William D. Kent	1Jan–11Jul68
	LtCol Donald R. Berg	12Jul–12Dec68
	LtCol Aydlette H. Perry, Jr.	13Dec–31Dec68

3d Tank Battalion

CO	LtCol Duncan D. Chapman III	1Jan–21Jan68
	LtCol Karl J. Fontenot	22Jan–26Jul68
	Maj Conrad J. Samuelsen	27Jul–16Aug68
	LtCol George E. Hayward	17Aug–31Dec68

3d Anti-Tank Battalion

CO	Maj Robert M. Jordan	1Jan–31Jan68

3d Motor Transport Battalion

CO	Maj William H. Stewart, Jr.	1Jan–14Jul68
	Maj William O. Day	15Jul–25Jul68
	Maj Billy W. Adams	26Jul–18Oct68
	Capt James E. Quill	19Oct–31Oct68
	Maj Guy W. Ward	1Nov–31Dec68

3d Engineer Battalion

CO	LtCol Jack W. Perrin	1Jan–6Mar68
	Maj Richard S. Krolak	7Mar–1Sep68
	LtCol Walter L. Persac	2Sep–31Dec68

3d Shore Party Battalion

CO	LtCol James W. Quinn	1Jan–10May68
	LtCol Richard A. Sulik	11May–5Oct68
	Maj Edwin J. Godfrey	6Oct–31Dec68

1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion

CO	LtCol Edward R. Toner	1Jan–17Mar68
	LtCol George F. Meyers	18Mar–12Nov68
	Maj Walter W. Damewood, Jr.	13Nov–31Dec68

3d Medical Battalion

CO	Cdr Robert A. Brown, MC, USN	1Jan–31Jul68
	Cdr Barton K. Slemmons, MC, USN	1Aug–30Nov68
	LCdr Billy C. Roberts, MC, USN	1Dec–31Dec68

9th Motor Transport Battalion

CO	Maj John R. Stanley	1Jan–27Jul68
	Maj Raymond Kulak	28Jul–1Oct68
	LtCol John R. Fox	2Oct–13Nov68
	Maj Laurier J. Tremblay	14Nov–31Dec68

11th Engineer Battalion

CO	LtCol Victor A. Perry	1Jan–3Aug68
	LtCol Robert C. Evans	4Aug–31Dec68

5th Marine Division Units in Vietnam

26th Marines*

CO	Col David E. Lownds	1Jan–17Apr68
	Col Bruce F. Meyers	18Apr–11Aug68
	LtCol Clyde W. Hunter	12Aug–31Dec68
CO 1/26	LtCol James B. Wilkinson	1Jan–29Feb68
	LtCol Frederick J. McEwan	1Mar–26Jul68
	Maj Walter T. Cook	27Jul–17Oct68
	Maj Charles H. Knowles	18Oct–31Dec68
CO 2/26	LtCol Francis J. Heath, Jr.	1Jan–18Jul68
	LtCol Thurman Owens	19Jul–12Aug68
	LtCol William F. Sparks	13Aug–31Dec68
CO 3/26	LtCol Harry L. Alderman	1Jan–14Mar68
	LtCol John C. Studt	15Mar–15Jul68
	Maj Richard R. Blair	16Jul–2Aug68
	LtCol John W. P. Robertson	3Aug–31Dec68

** The 26th Marines transferred from the operational control of the 3d Marine Division to the 1st Marine Division on 18May68.*

27th Marines*

CO	Col Adolph G. Schwenk, Jr.	17Feb–10Sep68
CO 1/27	LtCol John E. Greenwood	17Feb–14Jul68
	Maj Kenneth J. Skipper	15Jul–12Sep68
CO 2/27	LtCol Louis J. Bacher	17Feb–19Jun68
	LtCol Albert W. Keller	20Jun–10Sep68
CO 3/27	LtCol Tullis J. Woodham, Jr.	17Feb–31Aug68

**The 27th Marines arrived in Vietnam on 17Feb and departed 10Sep68. The regiment remained under the operational control of the 1st Marine Division during this entire period.*

Battalions of the 13th Marines*

**The 1st Battalion largely supported the 26th Marines and was under the operational control of the 12th Marines when that regiment was with the 3d Marine Division and under the operational control of the 11th Marines when the 26th Marines was attached to the 1st Marine Division. The 2d Battalion arrived and departed with the 27th Marines and was under the operational control of the 11th Marines during its entire tour in Vietnam.*

CO 1/13	LtCol John A. Hennelly	1Jan–23May68
	LtCol Anthony Novak	24May–14Nov68
	Maj John B. Cantieny	15Nov–31Dec68
CO 2/13	LtCol Rhys J. Phillips, Jr.	17Feb–6Aug68
	Maj Walter F. Dunn	7Aug–12Sep68

Headquarters, 1st Force Service Regiment/Force Logistic Command (1st FSR/FLC)

CG	BGen Harry C. Olson	1Jan–25Oct68
	BGen James A. Feeley, Jr.	26Oct–31Dec68
C/S	Col Roy I. Wood, Jr.	1Jan–31Jul68
	Col Darwin B. Pond, Jr.	1Aug–31Dec68
G–1	LtCol Minard P. Newton, Jr.	1Jan–30Jul68
	Maj Donald A. Nilsen	31Jul–31Oct68
	LtCol Dennis K. Gray	1Nov–31Dec68
G–2	Maj Clarence E. Watson, Jr.	1Jan–30Jun68
	Maj Billy J. Fowler	1Jul–31Dec68
G–3	Col George K. Reid	1Jan–12Apr68
	Col James R. Jones	13Apr–4Sep68
	Col Francis W. Vaught	5Sep–31Dec68
G–4	LtCol Robert W. Howland	1Jan–2Jul68
	LtCol Stanley G. Tribe, Jr.	3Jul–24Jul68
	LtCol Alvin W. Bowen	25Jul–31Dec68
G–5	Maj Thomas J. Smyth	1Jan–2Aug68
	Maj John D. Crawford	3Aug–31Dec68

Headquarters and Service Battalion, 1st Force Service Regiment

CO	LtCol William F. Koehnlein	1Jan–13Jul68
	LtCol James G. McCormick	14Jul–18Sep68
	Maj Edward Lukas	19Sep–31Dec68

Supply Battalion, 1st Force Service Regiment

CO	Col Julian G. Bass, Jr.	1Jan–20Mar68
	LtCol Richard G. Eykyn	21Mar–14Sep68
	LtCol Edward G. Usher	15Sep–31Dec68

Maintenance Battalion, 1st Force Service Regiment

CO	LtCol Jack M. Hermes	1Jan–3Aug68
	LtCol Stanley G. Tribe, Jr.	4Aug–2Nov68
	LtCol Edward W. Critchett	3Nov–31Dec68

3d Service Battalion, Force Logistic Support Group Alpha

CO	Col Nolan J. Beat	1Jan–18May68
	Col Francis W. Vaught	19May–4Sep68
	Col Horton E. Roeder	5Sep–31Dec68

1st Service Battalion, Force Logistic Support Group Bravo

CO	Col James R. Jones	1Jan–31Mar68
	Col Julian G. Bass, Jr.	1Apr–17Aug68
	LtCol Raymond J. Weber	18Aug–16Sep68
	Col Harold L. Parsons	17Sep–31Dec68

1st MP Battalion

CO	LtCol Twyman R. Hill	1Jan68–28Feb68
	LtCol Bruce G. Brown	29Feb–11Oct68
	Maj John E. Decoursey	12Oct–20Oct68
	LtCol James D. Bailey	21Oct–31Dec68

3d MP Battalion

CO	LtCol Joseph J. N. Gambardella	1Jan–28Sep68
	Maj Donald E. Milone	29Sep–21Oct68
	LtCol Willard E. Cheatham	22Oct–31Dec68

5th Communication Battalion

CO	LtCol Donald L. Lindemuth	1Jan–9Jul68
	Maj Lee R. Johnson	10Jul–31Aug68
	LtCol Jack D. Hines	1Sep–31Dec68

7th Motor Transport Battalion

CO	LtCol Lance D. Thomas	1Jan–29Aug68
	Maj Lee R. Johnson	30Aug–31Dec68

1st Marine Aircraft Wing

CG	MajGen Norman Anderson	1Jan–21Jun68
	MajGen Charles J. Quilter	22Jun–31Dec68
AWC	BGen Robert P. Keller	1Jan–22Apr68
	BGen Homer S. Hill	23Apr68–31Dec68
	BGen Henry W. Hise	11Feb68–31Dec68*
C/S	Col Frank C. Thomas	1Jan–7Sep68
	Col Virgil D. Olson	8Sep–31Dec68
G–1	Col Robert Baird	1Jan–12Sep68
	Col Edward A. Parnell	13Sep–31Dec68
G–2	Col Robert D. Limberg	1Jan–25Feb68
	LtCol Edward H. P. Lynk	26Feb–3Jul68
	Col John R. Gill	4Jul–26Sep68
	LtCol Hugh R. Bumpas, Jr.	27Sep–31Dec68
G–3	Col Joel E. Bonner, Jr.	1Jan–9Jun68
	Col Edwin H. Finlayson	10Jun–31Dec68
G–4	Col Charles B. Armstrong, Jr.	1Jan–9Mar68
	Col Eugene V. Goldston	10Mar–25Mar68
	Col Edward N. LeFaivre	26Mar–13Aug68
	Col Steve Furimsky, Jr.	14Aug–31Dec68

**With the assignment of BGen Hise, the 1st MAW was authorized two assistant wing commanders.*

Marine Wing Headquarters Group 1 (MWHG–1)

CO	Col Tolbert T. Gentry	1Jan–8Oct68
	Col Thomas H. Nichols, Jr.	9Oct–31Dec68

Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron 1 (H&HS–1)

CO	LtCol Albert W. Keller	1Jan–13Jun68
	Maj Lawrence Furstenberg	14Jun–7Oct68
	LtCol Prentice A. Lindsay	8Oct–31Dec68

Marine Wing Communication Squadron 1 (MWCS–1)

CO	Maj David H. Tinius	1Jan–10Apr68
	Maj Robin W. Cobble	11Apr–6Oct68
	Maj Don J. Ogden	7Oct–31Dec68

Marine Wing Facilities Squadron 1 (MWFS–1)

CO	LtCol Edward A. Laning	1Jan–23Apr68
	Maj Harry E. Taylor	24Apr–12Jun68
	Maj Richard C. Hoffman	13Jul–31Jul68
	Maj Winston O. Goller	1Aug–5Dec68
	Maj Esta D. Grissom	6–31Dec68

Marine Wing Support Group 17 (MWSG–17)

CO	Col John E. Hansen	1Jan–23Feb68
	Col Robert D. Limberg	24Feb–15Jul68
	Col William Farrell	16Jul–5Sep68
	Col Richard S. Rash	9Sep–31Dec68

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 17 (H&MS–17)

CO	LtCol Eugene V. Goldston	1Jan–18Jan68
	Maj Frank E. Graham	19Jan–14Feb68
	LtCol Grover C. Doster, Jr.	15Feb–2Aug68
	LtCol Edward S. John	3Aug–31Dec68

Wing Equipment and Repair Squadron 17 (WERS–17)

CO	LtCol John R. Hansford	1Jan–31Mar68
	Maj William T. Lunsford	1Apr–5Aug68
	Maj Duane R. Van Note	6Aug–8Sep68
	Maj Stanley M. Williams	9Sep–31Dec68

Marine Air Control Group 18 (MACG–18)

CO	Col Lyle V. Tope	1Jan–22May68
	LtCol James W. Dillon	23May–2Aug68
	Col Edward S. Fris	3Aug–31Dec68

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 18 (H&MS–18)

CO	LtCol Paul B. Montague	1Jan–13Jan68
	Maj Laurence A. Taylor	14Jan–17Jan68
	LtCol Thomas W. Riggs	18Jan–6Oct68
	LtCol John R. Dopler	7Oct–31Dec68

Marine Air Suport Squadron 2 (MASS–2)

CO	LtCol John M. Johnson, Jr.	1Jan–3Jun68
	LtCol Gale Harlan	4Jun–29Jul68
	Maj Edward J. Dahy III	30Jul–31Dec68

Marine Air Support Squadron 3 (MASS–3)

CO	LtCol Hugh R. Bumpas, Jr.	1Jan–27Feb68
	LtCol Johnny O. Gregerson	28Feb–11Sep68
	Maj William J. Sullivan	12Sep–31Dec68

Marine Air Control Squadron 4 (MACS–4)

CO	LtCol William A. Cohn	1Jan–25Apr68
	LtCol David S. Twining	26Apr–14Sep68
	LtCol Thomas M. Kauffman	15Sep–31Dec68

1st Light Antiaircraft Missile Battalion (1st LAAM Bn)

CO	LtCol Marshall J. Treado	1Jan–13Aug68
	Maj Norman P. Fitzgerald, Jr.	14Aug–11Oct68
	LtCol John W. Drury	12Oct–31Dec68

2d Light Antiaircraft Missile Battalion (2d LAAM Bn)*

CO	LtCol Stanley A. Herman	1Jan68–7Feb68
	LtCol Donald E. Gunther	8Feb–12Oct68

**The 2d LAAM Bn departed Vietnam for ConUS, 12Oct68.*

Marine Aircraft Group 11 (MAG–11)

CO	Col Leroy T. Frey	1Jan68–7Jun68
	Col Robert D. Slay	8Jun–31Dec68

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 11 (H&MS–11)

CO	LtCol Anthony L. Blair	1Jan–8May68
	LtCol Carl R. Lundquist	9May–14Oct68
	LtCol Robert M. Stowers	15Oct–31Dec68

Marine Air Base Squadron 11 (MABS–11)

CO	LtCol John W. Irion, Jr.	1Jan–16Jun68
	LtCol James W. Haskell	17Jun–30Nov68
	LtCol Preston P. Marques, Jr.	1Dec–31Dec68

Marine Composite Reconnaissance Squadron 1 (VMCJ–1)

CO	LtCol Robert W. Lewis	1Jan–15Mar68
	LtCol Eric B. Parker	16Mar–16Nov68
	LtCol Bobby R. Hall	17Nov–31Dec68

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 122 (VMFA–122)

CO	LtCol John M. Verdi	1Jan–28Jan68
	LtCol Paul B. Montague	29Jan–30Jun68
	LtCol Eugene R. Howard, Jr.	1Jul–25Aug68
	Maj Donald L. Waldvogel	26–30Aug68*

**The squadron was transferred to MAG–15 in Japan on 30Aug68.*

Marine All-Weather Attack Squadron 242 (VMA [AW]–242)

CO	Maj Arthur W. D. Lavigne	1–22Jan68
	LtCol James R. Penny	23Jan–22Jul68
	LtCol Fred C. Rilling, Jr.	23Jul–31Dec68

Marine All-Weather Attack Squadron 235 (VMA [AW]–235)

CO	LtCol Carl R. Lundquist	1Jan–8May68
	LtCol Anthony L. Blair	9May–10May68*

**The squadron was transferred to MAG–15 in Japan on 10May68.*

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 334 (VMFA–334)

CO	LtCol Hiel L. VanCampen	30Aug–30Sep68*
	LtCol James R. Sherman	1Oct–31Dec68

**The squadron arrived from CONUS on 30Aug68.*

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 542 (VMFA–542)

CO	LtCol Robert N. Hutchinson	10May–29Jul68*
	LtCol Henry R. Vitali	30Jul–31Dec68

**The squadron was transferred from MAG–15, in Japan on 10May68.*

Marine Aircraft Group 12 (MAG–12)

CO	Col Dean Wilker	1Jan–7Mar68
	Col Charles B. Armstrong, Jr.	8Mar–31Jul68
	Col Rex A. Deasy	1Aug–31Dec68

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 12 (H&MS–12)

CO	LtCol Dan C. Alexander	1Jan–28Oct68
	LtCol Clifford D. Warfield	29Oct–31Dec68

Marine Air Base Squadron 12 (MABS–12)

CO	LtCol Leo J. Leblanc, Jr.	1Jan–25Feb68
	LtCol John H. Miller	26Feb–8Oct68
	Maj Lawrence Furstenberg	9Oct–31Dec68

Marine Attack Squadron 121 (VMA–121)

CO	LtCol Richard J. Kern	1Jan–10Mar68
	LtCol William D. Shippen	11Mar–14Oct68
	Maj David A. Lerps	15Oct–31Dec68

Marine Attack Squadron 211 (VMA–211)

CO	LtCol Francis H. Thurston	1Jan–28Feb68
	LtCol Leo J. Leblanc, Jr.	29Feb–26Aug68
	LtCol Frederic P. Salzman, Jr.	27Aug–30Nov68
	LtCol John R. Waterstreet	1Dec–31Dec68

Marine Attack Squadron (VMFA–223)

CO	LtCol Arthur W. Anthony, Jr.	23Apr–30Apr68*
	LtCol Erin D. Smith	1May–15Oct68
	Maj Leonard T. Preston, Jr.	16Oct–31Dec68

**The squadron was transferred from MAG–15 in Japan on 23Apr68.*

Marine Attack Squadron 311 (VMA–311)

CO	LtCol Richard B. Taber	1Jan–10Mar68
	LtCol Norman B. McCrary	11Mar–24Sep68
	LtCol Charles O. Hiett	25Sep–31Dec68

Marine All-Weather Attack Squadron 533 (VMA [AW]–533)

CO	LtCol William E. H. Fitch III	1Jan–1Apr68
	LtCol Ronald L. Iverson	2Apr–31Jul68
	LtCol Edward A. Laning	1Aug–31Aug68
	LtCol Paul K. German, Jr.	1Sep–31Dec68

Marine Aircraft Group 13 (MAG–13)

CO	Col Edward N. Lefaivre	1Jan–24Mar68
	Col James H. Berge, Jr.	25Mar–3Sep68
	Col Norman W. Gourley	4Sep–31Dec68

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 13 (H&MS–13)

CO	LtCol Paul L. Siegmund	1Jan–12Aug68
	Maj Edgar A. House	13Aug–31Dec68

Marine Air Base Squadron 13 (MABS–13)

CO	LtCol Leroy A. Madera	1Jan–21Apr68
	LtCol George L. Bruser	22Apr–12Jul68
	Maj Charles V. Smillie, Jr.	13Jul–31Dec68

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115 (VMFA–115)

CO	LtCol Richard E. Carey	1Jan–16Jan68
	LtCol Gerald W. Vaughan	17Jan–12Aug68
	Maj John J. Hudson	13Aug–27Nov68
	LtCol Robert R. Norton	28Nov–31Dec68

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 (VMFA–314)

CO	LtCol Frank D. Topley	1Jan–13Jan68
	LtCol Herbert V. Lundin	14Jan–28Jul68
	LtCol Frank E. Petersen, Jr.	29Jul–31Dec68

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 323 (VMFA–323)

CO	LtCol Harry T. Hagaman	1Jan–15May68
	LtCol Don J. Slee	16May–11Dec68
	LtCol Ira L. Morgan, Jr.	12Dec–31Dec68

Marine Aircraft Group 16 (MAG–16)

CO	Col Edwin O. Reed	1Jan–12Sep68
	Col Warren L. MacQuarrie	13Sep–31Dec68

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 16 (H&MS–16)

CO	LtCol Lawrence J. Flanagan	1Jan–6Jan68
	LtCol Horace A. Bruce	7Jan–30Apr68
	LtCol Morris G. Robbin	1May–11Jul68
	Maj William L. Whelan	12Jul–7Oct68
	LtCol Charles W. Gobat	8Oct–31Dec68

Marine Air Base Squadron 16 (MABS–16)

CO	LtCol Samuel J. Fulton	1Jan–30Apr68
	LtCol William E. Smilanich, Jr.	1May–29Jun68
	LtCol Robert F. Rick	30Jun–10Sep68
	LtCol Lowell W. Parish	11Sep–10Nov68
	LtCol William Cunningham	11Nov–31Dec68

Marine Observation Squadron 2 (VMO–2)

CO	LtCol Morris G. Robbins	1Jan–30Apr68
	LtCol Samuel J. Fulton	1May–4Nov68
	LtCol Thomas J. Dumont	5Nov–31Dec68

Marine Light Helicopter Squadron 167 (HML–167)

CO	Maj Robert C. Finn	15Mar–10May68*
	Maj George H. Dunn II	11May–17Aug68
	LtCol Thomas F. Miller	18Aug–31Dec68

**The squadron was activated on 15Mar68 at Marble Mountain Air Facility, Da Nang, Vietnam.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM–163)

CO	LtCol Richard G. Courtney	19May–31Aug68*

**The squadron was transferred from ProvMag–39 on 19May68 and was detached on 31Aug68 for return to CONUS.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 164 (HMM–164)

CO	LtCol Robert F. Rick	16–29Jun68*
	LtCol William E. Smilanich, Jr.	30Jun–17Nov68
	LtCol Richard T. Trundy	18Nov–29Nov68

**The squadron was detached from SLF Bravo on 16Jun68 and was reassigned on 29Nov68 to SLF Bravo*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 (HMM–165)

CO	LtCol George L. Patrick, Jr.	4Oct–31Dec68*

**The squadron was transferred from SLF Bravo on 4Oct68, then reverted to SLF Bravo control on 29Oct68, and then on 6Oct68 returned to MAG–16 control.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 265 (HMM–265)

CO	LtCol William R. Beeler	1–12Jan68*
	Maj William L. Whelan	13Jan–4Jun68
	LtCol Roy J. Edwards	5Jun–15Jun68
	Maj Richard L. Yanke	16Jun–7Jul68
	LtCol Roy J. Edwards	19Aug–18Sep68
	LtCol Richard L. Yanke	19Sep–30Sep68

**On 15Jun68, the squadron command group of HMM–265 and a detachment was transferred to SLF Bravo, leaving Major Yanke in command of the squadron. On 7Jul68, the rest of the squadron was transferred to SLF Bravo. The squadron was detached from the SLF on 19Aug68 and returned to the control of MAG–16. On 30Sep68, the squadron was transferred to MAG–36.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 361 (HMM–361)

CO	LtCol Daniel M. Wilson	10Feb–25Mar68*
	Maj Forrest W. Crone	26Mar–18May68

**The squadron was attached from SLF Alpha on 10Feb68 and departed for CONUS on 18May68*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 362 (HMM–362)

CO	Maj Walter H. Shauer, Jr.	5Sep–18Sep68*
	LtCol Jack E. Schlarp	19Sep–8Dec68

**The squadron was attached from SLF Alpha on 5Sep68 and reverted to SLF Alpha control on 8Dec68.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 363 (HMM–363)

CO	LrCol Frankie E. Allgood	1Jan–9Feb68*

**The squadron was transferred to SLF Alpha on 9Feb68*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364 (HMM–364)

CO	LtCol Merlin V. Statzer	10Dec–31Dec68*

**The squadron was transferred from MAG–36 on 10Dec68.*

Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463 (HMH–463)

CO	LtCol Joseph L. Sadowski	1Jan–1Apr68
	LtCol Joe G. Walker, Jr.	2Apr–7Oct68
	LtCol Roger W. Peard, Jr.	8Oct–31Dec68

Marine Aircraft Group 36 (MAG–36)

CO	Col Frank E. Wilson	1Jan–30Apr68
	Col Bruce J. Matheson	1May–31Dec68

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 36 (H&MS–36)

CO	LtCol Richard G. Courtney	1Jan–30Apr68
	LtCol George L. Patrick, Jr.	1May–22Aug68
	LtCol Ralph Thuesen	23Aug–31Dec68

Marine Air Base Squadron 36 (MAB–36)

CO	Maj James C. Robinson	1Jan–5Mar68
	LtCol William D. Watson	6Mar–11Sep68
	LtCol Dennis W. Wright	12Sep–31Dec68

Marine Air Group 36, Detachment Alpha (MAG–36, Det Alpha)

OIC	Col Owen V. Gallentine	1Jan–27Feb68*
	Col John E. Hansen	28Feb–15Apr68

**Detachment Alpha was a command and control element of MAG–36 based at Quang Tri Air Base until replaced on 15Apr68 by Provisional Marine Aircraft Group 39 (ProvMAG–39).*

Marine Observation Squadron 3 (VMO–3)

CO	LtCol Glenn R. Hunter	1Jan–29Feb68*

** VMO–3 was deactivated in March and reactivated as HML–367.*

Marine Observation Squadron 6 (VMO–6)

CO	LtCol William J. White	1Jan–24Mar68*
	LtCol Bertram A. Maas	25Mar–15Apr68

**The squadron was transferred to ProvMAG–39 on 16Apr68.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM–163)

CO	LtCol Louis W. Schwindt	1Jan–15Apr68*

**The squadron was transferred to ProvMag–39 on 15Apr68.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 164 (HMM–164)

CO	LtCol Robert F. Rick	1Jan–3Mar68*

**On 3Mar68, the squadron was transferred to SLF Bravo.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 (HMM–165)

CO	LtCol Richard E. Romine	1Jan–31Mar68*
	LtCol Elvyn E. Hagedorn	1Apr–22Aug68
	LtCol George L. Patrick, Jr.	23Aug–31Aug68

**From 9Jan–18Feb68, the squadron was detached to SLF Bravo. It then returned to MAG–36 and then once more reverted to SLF Bravo on 1Sep68.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262 (HMM–262)

CO	LtCol Melvin J. Steinberg	10Jan–15Apr68*

**The squadron joined MAG–36 on 10Jan68 from SLF Bravo and then later transferred to ProvMAG–39 on 16Apr68.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 265 (HMM–265)

CO	LtCol Richard L. Yanke	1Oct–31Dec68*

**On 1Oct68, MAG–36 assumed command of the squadron from MAG–16.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 362 (HMM–362)

CO	Maj Walter H. Shauer, Jr.	1Jan–14Apr68*

**On 15Apr68, the squadron joined SLF Alpha.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 363 (HMM–363)

CO	Maj Duwayne W. Hoffert	15Apr68–22Aug68*
	Maj James L. Harrison	23Aug68–30Nov68
	Maj Timothy J. Cronin, Jr.	1Dec–31Dec68

**The squadron was transferred to MAG–36 on 15Apr68 from SLF Alpha. For the period 29Oct-7Dec68, the squadron was under the administrative control while under the operational control of MAG–36. On 8Dec68, it reverted once more to MAG–36 administrative control as well as operational control.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364 (HMM–364)

CO	LtCol Louis A. Gulling	1Jan–16Apr68*
	LtCol Joseph R. Dobbratz, Jr.	17Apr–11Sep68
	LtCol Merlin V. Statzer	12Sep–9Dec68

**The squadron was transferred to MAG–16 on 10Dec68.*

Marine Light Helicopter Squadron 367 (HML–367)

CO	LtCol Glenn R. Hunter	Mar–7Apr68*
	LtCol Robert King, Jr.	8Apr–22Aug68
	LtCol Richard L. Robinson	23Aug–31Dec68

**The Squadron was formed from the personnel and equipment of VMO–3 in March 1968.*

Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 462 (HMH–462)

CO	LtCol Ronald E. Nelson	21Aug–31Dec68*

**The squadron arrived from ConUS on 21Aug68.*

Provisional Marine Aircraft Group 39 (ProvMAG–39)

CO	Col John E. Hansen	16Apr–30Jun68*
	LtCol Paul W. Niesen	1Jul–4Jul68
	Col Walter Sienko	5Jul–31Dec68

**ProvMAG–39 was formed at Quang Tri on 16Apr68 and replaced MAG–36, Detachment Alpha. LtCol Niesen remained commander of HMM 161 as well as ProvMAG–39 commander during the period 1–4 Jul68.*

Provisional Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 39 (ProvH&MS–39)

CO	Maj Charles G. Gerard	16Apr–9Aug68
	Maj Herman R. Bolen	10Aug–29Nov68
	LtCol Bobby R. Wilkinson	30Nov–31Dec68

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161 (HMM–161)

CO	LtCol Paul W. Niesen	17May–8Nov68*
	LtCol David L. Elam	9Nov–31Dec68

**The squadron joined ProvMAG–39 from CONUS on 17May68.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM–163)

CO	LtCol Richard G. Courtney	16Apr–18May68*

**The squadron was transferred from MAG–36 to ProvMAG–39 on 16Apr68 and then transferred to MAG–16 on 19May68.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262 (HMM–262)

CO	LtCol Melvin J. Steinberg	16Apr–20Sep68*
	LtCol Albert N. Allen	21Sep–31Dec68

** The squadron was transferred to ProvMAG–39 from MAG–36 on 16Apr68. It returned to MAG–36 on 21Sep68.*

Marine Observation Squadron 6 (VMO–6)

CO	Maj Bertram A. Maas	16Apr–20Sep68*
	Maj Hans A. Zander	21Sep–31Dec68

**The squadron was transferred to ProvMAG–39 from MAG–36 on 16Apr68.*

9th Marine Amphibious Brigade (9th MAB)/Task Force 79*

9th MAB Headquarters

CG	BGen Jacob E. Glick	1Jan–21Jan68
	BGen William C. Chip	22Jan–11Aug68
	BGen John E. Williams	12Aug–31Dec68
CS	Col James A. Etheridge	1Jan–30Sep68
	Col John Lowman, Jr.	1Oct–31Dec68
G–1	Col George H. Benskin, Jr.	1Jan–10Apr68
	LtCol Parks H. Simpson	11Apr–16Oct68
	Maj William H. Groesbeck	17Oct–31Dec68
G–2	Maj Hugh S. Jolley	1Jan–3Jan68
	Maj James V. Knapp	1Feb–5Mar68
	Maj Hugh S. Jolley	6Mar–26Aug68
	Maj Aubrey L. Lumpkin	27Aug–31Dec68
G–3	LtCol Anthony Novak	1Jan–30Apr68
	Col John A. Conway	1May–5Jun68
	Col Robert R. Wilson	6Jun–11Jul68
	LtCol Ronald A. Mason	12Jul–27Jul68
	LtCol George C. Kliefoth	28Jul–31Dec68
G–4	Col Warren A. Butcher	1Jan–26Feb68
	LtCol Paul R. Fields	27Feb–29Feb68
	Col Maynard W. Schmidt	1Mar–11Oct68
	LtCol Stewart B. McCarty, Jr.	12Oct–31Dec68

**The 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade was established on 1Mar66 and assumed responsibility for Task Force 79 (TF 79) duties on that date. On 15 April 1966, 9th MAB assumed responsibility for all tactical Marine aviation and ground units in the Western Pacific which were not in Vietnam.*

Regimental Landing Team 26 (RLT–26)/Task Group 79.2*

CO	Col David E. Lownds	1Jan–11Apr68
	Col Bruce F. Meyers	12Apr–11Aug68
	Col Clyde W. Hunter	12Aug–31Dec68

**RLT–26 remained administratively under 9th MAB, but, only RLT–26 (Rear) remained on Okinawa. The regimental command group and its three integral infantry battalions were in Vietnam.*

Regimental Landing Team 26 (Rear) (RLT–26 [Rear])

CO	LtCol Richard D. Alexander	1Jan–16Feb68
	Maj John B. Bany, Jr.	17Feb–31Mar68
	LtCol Jack Erwin	1Apr–19Oct68
	Maj James E. Anderson	20Oct–27Oct68
	LtCol Rufino Delacruz	28Oct–31Dec68

1st Battalion, 13th Marines

CO	LtCol John A. Hennelly	1Jan–23May68
	LtCol Anthony Novak	24May–15Nov68
	LtCol John B. Cantieny	16Nov–31Dec68

Provisional Service Battalion/Task Group 79.8

CO	Col Thomas W. Burke	1Jan–17Jul68
	Col Robert R. Wilson	18Jul–21Aug68
	LtCol James F. Conlon	22Aug–8Sep68
	Col William C. Doty, Jr.	9Sep–31Dec68

Marine Aircraft Group 15 (MAG–15)

CO	Col Wilbur C. Kellogg, Jr.	1Jan–12Oct68
	Col Clement T. Corcoran	13Oct–31Dec68

Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 15 (H&MS–15)

CO	LtCol Herman L. Mixson	1Jan–18Jul68
	LtCol David P. Grafl	9Jul–7Dec68
	LtCol Kenneth M. Scott	8Dec–31Dec68

Marine Air Base Squadron 15 (MABS–15)

CO	LtCol Clement C. J. Chamberlain	1Jan–5Apr68
	Maj Raymond D. Fortmeyer	6Apr–21Aug68
	LtCol Dock H. Pegues	22Aug–31Dec68

Marine Air Control Squadron 6 (MACS–6)

	LtCol Rollin E. Hippler	1Jan–27Feb68*

**MACS–6 returned to CONUS on 27Feb68 after being relieved by MACS–8.*

Marine Air Control Squadron 8 (MACS–8)

	LtCol Dirk C. Bierhaalder	27Feb–31DEc68*

**MACS–8 joined MAG–15 from the 2dMAW at MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina on 27Feb68.*

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 122 (VMFA–122)

CO	Maj Donald L. Waldvoge	131Aug–15Sep68*
	Maj Don K. Hanna	16Sep–2Oct68
	LtCol Lawrence J. Willis	3Oct–31Dec68

**The squadron was transferred from MAG–11 in Vietnam to MAG–15 on 31Aug68.*

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 223 (VMFA–223)

CO	LtCol Arthur W. Anthony, Jr.	1Jan–23Apr68*

**The squadron was transferred to MAG–12 on 23Apr68*

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 542 (VMFA–542)

CO	LtCol Richard C. Marsh	1Jan–26Jan68
	LtCol Robert N. Hutchinson	27Jan–10May68*

**The squadron was transferred to MAG–11 on 10May68.*

Marine All-Weather Attack Squadron 235 (VMA (AW)–235)

CO	LtCol Anthony L. Blair	11May–Sep68*

**The squdron was transferred from MAG–11 on 11May68 and then transferred to the 1st Marine Brigade, MCAS Kaneohe, Hawaii on 6 Sep68.*

Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 152 (VMGR–152)

CO	LtCol Royce M. Williams	1Jan–31Mar68
	LtCol Frank G. McLenon	1Apr–31Dec68

Special Landing Force Alpha (SLF Alpha)/ Task Group 79.4 (TG 79.4)

CO	Col John A. Conway	1Jan–14Jan68
	Col Bruce F. Meyers	15Jan–10Apr68
	LtCol Paul R. Fields	11Apr–2May68
	Col Alfred I. Thomas	3May–1Aug68
	LtCol Paul R. Fields	2Aug–6Aug68
	Col Alfred I. Thomas	7Aug–24Aug68
	Col John F. McMahon, Jr.	25Aug–31 Dec68

SLF Alpha Battalion Landing Teams (BLTs)*

Battalion Landing Team 1/3 (BLT 1/3)

CO	LtCol Richard W. Goodale	1Jan–2Jan68

Battalion Landing Team 2/4 (BLT 2/4)

CO	LtCol William Weise	3Jan–2May68
	Maj Charles W. Knapp	3May–4May68
	LtCol Louis A. Rann	5May–13Aug68

Battalion Landing Team 2/26 (2/26)

CO	LtCol Thurman Owens	13Aug–17Aug68
	LtCol William F. Sparks	18Aug–31Dec68

**The assigned BLTs were drawn from III MAF on a rotating basis and returned to III MAF after their respective SLF deployment tours.*

Special Landing Force Alpha Helicopter Squadrons

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 361 (HMM–361)

CO	LtCol Daniel M. Wilson	1Jan–10Feb68*

**The squadron was transferred to MAG–16 on 10Feb68.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 363 (HMM–363)

CO	LtCol Frankie E. Allgood	10Feb–25Mar68*
	Maj Duwayne W. Hoffert	26Mar–14Apr68
	Maj James L. Harrison	6Sep–28Nov68
	Maj Timothy J. Cronin, Jr.	29Nov–7Dec68

** The squadron was transferred to SLF Alpha from MAG–16 on 10Feb68 and detached to MAG–36 on 14Apr68. It was reassigned to SLF Alpha on 6Sep68 and then again returned to MAG–36 on 8Dec68.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 362 (HMM–362)

CO	Maj Walter H. Shauer, Jr.	14Apr–6Sep68*
	LtCol Jack E. Schlarp	7Dec–31Dec68

**The squadron was transferred to SLF Alpha from MAG–36 on 14Apr68 and on 6Sep68 it was then transferred to MAG–16. On 7Dec68, it reverted once more to SLF Alpha.*

Special Landing Force Bravo (SLF Bravo)/ Task Group 79.5 (TG 79.5)

CO	Col Maynard W. Schmidt	1Jan–28Feb68
	Col Warren A. Butcher	29Feb–5Sep68
	Col Robert R. Wilson	6Sep–31Dec68

Special Landing Force Bravo Battalion Landing Teams*

Battalion Landing Team 3/1 (BLT 3/1)

CO	LtCol Max McQuown	1Jan–4Jun68
	LtCol Daniel J. Quick	5Jun–15Jun68

Battalion Landing Team 2/7 (BLT 2/7

CO	LtCol Charles E. Mueller	15Jun–30Jul68
	LtCol Leroy E. Watson	31Jul–20Sep68
	LtCol Neil A. Nelson	21Sep–31Dec68

**The SLF Bravo BLTs like the BLTs in SLF Alpha rotated in and out to the SLF from III MAF.*

Special Landing Force Bravo Helicopter Squadrons

Detachment Alpha, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262 (HMM–262)

CO	Maj David A. Althoff	1Jan–2Jan68*

**Detachment Alpha, equipped with CH–46s, remained with the SLF while the remainder of the squadron was involved in a massive helicopter repair program. The remainder of the squadron rejoined Detachment Alpha on 3Jan68.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 (HMM–165)

	LtCol Richard E. Romine	10Jan–3Mar68*
	LtCol George L. Patrick, Jr.	1Sep–28Dec68

** The squadron transferred to the SLF from MAG–36 on 10Jan68. It was relieved on 3Mar68 by HMM–164. It returned to the SLF on 1Sep68 and then relieved again by HMM–164 on 28Dec68.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 164 (HMM–164)

CO	LtCol Robert F. Rick	3Mar–16Jun68*
	LtCol Richard T. Trundy	28Dec–31Dec68

**The squadron relieved HMM–165 on 3Mar68 and was in turn relieved by HMM–265 on 16Jun68. On 28Dec68, it once more returned to the SLF.*

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 265 (HMM–265)

CO	LtCol Robert J. Edwards	16Jun–1Sep68

**The squadron was assigned to SLF Bravo from MAG–16 on 16Jun68 and was in turn relieved on 1Sep68 by HMM–165.*

Appendix B

Chronology of Significant Events January–December 1968

1 January	Allied and Communist forces in Vietnam begin the new year with a cease-fire. The allies report 63 violations of the truce.
1 January	The Marine Corps troop level in Vietnam reaches 81,249. The III Marine Amphibious Force, which is responsible for I CTZ, begins the year with a total strength of 114,158 troops, composed of 76,616 Marines divided among the 1st Marine Division, the 3d Marine Division, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, and Force Logistic Command; 3,538 Navy personnel; and 36,816 Army personnel, including the Americal Division and one brigade of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, and 88 Air Force personnel.
3 January	The 5th Marines concludes Operation Auburn south of Da Nang (28Dec67–3Jan68). The operation results in 37 reported enemy casualties with 24 Marines killed and 62 wounded.
11 January	As part of Operation Checkers, in an effort to rotate units of the 1st Marine Division north to relieve the 3d Marine Division, Task Force X-Ray headquarters is activated at Phu Bai. Task Force X-Ray subsequently relieved the 3d Marine Division headquarters at Phu Bai, which moved to Dong Ha in Quang Tri Province.
16 January	The 2d Battalion, 26th Marines reinforces the Marine base at Khe Sanh.
16 January	A North Vietnamese representative states that North Vietnam will not begin peace talks until the United States halts bombing of the North.
20 January	Operation Lancaster I (1Nov67– 20Jan68), a 3d Marines operation to safeguard Route 9 between Cam Lo and Ca Lu, ends with a reported 46 enemy casualties and 27 Marines killed and 141 wounded.
20 January	The 1st Marines concludes Operation Osceola I (20Oct67–20Jan68) in the Quang Tri City region. The operation resulted in a reported 76 enemy casualties with 17 Marines killed and 199 wounded.
20 January	The 4th Marines concludes Operation Neosho I (1Nov67–20Jan68) northwest of Hue. The operation resulted in 77 reported enemy casualties with 12 Marines killed and 100 wounded.
20 January	A Marine patrol participating in Operation Scotland makes contact with a heavy concentration of North Vietnamese troops around Hill 881 South near Khe Sanh. The ensuing battle signaled the beginning of the siege of Khe Sanh.
21 January	The 1st Air Cavalry Division, USA, is placed under the operational control of III MAF commander, Marine Lieutenant General Robert E. Cushman, Jr.
21 January	The 4th Marines begin Operation Lancaster II in the same area as Operation Lancaster I.
21 January	The 3d Marines begin Operation Osceola II in the same area as Osceola I.
21 January	General Westmoreland, Commander USMACV, orders a temporary halt to work on the "McNamara Line," the barrier and antiinfiltration system south of the DMZ.
21 January	The NVA begins the bombardment of the base at Khe Sanh and the Marine outposts in the surrounding hills. This rocket, mortar, and artillery barrage will continue for the next 77 days.

22 January	The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines reinforces the garrison at Khe Sanh.
22 January	The 1st Air Cavalry Division begins Operation Jeb Stuart in the northern part of I CTZ.
23 January	The USS *Pueblo* (AGER 2), an American intelligence ship, is seized off the coast of Korea by the North Koreans.
23 January	Special Landing Force Bravo consisting of BLT 3/1 and HMM–165 begins Operation Badger Catch near the Cua Viet River.
26 January	Operation Badger Catch is renamed Operation Saline. The Marines in Badger Catch continue to work in conjunction with Operation Napoleon, a similar effort by the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion to keep the Cua Viet River supply line open.
27 January	The seven-day Communist ceasefire for the Tet holiday begins.
29 January	The allied ceasefire for the Tet holiday begins in all of South Vietnam except I CTZ.
30 January	Enemy troops launch the beginning of their Tet offensive in ICorps, attacking Da Nang and several cities south of the base.
31 January	The NVA opens its Tet offensive throughout South Vietnam with attacks against 39 provincial capitals and major cities including Saigon and Hue.
31 January	VC troops fail in an attempt to seize the U.S. Embassy in Saigon after breaching the compound.
31 January	Gen Leonard F. Chapman becomes the 24th Commandant of the Marine Corps, upon the retirement of the former Commandant, Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr.
31 January	1st Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry Division launches a counter-offensive air assault into the city of Quang Tri.
January	Operation Kentucky in "Leatherneck Square," south of the DMZ, resulted in 353 reported enemy casualties.
January	The Americal Division continues Operation Wheeler/ Wallowa south of Da Nang.
1 February	The 1st Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry Division together with ARVN forces successfully defend the city of Quang Tri. The enemy sustained 900 reported casualties and 100 captured.
1 February	Richard M. Nixon announces his candidacy for president.
1 February	Units of the 1st and 5th Marines begin Operation Hue City to drive the NVA out of the city.
5 February	Marines from the 26th Marines at Khe Sanh repel a battalion-sized attack killing a reported 109 NVA soldiers with 7 Marines killed and 15 wounded.
7 February	NVA units overrun the Special Forces base at Lang Vei, west of Khe Sanh.
7 February	Elements of the 3d Marines, 5th Marines, and the Americal Division engage the *2d NVA Division* in fighting around Da Nang.
9 February	III MAF units succeed in throwing back the *2d NVA Division* offensive at Da Nang.
9 February	MACV Forward, under General Creighton B. Abrams, Deputy Commander USMACV, is established in I CTZ at Phu Bai.
13 February	The headquarters and combat elements of the 101st Airborne Division arrive in I CTZ.
16 February	Operation Osceola II ends. This operation resulted in 21 reported enemy casualties with 2 Marines killed and 74 wounded.
23 February	NVA troops fire more than 1,300 shells into the Marine garrison at Khe Sanh. This barrage marks the heaviest shelling of the entire siege.

24 February	American and South Vietnamese troops capture the Citadel in Hue.
25 February	American forces declare the city of Hue secure.
29 February	Operation Saline is combined with Operation Napoleon.
February	The 27th Marines arrives in Da Nang from the U.S. as part of the reinforcements approved by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The President made extensive reductions to original recommendations of MACV and the JCS.
February	Operation Kentucky results in 398 reported enemy casualties with 90 Marines killed and 277 wounded.
1 March	Clark Clifford replaces Robert S. McNamara as Secretary of Defense.
2 March	Operation Hue City ends successfully as the 1st and 5th Marines defeat the NVA assault in Hue. The operation resulted in 1,943 enemy casualties with 142 Marines killed and 1,005 wounded.
10 March	MACV Forward is deactivated.
10 March	Provisional Corps Vietnam is created. This command, led by Lieutenant General William B. Rosson, USA, controls the 3rd Marine Division, the 1st Air Cavalry Division, and the 101st Airborne Division and is subordinate to Lieutenant General Cushman, commander of III MAF.
12 March	Senator Eugene McCarthy makes a substantial showing in the New Hampshire primary, winning 40 percent of the vote, with President Johnson winning 49 percent.
16 March	Troops from the Americal Division massacre more than 100 civilians, mostly women and children, in the village of My Lai.
21 March	As part of the Single Management System, the Seventh Air Force assumes responsibility for coordinating and controlling all fixed-wing aircraft missions, including those of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.
31 March	Operation Scotland (1Nov67–31Mar68) near Khe Sanh ends. The operation, which included the defense of the besieged garrison of Khe Sanh, resulted in a reported 1,631 enemy casualties with 204 Marines killed and 1,622 wounded in action.
31 March	The 1st Cavalry Division concludes Operation Jeb Stuart. This operation resulted in a reported 3,268 enemy casualties with 284 Army personnel killed and 1,717 wounded.
31 March	President Johnson announces a partial halt in the bombing of North Vietnam and that he will send an additional 13,500 troops to South Vietnam. In a surprise move, the President declares that he will not run for re-election due to the war in Vietnam and public unrest at home.
March	Operation Kentucky results in a reported 413 enemy casualties with 38 Marines killed and 217 wounded.
1 April	The 1st Air Cavalry Division together with units from the 1st Marines and the ARVN, begins Operation Pegasus from the Marine base of Ca Lu to relieve the Marine garrison at Khe Sanh.
9 April	U. S. troops retake the Special Forces Camp at Lang Vei, southwest of Khe Sanh.
15 April	Operation Pegasus ends with the relief and resupply of Khe Sanh. The operation resulted in 1,044 reported enemy casualties, with 51 Marines killed and 459 wounded. The 1st Air Cavalry Division suffered 41 personnel killed and 208 wounded.
15 April	With the relief of Khe Sanh and the end of Operation Pegasus, Operation Scotland II, a continuation of Marine Corps action around the base at Khe Sanh begins.

19 April	Elements of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, the 101st Airborne Division, and several ARVN units begin Operation Delaware/Lam Son 216. This operation takes place in the A Shau Valley and is designed as a spoiling assault to disrupt enemy preparations for another attack on Hue.
30 April	NVA units are engaged in the village of Dai Do by BLT 2/4. Heavy fighting in this area continues until 3 May.
4 May	The 7th Marines begin Operation Allen Brook, an operation designed to disrupt the growing enemy presence South of Da Nang.
30 April–17May	Marine, Army, and ARVN units succeed in thwarting a possible enemy assault on Dong Ha. The NVA suffered a reported 1,547 casualties while the allies sustained casualties of nearly 300 dead and 1,000 wounded.
4 May	The 7th Marines begin Operation Allen Brook, an operation designed to disrupt the growing enemy presence south of Da Nang.
5 May	Signalling the second major offensive of the year, enemy troops launch 119 rocket and mortar attacks on towns and cities throughout South Vietnam.
13 May	Peace talks among North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the United States begin in Paris.
17 May	Operation Delaware/Lam Son 216 ends with a reported 735 enemy casualties with 142 Army personnel killed and 731 wounded.
17 May	1st Air Cavalry Division begins Operation Jeb Stuart III along the border of Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces.
18 May	Battalions from the 1st Marine Division begin Operation Mameluke Thrust in the central regions of Quang Nam Province.
20 May	Major General Raymond G. Davis replaces Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins as Commanding General, 3d Marine Division.
22 May	The Marine Corps makes its first use of the North American OV–10A Bronco as an observation and counter-insurgency aircraft.
26 May	Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins becomes Deputy Commander of III MAF, replacing Major General William J. Van Ryzin.
27 May	Peace talks between the United States and North Vietnam break down in Paris.
May	Operation Kentucky results in a reported 817 enemy casualties with 134 Marines killed and 611 wounded.
May	Marine Corps force levels in Vietnam reach 89,000.
1 June	Lieutenant General Henry W. Buse, Jr., replaces Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak as the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.
5 June	Robert F. Kennedy is assassinated.
26 June	Major General Carl A. Youngdale relieves Major General Donn J. Robertson as Commander of the 1st Marine Division.
27 June	Marine troops begin to dismantle and withdraw from their static defense base at Khe Sanh.
1 July	General Creighton Abrams relieves General William Westmoreland as Commander USMACV.
1 July	Operation Thor begins in the eastern part of the DMZ. Planes from the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marine Corps, as well as artillery from Army and Marine artillery batteries in the DMZ sector and naval gunfire from cruisers and destroyers off the coast pound enemy artillery installations in the DMZ.
7 July	Operation Thor ends.
25 July	The 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized), USA, arrives in I CTZ and is placed under the operational control of III MAF.

15 August	Provisional Corps Vietnam is deactivated and replaced by XXIV Corps.
23 August	Operation Allen Brook ends. This operation resulted in 1,017 reported enemy casualties with 172 Marines killed and 1,124 wounded.
23 August	Enemy troops mount their third major offensive by firing on 27 different allied installations and cities including Hue, Da Nang Air Base, and Quang Tri City. The major thrust of this effort is the city of Da Nang. The Communists fall far short of their objective due to resistance of U.S. Army, Marine Corps, and South Vietnamese troops.
24 August	The Democratic Party Convention begins in Chicago. Vietnam War protesters clash violently with police for the next four days.
29 September	The USS *New Jersey* (BB 62) arrives off the coast of the DMZ. The arrival of this battleship greatly increases the Navy's firepower and power projection in the eastern DMZ.
September	Engagements from Operation Kentucky result in 305 reported enemy casualties with 1 Marine killed and 8 wounded.
6 October	7th Marines begin Operation Maui Peak, an effort to relieve the Special Forces base at Thuong Duc in Quang Nam Province.
19 October	Operation Maui Peak ends, resulting in 202 reported enemy casualties with 28 Marines killed and 143 wounded.
23 October	Operation Mameluke Thrust ends, resulting in 2,728 reported enemy casualties with 269 Marines killed and 1,730 wounded.
23 October	The 5th Marines begins Operation Henderson Hill in Quang Nam Province as a continuation of Operation Mameluke Thrust.
28 October	The 1st Air Cavalry Division begins to move from I CTZ to III CTZ.
31 October	President Johnson announces a complete halt in the bombing and naval bombardment of North Vietnam.
1 November	North Vietnamese officials announce that they will meet in Paris with representatives from the United States, South Vietnam, and the National Liberation Front to begin peace talks.
1 November	South Vietnamese units, aided by squads and platoons of American troops, begin the Accelerated Pacification (*Le Loi*) Campaign in order to regain the trust and control of South Vietnamese villages lost due to the major enemy offensives of the year.
2 November	South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu states that his nation will not negotiate in Paris if the Communist National Liberation Front is given equal status with the other participants.
3 November	Operation Jeb Stuart III ends. This operation resulted in 2,016 reported enemy casualties with 212 Army personnel killed and 1,512 wounded.
5 November	Richard Nixon wins the presidential election by narrowly defeating Hubert Humphrey.
11 November	The Americal Division ends Operation Wheeler/Wallowa after 14 months in the Nui Loc Son Valley. This operation resulted in a reported 10,020 enemy casualties with 683 Army personnel killed and 3,597 wounded.
20 November	The 1st Marines begin Operation Meade River, nine miles south of Da Nang, in support of the South Vietnamese Accelerated Pacification Campaign.
23 November	Operation Lancaster II ends. This operation resulted in a reported 1,800 enemy casualties with 359 Marines killed and 2,101 wounded.
26 November	President Johnson states that the peace talks will include the United States, South Vietnam, and a Communist delegation which consists of representatives from North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front.

6 December	Operation Henderson Hill ends. This action resulted in a reported 700 enemy casualties and 35 Marines killed and 273 wounded.
9 December	Operation Napoleon/Saline ends, resulting in a reported 3,495 enemy casualties with 353 Marines killed and 1,959 wounded.
9 December	Operation Meade River ends with 841 reported enemy casualties with 107 Marines killed and 522 wounded.
21 December	Major General Carl A. Youngdale relieves Major General Rathvon McC. Tompkins as Deputy Commanding General, III MAF. Major General Ormond R. Simpson relieves Major General Youngdale as Commanding General, 1st Marine Division.
29 December	Camp Carroll, the artillery base that supported the garrison at Khe Sanh, is deactivated.
29 December	Allied troops in Vietnam announce that they will not honor any holiday truces.
December	III MAF ends the year with operational control of the 1st Marine Division, the 3d Marine Division, the 1st Marine Air Wing, the Marine Force Logistic Command, the 101st Airborne Division, the Americal Division, and the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized).
December	The year closes with 31,691 reported enemy casualties at the hands of Marine units in III MAF. The cost of the year's fighting to the Marine Corps was 4,618 Marines killed and 29,320 wounded.

Appendix C
Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

A-1—A-5—Designations for Strong Points which form the Dye-marker barrier.

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 Inrruder, a rwin-jet, twin-sear, attack aircrafr specifically designed to deliver weapons on targers completely obscured by weather or darkness.

AAR—After Action Report.

ABCCC—Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center, a U.S. Air Force aircraft equipped with communications, data link, and display equipment; it may be employed as an airborne command post or a communications and intelligence relay facility.

AC-47—Douglas C-47 Skytrain, twin-engine, fixed-wing transport modified with 7.62mm miniguns and used as a gunship.

AC-119—Fairchild Hiller C-119 military transport aircraft remodified into a gunship with side-firing 7.62mm miniguns.

ADC—Assistant Division Commander.

AdminO—Administrative Officer.

Adv—Advanced.

AFP—Armed Forces Police.

AGC—Amphibious command ship. The current designation is LCC.

AH-1G—Bell Huey Cobra helicopter specifically designed for close air support.

AK-47—Russian-designed 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.

ALMAR—All Marines, a Commandant of the Marine Corps communication directed to all Marines.

ALO—Air Liaison Officer, an officer (aviator/pilot) attached to a ground unit who functions as the primary advisor ro the ground commander on air operation matters.

ALP—Air Liaison Party.

AMERICAL—The U.S. Army's 23d Infanrry Division.

AmTrac—Amphibian Tractor.

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.

AO—Air Observer, an individual whose primary mission is to observe or to take photographs from an aircraft in order to adjust artillery fire or obtain military information.

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.

APD—Airborne Personnel Detector.

APT—Armed Propaganda Team, a South Vietnamese pacificarion cadre who carried weapons in self-defense as they attempted ro convince South Viernamese villagers to remain loyal ro rhe governmenr.

ARA—Aerial Rocket Arrillery.

Arclight—The codename for B-52 bombing missions in Sourh Vietnam.

ARG—Amphibious Ready Group.

Arty—Artillery.

ARVN—Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Viernam).

ASP—Ammunition Supply Point.

ASRT—Air Support Radar Team, a subordinare operational component of a tactical air control system which provides ground conrrolled precision flight path guidance and weapons release for attack aircraft.

ATDS—Airborne Tactical Data Sysrem.

B-40 rockets—Communist rocket-propelled grenade.

B-52—Boeing Stratofortress, U.S. Air Force eight-engine, swept-wing, heavy jet bomber.

BA—Base Area.

BB—Navy Battleship.

BDA—Battle Damage Assessment.

BDC—Base Defense Commander.

Bde—Brigade.

BDR—Battle Damage Repair.

BGen—Brigadier General.

BLT—Battalion Landing Team.

Bn—Battalion.

Bru—One of several non-Vietnamese ethnic groups living in the Vietnamese highlands; the inhabitants in the Khe Sanh area were primarily *Bru*.

Btry—Battery.

BUIC—Back-Up Intercept Computer.

C-1—C-3—Designations for base areas which support the Dyemarker barrier.

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-123—Fairchild Provider, two-engine, turboprop, transport aircraft with a maximum payload of 15,000 pounds.

C-130—Lockheed Hercules, a four-engine turboprop transport aircraft.

CAAR—Combat After Action Report.

CACO—Combined Action Company.

CAF—Combined Action Force.

CAG—Combined Action Group.

CAP—Combined Action Platoon.

Capt—Captain.

CAS—Close Air Support.

CBU—Cluster Bomb Unit.

CCP—Combined Campaign Plan.

Cdr—Commander.

CG—Commanding General.

CH–46—Boeing Vertol Sea Knight, a twin-engine, 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.

CH–54—Sikorsky Sky Crane, U.S. Army, two-engine, single-rotor, heavy transport helicopter with three-man crew and useful payload of 22,890 pounds.

Chieu Hoi—The South Vietnamese amnesty program designed to attract Communist troops and cadre to defect to the government cause.

CICV—Combined Intelligence Center, Vietnam.

CID—Criminal Investigative Division.

CIDG—Civilian Irregular Defense Group, South Vietnamese paramilitary force, composed largely of *Montagnards* and advised by the U.S. Army Special Forces.

CinCPac—Commander in Chief, Pacific.

CinCPacFlt—Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet.

CIT—Counter Intelligence Team.

Class (I–V)—Categories of military supplies, e.g., Class I, rations; Class II, Uniforms and other individual items; Class III, POL; Class IV, Construction materials; Class V, Ammunition.

Claymore—A U.S. directional antipersonnel mine.

CMC—Commandant of the Marine Corps.

CMH—Center of Military History, Department of the Army.

CNO—Chief of Naval Operations.

CO—Commanding Officer.

Co—Company.

COB—Combat Operations Base.

COC—Combat Operations Center.

CoFraM—Controlled Fragmentation Munitions.

Col—Colonel.

Combined Action Program—A Marine pacification program which integrated a Marine infantry squad with a South Vietnamese Popular Force platoon in a Vietnamese village.

ComdC—Command Chronology.

ComdHist—Command History.

ComNavForPac—Commander, Naval Forces, Pacific.

ComNavForV—Commander, Naval Forces, Vietnam.

ComUSMACV—Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

CORDS—Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, the agency organized under MACV in May 1967 and charged with coordinating U.S.-Vietnamese pacification efforts.

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.

CPDC—Central Pacification and Development Council, the South Vietnamese government agency responsible for coordinating the pacification plan.

Cpl—Corporal.

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.

CRIMP—Consolidated Republic of Vietnam Improvement and Modernization Plan.

C/S—Chief of Staff.

CS—A chemical irritant which affects the upper respiratory system, similar to tear gas.

CSC—Communications Service Company.

CTZ—Corps Tactical Zone.

DAIS—Da Nang Antiinfiltration System.

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.

Det—Detachment.

DIOCC—District Intelligence and Operations Coordination Center.

Div—Division.

DMZ—Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Vietnam.

DOD—Department of Defense.

DOIC—District Operations and Intelligence Center

DPP—Data Processing Platoon.

DPS—Data Processing Section.

DRV—Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam).

DSA—District Senior Advisor.

DSS—Da Nang Special Sector.

Dtd—Dated.

Duel Blade—The final codename for the DMZ barrier.

Duster—The nickname for the U.S. Army's tracked vehicle, the M–42, which mounted dual 40mm automatic weapons.

DVA—Da Nang Vital Area.

Dyemarker—Codename for the Strong Point/Obstacle System (also known as the "McNamara Line" and "the barrier") which was constructed south of the DMZ and intended to limit infiltration from North Vietnam. See Practice Nine.

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.

ELINT—Electronic Intelligence, the intelligence information gained by monitoring radiations from enemy electronic equipment.

Engr—Engineer.

EOD—Explosive Ordnance Device.

F–4B—McDonnell Phantom II, a twin-engined, two-seat, long-range, all-weather jet interceptor and attack bomber.

F–8—Chance-Vought Crusader, single-engine, single-seat carrier fighter aircraft.

FAC(A)—Forward Air Controller (Airborne).
FADAC—Field Artillery Digital Automatic Computer.
FAE—Fuel-Air Explosive.
FAG—Field Artillery Group.
FDC—Fire Direction Center.
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.
FOB—Forward Operating Base.
FRC—Federal Records Center.
Front 4—A Communist headquarters subordinate to MR–5 and responsible for Quang Nam Province.
FSB—Fire Support Base.
FSCC—Fire Support Coordination Center, a single location involved in the coordination of all forms of fire support.
FSIC—Fire Support Information Center
FSR—Force Service Regiment.
Fwd—Forward.
FWMF—Free World Military Force.

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.
GCA—Ground Control Approach.
GCI—Ground Control Intercept.
Gen—General.
Golden Fleece—Marine rice harvest protection operation.
GPES—Ground Proximity Extraction System.
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.
GSW—Gunshot Wounds.
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.
GVN—Government of Vietnam (South Vietnam).
GySgt—Gunnery Sergeant

H&I fires-Harassing and Interdiction fires.
H&MS—Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron.
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.
HDC—Helicopter Direction Center.
HE—High Explosive.
Hectare—A unit of land measure in the metric system and equal to 2.471 acres.
HES—Hamlet Evaluation System, the computerized statistical data system used to measure pacification in the hamlets and villages of South Vietnam.
H-Hour—The specific hour an operation begins.
HistBr, G–3 Div, 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.
HMH—Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron.
HML—Marine Light Helicopter Squadron.
HMM—Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron.
Hoi Chanh—A Viet Cong or North Vietnamese defector under the *Chieu Hoi* amnesty program.
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, M114A towed and M109 self-propelled—U.S.-built medium artillery with a maximum range of 15,080 meters and a maximum rate of fire of three 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 (107mm) mortar tube mounted on a 75mm pack howitzer frame.
HQ or Hq—Headquarters.
HST—Helicopter Support Team.
"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.
ICJCC—I Corps Joint Coordinating Council, consisting of U.S. and Vietnamese officials in I Corps who coordinated the civilian assistance program.
I Corps—The military and administrative subdivision which included the five northern provinces of South Vietnam.
IDA—Institute for Defense Analysis.
Intel—Intelligence.
Intvw—Interview.
IOD—Integrated Observation Device.
ITT—Interrogation/Translator Team.

J—The designation for members of a joint staff which includes members of several services comprising the command, e.g., J–1 would refer to the staff members responsible for personnel; J–2, intelligence; J–3, operations; J–4, logistics; and J–5, civil affairs.
JCS—Joint Chiefs of Staff (U.S.).
JGS—Joint General Staff (South Vietnamese).
JTD—Joint Table of Distribution.
JUSPAO—Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office.

KC–130—The in-flight refueling tanker configuration of the C–130 Lockheed Hercules.
KBA—Killed by Air.
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.

LAAW—Light Anti-Armor Weapon

LAPES—Low Altitude Parachute Extraction System.

LCM—Landing Craft Mechanized, designed to land tanks, trucks, and trailers directly onto the beach.

LCpl—Lance Corporal.

LCU—Landing Craft Utility.

LCVP—Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel, a small craft with a bow ramp used to transport assault troops and light vehicles to the beach.

Le Loi—The Accelerated Pacification Campaign.

LKA—The current designation for an attack cargo ship. See AKA.

LOACH—Light Observation and Command Helicopter.

LOC—Lines of Communication.

LOH—Light Observation Helicopter.

LOI—Letter of Instruction.

LOTS—Logistics Over the Shore.

LP—Listening Post.

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 had 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—Landing Vehicle, Tracked, Engineer, a lightly armored amphibian vehicle designed for minefield and obstacle clearance.

LVTH—Landing 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.

LVTR—Landing Vehicle, Tracked, Retriever, an amphibian vehicle used for repair purposes.

LZ—Landing Zone.

MAB—Marine Amphibious Brigade.

MABS—Marine Air Base Squadron.

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 minure 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 susrained 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.

MACG—Marine Air Control Group.

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 guerrilla groups.

Maj—Major.

MajGen—Major General.

MarCad—Marine Aviation Cadet.

MarDiv—Marine Division.

Marines—Designates a Marine regiment, e.g., 3d Marines.

MASS—Marine Air Support Squadron, provides and operates facilities for the control of support aircraft operating in direct support of ground forces.

MAU—Marine Advisory Unit, the Marine advisory unit under the Naval Advisory Group which administered the advisory effort to the South Vietnamese Marine Corps; not to be confused with a Marine Amphibious Unit.

MAW—Marine Aircraft Wing.

MCAF—Marine Corps Air Facility.

MCAS—Marine Corps Air Station.

MCCC—Marine Corps Command Center.

MCO—Marine Corps Order.

MCOAG—Marine Corps Operations Analysis Group.

MCSA—Marine Corps Supply Agency.

MEB—Marine Expeditionary Brigade.

MedCap—Medical Civilian Assistance Program.

MedEvac—Medical Evacuation.

MEF—Marine Expeditionary Force.

MGySgt—Master Gunnery Sergeant.

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 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.
MSgt—Master Sergeant.
MTDS—Marine Tactical Data System.
MTT—Mobile Training Team.
Montagnard—From French for "mountaineer," refers to the several tribes of non-ethnic-Vietnamese nomadic tribesmen who populate the South Vietnamese highlands.
MWHG—Marine Wing Headquarters Group.
MWSG—Marine Wing Support Group.

NAC—Northern Artillery Cantonment.
NAG—Naval Advisory Group.
NAS—Naval Air Station.
NavCad—Naval Aviation Cadet.
NCC—Naval Component Commander.
NCO—Noncommissioned Officer.
NGLO—Naval Gunfire Liaison 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.
NOD—Night Observation Device.
NPFF—National Police Field Force.
NSA—Naval Support Activity.
NSD—Naval Supply Depot.
NSDC—Northern Sector Defense Command.
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-1C/G—Cessna, single-engine observation aircraft.
OAB, NHD—Operational Archives Branch, Naval History Division.
OJT—On the Job Training.
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.
OP—Outpost or observation point.
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.
ORLL—Operations Report/Lessons Learned.
OSJS (MACV)—Office of the Secretariat, Joint Staff (Military Assistance Command Vietnam).
OV-10—North American Rockwell Bronco, twin-engine aircraft specifically designed for light armed reconnaissance missions.

PAR—Progressive Aircraft Rework.
PAVN—Peoples Army of Vietnam (North Vietnam). This acronym was dropped in favor of NVA.
PDC—Pacification and Development Councils.
PF—Popular Force, Vietnamese militia who were usually employed in the defense of their own communities.
PFC—Private First Class.
Phoenix program—A covert U.S. and South Vietnamese program aimed at the eradication of the Viet Cong infrastructure in South Vietnam.
PIIC—Photo Imagery Interpretation Center.
POL—Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants.
Practice Nine—The codename for the planning of the antiinfiltration barrier across the DMZ. See Dymarker.
PRC-25—Standard radio used by Marine ground units in Vietnam that allowed for voice communication for distances up to 25 miles.
Prov Corps—Provisional Corps Vietnam.
PRU—Provincial Reconnaissance Unit.
PSA—Province Senior Advisor.
PSDF—People's Self-Defense Force, a local self-defense force organized by the South Vietnamese Government after the enemy's Tet offensive in 1968.
Pvt—Private.

QDSZ—Quang Da Special Zone.
QRF—Quick Reaction Force.

R&R—Rest and Recreation.
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.
Regt—Regiment.
Rein—Reinforced.
Revolutionary Development—The South Vietnamese pacification program started in 1966.
Revolutionary Development Teams—Specially trained Vietnamese political cadre who were assigned to individual hamlets and villages and conducted various pacification and civilian assistance tasks on a local level.
RF—Regional Force, Vietnamese militia who were employed in a specific area.
Rifle, M14—Gas-operated, magazine-fed, air-cooled, semi-automatic, 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.
ROE—Rules of Engagement.
ROK—Republic of 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—Codename 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.
RPG—Rocket-Propelled Grenade.

RRU—Radio Research Unit.

Rural Reconstruction—The predecessor campaign to Revolutionary Development.

RVN—Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam).

RVNAF—Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces.

RZ—Reconnaissance Zone.

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.

SAM—Surface to Air Missile.

SAR—Search and Rescue.

SCAMP—Sensor Control and Maintenance Platoon.

SEATO—Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.

SecDef—Secretary of Defense.

SecState—Secretary of State.

Seventh AF—Seventh Air Force, the major U.S. Air Force command in Vietnam.

Seventh Fleet—The U.S. fleet assigned to the Pacific.

SFD—Surprise Firing Device, a euphemism for a boobytrap.

SID—Seismic Intrusion Device, sensor used to monitor movement through ground vibrations.

SitRep—Situation Report.

Sgt—Sergeant.

SgtMaj—Sergeant Major.

SKS—Russian-designed Simonov gas-operated 7.62mm semiautomatic rifle.

SLAM—Seek, Locate, Annihilate and Monitor.

SLF—Special Landing Force.

SMA—Senior Marine Advisor.

SOG—Studies and Operations Group, the cover name for the organization that carried out cross-border operations.

Song—Vietnamese for "river."

SOP—Standing Operating Procedure, set of instructions laying out standardized procedures.

SPIE—Special Patrol Insertion/Extraction line.

Spt Rept—Spot Report.

Sortie—An operational flight by one aircraft.

Sparrow Hawk—A small rapid-reaction force on standby, ready for insertion by helicopter for reinforcement of units in contact with the enemy.

SSDC—Southern Sector Defense Command.

SSgt—Staff Sergeant.

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.

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.

TACP—Tactical Air Control Party, a subordinate operational component of a tactical air control system designed to provide air liaison to land forces and for the control of aircraft.

TADC—Tactical Air Direction Center, an air operations installation under the Tactical Air Control Center, which directs aircraft and aircraft warning functions of the tactical air center.

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.

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; has maximum road speed of 32 miles per hour and an average range of 195 miles.

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.

TAOC—Tactical Area of Coordination.

TAOI—Tactical Area of Interest.

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.

TASE—Tactical Air Support Element.

TDCC—Tactical Data Communications Central.

TE—Task Element.

T/E—Table of Equipment.

Tet—The Vietnamese Lunar New Year; Commonly associated with the NVA/VC offensive launched during the Tet Holiday of January 1968.

TF—Task Force.

TG—Task Group.

Tiger Hound—Airstrikes in Laos directed by U.S. Air Force small fixed-wing observation aircraft, flying up to 12 miles into southeastern Laos.

T/O—Table of Organization.

TO&E—Table of Organization and Equipment.

TOC—Tactical Operations Center.

Trung-si—A South Vietnamese Popular Force sergeant.

TPQ–10—Radar system used to control air strikes in poor and marginal weather.

TSF—Transitional Support Force.

TU—Task Unit.

UCMJ—Uniform Code of Military Justice

UH–1E—Bell Iroquois (commonly referred to as a "Huey"), a single-engine, light attack/observation 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 eight to 12 combat soldiers, depending upon weather conditions.

USA—U.S. Army.

USAAG—U.S. Army Advisory Group.

USAF—U.S. Air Force.

USAID—U.S. Agency for International Development.

USARV—U.S. Army, Vietnam.

USASuppComDaNang—U.S. Army Support Command, Da Nang.

USIA—U.S. Information Agency.

USMC—U.S. Marine Corps.

U.S. Mission Council—Council, chaired by the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam and including ComUSMACV, which developed and coordinated U.S. policy within South Vietnam.

USN—U.S. Navy.

VC—Viet Cong, a term used to refer to the Communist guerrillas in South Vietnam; a contraction of the Vietnamese phrase meaning "Vietnamese Communists."

VCI—Viet Cong Infrastructure.

VCLF—Viet Cong Local Force.

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.

VIS—Vietnamese Information Service.

VMA—Marine Attack Squadron.

VMA(AW)—Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron.

VMCJ—Marine Composite Reconnaissance Squadron.

VMFA—Marine Fighter Attack Squadron.

VMF(AW)—Marine Fighter Squadron (All-Weather).

VMGR—Marine Refueller Transport Squadron.

VMO—Marine Observation Squadron.

VNAF—Vietnamese Air Force.

VNMB—Vietnamese Marine Brigade.

VNMC—Vietnamese Marine Corps.

VNN—Vietnamese Navy.

VNRS—Vietnamese National Rail System.

VT—Variable timed electronic fuse for an artillery shell which causes airburst over the target area.

WestPac—Western Pacific.

WIA—Wounded in Action.

WFRC—Washington Federal Records Center.

Appendix D
Medals of Honor Citations
1968

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 ROBERT C. BURKE
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 for service as a Machine Gunner with Company I, Third Battalion, Twenty-Seventh Marines, First Marine Division in the Republic of Vietnam on 17 May 1968. While on Operation Allen Brook, Company I was approaching a dry river bed with a heavily wooded treeline that bordered the hamlet of Le Nam (1), when they suddenly came under intense mortar, rocket propelled grenade, automatic weapons and small arms fire from a large, well concealed enemy force which halted the company's advance and wounded several Marines. Realizing that key points of resistance had to be eliminated to allow the units to advance and casualties to be evacuated, Private Burke, without hesitation, seized his machine gun and launched a series of one man assaults against the fortified emplacements. As he aggressively maneuvered to the edge of the steep river bank, he delivered accurate suppressive fire upon several enemy bunkers, which enabled his comrades to advance and move the wounded Marines to positions of relative safety. As he continued his combative actions, he located an opposing automatic weapons emplacement and poured intense fire into the position, killing three North Vietnamese soldiers as they attempted to flee. Private Burke then fearlessly moved from one position to another, quelling the hostile fire until his weapon malfunctioned. Obtaining a casualty's rifle and hand grenades, he advanced further into the midst of the enemy fire in an assault against another pocket of resistance, killing two more of the enemy. Observing that a fellow Marine had cleared his malfunctioning machine gun, he grasped his weapon and moved into a dangerously exposed area and saturated the hostile treeline until he fell mortally wounded. Private Burke's gallant actions 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

SERGEANT ALFREDO GONZALEZ
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 Platoon Commander, Third Platoon, Company A, First Battalion, First Marines, First Marine Division, in the Republic of Vietnam. On 31 January 1968, during the initial phase of Operation Hue City Sergeant Gonzalez's unit was formed as a reaction force and deployed to Hue to relieve the pressure on the beleaguered city. While moving by truck convoy along Route #1, near the village of Lang Van Lrong, the Marines received a heavy volume of enemy fire. Sergeant Gonzalez aggressively maneuvered the Marines in his platoon, and directed their fire until the area was cleared of snipers. Immediately after crossing a river south of Hue, the column was again hit by intense enemy fire. One of the Marines on top of a tank was wounded and fell to the ground in an exposed position. With complete disregard for his own safety, Sergeant Gonzalez ran through the fire-swept area to the assistance of his injured comrade. He lifted him up and though receiving fragmentation wounds during the rescue, he carried the wounded Marine to a covered position for treatment. Due to the increased volume and accuracy of enemy fire from a fortified machine gun bunker on the side of the road, the company was temporarily halted. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Sergeant Gonzalez exposed himself to the enemy fire and moved his platoon along the east side of a bordering rice paddy to a dike directly across from the bunker. Though fully aware of the danger involved, he moved to the fire-swept road and destroyed the hostile position with hand grenades. Although seriously wounded again on 3 February, he steadfastly refused medical treatment and continued to supervise his men and lead the attack. On 4 February, the enemy had again pinned the company down, inflicting heavy casualties with automatic weapons and rocket fire. Sergeant Gonzalez, utilizing a number of light antitank assault weapons, fearlessly moved from position to position firing numerous rounds at the heavily fortified enemy emplacements. He successfully knocked out a rocket position and suppressed much of the enemy fire before falling mortally wounded. The heroism, courage, and dynamic leadership displaced by Sergeant Gonzalez reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and were in keeping with 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

SECOND LIEUTENANT TERRENCE COLLINSON GRAVES
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 Platoon Commander with the Third Force Reconnaissance Company, Third Reconnaissance Battalion, Third Marine Division, in the Republic of Vietnam on 16 February 1968. While on a long-range reconnaissance mission Lieutenant Graves' eight-man patrol observed seven enemy soldiers: approaching their position. Reacting instantly, he deployed his men, and directed their fire on the approaching enemy. After the fire had ceased, he and two patrol members commenced a search of the area, and suddenly came under a heavy volume of hostile small arms and automatic weapons fire from a numerically superior enemy force. When one of his men was hit by the enemy fire, Lieutenant Graves moved through the fire-swept area to his radio and, while directing suppressive fire from his men, requested air support and adjusted a heavy volume of artillery and helicopter gunship fire upon the enemy. After attending the wounded, Lieutenant Graves, accompanied by another Marine, moved from his relatively safe position to confirm the results of the earlier engagement. Observing that several of the enemy were still alive, he launched a determined assault, eliminating the remaining enemy troops. He then began moving the patrol to a landing zone for extraction, when the unit again came under intense fire which wounded two more Marines and Lieutenant Graves. Refusing medical attention, he once more adjusted air strikes and artillery fire upon the enemy while directing the fire of his men. He led his men to a new landing site into which he skillfully guided the incoming aircraft and boarded his men while remaining exposed to the hostile fire. Realizing that one of the wounded had not embarked, he directed the aircraft to depart and, along with another Marine, moved to the side of the casualty. Confronted with a shortage of ammunition, Lieutenant Graves utilized supporting arms and directed fire until a second helicopter arrived. At this point, the volume of enemy fire intensified, hitting the helicopter and causing it to crash shortly after liftoff. All on board were killed. Lieutenant Graves' outstanding courage, superb leadership and indomitable fighting spirit throughout the day were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Services. 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 RALPH H. JOHNSON
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 reconnaissance scout with Company A, First Reconnaissance Battalion, First Marine Division in action against the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong forces in the Republic of Vietnam. In the early morning hours of 5 March 1968, during Operation Rock, Private First Class Johnson was a member of a fifteen-man reconnaissance patrol manning an observation post on Hill 146 overlooking the Quan Duc Duc Valley deep in enemy controlled territory. They were attacked by a platoon-size hostile force employing automatic weapons, satchel charges and hand grenades. Suddenly, a hand grenade landed in the three-man fighting hole occupied by Private Johnson and two fellow Marines. Realizing the inherent danger to his two comrades, he shouted a warning and unhesitatingly hurled himself upon the explosive device. When the grenade exploded, Private Johnson absorbed the tremendous impact of the blast and was killed instantly. His prompt and heroic act saved the life of one Marine at the cost of his own and undoubtedly prevented the enemy from penetrating his sector of the patrol's perimeter. Private Johnson's courage, inspiring valor and selfless devotion to duty 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 to

CAPTAIN JAMES E. LIVINGSTON
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 Commanding Officer, Company E, Second Battalion, Fourth Marines, Ninth Marine Amphibious Brigade in action against enemy forces in the Republic of Vietnam. On 2 May 1968, Company E launched a determined assault on the heavily fortified village of Dai Do, which had been seized by the enemy on the preceding evening, isolating a Marine company from the remainder of the battalion. Skillfully employing screening agents, Captain Livingston maneuvered his men to assault positions across 500 meters of dangerous open rice paddy while under intense enemy fire. Ignoring hostile rounds impacting near him, he fearlessly led his men in a savage assault against enemy emplacements within the village. While adjusting supporting arms fire, Captain Livingston moved to the points of heaviest resistance, shouting words of encouragement to his Marines, directing their fire, and spurring the dwindling momentum of the attack on repeated occasions. Although twice painfully wounded by grenade fragments, he refused medical treatment and courageously led his men in the destruction of over 100 mutually supporting bunkers, driving the remaining enemy from their positions, and relieving the pressure on the stranded Marine company. As the two companies consolidated positions and evacuated casualties, a third company passed through friendly lines, launching an assault on the adjacent village of Dinh To, only to be halted by a furious counterattack of an enemy battalion. Swiftly assessing the situation and disregarding the heavy volume of enemy fire, Captain Livingston boldly maneuvered the remaining effective men of his company forward, joined forces with the heavily engaged Marines, and halted the enemy's counterattack. Wounded a third time and unable to walk, he steadfastly remained in the dangerously exposed area, deploying his men to more tenable positions and supervising the evacuation of casualties. Only when assured of the safety of his men did he allow himself to be evacuated. Captain Livingston's gallant actions uphold the highest 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

CORPORAL LARRY LEONARD MAXAM
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 Company D, First Battalion, Fourth Marines, Third Marine Division in the Republic of Vietnam. On 2 February 1968, the Cam Lo District Headquarters came under extremely heavy rocket, artillery, mortar, and recoilless rifle fire from a numerically superior enemy force, destroying a portion of the defensive perimeter. Corporal Maxam, observing the enemy massing for an assault into the compound across the remaining defensive wire, instructed his Assistant Fire Team Leader to take charge of the fire team, and unhesitatingly proceeded to the weakened section of the perimeter. Completely exposed to the concentrated enemy fire, he sustained multiple fragmentation wounds from exploding grenades as he ran to an abandoned machine gun position. Reaching the emplacements, he grasped the machine gun and commenced to deliver effective fire on the advancing enemy. As the enemy directed maximum fire power against the determined Marine, Corporal Maxam's position received a direct hit from a rocket propelled grenade, knocking him backwards and inflicting severe fragmentation wounds to his face and right eye. Although momentarily stunned and in intense pain, Corporal Maxam courageously resumed his firing position and subsequently was struck again by small arms fire. With resolute determination, he gallantly continued to deliver intense machine gun fire, causing the enemy to retreat through the defensive wire to positions of cover. In a desperate attempt to silence his weapon, the North Vietnamese threw hand grenades and directed recoilless rifle fire against him, inflicting two additional wounds. Too weak to reload his machine gun, Corporal Maxam fell to a prone position and valiantly continued to deliver effective fire with his rifle. After one and a half hours, during which he was hit repeatedly by fragments from exploding grenades, and concentrated small arms fire, he succumbed to his wounds, having successfully defended nearly one-half of the perimeter single-handedly. Corporal Maxam's aggressive fighting spirit, inspiring valor and selfless 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

STAFF SERGEANT KARL GORMAN TAYLOR, SR.
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 company gunnery sergeant during Operation Meade River in the Republic of Vietnam on the night of 8 December 1968. Informed that the commander of the lead platoon had been mortally wounded when his unit was pinned down by a heavy volume of enemy fire, Staff Sergeant Taylor along with another Marine, crawled forward to the beleaguered unit through a hail of hostile fire, shouted encouragement and instructions to the men, and deployed them to covered positions. With his companion, he then repeatedly maneuvered across an open area to rescue those Marines who were too seriously wounded to move by themselves. Upon learning that there were still other seriously wounded men lying in another open area, in proximity to an enemy machine gun position, Staff Sergeant Taylor, accompanied by four comrades, led his men forward across the fire-swept terrain in an attempt to rescue the Marines. When his group was halted by devastating fire, he directed his companions to return to the company command post; whereupon he took his grenade launcher and, in full view of the enemy, charged across the open rice paddy toward the machine gun position, firing his weapon as he ran. Although wounded several times, he succeeded in reaching the machine gun bunker and silenced the fire from that sector, moments before he was mortally wounded. Directly instrumental in saving the lives of several of his fellow Marines, Staff Sergeant Taylor, by his indomitable courage, inspiring leadership, and selfless dedication, upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and 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 to

MAJOR M. SANDO VARGAS, 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 Commanding Officer, Company G, Second Battalion, Fourth Marines, Ninth Marine Amphibious Brigade in action against enemy forces in the Republic of Vietnam from 30 April to 2 May 1968. On 1 May 1968, though suffering from wounds he had incurred while relocating his unit under heavy enemy fire the preceding day, Major (then Captain) Vargas combined Company G with two other companies and led his men in an attack on the fortified village of Dai Do. Exercising expert leadership, he maneuvered his Marines across 700 meters of open rice paddy while under intense enemy mortar, rocket and artillery fire and obtained a foothold in two hedgerows on the enemy perimeter, only to have elements of his company become pinned down by the intense enemy fire. Leading his reserve platoon to the aid of his beleaguered men, Major Vargas inspired his men to renew their relentless advance, while destroying a number of enemy bunkers. Again wounded by grenade fragments, he refused aid as he moved about the hazardous area reorganizing his unit into a strong defense perimeter at the edge of the village. Shortly after the objective was secured, the enemy commenced a series of counterattacks and probes which lasted throughout the night but were unsuccessful as the gallant defenders of Company G stood firm in their hard-won enclave. Reinforced the following morning, the Marines launched a renewed assault through Dai Do on the village of Dinh To, to which the enemy retaliated with a massive counterattack resulting in hand-to-hand combat. Major Vargas remained in the open, encouraging and rendering assistance to his Marines when he was hit for the third time in the three-day battle. Observing his battalion commander sustain a serious wound, he disregarded his excruciating pain, crossed the fire-swept area and carried his commander to a covered position, then resumed supervising and encouraging his men while simultaneously assisting in organizing the battalion's perimeter defense. His gallant actions upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

* On 26 December 1973, Major Vargas legally changed his name from Manuel Sando Vargas to Jay R. Vargas.

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 DEWAYNE T. WILLIAMS
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 rifleman with the First Platoon, Company H, Second Battalion, First Marines, First Marine Division in action against communist insurgent forces in the Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam. Private First Class Williams was a member of a combat patrol sent out from the platoon with the mission of establishing positions in the company's area of operations, from which it could intercept and destroy enemy sniper teams operating in the area. On the night of 18 September 1968, as the patrol was preparing to move from its daylight positions to a preselected night position, it was attacked from ambush by a squad of enemy using small arms and hand grenades. Although severely wounded in the back by the close intense fire, Private First Class Williams, recognizing the danger to the patrol, immediately began to crawl forward toward a good firing position. While he was moving under the continuing intense fire, he heard one of the members of the patrol sound the alert that an enemy grenade had landed in their position. Reacting instantly to the alert, he saw that the grenade had landed close to where he was lying and without hesitation, in a valiant act of heroism, he rolled on top of the grenade as it exploded, absorbing the full and tremendous impact of the explosion with his own body. Through his extraordinary initiative and inspiring valor in the face of certain death, he saved the other members of his patrol from serious injury and possible loss of life, and enabled them to successfully defeat the attackers and hold their position until assistance arrived. His personal heroism and devotion to duty 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

LANCE CORPORAL KENNETH L. WORLEY
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 L, Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, First Marine Division in action against enemy forces in the Republic of Vietnam. After establishing a night ambush position in a house in the Bo Ban Hamlet of Quang Nam Province, security was set up and the remainder of the patrol members retired until their respective watches. During the early morning hours of 12 August 1968, the Marines were abruptly awakened by the platoon leader's warning that "Grenades" had landed in the house. Fully realizing the inevitable result of his actions, Lance Corporal Worley, in a valiant act of heroism, instantly threw himself upon the grenade nearest him and his comrades, absorbing with his own body, the full and tremendous force of the explosion. Through his extraordinary initiative and inspiring valor in the face of almost certain death, he saved his comrades from serious injury and possible loss of life although five of his fellow Marines incurred minor wounds as the other grenades exploded. Lance Corporal Worley's gallant actions upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

Appendix E

Distribution of Personnel

DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONNEL*

FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

27 JANUARY 1968

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)		74	1	24AUG67									74	1								
H&S BN, FMF, PAC		1228	31	18JAN68													1228	31				
CAMP S. M. BUTLER		1075	118	23JAN68									1075	118								
CASUAL/TRANSIENT		1404		23JAN68									1404									
HQ, V MEF		89	2	18JAN68															89	2		
1ST CIV AFF GRP		78	5	18JAN68															78	5		
HQ, 5TH MAR DIV																						
HQBN, 5TH MAR DIV		1491	49	18JAN68															1491	49		
HQ, FORTRPS, FMF, PAC																						
HQ CO, FORTRPS		302	17	18JAN68															302	17		
HQ, 1ST MAR BRIG																						
HQ CO, 1ST MAR BRIG		207	17	18JAN68													207	17				
HQ, 9TH MAB																						
HQ CO, 9TH MAB		508	12	18JAN68									508	12								
HQ, III MAF																						
H&S CO, III MAF		726	29	13DEC67	726	29																
1ST & 2D CAG	4	777	65	13DEC67	777	65																
HQ, 1ST MAR DIV																						
HQBN, 1ST MAR DIV		1718	34	10JAN68	1718	34																
HQ, 3D MAR DIV																						
HQBN, 3D MAR DIV		1949	34	27DEC67					1949	34												
INFANTRY																						
1ST MARINES																						
HQ CO		259	7	10JAN68					259	7												
1ST BATTALION		1220	54	10JAN68							1220	54										
2D BATTALION		1159	56	10JAN68							1159	56										
3D BATTALION	1	1718	95	27DEC67																	1718	95
3D MARINES																						
HQ CO		219	5	27DEC67							219	5										
1ST BATTALION		1267	93	27DEC67							1267	93										
2D BATTALION		1154	55	10JAN68	1154	56																
3D BATTALION		1230	65	27DEC67							1230	65										
4TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		237	5	27DEC67							237	5										
1ST BATTALION		1168	66	27DEC67							1168	66										
2D BATTALION	1	1799	86	27DEC67																	1799	86
3D BATTALION		1178	64	27DEC67							1178	64										
5TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		233	5	10JAN68					233	5												
1ST BATTALION		1011	43	10JAN68					1011	43												
2D BATTALION		1092	53	10JAN68					1092	53												
3D BATTALION		1132	55	10JAN68	1192	55																
7TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		250	7	10JAN68	250	7																
1ST BATTALION		1075	54	10JAN68	1075	54																
2D BATTALION		903	52	10JAN68	903	52																
3D BATTALION		1341	54	10JAN68	1341	54																
9TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		216	5	27DEC67							216	5										
1ST BATTALION		1133	59	27DEC67							1133	59										
2D BATTALION		1227	65	27DEC67							1227	65										
3D BATTALION		1170	57	27DEC67							1170	57										
26TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		450	16	10JAN68							191		259	16								
1ST BATTALION		1236	65	10JAN68							1236	65										
2D BATTALION		1186	68	10JAN68							1186	68										
3D BATTALION		1215	64	10JAN68							1215	64										
27TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		217	4	18JAN68															217	4		
1ST BATTALION	3	1509	66	18JAN68													1509	66				
2D BATTALION		1044	33	18JAN68															1044	33		
3D BATTALION		1044	32	18JAN68															1044	32		
26TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		299	5	18JAN68															299	5		
1ST BATTALION		999	32	18JAN68															999	32		
2D BATTALION		1000	30	18JAN68															1000	30		
3D BATTALION		989	32	18JAN68															989	32		
ARTILLERY																						
11TH MARINES																						
HQ BTRY		295	7	10JAN68	295	7																
1ST BATTALION		460	12	10JAN68							460	12										
2D BATTALION		515	11	10JAN68	515	11																
3D BATTALION		595	14	10JAN68	595	14																
4TH BATTALION		491	11	10JAN68	491	11																
12TH MARINES																						
HQ BTRY		320	11	27DEC67							320	11										
1ST BATTALION		753	15	27DEC67							753	15										
2D BATTALION		489	6	27DEC67							489	6										
3D BATTALION		582	10	27DEC67					582	10												
4TH BATTALION		528	12	27DEC67					528	12												

* 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.

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DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONNEL

FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

27 JANUARY 1968

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
13TH MARINES																						
HQ BTRY		259	6	18JAN68															259	6		
1ST BATTALION		388	8	16NOV67							389	8										
2D BATTALION		409	10	18JAN68															409	10		
3D BATTALION		614	15	18JAN68															614	15		
4TH BATTALION		364	8	18JAN68															364	8		
HQ BTRY, 1ST FAG		111	2	27DEC67					111	2												
HQ BTRY, 5THFAG		153	5	30NOV67															153	5		
1ST 155MM GUN BTRY		126	3	27DEC67					126	3												
3D 155MM GUN BTRY		148	3	10JAN68	148	3																
5TH 155MM GUN BTRY		150	3	27DEC67	150	3																
7TH 155MM GUN BTRY		162	3	23NOV67															162	3		
1ST 8" HOW BTRY		84	2	30NOV67							84	2										
3D 8" HOW BTRY		201	3	10JAN68	201	3																
5TH 8" HOW BTRY		213	2	30NOV67															213	2		
1ST SEARCH LIGHT BTRY		97	2	27DEC67							97	2										
RECONNAISSANCE																						
1ST RECON BN		689	30	10JAN68	689	30																
3D RECON BN		772	55	27DEC67					772	55												
5TH RECON BN		323	14	18JAN68									36	1					287	13		
1ST FORCE RECON CO		160	7	10JAN58	160	7																
3D FORCE RECON CO		162		27DEC67							162											
5TH FORCE RECON CO		107	2	18JAN68															107	2		
ANTI-TANK																						
1ST AT BN		221	5	13DEC67	221	5																
3D AT BN		122	4	27DEC67					122	4												
5TH AT BN		273	7	18JAN68									49	1					224	6		
TANK																						
1ST TANK BN		686	15	10JAN68	686	15																
3D TANK BN		569	15	27DEC67					569	15												
5TH TANK BN		604	11	18JAN68									71	1					533	10		
AMTRAC																						
1ST AMTRAC BN		720	24	27DEC67							720	24										
3D AMTRAC BN		578	12	10JAN68	578	12																
5TH AMTRAC BN		685	17	18JAN68									110	1					575	16		
1ST ARM AMPHIB CO		266	3	10JAN68	266	3																
ENGINEER																						
1ST ENGR BN		678	16	10JAN68	678	16																
3D ENGR BN		621	14	27DEC67					621	14												
5TH ENGR BN		524	11	18JAN68									31	1					493	10		
7TH ENGR BN		933	22	10JAN68	933	22																
9TH ENGR BN		975	17	10JAN68			975	17														
11TH ENGR BN		1017	26	27DEC67							1017	26										
13TH ENGR BN		983	16	18JAN68															983	16		
1ST BRIDGE CO		148		10JAN68	148																	
3D BRIDGE CO		144		10JAN68	144																	
5TH BRIDGE CO		154	2	18JAN68															154	2		
MOTOR TRANSPORT																						
1ST MT BN		253	6	10JAN68	253	6																
3D MT BN		386	8	27DEC67					386	8												
5TH MT BN		208	7	18JAN69									11	1					197	6		
7TH MT BN		401	3	10JAN68	401	3																
9TH MT BN		386	9	27DEC67							386	9										
11TH MT BN		354	7	10JAN68	354	7																
13TH MT BN		381	7	18JAN68															381	7		
COMMUNICATION																						
1ST RADIO BN		462	2	13DEC67	242												220	2				
5TH COMM BN		744	8	10JAN68	744	8																
7TH COMM BN		654	13	10JAN68	654	13																
9TH COMM BN		624	3	18JAN68									197	2					427	1		
1ST ANGLICO	2	340	13	18JAN68													115	3			225	10
SHORE PARTY																						
1ST SP BN		424	15	10JAN68	424	15																
3D SP BN		395	27	27DEC67					395	27												
5TH SP BN		317	20	18JAN68									20	5					297	15		
MILITARY POLICE																						
1ST MP BN		718	8	10JAN69	718	8																
3D MP BN		752	14	10JAN68	752	14																
5TH MP BN		363	6	18JAN68															363	6		
SERVICE/SUPPORT																						
FLC, III MAF																						
HQ, FLC/1ST FSR																						
H&S BN		1523	59	10JAN68	1523	59																
SUPPLY BN		1448	17	10JAN68	1448	17																
7TH SEP BK FUEL CO		128	9	10JAN68	128	9																
MAINT BN		1068	1	10JAN68	1068	1																
FLSG-A/3D SERV BN		1181	25	10JAN68					1181	25												
FLSG-B/1ST SERV BN		1529	28	10JAN68							1529	28										
3D FSR																						
H&S BN		941	33	18JAN68									941	33								
SUPPLY BN		1197	15	18JAN68									1197	15								
MAINT BN		1018		18JAN68									1018									
5TH FSR																						
H&S BN		518	34	19JAN68															518	34		
SUPPLY BN		575	23	19JAN68															575	23		
MAINT BN		643		18JAN68															643			
5TH SERVICE BN		258	18	18JAN68															258	18		
PROV SERVICE BN, 9TH MAB		547	10	18JAN68									547	10								
9TH SEP BULK FUEL CO		293		18JAN68															293			

DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONNEL

FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

27 JANUARY 1968

UNIT	NOTE	ASSIGNED STRENGTH		STR RPT DATE	DANANG		CHU LAI		PHU BAI		DONG HA		OKINAWA		JAPAN		HAWAII		EASTPAC		OTHER	
MEDICAL		USMC	USN		USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN	USMC	USN
1ST MED BN		141	336	10JAN68	141	336																
3D MED BN		91	311	27DEC67					91	311												
5TH MED BN		88	185	18JAN68									1	53					87	132		
1ST HOSP CO		36	93	10JAN68			36	93														
5TH HOSP CO		37	41	18JAN68															37	41		
1ST DENTAL CO			84	10JAN68		84																
3D DENTAL CO			81	27DEC67		81																
5TH DENTAL CO			13	18JAN68																13		
11TH DENTAL CO			60	10JAN68		60																
13TH DENTAL CO			27	18JAN68																27		
15TH DENTAL CO		2	47	18JAN68														10	2	37		
17TH DENTAL CO		3	64	18JAN68															3	64		
USMC		89,305			24,876		1,011		10,028		21,657		7,549				3,279		17,163		3,742	
USN		4,341			1,208		110		705		934		271				129		789		191	
GROUND TOTAL		93,646			26,084		1,121		10,737		22,591		7,820				3,408		17,952		3,933	

AVIATION UNITS

HQ SQDN FMFPAC		74		2NOV67													74					
1ST MAW																						
MWHG-1																						
H&HS-1		759	39	10JAN68	759	39																
MWTS-1		157		10JAN68	157																	
MWCS-1		237		10JAN68	237																	
MWSG-17																						
H&MS-17		696	22	10JAN68	696	22																
WERS-17		201		10JAN68	201																	
MACG-18																						
H&HS-18		189		10JAN68	189																	
MASS-2		235	3	10JAN68	235	3																
MASS-3		205	2	10JAN68			205	2														
MACS-4		272	3	10JAN68	272	3																
1ST LAAM BN		560	13	10JAN68	560	13																
2ND LAAM BN		473	14	10JAN68			473	14														
MAG-11																						
H&MS-11		470		10JAN68	470																	
MABS-11		325	30	10JAN68	325	30																
VMCJ-1		430	1	10JAN68	430	1																
VMFA-122		390	1	10JAN68	390	1																
VMF(AW)-235		217	1	10JAN68	217	1																
VMA(AW)-242		315	1	10JAN68	315	1																
MAG-12																						
H&MS-12		516		10JAN68			516															
MABS-12		488	33	10JAN68			488	33														
MATCU-67		86		10JAN68			86															
VMA-121		191	1	10JAN68			191	1														
VMA-211		186	1	10JAN68			186	1														
VMA-311		206	1	10JAN68			206	1														
VMA(AW)-533		201	1	29NOV67			201	1														
MAG-13																						
H&MS-13		491		10JAN68			491															
MABS-13		445	25	10JAN68			445	25														
VMFA-115		315	1	10JAN68			315	1														
VMFA-314		312	1	10JAN68			312	1														
VMFA-323		265		10JAN68			265															
MAG-16																						
H&MS-16		596		10JAN68	596																	
MABS-16		616	31	10JAN68	616	31																
MATCU-62		63		10JAN68							63											
MATCU-68		68		10JAN68					68													
VMO-2		190	1	10JAN68	190	1																
HMH-463		299	1	10JAN68	299	1																
HMM-265		205	4	10JAN68	205	4																
HMM-363		231	1	10JAN68	231	1																
MAG-36																						
H&MS-36		509		10JAN68					509													
MABS-36		727	31	10JAN68					727	31												
MATCU-70		23		13DEC67							23											
VMO-3		221	1	10JAN68					221	1												
HMM-163		214		10JAN68							214											
HMM-164		206	1	18JAN68					206	1												
HMM-262		212	4	10JAN68							212	4										
HMM-362		217	1	10JAN68					217	1												
HMM-364		223	2	10JAN68					223	2												
VMO-6		198	1	10JAN68							198	1										
9TH MAB																						
MAG-15																						
H&MS-15		564		18JAN68									50		514							
MABS-15		435	27	18JAN68											435	27						
H&HS IWAKUNI		394	293	14DEC67											394	293						
H&HS FUTEMA		244	61	14DEC67									244	61								
MACS-6		216	2	18JAN68									216	2								
MATCU-60		63		18JAN68											63							
MATCU-66		38		18JAN68									38									
VMGR-152		463	6	18JAN68									463	6								
VMA-223		185	1	18JAN68											185	1						
VMFA-542		295	2	10JAN68											295	2						
HMM-361	1	202	4	11JAN68																	202	4
HMM-165	1	239	1	27DEC67																	239	1

DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONNEL

FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

27 JANUARY 1968

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		92		18JAN68													92					
MACS-7		230		18JAN68													230					
VMF(AW)-212		227	1	18JAN68													227	1				
3D MAW																						
MWHG-3																						
H&MS-3		651	7	18JAN68															651	7		
MWFS-3		195		18JAN68															195			
MWCS-3		152		18JAN68															152			
MWTG-30																						
H&MS-30		412	1	18JAN68															412	1		
HMMT-301		262	1	18JAN68															262	1		
HMMT-302		247	1	18JAN68															247	1		
MAG-33																						
H&MS-33		805		18JAN68															805			
MABS-33		588	2	18JAN68															588	2		
MATCU-65		85		18JAN68															85			
VMCJ-3		425	1	18JAN68															425	1		
VMA-214		246	1	11JAN68															246	1		
VMFA-232		295	1	11JAN68															295	1		
VMFA-334		361	2	11JAN68															361	2		
MWSG-37																						
H&MS-37		689	3	18JAN68															689	3		
MERS-37		292	103	18JAN68															292	103		
VMGR-352		453	1	18JAN68															453	1		
MACG-38																						
H&HS-38		241		11JAN68															241			
MASS-5		205		18JAN68															205			
MACS-1		316		18JAN68															316			
MACS-3		246		18JAN68															246			
MACS-7		265	4	18JAN68															265	4		
5TH LAAM BN		518	9	18JAN68															518	9		
MAG-56																						
H&MS-56		384	1	18JAN68															384	1		
MABS-56																						
VMO-5		438	3	18JAN68															438	3		
HMH-462		255		11JAN68															255			
HMH-263		180	3	11JAN68															180	3		
MATCU-74		29		18JAN68															29			
USMC		28,047			7,590		4,380		2,171		710		1,011		1,886		623		9,235		441	
USN		815			152		80		36		5		69		323		1		144		5	
AVIATION TOTAL		28,862			7,742		4,460		2,207		715		1,080		2,209		524		9,379		446	

RECAPITULATION OF FMFPAC PERSONNEL DISTRIBUTION

		ASSIGNED STRENGTH	DANANG	CHU LAI	PHU BAI	DONG HA	OKINAWA	JAPAN	HAWAII	EASTPAC	OTHER
GROUND TOTAL	USMC	89,305	24,876	1,011	10,028	21,657	7,549		3,279	17,163	3,742
	USN	4,341	1,208	110	709	934	271		129	789	191
AVIATION TOTAL	USMC	28,047	7,590	4,380	2,171	710	1,011	1,886	623	9,235	441
	USN	815	152	80	36	5	69	323	1	144	5
GRAND TOTAL	USMC	117,352	32,466	5,391	12,199	22,367	8,560	1,886	3,902	26,398	4,183
	USN	5,156	1,360	190	745	939	340	323	130	933	196

NOTES:

1. FIGURES IN "OTHER" ASSIGNED TO SLF'S AND ARE BLT STRENGTHS
2. FIGURES IN "OTHER" ASSIGNED VARIOUS RVN LOCATIONS.
3. STRENGTHS INDICATED IS FOR BLT 1/27
4. AT VARIOUS I CTZ LOCATIONS.

MARINE CORPS COMMAND CENTER

DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONNEL*

FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

DOD DIR 5200.10

30 DECEMBER 1968

UNIT	NOTE	ASSIGNED STRENGTH		STR RPT DATE	DANANG		CHU LAI		PHU BAI		No I CTZ		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)		74	1	24JUL68									74	1								
H&S BN, FMF, PAC	4	1624	50	18DEC68													1507	50			120	
CAMP S. D. BUTLER		866	137	28DEC68									866	137								
CASUAL		580		28DEC68									580									
HOSPITALIZED	7	955		28DEC68									472		483							
HQ, V MEF																						
1ST CIVAFFGRP		66	7	18DEC68															66	7		
HQ, 5TH MAR DIV																						
HQBN, 5TH MAR DIV	4	1408	37	18DEC68															1363	37	45	
HQ, FORTRPS, FMF, PAC																						
HQ CO, FORTRPS	4	438	22	18DEC68															194	22	244	
HQ, 1ST MAR BRIG																						
HQ CO, 1ST MAR BRIG		223	8	18DEC68													223	8				
HQ, 9TH MAB																						
HQ CO, 9TH MAB		508	19	18DEC68									508	19								
HQ, III MAF																						
H&S CO, III MAF	4	989	11	18DEC68	977	11															12	
1ST CAG		367	31	18DEC68			367	31														
2D CAG	2	781	42	18DEC68	761	42															20	
1D CAG		252	32	18DEC68					252	32												
4TH CAG		267	21	18DEC68							267	21										
HQ, 1ST MAR DIV																						
HQ BN, 1ST MAR DIV	4	1948	37	18DEC68	1902	37															46	
HQ, 3D MAR DIV																						
HQBN, 3D MAR DIV	4	1946	37	18DEC68							1930	37									16	
INFANTRY																						
1ST MARINES																						
HQ CO		245	8	18DEC68	245	8																
1ST BATTALION		1071	59	18DEC68	1071	59																
2D BATTALION		1098	53	18DEC68	1098	53																
3D BATTALION		1068	61	18DEC68	1068	61																
3D MARINES																						
HQ CO		230	6	18DEC68	230	6																
1ST BATTALION		1187	50	18DEC68	1187	50																
2D BATTALION		1168	58	18DEC68							1168	58										
3D BATTALION		1169	59	18DEC68	1169	59																
4TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		218	5	18DEC68							218	5										
1ST BATTALION		1118	49	18DEC68							1118	49										
2D BATTALION		1150	56	18DEC68							1150	56										
3D BATTALION		1170	52	18DEC68							1170	52										
5TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		245	7	18DEC68	245	7																
1ST BATTALION		1092	53	18DEC68	1092	53																
2D BATTALION		1121	53	18DEC68	1121	53																
3D BATTALION		1086	46	18DEC68	1086	46																
7TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		242	6	18DEC68	242	6																
1ST BATTALION		1057	56	18DEC68	1057	56																
2D BATTALION	1	1545	113	18DEC68	1545	113																
3D BATTALION		1084	56	18DEC68	1084	56																
9TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		233	6	18DEC68							233	6										
1ST BATTALION		1157	50	18DEC68							1157	50										
2D BATTALION		1150	52	18DEC68							1150	52										
3D BATTALION		1157	47	18DEC68							1157	47										
26TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		477	12	18DEC68	238	6							239	6								
1ST BATTALION		1097	57	18DEC68	1097	57																
2D BATTALION	1	1479	97	18DEC68																	1479	97
3D BATTALION		1229	66	18DEC68	1229	66																
27TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		235	7	18DEC68															235	7		
1ST BATTALION		756	88	18DEC68													756	88				
2D BATTALION		1097	32	18DEC68															1097	32		
3D BATTALION		1181	32	18DEC68															1181	32		
28TH MARINES																						
HQ CO		267	6	18DEC68															267	6		
1ST BATTALION		1176	46	18DEC68															1176	46		
2D BATTALION		1167	41	18DEC68															1167	41		
3D BATTALION		1334	41	18DEC68															1334	41		
ARTILLERY																						
11TH MARINES																						
HQ BTRY		309	9	18DEC68	309	9																
1ST BATTALION		632	18	18DEC68	632	18																
2D BATTALION		658	18	18DEC68	658	18																
3D BATTALION		413	12	18DEC68	413	12																
4TH BATTALION		518	12	18DEC68	518	12																
12TH MARINES																						
HQ BTRY		285	12	18DEC68	285	12																
1ST BATTALION		571	17	18DEC68	571	17																
2D BATTALION		1161	51	18DEC68	1161	51																
3D BATTALION		852	21	18DEC68	852	21																
4TH BATTALION		533	12	18DEC68	533	12																

* 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.

DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONNEL

FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

20 DECEMBER 1968

UNIT	NOTE	ASSIGNED STRENGTH		STR RPT DATE	DANANG		CHU LAI		PHU BAI		No I CTZ		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
13TH MARINES																						
HQ BTRY		280	6	18DEC68															280	6		
1ST BATTALION		511	12	18DEC68	511	12																
2D BATTALION		407	8	18DEC68															407	8		
3D BATTALION		556	16	18DEC68															556	16		
4TH BATTALION		400	11	18DEC68															400	11		
HQ BTRY, 1ST FAG		124	2	18DEC68	124	2																
HQ BTRY, 5TH FAG		115	4	18DEC68															115	4		
1ST 155MM GUN BTRY		130	3	18DEC68	130	3																
3D 155MM GUN BTRY		145	3	18DEC68	145	3																
5TH 155MM GUN BTRY		186	8	18DEC68							186	8										
7TH 155MM GUN BTRY		104	2	18DEC68															104	2		
1ST 8" HOW BTRY		195	6	18DEC68							195	6										
3D 8" HOW BTRY		211	4	18DEC68	211	4																
5TH 8" HOW BTRY		126	2	18DEC68															126	2		
1ST SEARCH LIGHT BTRY		97	2	18DEC68							97	2										
RECONNAISSANCE																						
1ST RECON BN		773	48	18DEC68	773	48																
3D RECON BN		751	52	18DEC68							751	52										
5TH RECON BN		351	15	18DEC68	70								5						276	15		
1ST FORCE RECON CO		164	8	18DEC68	164	8																
3D FORCE RECON CO		142		18DEC68							142											
5TH FORCE RECON CO		134	2	18DEC68															134	2		
ANTI-TANK																						
1ST AT BN	6																					
3D AT BN	6																					
5TH AT BN		267	8	18DEC68									54	1					213	7		
TANK																						
1ST TANK BN		762	18	18DEC68	762	18																
3D TANK BN		763	19	18DEC68							763	19										
5TH TANK BN		625	13	18DEC68															625	13		
AMTRAC																						
1ST AMTRAC BN		715	30	18DEC68							715	30										
3D AMTRAC BN		633	15	18DEC68	633	15																
5TH AMTRAC BN		698	15	18DEC68									125	5					573	10		
1ST ARM AMPHIB CO		228	5	18DEC68	228	5																
ENGINEER																						
1ST ENGR BN		782	11	18DEC68	782	11																
3D ENGR BN		773	15	18DEC68							773	15										
5TH ENGR BN		548	12	18DEC68									33	1					515	11		
7TH ENGR BN		1009	25	18DEC68	1009	25																
9TH ENGR BN		948	23	18DEC68			948	23														
11TH ENGR BN		1184	30	18DEC68							1184	30										
13TH ENGR BN		844	15																844	15		
1ST BRIDGE CO	5																					
3D BRIDGE CO	5																					
5TH BRIDGE CO		149	2	18DEC68															149	2		
MOTOR TRANSPORT																						
1ST MT BN		322	7	18DEC68	322	7																
3D MT BN		334	9	18DEC68							334	9										
5TH MT BN		171	5	18DEC68															171	5		
7TH MT BN		398	3	18DEC68	398	3																
9TH MT BN		384	10	18DEC68					384	10												
11TH MT BN		451	11	18DEC68	451	11																
13TH MT BN		415	7	18DEC68															415	7		
COMMUNICATION																						
1ST RADIO BN		495	2	18DEC68	408	2											87					
5TH COMM BN		665	5	18DEC68	665	5																
7TH COMM BN		663	12	18DEC68	663	12																
9TH COMM BN		397	9	18DEC68															397	9		
1ST ANGLICO	3	277	11	18DEC68													143	5			134	6
SHORE PARTY																						
1ST SP BN		430	25	18DEC68	430	25																
3D SP BN		494	23	18DEC68							494	23										
5TH SP BN		282	24	18DEC68	90								5	6					187	18		
MILITARY POLICE																						
1ST MP BN		693	14	18DEC68	693	14																
3D MP BN		747	13	18DEC68	747	13																
5TH MP BN		469	5	18DEC68															469	5		
SERVICE/SUPPORT																						
FLC, III MAF																						
HQ, FLC/1ST FSR		1693	45	18DEC68	1693	45																
H&S BN		1621	25	18DEC68	1621	25																
SUPPLY BN																						
7TH SEP BK FUEL CO		1030	11	18DEC68	1030	11																
MAINT BN																						
FLSG-A/3D SERV BN		1234	20	18DEC68							1234	20										
FLSG-B/1ST SERV BN		1359	17	18DEC68	1359	17																
3D FSR																						
H&S BN		1102	34	18DEC68									1102	34								
SUPPLY BN		467	20	18DEC68									467	20								
MAINT BN		1093		18DEC68									1093									
5TH FSR																						
H&S BN		400	23	18DEC68															400	23		
SUPPLY BN		399	18	18DEC68															399	18		
MAINT BN		520		18DEC68															520			
5TH SERVICE BN		715	15	18DEC68															715	15		
PROV SERVICE BN, 9TH MAB		947	18	18DEC68									947	18								
9TH SEP BULK FUEL CO		321		18DEC68															321			

DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONNEL

FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

30 DECEMBER 1968

UNIT	NOTE	ASSIGNED STRENGTH		STR RPT DATE	DANANG		CHU LAI		PHU BAI		No I CTZ		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
MEDICAL																						
1ST MED BN		148	264	18DEC68	148	264																
3D MED BN		133	349	18DEC68					133	349												
5TH MED BN		101	158	18DEC68															101	158		
1ST HOSP CO		43	72	18DEC68	43	72																
5TH HOSP CO		30	48	18DEC68															30	48		
1ST DENTAL CO			84	18DEC68		84																
3D DENTAL CO			88	18DEC68				88														
5TH DENTAL CO			14	18DEC68																14		
11TH DENTAL CO		3	71	18DEC68	3	71																
13TH DENTAL CO			36	18DEC68																36		
15TH DENTAL CO		3	42	18DEC68															3	42		
17TH DENTAL CO		3	61	18DEC68															3	61		
USMC		91,065			41,982		1,315		769		17,586		6,570		483		2,716		17,528		2,116	
USN		4,458			1,922		142		391		647		248				151		854		103	
GROUND TOTAL		95,523			43,904		1,457		1,160		18,233		6,818		483		2,867		18,382		2,219	

AVIATION UNITS

HQ SQDN FMFPAC		61		18DEC68													61					
1ST MAW																						
MWHG-1																						
H&MS-1		719	34	18DEC68	719	34																
MWFS-1		133		18DEC68	133																	
MWCS-1		289		18DEC68	289																	
MWSG-17																						
H&MS-17		664	22	18DEC68	664	22																
WERS-17		209		18DEC68	209																	
MACG-18																						
H&MS-18		246		18DEC68	246																	
MASS-2		254	3	18DEC68	254	3																
MASS-3		223	2	18DEC68			223	2														
MACS-4		347	3	18DEC68	347	3																
1ST LAAM BN		719	14	18DEC68	719	14																
MAG-11																						
H&MS-11		414		18DEC68	414																	
MABS-11		349	26	18DEC68	349	26																
VMCJ-1		394	1	18DEC68	394	1																
VMFA-542		312	1	18DEC68	312	1																
VMA(AW)-242		333		18DEC68	333																	
VMFA-334		355	1	18DEC68	355	1																
MAG-12																						
H&MS-12		579	1	18DEC68			579	1														
MABS-12		508	32	18DEC68			508	32														
MATCU-67		86		18DEC68			86															
VMA-121		192	1	18DEC68			192	1														
VMA-211		197	1	18DEC68			197	1														
VMA-223		190	1	18DEC68			190	1														
VMA-311		189	1	18DEC68			189	1														
VMA(AW)-533		307	1	18DEC68			307	1														
MAG-13																						
H&MS-13		521		18DEC68			521															
MABS-13		480	26	18DEC68			480	26														
VMFA-115		280	2	18DEC68			280	2														
VMFA-314		277	1	18DEC68			277	1														
VMFA-323		280	1	18DEC68			280	1														
MAG-16																						
H&MS-16		570		18DEC68	570																	
MABS-16		725	27	18DEC68	725	27																
MATCU-62		82		18DEC68							82											
MATCU-68		79		18DEC68					79													
VMO-2		261	1	18DEC68	261	1																
HML-167		243		18DEC68	243																	
HML-164		243		18DEC68	243																	
HMH-463		326	1	18DEC68	326	1																
HML-165		208	4	18DEC68	208	4																
HMM-364		222	1	28DEC68	222	1																
MAG-36																						
HMM-265		235	1	18DEC68					235	1												
H&MS-36		490		18DEC68					310		180											
MABS-36		539	23	18DEC68					331	23	208											
MATCU-62 DET "A"		82		18DEC68							82											
HMH-462		203	1	18DEC68					203	1												
HMM-363		254	4	18DEC68					254	4												
HML-367		202	1	18DEC68					202	1												
PROVMAG-39/PROV H&MS-39		441	20	18DEC68							441	20										
VMO-6		250	1	18DEC68							250	1										
HMM-161		250	1	18DEC68							250	1										
HMM-262		238									238											
9TH MAB																						
MAG-15																						
H&MS-15		442		18DEC68									64		378							
MABS-15		294	25	18DEC68											294	25						
MACS-8		240	1	18DEC68									240	1								
VMFA-122		350	17	18DEC68											350	17						
HMM-362	1	255	1	18DEC68																	255	1
MATCU-60		66		18DEC68											66							
MATCU-66		61		18DEC68									61									
VMGR-152		457	4	18DEC68									457	4								

DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONNEL

FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

30 DECEMBER 1968

UNIT	NOTE	ASSIGNED STRENGTH		STR RPT DATE	DANANG		CHU LAI		PHU BAI		No I CTZ		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
MAG-24																						
H&MS-24		454		18DEC68													454					
MABS-24		435	22	18DEC68													435	22				
MACS-2		223		18DEC68													223					
MATCU-70		67		18DEC68													67					
VMFA-212		254		18DEC68													254					
VMFA-235		248		18DEC68													248					
3D MAW																						
MWHG-3																						
H&HS-3	4	621	7	18DEC68															602	7	19	
MWFS-3		147		18DEC68															147			
MWCS-3		220		18DEC68															220			
VMT-103		345		18DEC68															345			
MHTG-30																						
H&MS-30		284		18DEC68															284			
HMMT-301		159	1	18DEC68															159	1		
HMMT-302		226		18DEC68															226			
MAG-33																						
H&MS-33		642		18DEC68															642			
MABS-33		529	2	18DEC68															529	2		
MATCU-65		87		18DEC68															87			
VMCJ-3		321		18DEC68															321			
VMFA-214		201	1	18DEC68															201	1		
VMFA-232		279	1	18DEC68															279	1		
VMFA-531		258	1	18DEC68															258	1		
MWSG-37																						
H&MS-37		597	3	18DEC68															597	3		
MWRS-37		230	80	18DEC68															230	80		
VMGR-352		362	1	18DEC68															362	1		
MACG-38																						
H&HS-38		241	3	18DEC68															241	3		
MASS-5		198		18DEC68															198			
MACS-1		272		18DEC68															272			
MACS-3		251		18DEC68															251			
MACS-7		242	2	18DEC68															242	2		
5TH LAAM BN		512	10	18DEC68															512	10		
2D LAAM BN		235		18DEC68															235			
MAG-56																						
H&MS-56		352		18DEC68															352			
MABS-56		334	2	18DEC68															334	2		
MATCU-74		66		18DEC68															66			
HMM-163		240		18DEC68															240			
HMM-263		256		18DEC68															256			
HML-267		412	5	18DEC68															412	5		
HMM-561		259		18DEC68															259			
USMC		29,474			8,535		4,309		1,614		1,731		822		1,088		1,742		9,359		274	
USN		450			139		70		30		22		5		42		22		119		1	
AVIATION TOTAL		29,924			8,674		4,379		1,644		1,753		827		1,130		1,764		9,478		275	

RECAPITULATION OF FMFPAC PERSONNEL DISTRIBUTION

		ASSIGNED STRENGTH	DANANG	CHU LAI	PHU BAI	No I CTZ	OKINAWA	JAPAN	HAWAII	EASTPAC	OTHER
GROUND TOTAL →	USMC	91,065	41,982	1,315	769	17,586	6,570	483	2,716	17,528	2,116
	USN	4,458	1,922	142	391	647	248		151	854	103
AVIATION TOTAL →	USMC	29,474	8,535	4,309	1,614	1,731	822	1,088	1,742	9,359	274
	USN	450	139	70	30	22	5	42	22	119	1
GRAND TOTAL →	USMC	120,539	50,517	5,624	2,383	19,317	7,392	1,571	4,458	26,887	2,390
	USN	4,908	2,061	212	421	669	253	42	173	973	104

NOTES:

1. FIGURES IN "OTHER" ASSIGNED TO SLF's AND ARE BLT STRENGTHS.
2. FIGURES IN "OTHER" ASSIGNED TO VARIOUS RVN LOCATIONS.
3. AT VARIOUS I CTZ LOCATIONS.
4. PERSONNEL LISTED IN "OTHER" ARE ASSIGNED TO IT, ITT, SSC, CI TEAMS, RED EYE AND NUCLEAR ORDNANCE PLATOONS.
5. STRENGTHS INCLUDED IN 7TH AND 11TH ENGINEER BATTALIONS.
6. 1ST AND 3D ANTI-TANK PERSONNEL ARE INCLUDED IN 1ST AND 3D TANK BATTALIONS STRENGTHS.
7. HOSPITALIZED AT LOCATIONS OTHER THAN OKINAWA BUT CARRIED ON THE ROLLS OF CASUAL COMPANY, CAMP BUTLER.

Appendix F

Combined Action Program Expansion—1968

1ST CAG		
UNITS	1967	1968
GROUP HQ	1	1
COMPANY HQ	3	3
PLATOONS	15	21
MOBILE TRAINING TEAMS	-	2
STRENGTHS		
USMC	213	364
USN	19	34
RVN	334	664

2D CAG		
UNITS	1967	1968
GROUP HQ	1	1
COMPANY HQ	7	8
PLATOONS	40	38
MOBILE TRAINING TEAMS	-	1
STRENGTHS		
USMC	633	571
USN	42	41
RVN	1,070	1,043

3D CAG		
UNITS	1967	1968
GROUP HQ	1	1
COMPANY HQ	2	5
PLATOONS	15	31
MOBILE TRAINING TEAMS	-	2
STRENGTHS		
USMC	296	546
USN	18	28
RVN	378	809

4TH CAG		
UNITS	1967	1968
GROUP HQ	-	1
COMPANY HQ	2*	3
PLATOONS	9*	12
MOBILE TRAINING TEAMS	-	2
STRENGTHS		
USMC	123	282
USN	9	19
RVN	229	540

*Includes three CAP's and one CO Hq deactivated at Khe Sahn

Legend and Recapitulation

STATUS AS OF	31DEC68	ACTIVATED DURING	1968	STATUS AS OF	31DEC1968
GROUP HQ	3	GROUP HQ	1	GROUP HQ	4
COMPANY HQ	14	COMPANY HQ	*6	COMPANY HQ	19
PLATOONS	79	PLATOONS	*28	PLATOONS	102
MOBILE TRAINING TEAMS	-	MOBILE TRAINING TEAMS	7	MOBILE TRAINING TEAMS	7
STRENGTHS		STRENGTHS		STRENGTHS	
USMC	1,265	USMC	498	USMC	1,763
USN	88	USN	34	USN	122
RVN	2,011	RVN	1,025	RVN	3,036

[1]Five CAP's (two in 2d CAG; three in 4th CAG) and one Company Hq were deactivated during 1968

Appendix G

Casualties

NVA/VC Casualties Reported by III MAF Units

1968	USMC		Americal Division		1st Air Cav Div[1]		101st Airborne[2]	
Month	KIA	POW	KIA	POW	KIA	POW	KIA	POW
JAN	2126	55	2350	70	314	9		
FEB	5040	92	1691	62	1879	39		
MAR	3118	83	1621	41	1066	78	677	27
APR	1769	30	795	50	1259	10	859	29
MAY	6200	140	1393	21	473	35	1683	172
JUN	2154	65	688	15	661	85	450	121
JUL	2124	57	781	12	490	44	305	82
AUG	1894	57	1384	11	485	51	583	45
SEP	2392	105	1294	17	207	15	268	148
OCT	1707	24	685	11	202	28	397	207
NOV[3]	1042							
DEC[4]	1612							
TOTAL	31178	708	12682	310	7036	394	5212	831

[1]U.S. Army 1st Cavalry Division (Air Mobile) left I Corps Tactical Zone on 10 November 1968

[2]U.S. Army 101st Airborne Division (Air Mobile) came under the operational control of III MAF on 13 February 1968.

[3]Statistics for Army units are not recorded in III MAF Command Chronologies. Total casualties inflicted by III MAF units in November 1968 are: KIA: 2355; POWs: 131.

[4]Statistics for Army units are not recorded in III MAF Command Chronologies. Total III MAF casualties inflicted in December 1968 are: KIA: 2848; POWs: 165.

Casualties Sustained by III MAF Units

1968 Month	USMC				USA				USN			
	KIA	WIA	MIA	DOW	KIA	WIA	MIA	DOW	KIA	WIA	MIA	DOW
JAN	225	1122	30	41	177	552	22	13	15	45	3	0
FEB	554	2368	18	58	215	754	35	21	27	99	1	4
MAR	364	1915	65	19	199	843	6	14	15	73	0	1
APR	368	1596	9	33	257	887	43	13	21	71	0	3
MAY	723	2670	5	37	333	1499	73	36	37	83	0	1
JUN	495	2092	8	41	146	667	32	20	20	89	0	2
JUL	259	2131	15	25	92	591	31	18	9	96	0	3
AUG	250	1947	1	35	133	1301	31	25	10	104	0	0
SEP	207	1706	14	25	80	815	34	7	6	73	0	1
OCT	117	1052	10	20	73	734	26	8	3	28	0	0
NOV	157	843	0	15	94	479	70	19	7	53	0	2
DEC	165	1099	0	12	42	350	54	15	12	48	0	1
TOTAL	3884	20541	175	361	1841	9472	457	209	182	862	4	18

3d Marine Division
Enemy Casualties Reported and Friendly Casualties Sustained
(Includes 1st Marines through 31 August)

Month	Enemy KIA	POWs Captured	US KIA	US WIA
JAN	1290	34	154	935
FEB	1344	61	185	1279
MAR	2237	52	179	1239
APR	598	23	184	1203
MAY	5145	114	233	1398
JUN	1099	3	244	1409
JUL	1003	22	75	744
AUG	694	6	76	571
SEP	1399	18	92	703
OCT	679	7	23	199
NOV	64	12	37	320
DEC	217	11	35	231
TOTAL	15469	363	1517	10231

1st Marine Divison

Enemy Casualties Reported and Friendly Casualties Sustained

(Includes 1st Marines after 1 September)

Month	Enemy KIA	POW's Captured	US KIA	US WIA
JAN	900	79	73	826
FEB	3228	19	336	2425
MAR	942	23	130	1167
APR	1096	15	163	1182
MAY	1777	32	350	2002
JUN	887	32	128	1217
JUL	598	27	110	991
AUG	1120	26	117	1222
SEP	945	41	133	1111
OCT	920	17	74	827
NOV	976	91	110	857
DEC	1287	116	126	780
Total	15676	518	1850	14607

All units in I Corps Tactical Zone
Enemy Casualties Reported and Friendly Casualties Sustained

Month	Enemy KIA	NVA POW	VC POW	Total POW	US KIA	US WIA	US MIA	US DOW	Total US[1]
JAN[2]	8037	37	525	562	417	1719	55	54	2245
FEB[2]	14344	111	386	497	796	3221	54	83	4154
MAR[3]	9203	117	406	523	578	2831	71	34	3514
APR[3]	7030	47	224	271	646	2554	52	49	3301
MAY[3]	12820	254	278	532	1093	4252	78	74	5497
JUN[3]	5563	130	497	627	661	2848	40	63	3612
JUL[3]	5050	81	393	474	360	2818	46	46	3270
AUG[3]	6954	80	584	664	393	3352	32	60	3837
SEP[3]	6733	51	768	819	293	2594	48	33	2968
OCT[3]	4280	36	602	638	193	1823	36	28	2080
NOV[4]	4141	32	516	548	258	1393	70	36	1757
DEC[5]	5047	51	1016	1067	219	1497	54	28	1798
Total	89202	1027	6195	7222	5907	30902	636	588	38033

[1]Includes casualties suffered by: USMC, USA, and USN

[2]Includes casualties inflicted by: USMC, Americal Division, 1st Air Cavalry, CIDG, ARVN, and ROKMC

[3]Includes casualties inflicted by: USMC, Americal Division, 1st Air Cavalry Division, 101st Airborne Division, CIDG, ARVN, and ROKMC

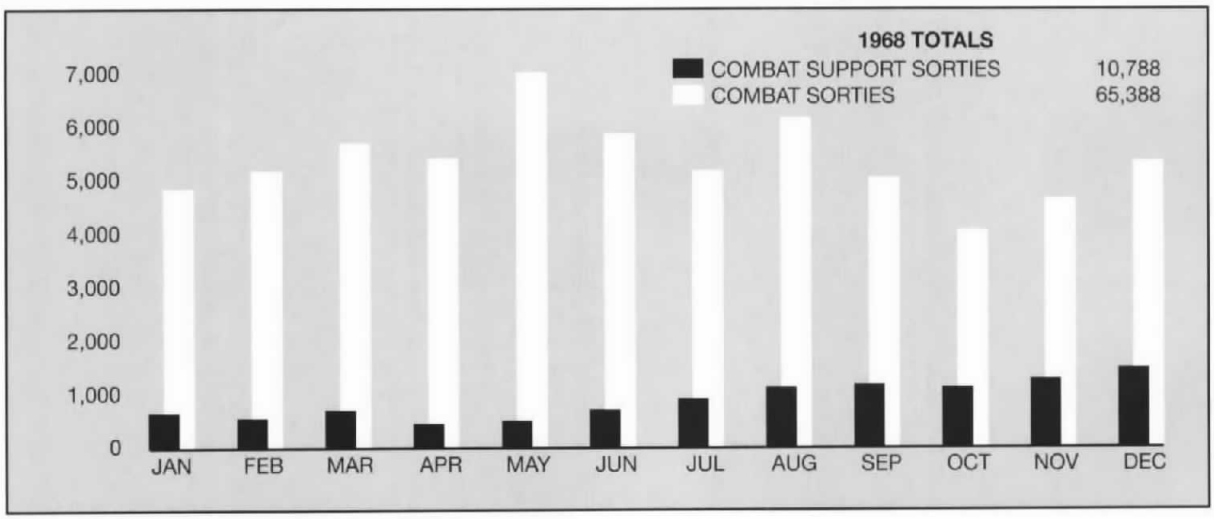
[4]Includes casualties inflicted by: units OpCon III MAF, ARVN, ROKMC, and USSF

[5]Includes casualties inflicted by: units OpCon III MAF, ARVN, ROKMC, and CIDG

Appendix H

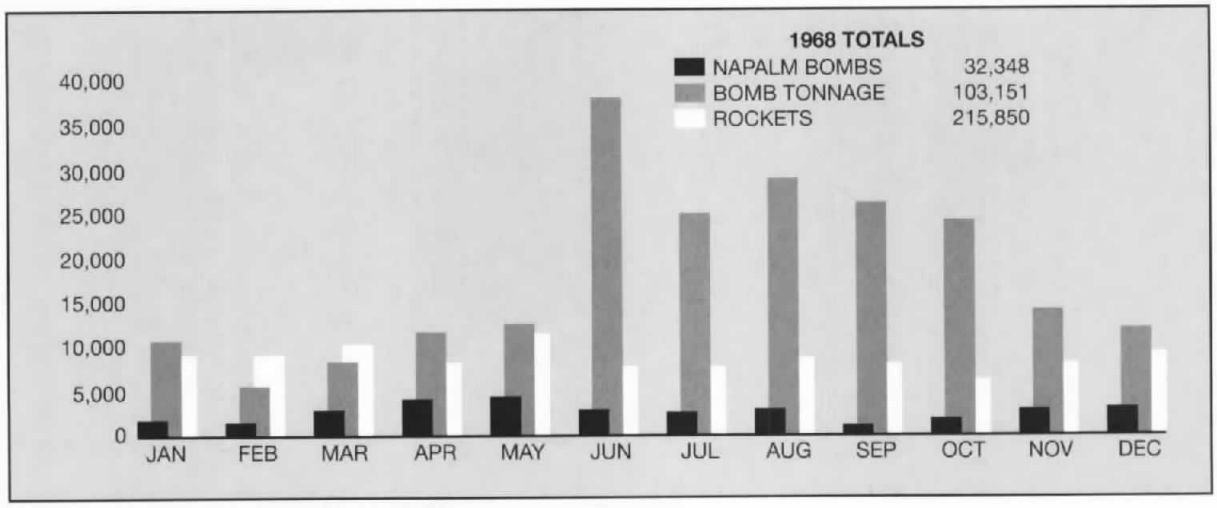
Marine Fixed-Wing Support

IN-COUNTRY FIXED–WING SORTIES BY MARINE AIRCRAFT JANUARY-DECEMBER 1968



From Operations of Marine Forces Vietnam 1968.

ORDNANCE DELIVERED BY MARINE AIRCRAFT IN ICTZ JANUARY-DECEMBER 1968



From Operations of Marine Forces Vietnam 1968.

Appendix I
List of Reviewers

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LtGen William J. White, USMC (Ret)

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MajGen Kenneth J. Houghton, USMC (Ret)
MajGen James R. Jones, USMC (Ret)
MajGen James E. Livingston, USMC
MajGen James J. McMonagle, USMC
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MajGen Jonas M. Platt, USMC (Ret)
MajGen Arthur J. Poillon, USMC (Ret)
MajGen Francis X. Quinn, USMC (Ret)
MajGen Donn J. Robertson, USMC (Ret)

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BGen Michael P. Downs, USMC (Ret)
BGen Jacob E. Glick, USMC (Ret)
BGen Paul G. Graham, USMC (Ret)
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Col Neil A. Nelson, USMC (Ret)
Col Thomas P. O'Callaghan, USMC (Ret)
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LtCol Merrill L. Bartlett, USMC (Ret)
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LtCol Gene W. Bowers, USMC (Ret)
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Maj Donald E. Milone, USMC (Ret)
Maj Edward Palm, USMC (Ret)
Maj Gary E. Todd, USMC (Ret)

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Capt George B. Meegan, USMC (Ret)
Capt Alexander W. Wells, Jr., USMCR
1stLt Tyrus F. Rudd, USMC (Ret)

CWO 4 Henry Wildfang, USMC (Ret)

MGySgt James W. Rogers, USMC (Ret)

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Col Bruce B. G. Clarke, USA
Col Lewis Sorley, USA (Ret)
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Appendix J

Tables of Organization

Tables of Organization

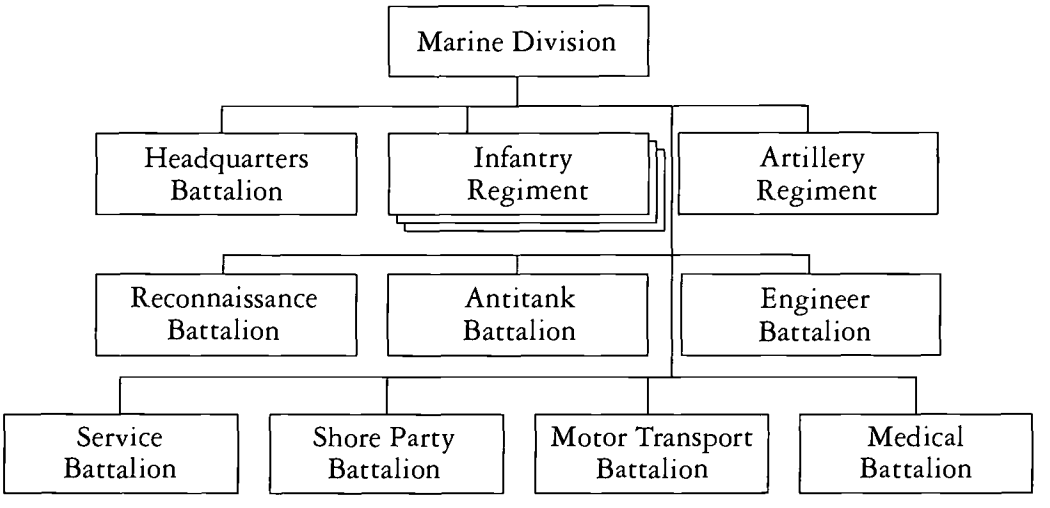
None of the major units in Vietnam followed standard Marine Corps tables of organization (T/O), and many smaller units were also task-organized to adapt to the circumstances of the Vietnam war. This appendix contains tables of organization for selected types of units.

It is worth recalling that almost no unit in Vietnam was ever staffed exactly according to its T/O. The demands of sustained combat forced the Marine Corps to man some units, particularly headquarters units, considerably above their T/O. Almost every unit found that it had to detail some men to perform tasks for which the T/O had not provided. In general, most units were consistently manned well below their T/O strength.

The Marine Division

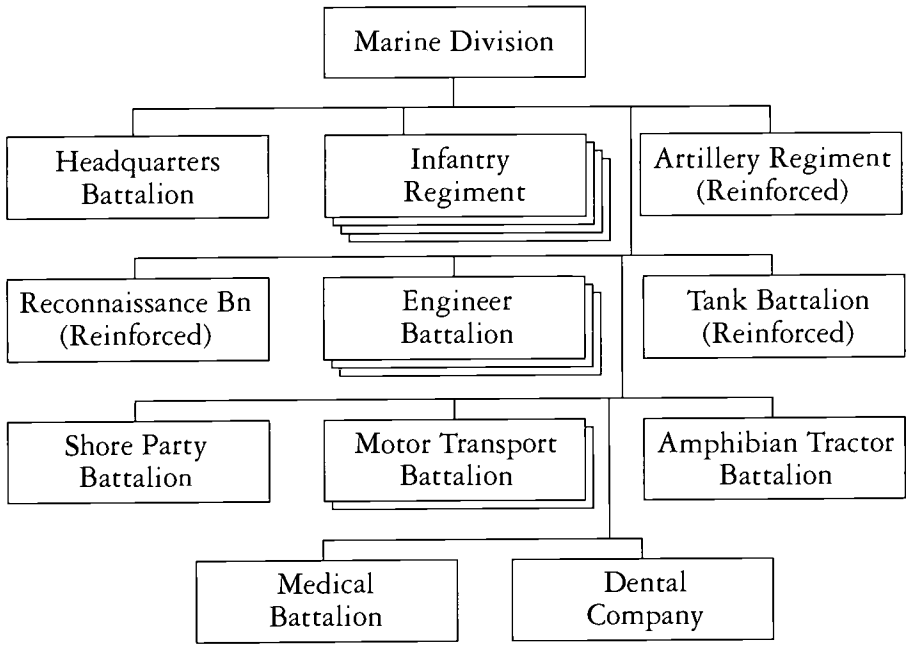
The standard T/O for a Marine Division called for a headquarters battalion, three infantry regiments, an artillery regiment, a reconnaissance battalion, an antitank battalion, an engineer battalion, a service battalion, a motor transport battalion, a shore party battalion, and a medical battalion.

Standard Marine Division



The organization of Marine divisions in Vietnam differed markedly from this standard organization, and also varied from time to time. By 1968, the service battalions had been transferred to the Force Logistic Command and the antitank battalions cadred. Units normally subordinate to the Fleet Marine Force commander, including tank battalions, amphibian tractor battalions, and force reconnaissance companies, had been attached. For most of 1968, both divisions included four infantry regiments, a reinforced artillery regiment, and additional motor transport and engineer battalions. The following diagram shows what a "typical division looked like in Vietnam." The exact units in a given division at any given time is in Appendix A, Marine Command and Staff List, January-December 1968.

Marine Division, Vietnam 1968



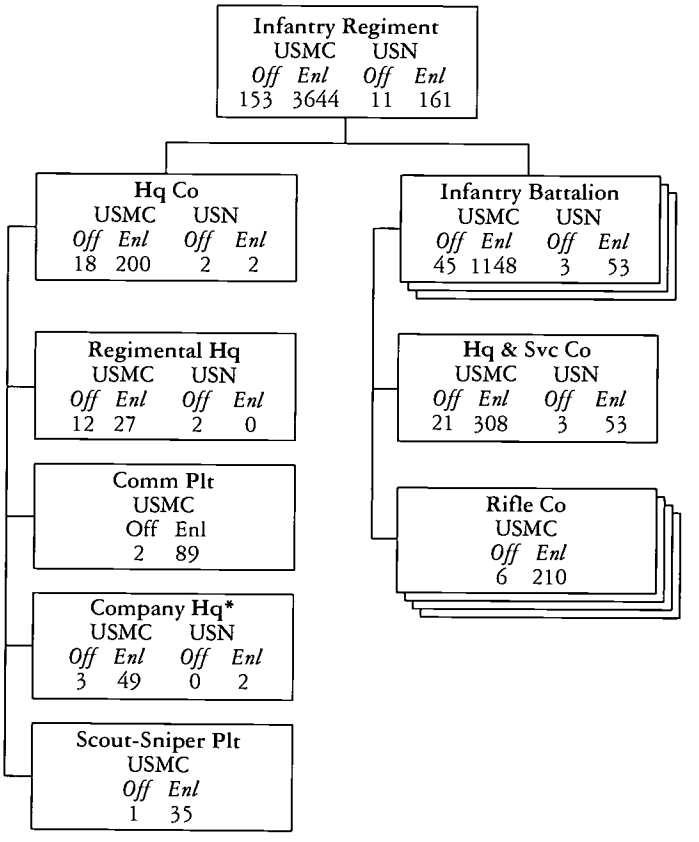
Marine Aircraft Wing

There was no standard organization for any Marine Corps aviation unit above the squadron level. Selected squadron tables of organization are included in this appendix. The exact units making up the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing can be found in Appendix A, Marine Command and Staff List, January-December 1968.

Combat Service Support Units

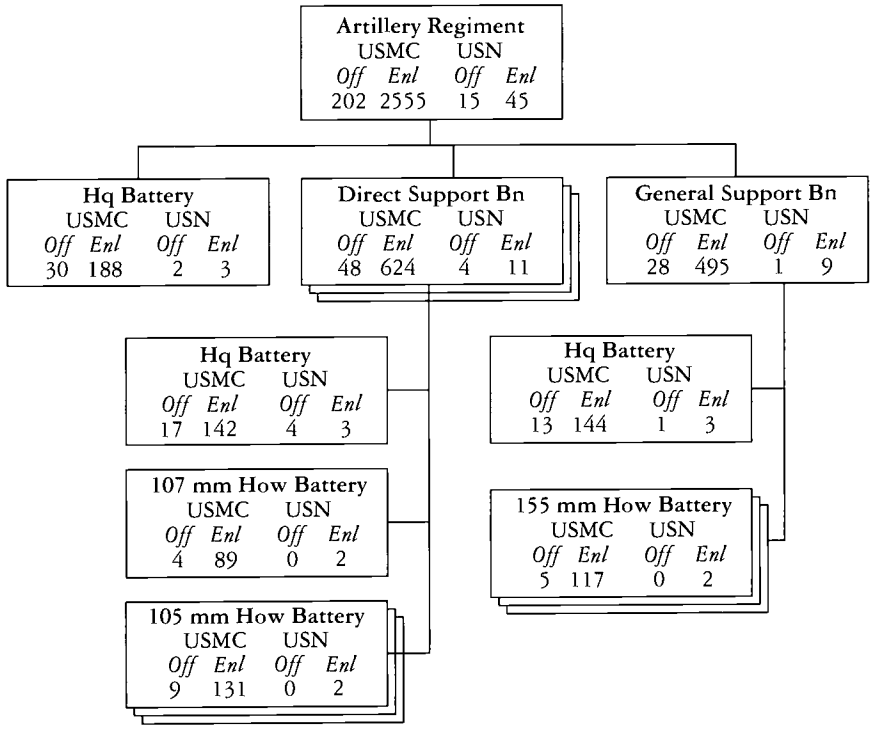
Standard Marine Corps practice placed combat service support units into a force service regiment, consisting of a headquarters and service battalion, a maintenance battalion, and a supply battalion. In Vietnam combat service support units were consolidated into the Force Logistic Command, which also included the service battalions from both divisions, two military police battalions, a communications battalion, and a motor transport battalion. Since the organizations for the battalions in the Force Logistic command were heavily modified to enable them to support sustained ground operations, no T/O's for these units are included. The exact units making up the Force Logistic Command can be found in Appendix A, Marine Command and Staff List, January-December 1968.

Infantry Regiment
T/O M–1099, Revision 2
6 June 1967



* The company headquarters included a command post security platoon of 19 Marines, with a staff sergeant as platoon commander, and two squads of nine Marines each, consisting of a squad leader and two four-man fireteams.

Artillery Regiment
T/O M–1199, Revision 2
17 April 1964



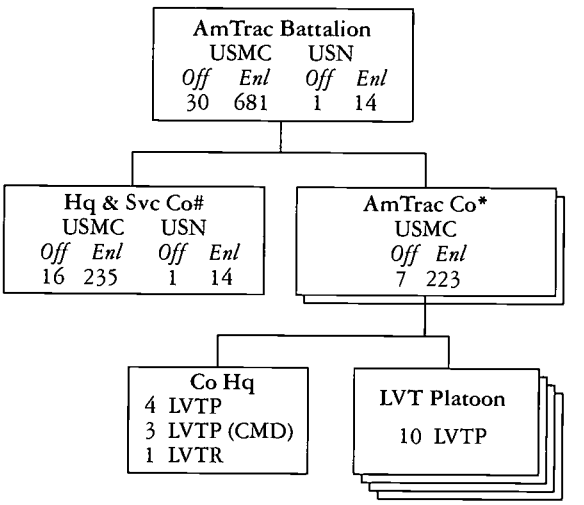
Direct support battalions contained 18 M101A1 towed 105mm howitzers (six per battery) and six M98 107mm towed mortars.

General support battalions contained 18 M109 self propelled 155mm Howitzers (six per battery).

Amphibian Tractor Battalion
T/O M–4658, Revision 1
6 March 1967

The amphibian tractor battalion normally fell under force troops, but in Vietnam each division had an amphibian tractor battalion attached. The battalion's primary mission was to transport troops and equipment under combat conditions, and it had only enough Marines and sailors to operate and maintain its vehicles. For combat operations in Vietnam the battalion either had infantry units attached to ride in its vehicles or parcelled out its companies and platoons to support other units. Generally one amphibian tractor company could support an infantry battalion, and one amphibian tractor platoon could support a rifle company.

The headquarters and service company rated 12 LVTP5A1 personnel carrier landing vehicles, tracked, three LVTP5A1 CMD command variants, one LVTR1A1 recovery vehicle, and eight LVTE1 engineer vehicles. These vehicles supported the operations of the amphibian tractor battalion. Each amphibian tractor company contained 44 LVTP5A1s, three LVTP5A1 CMDs, and one LVTR1A1. Since LVTs suffered frequent mine damage in Vietnam, both amphibian tractor battalions received an increased allowance of LVTR1A1 recovery vehicles.



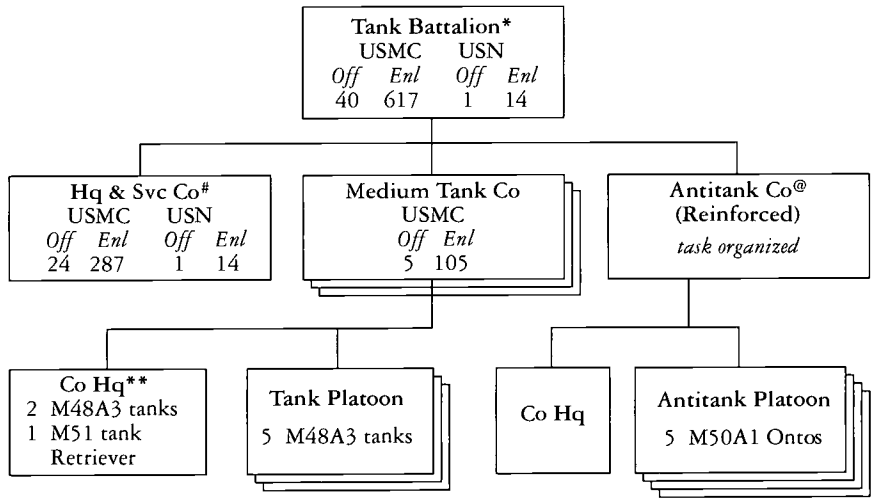
* A third amphibian tractor company could be activated by order of the Commandant. During 1968 both amphibian tractor battalions in Vietnam contained two amphibian tractor companies.

Tank Battalion
Vietnam 1968

Normally part of force troops, in Vietnam the two tank battalions were assigned to the divisions. The standard table of organization (T/O M–4238, Revision 1, 25 September 1967) for tank battalions called for a headquarters and service company, a heavy tank company, and three medium tank companies, with the proviso that only three tank companies would be activated except by order of the commandant. Both the 1st Tank Battalion and 3d Tank Battalion omitted the heavy tank company in this period (which would have been equipped with 17 M103A2 120mm gun tanks).

The headquarters and service company contained nine M67A2 flamethrower tanks (organized into a platoon with three sections of three tanks each), two M48A3 90mm gun tanks for the command section, and one M51 tank recovery vehicle. Each medium tank company rated 17 M48A3 90mm gun tanks and one M51 tank recovery vehicle, with two gun tanks and the recovery vehicle in the company headquarters and three platoons of five gun tanks each.

In December 1967 the 1st and 3d Antitank battalions were cadred, both being reduced to one reinforced antitank company. These companies were then attached to the like-numbered tank battalion, adding approximately 100 Marines, one corpsmen, and 20 M50A1 Ontos, a small tracked vehicle mounting six 106mm recoilless rifles.



* Does not include attached antitank company.

** One of these tanks was fitted with an M8 bulldozer blade.

\# Does not include additional personnel to support attached antitank company.

@ The standard T/O for an antitank company called for five officers and 76 enlisted Marines (T/O M–1248, Revision 2, 1 June 1967). Normally a company was divided into three platoons and equipped with 15 M50A1 Ontos. The reinforced companies attached to the tank battalions in December 1967 contained approximately six officers, 90–95 enlisted Marines, and one corpsman, and contained four platoons and a total of 20 M50A1 Ontos. Roughly one officer and six enlisted Marines were attached to the headquarters and service company to provide administrative support.

The Marine Aircraft Wing

There was no standard organization for any Marine Corps aviation unit above the squadron level. This section contains the official tables of organization for some of the more common Marine aviation squadrons present in Vietnam in 1968. It must be remembered that the actual number of Marines and aircraft assigned to a given squadron almost certainly varied from these tables. Squadrons of the same type, but flying different types of aircraft, had different T/Os. Also, the Marine Corps had multiple T/Os for certain types of squadrons flying the same aircraft. For example, some Marine Observation Squadron (VMO) were organized to fly 24 UH–1E Iroquois helicopters, some 30 UH–1E helicopters, while others flew a mix of helicopters and O–1B Bird Dog Cessna fixed wing light observation aircraft. In 1968 the Marine Corps introduced the OV–10A Bronco fixed wing observation aircraft to Vietnam, further complicating the picture.

Most squadron T/Os included an intermediate maintenance section. The Marines in these sections were not actually assigned to the squadron, but were instead an integral part of the parent group's headquarters and maintenance squadron. Still, these sections represented a manpower requirement associated with a specific squadron, and therefore these sections are included here.

The tables shown here are for squadrons at wartime strength. During the war, however, Marine aviation units remained on the reduced peacetime manning level, making their actual strength considerably less than shown in this appendix.

The exact units making up the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing can be found in Appendix A, Marine Command and Staff List, January-December 1968. *Note: Numbers in parentheses show billets filled by pilots, and are not included in the totals.*

Tables of Organization for Selected Squadrons

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA)
15 F–4J Phantom Jet Interceptor/Attack Aircraft
T/O M–8848, 23 July 1968

	USMC				*USN*	
	Pilots	NFOs	Grd Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Squadron Headquarters	(3)		2	19		
Operations	26	26	1	6		
Aircraft Maintenance	(5)		3	240		
Motor Transport	(1)			9		
Medical					1	4
Squadron Total	26	26	6	274	1	4
Intermediate Maintenance				61		
Total	26	26	6	335	1	4

Marine Attack Squadron (VMA)
20 A–4C/E SkyHawk Jet Attack Aircraft
T/O M–8955, 7 November 1967*

	USMC			*USN*	
	Pilots	Grd Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Squadron Headquarters	(3)	2	19		
Operations	35	1	6		
Aircraft Maintenance	(5)	3	151		
Motor Transport	(1)		9		
Medical				1	4
Squadron Total	35	6	185	1	4
Intermediate Maintenance		33			
Total	35	6	218	1	4

* On 23 July 1968 an additional Marine was added to the intermediate maintenance section, bringing the enlisted total to 219.

Marine All-Weather Attack Squadron (VMA(AW))
12 A–6A Intruder Jet Attack Aircraft
T/O 8857, 25 May 1967*

	USMC				*USN*	
	Pilots	NFOs	Grd Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Squadron Headquarters	(3)		2	17		
Operations	21	21	1	7		
Aircraft Maintenance	(5)		3	222		
Motor Transport	(1)			9		
Medical					1	4
Squadron Total	21	21	6	255	1	4
Intermediate Maintenance				68		
Total	21	21	6	323	1	4

* On 20 August the total number of enlisted Marines was increased to 324, with one Marine added to both the squadron headquarters and intermediate maintenance section, and one dropped from the aircraft maintenance section.

Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron (HMH)
24 CH–53A Sea Stallion Heavy Transport Helicopters
T/O M–8942, 28 December 1967*

	USMC			*USN*	
	Pilots	Grd Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Squadron Headquarters	(3)	2	19		
Operations	60	1	6		
Aircraft Maintenance	(5)	2	158		
Motor Transport	(1)		17		
Medical				1	4
Squadron Total	60	5	201	1	4
Intermediate Maintenance			43		
Total	60	5	244	1	4

* On 23 July 1968 a Marine was shifted from the aircraft maintenance section to the intermediate maintenance section.

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron (HMM)
24 CH–46 Sea Knight Medium Transport Helicopters
T/O M–8935, 25 May 1967*

	USMC			*USN*	
	Pilots	Grd Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Squadron Headquarters	(3)	2	19		
Operations	60	1	6		
Aircraft Maintenance	(5)	2	145		
Motor Transport	(1)		14		
Medical				1	3
Squadron Total	60	5	184	1	3
Intermediate Maintenance			31		
Total	60	5	215	1	3

* On 23 July 1968 one Marine moved from the aircraft maintenance section to the intermediate maintenance section.

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron (HMM)
24 UH–34D/E Sea Horse Medium Transport Helicopters
T/O M–8932, 22 November 1967*

	USMC			*USN*	
	Pilots	Grd Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Squadron Headquarters	(3)	2	18		
Operations	60	1	6		
Aircraft Maintenance	(5)	2	146		
Motor Transport	(1)	14			
Medical				1	3
Squadron Total	60	5	184	1	3
Intermediate Maintenance			41		
Total	60	5	225	1	3

* On 23 July 1968 an additional Marine was added to the intermediate maintenance section, bringing the total number of enlisted Marines to 226.

Marine Observation Squadron (VMO)
24 UH–1E Iroquois Light Attack/Observation Helicopters
T/O M–8963, 24 May 1967*

This T/O is for a squadron with 24 UH1E helicopters

	USMC			*USN*	
	Pilots	Grd Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Squadron Headquarters	(3)	2	13		
Operations	48	1	6		
Aircraft Maintenance	(4)	2	144		
Services	(2)	3	6		
Medical				1	3
Squadron Total	48	5	199	1	3

* On 20 August 1968 one Marine was added to the squadron headquarters, bringing the total number of enlisted Marines to 200.

Index

Key: p = photograph; n = informational note

A

A Shau Valley, 16, 37, 107–108, 223, 241, 249, 252–53, 254, 287, 291, 370–71, 411–12, 455, 516, 540, 652

A–1 Strongpoint, 24, 24n, 26, 28–29, 30p, 31, 38, 40, 115, 128, 292, 361–62, 394, 443 (*See also* barrier)

A–2 Strongpoint, 31, 41, 139, 292, 360, 393, 443 (*See also* barrier)

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